

Trail Talk

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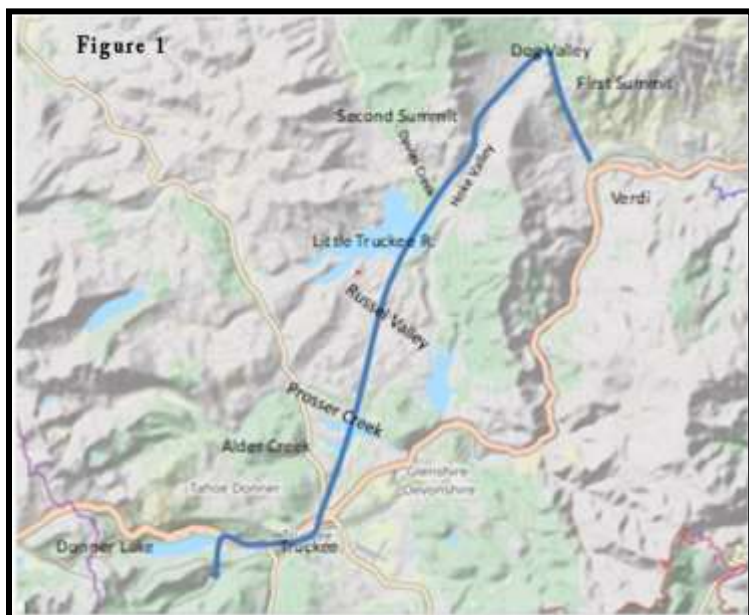
Spring 2024

Reconsideration of the Truckee Trail Route: Hoke Valley to the Donner Creek Crossing

By David Fullerton¹

Leaving the lake [Donner Lake] and the river which flows from it, to the right, we bore off to the North East, for a wide, deep gap, though which we supposed that we could both pass, and leave the mountains. At ten miles, we crossed the North branch of Truckies River [Prosser Creek], a stream of considerable size. We traveled eight miles further, to the head of a stream, running to the North West, which we called Snow River [Little Truckee River ... [W]e again proceeded on our journey, leaving the gap for which we had been steering, and bearing to the East, through a break in the mountain [Second Summit] which follows the course of Truckies River, and which is a spur of the main California chain. Having crossed this mountain, we again came, at five miles, to Truckies River...

William Winter, May 1845 traveling east from California



The Route of the Truckee Trail from Verdi, Nevada to Donner Lake, California is well known in general terms. The Stephens party had come straight up the Truckee River in 1844. By May of 1845, a better route had been found. The road turned away from the Truckee River at Verdi to the north and traveled up the South Branch of Dog Creek and over a ridge to Dog Valley. From there the trail turned west and after passing over the “second summit” crossed the Little Truckee River, Russel Valley and Prosser Creek before returning to the Truckee River in the vicinity of the modern City of Truckee. The trail headed up the Truckee River, then up Donner Creek to near Donner Lake. Figure 1 shows a generalized route with no attempt to map the actual trail.

William Winter, a diarist with the first party to use this new route, described the general route beautifully.² While the approximate route is well known, the exact route has been debated for many decades and the “official” route has shifted several times.

The cause of this instability is economic. Intensive land use in the Tahoe area began very early and has continued to the present. The trails were covered over by newer roads, homes, reservoirs and the like. The land was disturbed

¹The author would like to express his gratitude to Dee Owens for preparing the maps presented in this article.

²The discovery of this route is generally attributed to Caleb Greenwood, another member of this 1845 party. The only problematic part of the description is the statement that Snow River or the Little Truckee River runs to the Northwest where they cross it. This cannot be right. He probably meant to write Northeast.

by logging and other activities. But the problem is not simply the destruction of the old traces, but the creation of new traces that cannot easily be distinguished from the emigrant road. Given the absence of an obvious true trail and/or the existence of too many possible false trails, it is inevitable that there will be disagreements about the route.³

Nevertheless, the time seems right for a reappraisal of the Truckee Trail from Hoke Valley to Truckee.⁴ First, through the efforts of people like Don Buck and Richard Rieke, we now have access to many more diaries than were previously available to researchers. Second is the effort led by Bob Black at Trails West Inc. to create a Truckee Trail Guide.⁵ Those of us who walk the emigrant trails are familiar with these marvelous guidebooks. Third is a permit granted to OCTA by the Tahoe National Forest to use metal detection within Tahoe National Forest in our quest for the exact Truckee Trail route. The permit is valid through 2026 so we have three years to test hypotheses about trail locations.

Work on the development of possible routes for the Truckee Trail through the Tahoe region began with the work of Earl Weddell in 1921. Various individuals and groups, including Peter Rhoads, the Nevada Emigrant Trail Marking Committee, Bert Wiley, Harold Curran and Charles Graydon continued to propose routes through the 1990s.⁶ However, the current “official” route (accepted by Trails West Inc. and the National Park Service) was developed from 1996 through 1999 by Don Wiggins.⁷ For more information on the history of Truckee Trail routing refer to a 2018 article written by the late Don Buck.⁸ What I will call the “Wiggins Route” for the section from Hoke Valley to Truckee is shown as the brown dashed line in Figure 2.

My review of the evidence suggests that the Wiggins Route from Hoke Valley to Truckee is incorrect. I believe that the trail generally ran about one to two miles to the west of the Wiggins Route and that the original Truckee Trail route was later adopted in the 1860s as the route of the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road (“Dutch Flat Road”). This is not a new idea. For example, the Nevada Emigrant Trail Marking Committee, Curran and Graydon have segments similar to my proposed route though none of their routes are identical to mine. However, of all the previous analysts, only Wiggins has presented the evidence and logic upon which his route is based. Thus, while I come to different conclusions than Wiggins, I applaud the candor of his analysis. Only with complete transparency can we have an informed discussion about routes. My proposed route – I will call it the “Fullerton Route” is shown in Figure 2 as a red dashed line.

The foundation of trail analysis is the diaries. We have approximately 100 diaries that have enough detail to be of some value in trail analysis of the Truckee Trail. However, only a small number of diaries give enough detail to truly help distinguish one route from another. Trail routing in the absence of strong physical evidence must be based on the most likely interpretation of the diaries, analyzed as a whole. Individual diaries may have problems – incorrect mileages, exaggerated descriptions, incorrect compass readings, etc. In some cases, diaries were not written daily but might have been written a few days after the fact so the descriptions can be muddled.⁹ Thus, we are looking for trail routes that best fit the diaries as a group (much as we put a line through a fuzzy cloud of points when performing a statistical correlation).

Additional evidence comes from maps or other observations made during or within a few years of the migration. The best example of this is the General Land Office (GLO) surveys. These surveys were conducted in the Tahoe region in the mid-1860s and the sur-



³This is not to say that no traces remain of the Truckee Trail in the Tahoe area. There are traces from Verdi to Hoke Valley. The ascent from Coldstream Canyon to Roller Pass and the descent from Roller Pass to Summit Valley have marvelous traces. Where the road crosses Big Bend there is an entire granite field with iron marks. There are other examples as well.

⁴I hope to analyze additional trail segments in later issues.

⁵Bob Black has been assisted in this effort by several OCTA members, including Jon Nowlin, Jeanne Young and myself.

⁶See Nevada Emigrant Trail Marking Committee, Inc., *The Overland Emigrant Trail to California: A Guide to Trail Markers Placed in Western Nevada and the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California* (Reno: Nevada Historical Society, 1975.)

⁷Wiggins' analyses were compiled by Don Buck as *Notes, reports, and Investigations on the Truckee Trail in California from the Last Crossing of the Truckee River to Roller Pass and Stephens Pass* (1996 to 1999). His analysis can be read in [Appendix 1](#)

⁸Don Buck, *Development of Emigrant Trail Research in the Post-Weddell Era in the Truckee-Donner Region*. The Overland Journal V36 N2 (Summer 2018) pp. 50-72

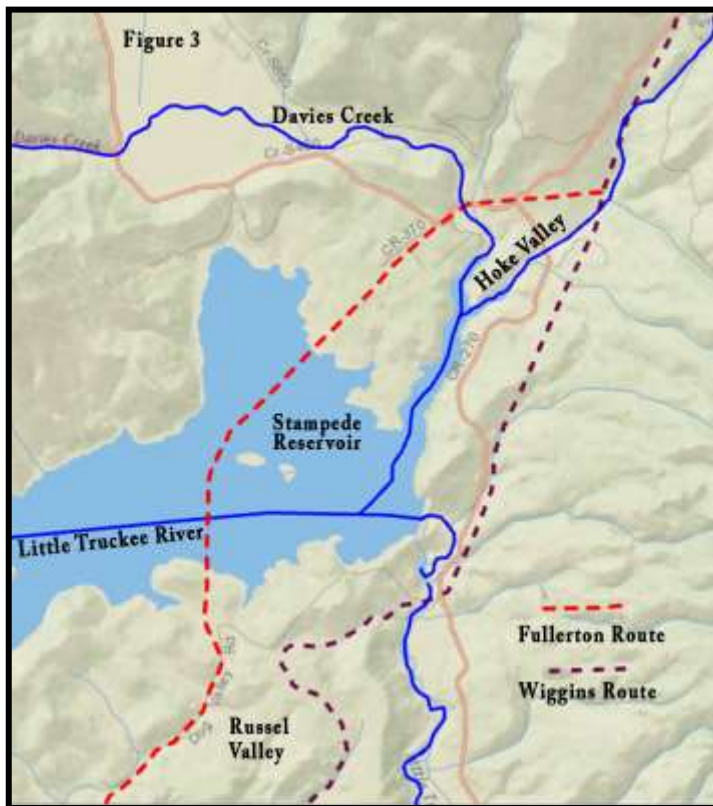
veyors did often mention where the survey lines were crossed by trails, including emigrant trails. Emigrant trails would presumably have been distinguishable by the volume and type of debris left behind by the emigrants. The notes of these surveys are themselves not infallible, but they carry a fair amount of weight.¹⁰

