

Osborne Russell's Journal of a Trapper: Edited from the Original... Study Guide

**Osborne Russell's Journal of a Trapper: Edited from
the Original... by Osborne Russell**

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Plot Summary

Osborne Russell's narrative takes place in the years 1834 to 1843, when he travels and traps beaver in the northern area of the Rocky Mountains. Much of the area, including the famous natural springs and geysers is presently in Yellowstone National Park. Russell at age 20 signs up for Wyeth's expedition to the Rocky Mountains, with the Columbia Fishing and Trading Co., leaving from Missouri. The overland party arrives for the yearly rendezvous in July of 1834. Mr. Wyeth builds Fort Hall on the Snake River to trade for beaver skins, which is where Russell begins his service. In the beginning, Russell has to learn how to trap beaver and kill the wild game of the area, from buffalo to grizzly bears. Russell meets friendly Snake Indians and soon learns much of their language. Russell hears about Indians, mostly Blackfeet that attack white trappers.

Russell becomes a free trapper who operates with other trappers from Ft. Hall. In June of 1835, there is a skirmish with Blackfeet Indians near the Teton Mountains. Russell meets many friendly Indians who help him in his travels. For the first time, he sees the hot springs of the Yellowstone Lake area. Russell spends some time alone on a mission and is feared dead before he appears again at Ft. Hall. Yellowstone Lake and the surrounding springs becomes a favorite place to hunt and trap for Russell and the men with James Bridger. It also is a favorite hunting ground of the Blackfeet Indians and skirmishes develop on a regular basis. During the wintertime often things are quiet, and Russell has time at his "Rocky Mountains College." Other favorite spots of Russell and other trappers are Jackson Lake, Jackson's Hole (Valley) and the Snake, Bear, Big Horn and Wind Rivers and tributaries. Russell ranges in his travels from 25-Yard River in the north, to Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake in the south.

Later, a hostile Indian village approaches and a series of battles with the Indians occur. Russell is sent with three other men on a mission, and they are robbed by Crow Indians. Despite the apologies of the Crow Chief several days later, Russell and his comrades refuse to trust the Chief, and they proceed on foot for a long period before making it to Fort William. Russell is humiliated because he has lost his goods and horses but soon gets most of his property back. Russell is attacked on another journey while with one comrade and is injured and loses his horse. He depends on the friendship of other trappers and Indians to survive and reequip. Each year, parties from the Eastern United States or the mouth of the Columbia River bring supplies to the trappers and buy beaver skins from them. Russell spends many months trapping with Elbridge Trask in the area around Gray's River, till he decides to leave his life as a trapper. Russell joins a group going to a new town on the Willamette River. There he is injured in an accident and loses his right eye.



Part 1, pp. 23- 43

Part 1, pp. 23- 43 Summary and Analysis

In April 1834, Osborne Russell joins an expedition to the Rockies. Fifty men set out including independent trappers, scientists and missionaries. The expedition is led by Nathaniel Wyeth. They arrive in a couple of weeks to the Platte River. They cross the Platte River at a place called Red Buttes and head towards the northwest. On June 18th, they cross the continental divide, where on one side the water goes to the Atlantic, and the other side the water goes to the Pacific. They arrive at the Green River, by Ham's Fork, where on June 20th about six-hundred hunters meet, including men under contract with the American Fur Co. and the Rocky Mountain Fur Co. Wyeth has his large group march northwest past the Bear River to the Snake River. The party passes the Sheep Rock, a prominent rock frequented by mountain sheep and an area of hot mineral springs. They build a fort, which they name Fort Hall on the Snake River, which is finished by August 5th, 1834. Then Mr. Wyeth leaves for the Columbia River and the Pacific, leaving 12 men, including Russell at Fort Hall.

In his inexperience, Russell shoots a Grizzly Bear in the shoulder and is attacked at close quarters. He barely is able to shoot the bear dead in time. On October 1st, some of the hunters discover an Indian village of about 60 lodges. Luckily, they are friendly Snake Indians. Three Indians spend a night at the fort and give the men useful information and Russell begins to learn their language. The next day the men from the fort have supper at the Indian village. The men at the Fort trade with the Indians and get a large amount of buffalo meat for the coming winter. Some white men come to the Fort that have been attacked by Indians, and one man's arm is injured. The men at the fort get news that 60 of Bridger's men are about 60 miles north on the Snake River and are going to pass the winter there. The American Fur and Rocky Mountain Fur companies have united.

Supplies arrive from the Columbia River under Captain Thing. Russell passes the winter at the Fort and on March 25th, 1835 joins a group of nearly 20 trappers going out to trap beaver. For ten days they live on roots because hunting is very poor. Then, they kill two Grizzly Bears and a large stew is made for all the men. Russell sees a valley stretching out along the Snake River. It is difficult to trap beaver here because of the high water. The men arrive at Snake Lake and find a friendly Snake Indian village of 300 lodges. The men then head up into the mountains. In the valley of the Salt River, there are seen many salt springs that leave white crusts of salt on the ground. On May 11th, the men camp by Gardner's Fork and there meet Mr. Bridger and his party. Bridger says there are swarms of hostile Blackfoot Indians in the area. The men in Russell's group decide to head back towards Fort Hall. They go along the Blackfoot River, which runs into the Snake River. The men return to the Fort at the end of May and find out that Captain Thing had an expedition that was defeated by the Blackfoot Indians, and they lost everything except the men and horses. A group of almost 50 men plan to go to Yellowstone Lake and later return to Fort Hall.



Part 2, pp. 44-63

Part 2, pp. 44-63 Summary and Analysis

The men set out to Lewis' Fork, in June 1835. The men cross Lewis' Fork by making a boat of stretched buffalo skin over logs and cross successfully, except for a man who tries to ford the river on his horse and drowns. The men then follow a creek into the Teton Mountains. On June 28th, the men see 60 Indians in the morning who grab some of their horses and surround the trapper's camp, making circles around it. After two hours, the trappers sneak up on the Indians and kill some of them. The trappers find that they lose eight horses in the battle and some men are injured. The men cross the Teton Mountains, though one man is in a lot of pain from being shot in the leg. The party makes it to the Salt River and a valley called Jackson's Hole. In the beginning of July, a bull skin boat makes it across Lewis' fork but then falls apart on the return trip. A raft of wooden logs is abandoned mid river and Russell fears losing all his clothes and tents. The next day the raft is found trapped by an island and all the party's goods are recovered. The men are in dispute as to where they are, where their goal is to make it to the Yellow Stone Lake, and the group splits up.

