HELP PRESERVE THE PAST

Remember, as you explore the Kirkwood region you are entering a historic area. You may find relics of the past and wonder how they got here.

By leaving these items as you found them, you will leave in place clues that could help us answer these very questions. If you take artifacts home with you, or move them to other spots, you may destroy clues to the past. Every artifact is not merely something to be held and examined, it is also a piece of a puzzle which, when put together with other pieces, allows us to unravel the mysteries of the past.

Please treat all historic and archaeological sites with care and respect when you visit them. The remains of prehistoric and historic cultures are a part of our heritage. When artifacts are stolen and archaeological sites are destroyed, we lose important clues about the past, forever. Strict laws protect artifacts and sites on state and Federal and Native American lands. Report violations to your local law enforcement or land management agency.

KIRKWOOD

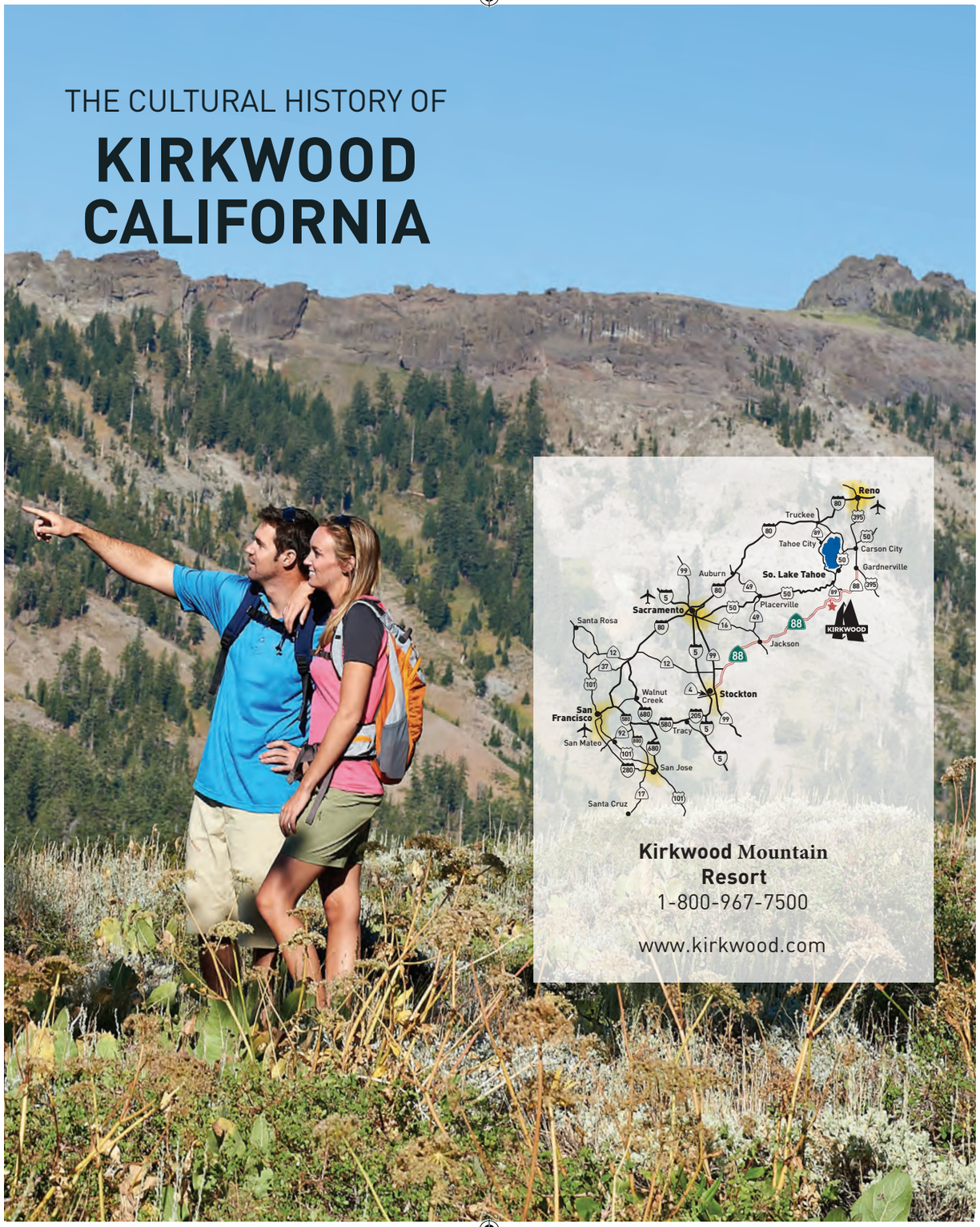
Kirkwood Mountain Resort
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FOREST SERVICE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

U.S. Forest Service
Amador Ranger District
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THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF

KIRKWOOD CALIFORNIA



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THE KIRKWOOD INN

Kirkwood Station, as it was originally called, soon became a hostelry, post office and stagecoach depot, which served many travelers through the Sierra in the late 1800's. In 2019, the Kirkwood Inn celebrated its 155th year of friendly western hospitality.



