

Touring Topics

SEPTEMBER 1927 ▶▶

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LOS ANGELES, CAL.
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BY PAUL JORDAN-SMITH

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BY MARTIN WALSH

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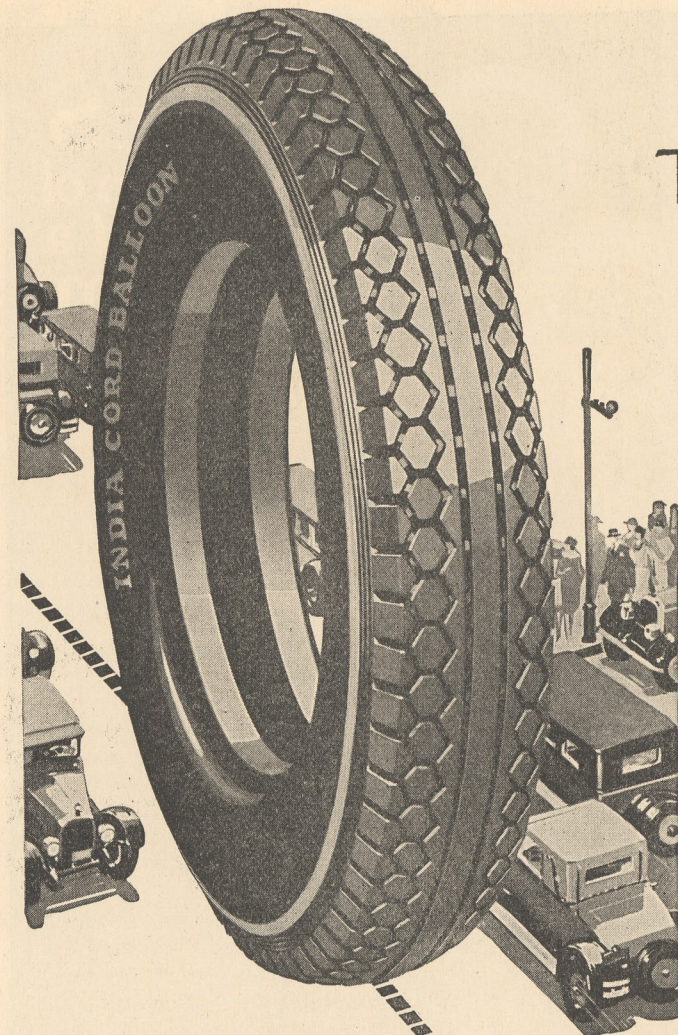
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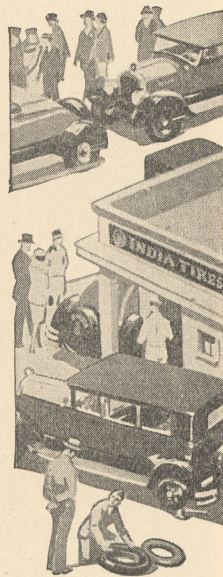
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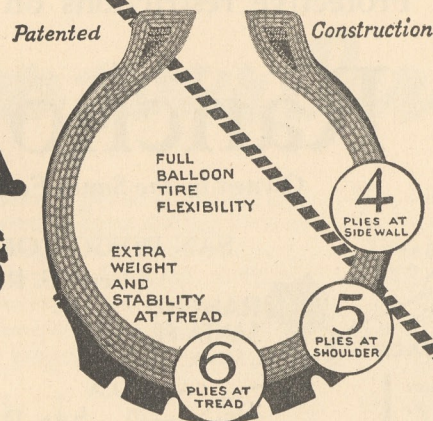
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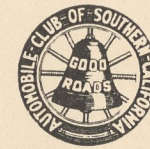


