



# ENFIA Interpreter

May 5, 2024 Vol. 16

## A Message from the President

By Stan Trevena

### Forest for the Trees

As we are about to open our 2024 season up at Carson Pass, I want to bring some attention to a group of people you may not even be aware of that are integral to the operations of ENFIA.

I was a volunteer docent before I was voted in as ENFIA's president. I worked my shifts every season like everyone else up at the station, but I discovered over the past few years that ENFIA reaches beyond just Carson Pass, and that many people are involved in the operations of the organization. There is no "season" for these volunteers and partners, many of whom are busy throughout the year.

As our name implies, Eldorado National Forest Interpretive Association encompasses the entire forest. ENFIA derives its funding from our memberships, donations, occasional grants, and from our retail sales. Funds generated by our retail operations offset most of our expenses. We do not receive funding from the Forest Service.

Here is a list of many of the other people and places you may not have encountered that contribute to the operations and success of our non-profit organization:

### Forest Service

On Highway 88 we work with the Amador Ranger Station. ENFIA operates under an agreement with the Forest Service. As Forest Service employees are only authorized to sell maps at their stations, ENFIA is key to offering the wide range of products

and information that best serves the visiting public. This agreement with ENFIA allows us to have retail operations in Forest Service stations within the Eldorado National Forest. Our retail operations are very similar to the gift shops you see at places like Big Trees State Park or Yosemite National Park.

Kristi Schroeder, Assistant Forest Recreation Officer, is who we work with at the Forest Service for all the locations within the Eldorado National Forest:

- Forest Service Supervisor's Office in Placerville (Kristi's office)
- Highway 50 Information & Interpretation Office at Placerville Ranger Station in Camino
- Amador Ranger District (Chris Sailor's office)
- Crystal Basin Information Station located between Ice House Reservoir and Union Valley Reservoir
- Georgetown Ranger District

Chris Sailor, Acting Recreation Officer at the Amador Station in Pioneer, is who we work with specifically for Carson Pass, the Silver Lake Cabin, and our retail operation at the Amador Ranger Station.

At each of these locations ENFIA coordinates with one or more Forest Service employees in support of retail

sales. They are able to process transactions using our Square point of sale system. There have been discussions about expanding ENFIA's reach into these areas beyond just retail, to have docents volunteering at some of these locations.

Unfortunately, our currently limited number of volunteers is just enough to fully staff Carson Pass during the open season. We hope to get our volunteer numbers up so we can explore some of these opportunities in the future.

We have the following people, not affiliated with the Forest Service, running the business of ENFIA (\*\* denotes new in the position):

### **ENFIA Board of Directors**

- Stan Trevena, President
- Ken Nieland, Vice President
- Barbara Simpson, Treasurer \*\*
- Edi Barrow, Secretary \*\*
- Bruce Odelberg, Member at Large

### **Retail Team**

- Lisa Irving-Peterson, Retail Lead (past board member)
- Kellie Trevena, Square operations, Retail Support \*\*
- Robyn Sandperl, Retail Support \*\*
- Becky Galloway, Retail Support \*\*

## **Media**

- Mark Sandperl, Social Media (Facebook and Instagram)
- Robyn Sandperl, ENFIA Newsletter

## **Carson Pass Solar**

- George Doty, retired Forest Service (designed and installed the original solar system at Carson Pass)

George has assisted with the redesign and rebuilding of the solar system that powers the Carson Pass Information Station. Chris Sailor coordinated Forest Service funding for some of the repairs and replacements related to the solar system after the damage of last year's record setting winter.

- California Alpine Club Foundation

ENFIA received a grant from the California Alpine Club Foundation to purchase a backup solar battery and two solar panels when the building solar system started to fail in 2022. This battery is what kept our station operating this past season when the station solar was inoperable due to damage. We received another grant from them last year to assist in the repairs of the solar system rebuild at Carson Pass. That project is now complete, and we will open this season with a fully functioning power system at Carson Pass.

## **Facilities**

- Mike Conroy (\*\*) and Mike Barrow (\*\*) are sharing in the role of Station Manager for Carson Pass

- Phil Hartvig is the Facilities Manager of the Silver Lake Cabin and Carson Pass Station (past board member)

## **Scheduling**

- We've recruited multiple times for a new Scheduling Manager. We've been unsuccessful in our search. This is a critical role for the operation of Carson Pass.

