

Chapter 8

Debunking the Mark Twain-Lake Tahoe Myths

Mark Twain once wryly remarked, “Often, the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it.” One can add to this another of Twain’s incisive observations, “Loyalty to petrified opinions never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul in this world – and never will.” Both quotes are dense with meaning and sensibility. In the general sense, they reinforce the view that a long-held belief, irrespective of justification or rationality, is an impediment to progress, new ideas, and expansion of knowledge. He probably had in mind the larger notions of society, religion, and governance as he contemplated the inflexibility of human nature. The same concept applies at the micro level for the various Mark Twain-Lake Tahoe myths that have embedded themselves in the ethos of the region.

Where might one expect to encounter Mark Twain-Lake Tahoe myths? The worst offenders are commercial websites where naive webmasters simply feed on each other’s ignorance and create a perpetual-motion machine of Mark Twain and Lake Tahoe

misinformation. Add to this marketing literature for real estate, hotels, and recreation pursuits. Authors that fail to do thorough research repeat the myths in their guidebooks and Tahoe history volumes. Even knowledgeable tour guides embellish and misspeak about Mark Twain. Similarly, publishers of historical magazines and scholarly books have failed their readers by inadequately fact checking their author's manuscripts as it pertains to Mark Twain.

The myths trace back to one or more rationales for their existence. In the most elementary case, a myth may be the result of flawed historical research or mistaken identity. In other cases, misinterpretation of Twain's sometimes-vague writings may be the culprit. In the extreme case, the desire to associate one's self or a region with Mark Twain for financial or prestigious advantage lies at the heart. Irrespective of the reason for the myth and because of the limitless popularity of Mark Twain, these myths persist despite their spurious origins.

In this digital age of broadly and indiscriminately distributed information, the Mark Twain-Lake Tahoe myths find repetition with reckless unrestraint over a modern-day electronic path paved with laziness, naivety, and fallacy. The more repetition a myth receives and the more often it appears in otherwise credible sources, the more deeply ingrained in Tahoe history the belief becomes. Likewise, the denial becomes more vehement in those who have an ego-centered ownership stake in the myth.

As we dissect these myths and examine the entrails of their sources, we use for guidance the principle of "preponderance of evidence." The principle states that the explanation that garners the preponderance of evidence in support based on weight and credibility denotes the most likely factual explanation. This is a common standard for burden of proof in civil court cases. The principle fits the analysis of Mark Twain-Lake Tahoe myths well because of inherent uncertainties. Historical records can be murky and contradictory. Often, there is an absence of clear and convincing evidence that alone is insufficient to stand as proof. Finally, the ongoing addition of Mark

Twain-related documents and primary source information to existing collections make it impossible to certify an accurate, comprehensive, and complete record of all relevant facts.

Myth: Mark Twain Stayed at the Lake Shore House in Glenbrook in 1863.

This myth is a simple case of flawed historical research by a primary source. Lake Shore House was Augustus Pray's 19th century hotel in Glenbrook, Nev. The erroneous conclusion that Mark Twain stayed there in 1863 appears as a footnote added by Mark Twain Project (MTP) editors to *Mark Twain's Letters, Volume I, 1853-66*. The letter in question is the August 19, 1863 letter from Mark Twain to his mother and sister. As previously explained in Chapter 4, Twain was writing about his stay at Lake House on the South Shore. In the footnote, the MTP editors looked to E.B. Scott's *The Saga of Lake Tahoe* as their primary source for guidance. Based on this lone source, they determined that Twain meant "Lake Shore House" when he wrote, "Lake House."

Scott states in *The Saga of Lake Tahoe*, Augustus Pray was rushing the Lake Shore House in Glenbrook to construction in 1863. Scott references the August 26, 1863 edition of the *Sacramento Daily Union* as the foundation for this statement. In truth, the *Sacramento Daily Union* article states that Pray sold five acres to Colbarth for construction of a hotel. The hotel in question was the upscale Glen Brook House that opened later in 1863. Thompson & West's *History of Nevada* tells us that it was not until the spring of 1876 that Pray converted part of his lakefront sawmill to a hotel and named it Lake Shore House.

Mark Twain passed through Glenbrook several times each way while traveling through Tahoe by stagecoach to and from Tahoe and San Francisco. He was surely familiar with the community, and he may even have made day trips to Glenbrook for pleasure. However, no

writings by Twain or others exist to document any such day-use or overnight visits at Glenbrook.

Myth: Mark Twain Stayed at Lake House at Hobart on the East Shore in 1863.

