

ENFIA Interpreter

February 3, 2026 Vol. 23

A Message from the President

By Stan Trevena

Getting ready for the new season

I am sitting here staring at the screen as I begin my last year as President of ENFIA. It always seems to be the start of the new year that kicks off preparations for the new season up at Carson Pass. That period between the Fall meeting and the holidays is the slowest time of the year.

We have accomplished a lot in the past three years in changing how ENFIA does business. We are now running "like a business" with all the support systems and resources you would normally expect. We have deepened our interaction with the Forest Service, and our Interpretive Manager (Mike Conroy) is working with the Conservation Education

Specialist at the Forest Service on expanding our interpretive activities, possibly extending into the off-season.

In the August newsletter, I wrote about how hard it is to fill positions within ENFIA. I made an appeal to everyone to step up and get involved beyond the role of docent. I was both surprised and pleased with the responses to that newsletter article. I can report that we filled several very important positions. Retail has brought two additional Retail Associates on board. We've brought on a Business Manager to help with the running of ENFIA. We have two people working on a conservation program for Carson Pass for the coming season (*starting with water and recycling*). I've been working with the Forest Service to update and reissue our Participating Agreement that allows us to do business within the Eldorado National Forest and

operate the Carson Pass Information Station.

As mentioned in the August article, we had two station managers last year. They have both taken roles associated with that position and made them into new positions. Karen Heine, the prior Station Manager, back when I joined ENFIA, helped with the opening and closing of the station this past year. We decided after closing to split off the responsibility of opening and closing of the station into its own position. Karen has graciously volunteered to take this on. She created the guide that we use every year for opening and closing the station.



Since we closed for the season, we've had several conversations at board meetings and between various people and have decided to do something different with station management. Instead of locking someone in for five months (*May-September*) every year, we have decided to go to a rotating schedule of people to handle the responsibilities. This will primarily involve being available for phone calls and communicating with the Forest Service on issues regarding the

Station. We've already had a few people express an interest. We'll give more information on this in the next few months. If you have a history with ENFIA and knowledge of the operation of the Station and you're interested in joining this group drop me an email.



We are also still looking for an experienced webmaster. Our ENFIA website needs some attention. It has served us well over the years, but it's really in need of a refresh and possibly a redesign. This would be a great opportunity for anyone wanting to take it on. This would be a job that can be done remotely. There are so many more things we could do with our website if we had an experienced person maintaining and expanding it.

It has truly been a group effort to bring us to where we are today. I never cease to be amazed by the people who make up ENFIA, from the docents to those in specific positions. There are a lot of people that believe in this organization. If you have an interest in leading this organization, next year will be the perfect time to get on the Board of Directors and help with leading the organization. We will have brought everything up to date

with what we do and our relationship with the Forest Service.

I am not planning on leaving ENFIA. I plan on keeping involved as long as I can. I believe strongly in the role of ENFIA up at Carson Pass. This area is a treasure of outdoor activities for people visiting from our state and abroad. The flow of PCT hikers alone brings people from all corners of the world to our station.

How's the Snow?



I was up at the station last weekend. We were doing some maintenance on the solar system. It was frigid cold. Inside the station in the morning it was 22 degrees. By the time we left it was up to 28 degrees. There is not much snow, maybe four or five feet at the parking lot. And calling it snow would be a misnomer. It's more like a giant block of ice. I put my spikes on to get from my vehicle to the station. We desperately need more snow. Hopefully, we'll get some big storms between now and the opening at the end of May. California gets a lot of water from the snowpack during the summer. If we don't get more snow soon, it's going to be a very dry summer.

Spring is on the way! We open in about four months, depending on snow between now and then. Looking forward to a great season this year!

Contact me



If you have an interest in the position of President drop me an email: President@enfia.org I would be happy to answer any questions, or explain in more detail what the role of President entails. After my tenure in the position, I believe a good term is two to four years. I truly believe that ENFIA would benefit from a new person in this position every two to four years. My time as President has been both challenging and rewarding. Drop me an email if you want to discuss it in more detail.

Get to Know Your Docents

By Robyn Sandperl

I'd like to start a new column where docents submit articles of adventures they have done. Submissions may be made to my email at robynsandperl@enfia.org. I will save them and use a few at a time for this newsletter. Our first submission is a snowshoe adventure that several docents and friends recently took. Thanks Phil for this next article!

Snowshoe Trek from Luther Pass to Scott Lake and Hope Valley - Jan 9, 2026

By Phil Hartvig

A group of ENFIA volunteers and friends who like to get out on the trails year round gathered at Luther Pass early in the morning of Jan 9, 2026 to break a little trail on snowshoes. I admit that I am new to this weekly hiking group and a novice on shoeshoes. This was only my third time strapping a piece of metal and plastic to my summer hiking boots and setting out to experience the joys of a brisk winter day in the woods. I have traveled the areas in and around Carson Pass and Hope Valley for over thirty years but only in hiking boots (more recently hiking shoes) during the spring, summer, fall and on backcountry touring skis in the winter.



