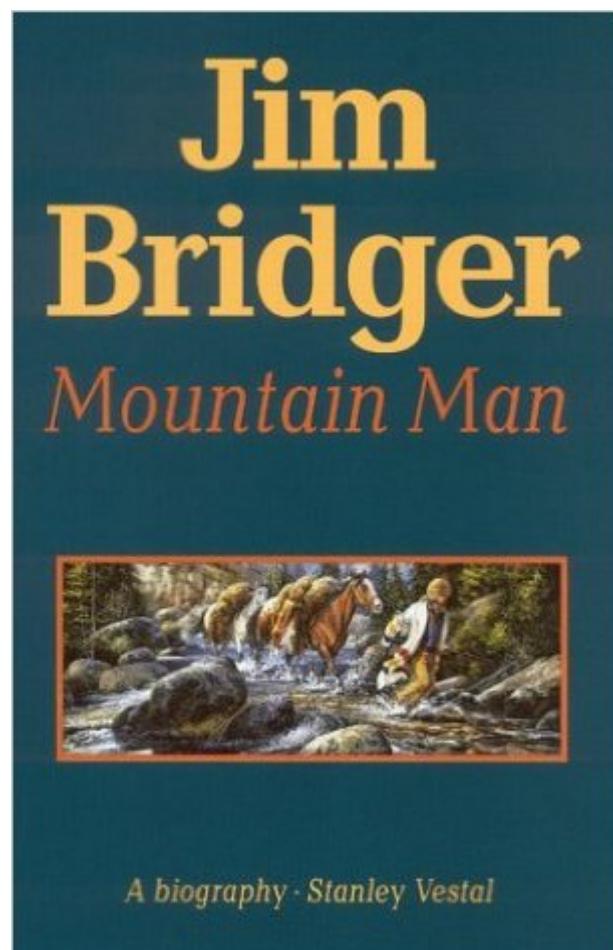


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Jim Bridger: Mountain Man



Synopsis

Even among the mighty mountain men, Jim Bridger was a towering figure. He was one of the greatest explorers and pathfinders in American history. He couldn't write his name, but at eighteen he had braved the fury of the Missouri, ascending it in a keelboat flotilla commanded by that stalwart Mike Fink. By 1824, when he was only twenty, he had discovered the Great Salt Lake. Later he was to open the Overland Route, which was the path of the Overland Stage, the Pony Express, and the Union Pacific. One of the foremost trappers in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, he was a legend in his own time as well as ours. He remains one of the most important scouts and guides in the history of the West. The Christian Science Monitor has called this biography "probably the fairest portrait of Jim Bridger in existence." The New York Times has praise for a "painstaking job of research among the usual Bridger sources and among some others which have been neglected. . . . [The author] has adequately set the scene for his hero's adventures and has honestly appraised the great guide's historical stature." Other Bison Books by Stanley Vestal: Dodge City: Queen of Cowtowns, Joe Meek: The Merry Mountain Man; The Missouri, The Old Santa Fe Trail, and Warpath: The True Story of the Fighting Sioux Told in a Biography of Chief White Bull

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Customer Reviews

Stanley Vestal did an admirably good job in recreating an accurate history of the early 1800's in the American West. This historical biography delves into the little known life of the great American explorer, trapper, and scout, Jim Bridger. He starts with his youth and factually chronicles almost every known aspect of his life until his death at the old age 76. (which you will find was quite

characteristic of many a mountain man.) Jim Bridger was the discoverer of the Great Salt Lake and most points of interest in the Rocky Mountain Range. His verbal descriptions of the unknown west are given in Vestal's book and vividly show why Bridger was one of the main reasons the early settlers heading west to Oregon survived. Vestal writes this book in the language used by the early "mountain men." He explains the "special" vocabulary used by these early men of courage. Vestal tells of actual events involving the American aboriginal peoples known as "Indians." He tells of the good things and the bad things that happen to these people, and why; and yet doesn't present the episodes in the usual "cry baby" attitude used by many of today's writers describing our aboriginal Americans. In this book, Vestal gives the reader glimpses of the real lives of Hugh Glass, Kit Carson, William Sublette, and other explorers of the time. Jim Bridger, although not usually recognized for this, was nearly single-handedly responsible for the opening of the Great American West. Jim Bridger was a friend to the aboriginal Americans. He understood them. Vestal brings this to life, as well as explaining the REAL reason the settlers and aboriginal Americans developed conflicts. Stanley Vestal did a marvelous job in this book.

I'd like to give the book another star, but just don't think I can. I found it an interesting and well researched description of Bridger's life. It has both an excellent index and references. The author gave a fair and balanced assessment of Bridger. It appears that some previous books on him might have been unfair or too praiseworthy about his life. Somehow the descriptions lacked a little spark, although there are a number of vivid passages. Perhaps this has to do with the fact the book was written 100 years after Bridger's death. In fact, this book is now 30 years old, and I believe the author wrote his first book on similar topics back in the 30s. Nevertheless, it's a good and complete description of Bridger's life. One of the sadder aspects of the story is near the ending when the author reveals that during the last 10-15 years of Bridger's life no writer took the opportunity to interview Bridger. He was in his sixties and seventies, I believe, but was a rather ignored individual, except by his family. He had an exceptionally good memory. Someone missed the opportunity to get more of his rather amazing life straight from the source. The 2-3 page description of his last years, and his desire to keep moving summarize his deep need for adventure and discovery. He was apparently quite a wit and teller of tall tales. Only four of five of his short tales are found in the book. Interestingly, he told many of his stories in sign languages to the Indians. The book contains one chapter of the famous Hugh Glass incident. It's worth reading if you have not heard it. The story was incorporated into a movie, *A Man Called Horse*, starring Richard Harris, in a slightly different form. I also found the long passage on "medicine wolves" quite intriguing.

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