

Meet Charles Autobees



Real People! Real Stories!

Santa Fe Trail Hall of Fame

Charles Autobees
(1812-1882)

- Trapper, trader, freighter, scout, rancher, and farmer
- Helped construct Bent's Old Fort
- Participated in Indian Hostilities & served as a Scout for U.S. Govt.
- Established a settlement at the mouth of the Huerfano River
- A Justice of the Peace and county commissioner in Pueblo County, CO
- Buried St. Vrain Cemetery, Avondale, CO, Pueblo County

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CHARLES AUTOBEES was born in 1812 in St. Louis to Sarah, who may have been a Delaware Indian, and Francois Autobees. By 1828, Autobees was engaged in the northwest fur trade and was employed as a trapper by the Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain, becoming friends with Jim Bridger, James Beckwourth, and Kit Carson. He survived the battle at Pierre's Hole in 1832 which mountain men and Blackfeet Indians fought following a rendezvous.

By the 1830's Autobees was living in Taos and in 1833, by his account, he was employed as a laborer in the construction of Bent's Old Fort. During the years 1834 – 1847, Autobees was employed as a trader by Simon Turley at his whiskey distillery at Arroyo Hondo, near Taos, making numerous trips over the Taos and Santa Fe Trails, often traveling with his half-brother, Tom Tobin.

In 1847, he joined forces that put down the Pueblo Indian Revolt. Following that event, Autobees farmed and ranched in the Mora Valley in New Mexico. In 1853, St. Vrain gave Autobees land at the junction of the Huerfano and Arkansas Rivers near present day Avondale, CO where he farmed, traded for robes and pelts with the Indians, freighted goods between Bent's New Fort and New Mexico towns, and even built and operated a ferry on the Arkansas River near his settlement.

In 1864, Autobees was pressed into service by Colonel John Chivington and forced to march to the battle site at Sand Creek. According to John Smith, a scout and interpreter who was living in the Indian village at the time of the massacre, Autobees refused to fight and was credited with saving the life of Smith and his family.

During his life, Charles Autobees knew, and was known by, most of the important persons in the American west. He was called Charley, and known as "hoarse voice". He was over six feet tall, known for his strong arms, undaunted bravery and worked as a trapper, trader, freighter, scout, rancher, and farmer. All admired his prowess. Today he is buried in the St. Vrain cemetery in Avondale, CO.