by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

"Today, one can stand where Carson and Fremont stood thanks to a trail running from the top of the Heavenly Ski Resort tram," according to an article in the Nevada Day 2000 Official Program published in Carson City's *Nevada Appeal.* "The view was 'awesome' then, history records Fremont as saying, and it remains one of the definitive vistas around Lake Tahoe today."

Nothing could be farther from the truth! The location where John Charles Fremont and cartographer Charles Preuss viewed Lake Tahoe on February 14, 1844 was some twenty miles to the south of where Heavenly Ski Resort is today. The area is near Highway 88 and Carson Pass. More importantly, Kit Carson was NOT with Fremont and Preuss at the time Lake Tahoe was sighted on their journey to northern California.

Fremont wrote in his journals that, "With Mr. Preuss, I ascended to-day the highest peak to the right [Red Lake Peak]; from which we had a beautiful view of a mountain lake at our feet, about fifteen miles in length, and so entirely surrounded by mountains that we could not discover an outlet." In Fremont's 1845 report he calls the largest lake in the Sierra Nevada "Mountain Lake." Charles Preuss' map of 1848 identifies the magnificent body of water as Lake Bonpland, named in honor of French botanist Aime Jacques Alexandre Bonpland (1772-1858).

The Washoe tribal name, Da ow a ga ("edge of the lake" according to *Wa She Shu: A Washo*

*Tribal History* ), and mispronounced as "Tahoe," was commonly used by the 1860s. However, the breathtaking body of water was also known as Lake Bigler. The name Bigler had been unofficially applied in 1852 to honor California's third governor who led a rescue party into Lake Valley to retrieve a snowbound emigrant party. The following year California Surveyor General William M. Eddy designated Lake Bigler on area maps. Despite the fact former Governor Bigler fell out of favor in California for his pro-Southern views during the Civil War, the state legislature made the name official in 1870. The state legislature did not officially change the name to Lake Tahoe until 1945.

Fremont and Preuss are believed to be the first Euro-Americans to see Lake Tahoe. However, history does NOT record Fremont ever exclaiming that this captivating mountain lake was "awesome".

When this story started circulating is anybody's guess, although it may be traced to after Heavenly Ski Resort opened in 1955. Another example of a "George Washington slept here" story?

You make the call.

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