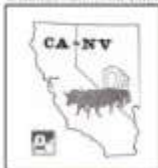


# Trail Talk

A Newsletter of the California-Nevada Chapter  
of the  
Oregon-California Trails Association



Number 121

Fall 2024

## Gunlock Found Near Truckee Route of the California Trail

By Bill Holmes

On May 11, 2024, a small group of OCTA trail researchers found a gunlock (a mechanism attached to or usually integral with a firearm by which the charge is ignited) near the emigrant trail near Prosser Reservoir.

The OCTA volunteers are working under a special permit from the Tahoe National Forest to determine the exact route of the 1844 emigrant trail, using new and old technology to help them. They have examined all known diaries of trail pioneers to help determine the location of the trail, reviewed other researchers' work, studied 1860s Government Land Office (GLO) maps, looked at a progression of maps, Google Earth and Lidar maps for landscape changes, and metal detected for artifacts to pinpoint the trail's location. This is the first time the use of metal detectors has been authorized for this particular project.

In most cases there are multiple trails, shortcuts, and reroutes due to fallen trees or wet areas. There is rarely just one single trail. Finding metal items along the routes the emigrants used or are supposed to have used helps determine for certain that particular trail was the one used. Normal items found are ox shoes, mule shoes, wagon parts and various small bits of metal. All items found are documented, photographed and reburied where they are found.



Gunlock

The gunlock is a rare find, and even more significant if it belonged to a notable person like James Clyman (1792-1881), an early explorer and mountain man. Although we may never know with absolute confidence that the gunlock belonged to Clyman, it most likely did. Clyman states in his journal that he lost his gunlock on May 2, 1846, along Prosser Creek, while heading east with Lansford Hastings and others. He was very specific in stating "gunlock," not "gun." The gunlock is a part of a rifle or pistol that can come loose very easily and fall out, leaving the barrel and wood stock. If Clyman had noted that he had repaired the gunlock with a square nail that would cinch it,

as the one found has that repair. Even so, I believe the use of the

term "gunlock," and his description of the vegetation and geography, tell us he lost it exactly where it was found. The following is an excerpt from his journal:

Proceeded down the vally of Truckees. River through open pine woods and here we first saw the plains covered with wild sage the chain of mountains we have Just past is the same called the cascade chain in Oregon and is generally covered with several kinds of Pine Firr and other evergreen timber. and here I found out that I had the misfortune to loose my gunlock some whare in the Everlasting snows that we had Just pased. we made a short days travel and encamped on Johns creek [named for John Greenwood; now Prosser Creek] to recriut our half starved animals who had been three days and two nights without a mouthfull of forrage haveing traveled not more than 6 miles this camp is in a large cove in the mountains which are all covered whit in snow now melting rapidly on the lower ranges or hill the vally [Martis Valley] however is barren and no signs of game to be seen a few naked natives ware seen to day

The OCTA volunteers again went out June 1, 2024, with Tahoe National Forest archeologist Carrie Smith to continue to find more items to verify the trail routes. They did find some physical features (a swale) and period-correct items to support what they were seeing on the GLO and Lidar maps.

After some cursory work on identifying the gunlock, it appears it is an L & R flintlock converted to a percussion lock. Estimates are that this gunlock dates to sometime between 1840 and 1855. During this time, the gunlocks for a rifle and pistol were the same size. At this point we are not sure whether it came from a rifle or a pistol. The square nail is a field fix for a lost pin which the lockplate pivots on. The hammer would not lock back without the nail fix. It's a conversion sidelock that turns a flintlock into a caplock. Caplocks were introduced in the 1830s and became the primary ignition system for black powder rifles by the 1840s. Conversions started in the early 1840s to make use of the large supply of already-in-use flintlocks. By 1855 most flintlocks were converted to caplocks.

By 1860 brass cartridges came out with the Volcanic repeating rifle. In 1866 there was the 1866 Winchester, the Henry and the Spencer that used rimfire cartridges. Centerfire firearms came out in 1868.

