

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:04,800

There's a whole other chapter to the Donner Party story people have never heard.

2

00:00:07,800 --> 00:00:12,600

Charles Stanton went snow blind. The rescuers would find his bones in the spring.

3

00:00:15,600 --> 00:00:19,000

When they tried to cross the summit, a storm hit and they were pushed back.

4

00:00:19,000 --> 00:00:22,200

Everything, possibly they could go wrong, went wrong.

5

00:00:22,200 --> 00:00:25,000

This is the spot we believe is the camp of death.

6

00:00:25,000 --> 00:00:27,000

This is where the cannibalism happens.

7

00:00:27,000 --> 00:00:28,000

This is the spot.

8

00:00:31,000 --> 00:00:36,000

He pulled nine children out of that hole and he'd put them on his back.

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00:00:36,000 --> 00:00:40,000

It's a story of survival. The human instinct to survive.

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00:00:40,000 --> 00:00:43,000

Can you just imagine with thirty feet of snow? Forget it.

11

00:00:43,000 --> 00:00:46,000

Ah, come on! Ah, f***!

12

00:00:50,000 --> 00:00:54,000

This is where everyone that wanted to come to California had to pass through here.

13

00:00:54,000 --> 00:00:55,000

The entire country.

14

00:00:55,000 --> 00:00:56,000

What do you got?

15

00:00:56,000 --> 00:00:59,000

Whoa, whoa, Josh, we got something up here. Check this out.

16

00:01:01,000 --> 00:01:05,000

From here. Oh, my word, look at that!

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00:01:06,000 --> 00:01:10,000

If this is what we hope it is, it's historic.

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00:01:15,000 --> 00:01:20,000

The Donner Party. The very name conjures terror in those who've heard their story.

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00:01:20,000 --> 00:01:28,000

In 1846, more than 80 souls, men, women and children set out from the Midwest for California's Golden Shores.

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00:01:29,000 --> 00:01:37,000

But a disastrous decision to take a shortcut leaves the emigrants hopelessly snowed into the uncharted Sierra Nevada mountains.

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00:01:37,000 --> 00:01:44,000

And instead of the promised land, the pioneers are led to starvation and the most desperate and gruesome of acts.

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00:01:46,000 --> 00:01:55,000

The tragedy became lurid national news and has been so sensationalized that today, the Donner Party is synonymous with one thing, cannibalism.

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00:01:56,000 --> 00:02:01,000

But what really happened out there in the Western Frontiers' Heart of Darkness?

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00:02:01,000 --> 00:02:09,000

In the 175 years since, a combination of lies and legend has buried the truth behind this real American horror story.

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00:02:09,000 --> 00:02:16,000

Why did the pioneers fatally alter their course? Why were they unable to band together and escape the mountains?

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00:02:16,000 --> 00:02:22,000

And what of the people themselves? Their heroism and largely forgotten rescue effort have been buried.

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00:02:23,000 --> 00:02:33,000

Now, a daring group of extreme athletes and historians are retracing the settler's route in the dead of winter to unlock the secrets of the Donner Party.

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00:02:33,000 --> 00:02:42,000

And they may have uncovered something lost to history, the so-called Camp of Death, where the first instances of cannibalism occurred.

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00:02:42,000 --> 00:02:47,000

Its discovery would be a major find and could produce untold artifacts.

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00:02:47,000 --> 00:02:56,000

My mission is to uncover the real story of the doomed Donner expedition, and it will take us many months and hundreds of miles to do it.

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00:02:56,000 --> 00:03:05,000

So prepare to go west, into the snow, into the mountains, and into the gathering storm of the most terrifying journey in American history.

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00:03:07,000 --> 00:03:09,000

My name is Josh Gates.

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00:03:09,000 --> 00:03:10,000

Hello!

34

00:03:10,000 --> 00:03:11,000

Explorer.

35

00:03:12,000 --> 00:03:13,000

Adventurer.

36

00:03:13,000 --> 00:03:14,000

Amazing.

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00:03:14,000 --> 00:03:15,000

Wow!

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00:03:15,000 --> 00:03:19,000

And a guy who ends up in some very strange situations.

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00:03:19,000 --> 00:03:21,000

That was exciting.

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00:03:21,000 --> 00:03:30,000

With a degree in archaeology and a passion for the unexplained, I travel to the ends of the earth, investigating the greatest legends in history.

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00:03:30,000 --> 00:03:31,000

Now let's punch it.

42

00:03:31,000 --> 00:03:34,000

This is Expedition Unknown.

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00:03:46,000 --> 00:03:50,000

Welcome to the frontier.

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00:03:50,000 --> 00:03:54,000

You know, it hasn't changed much around here since the spring of 1846.

45

00:03:54,000 --> 00:04:05,000

That's when 1600 men, women, and children set out to cross the country in search of pristine land and untold fortune, in a faraway place known as California.

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00:04:06,000 --> 00:04:12,000

At this time, a still young America is comprised of 28 states.

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00:04:12,000 --> 00:04:20,000

Beyond is the untamed wilderness of the west, leading to the coastal territory of Oregon and California, then part of Mexico.

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00:04:20,000 --> 00:04:24,000

There's no transcontinental railroad, no interstate highway system.

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00:04:24,000 --> 00:04:30,000

Settlers face a six-month-long, 2,000-mile journey on foot and by wagon.

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00:04:31,000 --> 00:04:40,000

To stay ahead of deadly winter snowstorms in the west, these pioneers must set off in the spring

just as soon as there's enough grass to feed their livestock.

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00:04:40,000 --> 00:04:47,000

One such group includes the families of James Reed and George Donner, but they get off to a late start.

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00:04:49,000 --> 00:04:53,000

Their group consists of 20 ox-drawn wagons and 87 people.

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00:04:53,000 --> 00:04:59,000

The Donners, George, a farmer, and Jacob, a furniture manufacturer, are originally from North Carolina.

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00:04:59,000 --> 00:05:07,000

Joining them are other families, including those of James Reed, an Irish businessman most recently from Illinois, and William Eddy, a carriage maker.

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00:05:07,000 --> 00:05:10,000

These are not frontier-hardened survivalists.

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00:05:10,000 --> 00:05:18,000

Nevertheless, on May 12, 1846, the party leaves Independence, Missouri, with their sights set on California.

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00:05:18,000 --> 00:05:25,000

The initial leg of the trip across the Great Plains goes smoothly enough, but the train gradually falls further behind schedule.

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00:05:25,000 --> 00:05:29,000

Up ahead, however, there may be a way to make up their lost time.

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00:05:29,000 --> 00:05:33,000

The party, like most of the people moving west, are carrying this.

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00:05:33,000 --> 00:05:41,000

The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California, a how-to pamphlet written by a real estate investor named Lansford Hastings.

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00:05:41,000 --> 00:05:48,000

The guide was his way to lead people toward plots of land in California, where he conveniently has interests.

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00:05:48,000 --> 00:05:54,000

In other words, he's a hustler, and he's devised a shortcut known as the Hastings Cut-Off.

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00:05:54,000 --> 00:06:02,000

It's designed to trim 300 miles from the journey by forging across the Great Salt Lake before rejoining the California Trail.

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00:06:02,000 --> 00:06:04,000

There's just one problem.

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00:06:04,000 --> 00:06:09,000

Prior to 1846, Hastings had never actually tested the route.

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00:06:09,000 --> 00:06:13,000

And that brings us here, near the Little Sandy River in Wyoming.

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00:06:13,000 --> 00:06:17,000

In this very spot, the lagging group is forced to make a choice.

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00:06:17,000 --> 00:06:24,000

If they stay to the right, they maintain their course on the well-trod California Trail, the chosen path of every other group.

69

00:06:24,000 --> 00:06:30,000

But if they bear left, they veer toward the Hastings Cut-Off, which could get them back on schedule.

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00:06:30,000 --> 00:06:32,000

What to do?

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00:06:33,000 --> 00:06:40,000

In need of a party leader, they elect George Donner, who by all accounts is the exact wrong man for the job.

72

00:06:40,000 --> 00:06:44,000

Professional, soft-spoken, gentle and charitable.

73

00:06:44,000 --> 00:06:48,000

Not exactly someone familiar with making choices of life or death.

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00:06:53,000 --> 00:06:57,000

The Donner party steps left and chooses the Hastings Cut-Off.

75

00:06:57,000 --> 00:07:06,000

And while they don't yet know it, this one decision will alter not just the course of their journey, but their very lives as they walk on toward a horrifying destiny.

76

00:07:11,000 --> 00:07:17,000

The supposed shortcut takes them through what is now Utah. It does not go well.

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00:07:17,000 --> 00:07:21,000

Crossing 80 miles of desert takes six grueling days.

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00:07:21,000 --> 00:07:25,000

The wagon wheels sink into the hot salt flats like warm butter.

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00:07:25,000 --> 00:07:28,000

Three days in, their water is gone.

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00:07:28,000 --> 00:07:33,000

36 oxen die, and several of the crippled wagons have to be abandoned.

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00:07:34,000 --> 00:07:40,000

Whatever unity the party had evaporates in the scorching sun. Families turn against each other.

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00:07:40,000 --> 00:07:47,000

In fact, James Reid gets into a heated argument that ends with him stabbing another man to death.

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00:07:47,000 --> 00:07:54,000

But on October 20th, the lead wagons of the Donner party reach the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

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00:07:54,000 --> 00:07:58,000

The desert is behind them, but winter lies ahead.

85

00:07:59,000 --> 00:08:17,000

They forge on into an unseasonably early snow, ascending to 7,000 vertical feet to a high pass that acts as a doorway to California, to a place known as Truckee Lake, where they can rest before the final push.

86

00:08:22,000 --> 00:08:24,000

Welcome to Truckee, California.