The men with Russell are somewhat lost. They find a valley that is full of mountain sheep, and a small river. Russell and another man go up a treacherous mountain that is covered with snow, cutting steps into the ice with their knives, at one point leaving their mules below them. When the two men descend they reunite with their mules in a small valley and see two Indians. After much alarm, the Indians identify themselves as friendly Snake or Shoshone Indians. Russell gets information on a safe way down the mountains and also generally where Lake Yellow Stone is located. The party reaches the Stinking River, which is a branch of the Big Horn River. Here there are hot sulfurous springs. In a few days, the party reaches a small river that they all agree is a branch of the Yellow Stone River. The party meets a band of Snake Indians, about 25 men, women and children altogether, that are friendly. They get a map of the area and some more information. The men also trade ammunition, axes, and other goods for some fine panther, sheep and elk skins. The men reach a large valley of the Yellow Stone River.



pp. 64- 83

pp. 64- 83 Summary and Analysis

The men cross the Yellowstone River with the horses more or less swimming across. Four trappers secretly leave to form another party. The remaining men unite with another larger trapping party and then the two parties are attacked by the Blackfoot Indians in September, 1835. The party is so disabled by animals being shot and men deserting that they decide to join Mr. Bridger's party and pass the winter with them. More Blackfoot Indians are spotted, but they wave an American Flag and entreat for peace. A Frenchman goes to set his beaver traps without being in a secure position and is killed and scalped by the Blackfoot Indians. The united party meets up with 2 villages of friendly Flathead Indians.

Russell feels uncomfortable under his bossy leader. He is sent on a mission on his own, but the directions he is given are totally wrong. Russell meets a friendly Bonnock Indian and meets the Bonnock's tribe. Russell spends more time with friendly Indians, being at one time with a lodge and a group of about 1800 Indian individuals. Finally, he meets friendly Snake Indians with whom he converses. He finds out where Bridger is and makes it back to Fort Hall, where Russell is feared to be dead. Russell is now an independent trapper.

Ft. Hall is resupplied and in December, Russell goes off with 15 other trappers to a place 40 miles southeast of the fort called Mutton Hill, where he stays well-fed and comfortable until February. Russell leaves the fort to a camp with Mr. Bridger's men about 15 miles from Ft. Hall. Russell complains that the provisions are poor because all the men have is stored blue bull meat that is tough. He stays there until March in the winter of 1835-36. In the Spring of 1836, Russell goes to the valley of the Salt River and then to Grays Creek to set beaver traps. It is difficult to catch beaver because the rivers are near flood stage at this time of year. On May 5th, some of the men are fired on by Blackfoot Indians near the Blackfoot River. One man is slightly wounded. The men rendezvous with a larger hunting party and friendly Indians. This large group has to separate to make room for feeding the horses. Russell's group again makes a rendezvous about July 4th on the Green River. Mr. Wyeth brings supplies there from the Columbia River mouth; Wyeth's party includes missionaries and their wives. Russell is in a group of about 15 trappers that is ordered by Mr. Bridger to go to the Yellow Stone Lake. They camp near the headwaters of the Green and Snake Rivers and then march down the mountains to Jackson Lake and Jackson's Hole. On the southwest of this valley are the three large peaks known as the Tetons. This area is by the Continental divide, and the party meets Mr. Bridger's party at Yellow Stone Lake.



pp. 84-103

pp. 84-103 Summary and Analysis

Yellow Stone Lake is large, about 100 miles in circumference. The men camp by the famous hot springs that bubble from beneath the surface. The earth seems hollow and the springs make a loud noise. The men are happy telling stories in the cool August evenings by the fireside. The men march over some mountains and arrive at the Secluded Valley, a favorite rest stop for the trappers and Indians. They meet some friendly Indians there and trade with them. At Gardner's Hole, the large party breaks up, with Mr. Bridger making camp there, and small parties going out to trap beaver. By September, Russell reaches a relatively northern point in his travels, the 25-Yard River. He traps there and meets some friendly Delaware Indians, and game is abundant. Large numbers of grizzly bears are seen in the area enjoying the cherries and other fruit that grows here. Russell and another trapper do much trapping on branches of the Yellowstone River.

At this point, Russell hears again of Blackfeet Indian attacks, with a French trapper killed and others wounded. A trapper rides up whose horse has been wounded by Blackfeet gunfire. The next day, 60 Blackfeet attack two trappers by a river and shoot one, Howell, who soon dies. The trappers then are obliged to plot their counterattack. A mixed White and Delaware Indian group of 20 men find and attack the Blackfeet and drive them to their fort on a river island. One friendly Indian is killed and several Blackfeet are killed before they flee. The spot by Clarks Fork and Rocky Fort is named Howell's encampment, where Howell is buried. As the trappers continue to move, they pass two bands of friendly Crow Indians that say they are going to fight the Blackfeet. In late September, snow begins to fall, and by mid-October 1836, streams are frozen and beaver trapping has to be suspended. The men pass Bridger's camp for the winter on the Yellowstone River. As the long winter set in, the men kill buffalo for food and set up large lodges that hold 6 men each. Russell calls this his "Rocky Mountain University," since some of the men are schooled in classical studies. In January 1837, Russell and other trappers go out for a few days to kill more buffalo. The trappers are relaxed when suddenly they are attacked by a band of naked Indians. One man's arm is wounded by a shot and the men are forced to flee. A few days later another group of Blackfeet are spotted and the trappers attack the Indians.

Back at Bridger's camp, in February, Bridger is looking through his telescope and sees a band of Indians. A large group of Indians, perhaps 1100 in all is seen and the men build up fortifications to prepare a defense. That night in the heavens the northern lights shine. The next day, the trappers send out a small reconnaissance team led by Mr. Bridger. Later a lone Indian comes close and fires a few shots at the makeshift fort. A Spaniard coming out of the fort is shot in the heel. Then the Indian Chief comes out with a white flag and signals that the Indians are leaving and are not going to fight. The Indians may have seen the fortifications, or been afraid of the sign of the "bloody" northern lights, being very superstitious.



In February, 1837, the men march out to the Bovy Fork near Big Horn Mountain. They kill many buffalo and also play games, with only friendly Indians nearby. This village is called "Long Hair's Band." The Crows are characterized as courageous when they think they can be successful in attacking and looting, but cowardly when they feel they are inferior in force. By April 1st, the men begin the spring hunt for beaver. The group of trappers with Russell meets four Delaware Indians who just have fought and killed several Blackfeet Indians. The trappers see two Blackfeet forts that are empty. They meet another party of trappers who were recently defeated by Blackfeet Indians, with horses lost or abandoned. The men continue to the Wind River, which is there called the Big Horn River. There are more hostile Blackfeet in the area. Back along a branch of the Wind River, Russell sees an oil and coal tar spring that is flammable. The men travel to the Green River through the low spurs of the mountains to avoid being ambushed.



pp. 104- 123

pp. 104- 123 Summary and Analysis

On the Green River are assembled all sorts of White, Half-breed and Indian trappers. They are playing games and are assembled for the 4th of July, 1837. A village of Bonnack Indians approach to trade, but they have also killed two white trappers and have been stealing horses. Two friendly Nez Percey Indians grab the horses back. Then, a party of the Bonnack Indians come to seize back their stolen horses. A gunfight ensues and many Bonnacks are killed and their village is looted. After 3 days of running combat, the Bonnacks sue for peace and promise to be good Indians.