Why restrict yourself to the three milder seasons of the year, when the winter awaits you with such beauty and often soul refreshing solitude? Well the diverse group of showshoers maybe did not get a solo solitude experience since there were 9 of us as we started out, but we were a friendly

social group that enjoys a common pursuit so off we went.

The winter storms that had blanketed our route a few days before along with the cold temperatures presented us with a rare event in the Sierras-light powdery snow usually reserved for mountains in Utah or Colorado. Many of the trees on our route were still covered with a beautiful “flocking” not found in a can....the real stuff.



We saw a group of Alpine touring skiers as we started up the trail from Luther Pass. They were off to conquer the nearby Waterhouse Peak and earn their turns without a ski lift. We followed their ski tracks for a short distance before veering to our left to follow a more or less level contour to the east of Waterhouse and into the forests overlooking the Hope Valley Area. The route is known as the Scott Lake-Luther Pass connector trail during the hiking seasons but today no trail was to be found. There were none of the blue diamond winter cross-county trail markers that you

find in the Carson Pass area. We were trying to make our own trail through the snow. We looked for a path that was more open and not too steep so we zigged and zapped a bit, gaining and losing elevation a few times before settling into a gradual downhill transverse following an electronic map downloaded onto our phones. Who uses paper maps anymore!



For those of you not familiar with snow shoeing or cross-country skiing in deep fresh powder snow, there is a term called “breaking trail”. Unlike the TV series “breaking” is not all BAD. It is exhausting to all but the ultra-conditioned adventurer. In a group you usually ask the new additions who are eager to have the honor of breaking trail for the trekking party and they soon discover that lifting your snow shoes or pushing your skis through the snow is a real workout. After a while you learn to rotate the “honor” to help conserve everyone's energy. Sometimes you are lucky and one or two individuals in the group with a workout mindset smash a trail into the deep snow and each person who follows helps to pack it down into a more manageable and civilized path.

If you are in the back of the pack (like Mark and I were most of the time heading out), you get the benefits and can enjoy a “groomed” path.

Unfortunately one of our group members had to return to the trailhead after only a half mile into the adventure due to an equipment failure. Straps on her snow shoes had cracked and broken due to age and the very cold temperatures that made the plastic more brittle. A tip for future outings...check your gear before heading out and bring extra straps, duct tape, and zip ties for emergency repairs in the field. The week prior to this trek two members had similar equipment failures with their gear. They were able to make repairs and carry on. Best to be prepared. There is an advantage to traveling in a group rather than solo - if your equipment fails, you are not alone. Having reliable communication in the backcountry is also important. Several people in our group were carrying satellite phones in addition to our cell phones and were able to communicate as needed.



Our group stopped to take pictures along the way of the surroundings and regroup as the pace of different people can quickly result in having people get better spread out. A few times I

fell behind due to taking photos or due to “post-holing”. This term refers to when the snow surface is not solid enough to support your weight and your foot (even with a snowshoe) will sink deep into the snow. Sometimes you can sink all the way up to your pelvic area. Sometimes getting out of a post hole can take a bit of time and flexibility. Our group has learned that the lighter participants can sometimes walk across a snowfield and never break through while the heavier folks like me crash and stumble when a foot disappears into a hole.

Well we made it to our lunch spot at Scott Lake and people broke out their seating pads, lounging pads and a variety of delicious snacks, sandwiches, and even some had “hot meals” carried in thermos containers. The views were great and the conversations flowed along with a few “hot drinks” to supplement the cold water bottles of hydrating fluids.

After sitting/lounging for our lunch, members started to get a little cold and we started out again to join us with our “shuttle car” waiting on Hwy 88 in Hope Valley below. We tried to follow our electronic map but a small group of folks took a few too many right turns and we ended up on the highway a bit south of our target car.



After a short walk along the highway we made it safely back to a warm car and the drivers who left their cars at Luther Pass were shuttled back and we all were reunited and had the pleasure of fond memories of another successful adventure together.

Avalanches - Devastation or Wildlife Hotspots?

by Lester Lubetkin

Last summer my wife, Alice and I were hiking in the mountains and as we came up into a beautiful alpine meadow, we found our path blocked by a jumble of down tree trunks, all pointing in one direction (away from the hillslope). Clearly a snow avalanche had come down, breaking off tree trunks and tree tops as it careened down the hillside, coming to rest in the flat meadow. The presence of all this woody debris got us to wondering what role avalanches play in the ecology of alpine landscapes. We know of the dangers and risks that avalanches play in winter recreation,

but is there an important, positive side to avalanches as well?

Turns out a lot of research has been done on the role of avalanches in mountain ecology, and there are a lot of really important benefits that avalanches provide in creating habitat, cycling of nutrients, and supporting biodiversity. But, as we will learn, there are some negative impacts from avalanches as well.



Top photo: Hillside avalanche (Photo from Sierra Avalanche Center). Lower photo: Avalanche chute. Photo from TahoeDailyTribune.com.

