

# Lassen Trail Fun Trip

Bruff's Camp Clean-Up and Hike to Steep Hollow  
October 15 and 16, 2011

Journal of Denise Moorman    Photos by Jim Moorman

With fall on the approach, the last scheduled trip of the season took place October 15 and 16 along the infamous Lassen Trail. Organized by Alison Portello, and assisted by Don Buck, the two day trip began at the meadow next to Deer Creek, following logging roads along the trail corridor as it climbed to the Ishi Wilderness and the emigrant camp site at Steep Hollow.

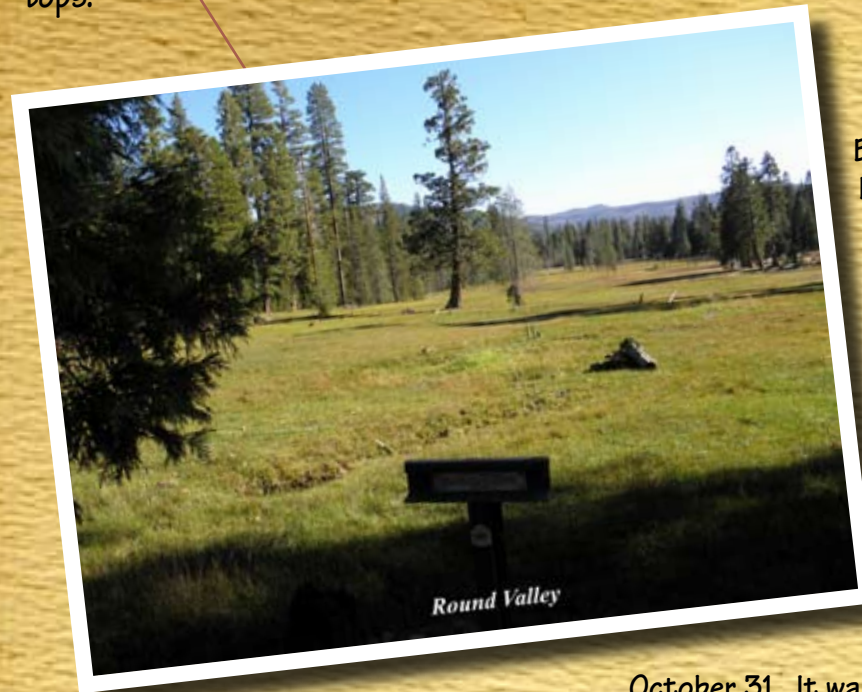
Designed for those Trails West members who hadn't had the opportunity to explore this section of the trail and its historically significant sites, the trip was a well-planned mix of visiting markers, trail maintenance, camping and a five mile hike through spectacular scenery painted with the colors of the changing season. And all in the span of two days, with enough time left over to return home by Monday!



The group of 20 old and new Trails West members met at Deer Creek Meadows (Marker L-48) along Highway 32, near Chester, CA on a chilly Saturday morning. Eager to get started, everyone showed up early and the group rolled out on time. Deer Creek Meadows was a "recruiting area" for the emigrants and their teams, in preparation to commence crossing the "Mountain Desert" (George Enoch Jewett, Oct 2, 1849). Although water sources were adequate, the forest they were entering was thick; there would be no grass available for the livestock.

Cattle were still grazing in that meadow the morning the tour started, and it wasn't difficult to understand the anxiety the emigrants must have felt heading into this steep stretch of mountains with the specter of approaching cold weather hanging over them. Another quote, provided by Don Buck, spoke of snow covering the meadow and cattle freezing to death in early November, 1849.

As the caravan visited Markers L-49 (God Help the Hindmost), L-50 (Through Thick Timber), L-51 (Round Valley), L-52 (The Last Summit) and L-53 (Mill Creek Overlook), L-54 (The Narrows), the members scanned landscape the emigrants had traveled: thick forests that made it difficult to maneuver a wagon along the narrow, steep path; a meadow and springs suddenly opening into view, but the grass eaten down to the dirt by the thousands of teams ahead of you; drop offs of a thousand feet along an isthmus connecting two ridge tops.