Wiggins based his route on a number of observations in the diaries about the landscape through which the trail passed. But, in truth, the route that Wiggins proposed and the route that I propose are founded on analysis of just three sections of trail where there is detailed information about the landscape with respect to the trail: (1) from Hoke Valley to the crossing of the Little Truckee River; (2) from the descent to Prosser Creek to the ascent out of the Prosser Creek watershed; and (3) the location where the trail rejoined the Truckee River. If we can identify these three sections, then we can presumably deduce the intervening trail sections as well.

For each of these three sections I will give a brief summary of Wiggins' evidence and logic, and then I will indicate some weaknesses in his argument, followed by my evidence for my route for that section. Finally, I will propose an overall route from Hoke Valley to Donner Creek Crossing.

Hoke Valley to the Crossing of the Little Truckee River

Wiggins pointed to numerous diaries that noted the existence of hilly/rolling terrain between Hoke Valley and the Little Truckee River. Based almost exclusively on these general observations, Wiggins routed the trail over a single rather high rise to the south of Hoke and Davies Creeks and back down to the Little Truckee River about 400 yards south of Stampede Dam. I do not find his route convincing. My route heads west out of Hoke Valley, crosses Davies Creek far enough upstream to avoid difficult bluffs, then turns southwest to the Little Truckee River. The crossing of the Little Truckee on my route is now beneath the waters of Stampede Reservoir. The two possible routes are shown in Figure 3.



My conclusion is based on the following points. First, the diaries talk more about a series of small hills rather than one or (if we include Second Summit) two large hills. For example, Edward Harrow wrote on August 20, 1849. *...Our course so far has been south-southwest between the ridges of the mountains. We sometimes ascend, then descend into small valleys which we cross and ascend again on the opposite side. At 11 1/2 we came to and crossed a small but swift tributary of Truckies river [Little Truckee River]... See Appendix 2 for a more complete list of diary accounts of the rolling nature of the terrain between Hoke and Davies creeks fits these diary descriptions much better as is obvious to anyone walking or driving the ground today.*¹¹

Second, Wiggins' proposed crossing of the Little Truckee is in a narrow, rocky, and relatively barren valley with no real bottomland and little grass as shown in Figure 4.

By contrast, many diaries warmly praise the grass to be found at the Little Truckee Crossing. For example, William Baker wrote on August 24, 1852: *Traveled 10 miles over a very good road today; camped at 1 o'clock on a branch of the Truckey River. Grass good and plenty and aplenty of wood.* Many other diaries make the same point. See Appendix 3 for a long list of diarists praising the good grass at the Little Truckee River. As

early as the 1870s, Stampede Valley became a major center of ranching and dairying.¹¹ But the truly decisive information comes from Ansel McCall on September 5, 1849.

⁹Recollections and oral histories from decades after the fact are of little value for trail analysis because detailed memories simply do not survive intact for that long.

¹⁰Many analyses of trail routes also give heavy weight to the work in the 1920s and later by early trail enthusiasts such as Earl Weddell and Peter Rhoads. However, these individuals were largely relying upon physical evidence and local traditions and not the diaries, since few diaries were available at that time. Due to the passage of 70 years or more between the migration and their work, the land would have been littered with attractive-looking trails and it would have been easy to construct a plausible route that turned out to have no diary support. I give these early analysts light weight compared to the written evidence of the emigrants who actually traveled these roads. I can cite a number of examples where routes proposed by these early analysts were demonstrably incorrect.

¹¹Also, in 1865 the GLO surveyor described the land north of Davies Creek as "rolling" and "rolling hills."



Figure 4

September 5, 1849. – The trail wound up a long and difficult hill this morning [this is the climb after the Verdi ford] and then led down a tremendous steep into a small valley where there was some grass and a fine cold spring [Dog Valley]. We halted at noon for lunch and rest. In the afternoon moved on over a pine covered hill [Second Summit] and struck into the sweetest valley mortal eye ever rested upon. It was about four miles long and a half mile in width, as level as a floor, and completely embosomed by green hills sweeping up from their base a thousand feet, densely covered with pine, Cyprus and cedars [Stampede Valley]. Through its centre, gracefully coursed a silver stream. It had evidently once been the bed of a mountain lake which had at some time burst its barriers permitting its waters to escape into

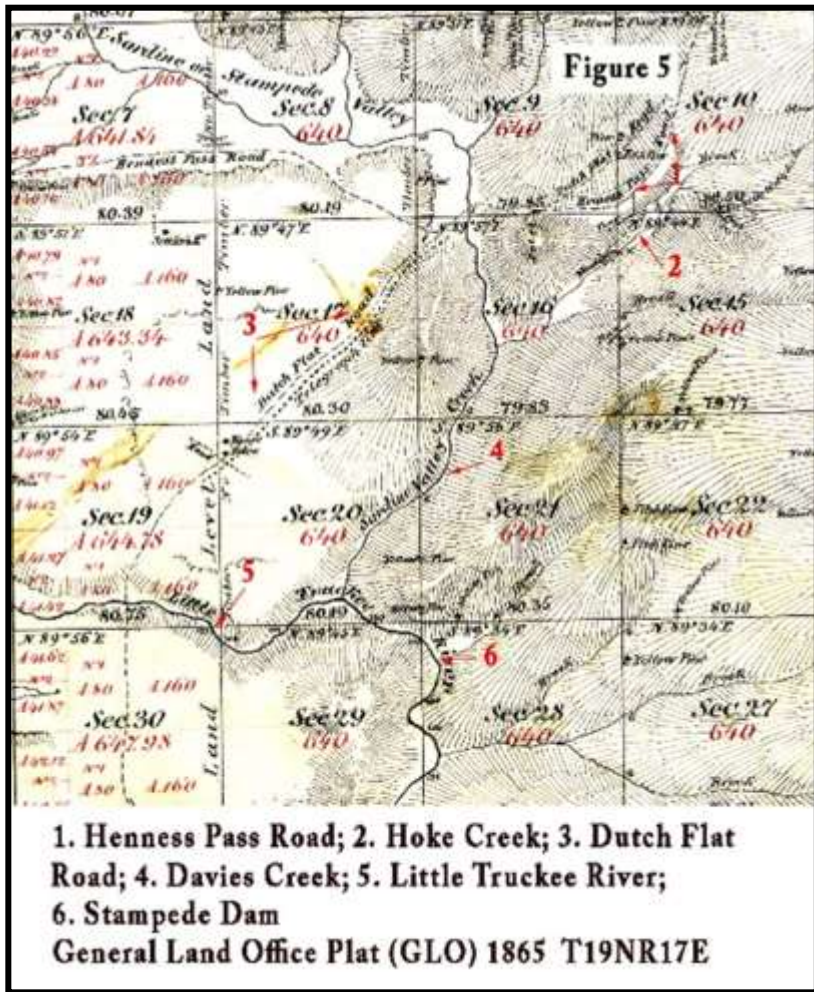
the great basin below. This is made apparent from the fact that the lower part of the valley shows a heavy deposit of the finest alluvion, perfectly smooth and level, covered with luxurious grass three feet high, that would yield, at least, three tons of hay to the acre. In a mile or so you come to a coarser material of sand and gravel growing coarser as you proceed until at the upper end large stone and boulders appear as at the head of a rift. We encamped here, having made fifteen miles. [Then on September 6th McCall travels 20 miles and appears to camp near the Donner Lake Camp.]

Wiggins mistakenly identifies the valley described in this entry as Russel Valley and thus misses the significance of this passage. The valley described is very unlikely to be Russel Valley. Russel Valley does not have a “silver stream” in the middle but a tiny trickle at best that is rarely mentioned in the diaries. It would probably have been dry late in the season in a dry year like 1849. Russel Valley is not surrounded by high mountains. It has no “barriers” that could burst and drain an old lake but is simply a large flat. By contrast, Stampede Valley fits the description by McCall in every way. It has a stream running through the middle of it. The hills surrounding the valley are high. There would have been significant bottomland. Finally, the narrows where Stampede Dam sits today would have been the “barrier” that McCall thought had burst open at some time in the past. McCall travels 20 miles from this valley to near the Donner Lake Camp the next day. But the mileage from Russel Valley to Donner Lake Camp is only 11-12 miles, a significant difference. The mileage from the Little Truckee River to the Donner Lake Camp is much closer to 20 miles.

