

# OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION



Fourth Annual National Convention

Carson City, Nevada

August 20-24, 1986

"I wish California had sunk into the ocean before I had ever heard of it."

James F. Wilkins  
Upon reaching the Carson River,  
September 12, 1849

THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL

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OF THE  
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Hosts & Tour Guides--Members, California-Nevada Chapter

Cover: View of West Pass from Caples Lake by Richard Davis



## CONTENTS

Historic Places Along Emigrant Trails in Nevada	Page 1
Carson City	1
Dayton	1
Sutro Tunnel	1
Walley's Hot Springs	1
Mormon Station (Genoa)	1
Van Sickle Station	2
Fort Churchill	2
Geological Sketches	3
Lake Lahontan, Humboldt Lake and Sink, Carson and Truckee Forty-Mile Deserts	3
Sierra Nevada	3
Account of the Opening of the Truckee River Route by the Stevens-Townsend-Murphy Party, in 1844 (Moses Schallenberger Reminiscence)	5
Account of the Opening of the Carson River Route by the Mormon Battalion, as Reported in Henry Bibler's Chronicle of the West	6
Emigrant Diary Accounts	11
Lower Humboldt River and Humboldt Sink	11
Forty Mile Desert, Truckee Route	13
Forty Mile Desert, Carson Route	15
Hummocks and Mirage	17
Soda Lake, Carson Route	18
Carson River Route Desert Crossing	18
First Views of Eagle Valley (Carson City)	19
Carson Valley	19
Mormon Station (Genoa)	20
Walley's Hot Springs	21
Carson Canyon	22
Hope Valley	24
Red Lake	24
Carson Pass Ascent	25
Twin Lakes (Caples Lake)	26
Emigrant Valley and West Pass	27
Squaw Ridge	29
Tragedy Springs	29
Maiden's Grave	29
Recommended Reading List	32
Illustrations and Maps follow page . . . . .	33

## HISTORIC PLACES ALONG EMIGRANT TRAILS IN NEVADA

**Carson City.** Area first settled in 1851 by a man called Frank Hall, who shot an eagle and nailed the skin on the front of his rude cabin. This led to the place being called "Eagle Station", "Eagle Rancho," and "Eagle Valley." The first building in Carson City proper was erected by Abraham Curry in 1858.

**Dayton.** Often referred to by the emigrants as "Gold Canyon" because of small amounts of gold found in placers in the canyon. Later became known as "Chinatown" and "Mineral Rapids." The Chinese were there, not because of mining activities, but to build irrigation canals for farming the bottoms along the Carson River. Some went into trading. The town was named "Dayton" in 1856.

**Sutro Tunnel.** Begun in October, 1869 and finished in 1877. Dug to drain the water out of the mines at Virginia City. The main tunnel was 20,480 feet long and 9' 5" high by 13' wide. It cost approximately \$2,100,000 to dig and drained 1,275,000 gallons of water annually, mostly going to waste into the Carson River.

**Walley's Hot Springs.** Built in 1862 as a spa and luxury hotel. Original hotel burned in the 1920's. The present buildings were opened just a few years ago as a membership resort.

**Mormon Station (Genoa).** Hampden S. Beattie set up a trading station here in 1849. It did extremely well selling goods and trading animals with the '49ers. In 1850, there were probably twenty trading posts (often nothing more than tents or wagon beds) along the trail. In 1851, Beattie's uncle, also a Mormon, although reputed not to be a particularly good one, brought out provisions for a permanent trading post from Salt Lake City and took over the property that Beattie had sold to a Mr. Moore. The uncle's name was John Reese, and he became an important personage in Carson City for many years. The Mormon influence is very great in this valley, and in 1852 the Utah legislature (acting as the "State of Deseret") set up a Territorial Government in which Mormon Station was included as part of their Millard County. The emigrant trail continued to be used heavily. In 1854, James Ellis, keeping records only until July 1, counted 213 wagons, 360 horses and mules, 7,528 cattle, and 7,150 sheep. In 1856, the Mormons sent out a large group of settlers, numbering sixty to seventy families and they settled in Carson, Eagle, Washoe, Jack, and Pleasant Valleys and pretty much took political control of Western Nevada. In this same year, Judge Orson Hyde, a Mormon Apostle, changed the name from Mormon Station to Genoa. In 1857, thinking war with the U.S. was imminent, the Mormons were called home to Salt Lake City and, once again, had to abandon all their property at cut-rate prices to the gentiles. In 1862, Orson Hyde, still hoping to get paid for his properties, issued his famous letter in which he placed a curse on the inhabitants of Carson Valley.

## Historic Places Along Emigrant Trails

### Orson Hyde's curse:

"You shall be visited of the Lord of Hosts with thunder and with earthquakes and with floods, with pestilence and with famine until your names are not known amongst men, for you have rejected the authority of God, trampled upon his laws and his ordinances, and given yourselves up to serve the god of this world; to rioting and debauchery, in abominations, drunkenness and corruption. You have chuckled and gloried in taking the property of the Mormons, and withholding from them the benefits thereof. You have despised rule and authority, and put God and man at defiance. If perchance, however, there should be an honest man amongst you, I would advise him to leave; but let him not go to California for safety, for he will not find it there. . . . twenty thousand dollars is our demand; and you can pay it to us, as I have said and find mercy, if you will henceforth do right, or despise the demand and perish.

**Van Sickle Station.** Henry Van Sickle arrived at Mormon Station in 1852. In 1855 he took up land south of Genoa and built the Van Sickle Station Hotel there in 1857. This was an important stopping place for travelers in subsequent years. The original wooden hotel was torn down around 1909. The present stone residence was originally the store, warehouse, bar and blacksmith buildings, since renovated into a private residence.

**Fort Churchill.** Founded 1860, abandoned 1871. Founded as a result of a minor Indian uprising due to the pressure put on the Indians by the 1859 silver rush in Washoe County, this fort became the main supply depot for the Nevada military district throughout the Civil War. The fort was also on the Pony Express Route. A classic case of cost overruns, the fifty-five buildings, once begun, were stopped and an investigation begun. Each of the six double-story officers' quarters were estimated to cost \$16,000, and the estimates to finish the fort were placed at \$178,889.69. Army headquarters commented that "these estimates exceeded the amount appropriated for the construction and repair of barracks, etc. . . . for the whole army," but because of the Civil War the building was continued and completed. There was much secessionist sentiment in Nevada, so the post was considered essential to the Union. The fort was named for General Sylvester Churchill, Army Inspector General for 20 years, and was sold back to the Buckland family, who had originally owned the property, for \$750 when it was abandoned.

GEOLOGICAL SKETCHES

Lake Lahontan -- Humboldt Lake and Sink, Carson and Truckee  
Forty-Mile Deserts (See illustration.)

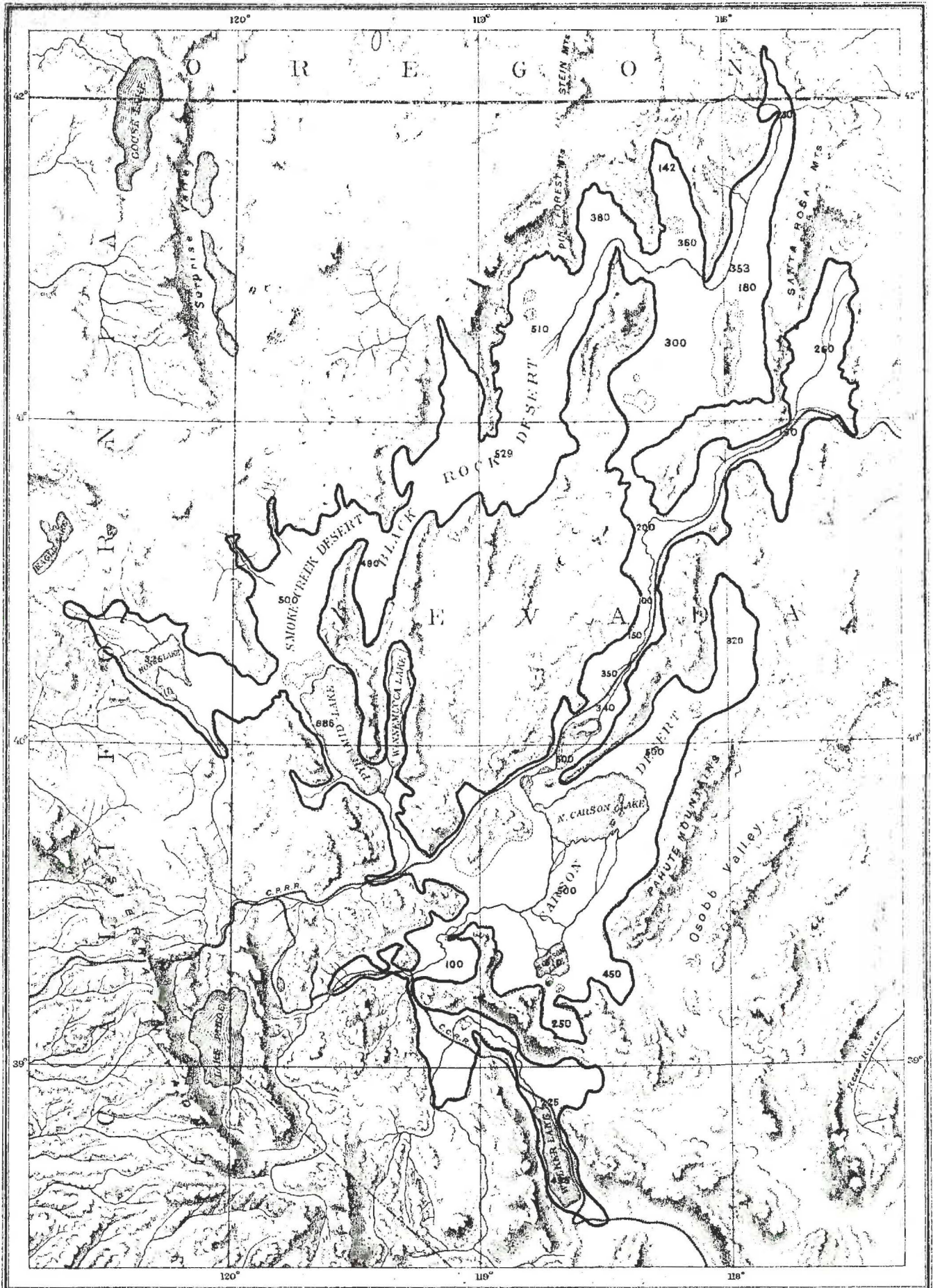
Lake Lahontan was named for Baron La Hontan, one of the early explorers of the headwaters of the Mississippi River. During the last 80,000 years, the lake rose and receded two separate times. At its greatest extent, it covered an area of approximately 8,422 square miles, and its greatest depth was 886 feet, at Pyramid Lake. At its largest, it extended from beyond Winnemucca to Walker Lake, into Oregon on the Quinn River drainage, and into California as far as Honey Lake and Susanville. It was a very irregularly shaped lake with a huge island in the center, and on this island was another sizeable lake. Where we visit Humboldt Lake was at one time 500 feet below the surface.

Sierra Nevada

The Sierra Nevada are 50 to 80 miles wide and 400 miles long, thus comprising the largest single mountain range in the contiguous United States. The range is tallest in the south (Mt. Whitney, at 14,496 feet, is the tallest mountain in the lower 48 states) and falls to a crest of about 8,000 feet in the north. It is a granitic batholith which is sharply tilted up in the east to form the great Sierra escarpment and tilts down rather gradually to the west to go under the deep, erosional sediments of California's Great Central Valley.

About 210 to 225 million years ago, granite began forming under the sediments below a sea which then covered this area. From 80 to 55 million years ago, the land surface was uplifted above the sea and the sediments eroded to expose the granite. From about 30 million years ago until 3 million years ago, great volcanic eruptions buried most of the northern Sierra with deep layers of volcanic ash and volcanic mud flows. This volcanic action continues until today. From about 10 million years ago to 2 million years ago, the great granitic batholith began tilting westward. Faulting and earthquakes and uplifting raised the Sierra to present heights during the last 3 million years, and these processes continue. During these same 3 million years, glaciers and ice covered the Sierra. 60,000 years ago saw the maximum extent of Sierra glaciation, and 20,000 years ago saw the melting of the last glacier of the Great Ice Age. 700 years ago, the present glaciers formed. The Carson Pass area shows the granitic batholith covered over with the remains of volcanic action. Carson Spur is a fine example of a Lahar (volcanic mud flow.)





ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING OF THE TRUCKEE RIVER ROUTE  
BY THE STEVENS-TOWNSEND-MURPHY PARTY, IN 1844  
(MOSES SCHALLENBERGER REMINISCENCE)

At the sink of the Humboldt, the alkali became troublesome, and it was with difficulty that pure water was procured either for the people or the cattle. However, no stock was lost, excepting one pony belonging to Martin Murphy, Sr., which was stolen. The party stopped at the sink for a week in order to rest the cattle and lay out their future course . . . their oxen were in tolerably good condition; their feet were as sound and much harder, and except that they needed a little rest, they were really better prepared for work than when they left Missouri. The party seemed to have plenty of provisions, and the only doubtful question was the route they should pursue. A desert lay before them, and it was necessary that they should make no mistake in the choice of a route. Old Mr. Greenwood's contract as pilot had expired when they reached the Rocky Mountains. Beyond that he did not pretend to know anything. Many anxious consultations were held, some contending that they should follow a southerly course, and others held that they should go due west. Finally, an old Indian was found, called Truckee, with whom Old Man Green[wood] talked by means of signs and diagrams drawn on the ground. From him it was learned that fifty or sixty miles to the west there was a river that flowed easterly from the mountains, and that along this stream there were large trees and good grass. Acting on this information, Dr. Townsend, Captain Stevens, and Joseph Foster, taking Truckee as a guide, started out to explore this route, and after three days returned, reporting that they had found the river just as the Indian had described it. Although there was still a doubt in the minds of some as to whether this was the proper route to take, none held back when the time came to start. In fact, there was no time for further discussion.

The party left the sink of the Humboldt, having cooked two days' rations and filled all the available vessels with water. After traveling with scarcely a halt until twelve o'clock the next night, they reached a boiling spring at what is now Hot Spring Station, on the Central Pacific Railroad. Here they halted two hours to permit the oxen to rest. Some of the party dipped water from the spring into tubs, and allowed it to cool for the use of the cattle. It was a sad experiment, for those oxen that drank it became very sick. Resuming the march, they traveled steadily until two o'clock the next day, when they reached the river, which they named Truckee, in honor of the old Indian chief, who had piloted them to it.

The cattle, not having eaten or drunk for forty-eight hours, were almost famished. This march was of eighty [forty] miles across an alkali desert, knee deep in alkali dust. The people, having water in their wagons, did not suffer so much, but there were occasions when it was extremely doubtful if they would be

able to reach water with their cattle. So crazed were they with thirst that if the precaution had not been taken to unhitch them while yet some distance from the stream, they would have rushed headlong into the water and wrecked the wagons and destroyed their contents. There being fine grass and good water here, the party camped for two days, until the cattle were thoroughly rested and refreshed. [In San Jose Pioneer, March 15, 1893. Reprinted from Horace S. Foote's Pen Pictures from the Garden of the World, Chicago, 1888.]

ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING OF THE CARSON RIVER ROUTE  
AS REPORTED IN HENRY BIGLER'S CHRONICLE OF THE WEST

1848. (June 18) . . . We gave the name of our little valley, Pleasant Valley. Here we felled pine timber and built a large corral. On the twenty-first some of the boys arrived with our band of loose horses, and the twenty-two wagons began to roll in, mostly drawn by oxen, followed by our cows and calves. The gathering continued until the second of July. On the morning of the third a general move was made, except myself and a few others, who were detained in finding our oxen, when on the fourth, about 11:00 a.m., we rolled out after the camp, taking the divide between the American River and the Cosumnes. We made about ten miles, and just as we began to prepare for camping we heard the cannon from the front camp and were reminded that this was the birthday of American independence.

July 5. Made an early start, still keeping the divide, and by 9:00 a.m. we rolled up to the front camp. Here they had concluded to stop a few days, as they had found a nice little valley (although about two miles to the south of the waters of the Cosumnes) for our stock and sent out some men to examine the route, and look for three of our company, viz. Browett, Allen, and Cox, who had left our camp on the twenty-fifth of June to look out for a pass while the company was gathering, and as yet we had not heard anything from them, and the camp began to feel uneasy about them. Accordingly, we sent out ten men to look for them, while the rest of us took the stock down into the little vally, which we called Sly's Park after one of our men who found it and there built a couple corrals, and we waited the return of the ten men.