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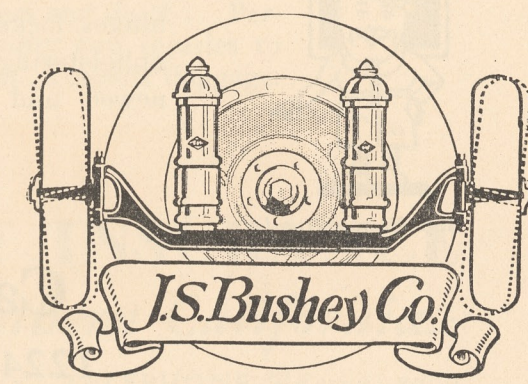
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Kit Carson

IN CALIFORNIA

A Sketch of the Golden State
Adventures of
America's Foremost Scout

By PAUL JORDAN-SMITH

With Illustrations From
Contemporary Drawings



Kit Carson as he appeared about the time that he joined the Fremont expedition

THE very name of Kit Carson recalls the romance of America. Before movies were the yellow-backs, with their fervid tales of Indian massacre, of mighty hunters after buffalo, and of the blood-stained, bone-strewn Santa Fe Trail. The man is linked, in our minds with Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett, even more than with Fremont and the exploits of Jedediah Smith.

For the racy stream of Carson legend overflows the confines of his true history. The hero overtops the man, for all the strict and busy makers of footnotes, and collectors of true data. The poet in the common man defies the historian, and thus we get our demigods. Let them deify Lincoln. Let them humanize him once more in order that again he may be placed among the gods, and defeated man may enrich the dullness of this mouldering earth.

The legendary Carson was already alive when the man himself made his first journey to Washington (1847). Carson had killed Indians; therefore he had killed by the thousand. He was a hunter; he surpassed all others!

Carson himself was a modest man, hating the inevitable lionization that awaited him in the cities. An adobe hut in Taos, N. M., was to him finer and more com-

fortable than the marble corridors of Washington, D. C.

Unassuming, simple, quiet, and slight of stature, his appearance belied his fame; and for the most part he was inclined to speak slightly of his exploits. To one hero-worshipper who had exclaimed: "So this is the great Kit Carson who has made so many Indians run," he replied, "sometimes I ran after them, but most times they war runnin' after me!"

In this connection one recalls the incident narrated by Edwin L. Sabin (*Kit Carson Days*). A traveling man, excited at being in the presence of the adventurer, begged for a story. Carson, having heard of the exaggerated reports of his bravery, related the following yarn:

"Well, I'll tell ye. I war down on the plains, an' the Comanches got after me. Thar war 'bout five hundred of 'em, an' they chased me. We run an' we run, an' my hoss war killed an' I clum a sort o' butte. Thar war a leetle split or cañon in it, an' I run up this. One big red rascal kep' right on my heels; my gun war busted, but I had my knife. The split nattered an' nattered, an' got smaller an' smaller, an' suddenly it pinched out; an' thar I war, at the end. So I turned, with my knife, an' when he come on I struck at him. But the

walls o' the split war so near together that I hit the rock, an' busted my knife squar' off at the hilt. When he seed that he give a big yell for my scalp, an' at me he jumped.'

"Here Carson stopped, reflectively, and spat. The interrogator waited, breathless, until the suspense was beyond endurance.

"Yes! And then what, General?" he demanded.

"Wall, drawled Carson, calmly, 'then the Injun killed me!'"

But whether from legend or authentic history, the Carson record comes down to us with clean pages. He is remembered as honest, fair-minded, courageous; a friend to both Indian and white, and one ready to sacrifice his personal ambitions to the needs of his country.

He was born in Kentucky on the Christmas day of 1809, the descendant of Indian-fighters, way-breakers, and Revolutionary soldiers. While he was but an infant, his people removed to what is now Howard County, Missouri, and there he remained until he was nearly seventeen. In the year 1825, he was apprenticed to one David Workman, a saddler, but the trade was too dull for a born fighter.

