

MAKING INROADS: A PROGRESS REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE YREKA TRAIL

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In 2000, the Bureau of Land Management, Klamath National Forest, and Northern California Resources Center began a collaborative project to study the Yreka Trail/Pitt River Road, one of the earliest trails to penetrate frontier California. The initial goal of our study was to cast light on the lives of emigrants, soldiers, and others who traversed the trail on their way to the goldfields of the Klamath Mountains, the agricultural settlements of the southern Cascades, and elsewhere. After nearly three years of work, we have learned that the trail's complex archaeological record has much more to offer than insight on the trail's earliest travelers. This record contains telling clues to long-term changes in land use and rural living since the mid-1800s.

In 2000, the Bureau of Land Management, Klamath National Forest, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and Northern California Resources Center teamed up to begin an archaeological and historical study of the Yreka Trail/Pitt River Road—one of the earliest Euroamerican trails to penetrate northern California. An initial goal of the study was to cast light on the lives of emigrants, soldiers, and others who traversed the trail on their way to the goldfields of the Klamath Mountains, the agricultural settlements of the southern Cascades, and elsewhere. After years of work, we have learned that the trail's complex archaeological record has much more to offer than insight on the trail's earliest travelers. This record contains telling clues to understanding changes and continuity in rural life since the mid-1800s.

...We ran entirely out of flour three days before we reached a pioneer settlement in Shasta Valley, California. There our hunger troubles were over. At the first ranch we came to we bought flour and potatoes. The potatoes made us all sick. Our stomachs would not stand such hearty food.

Our road ran toward Shasta Butte, now called Mt. Shasta. When we first saw it, it appeared to be ten miles away, but we traveled three days before reaching it. Our road from Shasta Valley took us to Yreka, one of the principal mining towns of Northern California...

This was the account of Alonzo Brown as he traveled by wagon train to Yreka during the 1850s (quoted in Arnold 1999:97). The route that Brown described in his account was the Yreka Trail. Brown was one of many transcontinental travelers to take this trail, which opened in 1852—shortly after gold was discovered in the Klamath Mountains of northwestern California and southwestern Oregon.

The Yreka Trail was another tentacle of the overland trail system that began penetrating the Far West by the 1840s (Figure 1). Near the southwest corner of Lower Klamath Lake, the Yreka Trail departed the Applegate Trail and headed west through Red Rock and Butte valleys. The trail then crossed a low point in a volcanic range called the High Cascades of California, which extends northward from the foot of Mount Shasta. From here, the trail dropped into Shasta Valley, passed by Sheep Rock (Figure 2), and continued to Yreka, gateway to the goldfields (Silva 1999:22-42).

Beginning in 2000, archaeologists from the Bureau of Land Management, Klamath National Forest, and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection teamed up to study segments of the Yreka Trail on federal lands in Butte Valley, the High Cascades, and Shasta Valley. In all, about eight miles of trail were studied. Other members of the team included natural resource technicians from the Northern California Resources Center, funded under the federal Jobs-In-

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Figure 1: Map of Yreka Trail area (distance across map from east to west approximately 40 miles). Arrows illustrate location of analyzed trail segments.

