7. Genoa to Smith Creek Valley

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Camps 38-W and 1-E. Near the mouth of Genoa Canyon, the campsite was probably in the grove of trees near the center of the photo. “Encamped among some giant pines at the foot of the Sierra Nevada, just upon the southern edge of the town, and on a gushing stream of pure water.” This area is still on the southern edge of the town but the giant trees are gone and the streambed is lined with concrete.
June 24, Genoa, Camp No. 1.—At 7 A.M. we took up our march on our return to Camp Floyd.... Mr. Reese, though a citizen of Genoa, returns with us as guide, and I have sent him, Ute Pete, and two other persons in advance, to provide for improvement of route, by taking a short cut from bend of Carson to south side of Carson Lake.... Train reached Carson City early in the afternoon, and party encamped. We reached it about dark. Journey, 13.8 miles. Route the same as traveled on outward journey.¹

Simpson indicated that they returned to Carson City by following their earlier route, but does not specifically state whether or not they returned to the exact spot that they had used for a campsite two weeks earlier. However, since the distance was the same for both trips, it can probably be assumed that they did camp at the same place, which would mean that Camps 37-W and 2-E were both near the little park at the intersection of Carson and Stewart streets.

When the expedition left Genoa, it was accompanied by an additional passenger. While in San Francisco, Simpson had been approached by two newspaper reporters, who told him about the plight of one Walter Lowery, a fellow newspaper correspondent who was suffering from some serious health problems and wanted to return to the States. They wondered if Simpson would allow Lowery to join the expedition during its eastbound trip. Simpson was reluctant at first, but finally agreed. Lowery was suffering from what was probably tuberculosis, as Simpson described it as being “of a pulmonary character.” Lowery seems to have been convinced that a “trip across the plains” would be good for him. During the return journey, Simpson must have become quite sympathetic to Lowery and his problems, because when he began his trip from Camp Floyd back to Fort Leavenworth, Lowery was traveling with him again. Unfortunately, when they reached Fort Laramie in eastern Wyoming, Lowery had to be hospitalized, and died a few days later.²

June 25, 1859

June 25, Camp No. 2, Carson City.—Moved at 5 A.M. In 11.7 miles reach Chinatown, about 9.30 A.M. Here leave our old road, and immediately cross Carson River by ford, and take route along river on south side.... Five miles from ford, after crossing some bad sloughs, which may be avoided by taking higher ground, reach camping place for the night. Journey, 17.2 miles.³

From Carson City to Dayton, the expedition backtracked along its earlier route, but when they reached Dayton, Simpson decided to try a shortcut. Crossing the river just east of the center of town, they traveled in a northeasterly direction through an area called Carson Plains. There must have been something about this section of the route that Simpson did not care for, because the next day he commented that they should have remained on the other side of the river until they reached Pleasant Grove. The campsite was in the eastern portion of the Carson Plains, about two miles upstream from Pleasant Grove.

September 2004

Nancy and I turned off US 50 near the center of Dayton, and headed east toward the area known as the Carson Plains. Parking at the northern end of Comstock Road, I hiked a quarter of a mile to the site of Camp 3-E, then headed northeast along the south bank of the river for another two miles, until I was across the river from the site of Pleasant Grove and Miller’s Station.

June 26, 1859

June 26, Camp No. 3, Carson Valley.—Moved at 5 A.M. Continued along an old road on south side of Carson River for 2 miles, where we join, opposite Pleasant Grove, our old outward track, and continued on same 12.6 miles to east foot of ugly hill referred to June 9, which we found we could not, as we hoped, evade by passing between it and the river. Going east however, the hill is not bad. The difficulty, as before stated, is in the ascent from the east side.⁴

In his description of the previous day’s journey, Simpson failed to mention that they had been traveling on a road after crossing the river. On this day, however, he indicated that when they left camp, they “Continued along an old road on
Camp 2-e. Looking to the north from where the expedition camped on the night of June 24. This is the same place where they probably spent the night of June 11 during the outbound journey. The large structure is part of a shopping mall on the far side of Stewart Street.

