

# The Rediscovery of Colter's Hell and Other Research Adventures

by MERRILL J. MATTES, P.M.

According to supposedly ancient and honorable tradition the term "Colter's Hell" was applied by the early fur trappers to Yellowstone Park, or rather, to the geysers, hot pools, etc. which later became a part of Yellowstone. I say "supposedly" because this tradition is neither ancient nor honorable. It is a hoax. Or, to put it more politely, it was a careless misconception by an amateur historian which blossomed into one of the West's cherished legends.

Yes, Virginia, there was a Colter's Hell in the fur trappers' lexicon; but no, Virginia, this did not relate in any way to the thermal phenomena with which we are familiar today in Yellowstone Park. Later in this paper I will tell you about the real Colter's Hell, but right now I have to explain that the title I have selected is more symbolic than descriptive. What I really have in mind is to share with you several of my fur trade adventures, or rather, my adventures in research which led me to discover some new facts, and to rediscover some old ones long buried.

I am not sure how Noah Webster defines it, but according to my definition, research can be either of two things, or a combination of both: the systematic search for new facts or, a systematic review of old facts which, coupled

with logic and an open mind, can lead to new and more truthful interpretations. The early fur trade, coupled as it is with trail-blazing exploration of the American West, is an inherently exciting field of research. However, it does not seem like a fertile one since written records of this primitive private enterprise are meager, and most of the actors were illiterate, leaving no imprint of their own. Even so, I found that scholars had neglected this subject even though popularizers were legion. So even as John Colter and Jim Bridger knew the thrill of being the first Americans to gaze upon certain natural wonders of the West, I have had the thrill of other though less spectacular discoveries—discovering actual people behind the shadowy heroes of legend, and actual places obscured by mythology.

In fact, going on forty years now I have lived closely with the mountain men, not to know them personally because I was born in the wrong century, but through the windows of research—in libraries, in government archives, in stray bits of personal correspondence, and in field studies of trails, forts, campsites and rendezvous. I have felt the shadow of those giants with beaver traps, muzzle-loaders and seven-league boots, and the compelling fascination of unfettered, sometimes explosive personalities.

First from my portfolio I draw *The Case of Hiram Scott*, which might otherwise be entitled, "The Mystery of Scott's Bluffs." In 1935, after serving as a temporary ranger or "ninety day wonder" in Yellowstone I joined the National Park Service on a somewhat permanent basis, first as a combination Superintendent and Historian of Scotts Bluff National Monument. This area was set aside in 1919 because the bluffs in Western Nebraska are among the great natural landmarks of the Oregon Trail. At this time distressingly little was known about the man for whom the bluffs were named, this little being largely derived from the version found in Washington Irving's *Captain Bonneville*. I resolved to penetrate the veil of mystery regarding Scott, his identity, and the actual circumstances of his death. Over

a period of many years, and travels to Missouri and California, this evolved into many publications, gradually going far beyond the scope of Scott's Bluffs, but all starting with that one seed of curiosity about a fur trade enigma.

To reduce the Scott story to its essentials, Captain Bonneville, who first went up the Platte in 1832, had it that the unfortunate fur trader, ill from some unidentified cause, was travelling the North Platte downstream in a dugout canoe with unidentified companions when their boat overturned, near Laramie Fork. After some debate, and fearing starvation, the two faithless companions abandoned Scott, later reporting to their leader that Scott had died and was decently buried at Laramie Fork. The next spring the unidentified leader, returning to the Rocky Mountain rendezvous, found Scott's skeleton at Scotts Bluffs, 60 miles below Laramie Fork. This clearly indicated two things, that the companions had lied about his death, and that Scott did somehow manage to walk, crawl or swim 60 miles from the point last seen alive to the point of death. That was the whole depressing story as given to Nebraska school children for decades, and it had enough horrendous ingredients of human heroism and human frailty to be good enough for them, a real Shakespearian tragedy.