Since the find, David Fullerton has been doing a tremendous job leading several groups of people in both the Verdi area and the Cascade Lake to Hampshire Rocks area. They have found at least two sections of trail that have never been mapped or discovered, one along the ridgeline out of Verdi and a second section of trail up near, but not at, Devil's Peak.

Stay tuned for future discoveries!



**Bill Holmes, Dee Owens, Tom Young, Jeanne Young, Pedro Kinner, David Fullerton**

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## Things are Happening in Fernley!

By Steve Knight

For the 24th Annual Fernley Deep Sand Swale Cleanup on Public Lands Day, Sept 28, 2024, volunteers came from several states and organizations to clean up trash dumped on the historic deep sand swales and 1868 Central Pacific Railroad right-of-way near Fernley, Nevada.

OCTA and Trails West member Jon Nowlin, who has been organizing and documenting this event for many years, unfortunately passed away only weeks prior to the event. I used to organize the cleanup along with Tom Fee, so I was able to step in and take up Jon's well-organized program this year.



**An example of the trash to be removed. Dozens of locations were like this plus well over 80 discarded semi-truck tires, some weighing 100-120 pounds.**



**Steve Knight, Bill Holmes, Janet, Joelyn and Scott Nowlin**

Winston Miller, the new archeologist with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), arranged two large commercial dumpsters, portable potties and hand washing facilities, and a reception tent. BLM also provided water, electrolyte beverages and snacks, gloves, and the ever-popular Public Lands Day BLM T-shirts for all participants. BLM crews filled a large dump truck



numerous times with approximately 80 discarded large commercial truck tires. The tire dumping has been a continual problem every year all along the historic property.

Volunteers from OCTA, including President Bill Holmes, and Trails West members fanned out to gather the trash. A big shout-out is due the Desert Pigs and their president Don Hawkins. Their large volunteer cleanup crew with trucks and trailers showed up and got right to work after the morning safety briefing.



**Mike Freer (a new member with Trails West from Shingle Springs). It's a toss-up if he or Bill Holmes traveled the farthest.**



**Janet and Joelyn Nowlin unloading the trailer**

Janet Nowlin, along with her and Jon's son Scott and his wife Joselyn, pitched right in with the others gathering trash and helped fill at least five 25-foot flatbed loads and another smaller trailer. The crews worked from 9 am to 1 pm, almost completely filling both dumpsters.

There were also three truckloads of scrap tires that BLM took to the transfer station for disposal. Unfortunately, we had to leave seven abandoned vehicles scattered about, all of which had identifiable VIN numbers. Hopefully, BLM law enforcement will track down the owners and have them removed soon.

Thank you all who participated and we will see you next year.



**Rolling 100-pound discarded semi-truck tires to load on the trailer.**



**Brian McMillan and Winston Miller presenting Janet Nowlin new informational signs to replace those damaged and shot up.**



**Group photo of only part of the volunteers. Others were still hard at work. Those in orange are with the Desert Pigs. Group photos are like herding cats; impossible to get everyone at once.**



## Jon Nowlin

We are deeply saddened to share that Jon O. Nowlin of Carson City passed away peacefully at home on Tuesday, August 13, 2024. His extraordinary life began in Eugene, OR in 1942. His family moved to Michigan where Jon and his parents, Ralph and Lucy Nowlin, lived on a beautiful lake. Jon met Janet E. Paepke in high school, and they married several years later in 1965 (spending 59 loving years together). This was a busy year as Janet gave birth to their first son, Mark J. Nowlin, and Jon got a job with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) as a hydrologist.

Jon had attended Michigan State University where he got his geology/hydrology degree. Jon also served in the Navy Reserves and spent over 18 months in Vietnam in service to his country.

Jon and Janet gave birth to their second son, Scott R. Nowlin, in 1970. In 1975 the family made the move across the country to Carson City, Nevada, where he worked as a hydrologist for the Utah/Nevada division of the USGS, working his way up to being the Director of the Nevada Water Science Center at USGS, until his retirement in 2000.

