

*Adventures on the American Frontier*

# EXPLORERS in a NEW WORLD

Part Eight  
Jim Bridger's Sea of Salt



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As men explored the western half of America, stories of good hunting and trapping lands reached the ears of men with adventure in their hearts. It didn't matter to the hundreds of trappers who headed west that there were great blank spaces on the maps. Unknown areas did not scare them.



The trappers followed the rivers. Where the rivers went, they went. When the river they were following no longer held enough beavers, they moved on until they found another river with plenty more. In that way, the trappers helped fill in the blank spaces on the maps with what they learned about the West.

In the winter of 1824-1825, a group of trappers working for a fur trapping company was camping in the valley of the Bear River. They had trapped their way down the river



from its beginning in southern Idaho. They were almost to where the Idaho-Utah border is today when they got to talking about the Bear River one night as they sat around their campfire.

“Where does the Bear River go?” young James Bridger asked. He was new to the trapping company.

“Can’t tell you, Jim,” said General William Ashley, one of the company owners.

“No one has followed it any farther than this.”

“It could be the Buenaventura River,” one of the men said. Everyone had heard of the Buenaventura River, but no one had seen it. It was on the old Spanish maps as a river that led through the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

“More likely it’s a river that joins those that run into the Missouri River,” said another trapper.

The trappers began to argue about where the river might flow.

“Why don’t we just find out?” said



General Ashley. "We'll send a man down the river." He looked around at the faces of the men seated around the campfire. One looked eager. It was the face of young Jim Bridger.

"Jim, how would you like to settle this question for us?" asked General Ashley. "Take a canoe, and go exploring for a day or two."

Jim was pleased to be chosen. "Take care of my traps for me, and I'll be glad to go," he said.