

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

January, 2021 issue #149



History Trail Trekking The 2020 Reprise of the Forlorn Hope

On January 17, 1847 Wm. Eddy, supported by two Native Americans, knocked on the door of a small cabin at Johnson's Ranch (near today's Wheatland, CA). When seventeen-year-old Harriet Ritchie opened the door she burst into tears at the sight of him. He was emaciated, exhausted, and barely alive. The trail of his bloody footprints would enable people in the settlement to find Eddy's six companions on the trail behind him. Those seven were all who had survived the thirty-three-day trek across the Sierra in the middle of winter.

So ended the greatest human endurance feat in history. It set in motion the rescue of the Donner Party survivors at Donner Lake.

Last month we covered the story of the 1846 Forlorn Hope trek, the background, and the party members. This month we move on to the equally compelling story of the 2020 reprise of the event, 174 years later, along with some other related stories.

This month:

The 2020 adventure,
People and the Sierra,
Support and Equipment,
Who Are These People?,
Finding the Original Trail, and
The Missing Five Pages
as well as a couple of book reviews.



First, this particular feat, retracing the Forlorn Hope, has never been done before. Emigrant trail buffs and experts explore the many emigrant trails and they've mapped and described them. There's evidence for those trails in the diaries and memories of the emigrants, in the maps, in physical evidence (ruts, rust marks, piled or removed rocks and branches), and in the things left behind.

The trail of the Forlorn Hope has never been identified. It was used only once by only a few people, travel was over the snow so no physical evidence of passage, and nothing was left behind because the fifteen members had almost nothing to leave behind. There is, however, an axe head that flew off in 1846 at what's called the Camp of Death which has never been found.

Second, our intrepid trekkers of the 2020 reprise may have invented a new sport, History Trail Trekking (HTT) which combines the extreme sport of long distance running with historical investigation. The story of the 1846 Forlorn Hope is one story but there are other historical expeditions that could lend themselves to HTT. Stay tuned.

Third, there is some "front page news" that historians will want but that exposure will have to wait a bit.

The 2020 trek reprising the 1846 Forlorn Hope trek itself is an amazing achievement: more than one hundred miles over some of the roughest, most rugged terrain the Sierra has to offer. To see examples, go to www.forlornhope.org to see pictures by Keith Sutter, who was embedded with this year's Forlorn Hope group for a day during some of the roughest parts of the route. The organization was amazing with a crew of several dozen people to help with various aspects from publicity to photography to supplies and communication. The outreach has been amazing to news organizations, emigrant groups, schools, and various organizations.

The trek started at Donner Memorial State Park on December 16, 174 years after the original Forlorn Hope left Donner Lake for California. It was dark as people gathered: news media, well-wishers, support, and the trekkers. After a very short gathering, above right, and then a huddle, below, they were on their way to conquer Donner Pass (next page).



Left to right at the Donner State Park: Tim Tweitmeyer, Bob Crowley, Jennifer Hemmen, and Elke Reimer.

The 2020 expedition climbed the one thousand feet to Donner Pass, then crossed the summit and Summit Valley, up to Serene Lakes, out to Kidd and Cascade Lakes, and then to their first night at Big Bend.



Bob Crowley, one of the 2020 expedition (second from the left above) reflected,

"We witnessed the same features and topography as the Forlorn Hope: Donner Pass, the snowy meadow of Norden, the boulder field with Devil's Peak looming behind. Kidd and Cascade Lakes and the Yuba River where we camped. We camped next to the Yuba, where the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party had wintered two years before [1844]. History engulfed us, swirled through the pines as the weather shifted from fair to stormy."

A storm came in with rain and then heavy thick snow soaking everything. "It was cold, miserable. As it should be since those were precisely the conditions Forlorn Hope encountered. But we had warmth, shelter and provisions - minimal suffering," said Bob.

It took the original Forlorn Hope four days to reach the same spot.

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Can you spot the four figures climbing Donner Pass on their way to conquering the immensity of the Sierra. On another day Donner Lake would be visible under the fog.



The scenery was jaw dropping. A light fog settled over Donner Lake at sunup when we departed. As we ascended to Donner Pass, we turned around to see a magical sight of light, serenity and calm. The still lake with a layer of rising fog lifting to the blue heavens above. A few tears may have been shed.

Bob Crowley

Coming up Summit Canyon a few minutes after the above picture.

The 2020 Forlorn Hope reprise approaching Serene Lakes on the Emigrant Trail. From left to right: Elke Reimer, Bob Crowley, Jennifer Hemmen, and Tim Tweitmeyer.



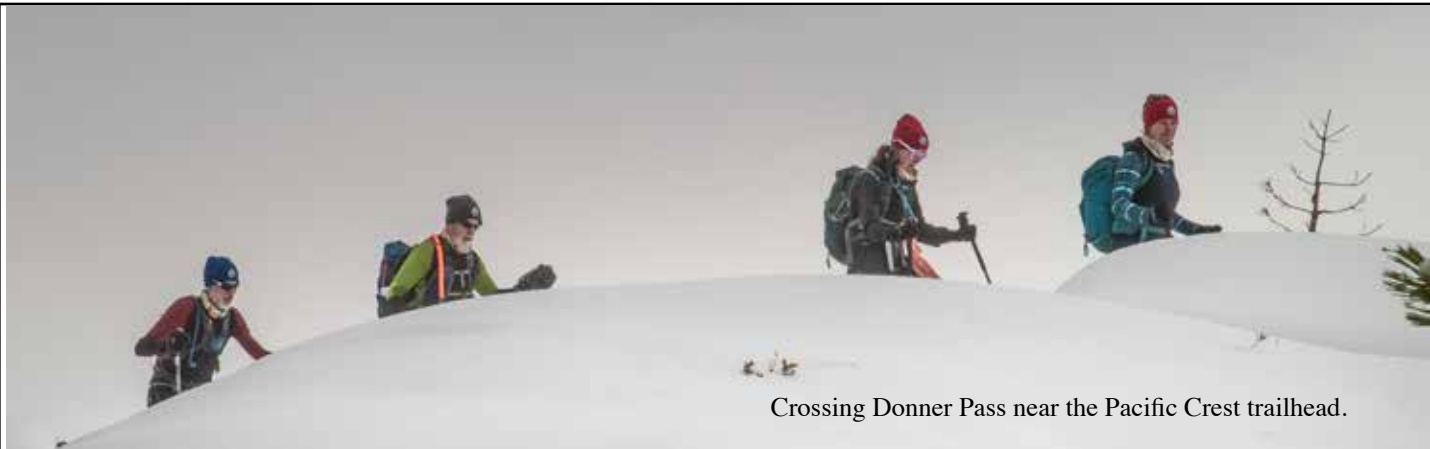
The group a few miles later.



The group passing Devil's Pk.



Trail Angels met the trekkers at Lake Mary on Donner Summit with coffee and cookies after the climb up the pass. Pictured are the trekkers and Pat Malberg (right).



Crossing Donner Pass near the Pacific Crest trailhead.

Day two saw a much greater challenge as they fought through miles of heavy manzanita brush and white thorn covered with heavy wet snow. There was no real passage through and there was nothing for it but to push through and stomp down on the brush. They didn't get to their planned campsite which left some extra miles to cover for the next day.

Day three was the longest day with 13,000 feet of elevation change and they did not get to camp until dark. Down at the American River they found a suitable crossing and then it was "Straight up the canyon where there is no trail." "It took four hours to travel one mile." Keith Sutter, the team photographer who traveled with the reprise this day, said, "Today was intense and gritty." That sounds mild. It was dark when they got into camp.

Many people had been tracking the 2020 Reprise on their electronic devices but updates stopped when Bob lost his tracker and cell phone near the Camp of Death. He went back. The cell phone did not turn up but the tracker was sitting on the snow. Bob saw this as a sign reflecting, "I sensed Franklin Graves [a member of the original Forlorn Hope who died at what would be called the Camp of Death] whispering to me, 'I'll keep the phone for future communications but you take the tracker and carry on with your journey.'" Bob has not mentioned any communications yet.

