

THE WAGON TONGUE

Newsletter of the California Trail Heritage Alliance



Spring 2024

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Just over 180 years ago, members of what came to be called the Bidwell-Bartleson party were beginning their preparations for the first attempt to take wagons overland to California. Four months after their May departure from Missouri they abandoned their wagons in northeastern NV (near Big Springs) and continued on to California. They arrived in November after a six-month journey! Today, the route they traveled has been determined to be eligible as a part of the National Historic Trails System (NHTS). We are hoping it will be included in a post-election public lands omnibus bill. Two other segments in northeastern Nevada, the Bishop Creek Cutoff and the Greenhorn Cutoff, were also determined to be eligible.

There are 21 Waysides along I-80 that interpret the story of the California Trail across northern Nevada. The closest ones to Elko are those located in the City Park just west of the Northeastern Nevada museum, and at South Fork State Park. Kevin Lee photographed these sites in 2021 and uploaded the information into Survey 123, the National Park Ser-



Helen Hankins, President

vice's data base for sign and other projects. In meetings on April 1, Helen Hankins discussed the need to replace the interpretive panels at some of these locations. The next step is for CTHA to prioritize which sites need attention first and to share this with the Oregon-California Trail Association. This will put these sites in the queue for future work.

The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) is gearing up for a competition to design a poster highlighting Native American life/activities along the California Trail. A member of CTHA has made a small donation to support this project. More details will be available in late spring.

Elko County received a Transportation Alternative Program grant from NDOT for a feasibility study of a multi-use path from Carlin to Lamoille along part of the California Trail. The grant will provide more than \$230,000 for the study.

Trail marking and mapping is planned in a big way this summer! Dick Waugh, and OCTA member,

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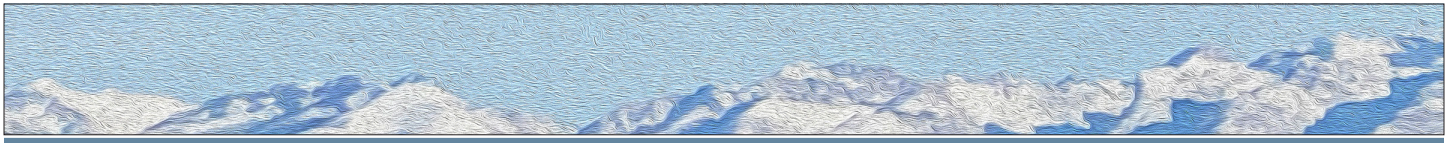
Trail Center Hours

Open 7 days a week from 8:30AM to 5PM

Upcoming events

Jun. 1-2	Trail Days at CTIC
Jun. 13	Board Meeting
Jul. 20	Preservation Workshop at OCTA Convention--Pendleton, OR
Jul. 21-25	OCTA National Convention--Pendleton, OR

*At this time, California Trail Heritage Alliance board meetings will begin at 5:30 p.m.



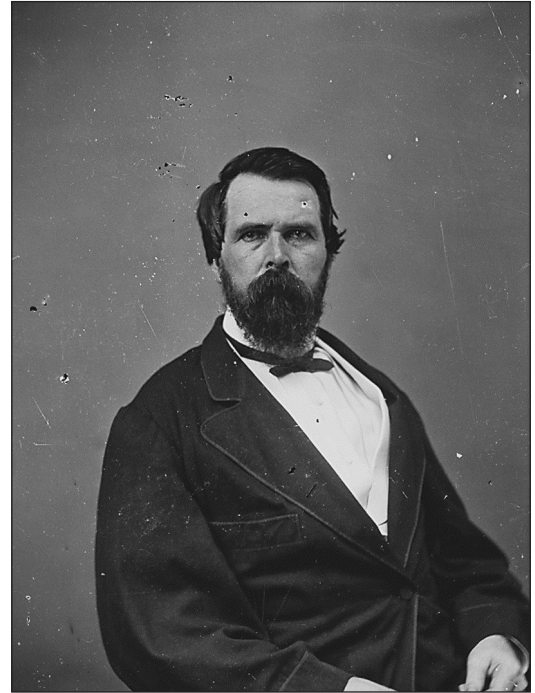
From the President, continued from page 1

is leading a two-day trail marking trip on the Greenhorn May 19 and 20. The 19th will be on the east end of the trail and the 20th will be on the west end. Check www.california-trailcenter.org for details. Mapping Emigrant Trails (MET) mapping on the Hastings Cutoff near the UT-NV line is planned for this summer but specific dates have not been set. CTHA is in the process of requesting a re-authorization for field work.

