

Fall Issue

2016



CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE

# THE Wagon Tongue



## *CROSSING THE SIERRA NEVADA*

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When the emigrants neared the end of the Humboldt River, they had to consider a major obstacle on their journey, Donner Pass in the Sierra Nevada mountain range.

By 1852, there were many different options. Did they proceed on the Truckee Trail route that had the most difficult terrain to cross or choose to travel the 40-Mile Desert to the Carson Trail or leave the Humboldt River and travel northwest across the Black Rock Desert and follow the Applegate/Noble Trail that was the easiest of the trails into northern California but longer? This was a hard decision because whichever trail they chose; it had its own hardships.

Many chose the Truckee Trail route. The Truckee Trail had many difficulties and also had different options. Options that changed once they were faced with the challenges of travel.

Once travelers reached the Truckee River, they had fresh water but they also had to cross the swift and sometimes deep river numerous times due to the canyons that the river traveled.

“We crossed the river twenty-seven different times as we traveled up the valley. We found little valleys where there was grass for our mules, as we approached the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains. “

- Edward Washington McIlhany, 1849

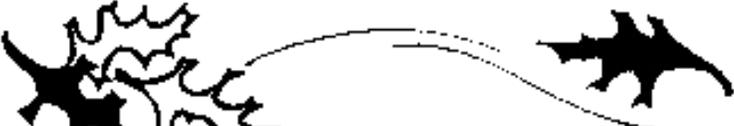
Many rejoiced when they reached the Truckee Meadows which is at the foothills of the Sierras. It was considered a lush resting place with grass and fresh trout.

“After 7 miles we emerged in a beautiful, green, velvety valley, which upon first coming into view, presented a most cheering appearance. We here crossed a slough, the crossing of which was fixed and bridged by our Captain & party ahead. Before this was done, it is said it was almost impassable, each having to be cordelled across. We passed over in safety and encamped in this lovely valley, with blue grass to the horses' knees. We passed today two graves; one had been drowned several days before, the other had died today.”

- Wakeman Bryarly, 1849

As they left the Truckee Meadows, the terrain became rockier and they had to consider other options to travel over the Sierras. Stay along the Truckee River or use other routes found by Patrick Hennessey and James Beckwourth, mountain man & guide that were not as steep. Many chose to continue on the Truckee Trail route even though they had to endure the rough terrain and (continued on page 3)

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# *OCTA National Convention*

**Ft. Hall Idaho – August 2016**

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Fort Hall Replica, Pocatello, ID

We got a real sense of how Fort Hall, a Hudson's Bay Trading Post, must have been in the early 1840's – at this year's national OCTA convention at that location.

The Idaho OCTA Chapter did a wonderful job with the pre and post-convention tours and well as the convention itself. Over 300 participants had a chance to savor those "good old days" through the formal presentations, and the tours and shared meals. The convention opened with a Western Shoshone Drum Circle and Song. It set the tone for the first three speakers of the event – Darrel Shay, the Vice Chair of the tribe, Rosemary Devinney, the Director of the Museum and Leo Ariwite, Tribal Liaison for the Cultural Preservation Department. They shared their thoughts on how the coming of the white man on the Oregon Trail impacted their tribe socially, environmentally, & culturally. Their insights provided a counter-balance to the Hollywood version of the western emigrant trails.

The presenters at the conference covered areas of regional and national interest. I found the talks very informative. The one that stands out in my mind is that about the business records for a 3-year period from Ft. Hall. It was fascinating to me the amount of information to be gleaned from the daily ledgers and the individual ledgers – how many times was Kit Carson there and what he purchased – brown soap and canvas pants if I recall correctly.

The California Trail Heritage Alliance (formerly the California Trail Center Foundation) was both honored and humbled by a contribution of \$5,000 from the California Nevada Chapter of OCTA toward the library fund which was presented by then chapter president Mark Wilson to Helen Hankins.