They returned on the fourteenth of July and reported they had seen nothing of the three men, neither any signs. After passing a certain point, they had discovered a pass but it would have to be worked.

July 15. This morning, myself and three others went ahead with axes to cut brush and roll rocks out of the way for our wagons and packs. My journal supposed a wagon never had been here before since these mountains were made and for aught I know, not even a white man. Our camp made about eight miles and encamped on top of the divide about one mile from water.



July 16. Cutting our way as yesterday, the road very bad; broke a coupling pole to one of the wagons; made about eight miles and encamped on the waters of the Cosumnes. This we called Camp Creek.

July 17. Today we had a bad road and a great deal of brush to cut; broke an axle tree; made eight or ten miles and camped at Leek Spring, a fine spring with plenty of leeks and grass about it.

July 18. Camp laid by to hunt some stock that was lost out of the herd yesterday. While myself and four others went to work the road, which we did for about ten miles, and as we were returning to camp we found the place where we supposed our three pioneers had camped by a large spring, running from the mountains into the Consumnes. Where they had their fire, was the appearance of a fresh grave. Some of us thought it might be an Indian grave, as near it was an old wickey up, but the more we looked at it, the more we felt there lay the three men. When we got back to camp all the lost stock was found, and we made a report of the road and the grave, etc. That evening the camp was called together and organized more perfectly by appointing captains of tens, and we also appointed Lieutenant Thompson Captain over the whole camp, in case there should be any fighting to do. That night for the first time we put out camp guard. Our numbers were as follows, forty-five men and one woman (Sargent Wm. Coray's wife), two small brass pieces bought of Sutter, seventeen wagons, one hundred fifty horses and about the same of cattle, and I believe every man had a musket.

July 19. Rolled out from Leek Spring; had hard, heavy pulling, the road very rocky in places; broke our new axle tree, and in passing over a snowbank Mr. J. Holmes' wagon broke down. Made only five or six miles and encamped at the spring near the fresh grave; determining to satisfy ourselves, it was soon opened. We were shocked at the sight. There lay the three murdered men robbed of every stitch of clothing, lying promiscuously in one hole about two feet deep. Two of them were lying on their faces. Allen was lying on his back and had the appearance that an ax had been sunk into his face and that he had been shot in the eye. The blood seemed fresh still oozing from their wounds. When we came to examine about, we found arrows lying plentifully on the ground, many of them bloody and broken. Examining still closer, the rocks were stained with blood, and Mr. Allen's purse of gold dust was lying about a rod from the grave. The gold was still in the sack. It was known by several of the boys who had seen him make it. He had attached a buckskin string of sufficient length so as to put it over his head and around his neck and letting the purse hang in his bosom inside of his clothes. Some thought their guns and saddles might be in their grave with them, for they had set out leaving the camp having each a riding animal and a pack mule. At the time they left camp, they were advised not to go but wait until all the camp was ready for a start; but they seemed restless and anxious to be on the move towards home and so left, saying they would travel slowly and hunt out the best way



across the Sierra Nevada and would meet us somewhere in the mountains.

July 20. . . . All was quiet till morning, when we found more than one-third of the stock missing. We lay here all day; sent men in all directions hunting up lost stock. In the afternoon we enclosed the grave with granite rocks to prevent wild beasts from tearing them out and to stand as a monument to all who may chance to pass that way. We judged they were killed the second night out, which would make it the twenty-seventh of June. We cut the following inscription on a balsam fir that stood near the grave: "To the memory of Daniel Browett, Ezra H. Allen, and Henderson Cox, who were supposed to have been murdered and buried by Indians on the night of the twenty-seventh of June, A.D. 1848." We called this place Tragedy Spring.

July 21. Having found all our stock, except one or two mules, we hooked on and moved about four miles and camped on what we called Rock Creek [Allen's] and built a corral by felling timber and piling up brush. The mountains well overlaid with large masses of rocks, in the little valleys plenty of leeks, young grass, and clover, with here and there a large bank of snow.

July 22. Camp laid by, while myself and fifteen others worked a road to the top of the mountain; some six miles from the top we saw several small lakes, some of which I was told abounded with trout. I passed over snow more than two feet deep and saw banks ten and perhaps fifteen feet deep. This day I gathered flowers with one hand and snow with the other. There were plenty of chickens in the timber resembling the prairie chickens. At evening we returned to camp, tired and hungry, although we carried lunch with us.

July 23. In camp all day.

July 24. Moved about six miles and camped just over the summit. Two wagons broke down and two were upset. Two Indians came in to stay all day.

July 25. Laid by while some went repairing wagons, others watching stock, while others again worked a road down the mountain some two miles.

July 26. Moved to the foot of the mountain and camped near a lake. This we call Lake Valley [Caples Lake]. As usual we broke down again; an axle tree snapped in two. This afternoon we sent out ten men to explore and hunt a pass across the mountain.

July 27. Made some road. Twenty Indians came into camp, all armed with bows and arrows, but laid them by while in camp. Late in the afternoon our ten men returned but had made no new discovery.

July 28. Moved three miles and made an early encampment at the head of the American Fork near or at the summit of the great Sierra Nevada. Here we soon built a corral sufficiently large to hold all our stock. Several Indians were seen, some peeking out from behind and over rocks; two however came into camp. Some of our party caught a young fawn. They marked the youngster and let him go. This afternoon we worked and made a road across the mountain.

July 29. Moved across about one mile and half and camped at the head of what we called Hope Valley, as we began to have hope. In crossing over we broke one wagon.

July 30. Worked and made a road for about two miles and moved camp about eight miles and encamped on what we called Pass Creek [Carson Canyon] at the head of a canyon. Here we expect to lay by for several days in order to work a road through the canyon about four miles and very bad.

July 31. A general turnout to work on the road, making fording places to cross the creek. Considerable digging to do and rolling rocks out of the way.

Aug. 1. Clear and frosty this morning. Fifteen turned out and worked the road. Some went a-fishing and caught a lot of trout. Here grows the first wild flax I ever saw. Some of it is in blow and some in the bowl.

Aug. 2. Working as yesterday in the canyon, except myself who went a-fishing. Caught twelve nice trout.

Aug. 3. Road working. In the afternoon fell a little rain and snow. We were overtaken today by thirteen of our boys with pack animals. They had left the mines five days ago. We finished the road.

Aug. 4. Moved through the canyon, all safe. Four Indians came into camp.

Aug. 5. At about seven o'clock we were on the march. Good road, made about twelve miles and camped on Carson River, though at that time we had no name for it; only the one we gave it, and that was Pilot River. One of our men killed a fine antelope. Several of the natives visited our camp. The mountains seemed to be all on fire and the valley full of smoke.

Aug. 6. Continued down Carson River passed a hot spring [Walley's Hot Springs]. Camped in the bend of the river. Here Mr. [Adison] Pratt killed a rattlesnake which gave the name Rattlesnake Camp. At night we could see as if there were a hundred fires in the California mountains. Made, no doubt, by Indians. . . .

Aug. 7. This morning four horses and one ox were missing; supposed to have been stolen by Indians. Made about fifteen miles and camped on the river. Road rather bad. Indians were seen following us all day.

Aug. 8. Still continued our course down the river making about fifteen miles.

Aug. 9. After making about fifteen miles we camped again on the river in a short bend. This we called Ox Bow Encampment.

Aug. 10. At two this morning the camp was aroused by the guard saying the horses were crossing the river, leaving the corral which we had made by forming our wagons across the narrow neck or bend of the river. On examining there were no horses missing but when daylight came we found that two horses and a mule were gone. There seemed to be no doubts but Indians had gotten them some way, in spite of the guard notwithstanding; our guard affirmed that they were and had been faithful while on duty and when we came to look after the cattle we found a cow and calf were missing. Ten men were sent out after the animals, when they

overtook some Indians and recovered one horse and one mule. One of the men, Mr. Dimond, was shot in the breast by an arrow from an Indian, but it did not prove fatal. After breakfast the calf belonging to the lost cow came up with an arrow sticking in its guts, and some of the camp had to knock it in the head.

Aug. 11. Traveled twelve miles and camped. A little dog belonging to one of the company came up, being shot with arrows; it had remained behind in the morning, eating on the remains of the calf.

Aug. 12. Left Carson River. Traveled rather a northwest course for twenty-five miles, when we struck the old Truckee road on the east side of the Truckee River. Here our packers left us and went ahead.

Aug. 13. Laid by.

Aug. 14. After traveling about eight miles over a sandy road, we then had a hard, smooth road and encamped at the boiling springs, making about twenty-five miles. Here we made our tea and coffee without fire to heat the water. A little dog walked up so near to one of these springs as to lose his balance, fell in, and was instantly scalded to death and boiled to pieces. Here was no water for our stock.

Aug. 15. At eleven last night we rolled out for water. The moon shone bright, and a good road. At six this morning arrived at the sink of the Humboldt and camped. The water here was not very good. Cattle did not like it. Towards evening eighteen emigrant wagons rolled in and camped by us. They had met our packers about forty miles ahead of us and had traveled about one hundred miles without water. These emigrants had come by way of Fort Hall. There was one family in the crowd by the name of Hazen Kimball that had wintered at the Salt Lake and had moved in March to Fort Hall. Kimball said he did not like the Salt Lake country and had left, but the people there had been sowing wheat all last fall and winter and had put in eight thousand acres of grain. At this camp we lost a cow. She mired and in her struggles broke a blood vessel.

Aug. 16. Made twenty miles. Road good. At this camp the water is a little better and runs a little. The stock looks bad, not having had much grass and water since leaving the Truckee. Today we met 25 wagons, emigrants for Calif.

## EMIGRANT DIARY ACCOUNTS

-- Lower Humboldt River and Humboldt Sink --

BRYARLY, 1849: . . . In the meantime the necessary preparations to pay the last respects to our deceased member were being made. A hill near by was chosen as a spot suitable, from its elevation & vicinity to what will always hereafter be the road, to receive his remains. At three o'clock the preparations were announced ready & we took a solemn movements towards the grave. His blanket served him for his winding sheet & a few planks layed over, for his coffin. The funeral service was read & a suitable board [placed] at his head, & thus he was left, each perhaps thinking of the uncertainty of life and death.

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

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

As many as five hundred have left since we arrived. It is rather amusing to see the many different manners which necessity has compelled the poor fellows to travel -- some packing upon their backs, others driving a half-dead mule or pony before them, laden with a few hard crackers & a coffee pot. [There are] carts of all descriptions, wagons [that] have been divided, one party taking the fore wheels & half the bed, another the hind ones with the remaining half. "Necessity is the mother of invention," & if anyone doubts it, I think it will be convincing to them to be upon this road. Oxen are also packed, the load being placed upon their backs & upon the yoke. They move along very well and keep up a very good gait.

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



LANGWORTHY, 1850: Arrived at noon on the confines of the "Big Meadow." Here the river spreads into a very shallow lake, twenty miles in length, by near ten miles in breadth. This sheet of water is nearly surrounded by a wide morass, covered with a kind of coarse grass and rushes. This is the fodder which the emigrants take on board their wagons, preparatory to crossing the "Great Desert." This Big Meadows lies on both sides of the lake, and stretches along for a distance of fifteen or twenty miles.

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

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

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

SHAW, 1849: The reader should not imagine the Humboldt to be a rapid mountain stream, with its cool and limpid waters rushing down the rocks of steep inclines, with here and there beautiful cascades and shady pools under mountain evergreens, where the sun never intrudes and where the speckled trout love to sport. While the water of such a stream is fit for the gods, that of the Humboldt is not good for man nor beast. With the exception of a short distance near its source, it has the least perceptible current. There is not a fish nor any other living thing to be found in its waters, and there is not timber enough in three hundred miles of its desolate valley to make a snuff-box, or sufficient vegetation along its banks to shade a rabbit, while its waters contain the alkali to make soap for a nation, and, after winding its sluggish way through a desert within a desert, it sinks, disappears, and leaves the inquisitive man to ask how, why, when, and where?

. . . On arriving at the Sink of the Humboldt, a great disappointment awaited us. We had known nothing of the nature of that great wonder except what we had been told by those who knew no more about it than ourselves. In place of a great rent in the earth, into which the waters of the river plunged with a terrible

roar (as pictured in our imagination), there was found a mud lake ten miles long and four or five miles wide, a veritable sea of slime, a "slough of despond," an ocean of ooze, a bottomless bed of alkali poison, which emitted a nauseous odor and presented the appearance of utter desolation. The croaking of frogs would have been a redeeming feature of the place, but no living thing disturbed the silence and solitude of the lonely region. There were mysteries and wonders hovering over and around the Sink of the Humboldt, but there was neither beauty nor grandeur in connection with it, for a more dreary or desolate spot could not be found on the face of the earth.

REMY, 1855: At sunset the mountains were clad with exquisite tints: some, illuminated by the twilight, presented shades of a delicate rose-colour, while others were of a lovely blue. The setting sun moreover was wrapt in magnificently golden clouds, blended with others of a rosy hue of inexpressible beauty.

ROYCE, 1849: The first question in the morning was, "How can the oxen be kept from starving?" A happy thought occurred. We had, thus far in our journey, managed to keep something in the shape of a bed to sleep on. It was a mattress-tick, and, just before leaving Salt Lake, we had put into it some fresh hay -- not very much, for our load must be as light as possible, but the old gentleman traveling with us had also a small straw mattress; the two together might keep the poor things from starving for a few hours. At once a small portion was dealt out to them and for the present they were saved. For ourselves we had food which we believed would last us till we reached the Gold Mines if we could go right on; if we were much delayed anywhere, it was doubtful. The two or three quarts of water in our little cask would last only a few hours, to give moderate drinks to each of the party.

-- Forty Mile Desert, Truckee Route --

BRYANT, 1846: . . . From this point the trail takes a southwest course, and runs across a totally barren plain, with the exception of a few clumps of sage-bushes, a distance of twenty miles. No sign of the river or of the existence of water indicated itself within this distance. Some remarkable petrifications displayed themselves near the trail early this morning. They had all the appearance of petrified fungi, and many of them were of large dimensions. . . .

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

bitter as the strongest lye filtered through ashes. . . .

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

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

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

CLYMAN, 1844: . . . at about 15 miles or half way from Waushee [Truckee] river to the first water near Marys Lake still exist a cauldron of Boiling water no steam issues from it [at] present but it stands in several pools boiling and again disappearing some of these pools have beautiful clear water Boiling in them and others emit Quantities of mud

into one of these muddy pools my little water spaniel went poor fellow not Knowing that it was Boiling hot he deliberately walked in to the caldron to slake his thirst and cool his limbs when to his sad disappointment and my sorrow he scalded himself

almost instantly to death I felt more for his loss than any other animal I ever lost in my life as he had been my constant companion in all my wanderings since I left Milwaukee and I vainly hoped to see him return to his old master in his native village (But such is nature of all earthly hopes)

BRYANT, 1846: . . . A ride of several hours down the valley, brought us to a ridge of sandy hills running entirely across it.

. . . The distance across the ridge, or rather elevated plain of sandy undulations, is about ten miles. Over this plain the travelling is very laborious. We were compelled to dismount from our animals, weakened as they were by thirst and hunger, in order to get them along through the deep sand.

PERKINS, 1849: . . . Took 2 hours rest about midnight and arrived to our great joy at the Salmon Trout [Truckee] River at 7 a.m. on Sunday Sept. 9, and once more had a refreshing draught of pure water and was gladdened by the sight of large majestic trees. The Salmon Trout being lined with the finest Cotton woods I ever saw. No one can imagine how delightful the sight of a tree is after such long stretches of desert, until they have tried it. We have seen very few of any kind since leaving the Platte, and what a luxury after our mules were taken care of, to lay down in their shade and make up our two nights loss of sleep, and hear the wind rustling their leaves and whistling among their branches.

WILKINS, 1849: I wish California had sunk into the ocean before I had ever heard of it. Here I am alone, having crossed the desert, it is true, and got to some good water, but have had nothing to eat all day, my companions scattered, our wagons left behind. That desert has played h\_\_l with us.

WATERS, 1855: . . . If ever I saw heaven, I saw it there.

