

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

Bus Tour Notes
for
OCTA's 20th Annual Convention



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Reno

by Don Wiggins

Traditionally, the Truckee Meadows (Reno and Sparks, Nevada) was one of the camp sites and winter home of the Washoe Indians. The Washoe's lived in the mountains and valleys along the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Their neighbors to the east were the Northern Paiutes.

The first non-Native Americans to pass through the area was the Stephens/Townsend/Murphy emigrant party in 1844. At the Humboldt Sink they met a friendly Paiute Indian, whom they called Truckee, that advised them of a river to the southwest that flowed easterly from the mountains. After an exploratory trip to verify the Indian's story, and with no better alternative, the party decided to chance it. After crossing the Forty-mile desert, they arrived at the Truckee River near the present community of Wadsworth. From there, following the river valley and with many crossing of the river, the party passed through the Truckee Meadows and continued up river to the lake we now call Donner Lake. Although difficult, they succeeded in getting their wagons over the Sierra Nevada. The road to California was then a reality, and its path led through the Truckee Meadows.

In the following years, hundreds more emigrant wagons, including the Donner Party wagons, would pass through the Truckee Meadows. Historical figures that traveled through the Truckee Meadows include John Fremont, with Kit Carson and others, in 1845, and the Donner Party in 1846. Fremont returned through the meadows again in 1847, but this time with, and at the formal request of, General Stephen Watts Kearny to face court-martial.

By 1857, a few settlers had moved into the valley. Then, in 1859 the Comstock silver discovered at Virginia City caused a huge surge

of traffic through the area. About that time, C. W. Fuller established a ferry, a small lodging house, and a bridge at a site where, today, Reno's Virginia Street crosses the Truckee River. M. C. Lake bought the property in 1863 and it became known as "Lake's Crossing." In 1868, the Central Pacific Railroad reached Reno. Railroad officials laid out a town plat around where the station stood and sold lots. They also named the new town "Reno," after General Jesse Reno, who was killed in the Civil War.

In 1906, Reno's tourist industry got a big boost when the wife of the president of U.S. Steel Corporation, William E. Corey, came to Reno to file for divorce. This was a major scandal at the time as she was a wronged, faithful wife whose husband had taken up with a young actress. The divorce attracted worldwide publicity for Reno and helped establish its reputation as a divorce mecca. This reputation was further enhanced when actress Mary Pickford obtained a divorce in 1920. The tourism industry was firmly established when gambling was legalized (again) in 1931.

Today the divorce industry is just about a thing of the past, as other states have reduced the waiting time and the legal requirements for obtaining a divorce. Reno gambling is also under pressure with increasing competition within the state from the world-class facilities in Las Vegas, and the spread of Indian gaming in the surrounding states. However, high growth in the area continues, as diversity is the watch-word in Reno today. Besides gaming and entertainment, the tourism industry promotes many special events, and stresses sports activities such as golfing, bowling, and winter skiing. Warehousing and light industry are also heavily courted in the Reno area.

Who Named the River "Truckee"?

by Don Wiggins

This first emigrant party to travel the river named it the Truckee, after the friendly Indian who guided them to it. The earliest documentation of this fact is found in William Winter's diary of his return trip east, with mountain man Caleb Greenwood in the spring of 1845. He explicitly states:

in this lake [Donner Lake] the South branch of Truckies River has its source. This stream was called, by the emigrating party that went into California in the Fall of 1844, after the name of an Indian, who piloted them across the mountains.

Greenwood was with the 1844 Stephens [Stephens-Townsend-Murphy] party that opened the Truckee Trail emigrant route. He was returning east to recruit Oregon-bound emigrants to try the new road to California. One group that he persuaded to go to California was a party of packers that included a diary keeper named Jacob Snyder. On September 14, 1845, Snyder made this entry in his diary:

This day we made the crossing between the sink of Mary's River [Humboldt River] & Truckees River, a distance of 40 miles.

The next year, 1846, Edwin Bryant gave a more detailed account of the naming of the river:

The sheet of water just noticed, is the head of Truckee river, and is called by the emigrants who first discovered and named it, Truckee Lake.

[It may not be improper for me in this place to give the origin of this name. A small party of emigrants, with but little knowledge of the country, and the difficulties obstructing their progress, late in the autumn of 1844, were attempting to force their way through these mountains to California. They were lost, and nearly discouraged. The snows fell in the mountains before they had reached the Pass; and death by starvation,

frost, and fatigue, was staring them in the face. At the crisis of their distress, while forcing their way up the river, a Indian made his appearance, and in a most friendly manner volunteered his services to guide a portion of the party over the mountains. His appearance and eccentricities of manner resembled so much those of a man by the name of Truckee, who happened to have been an acquaintance of one of the party, that they gave the Indian the name of TRUCKEE; and called the river and lake, along which he conducted them, after this name. This same Indian (Truckee) was the principal of the two who encamped with us twenty-five miles above the 'Sink' of Mary's river. He and his brother afterwards came over into California with a company of emigrants; and accompanied the California battalion on its march from Monterey to the Ciudad de los Angeles.]

As usual, Bryant embellishes, and adds his own interpretation to the events. The Stephens Party met the Indian at the sink. Also, there is some question as to how far up the river Truckee traveled with the party. However, it seems likely, from these early diaries, that someone in the party gave the name of Truckee to the Indian and the river was named in his honor.

Those are the documented facts, but over the years, other, generally anecdotal, versions of the name's origin have appeared. Acknowledged Nevada history authority, Phillip Earl, in a newspaper article, reported two other versions of the origin of the name Truckee. One is a version told by one of Fremont's men that a French trapper named Truckee fell into the river as they were camped near Wadsworth in 1844. The men got a laugh out of Truckee's misfortune and dubbed the river Truckee's River. However, in Fremont's journals and on the

official maps, it is always called the Salmon Trout River. In this version, there was no mention of an Indian that was named Truckee. The incident may have happened, but the Stephens Party would not have known about it when they arrived in the fall of 1844.

The other version Earl describes was published in a Sacramento newspaper in 1889. William Baldrige, a member of the Chiles/Walker party of 1843, claimed that the river was named in the fall of 1845 by an emigrant named James Harbin. Harbin had met the Indian at the sink. As the Indian led them to the river, he noticed a resemblance between the Indian and a French fur trapper he had known, named Truckee. On the way to the river, Harbin named the Indian guide Truckee after the Frenchman. On arriving at the river, it then became Truckee's River in honor of the guide. A problem with this account is that, by the fall of 1845, the name Truckee was already penned in a diary; the date, at least, cannot be correct. The interesting part of the story is that there was a Matthew Harbin with the Stephens party in 1844. Writing 45 years after the fact, Baldrige may have been off one year and forgotten Harbin's first name. Otherwise, this story closely parallels the facts and could be true, with Mathew Harbin being the one that actually named the Indian "Truckee." As both stories involve a French fur trapper named Truckee (an unusual name), could one of Fremont's men been the same Frenchman that Harbin had known?

In January, 1844, before the Stephens Party reached the river, John Fremont had discovered and named the river the Salmon Trout. Near the mouth of the river, which empties into Pyramid Lake, the native people living there prepared a feast of the large lake trout for Fremont and his men. The next day, January 16, 1844, Fremont recorded in his journal, "This morning we continued our journey along the beautiful

stream, which we naturally called the Salmon Trout River."

In 1849, emigrant diarists familiar with Fremont's account, sometimes called the river the "Salmon Trout or Truckee." After a brief usage of both names by emigrant travelers, "Truckee River" caught on and the "Salmon Trout" was mostly forgotten. However, in a twist of history, Fremont is sometimes erroneously given credit for the name "Truckee." In his journals and even in his "Memoirs," written later in life, he only referred to it as the Salmon Trout River, never as the Truckee.

However, rumors have a life of their own. Even today, stories persist in the Reno area that the river was not named by the Stephens Party, but by Fremont after "his good friend Chief Truckee." Most of these stories can be traced back to an 1883 book written by Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins called *Life among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*. At the time, the book appealed to the Indian reform movement; it is still popular today, with paperback reprints readily available. Sarah was the daughter of Chief Winnemucca and granddaughter of Truckee. In the book she writes:

My grandfather met him [Fremont], and they were soon friends. They met just where the railroad crosses Truckee River, now called Wadsworth, Nevada. Captain Fremont gave my grandfather the name of Captain Truckee, and he named the river after him.

Most readers of Sarah's book have never heard of the Stephens Party, or read William Winter's or Jacob Snyder's diaries, or even Edwin Bryants' journal. So they have no way of knowing that the account in the book, written many years after the fact, may not be factual. After keeping silent all those years, did William Baldrige write his article just after Sarah's book was published to set the record straight? Or was the timing just coincidental?

Historic Sketch of the Verdi Area

- 1844Stephens Party follows upper Truckee River Canyon to Donner Lake.
- 1845Caleb Greenwood leads emigrants from Verdi to Dog Valley on way to Donner Lake.
- 1845-50s...Emigrants follow Greenwood's Bypass to Donner Lake.
- 1852Hennes Pass Road opens to emigrant wagon traffic. Branches off Donner Lake Road in Hoke Valley. Other roads to California also open. Donner Lake traffic begins to dry up.
- 1859Gold and Silver discovered in Comstock Lode (Virginia City, Nevada). Massive amounts of lumber will be used for houses, mine timbering, and fire wood for the steam engines. Hennes Pass Turnpike and Toll road, from Marysville, California through Dog Valley/Verdi to Virginia City, started.
- 1860s.....Two scheduled stage lines from Marysville to Virginia City via the Hennes Turnpike.
- 1862Dutch Flat/Donner Lake Toll Road organized by directors of the Central Pacific.
- 1864Dutch Flat road completed to Truckee Meadows in June. Town of Crystal Peak laid out by Crystal Peak Company. Located on flat west of river. At that time, at least three sawmills already existed on the slopes west of town. Coal was discovered in main Dog Valley Canyon in 1864, and there were some hard-rock mining claims located in the vicinity. Wagon roads led to all these activities.
- 1867Crystal Peak reaches peak population of 1500. Railroad reaches general area.
- 1868Railroad establishes Verdi on east side of river. Crystal Peak, on west side, starts to decline. Railroad also establishes Reno, which prevents Verdi/Crystal Peak from becoming population center of area and possible county seat.
- 1869Transcontinental railroad completed. Crystal Peak is no more; post office is now at Verdi. Some still live in old Crystal Peak. Most freight now carried by railroad.
- 1870Great Train Robbery
- ca 1905Logging railroad built from Verdi to Dog Valley, via main Dog Creek Canyon.
- 1909Beginning of widespread auto travel. Lincoln Highway in middle/late teens, Victory Highway in early 1920's, both through Dog Valley. (May have been on east side of valley, not down in the bottom.) Dog Valley now main auto road from Reno to Sacramento.
- 1925US Highway 40 completed to Verdi. End of most vehicle traffic through Dog Valley.
- 1960Fire burns over trail above Verdi. Bulldozers restore forest to its "natural condition."
- 1994Fire burns over trail above Verdi. Archaeologists try to protect historic resources.

The Truckee-Truckee tour and the South Branch Hike go through Verdi. Although Verdi was named after the Italian composer, it is pronounced "vur-die" locally.

The Great Verdi Train Robbery

by Don Wiggins

During the night of November 4, 1870, the first train robbery in the west occurred about four miles east of Verdi near Mogul. That afternoon, the Central Pacific No. 1 had left Oakland with \$41,800 in \$20 gold pieces and \$8,800 in silver bars. The robbery was conducted by five men who boarded the train when it slowed in going through Verdi.

Earlier, when the train left Oakland, Sunday School superintendent John Chapman had sent a coded message to a confederate in Reno named Sol Jones. The message indicated the CP train was on the way with \$60,000 in the express car. Near dusk, the leader of the gang, one Jack Davis, proceeded with four of his gang to a point west of Reno where they placed a barrier across the tracks. The location of the barrier was near the old River Inn (now a half-built resort tied up in bankruptcy), probably between the 25 and 26 emigrant crossings.

After boarding the train, two of the robbers covered the engineer and his fireman and forced him to continue on about one-half mile east. There he was ordered to stop briefly while two more of the gang uncoupled the engine and express car from the rest of the train. The engineer was then ordered to proceed to the barricade near Mogul.

They then forced the engineer to persuade the express car messenger to open up. After filling their saddle bags with gold coin, the robbers rode off toward the slopes of Peavine Mountain where they split up and went in different directions. Three of the robbers had fled west into California along the Henness Pass Turnpike. On reaching Sardine Valley, the trio stopped at Pearson's Hotel. Hot on their trail, that afternoon Washoe County deputy sheriff James Kinhead found one of the robbers, James Gilchrist, still in his room. The other men having already left. Gilchrist squealed and identified the other two men and they were soon arrested.

In a few days, all the robbers and their confederates were caught, including John Chapman, who claimed he was innocent as he was in California at the time of the robbery. As to the money, most of it was recovered — at least all but about \$3000 in \$20 gold pieces. Rumors have persisted through the years that the gold coins are buried somewhere on the slopes of Peavine Mountain, or maybe along the Truckee River, or maybe along the Henness Pass Trail, or ?

What would 150 \$20 gold pieces be worth today?

Derby Diversion Dam

by Don Wiggins

The Reclamation Act of 1902 was signed into law on June 17, 1902 by the President Theodore Roosevelt. Nevada's representative in Congress, Francis Newlands (later Senator), had introduced the original bill in the House, and had worked for passage so ardently that the bill was sometimes called the Newland's Bill. This act gave the Federal Government the responsibility for reclamation and the large dam building projects, such as Hoover, Grand Coulee, and Shasta Dams, that occurred in the western states in the Twentieth Century.

The first of these dams was a small diversion dam built, not surprisingly, in Newland's home state of Nevada. Derby Dam was constructed under Specification No. 1 and Drawing No. 1 of the U.S. Reclamation Service, now the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation. Its purpose was to divert water from the Truckee River for irrigation use and is part of the Newland Irrigation Project. The other main part of that project is Lahontan Dam, on the Carson River.

Construction began on Derby Dam on October 2, 1903 and was completed May 20, 1905. The Truckee Canal was constructed at the same

time as Derby Dam, to transport Truckee River water to the reservoir on the Carson River. Water diversions began in 1906.

The Newland's Project turned Lahontan Valley into a most productive alfalfa farming and ranching area. Fallon, which was just a small post office before the project, grew rapidly into a town. The completion of Lahontan Dam and powerhouse also provided electricity to the surrounding area.

Unfortunately, there were some bad effects. The diversion of Truckee River water from Pyramid Lake resulted in a large drop in lake level over the years. Litigation, between the various users of Truckee River water, which began shortly after the project was completed, still goes on today.

About four miles east of Derby Dam, a small settlement called Derby was established during the construction of the dam and canal. It became notorious for saloon shooting scrapes that occurred in the "Derby Dives."

The Forty Mile Desert and Sand Springs Station bus tours pass the Derby Dam, on I-80.

Hazen

by Don Wiggins

In 1902, the Southern Pacific Railroad laid out a new route from Wadsworth to Brown, near the Humboldt Sink, through Hazen what, a year later, became the community of Hazen. The new route avoided the grade over White Plains Hill, near Boiling Springs. The original 1868 Central Pacific route was then abandoned.

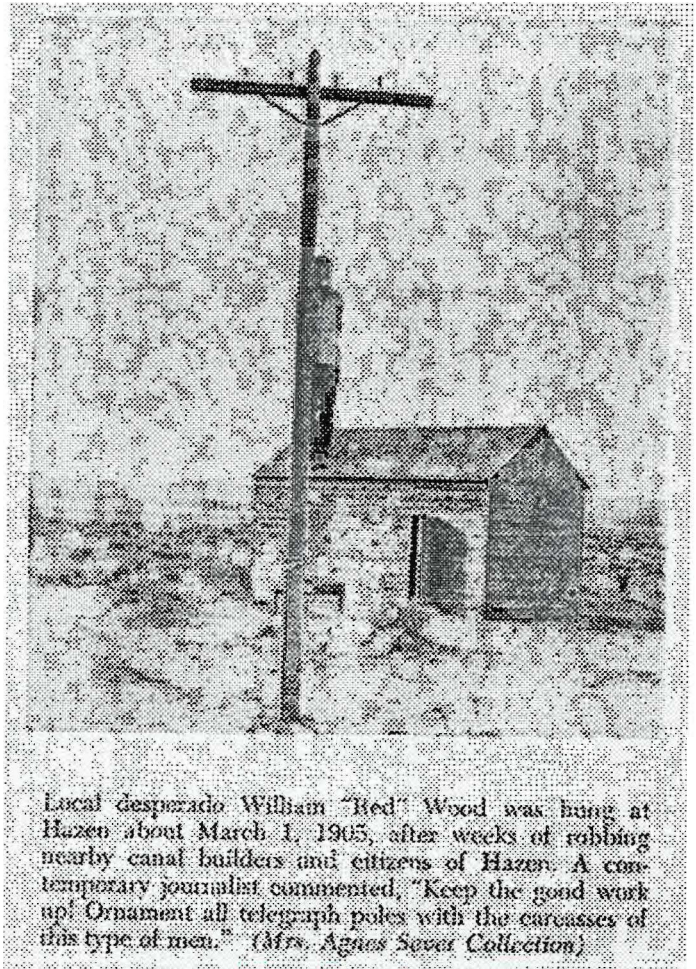
Hazen was named for William Babcock Hazen, an army officer who served under General Sherman during the Civil War.

The community of Hazen was established in 1903 to house men working on the Newlands Irrigation Project. A canal carrying Truckee River water from Derby Dam to the soon-to-be-completed Lahontan Dam and Reservoir was being constructed a short distance to the south.

In 1905, a new routing of the railroad from Tonopah, bypassing Virginia City, also came through Hazen. The Southern Pacific built a large roundhouse and depot there. In time, Hazen included the usual hotels, saloons, and brothels as well as schools and churches.

However, today Hazen is mostly remembered as the site of the last lynching in Nevada. This happened when a group of men busted William "Red" Wood out of Hazen's wooden jail and hanged him from a telegraph pole along the railroad tracks on February 28, 1905.

