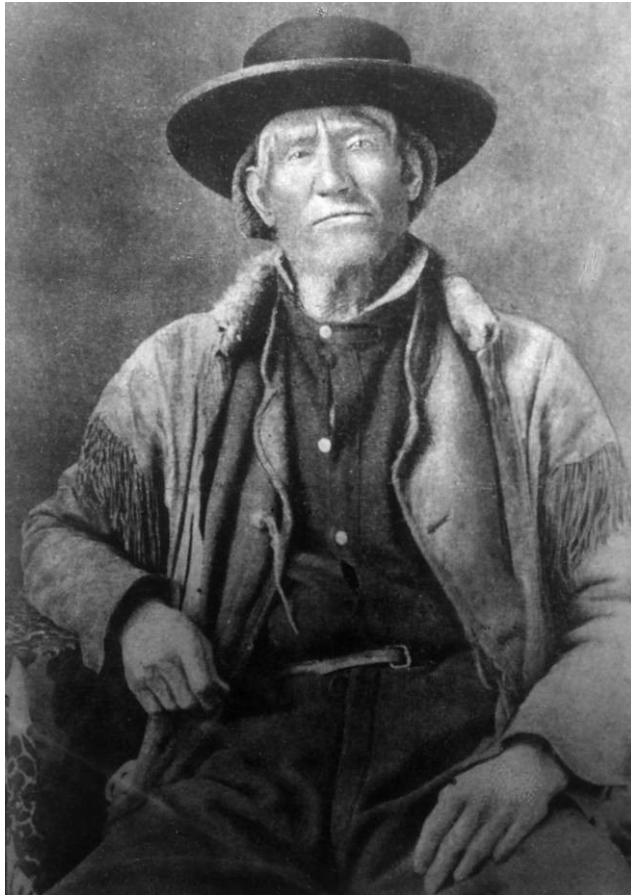




EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION



Biography

- Born: 1804, Richmond, Virginia
- Died: 1881, Kansas City, Missouri
- Married:
 - Cora (Flathead tribe), c.1835
 - Chipeta (Ute tribe), c. 1846
 - Mary "Little Fawn" (Shoshone tribe), c. 1848
- Noted mountain man and explorer of the American West

Achievements

- Among the first explorers of the Yellowstone region and the Great Salt Lake
- Established Fort Bridger as a major trading post on the Oregon Trail
- Blazed what became known as the Bridger Trail to the gold fields of Montana

James Felix Bridger

James Felix "Jim" Bridger was one of the most famous guides, scouts, and mountain men of the 19th century. Born in Virginia, his family moved to the edges of the American frontier near St. Louis, and he was orphaned at the age of 13. Never formally educated, illiterate his entire life, he apprenticed to Philip Creamer, a famous gunsmith, working at his gun shop and at the Illinois Indian Agency.

In 1822 he joined the fur trapping expedition of Andrew Henry and William Ashley to the upper Missouri River, traveling with Jedediah Smith and others. For the next two decades, Bridger wandered the American West, between the U.S.-Canadian border to the north and the Mexican border to the south; between the Missouri River on the east, and Idaho and Utah territories and Alta California on the west. He was among the first to explore the Yellowstone region and the Great Salt Lake.

In 1843, he established Fort Bridger which became an important resource for emigrant travelers. In the late 1850s, he guided topographical surveys of potential wagon roads along the Yellowstone, Wind, Bighorn, Three Forks, and other rivers. In the 1860s he was a guide at Fort Laramie and later was stationed as a scout at Forts Phil Kearney and C.F. Smith on the Bozeman Trail.

While involved in the Red Cloud War and other conflicts, and as a brigade leader and scout, he had generally good relations with tribes, who trusted his word. He showed Captain Stansbury what would become known as Bridger Pass, an alternative route in south-central Wyoming that bypassed South Pass and shortened the Oregon Trail by more than 60 miles. In 1864, recognizing the need for a safer route to the gold fields in Montana Territory than the Bozeman Trail, he blazed what became known as the Bridger Trail through the Bighorn Basin.

He returned to Missouri in 1868 where he lived until his death. Originally interred at a small cemetery near his home, his remains were moved to Mount Washington Cemetery in Independence, Missouri, in 1904. The reinterment was arranged by General Grenville Mellen Dodge who had consulted Bridger on surveys for the Union Pacific Railroad and had hired him to be chief guide for Indian campaigns on the Bozeman Trail. Dodge also arranged for the creation of a striking seven-foot monument at the gravesite depicting Bridger's principal achievements.