

# THE DEBITAGE

Say it in French...and it's more scientific!

The Official Newsletter of the Modoc National Forest Heritage Program

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## Special points of interest:

- Student Volunteer program since 1978. Hosting two students in 2015.
- Passport in Time since 1991. Three *PIT* projects offered in Summer 2015.

### During the FY-15 field season:

- 1,176+ volunteer hours were contributed to the Heritage Program.
- MDF crews recorded, re-recorded, updated, monitored or re-flagged 250+ archaeological and historic sites.
- 250+ site records were sent to CSU-Chico for trinomial assignments (including backlog site records).
- Heritage Program Managed to Standard – expect 60 points to be reached!

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Emigrant Trail Signs	1
FINDINGS – Not so old	2
Another Bow Stave Tree	4
Tom Smith Cabin – 1991	4
Fish Weir on the Pit River	5
A Final Word	5
Heritage Contacts	6



## MORE EMIGRANT TRAIL INTERPRETIVE SIGNS INSTALLED

This past fiscal year saw the installation of the last four Emigrant Trail Interpretive signs installed across the Forest. One sign was placed along the Applegate Trail (1846) at the low water crossing of Fletcher Creek in the Devil's Garden. One sign was placed near the Burnett Cutoff (1848) alongside of Highway 139 below Tule Lake, with second sign placed about thirty miles south above the Pit River near the junction of the Burnett Cutoff and the Lassen Trail (1848). The final sign was placed at the entrance to the Pit River Canyon noted in emigrant diaries for the multiple crossings of the river over a relatively short distance.

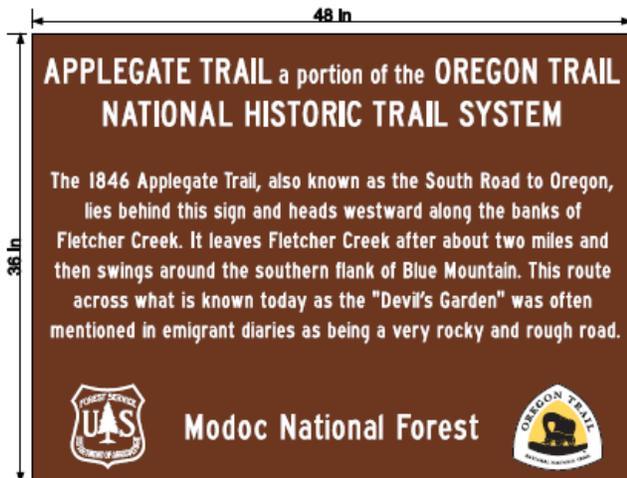
All three emigrant trails – the Applegate Trail (or South Road to Oregon), the Lassen Trail and the Burnett Cutoff – are all part of the National Historic Trails System as components of the California Trail and the Oregon Trail. The Modoc National Forest has, collectively, about 90 miles of these trails crossing Forest lands. In a few locations the roads are still in use after over 160 years and in other locations traces are no longer visible.

The forest now has emigrant trail interpretive signs at seven different locations. The funding for these signs came from Region 5 National Historic Trails grants. There are several more locations identified for interpretive signs, including funds requested for a larger interpretive kiosk to be installed at the Highway 139 location. This kiosk, recommended by the *Emigrant Trails Scenic Byway Interpretive Plan* (2005) could also offer interpretations of Peter Skene Ogden's 1826-1827 Hudson's Bay Company expedition, John C. Frémont's 1846 expedition, and the Modoc War of 1872-1873.

