

# Zebulon Pike's ill-planning leads

By Kelsey Seeger, USACE Public Affairs



photo courtesy John Martin Reservoir Resident Office

The name Zebulon Pike may sound like it came from some 1950s alien invasion movie, but for one U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employee, this name is not that of an alien from some other dimension in time.

It is instead the name of a man who had the worst luck when it came to his life and his expedition into the American Southwest. This unlucky explorer has inspired Don Headlee, a Park Ranger with the Albuquerque District at John Martin Reservoir to not only dress up like Zebulon Pike and teach his life story to anyone interested in it, but has also inspired him to contribute a chapter to the book “To Spare No Pains:” Zebulon Montgomery Pike and his 1806-1807 Southwest Expedition.

Headlee, a Park Ranger at John Martin Reservoir since 1998 and a resident Pike historical expert, is the author of the chapter titled “Pike’s Southwestern Expedition: Outfitted or Ill-fated?” in

“To Spare No Pains:” Zebulon Montgomery Pike and his 1806-1807 Southwest Expedition.

This chapter combines two of Headlee’s passions. The first is obvious because this chapter is all about Pike and his actions. The second part though connects back to his roots as a historian.

“I’ve been involved in interpretive history for more than 20 years, and as a living historian I have always been interested in their material goods, like weapons, clothing, etc...,” said Headlee.

Headlee’s chapter is combination of both of these things. He explores Pike’s lack of proper planning and prioritizing in the supplies he took on his expedition into the Southwest in 1806. Headlee decided to focus in on this because of how Pike hindered his own expedition and provided fuel for the disastrousness of his bad luck.

“I did some research on Lewis and

Clark and found how much planning had gone into that expedition, and when I researched Pike I found how much lack of planning went into this expedition.”

In Headlee’s own words...

“The main thrust of this chapter is the lack of equipment he had and the inappropriate equipment he took with them.” Let’s just say that some of those unfortunate individuals who went along with Pike lost more than one toe to frostbite due to Pike’s bad planning.

According to the Zebulon Pike Bicentennial Page Pike’s expedition from 1806-1807 resulted in him abandoning some of his colleagues in the mountain so that he and the main group could continue. Those left behind sent their toes that they had lost to frostbite to Pike as a way to convince him to come back and get them. While on the expedition a mountain’s peak was named after him, Pike’s Peak.