It is reported that "Red" Wood was a morphine addict and saloon owner who had been suspected of killing his partner. He was caught in the act of a robbery the night before he was hanged and thrown in a makeshift jail. His body was not discovered until the next morning, when it was found swinging from a rope. No one seemed to know the identity of any of the mob and officials soon dropped any investigation into the matter. The members of those who lynched Wood is still a mystery.



Local desperado William "Red" Wood was hung at Hazen about March 1, 1905, after weeks of robbing nearby canal builders and citizens of Hazen. A contemporary journalist commented, "Keep the good work up! Ornament all telegraph poles with the carcasses of this type of men." (Mrs. Agnes Sever Collection)

The only controversy is about a 1905 photo showing Wood hanging from the telephone pole. A story goes that when the photographer arrived, Wood had already been buried. The accommodating locals, however, dug him up and re-hanged him so the picture could be taken.

Today, all that remains of Hazen is a general store, an antique shop, and a junkyard. Rumors are that, at one time, souvenir pieces of rope, claimed to be from the original hanging rope, could be purchased in the store.

The Forty Mile Desert and Sand Springs Station bus tours pass through Hazen.

Ragtown Station

by Don Wiggins

The Carson Route segment of the California Trail was opened by a party of Mormons headed to Salt Lake City in 1848. The route was originally known as the Chiles Route, for reasons described below, but it soon became known as the Carson Route and remained the main entry into Northern California for many years.

The route the east-bound Mormons took left the Carson River in the vicinity of today's Silver Springs Nevada and went north to strike the Truckee River where it turned north toward Pyramid Lake. The Mormons then traveled the Truckee River branch of the Forty Mile Desert to reach the Humboldt River.

The Carson River branch of the Forty Mile Desert was opened later in 1848 when Joseph Chiles led a wagon train south from the Humboldt Sink to the Carson River at the location we now know as Ragtown. Chiles had learned about the new Carson Route from the Mormons, whom he met farther east on the trail, but speculated, correctly, that he could reach the Carson River directly from the Humboldt Sink, instead of first going to the Truckee River.

The Carson River branch of the Forty Mile Desert led across about forty miles of a waterless, treeless desert, almost totally flat, and including deep sand its last 12 miles. This sand required heavy pulling by animals already weakened by bad water and little nutritious feed along the last 100 miles or so of trail east of the Humboldt Sink.

In 1850, the Carson branch of the Forty Mile Desert became a death route. Most of the California migration shifted to the Carson Route that year and overloaded the already, almost non-existent resources. It has been estimated that in that one year nearly 10,000 animals, 4,000 wagons, and maybe up to 800 individuals were lost on this 40 mile stretch of desert.

No wonder that Jasper Hixson wrote in 1849 that "...men were seen to rush up, half crazed with thirst and hunger and embrace these noble old trees [on the Carson River] and weep as children, and bless God for their deliverance."

As early as 1849, the place where the Carson Route reached the Carson River was called Ragtown, because of the tattered and torn clothing the emigrants washed and hung on the bushes to dry. By 1850, entrepreneurs from California had set up shop in crude canvas huts buying worn-out animals and selling water, goods, and liquor to desperate emigrants coming in off the desert. In 1854, Ragtown Station was on a farm owned by Asa Kenyon. Emigrants coming across the Forty Mile Desert could rest and recuperate there before continuing on up the Carson River to California. In 1855, it was reported to consist of "... three huts, formed of poles covered with rotten canvas full of holes."

Business picked up at the station in 1859, after Captain James Simpson opened the Central Overland Route through Nevada. First used by emigrants, the route initially went around the south end of Carson Lake. From there emigrants could swing north around the western side of the lake, cross the Carson River and arrive at Ragtown. One of the first travelers to use this new route was Edward J. Mathews. After reaching the south shore of Carson Lake on Sept. 9, 1859, he wrote, "Found other company here. Provisions all out and ours almost gone. ... tried to fish and shoot something but no go. Retired early ... hungry. Touched my weak point."

Mathews arrived at Ragtown on September 11, after reaching and crossing the Carson River. "We crossed the river, and got to Ragtown at three o'clock. Took supper at station, had buttermilk and sugar, very good meal."

Earlier in 1859, a well-known traveler came across the Forty Mile Desert on his journey west in the summer of 1859. Nearing Ragtown Station, Horace Greeley wrote, very prophetically,

“By five A. M., after riding four days and the intervening nights without rest, we drew up at the station near the sink of the Carson. Though the Carson sinks in or is absorbed by the same desert with the Humboldt, a glance at its worst estate suffices to convince the traveler, that the former waters by far the more hopeful region. large cottonwoods dot its banks very near its sink; and its valley, wherever moist, is easily rendered productive.... The time will ultimately come - it may not be in our day - when two or three great dams over the Carson will render the irrigation of these broad, arid plains on its banks perfectly feasible.”

Another famous traveler that stopped by Ragtown in 1861. Orion Clemens had been appointed Secretary of Nevada Territory. His brother, Samuel, who assumed the pen name Mark Twain, accompanied him on a stage coach trip from St. Joseph, Missouri to Carson City, Nevada. Through Nevada, the stage followed the newly opened Central Overland (Simpson) Route via Sand Springs and Ragtown. (It is thought they went around the south side of Carson Lake.) On reaching Ragtown, Samuel wrote, “On the western verge of the desert we halted a moment at Ragtown. It consisted of one log-house and is not set down on the map.”

Before 1862, there was a slough (really a con-

tinuation of the Carson River) running north out of Carson Lake, or Upper Carson Sink, to Lower Carson Sink, a distance of about fifteen miles. A Doctor Redmond constructed a toll bridge over the slough in 1861 to provide a direct route for emigrants traveling from Sand Springs to Ragtown (approximately U. S. 50 today). In 1863 fifteen year old Flora Bender's family took this northern route. On August 2, 1863 she recorded in her diary, “This afternoon roads are as bad as ever - heavy freight teams stuck in the sand every few miles. At camping time got to Ragtown, which consists of one large house, at the junction of the Humboldt and Reese River roads.”

In the two years since Dr. Redmond constructed his toll bridge, things had changed. In the winter of 1861-62 a massive flood changed the course of the river, providing a bypass around Upper Carson Lake called New River. As the flow into Carson Lake was reduced, perhaps Dr. Redmond's toll bridge was no longer needed as no reference has been found where emigrants paid a toll to cross the slough. Also, in 1862 the Reese River mining district was organized, with Austin the principal town. The road from Ragtown to Austin became known as the Reese River Road, as Flora noted in her diary, with heavy freight traffic between Virginia City and the Reese River mines.

A monument now stands along US highway 50, near the site of the old Ragtown Station.

The Forty Mile Desert and Sand Springs Station bus tours stop at the location of Ragtown.

Sand Springs Station and Salt Wells

by Don Wiggins

Sand Springs Station was perhaps the longest lived station of all the Pony Express, mail, freight, and Simpson Trail emigrant stops. From 1860 through the 1940's, there was some sort of activity here, including milling, mining, ranching, and freighting.

With the opening of the Reese River Road in 1862-3, it appears from early maps that the station was moved along side the road, about where US highway 50 is today. This was also the route of the first telegraph to link the nation. Early in the twentieth century it was also a stop on the Lincoln Highway.

It was sometimes assumed that this "new" Sand Springs Station, near US 50, was the original station. However, after locating some old ruins under a sand mound about a mile from the highway, the BLM contracted a team of archaeologists from the University of Nevada, Reno to investigate the site. About six feet of sand had to be removed to reach the original floor level. After selectively excavating the site, it was concluded by Dr. Donald Hardesty and his team that this was the original site of the Sand Springs Pony Express station. Artifacts recovered, and diaries, indicated the site was used by various individuals over a period of time. The building had been modified at some point and perhaps a roof of some type placed over some of the rooms. (Richard Burton had noted in 1860 that it was "roofless.")

The site was first located by Capt. James H. Simpson on his outbound route. Traveling west, he entered "Alkaline Valley" about where US 50 is today. This is how Simpson described the location in his journal, June 4, 1859:

Descending this ridge 1.7 miles, and turning northwardly and skirting it for 2.7 miles, we come to our campground, where the guide party ... has dug a number of small wells. The water is found in an efflorescent sand-

flat, and lies 3 feet below the surface. In some of the holes it is strongly alkaline; in others just tolerable. The addition of vinegar improves it very much. It is, however, difficult to keep up a supply of water on account of the sand tumbling in. The grass in the vicinity is very alkaline and scant, and altogether this is a miserable camping-place, the worst we have had.

Simpson's addition of the acidic vinegar, of course, neutralize the alkalinity of the water.

When he reached Camp Floyd, in Utah, after exploring his new route, Simpson produced a way bill for the new route that he passed out to emigrants there. Apparently, he was not too enthusiastic about the Sand Springs site as he routes those first emigrants around it.

Edward Matthews, one of the first emigrants to use Simpson's new route, took Simpson's inbound road (the left fork, as recommended by Simpson) as he entered "Alkaline Valley" [now Salt Wells Basin] and bypassed Sand Springs. He went directly to across the valley to Simpson's Sulphur Springs [Rock Springs], in which the water was just as bad or worse. Reaching Alkaline Valley on September 7th, 1859, Mathews wrote, "Forks of outward road, took left hand, 23½ miles to Sulphur Springs. No grass ... Roads heavy, water strong with sulphur. Next place to H?LL. Could not drink water ..."

Near the end of 1859 or early 1860, Chorpénning adopted Simpson's new route for his mail coaches, although he would soon lose his mail contact. In early 1860, the Pony Express owners also decided to use the shorter Simpson route and constructed the station at Sand Springs. One of the first emigrants to travel the Simpson Road that year was Delia Brown, traveling with her family to Virginia City. On reaching Sand Springs, on August 25, 1860,

Delia wrote,

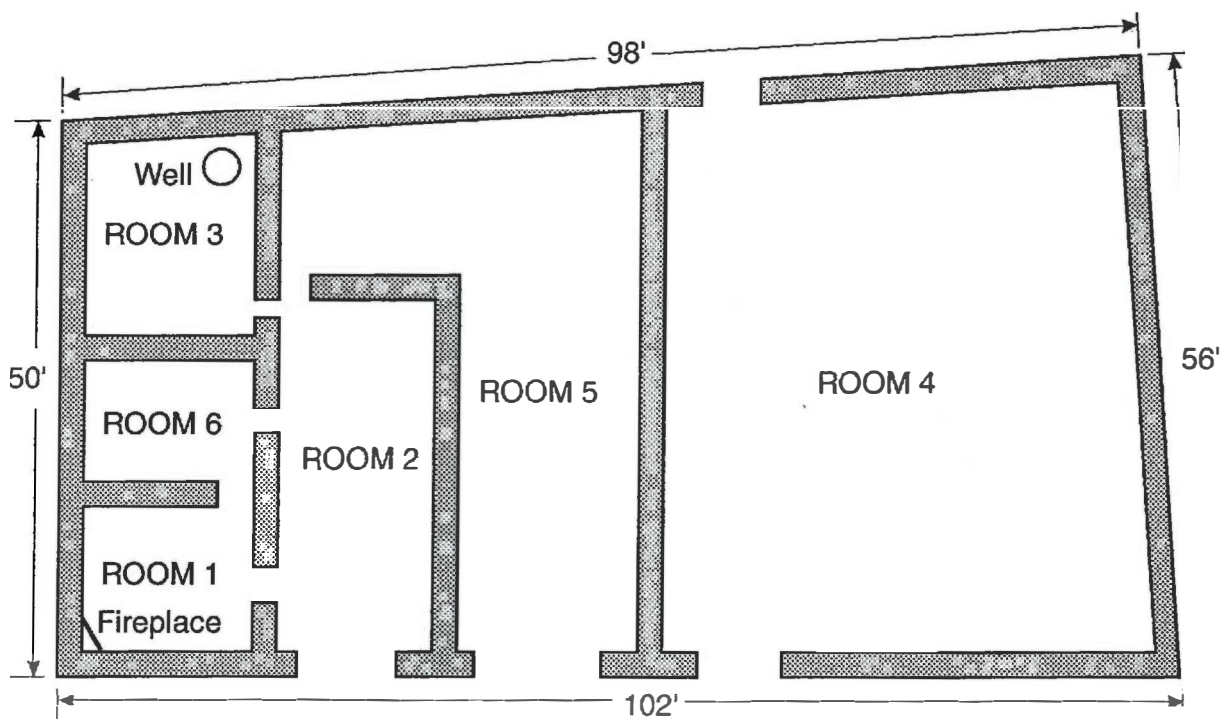
Here we are at Sand Springs and rightly named they are too. But such Springs only holes in the sand bank and poor water at that. We get water at the station to cook with but it tastes of sulphur ... We got here at this place about 2 o'clock in the morning and then the grass was 2 miles away so we tied the horses to the wagons and gave them some grass and we took our blankets and laid out on the sand.... We came about 27 miles yesterday and now we shall start again this afternoon and try to reach the sink of the Carson. We have some heavy sand to go over.

A few weeks later came Richard Burton, the English writer, explorer, and adventurer. He had left Salt Lake City by a hired "ambulance" with a party driving horses to California. Coming into Sand Springs on October 16th, 1860 he recorded,

Then crossing a long rocky divide ... we descended by narrow passes into a plain. The eye could not distinguish it from a lake,

so misty and vague were its outlines: other senses corrected vision, when we sank up to the hub in the loose sand. As we progressed painfully, broken clay and dwarf vegetation assumed in the dim shades fantastic and mysterious forms. ... At last about 2:30 A.M., ... we sighted a roofless shed, found a haystack, and, reckless of supper or of stamping horses, fell asleep upon the sand.

Oct. 17, 1860. Sand Springs Station deserved its name ... the land is cumbered here and there with drifted ridges of the finest sand, sometimes 200 feet high, and shifting before every gale ... The water near this vile hole was thick and stale with sulphury salts: it blistered even the hands. The station house was no unfit object in such a scene, roofless and chairless, filthy and squalid, with a smoky fire in one corner, and a table in the centre of an impure floor, the walls open to every wind, and the interior full of dust.



Sand Springs Station Floor Plan

Bus Tour Notes

Until sometime in the summer of 1861, the Pony Express, and the mail coaches came over Sand Springs Pass (US 50), went by Sand Springs Station and continued on west over Simpson Pass, around Carson Lake and on west to Buckland's Station on the Carson River. Shortly after July, 1861, the Overland Mail relocated the section of road between Buckland's Station (near Ft. Churchill) and Middlegate (east of Sand Springs on US 50). The new route branched off west of Middlegate, and turned northwest over a pass in the mountains north of Sand Springs. It continued through Stillwater and on to Ragtown on the Humboldt Road. It appears that for a short time, the Pony Express also used that route, until the end of the Pony Express in October of 1861. At some point, the transcontinental telegraph was also rerouted via Stillwater and the new road.

However, after silver was discovered in Austin in 1862, traffic was still heavy through the Sand Springs valley. The Reese River Road, carrying lots of freight traffic, was routed through the valley directly from Ragtown to Sand Springs Station. There was also mining of salt south of Sand Springs in the dry lake bed. Emigrants also continued to use the route. In 1863, Flora Bender, age 15, describes a stop at Sand Springs Station:

Friday [July], 31st, 1863: ... Stopped at noon, watered and fed and about five o'clock got to Sand Springs ?? salty water and no grass. Hay 5 cents per pound ... A miserable camping place. A family live at the station. Our road today lay over an alkali desert, strung with dead animals. We were invited in to dance this eve, but would not go.

When Delia Brown arrived at Buckland's Station in 1860, the men at the station came around the emigrant camps and invited all who wanted to go to a dance. However, it seems the "all" referred only to the girls. As Delia put it,

Last night they came down from the station and took all who chose to go up to a dance.

The emigrant boys did not have a very good chance, but the girls were in good demand.

The station boys worked it cute ...

With the opening of the Reese River Road, wells were dug and water, of sorts, could be obtained west of Sand Springs at Salt Wells. It is reported that at some point there was a small settlement here. Now, emigrants could proceed on to Salt Wells, bypassing Sand Springs. In 1864 Lucretia Epperson stopped by the wells and observed a strange sight near Sand Springs.

August 23, 1864. Our horses strayed off into the woods which caused us some delay, crossed the Carson desert, in going about twenty-two miles I counted sixty-five head of dead horses and cattle; camped at Salt Wells. Here we found the water very salt, our stock would not drink it. From the salt lake here, they make tons of salt, which is shipped in great quantities to Austin and Virginia City. The salt is used in the quartz mills. Saw several camels carrying packs of salt. Several in camp to-night, are having a dancing party; made so much noise until midnight we could not sleep.

This is one of the few sighting of camels by emigrants. Salt was an essential ingredient in the process of separating silver from its ores (essentially silver sulphide) without using a more expensive smelting process. Salt mines were developed in some of the salt lakes in Nevada, such as the salt flat south of Salt Wells. Camel were used early on to carry salt from the salt mines to the mills.

The station at Salt Wells is still in business today catering to the needs of male travelers on US 50, although the product mix is different now than when the freighters and emigrants came through on the Reese River Road.

Sand Springs Station is the destination of the Sand Springs Station bus tour, which passes by Salt Wells, on US Highway 50.

Simpson Road Background

by Don Wiggins

Late in 1858 under orders from General Albert Sydney Johnston, Capt. James H. Simpson began exploration for a wagon road directly west from Camp Floyd (south of Salt Lake City) to the Carson Valley. He only took out a small reconnaissance party for a short distance that year because of the on-coming winter. George Chorpensing, who had a contract to carry the mail between Salt Lake City and Placerville, took a look at the new route and decided this would be better than the old route over the Goose Creek Mountains, especially in winter. He then completed the road to the south end of the Ruby Mountains where it intersected the Hasting's Road. The mail route would then follow the Hasting's Road to the Humboldt and join the Old Emigrant Road.

When Simpson completed his survey in 1859, the mail coaches were soon running over that route. Horace Greeley followed the route in his famous stage coach ride to Placerville in 1859.

