



BLM News

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Elko Field Office, 3900 East Idaho Street, Elko, Nevada 89801 (775) 753-0200

DATE: August 30, 2002
ELKO FIELD OFFICE: 2002-81
FOR RELEASE: August 30, 2002

CONTACT: Mike Brown
(775) 753-0386
e-mail: Mike_Brown@nv.blm.gov

CALIFORNIA NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL MARKING PROJECTS COMPLETED

A group of local historic trails enthusiasts have recently completed a decades-long trail marking project on public and private lands in northeastern Nevada.

Using donated materials and volunteer labor, the Humboldt Highroaders, a local group of trail enthusiasts, wrapped up the final phases of a massive undertaking to mark about 400 miles of California National Historic Trails and Cutoffs in Elko County.

The various phases of the project included marking actual trail ruts with Carsonite posts; installing the steel rail markers and interpretive plaques on the markers; and installing California Historic Trail signs along I-80 across Nevada and on county roads in Elko County.

The roots of the trail marking project go back to the 1960s when Trails West (headquartered in Reno) began installing rail markers at historic sites across Nevada and California. The virtually indestructible steel markers are railroad rails welded into a T-shape and set in concrete. The first priority during the 1960s to 1990s was to install the steel markers and Carsonite posts on the main California Trail.

By 1996 when the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA) national convention was held in Elko, the main trail Carsonite post marking was wrapped up.

Once the main trail was completed marked, local volunteers turned their attention to the cutoffs and variants of the California Trail. For the past five summers with help from Trails West, the local Highroad group installed rail markers and plates on the Hastings Cutoff from Pilot Peak on the Nevada/Utah border to the Hunter site just west of Elko where the Hastings Cutoff rejoins the main California Trail.

In addition to the primary Hastings "wagon" route, the "pack train" variants were marked as well. In July 2002, the Humboldt Highroad members and other volunteers completed installation of the steel marker interpretive plaques on those pack routes used by John Fremont, the Bidwell-Bartleson party, and others. The pack train routes crossed Secret Pass, Harrison Pass, and the Pequop and Toano ranges.

In 2001, the Nevada Department of Transportation funded and installed about 75 auto tour signs on I-80 and other state highways across Nevada. The signs are at intervals of 18 to 20 miles in both the east and west-bound lanes where the highway is near the original California

Trail. In some cases the highways are right over the top of the trail. The purpose of marking the Interstate is to let the public know they're traveling the same route as the 49ers and the emigrants to California. The last of the auto tour signs are being installed this year. In addition, the 2002 official Nevada State highway map now shows the California Emigrant Trail.

The project's fourth and final stage - marking the trail along Elko County roads - was done this spring and summer. The Nevada Division of Tourism, Nevada Department of Transportation, and Elko County Road Department donated the signs, posts, and hardware needed. Local volunteers installed 25 of the signs at sites across the County where the California Trail and Hastings Cutoff are near the County roads.

Humboldt Highroad member and trails marking organizer Paul Sawyer commented, "This has been a tremendous project. The historic trails in Elko County are now marked as well or better as anywhere in the California Trail system. This trail marking is tied to the future California National Historic Trail Interpretive Center scheduled to be built just west of Elko. Once the Center is open, people will want to see the trail and know where it goes. The next step will be to produce maps so people can take self-guided auto tours to the various trail-side sites."

Sawyer continued, "Most everything used for every stage of the trail marking project was donated. Union Pacific donated steel rails and then Tricon Metals, Elko cut and fabricated the rail markers. We had enough markers to give 65 of them to the trail volunteer group in Utah who marked the Hastings Cutoff across the entire state. Our goal is to mark the length of the Hastings Cutoff from its beginning at Fort Bridger to its end at the Hunter Exit, 8 miles west of Elko."

"A number of people across the state helped with the project - Nevada Department of Transportation Director Tom Stephens; Bruce Bommarito, Nevada Division of Tourism; Elko County Roads Supervisor Otis Tipton; Steve Dondero, BLM Elko Field Office; Cashman Equipment; Architect J.D. Long; Don Wiggins of OCTA; all the private land owners along the trails who gave us unlimited access to their lands, and of course the local volunteers for all their sweat and blisters."

"Finally, we're highly indebted to Trails West who furnished the engraved interpretive plates for the rail markers and to Don Buck of Sunnyvale, California, for years of research and assistance," Sawyer concluded.