



December, 2018

Mountain Man Monthly

The Authorized Publication of the
Colorado Springs Muzzle Loaders Inc.

The Colorado Springs Muzzle Loaders, Inc. was chartered in 1969 by a group of men and women interested in their heritage and dedicated to preserving and promoting the sport of muzzle loading and buckskinning. CSML is a family oriented club that holds a broad range of functions such as camp outs, potluck dinners, and black powder shoots. CSML is affiliated with the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association and the National Rifle Association.

Views and opinions contained within articles submitted to the Mountain Man Monthly are not necessarily those of the editor or CSML. The editor reserves the right not to publish any article submitted but encourages articles on any subject regarding shooting sports and subjects related to the fur trade era.

Regular Monthly Meeting

January 3, 2019

7:00 p.m.

Wild Game Potluck &
Tall Tales Telling; Trophies

Club Paper Shoot - Jan. 6

Club Primitive Shoot - Jan. 20

Annual Board Meeting - Jan. 8

At Joy's House

February 7th meeting &

white elephant gift exchange

President

Joy Hicks

Vice President

Robert McCune

Treasurer

Gwen Blanchard

Secretary

Membership Chairman

Ted Beaupre

Range Officer

Ted Beaupre

Assistant Range Officer

Jock Harmon

Primitive Exec.

Doug "Moose Milk" Davis

Assistant Primitive Exec.

Tony "Tenderfeets" Hecker

Cannon Master

Richard "Singe" Stites

Mountain Man Monthly

Editor

Doreen Webb

UPCOMING EVENTS: CSML & Statewide

WHAT	WHERE	WHEN	INFORMATION
Regular Club Meeting & Wild Game Potluck	American Legion Post #209	January 3, 2019 7:00 p.m.	bring your favorite "wild game" dish, utensils, and tall tales.
Club Paper Shoot	Ft. Melchert	Jan. 6, 2019	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Annual Board Meeting	Joy's House	Jan. 8; 7:00 pm	set annual calendar for club
Club Primitive Shoot	Ft. Melchert	Jan. 20	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Club Paper Shoot	Ft. Melchert	Feb. 2	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Regular Club Meeting	Am. Legion #209	Feb. 7; 7:00 pm	annual white elephant exchange and finger foods to share
4-H Presentation	DOW Building	Feb. 16 th (TBD)	more details to come.....
Club Primitive Shoot	Ft. Melchert	Feb. 17	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Club Paper Shoot	Ft. Melchert	March 3	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Regular Club Meeting	Am. Legion #209	March 7	regular club business
CSMLA Winter Convention	Elks Lodge Ft. Collins	March 9	all day; one-day event & banquet; election of officers
DAYLIGHT SAVINGS	TIME BEGINS	MARCH 10	clocks FORWARD 1 hour!!!!
Club Primitive Shoot	Ft. Melchert	March 17	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Hunting License Application Due Date	Statewide	April 2	must have applied on-line for any limited draw licenses for hunting
Regular Club Meeting	Am. Legion #209	April 4	come to see what's up!!
Club Paper Shoot	Ft. Melchert	April 7	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Club Primitive Shoot	Ft. Melchert	April 21	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Regular Club Meeting	American Legion #209	May 2 7:00 p.m.	last planning meeting for THE EVENT!!!!
44TH Annual Memorial Day Shoot	Florence Mountain Park	May 25-27 set-up May 24	annual shoot, potluck, club tent and all the fixin's!!!!
Club Paper Shoot	Ft. Melchert	June 2	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm
Regular Club Meeting	Am Legion #209	June 6; 7:00 p.m.	wrap up of the annual shoot
Club Primitive Shoot	Ft. Melchert	June 16	pistols at noon; rifles at 1:00 pm

For CSML scheduled shoots; CALL SHOOT HOT LINE (719) 442-0150 after 9:00 a.m. on shoot day to be sure shoot is on!!!
Schedule is subject to change at any time and is based on information available at time of publication. On-line check csmlinc.org

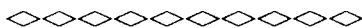
PAST THINGS

The December meeting was a fun one. The look-a-like dolls of Doug and Tony were a great addition to the ornament exchange. While Doug applauded the bearer with one finger, the rest of us enjoyed the creativity that was shown.

Ornaments were exchanged and the food was devoured. Lots of really good cookies and things on the table. Ken brought his (er....Kelly's) famous chicken salad sandwiches and Jim Murray brought his deviled eggs. We grazed our way through the table while the meeting and fun was taking place.