-- Forty Mile Desert, Carson Route

INGALLS, 1850: Imagine to yourself a vast plain of sand and clay; the moon riding over you in silent grandeur, just renders visible by her light the distant mountains; the stunted sage, the salt lakes, cheating the thirsty traveler into the belief that water is near; yes, water it is, but poison to the living thing that stops to drink. . . . Burning wagons render still more hideous the solemn march; dead horses line the road, and living ones may be constantly seen, lapping and rolling the empty water casks (which have been cast away) for a drop of water to quench their burning thirst, or standing with drooping heads, waiting for death to relieve them of their tortures, or lying on the sand half buried, unable to rise, yet still trying. The sand hills are reached; then comes a scene of confusion and dismay. Animal after animal drops down. Wagon after wagon is stopped, the strongest animals taken out of the harness; the most important



effects are taken out of the wagon and placed on their backs and all hurry away, leaving behind wagons, property and animals that, too weak to travel, lie and broil in the sun in an agony of thirst until death relieves them of their tortures. The owners hurry on with but one object in view, that of reaching the Carson River before the boiling sun shall reduce them to the same condition. Morning comes, and the light of day presents a scene more horrid than the rout of a defeated army; dead stock line the roads, wagons, rifles, tents, clothes, everything but food may be found scattered along the road; here an ox, who standing famished against a wagon bed until nature could do no more, settles back into it and dies; and there a horse kicking out his last gasp in the burning sand, men scattered along the plain and stretched out among the dead stock like corpses, fill out the picture. The desert! You must see it and feel it in an August day, when legions have crossed it before you, to realize it in all its horrors. But heaven save you from the experience.

ROYCE, 1849: After this one little episode, the only cheering incident for many hours, we turned to look at what lay round these monster wagons. It would be impossible to describe the motley collection of things of various sorts, strewn all about. The greater part of the materials, however, were paste-board boxes, some complete, but most of them broken, and pieces of wrapping paper still creased, partially in the form of packages. But the most prominent objects were two or three perhaps more, very beautifully finished trunks of various sizes, some of them standing open, their pretty trays lying on the ground, and all rifled of their contents; save that occasionally a few pamphlets, or, here and there, a book remained in the corners. We concluded that this must have been a company of merchants hauling a load of goods to California, that some of their animals had given out, and, fearing the rest would they had packed toward the river. There was only one thing, (besides the few pounds of bacon) that, in all these varied heaps of thing, many of which, in civilized scenes, would have been valuable, I thought worth picking up. That was a little book, bound in cloth and illustrated with a number of small engravings. Its title was "Little Ella." I thought it would please Mary, so I put it in my pocket. It was an easily carried souvenir of the desert; and more than one pair of young eyes learned to read its pages in after years.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: This point, on the river, bears the classic name of "Ragtown." The reason of the appellation, is because there are several acres here, literally covered with rags, or clothing, either sound or tattered. The wood-work of thousands of wagons have been burnt at this place; the irons covered the soil for a considerable space around.

At Ragtown, to our great surprise, we found an abundant supply of flour from California. The flour was sent here by the Benevolent Society of Sacramento city. The agent, who has a large cloth tent, sells the flour for twenty-five cents per pound to those who have money, and gives twenty pounds to each one who

is destitute of cash. I can assure you he was doing a heavy business, and throngs of moneyless customers crowded his store. This charitable interposition, on the part of the good people of Sacramento, has prevented an immense amount of suffering. Most of the emigrants were out of flour, or nearly so, on their arrival here.

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

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

#### -- Hummocks and Mirage

STEELE, 1850: At first we thought we were traveling a new road. . . but as we advanced into the plain the lake suddenly disappeared and there opened before us a wide valley, surrounded by low, well-timbered hills. Plainly defined in the center of this valley we could see trains of emigrant wagons, groups of horsemen, and, in short, almost anything the imagination might picture. The mirage continued until near sunset, when the beautiful illusion gradually faded from our view, leaving only the dull, monotonous desert. Though for hours we knew it was unreal, yet we so desired the lake shore, the woods, the grassy slopes, and probable cold springs, with all its beautiful revelations, that when the last trace was gone, there came to us a feeling of deep disappointment.

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

About sunset we passed among tall bunches of greasewood, around which the wind had piled large heaps of sand, making the place resemble a well-cultivated soft sand. Ascending these,

some of the oxen gave out and had to be taken from the wagons. This increased the labor of the others, and it was with the utmost difficulty that the wagons were brought to the summit of the vast ridge. But no sooner was it accomplished than the oxen, as though conscious of approaching water, renewed their exertions. One ox that had repeatedly lain down, and had been lifted on his feet, while coming up the ridge, puffed the sand from his nostrils, and extending his nose in the air, as if to satisfy himself that his efforts would not be in vain, pushed off with a steady pace for the river, and about two hour after dark, its murmur greeted our ears like the glad welcome of an old friend. [Truckee Route.]

WAYMAN, 1852: We passed 10 Trading Posts in traveling from The Humboldt sink to the Carson river. . . . This Desert is thickly studded with little mounds from 1 to 8 feet high & from 3 to 30 feet in diameter upon which a species of Greecewood grows -- the rootss of which seem to hold the Mounds in shape. In other places the surface of the ground is perfectly smoothe & level, in the distance it looks like a sheet of water & reflecting the image of objects like a Mirror. [Carson Route.]

-- Soda Lake, Carson Route --

INGALS, 1850: We stayed with them through the heat of the day, and about night started again, but turned off about a mile from the road to visit a small salt lake, where we found a very good spring of fresh water and a sulphur spring. This lake is about three miles from the Carson River; its waters are more salt than the most salt brine, and its shores are encrusted with pure salt. Its bed was evidently once the crater of a volcano.

-- Carson River Route Desert Crossing --

DECKER, 1849: Scenery baren & desolate, alternating banks & ridges of sand and black lava or volcanic rock. The low mountain ridges running in curious disorder indicate that we are ascending the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains. . . . Our stopping place was on the dry bed or bottom of a lake of some 20 acres -- level as water, hard so that wagon going over made but little impression -- being a cement of sand dried hard as the water evaporated at certain seasons & leaving a delicate coating of alkali on top, it looking white & hone in the light of the moon like spotless snow & in contrast with the ridge or circle of hills surrounding this basin with soft outlines, looked beautiful in contrast. Got our supper prepared for the night trip & partook of the simple meal sitting on this clean table in the clear light of the moon, the stars begemmed the canopy . . . . Some of the boys said this was the best tavern on the road as the floor was scrubbed clean.

## -- First Views of Eagle Valley (Carson City) --

DECKER, 1849: Left camp (good grass) at 6 o'clock & soon crossed a ragged spur [west of Dayton] of the mountain running up to the river. From this hill is a splendid scenery -- being near the head of the valley of Carson River issuing through a canon or gorge between the mountains. The valley stretched out from this view for many miles a beautiful greensward with the river winding gracefully through it sparking in its rapid current & banks fringed with the most beautiful trees. The high & rugged mountains show a curious contrast in this view. The road today has been extremely rocky & stony & uneven . . . . After ascending a little hill with deep ashy dust of snowy whiteness we passed through sparsely studded grove of Pines & Cedars of various kinds, a few miles in length. Struck the river again above the canon in a fine & picturesque bottom with good grass surrounded with high mountains. . . . The old road passing the canyon way is very bad compared with the cut off we came today. Passed (afternoon) through a fine meadow like valley after passing a spur of mountain on either side with very large rocks.

McKINSTRY, 1850: Some places nothing but sharp angular rock. The road is not hilly, though some hollows or ravines in two or three places. I passed over ridges of white ashes 4 or 5 inches deep, some of it as white as flour, in other places whitish. Scattering cedar along the road and one pine.

As we came over the summit a beautiful view presented itself. The river lay before us green as usual and beyond lay the range of the Sierra Nevada covered with snow, quite white in the s.w. and spotted in the n.w. The Mts. to the westward are tolerably well timbered under the snowline and the country is less barren in its appearance.

We watered where we struck the river, near another trading camp. These are quite numerous and it is astonishing to see the quantity of provisions that are going back on the track of the emigration. It must be cheap soon. . . .

Leaving the river we passed through an open valley on the right with a spring branch running through it (Eagle Valley) and good grass some 1 m. to the right near the foot of the hills, which were capped with snow and tolerably timbered.

## -- Carson Valley --

Decker, 1849: I will call this "Camp Beautiful." Starting out as the sun rose in gorgeous splendor casting her beams over valley & peaks I viewed the scene and was properly delighted & felt myself fully repaid for all the vexation & sacrifices made for & during this trip. From camp the road leads near the foot of the main chain of the Sierra which rises abruptly from 2000 to 3000 ft. The outlines or top is gently irregular in places beautiful peaks rise seemingly to a sharp point some of which are

covered with banks of snow. The most beautiful tapering pine trees cover this ridge in most places nearly of uniform size & regular distance apart, forming fairy like groves at the foot. . . . The bottom of valley is from 6 to 8 miles wide. The ridges on the opposite side rise less abruptly one ridge above the other until lost to view in the blue distance. The valley is level & ornamented with the willow fringed little streams winding their way to the Carson River which is marked by the bolder cotton wood studding its banks along its whole length. Grass of various kinds common in Ohio is abundant here. Clover in places grows thickly as it can stand. Timothy with its familiar looking head is also part of the spontaneous grass of this lovely valley. The scythe could be employed here in this meadowlike valley with profit if located in the states. The soil is evidently rich. Nearly every variety of grasses are on it & plants of kinds new & unknown to me in great variety. Sun flowers are abundant as well as other kinds of flowers, among which is a large white one of singular beauty, I suppose to be the "California Poppy."

LANGWORTHY, 1850: Moved along up the valley. It is an oasis of great extent, green, romantic, and beautiful, situated in the midst of vast deserts and barren mountains. The Carson river runs a serpentine course through the valley the banks being everywhere fringed with a luxuriant growth of willows. The valley lies north and south, is of an oval form, and is covered with a natural growth of excellent grass. On the west side, the mountain rises to a great height, and from its base spring a great number of small creeks of pure and exceedingly cold water. These rills, running swiftly over pebbled beds, cross the road at short intervals, and meandering through the grassy plain, fall at length into the Carson river.

At ten in the morning, we met a train of sixty Mormons, with four hundred horses and mules, on their way to Salt Lake. These Mormons informed us, that two days previously they had killed and scalped six Digger Indians, in revenge for thirty mules which the Indians had stolen from them. They took from the Diggers five horses, though they were not the same as those they lost, and did not know whether the Indians they had killed were those concerned in the theft, or otherwise. This was executing justice upon the same principle as practiced by the Indians. When an Indian is killed by a white man, the tribe to which he belonged never feel satisfied until the life of some white man atones for the offence. In this case, any other individual answers their purpose precisely as well as the identical murderer.

-- Mormon Station (Genoa) --

McKINSTRY, 1850: Trading houses as often as once a mile; everything to sell and want to buy cattle. Clark & Lyon sold their black cow for 35 dolls. Flour is down to 50 cts. per lb. We meet trains of provisions all the time. I presume that we have met from 50 to 100 mule loads this forenoon, besides wagons,

each mule carrying from 2 to 4 hund., mostly Spaniards driving them. Passed one trading tent that had jars of milk standing in a spring under a wagon, for sale at 50 cts. per quart. The valley is from 2 to 10 m. wide and presents a very animated appearance -- covered with cattle and wagons. Most of the traders have droves of cattle herded here. Made 7 or 8 m. this forenoon. Roads excellent.

In the afternoon we kept down on the right hand side of the valley, our course about the same as the valley, viz. a little w. of s. Passed the Mormon Station and several others. This is a picturesque place. Fine pines, one very large one at the station, the camp under it.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: At noon, we stopped at a trading-post, called the Mormon Station. It is a very large log building, standing in the skirts of the pine grove which covers the mountain side, and at this point extends quite down to the level of the valley. These are the nut-bearing pines, full of pitch, tall, and covered with limbs to within eight or ten feet of the ground. Some of these trees were six feet in diameter.

We encamped where wood, water and grass were abundant, and here found several companies of emigrants.

-- Walley's Hot Springs --

DECKER, 1849: Passing a part of the mountain of clean surface & entirely barren found all along its foot for a mile hot springs smelling of sulphur & emitting steam, some are too hot to bear the hand in more than an instant. Along there is a large slough or lake hiding most of the water by "Bull Rushes" which grow very large. Crossed several pretty bad sloughs, crossed a number of cold & crystal pure rills running over pebbles & shining yellow mica looking like gold under the limpid current. These rills start from springs in the ravines above increased by snow water which falls down in romantic cascades. These little streams irrigate this whole valley which alone cause the rich growth of vegetation in this country at this season. . . . Among these mountains distance is very deceiving, 10 miles appears like one mile in Ohio. The atmosphere is very clear & pure which accounts for it & views of landscape are on a large scale. The sky is here usually very clear or of a peculiar blue & hazy white. Saw this morning at a distance several objects in the valley looked like mule but on closer examination found they were Sandhill Cranes which are some 5 ft. high while walking & make the valley resound with the cooing or whirring noise.

MCKINSTRY, 1850: Passed 2 m. from the Mormon Station some hot springs. They are along under the foot of the hills, the road between them, and are scattered along for more than a mile and form quite a little lake or slough which is hot. Most of the springs are about hot enough for dishwater, though some 3 or 4 were boiling hot, one of the latter very clear, water coming out

from under a rock. There must be two or three hundred of these springs and they form a marsh of 2 or 300 acres, of rushes.

. . . The Pacific Train is now just behind with but 12 passengers and 9 baggage wagons, 4 men to each passenger wagon. They got out of provisions at Salt Lake and bought wheat at 10 dolls. but they were hindered greatly in getting it ground, &c., in fact fooled away their time and their passengers have suffered greatly and now the proprietors, Jerome, Hanson & Smith have nothing to buy with, and each man has to shift for themselves. The passengers pass us daily & some of them say that they have no money to buy provisions with, yet they can pay 50 cts. per drink for brandy. So ends this famous stage line from St. Louis to Cal. that I heard so much about before I started, advertised to carry men through in 60 days at 200 dolls. each. They have been beat by the ox teams. They left St. Joseph May 12th and have been now 113 days out.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: Moving forward, we passed a remarkable hot spring. It gushes from the base of a mountain, between strata of horizontal rocks, in nearly a continuous thin sheet; the water being near the boiling point, and the stream nearly a mile in breadth. This is by far the widest river of hot water that we have as yet seen. Indeed, we have not heard or read of anything like it. The quality of water, however, is not so great as might be inferred from its extraordinary width, the stream being very shallow, seldom more than an inch in depth, but it flows down upon an extensive flat, where it forms a large marsh, or pond, in which there is a dense growth of the most gigantic bul-rushes. The road runs just above the line from where the water flows, the mountain above it being entirely destitute of trees and vegetation of every kind, though other mountains around are covered with timber. This mountain looks as though scorched and dried by internal fires, and is said occasionally to present luminous appearances in the night, thus threatening a volcanic eruption.

-- Carson Canyon --

WM. JOHNSTON, 1849: In the afternoon, entering a valley between high mountains we followed it for a time until we reached a narrow gap or canyon, where we began the ascent of the Sierras. A turbulent mountain stream spanned by a corduroy bridge was crossed. This, we learned from Mr. Sly, had been built by the Mormon battalion on its return to Salt Lake. The stream in its precipitous course dashed madly; scarce more so than did we when having got over the bridge, we found the road frightfully steep, quite narrow and beset with rocks. Had not others preceded us we might have questioned whether such difficulties were not insurmountable. Within the narrow gap which we ascended the sun never enters, and the air had the chilliness of an ice house.

. . . Following the course of the little mountain stream; twice crossing it, where rocks well nigh choking it, presented barriers almost impassable, we continued climbing upward. Some



large trees uprooted by storms were in our way, and greatly impeded our progress; being unable to go around them, we were obliged to go over them, lifting the wheels on the side next to them, for the doing of which all latent energies were pressed into service. On two occasions high above us were benches, or levels, to gain which precipitous flights of a hundred feet in one instance and about sixty in another had to be overcome. To make these ascents with loaded wagons was not thought of; it was sufficiently difficult by doubling the teams, in addition to the use of ropes, to lift the empty wagons, taking one at a time and returning for the next, and so on until all were carried up. Nor was this accomplished without the use of such moral suasion as the wildest hallooing, the loudest of whip cracking, and the most extraordinary profanity that ever saluted ears, whether of dumb beasts or of men; indeed, the air seemed densely blue with oaths while all this was in progress. Then packs had to be made for the backs of the mules, for in this way the contents of the wagons were on these occasions carried upwards.

