



# ENFIA Interpreter

February 1, 2024 Vol. 15

## A Message from the President

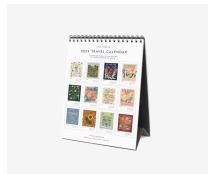
By Stan Trevena

### New Year and New Changes

Happy New Year. As I write this, the Carson Pass area has finally been getting some good snow. I just bought my first set of snowshoes this year and I am really looking forward to taking them for a spin in February. I hope you're looking forward to new experiences in the year ahead.

### Open Positions

**Scheduling Manager:** Duties include maintaining the online Signup.com system used for docents to schedule their shifts at Carson Pass and stays at the Silver Lake cabin. Ensuring shifts are covered and contacting docents to fill any last-minute cancellations.



Communicate with docents through email and phone calls.

**Webmaster:** Duties include periodically updating the ENFIA.org website with current information. Must have some experience with maintaining a website, experience with WordPress is desirable.

If you have an interest or just have questions about either of these volunteer opportunities, send an email to me at [President@enfia.org](mailto:President@enfia.org)

### Retail Operations

We are changing the way that ENFIA prices retail items in February. This decision was made by the board after consultation with our CPA. Since 2018, prices have included sales tax and were rounded to the nearest dollar. Starting in early February, prices will be clearly marked and sales tax will be added at the point of sale.

As a result of this pricing change, the board voted to switch to a “credit card only” procedure for all sales. This change will eliminate the handling of cash while providing a safer retail environment for our docents.

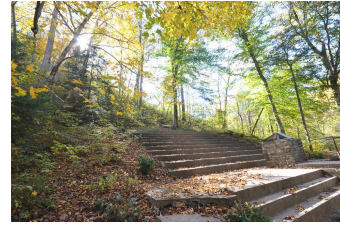


## **Interpretive Activities**

The Forest Service is developing a Junior Ranger Program for the Eldorado National Forest. Our Vice President, Ken Nieland, has been working with this group. Under our agreement with the Forest Service, ENFIA can contribute funds for projects that align with our stated mission. Our Board voted unanimously at our last meeting to contribute to this project. The Forest Service hopes to launch this program for the upcoming season. We eagerly await the draft booklet for this exciting new project.

We are also working with the Forest Service on some other interpretive activities along the Highway 50 corridor. After discussing this last year, it looks like things will be falling into place for us to explore several pilot projects in the Crystal Basin area. An amphitheater at Wrights Lake is scheduled to be refurbished as part of a Boy Scout Eagle Project this season. A new amphitheater is being constructed at the Sunset Campground at Union

Valley Reservoir now and should be open in June.



Announcements about pilot projects by ENFIA will be revealed this spring.

We hope to have more interpretive hikes at Carson Pass this season. Some of our quick tours, like the Devil’s Ladder walk, are being scripted so that docents can give impromptu walks if the station is fully staffed on weekends, and possibly even weekdays. We are actively seeking docents who want to volunteer to do some of these walks. Email [stationmanger@enfia.org](mailto:stationmanger@enfia.org) if you would like more information on leading specific walks and hikes or have a new hike you would like to offer.

## **ENFIA Memberships**

Every year in March ENFIA memberships come up for renewal. This is a process that is automated with our membership system. Every ENFIA member will receive an email reminding them of this renewal. If you have approved automatic renewals, your credit card will be automatically used for the renewal.

If you volunteer as a docent, **you must be an ENFIA member** to be covered by ENFIA insurance while working at any of our locations.

Log into our membership system at <https://enfia.org/membership/member-profile> to check how you are set up for membership renewal. When logging into the system, your Membership Card will be on the first screen. You should print or save a copy of your card to your phone to get 20% off on selected items at any one of our retail locations.

### **Thank You**

I am extremely grateful for everyone who volunteers and is involved with ENFIA. Keeping the station open seven days a week this past season through to the end of September was a huge success. We will likely be doing the same this season. Our list of active docents has gone down over the past four years. Even with fewer docents this past season, we still managed to keep the station staffed every day of the season. It was tight, and on some days, we only had the minimum required staffing. We would love to return to more docents on these shifts, especially on weekends. This would allow docents to be out on the trail assisting and answering questions for our visitors.

If you have friends or family that you think would want to volunteer, please pass these links to them:

Activities for volunteers:

<https://enfia.org/about/volunteer>

Contact us (online form):

<https://enfia.org/contact-us>

To become a member:

<https://enfia.org/membership>

**Stan Trevena, President**

Email: [president@enfia.org](mailto:president@enfia.org)

## **Eldorado Forest's Roche Moutonnée (or "rock mutton")**

by Lester Lubetkin

Did you know that you can find "rock mutton" in places across much of the higher elevation areas of the Eldorado Forest? These are bedrock erosional features created by the passing of glaciers tens of thousands of years ago. And actually, the name is not from the appearance that these rock formations look like sheep lying down, but rather was originally coined by a French Alpine explorer who thought these unique shapes looked like the wavy wigs popular in the 1700's that were smoothed over with mutton fat.

In late Fall I was up the east side of Loon Lake and realized that many of the peaks and ridges visible from Pleasant Campground are "roche moutonnée".



Another great place to find an easily recognizable "roche moutonnée" is along the Caples Creek trail near Jake Schneider Meadow. As you start to

become familiar with these bedrock landforms, you may find more and more of them.