Jerry Eichhorst led an excellent pre-convention tour of the Oregon Trail from Soda Springs to Ft. Hall. It was a part of the trail and associated springs not generally open to the public as it is within the boundaries of the Ft. Hall Reservation. John Winner did a wonderful job with a post-convention tour of the California Trail – the steep descent into Goose Creek, Record Bluff, Rock Springs and the Emigrant Post Office were among the highlights as we followed the trail south to a point not too far north of Wells Nevada. It was a very worthwhile event.  
- Helen Hankins

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## **Informative Books on the California Trail—Truckee Route**

Newell, Olive, *Tail of the Elephant, The Emigrant Experience on the Truckee Route of the California Trail, 1844-1852*. Cedar Ridge, CA, Nevada County Historical Society, 1997

Bryant, Edwin, *What I Saw in California*. New York, NY, Appleton & Co., 1848, Reprinted by University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

McIlhany, Edward W., *Recollections of a '49er*. Kansas City, MO, Hailman Printing Co., 1908, Reprinted by Donning Co. Publishers, 2006

## Crossing the Sierra Nevada

(continued from page 1)

sometimes having to walk in the river with their wagons due to the canyon walls. In later years, the other routes and the Carson Route was more traveled due to difficulties going over Donner Pass, Roller Pass, and Coldstream Pass on the Truckee Trail. Having left Donner (Truckee) Lake traveling northward, this traveler, noted the difficulties going over Donner Pass:

“It was several miles to the top of the mountain, over a steep and rough road. Ten mules were hitched to each wagon to pull to the top of the mountain. After a few hours of tedious and hard work, the wagons were landed at the top. An examination of the situation showed that there was no wagon road. The mules were unhitched from the wagons, taken some distance to a path that led down the mountain, and in single file were all led to the bottom. We succeeded in landing the wagons where we could again hitch up the mules by attaching a large, long rope to the hind axle trees and wrapping it about a large pine tree which was some two and a half feet through. The wagon was then steadied by the men, the rope slacked by degrees, until the bottom was reached. Others ahead of us had accomplished the same feat with their wagons, having used a rope on the tree so much that a groove six or eight inches deep had been cut. Finally all the wagons were landed safely.”

- Edward Washington McIlhany, 1849

Roller Pass was the second pass that was developed and went along Cold Creek on the southern side of Donner (Truckee) Lake. Its benefit was that it was an easier climb and shorter ascent than the Donner route. It has been noted, in later years, by the Donner Summit Historical Society as a little over a 29% slope which is a sixteen degree angle. Mr. Coats briefly notes the distance that they had to climb the final ascent which was a very steep climb.

“Our next problem was climbing the rugged summit of the Sierras which rose before us. After much labor we took our wagons as far as possible then unhitched all except one yoke of oxen and took them to the top of the mountain and fastened chains fifty feet long to the tongue, pulling the wagons up one at a time.

- Felix Coats, 1849

Coldstream Pass followed the Roller Pass trail and instead of following Cold Creek, it headed northward passing between Mt. Judah and Donner Peak. It is debated as to how the 3rd route developed but it may have been not only the amount of traffic on Roller Pass but as this traveler stated it was a shorter ascent.

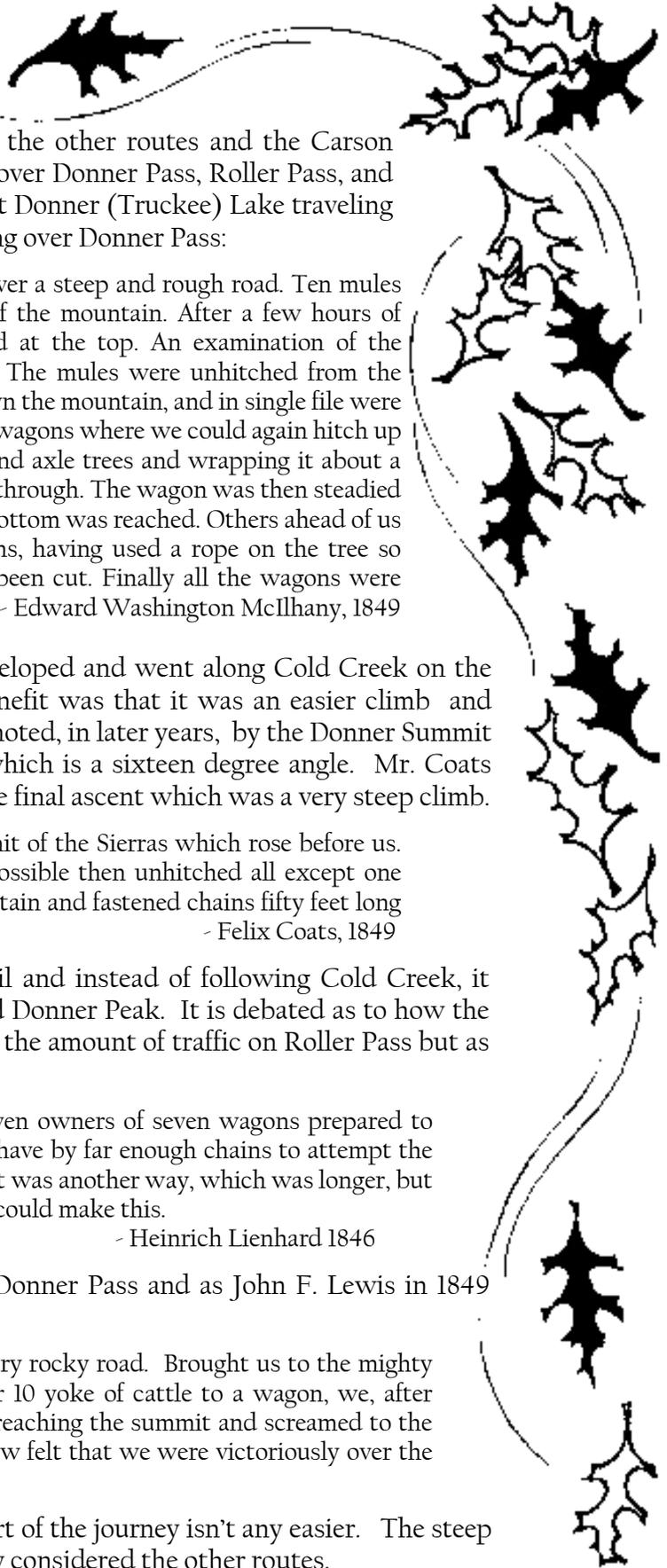
Early on the fourth of October [1846], we the eleven owners of seven wagons prepared to bring our vehicles across the summit. We did not have by far enough chains to attempt the course followed by the preceding party. To the right was another way, which was longer, but the steepest stretch much shorter. We thought we could make this.

