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# NEWS FROM THE PLAINS



THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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## USFS AND OCTA COOPERATE TO SAVE TRAIL ARTIFACTS

reported by  
Andy Hammond

Earlier this year some of our California OCTA members joined with U.S. Forest Service personnel to survey and retrieve emigrant artifacts on the Lassen Trail. Their combined effort provides an outstanding example of cooperation whereby OCTA and a government agency worked together to achieve an objective important to both. Following is the story as told by Andy Hammond, Kevin McCormick, and Diane Watts.

apex which only accommodated pack animals and foot traffic. Wagons and teams were forced to turn down into a deep V-shaped ravine which drains into Deer Creek to the south, and both the downhill and uphill slopes took a heavy toll of wagons and their cargo. The difficulty of this passage was noted by trail diarists J. Goldsborough Bruff, James Pratt, and Israel S.P. Lord. Conversely, Alonza Delano gave it little

note: i.e. "... We here left this ridge, and crossed by a deep ravine to another on the right . . . "

The uphill route out of the Hollow had been located earlier by Dick Davis as it was relatively free of brush and marked by wagon debris and other artifacts. The downhill route, however, had not been precisely located because of a thick cover of scrub oak, manzanita, and

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**Andy:** After leaving the Applegate trail, travelers enroute to Lassen's Rancho probably found no greater obstacle for their wagons than Steep Hollow. At the Hollow, the ridge between Deer Creek and Mill Creek narrows to a sharp rocky



Above: Typical artifacts found at the Steep Hollow site include straight razor, complete ox-yoke ring assembly, wheel hub bearing, ox-yoke ring clevis, fancy wagon box side brace, misc. hardware.

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Left: Steep Hollow downhill trace - looking up. photo by Andy Hammond

elevation snow on the 25th made access doubtful but by Friday evening roads were passable when Steve Larmore, Frank Tortorich, and I drove in and camped at the Ishi Wilderness boundary. Early Saturday morning we walked the two miles to the Hollow where we were greeted by a sight not soon to be forgotten: well over a hundred deer were feeding on green shoots and leaves sprouting from the ashes. Steve started photographing the general area and we were flagging artifacts when joined by Don Buck, all aforementioned Forest Service personnel and Gail Coensgen, a post-graduate geography student at California State University, Chico.

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poison oak, which was virtually impenetrable. This situation ended with a wildland fire which started on August 6, 1990 and ultimately covered 130,000 acres, including the Ishi Wilderness portion of the Lassen Trail.

After the fire I asked Kevin McCormick, Archaeologist, Plumas National Forest, to accompany me to assess the effect of the fire on the trail and also to paint Trails West markers at the Narrows, Obie Fields, and Steep Hollow. We were joined by Bill Smith, Forester, Plumas National Forest. We found that the fire destruction was spotty; little damage was done at Obie Fields and the fire did not enter Bruff's Camp. However, at Steep Hollow the fire had been so intense that most of the area was essentially bare except for a few larger trees. Not only did we find a deep, very obvious down-hill trace but the area, especially at the bottom, was littered with artifacts.

I immediately notified Tom Hunt of our discovery and also of our concern that the artifacts would be lost to vandals. Tom asked that I organize a "rescue" operation.

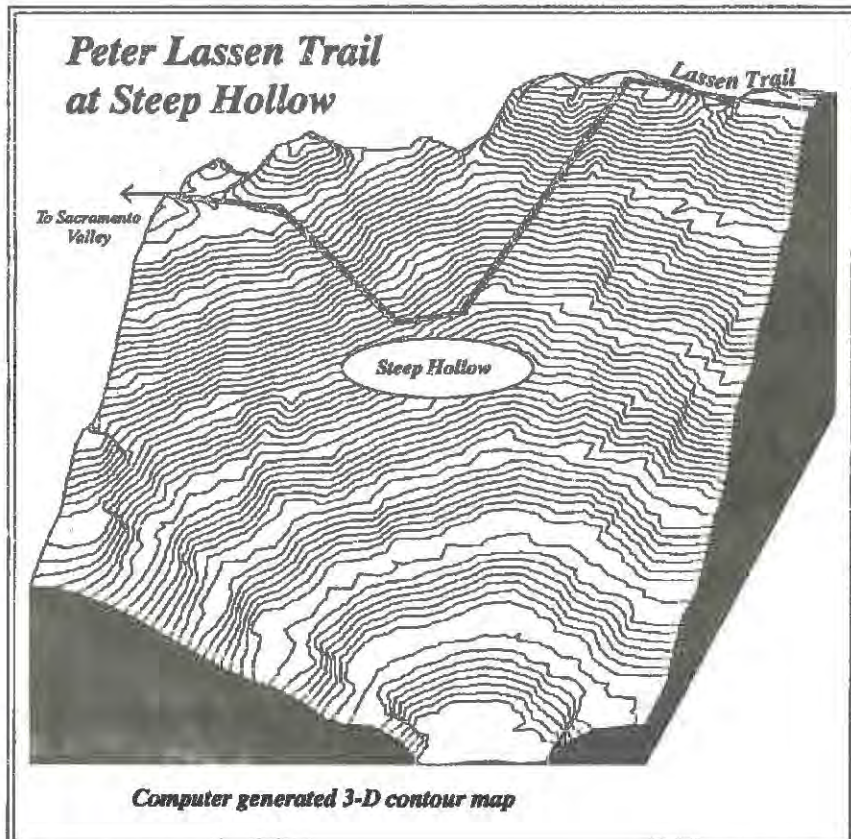
Except for limitations imposed by the fire season last fall and access problems caused by winter and spring weather, organization was easy. The Lassen National Forest, which administers the Ishi Wilderness, was as eager to have the site surveyed and recorded

as were the OCTA people involved. In this regard we are indebted to Diane Watts, Archaeologist, Lassen National Forest; Richard Jenkins, Archaeologist, California Department of Forestry; and Bob Grate, Fire Management Supervisor, Lassen National Forest.