The distinctive characteristics of this landform are that it is a bedrock hump, where one side has a gentle



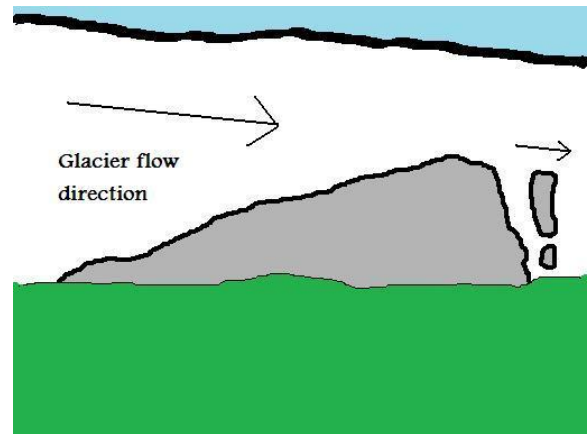
slope and the other side (in longitudinal profile) has a steep, often jagged slope.



These humps record the passing of a glacier and show us the direction that the glacier flowed. The gently sloping face was created as the glacier rode up and over the exposed bedrock hump, eroding and smoothing the bedrock surface, and in places leaving **glacial striations**.

In contrast, the steep faced side of the roche moutonnée is the result of **plucking** and **quarrying** (a different type of erosion from the scraping and grinding that took place on the

upslope side). As the glacier passed over the crest of the bedrock hump, water that had formed from melting of the glacial ice under pressure as the glacier pushed against the upslope face, now can seep into cracks and fissures in the stone. But, the pressure at the base of the glacier decreased markedly when the glacier was no longer pushing against the rock, and the water at the base of the glacier refreezes. The rock shatters as the ice expands, allowing the glacier to pull out chunks of the rock as the glacier continues to move across the landscape.



Don't be surprised if you are at Loon Lake you can't recognize the roche moutonnée. When you are at the west side of Loon Lake, you are looking at the steep, plucked faces of the roche moutonnée, as the glacier was flowing towards you, moving from east to west. It isn't until you get to the east side of the lake, or further along the trail towards Spider Lake, that you can see the more gently sloping bedrock surfaces.

Other glacial features that you may find associated with "roche



moutonnée” include *glacial erratics*, crescentic-shaped *chatter marks*, and one of my favorites, erosional *potholes* where only one side of the *pothole* is found in the bedrock, the other half having been formed by the glacial ice - and now lost.

Roche moutonnée tell a wonderful story about what the world you are in looked like 10,000 years or more ago - where the land was covered in ice, before the forest had a chance to grow. Take a picture when you find a roche moutonnée and post it on the ENFIA website so others can explore and share in the joy of “seeing an ancient landscape”.

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

By Frank Tortorich



*This stump and its carving are presently housed in The Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park museum in Coloma, California*

*This plaque was attached onto a granite rock at the base of the trail to the grave on Tragedy Spring Road on*

*September 2, 1967 by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers*



## INTRODUCTION

When I was very young my parents often took me into the Sierra Nevada for a day of fishing, picnicking, or camping at Silver Lake. It was on these trips that I first became aware of Tragedy Spring just off California State Route 88. We often stopped to drink from the spring and walk up to view the grave. In the 1960s a rock wall was built at the edge of the highway with a drinking fountain and the Daughters of Utah Pioneers bronze marker attached to the wall.

In 1978, my wife Mary Ann and I were recruited as US Forest Service volunteers to research the Carson River Route of the California Emigrant Trail for the Amador Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest.

Tragedy Spring is one of the most historic locations along the Carson River Route.<sup>1</sup> It seemed a good place to begin our research as we knew very little about emigrant trail history.

Our research naturally led us to the emigrant trail journals, of which there are many. We found that published versions of the same journal often differed from one another because of editing and transcription. These

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<sup>1</sup> There is only one spring at Tragedy Spring, though many mistakenly refer to it as Tragedy Springs.. The location is near California State Route 88, about two miles west of Silver Lake. The Oregon-California Trail runs from Missouri to Pocatello, Idaho. At that point the trail splits, with the California Trail headed southwest into the Humboldt River basin of present-day Nevada.

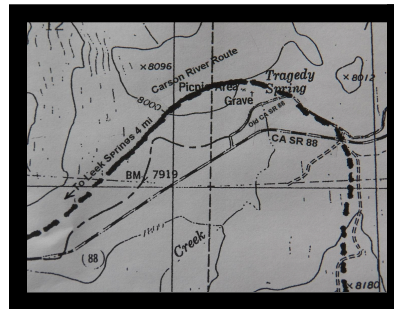
different versions made for interesting reading. Editors and transcribers often sought to correct spelling, punctuation, or attempted to make the text easier to understand in today's vernacular. The changes sometimes showed the bias of the editor. In this article we have footnoted each quote to let the reader know which version of the journal is being used.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we explore the interesting details that explain why this site became famous. We offer opinions about the events that took place at Tragedy Spring to augment the primary source documentation surrounding those events that sometimes fail to answer remaining questions. These opinions are based on forty-plus years of studying the research findings of the Carson River Route and Tragedy Spring stories.