Bob's description of the climb out of the canyon is best simply quoted here,

"The most daunting portion of the Expedition loomed before us. We began our ascent up the "steep climb" which measures 1.5 miles, at a 40% slope* and nearly 2,000' of elevation gain. We tried to find a rhythm, a few steps digging our toes into the moist dirt followed by a brief rest to catch our breath. Then repeat over and over. We finally emerged onto Elliot Ranch Road 80 minutes later. It was exhilarating to be done. We were exhausted, dripping in sweat. And dumbfounded. How could Forlorn Hope possibly have done this, exhausted, broken, no equipment, famished? Our awe for their tenacity, determination and grit grew yet again.

"We arrived in the dark at Iowa Hill, ready for a quick meal and sleep. We were feeling the impact of three straight days of arduous travel. And the NFAR [North Fork American River] only ground us down a bit more.

"To bed after sharing our reflections of the day around the campfire. One could hear the synchronized snoring from several tents."

Then it was on to a meet up with civilization at Colfax, down to Auburn, then to the conclusion at Johnson's Ranch where about thirty people were gathered to greet the trekkers.

*It's hard to imagine how steep 40% grade is; think of a square and slice it diagonally in half. The remaining hypotenuse is 45%. Treadmills typically go to max 12% grade. It's daunting." Bob Crowley

"It is simply unfathomable to imagine the Forlorn Hope party making this journey after so much dispute at the Camp of Death, especially the climb up from the North Fork of the American River."

Elke Reimer

Itinerary

geographic point	cumulative miles	
Donner Lake start	0.0	
Donner Lake West End	3.5	
Top of Donner Pass	6.0	
Big Bend Ranger Station	20.5	night 1
Eagle Lakes exit	23.5	
Lake Valley Rd.	27	
Laing Rd. wrong turn	28.5	
Onion Valley	32	
Tunnel Mills Campground	33	
Texas Hill Rd.	35	night 2
Camp of Death	35.5	
Elliott Ranch Rd.	46	night 3
Iowa Hill Rd.	56	
Placer Hills Rd.	65	
Bear River High School	74	night 4
Johnson's Ranch	101	finish



The 2020 Reprise of the Forlorn Hope arrived at Johnson's Ranch near Wheatland, CA about 3:30. The picture above is earlier in the afternoon. The tracks are from emigrant wagons 170 years ago.

Left, the Forlorn Hope reprise approaching Johnson's Ranch on the Emigrant Trail.

Below, the Forlorn Hope reprise coming across the horizon.





The idea behind the 2020 expedition was to honor the original Forlorn Hope group who as Bob Crowley says, "were unremarkable people who did a remarkable feat."

The 2020 group carried tribute cards with them. Each card had a name, description, and most had pictures of the original group. At the end Bob, Jennifer, Tim, and Elke walked in silence through the people assembled to welcome them and placed the cards at Johnson's Ranch, completing their tribute to the Forlorn Hope of 1846.

"This trek has evolved over time. We always thought we would trace the steps of the Forlorn Hope but it has evolved into something more meaningful, much more broad. We got to know the Forlorn Hope as people which made us better researchers, better historians, better athletes, better people. It made us think about how to be a better human being because these people were not extraordinary. They were mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, cousins, elders, youth...all who were just trying to find a better life in California."

"We are proud and honored to have been able to do this and bring attention to the Forlorn Hope and the hope, the positive side, of what they inspire in people which is ordinary people doing absolutely extraordinary things. We can all do it. It is inside us and at this time of year and what we've been through, this can bring us all back together as a country and as a world."

Bob Crowley



meeting civilization in Colfax, day four.

"We were surprised at the number of people meeting us on the road coming from different genders and backgrounds. What we represented to them was what it is like being an American and a human. We still don't know how the 7 Forlorn Hope survivors did it but now we know why they survived. They survived because they had love, they had family, they had each other and had something greater to live for. Along the way they had to make some unsavory, difficult decisions but we can all agree that what these people did was the best of human nature."

Jennifer Hemmen

The campfire for the 2020 expedition and those who'd come to greet them after their five day 100 mile trek. The sunset was an added benefit.



The members of the 2020 expedition took time each night to reflect on the day's progress and events. Here, at the end of the fifth day they reflected on the entire journey in front of the well-wishers.

Insignificance of Man Vs. the Sierra



The Sierra looking west from Emigrant Gap after climbing to get a good vantage point. Lake Valley Rd. goes from right to left. The route of the Forlorn Hope crosses the road just to the right of the clump of trees at the right side of the photograph. Which way should you go?

"The more I research this route the more I'm impressed that ANYONE made it to Johnson's Ranch. It's rugged, remote and very difficult to navigate. As I've read the account of the FH [Forlorn Hope] party and then travelled in their footsteps it's only galvanized my belief that this might be the greatest endurance trek in history. ... the more I see of this story, the more I'm humbled by their will to continue."

Tim Twietmeyer
2020 Forlorn Hope trekker

The various tellings of the Forlorn Hope story try to capture the difficulties of what was really an epic trek: lack of food, storms, wet inside and out, cold and frostbite, exhaustion, bloody feet, death, and having to resort to cannibalism. They talk about the snow and we can imagine trudging through it, although reading this in a warm living room does not come close to the actual experience of sinking into the snow with each step and lifting snowshoes laden with snow, step after step, mile after mile. The renditions of the story list miles per day and sometimes some geographical points, but you've really got to actively imagine the difficulties and the horror in order to really understand what makes the trip so extraordinary. The Forlorn Hope were cold, wet, exhausted, starving, were walking over snow, probably sinking in with each step on homemade snowshoes. They were desperate and despairing. They were afraid - afraid for themselves in a strange land and afraid for their families left back at Donner Lake. But that's not all.

On first reading it's easy to think it might not have been so bad. The direction was easy; they knew they had to go west so they couldn't get lost. The route was all downhill too. Could it have been that hard? It was and it was harder. Imagine the horror of being reduced to discussing eating the first to die and then the horror of doing it. Imagine 36 hours under blankets while a storm raged over them. Imagine killing someone for food. You also have to imagine the courage and determination to keep going because you are the only chance your family has back at Donner Lake. How bad must Wm. Eddy have appeared to the young woman at Johnson's Ranch (page 1) as two Indians took him to the door, bloody footprints following him, after the thirty-three day trek, to make her break into tears?

"The Sierra are daunting on several fronts: sheer ascents, high altitude, super rugged terrain, false valley after false valley as you work west; No forgiveness. You'd think by the time you hit the foothills it would ease up a bit but NO WAY! It's a slog to the bitter end. And the wilderness is breathtaking and dangerous!"

Bob Crowley
2020 Forlorn Hope Trekker



Top: view from Yuba Gap towards Emigrant Gap. I-80 is on the right side. Instead of turning into the Bear River drainage, right, the Forlorn Hope went left following the flats. Below: dense forest in the distant left of the picture above. Which way do you go?

Actively reading the stories we can get an idea of the suffering and so the bravery but there is one more aspect to consider that those renditions don't include: the immensity of the Sierra compared to the tiny humans trying to cross in winter. Just look at pg. 3.

The Forlorn Hope left Donner Lake and knew they had to get up the pass. They had Charles Stanton with them who'd covered the route twice before, once on his way to Sutter's Fort for supplies and once on the way back with mules, supplies, and two Native Americans. The Forlorn Hope could figure out the pass and Summit Valley that followed. They had Stanton and the geography led that way through the pass – it's the low spot between peaks – and the natural direction across Summit Valley is west; it's the only logical way to go. Stanton died below Cascade Lakes though, not much further along. Sutter's two Indians had never taken the route before their travel with Stanton, that we know of, and did not speak English. Besides, after a heavy snow the geography looks entirely different and there had been many snows since they'd come from California. Then the Indians were "bewildered" a few days later after the group made a wrong turn.

West was the general direction and presumably it was all downhill, so it's straight forward and could not be so difficult. That's in the abstract but the Forlorn Hope was not traveling in the abstract. In the immensity of the Sierra, if you see a possibility of two or



"The naiveté of man towards the Sierra. What kind of human is cut out to discover and try to tame the Sierra? Greenwoods of the world? Or maybe she's untamable. So how does one make peace with her and co-exist? What are the characteristics of a person who has been successful at co-existence with the Sierra?"

Bob Crowley
2020 Forlorn Hope Trekker

more routes ahead because you're lucky to have found a vantage point. Just which generally west route is the one to take? The immensity is spread out before you. What do you do? What if you don't have a vantage point and you're in the middle of the huge terrain? What happens when the dense forest prevents you from seeing possible routes? How do you go? Even if you could see, which possible route should you take and which might end in a box canyon? What do you do when a storm reduces the visibility so you can't see what's ahead?