Ten years later, 1945, in *Nebraska History* magazine I published a piece on "Hiram Scott, Fur Trader." Although for some puzzling reason this scholarly bombshell failed to shake anyone's complacency—it didn't even rate a notice in the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, the patriotic local daily—I definitely felt this should be rated as a minor historical triumph, for I had dug up and correlated a surprising amount of factual information on a subject that hitherto had been largely folk-lore. At the Missouri Historical Society I discovered that Hiram Scott was a real person, born in St. Charles County in 1805 who, along with 100 other enterprising young men, became an employee of the famous William Ashley and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in 1822. Also, that in 1823 he and Jedediah Smith were desig-

nated by Ashley as his two principal lieutenants when Colonel Leavenworth deputized the fur traders in his campaign against the hostile Arikara Indians on the Upper Missouri. This meant that the 18-year-old Scott and the famous Jed Smith—who toted a Bible as well as a gun—were co-equals as leaders of one of the toughest groups of frontiersmen ever assembled. They had been ambushed by the Arikara, losing a dozen men, and now with the assistance of the U. S. Army they were going to pay the Arikara for their sins. But Colonel Leavenworth bumbled. He stalled the attack long enough for the Arikara to make a mass escape from their besieged village. However, it is this episode that caused Ashley to be diverted from the Missouri River route and to push overland to the Central Rockies, and later to rediscover the Great Platte Route which became the Oregon Trail.

In the Ashley papers Scott shows up as a clerk. In the fur trade a clerk was not the same thing as a ribbon clerk today. He was an important official, a co-commander of the fur trade caravans. There is every reason to suppose that if he had not died in 1828, Scott might have been involved in other heroics and achieved lasting fame similar to that of Jed Smith, Jim Bridger and Kit Carson. But Scott died three years before Jed Smith received that Comanche spear in western Kansas on the Santa Fe Trail. Scott is immortalized by a topographic name but he missed the boat as a major historical figure.

In addition to the Ashley and Leavenworth records I began to turn up scores of overland journals—emigrants, soldiers, bull-whackers, and even a few rare literate fur traders—and a large percentage of these travellers paused at Scotts Bluff to pay verbal tribute to the deceased. The peculiar, but not surprising thing was, that among 50 or more versions of what happened to Scott, no two accounts were alike. There was every imaginable variation: according to some he didn't die at all, and lived like a hermit; he crawled 60 miles, or 30 miles, or one or two miles; accord-

ing to others he was not abandoned at all, in fact he encouraged his companions to go on without him. The causes of his death range from disease, starvation, exposure, and drowning, to wounding by arrow or gunshot. Obviously, none of these hearsay accounts could be credited—that is, none but one—the account of Warren A. Ferris of the American Fur Company expedition of 1830, two years ahead of Bonneville and therefore more credible. He dates Scott's demise at 1828, has him wounded somehow, but reaching the bluffs in a boat which overturns and he crawls only a short distance to die. The date matches the Ashley records where Scott's last payroll entry is 1828. In all probability the wound was caused by a recorded battle with Indians at the Bear Lake rendezvous of 1828. With this version we don't have to suffer along with the implausible concept of a 60 mile death crawl.

After 1945 I turned up more overland journals—hundreds of them, in fact, which later led me elsewhere—but there were three more accounts which enabled me to round out the picture of Hiram Scott. The William Anderson fur trade journal of 1834 and the Matthew Field *New Orleans Picayune* account of an 1843 trip enabled me to identify William Sublette positively as the expedition commander in 1828, and a fellow named Bruffee as one of the faithless companions. Finally, long after I had left the Scotts Bluff premises, one fine day an alleged collateral descendant of Hiram Scott visited the monument museum, left an ancestral manuscript giving details of Scott's appearance—tall, swarthy, handsome, etc.—and some genealogical data. Everything seemed quite credible except the family version of Uncle Hiram's death, namely that he was wounded by a grizzly bear, and subsequently froze to death. That bizarre ending is not theoretically impossible. After all, in 1823 Jed Smith was almost killed by a grizzly bear on the Grand River, in South Dakota. But even if the Scott ancestry is authentic, how would his surviving family members have reliable knowledge of the event which has been such a

mystery to everyone else? It seems that in this case we will be forever shielded from the complete truth.



Artist's Conception of Hiram Scott's Death. From Shumway's *History of Western Nebraska*.  
Collection of the author.