On July 5th, a party with goods and news from the states arrives. The trappers sell their beaver skins and buy clothing, coffee and other goods. A large trapping party forms under LB Fontanelle and James Bridger. Russell goes off with five men to hunt around the headwaters of the Yellowstone River. The trappers discover evidence of Blackfeet Indians and then are attacked. Russell's horse is shot twice, and the trappers are chased and return to the main party at the rendezvous point. The group goes to Little Jackson and Big Jackson's Hole. Russell and three others split off, instructed by Fontanelle to rendezvous with the main party again by October 15th, or post changes of plans by Howell's grave.

The four men travel north to near Jackson's Lake on August 1st, an area familiar to Russell. This is by the Continental Divide. The men spend some time in the Secluded Valley, where there are no mosquitoes due to the cold temperatures at night. The men kill, cook, and eat an elk and relax. Russell's companion, an Englishman, is not impressed with the beautiful scenery. The Englishman, Allen, and an Irishman, Corm, can only think of the beauty of their homelands. The men go to the headwaters of the "Stinking River." That night three of their horses are stolen. The next day, the men meet a small band of Snake Indians in the mountains. The men trade with the Indians and then hunt for beaver.

The party goes along the Yellowstone River and then up again to the Secluded Valley to set traps until September 2nd. By mid-September, there is heavy snow in mountainous areas. The Irishman, John Corm, is frightened and hides when he hears the high whistling of an elk. Russell and the Englishman, Allen, look for Fontanelle's group but do not find them or a note at Howell's grave. In late October, the men go back to beaver trapping on a tributary of the Wind River near the Big Horn Mountain. On the Big Horn River, Russell and the other three men meet a party of Crow Indians and eat and smoke with them. The Indians make threats and their villages are close by. The Indians follow the trappers and end up stealing much of their goods and all their horses. The men are burning their remaining goods when 20 Indians ride up. Allen suspects treachery and refuses to smoke with the Indians. The Indian Chief tells Russell that he is sorry that the men of his village robbed them. The Chief offers to replace the men's goods, but they refuse to go with the Indians.



pp. 124- 143

pp. 124- 143 Summary and Analysis

The men spend some time wandering in the snow, but are still able to light fires and kill animals to eat. On the 18th of November they reach Ft. William. Mr. Fontanelle gives Russell and his companions, ratty buffalo robes though he has 500 new ones for sale in the warehouse, causing much resentment. A Sioux Indian comes to speak with Russell at the Fort, dressed in white-man type clothing. The Indian, using a type of sign language that Russell knows, finds out about how Russell's goods were stolen by Crow Indians. Soon after on November 18th a trapper named Thomas Biggs comes to visit Russell and knows all about what happened with the Crow Indians and Russell. Mr. Biggs takes Russell and Allen with him to his camp a few miles a way. Then on the Powder River, Fontanelle meets up with Russell and Allen and informs them that all their goods and horses have been recovered at the Crow Village nearby. Their beaver skins had been traded with a Portuguese trader, who at length is forced to acknowledge that the skins have Russell's and Allen's names on them and must be returned to them. In sum, the Crow Chief's sorrow at having two of his men rob Russell seems to have been genuine. In January, the men bring supplies from Mr. Fontanelle back to the fort. Russell spends a comfortable time at the fort until winter breaks up by about March 25th, 1838.

In mid April the men move down the Powder River and continue to the fork of the Big Horn River. Russell speaks of the manner of setting up beaver traps under the waterline on river banks, and not letting too many men know where the traps are. When Russell is alone with a Canadian, a bear jumps on the Canadian and pushes him aside, but the wound ends up being minor. In May, Russell and the other men pass by a Blackfeet camp that is abandoned. There are bodies of Indians dead from smallpox. Soon after the men see a Blackfeet Village and are on the alert. The Blackfeet insult the trappers in the Flathead language.



pp. 144- 163

pp. 144- 163 Summary and Analysis

A trapper who is an Iroquois Indian strips naked and leads the other trappers in battle. The Blackfeet attack, but the Iroquois organize the trappers to outflank and defeat them, and the Blackfeet flee. Russell and the men with him pass a Blackfeet village and plan to destroy it. A party comes out and makes peace and asks to trade. The white men trade instead. Later they meet a party of ten men whose horses have been killed or hurt by Blackfeet.

The men continue hunting and trapping. In late June 1838, the men are by Grey's River and set traps. Later, when they go into the mountains, Russell's horse falls off a precipice and is killed. There are often thunder storms, and sometimes there are thunder storms without rain. The party leaves a valley and climb up into the mountains. Russell and his men see a trail of Blackfoot Indians, and they go to Fort Hall. It is the end of September, going into October, 1838. Into November, the men kill and dry buffalo, but then there are heavy snows by mid November. The men hunt by the Snake River, and then go into winter quarters. By January 1839, the men tire of dried meat and move up the Snake to the fork with the Lewis River, intending to live on sheep. The party meets with some friendly Snake Indians and Russell hunts for elk. It is cold but Russell has a blanket and an Epishemore to keep warm. Russell is by a river that is very warm because it comes out of a hot spring. He sets up beaver traps with his old friend Elbridge. There is easy hunting of mountain sheep, but it is dangerous. They are in the mountains, and one false slip on the ice could lead to a fatal fall.

Four of Russell's party, including Russell, are ready to go on the spring hunt. It is mid-March 1839, and the rain is breaking up the winter. Russell is left with his old buddy, Elbridge. By May, they are by Gray's River and Gray's marsh, and they find a place to store the furs they have caught and treated. They find 12 of their former comrades by the Salt River and Salt Spring. The men gather salt, and by June they return to Fort Hall. Fort Hall has been purchased from Mr. Wyeth by the (British) Hudson Bay Company, in 1837. The men form a party of four to trap in the Wind River and Yellowstone mountains. The party goes to big Jackson Hole and Jackson lake to trap. They walk north to Lewis Lake and find 50 hot springs. This water is sweet, with a limestone taste. The water forms little peaks that are deposited gradually by the hot water and are up to 6 feet tall. This is now known as the Shoshone Geyser Basin. After enjoying the beauty of the spring the men proceed north. There are thick pine trees, and they set traps by the head of the Jefferson branch of the Missouri River.

Russell and the men are near the Old Faithful geyser. The water forms cones of up to twenty feet tall of white limestone among the pines. A stream that begins from a spring has three distinct colors in it, white, reddish, and a tint of blue. This is by Shoshone Lake. The trappers spend the rest of July setting up beaver traps and collecting dead animals. They are in the vicinity of the Yellowstone River and in locations such as the



Secluded Valley. At this time they are north of Jackson's Hole. In August, some of the trappers go off into what they know is dangerous country to shoot Buffalo and get meat. There they see a fairly large Blackfeet Indian village of about 400 Lodges. The trappers encamp near Yellowstone Lake. Suddenly, Russell notices that he and a man named White are surrounded by Indians. Russell and White are shot by bow and arrow in the hip, and they think that they are done for.



pp 164- 183

pp 164- 183 Summary and Analysis

Both Russell and White are able to escape but are wounded and bleeding. Russell manages to get some water from the lake in his hat and the men drink. They hear the Indians in the distance celebrate, grabbing Russell's bullets and other loot. Russell's friend Elbridge is nowhere to be found, because the trappers have scattered. Finally, the two men see a Canadian, who kills two ducks for breakfast. Soon after, by a lake the men shoot a deer. By now it is September, and the men have to deal with rain and some snow while the men are on foot. Russell prepares the deerskin and uses it as a mantle to wrap in. The men are able to make to make moccasins of Elk hide. The men cross a pass in the Teton Mountains, which is not easy. Their goal is Fort Hall, 90 miles away. The men make the hike towards the Fort, despite not eating for 3 days. Russell is at the point of not being able to walk, having a cramp in his leg. Then he sees a half-breed (half-Indian, half-White) and is taken on a horse the last 10 miles to the fort. Russell is treated well by Mr. Courtney Walker of the Hudson Bay Co. and eats and gets rest and clothing. In ten days of rest and saltwater baths, his wounded leg completely recovers and he is back trapping beaver. Eldridge, Russell's friend makes it back to Fort Hall alone.

