Jedediah Strong Smith was one of the famous mountain men who traveled the west in search of beaver in the decades before the California gold rush. In 1826, he reached the Mexican province that was to become California, and two years later, he traveled through northwest California on his second expedition. While in the Sacramento Valley, he and his party of 20 men and 300 horses and mules turned west off the Great Indian Trail near Red Bluff and headed for an inviting gap in the mountains. He reasoned that the mountains to the west held the river that would take them to Trinidad Bay. From there he planned to follow the coast north to the Columbia River. Trinidad Bay was a prominent feature on maps of Smith’s day, based on the landings of Bruno Heceta and Juan Francisco Bodega y Cadra in 1775.

Jedediah Smith knew that trappers of the Hudson’s Bay Company were finding beaver and other furbearers in Oregon in the early 1800s. Would northwest California be next? Indeed, trappers entered the upper Klamath River watershed in 1826. The next year François Peyette led a small band of trappers downstream to the Yurok village of *weches* (Weitchpec), which will play an important role in the coming gold rush years.

After leaving the Great Indian Trail, the Smith party left the deep grasslands of the Sacramento Valley and entered the eastern foothills of northwest California. They encountered woodlands and chaparral similar to that of the Sierra Nevada and to those they had encountered on leaving the Presidio of Monterey at the beginning of their trip (Map 1). (Today you can experience this part of the trip by driving State Route 36 west from Red Bluff to Platina.)

The land they entered in the spring of 1828 was well populated. They used the trails of the Wintu, Tsnungwe, Hupa, Chilula, Yurok, and Tolowa peoples during the 72-day sojourn in the vastness of northwest California.
The party passed through summer settlements, villages of distinctive plank houses, meadows containing useful plants, and saw men fishing for spring Chinook.

The ease of travel changed dramatically on April 17, 1828, when the men crossed the divide, near present-day Wildwood, between the Sacramento River and a river that Smith assumed ran to the sea at Trinidad Bay (Pierson B. Reading would name it the Trinity River in 1848). They were now in the Klamath Mountains, which Harrison Rogers described as a "maze of woods, ridges, gullies, cliffs, and ravines" in his journal.

The party continued down a tributary of what Smith called "Indian Scalp River," to Hayfork Valley, the land of the Nor-El-Muk Wintu. From
here, they followed Hayfork Creek north and west to the South Fork of the Trinity River at the village of xayiin-pom (Hyampom). Here extensive forests of stately pine and fir mixed with small patches of chaparral and grass, very different from the open oak woodlands east of the mountains.

At Hyampom, the river turned north and proceeded quickly through a set of deep canyons of the Tsmungwe people, until the south fork met the main fork of the Trinity River near present-day Salyer. This area is roadless even today. Like the travelers of old, hikers today must use the South Fork Trail to climb steep slopes to ridges, only to drop into new drainages whose streams flow precipitously into the canyon below (Pl. 1).

When the Smith party reached the main stem of the Trinity River, they looked down at the river almost 1,000 feet below. Fortunately, trails existed high on the shoulder above the canyons, allowing them to access Hoopa Valley, land of the Hupa. After turning west up Supply Creek, and going northwest toward the ridgeline, they entered a new world: the hills of the North Coast.

At the summit of the coastal mountains, dense forests gave way to open woodlands of oaks and extensive prairies in the lands of the Chilula. The tall, rich grass offered abundant forage for the stock after the sparseness of the Trinity River lands. Slopes were gentler and the summits more rounded than were those on the first leg of the journey. Going north, they reached the Klamath River at the village of kime’l. (Kanick or Kenick on today’s maps), home to the Yurok. Our travelers missed the important meeting of the Trinity River with the larger Klamath River at Weitchpec. At kime’l they were well north of Trinidad Bay but tantalizingly close to the ocean. Unfortunately, the land was impassable, so they headed southwest on ridges until they reached Gans Prairie. Imagine their joy when they got their first look at the Pacific Ocean. However, it was short-lived.

Upon leaving Gans Prairie, the travelers experienced the world of the redwood forest. It would take an entire month to reach the coastal grasslands of the Tolowa only 40 miles to the north. While some redwood stands were open, others presented the Smith party with the greatest obstacles that they had met on their way to Oregon. Here the soils were deep and rich, and they supported massive trees—ones that, when they fall, take other trees with them, leaving jackstraws of massive logs over older piles of rot-resistant logs. Often the forest floor was such a tangled mass that the men could not see the ground. They scrambled over the logs, but the horses had to be led around them. The soft rock was eroded into an impermeable maze of smaller ridges, gullies, and ravines that were even harder to traverse than those of the Trinity River.