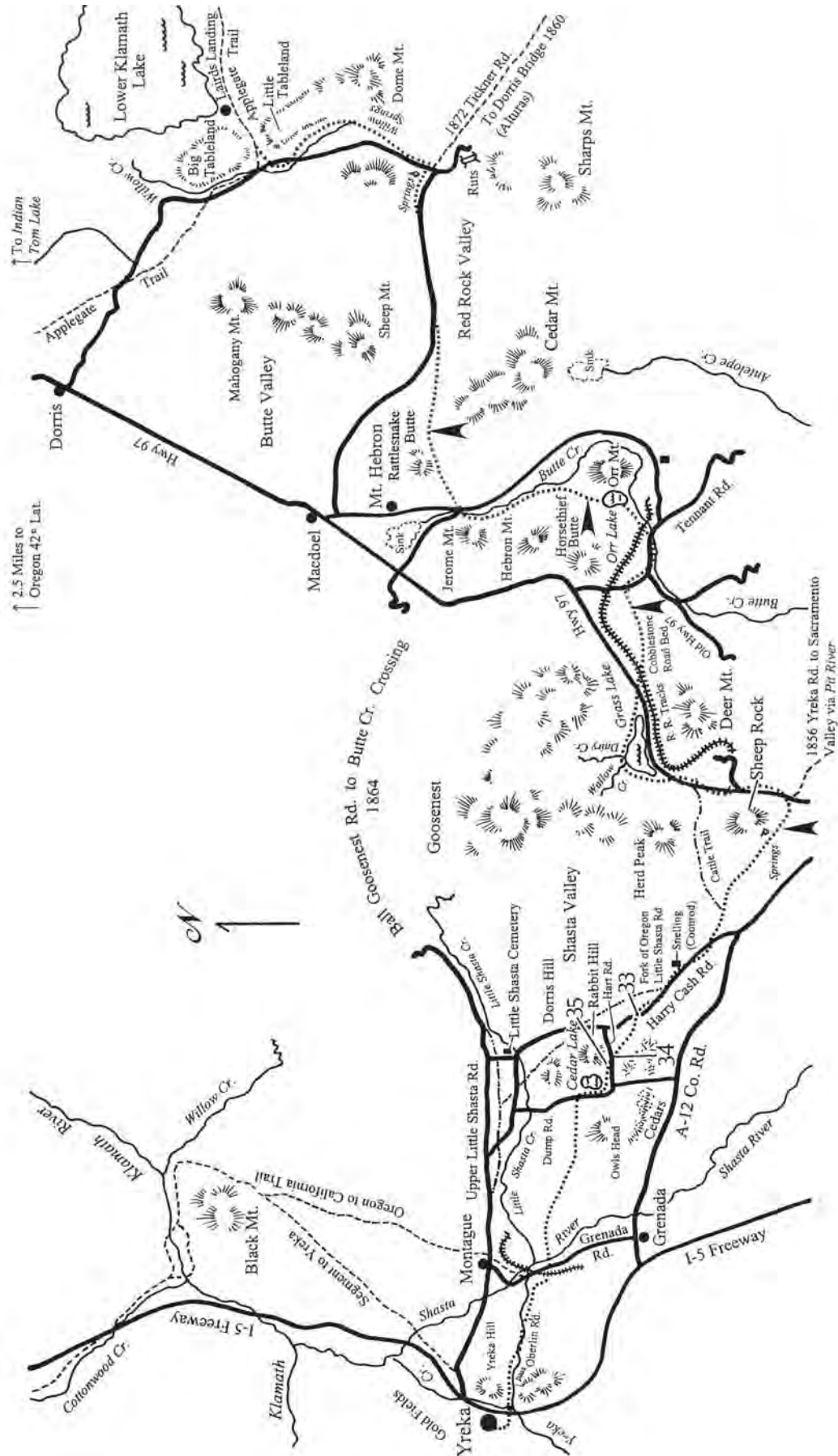




Figure 2: Yreka Trail heading east past Sheep Rock, Siskiyou County, California.

The-Woods program. We also got help from dedicated volunteers, including local trail historians Richard and Orsola Silva.

Our study was guided by a research design that gave us the flexibility to deal with the complexities of trail use over the long run (Ritter 2000). As we began the study, however, many of the team members expected to find clear opportunities within the trail's archaeological record to study the lives of people like Alonzo Brown and other early travelers. Some of us anticipated finding archaeological evidence of fur-trapping expeditions known to have entered the Mt. Shasta area prior to the emigrant period. During the late 1820s, the Hudson's Bay Company ordered its trappers to trap out the area so that the company's competitors wouldn't move in (Dillon 1975:23-24).