In October 1839, a party of 15 men is back hunting buffalo and getting stocked for the winter. Most of the men make a winter camp near a fork of the Snake River, while the four Americans return to Fort Hall on Dec. 10th to stay in winter quarters. Russell and Eldridge go out and kill ten buffalo in March and cover what they do not need in snow drifts. Later, when they come back to get the meat, most of it has been eaten by wolves. They face another problem in that after four days trapping and working in the snow, they have snow blindness. They have to wait several days to get their sight back. After resting several days, the men go to Gray's creek on April 20th. In May, Elbridge wants to go to another ground to set his beaver traps, and Russell is alone with his horses and some books.



pp. 184-196

pp. 184-196 Summary and Analysis

Russell is by Utah Lake, which is a salty lake that empties into the Great Salt Lake (Utah). He goes up a mountain and sleeps, to view the lake from 6,000 feet above at the sunrise. He shoots a mountain sheep and butchers it, eating some, but storing the rest, which is soon eaten by a wolverine. Russell stays at a lodge of Snake and Eutaw Indians and trades furs there. He notes that buffalo have already disappeared from the region of the Salt Lake. He then returns to Ft. Hall. Russell meets a Presbyterian Preacher and wife and child that are going back to the States.

Russell does some more hunting and gathers as many beaver skins as he can. He meets his old friend Elbridge and traps beaver by the headwaters of the Blackfoot River and on the tributaries of the Bear River. In November, Russell is up on a high mountain when he sees a Grizzly Bear escape into its den. Russell ambushes the bear that comes out of the den and is close to Russell when it is shot dead. Russell winters at Fort Hall and again goes with some comrades for the spring hunt in the vicinity of the Great Salt Lake. At the mouth of the Bear River where it goes into the Great Salt Lake, there are a huge number of ducks and other water birds. Russell returns to Fort Hall, where a party has just arrived from the Columbia River Valley. In August, he kills an elk and packs the meat for his planned journey west. Soon after, Russell heads west towards a settlement on the Willamette River with a group from the Eastern United States. On Sept 26, 1842, Russell reaches the town on the falls of the Willamette River. He is with Dr. White, a sub-agent to the Indians from the U.S. Government. Russell gets a job working on the construction of a mill by the fall and there is injured by an accidental explosion that sends a large rock flying into his head. Russell survives but loses his right eye.



Appendix pp. 197-216

Appendix pp. 197-216 Summary and Analysis

Russell describes animals and Indians of the region: The Wolverine is a small carnivore that attacks and eats small animals. It is a big problem for trappers because it scavenges stores of animals killed by human beings. The Wolf is an object of many superstitions of the Indians concerning the meaning of the approach and barking of wolves. The Panther is a destructive animal in the mountains that attacks sheep and other animals. It runs at the approach of man. The Grizzly Bear lives mostly on roots and berries and rarely on live game. It hibernates in rocks or holes during the winter. Grizzlies can be as much as seven feet tall. They usually run from man but can be dangerous when approached without warning.

The Mountain Sheep or Big Horn is a brownish color that darkens later in the year. In December, they get a thick impenetrable matted hair covering. They are incredibly agile mountain climbers. Rams fight over ewes in the mating season and the loser is often thrown to his death down a rocky cliff. The skins of mountain sheep are especially preferred by female Indians who make clothing and dresses out of them. The Elk is a huge animal that is up to eight feet long and stands four and a half feet high. When large bands of the animals are hunted, they collide with one another and get disoriented by loud noises. When they fall down, they can be killed by a hunter with a knife. In September, their mating season, the males make a shrill call. The Buffalo prefer the uplands to the river valleys. Russell finds the meat of the Buffalo cows to be superior to domestic beef. As in other species, the bulls fight for the privilege of mating with the cows. Buffalo cows give birth in April and May when the new grass is growing. The Indians chase the buffalo on horseback and then shoot them with guns or arrows. It takes some skill to hunt close to the buffalo and avoid having the horse being gored. Since the buffaloes are often in uplands on rocky ground this is not easy. The trained horse knows how to circle the buffalo, keeping it going in circle till it can be killed by the rider. Russell compares the hunting of buffalo favorably to that of Nobles hunting foxes.

The Snake Indians are called the Shoshonie in their own language, which Russell has learned thoroughly. They live near the Snake, Green and Bear Rivers and are generally friendly to whites. The Snakes believe in a Sun deity that is supreme over a dark deity of the moon and stars. The prophets and medicine men have special manners of eating and especially smoking. Men are often married to more than one wife, and prostitution is rare. There is a democracy with leadership of the Chief and other officials given to those who show the most bravery in battle. There are about 6,000 Snake Indians, divided into large villages and small nomadic groups of 10 or so individuals. They lost control of their territory after the death of two leading Chiefs.



pp. 218- 228, Letters pp. 236- 248

pp. 218- 228, Letters pp. 236- 248 Summary and Analysis

(Pages in between are occupied by references.) The Crow Indians live in the rolling black hills around the Yellowstone River. Their numbers are reduced because of war and smallpox. They seized their present territory from the Snake Indians. They have a democratic government and a council body that makes decisions and draft young men into military service. Prostitution is common, but incest is prohibited. A stranger can have a wife but not take her out of the village. The Crow Indians have strict laws about the hunting of buffalo and know how to surround and kill whole buffalo herds. In war, they kill adult males, but young males and women can be captured and made members of the tribe. The Crow Indians have strict laws on which animals can be killed and eaten and also separation from women during their menstruation. These Indians do not drink alcohol in general and have a rich cuisine, using herbs to season their food. They are a handsome people and many of them live to an old age.

The Beaver is about two and a half feet long, plus a tail that is 10-15 inches long. The tail and webbed feet of the animal help it to swim. Beavers produce a substance from their glands called castorum. The hunter collects castorum from a beaver as bait, since beavers are attracted to other beaver's castorum. The beaver is then caught by a trap on the bank below the water and drowns, since they have to breathe. When the beavers are about three years of age, they pair off in couples and build dams out of tiny pieces of wood on rivers. They build their lodge or nest in the middle of a pond on some sort of island. In winter, the beavers make a storage pile of bark and small trees, which they cut down with their teeth. Russell ends this section with a poem saying farewell to his hunting and trapping ground. He says farewell to the mountains and the animals he hunted. He misses the quiet nights around the campfire with his comrades.