June 25, 1859
June 26, 1859

Camp 3-E. On the south bank of the Carson River, near the northern edge of the Carson Plains. The cottonwood trees mark the course of the river.
south side of Carson River.” This road would have been the same one that they had followed along the south bank of the river during the outbound trip. Now traveling eastward along this road, they followed it until they were again forced to leave it to cross the ridge that Simpson called the ugly hill. In spite of their hopes, the river was still too high for them to get the wagons between the water and the northern end of the ridge.

After attaining valley on east side of hill, we left our outward track and old road, and turned to the left down the valley to within a few hundred yards of Carson River, and then go over another spur, and in about a mile get into valley of Carson River again, which we follow down 2 miles, and at 1.15 o’clock encamp on the river bank. Journey 18.2 miles.\(^5\)

At the eastern base of the ugly hill, they crossed the old wagon road, leaving their previous trail and making a turn to the north. They were now breaking new trail again, and would continue to do so until they came to their outbound trail at the southeast corner of Carson Lake.

A seldom-used road heads north from the Churchill railroad crossing along the east side of the tracks. After about three-quarters of a mile, this road makes a sharp turn to the east, and begins to climb up the ridge that lies on the eastern side of this little valley. This turn is about seven hundred yards from the normal channel of the river, but was probably only about three hundred yards from the high water level that existed in the summer of 1859, which would agree with Simpson’s description of being within a few hundred yards of the river. Turning to the east, the expedition crossed the summit of this “other spur,” dropped down the eastern slope, and, after another mile, came to the river again. At this point, they were across the swollen stream and about a mile east of the future site of Fort Churchill, an army post that would be established on the north bank of the river about a year later. Burton mentioned that on October 18, 1860, he could see the structures of the new army post after crossing the summit of the Dead Camel Mountains. His description of his party’s travels that day begins as they leave the Carson Sink mail station.

Crossing a long plain bordering on the Sink, we “snaked up” painfully a high divide… From the summit, bleak with west wind, we could descry, at a distance of fifty miles, a snowy saddle-back—the Sierra Nevada. When the deep sand had fatigued our cattle, we halted for an hour to bait in a patch of land rich with bunch grass. Descending from the eminence, we saw a gladdening sight; the Carson River, winding through its avenue of dark cotton woods, and afar off, the quarters and barracks of Fort Churchill.\(^6\)

After following the river downstream to the east for two more miles, the expedition stopped for the night. They were now in Churchill Valley and their campsite was located a little less than a mile downstream from where US Highway 95A crosses the Carson River.

While attempting to determine the most likely location for this campsite, I had to resist the temptation to place it among the cottonwood trees that cluster along the river. Given a choice, that is where I would pitch my tent. However, this area would have been under water during the summer of 1859, and the expedition would have been forced to set up camp on the bench, about a quarter of a mile from the river’s normal channel.

The talk in camp that evening must have given William Lee the idea that the expedition was going to continue to follow the Carson River all the way to Carson Lake. His journal entry for this day reads as follows:

\textit{Sunday, June 26th. Marched eighteen and a half miles and came to camp on Carson River. We left our old track about three miles from this camp and intend keeping down the river to Carson Lake.}\(^7\)

Following the river all the way to the lake would have added about fifteen miles to their journey, but this route would have avoided the steep climb through the Dead Camel Mountains.

\textit{June 27, 1859}

\textit{June 27, Camp No. 4, Carson River.— Resumed march at 5. Continued down valley of Carson River eastwardly about 2 miles, when we}
The ruins of Fort Churchill, the army post that was built during the year following the Simpson expedition. On the far side of the Carson River can be seen the "other spur" that the eastbound expedition crossed after climbing the "ugly hill" for the second time.

leave it and strike for south end of Carson Lake. Low mountains, perfectly destitute of timber, and of a brownish-reddish hue, range on either side and parallel to river. Eight miles farther commence ascending a sandy ravine of slight grade.⁹

When the expedition left camp on the morning of June 27, they started out by following the river downstream for a couple of miles, but then, contrary to Lee’s expectations, they left it and headed toward the Dead Camel Mountains. Simpson said that the expedition left the river, which could be taken to mean that they turned away from it. However, it was actually the river that left them. The expedition continued in a straight line in a slightly south-of-east direction and the river made a bend to the northeast.

After traveling about ten miles from camp, they passed a spot where the mail company would dig a well the following year. The well was for a Pony Express relay station, and it became known as Hooten Well. Later, the Pony Express changed its route through the Dead Camel Mountains, and built another station about a mile to the south. Just after passing the future site of Hooten Well, the expedition began to climb into the western foothills of the Dead Camel Mountains.

