



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Mother Lode Field Office  
5152 Hillside Circle  
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762  
[www.blm.gov/office/mother-lode-field-office](http://www.blm.gov/office/mother-lode-field-office)

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

June 3, 2025

Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission  
Attn.: Chairperson  
P. O. Box 1014  
Nevada City, CA. 95959

**Subject:** Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission Application for Registration of Historical Landmark: Mule Spring

**Historical Landmark:** Mule Spring

**Location:** Map coordinates are Latitude 39.24449, Longitude 120.80112 (UTM coordinates are 10S689757E 4346212N) WGS84. See Attached Map

**Applicant:**

Bureau of Land Management  
Mother Lode Field Office  
5152 Hillside Circle  
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

**Brief History of Proposed Landmark:**

The Donner Lake to the historic Johnson Ranch, segment of the California Trail, is known locally as the Overland Emigrant Road. Which is the earliest wagon road first used successfully by Captain Elisha Stephens in December 1844, with his train of ten wagons made up of men, women and children. By studying a number of the personal diaries of California bound emigrants, researchers have been able to accurately locate the route of the Overland Emigrant Road in Nevada, Placer and Yuba Counties. This Overland Road was one of the principal routes used by Gold Rush wagon trains going to California, and carried a great amount of the over-the-plains travel from the east to California, in the years 1848 to 1852. In 1852, toll road companies began to make improvements on the routes over both the Donner Pass and Echo Summit and created graded wagon routes with far better grades.

Located along a small segment of the California Emigrant Wagon Trail on BLM administered lands in Nevada County is Mule Spring. Mule Spring was a favorite place for the first Emigrants and their teams to rest traveling west to the Johnson Ranch and Camp Far West in the early 1850's. Mule Spring is also famous for where the first relief party set off to rescue members of the Donner Party in

INTERIOR REGION 10 • CALIFORNIA-GREAT BASIN

CALIFORNIA\*, NEVADA\*, OREGON\*

\* PARTIAL

1847. These young men came together at the urging of their organizer James Reed in hopes of rescuing the starving members of the Donner Party who were snowbound at Truckee Lake, today re-named Donner Lake in memoriam and for the sacrifices made by the rescuers.

The significance of the California Emigrant Trail that passes by Mule Spring has been recognized by the National Park Service and is designated, a National Historic Trail. Congress officially designated the California Trail as a National Historic Trail in 1992, recognizing it as a national treasure. Today the trail commemorates and interprets the rich heritage of the route through hundreds of historic sites including Mule Spring. See *Supporting documentation for the Historic Designation of Mule Springs Chuck Scimeca, Nev. County Historical Landmarks Commission, 8-16-22* for more information.

Sincerely,

**JEFFREY HORN**

Digitally signed by JEFFREY HORN  
Date: 2025.06.04 08:29:17 -07'00'

Jeff Horn

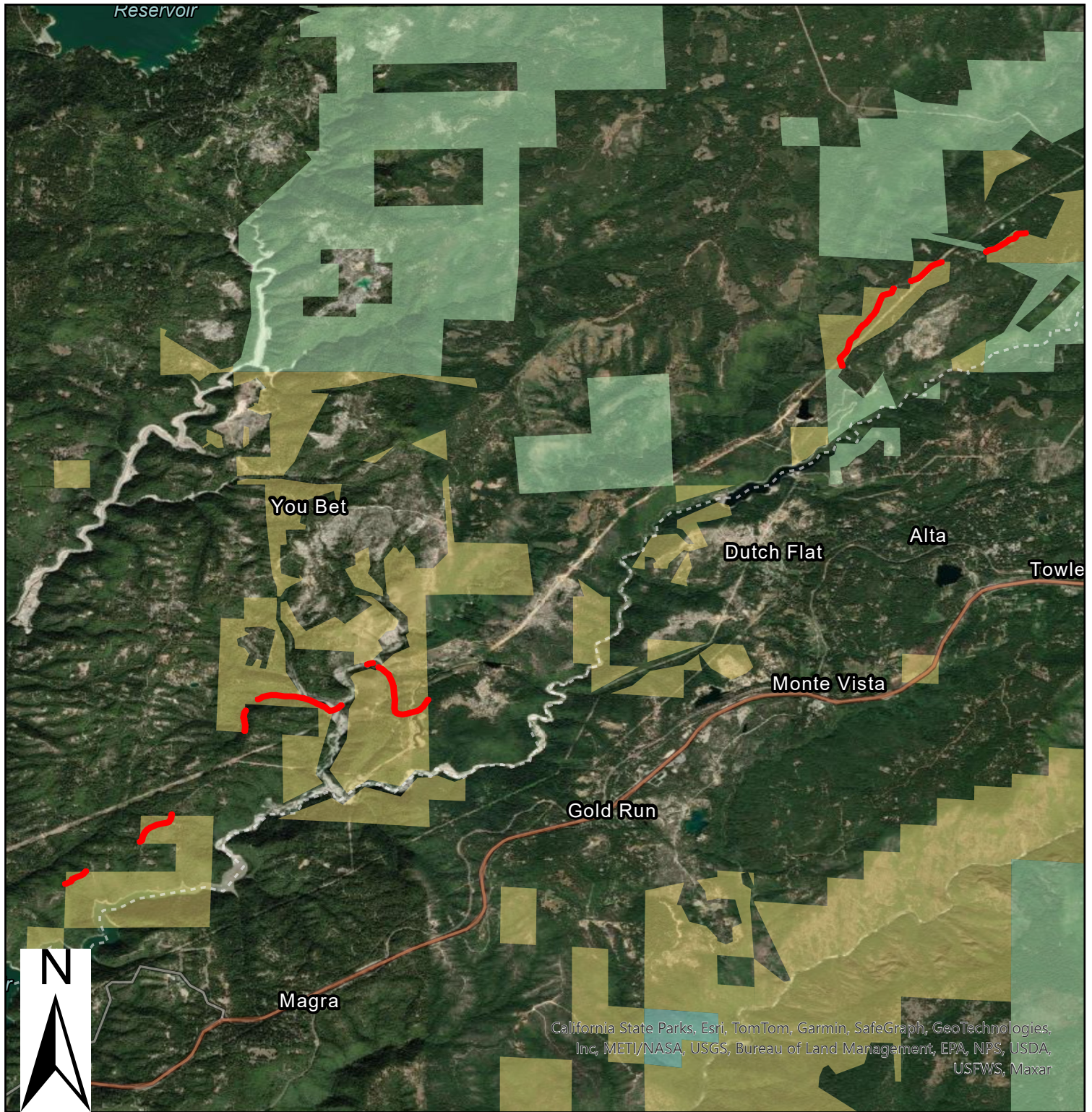
Mother Lode Field Office Manager

Enclosures:

Mule Springs Location Map

*Supporting documentation for the Historic Designation of Mule Springs Chuck Scimeca, Nev.  
County Historical Landmarks Commission, 8-16-22*





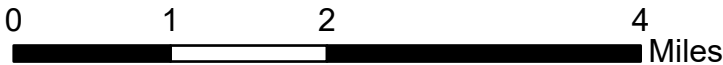
### Legend

Mule Springs Site Boundary

### Land Status

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| BLM                       | Bureau of Reclamation    |
| Forest Service            | Bureau of Indian Affairs |
| National Park Service     | Department of Defense    |
| Fish and Wildlife Service | Other Federal            |
|                           | State                    |
|                           | Local Government         |
|                           | Private                  |

# Mule Springs Location



## Supporting documentation for the Historic Designation of Mule Spring

### Chuck Scimeca, Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commissioner 2-12-24

The Donner Lake to the historic Johnson Ranch, segment of the California Trail, is known locally as the Overland Emigrant Road. Which is the earliest wagon road first used successfully by Captain Elisha Stephens in December 1844, with his train of ten wagons made up of men, women and children. By studying several of the personal diaries of California bound emigrants, researchers have been able to accurately locate the route of the Overland Emigrant Road in Nevada, Placer and Yuba Counties. The Mule Spring location on the Overland Emigrant Trail<sup>1</sup> was one of the principal routes used by Gold Rush wagon trains going to California and carried a great amount of the traffic of over-the-plains travel from the east to California, in the years 1848 to 1852. In 1852, toll road companies began to make improvements on other routes over both the Donner Pass and Echo Summit and created graded wagon routes with far better grades.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the significance of one small portion of the Overland Emigrant Trail which figured prominently in Nevada County's early history. I am speaking specifically of **Mule Spring**, Nevada County, on the Overland Emigrant Trail. The spring is located about three- and one-half miles northeast of Dutch Flat and one-half mile southwest of McGuire Mountain on Bureau of Land Management property. The map coordinates are 39.24449, 120.80112, Elevation: 3,925 ft. UTM coordinates are 10S689757E 4346212N WGS84. \*BLM map p. 9

Mule Spring was a favorite place for the first emigrants and their teams to rest traveling west to the Johnson Ranch and Camp Far West in the early 1850's.<sup>2</sup> Lt. Derby at Camp Far West counted 100 wagons a day in 1849.

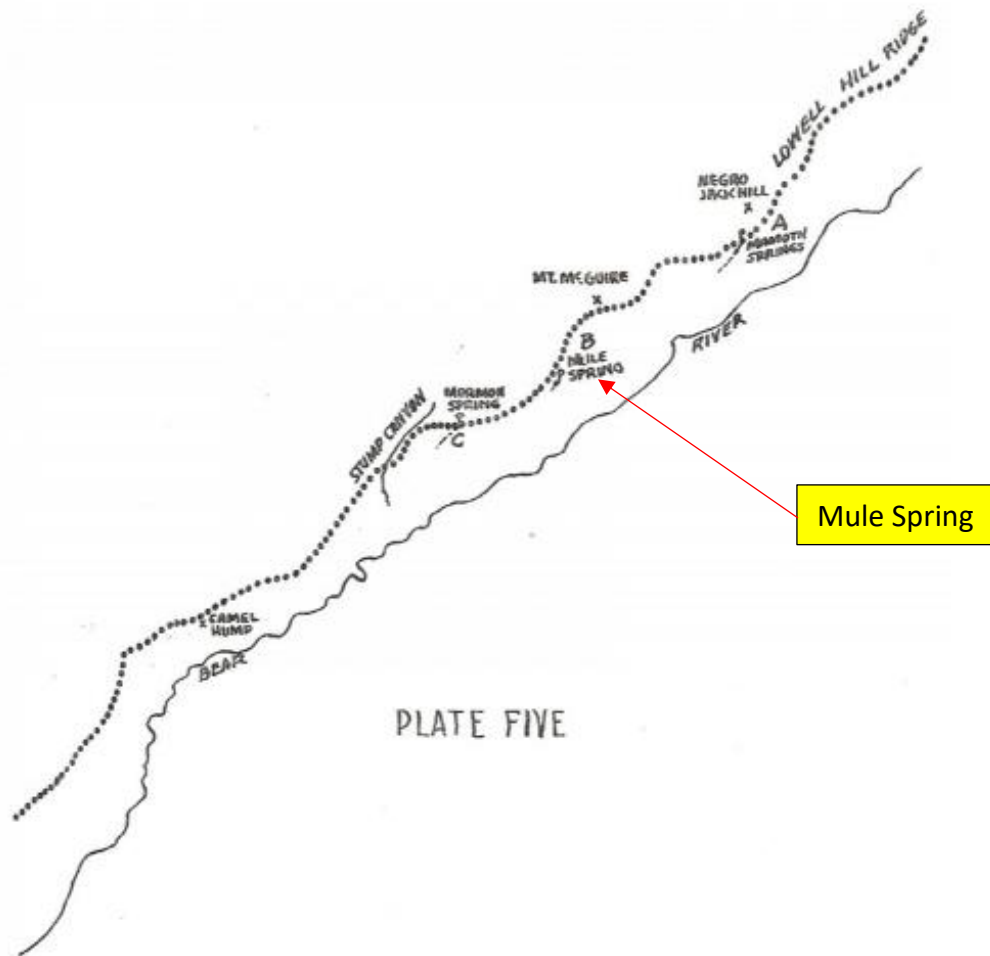
*“Mammoth Spring to Mule Spring, about two miles, the old road is on the very top of the ridge: it crosses the peak of McGuire Mountain, then goes down slope to Mule Spring. This was a favorite camping place for the travelers. The spring is still flowing, having been protected by the U.S. Forest Service.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Overland Emigrant Trail is the name commonly used today to describe the Trail and will be used throughout this paper. Other names used are, the Truckee Route of the California Emigrant Trail and the California Emigrant Wagon Road.