Osborne Russell's Letters: 1st Letter: to Miss Martha Russell, April 3, 1848. Osborne Russell complains that the U.S. Government is not protecting US Citizens in the Oregon Territory. The Cayuse Indians, 300 miles into the interior on the Columbia River have murdered 14 whites. The Indians blamed these missionaries for the spread of deadly measles. The Oregon Territory Legislature organized 500 men to fight the Indians. Osborn is trying to secure title to his lands in Oregon. He also tells his sister that his Rocky Mountains Journal has been sent to a publisher in NY. His sister worries that he will make a poor choice of wife in Oregon. Osborne assure her that he is not planning to marry and sends regards to his friends and relatives. 2nd Letter: to Mrs. Eleanor Read, April 4th, 1848. Osborne Russell complains more of the neglect of the Oregon Territory by the U.S. The winter in the Willamette Valley is mild and the crops are successful. An expensive war continues against the Indians. 3rd Letter: to Eleanor Reed from the California Gold Mines, Nov. 10th, 1899. Osborne Russell is now in Gallowstown,

California, close to Sacramento. He is working at a store and doing some gold mining by hand. Osborne has also served as a judge. People in California have gold fever.



Characters

Osborne Russell

At age 20, Osborne Russell joins an expedition to the Oregon Territory that leaves from Missouri. In the beginning, Russell has little idea of the rigors and way of life of the trapper. He has to learn to hunt animals and trap beaver. Russell finds out quickly that there is much danger as well as adventure in his new life as a trapper. He sees a young trapper drown who insists on fording a too-rough river on horseback. Russell is stationed at the newly-constructed Fort Hall. He learns the Snake Indian language from a friendly visiting Indian. Russell later also learns to use Indian sign language, a universal method of communication.

Russell learns to enjoy the excitement of the hunt, especially chasing Mountain Sheep in dangerous, icy terrain. He usually manages to avoid disaster but once is looted by Indians. Russell is angry but accepts his fate when Fontanelle in Fort William refuses to adequately resupply him after this incident. After a while, trappers help Russell and he gets a horse and supplies. Another time, he is shot by arrows and forced to limp on foot in the wilderness to Fort Hall. Russell particularly enjoys trapping beaver in the beautiful region of valleys and hot geysers around Yellowstone Lake. He finally tires of the life of a mountain man and joins a party going to the Willamette Valley. Ironically, after surviving in good shape nine years of life in the wilderness, Russell is severely wounded while working on building a mill by the Willamette River.

James Bridger

James Bridger is a partner in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Bridger has 60 men under him when Russell first meets him, but many of these men desert Bridger. Bridger sets up camp in the winter of 1835-36 on Blackfoot Creek, not very far from Fort Hall. Russell complains that the men there killed Buffalo Bulls, whose meat is blue and much less tasty than that of the cows. Later, Bridger leads a party that Russell is on that has several skirmishes with Blackfoot Indians and warns Russell that the country is swarming with hostile Blackfoot Indians. Bridger is the camp leader when a group of trappers is threatened by mass Indian attack. Bridger is known to the Snake Indians as the "Blanket Chief." Bridger serves as pilot for a party under LB Fontanelle and another party as well. In another instance, Bridger tries to avoid fighting Blackfoot Indians but is forced to do so by his men. He is continually leading brigades of trappers in hostile Indian territory.

Nathaniel Wyeth

Nathaniel Wyeth is the head of the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company and is known to Russell as an intrepid and courageous leader and businessman. Mr. Wyeth supervises the building of Fort Hall on the Snake River and then continues to the



Columbia River mouth on the Pacific Coast. The next year, Mr. Wyeth again brings a party from the Columbia River to trade for beaver skins and bring supplies to the trappers. In 1837, Wyeth sells Fort Hall to the British Hudson Bay Company.

Lucien Fontanelle, Fontanell, LB Fontanelle

Fontanelle is one of the leaders of the American Fur Company. Fontanelle leads a party with Bridger as pilot that goes through the Blackfeet Indian country. Russell and a couple other trappers fall under Fontanelle's command and are sent out on a mission but are unable to immediately rejoin Fontanelle when they return. Russell is robbed, and when he eventually returns to Fort William, Fontanelle is very stingy in replacing Russell's lost clothing and other possessions. After other leaders of the trappers intervene, Russell's beaver skins and horses are restored to him. Fontanelle appears quite accepting in this change of treatment of Russell for the better.

William Allen

Allen is an English trapper who is with Russell on a trapping journey. Allen, like another trapper from Ireland, sees little beauty in the Oregon Territory and prefers to reminisce about his homeland. Allen, along with Russell and two other men, is robbed by Crow Indians and has to make a painful walking journey to Fort William.

Captain Thing

Captain Thing brings up the rear in the initial expedition to the Oregon Territory wilderness. At one point, he and a small group of trappers are defeated by Blackfeet Indians and lose their horses and possessions. Captain Thing later leads groups bringing supplies from the Columbia River and trading trappers for beaver skins.

Francis Ermatinger

Francis Ermatinger is a leader of a resupply party that comes from the Columbia River mouth on the Pacific Coast, which includes Americans and Canadians. During Russell's stay in the Oregon Territory wilderness, Ermatinger leads several parties coming from the Pacific Coast and going to the United States, including missionaries and their wives. At one point, Ermatinger works for the Hudson Bay Company.

(Mr.) Elbridge

Elbridge is a friend and fellow trapper of Russell. He is described as younger than Russell and quite inexperienced. He is 5 feet 10 inches tall and very easy going. Russell is happy to meet him again and team up with Elbridge while going trapping.



(Mr.) Howell

Howell is a trapper who is ambushed and killed by Blackfeet Indians. An encampment is named after him, and his grave becomes a meeting place for trappers.

John Corm

John Corm is an Irish trapper who Russell is with for an extended period. Along with Russell and Allen, he is robbed by Crow Indians and forced to make a long journey back to Fort William on foot.



Objects/Places

Fort Hall

Fort Hall is erected under the command of Mr. Wyeth when Russell starts in his work in the Oregon Territory Wilderness. It is located on the Snake River near the Portneuf River. Later it is purchased by the British Hudson Bay Company.

Yellowstone Lake, Lake Yellow Stone

Yellowstone Lake is a favorite spot for both trappers and Indians. This is a large lake of about 100 miles circumference and is surrounded by hot springs and lovely valleys.

The Hot Springs, Geysers

Large numbers of Hot Springs and Geysers are found in the vicinity of Yellowstone Lake. The hot water and steam that erupts from the ground makes a regularly recurrent long noise, and the ground seems hollow in the vicinity. Russell reports that horses riding near the hot springs and geysers sometimes fall through the ground several feet.

Ephishemores

Ephishemores are a kind of robe made from a buffalo skin. These robes are much in style, with one Fort having a supply of 500 of them for selling to the United States. Collection of these ephishemores is one of the forces driving the hunting of the Buffalo towards extinction.

