Form 10-300
(Dec. 1968)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

STATE: Wyoming
COUNTY: Fremont, Sublette
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER: 69-04-49-0011 DATE: 4/16/69

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: Union Pass

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: None

CITY OR TOWN: None

STATE	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
Wyoming	49	Fremont 013 Sublette	035

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
District ☐ Building ☐	Public ☒	Public Acquisition:	Occupied ☐	Yes:
Site ☒ Structure ☐	Private ☐	In Process ☐	Unoccupied ☒	Restricted ☐
Object ☐	Both ☐	Being Considered ☐	Preservation work in progress ☐	Unrestricted ☒
				No: ☐

PRESENT USE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

Agricultural	☐	Government	☐	Park	☐	Transportation	☐
Commercial	☐	Industrial	☐	Private Residence	☐	Other *(Specify)*	☒
Educational	☐	Military	☐	Religious	☐	Pastorial	
Entertainment	☐	Museum	☐	Scientific	☐	Recreational - Waterholding	

Comments ☐

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNERS NAME: U. S. Forest Service, U. S. Government, Dept. of Agriculture

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE
Washington	District of Columbia	08

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION - (if described)

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Headquarters, Shoshone National Forest

STREET AND NUMBER: 1731 Sheridan Avenue

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE	CODE
Cody	Wyoming	49

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Wyoming Recreation Commission, Survey of Historic Sites, Markers and Mon.

DATE OF SURVEY: Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local ☐

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Wyoming Recreation Commission, Historical Division

STREET AND NUMBER: 604 East 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE
Cheyenne	Wyoming	49

STATE: | COUNTY: | FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY NUMBER 69-04-49-0011 DATE 4/16/69

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	*(Check One)* Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated ☐ Ruins ☐ Unexposed ☐	
INTEGRITY	*(Check One)* Altered ☐ Unaltered ☒	*(Check One)* Moved ☐ Original Site ☒

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL *(if known)* PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Union Pass is a strategically located passageway through the mountains of northwestern Wyoming. The pass location, at an elevation of 9,210 feet, is really in a sort of hub or core area from which three great Wyoming Mountain Ranges rise in gradually ascending elevations to heights of 13,000 feet or more as they radiate in three separate directions -- the Wind River Range to the southeast, the Gros Ventre Range to the west and the Absaroka Range to the north. The Union Pass area then, some 4,000 feet lower than mountains surrounding it on all sides, offers an easy common passageway among the headwaters of three great river systems, the Colorado, the Columbia and the Missouri.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

Pre-Columbian ☐	16th Century ☐	18th Century ☐	20th Century ☒
15th Century ☐	17th Century ☐	19th Century ☒	

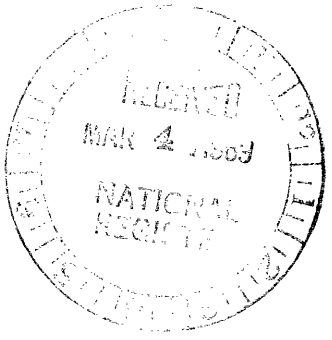
SPECIFIC DATE(S) *(If Applicable and Known)* September 15, 1811

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

Aboriginal		Education	☐	Political	☐	Urban Planning	☐
Prehistoric	☒	Engineering	☐	Religion/Philosophy	☐	Other *(Specify)*	☒
Historic	☒	Industry	☐	Science	☒	Exploration	
Agriculture	☐	Invention	☐	Sculpture	☐	Geography	
Art	☐	Landscape Architecture	☐	Social/Humanitarian	☐		
Commerce	☒	Literature	☐	Theater	☐		
Communications	☐	Military	☐	Transportation	☐		
Conservation	☒	Music	☐				

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE *(Include Personages, Dates, Events, Etc.)*

See addendum.



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See addendum

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

CORNER	LATITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	LONGITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"

OR

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN ONE ACRE

LATITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	LONGITUDE Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
109 °	52 '	24 "	43 °	28 '	54 "

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Wyoming	49	Fremont	013
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
		Sublette	035
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Nedward M. Frost, Historian

ORGANIZATION
Wyoming Recreation Commission

DATE
Feb. 26, 1969

STREET AND NUMBER:
604 East 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Cheyenne

STATE
Wyoming

CODE
49

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☒ State ☐ Local ☐

Name Charles R. Rodermel
Charles R. Rodermel

Title State Laison Officer

Date February 26, 1969

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Ernest Allen Connally
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

APR 1 6 1969

Date

ATTEST:

William J. Lanigan
Keeper of The National Register

Date

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

UNION PASS HISTORIC SITE

County: Fremont - Sublette, on county line.