In my view, the diary entry by Ansel McCall rules out the Wiggins location for the crossing of the Little Truckee River and thus rules out his routing of the trail from Hoke Valley to the Little Truckee River.

There are no obvious swales from Hoke Valley to Stampede Reservoir visible today. But the route is probably hiding in plain sight, underneath modern dirt roads. The GLO Plat and Field Notes from the 1865 survey show a trail route from Hoke Valley to the Little Truckee River that matches the diary descriptions quite well. The notes identify the section from Hoke Valley to Davies Creek as the Hennes Pass Road while the section from Davies Creek to the Little Truckee is identified as the Dutch Flat Road.¹² The GLO Plat can be seen as Figure 5.

¹²The Hennes Pass Road crossed the Sierra well to the north of the Truckee Trail and was an excellent route to the Sacramento Valley. However, it was not used by emigrants until 1852 when few emigrants were traveling via the Truckee River. Its greatest usage occurred in and after 1859 when it became a freight route to Virginia City from California. The Dutch Flat Road toll road was opened in 1864 from Alta to Verdi as an improvement on the Truckee Trail and to assist in the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. It became a public road by 1871. From Alta to Emigrant Gap the Dutch Flat Road generally followed the route of modern Highway 80. From Emigrant Gap it took a route generally similar, but by no means identical to, the Truckee Trail to Verdi, Nevada. The Dutch Flat Road later was adopted as the first route of the Lincoln Highway in 1914 so it has had much use. For more information on the Dutch Flat Road see Jack E. Duncan, *To Donner Pass from the Pacific* (2001).



The roads identified in 1865 as the Henness Pass Road from Hoke Valley to Davies Creek and the Dutch Flat Road from Davies Creek to Stampede Valley still exist and are used today. It is likely that the original Truckee Trail lies underneath these dirt roads. The fact that these roads are not identified as original emigrant trails in the GLO survey matters little. Emigrant roads were frequently renamed based on usage. The choice of this route for the Dutch Flat Road, after 15 years of experience, suggests that this was, in fact, a very good route and this increases the likelihood that emigrants of 1845 and later would have used this route.

Figure 6 Superimposes the 1865 GLO Survey plat onto a modern aerial photograph to allow the reader to see a route (in green) consisting of the Henness and Dutch Flat roads on the modern landscape. The Wiggins Route is also included in the figure in brown dashes.

There are a few additional hints in the diaries that also support this route:

James Tate, September 7, 1849. *Turned to the left through a timbered Valley[.] in 6 miles we found 2 small Valleys of grass and water[.] 4 miles further a fine creek [Little Truckee] and grass[.]*

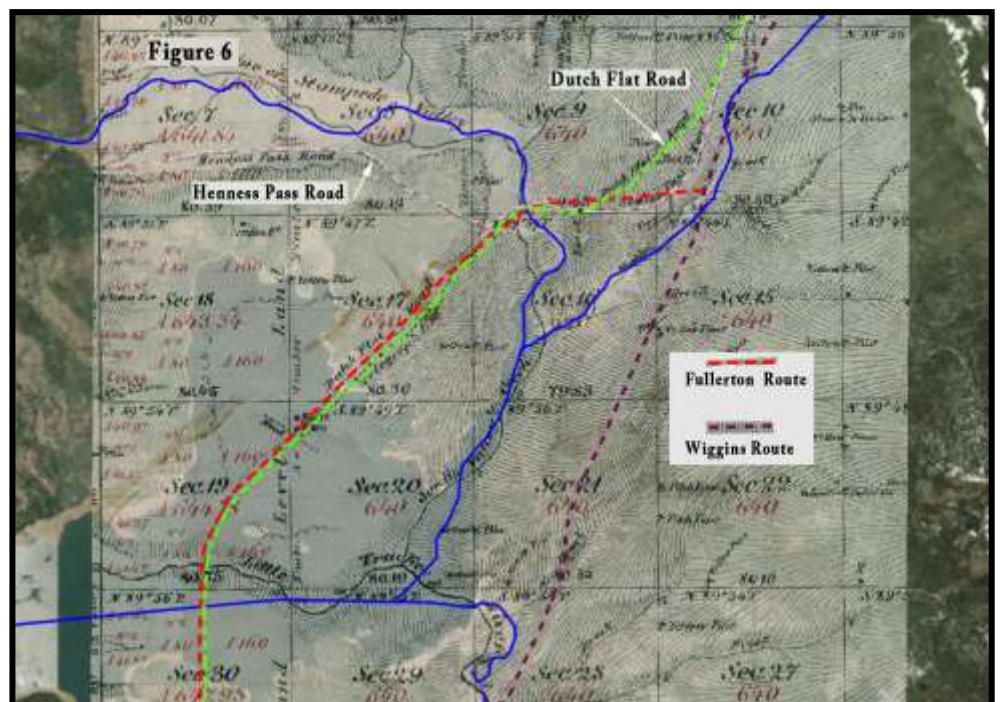
The two small valleys would be Hoke Valley and the Davies Creek valley.

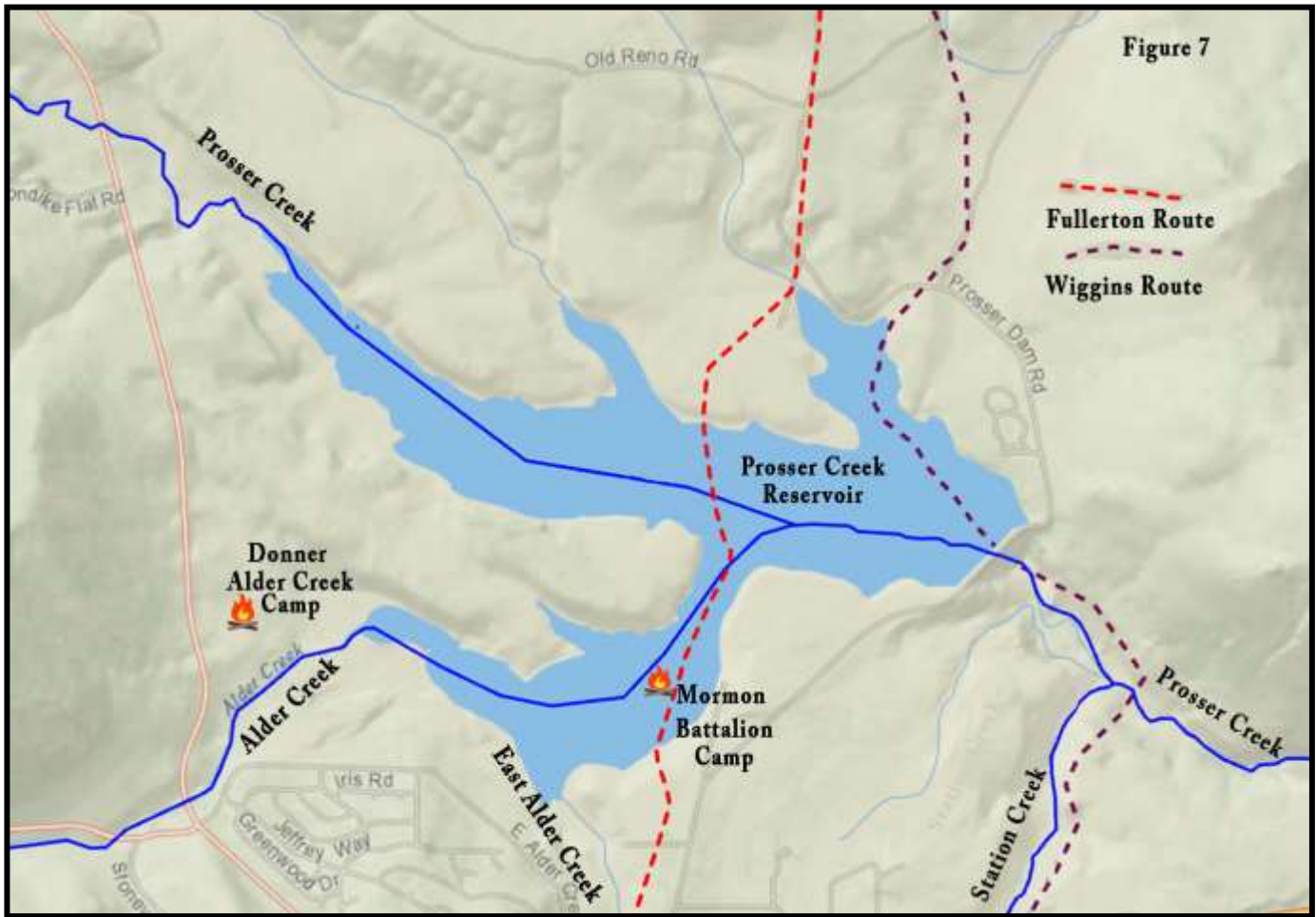
Jacob Hays, August 31, 1854. ... *we now strike across the Sierra Nevada Mountains after*

traveling five miles up gradual ascent road pretty rocky in places you have a very steep rough mountain to descend at the foot of which is a branch of good water and small valley, grazing not so good [Dog Valley], thence over a very good road, heavy timber to a narrow valley [Hoke Valley], good feed here we noon a spell. 3/4 mile the road forks and we leave the Truckee road and take the right called the Downville Route [Henness Pass Trail].

