

Alexander Ross and Thyery Goddin in the Lost Rivers country in 1824

Introduction

Alexander Ross (1783-1856) led an expedition for the Hudson's Bay Company into the Salmon and Snake drainages in 1824, and his party entered the Pahsimeroi, Little Lost, and Big Lost River valleys. The first entry in his journal from this 1824 expedition lists his party of trappers, and first in the list is Thyery Goddin. Modern travelers in the upper Big Lost River Valley will have read the sign along US Highway 93 about "Thyery Goddin, prominent Iroquois" and will remember that the first name that Europeans gave the Big Lost River was "Goddin's River".

This document draws on Ross's journal, his book, and an Idaho State Historical Society reconstruction of Ross's itinerary to outline the travel of Ross's party through the Lost Rivers country. If the itinerary seems roundabout, one has to remember that Ross's two main goals were to obtain beaver pelts and to avoid conflict with Native Americans unhappy with his party's presence.

An early venture into the Pahsimeroi and Little Lost

Ross's party left Flathead House in Montana in February, 1824, and came through Lemhi Pass over the Beaverheads into Idaho and the Lemhi River Valley in late April. By May 5 they had reached the modern location of the town of Salmon and moved on up the Salmon River. By May 9 they were in the Pahsimeroi Valley and camped near modern Ellis that night. By May 12 they were near the divide between the Pahsimeroi and Little Lost, and Ross noted that he was "where in 1819 died John Day" (Day was famous trapper after whom the Little Lost River was originally named, presumably after he died there while traveling with Alexander Mackenzie's party). Ross went on to report seeing "a little farther on the three knobs so conspicuous for being seen". His "three knobs" were the Big Southern Butte and Twin Buttes roughly fifty miles away on the Snake River Plain. However, the party turned back north that day and camped that night (the 12th) near modern May, and by the night of the 13th they were back down on the Salmon.

Into the valley of the Big Lost River

The next two weeks were spent exploring up the Salmon beyond modern Challis, and by May 26 the party was back to "Canoe Point", a location near modern Challis. By the 28th they were making their way south from Canoe Point, and on the 29th Ross wrote that they "crossed over height of land which divides the waters of the Salmon and the Snake", which is his large-

scale way of saying that they had come over Willow Creek Summit. Then they “descended to Goddin's River named in 1820 by the discoverer Thyery Goddin”. This was the Big Lost River, which Goddin had visited with Donald Mackenzie in 1819 or 1820 while in the service of the North West Company, then a rival of the Hudson’s Bay Company.

Back to the Pahsimeroi to hunt buffalo

The party was soon running low on food, and Ross decided to cross back into the Pahsimeroi to hunt for buffalo, having seen them there earlier. Ross left eight men to trap in the valley of Goddin’s River and, by May 31st, he and the rest of the party had moved up between Dickey Peak and Borah Peak and then over Doublesprings Pass into the Pahsimeroi again. They then made their way up the Pahsimeroi Valley and into the valley of the Little Lost River, near Hawley Mountain and Bell Mountain. According to his book his book *The Fur Hunters*, he “ascended a high mountain and saw the three pilot knobs quite plain, in the direction of the east”, and eventually his party was rewarded because “the buffalo were in thousands”.

Back to the valley of the Big Lost River

On June 7th the party went up Wet Creek and over Pass Creek Summit back into the drainage of Goddin’s River. After descending through Pass Creek Gorge, they camped that night near modern Leslie. Reunion with the party of eight became an interesting endeavor: two men sent out to find that party went downriver, stumbled onto a Blackfoot war party, and narrowly escaped. This led Ross to go downriver in force, although he only found an empty Blackfoot camp. He nonetheless completed a remarkable exploration, recorded in *The Fur Hunters*:

. . . The following day, I went and examined the Trois Tetons [the three buttes], so named from their appearance. These three little hills, standing in a group, a very conspicuous in the middle of an open plain, having hot springs at their base; but there is no cold water nearer than the south end of Goddin’s River.

On starting the next day, we proposed following Goddin’s River all the way to its source, as it had never been either trapped or examined so far. Following up this intention, we entered it at the extreme south point, wither the two men fell on the Piegan [Blackfoot] war party. Here that river enters the ground and wholly disappears . . .

On the 11th of June the entire party camped near modern Mackay. Ross’s entry for the 11th remarks that Donald Mackenzie, with whom Goddin had entered the valley in 1819 or 1820,

had gone no farther up the valley than their campsite (a fact to which presumably Goddin could attest).

Out of the valley of the Big Lost River, and beyond

By June 12th the party was camped in the valley of the Big Lost River somewhere below Borah and Leatherman Peaks. On the 13th, they turned southwest to go up the river along the path of modern Trail Creek Road. Four of the party went up the North Fork of the Big Lost and crossed the mountains into the Salmon drainage, but most of the party went on up Summit Creek, and thus stayed with the path of modern Trail Creek Road. On the 16th they crossed over the top to the valley of Trail Creek, and that night they camped near modern Ketchum. The rest of the summer was spent in a huge excursion across the Camas Prairie to modern Boise and back, and then up over Galena Summit to Stanley and from there down to modern Challis and Salmon again.

Later years

The Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, George Simpson, was not impressed with Alexander Ross's work and fired him after the 1824 expedition. Ross then settled in the Red River Colony in modern Manitoba and lived there for the remaining thirty years of his life. Thyery Goddin continued the life of a frontiersman in Idaho and was killed (or his son was killed) by the Blackfeet, according to some accounts along the river that already bore his name.

Caters of the Moon Historic Context Statements, Chapter 3: Close Encounters: The Fur Trade in the Craters of the Moon Region, 1820-1856 (https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/crmo/hcs/chap3.htm)

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