In May of 1859, Simpson, with 14 wagons and 21 men, left Camp Floyd following the new mail route to Ruby Valley. His orders were to find a new and direct route to California suitable for military and general (mail and emigrant) wagon traffic. Leaving the old Hasting's route where it and the new mail turned north to follow the South Fork of the Humboldt, Simpson went southwest, intending to strike the bend of Walker River north of Walker Lake. At Sand Springs he received word from his guide that Walker Lake was directly in front of him. Thinking his topographical maps were wrong (he was confident he hadn't made an error in his latitudinal calculations), he then turned northwest along the approximate route of today's highway 50 to reach the north end of Carson Lake. On reaching Carson Lake, he realized his guide, John Reese, was wrong and this was Carson Lake, not Walker Lake. The

party then turned south, and eventually reached Genoa, Nevada.

On his return trip, from a camp at "the south end of Carson Lake," he proceeded east 7.5 miles, striking his outbound trail, then followed it around the lake, northward, for 4.5 miles and camped. Leaving camp the next day, June 29, 1859, he reported, "We cross a low rocky ridge, 1 mile to the east of camp, and gradually bear to the right, and pass east of south along west edge of Alkaline Valley...."

The trail left by Simpson's wagons and the emigrant wagons that followed him later in 1859 can still be seen today where they went over that low rocky ridge.

A sandy pass that lies directly east of the south end of Carson Lake would provide a shorter route than the detour Simpson took over the "low rocky ridge" to reach his "Alkaline Valley." Simpson explained why he didn't take that route:

The nearest direction for the road would be from south end of Carson Lake directly across eastwardly to Alkaline Valley, but though there is a low pass to admit of a pack-route, Mr. Reese has reported it too full of sand to allow the passage of wagons...

Today that pass is noted on maps as Simpson Pass. By 1860, emigrants, wagons, and the Pony Express were coming over this pass to reach Carson Lake. Englishman Richard Burton (1860) and, it is thought, Mark Twain (1861) came over this pass. With the opening of the Reese River road in 1862-3, most of the emigrant traffic shifted that way. Records indicate the Simpson Route was being used by emigrant families as late as about 1890, or over 30 years of continuous use.

Traces of the Simpson Road are a stop on the Sand Springs Station bus tour.

Bus Tour Notes

Report of Explorations Across the Great Basin of the Territory of Utah for a Direct Wagon-Route From Camp Floyd to Genoa, in Carson Valley, in 1859, by Captain J. H. Simpson, Corps of Topographical Engineers, ... [Excerpt]

[June 3, 1859, Westbound, West of Gibraltar Cañon]

On reaching our camping-place, which I call the Middle Gate, saw a naked Indian stretched out on the rocks at an angle of about 20 degrees. He was so much of the color of the rocks as to escape our notice for some time. On being aroused he looked a little astonished to see so many armed men about him, but soon felt assured of safety by their kind treatment. He seemed particularly pleased when he saw the long string of wagons coming in, and laughed outright for joy. I counted twenty-seven rats and one lizard lying about him, which he had killed for food. He had with him his appliances for making fire. They consisted simply of a piece of hard greasewood, about 2 feet long, and of the size or smaller than your little finger in cross-section. This was rounded at the but. Then a second flat piece of the same kind of wood, 6 inches long by 1 broad and 1 thick. This second piece had a number of semi-spherical cavities on one of its faces. With this piece laid on the ground, the cavities uppermost, he placed the other stick between the palms of his hands, and with one end of the latter in a cavity, and holding the stick in a vertical position, he would roll it rapidly forward and back, till the friction would cause the tinder, which he had placed against the foot of the stick in the cavity, to ignite. In this way I saw him produce fire in a few seconds.

After sundown a Pi-ute Indian, the first we have met, came into camp, habited in a new hickory (coarse check) shirt, doubtless of the stock I gave the guide this morning, as presents to the Indians for information and guidance to water and grass. The shirt is most probably the credentials of his office as guide to us to-morrow, besides, his gestures (Pete is away and we therefore cannot talk to him) seem to indicate the same thing. In addition, the guide has sent no dragoon back, as directed, and this seems to confirm our suspicions that he has been sent to us as a guide. Dr Baily reports only one person on the sick-list, Mr. Jagiello. The day has been oppressively hot, and everything indicates that, from the Se-day-e range, we have descended to a lower level of altitude than we have experienced at any time along the route. The mountains, too, appear lower, and are entirely free from snow; the general face of the country is very arid and forbidding. The men had hard work to pitch our tents on account of the high wind and dust.

June 4, Camp No. 29, Middle Gate. — Elevation above the sea, 4,665 feet. For the first time it was so warm last night that I slept under a single comforter. Heretofore I could scarcely make myself warm enough with all the bed-clothing I could muster. Thermometer at 5 a.m., 38°.

Morning clear and pleasant. Moved at 6. Our new Indian guide cut an amusing figure in attempting to mount his mule. He rides by clinging to the pommel of the saddle. Immediately after passing through Middle Gate, strike southwestwardly over a pulverulent prairie to a third gate, which we reach in 3½ miles, and which I call the West Gate. It is also a gap in a low range of mountains running north and south. After threading this defile, pass over another thirsty-looking, marly prairie, surrounded by low, ashy-looking mountains, with passes between. In 5 miles get across this valley, and attain summit of a low ridge, whence we descend to another shallow valley, altitude above the sea 4,090 feet, which I call Dry Flat Valley, on account of the whitish clay flat we cross, and which is as smooth and as hard as a floor. Indeed, the glare from it was almost blinding. Twenty miles from camp we attain the summit of the range dividing Dry from a valley I call Alkaline Valley, on account of its general whitish alkaline appearance from saline efflorescence. Descending this ridge 1.7 miles, and turning northwardly and skirting it for 2.7 miles, we come to our camp-ground,¹ where the guide party, which is in advance of us, has dug a number of small wells.

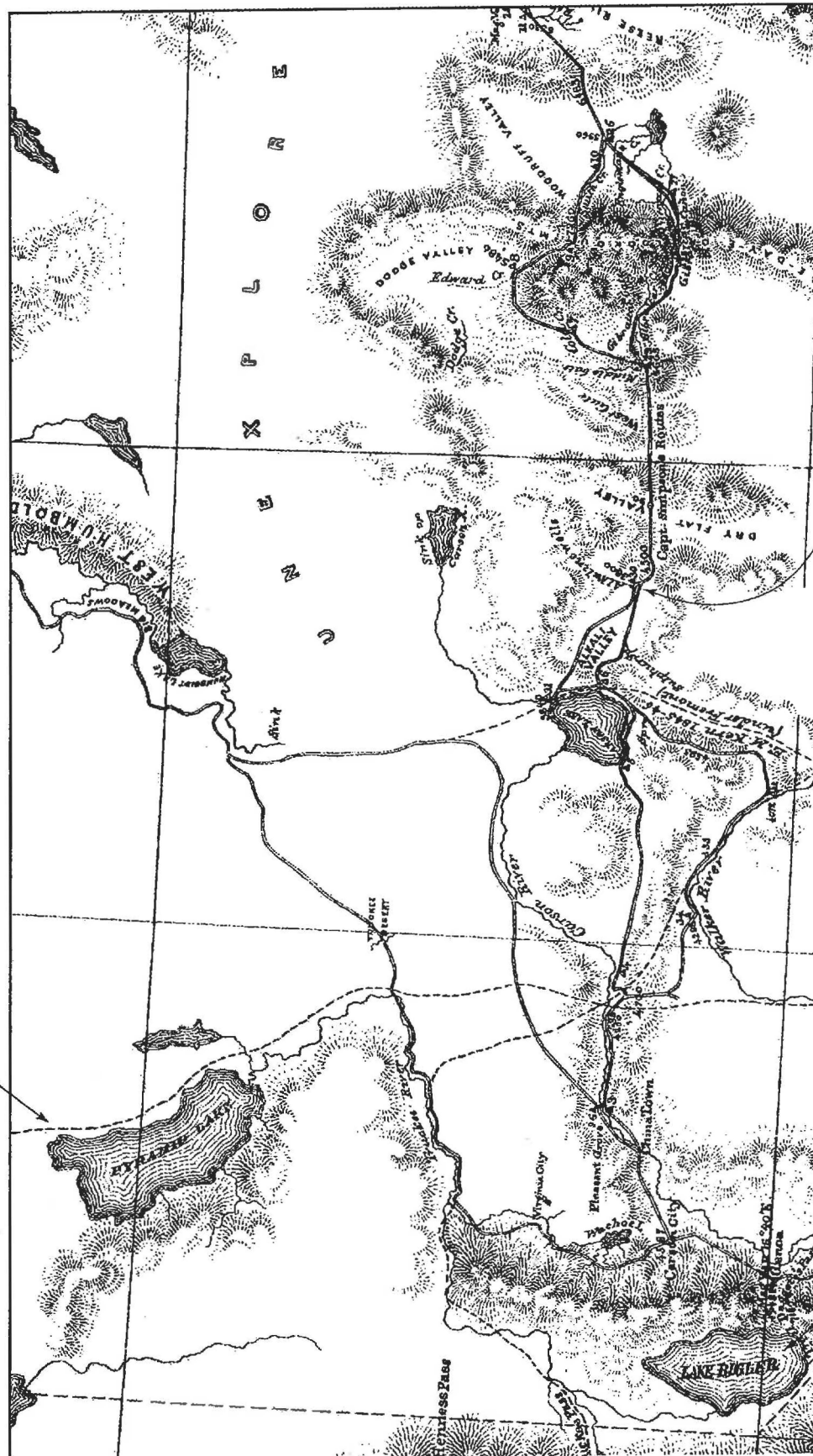
The water is found in an efflorescent sand-flat, and lies 3 feet below the surface. In some of the holes it is strongly alkaline; in others just tolerable. The addition of vinegar improves it very much. It is, however, difficult to keep up a supply of water on account of the sand tumbling in. The grass in the vicinity is very alkaline and scant, and altogether this is a miserable camping-place, the worst we have had. Fuel rabbit-bush, a miserable substitute for the sage or greasewood.

The wagons reached camp at half past 4. Journey, 24.5 miles. Road pretty good. Country very arid and desert. Mountains in the distance perfectly devoid of timber, and of a thirsty, ashy line, except the last range we crossed, which is of a dark-brown appearance, approaching black, and therefore called Black Mountains. The rocks at our morning's camp, Middle Gate, are porphyritic; westward of these as far as the Black Mountains, first quartzite, and then highly altered stratified rock, siliceous limestones, slates, dolomite. The Black Mountains are made up of partly strongly-metamorphosed, ratified rocks and partly igneous and scoriaceous, lava-like rocks traversed by quartz-veins.

The day has been very hot, and we have all felt very thirsty; not knowing when we started that water would be so far off, we had not taken the precaution which we

1. At Sand Springs.

Fremont's Route, 1843-44



"Lake Bigler" is Lake Tahoe

"Alkaline wells" are Sand Springs

Section of "Map of Wagon Routes in Utah Territory Explored & Opened by Capt. J.H. Simpson"

Bus Tour Notes

should have done to have our water-kegs filled at Gibraltar Cañon. Our great thirst over these desert plains is no doubt owing to the dry condition of the atmosphere which favors the rapid dessication or drying up of the humors of the body.

On the route, one of the dragoons returned from the guide's party with a note from Mr. Reese, informing me of the locality of to-night's camp, and giving the unpalatable news that the water was not good, the grass poor, and that we were within 12 miles of the north end of Walker's Lake, where we would encamp to-morrow. The consequence is, that as the point I have been aiming at is the north bend of Walker's River, and not the Lake, we are a great deal too far to the south, and must therefore make the necessary corresponding northing. This error could only have occurred on the supposition of Walker's Lake being wrongly placed on the Topographical Bureau map, for I feel confident that the latitudes which I have worked out, and upon which we have based our southing, have been correct. If Mr. Reese had not assured me that he had been over this portion of the country before, I should doubt the truth of his representations; but, relying on the accuracy of his observations, we are obliged to change our course from our present camp in a north-west direction in order to reach in the most direct way the north bend of Walker's River.

June 5, Camp No. 30, Alkaline Valley. — Altitude above the sea, 3,900 feet. Thermometer at 3.30 a.m., 48°. Up at half past 3 a.m., but in consequence of mules straying off to get grass and water, the train did not move until 5. Course north of West, along west foot of Black Mountains, to the north end of what turned out to be Carson instead of Walker's Lake. The guide, therefore, at fault, and neither the Topographical Bureau map nor my calculations wrong. As the map will indicate, it will be perceived that before I made the turn to the northwest, pursuant to the representation of our whereabouts by our guide, my course was direct for the bend of Walker's River, the locality aimed at from the commencement of the expedition at Camp Floyd. The consequence is that we have lost about 12 miles by our guide's errors, and will have to retrograde, for a distance, our steps.

The road to-day has been along the east edge of Alkaline Valley, and the west foot of the Black Mountains. In the valley it has been heavy, and on the benches, on account of the basaltic rocks, rough. The valley, which is almost everywhere white with saline incrustation, is about 16 miles long and 8 broad, and in wet weather must cut up a great deal. The mountains inclosing it are low, and give indications of passes in almost every direction. Not a sign of a tree is to be seen on any of them. The Sierra Nevada, seen for the first time to the west of us, some 60 or 70 miles off, is covered with snow. Journey, 16.6 miles. Teams got in at 12 meridian. O the luxury of

good sweet water to a thoroughly thirsty traveler! How little do we value the daily common bounties of Providence! For the past few days a draught of pure cold water has been prized at its true value; and it is only the real absence of our comforts that causes us to estimate them at their full value.

We are encamped at the head of the outlet from Carson Lake into the sink of Carson, where our only fuel is dry rush. This outlet is about 50 feet wide and 3 or 4 feet deep, and voids the lake rapidly into its sink, which is some 10 or 15 miles to the northeast of us. The water is of a rather whitish, milky cast, and though not very lively, is yet quite good. The Carson River to the northwest, where it empties into the lake, can be seen quite distinctly, marked out by its line of green cottonwoods.

The name of the river and lake was given by Colonel Fremont, in compliment to Kit Carson, one of his celebrated guides.

The alluvial bottom about Carson Lake is quite extensive and rich, as the luxuriant growth of rushes shows, and could, I think, be easily irrigated. The only drawback to its being unexceptionable for cultivation in every part is its being somewhat alkaline in places, particularly toward its southern portion. Curlew, pelican, and ducks, and other aquatic birds frequent the locality, and the lake is filled with fish. A number of Pi-utes, some two dozen, live near our camp, and I notice they have piles of fish lying about drying, principally chubs and mullet. They catch them with a seine. Their habitation consists of flimsy sheds, made of rushes, which screen them from the sun and wind. They present a better appearance than the Diggers we have seen, both in respect to clothing and features. Indeed, they act as if they had been in contact with civilization, and had to some degree been improved by it. The decoy-ducks they use on the lake to attract the live ducks are perfect in form and fabric, and I have obtained a couple for the Smithsonian Institution.

This valley of Carson Lake presents at sunset a very pretty landscape. It lies very level, and on every side, at a considerable distance, with intervals between, are very pretty blue mountains lying along the horizon, giving variety to the picture. The air this afternoon has been also very soft and balmy, having a tranquilizing effect on the senses and inducing one to drink in with delight what lies before him.

Pete, whom I found at camp, and had sent out to bring in the rest of the guide's party, returned at 6 p.m., bringing with him the infantry soldier, Sanchez, and the pack-mule. He missed the track of Mr. Reese, who will be in to-night, probably, or to-morrow. The Pi-ute with the check shirt accompanied us all the way to our present camp. In mounting his mule, he invariably would protrude his legs through and between his arms while resting his hands on the saddle, and in one instance, in his

attempt to mount in this way, awkwardly tumbled off on the other side.

June 6, Camp No. 31, north end of Carson Lake. — Longitude, 118° 30' 01"; latitude, 39° 23' 37"; altitude above the sea, 3,840 feet; thermometer at 4.45 a.m., 43½°. Mr. Reese returned during the night. The Indians in camp early this morning, with fish to barter in exchange for old clothing, powder, &c. seem to be pretty keen in a trade about small things; but in larger matters — as, for instance, the barter of a child — one of the Indians said he would sell his, a lad of about 8 years of age, for a jackknife. They seem to be perfectly beside themselves at the idea of a train of wagons passing through their settlement. Nothing of the kind has ever occurred before. They laugh and jabber like so many parrots, and it has been difficult to get any distinct notions from them about the country in advance of us.

We retrograde to-day in our course, southerly direction, and skirt the east shore of Carson Lake. Air balmy and throwing a blue veil over the near and distant mountains. The snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada seen on our right; the water of Carson Lake beautifully blue; lake margined with rushes; the shores are covered with muscle-shells; pelicans and other aquatic fowl a characteristic. Upper half, that is, north half, of east margin of Carson Lake very slightly alkaline. South half, east margin, white with alkali. Indeed, as I proceed I find that the margin of the lake generally, as far as I can see, looks alkaline. In 9.7 miles leave the lake at its southern end, and, passing over and through some sand-hills, in 5.7 miles come to a small spring of calcareous water, where there is no grass. Here there has been a number of these springs, and the locality for a very considerable area is nothing but calcareous tufa, formed by the springs, which are all closed but one. Three miles more brought us through some heavy sand-drifts to a very small spring of miserable mineral-water, so nauseous as not to permit me to take even a swallow. No grass in vicinity. After proceeding a few miles further, in consequence of the day being very warm and the sand-hills heavy, halted at 3 o'clock, and turned out the animals to graze upon the little grass which exists in bunches around. At 5 start again, and, still ascending to crest of dividing ridge between Walker's Lake Valley and Saleratus Valley, in 9.4 miles reach summit, 4,595 feet above the sea. Just before doing so, Lieutenant Murry sent word that some of the mules were giving out, and he was afraid he would be obliged to halt. I sent word back to him to try and hold on till he could reach the summit, and after that there would be no difficulty. He managed, by exchanging some of the mules, to get the wagons all up to the top of the divide, but it was midnight before we reached Walker's River, 6.9 miles distant, and as the night was quite dark, we considered ourselves very fortunate that

we got along without accident. Some of the party were so fagged out on reaching the camp-ground as to immediately roll themselves in their blankets on the ground and go to sleep. We find ourselves on (for this country) a noble river, but will have to await daylight to disclose its features; perceive, however, we are amid good grass and timber and have an abundance of water. Journey to-day a hard one. Country wretchedly sandy and barren, mountainous or hilly. Distance, 31.2 miles. The guide has been a Pi-Ute Indian, hired at Carson Lake. The formations along the route have been trachytic, scoriatic rocks and volcanic tufas. In the pass, just before attaining summit of divide, noticed some hieroglyphics on detached boulders:

June 7, Camp No. 32, Walker's River. — Altitude above the sea, 4,072 feet; thermometer at 7.30 a.m., 69°. In consequence of getting into camp so late last evening, and the teams requiring rest, we lay over it this point till this afternoon. The river we are encamped on (Walker's) is the largest I have yet seen this side of Green River; is about one hundred yards wide and from six to ten feet deep at its present stage, which seems to be high. It flows quite strongly toward Walker's Lake, in which it sinks. Its color is very much like that of the Missouri (a rather dirty yellow), and in taste is quite soft and palatable. Its banks, which are vertical, are about four feet above the surface of the water. The name Walker, applied to this river and to the lake into which it flows, first appears on Fremont's map of 1848, and was doubtless given by him in honor of Mr. Joseph Walker, the leader of the party sent by Colonel Bonneville, in 1835, to explore Great Salt Lake, and who subsequently, on his way to Monterey, Cal., passed by this river. Walker, after this, in 1845, was Fremont's guide along this same river and lake.