This myth stems from a secondary author's (Scott Lankford, *Tahoe Beneath the Surface*) misinterpretation of historical research by a primary author. This myth appeared in the Margaret Sanborn's *Mark Twain: The Bachelor Years* and was a variation of the Lake Shore House myth. Despite getting the hotel correct, the location is in error. Lake House was on the South Shore (see Figure 29 for the correct location), and the logging camp of Hobart did not appear until the 1880s when the Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber Co. entered the southernmost extent of the East Shore to conduct timber harvest operations there. The original Lake House burned in 1866 and was replaced by Rowland's roadhouse in 1868.

Sanborn appears to conflate across 20 years a narrative in *The Saga of Lake Tahoe* that speculated a picture of an abandoned boat was the same boat mentioned in the 1861 journal of artist Joseph Lamson. Lamson had written that he had walked three miles east from Lake House and encountered men working on a boat. The workers were in a location that 20-plus years later would be the site of the Hobart logging camp. The camp was the namesake for the surname of one of the Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber Co. owners, Walter Hobart. Sanborn overlooked the three-mile distance between Lamson's starting point, and the location where he encountered the boat workers to conclude erroneously that Lake House was farther east than it really was.

Myth: Mark Twain Visited Cascade Lake in the 1880s.

Cascade Lake is a small body of water south of Emerald Bay (Figure 29). This appears to be a myth rooted in storytelling or mistaken identity. The persistent myth about a Mark Twain visit appears in several books: *The Saga of Lake Tahoe* and various local history

books and guidebooks, including *Tahoe Beneath the Surface*. None of these cites a primary source.

The problem with the story is that there is no record that Mark Twain ever returned to Tahoe or any other place within the Sierra Nevada region after his final visit in April-July 1868 for a lecture tour in northern California and western Nevada. Afterward, the closest he came was his 1895 world lecture tour beginning in the upper Midwest, then on to Washington State and British Columbia before continuing the tour overseas.

A similar but true account has John Muir visiting Cascade Lake in 1878 and perhaps, the central characters became transposed during repeat storytelling.

Another possibility is a visit by a Mark Twain impostor that conned the well-respected residents of Cascade Lake. The venerable TwainQuotes.com website documents a fair amount of 19th century Mark Twain lookalikes and wannabes. Site author Barbara Schmidt sums it up succinctly, “Throughout his lifetime, Mark Twain was a target for impostors and doubles [that] played upon his well-known appearance and reputation. Untangling all of their trails and establishing their identities [have] yet to be accomplished.”

Myth: Mark Twain Described Lake Tahoe as the “Jewel of the Sierra”

Commercial copywriters often credit Mark Twain with describing Lake Tahoe as the “Jewel of the Sierra.” Although it sounds Twain-like, there is no evidence in the written record that he ever said this. The earliest written mention of the phrase appears in David Starr Jordan’s 1922 memoir, *Days of a Man*, in which he declares Lake Tahoe “the jewel of the Sierra.” Jordan was a prominent naturalist, president of Stanford University, and a director of the Sierra Club. He first visited Lake Tahoe in 1880 and was the likely source of this famous quote.

Myth: Mark Twain Attempted to Stake a Timber Claim and Accidentally Started a Wildfire on the East Shore Near Glenbrook in 1861.

Without question, this is by far the biggest and most over-hyped myth involving Mark Twain and Lake Tahoe. Widely circulated and repeated for such a long period, this myth became the epitome of Mark Twain's "loyalty to petrified opinion." While the basic storyline has some aspects loosely connected to reality, the Glenbrook and East Shore settings are the mythological elements.

A synopsis of the most-recent version of this mythical story unfolds something like this: Starting at an arbitrary point west of Carson City, Sam Clemens and friend John Kinney walked up an 1850s-era wagon road/trail. They followed Kings Canyon and Clear Creek over Spooner Summit and down a road along Glenbrook Creek to Lake Tahoe. They found a rowboat on the shore, rowed three miles north to Skunk Harbor where they found a food and supply cache in the rocks, and slept on a sandy beach. Over an undetermined number of days, they established their timber claim three miles further north of the cache site, slept on a sandy beach, walked six miles back to Glenbrook, borrowed a dugout canoe found at a vacant cabin at Glenbrook, paddled back to the timber claim site, suffered a wildfire, and returned to Carson City. Figure 120 presents the general sense of the East Shore timber claim scenario. The myth was so deeply rooted that even the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* naively published two flawed papers that attempted and failed to confer legitimacy on the story.