OCTA is working in partnership with the daughters of the American Revolution on a couple historic preservation related projects. Historic preservation is part of the missions of both OCTA and DAR. A field trip will be scheduled in May for show the DAR ladies some of the trail traces in the Elko vicinity. The DAR and CTHA and OCTA are also interested in placing a marker identifying the location of one of the historic trails or a junction between two of the trails. Work will be done on this in early June.

We hope to see you on the trail this summer. The national convention of the Oregon-California Trail Association will be held in Pendleton, OR this summer and is close enough to attend – there are many excellent tours and speakers planned. More details will be out soon.

Respectfully submitted, Helen Hankins

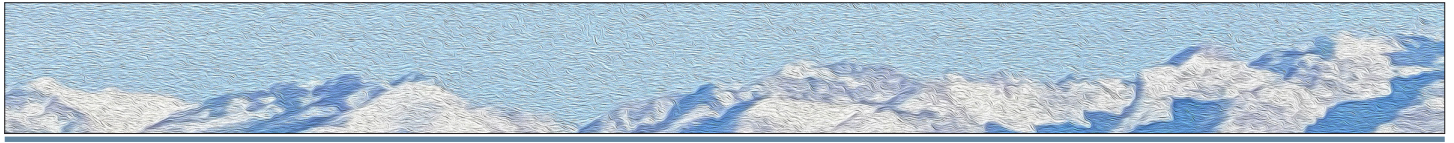


John Bidwell (1819-1900) was one of the first emigrants to travel the California Trail in 1841. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

FREE 2 DAY EVENT!

CALIFORNIA TRAIL DAYS

JUNE 1 - 2 2024



From the Trail Center

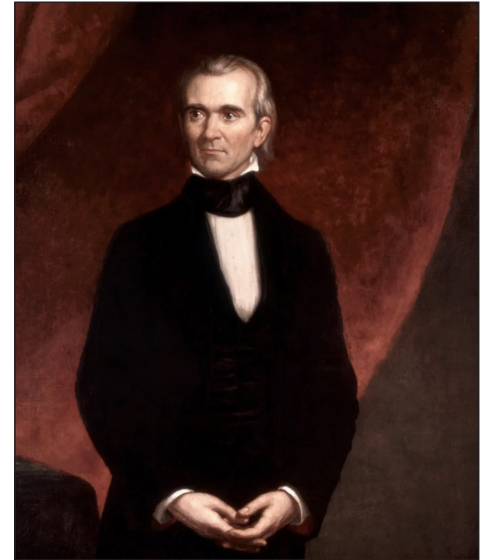
PAYING TRIBUTE TO TRAIL BLAZERS: THE BLACKSMITH

By Paul Brownlee

Blacksmithing stood as a cornerstone of the westward expansion of the United States, its fiery forge igniting the dreams of pioneers amidst the boundless expanse of the mid-19th century American frontier. As the nation's imagination was captivated by the allure of uncharted territories, settlers, adventurers, and dreamers alike embarked on a journey into the vast unknown.

The blacksmith profession

emerged as a beacon of progress in the heart of this unfolding saga. Within the resounding ringing of the forge, skilled craftsmen breathed life into the raw elements of steel and iron, shaping them into the very tools that would carve civilization into the untamed wilderness. From wheels to hammers, plows to horseshoes, each creation was a testament to the determined spirit of those who dared to venture westward.



James K. Polk, 11th President of the United States, extended US territory during his presidency. Photo: The White House.gov



A Park Ranger interprets the role of the blacksmith for modern audiences at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City, OR. Photo: S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

The year 1848 marked a pivotal moment as whispers of gold in California spread like wildfire. Following President James K. Polk's historic State of the Union Address, a wave of hopeful prospectors and pioneers set forth on the treacherous journey westward, traversing rugged terrain and facing the harsh realities of unfamiliar climates and conditions. In dusty towns along the frontier, the blacksmith's shop emerged as a cornerstone of community and progress, its skilled artisans tirelessly forging the tools and equipment needed to conquer the untamed wilderness.

As settlers pushed ever further into the frontier, the demand for blacksmithing expertise soared. Covered wagons, the iconic symbol of westward expansion, slowly labored their way across vast prairies, up mountain slopes, and through rushing rivers. Their wheels fortified by the sturdy ironwork meticulously crafted by skilled hands. Horses and oxen, the lifeblood of transportation in the frontier, relied on shoes forged with precision by local blacksmiths to endure the rugged terrain.

