



Just say NO to Foxtails



Never say Never

Because of the protective measures against COVID-19, all our work this spring was postponed. We have just started working again on some critical time sensitive projects. Spring is our busiest / best weather time. Our preference is always to work while the weather is still cool and before the grasses get too high.

Working in tall grass, dried foxtails and thistles causes two major problems for us. First, the dogs have a much harder time getting their nose close to the ground where the scent from burials is located. The second problem and most important is the danger dried grasses pose to the dogs health. Dried foxtails and similar grasses can go up their nose causing extreme pain and danger as its a one way barbed seed that has to be removed under anesthesia. In general for these two reasons we **never** work in fields as pictured above. But when extenuating circumstances happen we try to improvise and do what we can. Please remember this situation is **far** from ideal and most of the time we would say no. Even with our dogs nose, mouth and ears being protected, it still took us a lot of time to go through the dogs coats, and checking between their toes, to remove all the one-way barbed seeds.

A product that has really come in handy is OutFox Field Guard. As you can see in the pictures above, our dogs worked in the "mesh masks". If we did not have the masks we would have had to say no, its too dangerous for the dogs to work.

~Adela~

You can click on the link below to go to the web site of this product.



Back to our Donner Party Saga

Last month in the ICF newsletter we shared the article about finding the grave of John Snyder. If you missed it, there is a link below. The short story is on October 5th, 1846 John Snyder was killed in a fight with James Reed. A jury of James' peers found him guilty of murder, but instead of a death sentence he was exiled. He was forced to leave his wife and four children who stayed with their wagon and the rest of the Party.

[Finding the grave of John Snyder](#)



View from Starved Camp overlooking Donner lake

Starved Camp of the Donner Party

By mid-October 1846 the Donner Party became marooned in the Sierra Nevada mountains by an early snowstorm. By the 28th of October, James Reed had arrived at Sutter's Fort (James Reed had been banned from staying with the Donner Party and his family because of the murder of John Snyder). Johann August Sutter provided Reed and William McCutchen supplies and pack mules to carry back to the emigrants whose location was unknown. They were stopped by deep snow at Bear Valley and had to turn back.

In January several members of the Donner Party crossed the Sierras on snowshoes and reached the settlement at Johnson's Ranch. Most of the men in the snowshoe group had died, but all of the women survived. They told a harrowing story of the Donner Party trapped near Truckee Lake and starving to death.

A relief party was quickly organized at Sutter's Fort and began the dangerous trek through snow up to 30' deep. James Reed heard the news in San Francisco and quickly returned to organize a second relief party. They met the first relief group past Bear Valley where James Reed reunited with his wife and two of his children.

The second relief party continued on to the Donner Lake camps where they took seventeen survivors, thirteen of them children, including Reed's two other children, and began the trip back to safety. It took them three days to travel to the summit where they camped as a storm started lashing the mountains. They had run out of food, so Reed named this Starved Camp. For the next three days the storm tore through the camp dumping many feet of snow.

When the storm ended, the Donner Party adults in camp were too weak to leave. Since the relief party could only carry three children, Reed and the other members took his two children and a Donner child with them. Seven days later the third relief party arrived at Starved Camp and found people lying on the bare ground in the bottom of a 24' deep hole in the snow made by the camp fire. Elizabeth Graves (age 45), her son Franklin Graves (age 5) and Issac Donner (also age 5) had died. The eleven survivors had lived by eating the bodies of the deceased and were rescued.

As a side note, James Reed's family was one of only two families who all

survived even though he had to make a third attempt to rescue all of them. He was later acquitted of the murder of John Snyder due to lack of witnesses.

Back to the current date:

As dog handlers who specialize in locating historic and prehistoric burials, we love solving a mystery. One of our ICF handlers, John Grebenkemper, spent several years researching the location of Starved Camp. He joined forces with historians and experts on Donner history. After several hiking trips and more research he finally found a location that fit James Reed description. He took his dog, Kayle, out to work the area to see what would happen.

What is unusual for Starved Camp, as well as other Donner locations, is the dead were not buried, but left in the snow. We know that when a body is buried the remains are protected in the ground and the scent will stay for thousands of years. Bodies left on the surface are subject to scavenging animals and the forces of nature.

As of 2020, 173 years after the Donner Party was stranded, six certified ICF teams and three dogs in training have worked the area John has identified as a possible location of Staved Camp.

All the teams searched without knowledge of what other teams found. On our first trip, five teams covered approximately five acres each. All the teams had multiple alerts in the same general location, about 60 m x 100 m in size.

As the bodies decomposed into the soil, and bones were scattered by animals, the size of our alert area make sense. Even as dog handlers we think this phenomenon is amazing and unheard of. But we can't explain why six teams and nine dogs found the same location at different times of the year and blind from what the other teams had discovered. There is so much we don't understand about scent.

The pictures below are alerts by certified dogs all choosing to alert within a few meters of each other and never having observed what the other teams had done, some at different times of the year.

~Adela~

To read John's paper on Starved Camp please click on the link below.

[Overland Journal](#)

[Quarterly Journal of the Oregon-California Trails Association Volume 36,
Number 2, Summer 2018](#)

[JOHN GREBENKEMPER,](#)



John with Kayle alerting



Adela with Jasper alerting



Piper alerting



Barbara with Bailey alerting



Please feel free to pass our newsletter along to anyone who might be interested.

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our website -

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We are happy to talk with you about your project and
how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials.

Call, email, or check out our website.

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