

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF UPPER CLARK'S FORK OF THE YELLOWSTONE AND ITS TRIBUTARIES WITHIN THE STATE OF WYOMING

By John K. Rollinson

FOREWORD

In preparing the following article on early-day history of the Clark's Fork region in northwestern Wyoming, it has been necessary to include considerable data concerning certain border points in Montana, and especially Cooke City, as the early travel into the Clark's Fork district came by way of Cooke City. Up to about the year 1900, much of the trading was done in Cooke City or Livingston, Bozeman or Fort Yellowstone, and later, in Red Lodge, Montana.—J.K.R.

The earliest known white man to have left any history behind him in the state of Wyoming was John Colter, who definitely was known to have traversed, and for a time dwelt, in the valley of the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone as early as 1807. As the facts are well established in regard to Colter leaving the Lewis and Clark party on the return from the explorations down the Columbia to the Pacific, nothing further need be related as to how Colter happened to have separated himself from the Lewis and Clark Expedition and ventured by himself on an exploration which disclosed the Yellowstone National Park, as we now know it, but which was first known to the early travelers in the West as "Colter's Hell." Small wonder it is that his true stories of his discoveries were not regarded seriously by many in the early days.

Colter traveled through Sunlight Valley, a tributary of Clark's Fork, and crossed the divide between the head of Sunlight Creek and the head of the North Fork of the Stink-

EDITOR'S NOTE: John K. Rollinson, now living at 2285 Mar Vista Ave., Altadena, California, spent "many happy years as a cow hand, ranger and freighter" in Wyoming. He was an early pioneer settler of Sunlight Basin, one of the less known beauty spots in the extreme northwestern Wyoming, Park County, concerning which he has written the accompanying informative and entertaining article, especially for the ANNALS.

He was in the stock business in that section, as well as in the hunting and guiding business. He freighted to the Sunlight Mines and to the Winona Mines, also from Gardiner to Cooke City, Montana. Later, 1906 to 1913, Mr. Rollinson was a United States ranger in charge of the Sunlight-Clark's Fork district.

Mr. Rollinson is representative-at-large of the Montana-Wyoming National Cowboys association, a social organization made up of men who rode range in Montana or Wyoming for cow or horse outfits in the '80s or '90s. State "camps" are formed, "wagon bosses" elected and meetings held once or twice a year. "The organization, founded recently in Montana and Wyoming, was formed to organize and hold the old-

ing Water, down which stream he traveled, finding well-marked Indian trails leading to the Stinking Water Hot Springs, now known as the DeMarris Springs. He was the first white man to visit those springs, which caused the Indians to name the river which passes the Springs "The Stinking Water," because of the sulphurous odors arising therefrom, and because of the active small geysers, likewise emitting a strong sulphurous odor.

Years went by after the first visit on the upper Clark's Fork by John Colter, and it was not until fifty years later that any authentic knowledge was had of a white man in that section, when Pat O'Harra was known to have trapped in the Clark's Fork country and had established headquarters on Pat O'Harra Creek in 1857, when he was with the Great American Fur Company and where he lived for several years until the middle seventies, when all trace of him became lost, after he was last seen at old Fort C. F. Smith on the Big Horn.

Hunting parties of Crow Indians frequented the upper Clark's Fork and Sunlight Valley, as game was at all times abundant, and where there was but little difficulty in getting a few scalps of "Sheep Eaters" to take back to the Crow villages on the lower Clark's Fork, Pryor Creek and the lower Stinking Water.

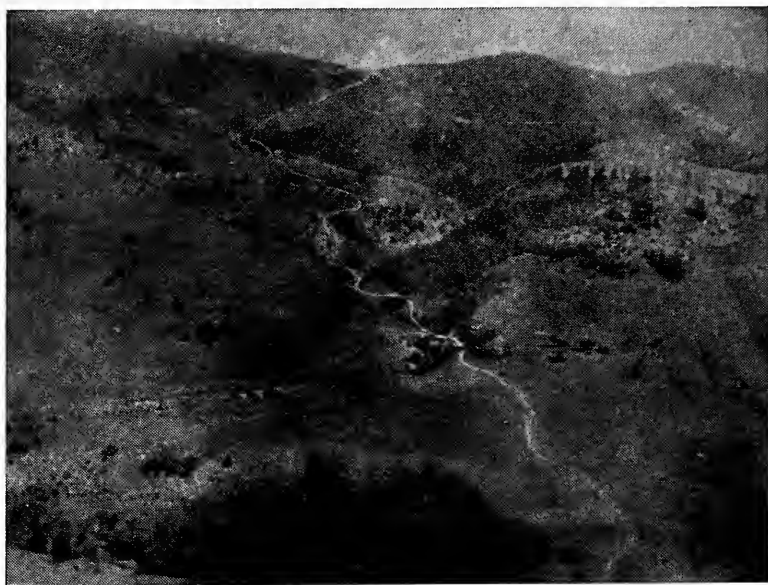
The first actual prospecting for gold in the upper Clark's Fork country followed closely the discovery of gold at Alder Gulch, Montana Territory, when prospectors came from the west, traveling down stream from the head of Clark's Fork, as the early prospector had entered the Gallatin Valley by the Bozeman Trail. It was one of the small groups of the original John Bozeman party that encountered disaster on Crandall Creek, a tributary of the upper Clark's Fork, when,

