



This is William Shaughnessy's eight horse team in Sierra City heading toward Downieville. They're hauling hay from the Sierra Valley, the northernmost part of Highway 49. It was one of many freighters that would haul animal feed as well as food supplies for the early pioneers as well as later residents. The Sierra Valley was, and still is, the bread basket for Northern California & Nevada mining communities.

Chapter 4: Sierra County — Downieville, Goodyear's Bar, Sierra City and vicinity

Sierra County lies in the north-eastern part of the state of California, its entire area being included within the great range of the Sierra Nevadas. The topography of the county, with the exception of Sierra valley, presents a continuous succession of lofty hills and deep cañons, many of the former rising to dizzy heights, and hundreds of the latter sinking into bewildering depths, with precipitous walls of rock and earth. Most of the hills are covered with magnificent coniferous forests of red spruce, balsam fir, cedar, sugar and yellow pine; while the valleys or cañons furnish a rich growth of oak and all the varieties of trees found in the foot-hills of California. Most of the mining towns in Sierra county are situated far above the snow-line, at elevations ranging from three to six thousand feet.

The steep and lofty mountain directly fronting the little village of tents, was so rugged and sudden in its declivity, that wagons could not descend; hence, mules packed with about 200 lbs. of provisions were started ahead, and sometimes, cautious in his step as this animal is known to be, he would miss his foothold, tumble over and over, until he reached the base, and not unfrequently plunge into the river, where the poor beast found rest in death.



S. M. Schaeffer, 1851

We sped merrily onward until nine o'clock, making the old woods echo with song and story and laughter. It seemed to me so funny that we two people should be riding on mules... and, funniest of all, that we were going to live in the Mines! In spite of my gayety, however, I now began to wonder why we did not arrive at our intended lodgings. At every step we were getting higher and higher into the mountains, and even F. was at last compelled to acknowledge that we were lost!

Totally unprepared for such a catastrophe, we had nothing but the blankets of our mules, and a thin quilt in which I had rolled some articles necessary for the journey... I sobbed and cried like and repeatedly declared that I should never live to get to the rancho. F. said afterwards that he began to think I intended to keep my word, for I certainly looked like a dying person.

Every one congratulated us upon not having encountered any Indians, and it is said they would have killed us for our mules and clothes. A few weeks ago a Frenchman and his wife were murdered by them. They generally take women captive, however; and who knows how narrowly I escaped becoming an Indian chieftainess, and feeding for the rest of my life upon roasted shoppers, acorns, and owerseeds?

*Dame Shirley,
Rich Bar,
September 13, 1851.*



Courtesy of the Kentucky Mine Museum

Grizzly bears were prolific in Northern California when the early miners and settlers arrived. They were greatly feared and aggressively hunted.

Consequently, grizzly bears were killed off entirely in this part of the country. The bear in this photo, however, is not likely a grizzly. His size indicates that he might be of a smaller and less dangerous variety, but that didn't save him from this unfortunate fate.

The water obtained from the numerous mountain streams is of the purest possible quality, being fed by the vast masses of snow melting from the summits. The crystal torrents on every side, dashing and foaming over the rocks, pursuing their serpentine ways through the wild yet always beautiful cañons of the Sierras, rushing with mighty swiftness along their narrow channels and singing the ever-sweet song of rushing waters, are laden with countless numbers of beautiful mountain trout, choice prizes for the eager angler.

The isolated peaks of Sierra county are Table Rock, Saddle Back, Mount Fillmore, Fir Cap, Mount Lola, and the Sierra Buttes. Fir Cap attains an altitude of 6,500 feet, Sierra Buttes 8,950 feet, and Mount Lola, the highest point in the county, about 9,200 feet. The Sierra Buttes mountain is one of the landmarks of the state rendered prominently conspicuous by the sharply-defined, cone-shaped, serrated, basaltic lava in its formation.

The primal cause of the settlement of Sierra county was the desire for gold, almost fabulous amounts of which have been found in many parts. The proportion of agricultural to mineral land is exceedingly small, not one acre in fifty being suitable for the plow.

EARLY HISTORY. The first explorers of this region are not all known. Along the cañon of the North Yuba men were mining as early as the summer of 1849. Philo A. Haven came up the North Yuba early in September, 1849, and at that time found notices of seven different claims posted on Big Rich bar, signed by Hedgepath & Co. He located on Little Rich bar, and was joined by Francis Anderson, who, on the fourteenth of September, found the first gold discovered in the neighborhood of Sierra's capital town. Several other settlements were made within the present confines of the county, either prior to the discoveries on the North Yuba, or simultaneously with them. By November several of them were quite populous camps. A few days prior to Mr. Anderson's discovery at the Forks, he was in Indian valley with John C. Fulton and — Elliott. There they abandoned their mules, and packed their culinary and mining utensils over to where Mr. Haven was on Little Rich bar with his party. Mr. Anderson went up to the Forks, and discovered gold at a point immediately above where the Jersey bridge at Downieville now stands. The value of the find was not large but it encouraged him to proceed farther up in hopes to discover larger pay. The traces of Indians were apparent everywhere. A tree on Jersey flat was still burning, while a white log lay across the river-on which were a number of deer skulls. Other indica-



In 1854 the bars on the river at Goodyear's were alive with men, and sanguinary quarrels were of almost daily occurrence. The gambling-saloons were generally the pest-houses from, which emanated the bloody crimes, and in one of these a man named Hawkins was killed one day by a Spainard. No sooner had the deed been committed than the murderer was fiercely attacked by the spectators, who cut and hacked him without mercy, causing his death almost instantly. On his body were ten deep knife-wounds.

Courtesy of the Kentucky Mine Museum



*Hitchcock &
Reis Mills,
below the Sierra
Buttes*