We attempt to offer some possible explanations of why, in the summer of 1848, three discharged soldiers of the Mormon Battalion died at this specific location, supposedly killed by Indians; what events brought them to the West Coast in the first place; and why they were scouting this Indian trail. In addition, why did this Indian trail become the primary route to the

California gold fields?<sup>3</sup> And what became of the members of this party as they continued east to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Perhaps, in exploring these questions, we can better understand why the simple tree inscription in the opening photo has puzzled so many.



*Grave and SR 88 and Carson River Route*

*graphics added by Frank Tortorich*

The story of Tragedy Spring is the account of 45 men, and one woman, seeking to rejoin their community of faith in the Salt Lake Valley. The inception of their odyssey can be traced to a vigilante murder just a few miles east of the Mississippi River in Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844. The nearby city of Nauvoo was the most recent home to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, Saints, or Mormons). The Mormons were led by their founder and beloved president Joseph Smith. Smith and his brother Hyrum were, on June 27, in jail in Carthage, having been charged with closing down an opposition newspaper in Nauvoo. A mob gathered nearby,

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<sup>2</sup> "Extracts from the Journal of Henry W. Bigler," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, "Bigler," October 1932, Vol 5, no 4, 148, states of the transcription "... It is a true copy of the original journal." However, page 155, offers the following correction obviously added to the original journal: "...camped on the Carson River though at that time we had no name for it only the one we gave it that was 'Pilot River.'"

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Tortorich, *Gold Rush Trail: A Guide To The Carson River Route* (Wagon Wheel Tours, 1998, revised 2016).

attacked the jail, and killed Joseph and Hyrum.<sup>4</sup> These murders were a continuation of the persistent persecutions of the Mormon people by non-Mormon Americans. After this event the violence against the Mormons escalated. Families were accosted, barns, and homes burned down.<sup>5</sup>

The killing of Joseph Smith fragmented the church. Debates erupted over who should lead it. Brigham Young was at that time the President of the Quorum of Twelve, or second in command after Joseph Smith, and so assumed the interim leadership role.<sup>6</sup> Eventually Young was chosen to become president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

By the end of September of 1845 it was clear to the leaders of the church that the Saints would have to sell or abandon their farms and homes in Nauvoo, for their own safety and leave for a new home somewhere beyond the Rocky Mountains.<sup>7</sup> Rumors of various destinations spread; Eventually the Salt Lake Valley in Mexican territory became their destination.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 546-50.

<sup>5</sup> J. Leonard Arrington and Davis Britton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 94.

<sup>6</sup> J. Leonard Arrington, *Brigham Young American Moses* (Urbana Chicago: University Illinois Press, 1986), 114.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

On February 4, 1846, the first group of Saints crossed the frozen Mississippi River into Iowa, a difficult winter trek.

In June the Mormons, after an exhausting winter, halted their migration for a few weeks at a site they named Mount Pisgah in Iowa. During this early migration, Brigham Young sent his nephew, Elder Jessie Little, to Washington to seek financial assistance from the federal government to aid their exodus from the United States.<sup>8</sup> At Mount Pisgah, on June 26, 1846, US Army Captain James Allen brought an answer to Young's request for help. The answer came in the form of a letter from President James K. Polk, who requested 500 men from the migrating Mormons to enlist into the US Army,<sup>9</sup> under the command of US Army General Stephen Watts Kearny.<sup>10</sup> They were to aid the nation in its war with Mexico, declared just a few weeks earlier. Needing the money to support the migration, Mormon leader Brigham Young encouraged this one-year enlistment.

This request from President Polk did not sit well with the Mormon community. The United States was considered by many Mormons to be their enemy. Joining the US Army and

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<sup>8</sup> Arrington, 128.

<sup>9</sup> Norma Baldwin Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion: U.S. Army of the West 1846-1848* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Pronounced KAR ney in Nebraska and KER ney in California. Family uses KAR ney.

leaving their families to migrate without them was repugnant.<sup>11</sup>

*... President Young encouraged the men by assuring them that their families should be cared for, that they should fare as well as his did, and that he would see that they were helped along. He also predicted that not one of these who might enlist would fall by the hands of the nation's foe, that their only fighting would be with wild beast.*<sup>12</sup>

By the end of July, Captain Allen, promoted to Colonel Allen, had collected a list of Mormon volunteers that would take on the identity of the Mormon Battalion. The US Army allowed the battalion to select their own officers and form their own companies.<sup>13</sup> The count was thus: 22 officers and 474 enlisted, for a total of 496 men. Four other men would join up in route, bringing the total to 500.<sup>14</sup> The battalion organized themselves into five companies of 100. Each company was allowed four laundresses for a total of twenty laundresses.<sup>15</sup>

The Mormon Battalion was dispatched to Fort Leavenworth,

Kansas, and inducted into the US Army of the West under the command of General Kearny.

Kearny was ordered to lead the Army of the West to California by way of the Santa Fe Trail. He was charged to occupy Santa Fe in Mexican territory, and then proceed on to Mexican California to take command of it for the United States.

On August 13, 1846, the US Army of the West, including the Mormon Battalion, began their march to California.