Then there is the issue of coming down the western slope. Ever since the Sierra rose about five million years ago, storms have been dropping water eroding deep canyons between ridges. On the western slope you can drop a thousand feet from ridge top to river or stream at the canyon bottom and be faced with a thousand foot climb on the other side. There's no snow below a few thousand feet in elevation so that's easy but there is thick brush. The route of the 2020 Forlorn Hope trek shows cumulative descents totaling about 20,000 feet and ascents totaling about 15,000 feet (depending on the map source). Clearly, it's not just go west and it's downhill all the way. Imagine the exhaustion of the original starving Forlorn Hope as they climbed a ridge and were confronted with a view to the west of more ridges and valleys. Take a look at the picture here, below, by Art Clark of the ridges in the distance and the depth of the canyons. The Forlorn Hope had to cross all that to save their families.

The pictures on these couple of pages show the difficulty of just heading west. There are a lot of choices and lots of forest. The original Forlorn Hope came down from today's Yuba Gap (previous pages). Unfortunately there was a fire some years ago so



Taken from Sawtooth Ridge looking southwest by Art Clarke about a mile east of where the 2020 group came up from Burnett Canyon.

we can only show the topography and not the forest (page 9). Move to the next pictures (top of page 10), taken a mile away next to the Freeway at the Yuba Gap exit. You are looking west and can see the freeway on the right. Just left of where the freeway goes downhill and you lose sight of it, there is a large brown area, Carpenter Flat. There is where the 1846 Forlorn Hope diverged from the Emigrant route. The Emigrant route went right through the notch (now filled by the railroad) and into the Bear River drainage. The route was covered by snow in December, 1846, and the group was faced with storm after storm. The Indians were not familiar with the route. Stanton was dead. Whatever the final reason, the group went left and into the American River drainage with its steep walled canyons (previous page) and tragedy. Here we should consider the wrong turn. The picture (top page 10) shows that the notch leading to the Bear River drainage is not obvious and in a storm could be easy to miss. One has to wonder how the first wagon train, the Stephens Party of 1844, decided to go right instead of the more obvious left. Everyone after followed the worn trail, right, but the first ones were lucky they chose right.

A few miles further the Forlorn Hope camped at what's now called the Camp of Death. Four would die and be consumed by some of the others. The immensity of the Sierra of course almost won, but the tenacity, courage, and desire to save the families of the seven survivors was stronger.

Then we come to the 2020 reprise. It's still not just go west and downhill even with modern equipment. It's still really difficult distilled by Art Clark, member of the DSHS Mobile Historical Research Team, in an email:

"The more I learn about the expedition and see some of the territory they will be going through, I'm struck by the enormity of what they are attempting.

"The sections that are roads and trails - they are used to that. Not that that is easy, but it's what they are good at. But the parts that are overgrown, and have to be bushwhacked, that's what I would be dreading. The parts where you only achieve 1/2 mile in an hour.

Yikes!"

Support and Equipment

This article reflects the planning that has gone into the 2020 reprise but was written before the event – hence the future tense of the verbs.

The story of the forlorn Hope is extraordinary, fifteen people traveling more than one hundred miles in thirty-three days in a bid to save their friends and families. That four people in 2020 wanted to cross the Sierra on foot at the same time of year, in a tribute to the original group, is also amazing. Just imagine, even with plenty of food, support, modern technology, and modern clothing, going more than a hundred miles, first on snowshoes and then on foot. Just imagine snow-shoeing and running through the cold for five days, across some of the toughest terrain in the Sierra. Just imagine, as you settle down for your evening sherry in front of a warm fire, music playing in the background, a good book in your lap or chessboard in front of you, others digging in to bivouac in the snow. The 2020 trekkers may not be starving, wet, and cold to the core, but they will be pushing the extremes.

This kind of ultra-event is not in the same frame of reference

as an ordinary outing or even a marathon. It's a lot more and so requires an amazing level of organization and planning. If the plan is not right the whole endeavor is in danger.

To begin with there is the route (that article is coming later in this Heirloom): the development, the exploration, and permission acquiring. In this case, different from other ultra-long distance events, the route was not laid out by the event coordinator but by the participants and only after seven years of diligent research (see the stack of books later in this edition). Then the route has to be broken into parts for the days of the trek. Where will the camping be each night? Then comes the equipment. The trekkers must decide what's most important to carry, what will be needed for each day's trek? What's needed for normal use and what's needed for contingencies and emergencies? Here on the next two pages we have four pictures by Bob Crowley of different collections of necessities.

The runners start with the "Gear On Body" and trek or run with the "Running Pack." Then their support crew will deliver "Backpack/Nite Gear 1 and 2" to the first night's camp at Big

Bend. The items in packs 1 and 2 have been divided for easy viewing; it all goes in one pack though - one for each person. In the morning the runners will leave the packs for the support to pick up and they'll travel with the "Gear on Body" and "Running Packs." Near the Laing Rd. exit from I-80 they'll meet the support crew and take the backpacks to head for Burnett Canyon, the possible location of the original Forlorn Trek's Camp of Death (see that article later in this edition), just before Sawtooth Ridge in the North Fork of the American River drainage. There they will spend night two. The next day they will drop down to the river, up Sawtooth Ridge and down the other side. The support crew will hike in some miles over steep terrain to pick up the big packs. The trekkers will then head west for Iowa Hill where they will pick up their packs again for night three. In the morning they'll leave their packs for the support crew and head off with their running packs. At Bear River High School they'll get their packs again and set camp for night four. The next day they'll grab their running packs and leave the heavy packs and head for Johnson's Ranch and the finish. The map of the trek follows in a couple of pages.

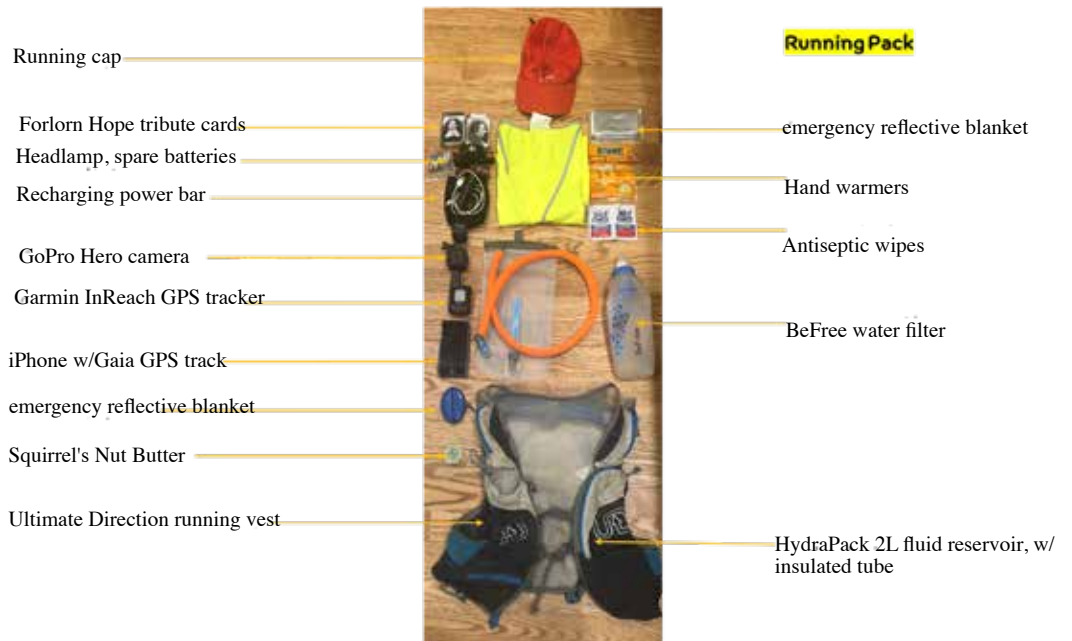
A lot of preparation, detail, and planning go into these events and as noted above, there was even more for this one.

Strong support is one of the keys to this event and for this event the amount of support is "considerably higher than normal." For a normal ultra-long distance event runners might have one to three support people and a pacer. For this event there is more support. There are three photographers and five crew/support along with miscellaneous others who will come out to see things unfold and wish the trekkers well. Photographers are needed to commemorate this unique event. It's winter so more gear is needed and the camping aspect adds even more.