<sup>2</sup> Bert Wiley, “The Overland Emigrant Trail in California.” Sac. CA. 1979

The following map is from Bert Wiley's research paper, page 43, plate five. Note that Mule Spring was once known as "Dead Mule Springs."<sup>3</sup> On the map Mule Spring is shown located between Mammoth Spring to the east and Mormon Spring to the west which is now dry.



1844 - Lowell Hill Ridge  
1854 -

- A - Mammoth Springs, no longer flowing.
- B - Mule Springs, at one time called "Dead Mule Springs."
- C - Mormon Spring. Three Mormons Murdered here.

<sup>3</sup> Note: Many of the early pioneer diaries refer to Mule Spring, in the plural, as Mule Springs.



Mule Spring remains embedded in early Nevada County history for another reason, the heroic rescue effort that cost men their lives. The rescue began at the Johnson Ranch in early 1847 and became known as the First Relief party. These young men came together at the urging of their organizer James Reed in hopes of rescuing the starving members of the Donner Party. The following is a quote from the leader of the modern day “relief party” made up of experienced athletes equipped with modern winter survival equipment.” They followed the same historic trail in March 2022, of the First Relief Party that made the heroic effort to rescue members of the Donner Party stranded at Truckee Lake, now known as Donner Lake.

### **Text from the Donner Relief Expedition of 2022**

*In the winter of 1846, eighty or so members of the Donner Party, a group of men, women and children, became snowbound and trapped in the Sierra Nevada mountains. They were among the first pioneers seeking a better life in California, their Manifest Destiny.*

*After seven survivors of the Forlorn Hope Party broke through to Johnson Ranch on January 18th, 1847, after a harrowing 33-day trek where 8 members perished and they were lost and starved for weeks, relief parties were mustered to try and retrieve the remaining survivors of the Donner Party.*

*There were four Relief Parties in all. 1st Relief departed Johnson Ranch on February 4th, 1847, with mules and provisions. As the frigid winter and rugged Sierra terrain persisted, their numbers dwindled to seven men who summoned their determination and goodwill, eventually reaching the cabins on the edge of Donner Lake on February 18th, 1847. Upon arriving they encountered silence and saw nothing but snow drifts 20 feet deep. Eventually a lone dark figure emerged from the snow and in a frail women’s voice said, “Are you men from California or do you come from heaven?” Thus began the rescue of the Donner Party.*

*The Relief Parties are a lesser-known part of the Donner saga yet have captivated historians and adventurers for nearly two centuries. The grit and selflessness of these men who risked their lives for strangers is a tale of inspiration and intrigue.*

The terrible disaster that the Donner Party suffered is well documented in California and Nevada County history.

The following statement found in the diary of John Markle who traveled the emigrant road to California in 1849 and personally witnessed seeing the remnants of the fallen members of the ill-fated Donner Party.

MONDAY, AUGUST 20, 1849

*Today we traveled about 10 miles and encamped in a valley at the base of the mountain about 3/4 of a mile east of Truckee Lake. Our first 2 miles of travel brought us to the valley where Donner encamped. 1 mile more brought us opposite to where his cabins were, which were situated about 1 or 2 miles from the road on the right-hand side, or Alder Creek. There were a number of fragments 3 left, but more human bones than anything else. 6 miles more and we came to where the Graves family wintered, and all perished except 5 and 2 of them died after they got through. 1 mile more and we came to Fosters and Breens cabins where we encamped, at the lake near the Donner Monument. The road now leaves them on the right, but the old road runs just past them leaving them on the left. No Donners were ever there except children going by with rescuers.*

JOHN A. MARKLE (As interpreted by Wendell Robie)

### **The First Relief Party Left Sutter's Fort on February 4<sup>th</sup> 1847**

George Tucker a 15-year-old, member of the First Relief Party, described Mule Spring camp in his 1879 manuscript:

*The next day [the 10<sup>th</sup> day after leaving Sutter's Fort], about noon, we reached Mule Springs. The snow was from three to four feet deep, and it was impossible to go any farther with the horses. Unpacking the animals, Joe Varro and Wm. Eddy started back with them to Johnson's Ranch. The rest of us went to work and built a brush tent in whch[sic] to keep our provisions.*

George Tucker and Billy Coon stayed at the base camp at Mule Spring guarding the provisions and horses while his father Reason P. Tucker and six other members of the First Relief Party hiked up over the pass to the Donner camps. On March 2, 1847 Reason P. Tucker returned to Mule Spring base camp with members of the First Relief Party and waited for the badly weakened Mrs. Reed to arrive.

From the journal of Reason. P. Tucker of the First Relief Party (father of George Tucker), beginning March 26, 1847

*26, at noon had a small divide of shoe strings roasted and eat them and then proceeded about half a mile when we met two of our men with provisions we struck fire and feasted on our dry beef when we travelled about one mile further and camped-*

*27th Travelled 4 miles and met with another Company hear Mr. Reed met with his wife and two children the meeting was very affecting; travelled about 3 miles further and camped in our old camp head of Bear Valley here we found plenty of provisions and was waited on by Mr. Thompson a man of good feeling and judgement-*

*28th remained in camp but after all our precaution three of the party eat to excess and had to be left in the care of an attend.*

*March 1st Travelled 10 miles and camped on the mountain side in the morning Mrs Reed was very sick and we had to stop that day*

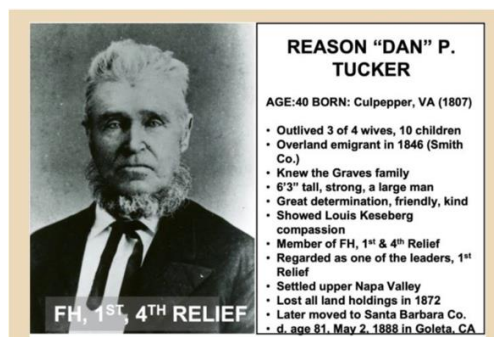
*on the 2d met Lieut. Woodworth and three men well loaded with provisions and blankets 10 miles from Bear Valley Travelled on 3 miles and reached the Mule Springs at our old encampment where we met with nourishment tea and sugar which revived us a good deal-*

*[March 3] Mrs. Reed reached Mule Springs and was waited on by Mr. Thompson about 4 o'clock John Gordon arrived with two of the three that were left behind sick the other a boy about 15 (Wm. Donnor [i.e., Hook]) had died and was buried in the ground by the side of a tree-*

*March 4th Lay still waiting for mr. Kern arrived at 9 o'clock with horses and packs-*

*[March 5] left Mule Springs and came to Rocky Run to Kerns Camp their he had 8 Baqueros to tend camp he shared very close with us keeping the best for himself and his Indians-*

*[March 7] at 3 in the evening reached Johnsons-*





## First Relief Party Members

Selem E. Woodworth was the designated leader, however, Captain Reason Tucker actually took the lead at Mule Springs to Donner Camp and then back to Mule Springs.

1ST RELIEF MEMBERS		
 <b><u>Adolph "Greasy Jim" Bruheim</u></b>  25 years old, 1st Relief, Auxiliary	 <b><u>Aquilla Glover</u></b>  40 years old, 1st & 3rd Relief	 <b><u>Daniel Rhoads</u></b>  25 years old, 1st Relief
 <b><u>Edward "Ned" Coffeemeyer</u></b>  36 years old, 1st, 3rd & 4th Relief	 <b><u>George W. Tucker</u></b>  15 years old, 1st Relief, Auxiliary	 <b><u>John Pierce Rhoads</u></b>  28 years old, 1st & 4th Relief
 <b><u>Joseph "Joe Foster" Sels</u></b>  Age ?, 1st & 4th Relief	 <b><u>Joseph Verrot</u></b>  36 years old, 1st Relief	 <b><u>Jotham Curtis</u></b>  Age ?, 1st Relief
 <b><u>Matthew Dill "Colonel" Ritchie</u></b>  42 years old, 1st Relief, Auxiliary	 <b><u>Reason "Dan" P. Tucker</u></b>  40 years old, 1st & 4th Relief	 <b><u>Riley Septimus Moutry</u></b>  22 years old, 1st Relief
 <b><u>Selem Edward Woodworth</u></b>  32 years old, 1st, 2nd & 3rd Relief	 <b><u>William Coon</u></b>  Age ?, 1st Relief, Auxiliary	 <b><u>William Eddy</u></b>  28 years old, 1st & 3rd Relief

**The following photographs were taken by members of the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission**



**Mule Spring May 2022**

**Landmark Commissioners from left Chuck Scimeca, Jerry Martini & Mike Kochis**



**BLM sign located about 50 feet north of above photo**

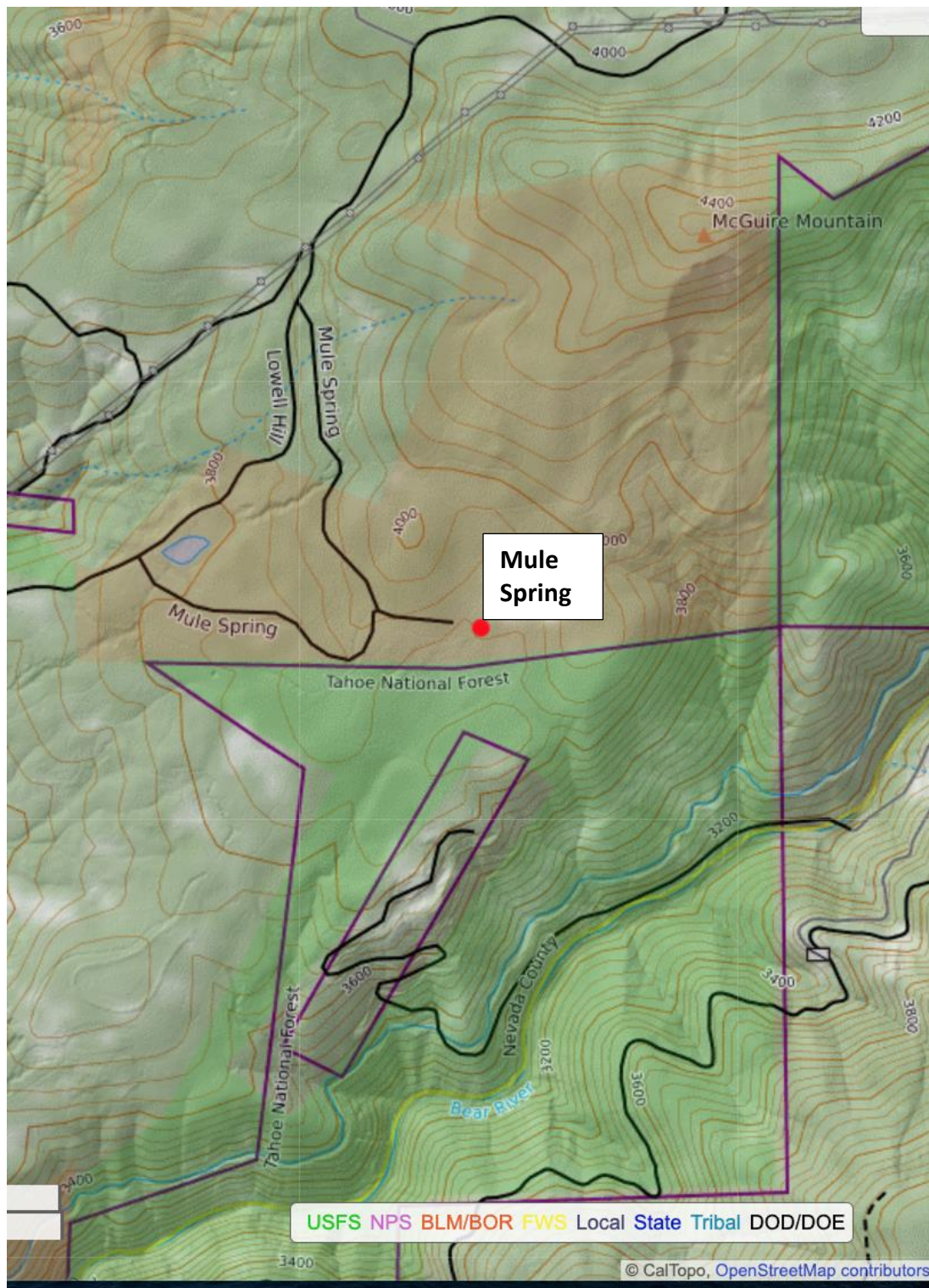




Camel's Hump

Camel's Hump on the Overland Emigrant Trail is not far from Mule Spring. The photograph shows the difficult terrain that was traveled. Often a steep hill was chosen to climb, as pictured here, to avoid the possibility of rolling the wagon and losing the team on the steep contours.