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00:08:24,000 --> 00:08:27,000

When the Donner party came through here, there was nothing but wilderness.

88

00:08:27,000 --> 00:08:36,000

Later, this became a frontier trading post, and from the Central Pacific Railroad to historic saloons, echoes of the Old West are everywhere.

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00:08:36,000 --> 00:08:43,000

This place was once infamous for its extreme weather. Today, it's celebrated for its extreme sports.

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00:08:43,000 --> 00:08:49,000

Truckee is the snowiest town in the U.S., getting an average of 168 inches a year.

91

00:08:49,000 --> 00:08:54,000

Athletes flock here to ski and snowboard. As for me, I'm more into biking.

92

00:08:59,000 --> 00:09:01,000

Whoa!

93

00:09:04,000 --> 00:09:07,000

I am riding what is known as a snow bike.

94

00:09:08,000 --> 00:09:14,000

Basically, if a snowmobile and a motorcycle got real drunk one night and made a baby, this would be it.

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00:09:14,000 --> 00:09:21,000

It's fast, it's maneuverable, it's sketchy, which is to say, it's fun.

96

00:09:22,000 --> 00:09:29,000

I'm on this ridiculous contraption to reach an expert on the Donner party at one of the most hallowed places in the Sierras.

97

00:09:29,000 --> 00:09:32,000

That is, if I can stay vertical long enough to get there.

98

00:09:33,000 --> 00:09:35,000

There goes nothing.

99

00:09:38,000 --> 00:09:40,000

Whoa!

100

00:09:40,000 --> 00:09:42,000

The key to that is to get there.

101

00:09:43,000 --> 00:09:49,000

The key to not falling is to just keep moving, which is easier said than done.

102

00:09:50,000 --> 00:09:51,000

Watch out.

103

00:09:53,000 --> 00:09:54,000

Ah, come on!

104

00:10:03,000 --> 00:10:05,000

Ah, come on!

105

00:10:09,000 --> 00:10:11,000

Oh, ow.

106

00:10:13,000 --> 00:10:14,000

Okay.

107

00:10:14,000 --> 00:10:18,000

I think my bones broke the fall, which is good.

108

00:10:18,000 --> 00:10:25,000

I've had a slight hiccup on my search to learn the truth about the infamous Donner party, but I'm not lying down on the job for long.

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00:10:26,000 --> 00:10:28,000

Alright, back to it. Here we go.

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00:10:34,000 --> 00:10:37,000

I'm heading to a place that used to be called Truckee Lake.

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00:10:37,000 --> 00:10:41,000

These days, it's known as Donner Lake, and there's a reason for that.

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00:10:42,000 --> 00:10:47,000

This is where the Donner party camped and ultimately became trapped.

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00:10:47,000 --> 00:10:54,000

After taking their disastrous shortcut, the Donner party eventually rejoins the main route to California.

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00:10:54,000 --> 00:10:58,000

But they've lost their most precious resource, time.

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00:10:58,000 --> 00:11:02,000

When they get here in the Sierra Nevadas, they are nearly a month behind schedule.

116

00:11:02,000 --> 00:11:05,000

Every other pioneering family has a chance to get there.

117

00:11:05,000 --> 00:11:08,000

They're going to be able to get there by the end of the year.

118

00:11:08,000 --> 00:11:11,000

And they're going to be able to get there by the end of the year.

119

00:11:11,000 --> 00:11:15,000

When they get here in the Sierra Nevadas, they are nearly a month behind schedule.

120

00:11:15,000 --> 00:11:19,000

Every other pioneering family headed to the West Coast has already come and gone.

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00:11:19,000 --> 00:11:26,000

The Donner party attempts to follow them high into the mountains, but a massive snowstorm stops them in their tracks.

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00:11:28,000 --> 00:11:34,000

To discover more about what happened here, I'm meeting historian Frank Mullen at a memorial plaque to the Donner party.

123

00:11:34,000 --> 00:11:36,000

Josh, how are you, man?

124

00:11:36,000 --> 00:11:37,000

Good, nice to meet you.

125

00:11:37,000 --> 00:11:39,000

Hey, nice to meet you too.

126

00:11:39,000 --> 00:11:42,000

Frank is a journalist and the author of the Donner party Chronicles.

127

00:11:42,000 --> 00:11:45,000

He has spent 30 years studying what happened here.

128

00:11:45,000 --> 00:11:48,000

They've got to get through this pass at the end of the lake, right?

129

00:11:48,000 --> 00:11:50,000

What's today known as Donner Pass?

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00:11:50,000 --> 00:11:57,000

Right. They made it within a few miles of the summit, but then a storm hit and they were pushed back here to the lake.

131

00:11:57,000 --> 00:12:01,000

If it had been another year, even if they'd been as late as they were, they might have been able to do it.

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00:12:01,000 --> 00:12:05,000

They just happened to do this in a year where the weather was really lousy.

133

00:12:05,000 --> 00:12:06,000

And early.

134

00:12:08,000 --> 00:12:16,000

The winter of 1846 in the Sierras was beset by a series of hundred year storms that rolled in one after another,

135

00:12:16,000 --> 00:12:22,000

dropping over 10 feet of snow by mid-November and another five feet by December 1st.

136

00:12:22,000 --> 00:12:24,000

They're not really a unified group anymore, right?

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00:12:24,000 --> 00:12:30,000

That's right. By the time the Donner party members reach Donner Lake, they are not talking to each other.

138

00:12:31,000 --> 00:12:37,000

Bitter and frustrated by their condition, the emigrants break off into different camps, most near the lake.

139

00:12:37,000 --> 00:12:43,000

The two Donner families make camps six miles away in a sheltered nook along Alder Creek.

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00:12:43,000 --> 00:12:45,000

What's left? What are they eating? Are they hunting?

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00:12:45,000 --> 00:12:50,000

There was no hunting here. The William Eddy had gotten his rifle, he shot an owl, he shot a squirrel,

142

00:12:50,000 --> 00:12:56,000

shot a fox, killed a bear, finally. But that didn't last all that long with giving the amount of people.

143

00:12:56,000 --> 00:13:02,000

When anyone mentions the Donner party, within a breath, they say cannibalism, right?

144

00:13:02,000 --> 00:13:04,000

I mean, this is forever linked.

145

00:13:04,000 --> 00:13:09,000

Yes, they are. We are repelled and also attracted, like a Dracula movie.

146

00:13:09,000 --> 00:13:17,000

What really shocked me in doing research about this story is that this whole ordeal that unfolds up here at the lake for months on end,

147

00:13:17,000 --> 00:13:19,000

there is no cannibalism. Not initially, right?

148

00:13:19,000 --> 00:13:20,000

Not initially, no.

149

00:13:20,000 --> 00:13:23,000

They are doing everything they can to avoid cannibalism.

150

00:13:23,000 --> 00:13:29,000

Yes, they are. They started scraping the bottles of the barrels, they started boiling the leather covers of books,

151

00:13:29,000 --> 00:13:32,000

and they're moccasins to soften them up to try to eat them.

152

00:13:32,000 --> 00:13:33,000

To literally eat their shoes.

153

00:13:33,000 --> 00:13:36,000

And their shoelaces sort of fry them like potato sticks.

154

00:13:36,000 --> 00:13:37,000

Wow.

155

00:13:37,000 --> 00:13:44,000

We have a Donner party plaque here with a list of those who perished and those who survived. Why is this plaque right here?

156

00:13:44,000 --> 00:13:52,000

This is the fourth wall of one of the cabins of the Donner party who were here during the terrible winter of 1846-47.

157

00:13:52,000 --> 00:13:53,000

Right here.

158

00:13:53,000 --> 00:13:55,000

Right here was one of the cabins, yes.

159

00:13:55,000 --> 00:13:57,000

How many people were living in this cabin?

160

00:13:57,000 --> 00:14:00,000

16 people living in this cabin, most of them children.

161

00:14:00,000 --> 00:14:02,000

And did any of them die here?

162

00:14:02,000 --> 00:14:05,000

Seven of them died in this cabin.

163

00:14:05,000 --> 00:14:09,000

Right where we're standing. So this is hallowed ground in a sense.

164

00:14:09,000 --> 00:14:15,000

This is the exact spot where people suffered for months where people died, where babies died.

165

00:14:15,000 --> 00:14:16,000

Yeah.

166

00:14:17,000 --> 00:14:21,000

So when does the cannibalism begin? Where does it start?

167

00:14:21,000 --> 00:14:25,000

The cannibalism begins with the escape group called the Forlorn Hope.

168

00:14:27,000 --> 00:14:37,000

Six weeks after becoming trapped at Truckee Lake, a small group of some of the strongest emigrants

strap on homemade snowshoes and set out in a last-ditch effort to find help.

169

00:14:37,000 --> 00:14:41,000

The escape group, as Frank calls them, came to be known as the Forlorn Hope.

170

00:14:41,000 --> 00:14:44,000

Why aren't the Donner brothers part of this group?

171

00:14:44,000 --> 00:14:52,000

George Donner is suffering from gangrene, injured his left hand, fixing his wagon on the way up prior to the lake.

172

00:14:52,000 --> 00:14:58,000

And Jacob Donner has given up. He's in bed and he's not getting up and nobody can tell him otherwise.

173

00:14:58,000 --> 00:14:59,000

So what happens to them?

174

00:14:59,000 --> 00:15:07,000

First couple days they went out, they got to the base of the pass and then up and over it and then

they were sucked in after they lost their guide.

175

00:15:07,000 --> 00:15:12,000

Charles Stanton went snow blind and he stumbled into camp in the next morning.

176

00:15:12,000 --> 00:15:14,000

When they were leaving he was sitting on a stump.

177

00:15:14,000 --> 00:15:16,000

Mary Graves said, are you coming Mr. Stanton?