He lived at the gateway of the West, which was, for most, a vast *terra incognita*,

teeming with perils and shining with glamor. Daily came the reports of trappers, guides, scouts. Danger awaited across the plains. In the mountains and along the smaller streams one might grow rich with trap and rifle. Outside was struggle. Life was a gamble, a warfare. The risk was great, but about the heads of those who took it was a halo. And Kit Carson was learning the business of making saddles—for heroes to ride!

Too confined, this shop, for the strides of young Carson. The pull from without was too great. After a year of it, he deserted his post and ran away.

His employer inserted the following advertisement in the county paper:

"To whom it may concern: That Christopher Carson, a boy about sixteen years old, small of his age, but thick-set, light hair, ran away from the subscriber, living in Franklin, Howard Co., Mo., to whom he had been bound to learn the saddler's trade, on or about the first day of September last. He is supposed to have made his way toward the upper part of the state. All persons are notified not to harbor, support, or subsist said boy under penalty of the law. ONE CENT REWARD will be given to any person who will bring back the said boy. (Signed)

David Workman,
Franklin, Oct. 6, 1826."

To me the most interesting thing about the notice was the amount of the reward!

From 1826 until 1829 Carson was part time cavy-boy, interpreter, camp-cook, teamster, by turn; but already he had chosen to make his permanent home in Taos, New Mexico. So slight, so harmless, so juvenile did he appear that his fellows regarded him unfit for hunting, trapping and fighting.

Then, in the spring of 1829, came the

famous Captain Ewing Young, with a company of trappers, bound for Mexican territory—forty men, banded together to fight Apaches, trap beaver and, ultimately, to march into California. For this last Young picked seventeen of the hardest and most tried, and it speaks well for the young Carson that in the space of a few months he had established himself among the best of the company. He could go without water, without sleep, and could eat horse flesh with a smile.

The greater number turning back to Taos with the furs already taken, Young and his little band moved toward the west. His was the second party of American white men to view the Grand Canyon.

Crossing the Mojave Desert the trappers came through what is now San Bernardino County to the prosperous mission of San Gabriel. There they learned that they were not welcome to tarry. Governor Echandia had already shown his hostility to Jedediah Smith, and he made it known that the rough-and-ready and, sometimes, boorish Americans were free to move elsewhere. Anticipating any act of the Governor, Young advanced toward the northern part of the State. The party vis-



The grizzly bear was a genuine menace to the traveller of the early half of the Nineteenth Century and the scout is reported to have been treed more than once by these savage creatures



Those were the days when buffalo were as prevalent in the Far West as the ubiquitous prairie-dog now is and Carson, it is related, was an excellent hunter

ited San Fernando, Sacramento Valley; trapped in the neighborhood of Suisun, camped at San Jose and paid flying visits to Monterey. But they found but little hospitality and less game. The Hudson's Bay Company had been before them. Within a year the trappers had enough and began to turn homewards.

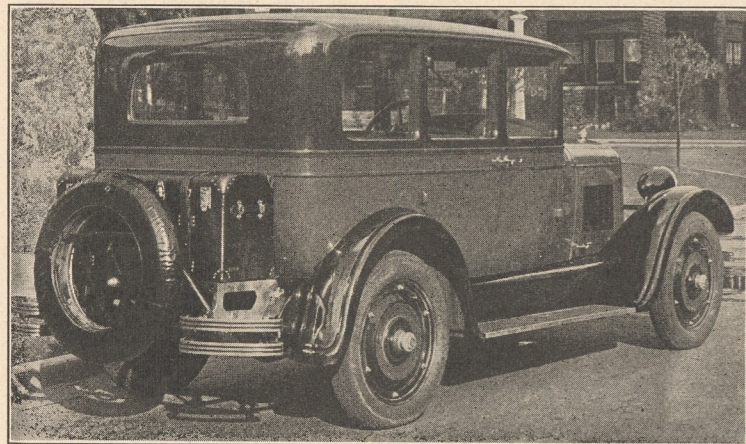
The fur hunters might have withdrawn quietly from the State without trouble had they not permitted appetite to get the better of discretion. One final celebration they demanded prior to the long, desert march to Taos. They decided to refresh themselves in the town of Los Angeles—a feat not impossible in the summer of 1830. The adobe huts of this little city held approximately one thousand persons, few of whom were averse to devoting their evenings to amusement.

