



Lewis & Clark's Route Retraveled, The Upper Missouri in 1858

W. B. NAPTON

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In 1858, the author took a steamboat voyage to visit Indian tribes in the country drained by the Missouri as an attache for the bureau of Indian affairs. Under existing treaties with the western Indian tribes, the national Government sent out to them annually large consignments of merchandise. The superintendent of Indian affairs, whose office was in St. Louis, chartered a steamboat to transport these annuities to all the—beginning with the Omahas and Winnebagoes in Nebraska and ending with the Blackfoot, at the base of the Rocky Mountains, around the sources of the Missouri. Nearly one-half of the cargo of this boat, however, consisted of the trading merchandise of Frost, Todd & Company, a fur-trading concern, whose headquarters were at St. Louis, and whose trading posts were established along the Missouri from Yankton to Fort Benton. The whole of the territory of the United States then north of Nebraska was without any legal name or designation; at least there were no such territories as Dakota or Montana shown on the maps. At that time, and for many years before, a steamboat load of merchandise was sent up as far as Fort Benton by the American Fur Company, having its headquarters also in St. Louis, and controlled mainly by the Chouteaus, to replenish the stocks of their trading posts along the river. The trade of these companies was exclusively with the Indians, the exchange being for buffalo robes, furs of the beaver, otter, mink, etc., used for making clothes, gloves, etc.

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