

# Emigrant Trails of Northeast California

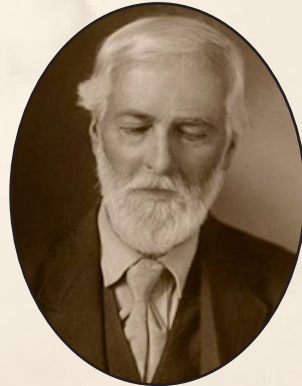
Between the 1840s and 1870s, Euro-Americans sought opportunity and traveled throughout this area. Pioneers emigrated from the eastern United States and were motivated by economic incentives including gold, undeveloped lands, and the promise of a new life.

Four major emigrant routes traversed northeastern California and northwestern Nevada within the boundary of the Applegate Field Office. These included the Applegate Trail to Oregon, the Lassen Trail to the upper Sacramento Valley, the Burnett Cutoff from Oregon to California, and the Yreka Trail to the Yreka mines in Siskiyou County.

These routes, among other lesser local trails, were traveled upon by Native Americans, fur trappers of the Hudson Bay Company and explorers such as John Frémont and Kit Carson.

## Applegate Trail

The Applegate Trail was named after the Applegate brothers - Jesse, Lindsay and Charles - who pioneered the trail in 1846.



Jesse Applegate, Courtesy of OSU

This trail diverged from the Oregon Trail at Fort Hall, Idaho, and traveled through the Great Basin, the formidable Black Rock Desert, High Rock Canyon, the lush Surprise Valley, and over the Warner Mountains.

From the Warner Range it traversed the Devils Garden north of Alturas, "where wagon wheels rarely touched the earth," according to travelers who faced the rocky, volcanic terrain before continuing on to the fertile Willamette Valley of Oregon.

## Lassen Trail

In 1848, Peter Lassen, pioneered the Lassen Trail route by leading a group of 12 wagons off of the Applegate Trail, at the southern end of Goose Lake,

and continuing on to northern Sacramento Valley in the vicinity of present-day Chico.

The trail was advertised as a shorter and more efficient route than the California Trail, but in reality it was neither. One anonymous Lassen Trail traveler noted it was, "the rockiest road ever."

## Burnett Cut-Off

In 1848, en-route to the rich farmlands and the California gold fields, the Peter Burnett-led party left the Applegate Trail in the Tule Lake Basin and joined the Lassen Trail near Lookout, California. With Hudson Bay trapper Charles McKay as guide, they headed south toward Big Valley near present day Bieber.

Peter Burnett eventually became the first elected governor of California (1849-1851).

## Yreka Trail

The Yreka Trail left the Applegate at lower Klamath Marsh and headed west to the Yreka mines and the rich Klamath River gold country of Siskiyou County. This trail was also a supply route during the Modoc War and used as recently as the 1950s.

# California National Historic Trail

The California National Historic Trail passes through lands in California and Nevada managed by the BLM Applegate Field Office.

Trails included in this system were mid-19th century highways for emigrants enticed by promises of gold, ranching, and rich farmlands in California and Oregon.

Explorers, often traveling in the footsteps of Native Americans, established numerous trails to create the best available route, or in some cases to exploit naive emigrants.

These trails fostered commerce and encouraged the development of transportation and settlement for tens of thousands of people.

Designated in 1992, the California Trail System commemorates all associated trail branches that brought settlers to this part of the American West. Today, these trails have associated auto tours, educational programs, and visitor centers.

## Visit the History of the Modoc Plateau

Today, you can follow the footsteps of the emigrants and explore the rich history of the area by visiting the many interpretive panels throughout Modoc, Lassen, Siskiyou, Shasta, and Washoe counties.

You can learn about prominent historical figures such as Modoc Leader, Kintpuash (Captain Jack), Pit River Chief, Istet Woiche (William Hulsey), Peter Lassen, John Frémont, the Applegate brothers, General George Crook, and Peter Burnett.

You can learn about the tragic Modoc War and Battle of Infernal Caverns and the experiences of early pioneers as they traveled west. Refer to the map on the opposite side of this brochure for locations of each panel and related Trails West markers.