DECKER, 1849: The view is on a scale so large so widely romantic, and yet desolate as almost to overpower the mind with awe. Contemplating this scenery (which cannot be described) & then turning to ones own dependent little self, a wide field is open for useful reflection while "looking through nature to nature's God." Pass Creek or the main tributary of Carson River -- a pretty strong stream which rushes in rapids among huge rocks now enclosed within a width of a few feet spraying current is forced, now forced among huge rocks in rapids & anon dropping its crystal current over a shelf of rock forming a fine cascade. But the gloomy part is yet to site. The road or rather the want of a road, I will call it a kind of blocked up passage winding in short angles among rocks large as common dwellings & over banks steeps, or pitches which no one would think an empty wagon had ever forced its way through save by tracks made when the wheels occasionally favored with a touch on "terra firma" (the ground). More than two animals cannot work to advantage in many places -- more being apt to cramp the wagon. The wheels often strike rocks half as high as themselves over which men have to assist & this is no slight job often. In other places it goes over solid compact rocks for rods rough in the extreme & often too steep for ascents. Over these rocks up & down which animals sometimes have to force their way, often they fall & struggle in their weakened condition to draw sympathy from a heart of stone, but this is no place for sympathy.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: The scenery of this canyon, exceeds all I have yet seen for wild magnificence. There is only room for the road and the river running close by its side, while on either hand the mountains rise to a fearful height, their sides, in some places, presenting perpendicular cliffs, and in others, trees of pine or balsam, clinging as with a death-grasp, to crevices in the rocks. A multitude of the putrescent carcasses of animals line the road-side, or have been thrown in the rushing stream.

The poor creatures here ended their wearisome journey, being unable, through weakness, to ascend this formidable height, and were by their owners abandoned to starvation and death.

-- Hope Valley --

MCKINSTRY, 1850: After emerging from the Kanyon we strike into a narrow bottom or valley some 1/4 m. wide. The hills are not so high or rather we are nearer the top of them for the snow is not far above us. This valley lasts some 8 miles but little grass, the soil most of the way sandy or gravelly, timbered with open groves of pine and rather beautiful.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: . . . we suddenly and unexpectedly emerged from the canyon into a mountain valley. It lies north and south, is ten miles long, and two in breadth. The road here turns to the left, or south, and passes through the valley lengthwise. The ground has a lively green hue, being covered with short grass, whilst around the landscape are dispersed clumps of pine and aspen trees, interspersed with many large heaps of loose granitic rocks. Through this lonely vale, the Carson river winds its way, but is here diminished to the size of a small brook, with gentle current, rolling over beds of pebbles. I think this valley must be six or seven thousand feet above the level of the sea, as snow lies through the year at a little higher elevation. Innumerable summits of rough, jagged, and snow-capped mountains surround the valley on all sides.

-- Red Lake --

MCKINSTRY, 1850: Camped at the head of a little lake where we began to rise to the first mountains. Found but little grass (none in fact). The afternoon has been windy with frequent squalls of snow, and at last it terminated in a fine little snow storm, which fell so as to cover the ground, and as cold as Dec. We have been rising all day and this lake may be considered on the side rather than at the foot of the Mts. We camped alone tonight (good).

DECKER, 1849: . . . reached a lake of considerable extent at the foot of the most impassable passable hill that was perhaps ever honored with wagons pressure on its brow.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: We emerged from it at the southern terminus, and passed over a chain of high hills, covered with the most stupendous trees, consisting of pine, cedar and balsam fir. We soon descended into another valley, where there is a sheet of water called Red Lake. It is narrow, and between one and two miles in length. It lies east and west. The western terminus stretches to the foot of the dividing ridge of the Sierra Nevada, from which the waters diverge to the east and west.

## -- Carson Pass Ascent --

WM. JOHNSTON, 1849: In a short way from camp we began the ascent of one of the principal ridges of the Sierra; what may be reckoned the backbone. While there was to some extent a repetition of the experiences of the previous day, we were not as then required to unpack the wagons, the grades being less severe, and our labors were consequently lessened. At times, however, double teaming had to be resorted to; eight and in some cases ten mules were used; and very often the men were called upon to put their shoulders to the wheels, while a reserve force followed in readiness to scotch them, whenever a rest was necessary. The mules carrying packs gave considerable trouble by their endeavors to rid themselves of the burdens they bore. In these attempts they rubbed close to one another, and when a tree seemed to favor their schemes they jostled against it; while at times they prostrated themselves to the earth, and rolled to and fro, in endeavors to lighten up. If they did not succeed in freeing themselves of their packs, which was seldom if ever the case, for our experience had already enabled us to acquire the art of strapping properly, they did at least get them so shifted, that we were frequently required to do some readjusting.

DECKER, 1849: At the head of the lake as seen from the foot of the hill is a bold wall of gray granite shelved upon each other in huge masses. Here at the foot of the hill were trains unloading wagons & packing things up the steeps. This hill of hills is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile high. Our packs being pretty heavy for fagged mules, my horse was packed pretty heavy. I led him up ascending as the others were ahead winding along at times could see them almost over my head, this hill is called "the Devil's Ladder." The horse I expected momentarily to fall back as he advanced with groans up the rocky steeps in places walled some feet height. . . . Passed a man with a Buggy halfway up seemingly despairing of ever reaching the summit to which he turned his eyes wistfully. On the summit I passed a two horse Yankee wagon with springs and a real down easter aboard -- "from Iowa last." Well, all kinds of vehicles employed to get to the "Diggins."

LANGWORTHY, 1850: After refreshing ourselves and team at the lake, we clambered up an ascent about two miles, which is the most dreaded by emigrants of any upon the entire land route to California. The road is crooked, taking numerous short turns around the roots of huge trees, and in some places, is paved over with large roundish rocks. Up, and over these, the cattle are compelled to climb, sometimes slipping down, and in other instances, creeping upwards upon their knees. Fortunately we had no load at this time, and we found an empty wagon quite sufficient for three yoke of oxen to draw.

I do not think it possible to drive teams over heights more difficult than those we have ascended, being twice the height of the Alleghenies; and higher than any of the passes of the Alps into Italy. Hannibal and Napoleon gained deathless

renown by crossing the Alps, which might not have been a more hazardous undertaking than crossing the Sierra Nevada, yet I am suspicious that thousands have crossed these tremendous heights the present year, who will not acquire immortal honor by the exploit. One thing, however, is certain; that is, if the names of the California emigrants should not chance to be inscribed in the records of fame, you may yet see countless thousands of their names, very legibly written with chalk, wagon grease, or paint, upon the everlasting rocks that compose the towering ranges of these mountains. Volumes might be filled with these elevated names. Here are monuments that will stand until the "rocks fall to dust," though the inscriptions upon them will soon fade away.

-- Twin Lakes (Caples Lake) --

DECKER, 1849: After my lonesome walk leading the horse alone I gladly hailed our folks from a hill. Camped in the most beautiful & picturesque valley of some miles in extent I ever beheld. The grass was finely carpeting it, at the end of a fine silvery lake with snow clad heights, around over all the declining sun cast her golden rays. Before reaching camp had to cross quite a stream & having no animal to ride jumped in 2 ft deep, water cold as ice (snow water) & the blood seemed to stop circulation I being warm, & for the moment felt as if death would result. Having Zivils medicine in pocket took a little & revived me at once. Reached camp & found Dr. Boyles alcohol for medicinal purposes, had been seized by the train when working up over the hill & some of the boys felt good. I took a little to counteract the effects of drenching. Washed myself & put on dry clothes & left like myself again.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: Here is a lake of considerable extent, irregular in form, and sprinkled with numerous little islands, green and overgrown with moss. I know of no name for this sheet of water. I will therefore venture to christen it Nevada Lake. We encamped in the skirts of an ancient forest at the south end of the lake, and under the shelter of immense rocks of granite. The cold was benumbing, but fuel being plenty, we rolled together a pile of dry pine logs and setting it on fire, the flame soon illuminated a portion of the deep, dark and gloomy vale. Overhead, the heavens were without a cloud, and the stars gleamed with the brilliancy of a Winter's night. Around us on all sides, dark mountains towered high, and being covered with the sable pall of night, presented a striking picture of gloomy magnificence. No place could be better fitted for contemplation of the sublime and wonderful works of Nature. We are naturally led to inquire what periods of duration have elapsed since these stupendous towers were upheaved in solemn pomp from the abyss of the deep? What crashing of a thousand thunders resounded over an uninhabited world, when by the mighty force of internal fires, the globe's solid crust was broken up? How long will these massive piles withstand the war of elements, before they shall be

decomposed and sunk to level plains? While this lengthy process moves slowly but surely onward, what revolutions among nations will take place, and what moral and intellectual changes in reference to the human race? We may raise a thousand queries, but no voice returns an answer. All is silent as the mute rocks or still waters now sleeping in this valley.

-- Emigrant Valley and West Pass --

DECKER, 1849: Soon reached a long sand hill the road leading through thickets of pines & cedars & underbursh, constantly ascending or descending mountains until we reached the main or highest ridge which is a long steep ascent with very ugly mirey places for the wagons. We struck to the right of the edge of a bank of snow to keep our mules from miring where teams were sticking fast & packing their loads up. This steep & the irregularity of the snow made it difficult. I mounted Sally & forced her up part of the snow bank (which was 20 ft. deep) nearly perpendicular to avoid worse road expecting her momentarily to fall back. Nearly exhausted (men & animals) we reached the top -- the highest point of the Sierra Nevada mountains, called the Backbone. Stopping we looked around & here is a view too magnificently grand & wildly romantic for me to attempt to describe, although we have traveled nearly half a day from this point we looked down to the East & saw stretched out apparently a little meadow patch, the valley we left this morning, our wagons looked like white specs in the view . . . . Standing here we seem higher than any immediate peak save a black volcanic beehive shaped pile of rock on our right hardby the road which overlooks us some 50 ft. Here the sky was peculiarly clear -- occasionally a snowy white hazy cloud passed apparently over our heads near by. For some days the altitude has affected us much, shortness of breath -- walking goes hard, ones breath short expecially today at this very high point. Snow in abundances covering in banks all the ridges around us & those had not already coats on put them on to shield them from the chilly wind which blows with some force seemingly from the Pacific. Here the road rises over a snow bank some 20 ft deep for some distance.

LANGWORTHY, 1850: We regarded it as the last and most formidable barrier we have to surmount, in arriving at the half fabulous region of untold wealth. We thought, that if we could once get to the height of this last summit, we should then be comparatively safe from those dreaded storms of snow, which in these elevated regions sometimes descend sudden as an avalanche, overwhelming whole caravans and dooming them to certain destruction. . . . The last ascent is six miles; the first three, through dense forest of ever-green timber, the remaining three miles, the mountain is mostly bare, except here and there a scattering tree. The last two miles of the ascent is terrific, being excessively steep, and a part of the way so sideling, that it was necessary for several men to brace themselves against a wagon to prevent

its upsetting and rolling down the side of the mountain. By doubling and assisting with manual strength, we succeeded in gaining the top of this dreaded eminence by two o'clock in the afternoon. The sun shone clear and bright, but the wind raged with violence, and the cold was so intense that we all went to the wagons and put on our great coats and woolen mittens. We were happily disappointed in finding but little snow in the road.

. . . Near the top of the ridge, there is an immense embankment of snow stretching along in a horizontal line, which it would seem was originally blown from, or over the summit of the mountain. . . . Near the summit of the ridge there is what appears to be the crater of an extinguished volcano [Emigrant Lake]. It is an immense hole, perpendicular on the sides, like a well, about four hundred yards in diameter, and we judged more than a thousand feet in depth. There is a pond of water at the bottom, and an outlet on the lower side. Arriving near the top of the ridge, the road turns to the south, and runs along the summit about two miles, but our view towards the west is obstructed as yet by a ridge of granite and trappean rock, that rises like a wall on our right to the height of nearly two thousand feet. The appearance of this wall, is as though the granite had been broken through by some tremendous force from below, while the dark masses of rock were protruded upward through the opening where it now appears as a crown-work to the wall.

Looking back to the east, the prospect is one of gloomy grandeur. A valley of immense depth embosoming a lake, and otherwise covered with dense forests of dark ever-greens, lies under our feet, while beyond it, many frosty peaks are seen mingling with the clouds and pinnacles of naked rocks projecting from a basement of snow. We now come to a break in the wall like a gate-way; through this we pass, and in an instant the New World of California bursts at once upon our impatient sight. . . . The view is so vast and of such surpassing grandeur, that the mind is bewildered and list admist the boundless expanse, like attempting to grasp eternity or infinite space by the aid of our feeble powers.

SARAH ROYCE, 1849: "But the morning was bright and sunny. "Hope sprang exultant;" for, that day, that blessed 19th of October, we were to cross the highest ridge, view the "promised land," and begin our descent into warmth and safety . . . I had purposely hastened, that morning, to start ahead of the rest; and not far from noon, I was rewarded by coming out, in advance of all the others, on a rocky height whence I looked, down, far over constantly descending hills, to where a soft haze sent up a warm, rosy glow that semed to me a smile of welcome; while beyond, occasional faint outlines of other mountains appeared; and I knew I was looking across the Sacramento Valley.

California, land of sunny skies -- that was my first look into your smiling face. I loved you from that moment, for you seemed to welcome me with loving look into rest and safety. However brave a face I might have put on most of the time, I knew



my coward heart was yearning all the while for a home-nest and a welcome into it, and you seemed to promise me both. A short time I had on those rocks, sacred to thanksgiving and prayer; then the others came, and boisterous shouts, and snatches of song made rocks and welkin ring.

Squaw Ridge --

DECKER, 1849: Passed long a ridge that commanded a fine view of these American Alps. Saw on the left a thousand ft below us a green vale which looked summerlike in contrast with the snowy regions around us here on the heights. Emerged two or three times into prairie patches of 10 to 50 acres, with but little grass & no timber, in one of which we stopped to noon. Put beans over boiled [water] 2 hours & were yet hard. Ate the soup & left determined not to be detained again by beans that would not cook (a watched kettle dont boil).

-- Tragedy Springs --

BIGLER, 1848: . . . encamped at the spring near the fresh grave; determining to satisfy ourselves, it was soon opened. We were shocked at the site. There lay the three murdered men robbed of every stick of clothing, lying promiscuously in one hole about two feet deep. Two of them were lying on their faces. Allen was lying on his back and had the appearance that an ax had been sunk into his face and that he had been shot in the eye. The blood seemed fresh still oozing from their wounds. When we came to examine around about, we found arrows lying plentifully on the ground, many of them bloody and broken. Examining still closer, the rocks were stained with blood, and Mr. Allen's purse of gold dust was lying about a rod from the grave.

"MAIDEN'S GRAVE"

San Jose Mercury-News, December 3, 1980

(Courtesy of OCTA's own Pat Loomis)

Does "sweet-faced Rachel" really lie beneath the blanket of artificial flowers along Highway 88 high up on Carson Pass?

Is there anyone in "the Maiden's Grave"?

And if Rachel is burried there, who lies in the "Pioneer Grave" three miles east in the snowy meadow near Tragedy Springs?

Perhaps no one will ever know, and maybe it doesn't matter any more. Perhaps it is better to let legends go on living untarnished by the picking and proding of curious historians.

For decades motorists have stopped to read the inscription on the headstone at "the Maiden's Grave," accepting it as a sad incident among many endured by the pioneers in making their long journey by wagon train to California.

## "Maiden's Grave"

The wording on the granite stone, erected in 1905 by guests at nearby Kirkwood resort, is simple and brief: "Rachel Melton, Died Oct. 4, 1950. Native of Iowa."

Warren Taylor of Jackson, an oldtimer who contributes bits of history to the Amador Leger from time to time is the grandson of Zacharian Kirkwood for whom the resort some miles east of the grave is named. Taylor says his great uncle, E. E. Cramer, who back in 1905 was in the monument business in Stockton, took up a collection among the guests at the resort and made the headstone. Taylor's dad, Walter Taylor, who lived in Jackson, hauled the stone up to the grave.

Both he and Cramer are gone now, or maybe they could throw some light on why Rachel's name was carved on the headstone when for years the name on the weathered board marking the grave was that of a man.

Mrs. Bertha King James, whose family founded the King Apple Ranch down the road at Pioneer in the 1890's, remembers seeing the grave when she was a young girl, and says an old board from a wagon bore the name Allen Melton with the rest of the legend the same . . . Died Oct. 4, 1850. Native of Iowa.

The late Stella S. Swenson, author of a little book, "One Hundred Years at Silver Lake," contributed a few pieces to the puzzle. She said that prior to the marking of the grave by the Kirkwood guests "a very old woman" appeared at the resort looking for the grave of her young daughter who had died in 1850 and was buried in the meadow near Tragedy Springs. "She had come to remove the remains of her child and give her a Christian burial."

According to Mrs. Swenson's information, the woman recognized the meadow, but could not find the giant fir tree she remembered marked the grave. No one apparently thought to get her name, but she may have mentioned Rachel as the name of her daughter.