In retirement, Jon and Janet enjoyed time with their grandchildren, Faith, Christina, Jonny, and Seth, all children of Scott and Joelyn Nowlin. Jon and Janet traveled extensively to visit family and went twice with the Men of Worth musical duo to both Scotland and Ireland with their son Mark and his wife Britt (Bridget). They spent time on Kauai with Janet's sister, Carol and her husband Rodger. One of Jon's dreams was to see the birthing whales in Baja, CA and he made this dream come true in 2023 when he and Janet took Mark, Britt, Scott, Joelyn, Faith, Faith's husband Edgar Loera, Christina, and her friend Jenna, Jonny, and Seth on a National Geographic tour in Magdalena Bay, Mexico.

Jon also volunteered for the Trails West Emigrant Trail marking group and for the CA-NV Chapter of OCTA where he was currently serving as chair of the membership committee. He was a leader in the efforts to keep the Fernley Swales clean and protected. He was proud of this work and cherished the many friends he made at these organizations, at the USGS, and elsewhere.

Besides his wife, two sons and daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren, Jon is survived by his brother Lee and his partner Barbara, and numerous other family members.

## Butterfield Historic Markers

By Sue Loucks



Visalia Station Historic Marker

Susan Pappas and I set out to attend the public hearing in Bakersfield on the new Butterfield National Historic Trail. The current Trail/Road is straight down the Central Valley since the water that our ancestors had trouble with is not held back by dams and their lakes—except for last year. The sightseeing was done on the trip back to Fresno from Bakersfield. Rain was threatening and it came through with the threat on the way back. As we looked for the Visalia Station Historic marker we were led to believe, by a picture on the internet, that it was a metal marker on the side of a building downtown. It had been replaced by a relatively new and nicer looking marker on the side of the street downtown, near the location of the former marker.

Visalia is about halfway between Fresno and Bakersfield and located at the base of the foothills, east of US 99 by about 10 miles.



Kingston Historic Marker

The Whitmore Ferry historical maker can be found somewhat west of Visalia and west of US 99 in the flat of the Central Valley. The ferry was the first ferry across the lower Kings River. It is located at the current Laton/Kingston County Park, which straddles the Fresno/Kings County line. The county line is down the middle of the Kings River. Because of dams and agricultural diversions almost all of the Central Valley rivers are currently just sandy, former river channels unless we have torrential snowmelt runoff as we did in the spring of 2023. This crossing is on the California State Historic Landmark list, and I am trying to get it listed on the Fresno County Historic sites list. The application has



Whitmore Ferry Historic Marker

been in the process since December 2022 and is currently sitting in the Fresno County Council's office pending a signature. At the time of the California State Centennial in 1950 a marker was put up on the Kings County side of the ferry crossing. The park in Kings County is much smaller than on the Fresno County side. It appears that kids might have used the smaller side of the park as a party site and therefore the parking lot and the marker have been fenced off for several years. In most years you can walk across the dusty riverbed from the Fresno side to see the marker on the Kings County side. I have included photos of the marker as seen from in front of the fence, a closeup of the marker, and a photo of the water in the Kings River in July of 2023.



Kings River - July 2023





Mountain House Marker

The next two markers are closer to Bakersfield. The first one is the Mountain House marker, north and east of Bakersfield, in the foothills. Due to the sloughs and the Tulare Lake basin in the lower and flat part of the Central Valley, the Butterfield Trail was often in or hugging the foothills surrounding the valley. Tulare Lake is usually totally dry due to the many dams and all the current pumping of water for agricultural and people use. The snowmelt runoff in the spring of 2023 was the exception as Tulare Lake again formed and flooded a lot of current rich farmland. The Mountain House site is about five to ten miles north of Bakersfield and a good five miles east of US 99 and, as you can see, the marker is along the side of a country road, serving cattle grazing land.



Mountain House Historic Marker



Gordon's Ferry Marker  
Behind a Bush

The last marker (Gordon's Ferry) is really on the north side of Bakersfield, at the edge of the big oil field, again along the roadside. It is half hidden by a weed on the edge of the road on the south bank of



Gordon's

### Chapter Member National Recognition

The CA-NV Chapter was well-represented at the OCTA National Convention in Pendleton in July.