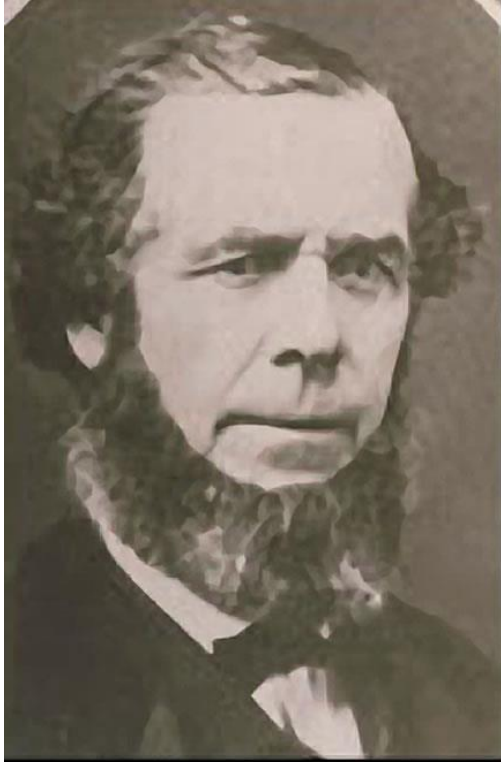
Mule Spring is located to the north of the Bear River across from present Baxter, California. The First Relief Party probably reached the snowline along Lowell Hill Ridge near the Camel Hump, a steep and narrow climb up the ridge.



Topographical map, tented brown area, is Bureau of Land Management Property, showing Mule Spring located within.



## Relief Party Extraordinary Heroism



John Stark, Forth Relief Party

(Courtesy of the Donner Summit Historical Society)

In Summit Valley the remaining rescuers discussed what to do and took a vote to save only two of the children in Starved Camp. That might have been all they could manage. The others would have to stay behind.

John Stark, above, could not abide that. That meant that nine people, mostly children, would die on the mountain, exposed to the elements down in a very deep hole in the snow. John Stark decided he would save all nine, “Already shouldering a backpack with provisions, blankets, and an axe, he picked up one or two of the smaller children, carried them a little way, then went back for the others. Then he repeated the whole process again and again and again.

To galvanize morale, he laughed and told the youngsters they were so light from months of mouse-sized rations that he could carry them all simultaneously, if only



his back were broad enough.” Once they were out of the snow he would eat and rest he said, but not before. He saved all nine.

This is an act of extraordinary heroism. It was also heroism he never got contemporary credit for. James Breen, one of those in the pit at “Starved Camp” later said, “To his great bodily strength, and unexcelled courage, myself and others owe our lives. There was probably no other man in California at that time, who had the intelligence, determination, and what was absolutely necessary to have in that emergency.”

## **In summary**

Mule Spring figured prominently in the early years of emigration along the Overland Emigrant Trail, used by the first wagon trains in 1846 through the early 1850’s.

In one poignant moment in California’s historic memory, Mule Spring also served as the base camp, at snow line, for all Four Relief Parties. Theirs was an extraordinary heroic effort by determined men to save the starving members of the Donner Party, it is a moment in history not to be forgotten.

## **References**

### **Donner Party Diary**

<https://www.donnerpartydiary.com/>

Bert Wiley, “The Overland Emigrant Trail in California.” Sac. CA. 1979

**Bibliography continues on page 12**

## Bibliography

Breen, Patrick, Manuscript Diary. The only known journal kept by a member of the Donner Party during the winter of entrapment. Transcribed and published in many later works. [Available online](#) in original manuscript at the University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library.

Bryant, Edwin, *What I Saw in California*, [University of Nebraska Press](#), 1985, originally published by D. Appleton & Company, 1848, is probably the most literate of the first-hand accounts of the 1846 migration. Bryant started out with Russell, as did the Donners, Reeds, Keseburgs, Eddys, and probably most of the other families, so his description of the journey through Kansas and Nebraska also describes the Donner Party's journey. He also includes Sinclair's statement based on Eddy's journal, and an early transcription of Breen's Diary.

Curran, Harold, *Fearful Crossing*, Nevada Publications, 1982, is the most thorough tracing of the Trail through Nevada. Pictures and maps locate the Hastings Cutoff and the Humboldt Trail, and diary entries describe the crossing.

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Farnham, Elizabeth, *California, In-doors and out*, (1856). An early published account of the Donner tragedy, based on interviews with the Breen family. Republished in Johnson's *Unfortunate Emigrants*, and [Available online](#) at the Library of Congress American Memory Collection.

Gibbons, Bond, "The Itch to Move West," *National Geographic*, Vol. 170, No. 2, August 1986, provides information about the California and Oregon Trails, and the usual excellent photos, including a photograph of one of the few surviving copies of Hasting's *Guide*.

Graydon, Charles K., *Trail of the First Wagons Over the Sierra Nevada*, The Patrice Press, 1986, is the most accurate tracing of the 1844-46 Trail from Truckee Meadows (Reno) to Mule Spring, using USGS topographic maps and photographs. Includes some diary accounts to verify the trail location.

Hall, Carroll, *Donner Miscellany*, The Book Club of San Francisco, 1947, is a transcription of the Miller-Reed diary and the various documents found in it when it was donated to Sutter's Fort by the estate of Martha "Patty" Reed Lewis. The existence of this diary was not known for 100 years, which led King to question its authenticity.

Hawkins, Bruce R. and Madsen, David B., *Excavation of the Donner-Reed Wagons*, University of Utah Press, 1990, provides information about the trail near the Great Salt Lake, and a thorough archaeological analysis of the remnants of the Reed and Donner wagons.

Hardesty, Donald, *The Archaeology of the Donner Party*, University of Nevada Press (1997), details the 1984 excavation of the Murphy Cabin site, and the several 1980's excavations at Alder Creek searching for the Donner campsite. Hardesty has published his findings in historical society journals, but this book adds historical perspective and an article by Donald Grayson, one of the co-authors, analyzing the causes of death among the party.

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Hill, William, *The California Trail Yesterday and Today*, Tamarack Books, 1993, provides a good history of the trail with historic and contemporary photographs of the landmarks on the Trail.

Houghton, Eliza Donner, *The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate*, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, is a reprint of the long out of print history by one of the surviving Donner girls. [Available online](#) at the Library of Congress American Memory Collection. As the author was only three at the time of the events, her book is actually based on stories told her by her older sisters and half-sisters. Some of her notes of those stories have been published elsewhere, notably in [The Dogtown Territorial Quarterly](#).

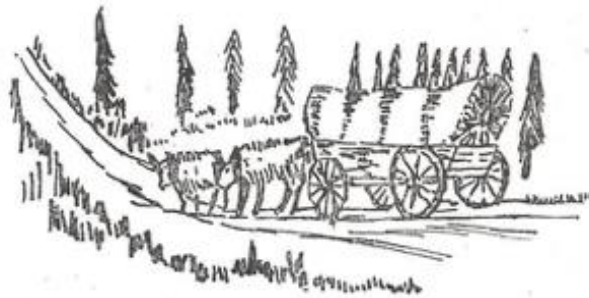
Johnson, Kristin, ed., *Unfortunate Emigrants: Narratives of the Donner Party*, Utah State University Press, 1996, contains reprints of long out of print accounts, including the 1871 articles by Reed and McCutchen, William Graves' 1877 article, and Eliza Farnham's 1856 article based on interviews with the Breens. Also includes Thornton's chapters related to the Donners, and Virginia Reed's *Century Magazine* article. Annotated with reference to Morgan, Stewart and other authorities. Ms. Johnson is the most active of present Donner historians, as editor of the Crossroads (Utah) Chapter of the Oregon California Trail Association, and author of the excellent [Donner Blog](#).

Kelly, Charles, *Salt Desert Trails*, Western Printing Co. (1930), reprinted with new material by Peter DeLafosse, Western Epics, Inc., Salt Lake City (1996), is Kelly's account of his exploration of the Hastings Cut-off and excavation of the remains of the Reed and Donner wagons. Contains the 1930 photographs and excerpts from the accounts by Leinhard, Harlan, Clyman and others who crossed the cut-off. Copies are available for \$13.95 plus shipping from Sam Weller's Bookstore, 254 South Main Street, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84111, 801-328-2586.

King, Joseph A., *Winter of Entrapment*, 3rd edition, K&K Publication (P.O. Box 564, Lafayette, CA 94549, phone and fax: 925-228-9205), (P.D. Meany published the book in 1992, and the 2d edition in 1994), provides information about the Breen family, and a copy of John Breen's manuscript dated November 19, 1877. King takes a different view of the participants than does Stewart, and offers an extensive criticism of the earlier histories, particularly Thornton and Stewart. King has the most extensive Donner bibliography published. The 1994 edition is more of a history and less of an attack on Stewart, but not much. King's work was the basis for the 1993 PBS program *The Donner Party*, Ric Burns' documentary for the PBS series *The American Experience*. The program is available on DVD from [The American Experience](#).

King, Joseph, "William G. Murphy's Lecture and Two Letters to Mrs. Houghton," and with Jack Steed, "Newly-Discovered Documents on the Donner Party: The Donner Girls Tell Their Story," *Dogtown Territorial Quarterly*, Bill and Penny Anderson, publishers, Paradise, California, 1996 Summer Issue # 26, contains a transcript of Eliza Donner Houghton's notebook and two letters from William Murphy. Amazingly, Mrs. Houghton's notebook had not been known to exist until 1994, when her granddaughter Mrs. Ann Houghton Smith donated her grandmother's papers to the Huntington Library, and provided a typewritten transcript of the notebook to Prof. King. Murphy's lecture had originally been published in the *Marysville Appeal*, Sunday, February 9, 1896. [The Dogtown Territorial Quarterly](#) is available online.

THE  
OVERLAND  
EMIGRANT TRAIL  
IN CALIFORNIA



BY: BERT WILEY

*Krueger Robert*  
*823 4516*

THE OVERLAND EMIGRANT TRAIL  
IN CALIFORNIA

*Bent Wiley*

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY WIFE, NELL.  
WITHOUT HER LOVE, PERSISTENCE AND HELP  
IT WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN COMPLETED.

