

Fall Issue

2019



CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE

The Wagon Tongue



The Last Hurdles

Having crossed the plains, the Rocky Mountains and the Humboldt River, emigrants reached the Humboldt sink. From that area the Sierra Mountains could be seen in the far distance; they were almost there. California.

However, two of the last hurdles that the emigrants had to pass before crossing the Sierra Nevada was the Humboldt sink and the 40 Mile Desert Route

Most emigrants came through Nevada in August and September. Any later than that, they would be snowed out of the Sierras. That theory was proven in 1846, when the Donner Party tragedy occurred. August and September had some of the hottest weather temperatures and water was scarce. Much of the Humboldt River was reduced to brackish and alkaline waters. There was little grass for the animals. Many diaries noted how horrible it was.

Eleazer Ingalls, 1850 wrote:

“Crossed a sand ridge about two miles, and travelled down the bottom about four miles, where we found some grass and camped. Our horses are failing fast. Kit Carson says truly that the Humboldt is the burying ground for horses and oxen. We pass daily great numbers of dead stock at the camping grounds, in the sloughs, and in the river. The river is nothing but horse broth, seasoned with alkali & salt. The appearance of emigrants has sadly changed since we started.”

As travelers reached the end of the Humboldt, known as the Sink, they would find that they had reached what would become the start of the worst desert you ever saw.

“... We came to some pools of standing water...covered with a yellowish slime, and emitting a most disagreeable feter. The margins of these pools are whitened with an alkaline deposits, and green tufts of a coarse grass, and some reeds or flags, raise themselves above the snow-like soil...Many of our animals being excessively thirsty, rushed to the pools immediately after we approached them, but upon tasting the water, they turned from it with disappointment and disgust.”

- Edwin Bryant, 1846

(continued on pg. 3)

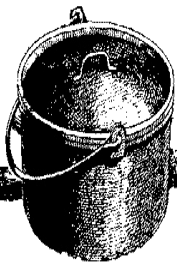
Humbug the Humboldt



USGS pic,

The Humboldt River is not favorably written about in some of the California Trail diaries but Olive Newell, in her book, Tail of the Elephant, 1997, summarized the importance of the river that was nicknamed Humbug the Humboldt.

“Whatever the emigrants thought of the river, the Humboldt fulfilled the prediction Fremont made for it as the highway to the West. No other path south of the Oregon Trail could support the great numbers of men and animals that successfully made the trek across the arid high plain of Nevada. People died there, certainly, and many animals perished. The grass was scarce and the water barely sufficient in volume or quality. The Indian threat seemed constant. The atmosphere was often suffocatingly hot and dusty. Yet the river supported as many as 50,000 emigrants and their thousands of oxen, horses and mules in a single season. Without the Humboldt River, California settlement by American emigrants would have been much slower; California might even have remained a northern Mexican province. Humbug the Humboldt might be, but it was an indispensable link in the California Trail.”



“For a Hearty and Nourishing Breakfast!”

Cornmeal Mush

Dried Currants	1 cup cornmeal
Tablespoon of lard	Teaspoon of salt
Molasses, butter, and milk	water

1. Put dried currants into 4 cups of boiling water.
2. Sprinkle a cup of cornmeal into the boiling water.
3. While stirring, add a tablespoon of lard and a teaspoon of salt.
4. Cook for 3 minutes, then pour into bowls.
5. Serve with molasses, butter, and milk.

- homesteading.com

The Last Hurdles (cont. from pg. 1)

Many had planned to prepare for the desert trip at this “meadow” but found water unfit and poor grass.

“Would have lain by today had we found grass. This country is arid, dreary and wretched.” - John Banks, 1849

“...The smell of dead stock & rotten water is strong, & we move down to the lower end of the Meadow 5 miles more. Here the stench is still worse...Not a man of us could eat dinner or supper at this place...” - John Clark, 1852

They made due as they could and moved onto the desert. In 1850, Eleazer Ingalls was very descriptive about his desert journey on the Carson Route:

“About midnight we reached the first wagon road where we found about four acres of wagons left to decay on the desert; this is the first sand ridge; we passed two other wagon yards before morning at similar ridges, besides great numbers along the road, many of them burning... Who will accurately describe this desert at this time? Imagine to yourself a vast plain of sand and clay; the moon riding over you in silent grandeur, just renders visible by her light the distant mountains; the stunted sage, the salt lakes, cheating the thirsty traveler into the belief that water is near; yes, water it is, but poison to the living thing that stops to drink...

