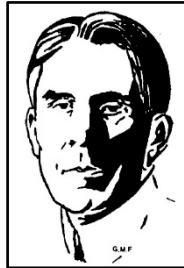


THE LAST TRAIL

Synopsis and Research Summaries

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Zane Grey's West Society

THE LAST TRAIL



Zane Grey

INTRODUCTION

This is the third novel in Zane Grey's Ohio River Trilogy. It follows the dangerous exploits of a sixteen year old woman, along with her father and cousin and other settlers face the challenges and dangers imposed by the elements, marauding Indians, and renegade whites as they move westward into the hostile Ohio River Valley to start new lives during the late 1700s and early 1800s. The settlers are dependent upon dedicated white border men who provide security and protection in a land where there are no laws or systems of justice. As in Grey's earlier two novels in the Trilogy, a rugged borderman named Lewis Wetzel creates hope for the settlers and fear on the part of Indians and renegades.

Note: Readers are advised to read Zane Grey's *Betty Zane* (1903) and *The Spirit of the Border* (1906), the first two novels in *The Ohio River Trilogy* before reading *The Last Trail*. Readers are also advised to read what many identify as the fourth novel in the "trilogy", namely *George Washington: Frontiersman* (1994), which was published posthumously.

Note: In addition to the above recommendation, readers are advised to first read the brief chronological overview provided by Dr. Carlton Jackson on pages 6 through 11 in the 1989 book *Zane Grey, Revised Edition* published by Twayne's United States Authors Series edited by Kenneth Eble, University of Omaha, (ISBN: 0-8057-7543-9).

LIST OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

(XX) Indicates the page where each character is first mentioned in the Walter J. Black Edition of *THE LAST TRAIL*.

George Sheppard (1)...settler traveling to Fort Henry to start a new life.

Will (1)...nephew of George Sheppard.

Jenks (2)...guide hired by Sheppard at Fort Pitt, thought to possibly be in with renegades.

Helen Sheppard (2)...sixteen year old daughter of George Sheppard.

Bing Leggett (6)...an outlaw suspected of being a horse thief.

Colonel Zane (7)...Commander at Fort Henry.

Jonathan Zane (7)...brother of Colonel Zane and a scout along the border.

Lew Wetzel (7)...40 year old borderman with a reputation of being an Indian killer.

Betty Zane (15)...sister of Colonel Zane.

Bill Elsing (20)...a settler from Yellow Creek whose horses were being stolen.

Bess Zane (aka Bessie) (23)...wife of Colonel Zane.

Jake Lane (20)...a settler murdered by horse thieves.

Mabel Lane (20)...daughter of Jake Lane kidnapped when Jake was killed by horse thieves.

Simon Girty (25)...renegade white man who joins with Indian raiders.

Noah and Sammy Zane (26)...sons of Colonel Zane and Bess Zane.

Rebecca Zane (26)...the first girl baby born to Colonel and Bess Zane

Silas Zane (27)...Colonel Zane's brother.

James Douns (27)...a preacher who had relocated to Fort Henry after Indians destroyed the Moravian Village of Peace.

Nell Douns (27)...wife of Joe Douns.

Roger Brandt (29)...a French-Canadian from Detroit who claimed to be a pioneer, hunter, scout, soldier, and trader who started the river barges which came from Fort Pitt.

Miller (34)...the man who stole powder from Fort Henry in the last battle of the Revolutionary War

Metzar (34)...owner of Metzar's tavern and gambling hall.

Sam (36)...in charge of the livery and stables at Fort Henry for Colonel Zane.

Chief (38)...Colonel Zane's dog.

Tom Bennett and Jim Morrison (52)...young men living at the fort.

Williams (49)...a soldier living at Fort Henry.

Alex Bennett (66)...the young frontiersman to whom Mabel had given her love.

Mordaunt (73, 76)...an Englishman infatuated with Helen, a man that nearly ruined George Sheppard in shady business dealings, a gambler and a drunkard.

Case (73, 97)...Mordaunt's servant.

Ashbow (125)...a Shawnee Indian plotting with Brandt and Metzar.

SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1. George Sheppard, his daughter Helen, and his nephew Will are headed to Fort Henry from Virginia. Jenks, the guide they hired at Fort Pitt, unexpectedly deserts them before arriving at Fort Henry. A teamster suggests Jenks may be in with outlaws. Two Indians approach the wagon train at their camp, eat the settlers' dinner, and then disappear into the wild. Two woodsmen approach the camp, Jonathan Zane and Lew Wetzell, and they say that Jenks is likely one of the outlaw Bing Leggett's border-hawks. Jonathan and Wetzell agree to guide the party to Fort Henry.

Chapter 2. George Sheppard tells Colonel Zane he has come west from Williamsburg to obtain some land and start a new life, as the Revolution took the lives of his sons. His daughter Helen is the last of their family. Colonel Zane warns George that Indians are keen to burn things. Colonel Zane offers to give George 100 acres of land. Colonel Zane tells George about Indian massacres, including the destruction of the Moravian Village of Peace, and tells him the bordermen help to protect the settlers. Bill Elsing arrives at the fort to inform Colonel Zane that horse-stealing has been going on most likely by some slick white guy with Indians helping him. Colonel Zane tells George he is more likely to have trouble with white men trying to marry Helen than he will from Indians. Jonathan announces that Old Jake Lane had been murdered and his daughter Mabel is gone.

Chapter 3. The Sheppard's are introduced to members of the Zane family and Jim Douns and his wife Nell and others living at Fort Henry in a dinner party. Colonel Zane introduces them to

Roger Brandt, a French-Canadian from Detroit who claims to have been a jack-of-all-trades, including having established river barges from Fort Pitt. Helen is especially impressed with Jonathan Zane, Colonel Zane's borderman brother. Colonel Zane and Wetzel discuss horse thieves that have been operating in the region. They suspect the leader is hanging out at Metzlar's tavern. They believe the killing of Jake Lane and the kidnapping of his daughter was likely the work of the renegade Bing Leggett and his Shawnee accomplices.

Chapter 4. Jonathan visits Metzlar's saloon faking interest in buying Metzlar's mare in order to try to see who the new arrivals are. Helen greets him as he is passing by the gate in front of her father's house. He compliments on her beauty, but tells her he does not have friendships with girls as he is a borderman. Helen asks him to be her friend and to come see her when he is in town. He says he will not. Brandt interrupts their conversation. Jonathan later asks Colonel Zane to tell him about Brandt. Betty tells Jonathan that Brandt had pursued her but she instinctively doesn't like him. Jonathan and Colonel Zane hear footsteps and what they think is a whistle, an Indian signal. They see three Indians at Metzlar's, Shawnees that they believe may have been trying to steal horses. Brandt tries to hold Helen's hand and kiss her, and Jonathan strikes him. Brandt apologizes. They hear Wetzel's owl call, a signal to Jonathan that Indians are present.

Chapter 5. Indians steal horses, including Betty's pony Madcap. Jonathan and Wetzel return with Mabel, the girl that had been captured. Wetzel indicates he had likely killed the captors.

Chapter 6. Helen asks Mabel to come live with her. Alex Baker arrives at the fort on a raft. Mabel had given her love to Alex, but he had not followed up to ask her to marry. Alex tells Colonel Zane that an Englishman named Mordaunt, a gambler and drunkard who had been pursuing the Sheppard's, also arrived on the raft. They later learn that Mordaunt had pursued Helen and nearly ruined her father in business dealings. Jonathan tells Helen he believes the horse thief is a man that has shown an interest in her. He asks her about Brandt. She believes Jonathan is jealous. He asks Helen to keep his suspicion a secret and to help him find the horse thief.

Chapter 7. Jonathan seeks the solitude of the wilderness, and he begins to think about the soft touch of a woman's hands and the kiss of baby's lips, clearly a subtle thought about Helen, although he doesn't admit it. Jonathan meets up with Wetzel. Jonathan tells Wetzel Helen is going to help them find the horse thief. They talk about Brandt, Metzlar, and Leggett. Wetzel warns Jonathan to not let Helen catch him, and that he himself had been caught by a woman once. They agree to meet every other day. Jonathan later finds Helen wandering lost in the woods looking for flowers. He offers to take her back to the fort after warning her of the dangers she faced. She says she doesn't need his help. When he walks away from her feigning disinterest, she calls him back and asks for his help. Holding her hand, he leads her back to the fort after she gets his pledge to not tell her father or Colonel Zane she had become lost. He warns her about Ben Leggett, clearly indicating he himself had some interest in her.

