

California's Preservation of the First Wagons Over the Sierra on the Truckee River Route

California Researches and Marks the Truckee River Route

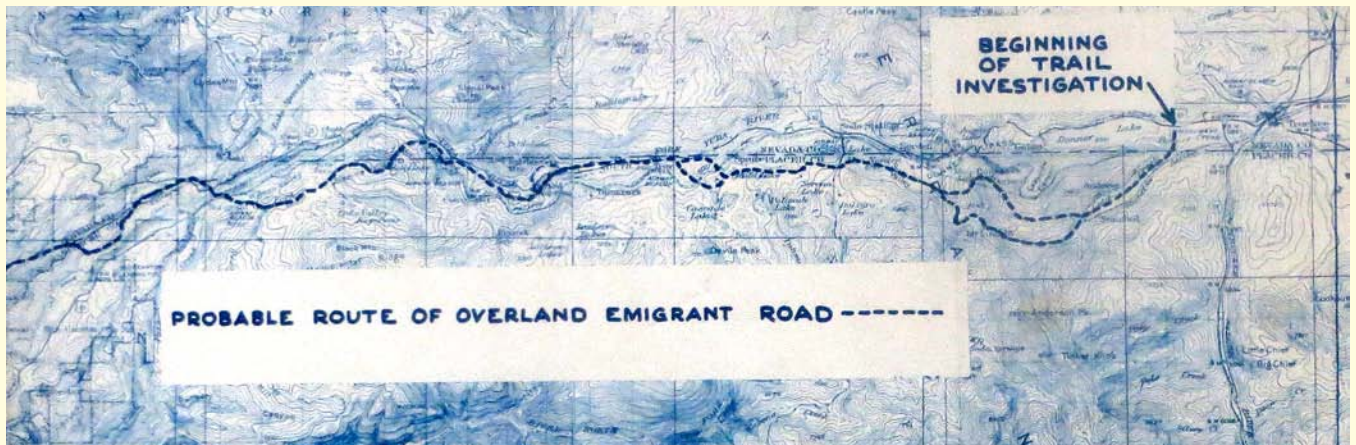
The 1844 Overland Emigrant Trail was marked in the 1970s by California Historical Landmarks, series No. 799. They were placed at Johnson's Ranch, Mule Spring, Wolf Creek (Grass Valley) Big Bend, Donner Pass and the the Alder creek Trail.



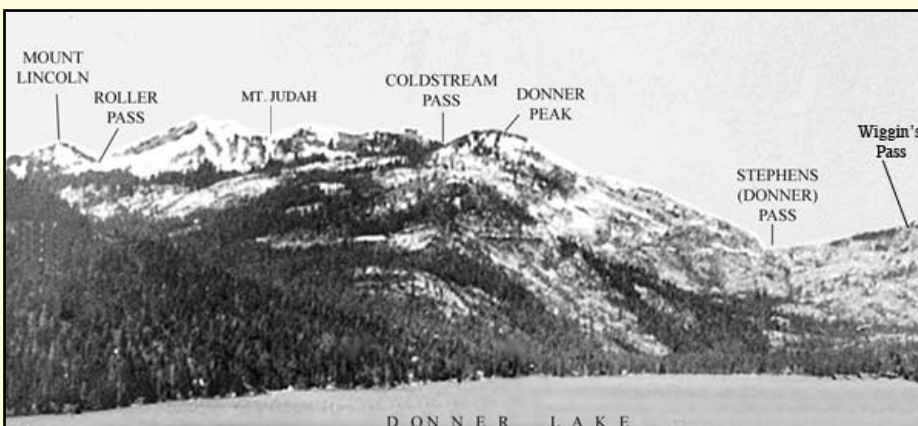
The state's Historical Landmark signs have been stolen off the cement posts at both Donner (Stephens) Pass and Mule Spring.

