



0. THE AMERICAN WILDERNESS - Story Preface

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This photo by Tom Bricker—"Sunrise Over Oconaluftee Valley in Great Smoky Mountains National Park"—is an example of the American wilderness which still remains. Today the "Wilderness Act" protects such areas of unspoiled beauty. License: [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

When John Soule urged young men to "go west," in 1851, it wasn't just places like [Yellowstone](#) which were undeveloped. Nearly the entire western part of the country was referred to as a great "wilderness," and there were few [recognized passes](#) on which to travel.

Although [Lewis & Clark](#) had completed their journey earlier in the 19th century, no [transcontinental railroad](#) yet existed. About seven years after Soule's article, the first non-stop stage coach left St. Louis for Los Angeles (in 1858).

That 2,600-mile journey took [twenty days](#).

What did the American West look like at the time? The [Library of Congress](#) has magnificent paintings and drawings (from the federally sponsored "Survey of the West," U.S. Geological [Survey of the Territories](#)) which answer that question. They reveal scenes observed by men and women who first heeded the call to [cross](#) the [Mississippi River](#) and develop the country's vast open spaces.

Some places have changed little between then and now. Other areas, once inhabited only by [Native Americans](#), are no longer recognizable.

Let's examine a representative sampling of paintings and engravings.

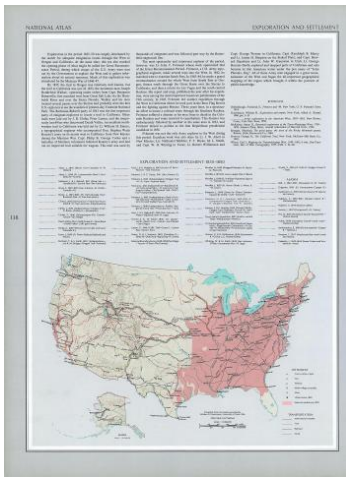
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-AMERICAN-WILDERNESS-Go-West-U.S.-Westward-Expansion>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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Media Stream



Map of the United States - Early Travel Routes

Image online, courtesy the [University of Texas](http://www.utexas.edu) website.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-of-the-United-States-Early-Travel-Routes>

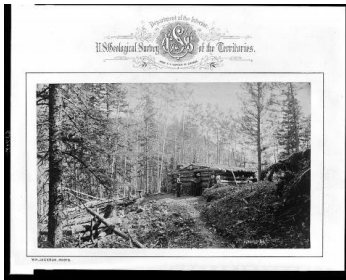


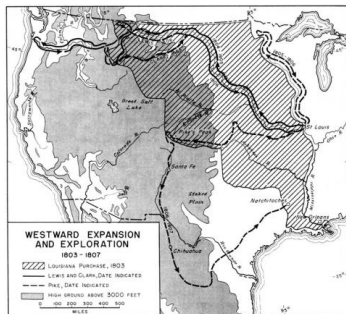
Photo of Survey Crew in the Early West

Image online, courtesy the Library of Congress.

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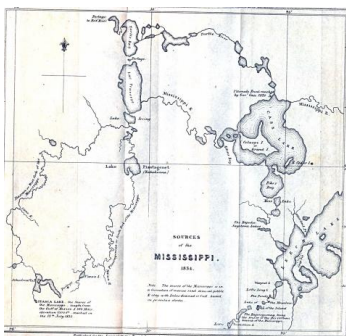


Map Depicting Westward Expansion and Exploration

Image online, courtesy the [lib.utexas](http://lib.utexas.edu) website from the University of Texas at Austin.

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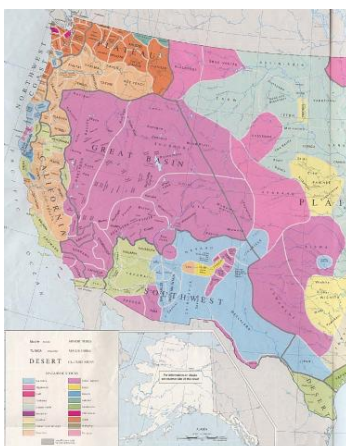


Map: Sources of the Mississippi River

Image online, courtesy the University of Texas at Austin website.

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Map Depicting Native-American Lands in the U.S.

Image online, courtesy the University of Texas at Austin.

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THE AMERICAN WILDERNESS

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