- We have just selected a new online scheduling service that we are deploying this season that has more automation and the ability for docents to manage their own schedule. It supports both Internet access and a mobile app.

- We have several of the people listed above that have volunteered to share in the support of this new system in lieu of a Scheduling Manager. \*\*

## **Webmaster**

- We are still without an assigned webmaster to maintain the ENFIA website (ENFIA.org). We have tried to recruit for this multiple times since last season. I've been maintaining the site at a minimal level in the interim. We are still looking for anyone who is interested in this position. Send me an

email at [president@enfia.org](mailto:president@enfia.org) if you want more information.

This list should give you some idea of just how many people, beyond the docents, are involved with the operations of ENFIA across the Eldorado National Forest. If I had listed individuals at each of the Forest Service locations that support our retail operations, this would have been an even longer article.

I know from my own experience that the full scope of ENFIA is not always apparent from the perspective of a volunteer at Carson Pass. Each year about now there is a call for volunteers to staff the Carson Pass station, on or around Memorial Day the station opens, and when you drive up to the pass for your first shift, you open the door, and everything is the same as it was the last time you were there the prior season.

I hope this article has pulled back the curtain and shown everyone what goes on behind the scenes throughout the forest in support of ENFIA. It takes a lot of trees to make a forest, and it takes a lot of people to successfully run and operate our organization. I want to thank everyone of you for your contributions to the success of ENFIA.

There are a lot of changes coming this season. Several positions that were

held by a single person in the past are now shared between multiple people. We are rolling out new systems and policies this season. We are asking for your patience as we will get things off the ground in the coming weeks. Trust me, everyone above has been putting in extra time preparing for all these changes this year.

## **Opening of the 2024 Season**

With a winter storm heading for the Sierras as we get ready to send out this newsletter, we have made the decision to delay the opening of the Station by two weeks. The weather forecast for the next two weeks has nighttime temperatures at or below freezing, with historical data showing this trend continuing through to the end of May. The snow at the station is basically ice at this point, and this storm will drop another 5” – 10” of new snow. Looking at the historical data for the last two weeks of the month, we will likely be in a cycle of snow melting during the day and refreezing each night through to the end of the month. The decision was made for the safety of the volunteers who will be preparing the station to open, and the conditions at the station when we open it up to the public. **We will be de-winterizing the station on June 1st and opening the following Friday, June 7th .**

We still need some volunteers to help with the de-winterizing of the station. We start at 9:00am and usually finish by 2:00pm (depending on the number of volunteers that we have). If you want to help, please drop an email to [stationmanager@enfia.org](mailto:stationmanager@enfia.org)

## **Docent Training – Launch of new Scheduling System**

As a reminder, the Docent Training is being held on May 11th from 10:00am- 1:00pm. We are holding this year's training at the Lake Tahoe Community College. A detailed email is being sent out to all docents with specific instructions for this event.

We have our new scheduling system ready to launch. We invite anyone attending the training to assist us with a final test of the system. At the end of the training session, we will have multiple ENFIA people that will be available to assist the attendees in getting online and scheduling some days. The best part is that the system has both a website (like our old Signup.com system) AND a mobile app for both IOS and Android. This final test will help us to discover any remaining issues before opening it up to everyone. I've been testing it for the past week and personally prefer the mobile app.

## **We will be opening the VSP Scheduling System up to everyone on Monday May 13 th .**

New this year, we will announce several days in the first week that we are open when new docents are welcomed to come up to the station and get on-site and hands-on training. We will be available all day for people coming up. You can stay as long as you want. This will be a “learn by doing” opportunity. The cabin will also be staffed for docents to drop by on the first Saturday. Specific information will go out in email soon.

## **In Closing**

All of us are excited to get this season underway. We've got a great snowpack this year and shouldn't have the issues that we had last year after opening. And best of all, the conditions should be perfect for an amazing wildflower bloom this season. I hope you are as excited as I am to get this season started.

I'll see you up at the station!