Bob Crowley sums up the successful event planning as

"In ultra-distance running, we've learned to follow the KISS Principle: Keep It Simple Stupid! Like a duck, there's calm on the surface but lots going on and paddling like hell beneath!

"A crack crew can make or break your event. The athlete needs to focus on the task at hand: taking care of her/himself, processing information about speed, nutrition, body condition, navigation, mental state, the course and what's coming next and racing strategy. And making sure the 'engine' doesn't blow up. We try to run our bodies right on the edge of the



red zone (tachometer); too much speed and we will burn out, too little and we leave it in the tank. I liken the athlete to a pilot, constantly monitoring the dashboard, adjusting accordingly, and scanning the horizon.

"The crew is there to assure the athlete has exactly what is needed in the moment in as efficient a manner as possible. In and out. Period. Like a NASCAR pit crew."

Backpack/Nite Gear 2



Backpack/Nite Gear 1





Who Are These People?

When you match an affinity for endorphins with an affinity for history you might get an interesting activity, a compelling story and maybe even a new sport - History Trail Trekking. That's what we'll get as spectators as four extreme athletes follow the 1846 route of the Donner Party's Forlorn Hope. Over five days and one hundred plus miles, they will go from Donner Lake, over Donner Pass and down to Johnson's Ranch, near Wheatland, in the Central Valley.

Tim Twietmeyer, above left, is an engineering manager at Hewlett Packard in Roseville. For recreation he has completed hundreds of ultra running and endurance events and won many both nationally and internationally. He is the only person to have completed the Western States Endurance Run 25 times, each in under 24 hours. He is the current president of the Western States Endurance Run Foundation. Tim and his wife, Kathy, have three sons and reside in Auburn, California.

Jennifer Hemmen, second from left, is an environmental lawyer focusing on conservation projects in California that benefit endangered species, habitats and water quality. She has completed more than fifty ultra trail races ranging from fifty to one hundred miles. She has recently gotten involved in adventure racing, for example competing in the EcoChallenge Fiji, a 640 kilometer adventure race known as the "world's toughest race" requiring outrigger canoe, mountain biking, climbing and swimming as well as jungle navigation. Her love of the wilderness started when she was in high school and extended later to leading Outward Bound trips and other outdoor programs for teenagers. She has lived and worked internationally and throughout the United States.

Jennifer, her husband Travis and their three children live in Fair Oaks, CA, along the American River.

Bob Crowley, third from left, has been an entrepreneur all his life, starting and managing companies. Currently he works with various non-profits and mentors young entrepreneurs. His extra-curricular passion, ultra-running is an extension of his risk taking. He has completed hundreds of endurance events both nationally and internationally, including the Western States 100 Mile Race in California. Bob lives in Fair Oaks with his wife of forty years, Marcy. They have two sons.

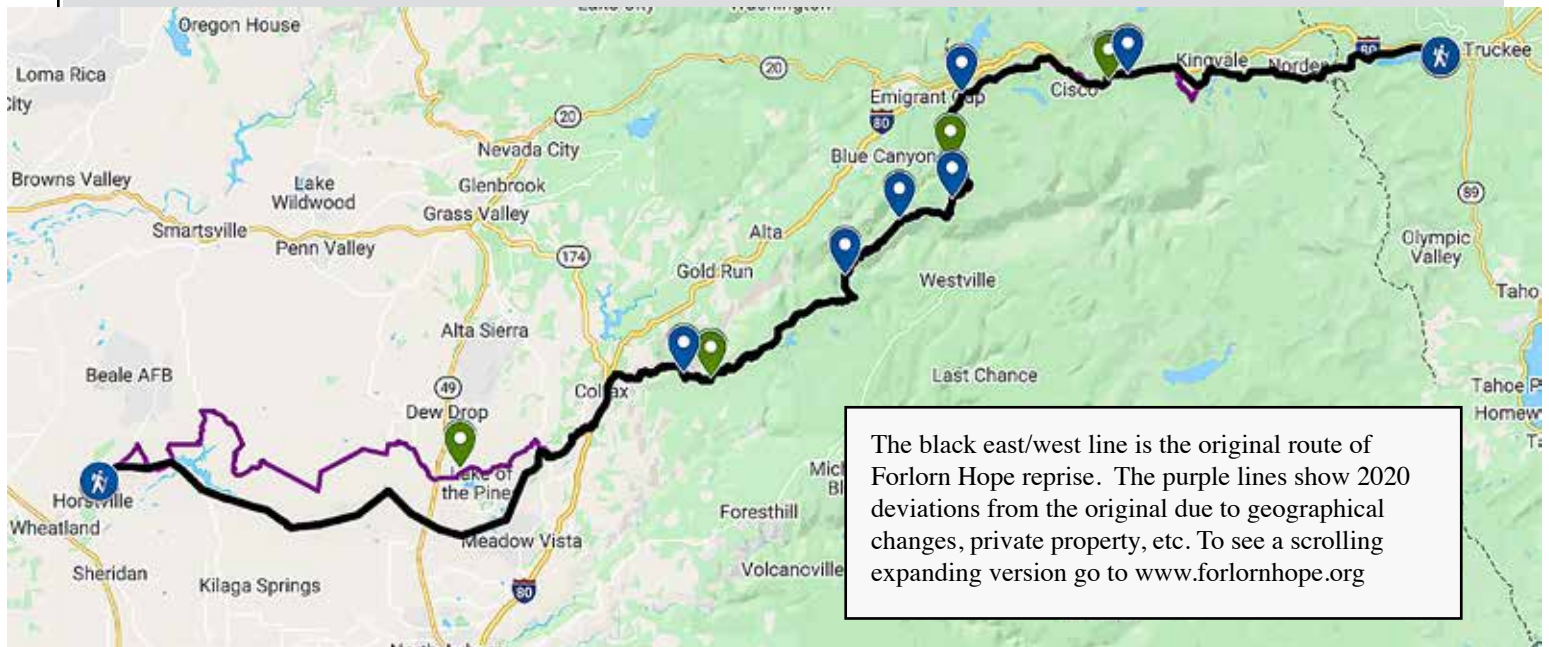
Elke Reimer, right, is an avid outdoor person and ultra-distance runner having completed forty races from 50k's to 100 milers. She and her daughter were the first mother-daughter team competing in the Western States 100 Mile Run. She climbs, runs, backpacks, and volunteers as a trail steward for the Western States Trail Foundation and the Pacific Crest Trail Association.

Elke is the mother of two and lives in Auburn, CA with her cattle dog and mountain companion, Lupine Sierra.



clockwise from top left: Bob Crowley, Tim Twietmeyer, Jennifer Hemmen, and Elke Reimer

Finding the Original Trail



The 2020 reprise of the Forlorn Hope is, like the original, a compelling story with many components. One of those components was discovering the original route of the Donner Lake escapees which no one had really done before now. Then there is studying each section in order to see what's possible in 2020 after 174 years of change. Man-made lakes cover some of the original route. Private property covers other sections and that led to a guy with a gun at Crystal but things were solved amicably. The 2020 group was able to solve a lot of that with deviations from the original. Other areas are impassable. So the 2020 group developed a route after many on site visits that adheres closely to the original but not exactly as you can see above. The 2020 is the black line. The purple shows deviations from the original.

The challenge was to discover the route of the Forlorn Hope and in doing so discover the people who engaged in the greatest endurance feat in history. How did our 2020 people discover the route?

Modern trail sleuths use old diaries and maps to get a general idea of a route. Satellite imagery can help spot possible trail remnants. Then trips to the field can validate desk research.

On the ground the sleuths look for ruts, moved rocks, branches and rocks piled up at steep inclines or declines, and evidence on trees of ropes or chains. Then out come the metal detectors and trowels to turn up artifacts as small as boot nails. It can be tedious work and often there is no pay off. At other times there is great satisfaction.

That's all pretty straight forward, maybe even obvious,

Green waypoints identify camp spots from east to west
Big Bend
Tunnel Mills
Iowa Hill Elementary School
Bear River High School

Blue waypoints identify important locations east to west from the story of the Forlorn Hope
Start at Donner Lake
Approximate location of Charles Stanton's death
Original Forlorn Hope's wrong turn
Forlorn Hope's Camp of Death
First view of Sacramento Valley by Forlorn Hope
Almost vertical climb by Forlorn Hope
Deer hunted by Forlorn Hope
End at Johnson's Ranch

because lots of emigrants following one after the other and re-using the routes year after year, can leave enough evidence to delineate trails.