By noon the group reached Bruff's Camp and The Alford Family Gravesite (L-55), the site where J. Goldsborough Bruff spent the winter of '49 barely surviving while protecting several his company's wagons and waiting in vain for his compatriots to return to rescue him. During his stay, a group of emigrants passing his camp, the Alford family, tented near him on the night of

October 31. It was a windy and rainy night.

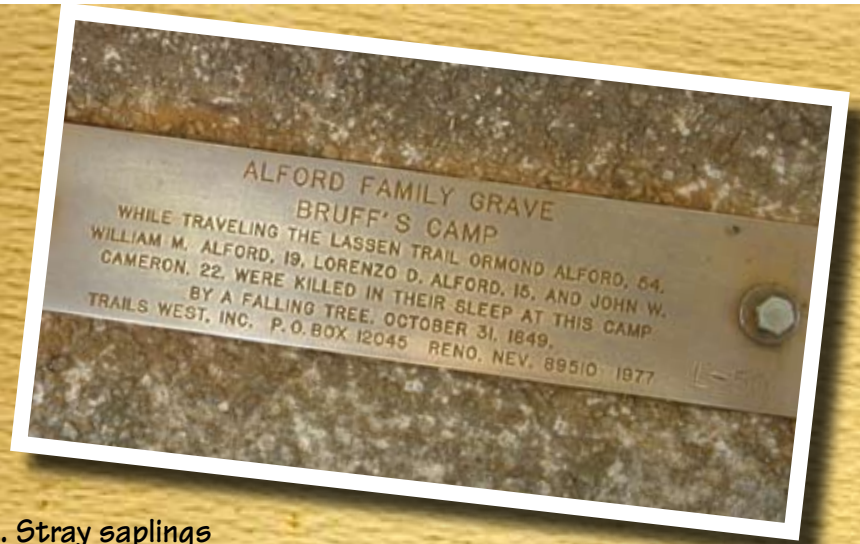
About 1 am, Bruff was awakened by someone at his tent seeking help. The wind had blown a large oak over on the family's tent and four men were trapped inside. Bruff and the others struggled to move the tree and found two of the men already dead, two others with such severe injuries that they were to die the next day.

An unidentified group has built a stone monument with a plaque in the clearing not far from the road, recalling this terrible event. Farther down the path, the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA) installed a sign next to what is thought to be the Alford Family gravesite and in 1977 Trails West placed a concrete marker at the foot of the site with a brass plate engraved with the family's names.



Alford Family Grave At Bruff's Camp After The Clean-up.

The tour group voted to eat lunch alongside the road here before they began the clean-up of the memorial site. After lunch, rakes, loppers, saws and various other “implements of destruction” were produced and the crew took off. Within an hour, the path from the road to the memorial and onto the gravesite was raked clean. Stray saplings had been tugged away and unruly tree branches wacked down. Everyone was amazed at how much had been accomplished in such little time, and was proud of making the site a fitting memorial once again.



The last stop was Marker L-56 located near the interpretive signs at the trailhead for the Ishi Wilderness—the campsite for the night. After everyone found a level spot to park their rig, Alison and Don led a short hike to Marker L-57 in Obe Field and start of the last leg of the

emigrants' trek down to Lassen's Rancho. The hike on Sunday would pass this marker again and head along the ridge, conifers giving way to oaks as the trail descends out of the mountains.