After six difficult months of travel, three groups separated from the main Mormon Battalion because of illness and fatigue, and the numbers fell to 335 and five women.<sup>16</sup> Those groups were sent to Fort Pueblo (Colorado) for the winter and would be known as the sick detachments.<sup>17</sup>

The Battalion, under the direct command of Philip St. George Cooke, pioneered a new road across the Southwest, arriving in southern California on January 29, 1847. They found the war in California over. Brigham Young's bold prophecy that no man would die in battle was fulfilled.

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<sup>11</sup> Sgt. Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History Of The Mormon Battalion In The Mexican War: 1846-1847* (Chicago, Illinois: The Rio Grande Press Inc., 1881, reprint 1964), 116.

<sup>12</sup> Tyler, 118.

<sup>13</sup> Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. The five women were: Melissa Coray, laundress; Susan Davis, laundress; Lydia Hunter, laundress; Phebe Brown, laundress. Mary "Agnes" Steel Brown. Ricketts only lists 18 laundresses by name, so Nancy may have been one of the names not recorded.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-46.



The Mormon Battalion members were discharged from the US Army in July of 1847 and left to their own resources to somehow reunite with their families and other members of their faith who had accompanied the westward Mormon migration. At that time they did not know that the Saints' final destination was the Great Salt Lake Valley.<sup>18</sup>

Upon discharge, the members broke into several groups. Seventy-nine men reenlisted in the army for another six months. Several men returned by the way they came to join their families still in Iowa or Winter Quarters in Nebraska. Some chose to follow the Old Spanish Trail out of southern California, hoping to find the migrating Saints. Fifty-one members traveled up the coast to Yerba Buena (today's San Francisco). However, the bulk of the discharged Mormons traveled north over Tejon Pass and through central California to Sutter's Fort to get supplies. They were planning to head east over the Sierra Nevada by way of the four-year-old Truckee River Route,<sup>19</sup> later to be known as the Donner Trail, to join their families and church.

En route, however, they encountered a messenger from President Brigham Young near what is now the town of Truckee, California. A letter dictated by Young communicated that the Salt Lake Valley was to be the destination

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>19</sup> Emigrant trails usually followed rivers; eight trails were so named, i.e. Truckee River Route.

and future home of the Saints. However, since the pioneers in the valley were in destitute circumstances, Young recommended that only those men with ample funds and adequate provisions should proceed east to join them. The others were asked to remain in California and labor until spring, then bring along their earnings and provisions.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the discharged Mormons that stayed found work in northern California with Captain John Sutter at his fort, located in present-day Sacramento. Sutter sent six Mormon men to work for James Marshall in building a sawmill in the Coloma Valley along the south fork of the American River. These men were: Henry Bigler, Azariah Smith, Alexander Stephens, James S. Brown, William Johnston, and William Berger.<sup>21</sup> They were the first to witness Marshall's discovery of gold in the tail race of the mill on January 24, 1848, and to correctly document the date of the discovery.<sup>22</sup>

Two of these men, Henry William Bigler<sup>23</sup> and Azariah Smith,<sup>24</sup> journaled a near daily account of their experiences, from their first day of

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<sup>20</sup> Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*. 176.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>22</sup> James Marshall claimed the date of gold discovery was January 19, but the two Mormon journalists disagreed.

<sup>23</sup> Erwin G. Gudde, *Bigler's Chronicle Of The West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962).

<sup>24</sup> David L. Bigler, *The Gold Discovery Journal: Of Azariah Smith* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1990).

their enlistment in the battalion, after their discharge, until their arrival in Salt Lake Valley. It is these two first-hand, eye-witness accounts that will be used as the primary sources for the events at Tragedy Spring.

There are several other journals that describe the events, however, most do not add significant details to the story. There is always an exception: Addison Pratt's<sup>25</sup> journal does add some detail not found elsewhere, and it will be cited.

### **STARTING THE JOURNEY TO THE SALT LAKE VALLEY**

Henry William Bigler:

*April, 1848. The next day Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> prity much all the boys come together to talk over matters and things in regard to makeing arrangements for going up to the Great Salt Lake and come to some understanding when we should make the start &c and the decision was that all be ready by the first of june except 8 who was ready and expected to start with an express the next Saturday through I believe to the States. It was further decided that we send out a few men as pioneers before that time to pioneer out a route across the Sierra Nevada and if possible find a much nearer way than to go the truckey*

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<sup>25</sup> Addison Pratt's Journal is in the History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

*route and shun Crossing the Truckey River 27 times as we were informed by Mr. Brannan we would have to do if we went that route and very deep and rapid.*<sup>26</sup>

It seems logical that the group sought information from any source possible for an alternative to the Truckee River Route. Most early day wagon trails were originally Indian trails, then trapper trails, and finally improved for wagons.<sup>27</sup> So, it is logical that the company would scout existing Indian trails, which proved to be the correct decision.

In the spring of 1848, a group of Mormons<sup>28</sup> consisting of 45 men,<sup>29</sup> one woman,<sup>30</sup> 17 wagons, two brass cannons purchased from Sutter, along with 150 oxen and 150 horses and mules;<sup>31</sup> They assembled in a valley just east of Placerville that Bigler called "Pleasant Valley." It retains the name today.

One member from the group went about six miles farther up the trail to

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<sup>26</sup> Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 148.

<sup>27</sup> Eight emigrant trails usually followed rivers and were so named, i.e. Truckee River Route. Additional reading: LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and Fur Trade of the War West, Vol 1* (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> This first group of discharged battalion members, with a few other Mormons who had not accompanied the Battalion, to head east became known as the Holmes-Thompson company. Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*. 204.