Betty Crockford and Bill Holmes

**Betty Crockford** was awarded the Elaine McNabney Distinguished Volunteer Award in recognition of service with OCTA as a key part of assisting in proposed projects, taking responsibility for keeping contact information, and taking a leadership role in finding a location to place a trail marker for the Carson River Route.

**Helen Hankins** received a Certificate of Appreciation for her service on the Board of Directors from 2021 through 2024. Helen was elected as Vice President but stepped up to act as President when needed and is now our National President.



Helen Hankins and Kathy Buob



John Winner and Dave Welch

**John Winner** was given the Preservation Award in recognition of many years of OCTA dedication to preserving emigrant trails, locating and marking trails, mentoring others, providing expertise with political knowledge, and including preserving data collections from others to be used for future trail exploration.

## A Visit to Peter Lassen's Mill and Adobe Site

By Phyllis Smith and Dave Freeman

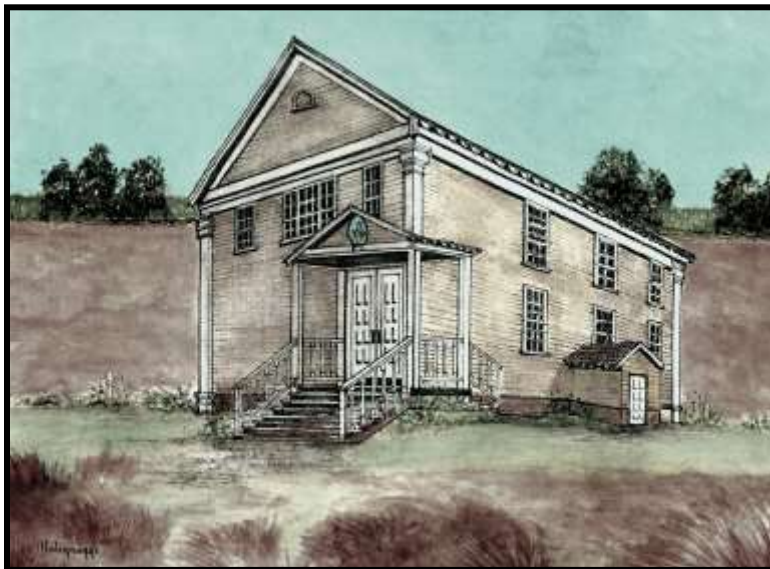
Dave Freeman has been working on investigating Peter Lassen's original land holdings in present-day Tehama County for ten years. He takes a crew with him every month and continues to find evidence of towns, mills, trails—you name it. He reports regularly on his progress, which has always piqued my interest, and in early October he offered a non-working tour of the area to OCTA members.

The genesis of this jaunt was a request from Robert Breeden, a direct descendant of Elisha Brown, who was one of the Masons from Keytesville, Missouri, in the Peter Lassen ten-wagon train to California, to visit the sites of the 1848 original Lassen emigrant party. This group not only pioneered the Lassen Trail but brought the Masonic Charter for the First Masonic Hall in California.



Bob Breeden at the Canal Ford

We met at 9:30 at the corrals, which is also the north end of Benton City. With very nice weather we promptly headed a bit north to the very faint original 1848 trail, which passes that area from Laniger Lakes and the 1850 Sill Adobe/Brick Pits. Next we passed along the east side of the 1850-1868 Benton City Business District and stopped at the Masonic Knoll portion of the town site.



A Typical Masonic Hall

Here we viewed the Lassen Masonic Hall (which is now just a basement and remnants of a chimney), some of the adobe sites, the "Halley House" Hardware Store site (1850-1868) and the newly found Sill subdivision. We walked over for a view of the Peter Lassen and later Daniel Sill 1844 adobe, garden and mill.

Dave is reluctant to advertise the specifics of where things are located, to avoid looting or destruction, but he did say I could relate that one of the important artifacts was "to the left of the vultures."

Pressing on as the temperature was on the rise, we stopped at the Lassen Canal Ford to check out the wagon ruts in the bedrock of the ford. The algae and water plants obscured this feature, which was normally visible in earlier months. We drove across the canal and made a quick stop at the Lassen 1844 adobe site.