Divining the route of the Forlorn Hope though, is an entirely different story. There were only fifteen in the group who started the journey and only seven were alive when they arrived in California. Since the route was used only once and only by a few, there was little impact on the land. A substantial portion of the route was over snow and of course travel over snow leaves no impact at all. Because they carried little with them, they didn't have artifacts to lose to leave behind for future generations to find. There was the axe head that was lost at the Camp of Death which would be a wonderful validation to find. Except for an abbreviated version that is now lost, the

1846 Forlorn Hope did not keep diaries because they were desperate and interested in survival, not plotting a route that later generations would follow.

The Forlorn Hope did relate the horror of their more than four-week journey in contemporary interviews, but those reports are all second-hand and things get lost in translation. Finally, one must consider human nature. The group had just been through the most horrific experiences watching family members die and being relegated to eat human flesh, one of the greatest of civilized taboos. They could be reviled for that. One can imagine that as they realized they were safe, and as they were beginning to tell their stories, they must have made some pacts to keep some things back; they had reputations in a new land to make. It would be hard to bear the opprobrium that would accompany accusations of cannibalism. We can only imagine the conversations those seven survivors had as they recovered and the rescue missions were organized. If some things were kept back, then the reports made from the interviews will have less to guide modern investigators.

Those are all problems in figuring out the route of the Forlorn Hope which was lost a good portion of the time, knew none of the landmarks, and sketched no maps. How did our guys, the Forlorn Hope reprise of 2020, estimate what their route should be?

Our four explorers, primary researchers, Bob Crowley and Tim Twietmeyer later joined by Elke Reiman and Jennifer Hemmen, developed their route after seven years of research. They assembled a library of accounts. With that basic knowledge they headed out into the field, making dozens of exploratory trips to spot the major points the original accounts listed: where the fateful wrong turn into the North Fork American River Canyon was made, where the climb was so steep they had to pull themselves up by roots, where they could view the Central Valley from a ridge top, where Charles Stanton died, and where maybe, the Native American settlements were. See the map on the previous page. Matching the secondary source information from original interviews to actual geography turned up inconsistencies among sources about geography and pointed out obvious impossibilities. Trips into the field noted clear errors by modern authors of the Donner Party saga. Our 2020 group also researched the weather at the time, the phases of the moon and the time of year. They tried to factor in the Forlorn Hope's physical state, hunger and exhaustion, but also their emotional state, fear, despondency, and anger because all of that would have affected choices when presented with multiple possibilities. Then they used common sense and let the land take them. The original Forlorn Hope was exhausted

every day and starving almost every day. They were cold and wet, inside from perspiration and outside from rain and snow. They got frostbite. They were miserable and some were dying. They had no maps and no knowledge of the geography. In that context, facing those extremes, faced with choices, they made decisions on their route. For our guys, trying to match their 2020 route to the 1846 route, decisions also had to be made with no forensic evidence. Here they let themselves be guided by the land making the best guesses among many possibilities while trying to put themselves in the place of those long-ago pioneers.

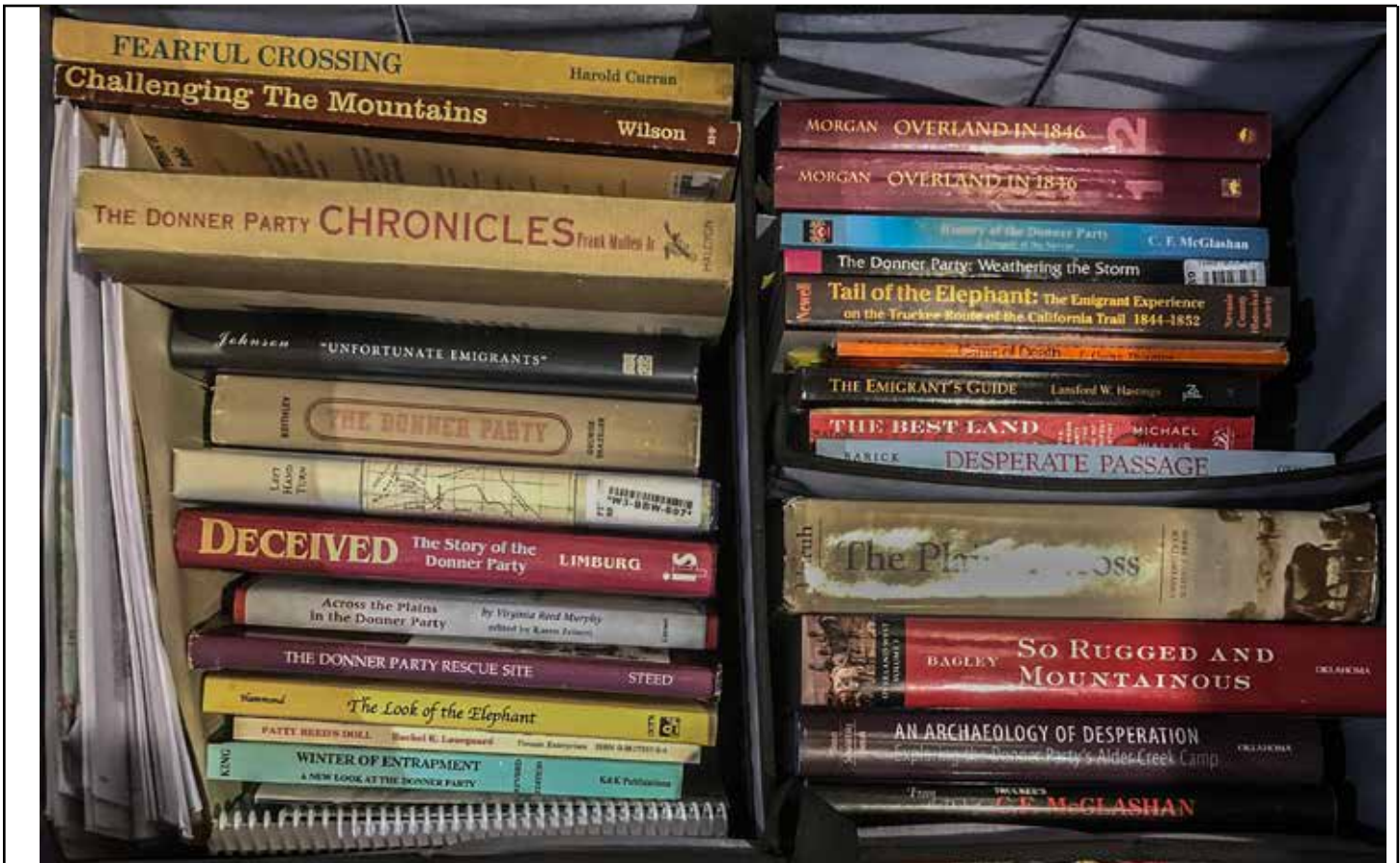
A good summary of the general process our explorers of the old route used comes from Bob Crowley, "A key takeaway of our seven-year project is that understanding the land must be equal to appreciating the word." They used a library of sources, "the word," but they also spent "as much time as possible in the field" seeing what the original Forlorn Hope saw. Bob says, "Nature never misleads, the landscape remains true leading the beholder to imagine the beauty - and horror - that the Forlorn Hope must have experienced." Bob and Tim got intimate with the land as they tried to decipher clues and lay out the route. No other researchers have done that to this extent and some, using only satellite imagery, are clearly far off.

Bob Crowley describes the process, "An example of this is our determination of where we believe the Camp of Death is located - or pretty darn close; the precise spot possibly will never be known [unless one day we invite cadaver dogs

Lessons from Bob Crowley as he and Tim Twietmeyer did trail research
Our methodology learned includes:

1. Always presume you're wrong.
2. Accept nothing as the whole truth or fact.
3. Be thorough, detailed, then thorough again.
4. Behaviors and routes of those on foot differ greatly from those with wheels.
5. Snow is a game changer: no trail to follow, flattens landscape features.
6. Understanding the land must be equal to appreciating the word.
7. Remain steadfast to applying common sense and the path of least resistance when encountering vague or conflicting facts.

to come and scour a few square acres near our determined location [see the next story]. We started with five theoretical routes regarding the possible location based upon the written research. Utilizing maps, several field trips and scrubbing the written accounts by comparing and contrasting and applying the above filters, we slowly eliminated each possible location, narrowing to two. We then did further research both in the word - and field to ultimately conclude we were likely very close. This included coming at the "puzzle" from several aspects and seeing if they all vectored upon the same location (which they remarkably did!)."