<sup>29</sup> Five non battalion members were included in that count. Rickett, *Mormon Battalion*, 222.

<sup>30</sup> Melissa Coray, wife of William Coray.

<sup>31</sup> Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*, 205.

build a corral to hold the 300 animals while waiting to begin their journey. He told the others “this place looks like a park.”<sup>32</sup> His name was James Sly “Sly Park,” and serves as a recreation area today. Bigler:

*(July) the 5<sup>th</sup>-, made an early start still keeping to the divide and by 9 am we roaled up to the front camp Here they concluded to stop a few days as they found a nice little valley (though about 2 miles on the south to the waters of the Mocozyamy<sup>33</sup>) for our stock and to send out some men to examine the route and look for three of our company viz. Browett, Allen & Cox who had left our camp on the 25<sup>th</sup> of june to look out a pass while the company was gathering as yet we had not heard anything from them and the camp began to feel uneasy about them, accordeingly we sent out ten men to look for them while the rest of us took the stock down into the little valley which we called Slys Park after one of our men who found it and there built a couple Corrals and awaited the return of the ten men who returned on the 14 of july and reported they seen*

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<sup>32</sup> Gudde, 113.

<sup>33</sup> Irene Dankin Padden, ed., *Journal of Madison Berryman Moorman:1850-1851* (San Francisco, California Historical Society, 1948), 84. entry of September 22, 1850, “... The Co[n]sumnes, commonly called McCosma...” 23.

*nothing of the 3 men neither any signs after passing a sertain point they discovered a pass but it would have to be worked.<sup>34</sup>*

Azariah Smith:

*Wednesday July the 5<sup>th</sup>...  
Brother Danial Browett, Ezra H. Allen & Henderson Cox have gone over the Mountains, to find the best pass, ...<sup>35</sup>*

### **THE DISCOVERY OF THE GRAVE**

Bigler:

*(July) 17<sup>th</sup> to day we had bad road and a great deal of brush to cut broke an axil tree -- made 8 or 10 miles and campt at leek Spring<sup>36</sup> a fine spring with plenty of grass and leeks about it<sup>37</sup>*

Smith:

*Tuesday, July the 18. ...This afternoon those men that went ahead (this was another group of men, not the 10 who went in search for the three scouts), saw some Indians, with clothing on which resembled those of Brothers Browett, Allan and Cox. They also saw a place*

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<sup>34</sup> Utah Quarterly, “Bigler,” 152,

<sup>35</sup> David L. Bigler, ed., *The Gold Discovery Journal of Azariah Smith* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 125.

<sup>36</sup> Leek Springs holds that name today.

<sup>37</sup> Utah Quarterly, “Bigler,” 152.

*where they suspect that they are killed and buried.<sup>38</sup>*

Bigler-:

*Tues 18<sup>th</sup> ... While myself and 4 others went to work the road which we did for about ten miles and as we were returning to Camp we found where we supposed our pioneers had camped by a large spring running from the mountain into the Mocozyamy<sup>39</sup> and near where they had their fire was the appearance of a fresh grave some of us thought it might be an Indian grave as near it was an old wickiup,<sup>40</sup> but the more we looked at it the more we felt here lay the 3 men. (They returned to Leek Springs to report) ...that night for the first we put out camp guard.*

*We. (July) 19<sup>th</sup>. Roled out from Leek spring had hard heavy pulling the road very rocky in places, broke our new axle tree and in passing over a snow bank Mr. J. Home's wagon broke down making only 5 or 6 miles and encamped at a spring near the fresh grave determining to satisfy ourselves it was soon opened, we were shocked at the*

*sight there lay the three murdered men robbed of every stitch of clothing lying promiscuously in one hole about 2 feet deep. two of them were lying on their faces Allen was lying on his back and had the appearance that an ax had been sunk into his face and shot in the eye **the blood seemed fresh still oozing from their wounds** when we came to examine around about we found arrows lying plentifully on the ground many of them bloody and broken examining still closer the Rocks were stained with blood, and Mr. Allens purse of gold dust lying about a rod from the grave the gold was still in the sack ... he had attached a buckskin string of sufficient length so as to put it over his head and around his neck and letting the purse hang in his bosom inside his clothes ...<sup>41</sup>*

Addison Pratt (no date noted):

*We commenced to open this (grave) at once and at the bottom to our great horror and dismay, we found the bodies of our three friends, divested of every article of clothing and exhibiting marks of terrible violence. One of the bodies had a withe<sup>42</sup> around the neck*

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<sup>38</sup> David L. Bigler, ed., 127.

<sup>39</sup> Bigler mistaken this drainage as Cosumnes River, but it is the Mokelumne River drainage.

<sup>40</sup> A wickiup is a "tent" made of branches. This was about 80 yards south east of the spring and grave is near a granite boulder with six bedrock mortars. The evidence suggests this site was an Indian summer camp.

