

Trappers and Hunters

After the US acquired the region through the Louisiana Purchase, throughout the late 1800s explorers, trappers, and hunters took advantage of the area. Little record was made of their visits but it wasn't long until there were few beaver, fish and animals in the area.



One of the first trappers and hunters was Jack Baker, for whom Baker Mountain and Baker Gulch in the Never Summer Range were named. These early trappers traversed the Grand Lake region in the eighteen fifties and sixties; two or three small log cabins were built at the lake during that time, which the men used as shelters. But none of these men stayed to establish homes.

(Information from Grand Lake in the Olden Days by Mary Lyons Cairns)

Philip Crawshaw is one of the few early trappers of whom we have authentic record. In the summer of 1857 he left Chillicothe, Missouri and came across the plains in a train of covered wagons and ox teams. In Denver he equipped himself for trapping and that autumn ventured across the mountains to Grand Lake. During the early fall he saw and camped with an occasional fellow trapper. Then the heavy snows came. He was trapped by a silent frozen winter. Along for five long months, he camped on the North Fork and his traps yielded richly in beaver, fox, bobcat and weasel.

In the spring when melting snow and ice had freed him, he made his way back to Denver with his furs which he traded for gold dust. He remained in Colorado 'til 1861. On return to Chillicothe he was waylaid by Quantrill's raiders and robbed.

Trappers and mountain men were the first European men to cross the Great Plains to the Rocky Mountains in search of fur. They traded with Native Americans from whom they learned hunting and trapping skills.

Beaver was one of the main animals of interest to the trappers as the fur wore well in coats and hats. Beaver hats became popular in the early 19th century but later the fashion changed. Towards the end of the century beaver became scarce in many areas and locally extinct in others.^[citation needed]

The decline in key species of fur-bearers, due to over-harvesting, and the later emergence of the first regulatory laws marked the end of the heyday of unregulated trapping.^[citation needed] Many trappers turned to buffalo hunting, serving as scouts for the army or leading wagon trains to the American west. The trails that trappers used to get through the mountains were later used by settlers heading west.

Mountain men were most common in the North American Rocky Mountains from about 1810 through to the 1880s (with a peak population in the early 1840s). Approximately 3,000 mountain men ranged the mountains between 1820 and 1840, the peak beaver-harvesting period. While there were many free trappers, most mountain men were employed by major fur companies. The life of a company man was almost militarized. The men had mess groups, hunted and trapped in brigades and always reported to the head of the trapping party. This man was called a "boosway", a bastardization of the French term bourgeois. He was the leader of the brigade and the head trader.











Harry & Sadie Harbison – Columbine Lake