The Hays diary entry suggests that the original junction between the Truckee Trail and the Henness Pass Road did not take place at Hoke Valley, but 3/4 mile from Hoke Valley. This would take the junction to just beyond Davies Creek. This is just where the GLO plat has the Dutch Flat Road splitting away from the Henness Pass Road.

The diary support for this general route is very strong. The diary support for the specific route beneath the modern Henness Pass Road and the Dutch Flat Road is moderate. It is possible that the actual trail is close to but not exactly under the modern Henness Pass Road and Dutch Flat Road. OCTA will be surveying this area with metal detectors over the next few years and perhaps new evidence will emerge.





Prosser Creek Crossing and Ascent

Wiggins assumed that the Truckee Road continued over some low hills after crossing the Little Truckee River. His route then crossed Russel Valley and continued south, eventually reaching the modern Boca Road. The trail continued along Boca Road across Prosser Dam Road and descended to Prosser Creek. The trail then turned left and followed Prosser Creek downstream for about a mile before fording Prosser Creek and turning up Station Creek, crossing modern Highway 80 just west of the California Agricultural Inspection Station. See Figure 7

Wiggins based this route on a number of entries in the diaries and some physical evidence:

- There are fine traces of an old trail running near Boca Road.
- Diaries mention ascending a hill after crossing Prosser Creek.
- One diary mentions a spring to the left of the trail. There is such a spring to the left of Station Creek.
- There are traces of an old wagon road along Station Creek.

However, the points noted by Wiggins are not conclusive. It would be impossible to travel from anywhere on Prosser Creek to the Truckee River near the City of Truckee without climbing up a hill. Many springs not visible today might have been destroyed by Prosser Reservoir. In any case, there are other springs visible today near other possible routes. The existence of old wagon roads is intriguing but not decisive as discussed above. Finally, not a single diary mentions turning left and following Prosser Creek for a mile before climbing out of the watershed. This is a very serious objection.

Thus, we are not compelled to support the Wiggins Route. On the contrary, the bulk of the available evidence suggests that the Truckee Trail was close to and perhaps sometimes under the Dutch Flat Road in this section. My suggested route reaches Prosser Reservoir about a half mile northwest of the Wiggins route, descends to Prosser Creek, fords immediately, crosses a low divide into the Alder Creek basin, then ascends Alder Creek for about half a mile. Finally, the route continues southwest along East Alder Creek toward the modern City of Truckee. See Figure 7.

The evidence for my suggested route is strong:

The GLO survey notes and plat from 1865 identify the Truckee Trail in two locations running near and parallel to the Dutch Flat Road. The Truckee Trail is identified as “Old Trail” on the plat. In the notes taken by the surveyor each segment is called “Old Immigrant road” as shown in Figure 8.



The first location is today about half a mile northeast of Prosser Reservoir just north of the Dutch Flat Road alignment. The second location is about half a mile southwest of Prosser Reservoir near East Alder Creek. The GLO surveys were taken around 1865 just after the opening of the Dutch Flat Road so the Truckee Trail would have been in use until just a year or two prior to the survey. Presumably, the trail would have been well known to locals and would have been littered with typical emigrant trail debris. I consider the GLO survey evidence to be very strong. After all, the surveyor is identifying the Dutch Flat and another road nearby. What road could that second trace be if not the Truckee Road, as affirmed by the surveyor?¹³

Figure 9 shows the GLO Plat from Figure 8 superimposed on a modern aerial photograph so the reader can understand the topographic relationships.

Henry Mann mentions the Donner Camp on Alder Creek on August 29, 1849. ... *our encampment was in Donner Valley. The place where he and his family perished and as we looked upon our scanty supply of provisions with no prospect of recruiting it, we could not help feeling that they were in a horrible situation. Then miles walk in the cool air this morning brought us to Cannibal Cabins, where another part of Donner party tried to winter and nearly all perished.*

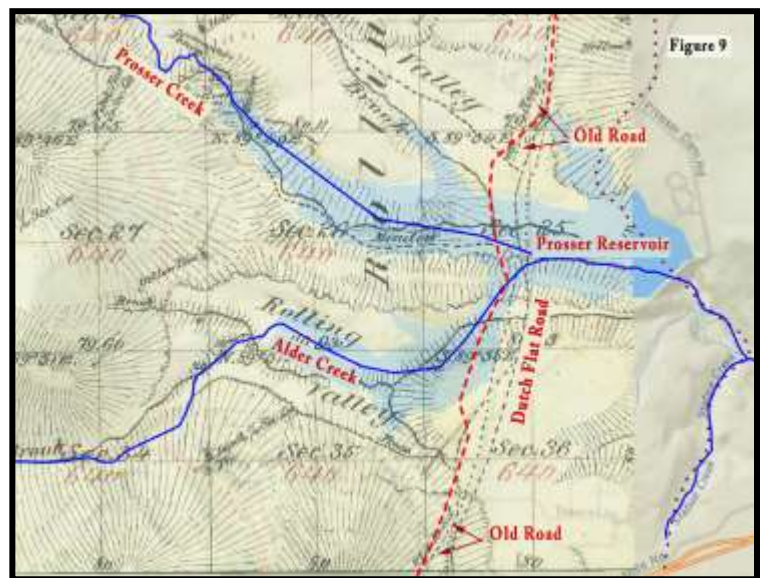
Mann’s entry makes it clear that on the morning of August 29th he was camped in “Donner Valley,” i.e., the Alder Creek watershed. It was only after a walk of another ten miles (an overestimate) that he arrived at the Donner Lake Camp.

This description is perfectly consistent with my routing along Alder Creek near the Dutch Flat Road. By contrast, the Markle entry is not very consistent with the Wiggins route. Someone, perhaps Markle

John Markle mentions the Donner Camp on Alder Creek on September 20, 1849.

2 miles brought us to the valley where Donner encamped [Alder Creek watershed]. 1 miles more brought us opposite to where his cabins were, which were situated about 1 ½ or 2 miles from the road on the right hand side. There were a number of fragments left But more human bones than any thing else.

himself, from Markle’s train visited the Donner Camp and reported back what they had found. For this reason, the mileage to the Donner Camp is probably reliable and it matches the distance from my proposed route well.¹⁴ The Wiggins route never enters “the valley where Donner encamped.” Even if Markle had mistakenly identified Prosser Creek as the valley where Donner encamped, an additional mile of travel on the Wiggins route would have taken him farther away from the Donner Camp, not closer. Finally, the point of closest approach on the Wiggins route is at least 2.5 miles and on the other side of a ridge. The mileage discrepancy could be a mistake, but the mileage does support my routing better.



¹³The GLO surveys are not infallible. The same surveyor incorrectly identifies a road ascending Prosser Creek as emigrant trail.

¹⁴Much ink has been spilled over the question of whether Markle could see the Donner Camp from the trail. This question is not relevant to the question of trail routing. All we need to know is that someone from Markle’s party visited the Donner Camp.

However, even more powerful than the Mann and Markle diaries is a set of diaries written by Mormon Battalion members in 1847 as they traveled back east from California. Two are by members of the General Kearney's party as it travelled back to Fort Leavenworth in June. Another five diaries by Mormon Battalion members in September of 1847 provide additional information that helps us determine the location of the Truckee Trail near Prosser Creek.¹⁵ The diaries make clear that the party camped about one mile downstream of the Donner Camp on Alder Creek on the Truckee Trail.

For example, Levi Hancock writes on September 7, 1847,

I stoped to the place whare the men eat each other[.] this day the boys said they saw one man lying on the plane up about one mile above us in a hollow[.] the most horable sight my informt ses he ever saw[.] some of the flesh was still dryed up like a mumma clothes on[.] has bin draged about by wild anemels[.] many bones seen skulls backbones [and] thy bones of human beings[.]

Collectively, the Mormon Battalion diaries make clear that the Donner camp site referred to here was not at Donner Lake but was the Alder Creek camp. These diaries are virtually conclusive evidence that the Truckee Trail came up Alder Creek then along East Alder Creek. See [Appendix 4](#) for a detailed discussion of these diaries. Wiggins does not appear to have had access to these diaries.

The route I am proposing would eliminate the problem of the location of the Donner Camp on Alder Creek. If the Wiggins route is accepted, then we must suppose that the Donners traveled miles up Alder Creek, far away from the Truckee Trail. With the Alder Creek route, they would simply have moved up the creek for a mile or so, with an easy way to rejoin the road later.