Stan Trevena, President

## A Red Shaft in the Forest

by Lester Lubetkin

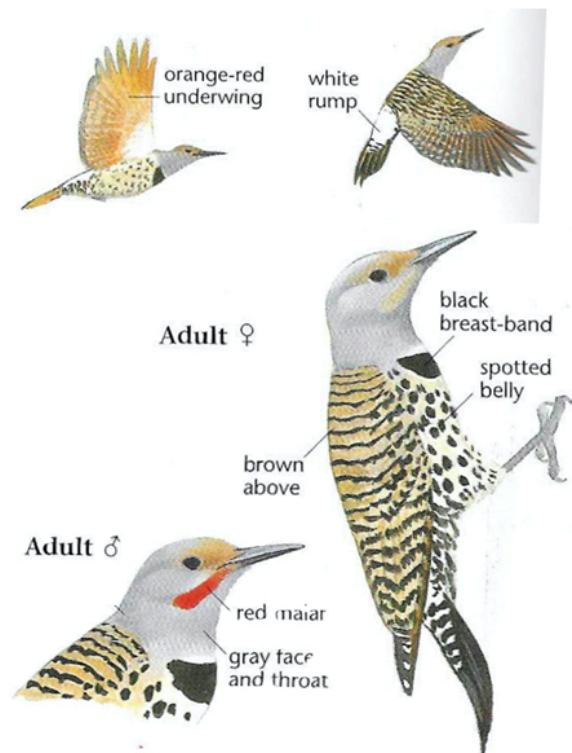
As seems to happen often enough, I was standing in an open forest recently when my eye was attracted to a brilliant flashing of orange-red swiftly moving through the trees. And then I registered the bright white rump patch of a fairly large fleeing bird. Unmistakably, it was a Flicker. We used to call it a “Red-Shafted” Flicker because of that distinctive coloring of the underside of the wings. Ornithologists had split the Red-Shafted Flicker of the western US from the Yellow-Shafted Flicker found in the eastern US. But now we know that they are both the same species and are known simply as the Northern Flicker (although the Red-Shafted and Yellow Shafted are considered subspecies or *forms*).

These fairly large birds (12 inches or so long with a wing span of nearly 2 feet) are in the Woodpecker family, although you wouldn’t immediately know that since they do not share the distinctive black and white coloring of most woodpeckers. But they certainly have the long sharp beak and tend to walk up trees just like a woodpecker. Flickers are brownish birds with dark speckles or barring on their backs, with lighter colored, speckled chests, gray neck and chin and for the male, a distinctive red mustache. But as I

said at the beginning, the most distinctive is the reddish orange

colored underwings and the bright white rump.

Northern Flickers forage for much of their food on the ground, eating mainly ants, although they also partake in other insects as well as seeds and fruit. They can push their longbill into anthills and then use their nearly 3-inch long tongue to gather ants, eggs and larva. While they may eat bark-dwelling insects, it is reported that when you see a flicker pecking away on a tree, it is likely engaged in other pursuits.



Flickers are monogamous, mating for life. However, the two birds don’t spend the whole year together, but

rather both return to the same breeding area year after year. They announce their arrival with drumming and a loud “Kekeke” call along with head-bobbing displays. This is in late-March through April with nest building, egg-laying and chick-rearing extending into July.

Flickers commonly nest in holes drilled into trees. But they are weak excavators, so they commonly seek out dead or well-rotted trees. Both the male and female birds work at excavating the nest. Irene Wheelock in her 1904 book, “Birds of California” has a wonderful description of Flicker nest building:

*“... the male clings to the surface and marks with his bill a more or less regular circle in a series of dots, then begins excavating inside this area, using his bill, not with a sidewise twist, as do many of the woodpecker family, but striking downwards and prying off the chips as with a pickaxe. When his mate has rested and wishes to share in the labor, she calls from a nearby tree and he instantly quits his task. In a few moments, before one has realized how or whence she came, the female has taken his place and the chips are flying merrily. As a rule, the birds work only early in the morning and late in the afternoon, taking from 10 to 14 days to finish the excavation.”*

Northern Flickers are found across all of the Eldorado Forest, although they favor open forests and forest edges. They avoid snow-covered areas in the winter, since they find most of their food on the ground.

For those that participate in the Christmas Bird Count, you will be glad to hear that the Northern Flicker is one of the bird species with a significant positive population trend, which is good news!