Copyright (c) 1979

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The diaries of the emigrants, each in itself a record of someone's problem and dream, show some interest in the country they were travelling through. Some show more interest in their own discomforts than in the country.

All the chronicles give an insight into the character of the emigrants; their strengths, their weaknesses, their desires and dreams.

In writing the following narrative, we have attempted to bring The Overland Emigrant Trail in California to the readers in such a manner that they will feel they could go out into the country traversed by the old road and find all of those traces that still remain.

If we accomplish this, we will feel that the old road may yet be preserved in the minds of the readers, as it has not been by many people and by nature.

It is hoped that some portion of the Overland Emigrant Trail in California will remain so that the future residents may visualize what the emigrants endured to accomplish their dreams.

## THE OVERLAND EMIGRANT TRAIL

### IN CALIFORNIA

#### WHY AND HOW

Once upon a time, in the year of nineteen hundred and forty-nine, the Legislature of the State of California passed, and the Governor did sign into law, Chapter 839, Statutes of 1949, which law did declare it to be the policy of the State to establish as a State Historical Monument in the State Park System, the Overland Emigrant Trail between Chicago Park and the Donner Memorial State Park, in commemoration of the centennial of the Gold Rush.

The Division of Beaches and Parks, Department of Natural Resources, was given the authority for the investigation and because no one else wanted the job, I, Bert Wiley, was elected.

It so happened that I received an invitation from the Auburn Trail Riders to ride over the so-called Donner Trail. The ride began at the Donner Memorial State Park on the Saturday before Memorial Day 1949. Mr. Wendell Robie of Auburn was our guide.

Mr. Robie lead some thirty of us from the park up and through Coldstream Valley, up Emigrant Canyon, over the pass between Mt. Judah and Donner Peak, down into and through Summit Valley and up to the lake area. We stayed above the railroad tracks until we reached Cisco. From Cisco, we followed the old highway to Yuba Gap and Highway 20 down and into Bear Valley where we again picked up the Old Emigrant Trail. We rode along the Old Emigrant Trail from Bear Valley to the top of Lowell Ridge. As the old trail is on the ridge, we followed it to a point across Bear River Canyon from Gold Run.

It was after the trail ride that our investigation began. We found that considerable work had been done by various historical and civic groups and organizations in locating the route of the Emigrant Trail, enough at least to furnish a point of beginning. Signs had been placed by the Mt. Lions Club of Auburn and by Mr. P.M. Wadell of San Jose, over portions of the supposed route according to an individual's interpretation of an emigrant's diary.

It became immediately apparent that a divergence of opinions of the trail route existed.

We first tried to relocate the old road by foot reconnaissance. All we acquired from this was a cognizance of the terrain and principal features that would stand us in good stead in later days. Help must be found if we were ever going to relocate the Overland Emigrant Trail in California.

The Librarian of the California History Section of the California State Library in Sacramento was most helpful. She found diaries and other works that gave us our first clues. It was she who sent us to the Bancroft Library at the University of California in Berkeley.

The Bancroft Library holds thousands of diaries and we spent four days reading diaries of people who had come to California in the early days, without finding so much as one who had entered by way of the road we were trying to relocate.

It was on the fourth day at the Bancroft Library that we had our first, and, as it turned out, our most important break. The Librarian thought of Mrs. Irene Paden. Mrs. Paden had done much research into the various emigrant roads. Her book "The Wake of the Prairie Schooner" covers the Oregon Road from Independence, Missouri, to the coast and the Overland Road to Hangtown, California. A call by the Librarian to Mrs. Paden resulted in an immediate invitation to the Paden home.

When Irene Paden learned that we were trying to retrace the Overland Emigrant Trail, she called Dr. William (Bill) D. Paden. This, our first meeting with the Padens, was the beginning of many. They would drop everything to join us in checking a new find.

Irene Paden had indexed hundreds of the old diaries by party, route, date and library. She graciously made her indices available to us and they were so very important. Without her help, we could have spent many months searching for and reading the diaries, finding few that would have any bearing on the Overland Emigrant Trail in California.

Finding the diaries was one thing, using them was another. Dr. and Mrs. Paden gave us their store of knowledge freely and their friendship without restraint.

With the tutelage of Irene and Bill, we began to collect and read the hundreds of diaries of those who entered California by way of the Overland Emigrant Trail. We took those passages that described a physical feature, and in context, re-assembled them so as to identify many features of the road.

The reassembled diaries in hand, we again made a reconnaissance on foot. We were able to find and identify much of the old road on the east slope of the mountains. All three passes were found by this method and the Roller Pass was located and identified.

It was during these trips that we found that horses were a must if one were to cover a sufficient amount of the country and be certain that all avenues had been explored.

When we had located a few good traces by foot reconnaissance, another good friend came to our assistance. Mr. Auther Brennan of Loomis, California who not only furnished us with horses, but also the means of transporting them. It was his contribution that made it possible for us to cross-section large areas and establish many portions of the old road that had not been uncovered before.



We have covered the Overland Emigrant Trail from Verdi, Nevada to Camp Far West, California many times; by foot, on horseback and by automobile. Each time we found some new indication of the passing of the emigrants and their wagons.

During our years of investigation and research of the old road we have been fortunate in meeting many wonderful people. The help we have received from each has been most important to us.

Mr. P.M. Wadell, a friend of McGlashin, who spent his summers tramping over the mountains searching for the Roller Pass, showed us many traces of the old road in Emigrant Canyon.

Dr. George Hinkle, son-in-law of McGlashin, allowed us to review the many notes left by his father-in-law. These notes established the verity of the three passes over the Sierra Summit.

We met Mr. William (Bill) Levee on Lowell Hill Ridge about one mile from the house where he was born. It was he who showed us the location of Mormon Spring and Mammoth Springs; both long since having ceased to flow. He remembered that when he was a boy the wagons were still using the old road.

Mr. H. A. Mason who was ninety-seven when we met, had come to California by wagon when he was seven. He and his family had used the toll roads and much of the old road that we were trying to locate. His memory was still sharp as to the trip.

Mr. John Hodgson, former Ranger at Big Bend Ranger Station, lead us to the three slides in that area; the Rainbow Slide, where the emigrants let their wagons down to the second crossing of the Yuba River, the Big Bend Slide where the wagon wheels left their marks in the solid granite, and the Yuba River Slide, where the emigrants pulled out of the Yuba River for the last time. He also showed us many other traces of the old road. He took us down and through Six Mile, showing us the site of the wagon camp where the wagons were repaired before attempting the biggest slide of them all, Emigrant Pass Slide into Bear Valley.

Mr. and Mrs. Guy Gillcrest of Dutch Flat were so much help in locating locale and artifacts pertaining to the old road. They gave us freely of their time.

We could go on and on but would undoubtedly miss one or more of those who contributed to our progress in relocating the Overland Emigrant Trail.

The initial investigation and report to the Governor and Legislature of the State of California was completed on December 1, 1949. However, due to the insistence of Bill and Irene Paden, we continued our efforts. There were so many questions left to be answered.

Inconnecting the various traces we had found, we found conflicting information. But it was these problems that intrigued us and kept us working. We spent our vacations with Irene and Bill Paden either in the mountains or in a Historical Library, trying to unravel these conflicts.

Some we were able to solve, others will never be deciphered because man has destroyed all trace of the passing of the emigrant wagons.

Those segments of the Overland Emigrant Trail in California that we were able to find and identify are described on the following pages.

We will continue our research and investigation in the future as we have in the years from 1949 to 1972.

THE OVERLAND EMIGRANT TRAIL  
IN CALIFORNIA  
TODAY

Man has done much to remove the Overland Emigrant Trail from the face of the land. He has built roads, highways, railroads, towns and other developments over a large portion of the old road. Nature and time have cooperated in covering some of the old road so that it is hardly visible.

There are a few very distinctive portions of the old road left. We will try to locate and describe as many as we can. The names and locations used in this part of our narrative are the present day names shown on the United States Quadrangle Maps.

It is fortunate that many names given to physical features by the Emigrants have survived to the present day; Truckee, Yuba River, Bear Valley and Bear River, Mule Spring, Steephollow and Greenhorn are just a few that can still be found on modern maps.

We were able to locate enough physical features so that with the aid of maps, diaries and perseverance, the old road unfolded and came to life again. Copies of the earliest government surveys obtained from the archives in Washington, D. C., gave us our first and best clue as to the location of the Roller Pass, now known as Greenwood Pass.

Cross sectioning the area with diaries in hand, brought to light many portions of the old road, lost in time. Horses were used to cover the remote sections which were later covered on foot. Putting oneself in concord with the writer of a diary often led to the discovery of a new portion of the road.



The old road continues to disappear. Portions that could be traced in 1949 to 1950 are now covered by the new freeway, Route 80.

The 1844 road established by the Townsen-Murphy-Stevens Party through the Truckee River Canyon - Verdi to Donner Lake - has completely disappeared. Highway and railroad have covered much of the old road. Logging and the construction of a power flume have destroyed the rest.

In 1857-1859, the construction of a toll road from Donner Summit to Donner Lake followed that portion of the 1844-1845 road where emigrants had to take their wagons apart in order to negotiate the ascent. Very little can be found in this area that was the old road.

That portion first opened in 1845 by Thomas Knight, Verdi to Donner Lake, and used by the many that were to follow, can still be found by the scattered traces. The road up the mountain just north of Granite Peak can be seen from the present highway as you pass by Verdi. Traces can be located in the Worn Creek area and some of the road still exists near Alder Creek which is the site of the Donner's last camp.

From the Donner Memorial State Park, through Coldstream Valley, the old road has, in just the last few years, been covered by the construction of an access road for a gravel operation. As the old road leaves Cold Creek and enters Emigrant Canyon near Horseshoe Bend on the Southern Pacific Railroad, about three-hundred feet of the old road can be seen. Deep ruts, some three or four feet in depth, have survived the ravages of time and man.

The first mile of the old road in Emigrant Canyon has been used by the Southern Pacific Railroad as an access road to their maintenance station at Elder. Extensive logging in the last few years has destroyed almost every other trace of the old road that remained.

After one manages to get past the area of logging, there are several short pieces of the road still to be found. There are indications that many jeeps have been using the old road. It is feared that even these few traces will disappear very soon.

Nature has just about eliminated all trace of the old road up and across the meadow on the east side of Roller Pass. The driving of sheep over the pass, which is in shale, covered the last perceptible trace of the passing of the many Emigrant wagons.

The site of the Roller, constructed in 1846 by the Nicholas Carriger Party, and the road built in 1848, can be found by evidence yet to be found on and in the rocks. The United States Forest Service has placed a sign on top of the pass at the site of the Roller.

We found a rock that was marked by the passing of many wagons, where they made an acute turn to reach the top of the ridge. There are still a few strong traces that can be seen if one will just take the time to search for them.

Very little of the old road remains on the west slope of the mountains. The spring, mentioned in many diaries, is still flowing, and is used today as a source of water for the Sugar Bowl development. Here again, man has destroyed the trace of the old road.

Summit Valley, so named by the emigrants, is covered by a man-made lake, Lake Van Norden. Of course no trace of the road has been able to survive. There is a short portion of the road still to be seen where the many wagons of the emigrants left Summit Valley. This interesting slide will no doubt disappear as man continues to develop the area.

The pass between Mount Judah and Donner Peak, first used in 1849, is the easiest to find. It was used during the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad to move equipment from Van Norden on the west to Donner Lake on the east. At least a locomotive was taken over the pass by laying rails temporarily in front of it and moving the engine ahead. This operation left a scar that to this day can still be followed. Here again, the use of jeeps is slowly, but emphatically destroying any trace that had survived the passing of time.