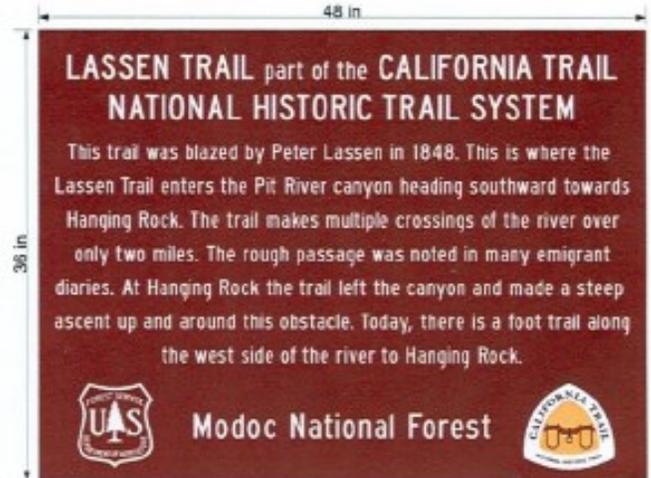


The sign on the left was installed at the head of the Pit River Canyon at a dispersed recreation camping area. About one mile down the canyon is the "fish weir" shown on page 5 of this Newsletter. Also, near that location is a large circular "blaze" on an old pine.

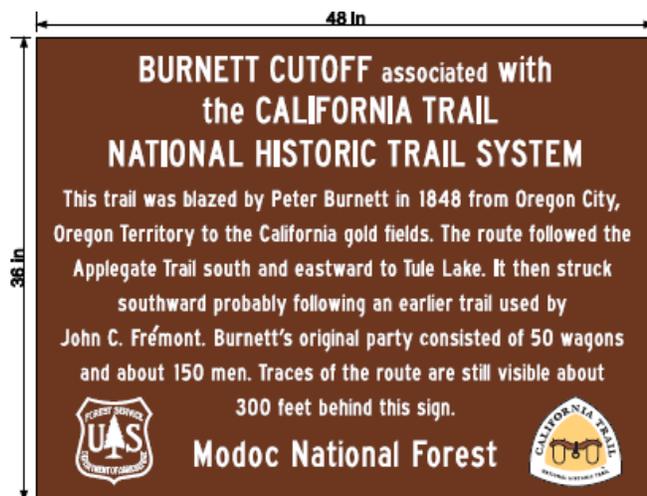
## INTERPRETIVE SIGNS (CON'T.)



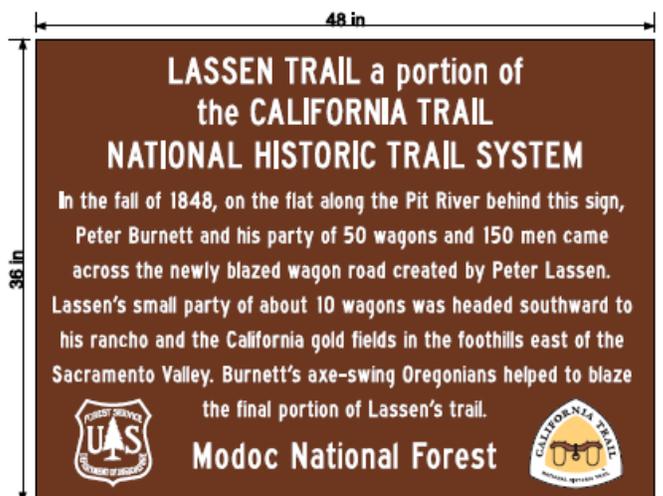
Applegate Trail sign installed at Fletcher Creek.



Lassen Trail sign installed at the Pit River Canyon.



Burnett Cutoff sign installed along Hwy 139.



Lassen Trail/Burnett Cutoff sign installed at the Pit River junction.

## FINDINGS – Not so old...

This past summer on the Boles Creek Archaeological District VI *Passport in Time* project we recovered a not so old piece of the past. This is a surveyor's compass found on one of the older sites initially located by Andrew and Julia Crow in 1985. The Crows were an elderly couple that wanted to volunteer to walk the canyons of the Devil's Garden looking for "rock art" sites. They had their own trailer and camped out on the Forest. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but the use of volunteers without close supervision is sometimes not a good idea. The Crows were able to locate sites, but were not skilled at the recording of sites, thus our Boles Creek survey is completing what they started. This compass was probably lost by Andrew while lunching under a juniper.