If you would like to learn more about Northern Flickers, here are some great references:

**Birds of the Sierra Nevada**, by Beedy and Pandolfino, 2013

**The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America**, by Sibley, 2003

**Discovering Sierra Birds**, by Beedy and Granholm, 1985

**Birds of Northern California**, by Fix and Bezener, 2000

**A Guide to Bird Behavior**, Vol 1, by Stokes, 1979

Breeding Behavior Calendar, modified from Stokes, 1979

	Nest Building	Eggs	Nestling	Fledge
April				
May				
June				
July				

## Tragedy Spring and The Opening of the Gold Rush Trail

By Frank Tortorich  
Part 2

### TRAGEDY SPRING IN GOLD RUSH JOURNALS

Unless otherwise stated, the following journal entries were selected from a USFS report with 212 trail journals, diaries, letters, recollections, and other primary sources compiled and edited by historian Dr. Kenneth N. Owens.<sup>1</sup>

Several emigrant journalists on the Carson River Route took the time to write about Tragedy Spring in detail.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Mormon-Carson Emigrant Trail Archaeological and Historical Investigation, Volume II: History, Appendix A, Mormon-Carson Emigrant Trail Documents. Dr. Kenneth N. Owens was the principal historian of this USFS report conducted in 1990 for the Eldorado and Toiyabe National Forests. The information that we have indicates that a copy of this report may be located at CCIC, CSUS / Dept. of Anthropology, Turlock, CA 95382. Further reading: Kenneth N. Owens, *Gold Rush Saints, California Mormons and The Great Gold Rush For Riches* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005). Originally published by Arthur H. Clark, 2004.

Others merely mentioned something about it in passing. Some emigrants went past and never mentioned seeing the grave.<sup>2</sup>

Pritchard, James A. (p. 68):

*Wednesday Aug. 8<sup>th</sup> (1849) ...  
At 11 am we haulted for a few moments at a cold springs, this water is as cold as melted Ice.  
At this spring last fall 3 Mormon Pioneers in looking out this road were killed by the Indians. Their Graves were nearby the spring. ...*

Tiffany, P.C. (p. 90):

*Monday, August 20 (1849) ... A few miles from Rock Valley, on the side of a mountain of great height<sup>3</sup> and nearly at its top, breaks out a bold clear spring of water, so cold as to make the teeth ache. A few rods below the spring is a large grave with a rough stone wall, and on a large pine tree that stands near its foot, is the following incription : "In memory of Daniel Browett, Ezra H. Allen, and Henderson Cox, supposed to have been murdered by the Indians on the night of June 27, 1848." This spring, from this circumstance has received the name "Tragedy Spring."*

Reid, Bernard (p. 125):

---

<sup>2</sup> Each journal entry includes the page number from USFS Report

<sup>3</sup> Tragedy Spring is just a few feet above 8000 feet elevation.



*Monday (Wednesday),  
September 19 (1849) Started at  
daybreak, 3 or 4 miles came to  
a small lake (Mud Lake) in the  
woods with a steep cavernous  
bluff on one side. Stop here to  
get our breakfast. 4 miles  
further Tragedy Spring beside  
the trail. Here is a kind of cairn  
or large tomb walled up and  
roofed with stone. On a tree  
nearby was this inscription - -  
"To the memory of Danial  
Brouett, Ezra H. Allen and  
Henderson Cox, who are  
supp[os]ed to have been  
murdered and buried by the  
indians on the night of 27<sup>th</sup> of  
June 1848." These men were  
mormons and were at that time  
of their massacre engaged in  
exploring and laying out the  
road on which we are now  
travelling.*

Thomason, Jackson (p. 139):  
*Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct. 1849.  
...About two miles from the  
Valley we came to tragedy  
Springs.<sup>4</sup> Those Springs took  
their name from the three men  
being murdered there  
suppose[ly] by the Indians in  
June [of] 1848 & burried by  
them....*

Pratt, Louisa Barnes (p. 161):.  
*July 8<sup>th</sup> (1850) ...Today we  
passed "Tragedy Springs,"  
where three men, on their way*

*to Salt Lake, were murdered by  
Indians for their horses and  
clothes. They were found and  
buried by their comrades who  
in a few days overtook them. A  
bag of gold was found on the  
neck of one, which the Indians,  
in their fright, had not  
discovered.*

Shepherd, Dr. J.S. (p. 239):  
*(August) 12<sup>th</sup> (1850). After a  
walk of five miles this morning,  
we found a grogshop on the  
road-side, kept by two  
brothers... They started on the  
21<sup>st</sup> of March, had beat us a  
month, and had returned  
fifty-five miles three weeks ago,  
and since been trading where  
they now are, in provisions of  
all kinds, and liquors. They are  
out of most kinds of eatables,  
but had plenty of drink.<sup>5</sup> They  
are located within a half mile of  
Tragedy Springs, (so called  
from three emigrants being shot  
by the Indians, last year, whilst  
in their tent) ...*

Frink, Mrs. Margaret (p. 274):  
*Saturday August 31 (1850) ...  
These springs were named from  
a tragical affair occurring in  
1849, in which two men,  
intoxicated, got into a fight with  
each other, in which one of  
them was killed.*

Edmundson, William (p. 332):

---

<sup>4</sup> There is only one spring.

