



Friends of Hope Valley Newsletter

Fall, 2009

Volume 24, Issue 2

For the preservation
of the scenic,
recreational, and
historic use of Hope
Valley and Alpine
County's eastern
Sierra slope.

Board of Directors

Debbi Waldear
President

John Barr
Yvonne Chen
Jim Donald
Gay Havens
Greg Hayes

Preserving the Ranch Lands

Greg Hayes

One of the visual charms of eastern Alpine County is the rolling pastures of its large cattle ranches, many of which have been in operation since the late 1800s. With only a handful of owners controlling most of these thousands of acres, the question that sometimes arises is: What would happen if one of these ranchers decided to develop his land?

In the current economic climate, development pressures are almost non-existent. But times change. Markleeville, for example, is nearly surrounded by pasture owned and operated by one person—Ted Bacon, whose home base is the lovely Jubilee Ranch just south of Genoa, Nevada. Mr. Bacon has been a wonderful steward of his Alpine County lands over the decades but will the next generation do the same? What will the future bring?

Is there value in trying to preserve ranch lands? For many, aesthetics alone make a strong case for preservation. But the value of ranch lands goes far beyond the beauty they provide. Jacques Etchegoyhen of Terra Firma Associates in Minden, Nevada puts it this way: Ranch lands provide “numerous and critically important ‘ecosystem services.’ These range from habitat enhancement and groundwater recharge to floodwater attenuation and basic food provision.” Habitat enhancement has many elements, including food, water, nesting sites, year-round cover, protection from predators, and corridors for easy movement for a multitude of local and migratory wildlife species.

Apart from the outright purchase of

ranch land, one less expensive and thoroughly viable way to protect it is through a conservation easement, which can be either donated or sold by the landowner and which restricts most future development, leaves the ownership of the ranch otherwise unchanged, permits the ranch to continue operating normally in perpetuity, and often provides tax benefits. Terra Firma Associates, for example, has to date helped acquire more than 13,500 acres of conservation easements in nearby Carson Valley, Nevada—most recently the Scossa home ranch on Foothill Road. The preservation of Alpine County ranch lands, however, remains a topic for the future. Is a win-win solution possible? All we can say so far is that the conversation has begun.



Winter Recreation Plan

Debbi Waldear

The Winter Recreation Plan for Alpine County is an agreement worked out by both motorized and non-motorized users in a series of consensus building meetings held during 2006. These strategy sessions resulted in a final Plan that defines areas of use, establishes new routes and areas, creates future campsites, and provides relief for the congested parking along the shoulder of Hwy. 88. One of the goals of the Plan is to reduce excessive snowmobile use in Hope Valley by opening up other areas in Eastern Alpine County not currently available for motorized uses. The Plan evolved around the core idea of equal opportunity, a quid pro quo method whereby each group gained from each facet of the Plan. Each group made concessions and each group benefited from the Plan.

Highlights of important changes for motorized users include improved parking, restrooms, and a camping facility at Blue Lakes Road as well as similar improvements at Centerville Flat for accessing approved areas of use along Hwy. 4. The Forest Service recently was granted an \$181,000 grant to build a RV parking and staging area along Blue Lakes Road on a half-acre sized portion of the Blue Lakes gravel pit. This work will include 10-12 parking spaces, including those for trailers and overnight RV camping. This development is intended to reduce the need for shoulder parking along Highway 88. The design would incorporate an existing berm to enhance screening from the highway. The new area will be available year round and will help eliminate unwanted dispersed summer camping in the area as well as preventing meadow encroachment.

The other half of the gravel pit will be restored to native meadow vegetation to enhance wildlife habitat and watershed conditions. The Alpine Watershed Group is now applying for a grant to complete the restoration of the area, and Friends of Hope Valley will be involved in this project.

One already completed project in the Plan is the installation of restrooms at Centerville Flat. In addition, the Forest Service has recently received a grant to eliminate a dangerous section of Highway 4, which will provide the motorized community a safer route to Bear Valley.

Friends of Hope Valley also received a \$37,000 matching

grant from the California Off-Highway Vehicle Fund to begin the education portion of the Alpine County Winter Recreation Plan. Our organization will be printing maps, generating signs and designing a website. The website will also be a link on the Humbolt-Toiyable National Forest webpage. In addition, a winter safety seminar is planned for February 20th at Blue Lakes Road. This seminar will include topics such as avalanche safety and safe winter travel. The education grant is primarily geared toward information about and guidance for winter motorized uses within Alpine County. Through this education process, the goal is to keep recreational motorized use away from the areas designated for non-motorized recreation.

Another big part of the Winter Recreation Plan is the "Red Corral" project. The old red corral currently sits unused on the south side of Hwy. 88, just east of Red Lake. The changes created by this project will provide access to easy-to-intermediate skiing terrain in the heart of Hope Valley. Designed around the old, historic cow loading structure will be a parking lot, restrooms and picnic area. This year-round site will be closed to motorized recreational uses in winter and summer.

