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RIDEOUT PRESENTS ZEBULON PIKE JOURNEY - Park County Historical Society presentation draws record attendance

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Rex Rideout garnered the largest attendance on record for the Park County Historical Society on Nov. 9 at the season finale of the society's dinner presentations.



Introduction

Park County Historical Society President Dee Brown (right), introduces Rex Rideout (left) to the 81 attendees of the society's season finale dinner presentation on Saturday, Nov. 9. Rideout is wearing period garb from the time of Zebulon Pike's journey in the early 1800s. Rideout told of Pike's journey through story and song. (Photo by Douglas Stephens/The Flume)

"There were 81 people last night! That's our record," said Vice President Karen Christenson in an email. Saturday's attendance overtook the previous record of 79 people, the number who attended for the Ken Hicks and

Clyde Johnson presentation on the building of the Harold D. Roberts Tunnel in Grant.

Rideout followed Pike's journey from Fort Bellefontaine in Missouri starting on July 15, 1806, through Colorado and South Park, culminating in his ultimate capture by the Spanish and return to Louisiana on July 1, 1807. Pike's mission was to find the headwaters of the Arkansas and Red rivers.

The mission was the result of the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the land area of the United States. In 1803 the United States purchased approximately 828,000 square miles of territory from France.

What was known as Louisiana Territory stretched from the Mississippi River in the East to the Rocky Mountains in the West and from the Gulf of Mexico in the South to the Canadian border in the North. Part or all of 15 states, including Colorado, were eventually created from the land deal, which is considered one of the most important achievements of Thomas Jefferson's presidency.

General James Wilkinson ordered Pike on the journey. Wilkinson was, Rideout said, a confederate of the Spanish and relayed information on the expedition to the Spanish. Another source for this assertion is "Of Patriots and Traitors" by Joshua Gornitsky. It states that Wilkinson was a double agent for Spain. Wilkinson's double agency was not discovered for more than 100 years, and only after the official records were released by Spain.

Wilkinson ordered Pike on the journey. Wilkinson also sent his son along, although it is not asserted that the son shared the complicity of the father. Rideout also dis-

agreed with those who say Pike was spying for the United States.

"Pike was an explorer," he said.

Expedition firsts

Among the many firsts highlighted by Rideout's presentation included Pike's seeing the "prairie goat," or pronghorn. He also saw the bighorn sheep in the Royal Gorge. Pike and his men built the first log building in Colorado near Pueblo. He wrote in his log: "November 24, 1806 ... cut down fourteen logs and put up a breast work five feet high on three sides and the other was thrown on the river."

Besides seeing the Royal Gorge, after crossing Medano Pass Pike saw the Great Sand Dunes.

Pike in South Park

Pike followed and correctly identified the South Platte River, following it near present-day Hartsel and through Eleven Mile Canyon to the area near present-day Fairplay. It was December when Pike encountered the remains of a large Indian camp. He was amazed at the area covered by the camp and wrote in his log: "The Doctor (Robinson) and myself ascended high enough to ... lay down the course of the river into the mountains. One of our party found a large camp, which had been occupied by at least 3,000 Indians, with a large cross in the middle," Dec. 16, 1806.

From Fairplay, Pike's expedition moved south toward present-day Buena Vista and the Arkansas River. Pike went north to near present-day Leadville, reaching the area in December.

On Christmas, near present-day Salida, Pike was cold with the men and suffering.

He wrote: "800 miles from the frontiers of our country. In the most inclement season of the year, not one person clothed for the win-

ter, many without blankets ...," December 25, 1806.

Rideout said that many of the blankets were cut up by the men to make socks. Socks and moccasins made from raw buffalo hide didn't last the men long on the journey.

Pikes Peak

Zebulon Pike never set foot on Pikes Peak, which was named in his honor by John C. Fremont in 1840. Pike did, however, climb nearby Mount Rosa.

In early November 1806, Pike and his team recorded the sighting, and tried to climb to the summit, of what was eventually named Pikes Peak. Unprepared for the conditions, they made it as far as Mt. Rosa, to the southeast of Pikes Peak, and they gave up the ascent of Pikes Peak in waist-deep snow. They had already gone almost two days without food.

Pike wrote: "We commenced ascending but found it very difficult ... And after marching all day we camped in a cave, without victuals or water."

Capture and return

On Feb. 6, 1807, Pike was captured by the Spanish in a stockade he and his men built, thinking the Rio Grande River was the Red River and that he was on U.S. soil. When informed otherwise, Pike struck the U.S. colors. After being held in Santa Fe, Pike and his men were taken to the capital of Chihuahua. There, they were taken to Commandant General Salcedo, who was governor of the state. After transcribing Pike's seized journal and papers, Salcedo had Pike escorted to Louisiana on July 1, 1807.

Story in song

Rideout sang several period songs and played the fiddle, tin whistle, and gourd banjo. A compact disc is available of the songs, titled "A Voyage of Such Nature (Acoustic Music in Celebration of the Pike

Expedition)" for those who missed the performance. It is available from Rideout at www.timetravelmusic.com.



Rideout on banjo

Rex Rideout plays a gourd banjo modeled after a banjo seen in the 1790s painting "The Old Plantation." The gourd banjo was an early instrument constructed by southern slaves. Seen with Rideout is an 1805 fiddle, right, and a fiddle Rideout used in the movie "Cowboys and Aliens," at left, below Rideout. Of the 1805 fiddle, Rideout said, "It's exciting to play music of the period of the Pike expedition on a fiddle that was made in that same era." (Photo by Douglas Stephens/The Flume)

Rideout is also a board member with the Pike National Historic Trail Association, which seeks to establish federal nomination and designation of the Pike National Historic Trail for the 1806-1807 Zebulon Montgomery Pike Expedition. To find out more about the expedition and trail, including maps of Pike's journey in Colorado, visit www.zebulonpike.org.