## Another Bow Stave Tree Located!

This past summer during monitoring of “Priority Heritage Assets” our Section 110 crew discovered a “bow stave tree” – that is a straight-trunked juniper that has been cut in a manner so that long “staves” of wood may be cut out. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> such tree found on the forest. It is in the vicinity of “Captain Jack’s Capture Site” of Modoc War fame. The axe used to make the cuts appears to have been metal rather than stone. This would tend to date the removal of the staves between about 1826 (when metal trade goods from the Hudson’s Bay Company were available) to about 1873 when the native Modoc’s of the area were compelled to leave the area.



## BLAST FROM THE PAST...Tom Smith Cabin Stabilization in 1991

The new District Ranger, Edie Asrow, on the Warner Mountain RD, turned the stabilization of the historic Tom Smith Cabin in the south Warner Wilderness into a district “Team Building Exercise.” Forest Historian Lex Palmer used his skills from a cabin stabilization training session to organize the employees into work groups to facilitate the work effort.

All items had to be brought into the site by pack horse and the employees camped out in the wilderness for the week-long exercise.

Lee Juillerat, Regional Editor for the Klamath Falls *Herald and News*, wrote an article on the cabin

for *The Journal of the Modoc County Historical Society* (No. 13, 1991) about the history of Tom Smith and the cabin: *It was 1923 when Surprise Valley Rancher Tom Smith finished Lincoln-logging together a one-room cabin in an aspen grove along Cottonwood Creek in the South Warners...In the cement caulking above the door he inscribed his name and construction date, “T. F. Smith, May 30, 1923.”*



Left to Right: Ken Ballard, Archaeological Technician; Edie Asrow, District Ranger; and Lex Palmer, Forest Historian working to set the north cornice beam on the cabin.

## Tom Smith Cabin (con't.)



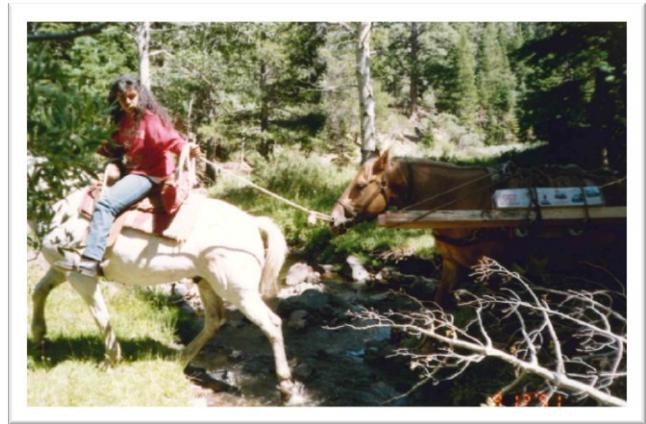
Laurie Johnson and Carol Root removing the shining corrugated aluminium roofing from the storage shed.



Laurie Johnson and Carol Root placing appropriate era corrugated steel roofing on the shed.



The "new" corrugated steel roof on the storage shed.



Nina Loretto packing materials into Tom Smith Cabin.



Lex Palmer, Ken Ballard and Larry Shippen fitting a new sill log in place.



Tom Smith Cabin sketch by *Modoc Record* Bob Sloss, 1991.

This 14 x 16 foot line shack was constructed the year after the dug-out storage structure. The cabin was to serve as a place *"to store supplies and provide shelter from spring or fall snowstorms or summer thundershowers"* up at the 6,800 ft. elevation of his range allotment on Forest Service lands. It is one of the Forests' "Priority Heritage Assets" and as Lee wrote – *"It's an integral part of the South Warner's human story – a symbolic, cultural, and historical link with a vanishing way of life."* After nearly a quarter century it is in need of a little more TLC.

