

Trails West

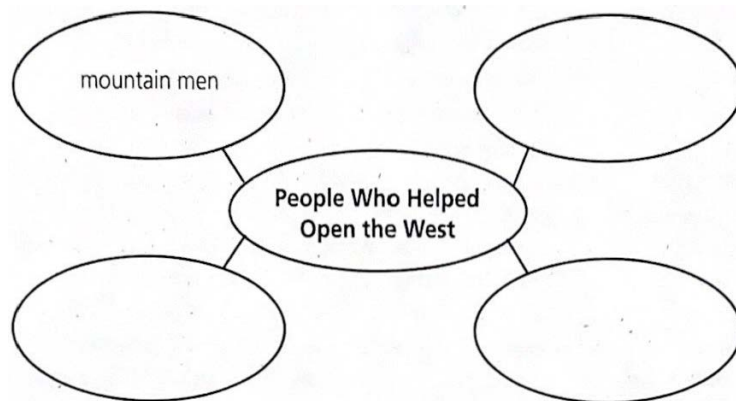
BEFORE YOU READ

In the last chapter, you read about the economic problems facing the United States in the 1840s.

In this section, you will learn how Americans continued to move westward.

AS YOU READ

Use this diagram to describe the people who helped open the West.



TERMS & NAMES

mountain man A fur trapper or explorer who discovered trails through the Rocky Mountains

Jedediah Smith Famous mountain man

Jim Beckwourth Famous mountain man

land speculator A person who buys land in the hope that it will increase in value and bring in a profit

Santa Fe Trail Trail from Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico

Oregon Trail Trail from Missouri to the Oregon Territory

Mormon A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

Brigham Young Mormon leader

Mountain Men and the Rendezvous

During the early 1800s, daring fur trappers and explorers, known as **mountain men**, helped open up the West by discovering the best trails through the Rocky Mountains. **Jedediah Smith** and **Jim Beckwourth** were two famous mountain men. These men were tough and resourceful. They spent most of the year alone, trapping small animals, such as beavers. Easterners wanted furs from these animals to make men's hats that were in fashion at that time.

The mountain men were connected to the businessmen who bought their furs. They created a trading arrangement called the *rendezvous* system. Under this system, individual trappers came to a chosen site to meet with traders from the East. The trappers bought supplies from the traders and paid them with

furs. This rendezvous took place every summer from 1825 until 1840. In that year, silk hats replaced beaver hats as the fashion, and the fur trade died out.

Mountain Men Open the West; The Lure of the West (page 394)

Mountain men killed off so many beavers from some streams that they had to find new streams where beavers lived. The explorations of these men provided Americans with some of the earliest knowledge of the Far West. The trails these men *blazed* helped make it possible for later pioneers to move west.

1. Explain the rendezvous system.

Many people moved west to make money. **Land speculators** bought huge areas of land. They divided their land holdings into smaller sections. They made great profits by selling those sections to thousands of settlers who wanted to own their own farms. Manufacturers and merchants followed the settlers west. They hoped to make money by making and selling items that the farmers needed.

2. How did land speculators make a profit?

The Trail to Santa Fe

Traders also went west in search of markets. One Missouri trader, William Becknell, took his *merchandise* to Santa Fe in New Mexico. By doing so, he opened the **Santa Fe Trail**, which led from Missouri to Santa Fe. Becknell then traveled to Santa

Fe by loading his goods in covered wagons, called prairie schooners. However, he could not take the wagons over the mountains on the Santa Fe Trail. He found a shortcut that avoided the steep slopes. Instead, it passed through a desert to the south. Soon, hundreds of prairie schooners used the shortcut, or cutoff, to make the journey from Missouri to New Mexico each year.

3. What are prairie schooners?

Oregon Fever; One Family Heads West

Many settlers traveled west on the **Oregon Trail**. It ran from Independence, Missouri, to the Oregon

Territory. The first white people to cross into the Oregon Territory were missionaries. Their reports of rich land in Oregon encouraged many other American settlers to make the 2,000-mile journey.

Traveling on the Oregon Trail was dangerous. So, settlers joined wagon trains. Before setting out, the wagon train members agreed on rules and elected leaders to enforce them.

4. Where did the Oregon Trail begin and end?

The Mormon Trail

The **Mormons** went west for religious reasons. They belonged to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The Mormons lived in close communities, worked hard, and *prospered*. Some people reacted angrily to the Mormon teachings, especially to the practice of polygamy. This practice allows a man to have more than one wife at a time.

In 1844, an anti-Mormon *mob* in Illinois killed Joseph Smith, the Mormon leader. So **Brigham Young**, the next Mormon leader, moved his people out of the United States to Utah, which was then part of Mexico. In 1847, about 1,600 Mormons followed part of the Oregon Trail to Utah, where they built a new settlement by the Great Salt Lake. The Mormons built dams and canals to bring water to their farms. Through teamwork, they made their desert homeland bloom.

5. Why did the Mormon move west ?

6. How were the Mormons able to farm in the desert?