



The Natural History of the Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains (1819-1820)

Howard Ensign Evans

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A little over 170 years ago--hardly a moment on the clock of history--one half of the United States was empty of all but Indians and the plants and game on which they subsisted. Indeed, acquiring the Louisiana Territory approximately doubled the size of the United States, adding 800,000 square miles of land that had scarcely been explored or adequately mapped. Americans would be given an in-depth look this rugged and untamed land only when Secretary of War John C. Calhoun and President James Monroe agreed that a military presence at the mouth of the Yellowstone River (near the boundary between North Dakota and Montana) would impress the Indians and serve notice to Canadian trappers and traders that some of their favorite beaver country was now part of the United States.

In *The Natural History of the Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains (1819- 1820)*, Howard E. Evans offers a colorful history of the expedition of Major Stephen H. Long--the first scientific exploration of the Louisiana Territory to be accompanied by trained naturalists and artists. Made up of twenty-two men--military personnel and "scientific gentlemen"--the Long Expedition struggled on foot and horseback along the Front Range of the Rockies, living off the land, recording rivers and landforms, shooting birds, plucking plants, and catching lizards and insects to preserve for study. They were often thirsty and hungry, sometimes ill, and always tired. But theirs was an experience awarded to only a chosen few: the opportunity to see and record firsthand the pristine lands that so majestically defined the United States.

Based primarily on the expedition members' reports and diaries, and often told in the participants' own words, this fascinating chronicle transports readers back to the near-virgin wilderness of 1820. We accompany naturalist Edwin James as he becomes the first man to climb Pike's Peak, and roam with him in his dual role as botanist, collecting a multitude of flora specimens, 140 of which were described by him and others as new. We sit with artist Samuel Seymour as he sketches in vivid detail the panorama of breathtaking peaks and prominent landforms, travel along with Titian Peale as he visits the homes of Native Americans and records with an artist's keen eye and gifted hand the intense beauty of this land's first inhabitants, and go exploring with zoologist Thomas Say as he describes never before seen mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and insects. Beautifully illustrated with crisp reproductions of Peale and Seymour's art, as well as photographs of the many plants and insects described by James and Say, *The Natural History of the Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains (1819-1820)* offers a vivid account of this monumental expedition. The story of the Long Expedition has been told before, but without due recognition of the party's great contributions to natural history. Now, anyone interested in the early history of the American West can witness for themselves how this vast and varied land looked and felt when it was first seen by trained scientists and artists.

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