Finally, the route up Alder Creek appears to be both shorter and easier than the convoluted and difficult route – down Prosser Creek then up a steep hill – preferred by Wiggins.

OCTA hopes to get additional information on this section of trail over the coming years. The two places where the Truckee Trail is identified in the GLO Plats are relatively undisturbed and are in the Truckee National Forest. We will use metal detection in an attempt to confirm the routing of the Truckee trail at these points.

Descent to the Truckee River and the Road to Donner Lake

The third point where the diaries give enough evidence to suggest detailed routing is the descent point to the Truckee River and the trail from there up to the crossing of Donner Creek.

A general description of the main route is clear. The Truckee Trail descends the bluff to the bottomland along the Truckee River. It continues southwest (upstream) to where old Highway 40 leaves the river, crosses under Highway 80 and passes through a gap about a mile long. Today this is Donner Pass Road. I will call this mile-long valley "Highway 40 Valley" for clarity. The trail then angled toward Donner Creek and continued up Donner Creek, passing first the Graves Cabins and then a half mile or so farther crossing Donner Creek from north to south. The ford would have been near the modern Donner Party State Historical Park. But the question remains, where did the trail descend to the Truckee bottomland?

Wiggins put the descent down the bluff to the Truckee River about 1.5 miles downstream of the entrance to Highway 40 Valley. By contrast, I believe that the main trail reached the Truckee very close to the entrance to Highway 40 Valley and that no sooner had the emigrants touched the Truckee River than they headed into this valley. I further believe that there was an alternative trail used by a minority of emigrants that went up the Truckee River all the way to the confluence with Donner Creek. This alternate trail then turned up Donner Creek and rejoined the main trail before the Donner Creek Ford. See Figure 10.



¹⁵The diarists who give usable information are Robert Bliss, James Pace, Henry Bigler, John King and Levi Hancock.

Wiggins identified his descent point to the Truckee River based on the following evidence:

Several diarists mention that the Truckee River was near the bluff down which the trail descended. For example, Wakeman Bryarly August 21, 1849. *We rolled in the evening at 2 P.M. The road still the same, except a little rougher. Four miles, the road turned left [i.e., turned to drop down the bluff to the Truckee floodplain]. Here, upon our left, distant some hundred yards from the road was Truckee River in all its glory again, splashing & dashing over the rocks. ... we rolled a mile or so farther & encamped.* Most of downtown Truckee is much further than 100 yards from the Bluff and so would not likely be where the trail descended.

There are traces of an old trail or trails from Highway 80 to this descent point.

A number of diaries give mileages from the descent point to Highway 40 Valley, Donner Creek and other points that are consistent with this location.

However, the Truckee River also approaches to within about 100 yards of the bluff farther upstream –about .2 miles from Highway 40 Valley near the top of downtown Truckee (See Figure 10). So the descent point chosen by Wiggins is not unique. Moreover, as noted above, people have been building roads in the Truckee area for 170 years. The existence of an old road is weak evidence unless confirmed by other methods.

So what then about the mileage listed in the diaries? Analysis of mileages in the diaries is always tricky. We tend to measure mileages from point A to point B as a series of straight-line segments. But the emigrant trail was sinuous, not straight, so mileages were often higher than we would expect. Moreover, diarists had a tendency to overstate mileage somewhat even under ideal conditions. Overestimates of mileage became greater as the trail surface became more difficult. So taking averages of the mileages listed in multiple diaries does not necessarily get us to the true mileage we would estimate from our maps. Mileage is important information, but it must be used in conjunction with more explicit descriptions of terrain where possible.

Also, I think it likely that some of the diary entries with elevated mileages from the descent point may be referring to an alternate trail segment. We tend to assume that there is a single emigrant trail and that all diary descriptions must be reconciled with that same trail. So while it is clear that most emigrants turned away from the Truckee River at Highway 40 Valley, some fraction of the emigrants appear to have traveled up the Truckee River to the confluence with Donner Creek, and then traveled up Donner Creek.

Certainly, the very first party, the Stephens Townsend Murphy party, did so in the fall of 1844. *They dragged their slow course along until they reached a point where the river forked, the main stream bearing southwest [Truckee River] and the tributary [Donner Creek] almost due west... The party with the wagons proceeded up the tributary, or Little Truckee, a distance of two miles and a half, when they came to the lake since known as Donner Lake.*¹⁶

The alternative trail along Donner Creek may have remained the main trail through 1845. Jacob Snyder' diary entries on September 20th and 21st 1845 certainly suggest this route.

September 20th, ... *We struck Truckees River & encamped about 1 mile from the point where we struck it. September 21st, Packed this morning at 8 o'clock and followed the river on the right side until we struck a lake at the foot of the declivity of the Back Bone of the California Mountains [Donner Lake]...*

By 1846 most diary entries that give detailed entries support the route to Donner Creek via Highway 40 Valley. However, a number of diary entries do indicate a route that fits the alternative route better. Consider this entry by James Abell on August 31, 1849.

..... came to turkeys river . Leaving it to our left we followed up a little creek [Donner Creek] Some distance where we made noon halt. After a Short Stop we preceeded up the creek about two miles when we came to the noted cabins... There is but two of these cabins now Standing....

The natural reading of this entry is that Abell did not turn up Highway 40 Valley on the main trail but continued up the Truckee River to the outfall of Donner Creek. He took a short rest there then proceeded up Donner Creek, rejoining the main trail near the Graves Cabins and finally forded Donner Creek about two miles upstream of where Donner Creek flows into the Truckee River. The route via the outfall of Donner Creek is about 0.6 miles farther than the main route. At least two other diarists around the same date, Alexander Love on August 22, 1849 and Elisha Lewis on September 16, 1849, give mileages that would fit this route.¹⁷

¹⁶H. H. Bancroft, *The Opening of the California Trail*, University of California Press, 1953, page 68. The book contains the reminiscences of Moses Schallenberger, a member of the Stephens, Townsend, Murphy party of 1844.

¹⁷Alexander Love, August 22, 1849. *Drove about 12m [from Little Truckee River] to the main branch of the river [Truckee] and noond. Here is a steep rocky bluff that the road passes down. Started at 3 drove 4 m. crossd a stream [Donner Creek] and campd.*

Elisha Lewis, September 16, 1849. *About 3 oclock decended a steap declivity and struck the main Truckee river[.] traveled up its bottom 1 Mile[.] our trail left the river again [.] 1 ½ Miles from this place we camped being within 1/2 mile of the place whare the Unfortunate Downer party attempted to winter[.]*

If these diaries are excluded, Wiggins' average mileages would be significantly lower. Note, however, that no diaries mention any kind of trail fork here which argues against frequent use of this alternate route. There is a section of land near the outfall of Donner Creek that could help us resolve this issue if we can get access to metal detect on the land.

Then there is the issue of the mountain stream crossed by Cyrus Loveland on September 12, 1850.

Four and one half miles to another valley with a very pretty branch [Prosser Creek] running through it. Nooned here; grass good. After leaving this [Prosser Creek], three and a half miles to another little valley with a small branch running down a ravine to the right [Trout Creek coming from the right]. One half mile up this valley [i.e., continuing to the west] to a large creek, which probably is the main fork of the Truckee. Here we left this creek and valley to the left and took up a very narrow valley to the right [Highway 40 Valley].

The year 1850 was much wetter than 1849 which explains why no one mentioned this creek in 1849. These mileages fit Trout Creek – a stream that passes through the middle of downtown Truckee – perfectly. There is no such creek on the Wiggins route a half mile before reaching the Truckee.

The diaries are explicit that soon after touching the Truckee River the emigrants left the river again and passed into Highway 40 Valley. They also give distances to the Graves Cabins, the Donner Creek Ford, and the Donner Lake camp that imply they touched the Truckee River just before Highway 40 Valley. The quote from Cyrus Loveland just above is a good example. More examples are listed below. A more complete list with discussion is given in [Appendix 5](#).