Having solved, if only partially, one Scotts Bluff mystery, I was aware there was another one even more tantalizing awaiting. This was the case of a French-Canadian named Robidoux who had a trading post at Scotts Bluff in 1849 and a few years thereafter, a place remarkable because during the prime years of the California gold rush it was the only fixed trading establishment in the 400 miles between Fort Kearny and Fort Laramie. Again, in the overland journals there are copious references to this so-called Frenchman with one or more Sioux squaws, an indefinite number of offspring, and a log-cabin trading post and blacksmith shop. Obviously, this man was related to the well-known Joseph Robidoux who had the trading post that became the nucleus of St. Joseph, Missouri but the Scotts Bluff Robidoux couldn't be the old man back in St. Joseph,

so who was he? Evidently no one worried about the subject until I adopted this as a research project. This also had been accepted as a vague bit of western Nebraska folklore. Again, a search of several hundred overland journals, including scientific observers like Captain Howard Stansbury of the Corps of Engineers, and the explorer Heinrich Mollhausen, turned up a quite respectable number of observations about the Robidoux establishment. A bit of surface reconnaissance archeology turned up the actual trading post site and, most gratifying of all, I began to receive unusual visitors at Scotts Bluff—Sioux Indians from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian Reservations, South Dakota, who all claimed the name of Robidoux, and that their grandfather had the Scotts Bluff trading post. These Indians were in the North Platte Valley to help with the potato harvest, but they were anxious to talk to someone else who had knowledge of their ancestor. There was disagreement among them whether grandfather's name was Joseph or Charles or Sylvestre, but Joseph had the inside track when I turned up two illuminating sources at the Nebraska State Historical Society. One of these was a recorded interview with Susan, half-breed daughter of James Bordeaux, the man who was the bourgeois at Fort Laramie in 1846 as recorded by Francis Parkman. She positively identified Joseph Robidoux as the squawman of Scotts Bluff. Also a rare Robidoux family biography reported a tradition that in 1857 Joseph E. Robidoux, eldest son of the St. Joseph Joseph, moved from the Plains to the White Cloud Indian Reservation in Eastern Kansas and married an Oto woman. But there was a hitch—the Indian descendants had said that their grandfather was killed by a mule and buried at Scotts Bluffs, they didn't know exactly where. It took me a while to figure out the probable truth—that grandfather in fact deserted his Sioux Indian family, and the story of the mule was invented by the aggrieved mother to put a good face on things for the children!

You're wrong if you think that solved the mystery of Robidoux's trading post. It was only the beginning, because my article on the subject in *Nebraska History* for June, 1949 aroused the interest of others who had axes to grind and some other Robidoux as their personal candidate. If you know anything about western history you know that there were a whole host of Robidoux perambulating about the west—brothers, sons, nephews, all related to old Joe at St. Joseph, but few contemporary writers, when they encountered a Robidoux, bothered to identify him. The strongest rival to Joseph E. or Joseph Jr. for Scotts Bluff honors was one Antoine Robidoux, for the simple reason that two or three writers did positively identify an A. or Antoine Robidoux at Scotts Bluff. Well, to make *this* long story short, it took a trip to the National Archives to prove what was beginning to seem evident—there were several Robidoux involved, not unnaturally, since it was a family enterprise headed up by the man in St. Joseph who got the trading licenses. On a register of licenses to trade among the Sioux in 1850 is one issued to old Joe and on it four traders are named—Joseph E., Antoine, Michel and Isadore Robidoux. This helps to explain why emigrants descriptions of the composite Robidoux are confusing and contradictory. The famous Scotts Bluff "Robidoux" was in fact several people! Nevertheless, I still hold to the conviction that Joseph E., eldest son of the patron of St. Joe, was the principal figure involved during the gold rush, and the probable ancestor of a large but indefinite number of present-day Sioux, including one of the attorneys for the Indian activists who recently occupied and "trashed" the village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, scene of the tragic 1890 fight turned massacre.

Incidentally, this Antoine was not the Antoine Robidoux who rode with Kearny to California in 1846, and who earlier had a trading post on the Colorado River, near Grand Junction. This Antoine of Scotts Bluff was a son of Francis



Robidoux, brother of the St. Joseph Joseph, and therefore a nephew of the elder Antoine, and a cousin of Joseph E.

