

UNION PASS
Origin of Three Watersheds
By Gerry Biram

One of the most interesting but little known places in Wyoming is Union Pass. At the crest of the pass stand 12 bronze plaques placed there by the United States Government confirming that this point is a divide between waters that drain into the Mississippi, the Colorado, and the Columbia Rivers. The plaques and maps point out the three directions of drainage.

The pass can be reached by a four-wheel drive road from either Dubois on the north or a branch off from the National Park service road leading to the Bridger-Teton Wilderness area on the south.

I had the privilege of visiting the area on a lovely July day in 1995. This happened to be a year of good winter snow and plentiful spring and summer moisture. As a result the entire trip of some fifty miles from the south was made through miles of spectacular displays of wild flowers. Picture red and yellow Indian Paint brush blue of lupine and larkspur, and white of the Mariposa lily carpeting the landscape in every direction as far as the eye could see.

Scattered groves of evergreen and aspen lent stately beauty to the scene.

At the actual flat area of the pass which is 9210 feet above sea level, were several miniature lakes. A green-winged teal duck family had homesteaded in one of them. Both gray and stellar jays were also in residence. As we walked about reading the plaques we had glimpses of tiny, glittering streams of water threading their way down the mountain slopes in three different directions.

Those flowing north toward Dubois would join the Wind River, then the Big Horn, the Yellowstone and finally the Missouri and the Mississippi Rivers on their journey to the Gulf of Mexico.

Other streams flow south joining the waters of the Green which drains into the Colorado and on down to the Gulf of California.

The third watershed flows west into the Snake which meanders through Idaho and eventually empties into the great Columbia and on to the Pacific Ocean.

It was truly awe inspiring to stand at this place and picture the final destination of each silver stream thousands of miles from the spot on which we stood. To my knowledge, this is one of a few spots in the United States where three distinct watersheds drain from one mountain area.