Secluded Valley

Not far from the Yellowstone Lake, the Secluded Valley is a favorite resting spot for trappers. It is located along a river about 15 miles west of the Yellowstone River.

Bear River

The Bear River runs into the (Great) Salt Lake towards the south. Along its length, much beaver trapping is done. One feature along its bank is the Cache Valley, a former deposit for skins and goods by fur traders.



Winter Quarters

Generally every year, Russell and other trappers go into winter quarters. Often Russell winters at Ft. Hall or places nearby, such as Mutton Hill.

The Rendezvous

Each year there is a Rendezvous of trappers and supply parties around the 4th of July. This is a joyful time for trappers because they get to sell their beaver skins and buy goods from the United States such as coffee, liquor and clothing items. Also mail is received and newspapers and news are gotten from the civilized world.

Beaver Skins, Beaver

The main commodity that Russell and other trappers seek is the beaver skin. Beavers are trapped using a secretion that beavers produce that attracts other beavers. Once beavers are caught in these traps along river banks, they drown and are retrieved by trappers.

The Oregon Territory

The Oregon Territory is a region that during Russell's years of trapping is jointly controlled by the British through Canada and the United States. The main organization of the British in the territory is the Hudson Bay Company. The Oregon territory stretches along the Pacific Ocean north and south of the Columbia River valley and extends into the interior area where Russell is operating. It includes areas such as the Salt Lake and the area around Yellowstone Lake.

The Snake River

The Snake River stretches on a north-south course and then veers to the east. It includes many tributaries that are favorite sites for beaver trapping, including Lewis' Fork, the Blackfoot, the Portneuf, and Gray's Creek. Fort Hall, the base of Russell's activities, is located on the Snake River.

The Yellowstone River

The Yellowstone River comes down from the north and ends in Yellowstone Lake. This is a favorite area for beaver trapping. The cherry trees along its bank make it a special place for grizzly bears. The trappers are often engaged in battle in this area with the Blackfoot Indians.



The Blackfeet Indians

The Blackfeet Indians are a usually hostile Indian tribe, with some exceptions like a peaceful group of Pagan Indians. Russell reports that the Blackfeet have lost much of their power due to losses in battle and from smallpox.

The Snake Indians

The Snake Indians are a generally friendly Indian tribe. Russell gets to know quite a few of these Indians and learns to speak their language.

The Crow Indians

The Crow Indians are usually friendly to trappers but with some exceptions. A small band of Crow Indians rob Russell and three other trappers. Later, the Indian chief tries to apologize to these men for the thefts, but the trappers do not trust the Chief and refuse to go with him.

Half-Breeds

Half-breeds are people who are half-White and half-Indians. In the sometimes hostile and often friendly relations between white trappers and Indians, many half-breeds have been born in Russell's time. Many trappers are half-breeds, while some of these people still live in Indian lodges and villages.

Wildlife of the Rockies

The wildlife of the Rockies are described in detail in the Appendix of the book. These animals include buffalo, elk, black-tail deer, grizzly bears and mountain sheep. Russell finds many areas with huge herds of buffalo that are quickly decimated by trappers hunting buffalo for their skins. Other mountain areas abound in mountain sheep and other large animals. However, Russell makes a point that not all areas are teeming with game and at times he is caught in areas with little or no game. These could be due to areas having inhospitable climates or lack of water for these animals.

The Hudson Bay Company

The Hudson Bay Company trades for beaver skins and other goods in the Oregon Territory. It is the main instrument of the British interests in the area, and the Company buys Fort Hall in 1837.



The Teton Mountains

The Teton Mountains are an imposing feature near Jackson Lake. The valleys near these mountains are favored by the trappers because in the summer it is too cold at night for the mosquitoes. These mountains are by Henry's Fork off the Snake River and only about 90 miles from Fort Hall.

Fort William

Fort William is by the intersection of the Laramie and Platte River. Russell arrives here in November of 1837 after being robbed and a long journey on foot. In his distress, he complains of being treated poorly at Fort William.

The Continental Divide

The Continental Divide is the place where on the western side the rivers flow to the Pacific Ocean, and on the Eastern side, they flow to the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. Russell reaches this spot where on one side the Sweetwater River enters into the Platte and towards the Atlantic, while Sandy Creek heads to the Green, the Colorado River and the Pacific Ocean. Russell finds another place on the Continental Divide on a peak near Yellowstone Lake, where a fish can jump from water going to the Atlantic into water going to the Pacific.



Themes

Surviving and Exploring the Wilderness

Osborne Russell is employed as a trapper for the Columbia River Company and later is an independent trapper. This is how he earns his living, but he also enjoys exploring the Oregon Territory as part of the West. In his careful observations in his Journal, Russell shows his acute interest in the phenomena of the Northern Rocky Mountains region. Russell takes enormous pride in his developing skills to survive in the wilderness. Even when he is robbed and wounded he tells his companions how to survive. Russell is able to kill animals with a gun and sometimes with a knife. He can make a fire and cook the butchered meat and prepare the skins. By preparing skins, drying them and turning them into a shelter, Russell is able to survive conditions that would kill a less able person. Likewise, Russell calmly fights Indians, sometimes attacking and other times fleeing. Though the Indians' firepower is generally inferior, in many locations they are in larger numbers than Russell's trapper comrades.

Russell is not only able to survive difficult conditions, but he develops an acute interest in the landscape of his surroundings. His descriptions of such spots as Yellowstone Lake and the surrounding geysers and hot springs, while not exact, are still highly interesting. Russell sees valleys and envisions that one day they will contain many farms and settlements. His careful descriptions of animals and their habits are quite interesting and often contradict myths about grizzly bears, buffalo and other creatures. Russell has a healthy respect for the Indians and takes time to learn the language of the Snake Indians and also to use the universal sign language of the Indians. These skills often help Russell find his way in the wilderness and at times are important to his and his friends' survival.

The Limits to the Independence of the Trappers and Mountain

Osborne Russell becomes an independent trapper, but often his well-being is dependent on others. There is continual tension between the desires of the individual trappers to make money by collecting beaver and buffalo skins with their need to band together for survival and prosperity. For example, trappers go together to lay their traps for beavers, which are located by river banks just below the water level. They often like to have small groups, because if too many trappers know where other trappers have laid their beaver traps, those beaver traps could be looted by other trappers. Trappers have to learn from other trappers about their environment to survive. There is a tendency for the mountain men to want to defy the forces of nature, but this can easily lead to their death. Early in his hunting career, Russell wounds a grizzly bear and insists on moving in on the kill. This has an enraged grizzly bear attacking him, and he is only saved by a lucky shot through the bear's heart.



On a larger scale, the main trapping companies, the Columbia Trapping Co., the Rocky Mountain Fur Co. and the American Fur Co. go through a series of mergers since it is difficult to make money in the region. Different types of skins and furs can go into short supply or out of style. Obviously, Mr. Wyeth and his Columbia Co. have difficulty, since Mr. Wyeth sells Fort Hall to the Hudson Bay Company. When Russell is robbed, he makes it alive to Fort William but is disappointed when he is treated coldly. Later, this mistake is realized by others and Russell's goods are restored. In the incident where Russell and another trapper are wounded by Indians, they are treated well immediately. All trappers in the area know that their fortunes can rapidly improve or be destroyed and that they need the help of their fellow trappers and that of the friendly Indians.