The Robidoux tangles were untangled, to my satisfaction at least, in my original biography of Joseph Robidoux which appears in Volume VIII of *Mountain Men of the Fur Trade*. The complexity of this untanglement may be indicated by the fact that there were not just two Josephs, but four Joseph Robidoux in four successive generations, all prominent in the western fur trade. It was necessary, therefore, to use Roman numerals with each of these Josephs to avoid confusion. By this device, the St. Joseph Joseph was III and the Scotts Bluff Joseph was IV.

The mountain of overland migration material generated by the initial research on these two fur traders led eventually to my book, *The Great Platte River Road* (Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969) which relates to the eastern one-third of the Oregon-California trail. Before it was over I had corralled 700 or 800 overland journals and something simply had to be done about them. Encouraged by a Nebraska Centennial research grant, I started the project in 1961, visiting virtually all major repositories. This started out to be merely a study of the Oregon Trail or western Nebraska; but it just wasn't possible to start at some arbitrary point like the South Platte Crossing or even Fort Kearny. The upshot was that I finally started out at the Missouri River jumping-off places and kept going to Fort Laramie, Wyoming. (I figured if someone else wanted to resume the narrative west of Fort Laramie they were free to do so; at this point after ten years of labor I ran out of steam.) Beside juggling the combined narratives of several hundred travellers I had to provide a proper chronology, and a review of what people ate, what they wore, how they died—likewise a 50-page bibliography. The result is a book of about 600 pages, not counting maps and illustrations. It includes much of my findings on Scott and the Robidoux, as well as a variety of other ex-fur traders who became involved as guides during the migrations.

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Besides Hiram Scott and Joseph Robidoux there are two other fur trade figures whose biographies I researched and wrote for *Mountain Men of the Fur Trade*—Seth Ward and Major John Dougherty. I am not going to elaborate on them here except to note that both were penniless fur trade contemporaries of Scott, Robidoux, Bridger, etc. and shared many of their exploits, both wound up as merchant princes who became millionaires, and both were involved—at different times—as the post sutler at Fort Laramie. Like many of his fellows, Ward had two wives—one Indian and one white girl back in the settlements—and thus two sets of descendants who, to my knowledge, have never met each other. As a matter of fact a well-to-do Ward descendant in Kansas City vigorously denied to me that his illustrious ancestor had any Indian wife or that he in turn had any Indian relatives, collateral or otherwise, but the record speaks for itself. To Ward's credit it must be stated that his two wives were more successive than contemporary.

Major Dougherty is such an incredible figure that I aim to deal with him more fully in book form. What is incredible about him is that he was a worthy fellow adventurer of the likes of John Colter, Andrew Henry, Jed Smith, Edward Rose and the Sublettes, and then on top of his fur trade experience he had a lengthy career as an Indian agent on the Upper Missouri River. He helped launch the Long expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1820, greeted Fitzpatrick and Clyman when they came into Fort Atkinson in 1824 to report the break-through geographical discovery of the Platte route, and was a key figure in Indian treaties negotiated out of Fort Leavenworth. So we'll have to deal with him separately another time.

Well, let's turn to a different kind of story which may be labelled the Jackson Hole case, or, "The State of Wyoming vs. the National Park Service." In 1929 Congress created Grand Teton National Park, consisting of the beautiful Teton Mountain Range. Meanwhile John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Horace Albright figured that the park wouldn't be

complete without the complementary valley floor—Jackson Hole. Through the Snake River Land and Cattle Company Rockefeller had been buying up valley land since the 1920s with this object in view. Accordingly, in 1944 Franklin D. Roosevelt created Jackson Hole National Monument. This touched off a storm of protest among Wyoming citizens who felt that their right to graze cattle on the public domain was in jeopardy, because an enlarged Grand Teton park would result in fewer cows and more tourists. This scrap culminated in a court case brought by Wyoming to declare the Presidential Proclamation null and void. This is where I came into the picture. The State claimed that the Proclamation, based on the Antiquities Act of 1906, was invalid because there was nothing of scientific or historic value in Jackson Hole—no geology, no history, no nothing. I was asked to research and document the history part, and was given just six months to prepare testimony as an expert witness.