~ 1949 California Attempts To Preserve The Trail ~

Prior to 1950 (state's centennial year), California did a feasibility study in an attempt to preserve the emigrant trail from the Donner Memorial State Park to Chicago Park by incorporating it into the state park system. An extensive investigation was done, including researching the trail and photographing segments of it, referring to numerous Diaries, reviewing maps and interviewing the ten most knowledgeable trail authorities of that time. Two of these trail researchers began placing wooden signs on trees along the trail as early as the 1920s. The report for the California Centennial Project contained 94 pages, plus the 11" x 24" fold out map shown below.



Unfortunately, the necessary \$246,025 funding for the 1949 proposal failed to be approved. In 1991, a second effort was made to include the segment of the emigrant trail from the Nevada State Line to Soda Springs into the state Park system. This resulted in a second feasibility study. A portion of this proposal is on the next page.



New Pass Over Donner Summit

156 years after the Stephens Party crossed

In 2000, Trails West pulled their marker T-26, "Lake Mary," off of the Coldstream Pass Route after pseudo Trail authority Don Wiggins proclaimed that no emigrants used this pass. Trails West then placed this T-26 marker on the newly created Wiggins Pass—designating the marker as T-40 "Stephens Pass."

~ 1991 California's Second Attempt To Preserve The Trail ~

In conducting this study, the department was guided by the language contained in 1989 Senate Bill 331, to wit: "Remnants of the Donner Party Trail from the Nevada State Line to Johnson's Rancho should be preserved as part of California's heritage, and that a program of multi-agency participation be developed to provide for that preservation, with particular emphasis on those variations of the route which passed over the crest of the Sierra Nevada range between Mount Judah and Mount Lincoln, between Mount Judah and Mount Donner, and at the shoulder of Mount Donner in the vicinity of old State Highway Route 40."

In anticipation of the passage of the above legislation, the National Park Service contracted with Donald Buck of the teaching staff at DeAnza College to provide mapping for this segment of the trail. The research techniques included both a thorough records search and a physical site reconnaissance of the entire route. Rough maps were produced using the trail classification system described below. Through the auspices of Thomas Hunt of the Oregon-California Trails Association, this material was made available to the state, and it became the basis for the maps which illustrate this study (see Sheets 1-5).

Staff from both the Planning and the Resource Protection Divisions of this department spent time reviewing the literature, conferring with authorities, and observing some of the trail evidence which still exists in the field today. These efforts were focused on confirmation of the validity of the research materials and methodology used, and no attempt was made to duplicate scholarly work already accomplished.

The three passes mentioned above, Roller, Coldstream and Donner, were drawn by Don Buck and his students at DeAnza College and are shown in their map (below) of the three passes.



Don Buck's 1991 Donner Pass Map

The route in pink is the Donner Pass Route (Stephen Pass '44-'45 Trail)

The route in yellow and designate as Middle Pass is the Coldstream Pass route.