That portion of the road down the west slope to meet the 1844-1845 road, has disappeared with the help of man.

From the slide at the west end of Summit Valley, the next mile of the old road has disappeared under houses and streets of a recreation subdivision. There are about two miles of road on the ridge in the lake country that must be either the old road or very near it. We cross sectioned this area thoroughly and were never able to find another route. The road is used today as access to the lakes and powerlines.

The upper portion of the slide from Kidd Lake to the Yuba River is still discernible until you reach the railroad. From the railroad to the present highway, one can find some traces through the trees and underbrush. Between the bottom of the slide and Big Bend, the only identifiable point on the old road that exists is the first crossing of the Yuba River. It can still be found about fifty feet upstream from the old Highway 40 bridge.

Construction of the Highway 80 Freeway has completely destroyed all traces of the old road over Hampshire Rocks. Just the lower end of the Rainbow Slide down and off the rocks to the second crossing of the Yuba River remains.

A portion of the old road from the second crossing and across the Big Bend of the Yuba River is probably one of the easiest to find and follow. There is only one route through the rocks and trees and at the west end where the wagons were forced to descend over large granite boulders. These are the most beautifully marked rocks we found anywhere on the old road.

From Big Bend Ranger Station the road was the bottom of the Yuba River for about a mile. Here the river entered a canyon and the emigrants took their wagons up and over a short ridge. With the aid of aerial photographs we were able to find this portion of the old road.



When the old road leaves this ridge, it again disappears under the highway. About one mile downstream from Cisco Grove the river enters a steep and very rough canyon and the emigrants were forced to take their wagons out of the river. It is here that they left their mark cut deep into the shale. Some fifty feet of this slide is visible from the eastbound lane of the freeway. The next mile of the old road, from the end of the slide to Crystal Lake, was used by the builders of a toll road. Only a few short traces can still be found.

Leaving Crystal Lake, the old road can be traced down-slope into Six Mile Valley. Through Six Mile Valley to the North Fork of the American River, hunters, cattlemen, and loggers have used the old road and kept it open. With assiduous search, one can still find the site of the wagon camp used by many of the emigrants during the period of heaviest travel. Nature is doing its best to cover even this, the last visible trace.

We found Edwin Bryant's small lake and the last trace of the old road between the North Fork of the American River and Carpenter Flat. Carpenter Flat has been used by man for so many purposes that nothing is left of the old road there. The valley saw so many wagons and emigrants waiting their turn to use the long and dangerous slide into Bear Valley, that they themselves would have destroyed any individual road.

The upper part or beginning of the slide into Bear Valley was covered with ninety feet of fill with the construction of the railroad. The slide itself has virtually been destroyed by man. Roads and a large ditch or canal now cross and recross the route. Construction notes for the Central Pacific Railroad gave us the location of the old road within a few feet.

Time and man have erased the last signs of the passing of thousands through Bear Valley. It was pure luck that we found a portion of the old road where it leaves the valley. The road crossed over a granite outcropping and the wagon tires left their tell-tale rust streaks for us to find. Without this clue, we might not have found the Bear River crossing.

From the Bear River crossing to the top of Lowell Hill Ridge, the clues are a few deformed trees; nothing else remains. The hillside is covered with pine and fir trees and duff several inches thick. When the emigrant wagons passed over the small seedling trees, they bent the trees up-hill. Today one can still see deformed one-hundred year old trees.

A fire in 1954 cleared a large area of underbrush, exposing the wagon tracks through the trees. These have since been covered by new growth. In 1972, we had a hard time finding the old road again. The old road intersects the Lowell Hill Road in the vicinity of the Mother Pine. This tree, which disappeared in the last few years, was a large hollow pine, some ten feet in diameter. It was supposed to have offered shelter to some miners during a storm and their fire burned out the insides.

The old road can still be followed along the ridge as it crosses and recrosses the present county road. The county road goes to the north of Negro Jack Hill, and the Emigrant Road passes to the south of the hill. Mammoth Spring was on the south slope of Negro Jack Hill. Mining in the 1860's was said to have caused the spring to dry up and vanish.

Mammoth Spring to Mule Spring, about two miles, the old road is on the very top of the ridge; it crosses the peak of McGuire Mountain, then goes down slope to Mule Spring. This was a favorite camping place for the travellers. The spring is still flowing, having been protected by the U.S. Forest Service.

You leave Mule Spring, going in a southwesterly direction, following the drainage from the spring. Mormon Springs should be next, but they have long since dried up. It is here that the old road enters Stump Canyon and follows the canyon for one-quarter of a mile. Again the old road is on a ridge, over Camel Hump to Christmas Hill Diggings. Here at least one mile of the old road was destroyed by the mining operations.

Little York Diggings is marked by a sign; it is at the beginning or top of the slide down and into Steephollow. The slide can be followed as the passage of many wagons have left their mark. Steephollow Creek has been filled with many feet of tailings from hydraulic mining, so there is not a trace of the old road in the bottom. We were unable to locate the crossing of Steephollow Creek for this reason.

The Overland Emigrant Trail leaves Steephollow Creek Canyon about one-half a mile downstream from where it entered the stream from the east. It follows Hawkins Canyon for some fifteen-hundred feet. As Hawkins Canyon turns north, the old road continues westerly, following an unnamed draw to the top of another ridge.

The old road follows a ridge lying south of and parallel to Poorman Creek. When the ridge breaks off, the road drops down to the Greenhorn Creek Crossing, crossing where Poorman Creek joins Greenhorn Creek. It then proceeded downstream along Greenhorn Creek to a point where an unnamed creek, flowing from the northwest joins Greenhorn Creek. Turning up this unnamed creek, the old road goes about half a mile and turns southwest, crossing the unnamed creek. Here the old road almost becomes a part of the Colfax-Grass Valley Road.

All the time the Overland Emigrant Trail is generally following parallel to and north of the Bear River. It passes to the southeast of Mt. Olive and enters Cedar Ravine. The wagons stayed in Cedar Ravine for four miles, more or less, until the ravine became too rough for their travel.

Again they took to the high ground, going through where the traveling was easier. They intersected South Wolf Creek about a mile and a half upstream from its confluence with Wolf Creek. The old Road then goes downstream along South Wolf Creek and Wolf Creek for two and a half miles to Long Hollow.

Then it went up Long Hollow and an unnamed creek, almost to Pine Hill; then crossed a small valley to the upper reaches of Little Wolf Creek; then along Little Wolf Creek until the way was blocked at Rab Ravine by a narrow canyon. It then went over a hill and down the other side where the going became easier again.



The Emigrants and their wagons forded Little Wolf Creek about three miles upstream from its confluence with the Bear River. The old road passes over some low hills and through a low saddle in the hills and into Austin Flat. From here the old road stayed generally to the ridges until the Emigrants reached Johnston Ranch.

It is believed that the ford of the Bear River was at or just downstream from Camp Far West and proceeded down Bear River to the Feather River, following the rivers in a general direction to the crossing of the American River and thence to Sutter's Fort.

We can follow the Overland Emigrant Trail from Mule Spring to Camp Far West on the aerial photographs taken in 1947 for use by the United States Geological Survey in preparing their topographic maps of this area. The Topographic Maps show the possible route of the Donner Party, which is in error.

THE OVERLAND EMIGRANT TRAIL  
IN CALIFORNIA  
AS IT WAS

In the beginning, the people were on their way to Oregon and not to Sutter's Fort in California. The people who made up the wagon trains headed west from Independence and Saint Joseph were from many walks of life. There were many men of character and determination who prepared their outfits with great care and forethought, had their families and assets along, hoping to pass through the wilderness and find a new home.

The most pathetic of all was the unsuccessful man; one who, having failed in life, was hoping to get a fresh start. He was poorly equipped, under supplied with food and necessities, but abundantly supplied with family. As he was not a welcome addition to any well organized train, he gravitated to a group of outfits similar to his. These weaker brethren then fell prey to everything from Indians to cholera, exposure and hunger; making trail history what it is.

There were boys fresh from the farm, bearded frontiersmen, loose ne'er-do-wells, adventurers, gamblers, discharged soldiers, riff-raff, thieves running from the law, and women looking for a new life in the west. Some would die from cholera, some from drowning in the many streams they had to ford; others would die from injuries sustained by handling unbroken oxen or mules. During the main push west many would die from Indian attacks. The trail west exacted its toll of men, women, children, animals, wagons and supplies.

From Independence and Saint Joseph, Missouri, the trail west across Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah and Nevada, exacted its toll; but the forty-five miles from the Humboldt Sink to the Truckee River was pure hell. Wagons were lost in the sand because dying animals could not move them. Men, women and children were walking alongside empty wagons. There was no water, and the heat was without respite.

The last eight miles of sand ends about a mile upstream from the present-day town of Wadsworth, Nevada. No more danger of alkali, desert heat, or lack of forage for the animals or healthful water for all. These troubles were past, and the emigrants could look ahead to soaring peaks of the Sierra Nevadas. These held delights and dangers of their own.

It is here that the story of the California segment of the Overland Emigrant Trail begins. We will follow those companies of emigrants that entered California over each of the three passes and in part, to their final destinations.

The year is 1844, and first company we join was the first to use this route to reach California. In 1844, the Townsend-Murphy-Stevens Party, captained by Stevens and accompanied by Caleb Greenwood, an eighty-one year old Squaw-man, who acted as an Indian interpreter, entered this area. They followed the Truckee River for more than forty miles, from the point where they first encountered the Truckee River to a flat now occupied by the town of Verdi, Nevada.

This party continued up the Truckee River, crossing and recrossing the river as many as thirty-three times in one mile. The ascent of the Truckee River had been cruelly hard and when they had completed it, a grassy meadow rewarded their perseverance. They had reached the valley or flat that is now the City of Truckee. Now they faced the mountains rising ahead. The road lay along the north side of the lake (Donner Lake), and up the mountain.

Old Greenwood took all the wagons over by taking them apart and lifting the pieces up the sheer cliffs. The oxen were taken out of their yokes and lead up and around to meet the wagons again at the top of the cliff. This was repeated until the summit of the Sierras was reached.

So much time was consumed in gaining the summit that it had begun to snow and it was thought better to cache their goods and push on to Sutter's Fort. A log house was built and three men; Foster, Montgomery and young Schellenberger were left to guard the cache until spring. Caleb Greenwood lead the rest of the party from the summit of the Sierras over the route that was to become the emigrant road for all those to follow.

The men left at the cache expected to live on game that abounded, but soon the snow was ten feet deep and no game remained. It was decided that they would hike out to civilization, but on reaching the summit, Schellenberger became too ill to proceed. He returned to the cache and cabin and somehow he lived and grew better. Young Schellenberger managed to trap foxes and the fox meat was his main support until the party returned on March 1, 1845.



In 1845 a caravan of emigrants deviated from Caleb Greenwood's Truckee River route. Thomas Knight tells the story that when they reached Verdi Flat the river was in flood. They turned to the right up a draw. This was a much longer route but it was easier on animals and wagons. The road passes to the north of Granite Peak, down-slope to Worn Creek, down to where Worn Creek joins the Little Truckee, through Russell Valley, across Prosser Creek to Alder Creek and over a saddle west of Alder Hill to join the 1844 road near Gateway and the winter cabin used by young Schellenger. From Verdi to Donner Lake, this road was to become the main route for thousands who would travel to California in the years ahead.

The Thomas Knight Party took their wagons over the Sierra summit the same way Caleb had taken the wagons over in 1844. They continued to follow the road broken by the Townsend-Murphy-Stevens Party.