Here, then, the thirsty wanderers came for entertainment; and they came, so to say, without passports. But they had guns, and were, so long as they were sober, formidable enough to be let alone.

Fortunately, five of the men remained sober—that is to say, they held their liquor well—sober enough to see that there was a plot afoot to keep them in good cheer until the local constabulary should be reinforced from San Gabriel or San Diego. Divining

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 39)

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Where Reigned the Utes

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25)

The route to the north rim leads, by an excellent road, through the famed Kaibab forest, where something over a billion and a half board feet of lumber is being grown for future needs of the nation under the watchful eyes of Uncle Sam's rangers.

If you are keen of eye and do not travel at too dizzy a pace, you may glimpse the white-tail squirrel, which is found nowhere else on earth. Unlike the rest of its family, it does not chatter, thereby greatly reducing the traveler's chance of sighting it. Deer, for which the forest is most widely known, are plentiful. Whereas there were 3,000 roaming over the slopes of Kaibab mountain when it became a game preserve in 1906, rangers now estimate the deer population at anywhere from 20,000 to 50,000.

A study of the situation has revealed that these animals probably do not hurt the area as a grazing ground for cattle and sheep, peculiar as this may seem. The reason therefor is found in the fact that deer are browsers. They eat little grass, leaving it for the domesticated animals. The deer, however, have denuded the aspen trees of their leaves as high from the ground as they can reach while standing on their hind feet, and one may pass through corridor after corridor, miles in length, of these gorgeous trees, where the bark of each has been scraped away, waist-high, by the hooves of the deer, seeking the younger and smaller branches for food.

The Californian who extends his visit eastward into Wyoming will find several points of interest which had a direct bearing upon the first settlement of Utah. Chief among these is old Fort Bridger, whose founder seems to have been part and parcel of the history of the entire region.

As a youth of 19 Bridger went west and found it so much to his liking that he remained there to his dying days. He spent a brief and unhappy period of residence at Westport, Missouri, during middle life, but the monotony of comfortable, civilized life galled him and he deserted his home there to return to the wilds.

About the first thing of importance Bridger did was to discover Great Salt Lake. While he and other members of William H. Ashley's fur-hunting expedition were camped on Bear River, speculation arose as to the stream's course. Wagers were made and Bridger was sent to learn the facts. In following the river, he came upon the mammoth inland body of saline water.

Fort Bridger was established as a trading post and later was an important base for troops. The wall erected during Mormon tenancy to repel Indian attacks has been rebuilt by the present owner of the post, who plans to restore it as a point of historical interest.

Leading from the main building to the edge of the stream nearby, can be traced lines where the earth has subsided. During the days of Mormon occupation, these were rock-walled trenches which furnished protection for the water carriers. Excavations which have been started indicate that they are but little caved and they will be restored in their entirety.

Working around the place at odd jobs is John McLaughlin, an ex-soldier who stayed on when the fort was abandoned by the five companies of infantrymen who occupied it until September 29, 1890, to protect travelers through the section.

Over the span of years, McLaughlin has gathered together

much of the history of the place and of the picturesque Bridger and many are the delectable yarns he can spin. His choicest, perhaps, is Bridger's explanation of why the early Mormon settlers found no buffalo roving the Salt Lake basin.

These ungainly animals were numerous there, it seems, until 1830. During the winter of that year there came snows of unprecedented severity. For seventy days and nights the air was filled with falling flakes, until the ground was covered to a depth of seventy feet. The buffalo were all trapped and killed, their carcasses being preserved in the icy drifts. When the thaw came in the following spring, all Bridger had to do was tumble the bodies into the brine of the lake. He obtained a supply of pickled beef which sufficed to feed himself and the entire Ute tribe of Indians as long as the red men remained in that section.