So, let's start with "What is an Avalanche?" As snow accumulates on hillslopes, there can be zones, or planes, of weakness, such as ice crystal layers, sections of rapid, loose snow accumulation or just very steep slopes that can't support the snow that has built up (generally over 30 degree slopes). At some point, either from temperature changes, additional snow loading, or people crossing the snow, the snow exceeds its capacity to stay where it is, and starts to flow rapidly

downhill. The weight of the snow and the force from movement are strong enough to break trees and move people, carrying them along with the moving snow until the flow comes to rest. But avalanches usually don't rip up snow all the way to the ground, rather they consist of a mass of snow flowing over a lower layer of snow. That is why when crossing avalanche chutes, you often see the trees broken off at a consistent height above the ground, marking the lower extent of the avalanche.



Broken tree trunk, showing the base of the avalanche as it flowed downhill. Photo from SummitDaily.com.

While avalanches can be highly destructive and pose a significant hazard to winter recreationists or other wildlife that gets caught in its path, these winter features also play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the alpine ecosystem. These natural disturbances can rejuvenate landscapes by creating a mosaic of vegetative openings along hillsides, thus providing fresh browse for deer and other herbivores. As trees are broken off, sunlight is able to reach the ground, encouraging shrubs and forbs to grow, changing the vegetative community from a dense forest to an open meadow or shrub field. Avalanche chutes also create critical edge-effects where different

plant communities come together. These edge zones are often biological hotspots with a highly diverse mix of plants, animals and insects. For instance, certain raptors are dependent on roosting in forest trees while watching for prey out in meadows or vegetative openings. Avalanches, and their associated removal of trees in their path, ensure that new openings are created as older avalanche chutes return to forests. Some animals tend to favor avalanche chutes as pathways to move across the landscape, which can play a role in predator-prey relationships.

Another benefit from avalanches is the movement of woody material - as the broken trees start to decompose, they release nutrients back into the soil. In fact, this can be a major source of nutrient enrichment in meadows. As the soil becomes enriched, it is able to support new plants and insects, which are the basis of the food chain for larger birds and animals. The transported woody material can also affect or disturb drainage patterns, in some cases leading to more stored water, and in other cases to creating erosion problems. In either case, these changes can rejuvenate stable landscapes.



Woody material delivered to a meadow by a winter avalanche. Photo from owc.com.

So, as you are out enjoying the Eldorado Forest this Winter, be cognizant of the hazards associated with avalanches, but also take time to appreciate the important role they play in helping to maintain a diverse and healthy ecosystem.

For more info on avalanche hazards, avalanche hazard forecasts, and how to avoid avalanche prone areas, visit the [Sierra Avalanche Center](http://sierraavalanchecenter.org) website or the [Eldorado Backcountry Ski Patrol](http://eldoradoavalanchepatrol.org) website. Another excellent source for avalanche awareness is [Avalanche.org](http://avalanche.org), a partnership between the American Avalanche Association and the US Forest Service National Avalanche Center.

And if you want to learn more about the ecological benefits of avalanches:

[How Do Avalanches Affect the Environment](#)

[A Review of Avalanche Ecology: Forest Habitat Structure and Wildlife Biodiversity](#)

More Than You Ever Wanted to Know about the History of California State Route 88

By Frank Tortorich



How many times have we driven up CA SR¹ 88 at 50, 60 or more miles per hour with our focus on a destination, be it Silver Lake, Caples Lake, Kirkwood, Carson Pass, Hope Valley, Carson City, or any other eastern locations, without thinking about the history that we might be missing?

Having grown up in Jackson and teaching in Amador County for 33 years, I have driven on that highway a couple of thousand times. You might say that is an exaggeration? Well, I worked seasonally for the US Forest Service for about 20 summers, so I drove the highway as far as Hope Valley 15 or 20 days a month over a five-month period each summer. That equates to about 1,500 trips. Now this does not count the many trips I took with my wife Mary Ann while doing research on the Carson River Route of the California Emigrant Trail. Nor does it count the other times I drove

to the high county to go hiking, camping, skiing, backpacking, or just a leisurely drive to see the scenery. So, now we are talking about well over 2,000 trips and counting.

I think by now I know every curve, turnout, pot hole, tree, rock, and vista points on the entire route.

I even remember riding up to Silver Lake from Jackson as a child with my parents about 1948.² It was mostly a poorly paved dirt wagon road that we called the Kit Carson Highway. It was so narrow at some points that two cars could not pass each other. The trip could take one and a half to two hours to get to Silver Lake. Over the years I have seen the highway redesigned, improved, realigned, and widened to its present high-speed highway with turnouts and passing lanes.

I remember when it was closed for the winter at Peddler Hill ski area. It remained that way until the Kirkwood ski resort opened in the winter of 1972-73. It was then that CA SR 88 became a year-round highway. Highway 88 joined I-80 and US 50 as the only three year-round highways over Sierra Nevada, even to this day.

Just recently I took the time to drive up Highway 88 to photograph every monument, plaque, or point of interest that I could locate. I will share those

¹ CA SR is California State Route.

² LRN (Legislature Route Number) 34 was renamed CA SR 88 in the early 1950s.

shortly. We can add that trip to the count.

PROFILE

CA SR 88 begins on US Route 99 near Stockton and terminates at the California-Nevada state line where it changes to Nevada State Route 88, ending at the junction with US 395 in Minden, NV. The California portion is approximately 125 miles long.