Some years later, after the monument had been placed, rancher Stephen Ferrari was clearing the meadow and burning brush and fallen trees. Beneath the ashes of a large log he found the outline of a grave marked with stones as the aged mother had described.

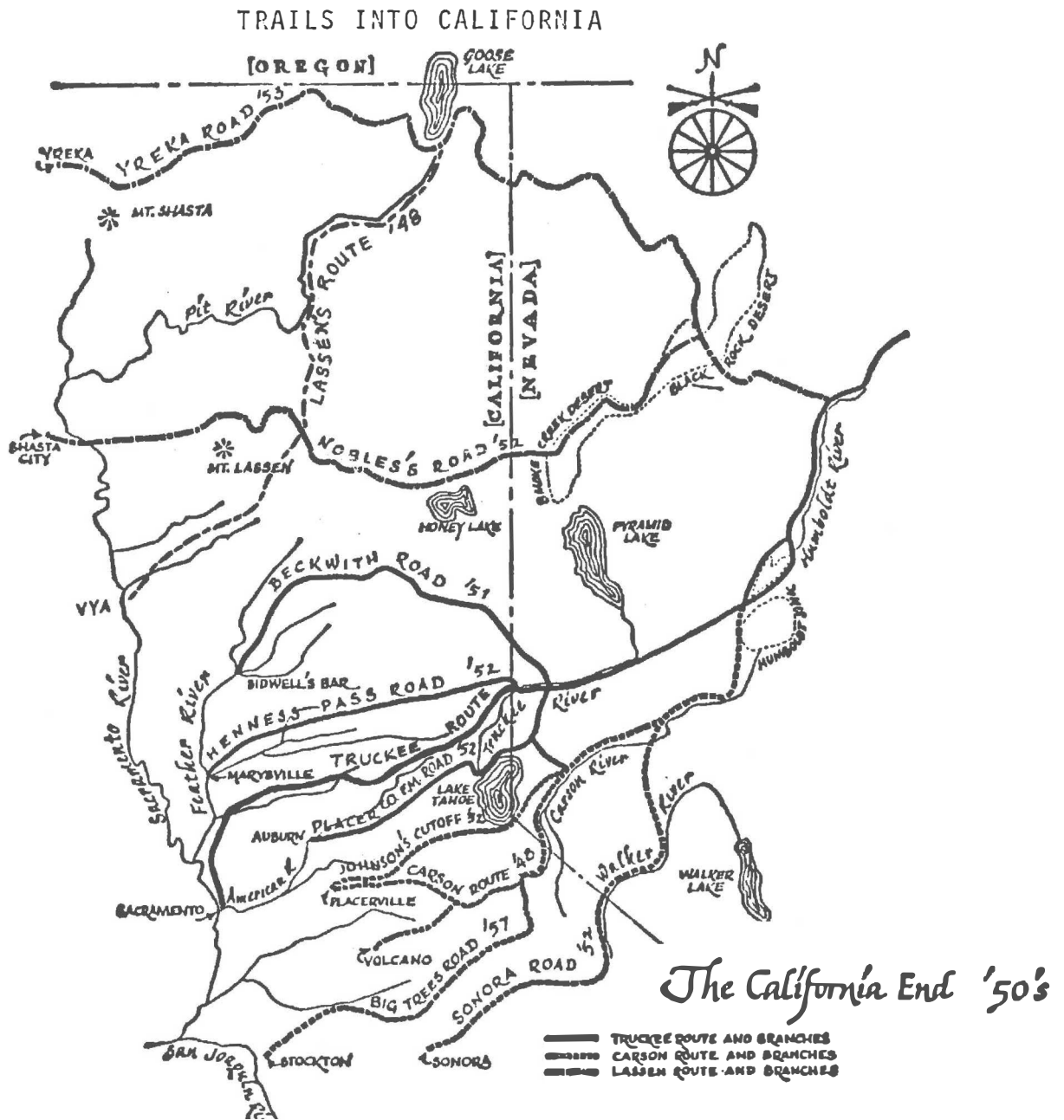
This grave today is marked by four metal posts painted green, the grave a mound of stones through which the meadow grasses grow.

The site is only about 100 yards off Highway 88 on the old trail that passed by Tragedy Spring, last resting place of three Mormon scouts reportedly killed by Indians as they were en route from the gold fields to Utah in the summer of 1848.

So many years have passed, it is not known just how closely the present wide highway follows the old wagon road of the emigrants. Mrs. Swenson believed the "Pioneer Grave" in the meadow was that of "sweet-faced Rachel." If so then it would seem the name of the Iowan, Allen Melton, belongs on the other grave.

If only someone had thought to record the story the old mother told we would at least know Rachel's last name, where she was from and where she was going when death came amid the pines and firs so long ago.

[Note: The U.S. Forest Service states: "It is conceivable that the marked pioneer grave on that property (the meadow near Tragedy Springs) . is the burial site of the unnamed young Woman."]



From George Stewart's The California Trail

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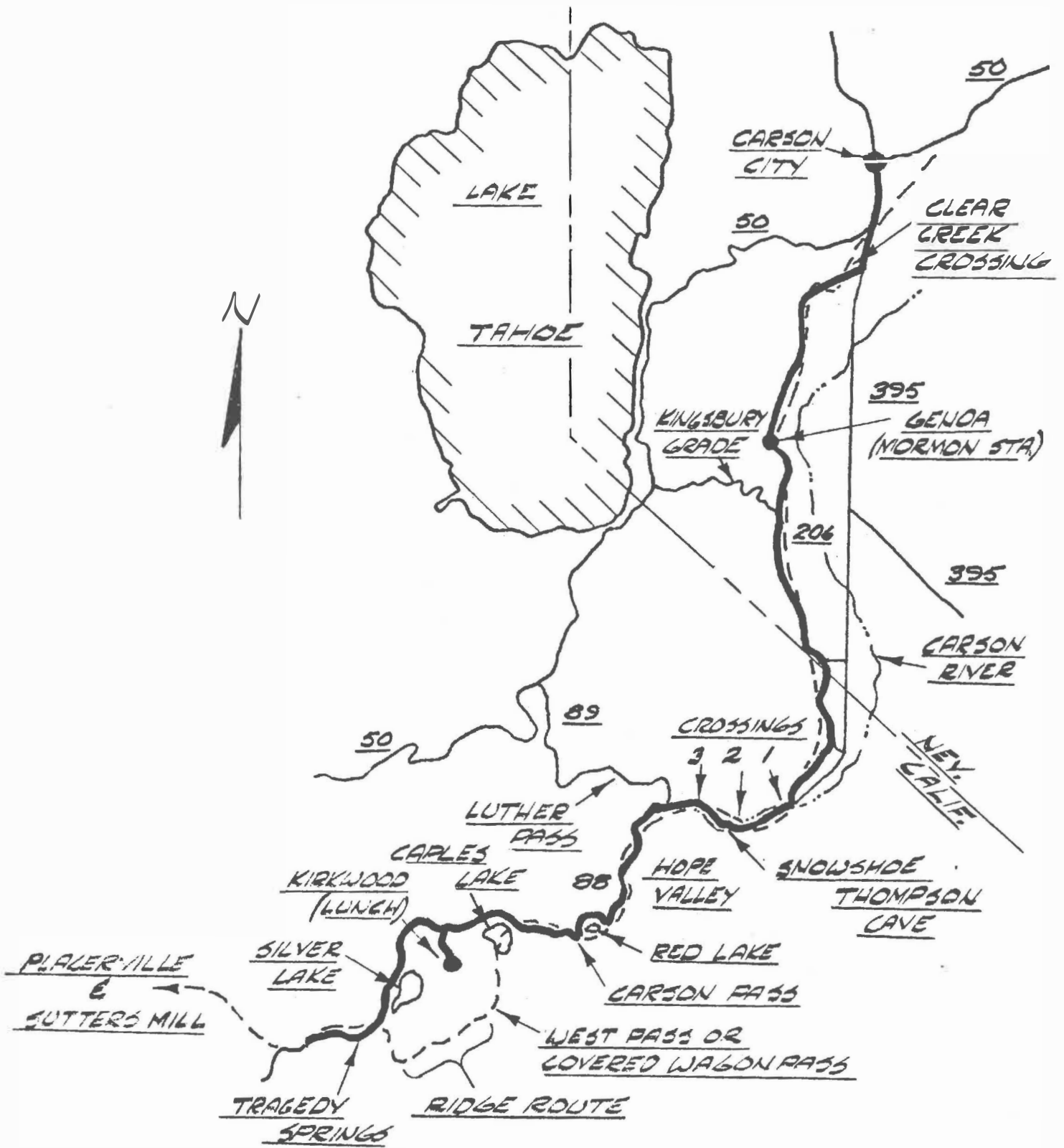
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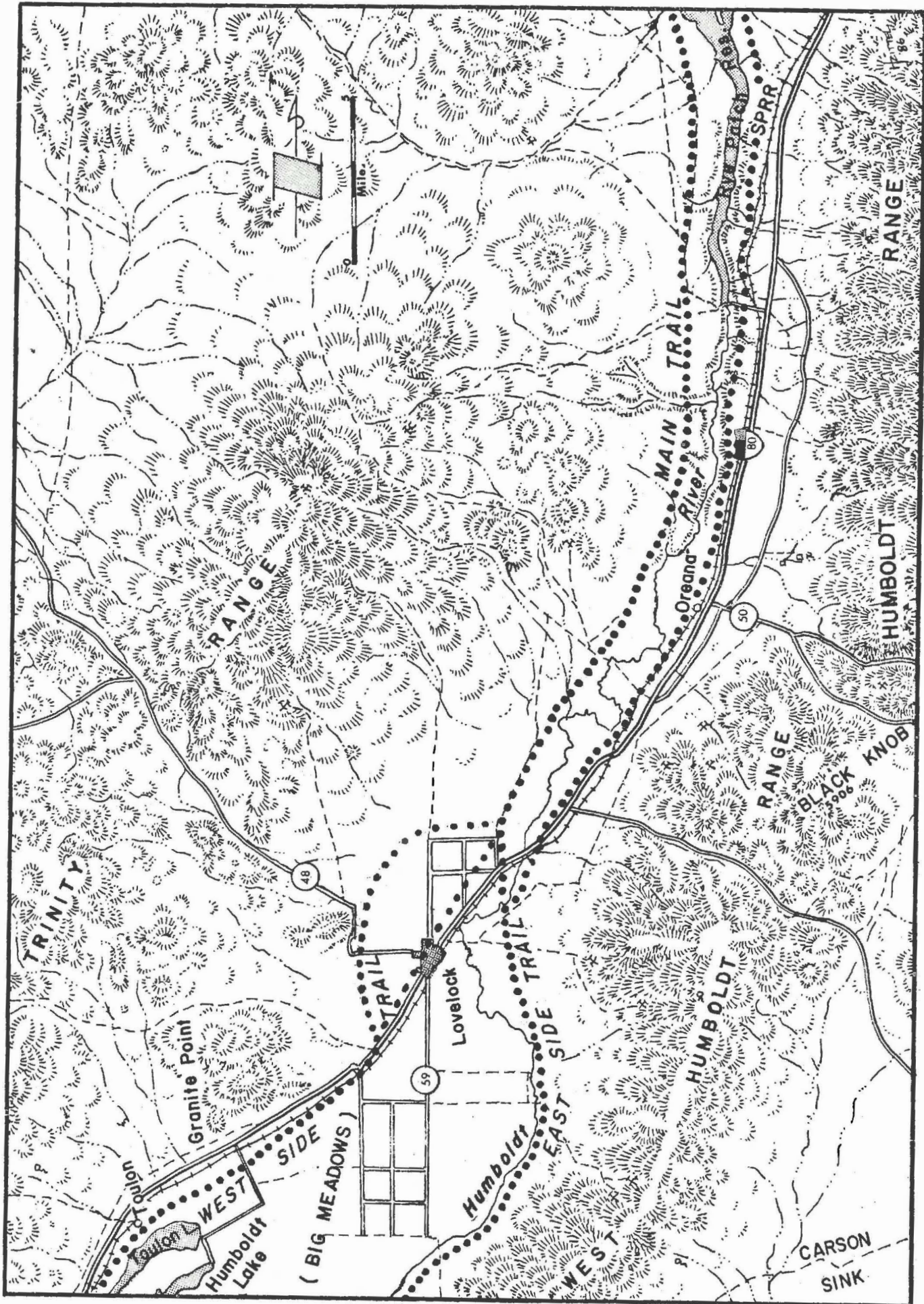