---

<sup>5</sup> From 1850 on, many journals stated there were trading posts every mile charging inflated prices.

*October 4<sup>th</sup> (1850) After Traveling 6 miles we came to a place called Tragedy-Springs from three men having been killed there by Indians; from an inscription on a tree close by they were killed on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1848. Their names were Danial Browett, Ezra H. Allen and Henderson Cox. They are all buried in one Grave under a pile of Stones. After Traveling 2 miles further we came to a Trading Post about noon where we camped having come 8 miles to day. A young man for Henry County, named Allen Melton died at this place during the night.*

1852 Guidebook, P.L. Platt and N. Slater. *The Travelers Guide Across the Plains. Upon the Overland Route.* ... Only states the name they gave the designation/location and miles from previous location:

*To Tragedy Springs (p. 356): These springs are so called, from the fact that three of the first explorers of this route were killed here by the Indians. Their graves and the springs are both on the left of the road as we ascend the hill....*

Turnbull, Thomas (p. 385):  
*Sunday (August) 15<sup>th</sup> (1852), [Monday 16<sup>th</sup>] ... Passed tragedy springwhere 3 men were killed by some Indians.*

*There are 3 graves covered with large stones & also a Station selling liquors & groceries. These men were 3 men that carried the mail to Salt Lake. It happened last winter 1851. ...*

It is obvious that as the years passed the Tragedy Spring story became altered from the actual event. By the mid-to-late-1850s those pioneers<sup>6</sup> coming to California via the Carson River Route were following a well-known, well-beaten route.

Some journalists that did mention Tragedy Spring used it only as a marker point on the trail. Here is a good example of the typical journal for the late 1850s.

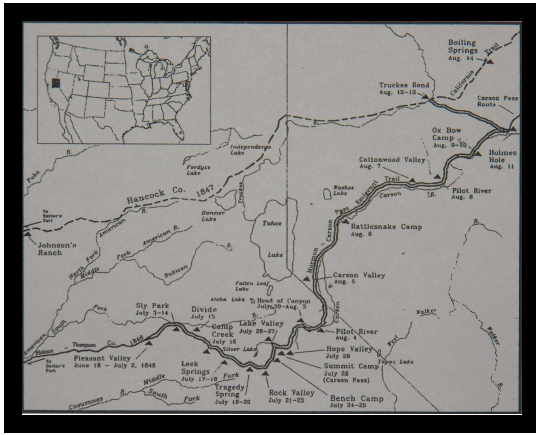
Crandall, Eliphalet (p. 455):

*Thursday August 17 [18], 1859. ... From Rock Valley to Tragedy Springs on the main road leading to the mines. Roads Rough. Feed good. From Tragedy Springs to Leek Springs descending the ridge which is in some place very steep. ...*

## **THE JOURNEY TO SALT LAKE CONTINUES**

---

<sup>6</sup> After California became a state September 9, 1850, they were no longer emigrants, but pioneers.



Map of journey from Placerville to the joining of the California Trail<sup>7</sup>

On July 21, the original group left Tragedy Spring to continue their journey to the Salt Lake Valley. The next few days found the going very difficult.

Bigler:

*Friday 21st. haveing found all our stock except 1 or 2 mules we hooked on and moved a bout 4 miles and campt at what we called Rock Creek...*<sup>8</sup>

*Sat. 22<sup>nd</sup>. Camp laid by while myself and 15 others worked a road to the top of the mountain (West Pass) ... I past over snow more than 2 feet deep and saw banks ten and perhaps 50 ft. deep, this day I gathered flowers with one hand and snow with the other...*

<sup>7</sup> Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*, 206.

<sup>8</sup> That name was used by most journalists. Today it is the private ranch of the Allen family.