Everyone was reminded that we need to check the shoot hot line or your e-mail before you go to the club shoots. Mother Nature and other things can cancel a shoot at the last minute and you don't want to drive down and find no one there.

Time to begin thinking about the annual Memorial Day Shoot. Lots of work and planning go into this event and we need to be prepared for it. Begin thinking about how you can and will help host the event.



Colorado Springs Muzzle Loaders Regular Monthly Meeting December 6, 2018

The December meeting was called to order. Welcome was extended to Ray and his wife Laurie. Ray is getting ready to retire at the end of the month and is trying to figure out what comes next. We sure hope that muzzle loading is one of the things he figures out he likes.

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Joy asked for a motion to accept the Secretary's report as published in the *Mountain Man Monthly*. Motion was made, seconded and unanimously approved.

Treasurer Gwen gave us a reading of the funds for the entire month. She noted that in January our insurance will come due and this will be a large check

to pay the bill. There being no discussion or questions, a motion was made, seconded, and unanimously passed to accept the report as presented.

Membership Chairman Ted advised us that dues are due in January so avoid the rush; renew now.

Old Business: Even with all of us in the room, there was no old business to discuss.

New Business: Joy advised that Belinda L. Schneider-Irsik has asked us to provide a presentation for the 4-H group on February 16, 2019. The presentation would be at the DOW building on Sinton Road. More information will be received and shared.

The group signed holiday cards for Ron, Cindy, and Reid Grainger. We are so thankful for these folks that allow us to shoot on their property and share in the resources that they have.

CSMLA Winter Convention is coming fast. Save the date and if you have a skill or story to share, please let Gwen or Joy know. They are looking for classes and presenters.

Gwen brought up the subject of the 2019 Memorial Day event. Since none of us are getting any younger, and the work doesn't stop for this event, maybe we should be looking at finding help to host this event. Maybe something like a Boy Scout or 4-H group would be able to help us with the set up, tear down, and running around the grounds that needs to be done. Everyone should be thinking about solutions to this issue so we can plan. It does take a lot of work and planning to host the annual shoot.

It was noted that the time is here for us to have a new CSML address book.

Upcoming events were noted.

Motion made, seconded, and approved to adjourn the meeting. So done.

Respectfully submitted,
Temporary Scribe Doreen Webb

We then drew numbers and exchanged ornaments, all the while enjoying the goodies brought to share. There were some very interesting ornaments this year and the food was, as usual, scrumptious!

Unknown if.....

No word heard from any of the range officers so we don't know if there were any pistol or club shoots this month. While the RO's may not think it important to notify the newsletter of their events, there are a lot of the members who enjoy reading about the shoots. Remember that the deadline for submission is the Thursday following the primitive club shoots.

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REMEMBER.....

The January club meeting is the annual wild game potluck. Even if you don't have true wild game, bring your favorite dish and join us for a good time. We ask that you bring your own plate and silverware to eat with as well as serving spoons for your dish to share. This is always an interesting meal and it is fun to hear about the wild game taken with a muzzle loader by our members. Trophies will be awarded.

The February meeting will be the white elephant gift exchange. This is one hilarious meeting at which you have no clue what might show up. We've had some very interesting items brought and taken home; some of which return and some of which disappear into oblivion. Most of us remember the man-hole cover and Humphrey the dog. Some of us remember the box that Gwen opened that had voices inside it. This is the meeting where you find the most awesome, bodacious, out-of-the-norm thing you can and bring it for someone to discover!!!!

50-70 vs. Flintlocks

By: Jacob Rathman

This may or may not be of interest as it is a bit far of field from the Mountain Man era. However, it does prove that the flintlock could still be as deadly as ever in 1870's combat - - given the right circumstances.

Bear with me as it is important that the stage be set for this encounter. The time is the spring of 1871. The place is Arizona Territory, close to the Huachuca mountains of the Sonora desert, just north of the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande. The antagonists were a lead patrol of the U.S. 3rd Calvary lead by the veteran Indian fighter, Lt. Howard B. Cushing and a Chiricahua Chief named Jun. The opponents were seasoned battle tested men, but from different theaters of battle. The Calvary were schooled in the tactics learned in the Civil War and fighting the Plains Indians. These Apaches were masters of guerilla tactics suited to the terrain of Southern Arizona and Northern Mexico. The Cavalry were issued 50-70 Sharps carbines and sidearms. I have never been able to ascertain if they were open top cartridge or cap and ball revolvers. I'd bet on open tops at this point in time. The Apaches were armed with anything that they could lay hands on. What is not commonly known, or acknowledged is that smoothbore flintlocks with cut-to-carbine length barrels loaded with a rather light charge of powder and a heavy charge of buckshot were devastating at close range. At this time, bows and arrows and lances were used along with a firearm.