- Heinrich Lienhard 1846

However, they came, they made it, crossing Donner Pass and as John F. Lewis in 1849 stated:

“We were now ascending 4 miles farther over a very rocky road. Brought us to the mighty hill called the elephant. We here by putting 9 or 10 yoke of cattle to a wagon, we, after labouring hard for several hours, we succeeded in reaching the summit and screamed to the top of our voices rejoicing at our victory... We now felt that we were victoriously over the mountains.”

While they made it to California, their next part of the journey isn't any easier. The steep descent and rough roads were another reason many considered the other routes.





## UPCOMING EVENTS

### CTHA Board Meetings

\*All California Trail Center Foundation Board meetings are held at the California Trail Interpretive Center and begin at 6:00 p.m.

October 18 CTHA Board Mtg.

November 15 CTHA Board Mtg.

*California Trail Days will be held the first weekend after Memorial Day*

## KEY LINKS

[www.facebook.com/pages/California-Trail-Center-Foundation/157116030992463](http://www.facebook.com/pages/California-Trail-Center-Foundation/157116030992463)

<http://www.californiatrailcenter.org/>

[www.emigranttrailswest.org](http://www.emigranttrailswest.org)

[www.octa-trails.org](http://www.octa-trails.org)      [www.appl.org](http://www.appl.org)

[www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko\\_field\\_office/blm\\_programs/blm\\_special\\_areas/california\\_trail\\_historic.html](http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko_field_office/blm_programs/blm_special_areas/california_trail_historic.html)

## TRAIL CENTER ACTIVITIES

### Nov. 6: For the Kids: Animal Detective

Animals leave behind clues: scat and tracks in all shapes and sizes. Join volunteer and biologist Beth Wood and become an animal detective. Discover how to identify animals by the clues they left behind.

### Nov. 12: Mail Order Brides: The Original Online Dating

By the 1850s, there were more eligible bachelors in the West than there were in the East. Volunteer Pami Briggs will share real-life tales of women who became mail-order brides.

Some were successful, such as Elinore Pruitt, who answered Clyde Stewart's ad and was happily married for over 20 years. Eleanor Berry was not so lucky. Her mail order husband misrepresented himself in his letters. The marriage lasted less than an hour. Learn about these brides and more at this provocative program.

### Nov. 20: For the Kids: How to Bake a Pioneer Biscuit

Join Ranger Alex Rose in the pioneer camp for a program on Dutch oven cooking. Learn how to bake biscuits from scratch.



Also, below is information about Pioneer Christmas for Kids:

### Pioneer Christmas for Kids

Ranger Rose is seeking volunteers to assist with Pioneer Christmas for Kids, taking place this year on Dec. 17, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Help local children create Christmas cards, ornaments, pioneer dolls, and other hands-on arts and crafts. To volunteer, or for more information, contact Rose at 738-1849.