*Mo. 24<sup>th</sup>. Moved bout 6 mi. and campt just over the Summit . ...*<sup>9</sup>

Smith:

*Tuesday July the 25<sup>th</sup>. Sunday some of the Boys went ahead to fix the road, and Monday we started, and travailed about Seven miles, haveing a very bad road, for the wagons; and Brother Rogers wagon tip[p]ed over twice; and several wagons got broke, and today they [are] fixing them, and getting the remainder of them to camp.*<sup>10</sup>

Bigler:

*Wed. 26<sup>th</sup> Moved to the foot of the mountain and campt near a lake, this we call lake valley ...*<sup>11</sup>

*Thurs 27<sup>th</sup> made some Road, 20 indians came into camp all armed with Bows & arrows but laid them by while in camp. ...*<sup>12</sup>

It would be interesting to know if these Indians knew about the Tragedy Spring killings.

*Fr. 28<sup>th</sup>, Moved 3 m. and made an early encampment at the head of the American fork<sup>13</sup> near or at the Summit (Carson*

<sup>9</sup> This is West Pass. At 9,640 feet it is the highest pass over which wagons traveled during the early years of the gold rush. Interesting to note there are two California state plaques placed on SR 88 stating the West Pass elevations of 9,460 feet and 9,640 feet, one cast after the other.

<sup>10</sup> David L. Bigler, ed., 132.

<sup>11</sup> This is Caples Lake.

<sup>12</sup> These would be Washoe Indians.

<sup>13</sup> Bigler had the drainage correct as Caples Lake drains into the Silver Fork of the American River.

Pass) of the great Sierra  
Nevada ...

*Sat. 29<sup>th</sup> ... moved across about one mile & half and camped at the head of what we called hope valley [as we began to have hope]<sup>14</sup> ...*

*Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> Worked & made a road for about 2 miles and moved camp about 8 and encamped on what we called pass Creek at the head of a Canyon.<sup>15</sup> Here we expect to lay by for several days in order to work a road through the Cannon about 4 miles and very bad.<sup>16</sup>*

Nearly every gold rush journal remarked on this canyon's difficulty.

Mary Jane Caples stated it well in her 1911 reminiscences of her 1849 journey:

*After about 30 miles up the river we came to Carson Canyon, one of the worst pieces of road on the whole route; It took all day, with the hardest work men and animals ever did, to make five miles. No one thought of riding. I carried my baby and walked all the way. The next day we had a beautiful drive through Hope Valley.<sup>17</sup>*

---

<sup>14</sup> Called Hope Valley today.

<sup>15</sup> This is the West Fork of The Carson River and they are camped in Hope Valley at the head of Woodfords Canyon.

<sup>16</sup> Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 154.

<sup>17</sup>

Mormon Battalion Journalist Zadok Knapp Judd, Sr. "Recollections."

Given at age 77:

Spring 1848

*... We had no hammers nor drill with which we could do anything with the stone. It seemed almost an impossibility to go farther. Finally some one suggested that we build a fire on the rocks, and as there was plenty of dry logs and brush near, there was soon a good fire blazing on each rock that lay in our way. When the fire had died down and cooled off a little, we found that as far as the heat had penetrated, the rocks were all broken in small pieces, which were soon removed with pick and shovel and another fire built with the same result. After building three or four fires, we found that the rocks were not much in our way, and we soon had a good wagon road right over them, ...<sup>18</sup>*

It took nearly a week for them to make a crude wagon trail down the canyon.

Bigler:

*Thurs (August) 3d Road workeing in the afternoon fell a*

---

Mary Jane Walker Caples, *Overland Journey to California*. The California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA, requested that Caples write her reminiscences and they house the document. **HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO NOTE THIS.**

<sup>18</sup> USFS Report, 4.

*little rain & Snow We were overtaken to day by 13 of our boys with pack animals they had left the mines 5 days ago. We finished our Road.*

*Fr. 4<sup>th</sup> Moved through the Kanyon all safe. 4 indians came into Camp.*

*Sun. 6<sup>th</sup> Continued down Carson River past a hot spring<sup>19</sup> campt in the bend of the River here Mr. Pratt killed a Rattlesnake which gave the name rattlesnake camp -- at night we could see as it were a hundred fires in the Cal. Mountains made no doubt by indians some think it is a signal to other indians of distress others say it is for peace and others say it is for war Mr Weaver one of Col. Cooks guides said a smoke raised on the mountains was a signal for peace and a token for help and a smoke raised in the valley was a sign for war.<sup>20</sup> ...*

The group continued down the Carson River to a place where they turned to the northwest (see the trail map on page xx) until they reached the Truckee River near today's Fernley, Nevada.

