

# MENOR'S FERRY TRAIL

## STOP 1

The ground you are standing on once belonged to William D. Menor. He came to the valley in 1894 and took up this homestead beside the Snake River. Here he constructed a ferry which became a vital crossing for the early settlers of this valley called Jackson Hole.

In addition to the existing white-washed cabin, storage shed and smokehouse, Menor's Ferry once included barns, a smithy, a general store, a garden, and irrigated hay fields and pastures. The homestead was a victim of weather and neglect when the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. restored the remaining buildings and reconstructed the ferry in 1949. The Preserve donated the restored complex to the people of America under the care of the National Park Service. Please follow the path to the next stop, and take a short trip into Jackson Hole's past.

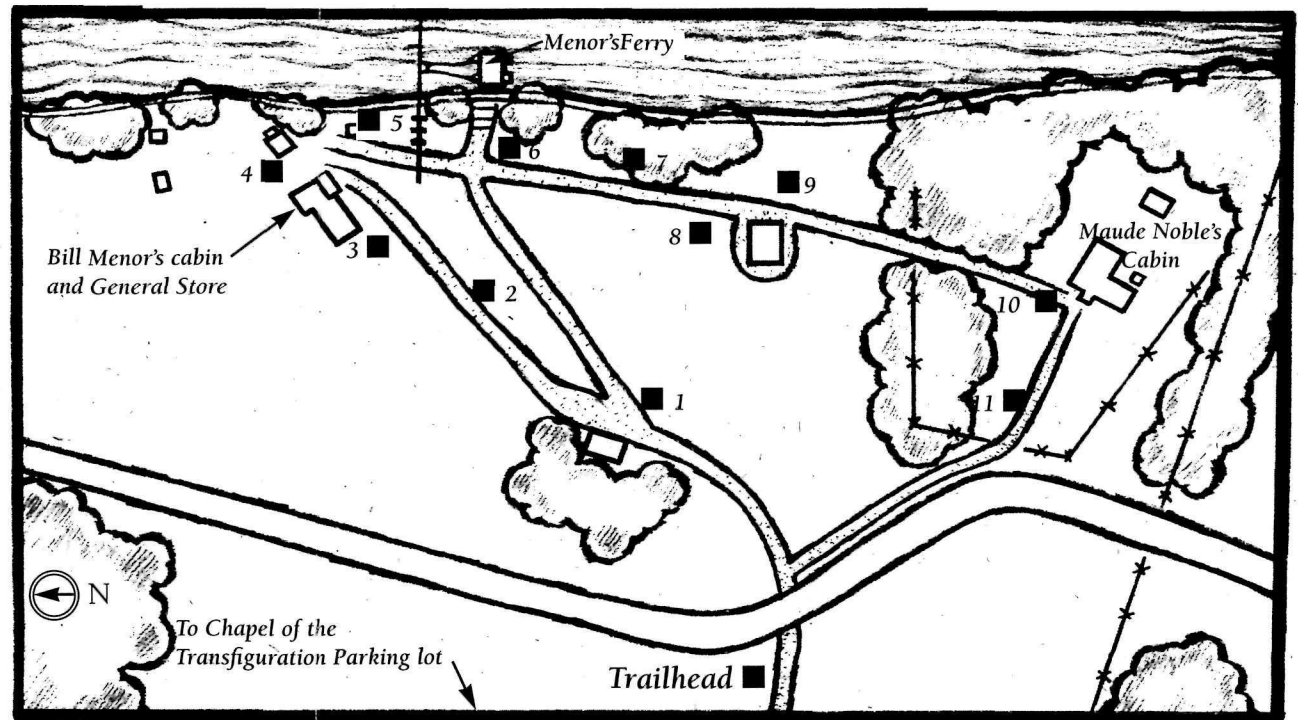
## STOP 2

Free land on the American frontier caused one of the greatest migrations of people in history. Bill Menor took part in this extraordinary event. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed any citizen or alien to claim 160 acres of federal land for a ten dollar fee. Homesteaders secured final title by living on the property or cultivating it for five years. But, like many individualistic pioneers, Menor chose a different method, squatting on 149 acres. He lived here for sixteen years before securing legal title in 1908. In this way, millions of acres of public land were transferred to private owners.

