

Welcome to Stagecoach where you'll find the best western books on the market and the men and women who write them. This podcast is brought to you by Dusty Saddles Publishing, home of the best selling authors in the western genre. This is Ginger Winters. Join us for this week's episode of Stagecoach.

Hello and welcome. Thank you for joining us for this week's episode. The book we are featuring this month is Zephaniah Mountain Man - Rocky Mountain Maturity, by Mike Mackessy. Read by Bruce Ryall.

The foundational story to a new mountain man series, Zeph flees his perfect life at twenty-one years old. He is an immature man who has a good job, a loving wife, and owns a nice home. He just lacks the self awareness to recognize his immaturity. Fleeing to the Rocky Mountains as a member of a company of trappers, Zeph encounters Black Foot warriors, winters over in a local Crow village, and learns what it takes to be a man.

Follow Zeph and his growing family through life in the Rocky Mountains as they trap, hunt, and trade, forging a legacy. Join us as we begin our story.

Zephaniah Mountain Man - Rocky Mountain Maturity
by Mike Mackessy.

Chapter 1
Zeph in the Beginning
Rocky Mountain Spring

An unknown, unseasoned, untrained, green, and inexperienced young man is hired in Independence, only to even out the number of trapping partners. The man, no he really acts more like a boy, is an immediate problem to the seasoned and experienced troop of trappers.

The Segundo, Elias, argues with the Booshway, Seth, before setting a single foot east.

"You know as well as I that we needed another man to round out the teams and partners," says the Booshway.

"Except he is so green he will be a hinderance to the entire troop. Mark my words old friend, this will not end well for any of us. I can feel it in my bones," complains the Segundo.

"In all deference to you and your old bones, we need him."

"Then make this Zephaniah a camp's boy and hire another trapper. There are plenty left to choose from."

"It is too late. I have made my decision, he stays," says the Booshway. The set of his shoulders informs everyone involved that all discussion is over.

"Fine, let it be on your head. I do not want him in my troop," says the troop's Segundo, the second man in charge and also his oldest and closest friend.

"Fine. Get them ready to move out," orders the Booshway, the leader of this troop of trappers.

Three Months Later

Us trappers have arrived at our winter grounds. I am the new man, Zephaniah, Zeph for short. I take my place at the end of the line as the Segundo leads us to the river. I can see it is slowly freezing over. Each team knows where we are to set our traps. The Segundo will brook no free thinking, especially from the new men, which specifically

means me. To the surprise of the Segundo I have withstood every mean and dirty trick ordered by the Segundo and carried out by the trappers he calls friends. There ain't many in that bunch. He is trying to make me quit the troop. Except I quietly perform to the best of my ability every low task and errand assigned to me. Way out here I do not have any other choice. This does not make the Segundo happy, but it helps endear me to the troop. By keeping quiet I have withstood the angry Segundo. Up to now, no man in camp has been able to stand against the Booshway's best friend. Except me. They all wonder how I can do it. Me, who does not understand the mountains nor its ways. To tell the truth, I don't know myself. I reckon I am mad enough that I want to show up the Segundo. I do realize the Segundo is trying to help me to leave the troop. So, I make a game of this whole deal and so far I'm winning.

I have violated the first law handed down to the troop of trappers from the Booshway and the Segundo. I kneel, hidden behind a pile of blowdowns on the north side of the creek. Yeah, I know I broke the number one rule by crossing the creek. I will tell you why. For three days my partner and I have trapped the south bank of the creek. Our combined take, not a single critter. I watch beaver on the north side of the creek adding limbs to their dams. The animals work through the day, every day; in plain sight they taunt us trappers. It is as if the critters know all beaver on the north bank of the river are safe. The beavers flaunt themselves during the day. I've had enough.

"I will slip across and set two traps. When the beaver trip them I will bring them back. All I need is a couple of hours," I tell myself as I work up the courage to break the troop's prime law. "Besides, who will know? No one that's who. I'll cross, get two, and recross with no one the wiser." This simple plan brings a smile to my face.

