

Snowshoe Thompson (from Wikipedia)

John Albert Thompson



Snowshoe Thompson

John Albert Thompson
born Jon Torsteinsson Rue
Telemark, Norway
April 30, 1827 – May 15, 1876
aka Snowshoe Thompson

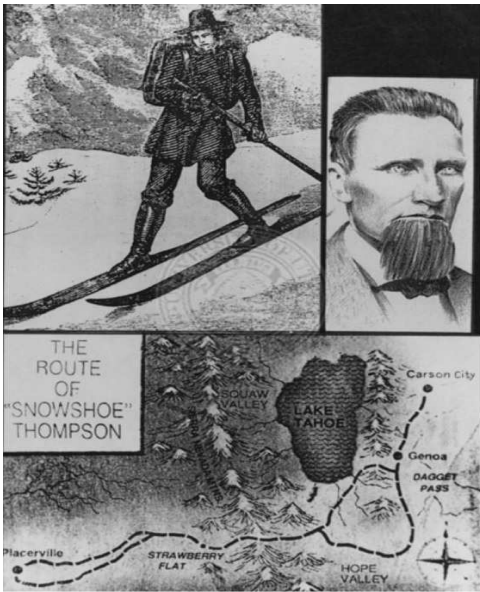
An early resident of the Sierra Nevada of Nevada and California, John Thompson was a Norwegian-American considered to be the father of California skiing.

Background

In 1837, at the age of 10, Thompson came to America with his mother, settling first on a farm in the Fox River settlement in LaSalle County, Illinois. The family subsequently moved to the Norwegian immigrant settlement in Shelby County which was under the leadership of Cleng Peerson. In 1839, they were joined by Thompson's brother Tostein (1819-1880) and sister Kari (born 1822). In 1840, they followed Hans Barlien and moved to the Sugar Creek Settlement in Lee County, Iowa.

In 1846, Thompson and his brother Tostein came to Dane County, Wisconsin. In 1851, Thompson drove a herd of milk cows to California and settled in Placerville. For a short while he mined in Kelsey Diggins, Coon Hollow and Georgetown. With the small amount he saved, he bought a small ranch at Putah Creek in the Sacramento Valley. In 1860, Thompson homesteaded a 160-acre ranch in Diamond Valley, south of Genoa in California's Alpine County.

Mail Delivery



Between 1856 and 1876, he delivered mail between Placerville in California and Genoa, Nevada and later to Virginia City, NV. Despite his nickname, he did not make use of the snowshoes which are native to North America, but rather would travel with what the local people applied that term to: ten-foot (over 3-meter) skis and a single sturdy pole generally held in both hands at once. He knew this version of cross-country skiing from his native Norway and employed it during the winter as one of the earlier pioneers of backcountry skiing in the United States.

Thompson delivered the first silver ore to be mined from the Comstock Lode. Later he taught others how to make skis, as well as the basics of their use. Despite his twenty years of service as a subcontractor, he was never paid for delivering the mail.

Thompson typically made the eastward trip in three days, and the return trip in two days. Thompson carried no blanket and no gun; he claimed he was never lost even in blizzards. A rescue attributed to him was that of a man trapped in his cabin by unusually deep snow. Thompson reached him, realized the damage to the man's legs from frostbite was sufficient to kill him, skied out to get chloroform, skied back in with it, and delivered the chloroform in time to save him.

Thompson traveled the Star routes along Old Emigrant Road and later Big Tree Route. The route known as "Johnson's Cutoff" was a pathway first marked by John Calhoun Johnson, an early explorer and first man to deliver mail over the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Today this approximates the route of U.S. Route 50 as it winds its way from Placerville, California to South Lake Tahoe.

Personal Life

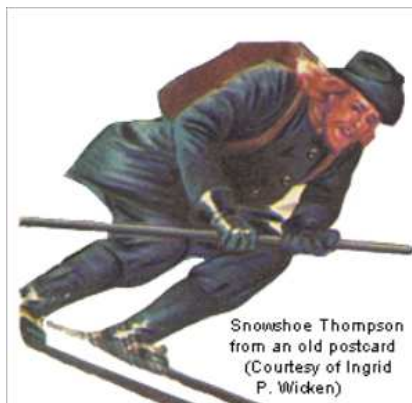
In 1866, Thompson married Agnes Singleton (1831-1915) who had come to America from Lancashire, England. The Thompsons' only child, Arthur Thomas, was born on February 11, 1867. From 1868 to 1872 Thompson served on the Board of Supervisors of Alpine County, and was a delegate to the Republican State Convention in Sacramento in 1871. In spite of a resolution sent to Washington, D.C. by the Nevada Legislature, the many political contacts he had gathered, and a trip to Washington, DC in 1872, Snowshoe Thompson was never paid for his services delivering the United States Mail.



Thompson Family Gravesite – Genoa, Nevada

Snowshoe Thompson died of appendicitis which developed into pneumonia on May 15, 1876. His grave can be seen in Genoa, Nevada, in Carson Valley, east of Lake Tahoe. His son, Arthur, died two years later of diphtheria, and was buried next to his father at the cemetery in Genoa.

Legacy



1954 Death Valley Days (S2E13) - 1956 Johnny Horton song "Snow-Shoe Thompson"
And... webpage inspiration from the memorial plaque in Lower Carthay Circle Park!