## STOP 3

The log cabin has become the symbol of pioneer life, since it was so common on the American frontier. The log cabin was an ideal shelter because of its simplicity and sturdiness. The building before you is the original homestead cabin of Bill Menor.

Study the Menor cabin for a moment. Portions of the building look different because the cabin was constructed in three phases. Menor built the west wing in 1894 (the Tetons are to the west). Around 1895, he added the frame central wing. The larger east wing was built about 1905. The west wing served as a bedroom and sitting room, while the central wing housed the kitchen and pantry. Menor opened a store (restored in 1994) in the east wing where settlers and travelers could purchase tobacco, coffee,



tea, sugar, flour, canned foods and some items of clothing.

The building materials tell us more. Except for glass and nails, pioneers used local materials to construct shelters. Abundant stands of lodgepole pine on the nearby benches provided a convenient source of lumber. The rough sawn boards of the central wing indicate the presence of a sawmill in the valley around 1895. Menor painted his cabin with a lime-based whitewash. He obtained the lime from his brother, Holiday Menor, who had a homestead across the river. Holiday Menor quarried the lime from a local source and prepared it in a kiln near the east landing of the ferry. Like most frontiersmen, the Menor brothers possessed skills needed to survive on the available natural resources.

## STOP 4

The short growing season and the isolation of Jackson Hole forced settlers to store large amounts of food supplies. During much of the winter, snow made travel difficult if not impossible. Even in warmer seasons, transporting supplies and mail was slow, time consuming work.

Storehouses such as this one were common on many

homesteads. Under the building, a cold cellar provided a cool, dark place to store root crops. Smoked, dried and canned goods were stored on the main floor. The smokehouse is located just north of the storehouse. Menor hunted plentiful animals such as elk and deer. He preserved the meat by suspending it over a slow, smoky fire inside the windowless smokehouse.

## STOP 5

Menor dug a well near the Snake River because it was convenient. It was easier to draw percolated river water from the well rather than fetch it from the river bank. He diverted water from the river to irrigate his garden. The snow-capped mountains and forest watershed guaranteed an adequate supply of water to the Snake River.

## STOP 6

Rivers are often important transportation courses. This is not true of the Snake River. Actually, it was a natural barrier that divided Jackson Hole. Most settlers, especially before 1900, lived on the east side of the river. In dry months the river could be forded safely in several locations, but during

periods of high water even the most reliable fords were impassable. After 1894, Menor's Ferry became the main crossing in the central part of Jackson Hole. Residents crossed on the ferry to hunt, gather berries and mushrooms, and cut timber at the foot of the mountains. Bill Menor skillfully built the original ferry and cableworks. Today's ferry and cableworks are reconstructed replicas. The ferry is a simple platform set on two pontoons. The cable system keeps the ferry from going downstream, but lets it move sideways. By turning the pilot wheel, the rope is tightened and points the pontoons toward the opposite bank.

The pressure of the current against the pontoons pushes the ferry across the river. This type of ferry existed in ancient times and was used elsewhere in the United States.

Menor charged \$ .50 for a wagon and team and \$ .25 for a rider and horse. Pedestrians rode free if a wagon was crossing. Menor did not earn his livelihood from the ferry. The income probably did little more than cover the cost of operations.

When the water was too low for the ferry, Menor suspended a platform from the pulley, and three to four passengers could ride a primitive cablecar across the river. In later years, Menor and his neighbors built a bridge for winter use, dismantling it each spring. One year Holiday Menor and his hired man arrived to dismantle and store the bridge, but no one came to help. Angry and cursing, Holiday rolled any log that could not be lifted by two men into the river.

Weary of the uncertain operations caused by the fluctuating river, Menor sold out to Maude Noble in 1918. She doubled the fares, hoping to earn a living from the growing number of tourists in the valley. Noble charged \$1 for automobiles with local license plates, but doubled the fares for out-of-state plates.

#### **STOP 7**

The Snake River begins as a trickle in the Teton Wilderness about 35 miles north of Menor's Ferry. It meanders in a north-westerly direction through Yellowstone National Park and abruptly turns south, flowing through the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway into Jackson Lake. The Snake exits through Jackson Lake Dam and cuts diagonally across Jackson Hole. It flows south through Wyoming, turns westward across Idaho and joins the Columbia River which empties into the Pacific Ocean.