I have sent Mr. Reese ahead with a few men to construct a raft to enable the party to cross Carson River when we shall reach it. After attending to this, he is to proceed on to Genoa and bring back our mail. Some Pi-Utes from Walker's Lake have come into camp to sell or trade salmon-trout, caught in the lake. The largest they have weighs about 20 pounds. These Indians talk a little English and dress, some of them, like white people. In condition they are superior to those we have seen.

Raise camp at 3 p.m. Sun scorching hot. Course north-westwardly along the left or north bank of the river, being forced occasionally by the river from the bottom to the sand-bench. River-bottom from one-fourth to one-half mile wide. Soil, a dark loam, very rich. Grass quite abundant and of good quality. Cottonwoods (sparsely) and willows (abundantly) fringe the river. The river-bottom could be readily and copiously irrigated and made very productive. A range of low mountains run parallel to the river on north, and another also on south side,

Bus Tour Notes

each about eight or ten miles distant. Not a tree or shrub is to be seen on them. The contrast between the perfectly barren, sandy, thirsty-looking country to be seen on every side and the valley of Walker's River, fringed with green cottonwoods and willows, very refreshing. After marching ten miles, at 7 o'clock encamped again on the river. Road good except on banks of valley, where it was sandy. Pete came in from guide's party, and reports bend of Walker's River six miles ahead, where I expect to camp to-morrow.

June 8, Camp No. 33, Walker's River. — Longitude, 118° 49' 00"; latitude, 39° 07' 38"; altitude above the sea, 4,200 feet; thermometer at 4.45 a.m., 53°. ...

RETURN TO CAMP FLOYD.

June 24, Genoa, Camp No. 1. — Thermometer at 4.50 a. m., 65°. Concluded settlement of accounts, and at 7 a.m. we took up our march on our return to Camp Floyd. Mr. Lowry will not listen to any advice in opposition to his accompanying us, and I, therefore, think it my duty to acquiesce, though I feel morally certain that he cannot survive the trip. Mr. Reese, though a citizen of Genoa, returns with us as guide, and I have sent him, Ute Pete, and two other persons in advance, to provide for improvement of route, by taking a short cut from bend of Carson to south side of Carson Lake, and to explore for passage through the mountain-range to the east of the sink of Carson. Having been politely invited to dine at Mr. Dorsey's, who lives 7 miles from Genoa, on our road, Lieutenant Murry, Mr. Lowry, Mr. Smith, of Genoa, Mr. Lee, and myself stopped for a few hours, and were kindly entertained by him and his lady. Mr. and Mrs. Noteware, kind neighbors of the family, were present. Train reached Carson City early in the afternoon, and party encamped. We reached it about dark. Journey, 13.8 miles. Route the same as traveled on outward journey. In the evening were visited by Major Ormsby and lady, and other persons, who take a kind interest in the success of our expedition.

June 25, Camp No. 2, Carson City. — Had the first cool night I have experienced for some time. Consequence, a refreshing sleep. Moved at 5 a.m. In 11.7 miles reach Chinatown, about 9.30 a.m. Altitude above the sea, 4,360 feet. Here leave our old road, and immediately cross Carson River by ford, and take route along river on south side. Depth of water, 3.5 feet. Wagons barely escaped receiving water in them. One forage-wagon capsized. All the rest got over without difficulty. By 11 all across. Five miles from ford, after crossing some bad sloughs, which may be obviated by taking higher ground, reach camping-place for the night. Journey, 17.2 miles.

June 26, Camp No. 3, Carson Valley. — Elevation above the sea, 4,300; thermometer at 5 a.m., 49°. Mosquitoes during the night terrible. Moved at 5 a.m. Con-

tinued along an old road on south side of Carson River for 2 miles, where we join, opposite Pleasant Grove, our old outward track, and continued on same 12.6 miles to east foot of ugly hill referred to June 9, which we found we could not, as we hoped, evade by passing between it and the river. Going east, however, the hill is not bad. The difficulty, as before stated, is in the ascent from the east side. After attaining valley on east side of hill, we left our outward track and old road, and turned to the left down the valley to within a few hundred yards of Carson River, and then go over another spur, and in about a mile get into valley of Carson River again, which we follow down 2 miles, and at 1.15 o'clock encamp on the river bank. Journey, 18.2 miles. Our experience shows that the road from Pleasant Grove on north side of river better to Chinatown than that on south side. It is a characteristic of this valley that the miry, rich soil prevents your approaching the stream except at a few points, and these are the best camp grounds. Cottonwoods and willows line the banks. The mules fattened up wonderfully at Genoa, and they are now in prime condition. One of the guide's party came into camp this afternoon, to show us our route to-morrow.

June 27, Camp No. 4, Carson River. — Elevation above the sea, 4,154 feet; thermometer at 4.30 a.m., 52½°. Resumed march at 5. Continued down valley of Carson River eastwardly about 2 miles, when we leave it and strike for south end of Carson Lake. Low mountains, perfectly destitute of timber, and of a brownish-reddish hue, range on either side and parallel to the river. Eight miles farther commence ascending a sandy ravine of slight grade, and in 3 miles attain summit of a low range 4,460 feet above the sea, from which, looking back, Carson River can be seen, well marked by the trees which line its banks. At intervals of 2.5 and 1.7 miles cross other low ridges, the last tolerably steep on east side; and 7½ miles farther, at half past 5, reach south end of Carson Lake, where we encamp. Journey, 25.1 miles. Road first 10 miles good, next 12 miles sandy and heavy, last 3 miles over margin of lake and good. Fine grass and rushes where we are encamped. Fuel should be brought.

June 28, Camp No. 5, south end of Carson Lake. — Elevation above the sea, 3,840 feet; night refreshingly cool; thermometer at 4.58 a.m., 55°. Moved at 5 minutes after 5. Continue along shore of Carson Lake, at foot of point of low range or spur, being sometimes, on account of marsh, forced on first bench; and, after crossing an alkali flat, 7.5 miles from last camp, join our outward route, which we follow along the lake shore 4.5 miles farther and encamp. Journey, 12.2 miles. Road good. It was my intention to proceed farther along the lake, but Wilson Lambert, of the guide's party, meeting us here, and informing me that Mr. Reese had not, as was hoped, been able to find a practicable route for wagons through

the mountain-range immediately to the east of the sink or more northern lake of Carson River, I am obliged to give up the idea of shortening my route in that direction, and to strike eastwardly and cut off the angle or cusp, caused on my outward route by the mistake of my guide, mentioned in my journal of June 5. There is an Indian trail, it appears, east from the sink of Carson, which is practicable for pack animals, but it would require considerable work to make it so for wagons. The next camp-ground, according to guide, is 7 to 9 miles from here, and is represented as being alkaline, and the supply of water a small spring. The guide, it seems, supposed we could not reach this spring till to-morrow, and intended sending back a man, the day after, to report the camp beyond. The result is that as our animals will fare best where we are, I have ordered a halt, and the command, as stated, to go into encampment.

I have noticed the pelican to-day floating on the lake and looming so large as to look like a small sail-boat. Our old road along the lake is at present overflowed by the water of the lake, and this when Carson River, which feeds it, has declined several feet. This shows that the lake does not sink and evaporate as fast as the water flows in. The best grass is to the north of our camp, to which we have driven our herd. Fuel should be brought.

June 29, Camp No. 6, east side of Carson Lake. — Elevation above the sea, 3,840 feet; thermometer at 6 a.m., 70°. In consequence of laying over at this camp for the benefit of the water and feed, and not wishing to tarry any longer than necessary at our next, where the water and grass are said to be very scant, and the latter alkaline, we did not move till 2 o'clock. At 11 o'clock a Mr. Ward, of Placerville, and three other persons, joined us, in order to accompany us on our route and thus have the benefit of our protection.

The nearest direction for the road would be from south end of Carson Lake directly across eastwardly to Alkaline Valley, but though there is a low pass to admit of a pack-route, Mr. Reese has reported it too full of sand to allow the passage of wagons.

We cross a low rocky ridge, 1 mile to the east of camp, and gradually bear to the right, and pass east of south along west edge of Alkaline Valley. Five and a half miles from camp come to grassy bottom, where there is some tolerable grass, and water probably within a foot of the surface. To the west of this place in the flat is a very small warm spring of pretty good water. The efflorescence around it is not alkali, but pure salt. This being the case, the probabilities are that by digging wells in the vicinity where there are indications of water, good water might be obtained. Two and a half miles farther brought us to a spring 6 feet long, 2 deep, and 1½ wide, which is sulphurous, but not unpalatable. There is a small patch of rushes in the vicinity, but no grass. This was the local-

ity intended by our guide as our camping-ground for the night, but the water and grass proving insufficient we only water the animals scantily and then push on, believing it better to get to the best grass and water as soon as possible, though in order to do so we shall have to travel all night.

Leave spring at 17 minutes after 5, and in 7.5 miles after crossing Alkaline Valley, join our outward route, near point of mountain, not far from our old camp, No. 30. Here we halt to take some coffee and feed the draught mules with some of the forage we have brought with us. The Alkaline Valley where we crossed it will evidently be impassable from mire in wet weather. In this case, persons coming from Carson Lake, should cross the valley about 7 miles north of dug-holes, and then cross on tolerably hard and high ground.

Leave at half past 11 p. m. Night pleasantly cool. Just before daylight felt oppressively sleepy, and every once in a while, though riding in the saddle, would catch myself dozing. One of my assistants passed me at day-break, at a gallop, as I thought to quickly arrive at our next camping-ground, but I had not continued far before I found him stretched out on the ground, fast asleep, holding his mule. Proceeding on in advance of train, I arrived at old camp (No. 29), Middle Gate, 23.4 miles from halting place of last evening, at 7 a.m. June 30; but unfortunately found the water, which was running before, was now to be got only by digging, and that scantily. The train did not get in till 10. We shall turn out our mules to graze and let them drink what water they can in the dug wells. Meantime, get breakfast. Found Pete at this point, and Mr. Reese came in subsequently on his return from a reconnaissance still farther ahead.

It should be remarked that there is not the slightest doubt that water in abundance could be got at this point (Middle Gate) by sinking suitable wells. Indeed, it exists now in springs in an arroyo near, and we got it in another easily accessible place by digging not more than two feet deep. There is plenty of rock at hand to wall the wells. I think it very probable, also, that in "West Gate," 3.5 miles west of this, water may be obtained by digging. Indeed, the indications are decided, also, that in the moist places in the Alkaline Valley we passed over yesterday afternoon, where there is no alkaline efflorescence, water could be got in sufficient quantity, and that it possibly would be good. I have already noted that while portions of the desert are alkaline, some portions discover pure salt on the surface, and others none of any kind. There are several families of Pi-Utes at this Middle Gate, collecting grass-seed, which they separate from the husks by first rubbing the heads lightly under stones and then winnow, by throwing it up in the wind. Afterward they convert it into a flour by rubbing it by the hand between stones. I notice they use a variety of seeds

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in making flour These Indians have come from Carson Lake, and appear to be industrious and able-bodied. I doubt not their present life is such as to make them facile subjects of husbandry and civilization generally. Indeed, I have been assured that some of them do hire themselves out as laborers in California for considerable periods of time — as long as a year at a time — and that they have been found faithful and to work well.

Resumed march at half past 1. In 1.75 miles cross an arroyo where the water yesterday, according to Mr. Reese, was running, but now exists in small pools. A small spring about two feet deep and one wide has been found to the right of this point, about three-quarters of a mile. There is no grass about it. Water not unpalatably sulphurous, but too scant for anything of a party. After crossing an arroyo, or creek, immediately leave old road, and bearing off to the left or northwardly, pass up valley, bounded by the Se-day-e Mountains on our right and a range of high mountain on our left. Distance between crests probably fifteen to twenty miles. Trees for first time since leaving Carson Valley appear on the Se-day-e Mountains, and also on the range to our left toward its north portion. Grass and water are visible in the ravines of the Se-day-e Mountains.

Ten miles from Middle Gate reach, near base of Se-day-e Mountain, a small running brook of icy-cold, pure water, which I call Cold Spring, and which, after running a few hundred yards, sinks; A more refreshing drink than I obtained from this brook, after the parched, wearisome travel of last night, I believe I never had. The men all seemed equally eager for the cold draught, and were equally delighted. But we have felt most for the poor animals, which have had but about a pailful apiece since yesterday afternoon. They are so fagged, that they failed to get up with the wagons to the stream, and we are forced, therefore, to go into camp a mile from the water. The animals are driven to the water, and find an abundance of grass at the head of the creek.

Mr. McCarthy reports water in the mountains to our left, or west of us; also says he found the water running at Gibraltar Gate. Journey, since 2 p.m. yesterday, 49.9 miles.; road good.

July 1, Camp No. 7, Cold Spring. — Elevation above the sea, 5,570 feet; thermometer at 6.30 a.m., 72°. All hands had a most refreshing sleep last night, and it is astonishing what a restorative pure cold water is. At 9 a.m. Mr. Thompson, the Norwegian, before spoken of, arrived and brought our mail from Genoa. He left the latter place on the 27th ultimo, and came by the way of Ragtown, on Carson River, crossing over thence to south side of Carson Lake, where he got into our road.

Mr. Reese, Pete, and four other men, including two soldiers, left about 10 o'clock to examine the country for the purpose of connecting our present route with the new

proposed route, south of Ruby Valley. This examination will involve an extent of travel ahead of from 130 to 150 miles.

Party and train decamped at 1 p.m., and continue northwardly up valley. After proceeding 11 miles come to rapid stream of pure water, 2 feet wide, $\frac{3}{4}$ deep, flowing from the Se-day-e Range. On this we encamp. Willows fringe it, and grass is to be found higher up in the cañon I call the stream after one of my assistants, Mr. Edward Jagiello, a Polish gentleman; his surname being difficult of pronunciation I have preferred his Christian name as the appellation. Road, to-day, stony, on account of being on bench; farther down in the valley it would be smooth.

Opposite our camp, in the range of mountains lying to the west of us, is a deep pass, in which can be plainly seen an extensive bottom of grass, and a creek running down from it into the valley in which we have been traveling. This creek, and the valley into which it flows, I propose calling after Major Frederick Dodge, the Indian agent of the Pi-Utes and Washos, who was so courteous to my party, and myself, at Genoa. The pass referred to, at the head of this creek, Mr. Reese has examined sufficiently to assure me that a good wagon-road can be got through it without a great deal of expense; and, as he pronounces, after examination, the corresponding pass in the next western range, lying nearest and east of the sink, or north lake of Carson, capable of being also made practicable without a very great deal of labor, a wagon-road could be made direct from Dodge Valley through to the North Carson Lake, which would reduce the intervals between water to 15 miles.

He also reports that cedars are to be found on the mountain-ranges at this interval. This, then, would be also the route for the telegraph. The road might keep to the north or south of North Carson Lake, as might be deemed expedient, and the bend of Carson River could be cut off from its crossing near north end of South Carson Lake, to a point higher tip, so as to make the interval between grass and water 15 to 25 miles, as might be found best. This route, as I have already noted, the guide says is now perfectly practicable for pack animals and stock, and is a most capital one for food and water. It will at once, then, be seen that in the improvement of the route, at any future period, the change referred to should all means be made. The Indians represent that the snow falls in Dodge Valley as much as 2 feet deep, and that in some winters there is scarcely any. They say that generally there is very little snow from Genoa to the Se-day-e Mountains.

July 2, Camp No. 8, Edward Creek, Dodge Valley. — Longitude, 117° 31' 42"; latitude, 39° 28' 56"; altitude above the sea, 5,486 feet; thermometer at 6 a.m., 71°. ...

Upper Carson Lake

by Don Wiggins

In the report on his 1859 exploration, James Simpson gives much detail on central Nevada's Native Americans, geology, geography, flora, and fauna. In addition, his is one of the first written descriptions of Carson Lake and the life around and in the lake. At Sand Springs, Simpson was informed by his guide John Reese that they were 12 miles from the north end of Walker Lake. Disappointed, as he was "aiming at the north bend of Walker's River, and not the lake," thinking his topographical maps were wrong (he was confident he hadn't made an error in his latitudinal calculations), he turned northwest. (His route now followed closely today's US highway 50.) On reaching Carson Lake and its outlet, Simpson realized it was Carson Lake and that Reese was mistaken. He then wrote: "The guide, therefore, at fault and neither the Topographical Bureau map nor my calculations wrong."

The party camped at the outlet of the lake, which he described as follows:

This outlet is about 50 feet wide and 3 or 4 feet deep, and voids the lake rapidly into its sink [Carson Sink, also known as Lower Carson Lake], which is some 10 or 15 miles to the northeast of us. The water is of a rather whitish, milky cast, and though not very lively, is yet quite good.

From his campsite he could see the Carson River:

The Carson River to the northwest, where it empties into the lake, can be seen quite distinctly, marked out by its line of green cottonwoods. The name of the river and lake was given by Colonel Fremont, in compliment to Kit Carson, one of his celebrated guides.