According to history or legend if you prefer, since only the Apaches survived to tell the tale. The lead elements of punitive expedition against this band of Apaches were lured by footprints of a woman leading a horse along a trail that wound amongst large rocks on either side. When the lead element was well within flintlock and bow range, the trap was sprung. Those who heard the engagement commence said the booming sound of the flintlocks were quite distinct from the hard bang of the 50-70's. It was all over in a matter of minutes. Eight brave enlisted Cavalrymen, a civilian, and Lt. Cushing lay dead. The element of surprise, at close range, with a weapon that was as deadly in 1871 as it was in 1771 won the day for the

Apaches.

I know we have all seen pictures of Indian warriors with a wide assortment of rifles or a pistol -- but a smoothbore gun? Actually the smoothbore muzzle loaders were more commonly used by the Indians, Canadian and American woodsmen than rifles in the pre-cartridge or even pre-cap lock era. It was a matter of utility. Most game was shot at less than 100 yards and was not dangerous game, except human opponents. A charge of shot, buck and ball or a ball was all that was needed and a smoothbore got the job done. Try a 50 grain charge of 2Fg and a dozen buckshot from your 12 gauge, .75 or .69 at a 100 yard target at 25 yards. That was considered an "Indians" loading for woods fighting. A rifle was much more specialized, required more upkeep, was more expensive and perhaps more prestigious. Ideally you owned one of each!

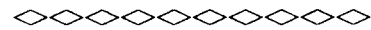
I heard of this encounter from some Chiricahua Apaches that were working at Fort Huachuca back in the summer of 1961. As an aside: Apaches very proudly identify themselves by the band they are born to -- "Apache" is just a generic term to them.

To get on with it; I was on a 4.2 mortar ballistics assignment. We got to discussing guns over lunch and I asked about any old guns that were for sale or trade -- no matter the condition. They -- literally -- unearthed some guns that were wrapped in some decomposing canvas from under a shed. They were last used, they said, during the Mexican Revolutions through the early 1900's. I was told the Apaches and their Mexican Indian brethren fought for fortune, fame, liquor, and lewd women. On either side, depending on who was winning that day. I have no reason to doubt them!

In any event I left with (what I discovered later) three models of Merwin Hulbert pistols in 44 caliber, a Whitney Arms "Phonex" shotgun in 14 gauge, and Whitneyville Armory (very early model) Kennedy lever action in 44 cal C.F. with a 24 inch barrel. All of these exhumed relics were incrustated in adobe, rust and God only knows what else. It has taken untold hours of cleaning over the last 57 years to get them into some semblance of what they were, but worth every hour. The Kennedy is the only one that will shoot -- a second time! Were they worth \$20 in 1961 money or did the Apaches get another

scalp?

Keep your flint sharp, powder dry, and watch your back trail.



BE TRUE TO THE EARTH

By: Gerald W. Morgan

It was a warm, sunny day last November. I had taken my vacation to coincide with the first two weeks of hunting season as is my annual custom. After eating a hearty lunch, I went to my shop in the back yard and began making preparations for the evening hunt. I swabbed the bore of my long, Kentucky flint gun, loaded it carefully, and proceeded to throw a handful of balls and some patching lubricated with bear grease into my hunting bag. Making sure that I had all of the necessary accouterments for my evening hunt, I proceeded at a leisurely pace into the woods.

The woods in which I hunt is a delightful mixture of tall, Virginia pines, and assorted varieties of maples, oaks and other hardwoods. The hardwoods were clothed in all of their autumn splendor. Their leaves seemed to shine with an unusual brilliance, the senses were almost overwhelmed by the hundreds of differing colors and hues.

Upon arriving at my favorite grove of hardwoods, I picked a comfortable spot beneath a large, old oak, and sat down to wait for brother squirrel to make his appearance. I checked my priming, and then laid the long squirrel gun in my lap. I then removed my squirrel skin tobacco pouch and filled my clay pipe with a modern mixture called Borkum Riff. For some reason squirrels in this area don't seem to be opposed to the smell of tobacco smoke. I sat back and quietly enjoyed the beauty of my surroundings.