Chapter 8. Mordaunt and Case, his servant, get drunk and raise hell at Metzlar's. Colonel Zane always attempts to maintain law and order in the fort using bordermen Wetzel and Jonathan Zane as enforcers. Jonathan realizes Helen looks at him in an unusual manner. Jonathan believes there will soon be trouble from Brandt and his outlaws, especially if Bing Leggett is mixed up with them. Jonathan goes to Metzlar's and gets into a confrontation with the knife-wielding Case, after which Colonel Zane warns Metzlar he will be expelled if any more violence occurs.

Chapter 9. Helen and Betty teach Sunday school and intend to start a school in the village. Betty and Colonel Zane plot as matchmakers to get Helen and Jonathan together by telling each of them the other has feelings for them. Helen learns about the fight at Metzlar's. She kisses Jonathan as a thank-you for saving her father's life, after which Jonathan flees.

Chapter 10. As summer passes by Helen realizes she is in love with Jonathan. As she is walking toward Betty's she meets Brandt who asks her to go walking in the forest with him. She refuses, angering Brandt. Helen goes to find Colonel Zane and learns he is away to a cabin-raising, and that Jonathan is away with Will. She overhears Brandt and Metzlar discussing a warning they had received from an arrow-shooting Shawnee Indian named Ashbow. Ashbow tells them that Wetzel was on their trail.

Chapter 11. Helen overhears Brandt tell Metzlar that he will try to kidnap her, as Wetzel and Jonathan are away from the fort. They plan to steal more horses and meet up with Leggett and run off to Denver. Helen believes Metzlar is in on the scheme. Not knowing who else to trust, remembering her pledge to Jonathan to keep the secret of trying to find the horse thieves, she heads through the forest to find Wetzel and Jonathan to tell them of Brandt's scheme.

Chapter 12. Jonathan and Wetzel find Helen's moccasin prints in the forest. Jonathan tracks them realizing she is likely trying to reach him. He finds her asleep under a rock ledge in a storm. She tells him about Brandt's plan. As Jonathan comforts Helen and allows her to sleep through the storm he begins to wonder about his feelings for her. When she awakens, he carries her across the river back to the fort where they find Metzlar's inn wrecked with all of the furnishings outside burned. When they reach Colonel Zane they learn Wetzel had arrived that morning and destroyed Metzlar's. He found the arrow as evidence of the warning the Shawnee Indian had delivered to Metzlar and Brandt, and they suspect Leggett's involvement. They talk about Jim Girty's bones still lying where he had been pinned to a tree to die, a place the Indians still believe to be haunted. (Reference to a killing in the novel *The Spirit of the Border*.) They realize they must still deal with Simon Girty, Brandt, and Leggett.

Chapter 13. Jonathan and Wetzel follow Brandt's trail. Wetzel is almost led into an ambush. Wetzel is nearly hit by a rifle shot. Jonathan is shot by an arrow, and he is taken captive by Ashbow. Brandt tries to convince Leggett to kill Jonathan, but Leggett allows Ashbow to attempt to take Jonathan to the Indian village where he can get credit for his capture. Ashbow and three Indians, with Jonathan's hands bound, head for the village. Wetzel follows them.

Chapter 14. As Colonel Zane and Helen are discussing their pleasure in seeing Will and Betty attracted to each other, Wetzel and the wounded Jonathan arrive at the fort. After Jonathan's wounds are treated Helen visits with him, and he tells her he loves her.

Chapter 15. Eight days after his return, Jonathan is ready to get back on the trail pursuing Brandt. Before he leaves he gives Helen the arrow with which he was shot. He again tells her he loves her, and she tells him she loves him as well. She tells him this trip will be his last trail. He realizes she is right in demanding that, but he cannot understand how he can leave Wetzel to be a borderman on his own. Helen kisses him as he leaves.

Chapter 16. That day becomes the longest day in Jonathan's life. In his mind he sees Helen in the nature that was in the past the place to which he could escape. He longs for Helen's presence. Wetzel meets up with Jonathan, and they plan to resume their pursuit of Brandt.