Research library used by Bob Crowley and Tim Twietmeyer during their seven year quest to discover the route of the Forlorn Hope.

We have a little extra space here and you want to get your money's worth so we'll fill it.

Here is Keith Sutton, the 2020 Forlorn Hope Reprise photographer. One of his tools is a drone (can you see it?) with which he took some very scenic pictures of the surroundings. They'll be up on the www.forlornhope.org website at some point. This spot is right in the general Camp of Death location. You can see how rugged it is.



The Missing Five Pages

This Heirloom was originally five pages longer than what you have before you. The missing articles are about our visits to the Camp of Death, one of the episodes of the Forlorn Hope.

The Forlorn Hope had taken a wrong turn somewhere before Emigrant Gap and instead of going into the Bear River drainage they went into the terribly rugged North Fork of the American River Drainage. There, above what is now Burnett Canyon and across from Sawtooth Ridge they were caught by a storm and spent 36 hours under blankets, arranged in a circle. It must have been miserable. It was cold. It was wet. They were starving. They'd just decided not to go back to Donner Lake and here four of their members would die and be at least partially consumed by the others. They lost their axe head when it flew off.

No one knows where this Camp of Death was located but the 2020 Forlorn Hope Reprise group, using what primary evidence there is and the geography (see the article on how the route was divined) made an educated guess. On October 31 we traveled to the site with a cadaver dog, trained in discovering human remains. If the dog alerted on a spot that would be an indication that there were human remains. A few weeks later we returned with the same dog and three more to validate any discoveries.

This of course could be historical breaking news if it panned out and of course the Heirloom staff would be quick to want to publish. It's not our story though, and the 2020 group wants to hold back any news along with other little stories for future use.

In the education business this is called the "anticipatory set" where you prepare people for something coming. Now you are prepared and you'll just have to keep up your subscriptions because the stories, Camp of Death I and II will be coming at some point.

Book Review

The Diary of Patrick Breen

one of the Donner Party

Edited by Frederick J. Teggart, 1910 16 pages

First published in the California Star May 22, 1847

If you've read books about the Donner Party you've probably only read second-hand accounts, except for a few diary entries authors following the event added for illustration. Some of James Reed's are particularly evocative. The Diary of Patrick Breen is an almost unique first-person account of the travails of the Donner Party.

In the introduction by Mr. Teggart, the editor, there is an interesting little fact and in considering it, we're primed to think not only about what the diary entries say, but what they don't say – the implicit part of the story. Teggart says Patrick Breen wrote his diary on "eight small sheets of letter paper roughly trimmed and folded to make a book of thirty-two pages, 3 3/4 x 6 inches." It was a bit of ingenuity by Mr. Breen and it took a bit of work. What made him do it? So much had been left in the desert, so much had been lost or used, it's remarkable that eight sheets of writing paper had been put aside and then, despite the suffering, became a diary. Having considered that, we can consider the actual writing. Breen was living in what he called a shanty. It had a hide roof, at least until the hide was eaten. It must have been cold and dark inside. The smell must have been obnoxious. It must have been so depressing and scary. There was nothing to think about every day all day except discomfort. The stress must have been great as food was depleted and people began dying. Still, Patrick Breen took out his diary and pencil each day to record the basic events. He did not write much because he didn't know how long he'd be writing the diary and the paper supply was finite.

Breen's diary starts almost three weeks after the party became trapped at what would come to be called Donner Lake. The first paragraph catches up saying that on October 31st the Donner Party tried to cross the summit but snow turned them back "to this shanty on the Lake..." Now they were resigned "to having to stay here until next spring & live on poor beef without bread or salt."

On the second day of his diary, November 21st, it was a "fine morning" and 22 of the company were going to try for the pass again. Two days later Breen reported they'd failed. He continued to report the weather daily and another attempt at escape but the weather prevented the group's leaving.

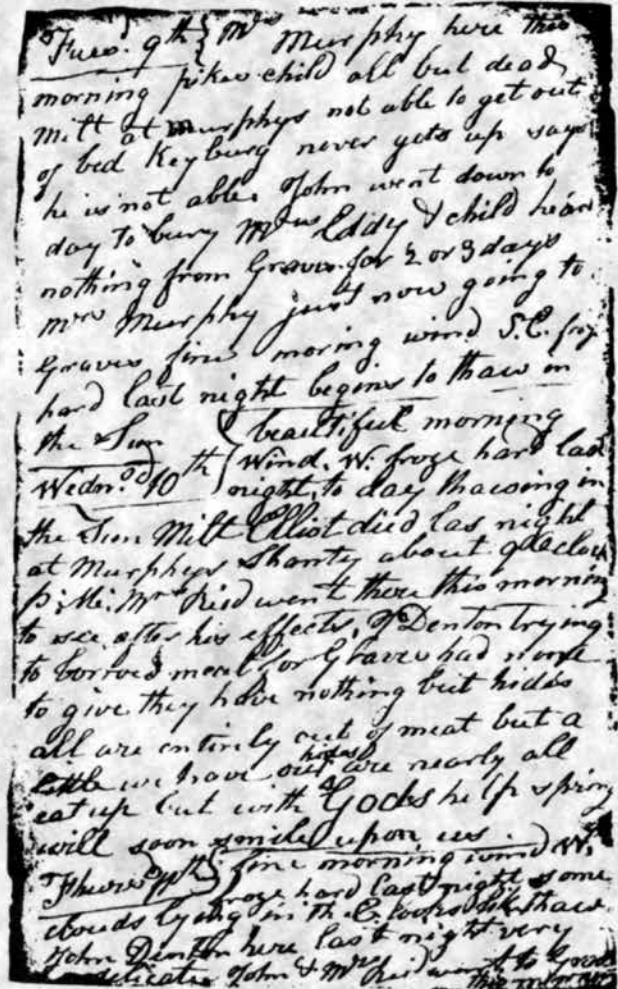
From there almost daily entries trace the growing danger and let us vicariously experience the entrapment. We can begin to imagine what it was like as we read into the diary entries. The snow is falling; the shanty is not insulated or even weather tight. What is it like to be living, pressed up continually to others in the cold and dark? The diet sounds monotonous. What's it like to wear the same clothes day after day after day? There seems to be no hope. What's it like to need wood but be trapped by snow from getting it? What did they use for bathrooms? How did they cook while there was still food? How did the entrapped spend

DIARY OF PATRICK BREEN ONE OF THE DONNER PARTY

EDITED BY

FREDERICK J. TEGGART

Curator of the Academy of Pacific Coast History



Page from the diary of Patrick Breen,
February, 1847—see pages 13-14.

waking hours?

Sunday 29th “still snowing... killed my last oxen to day... hard to get wood”

Monday 30th “snowing fast... 4 or 5 feet deep... no living thing without wings can get about”

December 1 “still Snowing... snow about 5 ½ or 6 deep difficult to get wood no going from the house completely housed up”

The last of the cattle were killed and some were lost in the snow, “no hopes of finding them alive.” Imagine the frustration. There is food out there – somewhere under the snow. Hides are horrible eating.

It continued to snow. When it sometimes stopped, “it is a relief to have one fine day...”

On December 5th they were making snowshoes. The next day there was "no account of mules" presumably more possible food lost.

December 8: “hard work to wood [sic] sufficient to keep us warm & cook our beef.”

On the 9th of December the Breens “took in Spitzer yesterday so weak that he cannot rise without help caused by starvation...”

Charles Stanton, who had left the party to get help from Sutter’s Fort and came back with food and two Indians, was trying to get food for himself and the Indians. Breen says he was “not likely to get much.” Imagine some people eating and others watching or knowing meals were being prepared. Imagine some starving while others ate. That said, it must have taken courage for Breen to take in Spitzer. Who had thrown him out?

It was a pleasant day when the snowshoe party left for California and help on the 16th of December. If only Breen had written more than just the facts. What was he thinking? This would be another failure or did he have hope? “snow 8 feet deep...”