It wasn't long before the first bushy tail made his appearance on a tree limb directly in front of me, about thirty yards away. Without moving from my position, I raised my rifle, which I have dubbed "Ole Tree Climber", and promptly shot him through the neck. After quickly reloading, I retrieved his carcass and resumed my former position under the tree.

After a while a spell of almost devout laziness seemed to take hold of me. I didn't seem to care anymore if I killed another squirrel or not. Everything was so quiet, peaceful, and beautiful that I became caught up in it and was content just to be a part of it all. Suddenly, I heard the sound of what seemed to be a rushing wind. Yet, I didn't feel any wind, nor did I see any of the usual effects of wind upon the trees.

I quickly forgot about it and settled down to enjoy the sunshine. It was then that I became aware of the feeling that I was not alone! Upon opening my eyes and looking around, I saw two figures approaching me from the side. To my complete amazement they were dressed like Indians of early Virginia! My first thought was "Wow." Now here are guys that really go all the way in primitive hunting. I knew that there were plenty of bow hunters in this area, but I hadn't heard of any that actually dressed in Indian costumes and carried the long bow that was used by Virginia Indians. Then I saw that not only were these people strangers to me, they were dark-skinned like real Indians. Now for the sake of the reader, let me explain. There haven't been any Indians in this area for over two hundred years. The nearest two Indian reservations are about a fort-five minute drive from here, and they never hunt in this area. Since my great-great-great grandmother was a full-blood Chiskiack Indian, I have always felt close to the, and have spent a lifetime collecting their artifacts. The Chiskiacks were the tribe inhabiting this area at the time of the coming of the white man to these parts in the early 1600's.

I immediately recognized these people as being dressed in the manner of the Chiskiack. I simply could not believe my eyes! They held their hands up in the sign of peace, and proceeded to sit on the ground in front of me. I was awed by the beautiful deerskin clothing they wore. They also had quivers for their arrows that were highly decorated, and each of them had a long, fringed bag hanging from their waists and were profusely decorated with cuttings from different types of seashells found on the Chesapeake Bay shores, about two miles distant. Their bows appeared to be almost four feet long. Their arrows were some of the longest that I had ever seen. Strangely enough, I felt only a peaceful kind of awe; never fear.

Finally, one of them spoke. "We would like to

talk to you. We have chosen you to carry a message from us to those of your kind." "Why me?" I asked. "I'm sure that there are many of my kind who are far more qualified than I am to deliver any messages that you may wish delivered."

Again he spoke. "We have chosen you because you have some of our blood. Not only that, your mind is one with our mind. You love the Great Spirit, you love his creations, and you walk upon the earth with respect and admiration. You realize that the trees and the waters, the winged creatures and the four-legged are as much a part of the Creator's perfection as you are. You treat them with respect. When we inhabited the temple of flesh, when we walked in physical form upon the breast of our Earth Mother, we moved as the wind. We killed only what we needed. We only cut those trees that we needed, and only after prayers to the Great Spirit thanking him for the gifts of those trees. We did not fill the water with poison, nor did we poison the air. We did not lay waste to the forests, nor did we destroy the mountains. Even now, if you did not occasionally find an arrowhead, or a piece of pottery, you wouldn't know that we have ever been here. Centuries after you and your kind are gone, people will still be able to see the wreck and ruin that your kind has made of the Great Spirit's creation. They will still be able to see where you have destroyed the forests and built cities of steel and concrete. They will still be able to see where your kind cut the breast of our Earth other to get coal, gold, oil and many other things to satisfy their greed. They think that by obtaining riches they will be happy. What fools! True happiness only comes by having a natural relationship with the Earth Mother and the Great Spirit Father. Happiness is never in things. True happiness is only found in Spirit. Your own Master, Jesus, told you that the only true heaven was inside you. Why didn't you believe Him? How can your kind believe they can have happiness by destroying the source of their lives? How long will it be before your kind realizes that they can't own the Earth or any part of it. They only have use of it for a while. It is not theirs to do with as they please. It is their sacred duty to leave it as they find it for those who come later. They have not done this. As a result they are slowly destroying themselves, and yet, they are still too blinded by greed to see it. It is our wish that they will see it before it is too late. The

time grows very short.

Please, tell your kind to stop their evil practices. Tell them to start trying to correct the wrongs that they have done to our Mother Earth. If they don't do this soon, only a few of you will survive.