The myth originated with the financial advantage rationale as its underpinnings. In the early 20th century, tour boats loaded with enthralled passengers circled the lake. The boat captains liked to entertain their guests with Native American legends and Tahoe-specific yarns to enrich their vacation experience. For example, one captain told his passengers that the vertical scars on the slopes above the East Shore near Sand Harbor were "bear slides" worn into the

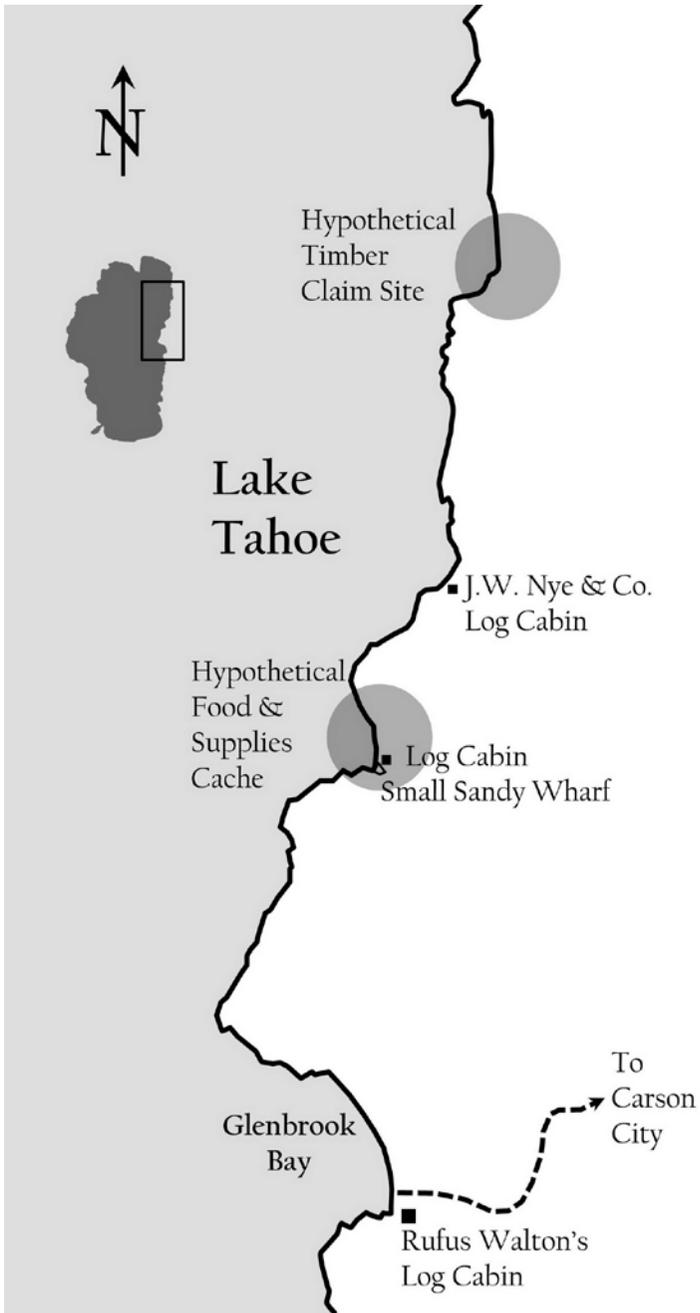


Figure 120. Location map and points of interest for East Shore timber claim myth

hillside each winter by generations of playful Tahoe bears. In truth, breaks in a 19th century water flume triggered massive landslides that created the still-visible scars.

In much the same way, early 20th century tour boat captains pointed to one of a few dilapidated squatter shacks visible on the East Shore north of Glenbrook, and pronounced one of them the remnant of the cabin built by Mark Twain. This, despite Mark Twain clearly stating in *Roughing It* that he quit building his log cabin shortly after starting it, and his “cabin” was nothing more than a pile of brush consumed in a wildfire anyway. With this creative storyline firmly implanted in the imaginations of generations of Tahoe tourists, it became firmly embedded as an inaccurate element of oral Tahoe history.

Others took a simplistic approach. They reasoned that Glenbrook was the first site at Tahoe for a Nevada lumber mill in 1861, so Twain must have been lurking nearby with his short-lived timber ranch. Others opted for folk wisdom over logic and reasoned the simplest explanation was the best, irrespective of the contradicting facts. They argued that one road leading to Glenbrook was the most direct from four available routes from Carson City to Tahoe, though it was not, so he must have gone that way.

The myth deeply entrenched itself in Tahoe history when it first appeared in print in 1949 in *Sierra Nevada Lakes*. Paradoxically, authors George and Bliss Hinkle cited the tourism origins of the myth but went on to repeat the myth as though it was a fact on the same pages. E.B. Scott noticed the *Sierra Nevada Lakes* information and cemented it into the minds of readers. He repeated it in *The Saga of Lake Tahoe, Volume I* as an undocumented statement, absent any other supporting rationale. Then, others simply paraphrased Scott’s account in their books, newspaper articles, blog posts, websites, newsletters, brochures and nearly every other conceivable form of communication media and promotional literature. The result was a supernatural conversion from myth to “truth” by the process of repetition.