Tall vegetation encouraged everyone to stay inside their rigs.

As it was near noon, we retreated to the Abbey at the New Clairvaux Monastery for a lunch break. Here we visited the site of the later 1847 Peter Lassen Rancho site, the long 2-¼ mile runs of the canal system for the Town of Benton (as opposed to Benton City), and the location of the Lassen Foundry and smelter, again first in California. The meeting was adjourned and as a final side trip, Dave took Robert Breeden to the Lassen Rancho wagon ford on Deer Creek where his forebears crossed 176 years prior.





Aerial View

After everyone had headed home, Abbey and Dave tried for another stab at finding more evidence on the 1850 "Miner Rest" site. While in the neighborhood, he launched his drone and hopped it over the creek and took some aerial shots of the end of the Lassen Trail camp/1846 J. C. Fremont Camp site.

The outing was well received. Seeing this area in person really made Lassen's efforts clear to me and I encourage others who are interested in trails and early California history (remember, this is pre-gold rush) to consider asking Dave if he'll take on any more workers. You can contact Dave at ar-

### Don Buck Collection Update



Here's an update on what's been happening with the Don Buck Collection reported on in the last issue of *Trail Talk*. We've been busy!

So far, twenty-one volunteers have put in (as yet) uncounted hours cataloguing, indexing, sorting, organizing and scanning books and documents. At the end of October we have catalogued 1300 books and 330 documents and booklets. And the fun's not over! We could use more volunteers with laptops, and especially those with portable scanners, to give us a hand in our borrowed office in Sacramento. If you're interested or have questions, please contact Phyllis Smith at 530-301-7044 or [phylesmith@aol.com](mailto:phylesmith@aol.com).



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## President's Message

By Bill Holmes

### Report to National Board of Directors

Bill Holmes

In July I reported to OCTA's National Board of Directors on our chapter's activities in relation to OCTA's Strategic Plan. At the time I said there continued to be a tremendous amount of effort being put forth by the volunteers of this chapter, and that has not changed. In my report I tried to capture just the activities that are notable right now.

**Strategic Plan Goal:** Preserve the historic emigrant trails.

**Objective:** *Identify, class, map, and mark historic emigrant trails.*

The chapter conducted a two-day symposium in Truckee, California, June 18-19, 2024. The first day was focused on how to do trail research and document what we find. The second day was a field tour from Verdi, Nevada, to Truckee demonstrating what we presented the day before in class.

Mapping and marking trails has been going on with the Lassen Trail, California Trail near Elko, and the Carson Trail at Camp Creek.

**Objective:** *Assist stakeholders in the protection and preservation of trails resources.*

We continue to work with BLM to preserve the trail through Fernley Swales. We take a leading role in the annual cleanup of the trail.

**Strategic Plan Goal:** Present the stories of the emigrant experience in a manner that is inclusive of other perspectives.

**Objective:** *Improve and expand data collection.*

The chapter has been working on scanning and cataloging the Don Buck collection.

**Strategic Plan Goal:** Be an effective historic trails organization through appropriate partnerships.

**Objective:** *Leverage OCTA's resources through partnerships.*

The chapter has been successful in securing a three-year archaeological permit to allow metal detecting on the Tahoe National Forest (TNF). This will help determine the emigrant trail as it passes through the TNF. This came with a \$35,000 grant from the Forest Service to use for travel, supplies, and anything else needed for the project. We have already made great progress.

**Strategic Plan Goal:** Keep OCTA's membership energized and informed.

**Objective:** *Improve internal communications to maintain an active and informed membership.*

Currently the chapter has been having Board/membership Zoom calls approximately once a month. We will meet in person twice a year.



**Strategic Plan Goal:** Promote membership growth.

Objectives: 1. Increase OCTA's membership to grow funding and expand the volunteer base. 2. Ensure that OCTA chapters are active and growing.

The chapter was authorized a "Beta Test" at the Mid-Year meeting in El Paso, Texas and we are allowed to sign up new members at the chapter level. This program has been going very well. We are still having problems with new OCTA members signing up at the National level and not picking a chapter. I believe it is the way the National web site functions.