Our ways and your ways can never mix. We love the Great Spirit and all of his creations. We treat them with respect. Many of your kind don't even believe in his existence. They will learn! We would never hurt the Earth Mother for the sake of selfishness or greed. Your kind do it every day. Your dead cease to love the place of their birth as soon as they pass the portals of the tomb and wander away beyond the stars. They are soon forgotten and never return. Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being. Know this: these shores still swarm with the invisible dead of our people. When your children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, or in the silence of the woods, or on the beach, they will not be alone. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent, and you think them deserted, they will throng with the hosts that once filled this land, and still love this land. The White Man will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with the Earth Mother, for the dead are not powerless. In reality there is no death. There is only a change of worlds. We have not meant to say that all of your kind are bad. There have always been a few of your kind feel as we do. We have always respected and protected them. There are many today who carry the long guns of your ancestors as you do; that feel the way we do. We love and respect them. We are watching them and helping them in any way we can. Tell them this.

We go now. We will return with our brother the wind. Before you come to where we are, we will see you again. Walk in peace."

I immediately heard the sound of rushing wind as before, and my visitors were gone. I asked myself if I really saw and heard all that I thought, or had I just been dreaming? I came to the conclusion that it didn't really matter if it were real or just a dream. The message was true.

(This article is from October, 1982.)



A SKETCH OF JOHN COLTER'S LIFE

By: Winfred Blevins

If you ask around the fire who the first mountain man was, some savvy beaver will probably tell you John Colter. And he has as good a claim as anyone. Sure a few French had been trading on the Great Plains for years, and the British in their footsteps. But when Colter turned around from the Lewis & Clark expedition and went back west, it was the Shining Mountains he went to, later known as the Rockies. He was the first to make the high country his trapping territory, not the plains, and the first white man to make those mountains his home. Thus the first mountain man.

Those mountains were nearly the death of him quite a few times. The most harrowing time, and the most celebrated, was his escape from the Blackfeet on foot. Though it is almost ludicrously dramatic, the tale is well-authenticated. This is how John Bradbury, who got it from Colter himself, told the tale:

Soon after he trapped in company with a hunter named Potts; and aware of the hostility of the Blackfeet Indians, one of whom had been killed by Lewis, they set their traps at night and took them up early in the morning, remaining concealed during the day. They were examining their traps early one morning, in a creek about six miles from that branch of the Missouri called Jefferson's Fork, and were ascending in a canoe when they suddenly heard a great noise, resembling the trampling of animals; but they could not ascertain the fact, as the high perpendicular banks on each side of the river impeded their view. Colter immediately pronounced it to be occasioned by Indians, and advised an instant retreat, but was accused of cowardice by Potts, who insisted that the noise was caused by buffalo, and they proceeded on. In a few minutes afterward their doubts were removed, by a party of Indians making their appearance on both sides of the creek, to the amount of five or six hundred, who beckoned them to come ashore. As retreat was now impossible, Colter turned the head of the canoe to the shore; and at the

moment of its touching, an Indian seized the rifle belonging to Potts; but Colter, who is a remarkably strong man, immediately re-took it, and handed it to Potts, who remained in the canoe, and on receiving it pushed off into the river. He had scarcely quit the shore when an arrow was shot at him, and he cried out, "Colter, I am wounded." Colter remonstrated with him on the folly of attempting to escape, and urged him to come ashore. Instead of complying, he instantly leveled his rifle at an Indian, and shot him dead on the spot. This conduct, situated as he was, may appear to have been an act of madness; but it was doubtless the effect of sudden, but sound reasoning; for if taken alive, he must have expected to be tortured to death according to their custom. He was instantly pierced with arrows so numerous that, to use the language of Colter, "he was made a riddle of." They now seized Colter, stripped him entirely naked, and began to consult on the manner in which he should be put to death. They were first inclined to set him up as a mark to shoot at; but the chief interfered, and seizing him by the shoulder, asked him if he could run fast? Colter, who had been some time amongst the Kee-kat-sa, or Crow Indians, had in a considerable degree acquired the Blackfoot language, and was also well-acquainted with Indian customs, he knew that he had now to run for his life, with the dreadful odds of five or six hundred against him, and those armed Indians there cunningly replied that he was a very bad runner, although he was considered by the hunters as remarkably swift. The chief now commanded the party to remain stationary, and led Colter out on the prairie three or four hundred yards, and released him, bidding him to save himself if he could. At that instant the horrid war whoop, sounded in the ears of poor Colter, who, urged with the hope of preserving life, ran with a speed at which he was himself surprised. He proceeded towards the Jefferson Fork, having to traverse a plain six miles in breadth, abounding with the prickly pear, on which he was every instant treading with his naked feet. He ran nearly half way across the plain before he ventured to look over his shoulder, when he perceived that the Indians were very much scattered, and that he had gained ground to a considerable distance from the main body; but one Indian, who carried a spear, was much before all the rest, and not more than a