Train after train drag their tiresome course along, man and beast suffering all the pangs of thirst toil on, feeling, knowing that the burning sun finds them on the desert in the coming day, their sufferings will be enhanced ten-fold, if worn out with fatigue and thirst they do not faint by the wayside and give up altogether. Burning wagons render still more hideous the solemn march; dead horses line the road, and living ones may be constantly seen, lapping and rolling the empty water casks (which have been cast away) for a drop of water to quench their burning thirst, or standing with drooping heads, waiting for death to relieve them of their tortures, or lying on the sand half buried, unable to rise, yet still trying. The sand hills are reached; then comes a scene of confusion and dismay.

Animal after animal drops down. Wagon after wagon is stopped, the strongest animals are taken out of the harness, the most important effects are taken out of the wagon and placed on their backs and all hurry away, leaving behind wagons, property and animals that, too weak to travel lie and broil in the sun in an agony of thirst until death relieves them of their tortures. The owners hurry on with but one object in view, that of reaching the Carson River before the broiling sun shall reduce them to the same condition. Morning comes, and the light of day presents a scene more horrid than the rout of a defeated army; dead stock line the roads, wagons, rifles, tents, clothes, everything but food may be found scattered along the road; here an ox, who standing famished against a wagon bed until nature could do no more, settles back into it and dies; and there a horse kicking out his last gasp in the burning sand, men scattered along the plain and stretched out among the dead stock like corpses, fill out the picture....

The desert! you must see it and feel it in an August day, when legions have crossed it before you, to realize it in all its horrors. But heaven save you from the experience.”

Upon reaching the Carson River, Jasper Hixson, 1849, wrote that he watched men:

“..rush up, weep as children, and bless God for their deliverance.”

Many recuperated here before heading on to their next challenge; the Sierra Nevada.



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.

Oct. 17, 2019 CTHA Board Mtg./
Farr Western Engineering

Nov. 21, 2019 CTHA Board Mtg./
Farr Western Engineering

December 2019—no CTHA Board Mtg.

KEY LINKS

www.facebook.com/pages/California-Trail-Center-Foundation/157116030992463

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

www.emigranttrailswest.org

www.octa-trails.org

www.appl.org

[www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko_field_office/
blm_programs/blm_special_areas/](http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/elko_field_office/blm_programs/blm_special_areas/)

TRAIL CENTER ACTIVITIES

Oct. 19, 2019 - 10:00 - 11:00 am

Other Ways West: Alternate Pioneer Routes to California.

Learn about the alternate ways that the Pioneers traveled to California.

Oct. 26, 2019 - 10:00 - 11:00 am

Honey, Mud & Maggots: Medical Practices of the California Trail.

Come and learn about the dangerous medical practices of the mid-19th century, from leeches and bone saws to mercury and arsenic. Warning: This program contains content not suitable for those with weak stomachs. Viewer discretion is advised. Ages 16 and up.

Oct. 27, 2019 - 2:00 - 3:00 pm

What's for Dinner? Mammoth!

Learn about the Atlatl and Prehistoric Hunting techniques. Join BLM Elko District Archaeologist Stephanie Jeffries as she presents an overview of the history of the atlatl, followed by an interactive live demonstration.

Dec. 7, 2019 - 10:00 - 3:00 pm

Pioneer Christmas:

Join California Trail Center Staff and volunteers as they provide Christmas craft activities for children.

<<<<<< >>>>>>

Contact Ranger Greg Feathers at gfeathers@blm.gov or 775-738-1849 for more information.

*Plan to attend California Trail Days
June 13-14, 2020!*



OCTA Convention 2019 – Santa Fe New Mexico



September was the perfect time for what was a wonderful OCTA convention hosted by the Southern Trails Chapter of OCTA. Field trips highlighted Spanish, Mexican and New Mexican history in this region and provided glimpses of the Santa Fe Trail and El Camino Real. The Hotel Santa Fe was a great setting for the convention with its adobe and viga architecture. World famous New Mexican cuisine highlighted several of the meals; the Awards Dinner featured native American cuisine.

Although there were many highlights to the Convention, one that really stood out for me was the morning we spent at the

Ranch de las Golendrinas. It was a site in the Rio Grande Valley that is home to many historic buildings – some dating back to the 1700's. In each, rooms were furnished as they would have been three hundred years ago – complete with candlelabras made of crossed pieces of wood with places for candles to sit. Crafts and shops from the period were demonstrated. The photo, accompanying this article, shows a woman spinning with a primitive version of the spinning wheel called a “malteca”. Others included the New Mexican “horno” oven for baking bread, as well as an operating blacksmith shop, carpenter’s shop and an operating flour mill.

I did not have the opportunity to visit Fort Union but I understand that it was a wonderful tour that told of the activities of General Steven Kearney in New Mexico and also shared information about the Mormon Battalion and the short-lived Civil War battles in New Mexico.

It was a great experience and it was wonderful to be reconnected with New Mexico where I graduated.