178

00:15:16,000 --> 00:15:23,000

And his eyes were pretty much swollen shut and he was smoking his pipe on the log and he said, I'll be along presently, Mary.

179

00:15:23,000 --> 00:15:27,000

And they went ahead. He never showed up. The rescuers would find his bones in the spring.

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00:15:27,000 --> 00:15:31,000

Without Stanton to guide them, the group becomes hopelessly lost.

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00:15:31,000 --> 00:15:35,000

Their meager food runs out and a blizzard catches them in the open.

182

00:15:35,000 --> 00:15:39,000

They're pinned down in a makeshift tent for five days.

183

00:15:39,000 --> 00:15:43,000

When the storm finally passes, two other men are dead.

184

00:15:43,000 --> 00:15:49,000

Facing certain death, the survivors tearfully resort to the ultimate taboo, cannibalism.

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00:15:49,000 --> 00:15:54,000

So many people say immediately, how could they have done that?

186

00:15:54,000 --> 00:15:57,000

I would never have done that. I could never engage in cannibalism.

187

00:15:57,000 --> 00:16:01,000

But in some ways it's easy to say that, not having been here.

188

00:16:01,000 --> 00:16:11,000

Right. It's very easy to say that when you're not in a position of choosing between death or eating the food that is forbidden food, but it's right in front of you.

189

00:16:12,000 --> 00:16:17,000

The place where it happened has never been found, a spot known as the Camp of Death.

190

00:16:17,000 --> 00:16:23,000

And for many people who have heard about the Donner Party, this is kind of the end of the story as they know it.

191

00:16:23,000 --> 00:16:26,000

A tale of disaster and cannibalism.

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00:16:26,000 --> 00:16:32,000

The terrible choice that the settlers made at the Camp of Death gave them enough strength to push forward.

193

00:16:32,000 --> 00:16:38,000

And helped ensure that some of the so-called escape party managed to do just that.

194

00:16:38,000 --> 00:16:46,000

And of those 15 people that set out in the Forlorn Hope Party, how many of them ultimately survive and walk to safety?

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00:16:46,000 --> 00:16:53,000

Of the 15 snowshoers, all five women and just two of the 10 men survived a 33-day trip out of the Sierra.

196

00:16:53,000 --> 00:16:54,000

Right.

197

00:16:55,000 --> 00:17:01,000

These survivors made their way down the western slopes of the mountains to find something they had nearly given up on.

198

00:17:01,000 --> 00:17:02,000

Rescue.

199

00:17:02,000 --> 00:17:06,000

And for years, historians wondered exactly where it happened.

200

00:17:10,000 --> 00:17:21,000

I leave Frank and the snow behind and drive west, descending more than 6,000 feet in elevation to follow the Pioneer's Trail in hopes of discovering where it leads.

201

00:17:21,000 --> 00:17:30,000

The 15 members of the Donner Party known as the Forlorn Hope, who tried to escape out of the mountains, figured it would take about a week for them to find rescue.

202

00:17:30,000 --> 00:17:37,000

33 days later, only seven of them managed to limp into the first outpost of civilization known as Johnson Ranch.

203

00:17:37,000 --> 00:17:44,000

It's an incredibly important part of this story, and yet for years its very location was lost to history.

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00:17:44,000 --> 00:17:51,000

For as famous a story as the Donner Party, nearly no archaeological evidence of their harrowing journey has been found.

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00:17:51,000 --> 00:17:56,000

Johnson Ranch could change that, since it's one of the only places we know they set foot.

206

00:17:58,000 --> 00:18:03,000

And since this is an extreme story, it requires extreme researchers.

207

00:18:03,000 --> 00:18:08,000

If there's anyone who might know exactly where the ranch was, it's Bob Crowley and Tim Tweetmeyer.

208

00:18:08,000 --> 00:18:12,000

The two of you are, I say this as a compliment, oddities.

209

00:18:12,000 --> 00:18:16,000

You are historians and you are ultramarathoners. They don't make a lot of those.

210

00:18:16,000 --> 00:18:18,000

Can you brag on Tim's behalf?

211

00:18:18,000 --> 00:18:25,000

Yeah, so one of the most famous ultramarathons here in America is the Western States 100-mile endurance run.

212

00:18:25,000 --> 00:18:26,000

A 100-mile run?

213

00:18:26,000 --> 00:18:32,000

Tim is a 25-time, under-24-hour finisher, 5-time winner.

214

00:18:32,000 --> 00:18:37,000

If there is a Michael Jordan of our sport, that's the guy right there.

215

00:18:37,000 --> 00:18:38,000

That's incredible.

216

00:18:38,000 --> 00:18:42,000

Is this sport what led you to your interest in the Donner Party as historians?

217

00:18:42,000 --> 00:18:51,000

It is. When you need to do field research, when you want to check a route, we can go into places on foot that most people wouldn't want to go or can't go.

218

00:18:51,000 --> 00:19:05,000

These two have been obsessively researching Donner Party history, culminating in December of 2020, when they used their skills and historical knowledge to undertake a week-long trek in deep snow and sub-zero temperatures.

219

00:19:05,000 --> 00:19:12,000

Along the route they believe was taken by Forlorn Hope, a route they think led here.

220

00:19:12,000 --> 00:19:18,000

And the first person to make it here from the Donner Group is William Eddy, right?

221

00:19:18,000 --> 00:19:20,000

The only one to make it there here.

222

00:19:20,000 --> 00:19:28,000

Eddy actually was found a short distance from the ranch by Native Americans, who brought him the rest of the way to the Adobe Ranch House.

223

00:19:28,000 --> 00:19:37,000

And the young gal there, 16 years old, greeted them at the door, the shadow of a man, and she cried, she wept, she was scared, looked like a ghost.

224

00:19:37,000 --> 00:19:42,000

The other survivors of Forlorn Hope were quickly found and brought back to the ranch.

225

00:19:42,000 --> 00:19:48,000

If Bob and Tim are right, and this is that long-lost site, it would be nothing short of historic.

226

00:19:48,000 --> 00:19:57,000

This story, the Forlorn Hope story, and Johnson Ranch, are pristine in terms of the opportunity for both discovering the story but also artifacts.

227

00:19:57,000 --> 00:19:59,000

All right, should we see what's under our feet?

228

00:19:59,000 --> 00:20:01,000

Yeah, let's go see if we can find it. I got someone I need you to meet.

229

00:20:01,000 --> 00:20:03,000

Okay, please lead on. Let's go.

230

00:20:05,000 --> 00:20:12,000

For the past few years, Bob and Tim have been working with a local historian who has managed to secure rare access to search this land.

231

00:20:12,000 --> 00:20:15,000

They bring me to meet Bill Holmes. Bill, how are you?

232

00:20:15,000 --> 00:20:16,000

Great, how are you?

233

00:20:16,000 --> 00:20:19,000

Nice to meet you. I see metal detectors and I see shovels.

234

00:20:19,000 --> 00:20:20,000

Right.

235

00:20:20,000 --> 00:20:21,000

It's a good sign.

236

00:20:21,000 --> 00:20:22,000

It is.

237

00:20:22,000 --> 00:20:26,000

You know, we look around here today, we see rolling fields. So where do we start swinging these metal detectors?

238

00:20:26,000 --> 00:20:28,000

I have a great place for you to go.

239

00:20:28,000 --> 00:20:41,000

Bill reveals the results of an aerial LIDAR survey, which has turned up what historians believe may be the foundation of the original Johnson Adobe, the mud structure where all the survivors were brought.

240

00:20:41,000 --> 00:20:48,000

If so, it would be one of the only locations in the entire Donner Party story to have been geographically pinpointed.

241

00:20:48,000 --> 00:20:52,000

This is it. This is it. Okay, shows up great on LIDAR.

242

00:20:52,000 --> 00:21:00,000

Right. So you can see though, there is clearly a rise. There is a feature here that goes back here. And then does it turn?

243

00:21:00,000 --> 00:21:02,000

Yeah, let's see what's in here.

244

00:21:05,000 --> 00:21:08,000

We start metal detecting in and around the footprint of the anomaly.

245

00:21:12,000 --> 00:21:13,000

Right here.

246

00:21:14,000 --> 00:21:16,000

And are quickly rewarded.

247

00:21:16,000 --> 00:21:17,000

Right in here, looks like.

248

00:21:18,000 --> 00:21:19,000

That's tough ground.

249

00:21:19,000 --> 00:21:24,000

This dried clay is hard to cut into. So we're doing more scraping than digging.

250

00:21:28,000 --> 00:21:30,000

But in no time, the hard work pays off.

251

00:21:30,000 --> 00:21:33,000

All right, looks like we got a half of a horseshoe.

252

00:21:33,000 --> 00:21:34,000

Look at that.

253

00:21:35,000 --> 00:21:36,000

That is awesome.

254

00:21:36,000 --> 00:21:38,000

Horse or a mule, look at that.

255

00:21:38,000 --> 00:21:41,000

Yeah, like how worn down the back of that shoe is.

256

00:21:42,000 --> 00:21:43,000

Look at that.

257

00:21:43,000 --> 00:21:45,000

That's 2,000 miles on that baby.

258

00:21:45,000 --> 00:21:46,000

That's right. How about that?

259

00:21:46,000 --> 00:21:48,000

Think about where this went.

260

00:21:49,000 --> 00:21:51,000

And it's still lucky if it's only half a horseshoe.

261

00:21:51,000 --> 00:21:53,000

Let's see if we can find the other half.

262

00:21:53,000 --> 00:21:54,000

Exactly.

263

00:21:57,000 --> 00:22:00,000

It turns out our half a horseshoe is lucky.

264

00:22:00,000 --> 00:22:02,000

At least our metal detectors seem to think so.

265

00:22:04,000 --> 00:22:06,000

Hey guys, guys.