The upper Carson Lake is viewed from a stop on the Sand Springs Station bus tour.

Native Americans and wild life around the lake:

The alluvial bottom about Carson lake is quite extensive and rich, as the luxuriant growth of rushes shows, and could, I think, be easily irrigated ... Curlew, pelican, and ducks, and other aquatic birds frequent the locality, and the lake is filled with fish. A number of Pi-utes, some two dozen, live near our camp, and I notice they have piles of fish lying about drying, principally chubs and mullet. They catch them with a seine. Their habitation consists of flimsy sheds, made of rushes, which screen them from the sun and wind. They present a better appearance than the Diggers we have seen, both in respect to clothing and features. Indeed, they act as if they had been in contact with civilization, and had to some degree been improved by it. The decoy-ducks they use on the lake to attract the live ducks are perfect in form and fabric, and I have obtained a couple for the Smithsonian Institution. This valley of Carson Lake presents at sunset a very pretty landscape. It lies very level, and on every side, at a considerable distance, with intervals between, are very pretty blue mountains lying along the horizon, giving variety to the picture.

The Smithsonian still has the ducks.

As Simpson skirted the east shore in a southerly direction, he remarked:

The snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada seen on our right; the water of Carson Lake beautifully blue; lake margined with rushes; the shores are covered with mussel-shells; pelicans and other aquatic fowl a characteristic.

A few months later, one of the emigrants that he sent over his new route feasted on the mussels at the south end of Carson Lake:

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Got up late. Fine day ... Tom and I went out in the lake with the cart to sit on and fish. Did not get a bite. I fell in about five feet deep. Discovered the bottom was covered with mussels. Got a lot and had them cooked for supper. Tasted very good as we were all hungry. Read and Clark got back with the provisions ... [Edward Mathews, September 10th, 1859.]

In 1860 Delia Brown came over Simpson Pass and stopped to rest at the south end of the lake on August 26th.

Here we are in Carson Valley near the Lake ... We drove on awhile further [after crossing Simpson Pass] and not finding good water concluded to tie up the horses and wait until morning. We did so but they ate nearly everything there was. They ate my sunbonnet up for one thing ...

The horses probably ate her bonnet for the salt on it.

Richard Burton continued this way from Sand Springs and, on October 17th, 1860, described Carson Lake as follows:

... a shallow sheet of water. ... Apparently it was divided by a long, narrow ruddy line, like ochre colored sand: a near approach showed that water on the right was separated from a saleratus bed on the left by a thick bed of tule rush ... Our conscientious informant at Sand-Springs Station had warned us that upon the summit of the divide [Simpson Pass] we should find a perpendicular drop, down which the wagons could be lowered only by means of lariats affixed to the axle-trees and lashed round strong "stubby-posts." We were not, however, surprised to find a mild descent of about 30 deg. From the summit of the divide, five miles led us over a plain too barren for sage, and a stretch of stone and saleratus to the watery margin, which was troublesome with sloughs and mud ... After passing a promontory whose bold projection had been conspicuous from afar, and threading a steep kanyon leading

toward the lake, we fell into its selvage, which averaged about one mile in breadth ...

In August of 1861, Mark Twain and his brother Orion Clemens left Middle Gate Station and made their way across "forty miles" of desert and arrived at Carson Lake.

On the nineteenth day we crossed the Great American Desert - forty memorable miles of bottomless sand, into which the coach wheels sunk from six inches to a foot. We worked our passage most of the way across. That is to say, we got out and walked. It was a dreary pull and a long and thirsty one, for we had no water. From one extremity of this desert to the other, the road was white with the bones of oxen and horses. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that we could have walked the forty miles and set our feet on a bone at every step! The desert was one prodigious graveyard. And the log-chains, wagon tyres, and rotting wrecks of vehicles were almost as thick as the bones. I think we saw log-chains enough rusting there in the desert, to reach across any State in the Union. Do not these relics suggest something of an idea of the fearful suffering and privation the early emigrants to California endured? [Mark Twain, from *Roughing It*.]

Some have interpreted the above passage as proof that Twain crossed the Forty-Mile Desert on the Humboldt route.

Although Twain later crossed the Forty Mile Desert on his way to Unionville, to try his hand at mining, he was actually on the Simpson route on the journey described above. He just got a little carried away with his literary license. Also, it was about 40 miles from Middle Gate to Carson Lake. The day before the passage quoted, he had written, "we encountered the eastward bound telegraph-constructors at Reese River Station ..." The original 1861 telegraph lines went over Simpson Pass, following closely Simpson's route, not the Humboldt route.

On reaching Carson Lake, Twain gives us a good description of the lake before the great

flood of January, 1862:

At the border of the Desert lies Carson Lake, or The 'Sink' of the Carson River, a shallow, melancholy sheet of water some eighty or a hundred miles in circumference. Carson River empties into it and is lost - sinks mysteriously into the earth and never appears in the light of the sun again - for the lake has no outlet whatever.

Twain's statement that the lake had no outlet indicates his mail coach went around the south end of the lake, thus not seeing the outlet Simpson described in 1859. On the west side of the lake Twain's coach turned north to Ragtown and the Humboldt Road, the same route taken by Matthews in 1859. During the following winter, heavy rains caused the Carson River to overflow into an older channel, cutting off the flow into Carson Lake. The result is what is seen today.

At the southwest end of the lake was another Pony Express Station, Sink Station. After stopping without water along the lake for the night, the Brown party moved on to Sink Station early the next morning:

We started this morning and came on to the station and Oh such a place. - no wood and no good water but we stopped and got breakfast and now we are going to do a little baking and start on tomorrow. Indians plenty here, and will get you wood and water for something to 'eat em'. [Delia Brown, August 26th, 1860]

Delia wasn't too impressed with Sink Station, and Richard Burton was even less impressed:

Sink Station looked well from without; there was a frame house inside an adobe inclosure, and a pile of wood and a stout haystack promised fuel and fodder. The inmates, however, were asleep, and it was ominously long before a door was opened. At last appeared a surly cripple, who presently disappeared to arm himself with his revolver. The judge asked civilly for a cup of water; he was told to fetch it from the lake, which was not more than a mile off, though, as the road was full

of quagmires, it would be hard to travel at night. Wood the churl would not part with: we offered to buy it, to borrow it, to replace it in the morning; he told us to go for it ourselves, and that after about two miles and a half we might chance to gather some ... I preferred passing the night on a side of bacon in the wagon to using the cripple's haystack ... [Richard Burton, October 17th, 1860.]

In 1861, an even better description of Sink Station, and the lake, was recorded by a soon-to-be contemporary of Mark Twain on Virginia City's Territorial Enterprise, Dan De Quille (William Wright). On approaching the lake from the west, De Quille observes that, "we had a most magnificent view of the Sink of the Carson, or Carson Lake. The Lake is about sixty miles in circumference, nearly circular in form, and has every appearance of having at one time been more than a thousand times its present size."

De Quille was quite correct about the one-time size of the lake — it was a remnant of the ancient Lake Lahontan.

De Quille then reached Sink Station:

We reached the Sink Station a little before sundown, and unsaddling our animals, drove them out to the margin of the lake to graze. The Station consists of a one-story house, surrounded by an adobe wall enclosing a plot of ground some six rods square. This wall is eight feet high, and three feet thick at the bottom by one at the top, with loopholes for muskets. The stables are also within the walls. This Station is on the west side of the lake and within a few rods of the shore. It is a stopping place, both for the Overland Mail Line and the Pony Express. There being nothing in the firewood line to be found at this station, the keeper very kindly invited us to come into his kitchen and make use of his stove or anything else we might need. This politeness on his part so warmed Tom's heart toward him, that he brought forth our basket-flask and gave him a 'pull' at the cocktail.

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Station-keeper departed — smacking his lips — within the walls of the fortification, and very shortly after came forth a red-nosed individual.

The red-nosed man may have replaced the “surly cripple” at the station. He soon talks De Quille and his friend Tom out of a short swig from their last bottle. De Quille humorously describes in detail what followed after they agreed to spare “very little” from their bottle.

Red-nose etc. is glad from ear to ear. He receives the precious flask; inserts the top of it just below the finis of his blazing nose; elevates the bottom. As the bottom of the flask goes up, the pair of jaws belonging to Tom and I expand. He still elevates the bottom of the flask; continues to elevate it gently — his ears work up and down slowly ? nostrils expanded — features rigid. Bottom of flask still slowly raising. Gentle elevation and depression of the ears; nervous twitching about nostrils; the rigid corrugations near the eye relax and we catch a faint glimpse of the twinkling pupil; cheeks and neck growing a deeper purple; great distention about the windpipe. He can hold out no longer — the bottom of the flask lowers, he withdraws it from the loving embrace of his lips and heaves a deep, long-drawn sigh — Ditto Tom and I. Red-nosed individual still holds the flask in his left hand, and — to Tom and I alarmingly near his mouth; looks as though about to make a second attack, but Tom stretches forth his hand and red-nosed etc., relinquishes his hold, heaves another sigh and without looking toward either of us says, ‘Thank’ee,’ turneth on his heel and departeth. Tom shook the flask, took off the top and looked into it; and I shook the flask, took off the top and looked into it. We both sighed; neither of us spoke - our hearts were too full for words.

At the lake, a long pier had been built out into the lake to reach drinkable water, De Quille continued:

The water near the shore of the Lake is bad, and to get water fit to use it is necessary to go out some distance from the shore. At this station they have built a sort of pier extending some two hundred yards into the Lake, yet the water is very warm and has a strong taste of decayed tule. Snipe and curlew are the principal game birds found on the shores of the Lake at this season. The curlew are the common brown species, but the snipe, most numerous, are of a peculiar build and color; the male bird mainly white with a bright yellow breast and black wings, and long, slender, red legs; the female, white with black wings - The Piute name for this species of snipe is tee-whoe-tee. Tom secured several good specimens of these birds.

On leaving Sink Station, De Quille went around the south end of the lake and up the eastern side. On the way he passed through some Paiute villages and at the north end of the lake, approached Redman’s house.

A mile ahead we could see the house of Doctor Redman ... This station is on a slough (called a slough but it is the Carson River), which empties into the Lower Sink some fifteen miles below, running northeast. Mr. Redman has a toll-bridge on this stream for the accommodation of emigrants taking the cut-off from Sand Spring to Ragtown.

A Mail Delivery

If an observer, standing near the future site of Sink Station a couple of days after Simpson had departed from his Carson Lake camp site near that location, had looked to the north along the west side of Carson Lake, he might have seen a lone horseman hurrying along in a southerly direction. When he reached Simpson’s well marked trail, this horseman would have turned and galloped off to the east, following the path. Borrowing a line from the Lone Ranger, the observer could well have asked: Who was that mail man? It was none other than the legendary Placerville-to-Genoa mail

carrier, "Snowshoe" Thompson.

Mail had arrived at Genoa for Simpson a few days after he had left on his return trip to Camp Floyd. Thompson had left immediately in pursuit of Simpson to deliver his mail. After coming by way of Ragtown, and south Carson Lake, he caught up with Simpson at Cold Springs, about 140 miles from Genoa, and delivered the mail. Probably testing Thompson's good nature, Simpson persuaded him to return by way of the mountains north of Sand Springs to look for a possible pass with better water. Thompson went too far north, and find-

ing no pass, continued west where he "came to the Forty-mile Desert, on the old Humboldt route, and struck the road 17 miles from Ragtown." [Quote from letter: Thompson to Captain Simpson, July 28, 1859.]

They don't make mail carriers like that anymore!

In 1861, a pass was found that allowed a road to be opened that bypassed Sand Springs and Carson Lake. Thompson had looked too far north and missed the pass. He was a better mail carrier than a "pass" finder.

Pioneer Children's Grave

by Don Wiggins

The grave of two sisters lies about 150 yards north of US highway 50, near Sand Springs.

For years, it was thought that the girls were emigrant children who died on the way to California. The original marker was inscribed "Two pioneer children. Known only to God."

In recent times, more information has been learned about the girls.

There were actually three sisters, not two, who died of diphtheria about 1865. Their father was a French-Canadian named Mitchel LeBeau, who ran Frenchman Station, located on a salt flat a few miles east of Sand Springs. The station was an early freight stop on the road to Austin, Nevada.

The girls were first buried farther north of the highway, probably off the salt flat, but a devastating cloudburst washed their remains from the original grave in 1940. Afterward, two men found the skeletons of the two older girls and re-buried them nearer the highway. The remains of the youngest girl were never found. A local mining engineer later placed a picket fence

around the graves and erected a new marker, as described above.

After a number of years, with the new grave site and marker badly weathered, a man named Johnson stabilized the grave with large rocks. He also erected a new cross with the identity of the girls, and placed a small plaque at the site. The plaque reads,

"Dedicated to the memory of the hundreds of men, women and children and thousands of animals that perished on the Old Simpson Trail to California 1846 to the 1880s."

Although this was the route of the Simpson Trail (beginning in 1859), it is unlikely the girls or their family were on their way to California. It is known that LeBeau left Canada and arrived in Nevada in the 1860s, he ran Frenchman Station, and later moved to the Nevada mining camp of Ellsworth. No record of him going to California has been found.

The Sand Springs Station bus tour passes the pioneer children's grave, on US Highway 50.

The 40 Mile Desert

By Don Wiggins

The 40 Mile Desert is usually regarded as beginning at the natural dike at the south end of the Humboldt Sink and continuing for about 40 miles to either the Carson River or the Truckee River. The Truckee Route was first traveled in 1844, while the Carson Route was opened in 1848. Today we can cross the dreaded 40 Mile Desert in about 30 minutes by automobile. It looks little different than much of other parts of Nevada. Also, before reaching this point, emigrants had crossed larger stretches of desert with some suffering, but with little loss of life. For example, not too long before reaching the Humboldt Sink, Hasting Trail travelers had to contend with about 85 miles of salt desert before reaching water. Yet, the 40 Mile Desert has the reputation of being the deadliest section of trail on the road to California. Why? The statistics are almost unbelievable: In one year alone, 1850, estimates are that almost 10,000 animals died, 3000 to 4000 wagons were abandoned, and 800 to 900 people perished along the 40 miles between the sink and the Carson River. The Truckee Route was also deadly, but not to the extent of the Carson Route in 1850.

What were the combination of circumstances that caused death, and destruction of property, along both trails and the tragedy on the Carson Trail in 1850?

(1) Travel along the last hundred miles, or so, of the Humboldt River was the beginning of the disaster. As the Humboldt River grew smaller and smaller, it became more and more alkaline, thick clouds of alkaline dust covered the emigrants and their animals all day long, the grasses had less nutrients, and the Indians ran off with, or shot arrows into, their animals causing some to have to abandon their wagons and much of their food supplies. The later in the year, the worse it got, as the river flow was reduced and the limited supply of grasses were

consumed. When they arrived at the sink, their wagons were falling apart, their food supplies were low or non-existent, animals were already dying, and the emigrants themselves were in poor physical and mental shape.

(2) Deep sand hills were blocking their path to the both the Carson and Truckee rivers.

(3) The necessity of having to travel through the desert during the hottest summer months.

(4) Lack of potable water from the upper Sink to the rivers, a distance of about 65-70 miles.

For a first hand account, let's follow William Kelly, *Across the Rocky Mountains from New York to California*, in 1849 as he travels down the Humboldt and nears the Sink [Remember 1850 was the bad year.]:

We had fine feed at noon close along the river banks; but although the road was level, it was most disagreeable, from the clouds of hot dust with which we were perpetually enveloped. It was not sand, but a fine impalpable power, as light as ashes, that covered everything and everybody, actually choking the nostrils of the mules and horses, who appeared to suffer seriously from it, and giving some amongst us who had susceptible lungs, very teasing coughs....[p. 190]

There was another matter that gave us not a little uneasiness: it was the state of our wheels; for since we began coming down the Humboldt River, being constantly immersed in hot sand, the felloes and naves shrank, the tires loosened, and the spokes rattled like a bag of bones ... [p. 197]

The water of the river, now clearly shrinking, both by evaporation and absorption, was positively bitter of alkali, preparing us for an increasing deterioration as we proceeded: not a very consoling look-out for unacclimatised travellers, already suffering from its modified effects. The only cure left us,

and one which we resolved pushing to the extreme, was despatch. [p. 200]

Nearing the sink: The porous banks were fast diminishing the river into a paltry stream, now nearly the consistence of thin gruel, so fully was it impregnated with alkali, and nearly at a blood heat.

Altogether the caravan in every branch--men, animals, and waggons--was in a very seedy and unsound state; more nearly resembling a batch of invalids crawling in search of an hospital, than a band of adventurous travellers charging the Great Sierra Nevada to jump into the golden valley of the Sacramento. But this lodestar . . . kept up the flagging spirit. [p. 203]

It was not unusual to see a devoted mother staggering over those burning plains, carrying her helpless offspring on her back, when drooping herself from sickness and exhaustion. [p. 207]

At the Sink, some would reorganize into a pack train with a better chance of making it across the desert. Some had lost everything and could only depend on the generosity of others for their survival:

Reached the Sink last night about sunset.

This is a basin about 80 rods wide and half a mile long. It is usually the last water found on the Humboldt, or where it loses itself in the sand, hence its name, but this year the water is so high that it runs down several miles further before it entirely sinks. There is no grass here whatever, nothing but desert. We broke up our wagon to day and made pack saddles, being convinced of the impossibility of getting our wagon across the desert, since the loss of the horse yesterday and the injury to the others. Last night while we were making our supper on coffee and boiled corn, soon after dark, a man came to us and asked for a drink of water. I gave it to him; after drinking he stood looking wistfully at our corn, then asked me if I would take half a dollar for a pint cup full of it. I told him I would not take half a dollar for

it, for money was no consideration for food here. He said no more, but turned sorrowfully away, when I stopped him and asked him if he was in distress. He said that he had eaten nothing for two days but a small piece of dried meat which a man gave him. I then told him that I would not take a half dollar for the corn, but that he was welcome to sit down and eat his fill; for although we were nearly out of provisions, we would divide with a man in distress to the last morsel ...