- Helen Hankins

<h1>CTHA Board of Directors</h1>		
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Bailey Billington-Benson		Contributors:
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Duane Jones	Paul Dinwiddie	Frank Tortorich
Kevin Lee	Grafton Miller	John Winner



CALIFORNIA TRAIL

HERITAGE ALLIANCE



On The Trail – The President’s Message -

It is the time of year that the emigrants of the mid-nineteenth century, who were part of the largest voluntary migration in U.S. history, were crossing or had already crossed the Sierra Nevada to reach their destination in Alta California. It is time for us at the California Trail Heritage Alliance to reflect on our summer’s work and on the opportunities ahead of us.

Welcome to New Board Members - It is my pleasure to welcome our two newest board members – Lisa Dinwiddie and Chuck Briggs. Lisa, a nurse by profession, brings enthusiasm and a knowledge of local goings on and people. Chuck is a retired history teacher who volunteers at the Trail Center. Both have an interest in helping further the availability and knowledge about the Western Emigrant Trails Collection at Great Basin College.

Western Emigrant Trails Collection – Great Basin College has moved the collection to the first floor of the college library. It is now housed adjacent to other special collections. The College has made some progress in getting all of the volumes entered into the UNR system. Duane Jones is working on setting up a meeting with GBC, BLM, our two new board members, and other OCTA representatives in late October.

Elko OCTA 2020 Convention

Work on the OCTA 2020 Convention is progressing at a great pace. A “dry run” bus tour was conducted in late September. Coach USA provided a bus and driver at their cost. This enabled us to determine drive times between various points on three of our planned bus tours. We also anticipate feedback from Nevada Gold Mines by the end of October with respect to tours on their properties at Long Canyon and Gravelly Ford during the 2020 Convention. A “landing page” has been submitted to OCTA HQ for placement on their website. Next steps include work on activity stations at ECVA and on the sponsorship package.

37th OCTA National Convention
September 18-24, 2020

*Through the Lens of History -
Preserving the Past—Focusing on the Future
Elko Nevada*





On The Trail – The President’s Message –(cont.)

Interpretation at Hot Hole Wayside – Kevin Lee, Duane Jones, and Jordan Thomas are working with Carole Wendler, Chief of Interpretation at the National Park Service Intermountain Region, and Long Distance Trail Office on development of a wayside exhibit for the Hot Hole. Much of the leg work will be done by Jordan Thomas who will research the history of the hot hole and seek photos, maps or other graphics that might be used in the wayside. Jordan’s work will also involve research of diaries. Our goal is to have the wayside completed prior to the OCTA Convention in 2020 in Elko NV. Duane Jones is actively working on acquiring grant funds to pay for this wayside.

OCTA 2019 Convention in Santa Fe, NM Helen Hankins and Duane Jones attended the 2019 OCTA Convention in Santa Fe NM. It was an outstanding event with interesting tours, speakers and cuisine. See the article elsewhere in this newsletter. We learned more about hosting a convention that will help us improve our convention activities.

MET Mapping - The first 2019 MET Mapping excursion occurred in late September. The trip was scheduled at this time due to personal schedules earlier in the summer. Kevin Lee spent considerable time preparing for the trip through review of maps, journals and diaries, and completing his own reconnaissance trips to the Ruby Valley. When the “team” arrived in late September there were about ten people working in two groups to investigate potential sites identified by Kevin’s earlier work. With the professional and very able assistance of archaeologist Tim Murphy, we identified, measured, photographed, described and documented. Based on the large number of square cut nails, washers, and bolts, Tim conjectured that were clearly following a wagon trail. More work may occur yet this fall in the same area.

Bike Path from Trail Center to Elko - William (Bill) Story, with NDOT, told Helen Hankins in an email in early September, that CTHA could expect a response to our May letter to the NDOT Assistant Director for Planning.

Long Canyon Mine Project - A meeting is scheduled for 1 p.m. on October 28 with the BLM to talk about the Long Canyon project. We are particularly interested in learning about the status of the project and receiving affirmation of BLM’s commitment to the mediation and mitigation for the indirect effects of this project on the Hastings Cutoff.

As always, our progress is a result of the work of many individuals on our board. We all appreciate the work we are able to do.

- Helen Hankins, President

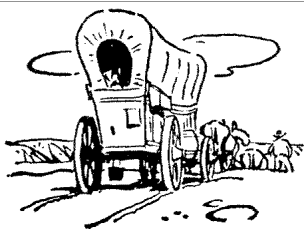


P.O. Box 1778
Elko, Nevada 89803

Phone: 775.340.2031

Email: ctcf1849@gmail.com

www.californiatrailheritagealliance.org



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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: _____

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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 Supporter membership levels & above.

Level	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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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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CALIFORNIA TRAIL HERITAGE ALLIANCE P.O. Box 1778, ELKO, NEVADA 89803

775.340.2031 ❖ ctcf1849@gmail.com ❖ www.californiatrailheritagealliance.org