

WINTER Issue

2017



CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE

# THE Wagon Tongue

## *James Beckwourth and a New Trail through the Sierra*



In 1850, a new trail crossing the Sierra Nevada was discovered by James Beckwourth. The trail proved to be an easier ascent over the Sierra, however, it had its trials.

The trail was found when Beckwourth was on a prospecting expedition in northern California. He and his companions had travelled north from the American Valley to the Pitt River when he saw a pass south of their expedition. He didn't explore it at that time but returned later with another group to explore it.

After exploring the area, he knew that this was a lower pass and could be an easier one for wagon trains to cross the Sierra. It could be prosperous not only for himself but for the communities of American Valley and Marysville as the trains came through their area.

He returned to those communities and proceeded to share his plan of opening a new route through the Sierra. He was able to get the financial backing of American Valley residents and the promise of more money from the Marysville mayor.

Having secured their support, he returned to the Truckee River route to turn emigrants onto his newly-discovered route. When he reached the river, he became ill and was bed-ridden in his temporary shelter, believing he would not survive.

Luckily, a train of wagons arrived where he was camped and he was able to share with them his new route. Helping him to get better, the emigrants agreed to go with him and he led the first train, consisting of seventeen wagons, through "Beckwourth's Pass."

Much of this information was shared by James Beckwourth in *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth: Mountaineer, Scout, and Pioneer and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians* as dictated to T. D. Bonner. In it, he shared the moment of arriving with the train:

*"We reached the American Valley without the least accident, and the emigrants expressed entire satisfaction with the route. I returned with the train through to Marysville, and on the intelligence being communicated of the practicability of my road, there was quite a public rejoicing. A northern route had been discovered, and the city had received an impetus that would advance her beyond all her sisters on the Pacific shore. I felt proud of my achievement, and was foolish enough to promise myself a substantial recognition of my labors."*

*(continued on page 3)*



## News from the California Trail Interpretative Center Library

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The California Trail Interpretative Center has purchased Web OPAC. This product is a searchable web site which allows you to search the Trail Center Library collection. Our books and journals are available for everyone to use but they cannot be taken from the Library.

You can sign on to [Californiatrailcenter.org](http://Californiatrailcenter.org) and go to the Trail Center. Go to the tab that says Education and then click on Library come down until you come to Digital Library. When you click on that you will be able to search our collection. Please try it and then come and enjoy reading a book or a chapter of interest. You will need to make an appointment by calling Ranger Rose at the Trail Center.

Craig Boone, our outgoing Librarian at the California Trail Center has shared a list of books with us. They mostly are Native Americans books but some are about other minorities in the west. These books can be found in the CTIC's online catalog by searching with either the call number, title, author, or subject.

Amazing Native American History A Book of Answers for Kids by Liz Sonneburn  
Ancient Tribes of the Boulder Dam Country by M.R. Harrington  
Black Frontiers : A History of African American Heroes n the Old West by Lillian Schlissel  
Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee an Indian History of American West by Dee Brown  
Catlins Letters and Notes on the North American Indian by George Catlin  
Chinese in Nevada by Sue Fawn  
Crazy Horse by Mari Sandoz  
Days of the Blackfeet by Carol Murray  
Fighting Indians of the West by David C Cooke  
First People, First Contracts by J.C. H King  
From the Heart of the Crow Country - The Crow Indians own Stories by Joseph Medicine Crow  
Great Basin Indians by Micheal Hittman  
Great Western Indian Fight by Members of the Potomac Corral  
Indian Life on the Upper Missouri by John C. Ewers  
Indian Paint Brush of Narratives of Native Love by Edna B Patterson  
Indian Spirit by Michael and Judith Fitzgerald  
Indians in the Fur Trade their role as Hunters Trappers and Middlemen in Lands southwest of Hudson Bay 1860-1870 by Arthur J Ray  
Indians of the Great Basin and Plateau by Francis Haines  
Medicine Man by John Gregory Bourke and His America West  
Navaho by Clyde Kluckhohn  
Native Family by Edward Curtis  
Native Land Native People by Wayne Youngblood  
New World Beginning Indian Cultures in Americas by Olivia Vlahos  
NEWE A Western Shoshone History by ITCN  
Northern Paiute Indians by Ruth Underhill  
On What a Slaughter by Larry Mcmurtey  
Our Stories Remember by Joseph Bruchuc  
Paiute by Session S Wheeler  
People of Color in the American West by Susheng Chan  
Portraits of Native American by Edward S. Curtis  
Road on which we came A history of Western Shoshone by Steven J. Crum  
Sarah Winnemucca of the Northern Paiutes by Gae Whitney Canfield  
Sioux by Micheal G. Johnson  
Treasury of Memory Making Indian Campfires by Allan MacFarlan

## James Beckwourth and a New Trail through the Sierras

(continued from page 1)

He felt foolish because fate would change the promise of financial gain. When he returned, he also found out that that same night Marysville was laid in ashes from a major fire. Any reward or reimbursement for expenses that he expected was gone.