The original motive to create the Winter Recreation Plan was to address user conflicts over the use of Forestdale Creek Road. The Plan now calls for the Forestdale Creek Road to be open for motorized use during the early and late months of winter. This will provide snowmobile access to the upper Blue Lakes area when there is insufficient snow at the nearby Blue Lakes Snow-Park. A mid-winter closure to motorized use on Forestdale Creek Road will be implemented when sufficient snow is available at Blue Lakes Snow-Park. This winter will be the third year this part of the Plan has been in effect. At first there was a great deal of resistance from the snowmobile community, but through education and signing this resistance has been substantially reduced; Forestdale Creek area is now a lovely and reliably quiet place to ski and snowshoe when snow conditions allow the closure of the road. (For details on skiing this area, see the separate article on "Experiencing the Silence of Forestdale.")

Education is key to this whole process. The more users who learn about the Plan and what opportunities it provides, the less conflict there will be. That is why Friends of Hope Valley is proud to have been approved for the Education and Safety grant funding the implementation of the educational process.

SUPPORT THE SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY

Join thousands of visionary Californians in a statewide effort to protect and restore our beloved mountain range, by registering to purchase a Sierra Nevada Conservancy License Plate.

www.sierralicenseplate.org

A Winter Outing: The Silence of Forestdale Road

Gay Havens

Now that snowmobiles have been banned on the Forestdale Road when there is enough snow for them on Blue Lakes Road, cross-country skiers and snowshoers can enjoy a wonderful day of play and skill building in this area. Forestdale Road from Red Lake into the Forestdale Divide offers a marvelous place for intermediate skiers to hone their skills and practice their turns.

Park along the road to Red Lake off of Hwy. 88 (a couple of miles east of Carson Pass and just east of the lake itself). Forestdale Road starts with a bit of a downhill; don't be shy about putting your skis on at the bottom of this little hill. The road then goes gently up and down for about two miles, a perfect place to practice your kick-and-glide technique. At about the 2-mile point you will come to the bridge crossing Forestdale Creek. Intermediate skiers should turn off the road at this point and follow the stream up to a beautiful open bowl. You can go up either side of the stream, but I prefer the right (east) side because it is more open. In about a quarter of a mile you will find yourself in an open bowl, a perfect spot for practicing your turns! This bowl offers slopes of varying steepness and all with a lovely, non-threatening, flat run-out at the bottom. There are very few trees on these slopes so it is really ideal for those just learning to turn. One can climb up a little way, ski down, get more confidence, climb up a bit higher, practice more turns, and on and on. In good conditions, this bowl can look like a groomed ski slope! When you stop for a rest, be sure look up at the cliffs above the south end of the bowl. Sometimes they are coated with blue ice—a very beautiful sight!

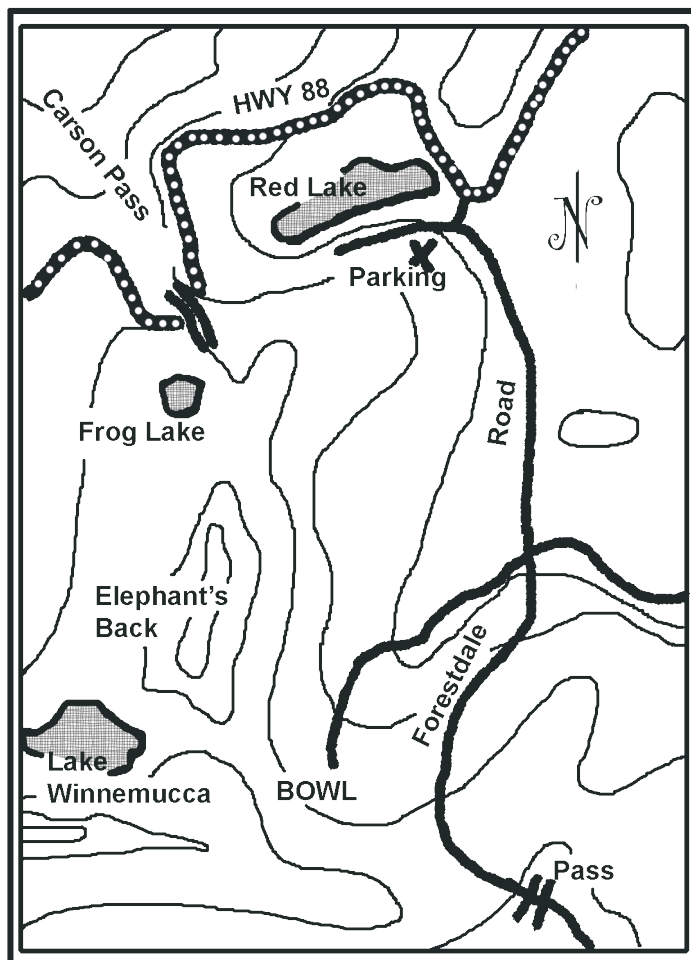
You can ski back home along the road, or, if you have increased your skills and confidence enough, you can come back along the "high" route beneath Elephant's Back. To do this, start at the north side of the bowl at the break in the slope above the bottom of the bowl. Continue to parallel the road, climbing a little uphill but staying below the steeper slopes above. You will cross a drainage and after climbing out of this drainage, you will come out on another broad open slope that you can ski down back to the road. There are some gorgeous, old juniper trees on this slope, so be sure to slow down and appreciate them!

