

Meet Thomas Fitzpatrick



Real People! Real Stories!

Santa Fe Trail Hall of Fame

Thomas Fitzpatrick
(1799 -- 1854)

- Explorer and Guide
- Trapper and Trader
- Indian Agent
- Head of Rocky Mountain Fur Company
- Discovered the South Pass
- Led caravan to Santa Fe
- Treaty Negotiator

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Thomas Fitzpatrick was born in County Caven, Ireland in 1799 and came to the U.S. as a young man in about 1816. He soon moved west and became involved with the Ashley Fur Company. On June 1, 1823 Ashley and his party of 70 men were attacked by 600 Arikara Indians, inciting what is known as the Arikara War. Twelve of Ashley's men were killed and the rest were forced to retreat. Fitzpatrick and Jedediah Smith led the party that discovered South Pass, which made crossing the mountains to Oregon much easier. In 1830, he and four other men purchased the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, which he became the head of. In 1836, he sold his interests in the fur company, but continued to independently hire out as a guide to the American Fur Company. He and Smith led a trade caravan on the Santa Fe Trail in 1831, during which Smith was killed by Comanches. In 1836 a gun accident took two fingers from Fitzpatrick's left hand; thereafter he was known to the Indians as "Broken Hand."

Fitzpatrick was a leader of mountain men fur trappers, an explorer of the mountain west, head of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, a guide for emigrant trains to the West, a guide for John C. Fremont, and he guided General Stephen w. Kearny's Army of the West to Santa Fe on the Mountain Route of the Santa Fe Trail in 1846.

He was appointed Indian Agent for the Agency of the Upper Platte and Arkansas Rivers to deal with the plains tribes. He met with the Indians at many places: Fort Laramie Bent's Fort, Fort Mann, and Fort Atkinson.

At Fort Atkinson, 1853, he and Major Robert Chilton signed a treaty with the Comanche, Kiowa and Plains Apache tribes, to protect travelers on the Santa Fe Trail

While in Washington, D.C. in 1854, he got sick with pneumonia and died on February 7, 1854. He was buried in the Congressional Cemetery. During his lifetime, he married a woman of mixed French-Snake ancestry and fathered two children.