

terrain became a fifty mile jaunt over a snow capped mountain and a three foot deep stream became a raging torrent.

Later, as the mountain men began to participate in their yearly "rendezvous", they would exchange tales. Each would vie with the others in telling "tall tales". They were not lies but only a cultural trait of men who, for entertainment and to alleviate their own tensions, felt compelled to participate in those kinds of verbal games. In a different vein, those verbal competitions were quite similar to the numerous other kinds of the City of angels. folklore which develop within isolated segements of society.

Moses "Black" Harris was the first Black trapper to enter the Great Basin but he would not first to explore any major be the last. He did not enter Nevada but he came close - the area around the great salt lake. The early fur traders "always got a Negro if possible to negotiate for them with the Indians because of their pacifying effect. They could manage them better than the small party of adwhite men, with less

friction." Harris performed such tasks.

In 1826, a small band of Americans representing the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, left Salt Lake headed west toward California. They were led by Jebediah Strong Smith. All total, there were fifteen men in the party. Two of these men were Black. The expedition entered Nevada near the present town of Bunkerville on the Virgin River, turned southward and followed the Colorado River southward and then westward to the San Gabriel Mission which later became Los Angeles or

Only the fringes of Nevada had been touched. What the interior had to offer was yet to be discovered. John C. Fremont was the portion of Nevada. He became the most well known of the early Nevada explorers. After exploring a large portion of the northwest territory, he turned southward in search of a river which had been named Humboldt by Peter Ogden. With his venturers were at least

four Black men.

Through the efforts of all of these men, the void which had been called the Great Basin (Nevada) began to be identified. Mountains, valleys, rivers and washes were discovered and named. Some were named for Indian groups, some for the explorers themselves and other points of interest were named

for loved-ones or for particular characteristics they possessed. Ogden, Ruby Valley, Wasatch, Emerald Mountain and such as that are examples.

Those mountain men blazed the trails which others would later follow. They wanted to keep at least two steps ahead of civilization. They wanted no part, for varying reasons, of the trappings of civilization - houses, soft beds and laws. They either were

or became tough and hardy and they tolerated no abuse. You would rather fight a forest fire than to fight one of them.

The mountain men of the early west were an independent lot. They were not to be "fooled" with. They asked no questions of the background of those they came upon and when some tenderfoot would ask where they had come from they would sardonically

and sarcastically reply: "I haven't been there yet".

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There was a unique quality of friendship which existed among most of those men. One was not concerned with what color a person's skin happened to be but only with whether or not they could handle themselves in a scrape. This is an aspect of the "good old days" which we could use more of today. MORE TO COME

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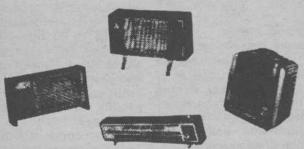
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