Chapter 17. As Will and Helen are returning along the river road from picking flowers and leaves, they are ambushed by Case and a few Indians. They are taken in a boat to meet Mordaunt who tells them their capture was his plan. This is contrary to Mordaunt's earlier apology to Helen and his statement to Helen that he was leaving the area. Mordaunt prevents Case from murdering Will, and orders that he simply be turned loose in the wild to perish on his own. Helen realizes Brandt was also likely involved in the kidnapping scheme. Helen is taken to an Indian village. Mordaunt realizes he has been tricked by Brandt, who tells him he plans to simply use Helen for his own pleasure until he gets tired of her, then he plans to turn her over to Leggett, all because she had flaunted his love. Brandt and Mordaunt fight.

Chapter 18. Brandt kills Mordaunt. Brandt and Case throw dice to split up Mordaunt's gold, and Case wins all of the gold. With Brandt's approval Jenks tries to kill Case, but Case stabs Jenks. Case gathers up his gold and tries to kiss Helen, but he is shot. The Indians declare that it had been Wetzel the Deathwind who had shot Case. Brandt and Leggett flee into the forest.

Chapter 19. Chapter 19 is a flashback to where Wetzel and Jonathan are tracking Brandt and Leggett. They find Will Sheppard who tells them of the kidnapping of Helen. Wetzel sets off in pursuit of Leggett and Brandt, and Jonathan heads off to return Will to the fort. Enroute he discovers the bodies of Metzger's man Smith and Mordaunt. When Jonathan rejoins Wetzel, he finds Leggett's camp and sees Case and Leggett throwing dice competing for gold. Chapter 19 ends with Wetzel shooting Case.

Chapter 20. Wetzel and Jonathan pick up Leggett's trail. They fear an ambush as they find Helen's moccasin prints. They split up and encircle the village where Helen is being held. They hatch a plan where they will attack the group and Jonathan will seize Helen and escape with her. Jonathan is not pleased with the plan, as he believes it places Wetzel too much at risk. Wetzel says the plan is the proper one, as this was to be Jonathan's last trail before he and Helen will marry and she'll keep him at home. Wetzel tells Jonathan love of a woman is important as he had once been in love with Jonathan's sister Betty to no avail after she had

married. They make their attack. Jonathan escapes with Helen, leaving Wetzel to fight with the Indians and Leggett.

Chapter 21. Jonathan and Helen return to Fort Henry. Helen asks Jonathan if Brandt is dead. He says no. She admonishes him for not killing Brandt as he promised after he had said he loved her. Jonathan leaves to rejoin Wetzel to kill Brandt.

Chapter 22. They find Leggett and Brandt in Leggett's hideout. They set fire to Leggett's cabin. Leggett and several Indians flee into the forest, and Brandt escapes through an attached stable.

Chapter 23. Wetzel pursues Leggett, and Jonathan pursues Brandt. Wetzel kills Leggett then sets out on Brandt's trail. Jonathan on Brandt's trail realizes he is heading back toward Fort Henry.

Chapter 24. Brandt reaches the fort and asks Colonel Zane for mercy. Jonathan arrives at the fort and learns Brandt is imprisoned in an upstairs room. Colonel Zane takes Jonathan to see Brandt. Brandt tells Jonathan he believes Wetzel had been wounded in the fight at the cabin. Colonel Zane says he will let Jonathan decide Brandt's fate. Jonathan says Brandt should die for the killing and thievery he has committed. Helen pleads with Jonathan to allow Brandt to go free. He agrees to do so, and Colonel Zane provides Brandt with a rifle, supplies, and a canoe. As Brandt is heading down the river, he stops, raises his rifle and shoots at Jonathan. Wetzel, coming out of the woods, shoots and kills Brandt.

Chapter 25. A year later the entire Zane family has gathered with friends from the fort and around the valley for a November 3 celebration of what Colonel Zane calls "Independence Day", namely because of the ending of the violence by Indians and renegades as a result of Jonathan's and Wetzel's eliminating the main renegades, and also because it is the one year anniversary of the wedding of Helen and Jonathan. Although Simon Girty has escaped to Canada, neither he nor any other renegades are bothering the settlers in the Ohio River Valley. Wetzel arrives at the celebration and picks up little Jonathan, Helen's and Jonathan's baby, and he tells him "When you're a man the forest trails will be corn fields."