**Strategic Plan Goal:** Make publications, diaries and journals available through improved website for public access. Objectives: 1. Develop a Social Media Plan and other outreach materials. 2. Expand use of social media.

The chapter has rebuilt our website and makes use of Facebook to reach a bigger audience.

National Convention. The chapter has agreed to host a national convention in 2026. However, chapters that host conventions find themselves unable to do trail work and/or their own symposiums. The National office has volunteered to do much of the upfront work. Our chapter would like to showcase the Lassen Trail project, although that is not final.

Trail Data Repository. This is more for the Preservation Committee. The chapter is comfortable that the data we are collecting is going to a retrievable national database when collected. We generally work with the Forest Service, a Department of Agriculture agency, and they keep the data locally by forest. The National Park Service, an agency of the Department of Interior, collects the chapters' trail data.

Other items to work on as a chapter and national organization:

Inventory the 26 trails in the chapter's purview.

Update the new website so that it remains current.

Expand into new social media forums that will reach a greater population.

Develop a simple on-line database for the public to use for driving and/or hiking small sections of the emigrant trails. The most often asked questions are, "Where can I see pieces of the trail?" and "Can I walk on the trail somewhere?"

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## 2024 Symposium

The 2024 Chapter Symposium was held June 18th and 19 at the Truckee Tahoe Airport. The theme of the event was *Researching and Documenting the Emigrant Trails and Other Historic Sites*.

On Tuesday chapter members who are experts in the work of finding and documenting emigrant trails made presentations about the work they do. This included Dee Owens on researching, recording and mapping trails; Clark Fenton about the Hawley Grade; Dave Freeman about the Peter Lassen site; Dave Fullerton talking about his work to narrow down the actual Truckee Route; and Bob Crowley and Tim Twietmeyer about how they research their historic treks. Check out History Expeditions at <https://historyexp.org/>.



Between Boca Reservoir  
and Verdi Peak

On Wednesday we headed out on the Truckee Trail to take a look, with Dave Fullerton as our guide. We started at the Verdi Community Library with 16 vehicles and 23 people, and traveled over the Henness Pass Road, stopping along the way to look at evidence of emigrant travel.



Stampede Reservoir

## History of Caples Lake (Part 1)

By Frank Tortorich



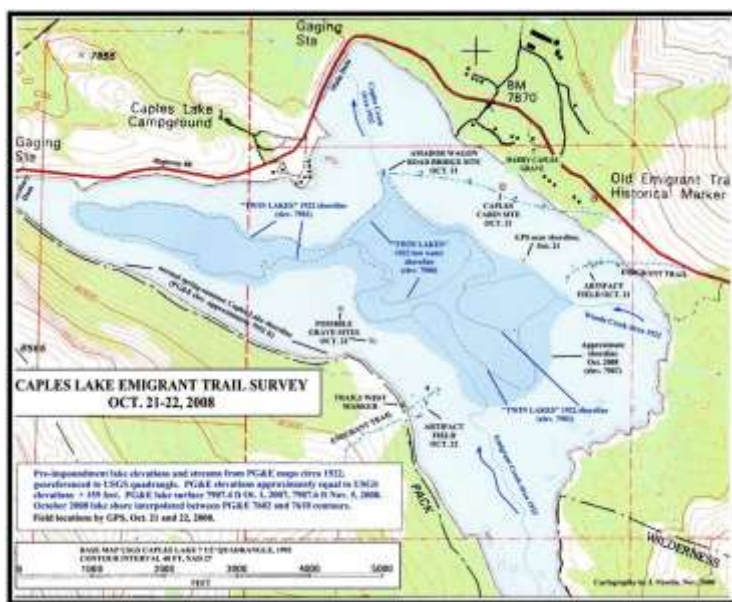
Caples Lake looking up to West Pass, the V notch in the upper left. The Emigrant Trail is on the bench below the ridge line going from right to left to West Pass.