266

00:22:06,000 --> 00:22:07,000

What do you got?

267

00:22:07,000 --> 00:22:10,000

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Josh, we got something up here. Check this out.

268

00:22:11,000 --> 00:22:13,000

Huge piece. Look at this.

269

00:22:18,000 --> 00:22:19,000

Wow.

270

00:22:21,000 --> 00:22:22,000

That's the edge of a plate.

271

00:22:22,000 --> 00:22:26,000

I'm with a team of researchers looking for the lost ruins of Johnson Ranch,

272

00:22:26,000 --> 00:22:30,000

a pioneer-era homestead reached by the survivors of the doomed Donner Party.

273

00:22:34,000 --> 00:22:35,000

Here.

274

00:22:38,000 --> 00:22:39,000

Wow, look at that.

275

00:22:39,000 --> 00:22:40,000

That's a lot of wood.

276

00:22:40,000 --> 00:22:41,000

That's a lot of wood.

277

00:22:41,000 --> 00:22:42,000

That's a lot of wood.

278

00:22:42,000 --> 00:22:43,000

That's a lot of wood.

279

00:22:43,000 --> 00:22:44,000

That's a lot of wood.

280

00:22:44,000 --> 00:22:45,000

That's a lot of wood.

281

00:22:45,000 --> 00:22:46,000

That's a lot of wood.

282

00:22:47,000 --> 00:22:48,000

Wow, look at that.

283

00:22:48,000 --> 00:22:50,000

That's incredible.

284

00:22:50,000 --> 00:22:53,000

Flathead nail and then this very cool piece of pottery.

285

00:22:53,000 --> 00:22:55,000

We can see the edge of a pattern there too.

286

00:22:55,000 --> 00:22:59,000

We dig around the pottery and quickly find more fragments and more pottery.

287

00:22:59,000 --> 00:23:00,000

Look at this.

288

00:23:00,000 --> 00:23:02,000

Oh, there's more. See, that's actually more.

289

00:23:02,000 --> 00:23:03,000

Look at that.

290

00:23:03,000 --> 00:23:06,000

Wow, there is just pottery everywhere you look here.

291

00:23:06,000 --> 00:23:08,000

That's the edge of a plate right there.

292

00:23:08,000 --> 00:23:09,000

Sure looks like it.

293

00:23:09,000 --> 00:23:10,000

Yeah.

294

00:23:10,000 --> 00:23:12,000

So this Adobe was in use between what years primarily?

295

00:23:12,000 --> 00:23:14,000

1844, 1854.

296

00:23:15,000 --> 00:23:16,000

So just that 10-year period.

297

00:23:16,000 --> 00:23:17,000

Yeah.

298

00:23:17,000 --> 00:23:19,000

If this is something that was used here in the Adobe,

299

00:23:19,000 --> 00:23:21,000

we're right in that time period.

300

00:23:21,000 --> 00:23:27,000

The Lidar scan, research and physical artifacts in this field are all but conclusive.

301

00:23:27,000 --> 00:23:29,000

We are in the middle of history here.

302

00:23:29,000 --> 00:23:31,000

This is Johnson Ranch.

303

00:23:31,000 --> 00:23:36,000

Every single one of the Forlorn Hope survivors, all seven, they slept here.

304

00:23:36,000 --> 00:23:37,000

Slept where we're standing.

305

00:23:37,000 --> 00:23:40,000

They were all reunited after being saved.

306

00:23:40,000 --> 00:23:42,000

This is the place they were reunited.

307

00:23:42,000 --> 00:23:47,000

This is one of those parts of the story that is kind of lost the time.

308

00:23:47,000 --> 00:23:48,000

It really is.

309

00:23:48,000 --> 00:23:49,000

Until now.

310

00:23:49,000 --> 00:23:50,000

Until now.

311

00:23:52,000 --> 00:23:55,000

It's humbling enough to stand in the footsteps of the Donner Party.

312

00:23:55,000 --> 00:23:59,000

But then I remember this is where their rescuers stood as well.

313

00:23:59,000 --> 00:24:01,000

Let's talk about the relief parties.

314

00:24:01,000 --> 00:24:05,000

When most people think of the Donner Party, they think of the doomed expedition,

315

00:24:05,000 --> 00:24:06,000

the people trapped up at the lake.

316

00:24:06,000 --> 00:24:11,000

There's a whole other chapter to the Donner Party story people have never heard.

317

00:24:11,000 --> 00:24:12,000

That's right.

318

00:24:12,000 --> 00:24:14,000

It's a story of survival.

319

00:24:14,000 --> 00:24:17,000

The human instinct to survive is remarkable.

320

00:24:17,000 --> 00:24:21,000

When those first survivors limped into Johnson Ranch, it became nationwide news.

321

00:24:21,000 --> 00:24:25,000

But most of the Donner Party were still trapped back at Truckee Lake.

322

00:24:25,000 --> 00:24:29,000

And that meant people were going to have to go and get them.

323

00:24:29,000 --> 00:24:31,000

And these are people that volunteered.

324

00:24:31,000 --> 00:24:32,000

They didn't get lost.

325

00:24:32,000 --> 00:24:35,000

They didn't get stuck in snow.

326

00:24:35,000 --> 00:24:37,000

They found out people were stuck in snow.

327

00:24:37,000 --> 00:24:39,000

They're fellow immigrants and they volunteered.

328

00:24:39,000 --> 00:24:41,000

How many people went up to try to save them?

329

00:24:41,000 --> 00:24:42,000

Total.

330

00:24:42,000 --> 00:24:43,000

Like total, close to 40.

331

00:24:43,000 --> 00:24:48,000

And there were several men that volunteered to not go just once, but several times.

332

00:24:48,000 --> 00:24:54,000

The rescuers who set out to save the stranded immigrants were the kind of heroes that history rarely remembers.

333

00:24:54,000 --> 00:24:56,000

In this case, literally.

334

00:24:56,000 --> 00:25:02,000

The actual route that they took to reach the Donner Party at Truckee Lake is totally unknown.

335

00:25:02,000 --> 00:25:05,000

Bob and Tim are aiming to do something about that.

336

00:25:05,000 --> 00:25:06,000

Something big.

337

00:25:06,000 --> 00:25:09,000

Your hat says Donner Relief Expedition 2022.

338

00:25:09,000 --> 00:25:11,000

What are you guys doing?

339

00:25:11,000 --> 00:25:12,000

What are you planning?

340

00:25:12,000 --> 00:25:16,000

We're going to retrace the steps of the first relief from right here in Johnson Ranch to Donner Lake.

341

00:25:16,000 --> 00:25:21,000

And we are going to arrive at Donner Lake 175 years after the first relief arrived.

342

00:25:21,000 --> 00:25:22,000

To the day?

343

00:25:22,000 --> 00:25:23,000

To the day.

344

00:25:23,000 --> 00:25:27,000

Using years of research, diaries from the survivors and their considerable outdoor skills,

345

00:25:27,000 --> 00:25:33,000

they have charted the most likely course that the original relief expedition took to rescue the Donner Party.

346

00:25:33,000 --> 00:25:35,000

The distance you're going to cover is?

347

00:25:35,000 --> 00:25:36,000

About 100 miles.

348

00:25:36,000 --> 00:25:39,000

On foot, back up into those mountains.

349

00:25:39,000 --> 00:25:40,000

I don't know if you know this or not.

350

00:25:40,000 --> 00:25:41,000

It's not warm up there.

351

00:25:41,000 --> 00:25:43,000

It's harder this way.

352

00:25:43,000 --> 00:25:44,000

This is going to take you how long?

353

00:25:44,000 --> 00:25:46,000

It's going to take us five days.

354

00:25:46,000 --> 00:25:52,000

Their effort is the culmination of years of planning and will be tracked by satellites as they go.

355

00:25:52,000 --> 00:25:58,000

I'd love to join them, but my camera team and I stand a 0% chance of keeping their pace.

356

00:25:58,000 --> 00:26:00,000

Still, I'm not getting out of it that easy.

357

00:26:00,000 --> 00:26:02,000

Why don't you meet us somewhere along the way?

358

00:26:02,000 --> 00:26:06,000

Okay, we can intersect with your group at the finish line with hot chocolates.

359

00:26:06,000 --> 00:26:07,000

I could just be lounging there.

360

00:26:07,000 --> 00:26:08,000

I don't think so.

361

00:26:08,000 --> 00:26:09,000

That's a little too easy.

362

00:26:09,000 --> 00:26:10,000

Too easy?

363

00:26:10,000 --> 00:26:11,000

Yeah, you have to see a little bit of the terrain.

364

00:26:11,000 --> 00:26:12,000

All right.

365

00:26:12,000 --> 00:26:13,000

How about Donner Pass?

366

00:26:13,000 --> 00:26:14,000

You have snowshoes?

367

00:26:14,000 --> 00:26:15,000

Yeah, I can get them.

368

00:26:15,000 --> 00:26:16,000

Bring them with you.

369

00:26:16,000 --> 00:26:17,000

I'll be there.

370

00:26:17,000 --> 00:26:31,000

All right.

371

00:26:31,000 --> 00:26:37,000

I'm chasing down Bob and his expedition team as they attempt to retrace the Donner Party relief route.

372

00:26:37,000 --> 00:26:40,000

Now, we've been tracking them on GPS.

373

00:26:40,000 --> 00:26:46,000

And in the last three and a half days, they have covered unbelievably more than 80 miles on foot.

374

00:26:46,000 --> 00:26:48,000

These guys are animals.

375

00:26:48,000 --> 00:26:56,000

So I got some serious catching up to do.

376

00:26:56,000 --> 00:27:01,000

I hop off the bike at the closest point I can get to the team and head out to meet them on foot.

377

00:27:01,000 --> 00:27:02,000

Hey!

