

by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

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Padre Pedro Font, during an expedition to Spanish-controlled northern California in 1776, named and mapped the Sierra Nevada for the first time. Sierra means saw-toothed mountain range in Spanish and Nevada means snow-covered. How many times have TV and radio commentators referred to the Sierra Nevada as the Sierra Nevadas? National news accounts rank among the worst examples when reporters make a plural out of Sierra Nevada akin to the Rocky Mountains becoming the Rockies (that's acceptable in English). Many times a journalist or writer, when mistakenly referring to the Sierra Nevadas, has compounded the problem by geographically placing nearby Carson City in the Carson Valley (it's in Eagle Valley) and situating Reno in Washoe Valley (it's in the Truckee Meadows).

Here is something that might surprise people who have lived in the area for some time and know to call the Sierra Nevada the Sierra Nevada or just the Sierra: technically the Sierra Nevada crest line and the mountains descending to the west and east are wholly and solely in California. It's true that the 19th century California-bound immigrants crossing the Great Basin, upon seeing the huge mountain range looming in front of them, assumed it was the Sierra Nevada. An 1874 map of Lake Tahoe describes the feature as "Sierra Nevada (eastern Summit)." Another name for the feature was the "Eastern Slope."

While most people refer to the Sierra Nevada when they look at Job's Peak, King's Canyon, or Mount Rose, geographers and geologists will tell you that what you are viewing is the Carson Range. Officially named in 1939 for pioneer frontier scout Kit Carson, the mountain range east

of the Sierra Nevada crest line was described as early as 1855 as the "Great Carson Spur."

The Sierra Nevada crest line is clearly west of Lake Tahoe. All of this would have been so much easier had California agreed to the language in *Nevada's Organic* (1861) and *Enabling* (1864) Acts and given Nevada the land east from the crest of the Sierra. Of course, California was not about to relinquish Lake Tahoe and a significant portion of its eastern border which now includes the communities of Susanville, Truckee, Tahoe City, South Lake Tahoe, Markleeville, Coleville, Bridgeport, Lee Vining, Bishop and points south.

In the end, remember Sierra is plural for mountains; Nevada is not to be made plural. And the Carson Range is a majestic, breath-taking eastern spur of the Sierra Nevada.

See *History of the Sierra Nevada* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965)

Photo: Credit: The Sierra Nevada: The Range of Light (1947)

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