Amidst the clamor of bustling boomtowns, blacksmiths emerged as more than mere metalworkers; they



From the Trail Center, continued from page 3

were architects of progress, shaping the destiny of a nation. Their expertise extended far beyond the confines of the forge, as they played a vital role in supporting the mining, logging, and agriculture industries that fueled the expansion of the West. Their knowledge of metallurgy and craftsmanship proved invaluable, ensuring the survival and success of the westward expansion.

Even as the Transcontinental Railroad rendered the covered wagon obsolete, the legacy of the blacksmith endured as a testament to American resilience and determination. Their contributions had

paved the way for progress, leaving an enduring mark on the landscape of the American West and the journals of history.

Inspired by this rich legacy, the California Trail Center embarked on a journey of its own in early 2022, seeking to pay tribute to the profession that helped forge the nation. Through meticulous research and collaboration with the BLM Nevada State Office, plans were set in motion to establish a blacksmith shop within the center's grounds.

By late 2023, the vision began to take shape as a building was installed to house the workshop.

Though work remains to be done, the project is progressing steadily. In the coming fiscal year, the Trail Center aims to secure funding for essential upgrades, including electricity for ventilation and safety needs, paving the way for the shop's opening to the public.

Once complete, the blacksmith shop will serve as a living testament to the spirit of innovation and resilience that defined the American frontier. Through demonstrations and educational programs, visitors will have the opportunity to experience firsthand the artistry and craftsmanship that helped shape

the destiny of our nation. The legacy of the blacksmith lives on, a timeless symbol of American ingenuity and determination.

“Once complete, the blacksmith shop will serve as a living testament to the spirit of innovation and resilience that defined the American Frontier.”



Interpretive image of emigrants approaching the Chimney Rock landmark on the Oregon/California Trail. Image: “Enduring Landmarks on the Oregon Trail,” *The Archway*



Recipes from the Trail

BREAD MADE OF WOOD

An earlier issue of the “Wagon Tongue” featured a recipe from a book published in 1849 entitled, *The Farmers and Emigrants Complete Guide or a Handbook*. Recipes for biscuits, pie crusts, cakes, meat pies, and other kinds of bread abound, but one recipe in particular tells a common story of what emigrants faced on the trail: the bread made of wood. In “times of great scarcity,” one might resort to eating wood to survive. The handbooks states:

In times of great scarcity, and where famine threatens, it is well to know how to prepare a nutritious substance, which may go under the name of bread, from the beech and other woods destitute of turpentine.

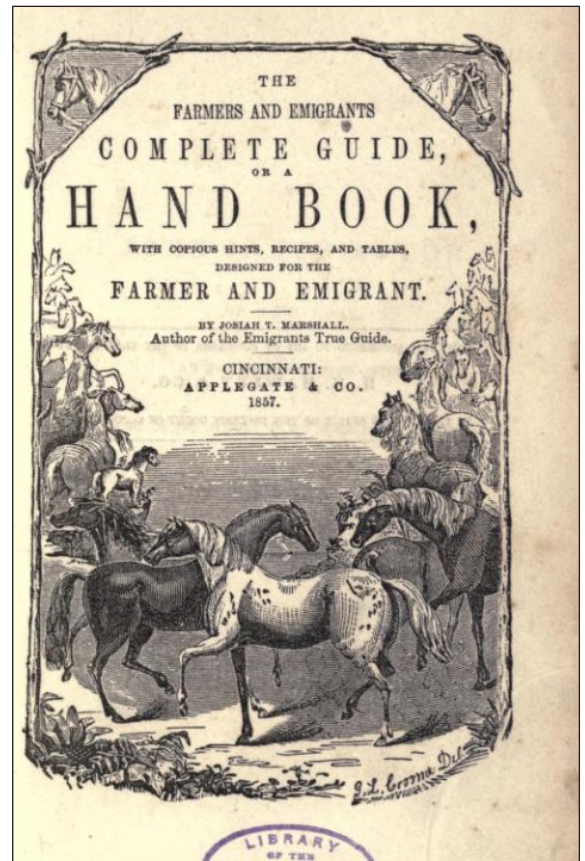
Take green wood, chop it into very small chips; or make it into shavings, which is better. Boil these three or four times, stirring them very hard during boiling. Dry them and then reduce them to powder if possible; if not, as fine as you can. Bake this powder in the oven three or four times, and then grind it as you would corn. Wood thus prepared acquires the smell and taste of corn-flour. It will not ferment without the addition of leaven. The leaven prepared for corn-flour is the best to use with it.