378

00:27:02,000 --> 00:27:04,000

Lucky for me, they agree to stop for a moment.

379

00:27:04,000 --> 00:27:05,000

How are you, man?

380

00:27:05,000 --> 00:27:06,000

Good to see you.

381

00:27:06,000 --> 00:27:12,000

Along with Tim and Bob are team members and experienced endurance athletes Jennifer Heman and Elkie Reimer.

382

00:27:12,000 --> 00:27:15,000

I am so impressed and amazed to see all of you.

383

00:27:15,000 --> 00:27:18,000

I mean, last time I saw you was nearly 100 miles ago.

384

00:27:18,000 --> 00:27:19,000

That's right.

385

00:27:19,000 --> 00:27:20,000

Back in Johnson Ranch.

386

00:27:20,000 --> 00:27:23,000

We're 93 miles into the 100-mile trek now.

387

00:27:23,000 --> 00:27:24,000

You're animals.

388

00:27:24,000 --> 00:27:25,000

All of you.

389

00:27:25,000 --> 00:27:26,000

Mind if I tag along with you?

390

00:27:26,000 --> 00:27:27,000

It'd be great.

391

00:27:27,000 --> 00:27:28,000

It'd be great.

392

00:27:28,000 --> 00:27:29,000

Yeah.

393

00:27:29,000 --> 00:27:30,000

Where are we headed?

394

00:27:30,000 --> 00:27:31,000

Towards the Donner Party.

395

00:27:31,000 --> 00:27:32,000

That way.

396

00:27:32,000 --> 00:27:33,000

I'm right behind you.

397

00:27:33,000 --> 00:27:34,000

Let's go.

398

00:27:34,000 --> 00:27:38,000

Just me and four of the most well-trained athletes in the world.

399

00:27:38,000 --> 00:27:42,000

Now I know how Ringo Star fell.

400

00:27:42,000 --> 00:27:43,000

Okay.

401

00:27:43,000 --> 00:27:44,000

How about a break?

402

00:27:44,000 --> 00:27:45,000

No.

403

00:27:45,000 --> 00:27:47,000

You're doing great.

404

00:27:47,000 --> 00:27:48,000

Thanks.

405

00:27:48,000 --> 00:27:52,000

Good job.

406

00:27:52,000 --> 00:27:57,000

The weather is on our side, but trekking in these conditions is slow going.

407

00:27:57,000 --> 00:28:01,000

We're following a trail that hasn't existed in nearly two centuries.

408

00:28:01,000 --> 00:28:05,000

Fortunately, it's late in the day, which means we do get to rest.

409

00:28:05,000 --> 00:28:08,000

What do you guys think?

410

00:28:08,000 --> 00:28:09,000

For camp, yeah?

411

00:28:09,000 --> 00:28:11,000

It's a nice little divot.

412

00:28:11,000 --> 00:28:13,000

All right, we got, we got flat ground.

413

00:28:13,000 --> 00:28:14,000

Let's take it.

414

00:28:14,000 --> 00:28:16,000

We make camp for the night.

415

00:28:16,000 --> 00:28:19,000

Thankfully, we've got much better equipment than the Donners.

416

00:28:19,000 --> 00:28:22,000

That is, if we can figure out how to set it up.

417

00:28:22,000 --> 00:28:23,000

Nope.

418

00:28:23,000 --> 00:28:26,000

What's this like crazy knot going into this like sheared section?

419

00:28:26,000 --> 00:28:29,000

It's an open letter to tent manufacturers.

420

00:28:29,000 --> 00:28:30,000

Stop innovating.

421

00:28:30,000 --> 00:28:32,000

Just crossed poles.

422

00:28:32,000 --> 00:28:33,000

Nope.

423

00:28:33,000 --> 00:28:34,000

Nobody asked for this.

424

00:28:34,000 --> 00:28:36,000

Nobody asked for this.

425

00:28:36,000 --> 00:28:37,000

What do you think guys?

426

00:28:37,000 --> 00:28:39,000

We're going to make sunrise or?

427

00:28:43,000 --> 00:28:49,000

Once we've built camp, it's time to get warm.

428

00:28:49,000 --> 00:28:54,000

So we gather around a fire just as the rescuers did near this very spot.

429

00:28:54,000 --> 00:28:59,000

It's hard not to imagine sitting here by this fire.

430

00:28:59,000 --> 00:29:04,000

What it must have been like 175 years ago for that relief party.

431

00:29:04,000 --> 00:29:08,000

So what did they find when they arrived at Donner Lake?

432

00:29:08,000 --> 00:29:09,000

Nothing.

433

00:29:09,000 --> 00:29:10,000

Nothing.

434

00:29:10,000 --> 00:29:12,000

They arrived at the cabins and everybody's inside hunkered down.

435

00:29:12,000 --> 00:29:14,000

I think everyone there had given up hope.

436

00:29:14,000 --> 00:29:16,000

They probably watched the past for weeks.

437

00:29:16,000 --> 00:29:18,000

When are they going to come get us?

438

00:29:18,000 --> 00:29:21,000

By the time the first rescuers arrived at the lake,

439

00:29:21,000 --> 00:29:24,000

the Donner party had been trapped there for over 12 weeks.

440

00:29:24,000 --> 00:29:29,000

In fact, by this time, the shelters of the lake were all but invisible.

441

00:29:29,000 --> 00:29:33,000

One of the women comes up out of the ground because they were all underground,

442

00:29:33,000 --> 00:29:37,000

buried in snow, their shelters looks up and says,

443

00:29:37,000 --> 00:29:41,000

are you men from California or were you sent here from heaven?

444

00:29:41,000 --> 00:29:42,000

Right.

445

00:29:42,000 --> 00:29:44,000

Like they didn't even really have a grip on reality.

446

00:29:44,000 --> 00:29:46,000

Are we living or did we just die?

447

00:29:46,000 --> 00:29:48,000

And this relief party is also in a terrible position here

448

00:29:48,000 --> 00:29:51,000

because they can't bring everybody out, right?

449

00:29:51,000 --> 00:29:53,000

They say we don't have food and they say,

450

00:29:53,000 --> 00:29:56,000

why have you come to save us only to kill us?

451

00:29:56,000 --> 00:30:02,000

13 people have already died and the remaining 54 are starving and desperate.

452

00:30:02,000 --> 00:30:06,000

Still, there are only enough supplies to bring 23 of them back to civilization.

453

00:30:06,000 --> 00:30:09,000

The rest will have to stay behind.

454

00:30:09,000 --> 00:30:13,000

The second relief party organized immediately after the first arrives 10 days later

455

00:30:13,000 --> 00:30:18,000

and discovers a horrific scene

456

00:30:18,000 --> 00:30:21,000

called by one an unholy feast.

457

00:30:21,000 --> 00:30:24,000

Four human bodies are in the process of being consumed.

458

00:30:24,000 --> 00:30:27,000

The remaining survivors have made the same unthinkable decision

459

00:30:27,000 --> 00:30:30,000

as those of the Forlorn Hope.

460

00:30:30,000 --> 00:30:35,000

Jacob Donner himself has died and is consumed by his family to extend their own lives.

461

00:30:36,000 --> 00:30:40,000

The second rescue party will bring 17 more survivors,

462

00:30:40,000 --> 00:30:43,000

mostly children, back to Johnson Ranch.

463

00:30:43,000 --> 00:30:48,000

In all, four rescue parties would make it to Truckee Lake.

464

00:30:48,000 --> 00:30:51,000

I have to say I can sense that all of you feel a real connection

465

00:30:51,000 --> 00:30:54,000

to the members of this relief party at this point.

466

00:30:54,000 --> 00:30:58,000

What we didn't anticipate is becoming fixated on the characters,

467

00:30:58,000 --> 00:31:00,000

which are so interesting.

468

00:31:00,000 --> 00:31:04,000

And one of the ways that helps us remind ourselves who they are

469

00:31:04,000 --> 00:31:09,000

as people is we make up little tribute cards with their picture on the front.

470

00:31:09,000 --> 00:31:12,000

This is a card, for instance, of John Stark.

471

00:31:12,000 --> 00:31:16,000

And we'll lay John Stark and 47 other cards like this

472

00:31:16,000 --> 00:31:20,000

at the Donner Memorial State Park tomorrow at the Pioneer Monument.

473

00:31:20,000 --> 00:31:22,000

Wow. Can I see one?

474

00:31:22,000 --> 00:31:24,000

Wow, this is something.

475

00:31:24,000 --> 00:31:26,000

So this is John Stark.

476

00:31:27,000 --> 00:31:30,000

John Stark was part of the third relief party.

477

00:31:30,000 --> 00:31:34,000

On their way out, Stark and the other rescuers came across a group of 11

478

00:31:34,000 --> 00:31:37,000

stranded in the snow, clinging to life.

479

00:31:37,000 --> 00:31:42,000

The rescuers took a vote and initially decided they could only save two.

480

00:31:42,000 --> 00:31:46,000

John Stark pulled nine children out of that hole,

481

00:31:46,000 --> 00:31:48,000

and he'd put them on his back.

482

00:31:48,000 --> 00:31:50,000

He'd carry them 100 yards.

483

00:31:50,000 --> 00:31:53,000

He'd go back and get the next three children,

484

00:31:53,000 --> 00:31:56,000

carry them 100 yards and set them in the snow,

485

00:31:56,000 --> 00:31:58,000

and then do it over and over again.

486

00:31:58,000 --> 00:32:01,000

He did that for three days without any help at all.

487

00:32:01,000 --> 00:32:05,000

And he said, I would have put all nine of them on my back if I had room.

488

00:32:05,000 --> 00:32:10,000

And when asked why did he do it, he said, because it's the right thing to do.

489

00:32:12,000 --> 00:32:15,000

Yeah, there's just something almost superhuman about the commitment

490

00:32:15,000 --> 00:32:17,000

that these people had to this cause.