September 2001

During our first trip to this area, Nancy and I turned off US 95A just south of the Carson River. Here we found an interpretive marker that featured a map of the area between US 95A and US 95. Extending across this entire distance was a
Camp 4-E. About two miles east of US 95A and Bucklands. The Carson River runs through the trees in the background. The campsite was probably on the bench in the foreground.

June 27, 1859
road labeled “Simpson’s Road.” This was something of a surprise to me, but I later learned that the USGS 7.5-minute maps also use this designation. We found that although it is drivable in a high-clearance vehicle, the road through the Dead Camel Mountains is very rough and rocky, and, in many places, the top speed that could be tolerated was something less than five miles an hour. There is a certain amount of irony in the fact that the only section of Simpson’s route that bears his name is by far the very worst of all the sections that can be driven today.

In 3 miles, attain summit of low range, from which, looking back, Carson River can be seen, well marked by the trees which line its banks. At intervals of 2.5 and 1.7 miles cross other low ridges, the last tolerably steep on east side; and 7½ miles farther, at half past 5, reach south end of Carson Lake where we encamp. Journey, 25.1 miles.9

The road across the Dead Camel Mountains crosses three separate and distinct ridges, and Simpson noted the distance measurements for each of them. After crossing the third ridge, the trail drops down the eastern slope of the mountains and comes to a three-way fork. From this fork, the branch that is called Simpson’s Road veers to the northeast toward the city of Fallon. There is a little more irony here, because Simpson’s expedition did not travel the eastern section of Simpson’s Road. The expedition continued almost due east, following the center branch of the fork. This was the route that was later used by Chorpenning, then the Overland Stage and the Pony Express. Today, this trail can be driven in a high-clearance vehicle for a couple of miles beyond the fork, but at that point it comes to an ungated fence.

It appears that the spot that Simpson chose for that night’s campsite was later used by Chorpenning’s mail company, and then by the Pony Express, and was known as the Carson Sink Station. Although the camp would have been a short distance from the shore of Carson Lake, young William Lee said that for drinking water they had “nothing but the alkali slough water.”10 According to John Townley, there was a good spring “within a few feet” of the station,11 but I have been unable to find anything that looks like a spring in this area. However, I have noticed large numbers of freshwater clamshells in the sandy flats just east of the station site, where the shore of the lake would have been at that time.

**September 2006**

During my earlier trips to the area, I had been unable to find a way to get a vehicle onto the last three-mile section of this day’s journey. On the west, the trail is blocked by the fence, and on the east it is bordered by a large, but presently dry, canal. There is a narrow road on the east side of this canal, and I was able to follow it until I was about a quarter of a mile east of the Carson Sink Pony Express station. Leaving my SUV on the east bank of the canal, I began hiking to the west. I soon passed the station site and continued on across the flats, following a very shallow but clearly discernable swale. After about two miles, I came to the western edge of the flats and began a gradual climb up a gravelly bench. After another mile, I came to the fence that had previously stopped me from following the trail in my vehicle. The USGS 7.5-minute quad shows that there is a Pony Express “monument” at this location. I found that it is one of the small concrete posts that were erected by the BLM many years ago to mark the trail. Between driving and walking, I had now covered the entire route between Fort Churchill and the Carson Sink station. It had taken the expedition one day to negotiate the straight-line shortcut between Churchill Valley and Carson Lake. Three weeks earlier, it had taken them four days to travel between these same points.

**June 28, 1859**

**June 28, Camp No. 5, South End of Carson Lake.**—Moved at 5 minutes after 5. Continue along shore of Carson Lake, at foot of point of low range or spur [White Throne Mountains], being sometimes, on account of marsh, forced on first bench; and after crossing an alkali flat, 7.5 miles from last camp, join our outward route, which we follow along the lake shore 4.5 miles farther and encamp. Journey 12.2 miles. Road good.…Our old road along the lake is at present overflowed by the water of the lake.11
Camp 5-E. Near what was then the southwest corner of Carson Lake, probably at the same location as the Carson Sink Pony Express station, now marked with both a Trails West T-rail post and a stainless steel marker.

“At half past 5, reach south end of Carson Lake, where we encamp.”