Someone died on the 18th. Some who’d gone to the Donners at Alder Creek had not returned. Maybe they’d gotten lost.

It snowed. It snowed. It thawed a little. When Charlie died in the night some members of the party divided up his few belongings. People are dying, what is edible is almost non-existent but some people are thinking ahead by gathering valuables. The dead don’t need them anymore. On New Year’s Breen hoped for a better year to come “with Gods help...” “Looks like another snow storm Snow Storms are

dreadful to us”

“We pray to God of mercy to deliver us from our present calamity... Commenced snowing last night.. provisions getting scant dug up a hide” to eat.

Provisions scarce.

Mrs. Reed decided to try to escape with one child and two other people. “It was difficult for Mrs Reid to get away from the [other] children.” Imagine the scene. Mom is desperate and the only way to save her children is try to escape to California. It looks like those who’d left on snowshoes were lost. That’s the first decision, to risk. Then, there’s the decision to leave three children behind. What was going through Mrs. Reed’s mind? Can someone be trusted to care for the children? What will they do for food if people are starving and being turned out? What were her children thinking? You can see mother and children crying, children demanding to go too.

Mrs. Reed failed and returned on January 8th. “they have nothing but hides to live on... may God relieve us...” Apparently Mrs. Reed has moved in with Breen. “Virginias toes frozen”

It continued to snow. “wood scarce difficult to get any more”

“snow higher than the shanty must be 13 feet deep dont know how to get wood...”

“provisions scarce hides are the only article we depend on” How do you eat hides? You’ve got to scorch and scrape off the hair. Then you’ve got to boil the hides into a kind of gruel. Imagine the taste. “may God send us help”

Sickness spreads. There are only hides to eat. It snows. “God send amen”

The Graves took away Mrs. Reed’s few possessions and the hides she and her children were living on (James Reed had been banished from the wagon train weeks earlier in Nevada and all the family's possessions had been left in the desert).

Breen reports the deaths one after another.

"Mrs. Reid [sic] has one hide left but it is on Graves’ shanty."

“with Gods help spring will soon smile upon us”

On February 12th it was a warm “thawey morning” and Breen hoped with “the assistance of Almighty God” that they would be able to live to see the bare surface of the earth once more”

On February 19th “7 men arrived from Colifornia [sic] yes-

terday evening with som provisions” The rescue party took out 24 people. Breen buried “Pikes child in the snow it died 2 days ago,”

“Mrs Murphy says the wolves are about to dig up the dead bodies... we hear them howl.”

Mrs Murphy said they’d commence to eat Milt. “it is distressing. The Donnos [sic] told the California folks that they commence to eat the dead 4 days ago”

On March 1st it was “So fine & pleasant... there has 10 men arrived this morning from Bear Valley with provisions we are to start in two or three days...”

There the diary stops even though Breen had three more “Pages” so we don’t know his thoughts about rescue or, more importantly, his thoughts about traveling over Donner Summit.

The Diary of Patrick Breen was reprinted by Vistabooks They have many reprints of old documents and other pieces of literature. For example, we also ordered “CPRR Central Pacific Railroad" reprinted from Marvels of the New West (VIST0090 or VIST0097), 1882 and "Notecards: the Donner-Tahoe Sierra" (VIST0298) by Thomas Moran, 19th century landscape painter. Check out their other offerings.

0637 Blue Ridge Rd. Silverthorne CO 80498
<http://www.vistabooks.com/vistpubslata.htm>

email@vistabooks.com



Book Review

“Highway 40 with its string of tows, lifts, and lodges... make one doubt that anyone could travel through here in winter and not become a skier.” “By 1949, Highway 40, also known as the Donner Trail, had grown to be the number-one ski locale in the state.”

Lost Ski Areas of Tahoe and Donner

Lost Ski Areas of Tahoe and Donner

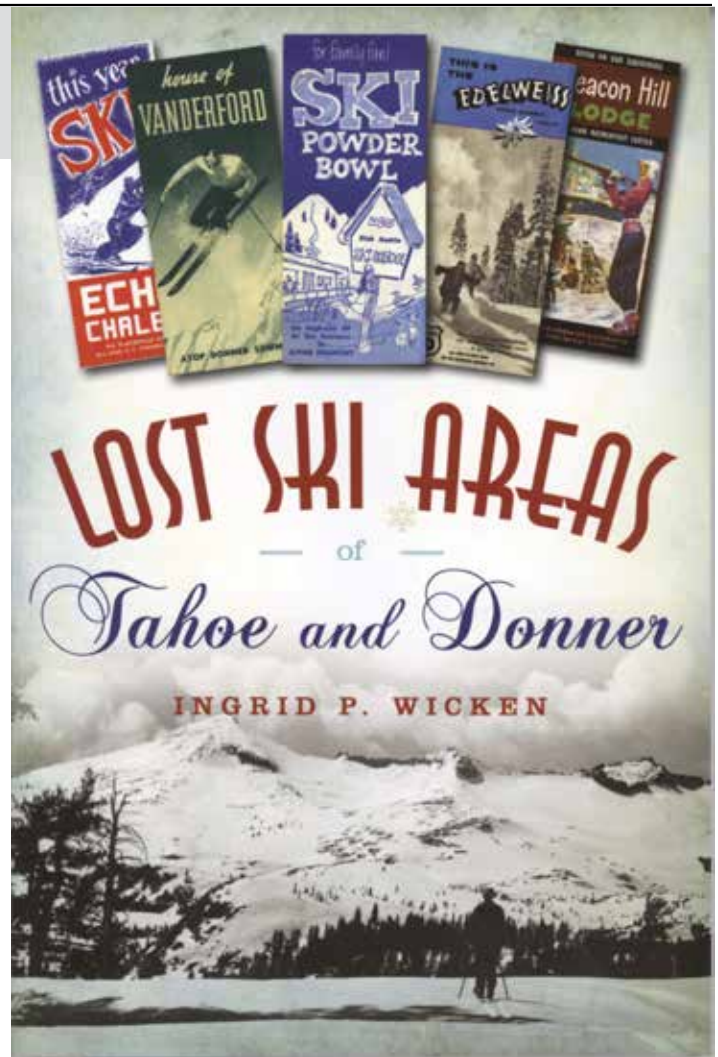
Ingrid P. Wicken 2020 188 pages

Ingrid Wicken founded the California Ski Library (skilibrary.com), a wonderful collection of ski information. She has also written four books until this fifth came along. This fifth is a gem (which is not to say the others aren't but this is not a review about them).

“Once snow removal brought about winter access, ski tows sprang up anywhere there was sufficient snow and open slopes.” In this book Ingrid Wicken brings these long lost “mom and pop” ski areas back to life, and fortunately for the Heirloom reader, many of those ski areas were on Donner Summit. Those early ski areas “paved the way for today’s large resorts that draw millions of snow sports enthusiasts every winter. And these lost ski areas marked the beginning of the Tahoe and Donner area becoming the skiing mecca that it is today.”

The book starts with a little recreational ski history focusing on adventurous individuals, then on to the first ski clubs and larger organizations and “the awakening of California to the prime ski fields right in their own backyard...” The popularization of winter sports brought about the building of ski lodges, improved ski instructions and ski lifts. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on No. Lake Tahoe and Highway 50 but then, of course, the real meat is in Chapter 6, Highway 40 and Donner Summit, “California’s first winter sports areas.” That Donner Summit and Highway 40 were “California’s first winter sports areas” was due to accessibility via the railroad.

By 1941 the Auburn Journal (February 3) said, “it was estimated that there were more ski lifts along Highway 40 than in any other winter sports area in the United States.” One Tahoe National Forest publication showed how rich the Donner Summit Highway 40 area was in ski areas about 1940: “...At the Sugar Bowl there are two rope tows and the giant chairlift. At Soda Springs two rope tows and a J-bar are operated. At Donner Summit, opposite Vanderford’s, two rope tows are located. To the south of the summit maintenance station a long rope tow will be found by following the Sierra Crest ski trail to the edge of Lake Mary. At the S.P. Station at Norden a rope tow has been recently installed.... The Sierra Club maintains



a double tow...” The quote goes on to enumerate small ski areas at Rainbow, The Auburn Ski Club, Yuba Gap, Emigrant Gap, and Pioneer Gap.

