# Paths of Profit

How the fur trade shaped travel across the West

**8.C.9.1.A** "Explain how the fur trade provided economic incentive for early exploration of the West including the crucial role played by traders and frontiersmen (e.g., Jedediah Smith, John C. Fremont, Kit Carson) in transcontinental migration (e.g...."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline what made western travel profitable, circle ways travelers learned about routes, and number two ways that knowledge later helped emigrants.

### From Beaver Pelts to Wagon Trails

1. In the early 1800s, beaver pelts brought high prices because hat makers used the fur to make felt. Trading companies paid trappers to search western rivers for beaver, even when the trip was risky and expensive. To earn money, traders and frontiersmen needed ways across mountains and dependable places to buy supplies. They exchanged goods with Native peoples, who already knew the land and its waterways. These exchanges could bring information about travel, although relations also included conflict. The search for profit pushed explorers farther west.

2. Jedediah Smith worked in the fur trade and traveled through large parts of the West in the 1820s. In 1827, he crossed the Sierra Nevada on a difficult eastward journey. His travels added to knowledge of western routes, but he did not discover empty land. Native peoples had lived and traveled there for generations. Trappers often followed existing Native paths and learned where to find water or cross mountains. As traders carried furs and supplies along these paths, some routes became better known to people planning longer journeys.

3. Kit Carson first worked as a trapper and later guided John C. Frémont's government expeditions in the 1840s. Carson's experience in western travel helped Frémont gather information for maps and reports. Frémont's widely read reports described routes and land that emigrants might encounter. The government expeditions were not fur-trading trips, but the travel knowledge built during the fur trade helped make them possible. Later, wagon parties used information from guides, maps, and established trails when traveling across the continent. These journeys also brought growing pressure on Native lands.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the price of beaver pelts encourage traders to explore farther west?

2. How could knowledge gained on Jedediah Smith's travels help people planning a longer western journey?

3. How did relations with Native peoples affect what traders knew about western travel?

4. How did Carson's earlier work connect the fur trade to information emigrants could use?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence notice for an 1840s emigrant newspaper. Explain a chain of events from the demand for beaver pelts to information a wagon party could use, distinguish trappers from government explorers, and include one effect of migration on Native peoples.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.9.1.A

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline what made western travel profitable, circle ways travelers learned about routes, and number two ways that knowledge later helped emigrants. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How did the price of beaver pelts encourage traders to explore farther west? | **High prices made beaver trapping profitable, so companies paid trappers to search western rivers and find ways to travel there.** |
| 2 | How could knowledge gained on Jedediah Smith's travels help people planning a longer western journey? | **His travels added to knowledge of western routes, including how to cross difficult terrain such as the Sierra Nevada.** |
| 3 | How did relations with Native peoples affect what traders knew about western travel? | **Through exchanges and by following existing Native paths, traders could learn about waterways, water sources, and mountain crossings.** |
| 4 | How did Carson's earlier work connect the fur trade to information emigrants could use? | **Carson's trapping experience helped him guide Frémont's expeditions. Frémont used information from those journeys in maps and reports that described routes and land for emigrants.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The demand for beaver pelts sent paid trappers into western river country. As they traveled, they learned about routes, often using paths and knowledge Native peoples already had. Former trapper Kit Carson later used his travel experience while guiding government explorer John C. Frémont. Frémont's maps and reports gave wagon parties information about land and routes they might encounter. As more emigrants traveled west, Native communities faced growing pressure on their lands.

Accept explanations that connect fur-trade profits to travel knowledge and then to migration, without claiming that trappers discovered unoccupied land or that Frémont's expeditions were fur-trading trips.