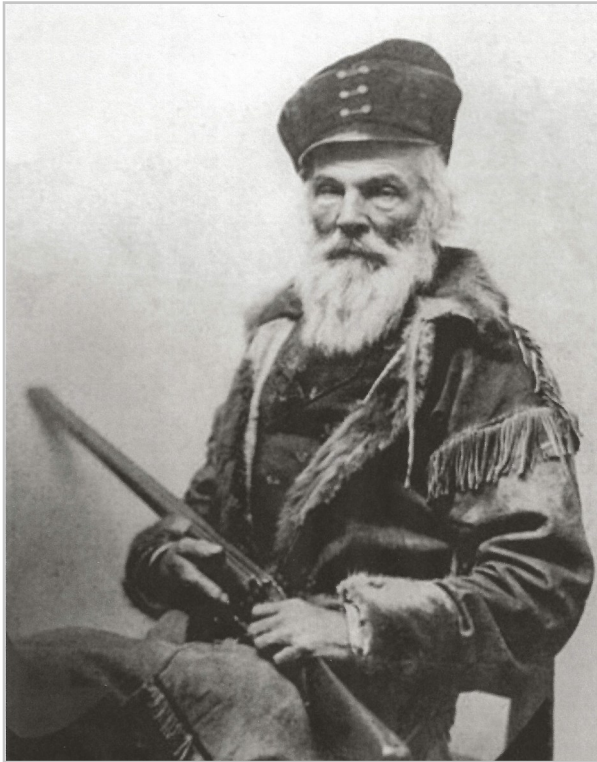




EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION



Joseph Rutherford Walker

Joseph Walker emigrated with his extended family from Tennessee to Missouri in 1819, settling near Fort Osage on the western Missouri frontier. From about 1820 to 1827 he was based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and worked as a guide and hunter on the developing Santa Fe Trail.

In 1832, he joined Benjamin Bonneville in a large party of men bound for Green River, Wyoming. In 1833, Bonneville asked Walker to command a group tasked with finding an overland route to California. After following the Humboldt River and crossing the 40-Mile Desert, Walker and his men began a long and treacherous ascent of the Sierra Nevada. They eventually found the headwaters of the Stanislaus River and were able to follow it down to the Central Valley of California. His crossing of the Sierra eventually formed the basis of what would be known as Walker Pass and a primary California Trail emigrant route.

In 1840 Walker made the first southern crossing of the Great Basin, from Green River to the confluence of the Virgin River and the Colorado River, then across the Mojave Desert to Los Angeles. In 1843 he led a divided party from Joseph Chiles' first emigrant party along a southern route, past what would become Walker Lake in Western Nevada, over a southern pass in the Sierra to California, making most of the crossing on foot because of a drought-year lack of forage for livestock.

In 1845, Walker joined John C. Frémont's third government expedition for California and Oregon as chief guide. In the 1850s, he once again crossed the Mojave Desert and served as a guide for a U.S. Army expedition against the Mojave Indians.

In his mid-60s, Walker led a group of gold seekers into the mountains of central Arizona, near what is now the city of Prescott. The discovery of gold along Hassayampa Creek is considered the impetus of settlement in the area. He lived the last ten years of his life in Northern California and is buried in the Alhambra Cemetery in Martinez.

Biography

- Born: 1798, Roane County, Tennessee
- Died: 1876, Contra Costa County, California
- Trail guide, trapper, pathfinder

Achievements

- Opened a major segment of the California Trail in 1833.
- Made the first southern crossing of the Great Basin in 1840.
- Served as chief guide for John C. Frémont's third expedition for California and Oregon in 1845.
- Served as guide for U.S. Army expedition against Mojave Indians in 1850s.

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