491

00:32:17,000 --> 00:32:18,000

To heroism.

492

00:32:18,000 --> 00:32:19,000

To heroism.

493

00:32:19,000 --> 00:32:20,000

To heroism.

494

00:32:21,000 --> 00:32:22,000

Cheers.

495

00:32:22,000 --> 00:32:23,000

Cheers.

496

00:32:29,000 --> 00:32:31,000

All right, should we get to it?

497

00:32:31,000 --> 00:32:32,000

Let's do it.

498

00:32:32,000 --> 00:32:33,000

Here we go. Come on.

499

00:32:33,000 --> 00:32:37,000

We awaken the next morning, February 18th, 2022,

500

00:32:37,000 --> 00:32:43,000

175 years to the day that the first relief party reached Donner Summit.

501

00:32:48,000 --> 00:32:52,000

To honor the survivors and the rescuers and to bring history to life,

502

00:32:52,000 --> 00:32:57,000

the expedition team opts to dress in period clothing for the final leg of the journey.

503

00:32:59,000 --> 00:33:01,000

Through Donner Pass.

504

00:33:01,000 --> 00:33:04,000

We have only six miles to cover today.

505

00:33:06,000 --> 00:33:09,000

At the end of the trail is history.

506

00:33:10,000 --> 00:33:12,000

Look at that view. Wow.

507

00:33:18,000 --> 00:33:21,000

This location is one of the most famous places on earth.

508

00:33:21,000 --> 00:33:24,000

I'm in the Sierra Mountains, part of an expedition team

509

00:33:24,000 --> 00:33:28,000

retracing the first rescue effort to reach the infamous Donner Party.

510

00:33:31,000 --> 00:33:34,000

And you know, it's kind of eerie in a way,

511

00:33:34,000 --> 00:33:39,000

but they would have stood right here where we are on this very day, right?

512

00:33:39,000 --> 00:33:43,000

The precise spot, 175 years ago today.

513

00:33:43,000 --> 00:33:44,000

How about that?

514

00:33:44,000 --> 00:33:47,000

The only difference is that when the rescue party was here,

515

00:33:47,000 --> 00:33:52,000

there was 25 more feet of snow in what is now known as Donner Pass.

516

00:33:55,000 --> 00:33:57,000

You know, this pass is such a funnel,

517

00:33:57,000 --> 00:34:01,000

not just the relief party, but think about over the centuries,

518

00:34:01,000 --> 00:34:05,000

all of the people who came through here, all the footsteps that we're walking in right now.

519

00:34:05,000 --> 00:34:07,000

This very pass, not a very big one,

520

00:34:07,000 --> 00:34:11,000

is where everyone that wanted to come to California had to pass through here.

521

00:34:11,000 --> 00:34:12,000

Right.

522

00:34:12,000 --> 00:34:16,000

The entire country, all narrows down to this very spot.

523

00:34:16,000 --> 00:34:19,000

Yeah, it started with originally with the wagon trains coming through the pass.

524

00:34:19,000 --> 00:34:23,000

Next they built the railroad through here, then the interstate highway.

525

00:34:23,000 --> 00:34:25,000

Everyone came through here.

526

00:34:25,000 --> 00:34:27,000

This really is the gateway to the West.

527

00:34:27,000 --> 00:34:28,000

It really is.

528

00:34:28,000 --> 00:34:32,000

Think about how much we owe to the people that came through right where we are right now.

529

00:34:32,000 --> 00:34:38,000

Everything from agriculture to the economy to high-tech Silicon Valley, California companies.

530

00:34:38,000 --> 00:34:40,000

Anytime you use social media,

531

00:34:40,000 --> 00:34:43,000

it's because somebody a couple hundred years ago came through Donner Pass

532

00:34:43,000 --> 00:34:45,000

and helped make California.

533

00:34:45,000 --> 00:34:48,000

This is the super highway of early America.

534

00:34:48,000 --> 00:34:50,000

Yeah. All right. Let's keep moving.

535

00:34:54,000 --> 00:34:57,000

Yeah, Josh, watch it. It gets real steep in here. Be careful.

536

00:34:57,000 --> 00:34:59,000

Okay. Nice and slow here.

537

00:35:01,000 --> 00:35:04,000

The next part of the trip is a steep downward slope,

538

00:35:04,000 --> 00:35:06,000

which gives me an excuse to use the phrase,

539

00:35:06,000 --> 00:35:08,000

ass over tea kettle.

540

00:35:08,000 --> 00:35:09,000

There we go.

541

00:35:09,000 --> 00:35:11,000

Watch those spikes. Watch those spikes.

542

00:35:12,000 --> 00:35:14,000

That was like a 30-second slip.

543

00:35:14,000 --> 00:35:16,000

We might have to go rescue the film crew.

544

00:35:16,000 --> 00:35:19,000

The pass isn't looking quite so easy anymore.

545

00:35:19,000 --> 00:35:20,000

Never easy.

546

00:35:20,000 --> 00:35:23,000

Snow shoeing down steep hills is a delicate balancing act,

547

00:35:23,000 --> 00:35:26,000

so we need to watch every step we take.

548

00:35:26,000 --> 00:35:31,000

Adding to the danger is the fact that the snow we're walking on isn't always solid.

549

00:35:31,000 --> 00:35:33,000

Watch this right here.

550

00:35:33,000 --> 00:35:36,000

Oh, look at that. Yeah, there's a hole down there.

551

00:35:39,000 --> 00:35:41,000

On the left side.

552

00:35:41,000 --> 00:35:43,000

There's a hole down there.

553

00:35:43,000 --> 00:35:45,000

On the left side.

554

00:35:51,000 --> 00:35:54,000

That lake is not as close as it looks from the top of the pass.

555

00:35:54,000 --> 00:35:55,000

It's deceptive.

556

00:35:55,000 --> 00:35:58,000

It was not easy to get up the Donner Pass.

557

00:35:58,000 --> 00:36:00,000

It was incredibly hard.

558

00:36:00,000 --> 00:36:03,000

And for the relief party, each time they made that trip,

559

00:36:03,000 --> 00:36:07,000

breaking trail for all those people each time in fresh snow.

560

00:36:07,000 --> 00:36:08,000

It's exhausting.

561

00:36:08,000 --> 00:36:11,000

You just imagine with 30-feet snow,

562

00:36:11,000 --> 00:36:14,000

and no clear route through, forget it.

563

00:36:18,000 --> 00:36:20,000

Be careful there one at a time.

564

00:36:29,000 --> 00:36:31,000

Alright, we're down in the flats here now.

565

00:36:31,000 --> 00:36:34,000

We've got to be getting close to that lake.

566

00:36:34,000 --> 00:36:37,000

Eventually, we complete the descent and link into the road

567

00:36:37,000 --> 00:36:40,000

that leads to Donner Memorial State Park.

568

00:36:40,000 --> 00:36:43,000

We've got a crowd. Look at this. Wow.

569

00:36:50,000 --> 00:36:53,000

Finally, after seemingly endless hours in snowshoes,

570

00:36:53,000 --> 00:36:55,000

the finish line is in sight.

571

00:36:55,000 --> 00:37:00,000

The Pioneer Monument built in 1918 to honor the Donner Party.

572

00:37:01,000 --> 00:37:05,000

We lay the cards representing the rescuers on the base of the monument,

573

00:37:05,000 --> 00:37:07,000

bringing them together again,

574

00:37:07,000 --> 00:37:11,000

if only symbolically, at this site of tragedy and triumph.

575

00:37:16,000 --> 00:37:18,000

Come on in here, guys.

576

00:37:18,000 --> 00:37:20,000

Well done, guys. Well done, guys.

577

00:37:20,000 --> 00:37:22,000

It was an honor.

578

00:37:32,000 --> 00:37:34,000

For these four endurance athletes,

579

00:37:34,000 --> 00:37:37,000

it's the culmination of a long and emotional journey,

580

00:37:37,000 --> 00:37:39,000

something for which they should be recognized.

581

00:37:39,000 --> 00:37:43,000

This event today is obviously about honoring the first relief

582

00:37:43,000 --> 00:37:45,000

and all the relief parties here.

583

00:37:45,000 --> 00:37:48,000

I just want to brag on behalf of these four folks for a second.

584

00:37:48,000 --> 00:37:50,000

They've done an extraordinary amount of work,

585

00:37:50,000 --> 00:37:53,000

and they've really helped to, in many ways, rediscover

586

00:37:53,000 --> 00:37:56,000

one of the most extraordinary parts of the Donner Party saga.

587

00:37:56,000 --> 00:37:59,000

Those cards that are up there, I hope everyone takes a look

588

00:37:59,000 --> 00:38:02,000

and goes and sees them. These folks are honoring people who did something

589

00:38:02,000 --> 00:38:05,000

really extraordinary, and they themselves have done something really extraordinary.

590

00:38:05,000 --> 00:38:08,000

So give them a round of applause. They're just amazing folks.

591

00:38:08,000 --> 00:38:12,000

And thank you for letting us tag along and play a small part in it.

592

00:38:12,000 --> 00:38:16,000

It certainly feels like the end of the road, but it's not.

593

00:38:16,000 --> 00:38:20,000

It turns out Bob and Tim aren't done making history with their expedition.

594

00:38:20,000 --> 00:38:23,000

Other than taking your boots off and resting, now what?

595

00:38:23,000 --> 00:38:26,000

When we did the Forlorn Hope expedition,

596

00:38:26,000 --> 00:38:29,000

one of the obscure areas that was lost to history

597

00:38:29,000 --> 00:38:31,000

was a place called Camp of Death.

598

00:38:32,000 --> 00:38:34,000

The Camp of Death.

599

00:38:34,000 --> 00:38:38,000

This is one of the most critical locations in the entire Donner saga.

