

Peter Skene Ogden Biography

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Biography

The Canadian fur trader and explorer Peter Skene Ogden (1794-1854) was a leader in the Pacific Northwest fur trade during the mid-19th century.

Peter Ogden, the youngest son of American loyalists Isaac and Sarah Ogden, was born in Quebec. Although his father held a judgeship, young Peter became a clerk for John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. By the time he was 15 or 16, he had joined the Montreal-based North West Company as a clerk. Between 1810 and 1817 he served in this capacity at several trading posts near Hudson Bay. In 1818 he led several successful trapping expeditions, and his competence brought a promotion. After his company merged into the Hudson's Bay Company, he led six major expeditions between 1824 and 1830.

On the first of these, Ogden met a party of Americans who demanded that the Canadians get out of American territory; Ogden refused. Unfortunately, the Hudson's Bay Company paid Ogden's trappers so little that 23 of his 70 men joined the American party. For the next 5 years the two groups waged a fierce competition to gather furs, and by the 1830s they had denuded the region. In 1835 Ogden was promoted to chief factor, the highest field rank in the company service, and went to Fort St. James on Lake Stuart, where he worked until 1844.

On these expeditions Ogden and his men traveled throughout the mountainous West and up and down the Pacific coast. They brought the first report of the Humboldt River, which was named for Ogden until 1843. Ogden is also credited with naming Mt. Shasta in northern California. Because of his years of trade with and travel among the Indians, Ogden was able to rescue the 47 American prisoners taken by the Cayuse Indians during the Whitman Mission massacre in 1847.

Ogden was married twice, each time to a Native American woman, and he had at least one daughter. Described as a distinguished, short, dark-complexioned man, Ogden was considered a witty and lively conversationalist. He wrote a short book entitled *Traits of American Indian Life and Character*, which he published anonymously in London in 1853. He died on Sept. 27, 1854, in Oregon City, Oregon Territory.