The weekend of April 27-28 was chosen for the survey. Rain and higher-

Kevin: The purpose of our work was to "rescue" or capture the historic information potentially contained at the site. To accomplish this, we recorded the extent of the artifact scatter, accurately mapped all artifacts and trail segments, and collected items mapped. All

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of the information collected will be compiled into an "Archaeological Site Survey Record". To the archaeologist, this systematic recording is an important first step in learning more about what occurred at a site. Research of historic diaries, maps, and other archival material can tell us much about a historic site; however, through archaeology we are better able to add details of activities that occurred which are not available to the historian. A textbook on historic archaeology was aptly entitled Small Things Forgotten. That is one of the goals of historic archaeology; to learn more about the lifeways of the past through an examination of material remains that long since have been forgotten.

Our recording activities consisted of systematically examining the site and "pin flagging" the artifacts with wire flags. A site datum was established and bearings and distances from the datum were taken for each artifact using a Brunton compass and 100 foot tape measure. In addition, the "downhill" and "uphill" trail alignments were plotted from the datum. Due to the long distances involved in recording the trail segments, a "string machine" was used to measure the distances. Roughly, each segment was 900 feet long. Other recording equipment used included an altimeter for determining elevations, and a clinometer for determining the degree of slope.

Due to the potential for theft from the site, another goal was to remove the artifacts for further study and curation. This is where the expertise and knowledge of the OCTA members was invaluable. In short, they were able to identify most of the wagon parts, many of which the archaeologists were unfamiliar. Over one hundred artifacts were noted on the site and all were photographed by both the OCTA and USFS teams. Among the artifacts tagged and collected were wheel parts, various hardware items from wagons, ox yokes, trunks, and personal effects such as a straight razor.

The final phase of recording the site will be the completion of the Archaeological Site Survey Record which

## TWO CONFERENCES YIELD A NEW SPIRIT OF COOPERATION

Two outstanding conferences were offered in November by the Long Distance Trails office of the National Park System. Both were held at the Menucha Retreat and Conference Center approximately 25 miles east of Portland, Oregon on the Columbia River Gorge.

The first conference was a two-day training course about Long Distance Trails attended by 28 people from various scenic and historic trails groups and NPS, BLM and Forest Service. Bill Watson and Ross Marshall were among those invited to attend.

The second conference was the second bi-annual National Conference on National Scenic and Historic Trails, which lasted three days and was attended by approximately 75 people from the same above mentioned groups. Attending were Bill Watson, Jim Budde, Ross and Jana Marshall, and several other OCTA members, particularly from the Northwest Chapter.

Both conferences were co-hosted by the National Park Service and OCTA. Bill Watson served on the planning committee, Jim Budde and the OCTA Headquarters staff handled all the registration funds and expenses, and the Northwest Chapter, under the leadership of Dick and Trudy Ackerman, handled all the local arrangements including registration, and uncountable trips to and from the airport. Truly, OCTA had high visibility with the National Trails community at these conferences. A lot of hard work was done by the above people.

Much of the first conference was training regarding the National Trails System Act (NTSA) of 1968 which provided the legislation for all trails to exist. However, it was not until 1978 that the NTSA was amended to provide for historic trails. As of this date, 17 trails have been authorized by Congress through amendments to the NTSA.

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will include artifact inventory forms for each artifact with an accompanying photograph of the item inventoried, plus a map showing site topography and the location of plotted artifacts and trail segments. A computer mapping software application is being used that will create a contour map and three dimensional model of the Steep Hollow site. A copy of the site survey record will be made available to OCTA.

**Diane:** When Andy first contacted me regarding the proposed Steep Hollow project I had only minimal knowledge of OCTA, and must admit my first reaction was one of caution (experience has taught us to be defensive of archaeological sites). The Steep Hollow project was initiated by OCTA and the "lions share" of fieldwork was performed by volunteers under the direction of Forest Service and California Department of Forestry Archaeologists. We, as agency archaeologists, should

strive to increase public awareness of archaeology and advocate a responsible approach to public participation in cultural resource preservation by taking advantage of opportunities such as the Steep Hollow project.

The collected artifacts from Steep Hollow are at the Almanor Ranger District headquarters in Chester, California. When all of the items have been properly inventoried and catalogued, it is our plan to prepare an interpretive display for the public to view at the Chester Ranger Station. At this time I am unable to give a completion date for the display but hope to provide an announcement in the near future.

To reiterate, I am pleased to have had OCTA cooperate with the Forest Service and hope it will be an ongoing relationship. As a result of our experience with OCTA, I have become a member as have other agency archaeologists (Kevin McCormick and Richard Jenkins) involved in this project.