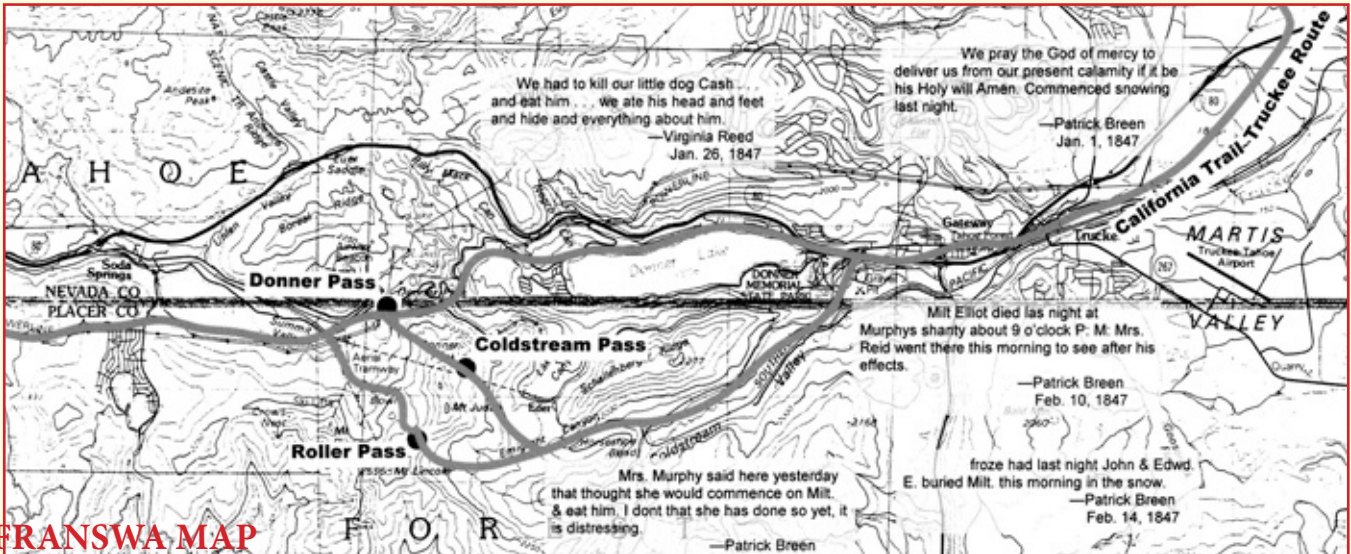
The bottom route in yellow is the Roller Pass route.

The numbers refer to the property owners.

The Roman Numerals refer to the classification of sections of trail.

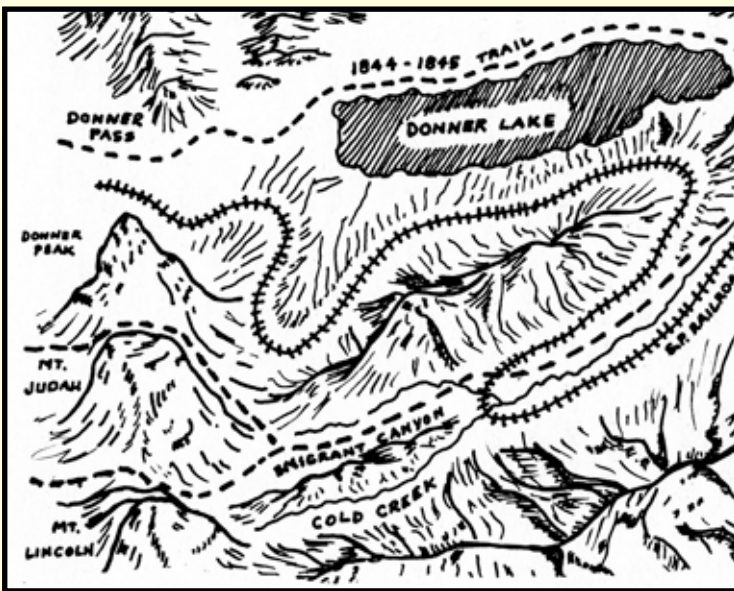
PCT is the Pacific Crest Trail head.