## FISH WEIR ON THE PIT RIVER!

Thanks to the low water levels in the Pit River we have finally been able to formally record a Native American “fish weir” on the Pit River. This is the only such feature we have located on Forest Service lands. Its existence has been known for quite some time, but the water levels have not been low enough to enable a proper archaeological recording of the feature. The photo showing the visible “ripple” in the river is generally how the weir has been seen over the years. During the recording of the portion of the Lassen Emigrant Trail this field season the Section 110 crew was able to fully record and photograph the feature.

It is constructed of local river rock in an arc shape with the arc pointed downstream. This rock man-made rock barrier required spawning fish to jump over it to go upstream. Native Americans would then use fishing spears or nets to catch the fish.

This feature will be part of the interpretation along the Pit River Canyon portion of the Lassen Emigrant Trail a part of the National Historic Trails System.



An overview of the fish weir “arc” ripple during a normal river flow.



Overviews of the fish weir “arc” now exposed due to very low water.



An overview of the river rock construction of the Pit River Canyon fish weir.

The fish caught by this method most likely included native species of trout and suckers. The old U. S. Geological Survey 15’ series topographic maps noted numerous “fish weirs” along the Pit River. Further west, at Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park there are numerous examples of other types of Native American construct fish traps. These locations are within the territory of the Pit River Tribe.



# A Final Word from the Retiring Forest Archaeologist



1977

*“This Must be a Really, Really Good Place – Some Hypotheses from the Modoc National Forest”* is the title of the paper I plan to give at the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for California Archaeology next March in Ontario, CA. This is also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Forest Services’ *Preservation50* celebration. This hypothesis is based on my earlier “This must be a good spot” hypothesis developed while studying small, sparse lithic scatters on a portion of the Devil’s Garden. This hypothesis may partly explain why certain very small sites (up to 1,000 square meters) contained evidence of multiple use episodes spread over hundreds or even thousands of years based on obsidian hydration dating. The “really, really, good place” hypothesis deals with the very large (greater than 20 acres and up to several hundred acres in extent) that also occur out in the Devil’s Garden area. It is likely that these mega-site areas are very “resource rich” areas utilized for



2015

thousands of years with numerous use or activity locations side-by-side, on top of each other, etc. eventually creating these vast areas of concentrated, or sometimes dispersed, but continuous, surface archaeological materials. Rather than the usual “vertical stratigraphy” with the areas’ shallow soils one gets “horizontal stratigraphy” that may be identified by the distribution of temporally diagnostic projectile points and/or obsidian hydration undertaken at observed “loci”.

Other research questions and hypotheses that may be addressed by the archaeological resources on the Modoc National Forest deal with the archaeology of “border areas” between tribal groups – the Modoc, the Pit River, and the Northern Paiute. The formation of hunter-gather “band” identity may be possible through obsidian sourcing and hydration studies by looking at the movement of the Pit River tribe into the upper reaches of the Pit River starting about 3,200 years ago. It is my opinion that as these folks progressively moved up-river and groups dropped off to settle some valley the band identities formed – *Atwamsini*, *Astariwari*, *Kosealktawi*, *Hewisedawi*, and *Hammawi*. Each band selected a primary obsidian source for “their” primary toolstone. By looking at the primary obsidian source and the secondary and tertiary sources present I believe one may be able to identify individual “band” territories archaeologically. When that magic mix of obsidians becomes fixed in the archaeological record that signifies the establishment of the “band” identity. Obsidian hydration studies may be used to “date” the sequence in which the various bands broke off and established their core territories.

*It’s about time!* This is the key concept to understanding the archaeological values inherent in the 12,000+ years of archaeological record on the Modoc National Forest. It is possible to “date” just about every site present. That temporal control will enable some very fine archaeological/anthropological research to be undertaken on the hunter-gatherer groups of this area. In other words, the folks from the past still have a lot of stories to be told to the folks of the present.

Gerry Gates, Forest Archaeologist, 1977-2015

*“You can’t always get what you want, but if you try, you might just find you get what you need.”*

**Please enjoy, but do not destroy  
your American heritage!**

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