Ms Wicken has done an amazing amount of research for this book getting so much information about so many lost ski areas. Many pictures and reproductions illustrate the text, such as the stylized map here of Donner Summit ski areas. There are also many quotes that enliven the text,

“The Sierra is beautiful in July but in winter it’s in “the fullness of its glory... winter... is not bitter, but is warm and friendly... the purple shadows of the trees and the pure rose of the alpenglow are colors as rich as those of columbine and heather... the smooth folds of sparkling virgin snow, the glitter of icicles, and the living green of firs showing beneath their heavy white mantels – all constitute an enchanted world which can be entered by the magic of the ski.”

Joel Hildebrand,
among other things,
one of the early Sierra Club members.

John Muir visited the west shore of Lake Tahoe (as well as

Donner Summit) and described ski fun, "My friend, however, heedless of advice, launched himself in wild abandon, bouncing and diving, his limbs and shoes in chaotic entanglement, now in the snow, now in the air, whirling over and over in giddy rolls and somersaults that would shame the most extravagant performances of the circus acrobat. How original and inimitable he was!"

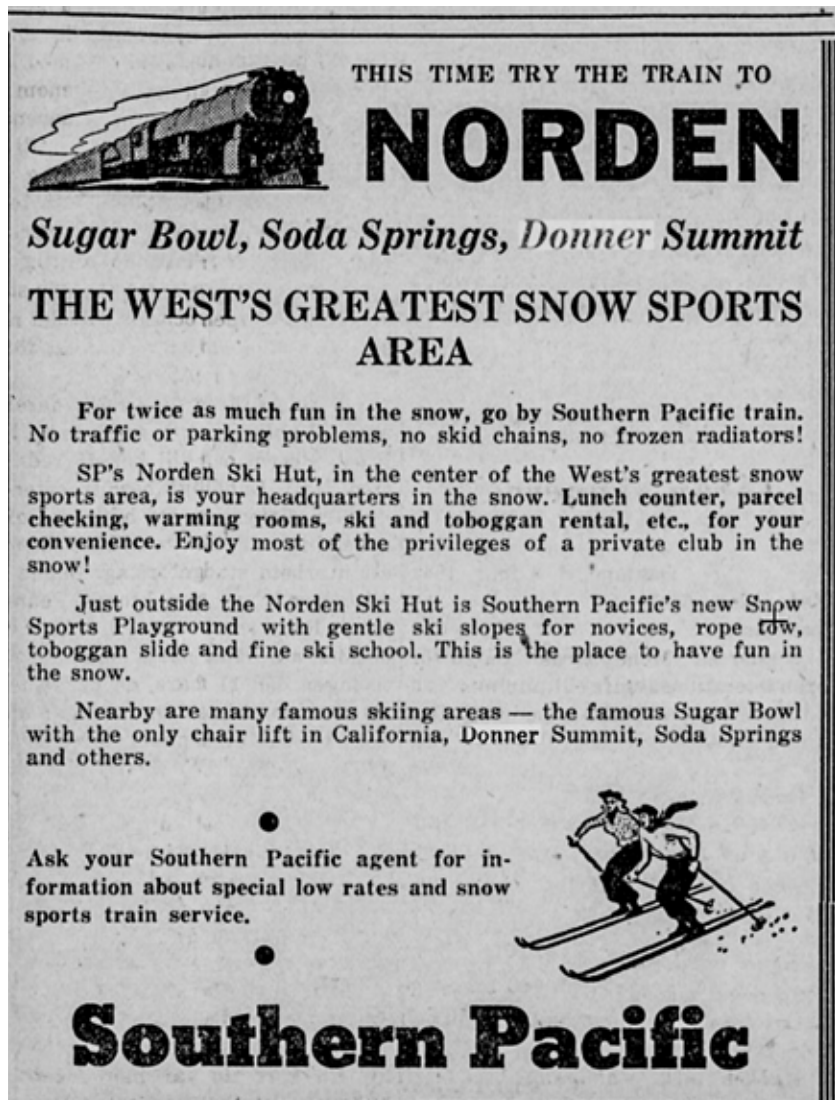
Lost Ski Areas can be ordered from Amazon, direct from History Press (www.historypress.net), and other online retailers. Word After Word books in Truckee is carrying it. If people would like a signed copy, they can order direct from me. Shipping would be \$4.00, payment via PayPal (ingrid@skilibrary.com).

Vestkusten

February 20, 1941

This graphic is not part of Lost Ski Areas but there was space and not enough room for the next page's graphic.

The graphic on the next page is from Lost Ski Areas"



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Southern Pacific

Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

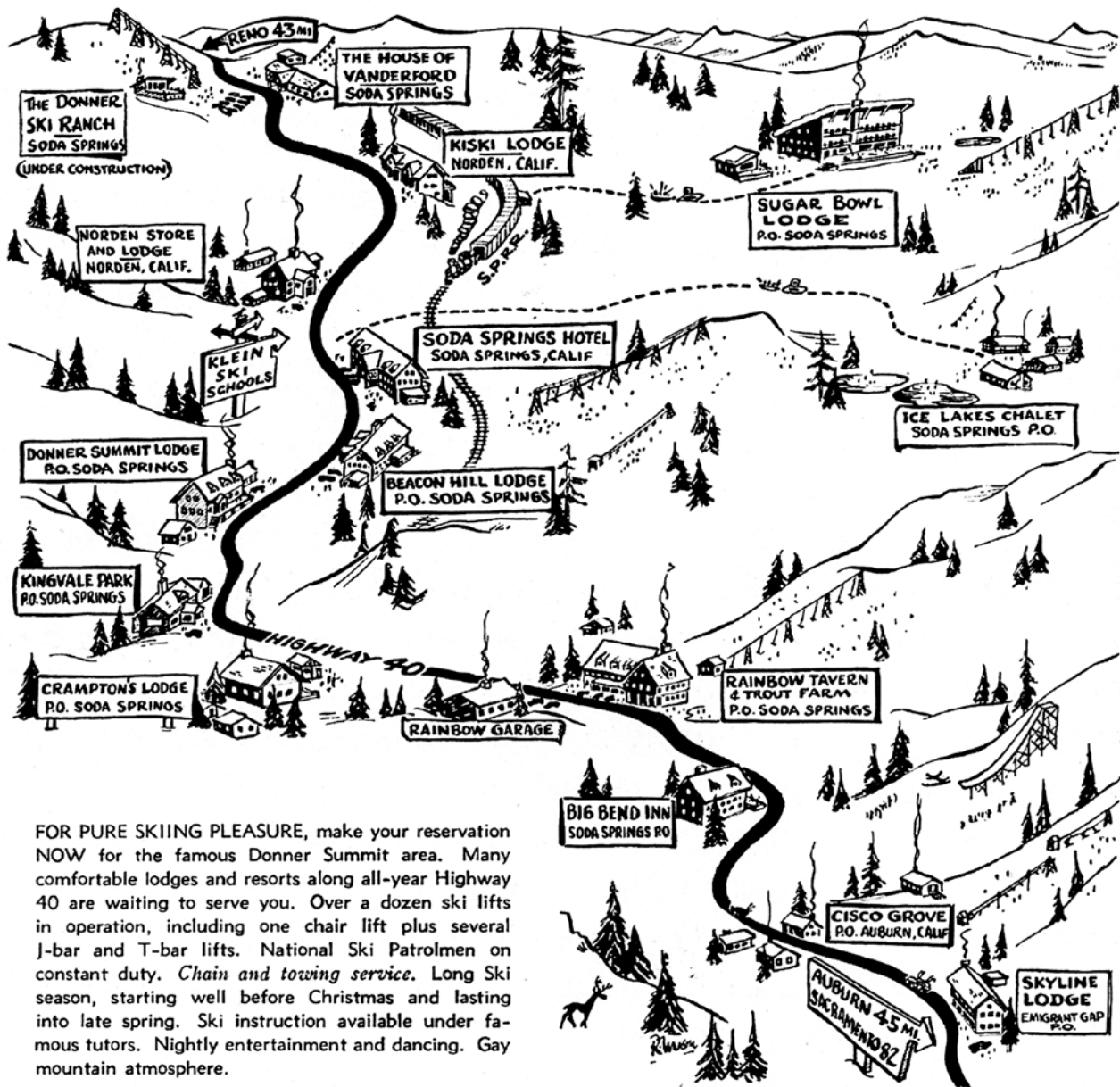
Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Saylor has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

You might even want to do a review for us.

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