Edwin Bryant, August 25, 1846. *About one o'clock, P.M., we descended a steep declivity, and struck a stream [the Truckee]... The trail runs along this stream a short distance, and then leaving it on the right hand, winds under a range of high mountainous elevations [Highway 40 Valley], until it strikes again the same watercourse, in a distance of a few miles.*

Joseph Wood, August 28, 1849. *We then went on to a point where we again struck the river [Truckee] but left it again soon and turned to the right [Highway 40 Valley].*

Charles Parke, August 30, 1849 *Traveled 10 miles this afternoon, crossed another tributary [Prosser Creek], and reached S. T. [Salmon Trout or Truckee] in 9 miles, when we again left the valley, driving over a spur [Highway 40 Valley] and returning in one mile, where we are now camped [Donner Creek]. 18 miles.*

James Tate, September 8, 1849. *Cross a creek in 5 miles [Prosser Creek] good grass[.] in ten miles [from mornings camp] came the river again and nooned but little grass[.] it is a foaming torrent[.] the road here turns off here to the right through a narrow Valley [Highway 40 Valley] and leaves the river for good[.]*

Augustus Burbank, September 10, 1849. *... after Some 4 miles we descended to the valley & neared the S. Trout river [Truckee]. turning Short to the right, passing up an avenue we Came to a fine little Stream [Donner Creek], which is the outlet of Truckey or the mountain Lake.*

Micajah Littleton, September 27, 1850. *6 miles more you come within less than 100 yards of T River again and take of to the right up a little valey and come over into the valey where Doner and his company wintered and Suffered and Starved So many...*

Another bit of support comes from the diary of Jacob Snyder on September 20, 1845. *We struck Truckeys River & encamped about 1 mile from the point where we struck it. Near the point where we struck it are 2 large isolated rocks in the valley.* Two large rocks still are visible in Truckee just east of Highway 267 that would fit the bill nicely. There are no such rocks near the Wiggins descent point. I view this evidence as rather weak, however, since we cannot be sure that the rocks visible today are the same rocks referenced by Snyder.¹⁸

¹⁸Snyder may well have taken the alternative road that continues up the Truckee to Donner Creek. On September 21st he wrote, "Packed this morning at 8 O'clock and followed the river on the right side until we struck a lake [Donner Lake]" Of course, we already have seen that the Stephens Townsend Murphy party took this route in 1844 so in 1845 this may well have been the standard route.

Figure 11



**1. Dog Valley; 2. Little Truckee River;
3. Russel Valley; 4. Prosser Creek;
5. Descent to the Truckee
Map of the Emigrant Road; T.H.
Jefferson; 1849**

shows that they camped there, presumably to take advantage of the nice grass in Russel Valley. The location where Jefferson's party camped at the edge of Russel Valley is, in fact, where the Dutch Flat Road would run in the 1860s. This is not strong evidence but it at least is consistent with the theory that the Truckee Trail ran along the northwest end of Russel Valley. To conclude, I suggest that the Truckee Trail between Hoke Valley and Davies Creek was renamed the Henness Pass Trail by 1865 as indicated by the 1865 GLO Survey Plat and that the Dutch Flat Road was built on top of or near the Truckee Trail from Davies Creek to the City of Truckee. However, the 1865 GLO surveys indicate two areas where the Dutch Flat Road and the Truckee Trail diverged somewhat. There were probably other locations as well where they were not identical. Finally, while the main trail traveled through "Highway 40 Valley" to the vicinity of the Graves Cabins and then the ford of Donner Creek, there was probably an alternative trail that traveled up the Truckee River to its confluence with Donner Creek. The alternative trail then turned and traveled up the northern bank of Donner Creek until it rejoined the main trail near the Graves Cabin.

Next Steps

The California-Nevada Chapter of OCTA has received a special permit from Tahoe National Forest to metal detect areas within the National Forest where we believe the Truckee Trail might run. We intend to test, where possible, the route I have presented in this paper. This will be a challenge since, as mentioned, much of the Truckee Trail probably lies beneath modern dirt roads. However, sections do exist where metal detection might be used to search for artifacts datable from the emigrant era in collaboration with Trails West, Inc. and perhaps the local historical societies:

The first half mile of trail from Hoke Valley toward Davies Creek has had limited usage and could yield artifacts. However, it will be difficult to tell whether any finds come from emigrants on the Truckee Trail versus the Henness Pass Trail.

The Dutch Flat alignment from Davies Creek to Stampede Reservoir has had limited traffic since the construction of Stampede Dam and could yield artifacts. However, since the Lincoln Highway also used this road it will be a challenge to find early artifacts.

Finally, there is the famous Jefferson map from 1846. The map clearly shows the trail hitting the Truckee River just as the Truckee turns from a northerly direction to an easterly direction. See Figure 11.

The Jefferson map is surprisingly accurate so I give his evidence here moderate weight.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that the Dutch Flat Road takes this same route, except that the Dutch Flat Road does not descend the bluffs to the river but simply stays on the bluffs above the river and into Highway 40 Valley. Indeed, if the reader has been convinced by my arguments in the earlier section that the trail ascended Alder Creek, then East Alder Creek, a trail route along the Dutch Flat alignment with a descent point just before Highway 40 Valley would seem very likely even without all the additional diary support.

Putting It All Together

I believe that analysis of the available emigrant diaries supplemented by GLO Plats and Field Notes demonstrates with reasonable certainty that the Truckee Trail and the Dutch Flat Road took similar and possibly overlapping routes (1) from Davies Creek to the Little Truckee River; (2) from just before Prosser Creek to the Alder Creek watershed; and (3) from East Alder Creek to the Truckee River. I say this even though we have yet to find physical evidence of the Truckee Trail in this region. These three sections are close enough together that we can more or less draw lines between the three sections and be fairly close to where the emigrant trail would have run. When we do this we find that the trail would have been below or near the Dutch Flat Road the entire distance from Davies Creek to the Truckee River.

There is just one additional bit of evidence to support this routing. The Jefferson Map of 1846 (Figure 11) shows the trail traveling between the Little Truckee River and Prosser Creek (called "Raven Creek" and "Pine Creek," respectively). About halfway between them it shows the trail passing just to the northwest of a drainage called "Pine Creek" that must be Russel Valley. The triangle in the map

- The GLO field notes identify a section of the Truckee Trail that cuts to the north of the Dutch Flat Road just a half mile before both roads drop into modern Prosser Reservoir. This is a very promising target for metal detection.
- The GLO field notes identify the Truckee Trail to the west of the Dutch Flat Road along East Alder Creek. There is a section of Tahoe National Forest land in this drainage that is a high-priority target for metal detection.
- Various locations on the Wiggins Route.

If a consensus forms around the route that I have outlined, then Trails West markers T-29 through T-36 would need to be relocated and we would need to apply to the National Park Service to have their trail map modified in this region. This paper is an attempt to start the conversation about which route is most strongly supported by the evidence.

CA-NV Chapter Award Recipients for 2024

By Norine Kimmy

Once a year Chapter Awards are given to recipients who have been selected by the Awards Committee to acknowledge their contribution to our goal of saving and preserving the history of the trails. To select these recipients, the Awards Committee reviews the Letters of Nomination submitted to the chapter for consideration. OCTA members and non-members or a community entity, such as a business, may be nominated. Before the Symposium, the Awards Committee reviews the nominations and selects the recipients. Committee members are Norine Kimmy, Kathleen Buob and Phyllis Smith.

While the majority of awards are *Certificates of Appreciation*, there are two specialized awards given. A *Senior Trail Boss* certificate may be awarded by our President, and one *Lifetime Achievement Award* may be presented to a chapter member in recognition of their many years of service.

Each award describes the reasons it is given and has a suitable background image on the certificate. Background images include various trail scenes such as *High Rock Canyon*, *Independence Rock*, *40-Mile Desert*, *Barlow Cutoff*, *Black Rock Desert*, *Wagon Heading Downhill*, *Approaching Chimney Rock*, and *Westport Landing*.

This year the Awards Luncheon was on April 29, 2024 at the Membership Meeting in Truckee.



Kathy Buob and Betty Crockford

Betty Crockford was presented with a *Certificate of Appreciation* to congratulate and thank her for the time and effort to plan the first-ever joint meeting of OCTA and DAR in 2023. Furthermore, she was acknowledged for the work taken to research and find a location for placing a trail marker for the “Carson River Route.”

Clark Fenton was recognized with a *Certificate of Appreciation* for work on the Hawley Grade Trail between the Upper Truckee River and Elko Summit. Clark made an extensive effort to collect the necessary facts to document the trail.

Kristin Hostetter was given a *Certificate of Appreciation* in recognition of managing work with OCTA on the Carson Trail. The Amador Ranger District of the Eldorado Forest, Kirkwood personnel, and several local jeep clubs cleared trails and fixed signs between Caples Lake and Covered Wagon Pass. They also examined the Tragedy Springs section of the trail.



Kathy Buob and Jeanne Young

Robin Kimmy was recognized for her many years of service to OCTA in support of the Awards Committee with a *Certificate of Appreciation*. Robin has assisted the Awards Committee with desktop publishing, newsletter editing, and production of the awards certificates, and has helped with technical issues.



Robin Kimmy

Jeanne Young was thanked for her contributions to OCTA and her service on our chapter Board of Directors with a *Certificate of Appreciation*. She is an author and photographer who has documented her experience as she traversed the trails.



Kathy Buob, Bob Crowley and Tim Twietmeyer

A group *Certificate of Appreciation* goes to the **History Expeditions Group**. This five person team has given us an impressive, in-depth look into history utilizing extensive research and carefully crafted historical reenactment. Members of the group include Bob Crowley, Tim Twietmeyer, Jennifer Hemmen, Elke Reimer and Hal Hall.

Seth Owens was selected by Bill Holmes, our CA-NV Chapter President, to receive the honor of the *Senior Trail Boss* award. Our chapter appreciates the time and archaeological expertise Seth devotes to our efforts and chapter outings. Some of the areas his research has covered include field work on the Carson Trail, Johnson Pass Cutoff, Truckee Route, Johnson Ranch and Lassen Benton City



Seth Owens

project.