JUNE 28, 1859
Leaving US 95 about fifteen miles south of the city of Fallon, I got onto a very difficult two-track that follows the Pony Express Trail along the northern base of the White Throne Mountains. Much of this road is in deep sand, and the rest of it is on a bench that is frequently cut by steep-sided ravines. Travel through this area definitely requires a vehicle equipped with a good four-wheel drive. Sometimes the trail virtually disappears because of washouts, and on a few occasions I had to get out of my SUV and search ahead on foot to find the trail. About four miles east of US 95, I came across the ruins of an old rock building, in front of which has been erected an interpretive sign:

WILDCAT FREIGHT STATION
(Allen’s Station)

These ruins are the remains of the Wildcat Freight Station. Founded in 1863 by Lemuel Allen this station was a wateringstop on a turnpike which originated west of Fort Churchill and extended past Sand Mountain. The turnpike closely followed a route explored by Captain James Simpson in 1859 and used by the Pony Express in 1860–1861.

Although the sign says that the turnpike closely followed Simpson’s Route, it actually followed the Pony Express Trail through Simpson’s Pass, rather than the expedition’s route along the eastern shore of Carson Lake. A little over a mile east of the freight station’s ruins, the road drops down off the rocky bench onto Wildcat Scarp, which Nancy and I had previously crossed while following the outbound trail. Near the eastern edge of the scarp, Simpson’s return trail joined his outbound route, and turned to the north along the eastern edge of the lake. Simpson’s comment about their old road now being under water indicates that the route they had to follow on this day was just slightly east of the trail they made through this area during their outbound trip. Although Simpson’s map shows only a single track, this is presumably due to the scale of the map.

The camp for this night was midway along the east shore of the lake, about four miles south of the outlet, where the expedition had spent the night of June 5. Simpson explained that they had traveled this far to the north because he wanted to return to the east on a route that would be somewhere north of their outbound trail. Although the report contains no previous mention of this plan, Simpson now indicates that he had sent Reese and a small party to look for such a route. He was obviously disappointed when the guide reported that they had been unable to find a satisfactory route for the wagons in this direction. Acting on this new information, Simpson reluctantly decided to turn back to the south along their outbound route. Once again, Simpson’s plans were thwarted, and once again he found himself near the northern end of Carson Lake when it would have been better to be south of it.

June 29, 1859

June 29, Camp No. 6, east side of Carson Lake.—In consequence of laying over at this camp for the benefit of the water and feed, and not wishing to tarry any longer than necessary at our next, where the water and grass are said to be very scant, and the latter alkaline, we did not move till 2 o’clock…. The nearest direction for the road would be from south end of Carson Lake directly across eastwardly to Alkaline Valley [Salt Wells Basin]. But though there is a low pass [Simpson Pass] to admit of a pack-route, Mr. Reese has reported it too full of sand to allow the passage of wagons.
Camp 6-E. On what was then the eastern shore of Carson Lake. In 1859 the water would have covered the light area in the center of the photo.

June 29, 1859
Genoa to Smith Creek Valley

The low pass that Simpson refers to here is Simpson Pass, which they had unknowingly bypassed during their outbound journey. This time they did know about it, but did not use it because Reese said it was too sandy. As mentioned previously, within a year this route was being used on a regular basis by mail coaches and the Pony Express.

We cross a low rocky ridge, 1 mile to the east of camp, and gradually bear to the right, and pass east of south along west edge of Alkaline Valley.14

The Bunejug Mountains run north and south, just to the east of Carson Lake. Near the northern tip of this range is a rather sizeable knoll. During the outbound journey, the expedition had passed just north of this knoll on its way to the outlet of Carson Lake. On the south side of the knoll, between it and the main body of the hills, can be found the “low rocky ridge” that the expedition used as a shortcut.

In the May 2002 edition of News from the Plains, the newsletter of the Oregon-California Trails Association, I noticed a photograph of Dave Hollecker of Reno, Nevada. Hollecker was standing in some ruts, and the caption indicated that they had been made by the Simpson expedition. I was able to make contact with Hollecker, who told me that Don Wiggins, also of Reno, was the one who had found the ruts and had more information about them than he did. I made contact with
Wiggins, who provided me with detailed information on how to find the ridge and the ruts.