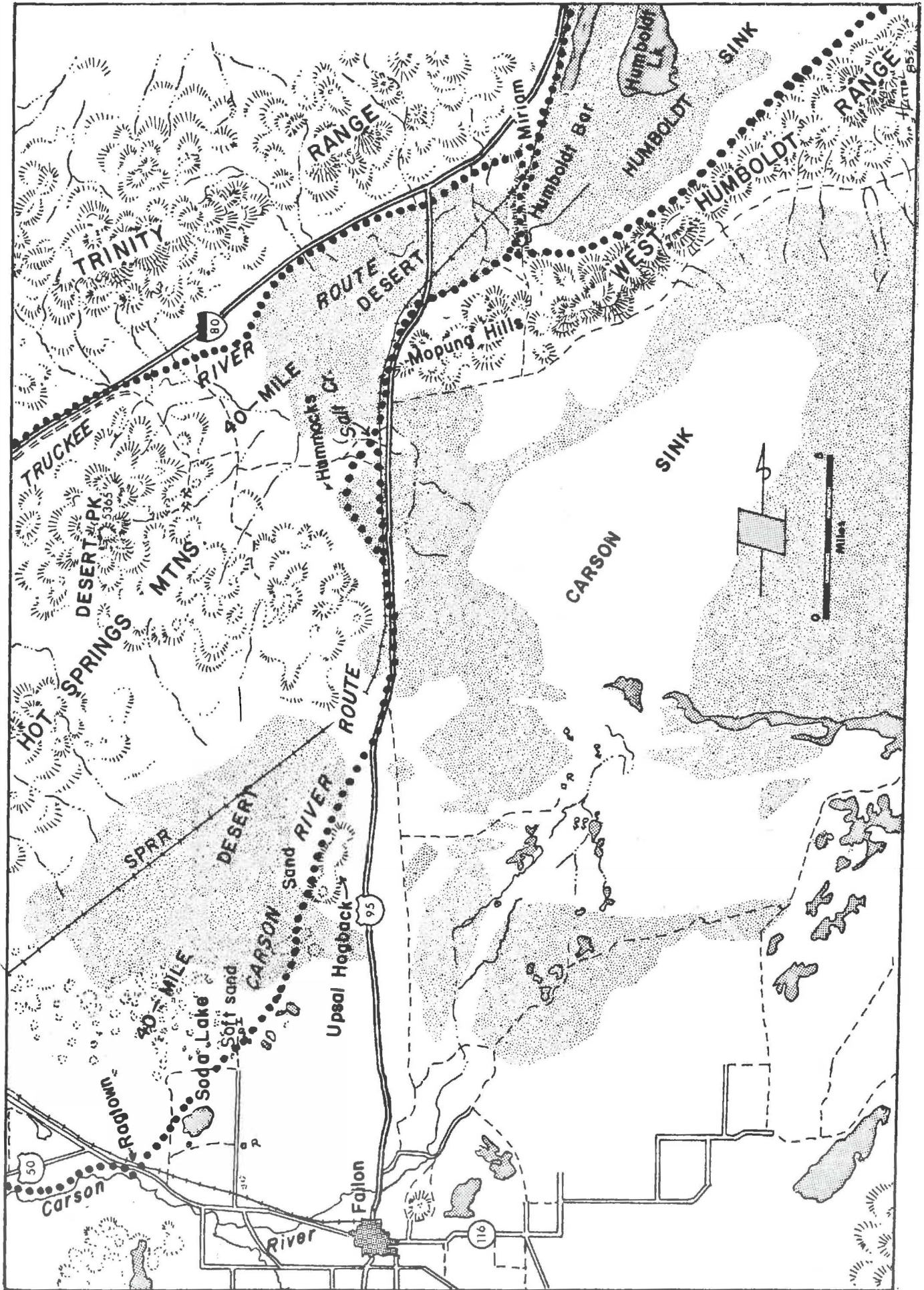
CALIFORNIA TRAIL  
CARSON RIVER ROUTE





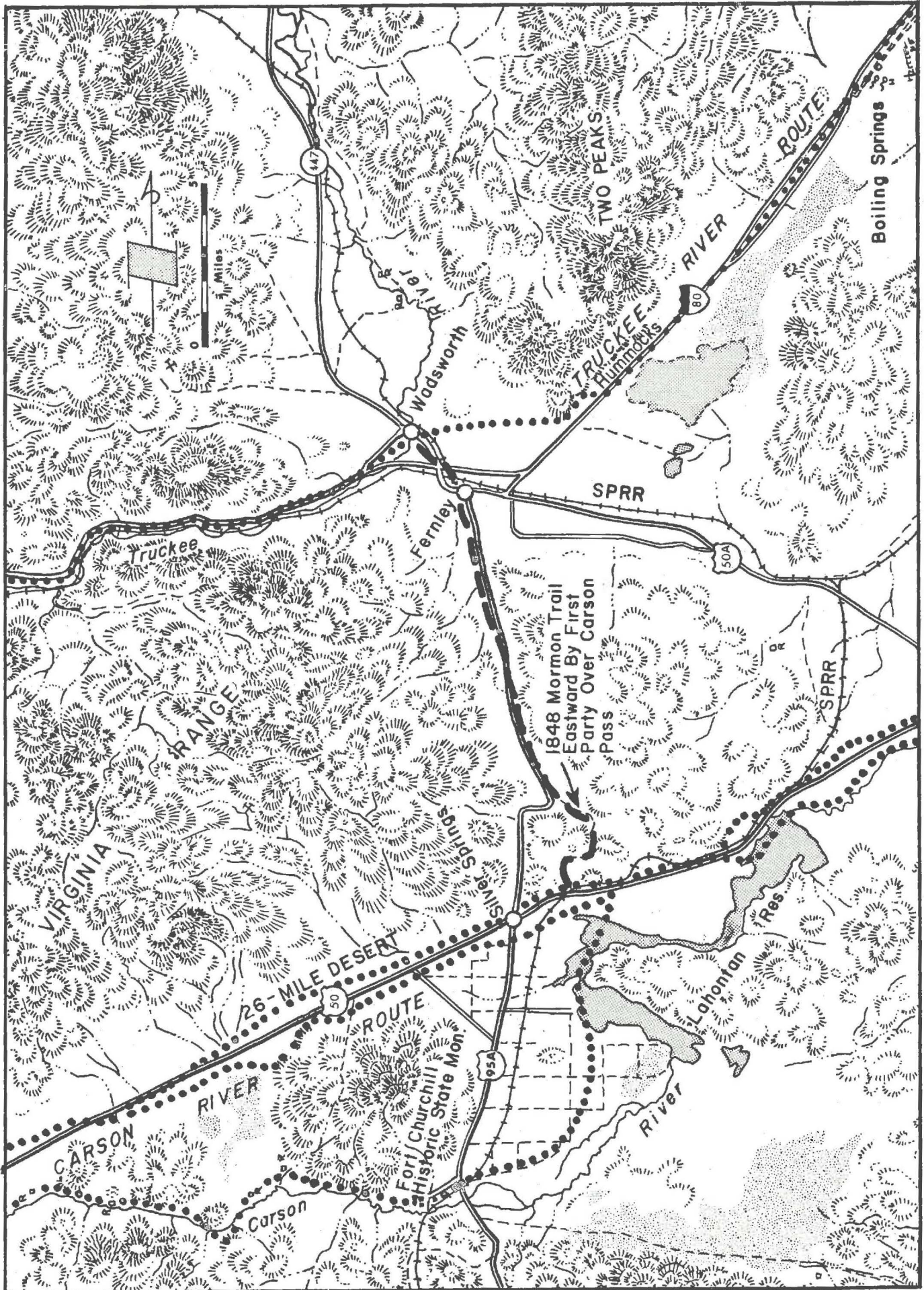
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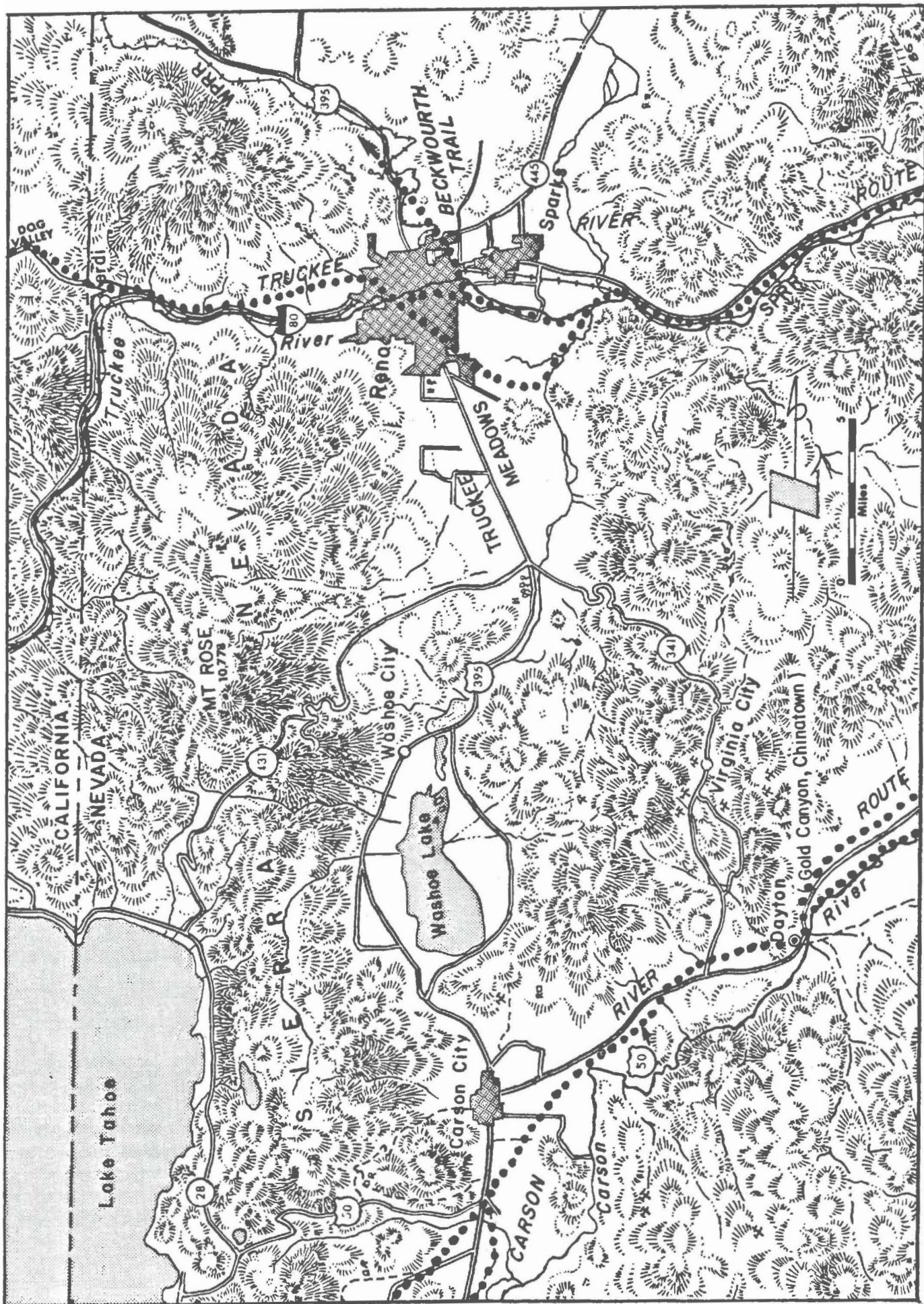
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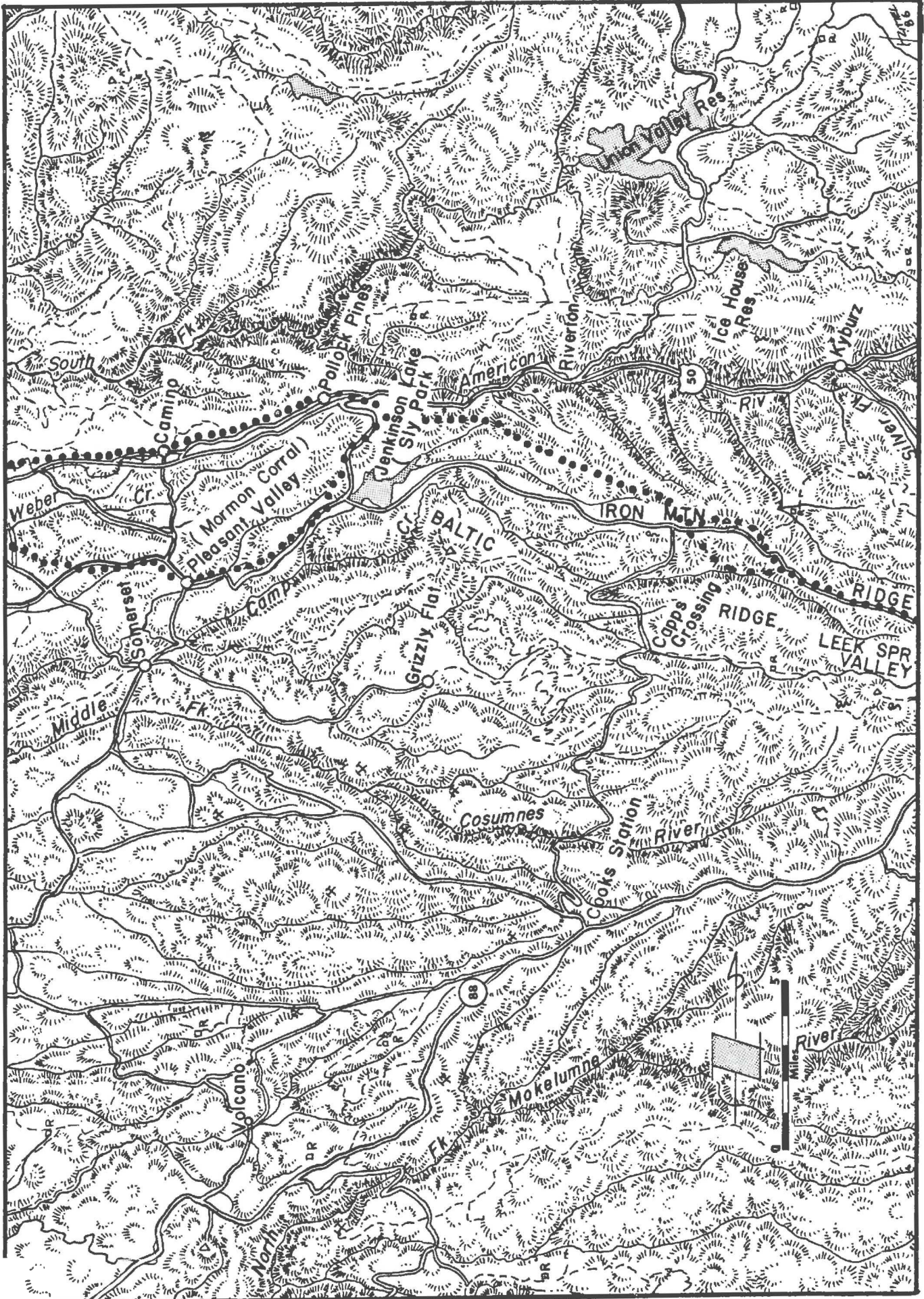
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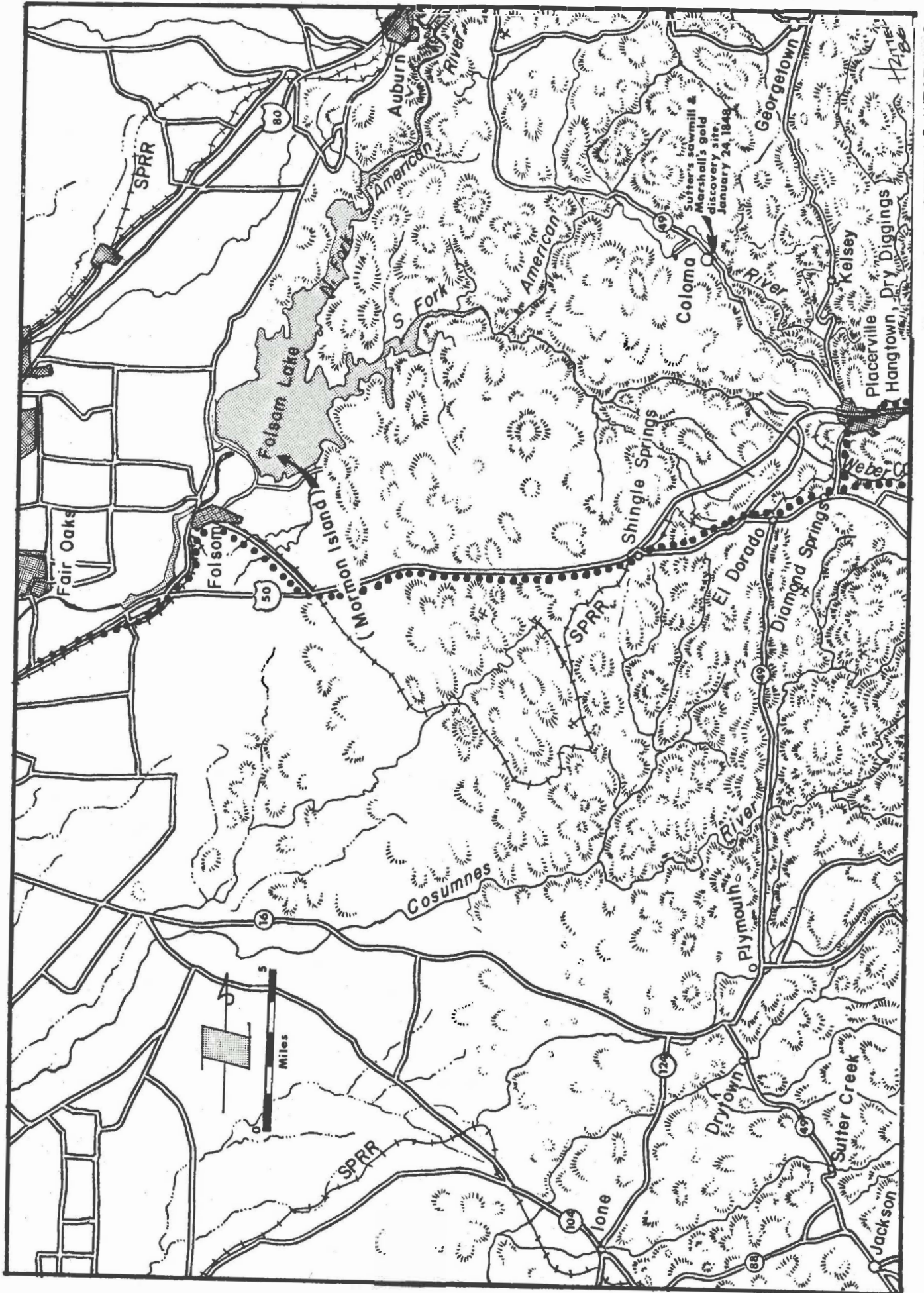
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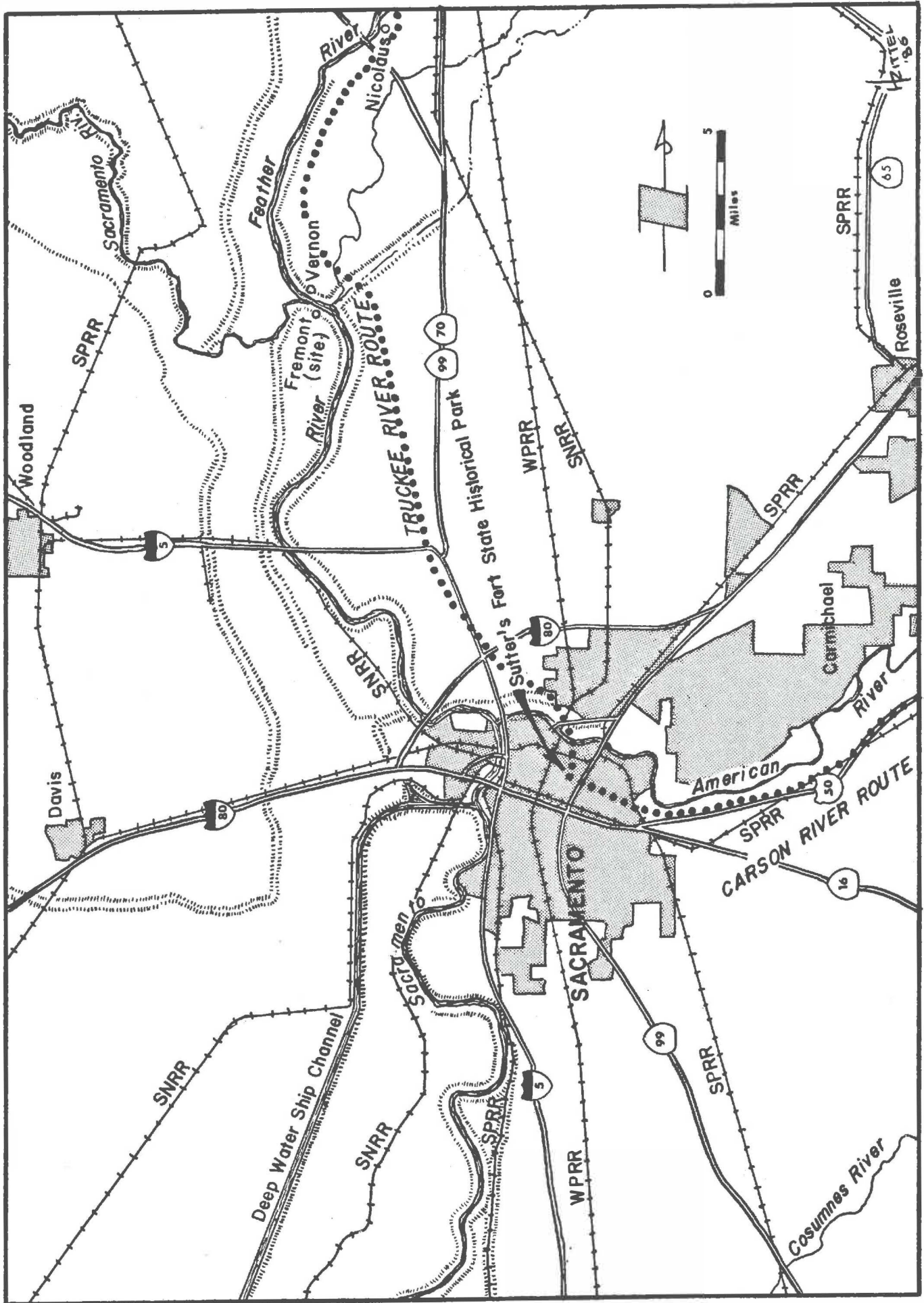
Map courtesy of TRAILS WEST, NC.