Maps Confirm Don Buck's 1991 Donner Pass Feasibility Study Map

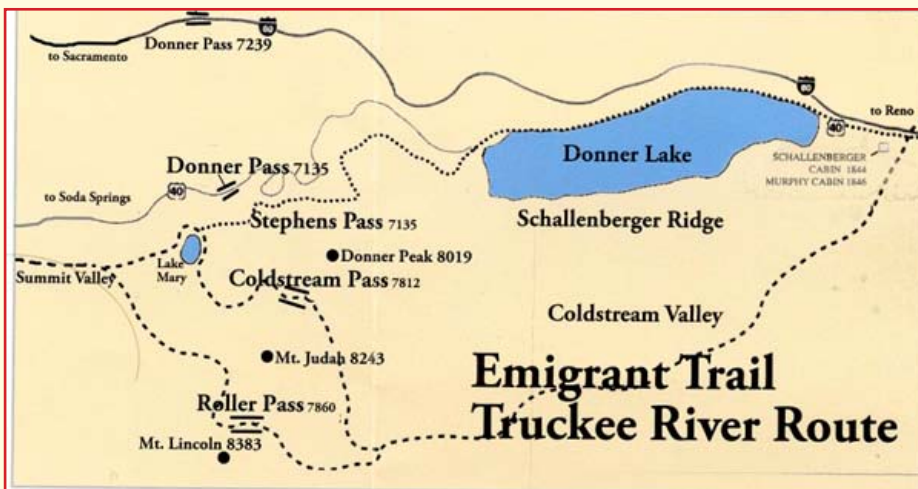
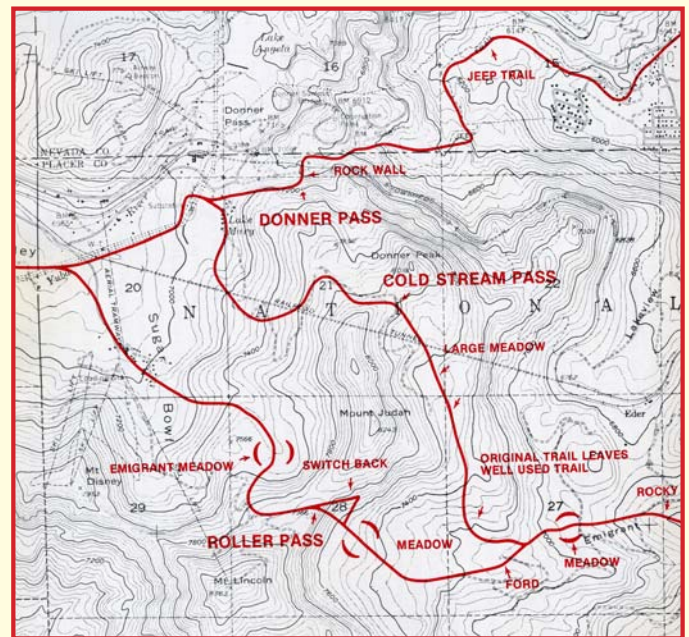


FRANZWA MAP

The map above is from Greg Franzwa's (founder of OCTA) *Maps of the California Trail*, 1999. His map of the three Passes are identical to those shown in Don and his student's 1991 Feasibility Study. Franzwa, a long time trail researcher, was very critical in his final issues of the *Folio* of Don Wiggins' trail changes and those instigating the changes that revised the long "established" routes along the California Trail, like shown here.



Curran's map shows the three routes but does not name them all



Upper left: *Fearless Crossing*, 1983, Harold Curran. The author was a native Nevadan who spent numerous years researching and lecturing the California Trail.

Upper right: *Trail of the First Wagons Over the Sierra Nevada*, Charles Graydon, 1986. Featured maps that noted Weddell/Rhoads 1924-1950 emigrant trail signs.

Left: *The Emigrant Trail Over Donner Summit*, Donner Summit Historical Society, 2012. Historians living on the hill endorse Don's 1991 Feasibility Study map.