This pass was again used in 1846 by Edwin Bryant, who, along with the rest of his party were mounted on saddle horses and carried their supplies on pack mules. To quote Mr. Bryant: "August 26, The trail leaves the lake on the right hand, ascending over some rocky hills, and after crossing some difficult ravines and swampy ground densely timbered, we reached the base of the crest of the Sierra Nevada. To mount this was our great difficulty. Standing at the bottom and looking upwards at the perpendicular, and in some places, impending granite cliffs, the observer, without further knowledge on the subject, would doubt that man or beast ever made good a passage over them. But we knew that man and horse, oxen and wagon, women and children, had crossed this formidable and apparently impassable barrier erected by nature between the desert and the fertile districts on the coasts of the Pacific."



ROLLER PASS LOOKING EAST AND UP TO THE SADDLE

The site of the roller was in the saddle to the left of center.

A faint trace of the old road can be seen on the east face of the mountain.

In 1846 Caleb Greenwood was again the guide for a group of emigrants to California and Sutter's Fort. The Nicholas Carriger Party had reached Verdi Flat with eight wagons and twenty-four yoke of oxen. From Verdi, they followed the road which had been opened in 1845 by the Thomas Knight Party, to Donner Lake. This party arrived in California on September 29, 1846.

Caleb took this party to the left and south of the lake, up Cold Creek, through Coldstream Valley to Emigrant Canyon. On September 21, 1846, they arrived at the base of a saddle between Mount Lincoln and Mount Judah. Here they were faced with the problem of lifting their wagons up two-hundred and forty feet. Mr. Judson Green, a member of the party, proposed that they make a roller and fasten chains to the wagons and pull them up and over the mountain in that fashion. On the twenty-second of September the roller was constructed and the next day with twelve yoke of oxen to a wagon and twelve more on top pulling downhill, all eight wagons were safely placed on the summit.

To quote Mr. Carriger, "September 22, We made a roller and fasened chans to gether and polited the waggons up with 12 yoke oxen on top and the same at the bottom 23 halling way."

This Pass was used by at least one other Party in 1846. According to an account by Mary A. Jones: "The way we climbed the mountain we hitched nine or ten yoke of oxen to a wagon and drove them as far as they could go and a chain that worked over a roller, on top of the mountain and a man at each wheel did the work".

Later a large party built a road up the side of the saddle and over the pass. It is believed that this was done in 1847, as later diaries tell of seeing the site of the roller or windlass, as some called it.

From Roller Pass (now called Greenwood), the road goes down the west slope about one mile to Emigrant Spring and the headwaters of the Yuba River. Leaving the spring, the road follows the creek which is formed by the waters of Emigrant Spring, to Summit Valley, where it joins the road of 1844 and 1845.

By 1849, hundreds of wagons were using the Roller Pass; so many that they had to wait their turn to cross the summit of the Sierras. So, another pass was opened. This was between Mount Judah and Donner Peak.

From the diary of John Steele: "From our camp to the summit, over seven miles, the road was very steep, in places passing over large granite boulders. Consequently we climbed slowly, and at noon stopped at a large spring, high a mile from the highest point. After resting awhile, most of the oxen were attached to a single wagon, and with difficulty it was drawn up the precipitous ascent. this was repeated until all wagons were on top.

"Having reached the highest of the last mountain ranges so we could look forward from its summit to the land of our dreams, toil and hope, we gave three cheers. Looking down the steep gorge whence we had come, we bade adieu to its dark avenues, towering cliffs, sequestered shades, bright waters and melancholy scenes.

"A short distance north of the pass I climbed the dizzy heights of a granite peak. The view was magnificent. Perennial snow, rock, chasm, forest, lake and stream, a veritable map of one of the wildest, grandest parts of America, spread out on every side."

In her diary, Eliza Ann McAuley described the Pass as follows: "Tuesday, September 14th, 1852. This morning we began the ascent of the main ridge, which is very steep and rough. About nine o'clock we doubled teams and began the ascent to the summit, and by one o'clock we all arrived in Summit Valley on the western slope, where remained the rest of the day.

"While the teams were toiling slowly up to the summit, Father, Mr. Buck, Margaret and I climbed one of the highest peaks near the road, and were well paid for our trouble by the splendid view. On one side the snowcapped peaks rise in majestic grandeur, on the other they are covered to their summits with tall pines and fir, while before us in the top of the mountains, apparently an old crater, lies a beautiful lake in which the Truckee takes its rise."



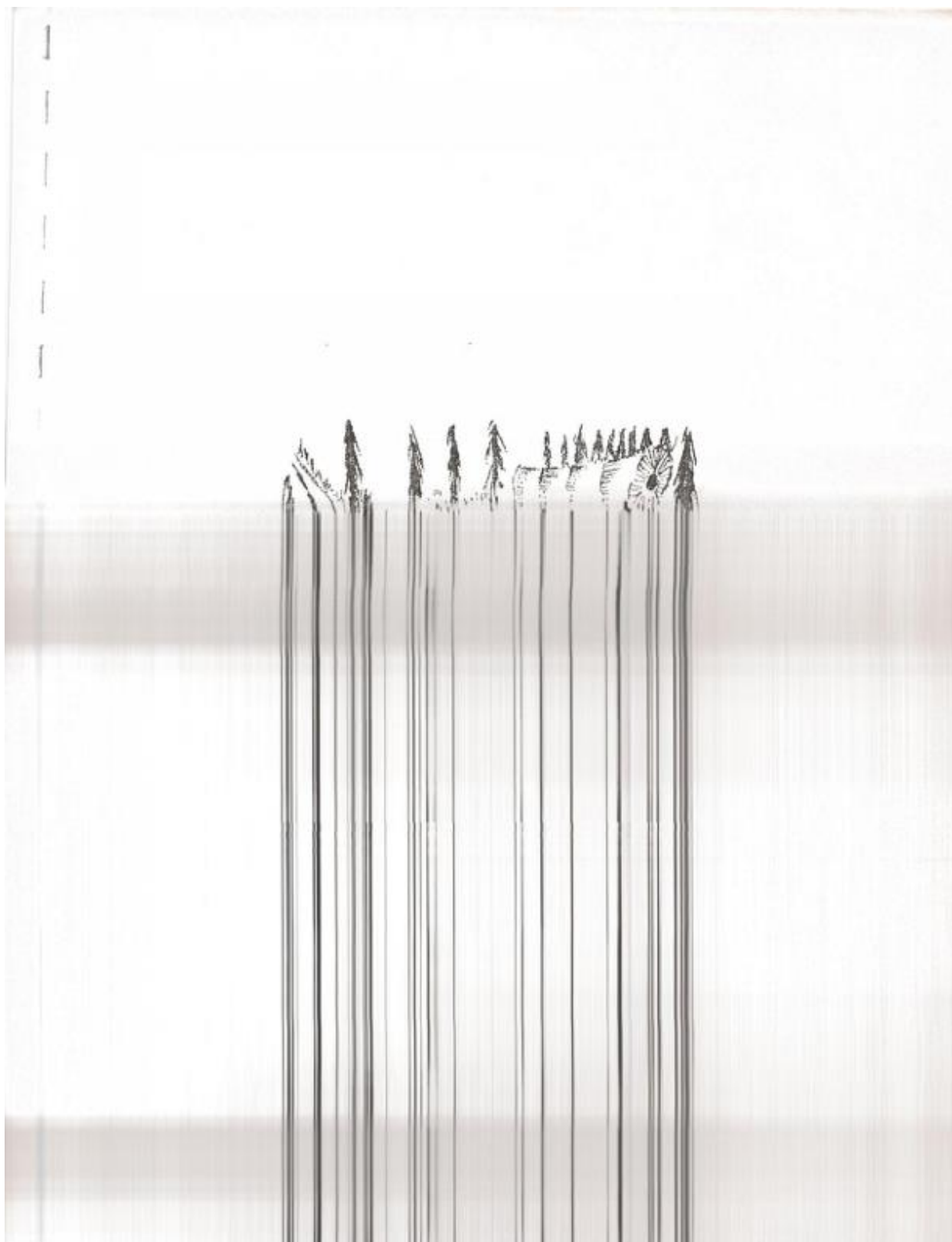
There is only one place on the summit that can be described in such a manner; the pass between Mount Judah and Donner Peak. Donner Peak is north of the pass and is the only granite peak in the area. Also, the view from its top is as described by these travellers.

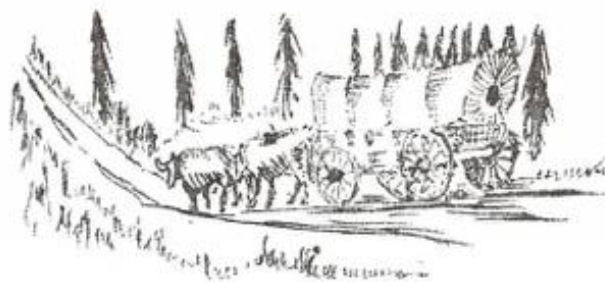
From the summit, the old road is down the western slope to Summit Valley. John Steele, described it well when it called it precipitous. He said: "By making a series of acute angles, our road down the precipitous western slope was very easy, and thence, following a mountain gorge about four miles, we came to a small valley, overgrown with grass and clover, and belted around by dense pine forest."

It is here in Summit Valley, now covered by Lake Van Norden, that all three roads, from the three passes, meet. The old road crossed Summit Valley in a westerly direction for two miles, then because their way was blocked by the Yuba River Canyon, the emigrants turned to the right up a small draw to the top of a ridge. The old road then followed the ridge for about three miles. The first mile is through a pine and fir tree forest, the second mile is covered with large granite boulders and trees, and the third mile is through the lake area. There are a number of lakes; Kidd Lake, which used to be three lakes; Knott Lake, which at one time was two lakes; and the Cascade Lakes and the Kilborn Group of lakes. There is no doubt that the old road came through this area.



" THE ROCK IS ALL THROUGH THE WOOD LOOKING  
LIKE WAGGONS, WHITE COWS AND SHEEP"





THE ROAD WAS EASY FOR AWHILE

29 -A

After crossing over the rocks, the wagons were let down to the second crossing of the Yuba River. From the second crossing, the old road passes over the high ground in the bend of the Big Bend River until it again joins the river near Big Bend Ranger Station. For the next two miles the old road was in the river on the heights just south of the river. About a mile below Cisco Grove the river again enters a steep canyon. Here the old road turns to the left, leaving the Yuba River, and goes up and over a shale outcropping.

John Steele described the road thusly: "Sept. 18, 1850. We followed the brook upon a bed of large boulders, difficult for teams and dangers to wagons. About noon our road became easier, and for several miles we traveled in the cool shade of live oak and alder, when we reached the brink of a deep abyss down which the stream, by a succession of cascades, fell in a spray and was again collected in the chasm below. On our right a mountain peak towered far into the sky, encircled with bands of perpendicular rocks."

Steele's description of the mountain fits that of Red Mountain which is a series of peaks, the highest being Signal Peak, 7,841 feet high.

John Steele's diary continued: "Turning up a rocky ravine on the left, in about four miles we reached the mountain summit where the last gleam of day light disclosed the broad surface of a pond."



The pond described by John Steele is now called Crystal Lake. From Crystal Lake the old road takes a southwesterly direction downslope to Six Mile Valley, through the valley to the North Fork of the American River. Then the old road leaves the North Fork and crosses a low ridge, passing a small lake. Edwin Bryant tells as follows: "Passing from this ridge, in a southwest course, we crossed a valley in which there is a small lake. From this lake we returned to the ridge again."

This ridge is at the east end of Carpenter Flat. The old road crosses the flat and goes up and over a low ridge and down into Bear Valley. John Steele said it best in his diary: "We crossed a low ridge and in about three miles halted on a small prairie, where we spent the afternoon. Then we wound by a curving road up a easy slope, to a brink of a precipitous descent of about four hundred yards. All but one yoke of oxen were taken from each wagon, the wheels rough locked, and a line tied to the hind axle by which three or four men held fast, to regulate the motion. The wagons were then shoved off, when one after another thundered down over rocks, through a cloud of dust, into the valley below." This page of his diary was dated September 19, 1850. Mr. Steele also tells us that when they reached the valley, they found a restaurant and a copy of the New York Tribune, announcing the death of President Taylor, on July 9, 1850. For more than four months they had been shut off from the rest of the world.