Caples Lake is a beautiful lake set in a glacial cirque at 7,798 feet above the sea on State Highway 88, just six miles west of Carson Pass. Before the dams were built in 1922, it appeared to be two lakes, as you can see on the map. The original lake line is within the darker blue outlined by the dashed line. I will explain the map in detail in Part 2 of this article. The lighter blue is the present-day Caples Lake. As a child growing up in Jackson, California, my dad took me to Twin Lakes to go fishing. Everyone I knew called it Twin Lakes because it looked like two lakes. When I had my own family, we came to Caples Lake to camp, fish and hike. I had no idea that Caples Lake has an incredibly rich history that is mentioned in numerous gold rush journals.

Caples Lake, a.k.a. Twin Lakes, has been and is an increasingly popular destination. It is wonderful for camping, fishing, boating, hiking, photography, painting, or just relaxing starting in the late 1800s and continuing today. When I became interested in the gold rush migration and began doing research about 1978, I came to realize that Caples Lake was an important stopping place for the gold rushers from 1849 onward.

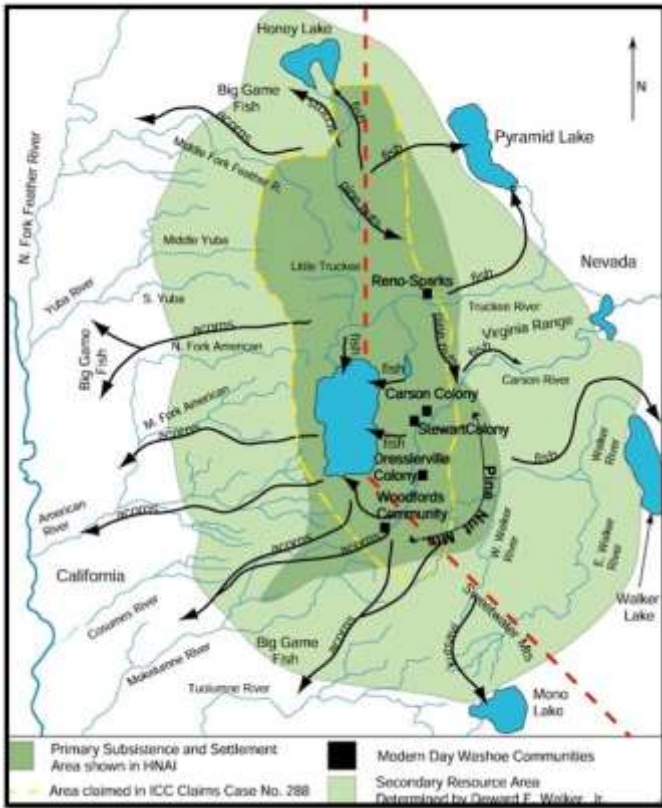
I would like to pause for a bit and journey back before the gold rush. As far back as 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, the Washoe people inhabited this area during the summer. The Washoe people are the original inhabitants to the Carson Pass area for at least 10,000 years. They are a Hoka-speaking people, distinct from the neighboring tribes. Washoe territory extended from Honey Lake to the north, south to Sonora Pass, and east from the Pine Nut Range in Nevada to the west slope of the Sierra Nevada. Lake Tahoe is the center of the Washoe world. Washoe territory has dramatic landscapes and ecological diversity from high alpine forests, lakes and rivers; meadow systems to pinyon juniper woodlands and semi-arid landscapes; and in the eyes of the Washoe; *"the most beautiful country of all."* The Washoe occupied the Carson Pass area during the summer months, hunting, fishing and harvesting plants in the local area, and moving to lower elevations during the harsh winter months. It was a seasonal lifestyle, moving with the changing seasons.

Because the Washoe are situated between two geographic regions, they are ideally suited to trade between the two regions. For example, obsidian, hides, seeds, salt, acorns and seashells were common exchange goods. With the sudden influx of hundreds of thousands of emigrants flocking to the gold and silver mines of California and Nevada, all within a span of a decade, the Washoe way of life changed forever. They persevered and continued to thrive in the local area. They still come to the Carson Pass area for the same reasons they did years ago. The map below illustrates how extensively the Washoe people traveled. It was common for them to travel west over the Sierra Nevada for trading purposes. It was less common for the west-side Indians to travel east over the mountains. Washoe traders were often stranded on the west side of the Sierra Nevada in the fall due to snowfall that prevented their return home before the snow melted in the spring. As a result, intertribal marriages between the Washoe and Miwok were the norm.