September 2003

I drove to the area east of Carson Lake, and hiked up the ridge and found the ruts without difficulty. They are not really ruts, in the normal sense of deep depressions that have been worn into the ground. The ridge is densely covered with volcanic rocks measuring from one to two feet in diameter. The ruts were made when large numbers of the boulders were moved to the sides of a swath that heads up the slope at an angle to the southeast. This swath is now filled with sand, and is quite visible as it climbs up the slope and across the top of the ridge. On the eastern slope, which is not as steep and is not nearly as rocky, there are a large number of visible tracks, and it appears that most of them have been made by rubber-tired vehicles in fairly recent years. Wiggins also told me about the emigrant journal written by Edward Mathews, which indicated that he crossed this ridge while traveling from the east. Sometime later, I was able to obtain a copy of this journal, and learned that Mathews had spent a few days at Camp Floyd, arriving there on August 10, just six days after Simpson had returned from the expedition. Leaving Camp Floyd on the August 13 or 14, the Mathews party reached the Carson Lake area on September 8.

The journal entry for the previous day indicates that his party had camped at Sand Springs during the night of September 7. Mathews describes their travels on the eighth as follows:


While this description of the route leaves something to be desired, it does seem to indicate that Mathews was traveling westward on Simpson’s return trail, and came to where it joined Simpson’s outbound route. It seems reasonable to assume that if he had been traveling on Simpson’s outbound route, he would have said that he came to its junction with the return road. If this is the correct interpretation, it follows that the wagons of the Mathews party crossed the rocky ridge and helped to make the ruts.
After reaching the summit of the low ridge, the expedition continued in a slightly north-of-east direction, and dropped down onto Turupa Flat. Once on the flat, the route began to bend to the south and soon joined the present-day road that comes south from Salt Wells.

Four and a half miles from camp come to grassy bottom, where there is some tolerable grass, and water probably within a foot of the surface. To the west of this place in the flat is a very small warm spring of pretty good water. The efflorescence around it is not alkali, but pure salt.16

The grassy bottom is easily recognized. A well-traveled dirt road leaves US 50 at Salt Wells and, after traveling four miles, comes to a flat area where numerous grass-covered hummocks protrude above the swampy ground. I have been unable to find the small warm spring.

Two and a half miles farther brought us to a spring 6 feet long, 2 deep, and 1½ wide, which is sulphurous, but not unpalatable. There is a small patch of rushes in the vicinity, but no grass. This was the locality intended by our guide as our camping-ground for the night, but the water and grass proving insufficient we only water the animals scantily and then push on.17

This was what is now known as Rock Springs. Reese had planned for the expedition to spend the night at these springs, but after taking a look at the area, Simpson did not feel that there was enough feed for the livestock and decided to keep going, even if it meant that they would have to travel through the night. Rock Springs is located in Salt Wells Basin, near the southwest edge of Eightmile Flat. Immediately to the west of this road, the terrain begins to rise toward the foothills of the Bunejug Mountains. The springs are out in the flats, about a city block from the road. In order to get to the springs, it is necessary to drive across an area that seems to remain fairly wet most of the time.

September 2003

After finding the ruts on the west side of the Bunejug ridge, I made my way around the northern tip of the ridge, then turned south along its eastern base. When I came to the place where the expedition’s trail came down from the ridge, I parked and hiked to the top of the ridge from the east. Returning to my SUV, I headed in a south-easterly direction across Turupa Flat and down the western sides of Eightmile and Fourmile Flats. When I reached Rock Springs, I got myself into a little trouble. The spring is located out in the mud flats, about a hundred yards away from
the road. I decided to drive to the springs, and I got there without a problem. But on the way back to the road I got stuck. Thankfully, I was prepared for such an emergency, and it only took me a couple of hours to get out. My SUV was not equipped with a winch, but I was in the habit of carrying a good rope, a manually operated come-along, a four-foot steel bar, a sledgehammer, and a shovel. Making full use of all this equipment, I was finally able to get out of the mud. I was covered head-to-toe with sticky mud, but it could have been much worse.