HELPFUL RESEARCH AND STUDY SUMMARIES

(XX) Denotes the pages in which the quotation appears in the novel.*

Note: Before reading ***The Last Trail***, the reader is advised to first read the brief chronological overview provided by Dr. Carlton Jackson on pages 6 through 12 on the 1989 book ***Zane Grey Revised Edition*** published by Twayne's United States Authors Series edited by Kenneth E. Eble, University of Omaha, (ISBN: 0-8057-7543-9). Dr. Carlton's overview places in proper sequence the three novels in Grey's Ohio River Trilogy, of which ***The Last Trail*** is the third novel. A fourth

Grey novel ***George Washington: Frontiersman*** was published posthumously in 1994 after being completed by Zane Grey Scholar Dr. Carlton Jackson, and readers are advised to read it after having read the previous three Ohio River Trilogy novels.

Charles G. Pfeiffer, *Zane Grey, A Study in Values – Above and Beyond the West*, Zane Grey's West Society, 2005 (ISBN 0-9768720-0-5)

References (14, 171, 232, 234, 379, 398, 425, 427, 483, 552, 561)

(14) While some men are able to resist falling in love by taking a walk in the woods, that did not work for Grey in his private life, and it did not work for many of his characters, such as for Jonathan Zane who tried to forget that Helen Sheppard loved him by visiting a sylvan glade.

(171) Grey illustrates the deep trust and affection between Jonathan Zane and Wetzel as shown by their firm handshake as they believe they may not see each other again as Wetzel risks his life to save the girl Jonathan loves in ***The Last Trail***.

(232) Wetzel's willingness to face death for the heroine Helen is common to other Grey novels, such as in ***Wildfire***, ***Boulder Dam***, and ***The Heritage of the Desert***.

(379) Wetzel's handshake before beginning what may be his crawl to death is an example where Grey, being a man of action, was firmly convinced of the power of good example.

(425) The friendship between Wetzel and Jonathan Zane is an exception to Grey's usual treatment of friendships between characters as it continues throughout the three novels in the Ohio River Trilogy.

(427) In some of Grey's novels he suggests lightly the possibility of a homosexual relationship between some of the characters. In ***The Last Trail*** Jonathan Zane, the borderman companion of Wetzel, falls in love with Helen Sheppard. Wetzel never marries, although Zane does. Pfeiffer refers to the criteria of Dr. Jane Tompkins (***West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns***, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 39), TO WIT, "In the course of these struggles the hero frequently forms a bond with another man...that is more important than any relationship he has with a woman and is frequently tinged with homoeroticism...".

(552) Jonathan Zane learned in ***The Last Trail*** that nature can lose its ability to satisfy apart from human love. *"The longest day in Jonathan's life, the oldest, the most terrible and complex with unintelligible emotions, was that one in which he learned that the wilderness no longer sufficed for him...His favorite waterfall had denied him...a beautiful girl loved him, she had kissed him, and his life could never again be the same."*

(561) The breasts, both male and female, but predominantly the latter, are used in nearly every (Grey) book to either excite passion or reveal it. The lips, too, are involved, as Grey uses the kiss as one of the primary means of arousing passion...Grey grows bolder in ***The Last Trail***. Jonathan has told Helen that he loves her, but that he is a borderman and there can be no wife for him in this life. Helen runs to him “...Then two soft, rounded arms encircled his neck, and a golden head lay on his breast.” Jonathan clasped the beautiful, quivering girl to his heart “...I love you,” she repeated, her rich voice indescribably deep heaving bosom, with great eyes dark, with woman’s sadness, passionate with woman’s promise, perfect in her beauty, glorious in her abandonment”.

Dr. Joseph L. Wheeler, *Zane Grey’s Impact on American Life and Letters: A Study in the Popular Novel* (George Peabody College for Teachers [Vanderbilt] – 1975)

References MSS (13, 152, 153)

(13) Wheeler discusses the concept of “the last of” as being a theme in much American literature relative to the history or historical fiction written about the West. In the case of ***The Last Trail***, this concept applies to “the last of the Indian culture before the encroachment by settlers”, “the last of the bordermen such as Wetzel and Jonathan Zane”, and “the last of settlers moving into the Ohio River Valley where they would be challenged by Indians defending their right to tribal lands”. Wheeler discusses the popular opinion of many of who “would like to see the country as it was”. Clearly the title ***The Last Trail*** epitomized those feelings.

(152) Moving the manuscript for ***The Last Trail*** culminated in Grey finally seeing the novel published and making the year 1909 the best year yet for the author. His income jumped from \$100 in 1908 to \$423 in 1909.