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<sup>41</sup> Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 153. Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> A withe is a rope made of natural plant material.



indicating that the man had been killed some distance from the spot and that the withe had been used to drag the body to the grave. On a closer examination of the ground, we found some blood stained stones with lots of hair adhering to them. We naturally concluded that these stones had been used in breaking in the skulls of the murdered men. In the grass we found a buckskin bag containing some gold dust and some coin. It had been suspended from the neck by a buckskin string and from the position in which it was found and the blood and truskots (tussocks) on it we concluded that the wearer was in the act of defending himself and in defending himself had received the blow on the back of the head and neck which cut the string and held the man to the ground. As the murderer took off his clothing, the bag most likely slid into the grass and as the act was undoubtedly committed in the **night**, the bag was left undiscovered by the savages.<sup>43</sup>

Bigler:

*Thurs 20<sup>th</sup> ... We cut the following inscription on a Balsam fir that stood near the*

*grave. "To the memory of Daniel Browett and Ezra H. Allen, Henderson Cox who were supposed to have been murdered and buried by Indians on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of June,<sup>44</sup> A.D. 1848"<sup>45</sup> We called this place tragedy spring.<sup>46</sup>*



This inscription and the journal entries above contain troublesome words that might cause one to pause with questions. Well, maybe, it is only this author who took pause.

The troublesome words are: **supposed, murdered, night** and the date of **June 27**.

## THE QUESTIONS

My first question regarding the inscription focuses on the word “**supposed.**” Why was the word “supposed” used in this context?

<sup>43</sup> Norma B. Ricketts, *Tragedy Spring and The Pouch of Gold* (Sacramento, California: Ricketts Publishing Company, 1983), 20. Emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> June 27, 1844 is the day that the founder of the LDS church, Joseph Smith was killed.

<sup>45</sup> Notice Bigler quotes the inscription with “A.D.” however, the A.D. was not included in the inscription on the tree.

<sup>46</sup> *Utah Quarterly*, “Bigler,” 154. Emphasis added.

Does “supposed” refer to the word “**murdered**” or “**it was Indians,**” or **the time of day (night),** or the **death date**?

To me, the word “supposed” was used because it was unclear what had happened or when the killing took place.

Further exploration shows this word “supposed” is also used numerous times in the journals, mostly by Smith in another context. It is a commonly used word, and its intent and contextual meaning may never be known.

Let us take a closer look at the date: “**27 of June 1848.**”

The tree inscription designates the killing occurred on 27 June 1848, three-weeks before the discovery of the grave on July 19.

Why would they specify the supposed date of the death as June 27?

Could it be that they chose the date of “June 27” because it was on that day in 1844 that the founder and prophet of the LDS church, Joseph Smith, was martyred in the Carthage jail?<sup>47</sup> After all, only four years had passed since this momentous event in their lives, and it was the death of Smith that triggered the Mormon migration of 1846. Could it be that they chose the same death date as Joseph Smith to honor these three men?

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<sup>47</sup> Preston Nibley, ed., *History Of Joseph Smith: By His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1901), 325.

The next question is how would they know the event took place at **night**? It certainly was not the night of June 27; reasoning to follow.

So, could they have been referring to the **night** on July 17? It could not have been the night of July 18, because that was the day on which Azariah Smith wrote of seeing Indians wearing the clothing of their brethren.

Addison Pratt’s journal mentioned “a buckskin bag containing some gold dust & some coin” found in the grass near the grave. Suppose that the gold pouch was neither seen nor taken by the Indians because the killing took place at “night” and the Indians did not see it? Of the three journals, Pratt and Smith are the two that mention the event taking place at “night.” Could Smith suppose the event took place at “night” in his rather imaginative narration of the killings?

Could it be that the inscription specified “night” because of Pratt’s conclusion along with Azariah Smith’s fabricated recreation of the event? Examination of Smith’s story to follow.

In Bigler’s journal of July 19 he relates “***blood seems fresh and is still oozeing from their wounds.***”

Research shows that blood does not ooze three weeks after a person is killed. One forensic scientist stated that blood congeals within six hours, depending on the conditions.

Another medical opinion is offered by Dr. Roger Blair.

*I know nothing about forensic medicine, I am skeptical that blood was oozing after several days--or even beyond a few hours. Once the heart stops, there is neither arterial nor venous pressure to drive the blood any farther. Thereafter, blood coagulates rather quickly at the wound site and sporadically throughout the circulatory system--a mix of clots and liquid blood. There might be some clear serous fluid that might ooze from the subcutaneous tissues at the wound site for a while, but I would think no active bleeding. I am more inclined to think that what Bigler took to be oozing or fresh blood might have been clotted blood from the skin that was diluted and became fluid by the snow as the corpses were dug up. Or, perhaps more likely, manipulating the bodies out of the grave dislodged superficial clots in the wounds and there was some drainage from deeper vessels that had not completed coagulation yet. Mere speculation.<sup>48</sup>*

From reading hundreds of journals, most wagon trains started to roll out

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<sup>48</sup> Dr. Roger Blair, Radiologist in Pendleton, OR., email to the author. January 13, 2020. Roger is a founder and past president of Oregon-California Trails Association.

about 7:00 a.m. In the mountains wagon travel averaged about one mile per hour and Bigler states they made only five or six miles.

Assuming they left Leek Springs at 7:00 a.m. on July 18, making five or six miles would place them at the grave around noon, provided they moved along without difficulty. But that does not seem to be the case. They broke an axle tree and Holmes' wagon broke down. This would add considerably more time to travel the five or six miles, so they most likely arrived in the afternoon.

