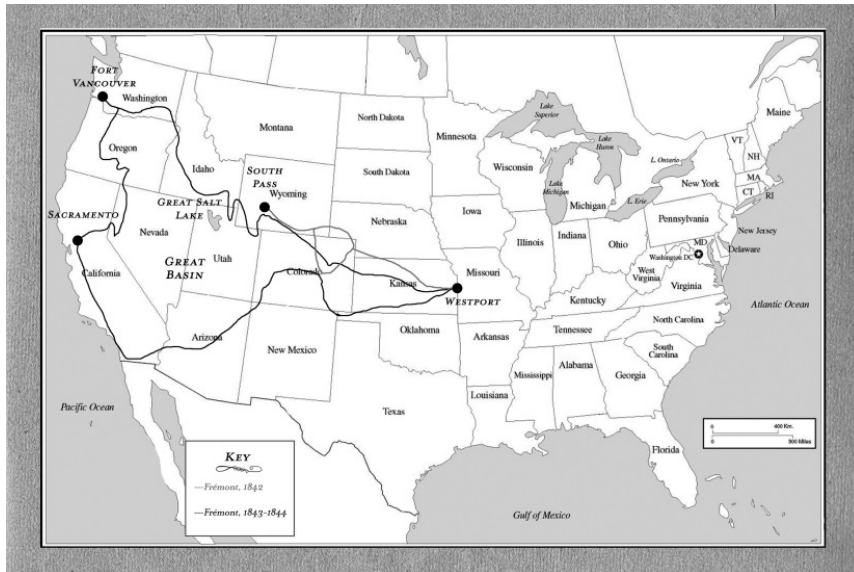


Chapter 108 - Fremont's Second Expedition Explores The West Coast

Time: May 29, 1843 – August 1844

A Second Fremont Journey Extends South Along The California Coast



Map of Fremont's Second Expedition

No sooner has Fremont returned from his first journey than preparations begin for a second.

His assignment this time is to finish up mapping of the entire Oregon Trail route, pushing beyond the South Pass and heading northwest all the way to Fort Vancouver.

Fremont reassembles his roughly thirty-man crew, again including both Kit Carson and Charles Preuss, and sets out from St. Louis on May 29, 1843.

The outward trip is relatively uneventful, with the party reaching the Great Salt Lake on September 6 and Fort Vancouver in early November. At this point Fremont's orders are to turn around and return home by the same route he has just completed. Instead he ignores tribal warnings about the winter ahead, and decides to swing south, heading along the eastern face of the Sierra Nevada range toward Sacramento, California. It is a decision which almost proves fatal.



Map Of The Sierra Nevada Range Heading South

By January 27, 1844, the expedition – some 27 men, 67 horses and mules, and a wheeled cannon -- is strung out and stymied in the mountains. Charles Preuss captures the moment.

We are now completely snowed in. The snowstorm is on top of us. The wind obliterates all tracks which, with incredible effort, we make for our horses. The horses are about twenty miles behind and are expected to arrive tonight, or rather, they are now no longer expected. How could they get through? At the moment no one can tell what will really happen. It is certain we shall have to eat horse meat.

Indeed they do end up eating their horses, before being saved by Kit Carson who finally finds a pass across to the west slope of the Sierras and safety. The guide carves his initials into a tree marking the location, henceforth known as *Carson's Pass*.

Another two week struggle finally ends on March 6, 1844, as they limp into Fort Sutter, east of Sacramento and soon to be famous for the nearby discovery of gold. A three week rest there prepares them for the trip home, which takes them through the San Joachim Valley to the Old Spanish Trail through the Rocky's in Utah.

Their fourteen month journey ends in August, when they arrive back in St. Louis.

Upon his return, Fremont is breveted to the rank of captain by the army, receives national publicity from the press, and is transformed into the "Great Pathfinder" by an adoring public. He is thirty-one years old, with a future ahead that will find him repeatedly in America's spotlight over the next four decades.

Time: 1842-1844

Impact Of Fremont's First Two Expeditions To The West

In reality, casting Fremont as the “Great Pathfinder” is more the product of publicity than performance – since almost all of the trails he takes have been “blazed” by many others before him.