It remains a mystery of how they knew to take this detour to reach the

---

<sup>19</sup> This is today's David Walley's Hot Springs Resort and Spa, Genoa, NV.

<sup>20</sup> Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 155.

main California Trail. Then they turned east to face the forty-mile desert and the 650-mile journey to the Salt Lake Valley.

Bigler:

*Sat. 12<sup>th</sup> Left the Carson River traveled rather a N.W. course 25 miles when we struck the old trucky road on the east side of Truckee River Here our packers left us and went ahead<sup>21</sup>*

## **BIRTH OF THE GOLD RUSH TRAIL**

Little did these members of the battalion know that their new wagon trail would become the most heavily used route to the gold fields during the great gold rush migration. The following journal readings help explain how this all came about.

As you read Bigler's August 12 journal entry above, their group had turned east to merge with the Truckee River Route, California's first wagon trail over the Sierra Nevada opened in 1844; after 1847 it became known as the Donner Trail.

Bigler:

*Mo. 14<sup>th</sup> after traveling about 8 miles over a sandy road we than had a smooth road and encampted at the boiling springs makeing about 25 m.<sup>22</sup> Here we made our tea and*

---

<sup>21</sup> Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 156.

<sup>22</sup> This is located off I-80 at the Nightingale exit. Today it is the site of a large onion drying plant.

*Coffee without fire to heat the water. A little dog walked up so near to one of these springs as to loose his balance and fell in and was instantly scalled to death and boilt to peaces ...*

*Tues. 15<sup>th</sup>. At 11 last night we rolled out for water the moon shone bright and a good road and at 6 this morning we arrived at the sink of the Humboldt and campt the water here was not very good Cattle did not like it towards evening 18 emigrant wagons rolled in and campt by us ...*<sup>23</sup>

They had just crossed the infamous “Forty-Mile Desert” on the Truckee River Route. The Humboldt Sink<sup>24</sup> is about 25 miles west of Lovelock, Nevada.

Smith:

*Wednesday August the 16<sup>th</sup>. In the after noon yesterday, some sixteen<sup>25</sup> wagons came in, on their way to California, from the States, and they got a waybill of us--calculating to take our trail over the mountains.*<sup>26</sup>

Many historians consider this to be the party lead by mountain man James Clyman and would be the first wagon

---

<sup>23</sup> Utah Quarterly, “Bigler,” 156.

<sup>24</sup> Humboldt Sink refers to the area where the west end of Humboldt River disappears into the Nevada desert.

<sup>25</sup> Notice Bigler tells a similar story but stated eighteen wagons came in. 121.

<sup>26</sup> David L. Bigler, ed., 137.

train to take the Carson River Route traveling west.<sup>27</sup>

When the Mormon men showed the Clyman group their gold,

*... an old man traveling with Clyman, Lambert McCombs, jumped to his feet, threw his hat in the air, and shouted, “Glory Hallelujah, thank God, I shall die a rich man yet.”*<sup>28</sup>

Bigler:

*Wed. 16<sup>th</sup> ... made 20 miles, road good at this camp that water is a little better and runs a little the stock looks bad not haveing much grass and water sence leaveing trucky. To day we met 25 wagons, emegrants for Cal.*<sup>29</sup>

This most likely was the party of Pierre Barlow Cornwall who would be the second wagon train to take the Carson River Route traveling west.<sup>30</sup>

The east-bound party continued traveling up the well-beaten trail along the Humboldt River for another ten days when they met another west bound wagon train.

Bigler:

---

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Frederick Howard, *Sierra Crossing: First Roads to California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 44.

<sup>28</sup> Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*. 215.

<sup>29</sup> Utah Quarterly, “Bigler,” 156.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Cornwell, his son, *Life Sketch of Pierre Barlow Cornwall* (San Francisco: A.M. Robertson, 1906), 26.