1860 Trail and Exploration Map, Courtesy of CSU Chico



Wagon Ruts, Photo by Bob Black

## Leave No Trace

The traces left by the wagons are still visible today. The impacts we leave on this landscape can last for hundreds of years. Here are some Leave No Trace principles to follow as you travel the Great Basin and the Modoc Plateau.

### Plan Ahead and Prepare:

As the emigrants discovered, preparation is key to survival. Know your route, as many roads are unpaved. Bring plenty of water and provisions, and let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return.

Keep informed of weather and route information just as the emigrants used guides and trail mailboxes along the trail. Do not rely on your cell phone, service is intermittent.

### Dispose of Waste Properly:

The emigrants only packed what they needed. Pack it in, pack it out. Properly dispose of all food scraps and trash.

### Respect the Rights of Others:

Be aware of private property; leave gates as you find them, and don't let your dogs harass wildlife or livestock.

### Respect Natural and Cultural Resources:

Driving off road is prohibited. It is illegal to damage archaeological sites or take cultural artifacts.

### Be Informed:

Gas, supplies, and hospitals are available in Cedarville, Alturas, and Fall River Mills. Purchase maps at any BLM office.

## Find Out More:

Visit these local history museums and online resources for interpretive displays, trails west, markers, detailed historical accounts of the pioneers traveling west and much more:

**Modoc Historical Museum**  
600 S Main St, Alturas, CA 96101  
(P) 530-233-2944

**Fort Crook Museum**  
43030 Fort Crook Museum Rd,  
Fall River Mills, CA 96028  
(P) 530-336-5110

**Siskiyou County Historical Museum**  
910 S Main St, Yreka, CA 96097  
(P) 530-842-3836

**Klamath County Historical Museum**  
1451 Main St, Klamath Falls, OR 97601  
(P) 541-882-1000

**Lava Beds National Monument**  
1 Indian Well Hqts, Tulelake, CA 96134  
(P) 530-667-8113

**Trails West. INC**  
[www.emigranttrailswest.org](http://www.emigranttrailswest.org)

**Oregon-California Trails Association**  
[www.octa-trails.org](http://www.octa-trails.org)

**The Oregon History Project**  
[www.oregonhistoryproject.org](http://www.oregonhistoryproject.org)

## Contact Information

Bureau of Land Management  
Applegate Field Office  
708 West 12th Street Alturas,  
CA 96101  
Phone: 530 233-4666

Bureau of Land Management  
Black Rock Field Office  
775 623-1500

Lassen Volcanic National Park  
530 595-4480

Lassen National Forest  
530 257-2151

Lava Beds National Monument  
530 667-8100

Modoc National Forest  
530 233-5811

Modoc Historical Society  
530 233-2944

Alturas Chamber of Commerce  
530 233-4434

**For Emergencies call 911.**



**NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS**

# Emigrant Trails

California National Historic Trail



## Map and Guide



Black Rock Desert, BLM Photo

## Before the Trail

Long before the first emigrants came to this area, the Pit River, Modoc, Northern Paiute, and other indigenous people called this area home from time immemorial. These native peoples experienced significant changes to their traditional ways of life as Euro-American settlers traveled through, and often took by force traditionally occupied lands.