*Leave spring at 17 minutes after 5, and in 7.5 miles after crossing Alkaline Valley [Salt Wells Basin] join our outward route, near point of mountain, not far from our old camp, No. 30. Here we halt to take some coffee and feed the draught mules with some of the forage we have brought with us.*

This section of Simpson’s trail crosses Four-mile Flat, which is a totally barren area with no indication of a trail along the route that the expedition traveled. The Pony Express and the Overland Stage also crossed these flats, but I have been unable to find any visible trace of the route they used.

**September 2003**

After getting out of the mud at Rock Springs, I continued along the west edge of Fourmile Flat in a southeast direction for three more miles to where I believe the expedition began to cross the mud flats. Leaving my mud-covered SUV on the western edge of the flats, I set off on foot, and walked until I came to US 50 near Sand Springs. Even though this part of the country was in the midst of a several-year drought, I found that much of the trail across the flats was muddy. It is difficult to imagine how teams and wagons could have made it across this area. When the expedition reached the eastern edge of the flats, they were just a short distance south of where the road to Sand Mountain leaves US 50. Here they stopped, had a cup of coffee, and fed the animals.

*Leave at half past 11 P.M.…Proceeding on in advance of train, I arrived at old camp (No. 29), Middle Gate, 23.4 miles from halting place of last evening, at 7 A.M. June 30; but unfortunately found the water, which was running before, was now to be got only by digging, and that scantily. The train did not get in till 10. We shall turn out our mules to graze and let them drink what water they can in the dug wells.***

By the time the main party reached Middlegate, they had been on the road for twenty hours, and had traveled thirty-nine miles, but they were not finished yet. After getting some breakfast and letting the animals graze for about three hours, they moved out again.

*Resumed march at half past 1. In 1.7 miles cross an arroyo where the water yesterday, according to Mr. Reese, was running, but now exists in small pools.…After crossing an arroyo, or creek, immediately leave old road, and bearing off to the left or northwardly, pass up valley, bounded by the Se-day-e Mountains [Desatoya Range] on our right and a range of high mountains [Clan Alpine Mountains] on our left.*

After leaving the Middlegate gap, the expedition traveled in a slightly north-of-east direction, following its outbound trail for about one and three-quarters of a mile. Then, almost certainly using the same crossing that they had used during the outbound journey, they crossed to the north side of Eastgate Wash. Shortly after they had gotten across the wash, they left their old trail and headed in a northeasterly direction up the valley. For the second time during the return journey, they were now traveling a route that was to the north of their outbound trail.

*Ten miles from Middle Gate reach, near base of Se-day-e Mountain [Desatoya Mountains] a small running brook of icy-cold, pure water, which I call Cold Spring, and which after running few hundred yards, sinks. A more refreshing drink than I obtained from this brook, after the parched, wearisome travel of last night, I believe I never had. The men all seemed equally eager for the cold draft, and were equally delighted. But we have felt most for the poor animals, which have had but about a pailful apiece since yesterday afternoon. They are so fagged, they failed to get up with the wagons*
to the stream, and we are forced, therefore, to go into camp a mile from the water. The animals are driven to the water, and find an abundance of grass at the head of the creek. Journey, since 2 P.M. yesterday, 49.9 miles. Road good.

Simpson and some others must have been traveling some distance ahead of the wagons when they came to Cold Creek. After getting a good drink from the flowing stream, Simpson decided to make camp at that spot. But when the teamsters attempted to bring the wagons to that location, the mules were unable to do it. The grade that they had been climbing for the last few miles was not very steep, but the animals were so worn out they were unable to pull the wagons all the way to the water. Simpson changed his mind about the campsite, and they stopped the wagons about a mile from the water. Immediately after stopping the wagons at the new campsite, the teamsters unhitched the mules and drove them up the streambed to where the water was still running.

Cold Creek flows in a westerly direction out of the Desatoya Mountains, crosses US 50, and immediately makes a bend to the south. Simpson’s map clearly shows that the campsite was on the inside of this bend. A few years later, the Overland Telegraph Company built a large station at this same location. The ruins of this rock structure can be seen here today. About a half mile farther south, there is a similar-looking set of ruins, but these are the remains of an Overland Stage station. The Cold Springs Pony Express station is about a mile and a half to the southeast from the telegraph station ruins. Vehicles are not allowed in this area, and visitors must walk from a trailhead on the east side of US 50. However, this one of the best-preserved stations, and is well worth the walk.

