

## **Western States Trail Museum – An Idea Coming to Fruition**

*By Hal V. Hall*

Over the years, I have had the privilege of being asked to write many published articles about the history of the Western States Trail, its places, and landmarks, as well as the names of people that have shaped the Tevis Cup Ride. The emphasis of these articles was to provide informative and educational documentation. Perhaps, none of these articles are more important than this one.

With the premise that people love museums, the objective to preserve and interpret the history and modern-day uses of the Western States Trail, and to cultivate future endurance enthusiasts, a small group began to explore the creation of an organization to establish a museum in or around Auburn, California. In 2018, the group drafted bylaws and filed Articles of Incorporation with the State of California to establish a nonprofit corporation. Shortly thereafter these individuals began recruiting other interested individuals. Calling themselves the Western States Trail Museum Founders Committee, a handful of local individuals with expertise in historical preservation, fundraising, local government, and related organizational requirements, began holding periodic meetings to explore:

- Museum setup requirements
- Available buildings/properties
- Funding/grant resources
- Community support partnerships
- Sponsorship/donor opportunities
- Leadership recruitment

The initial goal of the Founders Committee was to ensure that the legacy of the Western States Trail would be preserved for future generations through the public display of relevant artifacts, photographs, video, recorded stories, and memorabilia. In November 2020, a formally established board of directors along with officers was duly elected, in an effort to further the efforts of the Founders Committee in establishing the Western States Trail Museum. The primary goal of the recently established board of directors is to study the feasibility of establishing a museum that visitors will find both informative and educational.

The storied history of the Western States Trail begins as far back as the pre-historical era with fleet-footed Native Americans traveling afoot back and forth over the Sierra Nevada Mountains gathering and hunting for food, along with bartering trade between the Maidu and Nisenan tribes on the western slope with the Washoe on the eastern side. During the early to mid-1800s early day American explorers, settlers, and gold seekers from the eastern side of the United States made their way across the Great Plains and the Great Basin Desert to what would later be called California. Following the discovery of gold near Coloma, California, in 1849, the rush of hundreds of thousands of would-be miners and entrepreneurs had made the difficult journey overland by foot, horseback, mule, oxen-pulled wagons, or horse-drawn stage coaches to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Express Riders of Wells Fargo and Adams Express Companies were travelling horseback in the foothills of the Sierras along the American River, and those messengers provided much needed communication and supplies to the mining camps and towns that had sprung up during the Gold Rush. The Western States Trail, as it is known today,

became known for being the shortest route over the Sierra Nevada Mountains used by miners from the northern gold mines of California's Mother Lode to and from the Comstock Lode of silver mines in northern Nevada. Today, the Western States Trail is the only remaining historic trail route from the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains through the foothills to the west and the Sacramento Valley that is largely untouched by development and, for the most part, remains much like what the early-day users would have known.

The documented history of this historic trail used between California and Nevada, along with relevant artifacts, stands ready for display and interpretation in the proposed Western States Trail Museum that will be located in Auburn, California. As stewards of this collection of history, the board of directors of the Western States Trail Museum formed a non-profit organization with the following objectives:

- A. Operate exclusively for literary, educational, and historical purposes.
- B. Encourage and provide for the collection and public display of historical data and information relating to the use of the historic Western States Trail route through the Sierra Nevada Mountains between Carson City, Nevada, and Sacramento, California, which was once used by Native Americans, the pioneers and Gold Rush emigrants to California, and early Express Riders of Wells Fargo and Adams Express Companies, during the early history of California and Nevada, along with current day uses of the trail.
- C. Encourage public visitation of the Western States Trail for knowledge and recognition of sites of once populous towns, mining camps, and trail-side locations of events prominent and important to the early history of California and Nevada.
- D. In cooperation with the Western States Trail Foundation and the Western States Endurance Run Foundation, as well as other organized groups and government agencies, it is our plan to display for public viewing the photographs, video, and memorabilia of modern-day Western States Trail events and recorded stories including, but not limited to, the following:
  1. Pre-historic times when Native Americans who resided on the eastern and western slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and travelled along the corridor of what is now called the Western States Trail between Carson City, Nevada, and Sacramento, California.
  2. Pioneers and early-day explores who travelled on foot, by wagon, or on horseback over the trail before and after the Gold Rush in California and the silver discovery in Western Nevada.
  3. Geological sites that serve as landmarks along the trail today.
  4. Mining camps and towns that sprung up and later disappeared along the trail after the discovery of gold, as well as the commerce that unfolded by entrepreneurs and the businesses that were created.
  5. The re-discovery, signing and mapping of the trail that began in the early 1930s by individuals and parties who wanted to keep the trail's history alive and did not want to see the somewhat abandoned trail route disappear entirely.
  6. 65 years of the Western States Trail (Tevis Cup) 100 Miles One Day Ride, an international equestrian riding competition and founding event of its kind in the world, has created and maintained public interest and historical memory of the type of an event made famous in Western American history by the Pony Express Riders of more than a century ago. Since 1955, horsemen and women from throughout America and from all over the world compete annually in the Tevis Cup Ride from Lake Tahoe to Auburn, California, through the rugged Sierra Nevada Mountains. This arduous event is the ultimate test of horsemanship, challenging both horse and rider of their

strength, stamina and expertise. Subsequent to 1955, other long-distance endurance competitions were established that follow the standards developed by its founders.

7. 47 years of the Western States 100 Miles Endurance Run, an international ultra-marathon competition and founding event of its kind, has created and maintained public interest and historical memory of this type of an athletic event throughout the world. The Western States Endurance Run is considered the crown jewel of ultra-marathons and, as a result, each year runners from around the world challenge the Western States Trail between Olympic (Squaw) Valley and Auburn, California, for the privilege of earning a finishing award. Subsequent to the founding of the Western States Endurance Run in 1974, ultra-marathon competitions of similar distances were established following the standards set by its organizers.

The Western States Trail Museum organization stands ready to create a financially stable, well-staffed museum that is overseen by a responsible, functioning board of directors and effectively designed committees. A business plan has been drafted that will guide the board and various committees as it relates to the operation of the museum and its organization, including financial resources, human resources, board of directors' development and governance, fundraising, marketing, and museum mission, vision and values. As the planning efforts grow toward establishing the proposed Western States Trail Museum, so will future strategies for achieving our stated objectives. We welcome your participation in this important effort, and please feel free to contact us.

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