

FREMONT AND THE FIRST CROSSING OF CARSON PASS

On February 20, 1844, "The Pathfinder," John C. Fremont, and his party of explorers crossed the Sierra Nevada over what we now call Carson Pass. While being only the third group of Euro-Americans to cross over the Sierra Nevada, Fremont's party was the first to cross over what we now call Carson Pass (See Endnotes). In addition, Fremont and/or members of his party were the first Euro-Americans to climb Red Lake Peak, Elephants Back, and, possibly, Round Top Mountain.

Starting near Bridgeport on January 25, 1844, Fremont and his party traveled past Topaz Lake and up Charity Valley Creek into Grover Hot Springs Valley. They then continued up the valley reaching Faith Valley on February 4, 1844. Charity Valley and the camp (Long Camp) in Charity Valley where the party stayed while preparing to cross over Carson Pass was reached on February 10, 1844. Ten days later, on the 20th, Fremont and his party crossed over what we now call "Carson Pass" and dropped down to the American River east of Sciots Camp and the 42-mile Campground near Strawberry. From there, the party continued west down the American River. They reached Sutter's Fort on March 6, 1844.

Obviously, Fremont's mid-winter crossing of the Sierra Nevada was a major accomplishment. Fortunately for us, his report to the United States Congress was published by order of the Senate of the United States and is available for us to read today. In addition, the diary kept by Charles Pruess, expedition cartographer, and the autobiography by Kit Carson, expedition hunter, are also available. Bob Graham, a latter day explorer, used these three source of information to determine the route followed by Fremont and his party during their epic journey across Carson Pass. In doing so, Bob used his technical expertise and knowledge of the Carson Pass area to determined what route was followed and where Fremont's Long Camp was located.

Fortunately for anyone interested in the history of the Carson Pass area, Bob presented the results of his research in the form of a book titled *The Crossing of the Sierra Nevada in the winter of 1843-1844*. The book starts out by giving an overview of the expedition's travel and then a somewhat technical but easy to understand explanation of how Fremont determined where they were. In doing so, Bob updates Fremont's data. This is followed by day-by-day excerpts from Fremont's Report, Pruess's diary, and Carson's autobiography. Bob provides explanatory comments to help us understand what the three expedition members were telling us.

Anyone interested in the history of the Sierra Nevada in general and Carson Pass in particular will find Bob's book most helpful. To obtain a copy of Bob's book, order it from Bob's web site [LongCamp](#)

The second edition of *Hiking the Greater Carson Pass Region* published by ENFIA, The Eldorado National Forest Interpretive Association provides information on how to find

Fremont's "Long Camp." This book is available at the National Forest Service Information Station at Carson Pass.

Endnotes:

1. Jedediah Smith and his party crossed over the Sierra Nevada near Ebbitt's Pass (west to east) during May, 1827. The Bartleson-Bidwell party crossed over the Sierra Nevada (east to west) in 1841. Fremont and his party crossed over following a south to north route.
2. All place names are present-day names.