To make *this* story short, a fast tour of the western history library circuit, coupled with analysis of topographic maps, revealed a rather staggering number of early explorers, fur traders and trappers who had operated in, through and around Jackson Hole, beginning with John Colter, who spent the winter of 1807-1808 in that vicinity, and Andrew Henry and his band of Missouri Fur Company refugees from the Blackfoot country in 1810. In 1811 the Astorian expedition under Wilson Price Hunt detached four trappers in Jackson Hole before proceeding over Teton Pass. Men of the British Northwest Company followed the Snake River to its source and named the Three Tetons. Smith, Sublette, Bridger and others of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company swarmed all over the place beginning in 1824. In 1829 Sublette and Jackson met here and named Jackson Hole after David E. Jackson before crossing the range to meet Jed Smith in Idaho on his return from his marathon journey to California and Oregon; thereafter came a whole procession of mountain men until 1840 when the last

rendezvous occurred. When I first published my findings later in the *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* my monograph was truthfully entitled, "Jackson Hole, Crossroads of the Western Fur Trade."

At the court trial the Wyoming prosecutor managed to produce witnesses who swore up and down that nothing ever happened in Jackson Hole. When I was called to the stand later the defense wheeled in a truckload of books I was prepared to offer in testimony, but the judge ruled that the books *per se* were inadmissible as evidence. Accordingly, I relied on the facts that had been engraved on my memory, and took over six hours, stretched over two days, to summarize my personal knowledge of significant fur trade happenings in Jackson Hole. When I had completed my recital of events to 1840 Judge Kennedy took his hands from his aching head, looked over the bemused audience and then at me, to ask: "Are you sure you haven't left out anything?" I told him I would be glad to give him also a rundown of events from 1840 to 1940. He hastened to assure me this wouldn't be necessary. The judge's verdict was that the President of the United States was within his rights to proclaim Jackson Hole a National Monument, since there evidently were historical as well as scientific values. It was a triumph for the conservationists, and led later to an expanded Grand Teton National Park which is enjoyed today by millions. I was later successful in persuading the National Park Service to develop a Fur Trade Museum at park headquarters to illuminate the role of the Tetons and Jackson Hole in Rocky Mountain fur trade and exploration. I laid out the basic exhibit plan for this museum and tracked down most of the artifacts and, with the help of Charles Hanson, the gun collection. When the Fur Trade Museum was dedicated in 1960, no objections were heard this time from the solid citizens of Wyoming; they were—and still are—too busy counting their dollars from the booming tourist business.

The Chief Historian thought I should next tackle the

history of Yellowstone Park to help celebrate its 75th anniversary, in 1947. It was already clear that the early fur traders were all over Yellowstone Park also after John Colter's discovery of it in 1808, and this seemed like a routine chore until I ran into a very strange fact. All my life I'd heard about Colter's Hell—that this was the colorful name bestowed on the Park by the fur trappers. Now all of us know that once an attractive untruth or misconception takes root it produces a tree with glamorous fruit and it's awfully hard to convince the general public that it's all an optical illusion. For a time I was caught in this same charming trap, until the evidence in certain prime source materials began sending out warning signals. We all hate to find out that George Washington didn't *really* cut down that cherry tree, and I found it difficult to overcome the romantic notion that Yellowstone's geyserfield and hot pools were known to the trappers and their contemporaries as Colter's Hell. But in time, mind triumphed over emotion and there it was. There *was* a place called Colter's Hell, but it wasn't the Yellowstone geysers at all; in fact it was over 50 miles east of the boundary of present Yellowstone Park, at a place on the Shoshone River near Cody, Wyoming. *That* was the real Colter's Hell. The evidence is in the known documentary and cartographic sources and it is also right there on the ground, where sinter cones, hot springs, sulphurous odors and other thermal phenomena still exist, although nobody pays any attention to it to this day.

Obtaining their information first-hand from Jim Bridger who was personally acquainted with the region, Captain Gunnison and Father DeSmet both wrote in the 1850s of a place of subterranean wonders on the Shoshone River, then called the Stinkingwater, and now identifiable as a distinct zone of vulcanism, near the highway a few miles below the Buffalo Bill Dam, where the Shoshone Canyon enters the mountains. Hiram M. Chittenden, the Yellowstone Park engineer turned historian, was responsible for the misconception when he published the first edition of his famous

book in 1895. He didn't exactly *say* that the Yellowstone Park geysers were Colter's Hell; however, since he didn't know anything like that elsewhere he just plain speculated that it was *probably* the Yellowstone geyser area Colter was talking about. Later he had his own doubts and the subject was omitted from later editions, but by that time the damage was done, and the romanticists wouldn't have it any other way—Yellowstone Park *was* Colter's Hell because it's such a lovely poetic concept!