With the above information about "oozing blood," more mystery is added to the actual time, or even day, of the killing. So, what was it that Bigler observed or even remembered that he observed when he wrote about oozing blood? His journal entry about the event was probably recorded hours or even days later. It also should be noted that Bigler is the only one to write about oozing blood.

Darrell Cruz, a Washoe Tribal Member:

*In those days no Washoe would ever touch anything from a dead person. The Washoe believe all possessions are to be destroyed or buried with the owner. Washoe did not bury with a mounded grave site and there was no marker. And even with the limited white contact they would have enough*

*wherewithal to disguise the grave and not leave it so obvious. I also think the place where the killing occurred was a habitation site and Washoe would not want foreigners anywhere near their living space; I wouldn't.*<sup>49</sup>

Based on the above information, could it be that the three men were still alive and held captive by the Indians, stripped of all their possessions, then killed by the Indians and buried?

The Washoe are a Hokan speaking people distinct from the neighboring tribes. Washoe territory extended from Honey Lake, California to the north, south to Sonora Pass California, and east from the Pine Nut Range in Nevada to the west slope of the Sierra Nevada with Lake Tahoe as the center of the Washoe world.

The Washoe occupied the Tragedy Spring area during the summer months for about 10,000 years, hunting and fishing and harvesting plants in the local area and moved to lower elevations during the harsh

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<sup>49</sup> Darrel Cruz, Director of the Tribal Historic Preservation Office/Cultural Resources Office of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, email exchange with the author on April 8, 2020.

winter months.<sup>50</sup> This became more complicated and generated more questions as the research continued.

The Bigler group did not open the grave until the following day, July 19, with “*blood still oozeing from their wounds,*” according to Bigler. So, what accounts for this time gap when it has been suggested that after six to eight hours blood no longer oozes?

Dr. Blair makes a reasonable assumption that the moving of the bodies could have dislodged blood clots, giving the appearance of oozing. This will go down as another unsolved mystery.

Recall they discovered what they thought was a grave on July 18, the same day Smith reports that some of the men saw Indians wearing the clothing of the three dead men. So, would not the killings have to have taken place on or before July 18?

Smith:

*Thursday July the 20<sup>th</sup>  
Yesterday we travailed about eight miles when we came to the place where the Brethren were **supposed** to have been killed and thrown into that hole, and covered with dirt by the Indians. After examining till we were sure that they were all three there, we again covered them up, and searched to see what we could discover, and found Brother Allens purse with*

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



some upwards of a hundred dollars in it. The manner in which they were **supposed** to have been overcome, and killed, were thus. They were **supposed** to have stopped there to camp for the **night** and some Indians came, and in a friendly way stayed with them; and the Brethren not thinking that they were thus cruel, was not at all afraid of them, **as they had been working a great deal in the Mountains, with them through the winter.**<sup>51</sup> Thus not suspecting them, they layed down, as they **supposed** in safety [and] after they had got fast asleep, a body of Indians crept up on them from behind the rocks, which were thick, and poured a heavy shower of arrows on them, and before they could gather their arms, in time to defend themselves against their enemies; they were killed on the spot. From the appearance of things Brother Allen got his six shooter, and got behind a big rock to protect himself. But there being so many Indians, they rushed upon him and mashed him in pieces with rocks, where the purse was found, which was covered with blood. There were a great many

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<sup>51</sup> According to Darrel Cruz, the area near Pleasant Valley is known as a winter camp for the Washoe people when they could not get home because of the snow.

arrows also picked up which were covered with blood.<sup>52</sup>

Notice how often Smith uses the word “**supposed.**”

Now this would be quite a story if Smith witnessed the entire incident as it happened. However, he was not even with the Bigler group at the time they opened the grave, but joined them shortly after.

Even more questions come to mind.

Why was the grave so close to a known Indian camp? As Cruz noted, would Indians (or anyone else) bury the dead in their living space?

Could it be that when the killings took place the Indians took great haste to “hide” the bodies and leave because they knew there were more heavily armed men coming along the footpath?

And in such haste to leave, they did not take the time to pick up their arrows. It is written in the journals that some of the arrows were broken. But then again, would not Indians pick up all arrows as it was hard work to gather and assemble all the components to make them and normally would not have left them?<sup>53</sup>

## **MURDERED**

This word “murdered” has always been troublesome. Washoe Indians are not known as a warrior people. I do

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<sup>52</sup> David L. Bigler, ed., 127. Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> Darrel Cruz, Washoe, Interviewed by author, 2020.

not believe it was murder. I do think Washoe killed these men, but perhaps in self-defense.

White men of that time had little respect for or trust of Indians. Many considered Indians to be less than human and were leery or even afraid of them. Likewise, Indians might be leery or afraid of white men they did not know.

Could it be when the three men came upon the Indian camp that both sides were startled, becoming defensive? Perhaps shots were fired with the result being the Indians defeated these three men. These Indians knew there were other white men soon to follow. It is unknown if any Indians were killed or wounded. Previously Smith stated some Indians were seen wearing the clothing resembling those of their three scouts. Likewise, these Indians saw the group and according to Smith, even helped them create the trail for wagons. This supports the assumption that Indians left the killing site in haste and it was not as an act of murder. Leaving in haste could also be the reason they placed the men in a close-by ground depression, covering the bodies with dirt and quickly leaving the area. If it was an aggressive act of vengeance, Indians might have traditionally left the bodies exposed for the animals to ravage.

