

James Pierson Beckwourth

Encyclopedia Article

James Pierson Beckwourth

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Contents

James Pierson Beckwourth Encyclopedia Article.....	1
Contents.....	2
James Pierson Beckwourth.....	3

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1798-1866?

African-American fur trader and mountain man who discovered a popular trail for gold miners through the Sierra Nevada mountains in California. Today, that trail is known as the Beckwourth Pass. Born a slave in Virginia, Beckwourth was freed at the age of 26. He headed west and lived with Crow Indians for about six years before setting off for California during the gold rush. Accounts of Beckwourth's death, which occurred during a visit to the Crow, vary. It is generally believed he was poisoned—either by an ex-wife or by Crow tribesmen—when Beckwourth refused their request to make him their chief.