Location: Union Pass is on the Continental Divide between the headwaters of the Wind River (Bighorn, Yellowstone, Missouri, Mississippi, Atlantic Ocean) via Warm Springs Creek and the headwaters of the Gros Ventre (Snake, Columbia, Pacific Ocean) via Fish Creek. Besides being on a county boundary it is on the boundary between the Teton National Forest and the Shoshone National Forest. By straight line it is about 12 miles west southwest of the Wind River Ranger Station, Shoshone National Forest at Dubois, Wyoming; it is about 16 miles north northeast of the Kendall Ranger Station, Bridger National Forest, on the Upper Green River; it is about 20 miles east southeast of the Goose Wing Ranger Station, Teton National Forest, on the Gros Ventre River. Legal description:

_____Sec._____; R._____W; T_____N.;_____P.M.

Geographic Significance: The foregoing description of location becomes of more than passing interest when one considers that the three reference points used, the three U. S. Forest Service ranger stations, are each related to one of three separate national forests occupying terrain within the separate watersheds of three of the total of six truly continental river systems of North America. These three are the Mississippi, the Columbia and the Colorado and it is true that at one point along the continental divide, only a few miles to the southeast of Union Pass and plainly within view from that pass, a man can easily span with the palm of his hand the dividing point of three mighty rivers

whose watersheds, taken together, account for somewhere near three quarters, if not more, of the total area of the United States.

Another triple divide on the boundary of Glacier National Park in Montana is landmarked and famous as a division where waters flow to the Pacific via the Columbia, to the Artic via the McKenzie and to the Atlantic via the Mississippi. If there are other than two such geographic locations in North America a third has not yet been brought to general attention while the second, the Union Peak-Union Pass vicinity, is not famed for that fact.

Ownership: Federal Government through the United States Forest Service, Department of Agriculture.

Historic Interest Phase: Pre-history, Exploration and Fur Trade.

Importance: This sites historic and pre-historic importance relates to its geographic significance. The three criteria together indicate worthiness of the site for consideration of its nomination as a National Historic Landmark.

Prepared by: Ned Frost

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Websters Geographic Dictionary--G. & C. Merriam Co. Springfield, Massachusetts, U. S. A.--1964.

Hayden. U. S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories of Wyoming and Idaho 1878, Part I. Conducted under the authority of the Secretary of the Interior. Washington: Government Printing Office-1883.

Washington Irving. Astoria. Clatsop Edition, Binfords & Mort, Publishers Portland Oregon--undated.

Washington Irving. The Adventures of Captain Bonneville. edited and with introduction (and modern footnotes) by Edgeley W. Todd. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press-1961.

Francis F. Victor. Eleven Years in the Rocky Mountains and Life on the Frontier. Columbian Book Company, Hartford Connecticut 1877. Published by Subscription.

Burton Harris. John Colter, His Years in the Rockies. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1952.

Supporting Data:

Websters Geographic Dictionary, page 1183, has this entry: "Union Pass, Mountain Pass, W. Wyoming, Crossing the Wind River Range; used 1807 by John Colter, trapper and explorer, member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition."

There is no reason to take exception to the first part of that entry, it is a flat statement of geographic fact; unfortunately the second half of the statement, as flatly stated, is not similarly closed to dispute. Western historians agree that there is too little historic evidence to establish details of Colter's exploratory route during the fall, winter and spring of 1807-08. What evidence there is, is primarily based on William Clark's map of 1814 which in its own turn, as relates to the country around the Yellowstone headwaters, was based upon information provided by Colter.

On evidence gleaned from a study of that map there is, aside from his starting and finishing point at Lisa's Fort at the mouth of the Bighorn on the Yellowstone, only one other exact spot where Colter can definitely be placed as having visited. That spot is "Colters Hell" at the western limits of the present city of Cody, Wyoming. Having no other recorded evidence to go by, the historian has turned to geography and logic and the dim evidence of later explorer's references to the pre-history aboriginal travel routes through the mountains of north-western Wyoming.

By such contrivance the historian has placed Colter as having either been here or there and one of the places he is supposed to have passed is Union Pass. Indeed on both grounds, the evidence taken from the

cartographer's work and the documented and well known examples of exploratory mention of intra-mountain Indian trails, it appears that Colter, seeking a route through or around the southern part of the Absaroka Mountain Range, had at the most but two or three choices and that the Union Pass one was the most likely for him to have used. The great weakness of this so often advanced and accepted conclusion is that the cartographer's work, though given the greatest practical scale, and journals or diaries stemming from the relatively large and organized expeditions of exploration and commerce are extremely tenuous evidence--even when examined through the processes of trained and careful logic. This is true because one factor necessary to proper logical determination of Colter's route is scarcely available to the typical student.