Relations Between White Trappers and the Indians

There is a complex relationship between the Indians and the White Trappers. While some tribes, such as the Snake Indians, are usually friendly to the white trappers, other tribes, notably the Blackfeet Indians, are hostile to them. Indians are armed with rifles that they get from trading, but their guns are often inferior models. They are nomadic and can suffer food and other shortages. Socially, Indians are described as having largely democratic governments based on the bravest fighting men being leaders. Their traditions are oral and none of the Indians are described as using reading and writing except for Indians that have been assimilated into the white community. Many Indian communities have been decimated by smallpox, a disease with which they are not familiar.

Relations between whites and Indians are often friendly. Russell is able to learn the Snake Indian language, and other trappers have lived with the Crow and even the often hostile Blackfeet Indians. The large number of Indian trappers that work with the whites and also half-breeds attest to the close relations between white men and Indians. Indeed, some trapping parties and groupings are as much as 50-percent Indians and half-breeds. Russell stays at Indian lodges where Frenchmen and other whites are married to Indians and raising children. Many Indians see their future, for better or worse, as a part of white society, though they would also like to maintain their language and traditions. Russell often does not explicitly write about this subject but implies that a large degree of cooperation has developed between Indians and whites. According to Russell, there is not a clear reason for the battles and skirmishes between white trappers and tribes of Indians. Russell tries to learn as much as he can about the different Indian tribes and has a certain amount of respect for them.



Style

Perspective

The book, *JOURNAL OF A TRAPPER*, is written from a first-person perspective of Osborne Russell's observation during his nine years around the area from the Salt Lake to north of Yellow Stone Lake. Russell warns the reader in the beginning that this *JOURNAL* is formed by his observations over nine years in the northern Rocky Mountains. Very little of the *JOURNAL* characterizes whether people are happy or prosperous. There is little characterization of other people's thoughts or motives. Even Russell himself concentrates on a narrative of his life and actions in the wilderness and seldom describes himself as exceptionally happy, sad or angry. There is mainly a feeling of a man who is slowly acquiring knowledge about how to successfully deal with his life in the wild. First, Russell has to learn how to hunt animals for food and trap beaver. Then, he has to learn how to fight Indians and successfully survive numerous ambushes and skirmishes. Sometimes Russell feels sorrow for himself when he is in a situation where he has lost his guns and horses or he is wounded. Usually, however, he is happy that he is able to deal with his situation and survive. Indeed, in a sense Russell conveys a feeling of being privileged to live the free and independent life of a trapper. What the reader is left with is the perspective of a young man who is intensely interested in the landscape of his surroundings and in solving the daily problems of being a trapper and a mountain man. Russell's interest in river valleys, natural food plants and mineral deposits show the view of a man who is thinking about the life of future settlers in this new territory for him and his nation.

Tone

The tone of the book is that of a young man going off on an exciting adventure. Especially in the first couple of years, Osborne Russell has a quiet sense of optimism. Russell's tone is that of a person who is glad to have the opportunity to live a life of which he had before dreamed. His extra efforts to learn the Snake Indian language and Indian sign language indicate him to be an intelligent person, though without any special studies or background. The vocabulary of the *JOURNAL* is not difficult but is that of an educated layman. The grammar is somewhat lacking, with many run-on sentences. Russell has respect for his superiors and the men who have come before him and are accustomed to life in the northern Rocky Mountains. Later in the book, Russell's life becomes more routine and large stretches of time are noted in only a page or two.

Russell probably intentionally travels a wide area of hundreds of miles east and west, north and south. He looks for both the best rivers to trap beaver on and the most scenic areas to see. Later in his stay in the Rockies, Russell spends much time in the vicinity of Yellowstone Lake and the surrounding geysers, and this becomes his preferred area of operations. His curiosity never totally leaves him. As Russell becomes more acquainted with various Indians, he manages to live with Indians for a period of time. He climbs up



a mountain peak to see a scenic valley at sunrise. What distinguishes Russell's JOURNAL is a keen desire to describe animals, Indians, other trappers and places in a clear and scientific manner.

Structure

The book is a continuous journal without divisions. At the end there is an Appendix with facts and descriptions of animals and Indians that Russell encounters. This lack of chapters and clear dates in many cases is one of the more difficult aspects of the Journal. Perhaps this JOURNAL would be more useful if it was edited with clear dates and chapters. In the case of this summary, the JOURNAL has been divided into a section of about 20 pages in the 255 page paperback edition. This edition also has a 23-page editor's preface that gives some of the historical context of the JOURNAL OF A TRAPPER and the life of its author, Osborne Russell. In addition, the editor Aubrey Haines has produced a series of maps throughout the book, which are useful in plotting the travels of Russell and the geography of the area. The maps are dated with Russell's travels and fills in part of the gap of information.

The JOURNAL is structured around time, with the first page describing Russell's joining an expedition to the northern Rocky Mountains in April 1834. The last page describes his severe injury when working on a mill in 1843. It is useful to note that about three-fourths of the Journal describes Russell life in the Rockies from 1834 until the end of 1838, with the rest of the journal describing the next five years. The journal concludes with the useful appendix mentioned above. Although the book has no formal structure, the most interesting and central events of the book are the two incidents where Russell is robbed or wounded and is in a life and death struggle to reach a place of safety. After Russell survives these two incidents and is resupplied and able to continue his life as a mountain man, he succeeds in his mission. There are also brief letters from Russell to his sisters in Maine that describes his concerns after his accident and then his trip to California during the gold rush.



Quotes

"On the morning of the 28th we were all equipped and mounted hunter like: about forty men leading two loaded horses each were marched out in double file with joyous hearts enlivened by anticipated prospects: led by Mr. Wyeth a persevering adventurer and lover of Enterprise whilst the remainder of the party with twenty head of extra horses and as many cattle to supply emergencies brot. up the rear under the direction of Capt. Joseph Thing an eminent navigator and fearless son of Neptune who had been employed by the Company in Boston to accompany the party and measure the route across the Rocky Mountains by Astronomical observation."

P 24

"The two latter having but very little experience in hunting game with the Rifle: and altho the country abounded with game still it wanted experience to kill it. On the 12th of August myself and 9 others (the Mullattoe included) started from the Fort to hunt Buffalo."

P. 30

"But we had to stay another night without supper. About 4 oclk the next day the meat of two fat Grizzly Bear was brought into Camp. Our Camp Kettles had not been greased for some time: as we were continually boiling thistle roots in them during the day: but now four of them containing about 9 gallons each were soon filled with fat bear meat cut in very small pieces and hung over a fire which all hands were employed in keeping up with the utmost impatience."