It will form a spongy bread, and when much baked with a hard crust, is by no means unpalatable.

This kind of flour boiled in water and left to stand, forms a thick, tough, trembling jelly, which is very nutritious, and in times of great scarcity in frontier countries, may be resorted to to preserve life, with perfect confidence. (128-129)



Modern interpretation of cooking a meal along the trail. Photo: National Parks Service, “Traveling the Emigrant Trails”

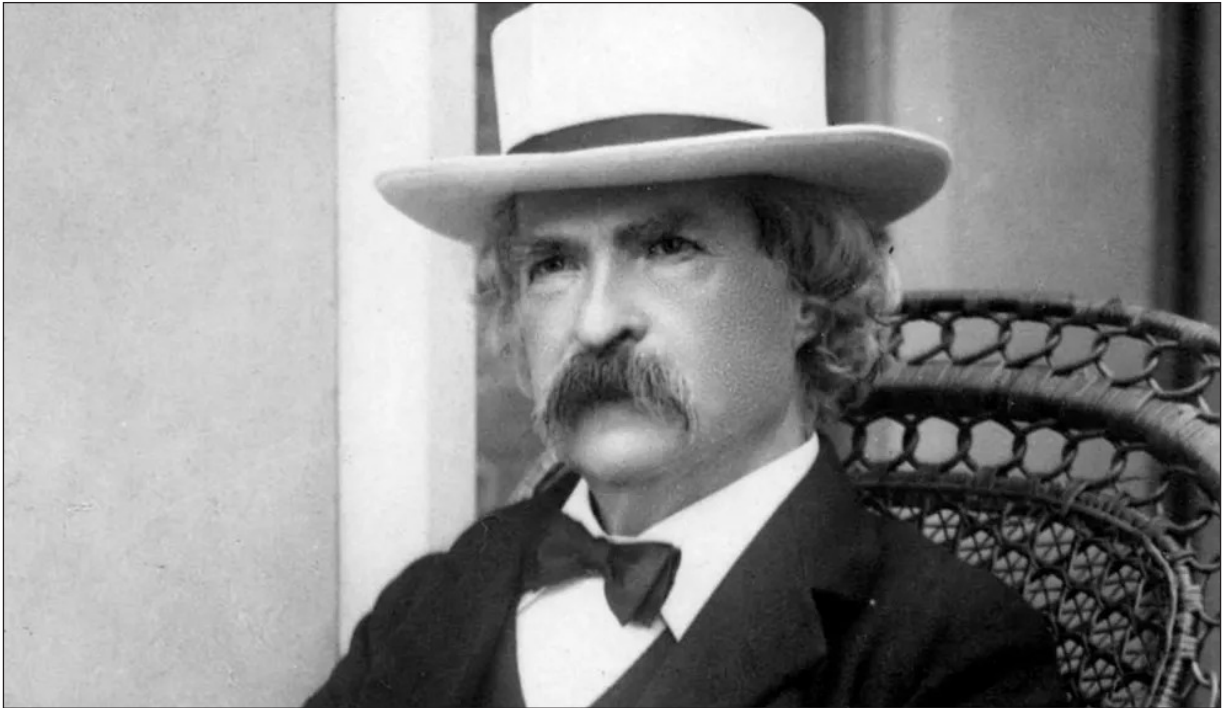


Title page of *The Farmers and Emigrants Handbook*



Nevada Trails

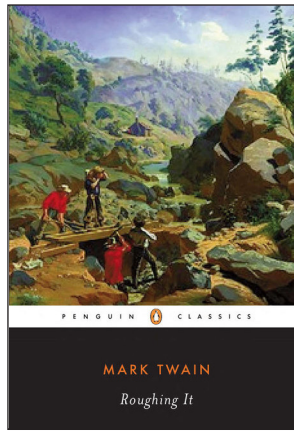
MARK TWAIN, SAGEBRUSH, AND COYOTES ON THE OVERLAND TRAIL



By Steven Hrdlicka

Mark Twain. Photo: *Le Nouveau Cenacle*

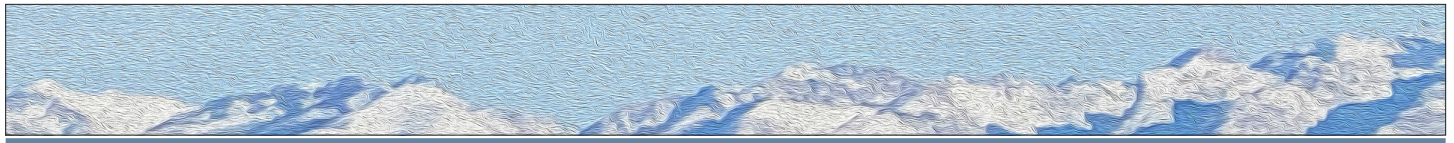
Readers of the “Wagon Tongue” may know that Mark Twain traveled the Overland Trail through Nevada. Although not an emigrant by any stretch, Twain was certainly an explorer. He seized the opportunity to head out west when his brother Orion was named Secretary of Nevada Territory. In his book *Roughing It* (1872) Twain details the gold frenzy that struck so many people of this country—including himself. He began the journey from his home state of Missouri, ended up spending some time in a cou-



Roughing It. This is the edition I recommend, edited by Hamlin Hill.

ple of mines here in Nevada, and lived in Virginia City for some time, editing the *Territorial Enterprise* newspaper (the gold rush thing didn’t really work out for him). Eventually he journeyed on out to California, and even went so far west as Hawaii. Certainly a wild book and a brilliant example of travel writing, Twain’s picaresque novel contains many of the descriptions of the trail he had jotted down while traveling for long hours through the Nevada desert.

I must say that having lived in the sagebrush and dust desert of Nevada nearly my whole life, along with the coyotes, I can attest that Twain’s descriptions are very accurate. And humorous too of course! It makes me wonder whether the emigrants had any sense of humor. It seems to me that without this crucial aid, traveling through long stretches of the Nevada desert would be ab-



Nevada Trails, continued from page 6

solutely torturous. Well, either way, those emigrants were very tough folk—especially since they didn’t ride in coaches like Twain did. In fact, many walked alongside the wagons, as Twain observes in Chapter XII of *Roughing It*:

Just beyond the breakfast-station we overtook a Mormon emigrant train of thirty-three wagons; and tramping wearily along and driving their herd of loose cows, were dozens of coarse-clad and sad-looking men, women and children, who had walked as they were walking now, day after day for eight lingering weeks, and in that time had compassed the distance our stage had come in eight days and three hours—seven hundred and ninety-eight miles! They were dusty and uncombed, hatless, bonnetless and ragged, and they did look so tired!