If anyone had bothered to take a magnifying glass and examine John Colter's route as shown in William Clark's famous map of 1810 he would have recognized that Colter did not even see the Yellowstone geyser basins, at least the major ones drained by the Firehole River; but when he came to the Stinkingwater Canyon he did note a place which gave off steam and sulphurous fumes. Jim Bridger had a reputation as a liar, but even he didn't pretend that Yellowstone Park was Colter's Hell. On the contrary, he drew a map for Father DeSmet, now in the DeSmet Collection at St. Louis University, which clearly identifies Colter's Hell as a specific spot on the Stinkingwater, just west of where Cody, Wyoming now stands.

With all that clear-cut evidence from unimpeachable sources, you would think, wouldn't you, that the matter was settled? In the September, 1949 issue of *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* I published an article entitled, "Behind the Legend of Colter's Hell: the Early Exploration of Yellowstone National Park." In 1962 the Yellowstone Park Library Association published my book, *Colter's Hell and Jackson's Hole*, in which my findings on both areas were combined, complete with maps, pictures and bibliography. Some 30,000 to 40,000 copies have been bought by Yellowstone Park visitors. But do you want to know something? I've seen several books and articles published in recent years by professional historians and authors in which Yellowstone Park is still called Colter's Hell, and I've heard Yellowstone Park lecturers dwelling on the same old





Typical American Trapper of the Early Rocky Mountain Fur Trade. Exhibit at Scotts Bluff National Monument.

—Collection of the author.

threadbare theme. Meanwhile my efforts to get Wyoming to at least put up a sign at the real Colter's Hell have been unrewarding. Finally, it dawns on you. In the popular mind Yellowstone Park is *still Colter's Hell* and there is nothing that any historian or even an Act of Congress can do about it. There is one human trait that stands out like the Rock of Gibraltar. People tend to believe what they *want* to believe, they *ignore* any facts that get in their way, and they *resent* efforts by anyone to confuse them with the facts.

My involvement with the fur trade has been extensive, primarily because of the magnetic force it exerts on anyone who has been hooked, so to speak, on Western history. But I'd get into it pretty deeply anyway because of National Park Service preservation efforts. We are currently restoring trading posts of the British Northwest Company at Grand Portage, at the western tip of Lake Superior, in Minnesota, and the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia River opposite Portland. We are into the story of Imperial Russia at Sitka, Alaska, where the trade in sea otter skins was the main economic force; when this trade languished, Russia was glad to accept 7½ million dollars for all of Alaska, once thought of as a bad bargain, now recognized as our new frontier, of incalculable riches. Contrary to the general impression that Alaska went into a deep freeze after the Seward purchase of 1867, there was a continuously active fur trade with Eskimos, Aleuts and Athabascan Indians, coupled with exploration and discovery. In 1968 it was my privilege to participate in a reconnaissance of the Kobuk-Koyukuk wilderness area, above the Arctic circle, and Eskimo villages on the Arctic sea-coast. That is the frontier today, and it is still a raw frontier to the extent that the fur trade still ranks No. 1 among economic activities. I am glad I saw it before the oil boom and the tourist boom started to cloud up on the horizon, and threaten to degrade that pristine landscape.

Somewhat comfortably closer to home than the Arctic

Circle, however, is the Missouri River, route of Lewis and Clark, particularly the Upper Missouri, which the American Fur Company once regarded as its private road. We hope to tell the story of exploration and the Indian trade at four Missouri River localities: at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial at St. Louis, in a museum underground below the 630 foot Gateway Arch; at the Knife River Indian villages, 50 miles above Bismarck, North Dakota; at the site of Fort Union trading post, opposite the mouth of Yellowstone River; and at Fort Benton, Montana, possible headquarters for a future riverway park encompassing the wild Missouri River Breaks. Fort Union and the Jefferson Memorial are already in the National Park System; the Knife River villages and the Missouri River Breaks are current proposals for addition to the National Park System. New vistas in fur trade research are opening here. But I want to mention, in closing, the research that has been expended on Missouri River historic sites that have been destroyed and lost forever.