Team members also hoped to find archaeological evidence of early interactions between local Native Americans and the newcomers. The nearby Tule Lake section of the Applegate Trail was one of the bloodiest places in the Far West (Hopkins 1979:32-34). The violence here was a precursor to the Modoc War of the 1870s. We did find considerable evidence of early trail use (i.e., pristine stretches of trail, old wagon parts, etc.) but we quickly learned that the archaeology of the Yreka Trail was considerably different than we expected.

FINDING THE "TRUE" YREKA TRAIL

The High Cascades of California were at times a formidable barrier to early travelers on the Yreka Trail. Between Grass Lake and Mt. Hebron, our team went to work surveying the route that the trail is thought to have followed. Team members armed with metal detectors methodically combed the countryside. Artifacts and features were mapped using GPS devices and documented with forms created for the study. Many artifacts were collected for analysis, display, and permanent curation at the Siskiyou County Museum in Yreka.

Near the Penoyar siding of the Union Pacific Railroad, we found considerable evidence of early railroad logging, probably using big wheels pulled by draft horses. With the construction of railroads through the Mt. Shasta area in the early 1900s, the High Cascades were intensively logged. Here, like elsewhere in the West, railroading and logging had a symbiotic relationship. Timber was needed for ties, trestles, and mill towns like Weed. In turn, railroads created a more profitable way to move timber to the mills and then on to markets across the country (Freeman 2000:54-61).

Generations of logging and grazing have altered the terrain of the High Cascades, and have obscured traces of the Yreka Trail. In many areas, finding the trail among the maze of logging skid roads was nearly impossible. But potentially important archaeological discoveries (expected and unexpected) are where you

find them. While many have studied logging camps (e.g., Baker and Shoup 1979; Elliott 1990; Vaughan 1985), few have considered the loggers' workplace – the woods. We found blacksmithing stock which suggests that, rather than buying manufactured parts, local logging companies of the early 1900s had blacksmiths on hand to fabricate and repair broken big wheels and other equipment.

The Yreka Trail has not been completely destroyed by logging. Sections of the trail appear largely unchanged since they were blazed in the 1850s. These sections reveal much about the design of roads built and improved by Americans of the mid-19th century—people still largely unaffected by industrialization. The trail plods along, aiming at prominent landforms: the trail runs along the west side of Butte Creek toward Orr Mountain; it heads around Grass Lake near Gooseneck Peak, and passes by the base of Sheep Rock at the head of Shasta Valley. The Yreka Trail was not engineered for speedy travel. In fact, there is virtually no engineering. Just getting there appears to be the goal. We observed that the trail often followed the path of least resistance, winding around hills, boggy meadows, and rocky impediments like Sheep Rock. It is possible that the people who built the Yreka Trail followed routes used by the area's

prehistoric inhabitants, although we found no definitive evidence for this.

At the head of Shasta Valley, the Yreka Trail joined the Lockhart Road, also known as the Pitt River Road, among other names. Built in 1855 this road was used by the U.S. military and government survey parties. Like elsewhere in the West, the federal government facilitated Euroamerican settlement by deploying military units to protect overland travelers from marauding Indians (real or imagined), and by sending out surveyors to collect, study, and disseminate information about people and natural resources of the West so they could later be exploited by American businesses.

The Clarence King survey party of 1870 camped at Sheep Rock and took photos of Mt. Shasta. The photos document environmental transformations caused by arrival of Europeans and Euroamericans, especially the change from native grassland to an area overgrown by junipers and noxious weeds like yellow star thistle. The federal government also sent surveyors from the General Land Office to tie the Mt. Shasta area into the township-and-range grid. Other survey crews laid out the routes of railroads through Shasta Valley (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Photograph of railroad survey crew in Shasta Valley, Siskiyou County (circa 1880). Photo courtesy of the Siskiyou County Historical Society.