Twain’s description of sagebrush in Chapter III of *Roughing It* contains a particularly striking description of the nature of our iconic “Sagebrush State:”

I do not remember where we first came across “sage-brush,” but as I have been speaking of it I may as well describe it.

This is easily done, for if the reader can imagine a gnarled and venerable live oak-tree reduced to a little shrub two feet-high, with its rough bark, its foliage, its twisted boughs, all complete, he can picture

the “sage-brush” exactly. Often, on lazy afternoons in the mountains, I have lain on the ground with my face under a sage-bush, and entertained myself with fancying that the gnats among its foliage were liliputian birds, and that the ants marching and countermarching about its base were liliputian flocks and herds, and myself some vast loafer from Brobdig-



All illustrations from *Roughing It* are from the 1872 edition (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co.)

nag waiting to catch a little citizen and eat him.

It is an imposing monarch of the forest in exquisite miniature, is the “sage-brush.” Its foliage is a grayish green, and gives that tint to desert and mountain. It smells like our domestic sage, and “sage-tea” made from it taste like the sage-tea which

all boys are so well acquainted with. The sage-brush is a singularly hardy plant, and grows right in the midst of deep sand, and among barren rocks, where nothing else in the vegetable world would try to grow, except “bunch-grass.”—[“Bunch-grass” grows on the bleak mountain-sides of Nevada and neighboring territories, and offers excellent feed for stock, even in the dead of winter; wherever the snow is blown aside and exposes it; notwithstanding its unpromising home, bunch-grass is a better and more nutritious diet for cattle and horses than almost any other hay or grass that is known—so stock-men say.]—The sage-bushes grow from three to six or seven feet apart, all over the mountains and deserts of the Far West, clear to the borders of California. There is not a tree of any kind in the deserts, for hundreds of miles—there is no vegetation at all in a regular desert, except the sage-brush and its cousin the “greasewood,” which is so much like the sage-brush that the difference amounts to little. Camp-fires and hot suppers

in the deserts would be impossible but for the friendly sage-brush. Its trunk is as large as a boy’s wrist (and from that up to a man’s arm), and its crooked branches are half as large as its trunk—all good, sound, hard wood, very like oak.