1965: Parade Magazine named Highway 88 as one of America's Most Scenic Highways. Indeed it is.

The highest elevation that Highway 88 reaches is 8,573 ft. at Carson Pass.



Highway 88 has 35 miles above 7,000 feet, US 50 has about four miles above 7,000 ft., reaching an elevation of 7,382 ft. at Echo Summit; I-80 has even less miles than Echo above 7,000 ft., reaching an elevation at Donner Summit of 7,057 ft.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

1848: The Carson Pass section of Highway 88 was opened to wagon travel by a group of discharged members of the Mormon Battalion. They were seeking a way over the Sierra Nevada on their way to the

Mormon settlement in Salt Lake, UT. They wanted to avoid the Truckee River Route of the California Emigrant Trail due to the well-known 1847 Donner tragedy. So, by following ancient Indian trails they were able to open the Carson River Route to wagon travel,³ from west to east.

This was the second wagon trail to be established over the Sierra Nevada. The first was the Truckee River Route, AKA Donner Trail, which opened in 1844, from east to west.

The Volcano Road is a branch of the Carson River Route, which opened in 1852. It began near the Iron Mountain Road, (now named the Mormon Emigrant Trail or MET), near where the defunct Iron Mountain Ski resort was located. It traveled west roughly along present-day Highway 88 to Dew Drop where it forked off and traveled the ridge parallel to present day Shake Ridge Road to Daffodil Hill. It continued down off the ridge to Volcano, coming through today's cemetery.

1855: California legislature appropriated \$5,000 to survey the existing wagon trails⁴ over the Sierra to determine the best routes for commercial wagon roads. They were

³ Tortorich, Frank. *GOLD RUSH TRAIL*. Pub. Wagon Wheel Tours 1998. Pp 1-9

⁴ The Annual Report of the Surveyor-General of California 1856, to explore numerous routes including the Carson River route, The Johnson route (highway 50) The Truckee route.

also looking for a possible route for the future transcontinental railroad. The Carson Pass route was one of the roads chosen in the survey. Nothing became of that survey until 1859 when silver was discovered near Virginia City which was then in the Utah Territory.



In 1862 Nevada Territory was formed followed by statehood in 1864.

The discovery of silver demanded improved roads between the state of California and Utah territory. The Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road was constructed starting in 1859.

1862: The Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road was opened when the Carson Spur was blasted through allowing the road to pass close to Silver Lake. That shortened the original emigrant wagon trail by six to eight miles by avoiding the circuitous trail high above Silver Lake. Thus lowered the elevation from 9,640 ft. at West Pass to 7,990 ft. at Carson Spur.

During this same time, residents of Amador County approved bonds for \$25,000 to widen the road to 16 ft. This then allowed wagons to pass each other in opposite directions when

traveling to and from the Comstock mining areas and California.

The Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road, including the Volcano Cutoff became a toll road offering a maximum grade of 18% from Antelope Springs (Dew Drop) to Caples Lake. It was later improved all the way to Nevada.

It was common practice in those days for the state, county, or city to approve a private contractor to build a road with their own personal funds and then establish a toll road to recover their investment. This was the case with the Volcano Cutoff, Pine Grove- Antelope Turnpike and Vogan Toll Road in Jackson. However, the cost for the construction of the Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road was built with public bonds and therefore could not become a toll road.

1995: The Bureau of Highways was created by the California State legislature. Their first report stated.

The condition of the highways in California today is the result of a generation of neglect and apathy.

WOW! Some things just never change with the same discussion going on today.

1897: The Legislature dissolved the Bureau of Highways and established the *Department of Highways*.

1909: The legislature gave the “tentative” designation to the Carson route as Legislative Route Number (LRN) 34.

1911: Highway 88 was designated as the *Alpine Highway* from CA SR 49 in Jackson to CA SR 89 in Hope Valley. It was also referred to as the *Kit Carson Highway*.

1915: It was officially designated as LRN 34. In those days when “new” roads were constructed they were given a number in the chronological order when they were built. There was no sequence or order to the system, which became confusing to the traveler and map makers.

1926: The states began looking for a more logical numbering system. It was decided that north to south roads were given odd numbers and east to west roads were given even numbers.

1956: President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 creating the US Interstate Highway system. This was when LRN 34 became California State Route 88. It is of interest to note; the shape of a California Highway sign is in the image of a miner’s shovel.



HISTORIC NAMES AND PLACES

Following along the road east from Volcano on Shake Ridge Road, there were a series of trading posts and hotels along the Volcano Cutoff and the Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road.

After leaving Volcano going east, the first stop was Foster’s Hotel at Lockwood junction of Shake Ridge and Fiddletown road. Lockwood is named after Henry Smith Lockwood.

Next was Ballard’s Hotel at Antelope Springs. Antelope Springs, AKA Dewdrop is at 4,300 ft. In 1864 when the Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road was built, the Pine Grove-Antelope Turnpike was built as toll stations, located at Antelope Springs and Pine Grove. The cost was 50¢ per person and 10¢ for each animal.

