

Forest Ranch

Many people have asked me to sit with them and discuss the past history of the Forest Ranch and Doe Mill areas while they jotted down notes from which they planned to write these things up in a presentable form. Because nothing ever materialized from these requests, I shall undertake the task myself.

Shortly after what is now the state of California was annexed to the United States as a territory, Army scouts were sent out to blaze trails from western points into this new and virgin territory. One of these trails meandered through what is now Nevada, then continued into California, and I believe, to Honey Lake; thence up the Susan River and through the Fredonyer Pass into the basin of Mountain Meadows; thence on to Big Meadows and on over the Big Summit into the Butte Creek watershed, thence down Butte Creek to the site of the original Butte Meadows Hotel. After crossing the stream at this point, the trail left the creek's right bank and soon began climbing the Little Summit. After leaving this summit the trail followed the ridge dividing Big Chico and Butte creeks. At the top of Platt Hill the trail divided. Doe Mill Ridge began on the east side of the south face of Platt Hill, while Humboldt Ridge left Platt Hill from the west side of the face. The trail then followed each of these ridges on down into the valley. Chico eventually became the western terminus of this trail. This trail was named Humboldt Trail in honor of the botanist who was with the scouts when the trail was blazed. It is also thought that the Humboldt Counties of both California and Nevada were named for this man.

This trail was slowly improved over the years, and by 1849 it was possible for wagons to traverse it, though at times and places, a great amount of ingenuity was required to negotiate portions of it. The wagon trains that came with the gold rush came fairly well supplied with the types of equipment that would be needed in negotiating the bad places. These wagon trains were known as emigrant trains. It is still possible to find shoes for oxen along these old trails.

The discovery of gold in California placed a heavy burden on these trails. The crude trails could not support the traffic and a demand was made to improve the trails into roads. The emigrants themselves did much to improve these crude roads.

Several years after California was admitted into the union, an agreement was consummated for the organization of the Humboldt Toll Road Co. This agreement gave the Humboldt Toll Road Company authority to buy such lands as they might need for the improvement of the Humboldt Trail into a toll road. It also gave the company the right to erect toll collection stations and to collect tolls for the right to use the road. Eventually the counties through which the toll road traversed saw fit to buy out the interests of the old Humboldt Toll Road Co. As soon as the counties bought out the Humboldt Company, the Humboldt Road became a free road.

After Butte County acquired this end of the road, John Bidwell became one of the first overseers of the road, a position he held for some time.

Claud L. Willis, California Places, Volume 13, FSR, Paradise Genealogical Library