July 1, 1859

July 1, Camp No. 7, Cold Spring.—At 9 A.M. Mr. Thompson, the Norwegian, before spoken of, arrived and brought our mail from Genoa.

As they were preparing to leave on the morning of July 1, the mailman arrived. This was in the person of Snowshoe Thompson, the Chorpenning employee that Simpson had become acquainted with during his trip to San Francisco. Apparently, some mail intended for the expedition had arrived at Genoa after the expedition departed. Whether by prior arrangement, or simply because Thompson thought it was the thing to do, he had packed up the mail and headed east, intending to catch up with the expedition. Thompson left Genoa three days after the expedition, but instead of following the expedition’s route past Fort Churchill and across the Dead Camel Mountains, he stayed on the emigrant road until he reached Ragtown. Heading south from there, he passed by the western shore of Carson Lake, getting onto Simpson’s trail somewhere near Carson Sink Station. Then, following the expedition’s eastbound route, he caught up with them at Cold Springs. Thompson delivered the mail, and then traveled with the expedition throughout the day and camped with them that night.

Party and train decamped at 1 P.M., and continue northwardly up valley. After proceeding 11 miles come to rapid stream of pure water [Edwards Creek], 2 feet wide, ¾ deep, flowing from the Se-day-e Range [Desatoya mountains]. On this we encamp. Willows fringe it, and grass is to be found higher up in the cañon. I call the stream after one of my assistants, Mr. Edward Jagiello, a Polish gentleman; his surname being difficult of pronunciation, I have preferred his Christian name as the appellation. Opposite our camp, in the range of mountains lying to the west of us, is a deep pass, in which can be plainly seen an extensive bottom of grass, and a creek running down from it into the valley in which we have been traveling. This creek, and the valley [Edwards Creek Valley] into which it flows, I propose calling after Major Frederick Dodge, the Indian agent of the Pi-Utes and Washos, who was so courteous to my party, and myself, at Genoa.

North of Cold Springs, and a short distance west of US 50, can be found the traces of an abandoned road that is designated as “Old Overland Road” on the USGS 7.5-minute map of the area. It is almost certain that this old road follows the route that Simpson’s party used as they traveled.
Camp 7-E. The ruins of this old telegraph station near Cold Springs are probably found at the same spot as the expedition’s campsite: “reach, near base of Se-day-e Mountain, a small running brook of icy-cold, pure water, which I call Cold Spring.”

July 1, 1859
Camp 8-E. Edwards Creek, near the northern base of the Desatoya Mountains: "come to a rapid stream of pure water, flowing from the Se-day-e range. On this we encamp."

July 2, 1859
north. As they neared the northern end of the Desatoya Mountains, they left this road, made a turn to the east, and began climbing into some low foothills. The Pony Express followed Simpson’s route in this area, and it is marked with signs erected by the BLM. I have driven the eastern part of this section of the trail, but the western two miles has been so deeply cut by so many washouts that I had to give up on it.

The expedition’s camp for this night was on Edwards Creek, near the northern base of the Desatoya Mountains, and about three miles south from where the creek crosses US 50. Simpson gave the name Dodge to the valley. Today it bears the name of the stream that he named after his civilian assistant.

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**July 2, 1859**

**July 2, Camp No. 8, Edward Creek, Dodge Valley.**—Mr. Thompson left us at half past 7 for Genoa, and intends going by the way of North Carson Lake [Carson Sink]. We at the same time decamp, our course being southeast up the cañon of Edward Creek, the purpose being to cross the Se-day-e range. After traveling 7 miles, at half past 1 I go into camp in superior grass, and on the babbling Edward Creek, three-fourths of a mile short of summit of pass [Basque Summit].

**July 4, 1859**

**July 4, Camp No. 9, Edward Creek Cañon.**—Move at 5.15 o’clock. Continue three-fourths of a mile up cañon to summit of pass, and then turning eastwardly, in 1.5 miles, by branch ravine, reach Kirby Smith’s Creek, the cañon of which we follow down, 3.25 miles, to where it debouches into Woodruff Valley [Smith Creek Valley], and, continuing along creek 3.3 miles farther, encamp on it. Journey, 8.5 miles.