Near Sheep Rock, team members found a gilded-brass button inscribed with a double-headed eagle wearing a crown and clutching a shield (Figure 4). This emblem signifies the Duke of Burgau, an Austrian archduchy dissolved in 1804. Since the inscription was likely fashioned after an 18th-century coin, it is unknown how long this type of button would have been in production and whether it was part of a military uniform. It is known that Austrian military buttons of the 1800s had the double-headed eagle inscription. The button cannot be definitely linked to fur-trappers, the military, government survey parties, or other early trail users. Someone may have had the button long after it was manufactured only to lose or discard it along the trail.

A woman's brass ring was found along the trail, also near Sheep Rock (Figure 5b). The ring has a square bezel for a semiprecious jewel or, more likely, a paste jewel. Similar rings were used as trade items by Hudson's Bay Company fur-trappers and others. Dozens of trade rings have been recovered from early historic sites in Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, Alabama, Washington, Louisiana, and elsewhere in the U.S (Hanson 1989; Gilman 1982; Hoffman and Ross 1975). It is possible that the ring found along the Yreka Trail was associated with early historic trade activities. Barnham Springs is located along the Yreka Trail not far from Sheep Rock and is thought to have been used by Hudson's Bay Company fur-trappers as a camp.

Other artifacts found along the Yreka Trail include a penknife, spur, boot, heel, plate, aluminum comb, corset stay, mower knife, straight pin, kettle, clothing fasteners, stove parts, horse trappings, watch parts, files, and grommets (Figure 5a-i). These artifacts are telling clues to the long, varied use of the Yreka Trail. They reflect the trail's use by both men and women, apparently with Anglo-American traditions. None of the artifacts appear to have been a serious loss, except perhaps the spur, boot, and watches. These losses were likely inconveniences related to rigors of travel and work (i.e., logging, ranching, etc.).

Team members also found numerous wagon parts, animal shoes, and shoe paraphernalia. Most of these artifacts were concentrated along steep, rocky portions of the trail. The jarring probably broke wagon parts and animal shoes loose as the teams heaved forward. Portions of the Yreka Trail were used for local traffic well after the gold rush of the 1850s. A bustling stagecoach business emerged in the Mt. Shasta area by the 1870s and lasted well into the 1900s. Freightage was also important. New roads were built that incorporated stretches of the Yreka Trail. These

stretches were straightened and rerouted to avoid rough terrain. Tickner Road was built in 1871 to better connect Yreka with fledging ranching and logging settlements to the east. The road paralleled and in some places, followed the route of the Yreka Trail. The goal was no longer just to get there, but to get there faster.

A vexing issue was determining the function and age of the numerous wagon parts, animal shoes, and other iron artifacts found along the trail. Team members worked with expert farriers and blacksmiths to identify these artifacts. The wagon parts were compared against old wagons still in existence and against descriptions in old retail catalogues. We determined that a variety of wagons and buggies were used on the trail. Most of the parts and animal shoes appear to have been made during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of the cast-iron parts and other artifacts initially believed to be hand forged (and presumably "early" in terms of their age) were probably mass-produced well after the turn of the century. Yet, blacksmithing continued almost to the mid-1900s.

Figure 4. Brass stamped Austrian double-headed eagle button from Sheep Rock vicinity of trail (Catalogue No. W25) (scale ½ inch).