To try to recoup some of his losses, in the spring of 1852, he went back to Beckwourth Valley, and set up a trading post that was the first trading post that emigrants found after crossing the Great Basin area. By 1852, the Beckwourth Trail became the major road over the Sierra on the Truckee Route because it was easier. Emigrants noted:

*“James Beckwith, (The Old War Horse) has a light frame house about 50 by 20, the roof covered with pine boards & the sides with muslin; and well divided into four rooms; a Bar room, store room, dining room & Kitchen. It is the first house we have seen covered with boards, since leaving Fort Laramie. He is a dark swarthy, keen looking, shrewd old fellow...” (Dalton, 1852)*

*“At evening Mr. Beckwith, the proprietor of this valley and ranch, passed an hour with us. He gave some account of his wild wandering way traversing unexplored regions and surveying roads across mountain passes. He says he was once lost upon his own road and came very near perishing, whereas, had there been no road, he could have crossed the mountains without difficulty or danger. He claims to belong to the F.F.V’s, and is descended from an English Baron of the name Beckwith. (H. Ward, 1853)*

So who was Jim Beckwourth? At [www.beckwourth.org](http://www.beckwourth.org), it states that,

*“He was an African American who played a major role in the early exploration and settlement of the American West. Although there were people of many races and nationalities on the frontier, Beckwourth was the only African American who recorded his life story, and his adventures took him from the everglades of Florida to the Pacific Ocean and from southern Canada to northern Mexico.”*

James Beckwourth lived a notable life and Thomas D. Bonner, who met him in California and wrote Beckwourth’s dictated book *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth: Mountaineer, Scout, Pioneer and Chief of the Crow Nation*, noted this about him:

*“Among the many men who have distinguished themselves as mountaineers, traders, chiefs of great Indian nations, and as early pioneers in the settlement of our Pacific coast, is James P. Beckwourth, whose varied and startling personal adventures would have found no record but for the accident of meeting with a wanderer in the mountains of California, interested in the man, and, patiently listening to his story, proceeded, as it fell from his lips, to put it upon paper. This autobiography was thus produced, and was the result of some months’ labor in the winter of 1854-55. In prosecuting the task, the author has in no instance departed from the story of the narrator, but it was taken down literally as it was from day to day related. Beckwourth kept no journal, and, of course, relied upon his memory alone; consequently dates are often wanting, which it was impossible to give with accuracy when recurring to events transpiring in the course of very many years. Beckwourth is personally known to thousands of people ‘living on both sides of the mountains,’ and also, from his service under the United States government, has enjoyed the acquaintance of many officers of the United States Army, who have been stationed in Florida, Mexico, and California. In his long residence with the Indians he adopted their habits, and was in every respect conformed to their ways: the consequence was, from his great courage and superior mental endowments, he rose rapidly in their estimation, and finally became their chief. As an Indian, therefore, he speaks of their customs, and describes their characteristics; and probably, from his autobiography, we have more interesting particulars than were ever before given of the aborigines.”*

Beckwourth left the Sierra Nevada in 1859 and went back to Missouri and Colorado, working as a scout, trapper, shop keeper and Indian Agent. He later died while living with the Crow Indians.

The online book can be found online at <http://mtmen.org/mtman/html/beckwourth/index.html#ch36>.



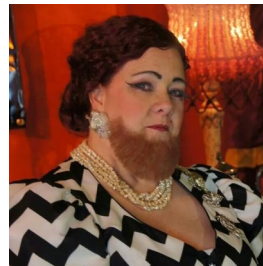


### A Different Kind of Love Story –

“I fell in love with the (California) Trail!” – said Dinna Frost, the BLM California Trail Interpretive Center Volunteer of the Year for 2-15-16. Dinna and her husband Stephen came to Crescent Valley a few years ago to take over property that had belonged to Dinna’s parents. They have four children and eight grandchildren. Dinna, who worked as a nurse in the Kansas City area for more than two decades, was looking for something to do. She said she drove by the Trail Center for two and a half years before stopping in. Then she was hooked. Dinna is one of those people who does whatever is needed to get the job done. She greets visitors, shares stories, works at the front desk, cuts out material for clothes pin dolls, collates documents, packs boxes for classroom use, and more. She says “seeing visitors from all over the world come to explore this little bit of American History is so invigorating! She loves being able to answer questions and help people understand the trail.