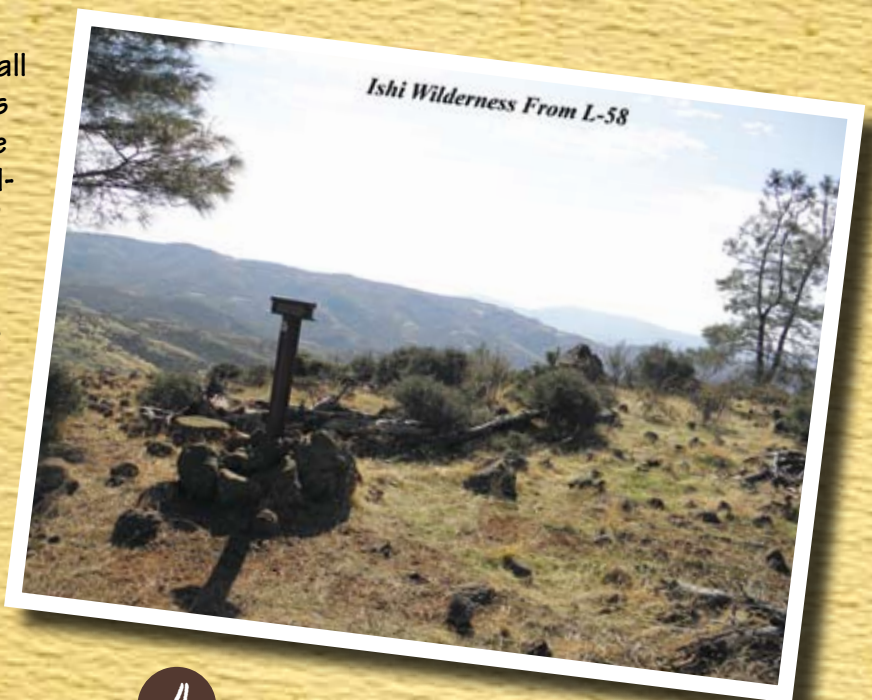
A perfect hiking day should be bright, sunny and cool with a little breeze. That describes Sunday exactly. Again, everyone going on the hike was ready ahead of time and the group took off for Marker L-58, located on the ridge just past Steep Hollow.



Alison and Don walked with the groups of Trails West members as everyone picked their way through heavy brush, watching for signs of the wagon trail and subsequent auto two-track. Sharp eyes spotted occasional pieces of unidentified hardware, but the big find of the day was the frame of a carpet bag (a large purse-looking suitcase which Don said was of the emigrant era.) Of course, all artifacts were left in place to be appreciated by future explorers.

As the group approached an impassable boney backbone on the ridge in front of them, Don Buck pointed off the left side of the trail to a meadow nestled among the ravines, several hundred feet below. Steep Hollow. Blocked by the boney ridge ahead of them, the emigrants dropped down the side of the mountain and camped in Steep Hollow. The inscription on Marker L-58 reads, "There was several trains encamped in this hollow and it reminded me of a small village as all wer up...to make an early start as there was a very steep hill to clime before we could get out of this hollow' P.F. Castleman OCT 20, 1849."

Early the next morning the emigrants would double and triple team their weary oxen to pull the wagons up the next mountain-side and past the rocky obstacle. From here on it was downhill (mostly) to Peter Lassen's ranch and the Promised Land of California and the goldfields. For the hikers, it was time to



discuss the “logical” route out of the hollow, pointed out by Alison, take pictures around the marker and head back to camp, hoping to get there near 1pm.

Amazed once again by the hardships and perseverance of the emigrants, the group said their good-byes and headed home. As always, everyone had found something to enjoy. We were glad to welcome three new members making this their first trip: Gary and Cherie Fiscus from Acampo and Kelly Berg from Roseville, CA who brought his son, Jeff (potential new member) along. Rounding out the group were, Jerry Boyer, Don Buck, Chuck Dodd, Lee Dummel, Bob Evanhoe, Roger and Karen Gash, Jack Greenhaigh, Dick Hallford, Ken Johnston and Jo Massey, Steve Larmore, Jim and Denise Moorman, Alison Portello and Jon Willers.



If you would care to join in the fun and help with worthwhile work, watch for upcoming announcements on this website. No matter what your experience or talents, you'll be a welcomed addition to the crew.

[www.emigranttrailswest.org](http://www.emigranttrailswest.org)