## *CALIFORNIA TRAIL INTERPRETATIVE CENTER STAFF*



"Jens learned how to fly fish in his off time and became very successful!"

Meet Native American Intern, Jens Camp. He worked at the Trail Center during the 2016 summer. Jens is from the Ponca Tribe in Oklahoma, grew up back East, and is studying law at Arizona State University in Tempe. His goal is to practice tribal law and help indigenous peoples across America. Jens came to the Trail Center through the Great Basin Institute as an AmeriCorps intern. Most of his time was spent researching the Western Shoshone and Paiute Tribes of the Great Basin. His work expanded our website pages and helped educate visitors about tribal culture and history. Besides research, Jens spent time in the encampment learning how to flint knap and carve. He also learned about pioneer history regarding the California Trail and its impact on native peoples. "One of my favorite things about working at the Trail Center," Jens explained, "is the chance to meet and work with members of the local tribes. I've learned a lot in my short 12 weeks here. I want to help native peoples have their voice heard and help right some of the wrongs of the past." Jens is back in Tempe, Arizona studying for his LSAT so he can get into law school. We wish Jens all the best!

## *Boiled Salt Pork*



2 lbs salt pork  
Salt and pepper  
Water

Assorted vegetables as available, chopped:  
Onions                      Cabbage  
Potatoes                    Carrots  
Turnips

Freshen salt pork by soaking in a kettle of water at least 2 hours. If very salty, repeat soaking. Cut salt pork into chunks and brown in the bottom of a Dutch oven. Add water to cover and bring to a slow boil. Add vegetables and cook until tender. Season with salt and pepper.

*- the Legends of America website.*



## Nature Notes: A young woman in native dress



Walking into the California Trail Interpretive Center, I pass a beautiful sculpture of a Native woman and child. The sculptor is Ben Victor and it depicts a generic Great Basin woman representing the native people of this area. The California Trail Interpretive Center is 7 miles west of Elko and is a great place to visit to learn both about the people traveling the California Trail and the native peoples living in this area.

The depicted clothing interested me. I wondered how such native garments were created so I talked to Leah Brady. She is a local Shoshone basket maker, who also volunteers at the California Trail Interpretive Center. Leah conducts demonstrations and teaches classes about native ways for various organizations.

Leah told me the sculptured woman is wearing a rabbit skin blanket, the typical, historic, winter dress of the Shoshone and Paiute. This warm garment required a lot of work to create, requiring the pelts from 100-150 jackrabbits. The skin from each rabbit was cut off in long strips. These were twisted into long ropes about four feet long and then the ropes were woven together using buckskin thongs to form the blanket. They constantly required repair or being replaced.

The woman's other major garment is a skirt made of sagebrush bark. Through a long process, bark was pulled from the brush and the inner bark stripped away and cleaned. The end result was reddish-brown, pliable, strong fibers. A rope was twisted from a plant called Indian hemp, a very rare plant today. The sagebrush bark strips were then draped over this rope and tied to it. The strips were woven together with more sagebrush to hold the skirt together. Leah also said the depicted skirt is too long. Sagebrush had a lot of other uses. Leah told me this same inner bark was also chewed as something like today's gum.

On the woman's feet are footwear made of tules. These reeds are a type of large bulrush found growing in marshes. This versatile and tough vegetable material was easily gathered in Ruby Valley along creeks and other marshy areas. The cut reeds were dried for a couple of days to allow shrinkage. They were then soaked to make them pliable and woven together. Reeds forming the soles bent up and over the toes. Such footwear did not last long but was easy to create.

She holds a tightly woven container formed of split willow. Some basket containers could be used to boil food when hot rocks were added. If the pot was used to store water, the inside would have been sealed with pitch. White globs of pitch were gathered from pine trees. Hot rocks and clumps of pitch went into the basket where the hot rocks melted the pitch and smeared it onto the woven willow as the woman rolled the pot in her hands. Such a sealed container could also store water during traveling. Pine pitch was also used to protect peoples' feet. Shoes were not typically worn during summer and pitch smeared onto feet helped to protect them from sharp rocks.

