



Help me, I have fallen into the toy box and I can't get out!

## Locating the Grave of John Snyder Field Research on a Donner Party Death

Most people know of the Donner Party tragedy, but many don't know of the difficulties that went on before they were even stranded in the snow in the area we now call "Donner Pass". The paper below tells the story of the murder of John Snyder and the banning of James Reed from traveling with the Donner Party. Its about researching historic documents and attempting to locate a grave that was left behind 165 years ago.



### [Overland Journal](#)

[Quarterly Journal of the Oregon-California Trails Association Volume 30, Number 3, Fall 2012](#)

[John Grebenkemper, Kristin Johnson, and Adela Morris](#)

### The Reed-Snyder Fight

The earliest description of the altercation appeared in J. Q. Thornton's Oregon and California in 1848 (1849), based on information provided him by Donner Party members in the fall of 1847.

"At length they commenced ascending the hill. All the wagons had been taken up but Mr. Reed's, Mr. Pike's, and one of Mr. Graves', the latter driven by John Snyder. Milton Elliot, who was Mr. Reed's driver, took Mr. Eddy's team, which was on Mr. Reed's wagon, and joined it to Mr. Pike's team. The cattle of this team, being unruly, became entangled with that of Mr. Graves', driven by Snyder; and a quarrel ensued between him and Elliot.

Snyder at length commenced quarreling with Mr. Reed, and made some threats of whipping him, which threats he seemed about to attempt executing. Mr. Reed then drew a knife, without, however, attempting to use it, and told Snyder that he did not wish to have any difficulty with him. Snyder told him that he would whip him, "any how;" and turning the butt of his whip, gave Mr. Reed a severe blow upon the head, which cut it very much. As Reed was in the act of

dodging the blow, he stabbed Snyder a little below the collar-bone, cutting off the first rib, and driving the knife through the left lung. Snyder after this struck Mrs. Reed a blow upon the head, and Mr. Reed two blows upon the head, the last one bringing him down upon his knees....."

Please click on the ICF logo link below to read the whole paper on locating the grave of John Snyder.



### The Battle to Get to the Site of the Fight

Iron Point is the area that best fits the location described for the fight between John Snyder and James Reed. On our first attempt to get to get there in June 2011, we faced several adversities. First we were only a mile from our location when the the dirt road turned into a lake. We did have 4-wheel drive, but because of the remoteness of the area the last thing we wanted to do was get stuck. So we drove north back to Hwy 80 and went through Golconda, off Nevada State Route 789 adding an additional 30 miles to our trip.



When we reached the described location, we were faced with the largest swarms of mosquitoes I have ever experienced. As we drove we had to have the windshield wipers on and using the window washer water to see where we were going. We put on as many clothes as we could to cover ourselves and made a run for it to survey the area. We left the dogs in the car, not only to avoid the mosquitos, but the area was thick with dangerous dried cheatgrass seed heads.





John ran back down the hill after doing a quick survey of the ridge top while battling the mosquitoes. You can see the sandy soil at the bottom of the picture and see why it would make it so difficult for the exhausted oxen to pull the heavy wagons over the hill.

Because of the mosquitoes and dry cheat grass it was clear we were not going to search the area for the grave of John Snyder on this trip.

October 5, 2011, exactly 165 years after John Snyder's death on, John and I returned to search Iron Point. We searched an area of about 6 acres separately, out of visual range of each other. Both dogs alerted very close together (see photos of both dogs alerts).

To have positive proof that this was John Snyder's grave it would need to be excavated. Short of that, we are relying on historical documents and two certified historical human remains detection dogs. Neither dog had any interest in any other locations in our six acre search.

Next month the story continues with the Donner Party and James Reed in "Starved Camp".

~Adela~



## Greetings to our Newsletter Followers and Friends

We are all healthy and safe and wish the same to all of you. I am sure all of us will remember 2020 as the COVID-19 year.

It has been fun going over some of our past projects and sharing them with our newsletter friends. We look forward to getting back to work when conditions are safe. It has been hard to keep the dogs entertained, small trainings near our houses and dog walks but they are more than ready to do something interesting.

Below, Kris's puppy showed her mom how much she loved her new bed. Got to

love puppies otherwise.... well, lets just say it takes great patience to train a working dog.

\* ICFTeam \*



From left, Sue Hatcher with Jasper, Adela and Jett, Lynne with Piper and Niku

## Specialized Training

During this downtime, Lynne and Adela were extremely fortunate to connect with a friend, Sue Hatcher, who is a POST-certified (Peace Officer Standard and Training) narcotics, explosives, accelerant and cell phone detection trainer for a number of police and sheriff's departments in California. Sue is a former K9 police officer who began training detection dogs in 1987. She works with Witmer-Tyson Imports out of Menlo Park, CA.

Lynne, with Piper and Niku, and Adela, with Jasper and Jett, spent two weeks training at the Tyson Training Center near La Honda, CA and at other venues. The Center offered a unique variety of challenging areas including open spaces, barns and other equipment and outbuildings. Sue is an extremely experienced trainer and offered a unique eye on our specialized HHRD training. It was an intense two weeks and the handlers and dogs were exhausted and exhilarated.

Our grateful thanks go out to Sue Hatcher and Randy Tyson-Witmer for this wonderful opportunity.

\* Lynne and Adela \*

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

Check out our past issues on  
our website -

[CLICK HERE](#)



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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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