**August 2001**

During my first long trip on Simpson’s route in 1999, I had taken a look at Edwards Creek Canyon from US 50, but had not had time to explore it at all. Returning to this area a couple of years later, I made my way to Edwards Creek and found the site of Camp 8-E. From there, I continued to follow Edwards Creek to the site of Camp 9-E. At that point the stream and the road separate, and I followed the road to the ridge, which is now known as Basque Summit. Turning to the east at the summit, I followed a narrow two-track down Smith Creek Canyon. At the lower end of Smith Creek Canyon, Simpson’s return route, the Overland Stage Road, and the Pony Express Trail all go through the Smith Creek Ranch. In *The Traveler’s Guide To The Pony Express Trail*, which was published in 1995, author Joe Bensen warns his readers that the owners of the ranch have...
Camp 9-E. Near the upper end of Edwards Creek. “After traveling 7 miles, go into camp in superior grass, and on the babbling Edward Creek, three-fourths of a mile short of summit of pass.”

July 4, 1859
locked the gate to this section of the trail. Bensen expressed his hope that “Perhaps this situation will be changed in the future.” As I traveled down Smith Creek Canyon, I was hoping that the situation had changed. I soon discovered that it had not. About a mile above the mouth of the canyon, I came to the gate and found that it was still securely padlocked. Reluctantly, I turned around at the gate and started back up the canyon, thinking that my only option was to backtrack the entire distance to US 50 in Edwards Creek Valley. However, after traveling back up the canyon for about a half mile, I noticed a faint two-track trail leaving the road and climbing up the steep slope of the south side of the canyon. I decided to give this trail a try, and after a couple of hours of fairly serious four-wheel-drive travel, I had worked my way around the ranch and had managed to find my way into Smith Creek Valley. Taking a look at my map, I was happy to see that I was not very far from the site of Camp 10-E, where the expedition had spent the night of the Fourth of July. On the other hand, I was disappointed by the fact that by being forced to take the roundabout route through the hills, I had missed about five miles of the expedition’s route. But since it was late in the day, I decided that I would have to leave and come back some other time.

July 2002

On the same day that I had driven across Smith Creek Summit and had gotten the flat tire while turning around in the sagebrush, I drove to the Smith Creek Ranch and spent some time talking to the manager. When I explained what I was doing, he offered to unlock the gate for me, but I told him that I had already been on the other side of the gate, and all I wanted to do during this trip was to cover the section of the trail that I had missed during my previous trip. He said that would be fine, and I headed up the canyon until I came to the gate. On my way back out of the canyon, I stopped to visit the Smith Creek Pony Express station, which is just

Smith Creek Pony Express Station, located on property belonging to the Smith Creek Ranch, is one of the best preserved Pony Express stations that the author has seen. The expedition’s trail would have passed the far side of the station.
a few yards from today’s road. This rock structure may very well be the best-preserved Pony Express station in existence today. The outside walls are all intact, and it even has a roof. The expedition’s campsite for this night was on the north bank of Smith Creek, about a half mile south of the old Overland Stage Road. William Lee mentioned that this campsite was about two miles from where they had camped on this same stream during the outbound journey. He would have been referring to Camp 26-W, the site of which is almost exactly two miles from where I believe Camp 10-E was located. Thus, Lee’s journal entry helps to confirm the location of these two campsites.

As previously noted, for the past two days the expedition had been traveling on a route that was to the north of their outbound route. While at this camp, Simpson made a few comments comparing the two routes across the Desatoya Mountains.

There is a great deal of grass in Smith’s Cañon and the adjoining ravines, and some little clover in the former; but the south pass; or that of our outward route, is still better in respect to pasture. The distance, also, is about 4 miles in favor of the more southern route; but in grade the more northern is much the best. I think it also probable, on account of the bottom of Smith’s Creek being moist and, therefore, miry early in the season, that until about the middle of June the route through the southern pass would be preferable for wagons; after that, however, the most northern route will be found the best. The truth is, both branches of the route should be made perfectly practicable when the road is perfected, so that either can be taken at any time.

As it turned out, the northern route was the one that developed into a well-used road, becoming the route of the Overland Stage, the Pony Express, and many emigrant parties. On the other hand, I have found no evidence that anyone other than the Simpson expedition ever used the southern route. When I hiked Simpson’s southern route through these mountains, I came across several places where even a minimum amount of wagon travel would be expected to produce some ruts, but I found nothing other than the modern two-track that travels a short distance through the upper end of Skull Canyon.