For more advanced skiers, you can continue up Forestdale Road from the bridge. The road gets steeper, and you will probably need skins. You can continue all the way up to the pass at the top of the

road (Enjoy the view!) and come downhill through the higher bowls back to the first bowl I mentioned above, or you can decide to not go so far and ski off the road down slopes to the right side of the road. These routes also drop down to the open bowl previously described.

Snowshoers will enjoy walking along Forestdale Road and can practice their hill techniques at many spots along the way. They will also enjoy just walking around Red Lake itself. Watch for beaver activity!

One caveat: if we are lucky enough to have deep powder, the two miles in from the road will be slow going. The most ideal condition is, of course, a smoothly packed base with powder still on the slopes. But whatever condition you find, you will truly love skiing in this beautiful area - now free of snowmobiles!



Preserving Hope Valley's Basque Oven

Debbi Waldear

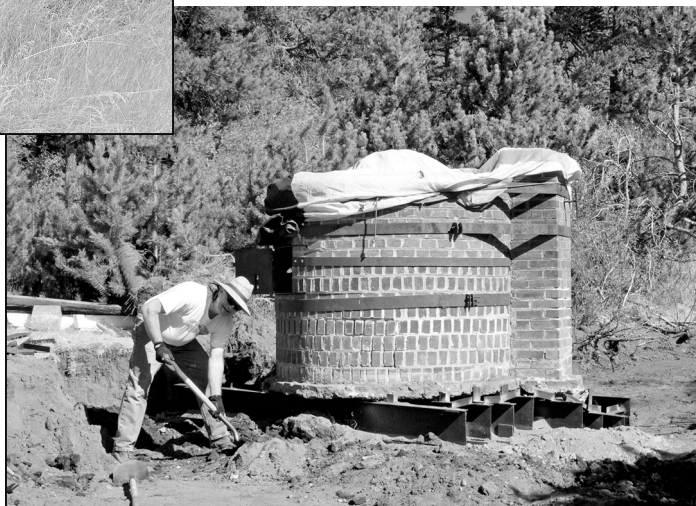
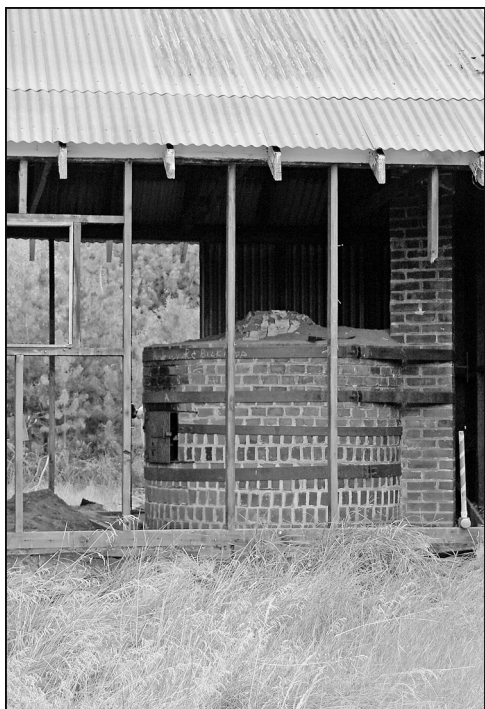
In the early 1900's Fred Dangberg started a sheep camp in Hope Valley. Seven bands of sheep (2,000 sheep per band) spent the summers there, each tended by a shepherd. Most shepherders in the west at that time were Basque, expert sheep tenders who were emigrating to the U.S. from their homelands in northern Spain and southwestern France in search of work.

The Dangberg sheep camp headquarters in Hope Valley, still visible still along Highway 89 partway up the Luther Pass grade, included a Basque tender man named Jesus. It was Jesus who in the 1930s was chiefly responsible for the building of the large, authentic bread oven we now hope to preserve. By the 1940's, however, the 14,000 sheep of the Dangberg

operation were replaced by cows as the grazers of Hope Valley, most likely due to concerns over the environment damage the sheep caused, especially the erosion along the West Fork of the Carson River.