600

00:38:38,000 --> 00:38:42,000

The place where the Forlorn Hope escape party got pinned down by weather

601

00:38:42,000 --> 00:38:44,000

and first turned to cannibalism.

602

00:38:44,000 --> 00:38:48,000

The event that came to define the doomed expedition.

603

00:38:48,000 --> 00:38:50,000

But it's never been found.

604

00:38:51,000 --> 00:38:53,000

We think we may have a bead on it.

605

00:38:53,000 --> 00:38:56,000

If he's right, and they have identified this lost location,

606

00:38:56,000 --> 00:38:58,000

it would be history in the making.

607

00:38:58,000 --> 00:39:00,000

Okay, so are you going to go try and find it?

608

00:39:00,000 --> 00:39:02,000

We are, but we've got to wait for the snow to thaw.

609

00:39:02,000 --> 00:39:03,000

Right, not today?

610

00:39:03,000 --> 00:39:04,000

Yeah, not today.

611

00:39:04,000 --> 00:39:06,000

Okay, but maybe I'll come look you up in the spring?

612

00:39:06,000 --> 00:39:08,000

Yeah, we'd love to have you along.

613

00:39:08,000 --> 00:39:09,000

Will there be less walk?

614

00:39:09,000 --> 00:39:10,000

Can't guarantee that.

615

00:39:10,000 --> 00:39:12,000

So, once the snow melts?

616

00:39:12,000 --> 00:39:14,000

Once the snow melts, we're going to meet you out there.

617

00:39:14,000 --> 00:39:15,000

Sounds good to me.

618

00:39:15,000 --> 00:39:16,000

Deal.

619

00:39:23,000 --> 00:39:24,000

All right, spring is here.

620

00:39:24,000 --> 00:39:27,000

The snow has melted and I am back near Truckee.

621

00:39:27,000 --> 00:39:32,000

California heading to a set of coordinates deep inside Tahoe National Forest

622

00:39:32,000 --> 00:39:34,000

to meet Bob and Tim once again.

623

00:39:38,000 --> 00:39:40,000

Hey guys, how are you?

624

00:39:40,000 --> 00:39:41,000

Josh.

625

00:39:41,000 --> 00:39:42,000

How are you, man?

626

00:39:42,000 --> 00:39:43,000

Hey, welcome back to Cali.

627

00:39:43,000 --> 00:39:44,000

Look at you, clean shaven.

628

00:39:44,000 --> 00:39:45,000

Yeah.

629

00:39:45,000 --> 00:39:46,000

Looking good, man.

630

00:39:46,000 --> 00:39:47,000

Hey Tim.

631

00:39:47,000 --> 00:39:48,000

Good to see you again.

632

00:39:48,000 --> 00:39:49,000

Good to see you, man.

633

00:39:49,000 --> 00:39:50,000

What's up?

634

00:39:50,000 --> 00:39:51,000

Hey, I'm Josh.

635

00:39:51,000 --> 00:39:52,000

Hey, I'm Greg.

636

00:39:52,000 --> 00:39:53,000

Nice to meet you.

637

00:39:53,000 --> 00:39:55,000

Greg is our archaeologist on the project.

638

00:39:55,000 --> 00:39:56,000

Awesome.

639

00:39:56,000 --> 00:40:01,000

I'm glad you got a long pants on because we're going for about a half a mile hike into the wilderness.

640

00:40:01,000 --> 00:40:02,000

You up for that?

641

00:40:02,000 --> 00:40:03,000

Yeah.

642

00:40:03,000 --> 00:40:04,000

I'm ready.

643

00:40:04,000 --> 00:40:05,000

Shall we do it?

644

00:40:05,000 --> 00:40:06,000

Yep.

645

00:40:06,000 --> 00:40:07,000

Let's go.

646

00:40:07,000 --> 00:40:08,000

Let's see what you got.

647

00:40:08,000 --> 00:40:09,000

Come on.

648

00:40:14,000 --> 00:40:17,000

After our last hike together, this feels like a stroll in the park.

649

00:40:17,000 --> 00:40:20,000

We snake through the pathless forest for an hour.

650

00:40:20,000 --> 00:40:26,000

If the camp of death is out here and could be identified, it would be nothing short of historic.

651

00:40:26,000 --> 00:40:30,000

And before long, the guys come to a stop in a small clearing.

652

00:40:30,000 --> 00:40:31,000

Okay, Josh.

653

00:40:31,000 --> 00:40:33,000

This is the spot.

654

00:40:33,000 --> 00:40:34,000

This is it.

655

00:40:34,000 --> 00:40:37,000

This is the spot we believe is the camp of death.

656

00:40:37,000 --> 00:40:38,000

How did you arrive at this?

657

00:40:38,000 --> 00:40:43,000

We researched the entire 100 mile journey of the Forlorn Hoppers over seven years.

658

00:40:43,000 --> 00:40:48,000

Our first hand accounts from William Metty and his diary, they were looking for shelter.

659

00:40:48,000 --> 00:40:53,000

They knew they had to get on the lee side away from the wind because it was blowing.

660

00:40:53,000 --> 00:40:54,000

That checks here.

661

00:40:54,000 --> 00:40:56,000

They had to have fuel for a fire.

662

00:40:56,000 --> 00:40:57,000

Plenty of that?

663

00:40:57,000 --> 00:40:58,000

There was plenty of that around here.

664

00:40:58,000 --> 00:41:02,000

We knew where they were the day before and we knew where they were five days later.

665

00:41:02,000 --> 00:41:05,000

Process of elimination, this really is the spot.

666

00:41:05,000 --> 00:41:07,000

It's the only spot they could have been.

667

00:41:07,000 --> 00:41:08,000

So what do we know about camp of death?

668

00:41:08,000 --> 00:41:09,000

What do they describe?

669

00:41:09,000 --> 00:41:14,000

They said they had built a fire on top of the snow, but during the time they were there,

670

00:41:14,000 --> 00:41:17,000

the fire burned through the snow and was extinguished in a creek.

671

00:41:17,000 --> 00:41:19,000

And we are literally standing here in a creek?

672

00:41:19,000 --> 00:41:24,000

Yeah, we're in a dry creek bed, but you can see how if there was wintertime or spring where the snow was running off,

673

00:41:24,000 --> 00:41:26,000

this is going to be a quite active stream.

674

00:41:26,000 --> 00:41:29,000

So this place fits geographically, it fits historically.

675

00:41:29,000 --> 00:41:31,000

How do we say for sure though?

676

00:41:31,000 --> 00:41:32,000

You're right.

677

00:41:32,000 --> 00:41:34,000

There's going to be very little forensic evidence here.

678

00:41:34,000 --> 00:41:40,000

However, when we were in here surveying the area, we found an item and we left it in the ground.

679

00:41:40,000 --> 00:41:46,000

And then we contacted Greg, our archaeologist, and said we need help to properly document this.

680

00:41:46,000 --> 00:41:52,000

For something to be properly studied archaeologically, it needs to be in situ or in its original place.

681

00:41:52,000 --> 00:41:59,000

Bob and Tim have done the right thing here, waiting for the next thaw and calling in an expert to properly document the find.

682

00:41:59,000 --> 00:42:02,000

But that also means we need to rediscover it.

683

00:42:02,000 --> 00:42:03,000

Okay.

684

00:42:04,000 --> 00:42:05,000

What did you find?

685

00:42:05,000 --> 00:42:07,000

Well, you know, it'd be no fun if we told you.

686

00:42:07,000 --> 00:42:08,000

Oh, come on.

687

00:42:08,000 --> 00:42:09,000

Do you know where it is?

688

00:42:09,000 --> 00:42:11,000

Well, we know it's in this creek bed somewhere.

689

00:42:11,000 --> 00:42:12,000

We need to go find it again.

690

00:42:12,000 --> 00:42:14,000

You're out here with a metal detector.

691

00:42:14,000 --> 00:42:15,000

You're doing what you love.

692

00:42:15,000 --> 00:42:16,000

Get to it.

693

00:42:16,000 --> 00:42:17,000

We'll find it.

694

00:42:17,000 --> 00:42:18,000

We'll find it.

695

00:42:19,000 --> 00:42:24,000

Bob and Tim are confident we're in the right spot, but I'll admit my faith wavers.

696

00:42:24,000 --> 00:42:27,000

Now, Bob, you're sure you found something here?

697

00:42:27,000 --> 00:42:28,000

We're certain.

698

00:42:28,000 --> 00:42:29,000

It's around here somewhere, Josh.

699

00:42:29,000 --> 00:42:30,000

It wasn't a dream.

700

00:42:30,000 --> 00:42:32,000

If it was a dream, it was a happy dream.

701

00:42:32,000 --> 00:42:33,000

All right.

702

00:42:34,000 --> 00:42:35,000

Oh.

703

00:42:36,000 --> 00:42:37,000

Hold on.

704

00:42:37,000 --> 00:42:38,000

You got something?

705

00:42:38,000 --> 00:42:39,000

Yeah, I got a hit.

706

00:42:39,000 --> 00:42:40,000

Something here for sure.

707

00:42:41,000 --> 00:42:42,000

You got that?

708

00:42:45,000 --> 00:42:46,000

Yeah, something here.

709

00:42:49,000 --> 00:42:50,000

That sounds like metal.

710

00:42:52,000 --> 00:42:54,000

What did you find?

711

00:42:55,000 --> 00:42:58,000

Oh, my word.

712

00:42:58,000 --> 00:42:59,000

Oh, my word.

713

00:42:59,000 --> 00:43:00,000

Look at that.

714

00:43:05,000 --> 00:43:09,000

The Sierra Nevadas were once the last obstacle to the West.

715

00:43:09,000 --> 00:43:12,000

Pioneers risked their lives to cross the mountains.