P. 38

"Our boat being completed we commenced crossing our equipage and while 5 of us were employed at this a young man by the name of Abram Patterson attempted to cross on horse back in spite of all the advice and entreaty of those present his wild and rash temper got the better of his reason and after a desperate struggle to reach the opposite bank he abandoned his horse made a few springs and sunk to rise no more - he was a native of Penna. about 23 years of age."

P. 45

"16th We staid at this place as our wounded comrade had suffered severely the day before. Some went down the stream to hunt a passage while others went to hunt Sheep. Being in Camp about 10 ock I heard the faint report of a rifle overhead I looked up and saw a sheep tumbling down the rocks which stopped close to where I stood but the man who shot it had to travel 3 or 4 miles before he could descend with safety to the Camp."

P. 58

"We immediately secure our horses in a yard previously made for that purpose and prepared ourselves for battle. In the meantime the Indians had gained the bluffs and



commenced shooting into the camp from both sides."

P. 66

"On the 19th learning that Bridger was approaching the forks and the party of hunters to which I had belonged had passed down the river towards the Fort I mounted my horse - started down the river and arrived at the Fort next day about noon the distance being about 60 Mls S. S. W. When I arrived the party had given up all hopes of ever seeing me again and had already fancied my lifeless body lying on the plains after having been scalped by the savages."

p. 76

"A large fire was soon blazing encircled with sides of Elk ribs and meat cut in slices supported on sticks down which the grease ran in torrents The repast being over the jovial tale goes round the circle the peals of loud laughter break upon the stillness of the night which after being mimicked in the echo from rock to rock it dies away in the solitary [gloom]."

P. 86

"I for one will cheerfully confess that I have derived no little benefit from the frequent arguments and debates held in what we termed The Rocky Mountain College and I doubt not but some of my comrades who considered themselves Classical Scholars have had some little added to their wisdom in these assemblies however rude they might appear."

P. 95

"Here presented what might be termed a mixed multitude The whites were chiefly Americans and Canadian French with some Dutch, Scotch, Irish, English, halfbreed, and full blood Indians, of nearly every tribe in the Rocky Mountains. Some were gambling at Cards some playing the Indian game of hand and others horse racing while here and there could be seen small groups collected under shady trees relating the events of the past year all in good Spirits and health."

P. 104

"I saw two guns pointed at me I instantly wheeled my horse but to no purpose the two balls struck him one in the loins and the other in the shoulder which dropped him under me the Indians at the Sametime jumped out of the bushes 60 or 70 in number and ran toward us shooting and yelling"

P. 108

"Said he I have been watching these cows some time and I can see but one that is poor enough to Kill" for said he it is a shame to kill one of those large fat Cows merely for two mens suppers" So saying he leveled his rifle on the poorest and brot. her down."

pp. 118-119

"We concluded it was best to lie still and keep the water warm that was about us for if we stirred we let in the cold water and if we removed our bed we were more likely to find



a worse instead of a better place as it rained very hard all night."

P. 126

"Myself and one of My comrades (a Canadian) were walking along half bent near some bushes secreting ourselves from the Buffaloe a large Grizzly Bear who probably had been awakened from his slumbers by our approach sprang upon the Canadian who was 5 or 6 feet before me and placing one forepaw upon his head and the other on his left shoulder pushed him one side about 12 ft. with as little ceremony as if he had been a cat still keeping a direct course as tho. nothing had happened."

P. 138

"Near where I was encamped was a small stream which ran from a spring about a 100 paces distant and emptied into the river the water was a little more than blood warm. The Beaver had taken the advantage of the situation Damed it up at the Mouth and built a large lodge on the bank at sunrise I discovered three of them swimming and playing in the water."

pp. 151-152

"Well said I if you persist in thinking so you will die but I can crawl from this place upon my hands and one knee and Kill 2 or 3 Elk and make a shelter of the skins dry the meat until we get able to travel."

P. 165

"About 1 o'clk we sat down to dinner in the lodge where I staid which was the most spacious being about 36 ft. in circumference at the base with a fire built in the center around this sat on clean Epishemores all who claimed kin to the white man (or to use their own expression all that were gens d'esprit) with their legs crossed in true Turkish style - and now for the dinner."

pp. 179-180

"In the meantime there arrived at the Fort a party of Emigrants from the States on their way to Oregon Territory among whom was Dr. E White U S sub agent for the Oregon Indians. 23d I started with them and arrived at the Falls of the Willamette river on the 26 day of Septr. 1842."

P. 194

"The vast numbers of these animals which once traversed such an extensive region in Nth. America are fast diminishing. The continual increasing demand for robes in the civilised world has already and is still contributing in no small degree to their destruction."

P. 210- about the Buffalo

"They are proud treacherous thievish insolent and brave when they are possessed with a superior advantage but when placed in the opposite situation they are equally humble submissive and cowardly."

P. 219 - about the Crow Indians



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the independent life of a trapper and mountain man. Is this an exciting life of beautiful scenery and experiences? Is this a place where a man can make his financial future? Does Osborne Russell become lonely?

Discuss the development of the West and the Oregon Territory. There are no towns in the northern Rocky Mountains yet except for Forts. Still, supply parties and brigades are regularly traveling from Missouri in the United States, to the Columbia River mouth on the Pacific Coast. Does the reader get a sense that economic activity is increasing and being developed?

Discuss relations between the trappers and the Indians. Some Indians, notably the Blackfeet, are generally hostile and trying to defend their territory from the whites. Other Indians are friendly to the white trappers and even join them or intermarry with them. Are the trappers being fair to the Indians or exploiting and looting them? Are the white trappers giving the Indians the opportunity to join a more developed culture and lead a better life?

What is the effect of the trappers on wildlife in the Oregon Territory? While Russell sees the buffalo decline rapidly; other animals do not seem to be overly disturbed by the trappers. Though beavers can be drained in one area by traps, they seem to continue to multiply in other areas.

Discuss the dangers of life in the Oregon Territory. The area of the Northern Rocky Mountains is almost total wilderness. Only a couple forts and unpaved roads and trails exist. Indian attacks can be dangerous, but the long winters and untamed rivers are often more dangerous. Why is it worthwhile for trappers like Osborne Russell to risk their lives in this region?

Discuss the pleasures of life in the northern Rocky Mountains. Russell writes of the varieties of wildlife and their abundance. The geysers and springs around the Yellowstone Lake are truly remarkable. So are the large valleys and high mountains of the region. Is the pleasure of the life of a Mountain Man more in the day-to-day occurrences or in the dreams of the future?

Discuss relations among trappers. Trappers must cooperate to survive. Any one of them can suffer immediate disaster due to Indian attack or destruction of property through floods or rock avalanches. Yet, trappers are in competition, too, since sometimes supplies of precious resources such as beaver and buffalo skins are short. How do the trappers deal with this need to cooperate with each other but also to compete?

Discuss the skills necessary to be a good trapper. Could many young men (in those days) become trappers and Mountain Men, or does it take a special type of person? A trapper not only has to shoot animals, but he has to butcher them and prepare the meat for food and the skins for use as goods and clothing. What about the ability to find one's

proper direction, deal with hardships and seek information from potentially hostile Indians? What qualities and skills does this occupation involve?