Over the ensuing decades, the land changed hands several times; California Fish and Game now manages it. As for the sheep camp, it remained unused and slowly deteriorated. The main house ultimately burned down yet the Basque oven immediately adjacent to the house remains in near-perfect condition.

To preserve this valued treasure the Friends of Hope Valley has been working with the Alpine County Historical Society on a project to relocate the oven to the Historical Society's museum in Markleeville. This historic oven is a valued part of the history of Alpine County and the west. It reminds us of the role Basque shepherders played in the history of the Sierra Nevada; preserving the oven honors their memory.



**Pictures by
Judy Wickwire**

The Little Mouse That Roared

John Barr

Ten years after Frederick Company closed trails through Pleasant Valley – trails used by the public for more than 100 years to access the Alpine County high country, including the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) and the Mokelumne Wilderness Area – the Friends of Hope Valley was forced to file a lawsuit to enforce the public's right to use these trails.

The trails were closed in 1999. During the following years the FOHV tried to persuade the Dressler Company to voluntarily reopen these trails for public use. For eight years members of the family refused to answer, much less acknowledge, letters asking for an opportunity to discuss this issue; it rebuffed all efforts at compromise.

With the support and encouragement of the local residents in Alpine County and FOHV members, the FOHV sought the assistance of the eminent San Francisco environmental law firm Shute, Mihaly & Weiberger (SMW). Two years later, on October 14, 2009, attorney Matthew Zinn of SMW, along with another prominent San Francisco firm, Kerr & Wagstaffe LLP, filed a 'Complaint To Quiet Title and For Declaratory and Injunctive Relief' in the United States District Court, Eastern District of California.

The long history of the trails' continuous public use in Pleasant Valley created, by implied dedication, nonexclusive public easements in the trails where they cross Frederick Company's land. There is ample evidence demonstrating the trails' lengthy historical use; a map drawn by a state judge in 1864 shows trails running through Pleasant Valley.

Prior to the trails' closure, PCT hikers crossed Pleasant Valley to access "civilization". Backpackers on their way to Canada from Mexico used the trails to pick up supplies, often food that they mailed ahead of themselves to the Markleeville Post Office, food needed to complete the three-month adventure. This author is aware of several PCT hikers who used the trail to seek medical assistance.

The FOHV acknowledges that, in the past, a few have treated Pleasant Valley with disrespect, e.g., pulling RVs into areas closed to camping, littering, uncontrolled dispersed camping. The FOHV has offered to maintain the trails and the land the trails cross. It has repeatedly volunteered to police the trails to pick up litter and remains committed to doing so. Much physical labor would be required to "find", groom and reopen these trails. The FOHV does not believe that the solution for public abuse of natural places is to lock the public out of these places.

Thank You Sorensen's

ENJOY SORENSEN'S

Sorensen's Resort is located at the eastern gateway of Hope Valley, just ¼ mile east of the valley along Hwy. 88/89. The resort has been a prominent supporter of and donor to FOHV's work, including its continuing effort to reopen Pleasant Valley trails near Markleeville. Not only does the resort matches donations from our annual Back Forty concert, several of its guests continue to make sizable contributions to our organization. We would like to thank Sorensen's for its generous gifts and unending support of the Friends of Hope Valley.



Be An Activist: Report Snowmobile Misuse

Debbi Waldear

Are you frustrated about unlawful and environmentally damaging use of snowmobiles? Snowmobiles are illegally using areas of Hope Valley and eastern Alpine County. With much of the new Winter Recreation Plan in place, there are restrictions where snowmobiles can and cannot be used. Maps that delineate authorized snowmobile routes will be available at the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest web site: become familiar with the new map.

We are all looking for that safe and tranquil winter experience. Be an advocate for muscle powered use in the winter environment. Report trespassers. For immediate reporting, if possible, call the local sheriff, 530- 694-2231 or the Forest Service at 775-885-6000. Always contact Snowlands to add your report to their growing data base. Your witness report and documentation will add to a developing body of documentation showing that there is a rampant problem our land managers need to address. These reports will assist in the creation of better snowmobile regulations. Go to www.SaveOurSnowlands.org.

The Friends of Hope Valley wants to thank you for your past support. We hope that you will continue your membership in this non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic, recreational, and scenic values of Hope Valley and Sierra Nevada's eastern slope in Alpine County. With your help we can continue to address the sensitive environmental concerns of the eastern Sierra.



Friends of Hope Valley 2010

_____ \$35 Friend _____ \$50 Sponsor _____ \$\$ other

Name (Print clearly) _____

Mailing Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

E-mail _____

The FOHV email list is used only for the purpose of alerting our members and friends about time sensitive issues.

Friends of Hope Valley is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Please return this form and your tax deductible check to:

Friends of Hope Valley, PO Box 431, Markleeville, CA 96120