Tom Mahach

The *Lifetime Achievement Award*, the most prestigious honor bestowed by the chapter, was awarded to **Tom Mahach**. According to John Winner’s article in the *News of the Plains*, this recognition underscores Tom's commitment to environmental preservation and highlights the significant impact of his work. It showcases his meticulous conservation efforts to save the "*second blaze tree*" from the site close to Tragedy Spring.

Thank you all for your contributions to OCTA!

Don't forget – the work of the Awards Committee for 2025 starts now! As you take part in our chapter activities, you will be interacting with members and others who are eligible to be nominated for a *Certificate of Appreciation*. Send the nominee’s name and reason for the nomination to me at norine.kimmy@gmail.com or complete the nomination form on our website, canvocta.org, under the What We Do tab.

We Remember..... Kayle

The Historic Human Remains Detection Dog Kayle passed away at the age of 15½ years on May 1, 2024. Kayle was a productive member of many of our OCTA field teams for many years. We will miss her!

Kayle's work in confirming grave sites has been featured in many publications, including the Fall 2023 edition of Trail Talk and the upcoming Winter 2024 edition of the Overland Journal. Kayle's search for Amelia Earhart's grave site in the South Pacific was published in a National Geographic article in 2017. Our last opportunity to watch her work was when she confirmed that a site identified by Don Buck years ago as a "large grave" along the California Trail east of Fernley was indeed that. Her oldest confirmed grave site was Carbon-14 dated at 9,450 years Before Present. John Grebenkemper will be training Kayle's great grand-niece to carry on her work.



Kayle Alerting at a Grave

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President's Message

By Bill Holmes

There has been a great deal going on in the chapter as you will read. I think we can easily describe 2024 as a year of change for the chapter.

The chapter had its Spring Board/Membership/Awards meeting on April 29th at the Truckee Airport, where we were able to secure a free meeting room. Dave Fullerton and Dee Owens were re-elected as Board members. We had a variety of presenters on the 29th following the meeting. Bob Crowley and Tim Twietmeyer from History Expeditions shared their recent 100-mile Snowshoe Thompson adventure, while Robert Keahey gave a presentation on the history of the Stephen-Townsend-Murphy party and the history of Sunnyvale.

On June 18th we will have presentations focused on how to find and verify an emigrant trail. David Fullerton will present his work on the Truckee Route and get us ready for a field trip the next day on June 19th. We will travel the Truckee Route from Verdi to Truckee. This will be a combination auto and walking tour. Nothing arduous.

On Sunday, February 18th, John Winner led a group of six chapter members to Don Buck's home in Sunnyvale, CA. We boxed up roughly 1500 books, and various loose papers, diaries and maps. This may well be the most complete collection of books, maps and diaries for the western migration period. Sacramento State University has expressed some interest in housing it.

Dave Freeman is opening up his Lassen project to OCTA members. He schedules work parties about once a month. Dave is going to showcase his project in the Spring of 2025. This will be a great event.

Chuck Scimeca has opened up his Nevada County "Mule Spring" project on the Truckee Route to OCTA members. The Bureau of Land Management has given Chuck permission to metal detect to verify where the trail alignment is.

I have been working with Coreen Donnelly and Thomas Kleinert out of the Sante Fe National Park Service office trying to complete the Emigrant Trail and XP highway sign project in California. They have needed help with numerous counties and cities. Funds authorized by Congress (\$130,000) run out in December 2024.

All the above information will be on our new website that should be done very soon. It will have a calendar of upcoming events and posts of what has

happened.

I attended the Mid-Year Symposium in El Paso, Texas March 12th – 16th. Also, the national OCTA Convention is July 21st – 25th in Pendleton, Oregon. We will have our annual business meeting and seat two Board members at the convention.

Butterfield Trail in Central California

By Sue Loucks



The Butterfield Overland Mail Route has just made the National Historic Trails list, so where exactly is the trail in California? I started this search thinking there might be one or two historic markers that had been erected during the California Centennial in 1950. I was amazed to find at least 14 markers listed on the California Historic marker historic website. So it was time to set out on a road trip to verify that the markers were still there and that they could be found.



Butterfield Overland Stage Marker

If you were watching the news last Spring as the snow started melting in California, you might remember references to Tulare Lake reforming. Tulare Lake is that blue lake just west of Visalia in the middle of this map. Some years this lake was much bigger than this picture and in fact there were many sloughs in the rest of the valley since the San Francisco area is the only way for the water to reach the ocean.

Since about 1890 the lake has been drained and the rivers have been channeled for irrigation, thus the valley is dry except where irrigated. I live in Fresno, so I divided the list of historic markers by north and west of Fresno, which are covered in this article, and south of Fresno.



Bell's Station

There are five markers in this group ranging from Gilroy, just over Pacheco Pass, to the original site of Fresno – near the present town of Kerman. By car going directly between the towns, it's about 113 miles, but remember there were no direct, straight roads at that time. It was a clear but sunny day in Fresno, but the clouds on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley were black with some rain that was forecast.

The first two markers are in Santa Clara County. The one in Gilroy is in the industrial area. The next marker and station for the Butterfield Overland Mail Stage (commonly known as the Butterfield Stage) is at Bell's Station. This is under an overhanging tree beside a building on the right side of the main CA-152 highway. This building used to be a restaurant and had been empty since at least the 1960s, but is now selling local produce.



Gilroy Marker

The next marker for the Butterfield Overland Trail is in Merced County, about five miles east of Los Banos. It is the Lone Willow Station and is at the junction of Delta and McDonald Roads, in the middle of agricultural land and near a farm residence, about 30 miles from Bell's Station. It was raining off and on between clouds and gave me a beautiful rainbow.



Firebaugh Ferry

The last two of these markers for the Butterfield stations are both in Fresno County. The first one is in the city of Firebaugh, at the edge of a city park. In fact the city crew was out cutting the grass in the park. This was a station at the ferry where the Butterfield Stage had to cross the San Joaquin River. The second marker in Fresno County is outside the city of Kerman. It, like Lone Willow Station, is alongside the road, in an agricultural area.



Lone Willow Station

I was able to photograph all the markers without rain but it was definitely raining off and on all day. The water for the valley is greatly dependent on the snow melt from the Sierra Nevada and the floor of the valley is quite flat. This means that the rivers in the late spring had a lot of water and spread out to cover a large area.



Site of Fresno City



Don Buck Collection

By John Winner

The effort continues to curate the extensive collection of materials that Don Buck accumulated over his decades of trail work. Don, a long-time member of OCTA and Trails West, had a keen interest in the mid-nineteenth century western migration. He was an expert mapper of emigrant trails, acquiring over 200 USGS topography maps. He amassed a large collection of emigrant diaries and journals and over 700 type-scripted diaries, mostly 8½ X 11 stored in file cabinets. His extensive library of western history included over 1200 books plus hundreds of miscellaneous articles, booklets and softcover publications of western and southwestern American history.

On September 13, 2022, Don passed peacefully at his home in Sunnyvale, California. In early 2023, as executor of his collection, a team and I began the task of processing Don’s “California Trail Collection.” We inventoried the collection. We went to Don’s house and collected several boxes of material, mostly southern trails, plus the USGS maps. We contacted the California State Library, which seemed to be only mildly interested in a small portion of the collection to be added to the “Western Overland Trails Collection” so we are pursuing other options. In the meantime, the team is processing, scanning and digitizing some of the collection. To date, we have scanned all USGS maps. We have digitized over 170 items of southern trails, diaries, journals and articles. All of the type-scripted diaries that were previously digitized are on the CA-NV website. In June 2023 we retrieved and inventoried another 25 boxes of mostly loose items, articles, papers and booklets; they are ready for scanning.

In an effort to keep the collection together, we needed a place to store and work. Through the efforts of Bill Holmes, Angelo Tsakopoulos, owner of AKT Development, a major real estate developer in the Sacramento area, graciously offered an unfinished, 30’ X 60’ office suite on the third floor of his office complex at 7919 Folsom Blvd. in Sacramento.

On February 18, 2024, a group of OCTA members met at the Buck home in Sunnyvale, California to pack and prepare the remainder of the collection for transport, including 1200 books, file cabinets, map cases, a bookcase and other miscellaneous furniture. A moving company brought the collection to the Sacramento office on March 3rd.



Howe Ave. Temporary Home of the Collection

Left to Right:

- Vilma Buck
- Bart Johnson
- Joe Wagershauser
- Becky Judd
- Dee Owens
- John Winner
- Dick Waugh
- Bill Holmes
- Robert Keahey



Photo by Margot Buck Gilliland

Bart Johnson assembling over 75 banker boxes.



Part of the Don Buck “Trail Collection”





Trail Outings Calendar

See articles in this issue for details on the work involved.

Many of these dates are tentative.

If you are interested, contact the project leader to keep updated on dates and details.

