

Bear Lake Rendezvous Oregon Trail- Paul

Over the years the local Indians of the Bear Lake Valley would get together for what was called a rendezvous. These were assembled for the purpose of a summer retreat and a time where fur traders, mountain men and Indians would trade and enjoy: singing songs, dancing, shooting, running, jumping, racing and was combined with all different kinds of extravagances that the white man, or Indians could come up with. The uncorking and drinking of "fire water" contributed to, and heightened this festive gathering.

A tradition began after the 1825 meeting, was to select the next years rendezvous during the current year's gathering. The sites that were most desirable included lush, green valleys, and lakes that were large enough for up to five hundred mountain men, several thousand Indians, and enough grassland and water for thousands of horses. The tribes of the Shoshone, Crow, Nez Perce and Flathead nations were usually always in attendance. The final consideration was that the location had to be accessible to the railroads, that were running East to West from St. Louis.

In 1827, the first rendezvous was held on Bear Lake. Mountain men and Indians gathered at the south end of Bear Lake. Right before the arrival of the pack train, Blackfoot Indians attacked the men at this rendezvous. As David Potts remembers, this event was a skirmish involving about 20 Blackfoot warriors. But according to James Beckwourth this was a large battle that involved more than 300 trappers and their Indian allies. Beckwourth noted that after six hours of viscous battle, more than 173 Blackfoot scalps were taken.

The same thing happened in the 1828 rendezvous, Blackfoot Indians made their attack just before the start. Approximately two to three hundred Blackfoot were on the warpath again, attacking the arriving party, a few miles outside the site.

The rendezvous went on year after year, at different locations and were overall successful in allowing the American fur traders to trade and sell beaver other fur and skins with the Indians. The rendezvous system ended at the end of 1840. The beaver in the mountains had been almost driven to extinction. Fashions in Europe had changed and prices had been driven down. Trapping furs and skins would continue until the end of the 1800's but it never provided much more than a meager living for the remaining mountain men.