Still his impact on America's drive to “open the West” is profound.

For the first time, thanks to Fremont's band, those eager to move across the continent have access to accurate maps to guide their way. These will prove invaluable in a few short years, first for the Army as west coast conflicts with Mexico and Britain materialize, and later when a flood of “forty-niners” head to the gold fields of California.

But beyond the sheer utility of the maps lies the magic of Fremont's often poetic descriptions of the natural beauty he encounters from one camp to the next. How much of this prose springs from his pen versus that of his wife and co-author, Jesse, remains unknown. Its effect, however, on the imaginations of the American public is undeniable.

For the first time those living east of the Mississippi can sense the vastness of the Great Plains, the majesty of the Rocky Mountains, the fertile California vineyards, the mighty roar of buffalo herds, rushing rapids, the Pacific Ocean.

Any early stirrings about expansion that the politicians and public might have felt since the Louisiana Purchase are suddenly amplified by Fremont's first two expeditions. In that sense, he becomes an important pathfinder of America's commitment to manifest destiny.

Sidebar: Births And Deaths Of Frontiersmen



It is not surprising that Americans who abandoned hearth and home on their own precarious journey across the Atlantic would form a love affair with the frontiersmen who ventured overland to the Pacific.

Daniel Boone heading through the Cumberland Gap into Kaintucky. John Jacob Astor chasing fur pelts across Canada to the west coast. George Clark and Meriwether Lewis blazing the Oregon Trail. Zeb Pike finding his 14,000 foot high peak in the southern Rockies. Tennessee Congressman Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie losing their lives on behalf of the Republic of Texas. The Missouri trader, William Becknell, who first blazes the Santa Fe Trail. The mountain men, Jedediah Smith, William Ashley, Jim

Mountain Man Seth Kinman (1815-1888)

Bridger and William Sublette making their living in the Rockies, crossing the Mojave Desert, reaching into southern California. Ceran St. Vrain and William Bent with their trading post near Taos, New Mexico, and John Sutter, whose sawmill in Coloma, California, will spark the 1849 Gold Rush. John Fremont, Kit Carson and Charles Preuss, whose maps will prove invaluable to all who follow. The host of largely unknown native tribesmen who were there first and often guided the way.

These are America’s very own explorers, their names on towns and monuments, their deeds forever memorialized in literature and songs, their spirit embedded in the psyches of those about to realize the vision of “manifest destiny” in the latter half of the 19th century.

Name	Birth	Death
Daniel Boone	Oct 22, 1734	Sept 26, 1820
George Rogers Clark	Nov 19, 1752	Feb 13, 1818
Robert Gray	May 10, 1755	July 1806
John Jacob Astor	July 17, 1763	March 29, 1848
Alexander Mackenzie	1764	March 12, 1820
Touissant Charbonneau	1767	1843
William Ashley	1770	Mar 26, 1838
Meriwether Lewis	Aug 18, 1774	October 11, 1809
John Colter	1774	Nov 22, 1813
Zebulon Pike	Jan 5, 1779	April 27, 1813
Davy Crockett	1786	1836

William Becknell	1788	April 30, 1865
Sacagewea	1788	1812
Stephen Austin	Nov 3, 1793	Dec 27, 1836
Benjamin Bonneville	April 14, 1796	June 12, 1878
James Bowie	1796	Mar 6, 1836
Charles Wilkes	April 3, 1798	Feb 8, 1877
William Sublette	Sept 21, 1798	July 23, 1845
Joseph Walker	Dec 13, 1798	Oct 27, 1876
Jedediah Smith	Jan 16, 1799	May 27, 1831
Ceran St. Vrain	May 5, 1802	Oct 28, 1870
John Sutter	Feb 20, 1803	June 18, 1880
Charles Preuss	1803	1854
Jim Bridger	March 17, 1804	July 17, 1881
Kit Carson	Dec 24, 1809	May 23, 1868
William Bent	May 23, 1809	May 19, 1869
John Grizzly Adams	1812	1860
John C. Fremont	Jan 21, 1813	July 13, 1890
Seth Kinman	Sept 29, 1815	Feb 24, 1888
Jim Baker	1818	1898