The Washoe also traded eastward. Trading was so extensive between the Indians that Pacific sea shells, traded as money and decoration, have been traced east to the Rocky Mountains. It was these earlier Indian trade trails that the gold





rushers followed as they came over the Sierra Nevada to seek their fortune in California.

Here are two excerpts from Mary Jane Walker Caples of her journey over Carson Pass and seeing Caples Lake.

*After the discovery of gold by Marshall in 1848, my husband and brother with myself and an infant child, joined the mad rush overland to California with an ox team, as it was thought at the time that horses could not stand the trip...*

After traveling for about four and half months, Mary Jane continues:

*We traveled up the Carson River with its small streams of ice cold water from springs and snow banks; it was a welcome sight to our weary eyes, after seeing nothing but sand and alkali, and the tantalizing mirages. After about 30 miles up the river we came to the Carson Canyon, (Woodfords) one of the worst pieces of road on the whole route; It took us all day, with the hardest work men and animals ever did, to make five miles. No one thought of riding. I carried my baby and walked all the way. The next day we had a beautiful drive through Hope Valley to the foot of the first summit, (Carson Pass) which we ascended with considerable difficulty by double teaming; then down 4 miles to Summit Lake, (Caples Lake) at the foot of the second summit, which we bought later and made it our summer home for 30 years.*

The Caples family built a summer home from logs and rocks. The rock foundation was exposed when the lake water level was drawn down to repair the outlet valve at the dam in 2008. I will detail this in Part 2 of this article.

The first non-native people to camp at Caples Lake were most likely the remnants of the Mormon Battalion who opened the Carson River Route for wagon travel on their eastward journey to the Salt Lake Valley in 1848.

Henry William Bigler, a diarist who was a member of the Mormon Battalion, wrote:

*July 24, (1848) Moved about six miles and camped just over the summit.*

*Two wagons broke down and two were upset. Two Indians came in to stay all night.*

*July 25, Moved to the foot of the mountains and camped near a lake. This we call Lake Valley. (Caples Lake)*

*July 28. Moved three miles and made an early encampment near or at the summit of the great Sierra Nevada (Carson Pass) ... This afternoon we worked and made a road across the mountain.*

*July 29. Moved across about what we called Hope Valley, as we have hope.*

Bigler is talking about having the hope of making it to the Salt Lake valley (Utah). This is how Hope Valley was named. Many diaries from the gold rush era referred to the Caples Lake area as Lake Valley. Others called it Summit Lake, Meadow Lake, Summit Meadow Lake, and even Red Lake which was confused with the lake at the foot of the Carson Pass climb.

Most travelers camped in the Caples Lake valley. However, some continued for another few miles and camped in a valley at the foot of the second Summit (West Pass). This valley was named Emigrant Valley and still holds that name today. It is now part of Kirkwood Ski Resort area where chairlifts three and four were built.

It is estimated that in 1849 somewhere between 20,000 and 45,000 people came over Carson Pass. In 1850 it is estimated that from 50,000 to 60,000 gold seekers came over Carson Pass and the majority would have camped in Lake Valley a.k.a. Caples Lake.

In Part 2 of The History of Caples Lake, I will write about the dam that flooded the valley and the exploring survey that OCTA did in 2008.

Video Link to Caples Lake Emigrant Trail Survey 2008  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cx1fAtycmb0>

<sup>1</sup> Source: Darrel Cruz was the director of Cultural Resources Department and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Washoe Tribe. He is now retired.

<sup>2</sup> Document at the California Historical Society, San Francisco.

<sup>3</sup> West Pass.

<sup>4</sup> Gudde, Erwin G. *Bigler's Chronicle of the West*. University of California press: 1962

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER  
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