Again, foiled in their attempt to reach the ocean, they retreated northeast to the Klamath River, crossing it at the Yurok village of peekwan (Pecwan). Continuing north and west, they finally reached the coastline at
the villages of omen and omen hipucr at False Klamath Cove, only to have to scramble over more rough country covered with forests of massive trees before attaining the grassy terrace of the Tolowa around present-day Crescent City. At last, the Smith party had an easier coastal route as they made their way to Oregon.

What interests me the most are observations made by Smith and his companions concerning the landscapes in the early 1800s, a time before the gold miners and others arrived. They suggest two very different worlds: the craggy lands of what we call the Klamath Mountains and the rolling hills of the North Coast. Could two landscapes be more different? While much of the answer lies in the geology and other environmental factors, the ecological history of the landscapes plays an equally important role. The early 1800s represent a divide between the old ways of the native peoples and those of the new settlers. Understanding the diverse influences that have affected the land since that settlement will also assist our interpreting the current landscapes of northwest California.

NORTHWEST CALIFORNIA

Early geologists described the natural areas of North America as physiographic provinces. Charles Hunt in *Physiography of the United States* defined a *province* as “a distinctive structural framework giving rise to distinctive land forms expressing their structure and, for the most part, distinctive climates, vegetation, soils, water, and other resources.” C. Hart Merriam at the end of the 19th century used similar thinking in creating his famous life zone classification that many naturalists learned early in their study of nature.

Robert Bailey updated this approach in his *Ecosystem Geography*. The sections of his Northern California Mountains Province—the Klamath Mountains, Northern California Coast Ranges, Cascades, and Sierra Nevada—are comparable to those of other geographers and geologists.

I will follow in the footsteps of Bailey in using the Cascades and Central Valley Provinces as the eastern boundary of northwest California, but I break from convention by using the watershed boundaries of Stony Creek and Eel River as my southern limit. It is not geologically distinct or topographically dramatic, but instead it is ecologically and culturally important. Snow Mountain is the last of the high peaks of the North Coast Ranges, and the southern border represents the divide between the north-trending Eel River and the south-trending Russian River. It also separates the timberlands to the north from the towns and vineyards to the south. The Pacific Ocean and the California-Oregon border form the western and northern boundaries, respectively.

Northwest California is an extremely complex part of the state, even by California standards. Its mountain ranges are spectacular, as are its plenti-
ful rivers that twist and turn on their way to the Pacific Ocean or to the plains of Central Valley. Climates are foggy and maritime on the coast, sunny and continental inland. The region is one of the least populated parts of the state, and much of its natural heritage is still intact. People interested in its natural history must wade through a huge quantity of names, descriptions, maps, charts, and graphs before getting a feel for the place. It is worth the effort, for names are rich in heritage, mountain ranges are abundant in biota, rivers are filled with riches, and the land is amazing in detail. The names of the major towns and highways are easy
to learn, as they are few: Crescent City, Eureka, Weaverville, Interstate 5, US 199 and State Route 299.

The Klamath Mountains
Geologists recognize mountain ranges in northwest California and southwest Oregon, with their ancient Paleozoic and Mesozoic rocks, as the Klamath Mountains. They contrast strongly with the neighboring younger, volcanic rocks of the Cascades (Map 2). The eastern boundary starts east of Interstate 5 and continues north from Redding to the volcanic rocks just south of Mount Shasta City. Farther north, the town of Yreka sits on the region’s eastern boundary; still farther north the line slides slightly to the east as the highway approaches Oregon. The North Yolla Bolly Mountains define the southern boundary, and the western boundary follows roughly the crest of South Fork Mountain and the westernmost ridges of the Siskiyou Mountains to the California-Oregon border. The Klamath Mountains encompass much of Shasta County, all of Trinity County, the western part of Siskiyou County, eastern Humboldt County, and much of Del Norte County.

The North Coast
The many rock types of the Franciscan and Great Valley formations distinguish the North Coast. The eastern boundary abuts the western ridges of the Siskiyou Mountains north of the Klamath River and South Fork Mountain to the south. South Fork Mountain at its southernmost point merges into the North Yolla Bolly Mountains. Here, the eastern boundary shifts to the base of the North Coast Ranges. The watershed divides of the Stony and Cache creeks and of the Eel and Russian rivers form a southern boundary, and I include the creeks west of the Eel River and south of the Mattole River watersheds north of Cape Vizcaino. The coastline to Oregon forms the western boundary. The northern boundary is also the California-Oregon border.

The North Coast includes the coastline of Del Norte County; much of Humboldt and Mendocino counties west of the crest of the North Coast Ranges and Yolla Bolly Mountains; and Shasta, Tehama, Glenn, and Colusa counties to the east. While most of northwest California is sparsely populated, we might call Eureka and Crescent City the “metropolitan” areas on the coast. The larger Redding metropolitan area is just south and east of the boundary, with its western and northern suburbs spilling into both subregions of northwest California.