



Jim Bridger

J. Cecil Alter

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On March 20, 1822, the *Missouri Republican* published a notice addressed “to enterprising young men” in the St. Louise area. “The subscriber,” it said “wishes to engage one hundred young men to ascend the Missouri River to its source, there to be employed for one, two, or three years. For particulars enquire of Major Andrew Henry... or of the subscriber near St. Louise.” The “subscriber” was General William H. Ashley, and among the “enterprising young men” who embarked with Major Henry less than a month later was eighteen-year-old James Bridger, former blacksmith’s apprentice. So began the Ashley-Henry fur empire and the long, colorful career of Jim Bridger.

In the years that followed, Jim Bridger became a master mountain man, an expert trapper, and a guide without equal. He came to know the Rocky Mountain region and its inhabitants as a farmer knows his fields and flocks. Indeed, J. Cecil Alter tells us, “he was among the first white men to use the Indian trail over South Pass; he was first to taste the waters of the Great Salt lake, first to report a two-ocean stream, foremost in describing the Yellowstone Park phenomena, and the only man to run the Big Horn River rapid on a raft; and he originally selected the Crow Creek-Sherman-Dale Creek route the Laramie Mountains and Bridger’s Pass over the Continental Divide, which were adopted by the Union pacific Railroad.”

Such knowledge, together with extraordinary skill and uncanny luck, preserved Jim Bridger in a country where nearly half of his mountain companions met violent death. It also gave rise to a brood of impossible tales about Old Gabe and his adventures-tales which he himself may unwittingly have helped along with his droll humor.

Based on Mr. Alter’s original biography of 1925 (a facsimile edition of which, with addenda, appeared in 1950) and a wealth of new facts gleaned from many years of careful research, Jim Bridger is the authentic story of the Old Scout’s life. Only those events in which Bridger took part are included; improbable and uncorroborated stories, however interesting, have been omitted.

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