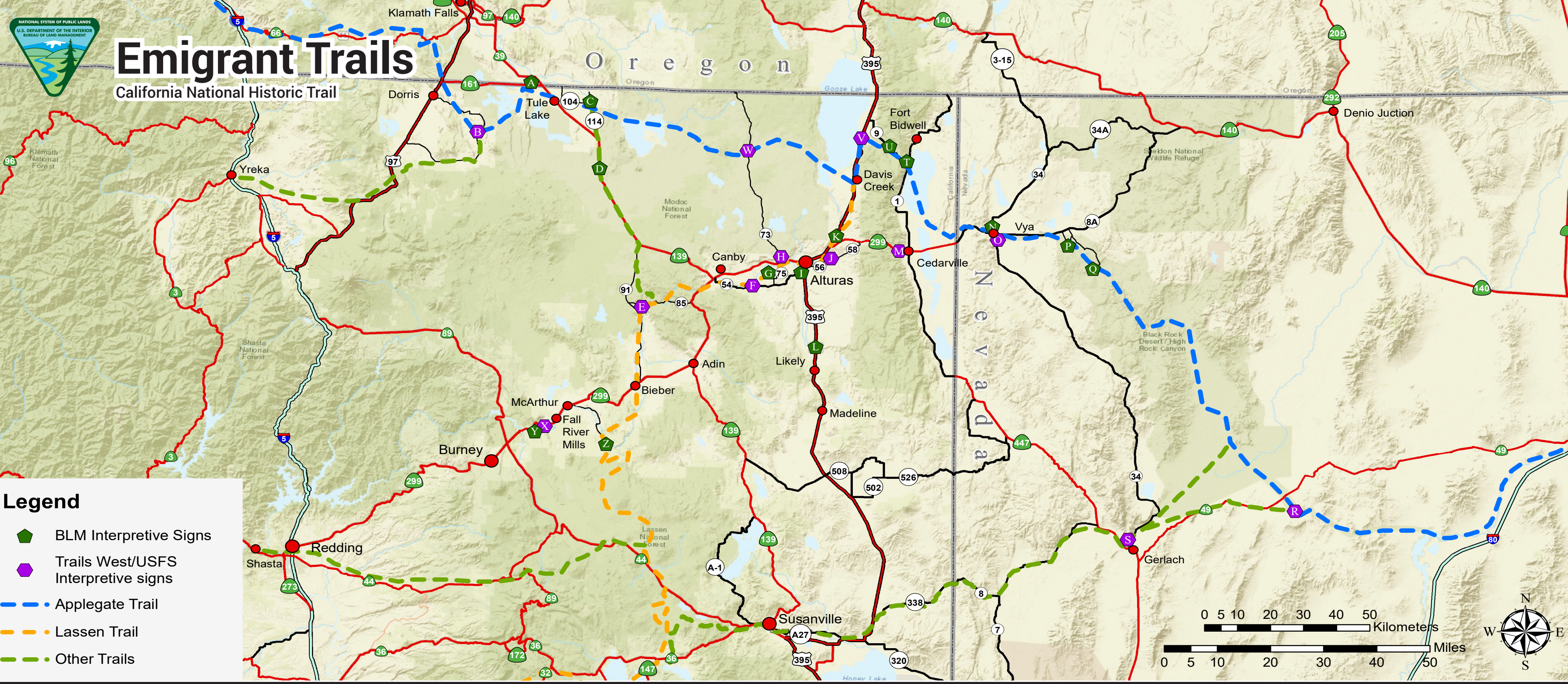
They introduced foreign diseases that decimated indigenous populations. Conflicts between settlers and Native Americans increased as more emigrants traveled west, culminating in the Modoc War of 1872-1873.

U.S. military forts, such as Fort Bidwell, were established to protect settlers and emigrants. Despite changes and adversities over generations, local tribes maintain strong ties to their respective cultural lifeways and customs.

To learn more about the Pit River, Modoc and Klamath tribes, visit the local museums, read the many historical publications or visit online to [www.pitrivertribe.org](http://www.pitrivertribe.org), [www.modocnation.com](http://www.modocnation.com) and [www.klamathtribes.org](http://www.klamathtribes.org).



Women of Pit River, Courtesy of CSU Chico



### Explore BLM Interpretive Panels & Trails West Markers

Are you ready for educational time travel back to the American West? Use this map and your smart phone (GPS coordinates) to find Trails West markers and BLM interpretive signs. Be aware that the coordinates are approximate and not exact.

These signs describe the mid-1800s emigrant routes and experiences through California and Nevada landscapes.

Trails West has installed over 700 trail markers made of steel railroad rails with quotes from emigrant journals. In many locations, BLM interpretive signs are next to historical markers.