1932: The Jackson Lions Club led a campaign to build a snow park at Antelope Springs. The name was later changed to Dewdrop for a nearby diner called DewDrop Inn. They cleared trees for 100 ft. width by 1,200 ft. long for a double slide, or wooden toboggan run.

They established a 16 ft. x 40 ft. clubhouse, refreshment stand, off-highway parking, and turning around area. By mid-December of that year two ft. of snow fell.

The grand opening was planned for January 1, 1933. But most of the snow had melted by then and the event had to be delayed. A few days later, over 4 ft. of snow fell which closed the highway and the opening had to be delayed again until January 29.

By the first week in February a two-lane road was cleared, and 150 autos arrived to enjoy the snow. It is not clear how long it operated, but in the early 1940s, Merv Amick opened Peddler Hill Ski Resort at 7,000 ft. elevation. It was just a rope tow that closed for lunch when Merv took a break. This may have been the reason Dewdrop Snowpark closed.

Cook Station:

1905: Charlie Sedham established Cook's Station, but previously it was known as Hipkin's Station and Wiley's Station. Cooks was named for Lewis H. Cook, who also operated the St. George Hotel in Volcano.



Hams Station:

1852: Clairborne and Margaret Foster migrated from Illinois in 1852, the same year that the Volcano Road was built. They settled at what is now Ham's Station and later moved to Lockwood Junction. When Clairborne

Foster settled "Hams" it was called Foster's Old Trading Post. Later, it was called Smith's Station and eventually bought by the Hams brothers and has been known since about 1881 if not several years before. Foster was involved with numerous other endeavors and Foster Meadow Road is named after him.

The following locations are on the old CA SR 88, which is now US Forest Service Road 8N26. This is mostly a dirt road and not well maintained. The road rejoins the new CA SR 88 at USFS Lumberyard Fire Station.⁵

After Smith's (Hams) we arrive at Prospect Rock where Osborn's Station was located. Less than a mile beyond was Patterson's Hotel at Mud Springs. The road continued past Avery's Lumberyard (USFS Lumberyard Fire Station) to Lower Corral Flat to a hotel owned by James Goldsworthy. Two miles farther brought us to Upper Corral Flat where Gilbert's Hotel stood. (This location is about where the junction for present day CA SR 88 and Mormon Emigrant Trail (MET)⁶ come together). A few miles farther we came to Washington Porter's Hotel at the meadow near Tragedy Spring. Three miles more and we dropped down into Plasse's

⁵ At one time this was a lumberyard called Avery's Lumberyard. Later it became the summer office for the Amador Ranger Station, with the winter office in Jackson.

⁶ The MET name was established by the US Forest Service in the 1970's. It is 26 miles on Forest Service paved road. To refer to the Carson Trail as the MET is not Historically correct.

Resort and then on to Wade's Lake House where the old Kay's Resort stood on Kay's Road.⁷

From here they had to travel over the treacherous Carson Spur to Kirkwood Inn. Even today traveling the spur can be hazardous with falling rocks and snow avalanches.

Why the need for all these stations? When the Comstock Lode hit in 1859, there was a need to get men and supplies over the Sierra from Sacramento, CA, to Virginia City, UT (today's NV). This great silver strike created a need for a commercial wagon road to manage all the traffic. The wagons were pulled by oxen, mules, and horses which could only travel a short distance in the mountains before needing feed, water, and rest, as did the men.

Prior to that, however, was the building of the Volcano Ditch, Amador County Canal, Pine Grove-Antelope Springs Turnpike, Volcano-Sutter Turnpike, not to mention all the mining that was going on in Amador County.

Kirkwood Inn: Zach Kirkwood may have settled in the meadow as early as 1858 running cattle and getting out of the valley heat.

1864: Zach established the inn on the newly constructed Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road.

⁷ This is now the boat launch ramp and picnic area owned by El Dorado Irrigation District.

It is at this inn, about 1904, that guest of the Kirkwood Inn heard of a woman who was looking for her daughter whom she buried in a meadow⁸ in 1850. So began the legend and confusion over the Maiden's Grave. (See Ledger Dispatch. July 23, 2021)

Caples Lake: This was the summer home for Dr. James and Mary Jane Caples from the mid-1850s for the next 30 years. Eventually they even carried a few trading post items.

1858: Meiss (pronounced mice) Meadow was settled by Louis Meiss. Louis ran cattle in Sacramento County off Meiss Road between Dillard Road and Ione-Michigan Bar Road out of the city of Ione. Many of the early day ranches had low elevation ranches. They also had a high-country pasture for their cattle during the summer. Most herded their cattle right up Highway 88 each spring and back down the highway in the fall. This lasted until the mid-1970s.



Owners of the Barton Ranch and the Mace Ranch were early day settlers, circa mid to late 1860s, near today's

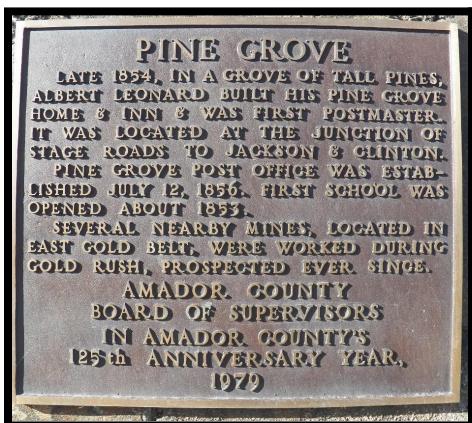
⁸ Tragedy Spring meadow.