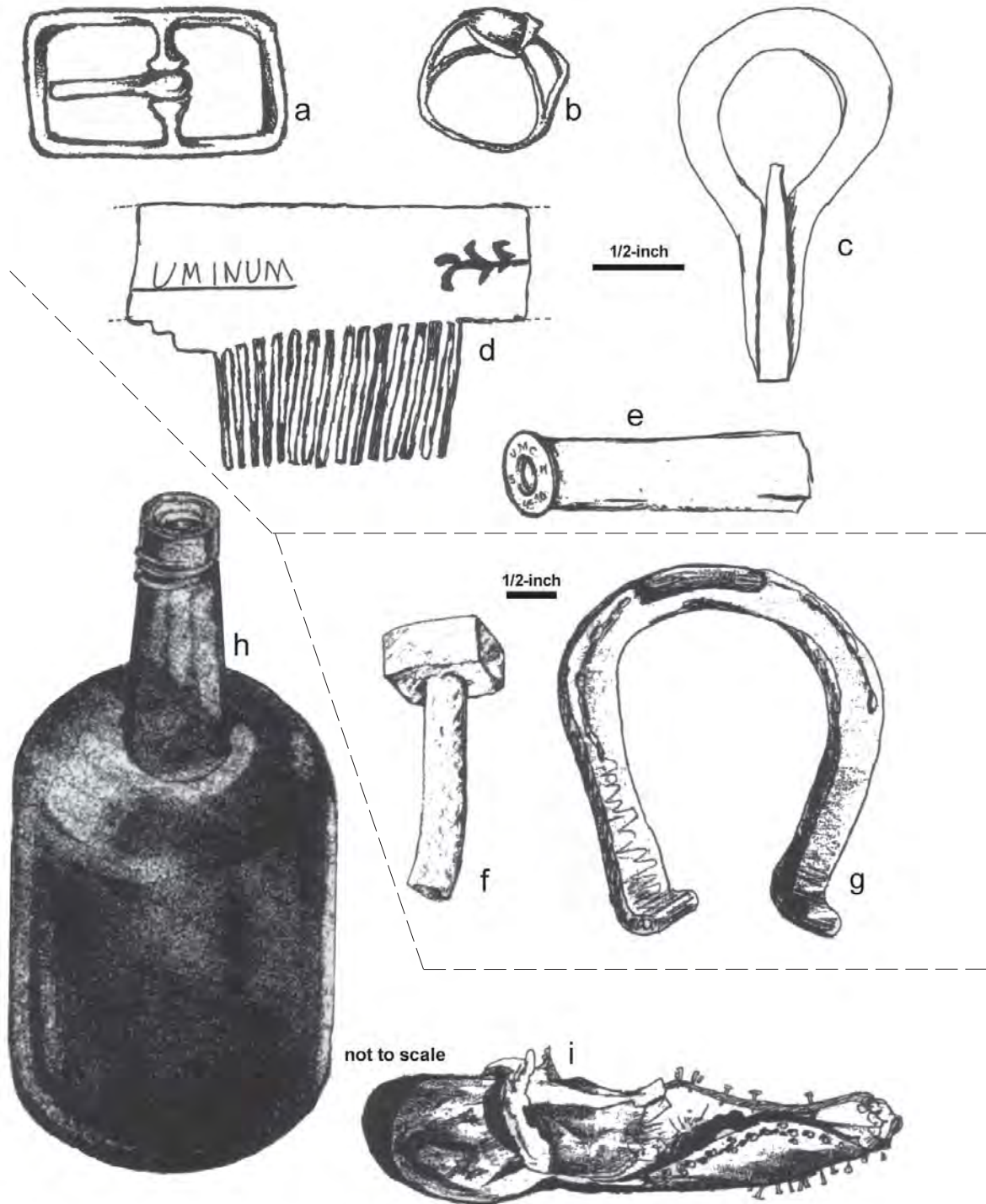


Figure 5: Yreka Trail artifacts.

- a. Silver-plated harness buckle (J13) (Sheep Rock segment).
- b. Woman's brass ring with square setting or bezel for stone (J19) (Sheep Rock segment).
- c. Iron whiffletree (PE29) (Penoyar segment).
- d. Aluminum dressing comb part (K18) (Kegg Pit segment).
- e. .45-60 brass cartridge (C14) (Penoyar segment).
- f. Iron hand-forged pin or bolt part possibly from a wagon (T15) (Penoyar segment).
- g. Iron horseshoe with heel and toe calks (G43) (Penoyar segment).
- h. Amber colored spirits bottle from Sheep mountain segment of trail (SH14) (1 quart size).
- i. Leather hobnail boot from Penoyar segment of trail (R26) (size 9 or 10).