hundred yards from him. A faint gleam of hope now cheered the heart of Colter; he derived confidence from the belief that escape was within the bounds of possibility, but that confidence was nearly being fatal to him, for he exerted himself to such a degree, that the blood gushed from his nostrils, and soon almost covered the fore-part of his body. He had now arrived within a mile of the river, when he distinctly heard the appalling sound of footsteps behind him, and every instant expected to feel the spear of his pursuer. Again he turned his head, and saw the savage not twenty yards from him. Determined if possible to avoid the expected blow, he suddenly stopped, turned around, and spread out his arms. The Indian, surprised by the suddenness of the action, and perhaps at the bloody appearance of Colter, also attempted to stop, but exhausted with running, he fell whilst endeavoring to throw his spear, which stuck in the ground, and broke in his hand.

Colter, instantly snatched up the pointed part, with which he pinned him to the earth, then continued his flight. The foremost of the Indians, on arriving at the place, stopped till others came up to join them, when they set up a hideous yell. Every moment of this time was improved by Colter, who, although fainting and exhausted, succeeded in gaining the skirting of the cottonwood trees, on the borders of the fork, through which he ran, and plunged into the river. Fortunately for him, a little below this place there was an island, against the upper point of which a raft of drift timber had lodged, he dived under the raft, and after several efforts, got his head above water amongst the trunks of trees, covered over with smaller wood to the depth of several feet. Scarcely had he secured himself, when the Indians arrived on the river, screeching and yelling, as Colter expressed it, "like so many devils."

They were frequently on the raft during the day, and were seen through the chinks by Colter, who was congratulating himself on his escape, until the idea arose that they might set the raft on fire. In horrible suspense he remained until night, when hearing no more of the Indians, he dived from under the raft, and swam silently down the river to a considerable distance, when he landed, and traveled at night. Although happy in having escaped from the Indians, his situation was still dreadful; he was

completely naked, under a burning sun; the soles of his feet were entirely filled with the thorns of the prickly pear; he was hungry, and had no means of killing game, although he saw abundance around him, and was at least seven days' journey from Lisa's Fort, on the Bighorn branch of the Roche Jaune River. These were circumstances under which almost any man but an American hunter would have despaired. He arrived at the fort in seven days, having subsisted on a root much esteemed by the Indians of the Missouri, now known by naturalists as Psoralea esculenta.

The account of Thomas James, later Colter's trapping companion, gives us a fuller picture of his trek back to the fort on the Bighorn:

He swam the river and hastened towards the mountain gap or ravine, about thirty miles above on the river . . . Fearing that the Indians might have guarded this pass, which was the only outlet from the valley, and to avoid the danger of a surprise, Colter ascended the almost perpendicular mountain before him, the tops and sides of which a great way down, were covered with perpetual snow. He clambered up this fearful ascent about four miles below the gap, holding on by the rocks, shrubs and branches of trees, and by morning had reached the top. He lay there concealed all that day, and at night proceeded on in the descent of the mountain, which he accomplished by dawn. He now hastened on in the open plain towards Manuel's Fort on the Big Horn, about three hundred miles ahead in the northeast. He traveled day and night, stopping only for necessary repose, and eating roots and the bark of trees, for eleven days. He reached the Fort, nearly exhausted by hunger, fatigue and excitement. His only clothing was the Indian's blanket, whom he had killed in the race and his only weapon, the same Indian's spear which he brought to the Fort as a trophy. His beard was long, his face and whole body were thin and emaciated by hunger, and his limbs and feet swollen and sore. The company at the Fort did not recognize him in this dismal plight until he made himself known. The whole affair is a fine example of the quick and ready thoughtfulness and presence of mind in a desperate situation, and the power of endurance,

which characterize the western pioneer.