[Eleazar Stillman Ingalls, August 5, 1850]

It was under these conditions that the emigrants set out across the last 40 miles of desert. Although animals started falling out soon after leaving the Sink, the real test of endurance would be the deep sand hills they would have to cross. On the Truckee Route, this would be about the last seven miles, but on the Carson Route it would be not only the last 10 to 12 miles but also three or four miles of sand hills about half way to the river. Many emigrants had a seemingly good idea to leave late in the afternoon and cross the desert at night to avoid the heat of the day. However, in summer, at this latitude, darkness lasted only about 9 to 11 hours through most of the migration season. Although some made it across the desert in 16 to 18 hours, most took 24 to 30 hours (some even longer) to make it to the river. This placed many in the heavy sand during the heat of the day, in mid-summer, with the sun beating down upon them and miles to go before reaching the river. Ingall's words tell the result: . . . The sand hills are reached; then comes a scene of confusion and dismay. Animal after animal drops down. . . . Morning comes, and the light of day presents a scene more horrid than the route of a defeated army. . .

The Truckee Route presented a better driving surface over most of the route, and about half way there were some hot springs where emigrants could get water. Although highly mineralized, foul tasting, caused sickness, and many were extremely hot, they were at least wet. Most diary keepers commented on the springs

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and many considered them the greatest "curiosity" they had seen on the trip. It is unfortunate that today the springs have been tapped for commercial use and we must rely on emigrant diaries for descriptions of what they must have looked like originally.

An emigrant describes arriving at the springs:

They reminded me as we neared them towards evening, seeing the steam and vapor rising from them, pits of the infernal regions indeed. There are some 30 to 50 of these springs, varying in their temperature from boiling heat to one we found which was barely milk warm. The largest of these was a pit some 20 feet in diameter which seemed to retain its fullness, with remarkably clear, but scalding hot water with a quiet surface. Others again violently in motion, while some subsiding for a time and again issuing forth with increased fury, sometimes throwing the water from 3 to 5 and 10 feet high and about their beds. Under most of these a deep rumbling noise is heard and I was almost inclined to say as did one of Bryant's men when standing near one of these, "Hell Is firing up, lets be off." [T. J. Van Dorn, Sunday Aug. 25, 1849]

Hearing the water was too hot to drink, some sent men ahead to collect and cool the water before their train arrived. Wagons and property are abandoned around the springs:

... a number of the boys had gone on ahead to the hot springs to cool water again the teams come up they did not all come up till nearly sundown the boys had cooled water enough to give them a bucket full apiece theas spring are the greatest curorisities i ever saw thear is over a hundred of them all of them boiling hot one of them is very large one another one boiles up in a hole about two feet over at stated times it dies entirely away and then in a moment it spouts up two feet and throws the boiling water for ten feet around the property that lays scattered around hear is increadable thear is over a

dozen good wagons and by the old irons laying around at least as many more had been burnt up log chains cooking utencils and in fact everything that one can think of amonst other things i noticed a splend[id] turning lathe it could not have cost less then one hundred and fifty dollars we counted fifty four dead oxen between hear and the sulpher wells ... [Joseph Hackney, August 25, 1849]

Some took advantage of the hot water to cook their food:

... this place offers the most remarkable phenomenon of all the rout thus far the spring holes occupy as much as five acres in one cavernous hole of a foot diameter the water boils up with report like gun powder explosion throwing the jets far & scalding whoever it touches. it seemed to rest for a moment & then furiously rage for five or more minutes & thus alternates rising two feet up its cavern at each ebullition we ate some duck cooked by immersion in it & saw a large bundle of beef suspended in it for cooking which was perfected much more redily than by ordinary boiling there were many cave mouths in all of which the water was above boiling heat ... [Charles Darwin, August 21, 1849]

More impressive than Soda Springs:

There is also what is called a "Steamboat Spring" nearby, which is much more grand and impressing than that at Soda Springs. The water in this boiling steamboat spring is forced through an opening in the rock or crust about 8 inches in diameter and thrown most of the time to a height of 3 feet ... [Charles Ross Parke, August 23, 1849]

How hot does it really get in the desert in August?

The thermomitor stood at 110 Deg[rees] above zero the heat was almost unindurable but we left this hell of boiling liquid for Truckies river as I said before at 5 P.M. [Charles Tinker, August 3, 1849. At boiling springs.]

However, besides being very hot, some of the springs contained many dissolved minerals that caused great discomfort to man and beast if they drank from them:

The water of the Hot Spring which was used freely by both the men & animals affected them most singularly. Two or three hours after drinking, it produced violent strangling to both. The men in particular were very much annoyed also by the most violent pain in the urinary organs. It was truly laughable to see their contortions & twistings after urinating, which they desired to do every hour. The mules also seemed to suffer much, but their symptoms lasted only 10 or 12 hours. Upon examining an old canteen that had had this water in it, with a grass stopper, I discovered the evident fumes of nitre, & upon examination found it [to] contain much, & no doubt these unpleasant symptoms were caused by it. [Wakeman Bryarly, August 13, 1849]

Others had the same experience, or more so: Some people were very sick here from the use of this water. Many animals perished for the want of food and by the use of this poisonous water. One train of 15 ox wagons on leaving the spring could only man three teams. Three of us were quite sick from the use of these waters. Two were so bad as to have to be borne in the waggons. The difficulty commenced by vomiting, and severe pain across the kidneys and bladder with great irritation and a desire to urinate frequently ... People should use as little of these salt waters as possible as they are very injurious. [J. C. Buffum, August 2, 1849]

From the boiling springs, it was about 13 miles until they reached the sand hills. It was a desperate time, even for those that came through early in the season:

... my mouth was so dry & a heavy fever on me when 5 miles from water [Truckee River] I saw a man coming on a mule he had 3 canteens full of water. I asked him for a mouthfull which he refused to grant

making as an excuse he was taking it to a back wagon which was the case _ but that was no excuse for or his refusing me _ I felt as though I could not get any further so I concluded to have it whether or not so I told him it depended on the strength of us as I would certainly die if I did not get. when he found I was determined to have it he handed me the canteen which I think saved my life. Some men of other companies were in such a state as to be nearly deranged. How in the name of God back emigrants are to get along is a mystery to me as now we are nearly the first on the road and on Mary's river [Humboldt River] we had not grass for our few horses ... [R.B. Laughlin, July 27, 1849. In the sand hills]

Some Other Quotations

Provided by Don Buck

James William Evans, Aug. 8, 1850 At the Humboldt Sink

"The Sink of Humboldt": what a dreary out-of-the-world looking place it is! But still I am rejoiced to see it; to see, the infernal Humboldt (that ought to have been called the River Styx) stuck down into the parching sands of an immense Desert, and buried in eternal oblivion! Let others eulogize this river, and compare it to the river Jordan; but for my part I must freely acknowledge that the 21 days I have been upon it, has been anything but pleasant. The general course of the river presents a model for a pothook; and though the Valley in which it runs is so wide, yet this serpentine river winds through every part of it, and lest some ground might not be traversed a thousand sloughs are sent out to twist and cross around every where and in every direction. If it were not too irreverent, I would suggest the idea that perhaps the Devil himself having cast his eyes over the

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world concluded to try his hand at making a river. He made it in the night and layed it down so crooked and ragged, that just at break of day when he stopped to look back at it, he got ashamed of himself and run it into the ground! [James William Evans, Aug. 8, 1850.]

Cornelia Ferris (June 26-27, 1853)

Don Buck says ...

Came across this interesting description of the vicinity of the Trails West marker on the south side of the Humboldt Bar where the trails on both sides of Humboldt Lake/Sink join for the crossing of the Forty Mile Desert on the Carson Trail. It's a fine description of the trading posts and land formations, and by a woman. Cornelia Ferris was a married Mormon accompanying her husband on a cattle drive from Great Salt Lake Valley to the gold fields. She wrote a series of letters describing her various journeys, including this one, that were published in *The Mormons at Home*; with some incidents of travel from Missouri to California, 1852-53 (Dix & Edwards and Sampson Low, Son & Co.: New York and London, 1856) pp. 281-83.

Cornelia Ferris says ...

[June 26] On the 26th we reached the sink of the river - a large basin, somewhat circular from ten to fifteen miles wide, and twenty-five to thirty long, bounded by hills. The portion at present dry is crusted over with saline substances, very similar in appearance to the ground, after a storm of sleet which has congealed. Over the flat, smooth, desolate surface, we kept on for about ten miles — the road, in places, slippery from the recently receding water — and took up our quarters at one o'clock.... At our left lay the lake, [her train is on the west side of

the lake] bordered by a belt of deep green grass and bulrushes, upon which the animals were driven with difficulty - poor things, they mired almost to their bodies and the high wind, growing colder and colder at evening, drove them for shelter to the carriages, around which they huddled, complaining all night.

[June 27] In the morning we resumed the journey over the smooth, wintery-looking plain, steering for a point of the mountain fifteen miles distant, which, in the clear atmosphere, appeared as though it might be reached in an hour's walk. Less than half the distance brought us to the shore of the lake (free from rushes), a beautiful sheet of water, from two to five miles wide, with a gravelly beach: saw a pelican and plenty of ducks. At the junction of the road from the other side of the sink were two trading stations, [her reference to the existence of an east side trail] consisting of slight tents, and supplied with some necessities for passing trains - but, it was said, diluted whisky and brandy composed most of the stock. These establishments were at the foot of an elevation, composed of red sand-stone and basaltic columns, resting on a strata of gray rock, running up at least a thousand feet, of varied jags, points, and turrets, making a view altogether too fine to be desecrated by a brace of rum holes. A sluggish stream, which the men called a slough, with scarce any perceptible current, led from the lake, and connects with Carson Lake - the amount of water forming no sort of comparison to that which flows in through Mary's River, and is said to be dry during part of the year. We passed on a mile, and encamped to prepare for the Forty-mile Desert, immediately in prospect, about which all manner of dismal stories are told.

Emigrant Diary Accounts for the Lower Humboldt River, Sink, and Forty Mile Deserts

Lower Humboldt And Sink

Wakeman Bryarly, 1849:

In the meantime the necessary preparations to pay the last respects to our deceased member were being made. A hill near by was chosen as a spot suitable, from its elevation & vicinity to what will always hereafter be the road, to receive his remains. At three o'clock the preparations were announced ready & we took a solemn movements towards the grave. His blanket served him for his winding sheet & a few planks layed over, for his coffin. The funeral service was read & a suitable board [placed] at his head, & thus he was left, each perhaps thinking of the uncertainty of life & death.

This marsh for three miles is certainly the liveliest place that one could witness in a lifetime. There is some two hundred and fifty wagons here all the time. Trains going out & others coming in & taking their places is the constant order of the day. Cattle & mules by the hundreds are surrounding us, in grass to their knees, all discoursing sweet music with the grinding of their jaws. Men too are seen hurrying in many different ways & everybody attending to his own business. Some mowing, some reaping, some carrying, some packing the grass, others spreading it out to dry, [or] collecting that already dry & fixing it for transportation. In fact the joyous laugh & the familiar sound of the whetted scythe resounds from place to place & gives an air of happiness & content around that must carry the wearied travellers through to the "Promised Land." The scene also reminds on much of a large encampment of the army, divided off into separate & distinct parties, everybody minding his business and letting other people's alone....

Our camp continued the same joyous, variable things during the day. We have perhaps remained longer than the majority, but our animals & men all required recruiting.

As many as five hundred have left since we arrived. It is rather amusing to see the many different manners which necessity has compelled the poor fellows to travel??some packing upon their backs, others driving a half?dead mule or pony before them, laden with a few hard crackers & a coffee pot. [There are] carts of all descriptions, wagons [that] have been divided, one party taking the fore wheels & half the bed, another the hind ones with the remaining half. "Necessity is the mother of inven-

tion," & if anyone doubts it, I think it will be convincing to them to be upon this road. Oxen are also packed, the load being placed upon their backs & upon the yoke. They move along very well & keep up a very good gait.

The men have all been busy fixing their grass & repacking wagons, The day was passed with pleasure & enjoyment to all, & at night the exciting violin & soft melodious flute was heard from the different campfires, giving cheerfulness to everything around, & serving to make us forget that we are two thousand miles from those we hold most dear....

Langworthy, 1850

Arrived at noon on the confines of the "Big Meadow." Here the river spreads into a very shallow lake, twenty miles in length, by near ten miles in breadth. This sheet of water is nearly surrounded by a wide morass, covered with a kind of coarse grass and rushes. This is the fodder which the emigrants take on board their wagons, preparatory to crossing the "Great Desert." This Big Meadows lies on both sides of the lake, and stretches along for a distance of fifteen or twenty miles....

Along here, we observed human skulls and bones scattered around the plain, the remains, no doubt, of former emigrants, many of whom have, from appearances, here ended their wearisome journey, and closed their mortal career. We here saw several new graves. The corpses were partly disinterred by wolves, that, in this gloomy region, riot upon the flesh of human beings. These bodies had been bruied in the most slight manner....

Moved along the eastern shore of the Lake, and about noon, arrived at its southern terminus, where we saw the outlet, a small river twenty feet wide. This stream runs south upon the Desert six miles* where it expands into numerous small ponds, and here finally sinks in the sand. This spot is therefore the place where the waters of the Humboldt entirely disappear. We found a considerable number at the south end of the Lake, cooking up food, filling water casks from the Lake, and making other preparations for crossing the dreaded Desert, whose arid sands are now in plain prospect before us....

We soon perceived that the Desert is not as we had supposed, a perfect level, but is covered with little hills of sand, upon which is a very stunted growth of greasewood bushes. We also passed within sight of some considerable hills, and even mountains, standing in the Desert.

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Shaw, 1849

The reader should not imagine the Humboldt to be a rapid mountain stream, with its cool and limpid waters rushing down the rocks of steep inclines, with here and there beautiful cascades and shady pools under mountain evergreens, where the sun never intrudes and where the speckled trout love to sport. While the water of such a stream is fit for the gods, that of the Humboldt is not good for man nor beast. With the exception of a short distance near its source, it has the least perceptible current. There is not a fish nor any other living thing to be found in its waters, and there is not timber enough in three hundred miles of its desolate valley to make a snuffbox, or sufficient vegetation along its banks to shade a rabbit, while its waters contain the alkali to make soap for a nation, and, after winding its sluggish way through a desert within a desert, it sinks, disappears, and leaves the inquisitive man to ask how, why, when, and where? ...

On arriving at the Sink of the Humboldt, a great disappointment awaited us. We had known nothing of the nature of that great wonder except what we had been told by those who knew no more about it than ourselves. In place of a great rent in the earth, into which the waters of the river plunged with a terrible roar (as pictured in our imagination), there was found a mud lake ten miles long and four or five miles wide, a veritable sea of slime, a "slough of despond," an ocean of ooze, a bottomless bed of alkali poison, which emitted a nauseous odor and presented the appearance of utter desolation. The croaking of frogs would have been a redeeming feature of the place, but no living thing disturbed the silence and solitude of the lonely region. There were mysteries and wonders hovering over and around the Sink of the Humboldt, but there was neither beauty nor grandeur in connection with it, for a more dreary or desolate spot could not be found on the face of the earth.

Remy, 1855

At sunset the mountains were clad with exquisite tints; some, illuminated by the twilight, presented shades of a delicate rose-colour, while others were of a lovely blue. The setting sun moreover was wrapt in magnificently golden clouds, blended with others of a rosy hue of inexpressible beauty.

Sarah Royce, 1849

The first question in the morning was, "How can the oxen be kept from starving?" A happy thought occurred. We had, thus far in our journey, managed to keep something in the shape of a bed to sleep on. It was a mattress-tick, and, just before leaving Salt Lake, we had put into it some fresh hay - not very much, for our load

must be as light as possible, but the old gentleman traveling with us had also a small straw mattress; the two together might keep the poor things from starving for a few hours. At once a small portion was dealt out to them and for the present they were saved. For ourselves we had food which we believed would about last us till we reached the Gold Mines if we could go right on; if we were much delayed anywhere, it was doubtful. The two or three quarts of water in our little cask would last only a few hours, to give moderate drinks to each of the party.

Forty Mile Desert, Truckee Route

Edwin Bryant, 1846

From this point the trail takes a southwest course, and runs across a totally barren plain, with the exception of a few clumps of sage-bushes, a distance of twenty miles. No sign of the river or of the existence of water indicated itself within this distance. Some remarkable petrifications displayed themselves near the trail early this morning. They had all the appearance of petrified fungi, and many of them were of large dimensions....

At the southern edge of this plain we came to some pools of standing water, as described by the Indians last night, covered with a yellowish slime, and emitting a most disagreeable fetor. The margins of these pools are whitened with an alkaline deposit, and green tufts of a coarse grass, and some reeds or flags, raise themselves above the snow-like soil. I procured from one of the pools a cup of the water, and found it so thoroughly saturated with alkali, that it would be dangerous for ourselves or our animals to make use of it. It was as acrid and bitter as the strongest lye filtered through ashes....

We passed from the pools or "Sink" over the low ridge of sand-hills, in a south course. Our mules waded through these hills, or heaps of dry ashy earth, rather than walked over them, sinking in many places nearly to their bellies, and manifesting the strongest signs of exhaustion... — The plain is utterly destitute of vegetation, with the exception of an occasional strip of sage on the swells, and a few patches of brown grass, and here and there a small clump of straggling flags or reeds, which seem to war for an existence with the parched and ungenerous soil.

We ascended the ridge of mountains just noticed, by an easy inclined plain. Some miles before we commenced the ascent, I observed on the slope of the plain a line of perpendicular rocks, forming a wall, with occasional high elevations, representing watch towers and turrets. A low gap afforded us an easy passage between the moun-

tains....

These springs are a great curiosity, on account of their variety and the singularity of their action and depositions. The deposit from one had formed a hollow pyramid of reddish clay, about eight feet in height, and six feet in diameter at the base, tapering to a point. There were several airholes near the top, and inside of it the waters were rumbling, and the steam puffing through the airholes with great violence. Miller threw stones at the cap of this pyramid. It broke like brittle pottery and the red and turbid waters ran down the sides of the frail structure which they had erected. Not far from this was a small basin, and a lively but diminutive stream running from it, of water as white as milk, which, indeed, it greatly resembled. I cooled some of it in my cup, and drinking, found it not unpalatable. It was impregnated with magnesia. In another basin, the water was thickened, almost to the consistence of slack mortar, with a blue clay. It was rolling and tumbling about with activity, and volumes of steam, accompanied with loud puffing reports, ascended from it. The water of the largest basin (about ten feet in diameter) was limpid, and impregnated with salt and sulphur. From this basin, where we encamped, a small stream ran down the slope. The rock surrounding these springs is a mere shell or crust, formed, doubtless, by a deposit from the overflowing waters from the basins or holes, which are so many ventilators for the escape of the steam from the heated and boiling mass of liquid beneath.