The horse and mule shoes (no oxen) indicate a wide range of animal sizes and foot-protection methods. In old logging areas in the High Cascades, we found large animal shoes suggesting that draft horses were probably used to pull big wheels. Some of the shoes show signs that these beasts of burden were either aged or had physical ailments.

At first glimpse, the Yreka Trail’s archaeological record reflects a chaotic melange of human uses and environmental impacts over decades. The physical evidence is often muddled and difficult to decipher. In contrast to this is a section of the Siskiyou Trail studied by archaeologist Mark Tveskov and his team from Southern Oregon University. Located in southern Oregon, this section of trail was blazed about the same time as the Yreka Trail and was heavily used during the height of the gold rush. As the mining boom petered out by the late 1850s, the trail was almost entirely abandoned. Tveskov and his coauthors show that the archaeological record provided a snapshot of trail life during the mid-19th century (Tveskov *et al.* 2001). This was not the case with the Yreka Trail and (we suspect) many other historic trails and roads across the West. We realized early on that the Yreka Trail’s archaeological record presented far different challenges and opportunities. Due to the trail’s ongoing use, we had to consider the ways in which the trail reflected (and shaped) dramatic changes and continuity in rural life since the mid-19th century (Northern California Resources Center *et al.* In press).

THE YREKA TRAIL AND RURAL LIFE
IN THE 20TH-CENTURY WEST

The Yreka Trail’s archaeological record has perhaps the most to say about the lives of rural Westerners during the first half of the 20th century, the time period when automobiles became prevalent. Along the trail there is a proliferation of trash dumps dating to the 1940s and later. This is mainly household trash from small, local ranches and farms that are now abandoned. People were apparently using their automobiles to move their trash farther away from their homes. This movement toward modern American notions of waste disposal, sanitation, and hygiene appears to have occurred later in time compared to American city dwellers.

We also found many early 1900s tobacco cans and liquor bottles, including picnic flasks and a bottle that contained a sour mash produced in Kentucky. The oral historical information gathered so far makes it clear

that people were not reusing these bottles to hold drinking water. They were consuming alcohol along the trail. We need to continue to draw on the memories of longtime ranchers to understand the social context in which this drinking took place. Were these covert activities? Were these leisure-time activities, possibly tied to hunting? Were they drinking as they rode the range (drinking on the job)? Were they drinking as they traveled to another town? These are questions to be addressed as we wrap up our study of the trail.

Team members found a wide assortment of spent ammunition including shotgun shells, pistol slugs and balls, and rifle casings. The spent ammunition dates from the mid-1800s to the present. The artifacts are evidence of hunting, target shooting and plain old gunplay. There is a continuation of this tradition to the present, although people are just as likely to fire high-tech rifles as they are the standbys, such as a shotgun or .22-caliber rifle. None of the team members were surprised by the number of ammunition-related artifacts found. This is, after all, the mythical State of Jefferson. Gun ownership here is tantamount to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We have joked that many locals seem to be increasingly concerned that their guns as well as their land might be taken away by the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, or even the United Nations. This antigovernment, anti-outsider slant is no doubt a vestige of pioneer thinking that has persisted to the present.

CONCLUSIONS

The more things have stayed the same, the more things have changed. These days you are as likely to see a cowboy riding the range by horseback as you are to observe a young urban professional couple driving their SUV up Highway 97 to Bend, Oregon for some rest and relaxation. This reminds us of what we are really grappling with in our study of the Yreka Trail. The data have forced us to think well beyond the world of Alonzo Brown and other early travelers on the trail, and consider the many complex, far-flung forces that have been shaping not only the Mt. Shasta area but much of the West for decades. We are not just talking about obvious transformations in the environment brought about by the arrival of corporate capitalism and the rise of federal bureaucracies, but changes and persistence in various attitudes, traditions, and lifestyles of the families and communities that have been here for generations.

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