When a party camps, the first thing to be done is to cut sage-brush;

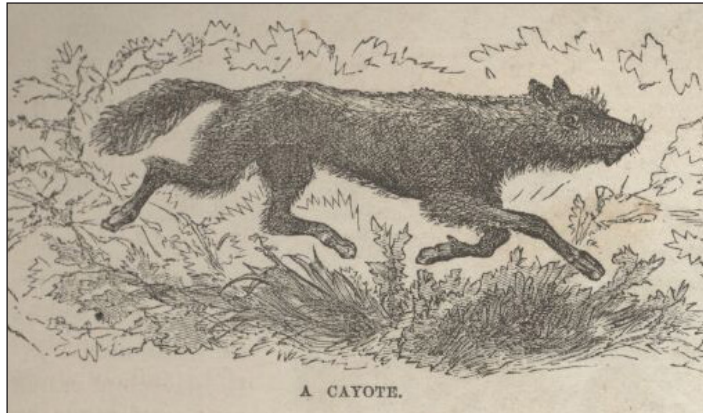


Nevada Trails, continued from page 7

and in a few minutes there is an opulent pile of it ready for use. A hole a foot wide, two feet deep, and two feet long, is dug, and sage-brush chopped up and burned in it till it is full to the brim with glowing coals. Then the cooking begins, and there is no smoke, and consequently no swearing. Such a fire will keep all night, with very little replenishing; and it makes a very sociable camp-fire, and one around which the most impossible reminiscences sound plausible, instructive, and profoundly entertaining.

Twain's obvious literary bent comes through in the passage above as he alludes to the famous satire/mock travel book *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) written by Jonathan Swift, and the lands of the Lilliputians and Brobdingnag. It's really just like that growing up in Nevada; you'll be sitting in a pile of dirt surrounded by sagebrush but imagining you are somewhere far away—if not dreaming about stumbling upon the coveted El Dorado, then dreaming that gnats are Lilliputian birds and fancying oneself a giant! I think it is natural to lapse into fantasy when facing the brutality of Nevada; it's like a coping mechanism.

Another memorable description from *Roughing It* is of the coyote, which Twain spells "cayote." If you read between the lines here, it might lead you to believe that Twain was

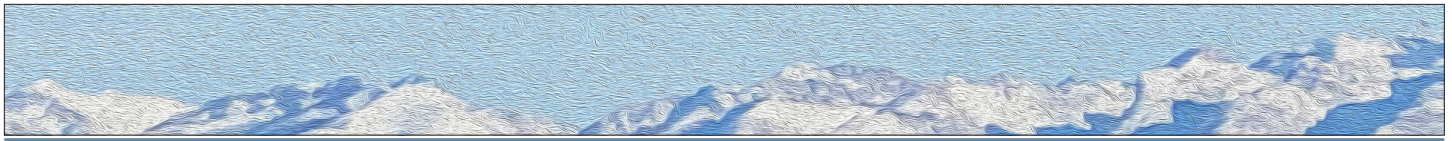


"A cayote"

talking about himself, or other luckless folks on the trail, as he says, "The cayote is a living, breathing allegory of Want. He is always hungry." The personified description continues:

He is always poor, out of luck and friendless. The meanest creatures despise him, and even the fleas would desert him for a velocipede. He is so spiritless and cowardly that even while his exposed teeth are pretending a threat, the rest of his face is apologizing for it. And he is so homely!—so scrawny, and ribby, and coarse-haired, and pitiful. When he sees you he lifts his lip and lets a flash of his teeth out, and then turns a little out of the course he was pursuing, depresses his head a bit, and strikes a long, soft-footed trot through the sage-brush, glancing over his shoulder at you, from time to time, till he is about out of easy pistol range, and then he stops and takes a deliberate survey of you; he will trot fifty yards and stop again—another fifty and stop again; and finally the gray of his gliding body blends with the gray of

