

Moses “Black” Harris

1840s





Excerpt from Black Harris – Northwest Mountain Man of Mystery

Moses “Black” Harris was known to tell some pretty tall tales. Perhaps the tallest was the one about a petrified forest he knew of in the American West that had petrified so suddenly, and so without warning, that the birds singing in the tree branches were petrified, too. And not just petrified, but petrified with their mouths open in mid-song!

Tall tales aside, Harris was much more than a storyteller. He was a mountain man, fur trapper, explorer, and a guide on the Oregon Trail who in just a few short years made significant contributions to the American development of the Pacific Northwest. Over time Harris acquired a mystique that became larger than life. He was spoken about with respect, even awe, by his peers. Newspapers delighted in reporting his travels. A St. Louis weekly, the *Reveille*, wrote of Harris in 1845: “He is fearless as an eagle, strong as the elk, preferring the wild haunts of the Indian and the buffalo to the tameness of civilized life.”