From the Mormons perspective, the word “murdered” might have been on their minds.

The reason for the white men’s possessions being taken by Indians was because the clothing, guns, and animals were of great value to Indians. At that time the Washoe people had not learned to ride horses.<sup>54</sup> The horses, however, would have been a source of food.

## **GOLD POUCH**

Why was Ezra Allen’s gold pouch the only personal item left when all other personal items were taken from the murdered men?

It is a common understanding that anything worn around the neck to an Indian is considered a “medicine bundle.” It would be “bad medicine” to take or even touch someone’s “medicine bundle.”<sup>55</sup> At that time, gold would be of no use or value to the Washoe.<sup>56</sup>



## **ONE WASHOE ORAL TRADITION**

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Keith Davis, a teacher of history and Native American Studies.

<sup>56</sup> David L. Bigler, ed., 129 fn 21. The gold pouch was delivered to Allen’s wife by battalion member Wilford Hudson. From some of the nuggets she had fashioned a wedding ring that she wore the rest of her life. (It is said to be in the family’s possession to this day.)

David Snooks, the late archaeologist and Washoe Indian, said the traditional oral history of the Tragedy Spring event handed down through his father was that some Mormon men kidnapped two Washoe children. In the attempt to get the children back, it was necessary to kill the three men. David went on to relate that the Tragedy Spring site was bad medicine for his family. One night, as his father was driving past Tragedy Spring,<sup>57</sup> his car stopped running for no apparent reason. He was stranded there for a while before he could get the car restarted. Finally, the car started, and he was able to leave the area, vowing never again to drive past that site at night.

In further discussion with Snooks, we both agreed that the kidnapping story was unlikely.

It would be out of character that the Mormon men would kidnap children and burden themselves with trying to take care of children as they struggled on their exploration of the Sierra Nevada and their arduous journey to the Salt Lake Valley.

Melissa Coray, the only woman with the group at Tragedy Spring on July 19, 1848, related her story years later to her grandchildren.

She said it was the worst night she spent on the entire trip from Missouri to California and back [on] to Utah.

That night around the campfire the men discussed the sad fate of their comrades. They determined two of the men had been on one side of the fire and the third on the other side across from them when the attack occurred. Everything had been taken – pack animals, riding horses, supplies, and their guns. Because Browett and Cox had their gold in their packs, it probably was not found until later when the packs were opened. Allen's pouch, however, had fallen into the brush and lay unnoticed during the attack. Having earlier seen Indians with their friends' clothing and because of the arrows, the men felt the attack was made by Indians. Before the company went to bed, a prayer was given.

Bigler:

*Thurs (July) 20<sup>th</sup> ... last night just before lieing down and before the guard was posted something or other gave our horses & cattle a dreadful affright supposed to be either Grizelys or indians the thundering of the runing stock fairly shook the ground and was like an earth quake Lieut. Thompson ordered to "limber up a Cannon and let her speak once", The guard was soon put out but nothing more occurred all was quiet til morning when we found more than one third of our stock missing we lay here all day,*

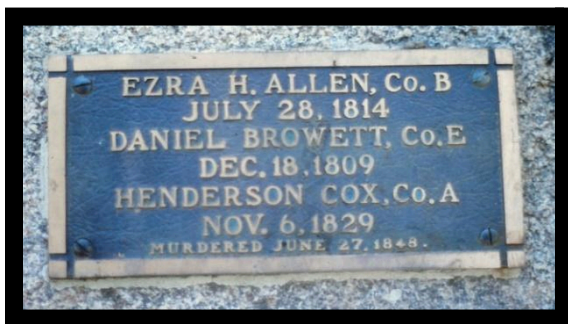
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<sup>57</sup> That is when old CA SR 88 ran closer to the site than present day CA SR 88.

*sent men in all directions  
hunting up the lost stock...*<sup>58</sup>

Melissa's story continued:

Some men who remained in camp repaired wagons and others made a new grave for their fallen comrades. They dug a grave and then built a wall of rocks about three feet high and about eight feet square around it. They filled in the center with dirt up to the top of the wall. The grave was covered with more rocks and, finally, a rock rounded at the top was placed upright as a headstone. Nearby stood a stately fir about 3½ feet in diameter, over 10 feet in circumference. Wilford Hudson took his ax and chopped the bark away on one side. Then he sat down and crudely carved the names of the three men and an approximate death date.<sup>59</sup>



On September 2, 1967, the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers dedicated the plaque on the left, which was embedded into the slanted granite headstone shown on the right. They also dedicated the plaque shown on page XX at the beginning of this paper.<sup>60</sup>

Old California State Route 88, now Tragedy Springs Road, is about 50 yards downhill from the grave [??in the direction the photos were taken. The old Carson River Route is about 20 yards uphill behind where the grave photo was taken. (see map on p. 4)

That tree fell in the late 1920s and the inscription section was saved as seen in the photo at the beginning of this paper. The tree's stump has long ago rotted away leaving no evidence as to its original location.

**This article will be continued in the  
next edition of the ENFIA  
Interpreter**

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<sup>58</sup> Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 154.

<sup>59</sup> Ricketts, *Pouch of Gold*, 21.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.