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers have built six giant dams across the Missouri River in the Dakotas and Montana, creating reservoirs that have inundated over 700 miles of river valley. This god-like tampering with the landscape may well have some distinct short-range economic benefits; on the other hand there are some distinct permanent economic losses, as well as ecological imbalances. There is also a high price paid in terms of cultural losses, for these dams have obliterated literally hundreds of historic and archeologic sites. At Omaha I was deeply involved in historical and archeological salvage programs, where with inadequate funding frantic efforts were made—before dam completions—to excavate the sites archeologically and research them historically. Confining ourselves to sites of exploration and fur trade provenience I can suggest to you the extent of the disastrous losses: over 50 identifiable Lewis and Clark camp sites; over a dozen trading post sites, particularly those from 1797 to 1840; and of course over 50 percent



Fur Traders and Trappers Rendezvous, Upper Green River. Exhibit at Fur Trade Museum, Grand Teton National Park.  
--Collection of the author.

of the historical landscape. Among lost sites, for example, are those of Fort Recovery and Fort Kiowa in the Fort Randall Reservoir, and, in the Oahe Reservoir, the historic Arikara villages and the setting of the hostilities of 1823, where Jed Smith and Hiram Scott became officers of the Missouri Legion. We made photographs, measured architectural evidence, collected artifacts and researched these sites which had been largely ignored by scholars, but it was too little and too late. There was not enough time or manpower to do the job right. Reports on these salvage activities for the benefit of posterity have appeared variously in *Collections* of the South Dakota Historical Society, the *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, and *Bulletins* of the Bureau of American Ethnology. In addition to site descriptions, these accounts are replete also with new historical data on traders and trading posts, explorers, activities of the U. S. Army and Indian agents, steamboat wrecks and ghost towns.

Let me close with the strange story of Sacagawea of Lewis and Clark fame, who died in 1812 at Fort Manuel Lisa just below the North Dakota line, a site now many fathoms deep under the Oahe Reservoir. In 1950 some Wyoming citizens thought that there should be a federal memorial to Sacagawea at Fort Washakie, on the Wind River Indian Reservation, because it was here—they said—that she died in 1884. This dubious history was proclaimed by a vigorous champion of women's rights, Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard of the University of Wyoming, in her book, *Sacajawea*, a masterpiece of verbal virtuosity, and a horrible example of how scholarship can be perverted by special pleading. We have no quarrel with her contention that the Shoshone girl, captive child bride of that French rascal Charbonneau, who was drafted by Lewis and Clark at the Knife River Indian villages as a guide and interpreter, was indeed a woman of force and character, who helped make American history. But Dr. Hebard's mission was not limited to providing a pedestal for a heroine. She evidently felt

that she had a sacred obligation to prove that a Shoshone woman who died at Fort Washakie in 1884 was indeed Sacagawea, notwithstanding the fact that the poor woman herself when alive never made such an extravagant claim! In Wyoming, as elsewhere, patriotic allegiance to the mystique of the moment can be both uncritical and emphatic. Thus it has been possible for some to embrace the concept that Jackson Hole had no history, while at the same time believing that Sacagawea did not *really* die of childbirth in 1812, as documented in the Luttig journal, but somehow lived magically on to the age of 97, totally unnoticed during her lifetime but now entitled to deferred sainthood at a Wyoming tourist shrine. In 1950 my attention was directed to a letterbook of William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, which is dated 1825 and which gives the status at that time of expedition members of 1804-1806 under his command. Sacagawea, in William Clark's own hand-writing, is listed in 1825 as "dead." As co-commander of the Lewis and Clark expedition, William Clark would be a rock-bottom authority. This is conclusive evidence to me, and it has been quietly accepted by other historians, but it evidently has had no impact on the loyal followers of Professor Hebard because "the grave of Sacajawea" continues as a revered shrine at the Wind River Indian Reservation.

Research is not all glamour. Much of it is drudgery, and the thrills of discovering something really new and exciting—or of discovering something old that has to be rehabilitated—comes rarely. Research, like bad breath, can also make you unpopular if it reveals truths which upsets favorite applegarts or romantic legends dear to State Travel Bureaus or television script writers. But by and large research also can be fun, and to the extent that it is the honest pursuit of truth, it can provide the satisfaction, sometimes the joy, that is the fringe benefit of any creative human skill.