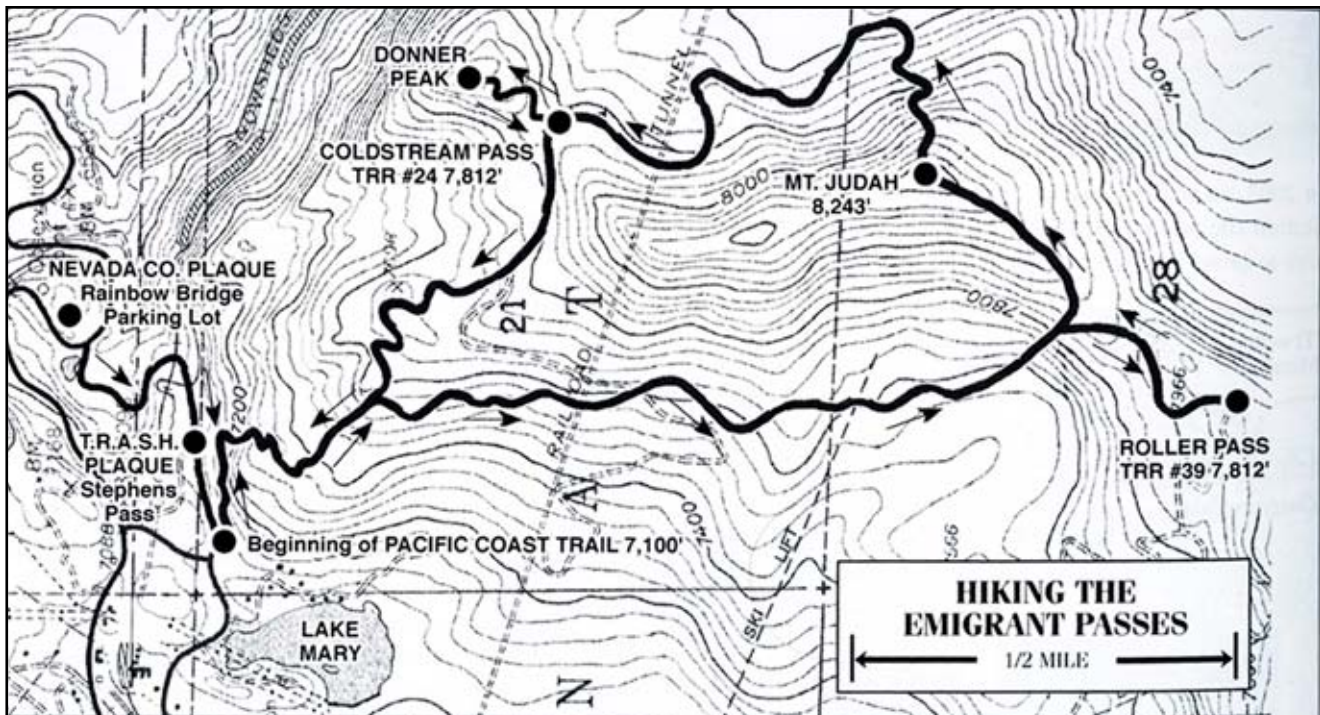
Hike the Passes Shown on Don Buck's 1991 Donner Pass Feasibility Map

Hiking the emigrant roads not gives a hiker first-hand knowledge of the trail, but it is also great exercise.



Donner Pass/Stephens Pass Hike

Walk the half-mile from the California Historical Landmark post (at the right of photo) to where the trail crosses under the abandoned railroad tracks and you will understand — with its almost level grade and the absence of granite ledges — why this route was used from 1844 until 1924 as an ideal crossing of the summit at its lowest elevation. The hike begins south of old Hwy 40 just 10 yards from the Pacific Crest Trailhead.



The epitome of all trail hikes, it is noted for its Incredible Views and historic significance

The trek not only allows the hiker to compare the ascending grades of Roller and Coldstream Passes as to difficulty, but the loop also offers a myriad of rewarding views. The hike along the 8,000-foot crest of Mt. Judah offers spectacular surveys of Summit Valley to the west and Donner Lake to the east. An awesome climax to the trek is a short, steep ascend from the Coldstream Pass Marker to Donner Peak. Here you will be walking in the footsteps of emigrants that made this climb to see what might lie ahead.

Will OCTA Endorse Donner and Coldstream Passes shown on Don Buck's 1991 Donner Pass Feasibility Study Map?

Attend the panel of speakers entitled, *A Bonanza of Trails—First Wagons Over the Sierra—Truckee River Route* Thirty-Third Annual OCTA Convention

Marshall Fey:

Member: Trails West and California-Nevada Chapter of OCTA

Charter Member: OCTA Trail Guide: Truckee River Route, 1975

Author: *Emigrant Trails. The Long Road to California*

The Truckee Meadows Trail Reconfirmed, Overland Journal, Spring 2004

Forward to other trail enthusiasts