Only a student of those particular mountains, one who through years of physical travel and study has become thoroughly familiar with the maze of the Absaroka Range, can know what a variety of choices of routes were--and are--open to small, experienced groups or the trained individual traveler. This is particularly true during the late summer and fall when even the highest and most shaded passes are free of blocking snow drifts and frequently enough so remain even until the end of November and sometimes until Christmas. Only such a student will know that Indian trails--any one of which Colter could have followed--crossed numerous passes, that to this date (1968) the trained and careful observer can still find evidence of aboriginal trail work on every one of a dozen routes leading from east to west across the southern part of the Absaroka Mountains.

To that student who knows the Absarokas it is as much a mystery as it is to anyone else which route John Colter actually chose in crossing

the divide. But he can be certain of one thing, if he did know what route Colter started up from the east side he could almost certainly trace that explorers descent on the west side; he wouldn't start him through Twogotee Pass (as Burton Harris, one of the latest Colter authorities has done) and then have him descend the Gros Ventre (a watershed having no connection with Twogotee), not while the Buffalo Fork lays wide open to the westward travelers view. If Colter did go down the Gros Ventre it would have been because he crossed via either Sheridan or Union Pass. But, considering Clark's map with its Lake Biddle (Jackson Lake) draining to the Atlantic it doesn't seem likely that Colter crossed the mountains as far south as either Union or Sheridan Passes. Had he, he would have taught Clark a greatly different geography lesson. Possibly, as Harris believes, he did go through Twogotee but, if he did, then, like any sane mountain traveler of his own or a later day, he surely chose his downward course through the inviting and relatively open aspect--a view laying before his eyes--of Black Rock Creek and the Buffalo Fork rather than taking off to the southwest across rough mountain top terrain toward a Fish Creek-Gros Ventre route of which he had no view, no chance to study at first hand and couldn't have had more than sketchy second hand knowledge. If he did go down the Buffalo Fork it seems unlikely that he ever was far south of the Jackson Lake outlet, that he went around the north end of the Tetons--a route he could easily have studied from the Twogotee Pass overlook--and that is the reason neither he nor Clark knew that he had, in the Jackson Hole valley, entered the Pacific slope drainage and was no longer following headwaters of a Yellowstone tributary.

To return to Union Pass, John Colter could have been, might possibly

have been, there in 1807. It is known that Mr. Wilson Price Hunt leading John Jacob Astor's overland expedition to the mouth of the Columbia crossed through Union Pass. Washington Irving's "Astoria" sets that date as September 15, 1811. These are the first white men that can be definitely placed as having there crossed the continental divide. However, since Mr. Hunt had as guides Edward Robinson, John Hoback and Jacob Rizner who had crossed the mountains (from Missouri headwaters) with Major Henry two years previously and then come back by a more southern route, and since these men now knew the way, and since, after following down the Green River and then turning west to the Hoback, that river was named by Hunt after his guide because Mr. Hoback had been there the year before, it seems reasonably certain that all three of those trappers had been through Union Pass, traveling in the opposite direction, during the year 1810.

That Mr. Hunt and his party followed a heavily used Indian trail through Union Pass cannot be doubted, the evidence is established in one testimonial after another relative to the affairs of the Fur Trade and the explorations of the Mountain Men. And such testimonials establish that at the time the trappers first came to the mountains, for some years thereafter and, deductively, for some long time previously, this pass had been used by Shoshones, Bannacks, Arapahoes, Gros Ventres, Flat Heads, Nez Perce, Crows and perhaps, occasionally, by even other tribes. This is not surprising since Union Pass was not, and is not, a one directional route but actually a centering point, a cross roads, of east-west and north-south traffic. The east-west route is generally well known and accepted by scholars--it ran by the Wind River from the east and either the Gros Ventre or Hoback rivers from the west and, if the traveler desired to change direction, by the

Green River to the south. The north-south route, not so well known in academic circles, was probably chiefly used by aboriginals for summer mountain sojourning but also, quite likely, was used by such kinsman visiting travelers as the Gros Ventres and Arapahoes. That route came up the Valley of the Yellowstone, (through Two Ocean Pass or Woodward canyon or the Valley of the Moon or under mighty Younts Peak) the final North Fork of the Yellowstone itself or, by a variation taken sooner, the Valley of the Thoroughfare (such were the many alternates open to the aboriginal familiar with the Absarokas) and then skirted the edges or crossed over the Buffalo Plateau and came down the DuNoir (and there were, and are, alternates to this part of the route also) at the headwaters of the Wind River and thence up Warm Springs Creek and its southern fork to Union Pass. From Union Pass the south bound aboriginal went down into the Green River Valley and continuing down the river had the choice of turning east through South Pass or bearing to the west toward the Snake River, the Bear River or Great Salt Lake Basin.

Thus Union Pass was an important aboriginal crossroads over what he knew as "The Top of the World" or the "Land of Many Rivers" and, on that basis, worthy of consideration for nomination as a National Historic Site.