James Clyman, 1844

at about 15 miles or half way from Waushee [Truckee] river to the first water near Mars Lake still exists a caldron of Boiling water no stream issues from it [at] present but it stands in several pools Boiling and again disappearing some of these pools have beautiful clear water Boiling in them and others emit Quantities of mud

into one of these muddy pools my little water spaniel Lucky went poor fellow not Knowing that it was Boiling hot he deliberately walked in to the caldron to slake his thirst and cool his limbs when to his sad disappointment and my sorrow he scalded himself almost instantly to death I felt more for his loss than any other animal I ever lost in my life as he had been my constant companion in all my wandering since I Left Milwawkee and I vainly hoped to see him return to his old master in his native village (But such is nature of all earthly hopes)

Edwin Bryant, 1846

A ride of several hours down the valley, brought us to a ridge of sandy hills running entirely across it....

The distance across the ridge, or rather elevated plain of sandy undulations, is about ten miles. Over this plain the travelling is very laborious. We were compelled to dismount from our animals, weakened as they were by

thirst and hunger, in order to get them along through the deep sand.

Elisha Douglass Perkins, 1849

Took 2 hours rest about midnight and arrived to our great joy at the Salmon Trout [Truckee] River at 7 a.m. on Sunday Sept. 9, and once more had a refreshing draught of pure water and was gladdened by the sight of large majestic trees. The Salmon Trout being lined with the finest Cotton woods I ever saw. No one can imagine how delightful the sight of a tree is after such long stretches of desert, until they have tried it. We have seen very few of any kind since leaving the Platte, and what a luxury after our mules were taken care of, to lay down in their shade and make up our two nights loss of sleep, and hear the wind rustling their leaves and whistling among their branches.

Wilkins, 1849

I wish California had sunk into the ocean before I had ever heard of it. Here I am alone, having crossed the desert, it is true, and got to some good water, but have had nothing to eat all day, my companions scattered, our wagons left behind. That desert has played h?l with us.

Waters, 1855

If ever I saw heaven, I saw it there.

Forty Mile Desert, Carson Route

Elizar Stillman Ingalls, 1850

Imagine to yourself a vast plain of sand and clay; the moon riding over you in silent grandeur, just renders visible by her light the distant mountains; the stunted sage, the salt lakes, cheating the thirsty traveler into the belief that water is near; yes, water it is, but poison to the living thing that stops to drink Burning wagons render still more hideous the solemn march; dead horses line the road, and living ones may be constantly seen, lapping and rolling the empty water casks (which have been cast away) for a drop of water to quench their burning thirst, or standing with drooping heads, waiting for death to relieve them of their tortures, or lying on the sand half buried, unable to rise, yet still trying. The sand hills are reached; then comes a scene of confusion and dismay. Animal after animal drops down. Wagon after wagon is stopped, the strongest animals taken out of the harness; the most important effects are taken out of the wagon and placed on their backs and all hurry away, leaving behind wagons, property and animals that, too weak to travel, lie and broil in the sun in an agony of thirst until death relieves them of their tortures. The owners hurry on with but one object in view, that of reaching the Carson River

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before the boiling sun shall reduce them to the same condition. Morning comes, and the light of day presents a scene more horrid than the rout of a defeated army; dead stock line the roads, wagons, rifles, tents, clothes, everything but food may be found scattered along the road; here an ox, who standing famished against a wagon bed until nature could do no more, settles back into it and dies; and there a horse kicking out his last gasp in the burning sand, men scattered along the plain and stretched out among the dead stock like corpses, fill out the picture. The desert! You must see it and feel it in an August day, when legions have crossed it before you, to realize it in all its horrors. But heaven save you from the experience.

Sarah Røyce, 1849

After this little episode, the only cheering incident for many hours, we turned to look at what lay round these monster wagons. It would be impossible to describe the motley collection of things of various sorts, strewn all about. The greater part of the materials, however, were pasteboard boxes, some complete, but most of them broken, and pieces of wrapping paper still creased, partially in the form of packages. But the most prominent objects were two or three, perhaps more, very beautifully finished trunks of various sizes, some of them standing open, their pretty trays lying on the ground, and all rifled of their contents; save that occasionally a few pamphlets, or, here and there, a book remained in the corners. We concluded that this must have been a company of merchants hauling a load of goods to California, that some of their animals had given out, and, fearing the rest would they had packed toward the river. There was only one thing, (besides the few pounds of bacon) that, in all these varied heaps of thing, many of which, in civilized scenes, would have been valuable, I thought worth picking up. That was a little book, bound in cloth and illustrated with a number of small engravings. Its title was "Little Ella." I thought it would please Mary, so I put it in my pocket. It was an easily carried souvenir of the desert; and more than one pair of young eyes learned to read its pages in after years.

Langworthy, 1850

This point, on the river, bears the classic name of "Ragtown." The reason of the appellation, is because there are several acres here, literally covered with rags, or clothing, either sound or tattered. The work of thousands of wagons have been burnt at this place the irons covered the soil for a considerable space around.

At Ragtown, to our great surprise, we found an abundant supply of flour from California. The flour was sent here by the Benevolent Society of Sacramento city. The agent, who has a large cloth tent, sells the flour for

twenty-five cents per pound to those who have money, and gives twenty pounds to each one who is destitute of cash. I can assure you he was doing a heavy business, and throngs of moneyless customers crowded his store. This charitable interposition, on the part of the good people of Sacramento, has prevented an immense amount of suffering. Most of the emigrants were out of flour, or nearly so, on their arrival here....

Traveling in constant clouds of dust, dirty faces, hands, and clothes, become less and less offensive, so that as we draw towards the termination of the journey, we see for a general rule, a dirty rabble. Men have stomachs that are far from being squeamish. I have seen a man eating his lunch, and gravely sitting upon the carcass of a dead horse, and we frequently take our meals amidst the effluvia of an hundred putrescent carcasses. Water is drunk with a good relish, into which we know that scores of dead animals have been thrown, or have fallen. I saw three men eating a snake the other day, that one of them had dressed and cooked, not because they were in want of food, but as a rarity, or perhaps, rather by way of bravo, to show others that nothing would turn their stomachs. Graves of emigrants are numerous on this side the Desert. The usual mode of burying the dead on this route, is to dig a very shallow grave, inter the corpse without coffin, and set up a narrow piece of board by way of monument, on which a brief inscription is cut with a knife. Many, however, have only a split stick set up, into which a paper is put, on which the inscription is written.

Leaving the river, we went over a hill of considerable elevation. No green thing visible until arriving again at the river, where we pitched our tent in quite a delightful place. Large cottonwood trees were dispersed around the landscape, which was covered with green, but very short grass.

Hummocks and Mirage

John Steele, 1850

At first we thought we were traveling a new road ... but as we advanced into the plain the lake suddenly disappeared and there opened before us a wide valley, surrounded by low, well-timbered hills. Plainly defined in the center of this valley we could see trains of emigrant wagons, groups of horsemen, and, in short, almost anything the imagination might picture. The mirage continued until near sunset, when the beautiful illusion gradually faded from our view, leaving only the dull, monotonous desert. Though for hour we knew it was unreal, yet we so desired the lake shore, the woods, the grassy slopes, and probable cold springs, with all its beautiful revelations, that when the last trace was gone, there came to us a feeling of deep disappointment

Soda Lake — Carson Route

Owing to the intense heat we traveled very slowly, and the stench from the decaying carcasses strewn along our way added nausea to our fatigue.

About sunset we passed among tall bunches of greasewood, around which the wind had piled large heaps of sand, making the place resemble a well-cultivated field. From this, in the deepening twilight, our road lay across ridges of soft sand. Ascending these, some of the oxen gave out and had to be taken from the wagons. This increased the labor of the others, and it was with the utmost difficulty that the wagons were brought to the summit of the last ridge. But no sooner was it accomplished than the oxen, as though conscious of approaching water, renewed their exertions. One ox that had repeatedly lain down, and had been lifted on his feet, while coming up the ridge, puffed the sand from his nostrils, and extending his nose in the air, as if to satisfy himself that his efforts would not be in vain, pushed off with a steady pace for the river, and about two hours after dark, its murmur greeted our ears like the glad welcome of an old friend. (Truckee Route.)

Layman, 1852

We passed 10 Trading Posts in traveling from The Humboldt sink to the Carson river This Desert is thickly studded with little mounds from 1 to 8 feet high & from 3 to 30 feet in diameter upon which a species of Greasewood grows the roots of which seem to hold the Mounds in shape. In other places the surface of the ground is perfectly smooth & level, in the distance it looks like a sheet of water & reflecting the image of objects like a Mirror. (Carson Route.)

Ingalls, 1850

We stayed with them through the heat of the day, and about night started again, but turned off about a mile from the road to visit a small salt lake, where we found a very good spring of fresh water and a sulphur spring. This lake is about three miles from Carson River; its waters are more salt than the most salt brine, and its shores are encrusted with pure salt. Its bed was evidently once the crater of a volcano.

Carson River Route Desert Crossings

Decker, 1849

Scenery barren & desolate, alternate banks & ridges of sand and black lava or volcanic rock. The low mountain ridges running in curious disorder indicate that we are ascending the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains....

Our stopping place was on the dry bed or bottom of a lake of some 20 acres level as water, hard so that wagon going over made but little impression being a cement of sand dried hard as the water evaporated at certain seasons & leaving a delicate coating of alkali on top, it looking white & shone in the light of the moon like spotless snow & in contrast with the ridge or circle of hills surrounding this basin with soft outlines, looked beautiful in contrast. Got our supper prepared for the night trip & partook of the simple meal sitting on this clean table in the clear light of the moon, the stars begemmed the canopy Some of the boys said this was the best tavern on the road as the floor was scrubbed clean

Industries Along The I-80 Corridor From Reno To US-95

Data compiled by Bob Evanhoe

Leaving Reno and entering the lower canyon of the Truckee River, you can see the Reno Sewage Treatment plant on the right, just downstream from the confluence of Steamboat Creek and the River. Treated effluent enters the River at this point. (This plant is accessed via a road named Clean Water Way.)

At the Patrick railroad section, the industrial complex nearest the highway is dog food manufacturer KalKan. This plant makes only kibble, nothing canned. KalKan is a division of Mars, Inc., now called Master Foods. The address given on a business card is McCarran, NV. This may be what this area is now called, but we were told that this whole section of Storey County (south of the River) is about to become a huge business and industrial development.

Behind KalKan is a large warehouse facility named SanMar, manufacturers of wearing apparel and accessories, primarily sportswear. They have their own brand, Port Authority, but also make apparel for Hanes, Fruit of the Loom, Lee, Cross Creek and Ping. They have other plants in Cincinnati and Seattle. They call their location the Patrick Business Park, also in McCarran, NV.

A couple miles further we come upon the largest facility on our trip, the Tracy Clark Power Station. This is owned and operated by Sierra Pacific Industries and has a generating capacity of 500 megawatts. It can be fired by natural gas, oil or coal gasification.

Behind and to the left (east) of the power station is a smaller generating facility designed to bring peaking units on line if electrical needs exceed the main power station capacity. It is independently owned by a New York company and has yet to be needed.

East of the above is the Eagle-Picher Industries diatomaceous earth mine and processing facility. The product is used for absorption materials such as OilDri and filtering used in the wine making business. These deposits pro-

vide evidence that the area was once under water as a part of prehistoric Lake Lahonton.

Around the bend of the river we come upon the Derby Diversion Dam. The dam is concrete with a crest length of 1,331 feet and a height of only 15 feet. Diversion capacity is 1,500 cfs (11,220 gal per second.)

Derby Dam, constructed under specification number 1 and drawing number 1 of the U.S. Reclamation Service, diverts the flow of the Truckee River for irrigation use. It was the forerunner of such mighty structures as Hoover, Grand Coulee, Shasta and Glen Canyon dams, and was authorized by Secretary of the Interior E.A. Hitchcock on March 14, 1903. It is part of the Newlands Project, named in honor of Nevada Senator Francis G. Newlands who worked for passage of the reclamation laws in 1902. Derby takes its name from a nearby Southern Pacific railroad station of the day.

Charles A. Warren and Co. of San Francisco, the contractor, started work on the dam on October 2, 1903, and finished May 20, 1905. Operational water diversions began in 1906.

In the northeast corner of the Fernley interchange, Exit 46, is the Nevada Cement Company. The plant began operation in 1965 and produces more than 500,000 tons of cement annually, from limestone mined seven miles southeast of Fernley, off Hwy 95. This is more evidence of the existence of ancient seas, although much older than Lake Lahonton.

Two facilities near I-80 Exit 65 take advantage of the geothermal potential at the hot springs. Gilroy Foods Geothermal Plant processes onions and other foods for drying. To their east is the Brady Geothermal Power Plant.

Also at Exit 65 is another diatomaceous earth facility: Moltan Company, headquartered in Memphis TN. This is a "turnkey" production, from mining to processing to packaging. OilDri is one of their products and cat litter is another.

Ancient Lake Lahontan

by Don Wiggins

In 1846, after leaving the Humboldt Sink area, Truckee Trail traveler Heinrich Lienhard noted “that the rocks had a peculiar formation, such as I had never seen before.” What Lienhard saw was tufa, or calcite (calcium carbonate) that had been deposited on large rocks in deep water, evidence that a large lake had once covered the area. Other physical evidence of such a large lake that once covered the Forty Mile Desert are the natural “dike,” separating Humboldt lake from the sink area, and the extensive sand dunes that extend from Wadsworth to Fallon. Both the “dike” and the sand dunes were formed by the receding waters of ancient Lake Lahontan.

Lake Lahontan is one of the two large Great Basin lakes formed during the Great Ice Age, which began about 70,000 years ago, Lake Bonneville being the other. During the next 60,000 years, it’s level fluctuated widely. Drying up at least once, maybe more, it reached an estimated maximum height of nearly 900 ft. above the bottom of Pyramid Lake, and covered an area of 8,422 square miles. It extended from Hawthorne northward, through connecting valleys, to the Oregon border.¹ The lake was named after a French Explorer in the Report of the Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, edited by Clarence King in the 1870’s.

Although he did not realize the extent of the ancient lake, one of the first geologists to note the existence of a former lake was Henry Engleman with Captain James H. Simpson’s 1859 expedition. High up in the mountains north of Sand Springs, Engleman noted “horizontal water-marks,” which indicated the temporary stabilization of a large lake at some point in the past. These, and many other such water-marks are visible today as they were to emigrants traveling along the Truckee, Carson, and Simpson routes.

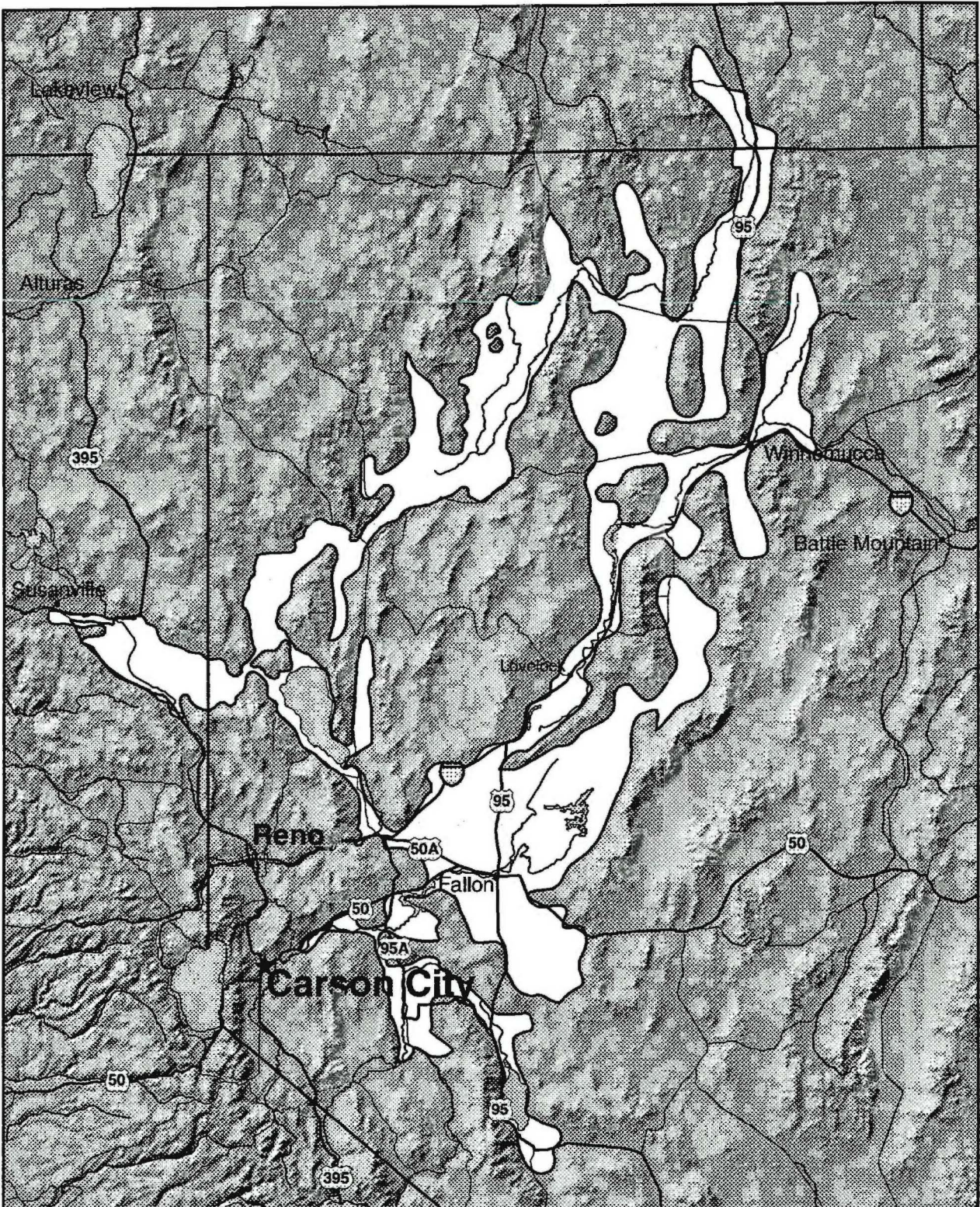
Although Honey Lake, the Black Rock and Forty Mile Deserts, and the Carson Sink area were a part of Lake Lahontan, there were many other Ice Age lakes in Nevada, such as Washoe Lake, that were not. As the northern ice fields and larger glaciers of the Sierra Nevada which had been feeding Lake Lahontan began to disappear about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, the rainfall was also becoming less. This decrease in rainfall is due in large part to the rapid rise of the Sierra Nevada in the last 2 or 3 million years, placing the eastern side of the Sierra in an increasing large rain shadow. With the disappearance of it’s water supply, the lake evaporated into a series of smaller lakes. Today all have disappeared except Pyramid and Walker Lakes, leaving only playas or dry salt flats in their place.²

An interesting, but unfortunate, phenomena is occurring at Pyramid Lake today. In the past, the lake was high enough so, during floods or wet periods, the lake would overflow into the Smoke Creek Desert. This overflow and the heavy influx of cold, pure water from the Truckee River would tend to flush out Pyramid Lake, which would otherwise grow increasingly salty due to evaporation, leaving it less salty. With the 20th century dams in the Truckee watershed that reduce flooding, and with lower lake levels, due in part to Derby Dam, this cleansing action no longer happens. As a consequence, we can expect Pyramid Lake to become more and more salty in the future.

