

The Treaty Trail:
U. S. - Indian Treaty Councils in the Northwest



The picture above, *Crossing the Bitter Root Mountains Nov. 1855*, depicts the Governor Isaac Stevens party crossing the Bitterroot Mountains. Two men and several horses or mules are following a steep trail through a snow-covered landscape. The painter, Gustav Sohon, was one of the men who accompanied Isaac Stevens during his treaty expeditions. The painting itself was done in pencil, ink and watercolors.

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CROSSING THE BITTERROOTS: WHO AND WHY

Twelve days after the Walla Walla treaty was signed, the *Oregon Weekly Times* published this announcement:

By an express provision of the treaty, the country embraced in these cessions (land given up) and not included in the reservation is open to settlement excepting, that the Indians are secured in the possession of their buildings and implements until removal to the reservations...

As a result of this public announcement, a stream of pioneers headed east of the Cascades. The treaties had not yet been authorized by the U.S. Government. Legally, those lands were still not available to settlement at that time.



The map above, entitled the "Theatre of Indian War of 1855-56 on Puget Sound and West of Cascade Mountains", was one of those featured in *Life of General Isaac I. Stevens*. This biography of the former territorial governor was written by his son, Hazard in 1901.

Washington State Historical Society Collection.



CROSSING THE BITTER ROOT

Crossing the Bitter Root as painted by John Mix Stanley in October of 1853.

Washington State Historical Society Collection.

The Indians felt the invitation for settlers to enter the land was premature and considered the settlers, trespassers. The Yakima war was a tragic response to this event.

On the evening of October 28th, 1855, when Governor Stevens' party was beginning their return trip westward following the Blackfoot Council, they were startled to receive the news that the Yakama Indians had killed their Indian Agent, A.I. Bolon, and several other White men on the Bolon party's way to the mines near Fort Colville. Open war had begun.

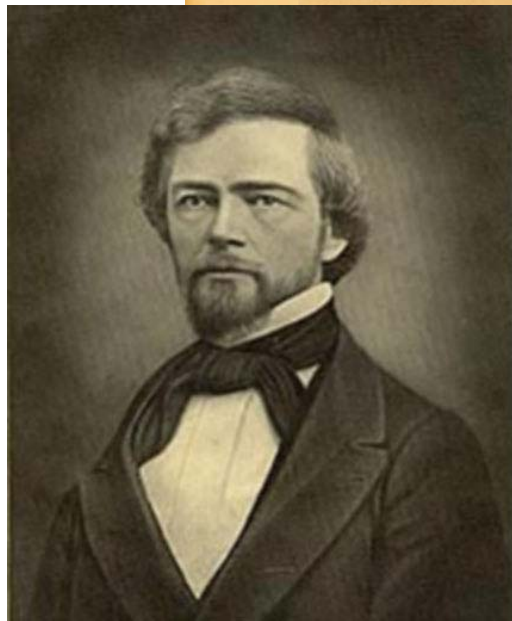
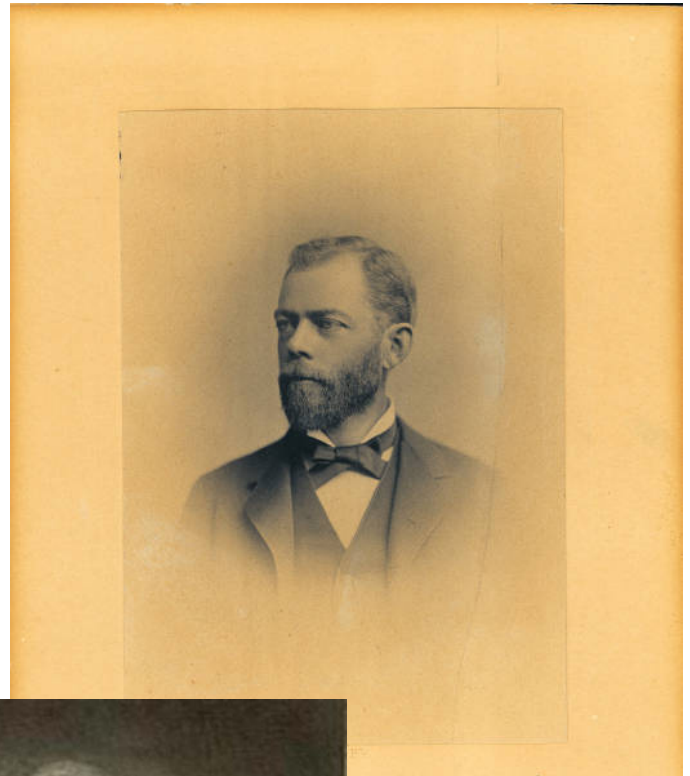
In considering his party's route to the next (and last) treaty council of 1855, the Spokane Council, Governor Stevens described his dilemma...

"The question was, what should be our route home. It was important...to our success that we should be able to cross the mountains and throw ourselves into the nearest tribes, without their having the slightest notice of our coming. I felt a strong assurance that if I could bring this

about, I could handle enough tribes and conciliate the friendship of enough Indians to be sufficiently strong to defy the rest. There would certainly be no difficulty from the snow down the Clark's Fork [River]; but it was known that the ...Pend D'Oreille Indians were along the road and no party could travel over it without [it] being communicated to the Indians; whereas Indian report had it that the Coeur D'Alene pass was blocked up with snow at this season and I felt satisfied that [hostile Indians] would not expect us on this route, and therefore I determined to move over it. It was also the shorter route of the two; it was a route where I desired to make additional [topographic] examinations; it...enabled me to creep up, as it were, to the first Indian tribe, and then, moving rapidly, to jump upon them without their having time for preparation.

Hazard Stevens, Governor Stevens' son who accompanied him on the journey, wrote of the route crossing Lookout Pass Nov. 17-20, 1855:

...(the mules) were continually getting off the narrow beaten path in the snow, and floundering helpless in the fleecy material, and then half a dozen sturdy packers would unsling the packs, seize the unlucky mule by tail and ears, neck-rope and saddle, and haul him on the trail by main strength.



Isaac Stevens (left; unknown photographer) brought his son, Hazard, on his western expeditions. He was thirteen at the time. Above, in this 1889 photo, Hazard is 47 years old.

**Washington State
Historical Society
Collection.**

Sources:

Stevens, Hazard. *The Life of Isaac Ingalls Stevens*. 2 vols. Boston: Mifflin and Company, 1901.

Stevens, Isaac. *Reports of Explorations and Surveys...for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean*. Volume XII, Part 1. (U.S. Congress, House, Ex. Doc. 56, 36th Cong., 1st Sess.), 1855.