To return to the historic period, Mr. Hunt and his party were only one small part of the affairs of John Jacob Astor. While Mr. Astor was a private citizen he was engaged in a business (the Fur Trade) having international ramifications and subject to international competition. In this competition he was acutely aware that British dominion and colonial expansion gave such rivals as the Hudson Bay and Northwest

Companies a tremendous advantage over his own efforts. Without in any way impuning his patriotism it is very apparent that it was to Mr. Astor's business interest, as well as pride in his adopted country, to prod the Government of the United States into a more forceful competition with the English for dominion over the last disputed sections of the North American continent--specifically the region known as Oregon. So it should be well kept in mind that while Mr. Hunt, when he crossed Union Pass, was on his own and Mr. Astor's private business, he was not crossing that pass--from Louisiana into the disputed Oregon Country--without the full knowledge and moral support of the United States government.

This state of affairs continued throughout the period of the Fur Trade and it was these fur bringers, the Mountain Men, whose physical presence helped to maintain the tenuous American claim until the time came when they could point the way and lead the immigration of pioneers whose settlements determined American dominion of the Oregon territory. Union Pass was, thus, at first a most important American entry to the Oregon country and, though it shortly lost that important position to the easier South Pass route, consequently became and remains a landmark of national importance.

Further, even after Union Pass had lost to the South Pass route its primary significance as an entry to the Oregon country, it remained of vital importance to the comings and goings of the fur bringers as one of the easy access passes which meant so much to the management of their economy. This was true in other ways than their own particular convenience because Union Pass was then, as it remains to a lesser extent today, one of the more important migratory routes for the wild animals which were both sustenance and economy to the trapper. In this connection the adventures

of Captain Bonneville as described by Washington Irving offer a graphic account of how the trapping brigades used Union Pass in their goings and comings from the Rendezvous Grounds on the Green or Wind Rivers and in their conduct of regular fur hunts. This is vivid description of how the Mountain Men progressed, from one trapped over watershed to the next fresh ground, season following season and year following year until, at last, as to all good things, came a virtual ending to that spectacular but only short lived commerce.

With the lapse of the Fur Trade the importance of Union Pass as a convenient and oft used route of mountain travel shrank accordingly. However it was still a most important migration route for the wild animals using the Green River Valley and Red Desert for wintering ground and the cool higher mountains for summer pasture. When, years later, the event of settler's fences cut off the Union Pass migration route to the use of wildlife the resulting disruption contributed to the decimation of Wapiti and Antelope herds and has presented management problems which yet to this date, 1968, tax the ingenuity of wildlife agencies.

Meanwhile the country itself, the mountains and plains, on either side and all around this location were of ever increasing concern to an ever increasing domestic population and, because of that populations actions and demands, to the national government. Here was concern for minerals, for the grazing rights of a pastorial society, for the commencement of an arid-land agriculture, for conservation and for reclamation. The agencies and bureaus created and re-created during a time of trial and error and partial accomplishment by a perplexed federal government are episodes of history centering more on Washington D. C. than on Union Pass

and the Valleys of the Green and the Wind Rivers. But Union Pass, providing access to the backbone of the continent and headwaters of the nation's three greatest rivers was more than a minor focal point to the scientists and engineers sent out by the central government to map the topography and the mineral wealth and the hydrologic wealth and the other resources and potential riches in an arid land.

Basic to every type of mapping is the map of the terrain itself, basic to the mapping of terrain is triangulation, basic to triangulation are points. The best points are high mountain peaks. Union Pass led to the peaks--these are on all sides of the pass. Hence, by the 1870's Union Pass was again growing accustomed to the steady comings and goings of mankind. Dr. Hayden of the famous Hayden Surveys was himself in the pass, Mr. Gannett, the very capable leader of topographic survey parties, worked there and gave his name to Wyoming's and the Wind River Range's most lofty mountain. These were years most important to the shaping of the West as we know it today. And Union Pass was important to that shaping.

Summary:

Union Pass was an important mountain crossing, north and south as well as east and west, at least for some length of time back into pre-history. It was important in the earliest recorded time, perhaps including the 1807-08 winter travels of John Colter. It was important to John Jacob Astor's earliest commercial plans for the Oregon Country and, so, important to the United States government to whatever extent Astor was able to influence its officers. Certainly before the date of Bonneville's first crossing of Union Pass the Federal Governments interest, though secretive, is now plainly evident. There is no other way to explain some of that

Captain's actions. In other words the government saw in the fur trade an unobtrusive means of advancing United States' interest in the Oregon Country. Union Pass was a factor in that game. The Pass has, since prehistoric time and up to the present, been important to the development and the welfare of the area's natural resources--both animate and inanimate.

In consideration of the foregoing it is recommended that Union Pass be considered for nomination to the National Register as a National Historic Landmark.