Mace Meadow Golf Course and housing development.

PLAQUES AND MONUMENTS

Driving east on Highway 88 from Jackson I have taken photos of all the plaques and monuments that can be found today, January 2026. Each of these locations has an area to park a vehicle.

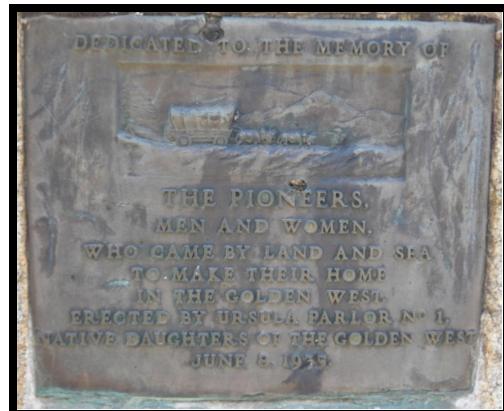
Our first stop is in Pine Grove. On the right side of the road, by Pine Grove Park, we find this monument.



Continuing east on Highway 88 passing through Pioneer, Buckhorn and Mace Meadow, in about one mile past Mace Meadow look for this monument to your right at what once was known years ago as Inspiration Point, you will find this small monument.



This plaque is mounted on the stone pillar.



Continuing east on Highway 88 for about 12 or 14 miles, passing Shot Rock Vista, we arrive at:

Maiden's Grave

It is on the right and about a mile or two past Shot Rock Vista and slightly below the level of the highway. There is a gravel area to park just past the grave. It is on the opposite side of the highway from the Devil's Garden view point. The grave is easy to miss going east.

Below is a photo of the grave with three markers.

The text for the pedestal maker is below the picture.



MAIDEN'S GRAVE

Although neither a maiden nor a grave, Maiden's Grave serves as a memorial to the many that died on

their journey to California. On October 4, 1850, William Edmondson wrote, "After traveling 6 miles we came to Tragedy Springs... After Traveling two miles further, we came to a trading post about noon where we camped, having come 8 miles today. A young man from Henry County, named Allen Melton died at this place during the night."

In 1908, guests at Kirkwood erected an engraved headstone near this site with the name Rachael Melton. Their error came due to mixing facts with the death of a young girl who died and was buried in the meadow near Tragedy Spring in 1850. When the highway was realigned, the gravestones were relocated but the remains were not moved. Allen Melton rests somewhere under the modern highway.

Dedicated October 4, 2004

Marker jointly dedicated by

Amador County Sesquicentennial Committee

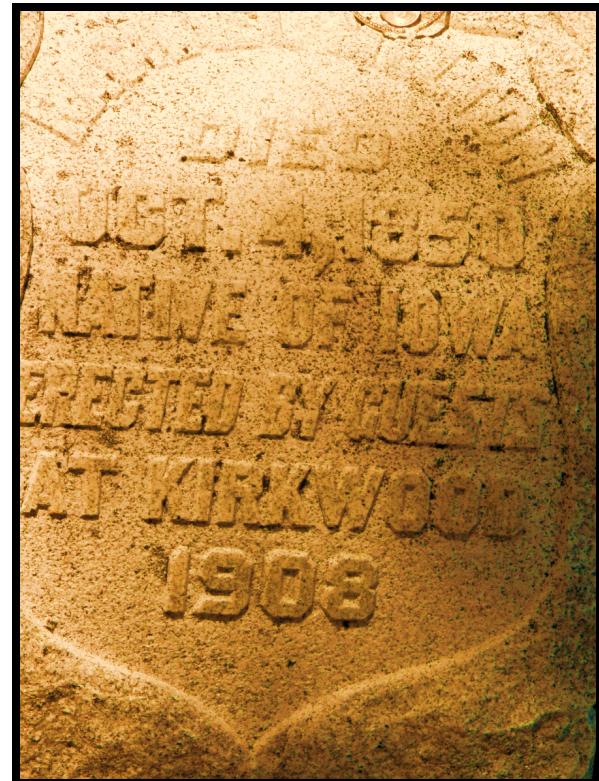
The United States Forest Service

and

Oregon-California Trails Association

There are two pedestal markers telling the true story of who is really buried in Maiden's Grave. This marker shares the area with two older monuments with some incorrect stories. The other pedestal marker is in the meadow at Tragedy Spring.

Next is the headstone erected by Friends at Kirkwood in 1908.