time American cowboys together and preserve the traditions of the range." There are no dues or assessments.

As symbolic evidence of Mr. Rollinson's continuing loyalty and interest in his home state, he has donated a handsome gift in the form of a bronze plaque to commemorate the historical aspects of the summit of Dead Indian Hill, that high pass, "which is the only passageway to the valleys west of the Big Horn Basin country, and opening to Sunlight Creek and the upper Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone."

Engraved on the plaque, which is 24" x 36" in size, are the names of the 16 pioneers including Mr. Rollinson as having made possible the road work in 1909 that rendered the dangerous Dead Indian Hill safer for travel. Efforts were concentrated particularly on the so-called "Beaver Slide," at the foot of the hill, which was the most perilous of several precarious stretches.

The plaque is set into a native stone, cut and faced by the Forest Service, and the monument is to be dedicated in a public ceremony by the Wyoming Landmarks Commission, some time in August, 1940.



**Old Dead Indian Hill Road to Sunlight Valley
and Upper Clark's Fork**

—Photo by J. K. Rollinson

in 1869, a prospector named Marvin J. Crandall, with one companion, went from Bozeman to Jardin, Montana Territory, and with a pack outfit traveled that old Indian trail to Lake Abundance, and through Daisy Pass to where Cooke City now is located. He prospected the upper Clark's Fork and upper Crandall Creek, and found a rich placer, which, as fall came on, he reported in Bozeman on his return there.

In the spring of 1870 (the following spring), a party of prospectors was organized by Adam (Horn) Miller, one of the original John Bozeman men, consisting of Bart Henderson, J. H. Moore, James Gurley, T. Dougherty and Marvin J. Crandall, (often referred to as "Jack"). Crandall and Dougherty started out a month in advance of the remainder of the party, and planned to meet on Clark's Fork Meadows, a few miles south of the Montana-Wyoming line. The main party under Horn Miller met Indians and crossed the divide west of Cache Creek. While there, Indians stole all their horses, leaving them afoot. They cached their outfit, hence Cache Creek. The four men, Miller, Moore, Henderson and Gurley, made their way over the old Indian trail down Slough Creek

and down the Boulder to Bozeman. A searching party was organized, and horses procured to hunt for Crandall and Dougherty. Their bodies were found at their camp on the forks of a creek which became known thereafter as Crandall Creek.

In murdering these two men, the Indians had decapitated both bodies, and placed each head on the spike of a miner's pick, which had been driven in the ground, and placed a tin cup of coffee in front of each impaled skull. In the right hand of each man's body, a few feet away, was held a spoon. It was evident to the searching party that young men of the Crow Nation had committed the murder and taken the men's horses, camp equipment and guns.

The same party of searchers, again under Miller, set out from Bozeman in the spring of 1871, and hunted all summer for the lost placer, and when on Cache Creek found that their cache had been looted by Indians, and the contents carried off and equipment destroyed, they crossed the divide from Cache Creek to Republic Creek, and discovered the manganese-stained outcrop which was later developed as the Republic mine.

The following year (1872) mining claims were staked out on Miller and Republic mountains, and by 1875 the mining camp then called Clark's Fork, was established, although located at that time on or within the Crow Indian Reservation. The Lost Placer has never been re-discovered.

In 1877, a raiding party of Chief Joseph's Nez Perce Indians, during their famous retreat from General Howard, robbed the small smelter at the outskirts of the new camp then called Cooke City, of lead bullion and silver, and used the silver lead for molding bullets for their muskets. Chief Joseph's retreat followed up Cache Creek and down Crandall Creek to Lodge Pole Creek, then over Lodge Pole Creek (a tributary of the upper Clark's Fork) then down Trail Creek and into Sunlight Valley, then to Dead Indian Creek, where a sharp skirmish occurred, and from which incident the creek acquired its name. Then up that steep pass, now known as Dead Indian Hill, then down eastward off Bald Ridge and on to the Clark's Fork below the canyon.

