

Mapping the Transmississippi West

the Great Basin in almost its central part, had again gone southwesterly to California and thence north along the coast from slightly above the Mexican settlements to Oregon, and had made his way back to the Rocky Mountain trapping area by a route which took him as far north as the present Canadian border. No other man of the fur trade era so thoroughly probed the American West as did this young adventurer, who first saw the region in 1822 as a youth of twenty-three in Ashley's employ, and whose career was cut short only nine years later when death stalked him beside a lonely water-hole of the Cimarron desert.

Smith planned to publish his journals, together with a map displaying the scenes of his wanderings, as soon as he should return from the expedition to Santa Fe on which he lost his life. That he did not survive to accomplish this program (and the fact that no one else appeared to draw his achievements to public attention) had much to do with the oblivion in which his memory rested for many decades. It was left to others, years after his exploits, to describe the West he had come to know so intimately, whose nature he was so well fitted to delineate, and which—as we now know—he had mapped with remarkable accuracy.

Exploration was certainly not Jedediah Smith's primary purpose, nor even one of his leading objectives during the years he roamed the West. Exploration was for him quite incidental to the pursuit of a business—that of trapping and trading for furs, chiefly those of the beaver. In this effort, Smith sustained himself and his men for several years, and he returned at last to St. Louis, known well and favorably to all acquainted with the fur trade. He had passed his stage of probation, had headed wilderness enterprises large for their day, and was ready for an even more important career when death suddenly overtook him. Before leaving St. Louis on his last expedition, he devoted much time and thought to writing up his journals and constructing a map of his wanderings, apparently planning to publish these documents on his return from Santa Fe. This project was never carried out and most of Smith's papers, including his map or maps, seem to have been lost or destroyed not long after his death. Because the Ashley-Smith enterprises in the West did so

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much to open up the still largely unknown West and make knowledge of it a part of the American consciousness, it seems desirable at this point to describe them at some length in order to establish the background for the notable cartographic advance which followed.⁵

Jedediah Smith entered the fur trade as a result of William H. Ashley's frequently quoted advertisement in the St. Louis *Missouri Gazette & Public Advertiser* for February 13, 1822, in which Ashley sought one hundred "enterprising young men" to ascend the Missouri to its source "there to be employed for one, two or three years." Ashley's partner, Major Andrew Henry, had become active in the trade as early as 1809, had even built a "fort" on Henry's Fork of the Snake River in the Columbia watershed, had seen the business dispersed partly as a result of the War of 1812, and was now anxious to return to the beaver-rich mountains. Ashley himself, though then inexperienced in fur trading, was a man of force and influence, a brigadier general of the Missouri militia and Lieutenant-Governor of the newly-admitted State. When two companies under Henry and Ashley set out up the Missouri in the spring and summer of 1822, there were some hundred and fifty men in all—trappers, boatmen, clerks, and principals. They proceeded up-river, past the Mandan villages where Lewis and Clark had wintered on the way out, and on to the mouth of the Yellowstone. Smith garnered practical experience as a trapper on the Yellowstone and on the Missouri. In the spring of 1823 he went down river to meet Ashley, ascending with fresh supplies, and was with him when he reached the Arikara villages.

Here occurred the most celebrated Indian fight of the fur trade era, and Ashley—licking his wounds—fell down river, sending Smith, with a French-Canadian, across country with messages to Henry. Later in 1823 Smith was sent with a party to the Crow country, wintering on Wind River. Failing to break through Union Pass, which Wilson Price Hunt, the Astorian, had used in 1811, on advice of the Crows Smith turned south along the base of the mountains to the broad, easy pass that now

⁵ Dale L. Morgan has given the details in his *Jedediah Smith* (Indianapolis, 1953), and in his work on *William Ashley*, which is being printed in San Francisco as this volume goes to press.

