

Adventures on the American Frontier

EXPLORERS in a NEW WORLD

Part Ten

John Fremont and Kit Carson
Map the Westward Trails



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When the United States was formed, the western half of it was still largely unknown. Mountain men explored it as they hunted and trapped, and by 1840, their reports of the Pacific coast had spread across the country. People began to dream of going to the Oregon Country.



A few brave pioneers made the long journey across the plains and the mountains to the great Northwest. They used the mountain men's trails and asked them the way to go.

There were maps, but none of them drew together all that the trappers had learned. The United States government gave the work of mapping the westward trails to a young man named John Charles Fremont.

It was luck that brought Kit Carson,



famous trapper and mountain man, onto the steamboat on which Lieutenant Fremont was riding just as he was about to begin his first trip west. Lieutenant Fremont needed a guide. Kit needed work. That was in 1842, and it was the beginning of a long friendship.

“Do you know the West?” Lieutenant Fremont had asked Kit.

Kit, brown and tough from years of living in the open, smiled. If there was any man alive who knew the West, Kit Carson was that man!

Kit had grown up in the Missouri town of Franklin, which for several years was the start of the Santa Fe Trail. His father had died when Kit was only eight years old, and the boy was sent to a saddle-making shop when he was fourteen to learn that craft. By the time he was sixteen, he knew that saddle making was not for him, and he got a job working on a wagon train traveling on the Santa Fe Trail. He quickly proved himself on the trail and went on to become a trapper. Soon he was known as one of



the best trappers in the West. He could live for months at a time in the wilderness.

“Lieutenant Fremont,” he said now, “I’ve trapped the streams from the northern Rockies to the southern deserts. I’ve traveled many times to the Spanish country around Santa Fe. From there I’ve gone west to the Colorado River and on to California, and north to the Columbia River. I know the streams of the country where you’re going as well as I know the veins on my own hand.”