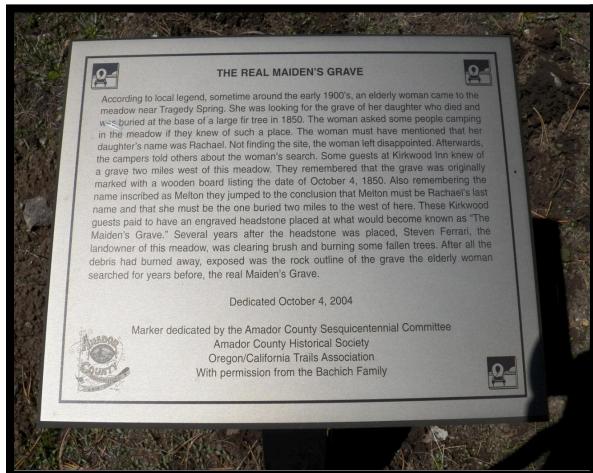


The headstone reads: Rachale Melton Died Oct. 4, 1850 Native of Iowa Erected by guests at Kirkwood 1908.

From Maiden's Grave, drive east for about two miles and turn left at the west end (first turnoff) of the Tragedy Spring Road loop (This is part of old Highway 88). This marker will be on your left. The grave is uphill above this marker.



Continue driving and another 100 yards to the supposed to be the "Real Maiden's grave."



This is the companion marker for the one at Maiden's grave.

On Highway 88 about two miles past Maiden's Grave, is the "Old Emigrant Trail" plaque.

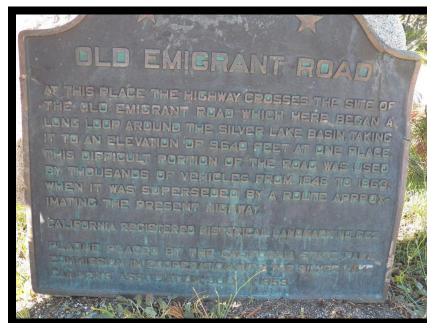
There were two of these makers.

This one is located near Tragedy Spring on the right of the highway, across from the east end of the Tragedy Spring loop road and near the 8,000 ft. marker.

The companion to this marker was near Caples Lake. Unfortunately, the plaque at Caples Lake has been taken

but the rock it was attached to is still in place.

These two markers were installed at the same time and cast one after the other. But like so many of these historic markers, they have errors and these two are no exception. This one refers to the wagon reaching a high elevation at 9,640 ft., California Registered Historical Landmark number 662 and the other one reads, 9,460 ft., number 661. The correct altitude is 9,640 ft. Elevation refers to West Pass' elevation.



This location is to the right side and across the highway from the east end of the loop-road to Tragedy Spring

Continue east for about another mile and look for wide gravel pull- out over- looking Silver Lake on the right. There is a granite boulder with an embedded plaque.



This is located on a gravel pullout about 1/4 mile past the east end of the Tragedy Spring loop-road. Melissa Coray peak (right arrow) and West Pass (left arrow)

Melissa Coray was the only woman with the Mormon Battalion remnants when they opened the Carson River Route in 1848, west to east.

Below is the plaque located at the top of Melissa Coray Peak.



Sorry, this marker cannot be driven by car.

Below is a photo of the missing plaque which is a companion marker to the one near Tragedy Spring.

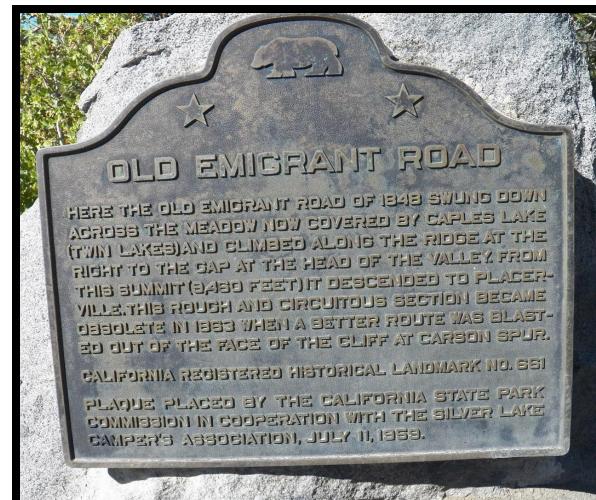
This marker overlooked Caples Lake and West Pass.



Caples Lake

Left arrow Melissa Coray Peak. Middle arrow West Pass. Right arrow the Emigrant Trail.

Many brass plaques have been stolen to melt down into belt- buckles and other objects. Most new plaques are made of anodized aluminum, which has little value for thieves.



This is a photo of the missing plaque. Originally located on the granite rock about 100 yards past the Caltrans Caples Lake maintenance station road. The Granite rock is still there.

The next marker is located at the Carson Pass parking lot. The Snowshoe Thompson obelisk.



This was placed by the Nevada Chapter of the Clampers.

E Clampus Vitus (ECV) is a fun-loving group who can do some good in helping to preserve history despite their unique and questionable dedication to facts. This obelisk is an example of their version of history. It is 49 ft. tall, representing how long Thompson lived. The top was broken off on purpose and was attached to the base, which is now missing. This broken top represented his life cut short.

The plaques list all the contributing members who donated to the placement of the monument. It provides little history to Snowshoe Thompson.

At the dedication they provided a handout to all who attended.