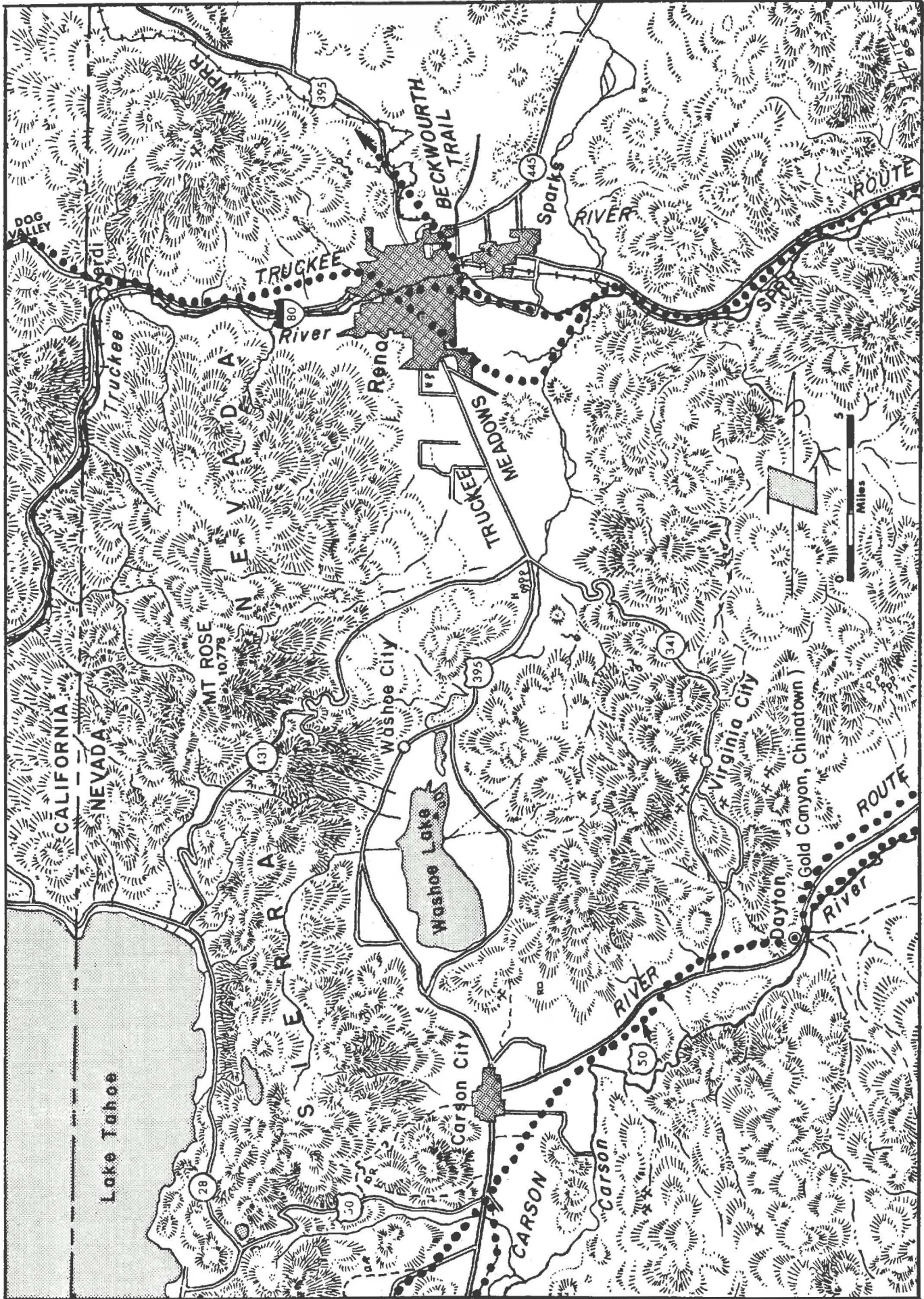
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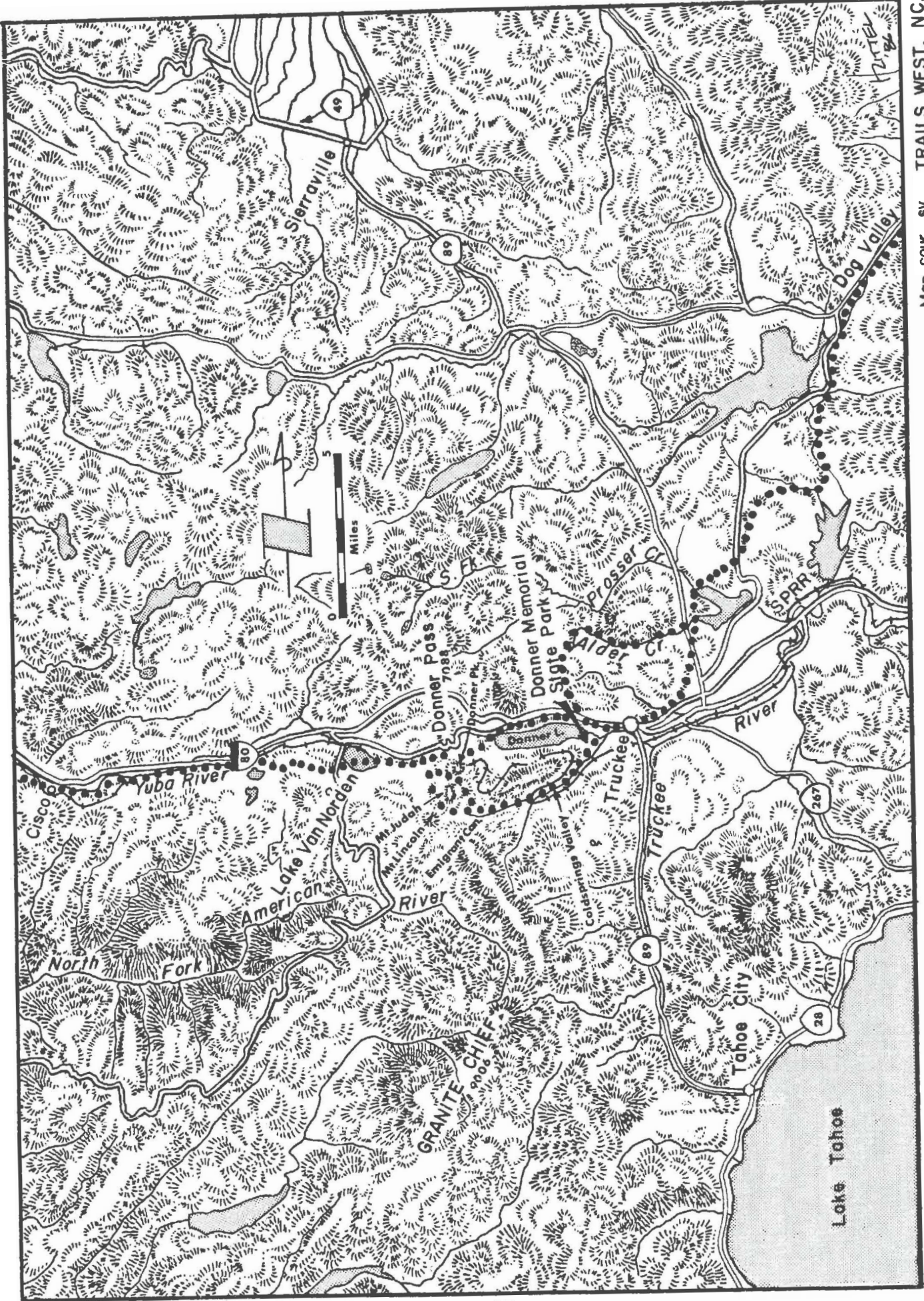
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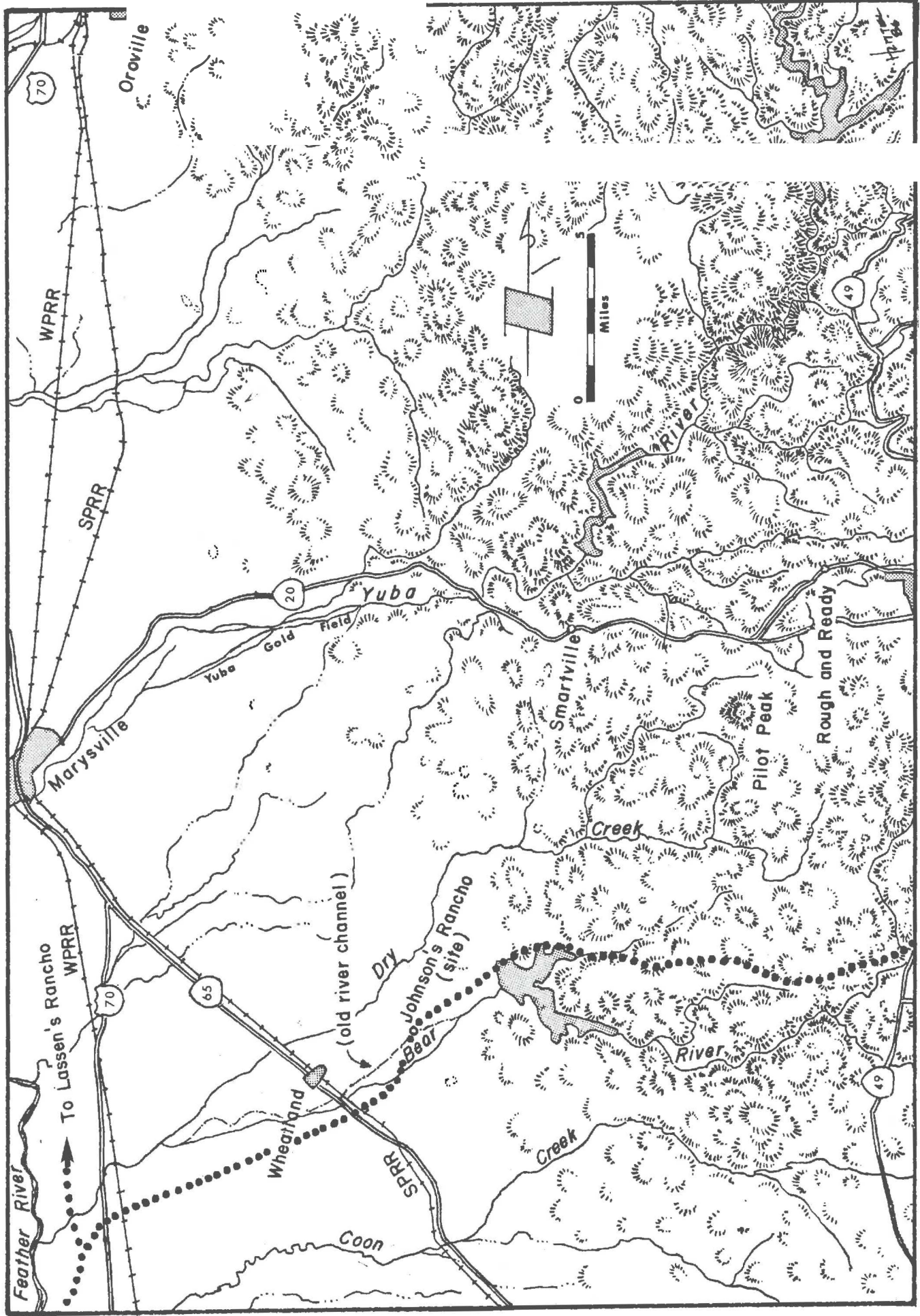