The old road from Emigrant Gap down into Bear Valley was a drop of seven hundred feet; the road itself about fifteen hundred feet in length. It was not the worst slide the emigrants had had to contend with on their trip west, but by this time their animals were in very poor condition. The toll on wagons and animals was terrific. Those who came during the gold rush period had trouble finding feed near the trail for the oxen and mules. At times they even cut willows and oaks to feed the animals. It is said that the animals learned fast and came running and most unmusically when they heard the ax ring against wood.

By the year 1850 Bear Valley had become the division point for those who turned north to what was called the Northern Gold Diggings. Many left the road to Sutter's settlement and went to Nevada City or the other mining camps that had sprung up along the many streams and creeks.

The old road was on the south side of the Bear River for nearly two miles, then after fording Bear River it goes straightway up the slope of the mountain, headed for the ridge. It was necessary for the emigrants to double team in order to make the top of the ridge called Lowell Hill Ridge. Again the old road follows the top of a ridge as it does so many times throughout its total length.

Mr. M. Littleton described the road thusly:

"for 2 miles after you leave Bear Valey you have the steepest hill and the longest one perhaps on the route one mile from where you come into the Valey you come to the forks of the road one goes down Steep Hollow to the left and the other by Navada City."

When the old road reached the top of the ridge it became very easy and the companies made good time. The road follows the Lowell Hill Ridge for four miles, passing Mammoth Spring, Mule Spring, Mormon Spring and Negro Jack Hill. The diaries we were able to find do not describe this area very well.

John Markle wrote on Sautrday, August 25, 1849:

The road for five miles was usual, rough and hilly. Three miles brought us where we crossed the river and we ascended two hills, the second so steep that we had to double team. Seven miles brought us to another spring where we tied our mules to trees and fed the grass we cut in Bear Valley. The road for the last six miles very good. The timber was very large and not any grass along the mountains or any place."

Eliza Ann McAuley reported that on Saturday,  
September 18, 1852:

"We started down the valley, passing a house on the way, which I must describe as it is the first California house we have seen. It is three logs high, about six feet long, and four wide, one tier of clapboards or shakes as they are called here, covering each side of the roof. Leaving this, and passing through a gate we soon came to another of larger dimensions. Here the road forks, one leading to Nevada City, the other, which we took, leading to Little York. About four o'clock we came to Mammoth Spring. This is the most delicious water. Finding some good grass a mile from here we camped for the night, this being our last camp on the journey."

On September 19th she wrote: "We passed Mule Springs this morning. There are some mines at this place, also a tavern and a small ranch. At noon we arrived at Father's cabin, where we considered our journey ended, after traveling almost constantly for more than five months."

From Negro Jack Hill the old road continues along the ridge, over McGuire Mountain, passing Mormon Springs. The site of Mormon Springs was shown us by Mr. William Levee who was born in a house that is about one-quarter of a mile from the spring. According to Mr. Levee, two Mormon Missionaries were attacked and killed while camped at these springs. Their bodies were found by other emigrants and they were buried near the springs. Mr. Levee was in his eighties in 1949 when he told us this story.

Leaving Mormon Springs, the old road enters Stump Canyon, goes down the canyon for four or five hundred yards, then turns back to the ridge. Camel Hump was the next landmark on the road, then it was over Christmas Hill to Little York. From Little York, the old road drops down into Steephollow and comes out again.

Mr. Edwin Bryant left a very vivid description of this road in his diary:

"August 28, A cup of coffee without sugar constituted our breakfast. Our march today has been one of great fatigue, and almost wholly without incident or interest. During the forenoon we were constantly engaged in rising and descending the sides of the high mountain ranges, on either hand of the stream, to avoid the canones, deep chasms, and ravines, and immense ledges of rocks, with which the narrow valley is choked. In the afternoon we travelled along a high ridge, sometime over elevated peaks, with deep and frightful abysses yawning their darkened and hideous depths beneath us."



Mr. Bryant's narrative continues:

"About five o'clock, p.m., by descent for a mile and a half, that ourselves and our animals slid rather than walked down it, we entered a small hollow or ravine, which we named "Steep Hollow". A gurgling brook of pure cold water runs through it over a rocky bed. In the hollow there was about a quarter of an acre of pretty good grass, and our mules fed this down to its roots, without leaving a blade standing."

John A. Markle, on Sunday, August 26, 1849, relates his account of the road thusly:

"Today we travelled 14 miles. Eleven miles brought us to another branch of the Bear River where there were some of the gold diggers operating but not with much success. The road from our camp to the branch ran along a ridge and was very hilly as there were a great many gaps in it. The descent to the branch was so steep and long that we had to tie trees to the wagons. Three miles from the branch brought us to a spring on the left of the road where we camped and cut down trees to let our mules graze upon the leaves as there was no grass."

This spring is about one-quarter of a mile before you reach Greenhorn Creek. The many accounts of the emigrants that we read, indicated their total lack of interest in the road from this point, until they reached Johnston's Ranch on the Bear River.

The diary of John A. Markle has as good a description of the old road as any we found in all our research. From his camp above Greenhorn Creek, he gave this account: "Monday, August 27, 1849. This morning we started and drove three miles to another branch of the Bear River where Blair's Mess was encamped. By this time our mules were so fatigued that we could go no further. We encamped and drove our mules four miles to grass. A number were digging gold where we encamped but it was scarce. Tuesday, August 28, 1849. Today we travelled 16 miles. The road was hilly and rough, water was scarce and not good and could only be got in ponds which were very stagnated. About five miles brought us to a tolerably good spring on the left of the road where there was some grass in the ravines, but it was so dry that the mules would not eat it. Our camp was in a small valley on the left. Oak timber was more plentiful today than usual and about sunset we got sight of the long looked for valley of the Sacramento."

There are several diaries that mention Steep Hollow and Greenhorn Creek, and a few that tell of reaching Johnston's Ranch, but John A. Markle's was the only one we found that continued the account until they arrived at Sutter's Fort and Sacramento.

His diary recites as follows: "Thursday, August 30, 1849. Today we travelled twelve miles. Six miles brought us to a spring at the base of a hill on the right and four miles brought us to Johnston's. Two miles more down river and we encamped where we found good grass. The road today was very good, the valley presented a beautiful appearance.

"Friday, August 31, 1849. This evening we started and travelled fourteen miles and encamped at Nicholson's Ranch about 12 o'clock in the night.

"Saturday, September 1, 1849. This evening we started and travelled twenty-five miles during which time there was no water. We encamped about one o'clock in the morning near a slough.

"Sunday, September 2, 1849. Today we travelled nine miles. Four miles brought us to where we crossed the American River. 2½ miles brought us to Sutter's Fort which was converted into a hospital. 2½ miles more brought us to Sacramento City."

## INTRODUCTION TO MAPS

We have attempted, by use of the nine plates that follow, to help the reader follow the Overland Emigrant Trail through California. Present day names are used to identify various places and physical features.

It must be remembered that few places had been named at the time of the emigration. Some that were mentioned in the diaries are the Yuba River, Bear Valley, Mule Springs, Mammoth Springs Steep Hollow and Johnston's Ranch. These have survived and are so identified today.

### PLATE ONE:

Shows the two routes by which the emigrants entered California, and the three passes over the summit of the Sierra Nevadas.

### PLATE TWO:

Covers that portion of the trail described in almost every diary, the lakes or ponds, and the rocks. There is no other place like this in the Sierras.

### PLATE THREE:

Is that portion of the old road described as possibly the roughest road the emigrants encountered.

### PLATE FOUR:

Emigrant Gap and Bear Valley, the best known locations on the California portion of the old road, are shown on this map.

### PLATE FIVE:

Lowell Hill Ridge, on this map, was the easiest road the emigrants had to traverse after reaching California. Here they found water and feed for their animals.

PLATE SIX:

This area is the least described by the emigrants as it was here they first saw the Sacramento Valley.

PLATE SEVEN:

Shows Long Hollow, Cedar Ravine, Cottage Hill, Buck Mountain, and parts of Bear River.

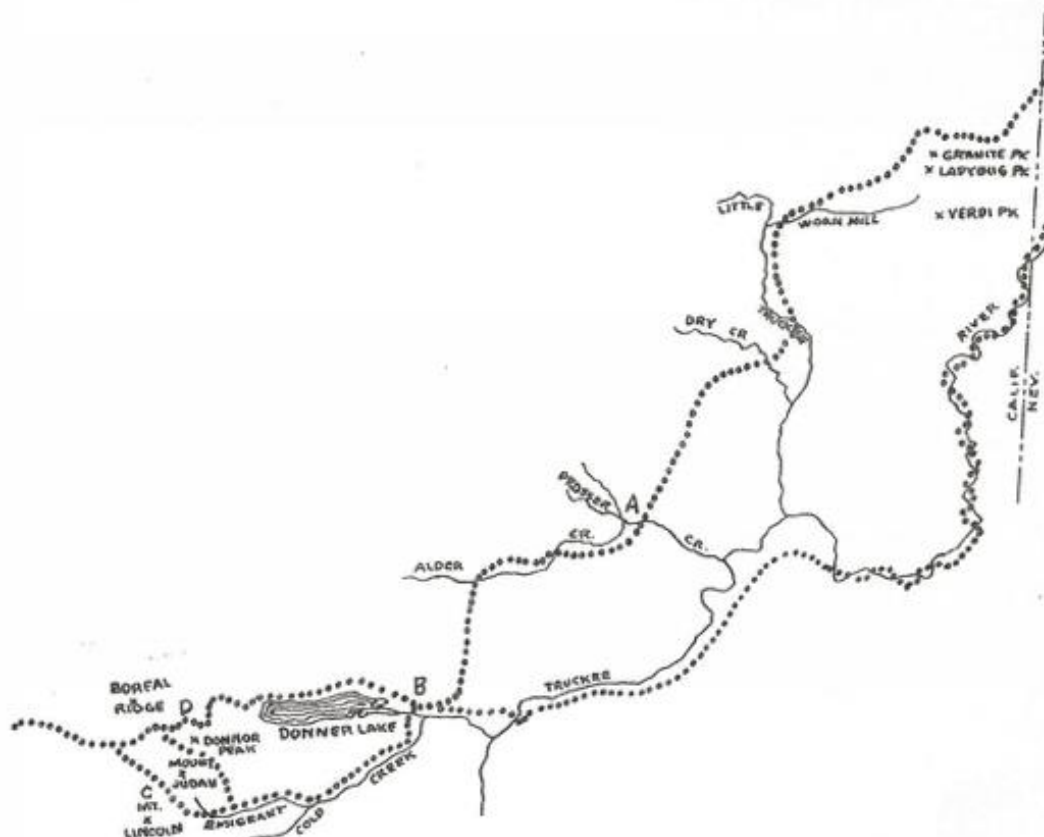
PLATE EIGHT:

Shows three crossings of Wolf Creek, Rock Mountain, Lucas Hill, Pine Hill, and Bear River.

PLATE NINE:

The emigrants left their marks on this country, even though they failed to leave many accounts of their passing. The road from Johnston's Ranch to Sutter's Fort has been wiped out by man and nature and no trace of the old road remains.

This plate shows a crossing of Rock Creek, Camp Farwest, Austin Ravine, Johnston's, and the Bear River.



### PLATE ONE

- 1844 - Route followed the Truckee River and passed to the North of Donner Lake.
- 1845 - Route North of Granite Peak opened. Route was still North of Donner Lake.
- 1846 - Caleb Greenwood opened route up Cold Creek, Emigrant Canyon, and passed between Mt. Judah and Mt. Lincoln.
- 1849 - Road between Mt. Judah and Donner Peak opened.