“NEVADA GIVES THE SHAFT TO CALIFORNIA”

July 10, 1977, ON THE CARSON PASS SUMMIT”

(There was a drawing of the obelisk surrounded by trees)

The bottom of the handout reads:

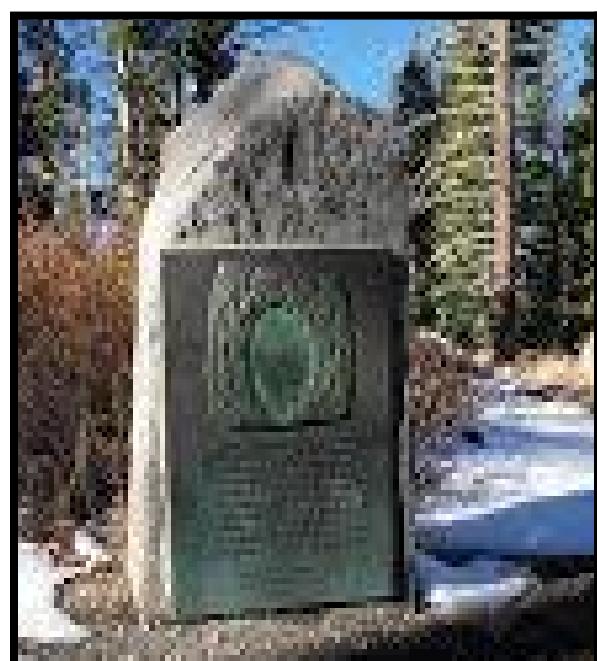
“SNOWSHOE THOMPSON
MONUMENT
An Eternal Erection
BY THE NEVADA CLAMPERS”

I find this is over the line for proper decorum when honoring a historical figure. I may be overly sensitive because I authored a book on the life of Snowshoe Thompson.⁹ It is my opinion; this monument was more about the Clampers than about Thompson.

To be fair to the Clampers, they have placed numerous other plaques that do make a significant contribution to the preservation of our history.

The last marker in this study will also be at Carson Pass on the other side of the restrooms.

The Kit Carson Tree Blaze marker.



I love to tell the story of the plaque, starting with the inscription.

**ON THIS SPOT, WHICH
MARKS THE SUMMIT OF THE**

⁹ Tortorich: JOHN A, “SNOWSHOE” THOMPSON, *Pioneer Mail Carrier of the Sierra*. Pronghorn Press, 2015.

**KIT CARSON PASS, STOOD
WHAT WAS KNOWN AS THE
KIT CARSON TREE ON WHICH
THE FAMOUS SCOUT KIT
CARSON INSCRIBED HIS NAME
IN 1844 WHEN HE GUIDED THE
THEN CAPTAIN JOHN C.
FRMONT, HEAD OF A
GOVERNMENT EXPLORING
EXPEDITION, OVER THE
SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS.**

**ERECTED BY LANDMARKS
COMMITTEE**

**NATIVE SONS OF THE GOLDEN
WEST, 1921**

ABOVE IS A REPLICA OF THE
ORIGINAL INSCRIPTION CUT
FROM THE TREE IN 1888 AND
NOW IN SUTTER'S FORT,
SACRAMENTO.

There are several problems with the marker, in the first sentence it states, “On this spot...” The present location of the marker is not the original “spot.” The spot was in the middle of the “saddle” of the pass itself as you can see from the photo below.



This is the original location for the 1921 dedication ceremony by the Native Sons of the Golden West for the Kit Carson Tree blazed marker.

The plaque goes on to say that Kit Carson inscribed his name on this tree in 1844. Well, I will never believe that Cason carved his name on that tree in 1844. They did pass here in February of 1844. That group of 38 men were near starvation, exhausted from battling 20 to 30 ft. of snow, trying to get to Sutter’s Fort and relief. Carson, nor any person under that condition, would take the time or expend the energy to dig down through the snow to ground level and carve their name on a tree.

However, in 1853, Carson, with a group of men, did cross this pass in the summer time with 6,500 head of sheep to sell in California for a huge profit. I can speculate he may have carved his name then, or not.

The next statement, “he guided the ...” Kit Carson was not the guide on this expedition, it was Thomas “Broken Hand” Fitzpatrick. Payroll records show that Carson was hired as a hunter and Indian fighter.

The last comment I have is the improper use of “Sierra Nevada Mountains.”

Proper use is the Sierra or Sierra Nevada. In Spanish, Sierra refers to mountains and Nevada is snow covered. So, by adding Mountains to

Sierra Nevada, is the same as saying
“mountain, mountain.”¹⁰

The Kit Carson marker today has been damaged by someone trying to pry off the plaque. There is a metal wedge stuck on the right side deforming the plaque. It is also leaning and needs to be righted.

The original tree blaze is in the California State Archives at McClellan Field, The field is located just north of Sacramento.

We can only hope the Native Sons will come to its rescue and save this wonderful part of history.

There are so many more stories along Highway 88. It is rich in history, and the most significant part is that more gold seekers traveled over Carson Pass than any other trail from 1849 through 1859 and the Comstock Rush. That is why I call it, “THE GOLD RUSH TRAIL.”

¹⁰ The Chicago Manual of Style, 15 editions, 8.59.