Probably that pivotal moment - - the Blackfoot with the raised weapon, Colter in the posture of supplication, the Indian trying to hurl the fatal spear but stumbling, Colter turning the tables on him - - probably that intense little scene is most modern buckskinners' favorite picture of John Colter. But most decisive moment is another:

He is sitting talking with two strangers, trappers by their dress and gear. The other men of the Lewis & Clark expedition are spread out through their camp by the Mandan Villages (in modern North Dakota). For several days these two trappers have been asking questions of Colter - - - where are the Indians peaceable? where warlike? where are the headwaters of the Bighorn and the Marias and Clark's Fork? where are the best beaver streams? And they've been letting on that they mean to make themselves rich men with this one trip to the mountains, to bring back all the beaver they can. Now, at length, they have gotten to the point.

Will Colter come back to the mountains with them? He knows the country - - they can supply the traps; they'll contribute the possibles - - he can teach them about the Indians. They keep mentioning that fortune to be made.

What Colter's thoughts were is speculation, but I don't think they were mostly on money. A man out to get rich, in nineteenth-century America, would not have enlisted with captains Lewis and Clark to trek to the Pacific for several years at a salary of \$5.00 a month. And Colter was already at least thirty years old when he set out from his home in Virginia to travel across roadless wilderness to find Lewis & Clark and join up. What that suggests is a man keen for adventure. Maybe even a romantic.

So Colter, sitting there considering the proposition, likely turns his mind to his time back there in the Shining Mountains. Since he was a hunter for the expedition, lots of that time was spent alone, wandering, seeing country. A high, wild, remote country like no North Americans have ever seen, except for Colter and his companions. After he dwells in the high country again in his mind, he tells the two trappers, Joseph Dixon and Forrest Hancock, that he will partner them back into these mountains.

He asks permission from the Captains. They

are willing to release Colter, provided that no other man musters out. No problem. The other men unanimously want to go back to the settlements. Probably their minds are on their families, their friends, the country where they were reared. Or maybe on St. Louis booze and the first white women they will have seen in over two years. Only Colter yearns first for the high country they just came from.

Strange how interpreters of different times view a choice like Colter's.

Nicholas Biddle, who put the journals of the Lewis & Clark expedition together to form its first history, saw a callousness, a want of human feeling in Colter's turnaround:

The example of this man shows how easily men may be weaned from the habits of civilized life to the ruder but scarcely less fascinating manners of the woods. This hunter has been now absent for many years from the frontiers, and might naturally be presumed to have some anxiety, or some curiosity at least to return to his friends and his country; yet, just at the moment when he is approaching the frontiers, he is tempted by a hunting scheme to give up those delightful prospects, and go back without the least reluctance to the solitude of the woods.

But in 1814, when Biddle wrote those words, civilization had only a tenuous hold in North America. Vast reaches of the continent were inhabited by people regarded as barbaric, and were simply wild, untamed, perhaps pulling civilized people back into barbarism as though by a magnet.

Nearly two centuries later, when little enough wild country is left on this continent, many of us see Colter's choice as welling from the opposite of callousness - - - welling from romantic impulses, perhaps even noble feelings.

What Captain William Clark thought, and wrote in his journal, was that Colter was offered a good business opportunity, and took it. But it doesn't wash. Both Colter and Clark were justifying Colter's actions with socially acceptable explanations - - just as men and boys do today, when they justify going fishing by putting trout in the frying pan, and going hunting by putting deer in the freezer. I think that Colter went back to the mountains because he loved living in them, and that Clark knew that very well.

Not much is known about Colter's year with

Dixon and Hancock, but the partnership was dissolved by the following spring. Colter headed for the settlements again - - this time alone - - and on the way met Manuel Lisa with a party of trappers bound for the mountains. Lisa put Dixon and Hancock's proposition to Colter - - come with us, because you know the country - - and again Colter accepted. This choice led directly to one of the most remarkable exploits by an American woodsman, known as Colter's long walk.