On the woman's back is a cradleboard that caused some questions with Leah. She could tell by the shape of the cradleboard that the contained baby was a newborn wrapped in its own rabbit skin blanket. Newborns usually stayed inside a hut for the first month. A special cradleboard was used during that time but it would not have a carrying strap, buckskin cover or sunshade. The sunshade is a contemporary addition. When the baby was old enough to go outside, it was transferred to a different style of cradleboard that offered more protection. The newborn cradleboard was called boat baskets by some people due to the fact that if the newborn did not survive its first month, baby and cradleboard were placed on the water and sent adrift instead of a burial.

The typical cradleboard has an oval frame made of hardwood. Peeled willow stems are lashed onto this frame with buckskin strips to form a flat backboard. It is then covered with buckskin and a sunshade attached to protect the baby from sun and in case of a fall. - *Larry Hyslop, Sept. 2016, Elko Daily Free Press*

# CALIFORNIA TRAIL

## HERITAGE ALLIANCE

### President's Message



“Animo” was the cheer I often heard as we began walking “El Camino Francesa” – The French Way or Route that ends in Santiago de Compostela Spain. Animo is also the cheer I would employ in regard to the work of the California Trail Heritage Alliance during the past quarter. An overview of our activities follows.

**Trail Stewardship** – Helen Hankins, Kurt Alleman, and Terri Perry met with BLM officials on October 11 to discuss involvement of Boy Scouts in the Trail Stewardship Program. Wes Allen will be the point of contact for the BLM. There are plenty of miles of trail to monitor so there will be opportunities for our group or individual members to be involved as they choose.

**Library** – The California Trail Heritage Alliance has purchased a lap top computer and two chairs for the library at the California Trail Interpretive Center. One National Endowment for the Humanities Grant has been applied for to fund the library position and the funding of the Western Emigrant Trails Collection digitized.

**Work Weekend** – Our planned work weekend in mid-October will be re-scheduled. John Winner has recommended that we continue efforts to work with BLM on OCTA mapping of the Hastings Cutoff involved in or in the vicinity of Newmont’s Long Canyon mining project.

**Grants** – Duane Jones, our “grants guy” has submitted four grants to Travel Nevada during the month of September.

Previous NCOT grants for plaza lighting and for an architectural assessment of the CTIC – related to adding on a library – have been completed and the work for both has been completed. Funds in a grant to trouble shoot and repair the Humboldt Riv3r Water Feature in the interpretive plaza have not yet been fully expended. Considerable work has been done to identify and fix issues with the feature.

**Bike Path** – Interested parties are continuing to evaluate alternative routes. The two primary ranches along the most direct route are not currently interested in a bike path crossing their land.

- *Animo!* Helen Hankins, President

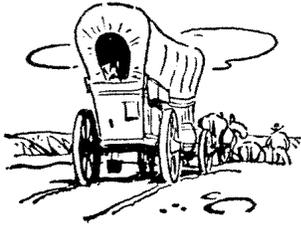
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## Join Today! - Membership Application

Join your friends and neighbors and become a supporter of the California Trail Interpretive Center! Every membership supports the California Trail Interpretive Center and Trail preservation. When you join other enthusiasts to become a member, or renew your membership, you directly support interpretation, education, and special events at the California Trail Interpretive Center, and help preserve the Trail and its history for the benefit of current and future generations.

Annual Memberships:  New  Renewal

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Email: \_\_\_\_\_

All members receive the informative electronic newsletter, electronic updates about special events and activities and a 10% discount at the California Trail Interpretive Center store. Invitations to one or more special events are extended to the membership levels above the Nancy Kelsey level.

Level	Lucinda Duncan	Nancy Kelsey	Virginia Reed	Elizabeth Townsend	Sarah Winnemucca
	Individual	Family	Supporter	Partner	Lifetime
Special Events)			1	2	3
Cost	\$25	\$50	\$75	\$100	\$200

\*Special Events may include presentations, workshops, tours, exhibit previews or other activities. Individuals who choose to make a donation equal to or greater than \$250 will receive recognition, if desired, on the Donor Wall in the California Trail Interpretive Center

PAYMENT:  Check  Visa  MC  Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Make Check Payable to: **California Trail Center Foundation, 530 Idaho St., Elko NV 89801**

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IN ADDITION TO BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE, INDIVIDUALS OR BUSINESSES MAY ALSO MAKE A DONATION TO THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL CENTER FOUNDATION. FOR THOSE DONATIONS GREATER THAN \$250.00, THE DONOR CAN CHOOSE TO BE PUBLICLY RECOGNIZED ON THE DONOR WALL AT THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL INTERPRETIVE CENTER. RECOGNITION LEVELS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

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Empire Building	\$5,000.00 or Greater

## CONTACT US!

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