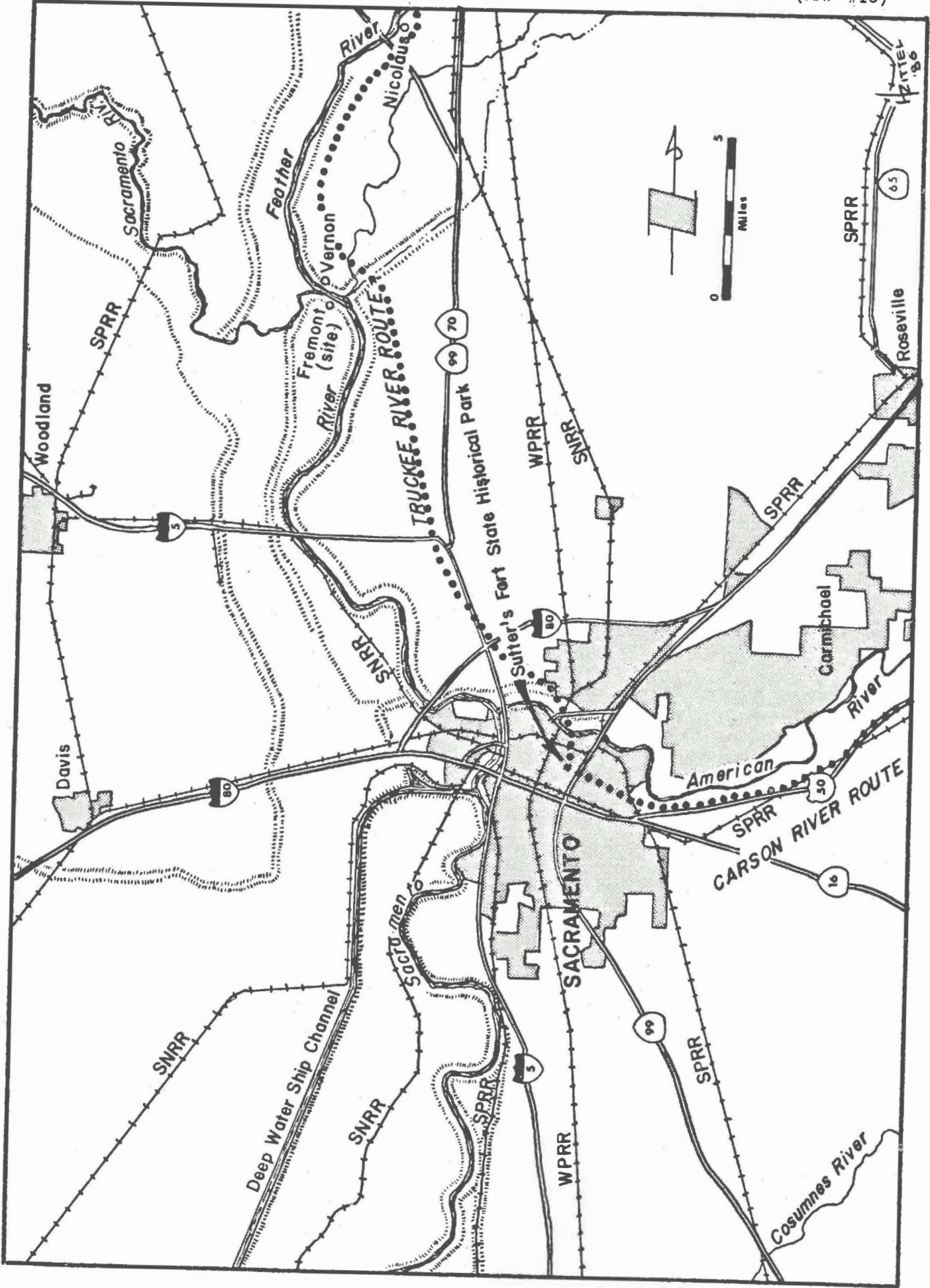


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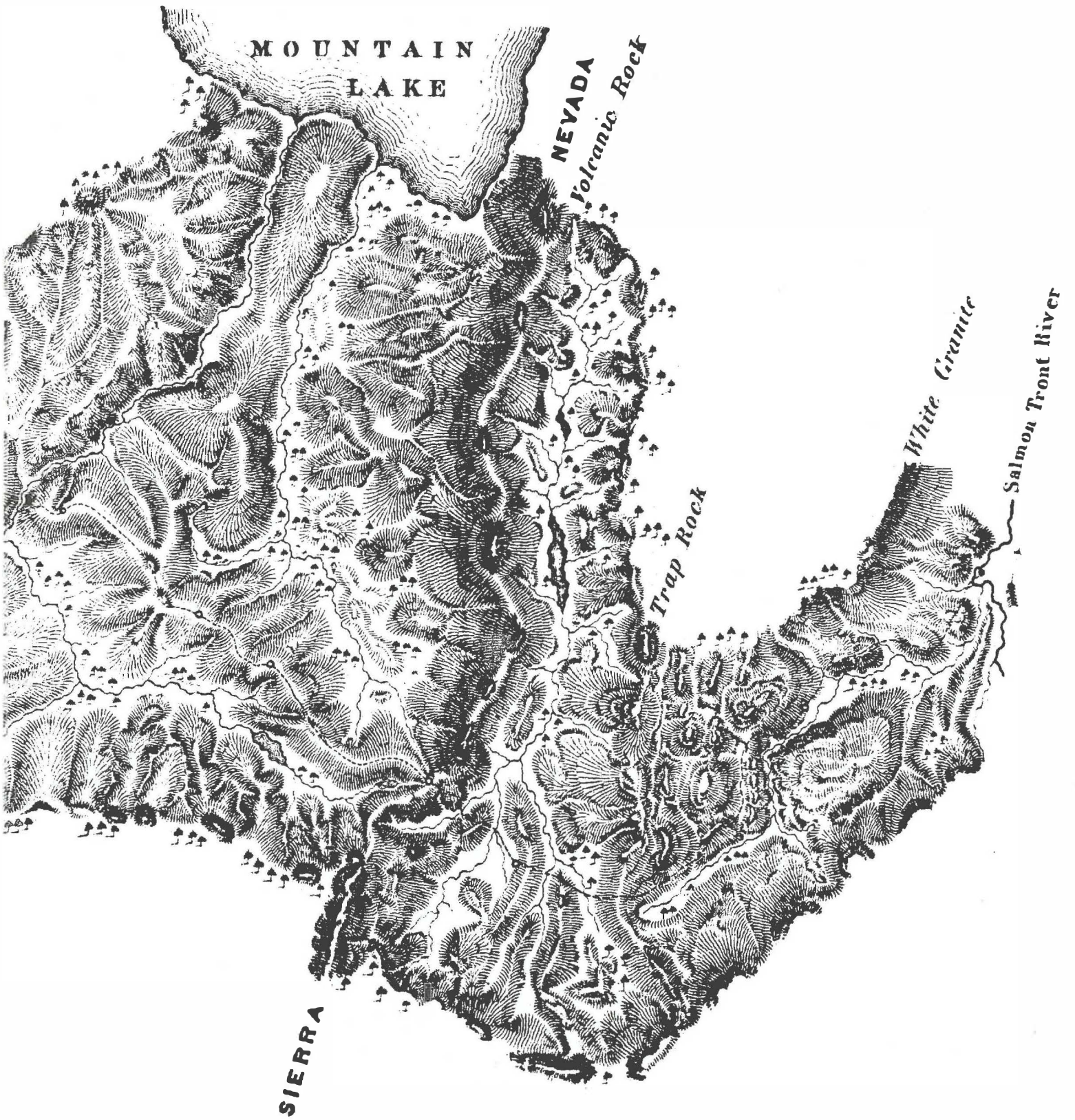
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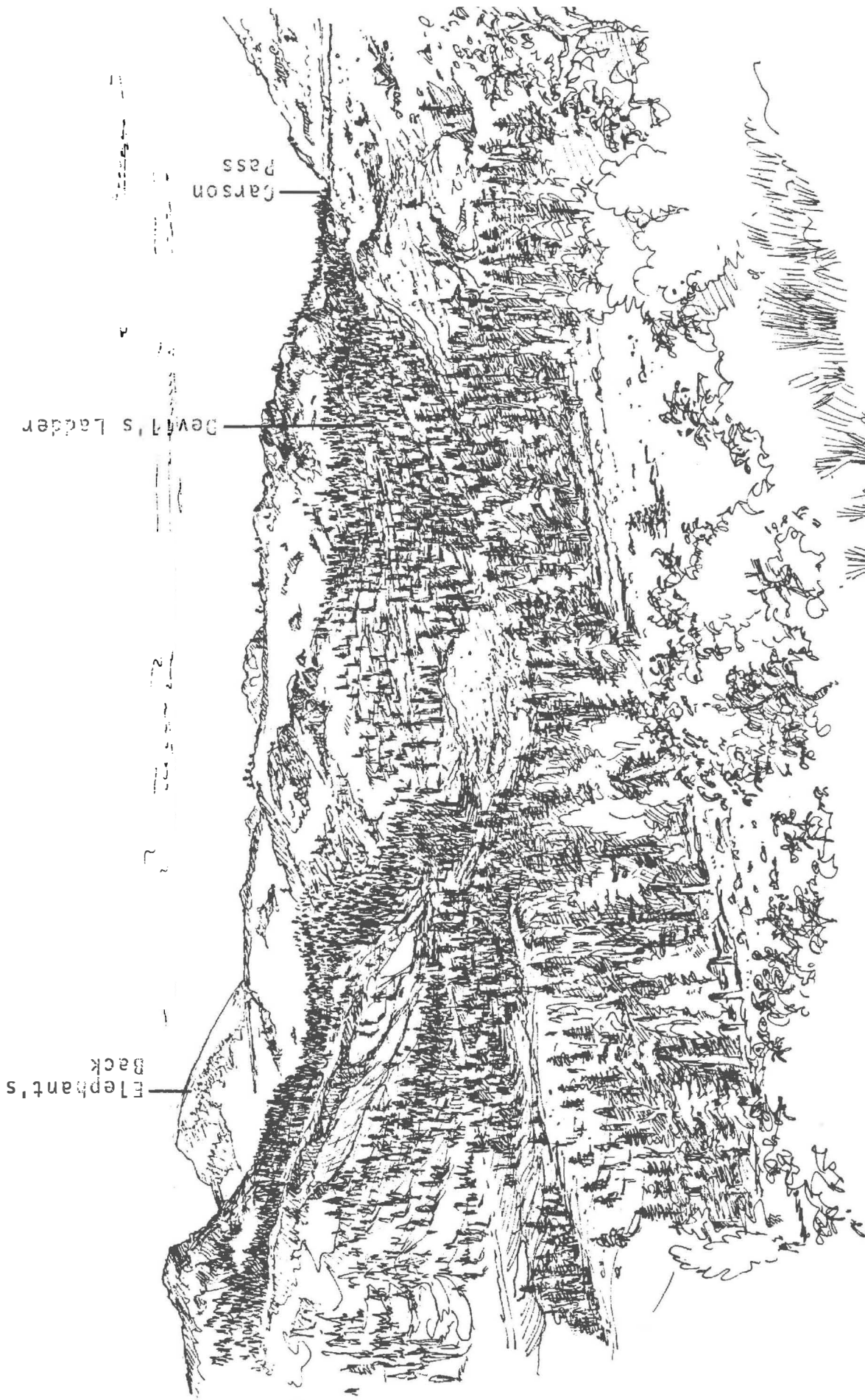






THE CHARLES PREUSS MAP OF FREMONT'S CROSSING OF THE SIERRA NEVADA IN 1844





Elephant's  
Back

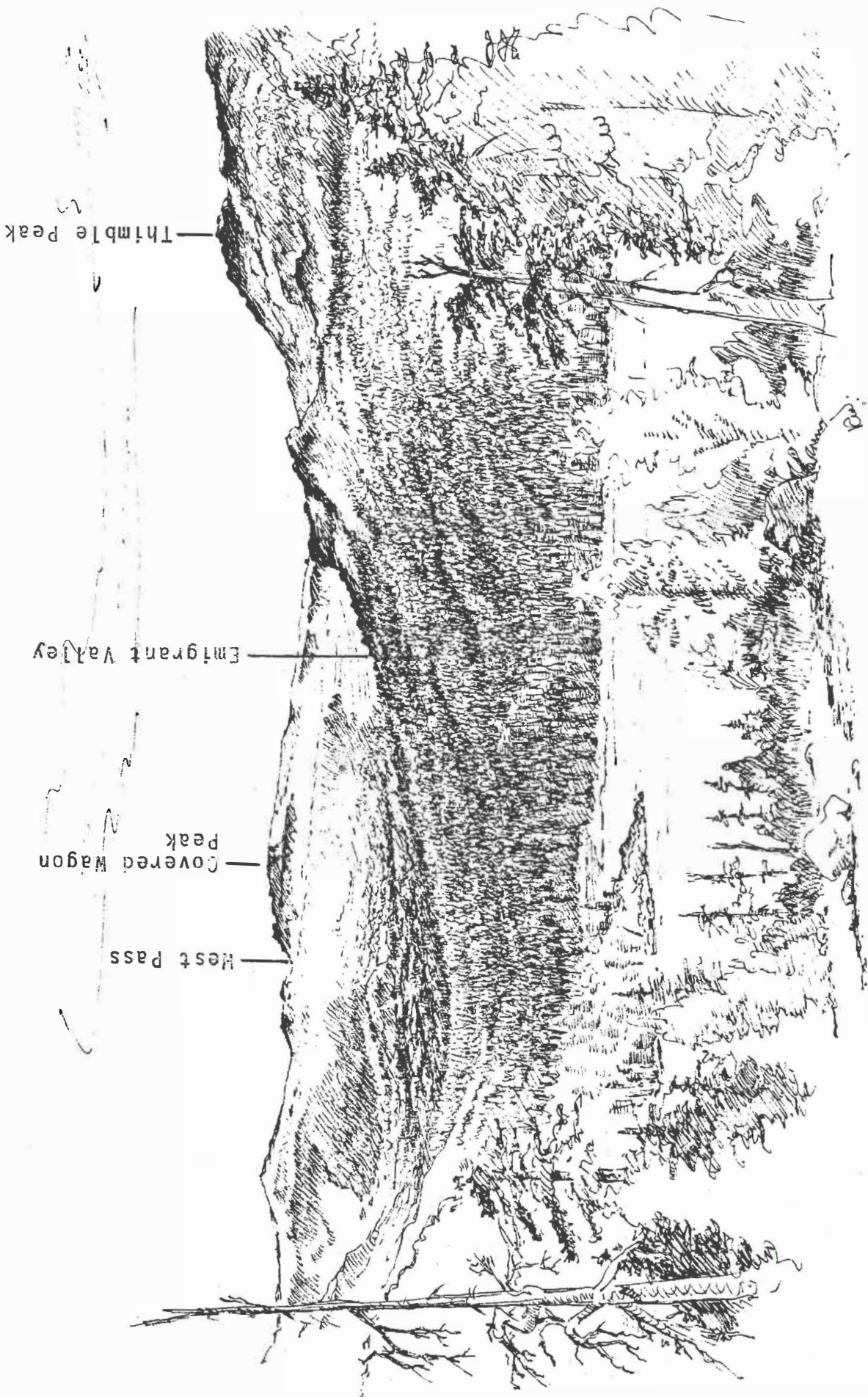
Devil's Ladder

Carson  
Pass

Red Lake

CARSON PASS FROM RED LAKE OVERVIEW





Thimble Peak

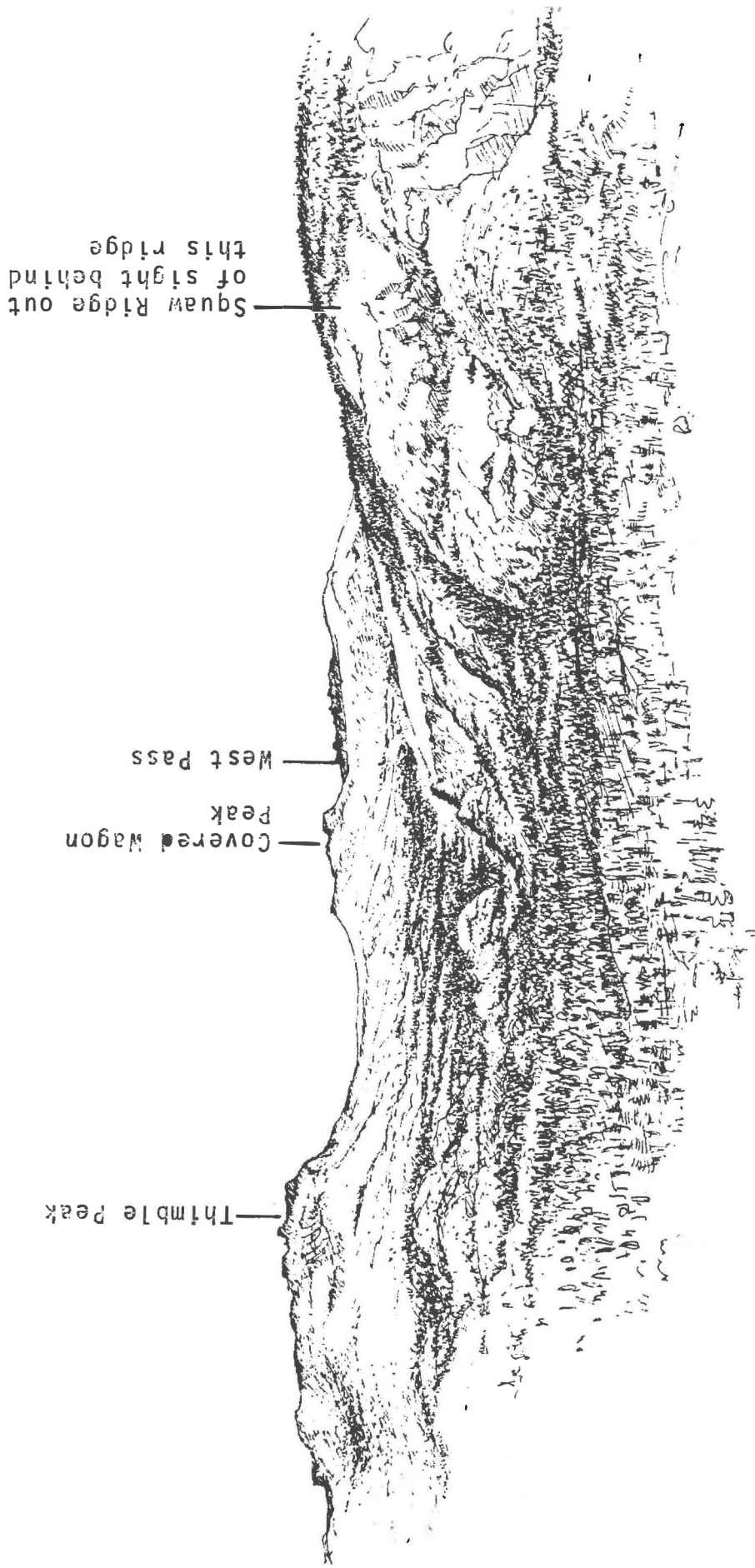
Emigrant Valley

Covered Wagon Peak

West Pass

WEST PASS FROM CAPLES LAKE





Squaw Ridge out  
of sight behind  
this ridge

West Pass

Covered Wagon  
Peak

Thimble Peak

Silver Lake

WEST PASS SILVER LAKE