



Biographical Sketch of James Bridger: Mountaineer, Trapper, and Guide (1905)

General Grenville M. Dodge

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James Bridger may be most famous for being, as a youth, one of the two mountain men who abandoned famed trapper Hugh Glass after he had been mauled by a grizzly bear. It was Hugh's thoughts of revenge for this abandonment that fueled his recovery and eventual tracking down of the young Bridger

The author of this biographical sketch is Grenville Mellen Dodge (1831 – 1916) who was a Union army officer on the frontier. As the Civil War was coming to a close, during the summer of 1865, Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians had been raiding the Bozeman Trail and overland mail routes. Dodge ordered a punitive campaign to quell these raids and he hired James Bridger as a guide. Dodge states: "I found him [at his home near Kansas City] when I took command of that country in January, 1865, and placed him as guide of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry in its march from Fort Riley to Fort Laramie. Bridger remained with them at Fort Laramie as their guide, and took part with them in the many encounters they had with the Indians, and his services to them were invaluable."

James Bridger, known as Jim Bridger (1804 – 1881), was among the foremost mountain men, trappers, scouts and guides who explored and trapped the Western United States during the decades of 1820–1850, as well as mediating between native tribes and encroaching whites.

The western plains and mountains brought forth thousands of men noted for their valor, bravery, daring, sagacity, woodcraft, frontiersmanship and skill in guiding wagon trains and military expeditions across the trackless prairie and barren desert and through snow capped mountain fastnesses on the way to the land of gold beyond the setting sun, or in trailing and bringing to bay the savage hordes that sternly fought the advances of civilization; but among those dauntless spirits there was one who stood head and shoulders above all others as the greatest scout, trapper and guide, the most skilled frontiersman, and the quietest, most modest and unassuming prairie man in all the west. That person was James Bridger, Major Bridger, or, as he was more commonly and familiarly known, "old Jim Bridger," the "grand old man of the Rockies." No history of the American western frontier would be complete without a sketch of the life of this remarkable man.

Bridger's status as a major player in the history of the Great West can be summed up on his monument located in Mount Washington Cemetery, Kansas City:

"Celebrated as a hunter, trapper, fur trader and guide. Discovered Great Salt Lake 1824, the South Pass 1827. Visited Yellowstone Lake and Geysers 1830. Founded Fort Bridger 1843. Opened Overland Route by Bridger's Pass to Great Salt Lake. Was guide for U.S. exploring expeditions, Albert Sidney Johnston's army in 1857, and G. M. Dodge in U. P. surveys and Indian campaigns 1865-66."

Originally published in 1904; reformatted for the Kindle; may contain occasional imperfection; original spellings have been kept in place.

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