Colter led Lisa and company to the mouth of the Big Horn River, in the country of the Crow Indians, who had been friendly to Colter, Dixon and Hancock. There the Lisa party built a picket fort. Since Lisa wanted to let the Indians know that they could trade hides for items they wanted, he asked Colter to spread the word. Colter responded with an extravagantly ambitious ramble:

Taking only a thirty-pound possible sack (plus trade goods, or maybe including trade goods), Colter set out on foot alone in the autumn to roam from Indian camp to Indian camp through northwestern Wyoming, the area around what we know as Yellowstone Park. He crossed the Pryor Mountains, walked over to what is now Cody, Wyoming, where he discovered the first boiling sulphurous spring he'd ever seen - - the back door to hell, he called it. Then he walked - - evidently during early winter - - over the formidable Absaroka Mountains into the Wind River Valley. There he camped with a Crow village. Then he crossed the Wind River Mountains into the extraordinary valley known as Jackson Hole, at the foot of the Grand Tetons. Still exploring, now out of country populated by Indians, and long since in territory never before seen by white men, he walked north into Yellowstone; sticking to the ridges, he apparently missed seeing the geysers and boiling mud pots, an even more impressive back door to hell. Then he turned northeast across Absarokas again and went home.

So Colter merely traveled upwards of five hundred miles, on foot, mostly in winter, across some of this continent's most forbidding terrain, through unknown country, and among Indians who could turn hostile at any moment. All of that alone. No wonder some of the other trappers had given him up for dead.

(Nothing much is known of his actual

relationships with the Crow bands whose land he traveled. He did learn their language. And he spent some of the winter with a village in the Wind River Valley. It would have been customary for him to take a squaw if he stayed for more than a brief visit, and to leave her with her people when he moved on.)

After Colter got back to Manuel's Fort in the spring of 1808, Lisa persuaded hi to go several times to the area of the Three Forks of the Missouri, Blackfoot country, to try to get those Indians to open their rich lands to beaver hunting. On the first trip Colter traveled to Blackfoot territory with some Crows and Flatheads, ancient foes of the Blackfeet. And the traditional enemies got into a fight, and Colter naturally shot back at the Blackfeet who were shooting at him so the Blackfeet took it that he and the other whites were their enemies. Colter was wounded in the leg in this battle.

The next year he went back to the area again with Potts, and had to make his famous run to get away that time.

And in the spring of 1810, he led another group of trappers to the area for the same reason, This time several men were ambushed and killed by Gros Ventres, who were mistakenly regarded as Blackfeet. Colter retreated to Manuel's Fort again, and decided he'd had enough.

"Colter . . . came into the Fort," reports James, who was there, "and said he had promised his Maker to leave the country, and 'Now,' said he, throwing down his hat on the ground, 'if God will only forgive me this time and let me off I will leave the country day after tomorrow - - - and damned if I ever come into it again.'"

He did leave, by canoe with just one other man, and made the two-thousand-mile journey to St. Louis through hostile country in just thirty days. So John Colter returned to civilization.

He did not thrive there. He discovered taht he had little pay due from his years in the mountains with Lisa, and could not collect the back wages owed him for his efforts with Lewis and Clark (Lewis had held the money but had died a bankrupt). Colter talked at length with Clark about his mountain doings, and described his ramblings in detail - - Clark carefully traced Colter's route on the map published in 1814, but somehow the route got put down inaccurately, and

is still a matter of speculation.

Colter pushed on toward returning to "normalcy". He married a girl named Sally and made a home on the Missouri about sixty miles above St. Louis. In the spring of 1811, Wilson Hunt's expedition visited Colter, plied him with questions, and asked him what Dixon and Hancock and Lisa had asked him - - will you come with us? Hunt was bound for the Pacific Ocean to set up a trading post for John Jacob Astor. Colter must have been tempted, but he said no. Farm and family had taken too strong a hold.

Two years later, just three years after he returned to the settlements for safety's sake, John Colter contracted jaundice and died.

Colter in brief: John Colter was born in the early 1770's in Virginia. Traveled across roadless wilderness to ask membership in Lewis & Clark expedition, 1803, and journeyed to the Pacific Ocean with Expedition. 1806 at Mandan Villages (in modern North Dakota) mustered out to join trapping expedition back to mountains. 1807 joined Manuel Lisa's trading expedition. 1807-08 made major journey into unexplored northwest Wyoming alone. 1810 quit the mountains. Died 1813.

Further reading on Colter: Barton Harris's biography *JOHN COLTER: His Years in the Rockies*, is reliable (Scribner's 1952, now available in paperback from Big Horn Books). Paul Lawrence's *John Colter: Journey of Discovery* is a serious effort to establish Colter's route on his long walk (self-published, available from Copper Mountain Books). The original sources on Colter's run are John Bradbury's *Travels in the Interior of North America in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811* (published 1817) and General Thomas Jame's *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans* (published 1845), both obtainable rom rare-book dealers, as is Stallo Vinton's Biography *John Colter*.