(By 1880 the little camp, (named in honor of Jay Cooke), one of the builders of the Northern Pacific Railroad which, at that time, had planned to build into the new mining camp, had a fast-growing population, and by that time travel had already started to come from the east side of the mountains and from Big Horn Basin and down the famous Dead Indian Hill where the grade was so steep that the driver of the

first two-wheel mountain carts cut down a heavy tree to use as a drag to help their double rough-locks make their descent of the hill less hazardous, and even when four-wheeled wagons made the descent, they likewise dragged huge trees as a precaution against the all-too-often accident. This hill had an altitude at the summit of 8,000 feet, and at the crossing of Dead Indian Creek, at the bottom of the hill, the altitude was 6,000 feet. The road was about a mile and a quarter long, and was in places a 25 per cent grade. The road from Dead Indian Creek crossed Sunlight at a dangerous ford and down a bad hill, so that any heavy vehicle was obliged to go up Sunlight Creek eight miles to the crossing at the Spruce point (later the Painter ranch), and there ford the stream, which was a safe ford except in flood water.

The road then went down Sunlight Creek to the rim of the box canyon of the Clark's Fork River, and followed up the south side of the river to the head of the stream, which was the Montana-Wyoming boundary. Three miles down the Soda Butte Creek side of the divide was located Cooke City.)

The need for meat in the new mining camp gave hunters an opportunity to profit from the abundant herds of elk that ranged in Wyoming close to the new mining camp, and outstanding amongst these hunters was Frank Chatfield, a young man with one of the earliest of the Bozeman Trail freighters. Chatfield went to Cooke City, and having a good pack outfit of horses, he engaged in killing elk for the camp, and built up not only a reputation as a good hunter, but a profitable enterprise as well, and as his hunting in late fall took him into the Sunlight Valley, where large elk herds were found, he made a winter camp there and in 1884 built the first log house in Sunlight Basin, and to keep the elk out of a piece of nice grass-land or meadow, he built a pole fence with bored posts to fence in his land, which now began to take the name of a "ranch," the first ranch in the entire upper northwest corner of what was then Sweetwater County, Wyoming Territory.

Frank Chatfield married a young woman in Cooke City in 1884, her given name was "Kitty" (last name unknown). She helped Chatfield build up the ranch in Sunlight Basin, and they purchased a few shorthorn or Durham cows from a trail herd that was driving from Oregon into Big Horn Basin to deliver to the Lovell ranch on the lower Stinking Water. Kitty milked cows all summer, and sold the butter in Cooke City, taking pack horses to carry the elk meat and butter, and they

brought back their winter provisions, a little at a time, each trip. They had taken into Sunlight an old mowing machine, piece by piece, on pack animals; they made a hayrack out of a pole with shafts on it with willow brush teeth. This was dragged by one horse, and a small amount of hay was put up and carefully husbanded, for it had to carry through the first calves that winter and spring to feed some of the older cows.

The following year they continued to make butter and put up hay, and soon several tons were produced from the natural meadow which they irrigated from a small ditch of water out of Sunlight.

Kitty was handy and willing, and Frank was able to do almost anything he set his hand to. They added to their fences and buildings, and their herd of cattle grew in numbers, for Sunlight was a fine grass country. This couple took time away from ranch and hunting duties to prospect for gold, for both had the mining urge. They crossed the head of Sunlight and on to the head of the Stinking Water, even as John Colter had done so long before, and prospected all the tributaries of the North Fork of the Stinking Water. On a small creek, now known as Kitty Fork or Kitty Creek, they found placer indications sufficiently promising so that they made a permanent camp and set up a pit saw, with which they whip-sawed lodgepole pine logs into inch lumber to build flumes and sluices to aid them in their placer operations. They succeeded quite well, it is said.

These same placer grounds on Kitty Fork are still being worked by other miners to this day. It was a man's work to whip-saw lumber, but Kitty was willing and courageous.

The second white man to become a permanent resident of Sunlight Basin was Adolphus J. Beam, who came from Prairie duChien, Wisconsin, and who had spent some time trapping and had assisted Chatfield with his market hunting. Al Beam, as he was familiarly known, settled on a piece of land two miles down the creek below Chatfield's, and began the development of a ranch, building log houses, corrals and pole fences. He purchased a small bunch of cows, and prospered as a cattleman, as did Chatfield, for they both shortly gave up their efforts at hunting for the market, and had sufficient cattle to require all their time in attending to the ranch and their herd.