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streams has since been ascertained, but the source of the mistake is nowhere noticed. The manuscript map of Oregon and California, by Jedediah S. Smith, which was, till lately the best source of information as to this part of the country, although in general singularly accurate, considering the extent of the region traversed and laid down by him, gave rise to it. Smith in 1828 ascended the Sacramento valley, and crossing the mountains, struck on what apparently was the south fork of the Trinity. This he followed down to its junction with the Klamath, and to the mouth of the latter; thence pursuing his route up the coast to Rogue's river, and the Umpqua, and over into the Willamette valley. Supposing Rogue's river, or the Too-too-tutnis, to be the one which headed in Klamath lake, he so represented it on his map; and to the Klamath he gave the name of Smith's river, by which it is yet called upon all the English sea-charts. Smith was a fur-trader, and one of the most adventurous of that class; and was, as is believed, for some time at least, a partner of General Ashley of Missouri. His travels from about the year 1821 to 1830, as traced upon his map, cover not only the heads of the Missouri, the Yellowstone, the two forks of the Columbia river, and the Colorado, but encircle the whole of the great basin of California (which he moreover claims to have crossed in 1826⁹ from San Francisco to the Great Salt Lake), and on the Pacific extend from the Pueblo de los Angeles to Fort Vancouver. He was finally killed by the Camanches, and not, as is often supposed, on the river of his name. He however lost a party of fifteen men upon the Umpqua, on his route up from the Klamath, escaping himself with some difficulty. His furs and goods were recovered for him by Dr. M'Loughlin of the Hudson's Bay Company, who sent out a party for the purpose. Smith's map, it is believed, was recently purchased in Oregon by the Joint Commission of Army and Navy Officers, and is probably now in Washington."¹⁰

⁹ This erroneous date is significant in the light of its use by Gibbs on his map.

¹⁰ *Journal*, September 29, 1851. In this journal of the tour with Fredrick M'Kee, U. S. Indian Agent, through northwestern California, Gibbs mentions this Smith map frequently, showing intimate acquaintance with it. (Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Archives of Aboriginal Knowledge* (Philadelphia, 1860), originally published as *Information respecting the History Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1853), III, 135.)

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Later in this journal, under date of October 26, 1851, Gibbs refers to Mount Shasta, saying "It is the same as the Rogers' peak of Smith." Since, as published, this was an official journal, and therefore written up from a personal diary, in preparing it Gibbs may have permitted himself some observations he did not have occasion to make while actually in the field, but, inasmuch as he transmitted the journal to Col. Fredrick McKee from Benicia, California, as early as February 23, 1852, with the result that it was published by Schoolcraft the following year, the inference seems clear as to approximately where and when Gibbs came upon the Smith map.

Some of the information in the Gibbs material just quoted may of course have come orally to him from such well-informed men as Dr. John McLoughlin and Peter Skene Ogden, both at the time still alive and dwelling in Oregon. Until the Smith-Gibbs-Fremont map was found, it even seemed probable that Gibbs had come upon a map prepared by Jedediah Smith for his hosts of the Hudson's Bay Company while wintering at Fort Vancouver between December, 1828, and March, 1829, though this assumption required one to believe that Gibbs was mistaken in saying in the journal that the Smith map he had seen depicted Smith's travels down to 1830.

Now, in the Smith-Gibbs-Fremont map, a direct reflection of the map so described has been discovered, and on examination it is found to support Gibb's statement in every particular. Since the map sets forth in detail movements and events which occurred subsequent to Smith's departure from Fort Vancouver on March 12, 1829, it is apparent that at least a portion of the map Gibbs worked from must have been drawn by Smith after that date, evidently after the explorer's return to St. Louis in October, 1830. It is of course conceivable that Jedediah Smith, after reaching St. Louis, went to the trouble of drawing up a separate map of his travels to be sent out to the Columbia. But this idea is scarcely believable, for he intended to publish his map and the Hudson's Bay Company could wait for a printed version like everyone else. The obstinate fact remains that a Jedediah Smith manuscript map did get out to Ore-