1. The definitive study of Lake Lahontan was the work of Israel Cook Russell, *Geological History of Lake Lahontan, a Quaternary Lake of Northwestern Nevada*, U.S. Geological Survey Monographs, vol. 11 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1885).

2. For those not familiar with the term, a playa is a dry lake bed, which still may periodically become a shallow lake during wet spells or after a large rain. Care must be exercised in driving a vehicle across a playa, such as the Black Rock Desert, after a heavy rain, if one does not wish to walk back without a vehicle.

Bus Tour Notes

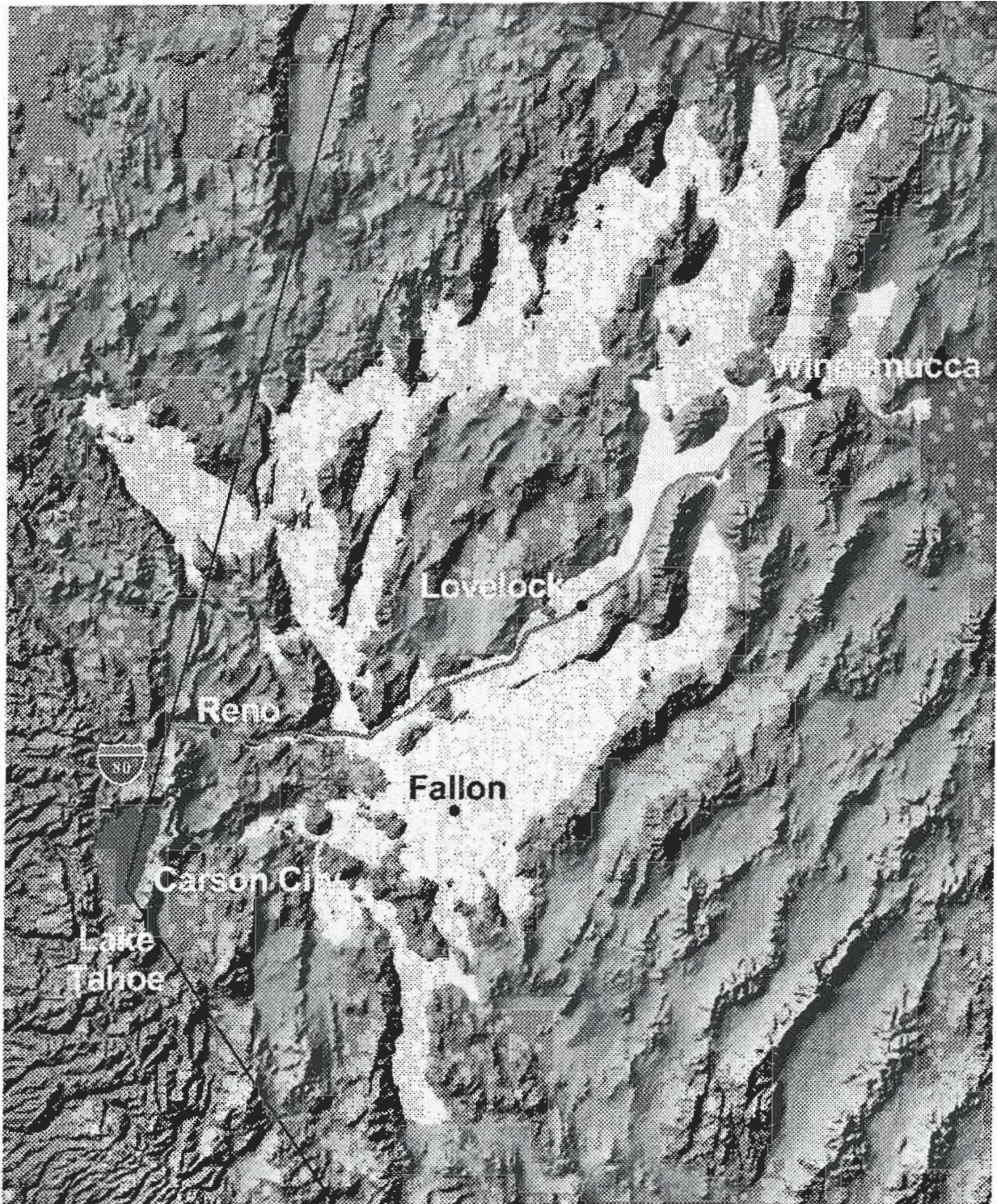


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The outline of lake Lahontan shown here is from Russell's *Geological History of Lake Lahontan* ... The outline shown on the facing page was generated by the BLM's GIS staff using the 4,380 foot elevation Russell had determined was the lake's level. Note that shoreline

as determined by the GIS differs from that that Russell had mapped. The GIS lake shoreline does not extend into Oregon, for example. (The GIS map is tilted somewhat.)

Seems some investigation of the differences is in order. What a great way to spend some summers!



Lake Lahontan

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual uses or aggregate use with other data.

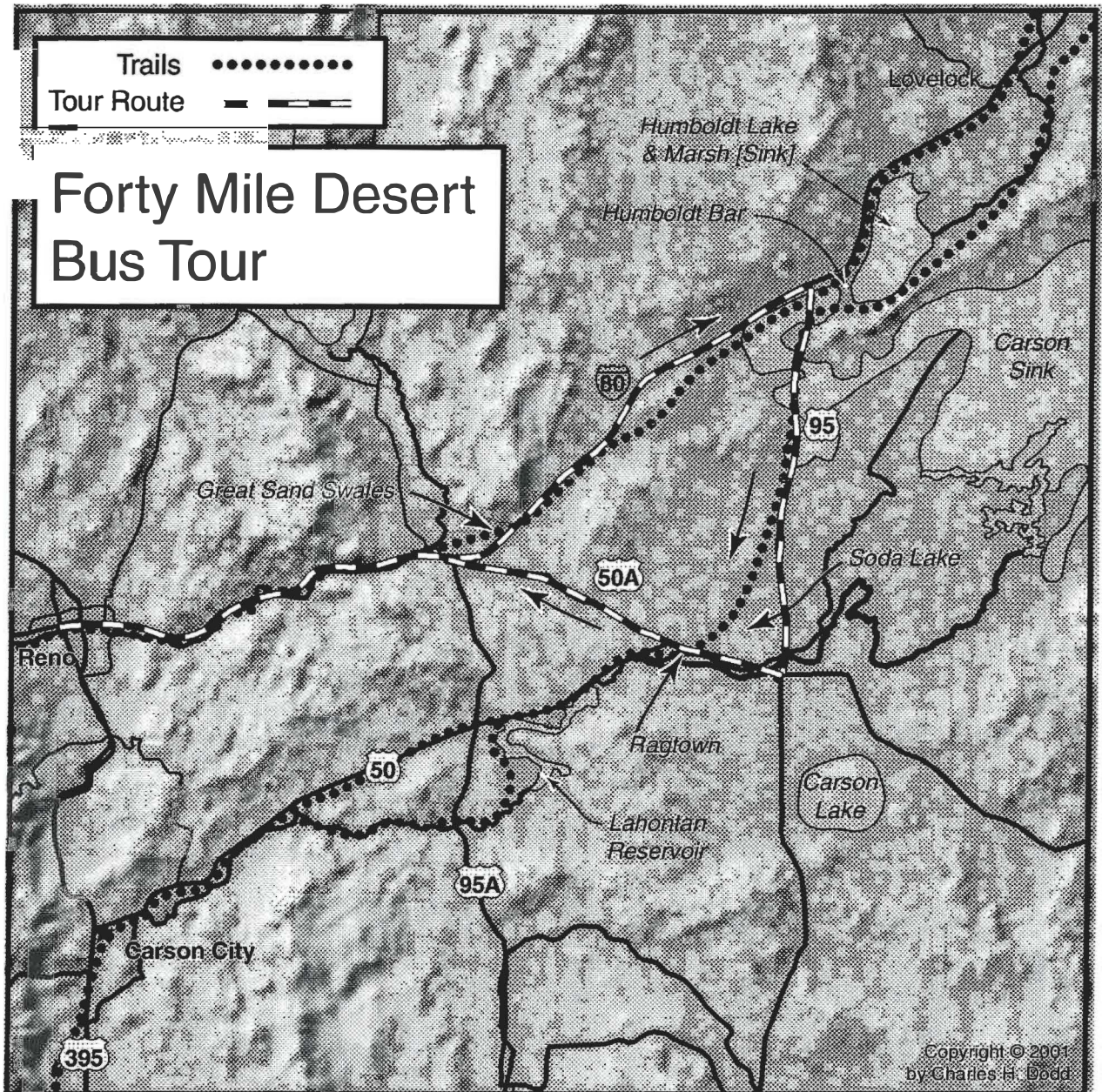
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4,380 foot level

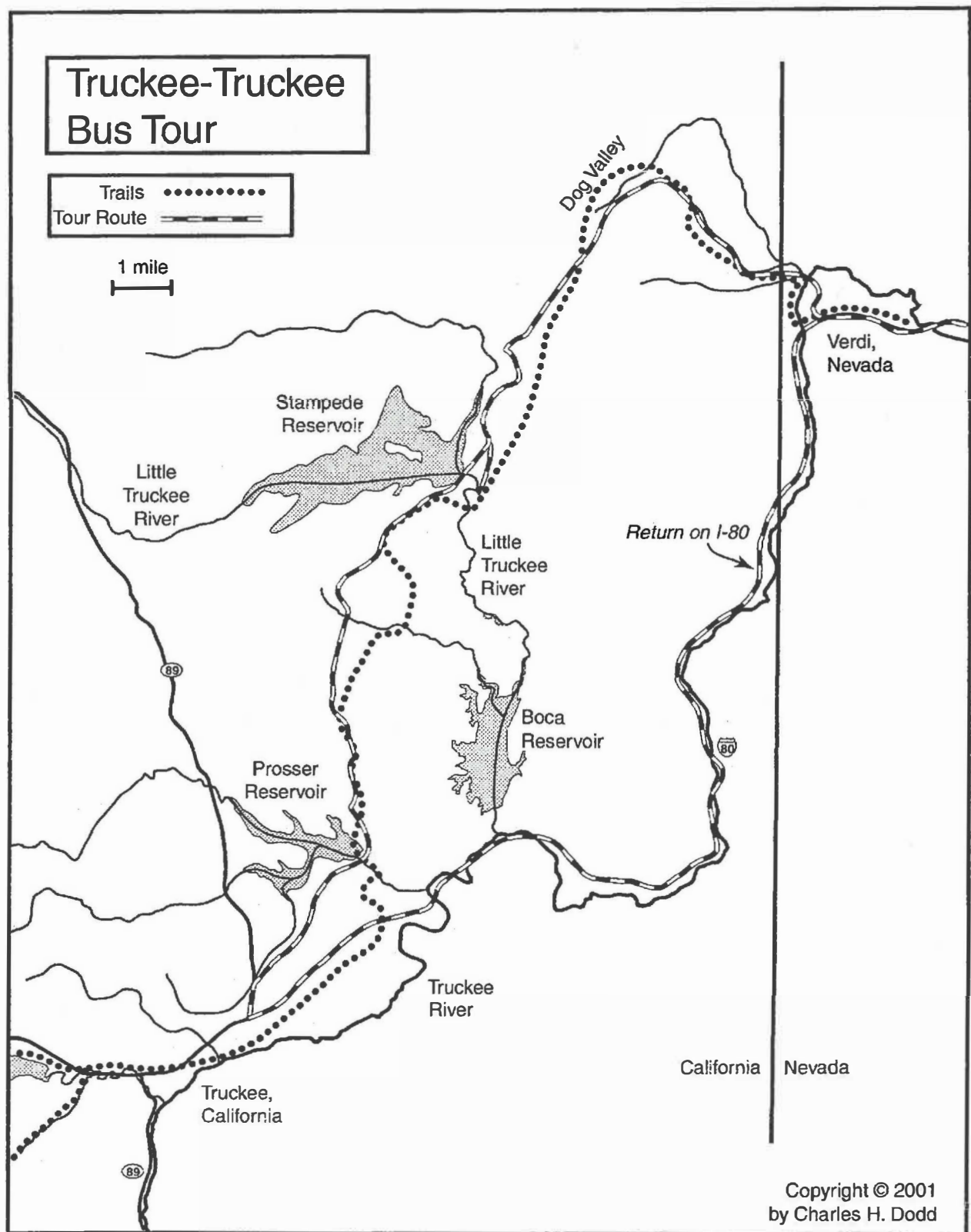


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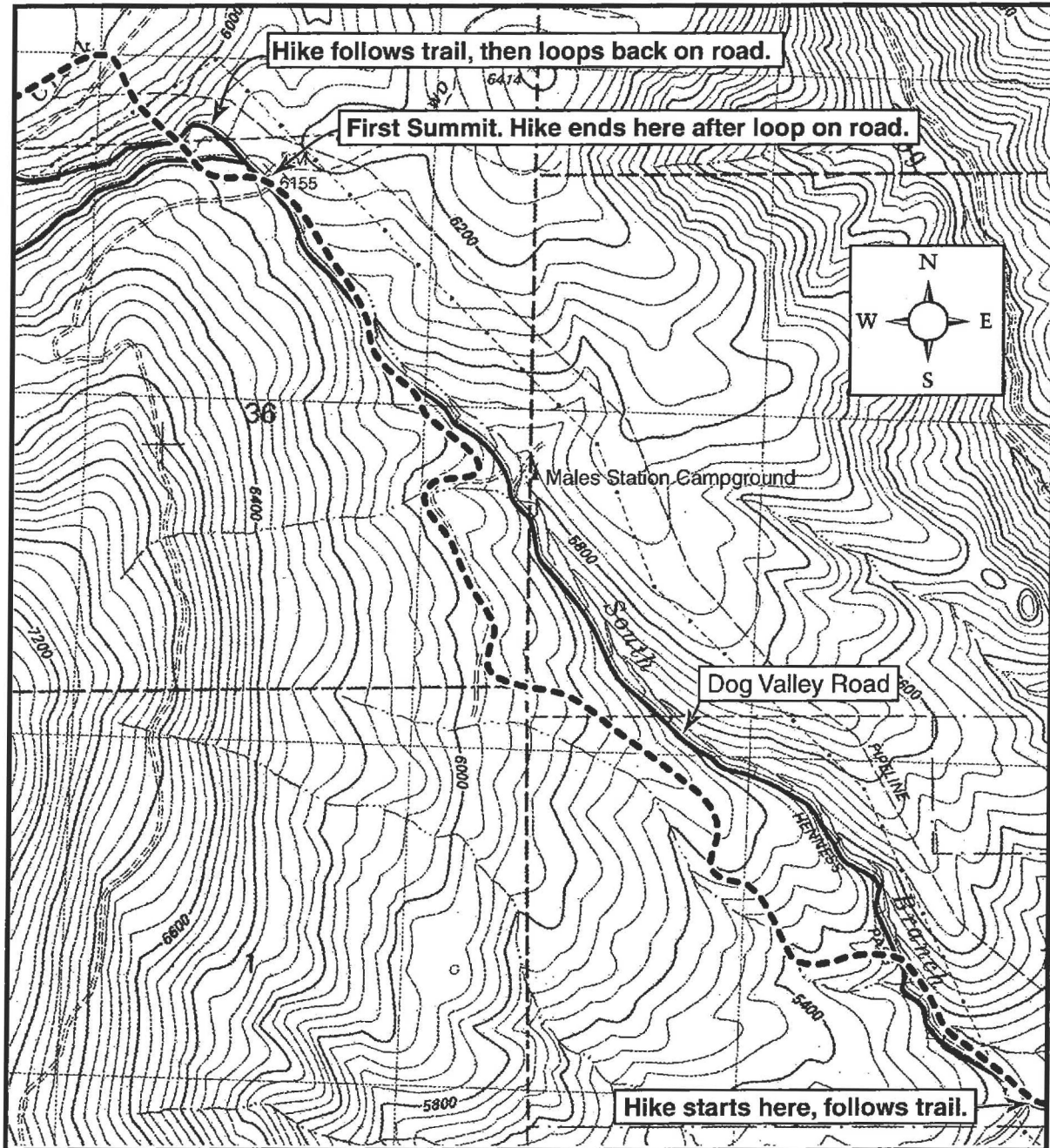
Bus Tour Notes



Bus Tour Notes



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South Branch Canyon Segment of the Trail Along the Truckee River

South Branch Hike

South Branch of Dog Valley Creek