- A - Site of Donner Camp
- B - Rest of Donner Party camped here.
- C - Greenwood Pass, site of roller.
- D - Stephen Pass where wagons were dismantled and lifted up shear granite walls.





## PLATE TWO

1844 - Route across Summit Valley and up ridge  
 1845 - where lakes or ponds were found; thence  
 along the Yuba River.

- A - Rocks described by M. Littleton in his  
 diary dated September 28, 1850.
- B - Lakes or ponds reported in many diaries.
- C - Area where Nicholas Carriger buried his  
 Father.



PLATE THREE

1844 - Route of the old road following along  
 1354 - the Yuba River to where rough terrain  
 forced it to cross the Indian Springs  
 area, go past Crystal Lake and on down  
 through Six Mile Valley.

- A - Site of slide near Rainbow.
- B - Road cut into solid granite.
- C - John Steele described river  
 as entering a deep abyss at  
 this point.
- D - Site of wagon camp.

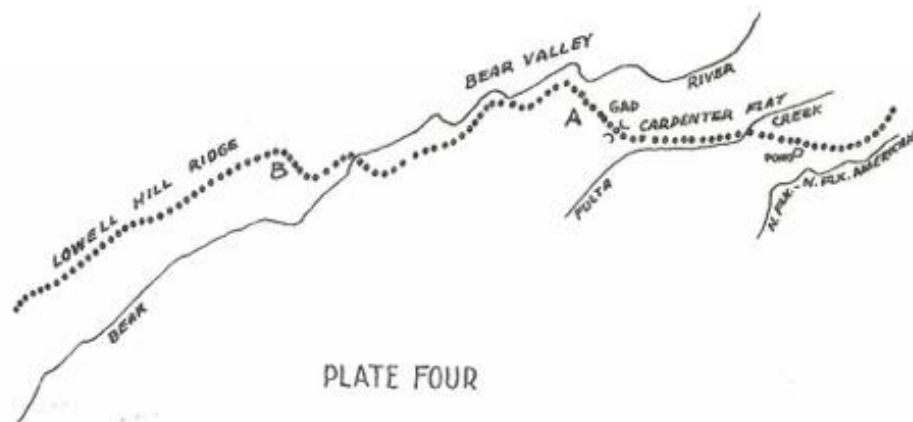
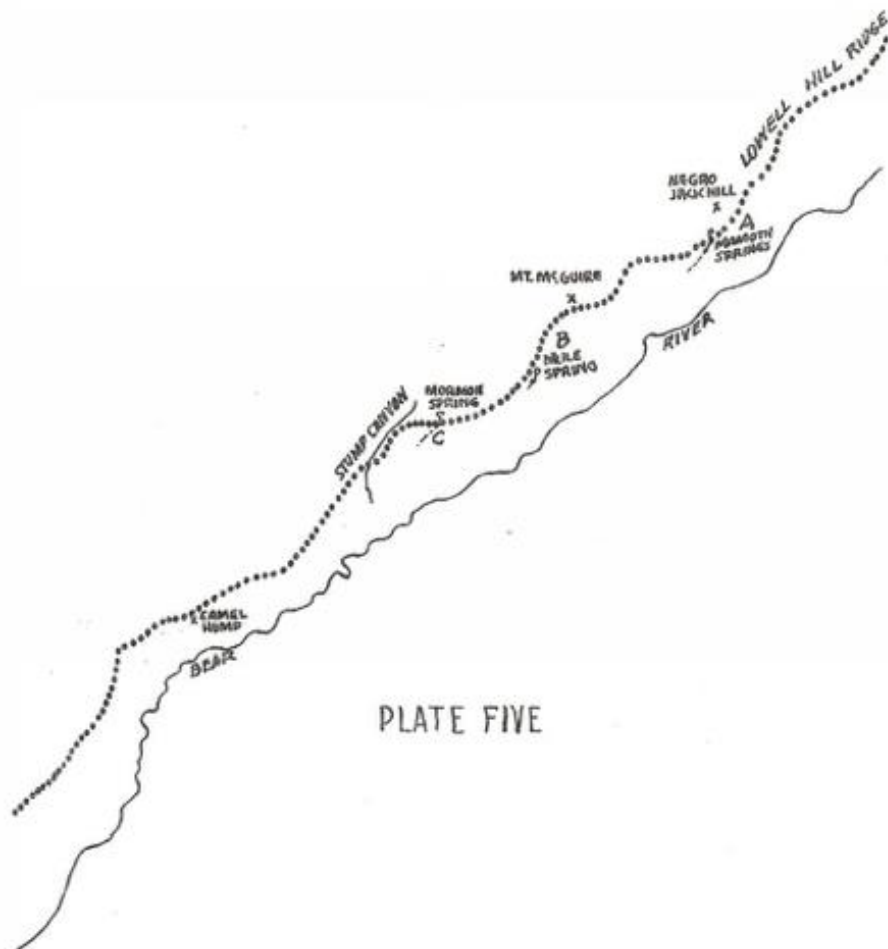


PLATE FOUR

- 1844 - The old road passes a small pond,  
 1854 - enters Carpenter Flat, making  
 slide into Bear Valley. It then  
 follows along Bear River and up  
 onto Lowell Hill Ridge.
- A - Bear Valley slide - 1500 feet from  
 Gap to the valley floor.
- B - From Mr. Littleton's diary: "for  
 2 miles after you leave Bear valley  
 you have the steepest hill and  
 longest one perhaps on the route."



1844 - Lowell Hill Ridge  
 1854 -

- A - Mammoth Springs, no longer flowing.
- B - Mule Springs, at one time called "Dead Mule Springs."
- C - Mormon Spring. Three Mormons Murdered here.



PLATE SIX

1844 - Here, the old road leaves Little York, goes  
 1854 - along the end of a long ridge down into  
 Steep Hollow, down to Greenhorn Creek, and  
 up to the high country again.

A - Steep Hollow slide where men and animals  
 slid rather than walked.

B - Last of the steep slides.

C - Approximate location of present highway No.  
 49.





1844 - Old road located from aerial  
1854 - photographs.

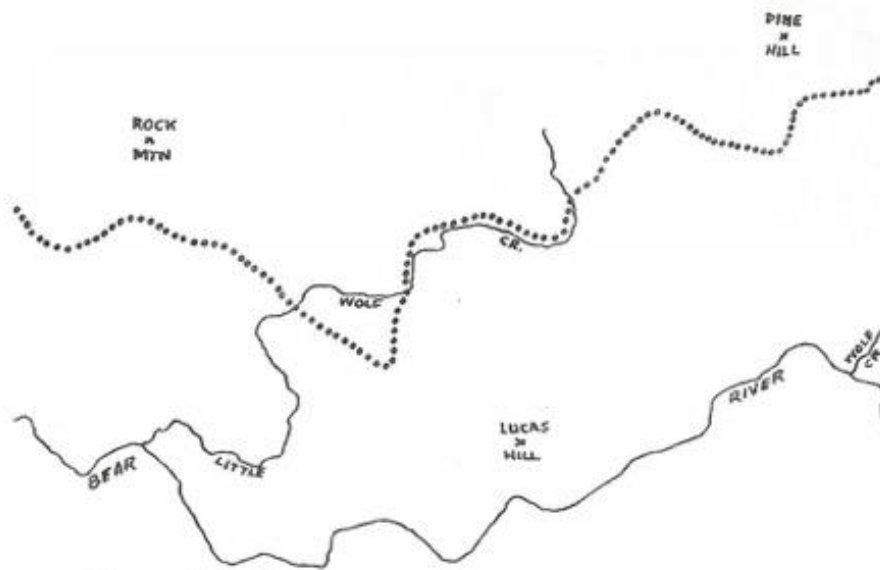
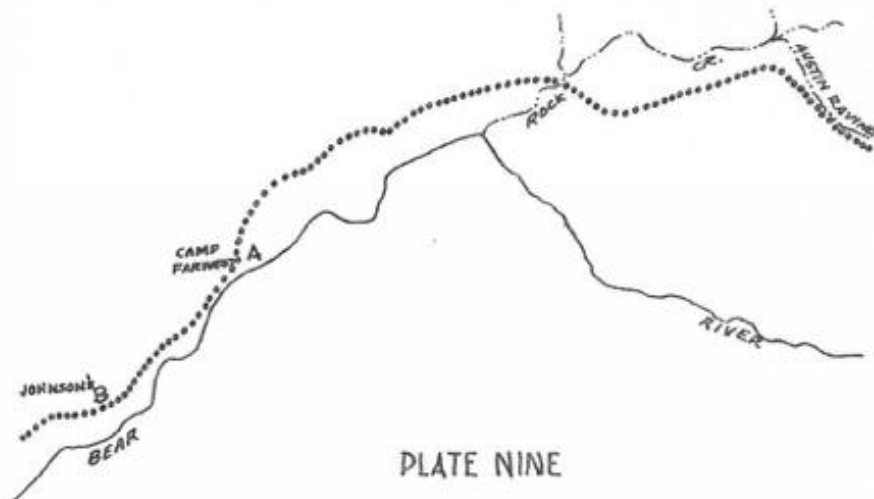


PLATE EIGHT

1844 - Old road located from aerial  
1854 - photographs.



1844 - Old road located from aerial  
1854 - photographs.

- A - Site of an early military post.
- B - Site of Johnston's Ranch House mentioned in so many diaries as the first contact with civilization in five or six months, and where most terminated their journals. However, John Markle did carry on with his diary beyond Johnston's, ending his journal with his arrival in Sacramento.



MR. LITTLETON, IN HIS DIARY IN 1850 WROTE: " THE  
ROCK IS ALL THROUGH THE WOOD LOOKING LIKE WAGGONS  
WHITE COWS AND SHEEP."

This area is described by many of the emigrants  
as some of the worst road they had travelled.



RUTS OF THE OLD ROAD AT THE BEGINNING  
OF EMIGRANT CANYON

The ruts are over three feet deep, worn  
by the passing of the thousands of wagons  
in the years 1846 to 1854.





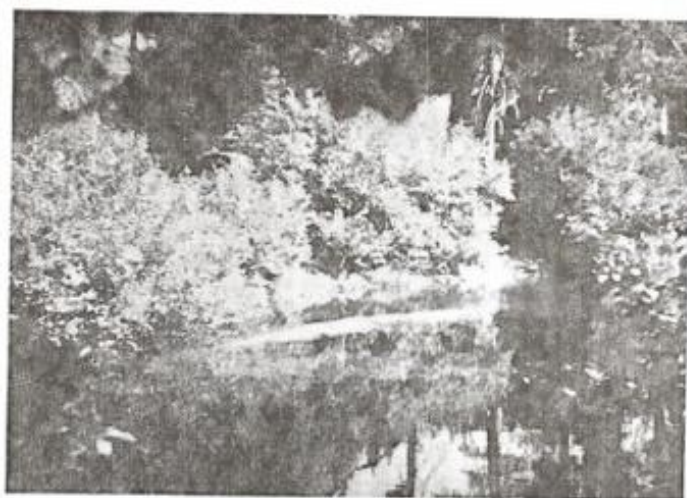
RUTS IN SOLID GRANITE IN EMIGRANT CANYON

As the Overland Emigrant Trail leaves the canyon over the granite, every wagon was forced to use the same road. This is the best evidence of their passing.



LOOKING EAST FROM THE ROLLER PASS

This pass was first used in 1846 by the Nicholas Carriger Party which was led by Caleb Greenwood.



#### THE SECOND CROSSING OF THE YUBA RIVER

The passing of the wagons so compacted the earth  
that even today the alders will not grow there.

This crossing is near Big Bend Ranger Station.