Recently, Helen Hankins discovered that Dinna has even more talent. Dinna has been involved in theater for more than forty years – in high school, at Church, in the Army, and in the communities where she has lived. She has acted, directed, choreographed, done set design, lights, and sound. She also does special effects make up. Dinna proposed to the Alliance that we host a Pioneer Dinner Theater as a fund raiser and as a fun event for the community. She has recommended the play “Quilters” as the play to begin with. Plans are underway for an April 20-21 production. Mark your calendar. You too, will see what an amazing woman we have in Dinna Frost.



#### Core Members:

Kerry Aguirre  
Bailey Billington  
John Collett  
Walt Goddard  
Coralee Griswold  
Helen Hankins  
Duane Jones  
Krys Munzing  
Jeff Williams

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#### Newsletter

Editor: Leah Brady  
Contributors:  
Helen Hankins  
Alex Rose  
Larry Hyslop



## Flowery Lake or Mad Woman Spring

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Flowery Lake Springs is named for yellow flowers that bloom in the marshy space each summer. The “lake” is seasonal. Subterranean water lifts the ground surface a few feet above the basin floor to form a spongy mound. It can support foot traffic and the surface ripples for a fifty-foot radius when someone walks on it.

Edwin Bryant describes this spring 20 miles west of Red Butte:

*“... we struck an oasis of about fifty acres of green grass, reeds, and other herbage surrounding a number of springs, some of cool fresh water, others of warm sulphurous water. These waters rise here and immediately sink in the sands. Our information from Fort Bridger led us to expect a spring and grass at this point, and in order to make use of it, we extended the flanks of our small party some three or four miles from the right to the left. The grass immediately around the springs, although not the best quality, is very luxuriant, and on the whole, it being a favorable place for grazing our mules...we determined to camp.”*

It is a fairly common sight in Nevada, where a small spring erupts and greens a few unlikely acres. “We made camp near the spring, which the mules soon completely exhausted of its scant supply of water,” Bryant notes.

Looking south Bryant could see mountains tops at least a hundred miles south. His eyes were drawn to one snowy peak—possibly Mt. Moriah or Mt. Wheeler—far away, and writes: “no words can describe the awfulness and grandeur of this sublime desolation.”

Bryant and friends observed a variety of animals. In his diary entries, Bryant recalls seeing hares, an antelope, and ducks: “... the signs of animals around the springs are numerous, and the wolves were howling near our camp until a late hour.”

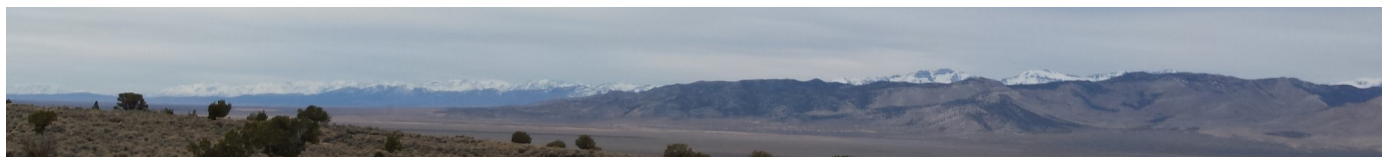
James Frazier Reed reveals the turbulence developing within the Donner Party, now 50 miles southwest of Donner Spring with Pilot Peak still dominating the eastern horizon. In his diary entry of September 13, 1846, he writes: “... south in the Vally to fine Spring or Bason of water and grass—sufficient for teams.” The following day, Reed observes: “...left the Bason Camp or Mad woman Camp as all the women in Camp were mad with anger.” Their anger continued, according to Reed’s diary, as the party used the rugged Flowery Lake Pass (Jasper Pass) to cross the Pequop Range and travel west to Mounds Springs. Reed’s diary reads that the party’s women “mad this day at the Two mound springs.”

### Visiting Flowery Lake Spring

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Most of the time, the springs can be reached by passenger car from the Shafter Exit on I-80. But there are no services along the way. From the interchange a dirt road runs southwest about 20 miles through serene but dusty open space to this strange desert waterhole.