the sage-brush, and he disappears. All this is when you make no demonstration against him; but if you do, he develops a livelier interest in his journey, and instantly electrifies his heels and puts such a deal of real estate between himself and your weapon, that by the time you have raised the hammer you see that you need a minie rifle, and by the time you have got him in line you need a rifled cannon, and by the time you have "drawn a bead" on him you see well enough that nothing but an unusually long-winded streak of lightning could reach him where he is now. But if you start a swift-footed dog after him, you will enjoy it ever so much—especially if it is a dog that has a good opinion of himself, and has been brought up to think he knows something about speed. The cayote will go swinging gently off on that deceitful trot of his, and every little while he will smile a fraudulent smile over his shoulder that will fill that dog entirely full of encouragement and worldly ambition, and make him lay his head still lower to the ground, and stretch his neck further to the front, and pant more fiercely, and stick his tail out straighter behind, and move his furious legs with a yet wilder frenzy, and leave a broader and broader, and higher and denser cloud of desert sand smoking behind, and marking his long wake across the level plain! And all this time the dog is only a



Nevada Trails, continued from page 8

short twenty feet behind the coyote, and to save the soul of him he cannot understand why it is that he cannot get perceptibly closer; and he begins to get aggravated, and it makes him madder and madder to see how gently the coyote glides along and never pants or sweats or ceases to smile; and he grows still more and more incensed to see how shamefully he has been taken in by an entire stranger, and what an ignoble swindle that long, calm,

soft-footed trot is; and next he notices that he is getting fagged, and that the coyote actually has to slacken speed a little to keep from running away from him—and then that town-dog is mad in earnest, and he begins to strain and weep and swear, and paw the sand higher than ever, and reach for the coyote with concentrated and desperate energy. This “spurt” finds him six feet behind the his friends. And then, in the instant

swim. He stops, and looks all around; climbs the nearest sand-mound, and gazes into the distance; shakes his head reflectively, and then, without a word, he turns and jogs along back to his train, and takes up a humble position under the hindmost wagon, and feels unspeakably mean, and looks ashamed, and hangs his tail at half-mast for a week. And for as much as a year after that, whenever there is a great hue and cry after a coyote, that dog will merely glance in that direction without emotion, and apparently observe to himself, “I believe I do not wish any of the pie.”

The coyote lives chiefly in the most desolate and forbidding desert, along with the lizard, the jack-ass-rabbit and the raven, and gets an uncertain and precarious living, and earns it. He seems to subsist almost wholly on the carcasses of oxen, mules and horses that have dropped out of emigrant trains and died, and upon windfalls of carrion, and occasional legacies of offal bequeathed to him by white men who have been opulent enough to have something better to butcher than condemned army bacon.

Subsisting on the carcasses of oxen, mules and horses—Wow! Twain’s image of coyotes living off of animals from stagecoaches and emigrant wagons is certainly disturbing, but it’s accurate too. They say that death was a familiar companion for the emigrants, and some historians estimate that there is a grave for every 500 feet on the trail. It makes his head

that a wild new hope is lighting up his face, the coyote turns and smiles blandly upon him once more, and with a something about it which seems to say: “Well, I shall have to tear myself away from you, bub—business is business, and it will not do for me to be fooling along this way all day”—and forthwith there is a rushing sound, and the sudden splitting of a long crack through the atmosphere, and behold that dog is solitary and alone in the midst of a vast solitude!



An image of the May 25, 1885 issue of the Territorial Enterprise. Image: Nevada Library Cooperative



Humboldt-Rubies Multi-Use Trail

TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY ADVANCES WITH TAP GRANT AMID BUDGET CHALLENGES

By R. Dean Straight and Leslie Creel

Elko County, Nevada - Progress towards the realization of the Humboldt-Rubies Trail took a significant leap forward with the recent acquisition of a \$237,000 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant. This funding boost promises to enrich connectivity and outdoor recreational offerings in the area. However, amidst these advancements, financial obstacles loom large, threatening to hinder the project's momentum.

The TAP grant, dedicated to financing the feasibility study for the primary trail, generated enthusiasm among project stakeholders. Curtis Moore, Megan Cox, and Leslie convened with the Nevada Department

of Transportation (NDOT) on March 26th, marking a pivotal moment in navigating the grant application process and signaling a collective dedication to propelling the project forward.

Leslie's proactive approach was evident in the pursuit of a grant application for technical support from the NPS-RTCA, a strategic move aimed at fortifying backing and expertise for the initiative. Subsequently, a Zoom meeting on April 1st, attended by Curtis Moore, Leslie Creel, and Kevin Lee of the California Trail Heritage Alliance, showcased a concerted effort to address committee inquiries and ensure project clarity.