716

00:43:12,000 --> 00:43:16,000

Now the risk is fun.

717

00:43:16,000 --> 00:43:18,000

Hashtag disco tubing.

718

00:43:18,000 --> 00:43:20,000

Is hashtag still a thing?

719

00:43:20,000 --> 00:43:26,000

Now going for an amateur recreational land speed snow tube record.

720

00:43:26,000 --> 00:43:28,000

Josh W. Gates Jr.

721

00:43:28,000 --> 00:43:30,000

Remember, kids, do not try this at home.

722

00:43:30,000 --> 00:43:32,000

I am a professional sort of.

723

00:43:32,000 --> 00:43:33,000

Okay.

724

00:43:33,000 --> 00:43:36,000

I guess I just sit in this thing and here we go.

725

00:43:36,000 --> 00:43:38,000

Oh, oh, oh, God.

726

00:43:38,000 --> 00:43:39,000

Oh, my God.

727

00:43:39,000 --> 00:43:40,000

Oh, God.

728

00:43:40,000 --> 00:43:43,000

Oh, it's much faster than it looks.

729

00:43:43,000 --> 00:43:44,000

Oh, boy.

730

00:43:44,000 --> 00:43:45,000

Oh, this doesn't seem safe at all.

731

00:43:45,000 --> 00:43:46,000

Oh, my God.

732

00:43:46,000 --> 00:43:47,000

Oh, my God.

733

00:43:47,000 --> 00:43:48,000

There's a corner.

734

00:43:48,000 --> 00:43:49,000

There's a corner.

735

00:43:49,000 --> 00:43:50,000

There's a.

736

00:43:50,000 --> 00:43:52,000

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.

737

00:43:52,000 --> 00:43:53,000

Oh, no.

738

00:43:53,000 --> 00:43:56,000

Oh, oh, I'm in the creek.

739

00:43:56,000 --> 00:43:57,000

Hey.

740

00:43:57,000 --> 00:43:58,000

Whoa.

741

00:44:00,000 --> 00:44:01,000

Land speed record.

742

00:44:05,000 --> 00:44:06,000

It's an axe.

743

00:44:06,000 --> 00:44:08,000

You found an axe head.

744

00:44:08,000 --> 00:44:09,000

That's what we found.

745

00:44:09,000 --> 00:44:12,000

Hi, in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

746

00:44:12,000 --> 00:44:15,000

I'm with a research team looking for evidence of the Donner

747

00:44:15,000 --> 00:44:18,000

Party's infamous and lost camp of death.

748

00:44:18,000 --> 00:44:19,000

Look at that.

749

00:44:19,000 --> 00:44:21,000

That's what we were looking for.

750

00:44:21,000 --> 00:44:22,000

Unbelievable.

751

00:44:22,000 --> 00:44:23,000

Greg, what do you think?

752

00:44:23,000 --> 00:44:24,000

Wow, fantastic.

753

00:44:24,000 --> 00:44:25,000

Amazing.

754

00:44:25,000 --> 00:44:26,000

Yeah, that is.

755

00:44:26,000 --> 00:44:30,000

That is a hand forged axe.

756

00:44:30,000 --> 00:44:32,000

You can see the pitting here.

757

00:44:32,000 --> 00:44:33,000

Yeah.

758

00:44:33,000 --> 00:44:35,000

Yeah, there are two things that are really distinct about this.

759

00:44:35,000 --> 00:44:37,000

One is the size.

760

00:44:37,000 --> 00:44:39,000

It was what's called a belt axe.

761

00:44:39,000 --> 00:44:42,000

It would have hung out near the belt rather than being a full

762

00:44:42,000 --> 00:44:43,000

size axe.

763

00:44:43,000 --> 00:44:44,000

It would have been carried portable.

764

00:44:44,000 --> 00:44:47,000

It would have been ready at the belt and used for smaller

765

00:44:47,000 --> 00:44:51,000

scale activities, limbing, production of firewood and

766

00:44:51,000 --> 00:44:52,000

kindling and things like that.

767

00:44:52,000 --> 00:44:55,000

And it could be anywhere from the time range you guys are

768

00:44:55,000 --> 00:44:59,000

looking for the 1840s on up to the 1850s or 60s.

769

00:44:59,000 --> 00:45:01,000

We are right on the money time wise here.

770

00:45:01,000 --> 00:45:04,000

And in terms of Donner history, we know they didn't have much

771

00:45:04,000 --> 00:45:05,000

with them.

772

00:45:05,000 --> 00:45:07,000

The only thing we are certain they had was a personal hand

773

00:45:07,000 --> 00:45:12,000

axe, likely carried by William Eddie and it's in his diary.

774

00:45:12,000 --> 00:45:13,000

That's mentioned.

775

00:45:13,000 --> 00:45:14,000

That's inventory.

776

00:45:14,000 --> 00:45:17,000

It is absolutely mentioned in his diary and he had a story

777

00:45:17,000 --> 00:45:19,000

that went with it in this very spot.

778

00:45:19,000 --> 00:45:22,000

When they came here and they began to harvest the wood with

779

00:45:22,000 --> 00:45:25,000

the snowstorm bearing down on them and it was 20 feet of

780

00:45:25,000 --> 00:45:26,000

snow at the time.

781

00:45:26,000 --> 00:45:29,000

They were chopping away and somewhere in the night they

782

00:45:29,000 --> 00:45:32,000

chopped and the axe head broke off and they lost it in the

783

00:45:32,000 --> 00:45:35,000

snow and weren't able to start a fire.

784

00:45:35,000 --> 00:45:38,000

And that's why for 36 hours they had to be under blankets.

785

00:45:38,000 --> 00:45:41,000

They had no mechanism to start the fire.

786

00:45:41,000 --> 00:45:44,000

And so that axe head was the one thing that you could

787

00:45:44,000 --> 00:45:46,000

possibly find in this spot.

788

00:45:46,000 --> 00:45:48,000

This is wild.

789

00:45:48,000 --> 00:45:51,000

I mean, could this really be?

790

00:45:51,000 --> 00:45:53,000

And the answer is it could.

791

00:45:53,000 --> 00:45:54,000

It could.

792

00:45:54,000 --> 00:45:55,000

I mean it fits the geography.

793

00:45:55,000 --> 00:45:56,000

It fits the history.

794

00:45:56,000 --> 00:46:01,000

And the axe itself is the right period, the right type.

795

00:46:01,000 --> 00:46:04,000

And if this is that axe, then we're standing in the camp of

796

00:46:04,000 --> 00:46:05,000

death.

797

00:46:05,000 --> 00:46:06,000

No doubt about that.

798

00:46:06,000 --> 00:46:09,000

And if that's the case, then this right where we are is

799

00:46:09,000 --> 00:46:13,000

where they made the most difficult of choices.

800

00:46:13,000 --> 00:46:17,000

Everything, possibly they could go wrong, went wrong here.

801

00:46:17,000 --> 00:46:18,000

Yeah.

802

00:46:18,000 --> 00:46:20,000

And yet they somehow survived it.

803

00:46:20,000 --> 00:46:21,000

That's the human spirit.

804

00:46:21,000 --> 00:46:22,000

Amazing.

805

00:46:22,000 --> 00:46:27,000

If this is what we hope it is, it's historic.

806

00:46:27,000 --> 00:46:30,000

It's monumental really.

807

00:46:30,000 --> 00:46:31,000

Thanks.

808

00:46:31,000 --> 00:46:32,000

Thank you.

809

00:46:32,000 --> 00:46:33,000

Really.

810

00:46:33,000 --> 00:46:34,000

Greg, it's a pleasure.

811

00:46:34,000 --> 00:46:35,000

Tim, thank you so much.

812

00:46:35,000 --> 00:46:36,000

Thanks.

813

00:46:36,000 --> 00:46:37,000

Thanks.

814

00:46:37,000 --> 00:46:42,000

For 175 years, the history of the Donner Party has been told

815

00:46:42,000 --> 00:46:43,000

as a horror story.

816

00:46:43,000 --> 00:46:47,000

A pioneer Stephen King yarn where the living envy the dead.

817

00:46:47,000 --> 00:46:50,000

But after walking in their footsteps, it seems clear to me

818

00:46:50,000 --> 00:46:53,000

that we've been telling the wrong tale.

819

00:46:53,000 --> 00:46:57,000

Their journey was a disastrous combination of a con, a lack of

820

00:46:57,000 --> 00:47:02,000

leadership, infighting, and the worst of weather.

821

00:47:02,000 --> 00:47:07,000

And yet over half the Donner Party survived.

822

00:47:07,000 --> 00:47:10,000

If it hadn't been for their nearly superhuman determination,

823

00:47:10,000 --> 00:47:14,000

or for the bravery of the Forlorn Hope and the selflessness of

824

00:47:14,000 --> 00:47:18,000

the rescuers, then all would have been lost.

825

00:47:18,000 --> 00:47:22,000

Those who lived would go on to settle the West and have families

826

00:47:22,000 --> 00:47:24,000

of their own.

827

00:47:24,000 --> 00:47:28,000

It has been calculated that 25,000 descendants are alive today

828

00:47:28,000 --> 00:47:32,000

because of the 48 people who refused to die in those mountains.

829

00:47:32,000 --> 00:47:38,000

They include state senators, judges, artists, and countless

830

00:47:38,000 --> 00:47:41,000

homesteaders who shaped the Golden State.

831

00:47:41,000 --> 00:47:45,000

So if you ever find yourself driving west on interstate 80

832

00:47:45,000 --> 00:47:49,000

through Donner Pass, be sure to remember that long before the

833

00:47:49,000 --> 00:47:53,000

highway, this was all wilderness that demanded great sacrifice

834

00:47:53,000 --> 00:47:57,000

from those who forged the path for us to follow.