All of the range was open to these two pioneers, and their herds of horses and cattle prospered. After the death of Frank Chatfield, the widow, Kitty, married a Cyrus Josiah Davis, who also came from the Gallatin Valley. In 1909, Kitty was wounded

in the arm by a gunshot while she was in the new town of Cody, Wyoming, and died as the result thereof.

(It was customary for the first few settlers in Sunlight and Crandall Creek and the Upper Clark's Fork Valleys to do their trading in Cooke City and Livingston, and very little travel went over Dead Indian Hill to the east, until the nineties, when each year a considerable migration of Mormons, traveling by wagon to Idaho did a little necessary road work here and there, and as the town in Big Horn Basin started to offer some trade advantages to the settlers of the upper Clark's Fork, to attract them and their purchasing away from Cooke City and Red Lodge, Montana, and when Big Horn County was formed from Fremont County, there were reasons for the Clark's Fork people to trade more in Big Horn Basin.) (In the late nineties, John R. Painter developed a ranch in Sunlight Basin, and was also opening up the Sunlight mining district. He built a wagon road from the settlement in Sunlight, on up to the mouth of Galena creek, close to the mining property, and as a considerable amount of freighting was done for three or four years, the Dead Indian Hill road became more traveled, and enough work was done on it to enable a wagon to travel the grade.)

(It was in 1909, however, before any attempt was ever made to permanently improve the old dangerous Dead Indian Hill road. That year the few original settlers in Sunlight Basin organized, and established a grade from the foot of the hill at the creek on up to the top of the old "Beaver Slide," which had been the worst of several bad places. This new grade was surveyed out with a spirit-level and a sixteen-foot straight-edge. The new road was about three-fourths of a mile long, and is still in use on the same grade as originally built, and today a good graded road has been completed to the top of the mountain, where the altitude is 8,000 feet.)

The county and the United States Forest Service made possible the later road building, but the first work was done entirely by the settlers without outside help of any kind. It is no longer necessary to drag a tree or use a rough-lock, and today the automobile ascends and descends this ancient game trail on a well-graded road. In the course of time the Sunlight and Clark's Fork country became a part of the Yellowstone Timber Reserve, which was the very first attempt by the Government to set aside a large piece of the public domain, and which became known later as the Shoshone National Forest.

The following men and women dwellers of Sunlight Basin in 1909 contributed work, teams, cattle or funds to make the new grade on the lower end of the hill a possibility:

Adolphus J. Beam
 William V. Campbell
 Siras J. Davis
 Wade McClung
 Augustus G. Lafond
 Oliver Whitney
 Hervey G. Marvin
 Samuel Thompson

Ella Tighe
 John R. Painter
 Willard D. Ruscher
 Evelyn T. Painter
 Mary E. Painter
 William T. Painter
 Marguerite M. Painter
 John K. Rollinson

(In the early part of this century a post office was established at the Painter Ranch on Sunlight at "Spruce Point;" it was called Painter, Wyoming. A once-a-week mail from Cody was inaugurated. It was quite a lengthy trip to the county seat of Big Horn County at Basin but a much longer trip to Lander, when that was the county seat, in Sweetwater County, and later Fremont County.)

JAMES BRIDGER'S CLAIMS

By Victor H. Cohen*

An article in the October, 1939, issue of this journal¹ mentions the claims of James Bridger against the United States government and includes quotations which suggest that Bridger was defrauded of his property through the machinations of United States army officers and a lack of good faith on the part of the United States government. The purpose of the article was merely to give a description of Fort Bridger and to convey some information concerning its acquisition, but the incidental reference to Bridger's claim against the government raises an important question. Was the United States government guilty of bad faith?

James Bridger, celebrated hunter, trapper, fur trader, and guide, founded Fort Bridger, a trading post, about 1843,²

*Mr. Cohen, who is a graduate assistant in the Department of History of the University of Wyoming, has prepared this essay under the direction of Dr. Alfred Larson.

¹ "James Bridger, a Mexican Citizen," p. 292.

² The exact year when the fort was established is a point of dispute among writers of Western History. The year 1843 is accepted by J. Cecil Alter, James Bridger (Salt Lake City, Shepard Book Co., 1925), p. 176, and Hiram M. Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West (New York, Press of the Pioneers, Inc., 1935), Vol I, p. 366. Hubert H. Bancroft, History of Nevada, Colorado and Wyoming, 1540-1888 (San Francisco, The History Co., 1890), p. 684, and C. G. Coutant, History of Wyoming (Laramie, Chaplin, Spafford & Mathison, 1899), Vol. I, p. 350, recognize 1842 as the date for the erection of Fort Bridger.