Fort Bridger is on the Lincoln Highway. It was there that the

trail from the east branched, the three forks being known as the Oregon, Overland and Bridger trails. They can still be traced by means of the depressions worn into the earth by the feet of the countless thousands who traveled them. The fort was a stopping point for the Pony Express.

Enroute from Salt Lake City to Fort Bridger, the road traverses Echo Canyon, a defile so narrow that only a one-way road could be chiseled around the most precipitous stretch of cliffs. If you meet a car there, one or the other of you must back up.

This point looms large in the stories which have been handed down from bygone years. The canyon was the prevailing route of travel into the Salt Lake basin. The Indians, it is related, suspended large boulders over the cliffs with long ropes, dropping them upon those enemies who declined to accept the advice that it was safer to remain out of the country.

Kit Carson

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23)

this, Carson, taking three of the steadier men, secured the extra horses and provisions and quietly withdrew from the town to the homeward trail.

Young, also sober, remained with the drunks and undertook to keep them out of danger, and fetch them out when they were able to move. But trouble they were bound to make. The inevitable free-for-all resulted in but one casualty, and at that, luckily, the native Californians had enough and withdrew. Taking this opportunity, and with his men now partially sobered by the fracas, Young contrived to get his men to the trail, where next day, they overtook Carson and the pack-horses. Thus ended Kit Carson's first trip to California.

But that was not the end; it was but the beginning of his Pacific Coast adventures.

Five times Carson visited California. Once in 1829, twice in 1844, once in 1846 and, finally, in 1853 when, with Lucien Maxwell, he drove more than 6,000 sheep over the Salt Lake Trail.

In 1843, Carson was not only the best trapper, but the best guide in the West, and it was a lucky day for Lieutenant John C. Fremont,

impetuous and Quixotic explorer that he was, when he and Carson joined hands. In 1842 they made their first pilgrimage up the Platte, and in the following year, Carson joined Fremont for California, where they arrived in the spring of 1844, taking refuge in Sutter's Fort, near the present Sacramento. The first visit aroused some speculation among the native Californians, but when, within a year, Fremont's party once more were received by Captain Johann Sutter, the authorities became suspicious.

But it was not until 1846 that things began to happen, and Carson found himself caught up, willy nilly, in the making of significant history.

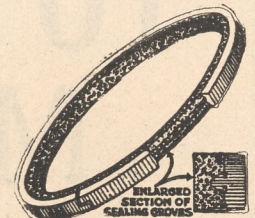
Fremont had been granted permission to pass through California on the ground that he was engaged in scientific exploration. He had been received with courtesy by General Castro at Monterey and through his graces was enabled to supply his party of sixty men; and the Californians were given to understand that the Americans were then bound for Oregon.

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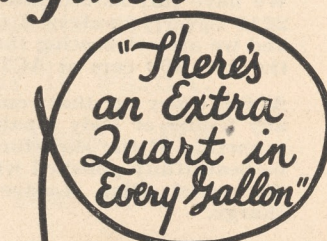
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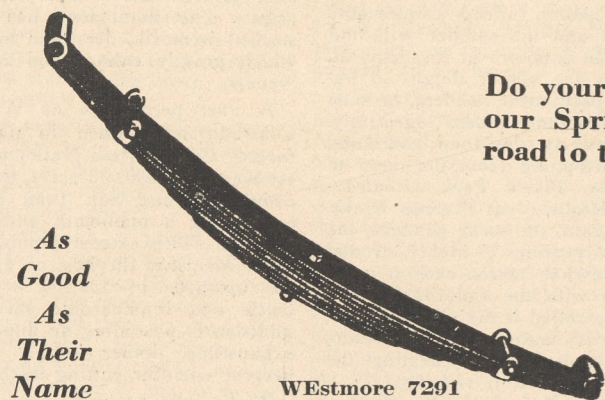
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