Today the Inn is a popular restaurant and bar located at Kirkwood's entrance on Scenic California State Route 88. The Inn sits on the point where Alpine, Amador and El Dorado counties' boundaries all meet. The Alpine/El Dorado county line actually runs right through the old bar room.





Zachariah S. Kirkwood chose this lush alpine valley for his summer ranching operations and settled here in the late 1850's. In 1861, he began the construction of the log cabin we know today as the Kirkwood Inn.

EARLY KIRKWOOD HISTORY

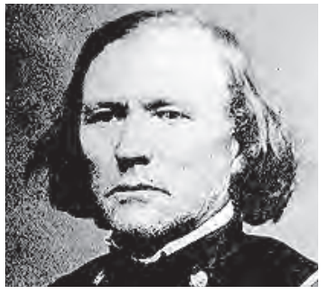
Kirkwood's mountains, valleys, lakes and rivers hold a special place in the history of our country, having afforded many solace, shelter and opportunity through its abundant natural resources and unique location in the Sierra Nevada mountain range.

The original native people of the Kirkwood area are the Washo, a tribe whose history spans nearly 9,000 years. The Washo people created a way of life that utilized seasonal migration and where they could live in harmony with the land.
People moved purposefully to the high mountain lakes and meadows to hunt, fish and collect medicinal plants, roots, and berries for the winter season in the valleys below.





Like the Washo before them, explorers, trappers and the early gold-seeking emigrants of the 1800's would find the barren mountaintops and ridges as the easiest of passable routes through the mountains during the snow months. These high altitude routes were favored for travel because their exposure to the wind would scour away the deep, impassable snow pack.



Christopher Houston "Kit" Carson

One of the earliest documentations of travel in this area by European descendants can be found in the memoirs of Jedediah Strong Smith who is believed to have passed through this area as early as 1826. Kit Carson also explored near here on his many trapping and scouting trips as early as 1838.

Captain John C. Fremont led his exploration party, which included Kit Carson as a scout, through the Sierra in January and February of 1844 in search of a passable route to Sutter's Fort in the California gold country. Following an old Native American trade trail, Fremont's party including 67 horses and mules first sighted Lake Tahoe on February 14, 1844 from the top of what is believed to be the nearby 10,067 foot Red Lake Peak.



John C. Freemont

Word of Fremont's successful passage through the Sierra spread, and by the summer of 1848, a battalion of Mormon soldiers attempted the same route in reverse, back to Salt Lake City from Sacramento. The soldiers cleared and charted Captain Fremont's route, making it accessible for their wagons. This trail became heavily traveled during the late 1840s and 1850's, and has had many names including the Carson Emigrant Road, Amador Grade and the Carson Canyon Route. Today this popular route is widely known as the Mormon Emigrant Trail.

The Mormon Emigrant Trail passes through the Kirkwood mountain area, winding up over the saddle just south of Thimble Peak, following approximately the same route as Kirkwood's Sunrise Chair #4. To this day, rust marks from the iron wagon wheels can be seen on the granite rocks along the route. Some scars on the trees made from the ropes and pulleys used to haul the heavy wagons up over the rugged terrain still remain. The trail continues around Emigrant Lake, located just south of Kirkwood's Iron Horse Chair #3, and then easterly along the south side of Caples Lake and up and over Carson Pass.



Covered Wagon Peak at Kirkwood

Regular mail delivery was established in the 1850's but was stopped during the winter months when deep snow closed the roads. In 1856, a Norwegian emigrant, Jon Torsteinson-Rue, nicknamed "Snowshoe Thompson," took on the mail delivery job.

Snowshoe became legendary as the only communication link over the Sierra during that time. He delivered the mail two to four times a month, for 20 years, and routinely passed through the Kirkwood area until 1876.



Snowshoe Thompson

Snowshoe learned to ski in the Telemark region of Norway, and skiing on 10-foot long homemade oak skis, he made the two-day trek to Sacramento and the return three-day trip back to Genoa, Nevada via the Mormon Emigrant Trail.

Soon there became a greater need for a quick mail delivery system, and the Pony Express Company was born in January of 1860. A pony relay system of 120 stations was established across the west. For five weeks the Pony Express trail ran through Kirkwood before it was re-routed over Kingsbury Grade to shorten the distance from Virginia City to Sacramento by 15 miles.

Newer and faster routes connecting emerging cities and towns resulted in fewer travelers taking the old Mormon Immigrant Trail. Over the next 100 years, the Kirkwood area would host mostly sheepherders and fishermen, few staying for very long.



At the heart of it all is the essence of Kirkwood; respect for the environment, pioneering spirit, a sense of adventure, a love for the legends and lore of days gone by—its colorful past is forever intertwined into its future.