This article is an excerpt from *Mountains, Grass and Water; Explore the Hastings Cutoff and Overland Trail through Ruby Valley* by Charles Greenhaw and Larry Hyslop.



(Pequop Range looking south)

# CALIFORNIA TRAIL

## HERITAGE ALLIANCE



### No Winter Slow-Down For the Alliance!

The northeastern Nevada winter has not slowed down the California Trail Heritage Alliance. We have things happening on many fronts despite the snow and freezing temperatures. This is a tribute to our committed and talented board members and other supporters! Here is a quick summary:

**Adopt A Trail** – The Alliance is evaluating locations where they can “adopt-a-trail” for monitoring and clean-up. Segments of the California Trail between the Idaho state line and the Trail Center and segments of the Hastings Cutoff in Nevada are under consideration. Mike Setlock will bring a map to the next meeting for further discussion.

**Artist in Residence** – Bailey Billington and Blaine Benedict have collaborated on this project. Bailey has completed a lot of research. A small committee of board members will work with Bailey to bring a detailed recommendation to the board about how we shall proceed with this project.

**Bike Path** – Larry Hyslop has looked at various route options for a bike path between Elko and the Trail Center. An NDOT representative from Carson City who specializes in bike paths is planning to come to Elko in the spring to work with Larry and the Alliance.

**Board Development** – At the suggestion of Kerry Aguirre, Tracy Turner with the Western Nevada Community Foundation, met with the Board via telephone, to discuss how to more effectively promote the Alliance. The more effectively we explain what we do and why we do it, the more we enhance our ability to increase membership in our organization and donations to support our goals and projects. Tracy’s overview on this topic was very informative and helpful to all of us.

**Grants** - December was a productive month for the Alliance in the area of grants. Based on Duane Jones’ 4 grant applications, we received a little under \$20,000 for Google ads, billboards, marketing of Trail Days and for advertisements in the Nevada Magazine and Travel Guide. In addition, the Elko County Recreation Board allowed us to repurpose \$80,500 from billboard construction to a variety of marketing activities. These include partial funding for some of the above items as well as funding for advertising on public television and in Sunset Magazine.

**Highway Signage**- Jeff Williams and Kerry Aguirre have been working for more than two years with Maggie Creek Ranch and the Nevada Department of Transportation to develop increased highway signage for the Trail Center. At this point, Kevin Lee with NDOT is actively working with us to place two signs – about three miles east and west of the Trail Center – to let motorists know that the exit for the Trail Center is coming up services available there. The signs will be large and within the NDOT right of way. There will be very little cost to the Alliance for these signs. (This is why money previously given by the Elko County Recreation Board for billboard construction was no longer needed and why we requested to re-purpose the money for other things. See Grants section above.)

**Membership Brochure** – Leah Brady and Krys Munzing will bring recommendations to the February Board meeting about how to revise and improve the membership brochure.

**Mitigation for Long Canyon Project** – The Alliance did not provide comments to Newmont’s Long Canyon Project. However, Helen Hankins submitted a personal letter supporting OCTA’s recommendations for an on-the-ground survey of the Hastings cutoff and other items. The Alliance and OCTA may have the opportunity to work as observers once a plan for mitigation is determined.

**Pioneer Dinner Theater** – Dinna Frost, a volunteer at the California Trail Interpretive Center, is partnering with Bailey Billington and others to host a Pioneer Dinner Theater April 20 and 21, 2017. The purpose of the theater is to entertain and to raise funds. More details will be available at the February meeting.

**Strategic Plan Development** – The Alliance is continuing to work methodically but slowly on our long term strategic plan. Only a few hours each month are dedicated to this. Progress is slow but steady.

**Facebook** – Susanne Reese has agreed to actively work on our Facebook page. Susanne was an educational specialist at the Trail Center and is now a volunteer for the Alliance – among many other things she does in the community.

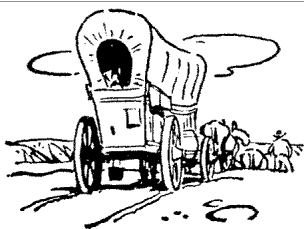
What an amazing group of people – with a Board like this, we can only succeed. - *Helen Hankins, President*



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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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/ST/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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Make Check Payable to: **California Trail Heritage Alliance, 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 HERITAGE ALLIANCE 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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