May 2024

May 18-19 Greenhorn Cutoff
 May 20 Georgetown Trail
 May 19 Carson Trail
 May 23 Carson Trail
 May 30 Georgetown Trail

June 2024

June 1-2 Truckee Route
 June 27-28 Lassen Trail

July 2024

July 5-6-7 Lassen Trail
 July 6-7 Truckee Route
 July 20 Hawley Grade Hike

August 2024

August 3-4 Truckee Route
 August 4 Lassen Trail
 August 10 Carson Trail
 August 24-25 Truckee Route

Contact information:

Greenhorn Cutoff: Dick Waugh, camalobo@comcast.net
Carson Trail/Georgetown/Lassen (June 27-28): Dee Owens, dgowens@comcast.net, 530-919-6513
Truckee Route: Dave Fullerton, dfullertond@netscape.net
Lassen Trail: Dave Freeman, artois.dave@gmail.com, 530-591-2043

September 2024

September 8 Lassen Trail
 September 14-15 Truckee Route
 September 21 Carson Trail
 September 28-29 Truckee Route

October—December

October 6 Lassen Trail
 November 3 Lassen Trail
 December 1 Lassen Trail

Upcoming Field Work

Truckee Trail – Dave Fullerton

A new chapter field project is starting near Truckee, CA. The first road over the Sierra Nevada was opened in 1844 by the Stephens Townsend Murphy party. Their route was up the Truckee River, past Donner Lake, over Stephens Pass, then down the Yuba and Bear Rivers to the Central Valley. Improvements were made to their route over the years, including a long bypass of the Truckee River from Verdi to the modern City of Truckee via Dog Valley. However, with the opening of the Carson Trail in 1848 and other alternative routes, travel on the Truckee Route diminished over time.

We know the general route taken by emigrants on the Truckee Route through their diaries. However, in many cases the precise location of the trail is unknown or contested. To make further progress on locating the trail, we need to metal detect the area to support or reject proposed routes.

In 2023 OCTA sought and received a special permit from the Tahoe National Forest to look for emigrant artifacts on Tahoe National Forest land, provided that we abide by a strict set of conditions to preserve the historical integrity of the area. The permit is valid through the end of 2026 so we have three seasons to do the work. Of course, not all land in the Tahoe area is in the Tahoe National Forest, but there is still a large area where we can work. I will be the OCTA coordinator of this work.

Most of our target locations will be relatively accessible by automobile. Some may require a trek to reach. People need not attend both days of a two day event. I will send out notices via email of our target locations in advance along with the likely difficulties to be faced (if any). Everyone is invited to participate. If you have a metal detector, great, but that's not mandatory. You can be a digger or recorder as well. Non OCTA members are also invited. We hope they will join the organization if they enjoy their day.

Marking the Greenhorn Cutoff – Dick Waugh

The CA-NV Chapter of OCTA will be holding field work days **May 18-19, 2024** in the Elko, NV Area. This is the conclusion of the two-year project reaffirming and updating the route of the Greenhorn Cutoff.

The Greenhorn Cutoff has been marked on both private and BLM land in the past. The work project will be refreshing decals, and

replacing and adding carsonite markers as needed. The project extends from the beginning of Greenhorn Cutoff where it leaves the California Trail until it rejoins the main trail east of Carlin, NV.

This project is open for members and non-OCTA members. Remember, many hands make light work!

Saturday we will work on the Maggie Creek Ranch. This day will require a moderate amount of hiking over hills with participants carrying the equipment and marking material. Sunday will be on BLM rangeland with more driving and less hiking.

Work locations will be accessible via rough, dirt ranch roads and moderate hikes. There are several areas that are steep with loose scabble and moderately deep powdered dirt. A high clearance SUV or 4-wheel drive vehicle is recommended.

We will meet at 8:30 am on Saturday May 18th at the Hunter Road and I-80 interchange west of Elko, NV, Exit 292. This is the entrance area of the California Trail Interpretive Center. There will be an orientation to the project, equipment check and safety briefing. If you need to car share or catch a ride in a 4-wheel drive vehicle this is where we will consolidate.

You will need to bring your own lunch each day, have lots of water, and have appropriate clothing and footwear for hiking and sun protection. Gloves are recommended. I will provide tools to pound in carsonites and clean and decal carsonites.

This is a great project to see a portion of the California Trail not often visited. There will be ample opportunity for photography, history discussions and conversations about our mission to protect the California Trail in Nevada!

(Note: Dick will be exploring the California Trail from Idaho to Elko May 13-17 so his internet may be spotty. Please let him know you will be participating in the Greenhorn Project as soon as possible.)

Carson Trail marking – Dee Owens

On **May 23**, the California-Nevada Chapter will be marking the Carson Trail on trees with National Historic Trail signs along the Mormon-Emigrant Trail road through the Eldorado National Forest. The Carson Trail roughly follows this paved forest road in many places; however, we will be working on the 23rd in an area off the road. To avoid Iron Mountain the emigrant trail went south downhill to Camp Creek and back up to continue west.

We have metal detected this section and verified the location of the trail.

There are beautiful sections of Class 1 trail on this segment. It is about 1.25 miles down to Camp Creek on both fairly open trail and with some bushwhacking. We will be moving slowly. This area was partially burned in the Caldor Fire. We will leave a vehicle on the road near Camp Creek for those who don't want to climb back up to the paved Mormon-Emigrant Trail.

The markers on trees need to be in line of sight through the forest. The plan is to have teams of three who can leapfrog ahead of other groups as they finish at a tree. Their jobs will be nailing the marker to the tree as high as possible; handing materials (marker, nails) to the person doing the nailing; and recording. The jobs can be shared among members of the team if they wish. Everyone will have to carry some of the markers and some nails. The recorders will use their phone for recording on a free map app.

CA-NV Chapter OCTA 2024 Symposium

The 2024 Chapter Symposium will be Tuesday, June 18 and Wednesday, June 19 in Truckee, CA. The theme for the event is *Researching and Documenting the Emigrant Trails and Other Historic Sites*.

Tuesday's program will have presentations by chapter members who are experts in the work of finding and documenting emigrant trails. The proposed program is as follows:

- 9:00 a.m. Dee Owens – Researching, recording & mapping
- 10:00 a.m. Clark Fenton – Hawley Grade
- 11:00 a.m. Dave Freeman – Lassen Project
- 11:45 a.m. Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Bob Crowley & Tim Twietmeyer – Researching their historical projects
- 2:00 p.m. David Fullerton – Truckee Route

On Wednesday we'll head out on the Truckee Trail to take a look. We'll meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Verdi Community Library, 270 Bridge Street, Verdi, NV.

Please see the registration form in this issue for additional information regarding location, meals and payment.

CA-NV Chapter OCTA 2024 Symposium

Researching and documenting the emigrant trails and other historic sites

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Presentations

Truckee Tahoe Airport

10356 Truckee Airport Road

Truckee, CA 96161

Wednesday, June 19, 2024

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. On the Trail

Meet at Verdi Community Library

270 Bridge Street

Verdi, NV 89439

Registration and payment **must be received** by **Monday, June 3, 2024.**

Questions? Phyllis Smith, 530-301-7044, phylesmith@gmail.com

Event Hotel: **Best Western Plus – Hotel Truckee Tahoe** at 11331 Brockway Road, Truckee, CA 96161.

Rooms are \$172 plus tax, and can be booked at this link: https://www.bestwestern.com/en_US/book/hotel-rooms.05722.html?groupId=4B5JJ4S1 . Pets are an additional \$30 per day.

Attendees:

First Name	Last Name	
First Name	Last Name	
Address		
City	State	ZIP
Phone	Email	

Lunch on Tuesday provided by Full Belly Deli

Please provide your own lunch on Wednesday.

\$20 per person, check or credit card

Total payment

\$

Credit Card Number	Expiration Date	3-Digit Code
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If you want a gluten-free sandwich, please indicate how many.

I/We will attend a reception the evening of Monday, June 17.

If you have a high-clearance vehicle and are willing to give others a ride, please indicate how many seats you have available.

**Make checks payable to CA-NV Chapter, OCTA and mail to
CA-NV Chapter OCTA, PO Box 182, Yuba City, CA 95992**

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER
OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 1521
Yreka, CA 96097

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Reconsideration of the Truckee Trail Route: Hoke Valley to the Donner Creek Crossing	----- Page 1
CA-NV Chapter Award Recipients for 2024	----- Page 12
We Remember..... Kayle	-----Page 13
President’s Message	-----Page 14
Butterfield Trail in Central California	----- Page 15
Don Buck Collection	----- Page 16
Trail Outings Calendar	----- Page 17
Upcoming Field Work	----- Page 17
CA-NV Chapter OCTA - 2024 Symposium	----- Page 18
CA-NV Chapter OCTA 2023 Symposium Registration Form	----- -Page 19

Email address for TRAIL TALK
Submissions, Membership
questions or
Inquiries, contact us at:
canvocta@gmail.com

Ca-NV Chapter OCTA
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