*Sat. 26th. We met ten wagons of emigrants.*<sup>31</sup>

This was the Peter Lassen wagon party. However, the party did not take either the Carson River Route or Truckee River Route, but rather followed the Applegate Route opened in 1846.<sup>32</sup> This route left the main California Trail heading northwest to cross the Black Rock Desert and beyond.<sup>33</sup>

Bigler:

*Sunday 27<sup>th</sup>. Laid by at 3 p.m. the camp come together at Addison Pratts tent and held a prayer meeting, just as the meeting was over, Captain S. Hensley and Company of ten on packs came up we were informed by Capt. H. that it was not more than 380 miles to Salt Lake by takeing a certain route that he had found and had just come he gave us a way bill saying the route was a good one and easy to be found saveing at least 8 or ten days travel as it was our intention to go by way of fort hall ... and on the 30th we met Captain Chides (Chiles) and Company of 48 wagons, of emigrants he gave us a way bill purporting to*

*give a still nearer route than that of Hensley's. ...*<sup>34</sup>

Joseph B. Chiles first came to California in 1841. Proceeding west, he guided his party to the Humboldt Sink. However, instead of following the Mormon route along the Truckee River Route, he struck boldly across the country directly from the Humboldt Sink to the Carson River.<sup>35</sup> This line of travel formed the base of the triangle instead of following the two sides as the Mormons had done. By this daring move he successfully established “the arduous route across the forty-mile desert.”

This cut-off later became the established route “and over it in the next few years, passed thousands of travelers... Following along the west fork of the Carson River, toward the Sierra, and using the map supplied to him by the Mormons, Chiles directed his company over the Carson Pass.”  
...<sup>36</sup>

Bigler:

*September 27. Laid By. The day was spent mending wagons... Washing clothes, trimming hair, shaving up, and dressing seemed to be the order of the day. Everybody in camp busy and in the finest of spirits, and [it was] said to be only about*

---

<sup>31</sup> *Utah Quarterly*, "Bigler," 157

<sup>32</sup> Further reading: Ken Johnston, *Legendary Truths: Peter Lassen & His Gold Rush Trail in Fact & Fable* (Greybull, WY: Pronghorn Press, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Howard, 72.

---

<sup>34</sup> *Utah Quarterly*, "Bigler," 157.

<sup>35</sup> They met the Carson River at Ragtown, 7 miles west of Fallon, NV.

<sup>36</sup> Helen S. Giffen, *TRAIL-BLAZING PIONEER: Colonel Joseph Ballinger Chiles*. (San Francisco: John Howell-Books, 1969), 72-73.

*twenty-five or thirty miles to Great Salt Lake City. ...*

*September 29. We arrived at the Great Salt Lake settlement where a city was already laid out and named "Great Salt Lake City." Here I found my sister Emeline and husband John W. Hess, at whose house I made my home. ...<sup>37</sup>*

## CONCLUSION

It did not take long for the word to spread that the new Carson River Route of the California Trail was a better and shorter route to the gold fields than the older Truckee River Route. The Carson River Route not only went directly to the gold fields, but it avoided the 27 river crossings in the Truckee River Canyon. The Mormon route had only three river crossings in Carson River Canyon.

In 1849 it is estimated that some 25,000 to 40,000 gold rushers came to seek their fortune. Most used the Carson River Route. In 1850 it is estimated that between 55,000 and 75,000 gold seekers came to California, and again most used the Carson River Route. The cholera epidemic of 1849-1850 suppressed the 1851 migration,<sup>38</sup> with an estimate of only 10,000 coming to California.

But 1852 was another year of heavy migration with an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 pioneers coming to California.<sup>39</sup>

Their goal, from the day they were mustered into the US Army at Mount Pisgah, Iowa, on July 16, 1846, and through a more than two-year separation, was to reunite with family and friends to settle their new church home.

Their intention was not to clear a trail for wagons for all those who might come later, but simply to get themselves, their 17 wagons, two brass cannons, and 300 hundred head of animals to the Salt Lake Valley.

These discharged members of the Mormon Battalion, following an Indian footpath, created a new wagon trail through heroic efforts, hard work, and suffering.

It was these efforts that their wagon trail would forever be known as the Carson River Route of the California Trail, the "Gold Rush Trail."<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Gudde, 129.

<sup>38</sup> The outbreak that struck Nashville, TN, in 1849-1850 took the life of former U.S. President James K. Polk.

---

<sup>39</sup> Mattes, Merrill J. *Platte River Road Narratives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 2-3.

<sup>40</sup> Tortorich, *Gold Rush Trail*.