Nevertheless, as progress ensued, financial challenges surfaced. The opening of the "Call for Projects" for the Federal Land Access Program grant on April 15th shifted focus towards navigating fiscal constraints. NDOT, Elko County, City of Elko, Elko Trail System Initiative and CTHA are working collaboratively to submit a comprehensive application with segment prioritization that highlights each section's merits. The FLAP application submission will be on the city council's agenda on May 28th and the county commissioner's agenda on June 5th. Leslie's outreach endeavors highlighted a commitment to community engagement, with updates provided

CTHA Board of Directors

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Walt Goddard	Gratton Miller	Curtis Calder
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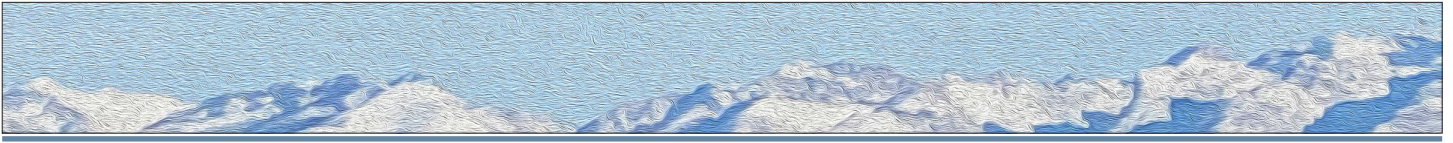
Contributors:

Helen Hankins	Paul Brownlee	Leslie Creel
	R. Dean Straight	Steven Hrdlicka

Please send all news items and articles to HelenHankins@gmail.com The deadline for the summer issue submissions is July 1

California Trail Center partnerships on the web

- 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/



Humboldt-Rubies Trail, continued from pg.10

to the Elko Desert Rotary Club and Elko Velo, emphasizing the proj-

ect’s significance and garnering grassroots support. To boost their visibility in the community and inform people of trail developments, ETSI partnered a table with the Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group at the Volunteer Fair on May 9th.

Simultaneously, Elko County’s vision to develop a recreation strategy came into focus. With existing frameworks in place, including a Water Resource Management Plan and Sage Grouse Management Plan, Curtis advocated for a dedicated Recreation Plan, acknowledging its pivotal role in fostering comprehensive community development.

As the Humboldt-Rubies Trail edges closer to fruition, stakeholders re-

main undaunted by financial obstacles. With collective determination and strategic maneuvering, Elko County navigates the complexities of funding challenges, unwavering in its commitment to unlocking the region’s untapped potential for outdoor recreation and connectivity.

There are two upcoming meetings that feature opportunities for public e-comment. To submit an e-comment for consideration during the County Commission meeting, please do so before June 5 at: https://cms2.revize.com/revize/elkocountynevada/meetings/board_of_commissioners/index.php

To submit a comment for consideration by the City Council, please send an email to cityclerk@elkocitynv.gov by the morning of Tuesday, May 28. All comments will be read during the meetings, and can be used to support future grant applications.



Above: A multi-use path would alleviate safety concerns for pedestrians, cyclists, and others travelling SR 227. **Below:** The proposed path features stunning views of Carlin Canyon. Photos: Leslie Creel



A cyclist riding up the Summit on SR 227. Photo: Leslie Creel



CTHA 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 Supporter membership levels and above.

Level	Individual	Family	Supporter	Partner	Lifetime
Special Events				1	2
Cost	\$25	\$50	\$75	\$100	\$250

*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 \$ _____
 Card No. _____ Exp. ____ / ____
 Date _____ Signature _____

Make Check Payable to:
 California Trail Heritage Alliance, P.O. Box 1778, Elko NV 89803



Want to donate?

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 donations greater than \$250, the donor can choose to be publically recognized on the donor wall at the California Trail Interpretive Center.

Recognition levels are as follows:

California Trail Interpretive Center Donor Wall recognition levels

Level name	Donation amount
Pioneer	\$250 to \$499.99
Trail Blazer	\$500 to \$2,499.99
Wagon Master	\$2,500 to \$4,999.99
Empire Building	\$5,000 or greater

Contact information

California Trail Heritage Alliance
 P.O. Box 1778, Elko, Nevada 89803
 775.340.2031 | ctc1849@gmail.com | www.ctha-nv.org