"I'm going to put out one last set right here. You boys go on ahead. I'll catch up and put my other traps out with yours," I tell the men assigned to work with me as partners. Their answer, just a silent wave as they turn their back.

As soon as I lose sight of them, I walk across the creek, downstream from where I sighted a beaver's run. I have a bad habit of disregarding good advice. I do not bother to look while crossing the cold creek. I lift my rifle, possibles and two pistols well clear of the water. I have learned the hard way the effect water has on the black powder in the pans of my flintlock weapons. On one of my first days in the mountains I allowed my rifle's pan to get wet crossing a creek.

Unfamiliar with weapons I did not know any better. A part of the Segundo's instruction is a short fight. It only took raining two dozen blows on me for him to win that fight. I never landed a single fist on him. Now I know better, I now keep my powder dry all the time.

"This creek will ice over within a week. It is good I do this now," I say smiling to myself thinking I have it all figured out. Climbing out of the freezing water my internal conversation continues, "This falling snow will blot out any trail I leave behind," I silently laugh.

I set a trap under both of the slides I knows are active. I ignore the strange itch along the back of my neck. I have felt it before but do not have the experience to understand what it means. Carefully closing the cork on the horn container of my beaver medicine, I stretch my cold back. The arrow thumping into the tree at the side of my head sends a shock through my entire body. I grip my rifle tighter. Looking up in time to see a Blackfoot warrior running from the trees toward me, I duck. The warrior flies over me, landing in the cold creek water. Without thinking I pull a pistol and shoot. The Blackfoot grunts, goes limp in the water, and floats downstream with the current. I trip, then look down. Seeing the warrior's hawk on the ground I bend over to pick it up. I've been wanting one of these ever since seeing the one in the Segundo's belt. Bending, I avoid a second arrow, but not the warrior jumping down from the bank and grabbing hold of me.

The warrior fights as I struggle, both of us floundering in the creek. I find my feet first. I stand and without a conscious thought I slam the hawk, still in my hand, down onto the top of the warrior's head. A second Blackfoot

floats face down in the creek. Seeing a war club on his belt, I take it from the dead warrior. Standing in the creek I see two additional warriors running my way. I bring my 54-caliber Pennsylvania Long Rifle to a shoulder, take aim, and fire. When the cloud of burnt black powder clears, I see both warriors have stopped. Quickly reloading I see one warrior lying on the ground bleeding from a mortal wound.

A war cry from the other warrior forces me to move my eyes from the dying warrior to the creek's bank and the warrior, readying an arrow. The Blackfoot stands on the bank with a grin thinking he has me under his arrow. The warrior's expression changes from victory to unawareness as my pistol ball lands between his eyes. He falls into the creek. Before slowly joining his brothers floating downstream, I take the knife and scabbard from the dead warrior's belt. I walk out of the creek to check on the fourth warrior.

With a last feeble attempt to kill his enemy, me, the warrior lifts his hawk. I pluck it from his hand and kick the last Blackfoot into the water. The creek carries away the four bloodied Blackfoot warriors.

In a daze, not understanding what just happened, but knowing I have used up every ounce of luck I ever will own, I trip the jaws to both traps. I throw them over a shoulder and cross the creek. Except, I'm hearing bees flying by my ears, I stop. Turning around on the bank, one of the bees bites me. Looking down I see an arrow sticking in my side.

"They ain't bees, just arrows," I tell myself. I am surprised and wounded. In painless shock I collapse behind the fort of the blown down trees, where I stashed the rest of my traps and possibles.

Ignoring the heat and the pain slowly growing and spreading through my body, I reload my rifle and both pistols. Each weapon is a single shot flintlock. I must make each shot count. More arrows thud into the downed trees providing me a safe place to hide. Yes, I am hiding. The realization of what I have done and knowing I will face the consequences for my actions seize my mind

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Stagecoach, brought to you by Dusty Saddles Publishing, the home of western excellence where the best of the western authors can be found. Visit our website at dspublishingnetwork.com. Join us next week for part II of Zephaniah Mountain Man - Rocky Mountain Maturity, by Mike Mackessy.