The Snake River is one of the best areas for viewing wildlife in the valley. Along the river a variety of vegetation

provides abundant food and shelter. Black and narrowleaf cottonwood, interspersed with Colorado blue spruce and Engelmann spruce, line the banks of the river. The cottonwoods and nearby stands of aspen are a favored food of the beaver. Shrubs, especially willows, provide important browse for the moose. Grasses support elk, mule deer and a small bison herd. A variety of fishes feed on insect larvae and plants. In turn, the fishes are an important food source for eagles, ospreys and otter.

In the winter, the river bottomland becomes critical habitat to many species of wildlife. Because the water moves rapidly, the Snake River is one of the few bodies of water in Jackson Hole that does not freeze over. As a result, many waterfowl species, moose, elk and deer migrate to the river to take advantage of the accessible food, water and shelter.

#### **STOP 8**

The settlement of Jackson Hole was accomplished long before paved highways and modern vehicles. This collection of wagons and coaches represents frontier transportation. Covered wagons brought families full of hope to a new home. Other wagons hauled supplies and mail. Imagine a couple riding the Peter Hansen buggy home from an all night dance. Or picture early visitors in the yellow coaches bumping over dusty, rutted roads to the valley's first dude ranches, the JY and the Bar BC.

#### **STOP 9**

The environment of Jackson Hole affected not only the wildlife, but pioneers as well. The soils and climate made ranching and farming risky. If you examine the soil in the sagebrush flats closely, you will notice that it is littered with large round cobbles. The quartzite cobbles and the lack of clay-like material make the soil very porous, allowing moisture to quickly percolate deep into the ground. The dry surface required an irrigation system to support crops and the cobbled soil was very hard to plow. Moreover, the climate does not favor farming. The growing season in Jackson Hole is very short, with less than 60 frost free days per year. After 1900, many settlers realized that the rugged scenery, wildlife and romantic notions of the "Old West" attracted visitors to Jackson Hole. Most homesteaders on the west side of the Snake River decided to "raise" dudes instead of cattle and dude ranches blossomed in Jackson Hole.

#### **STOP 10**

Maude Noble had this cabin moved to its present location

after purchasing the Menor homestead in 1918. With a partner named Frederick Sandell, she ferried increasing numbers of visitors across the Snake River. In 1927, the Bureau of Public Roads constructed a steel truss bridge just south of the ferry, making it obsolete. Miss Noble sold the property to the Snake River Land Company in 1929.

One evening in 1923 a group of local residents met with Horace Albright, the Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, to discuss their concerns over commercial development in the Teton country. With more tourists came more facilities to serve them. Commercialization of the valley threatened to destroy the quality of the scenery and wildlife habitat that brought people to Jackson Hole. The alarmed participants discussed ways of saving the valley from tawdry exploitation. They agreed that some sort of preserve would be necessary to protect the "Old West" character of the valley, though their concept of the preserve was different from national park status. The group decided to seek a wealthy individual who would be willing to buy up private lands to donate to the preserve.

In 1926, Superintendent Albright met John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and aroused Mr. Rockefeller's interest in saving the valley. Through the Snake River Land Company, Rockefeller provided money to purchase private lands for future donation to the federal government.

Meanwhile, Congress created Grand Teton National Park in 1929. The first park included the Teton mountain range and the glacial lakes at the foot of the mountains. In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a proclamation creating Jackson Hole National Monument. The monument consisted of federal land in the valley. In 1949, Rockefeller donated over 32,000 acres to the Department of the Interior. Congress established the present park in 1950. It included the 1929 park, the national monument and the Rockefeller donation.

#### **STOP 11**

Today, the ground you are standing on is a part of Grand Teton National Park. It belongs to the American people. When Bill Menor came to Jackson Hole and took up a homestead, the land provided resources for man's physical needs: food, water and shelter. But, always there were the mountains. Far-sighted individuals understood the aesthetic importance of natural resources to man's spirit. Today, this land is protected for you, your children and future generations.