The Applegate and Lassen trails have corresponding publications for purchase that contain maps, photos and journal entries. For more information visit Trails West at: [www.emigranttrailswest.org](http://www.emigranttrailswest.org)

- A Stone Bridge Markers:** Applegate Trail (1846) Modoc War (1872) Discover how the emigrants used a natural stone crossing and where the Modoc War began. 42.010629, -121.561158
- B Klamath Marsh:** Learn about the Yreka Trail to the Klamath gold fields. See how supplies were brought over the emigrant trails and discover large numbers of bald eagles and waterfowl on the Pacific Flyway. 41.85726, -120.75044
- C Bloody Point:** Read about the histories of the emigrants and the Modoc people. In 1852, near here was a significant conflict that was one of several events that led to the beginning of the Modoc War of 1872. 41.957473, -121.349248
- D California Cutoff/Burnett Trail:** See how the first elected governor of California entered the Golden State of California. 41.75989, -120.302154
- E Burnett Cutoff:** See why Peter Burnett was utterly surprised and astonished to find a new wagon road (Lassen Trail) in the wilderness. 41.35378, -121.13850
- F J. Goldsborough Bruff:** Find out how this topographical engineer left his Washington D.C. desk job to go on an adventure of a lifetime in 1849. 41.421731, -120.735597
- G Panorama Vista:** See the fabulous 360 degree panorama view that the emigrants experienced. 41.46159, -120.67908

- H Barnes Grade:** Enjoy the spectacular view of the South Fork Valley and the Warner Mountains. Learn what the 1849 emigrants left behind and get a glimpse into the wildlife of Devil's Garden. 41.501148, -120.631951
- I Makers & Markers of History:** Find out why a lieutenant has a memorial next to this interpretive panel. 41.47526, -120.55613
- J Dorris Reservoir:** Learn about the warning for other emigrants traveling the trail. 41.492438, -120.491606
- K Chimney Rock:** See where 55 fine trout were caught for dinner using a canvas wagon top. 41.565512, -120.44073
- L Battle of the Infernal Caverns:** Find out how the town of Likely got its name and learn about Battle of the Infernal Caverns of 1867. 41.26136, -120.50313
- M Welcome to the Great Basin:** Learn why no water flows to the sea. Explore the habitats of woolly mammoths, and the routes of John C. Frémont and Peter Lassen. 41.53053, -120.19359
- N Vya/Bishop's Mitre:** See where the emigrants camped and why they saw a bishop's mitre in the desert. 41.589505, -119.859331
- O Painted Point:** Learn about the geology of a "painted mountain" and the strange rocks that look like a bishop's mitre, or hat. 41.571053, -119.84911

- P J. Goldsborough Bruff/Singular Rock:** Experience the Singular Rock and imagine hundreds of wagons at camps in the meadows at Massacre Ranch. 41.56091, -119.58268
- Q Stevens Camp:** Engaging historic interpretive panels and superb desert vistas. 41.48991, -119.49171
- R Rabbithole Spring:** Learn why rabbit trails led to life-saving water for the emigrants and their livestock. 40.452665, -118.452259
- S BLM Blackrock Office:** Great interpretive panels and superb vistas. 40.659227, -119.583623
- T Fandango Pass:** Learn how this pass got its name from a popular mid-19th century dance. Continue to the next stop and find out why the emigrants thought they had reached the Sierra Nevada. 41.7958, -120.18813
- U USFS/State Historical Marker:** Experience the steep pull to the top of the Warners and see why emigrants thought they had arrived in the Sacramento Valley. 41.80156, -120.20561
- V Descent to Goose Lake:** See why the emigrant wagons were falling apart on their journey west. 41.84167, -120.35883
- W Fletcher Crossing:** See where the Applegate Trail crosses Devils Garden, "where wheels rarely touched the earth". 41.819947, -120.763611

- X Many Journeys up the Pit River:** Visit the old Yellowstone Cut-Off. See where highway 299 crossed the river in 1928. Learn about salmon/steelhead historic journeys from the ocean to the fertile Fall River Valley. 40.992477, -121.473992
- Y Pit River Campground:** Discover the multitude of panels: find out how the Pit River got its name, learn about Euro-American exploration, indigenous people, and wildlife. See why Fall River Valley is known for world class fishing, hiking and boating. 40.991835, -121.50736
- Y Pit River Watershed:** This 200-mile river connects with Fall River, Hat Creek and the waters of Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park. Find out how these rivers join and eventually find their way down to the Pacific Ocean. 40.991835, -121.50736
- Z West Branch of the Lassen Emigrant Trail:** Learn how pathfinder John C. Frémont mapped the West and how in 1848 Peter Lassen forged a "short cut" to his rancho and the California gold fields. 40.97514, 121.26962