The most-recent attempts to prove the myth involved an effort to connect the East Shore site to the descriptions in *Roughing It* and Clemens' letters. When this approach failed its objective under independent scrutiny, proponents pivoted to a hypothetical story, called a counter-factual speculation. This latter document rejected most of Twain's specific and valid descriptions as "made up" and embraced narrow and favored interpretations of the limited historical record, most of which was not directly related to the story.

Undoing over 100 years of Mark Twain-Lake Tahoe mythological dogma is no small task, and with that in mind, we begin.

Food and Supplies Cache and J. W. Nye Timber Claim and Cabin Were Not Located Near Each Other

Twain wrote in *Roughing It*, "Three or four members of the Brigade had been there [Lake Tahoe] and located some timber lands on its shores and stored up a quantity of provisions in their camp." We start here because proponents of the East Shore location myth point to this lone quote as the lynchpin of their argument. They say it locates the first night's campsite and thus, determines the general location of the timber claim adventure. This one false assumption restricts and determines all that follows.

The implied assumption is this: When Twain talked about the Brigade claim, he was referring to the J.W. Nye & Co. timber claim and cabin. However, the evidence-based nexus that the sites are near each other is nonexistent. Their reasoning superimposes location information by speculation that extends beyond that which Twain did not provide. Twain does not give any specifics that would positively identify the location of the claim; we must deduce this from his descriptions of the surrounding environment, and these do not validate this location. Clearly, Twain is talking about a different site in another location.

Twain describes finding, "In a 'cache' among the rocks... the provisions and the cooking utensils..." Later in the text; he mentions sleeping on a sand beach. Both aspects are inconsistent with an East

Shore cache site. Although East Shore proponents do not acknowledge this, there were already a cabin and landing at the same location they say was the undeveloped Brigade cache site.

Why would one store scarce and valuable food and supplies in the exposed rocks instead of the protected and secure cabin? Twain recalled, “It is always very cold on that lake shore in the night,” and endured, “the procession of ants that passed in through rents in our clothing and explored our persons.” Why would one sleep on the beach in the cold air pestered by insects when a comfortable and available cabin was within sight?

Another inconsistency that weakens any geographical relationship between the Brigade camp, and the existing Nye cabin and landing is Twain’s omission of any reference to this highly relevant cabin in the context of his campsite descriptions in either *Roughing It* or his letters. The reason is clear: Clemens was never at a cabin site, nor is this cabin site the location of the cache in the rocks.

Clemens’ Route Was Not the Kings Canyon-Clear Creek Alignment

The written description of Clemens’ route from Carson City to Lake Tahoe occurs in just one place: Chapter 22 of *Roughing It*. In lectures, he only mentioned the distance twice, citing it at 10 miles, a number less than the 11-mile distance recollected in *Roughing It*. As Twain recalled, the key elements of the hike were, 11 miles in length, began on level ground, scaled two summits, crossed a valley between the summits, and afforded a high-elevation view of the lake.

The actual route was the Ash Canyon road/trail to the Washoe Trail. However, East Shore timber claim believers speculate on the Kings Canyon-Clear Creek road/trail, known as the Johnson’s Cutoff, as their preferred route explanation since it takes them to the mistaken location of the cache at the Nye claim. In effect, they are reverse engineering their route by starting at the supposed end and finding some way for Clemens and Kinney to have gotten there.

The Johnson's Cutoff east of Spooner Summit does not appear on the 1861 General Land Office maps, though the Kings Canyon and Walton Toll Roads do. This suggests that because of use of other preferred routes, the old Johnson's Cutoff had fallen into disuse, and traceable remnants had disappeared by 1861 or the surveyors overlooked it as inconsequential, though the route did exist at one time.

Only a rough alignment based on emigrant diaries, and an 1853 handbill serve to document the Johnson's Cutoff route. Using the work of original researcher, Dana Supernowicz, we plotted his mapped route for the Johnson's Cutoff as shown in Figure 121. We found that while the route did meet the two summits with valley criteria, it came in 14 miles travel distance from Carson City to Lake Tahoe at Glenbrook – three miles longer than Twain quoted in *Roughing It*.

The Nevada Department of Transportation has weighed in with their determination of the possible 1861 alignments that Clemens could have walked. In 2010, they published a historical map analysis, "Mark Twain in Tahoe 1861: Which Way Did He Go?" that presented the 1861 alignments of the Ash Canyon-Washoe Trail, Kings Canyon Road, and the Rufus Walton Toll Road as the candidate routes. They rejected the alternative Johnson's Cutoff route as a viable possibility since it did not appear on the 1861 map. In the NDOT historical booklet on the Highway 50 corridor, "Foot Path to Four Lane," the author concludes that the Johnson's Cutoff followed Clear Creek all the way to the valley floor. The Kings Canyon Road and the Johnson's Cutoff used the same alignments for the first six miles. For Clemens' to use the Johnson's Cutoff, it required that he leaves the main Kings

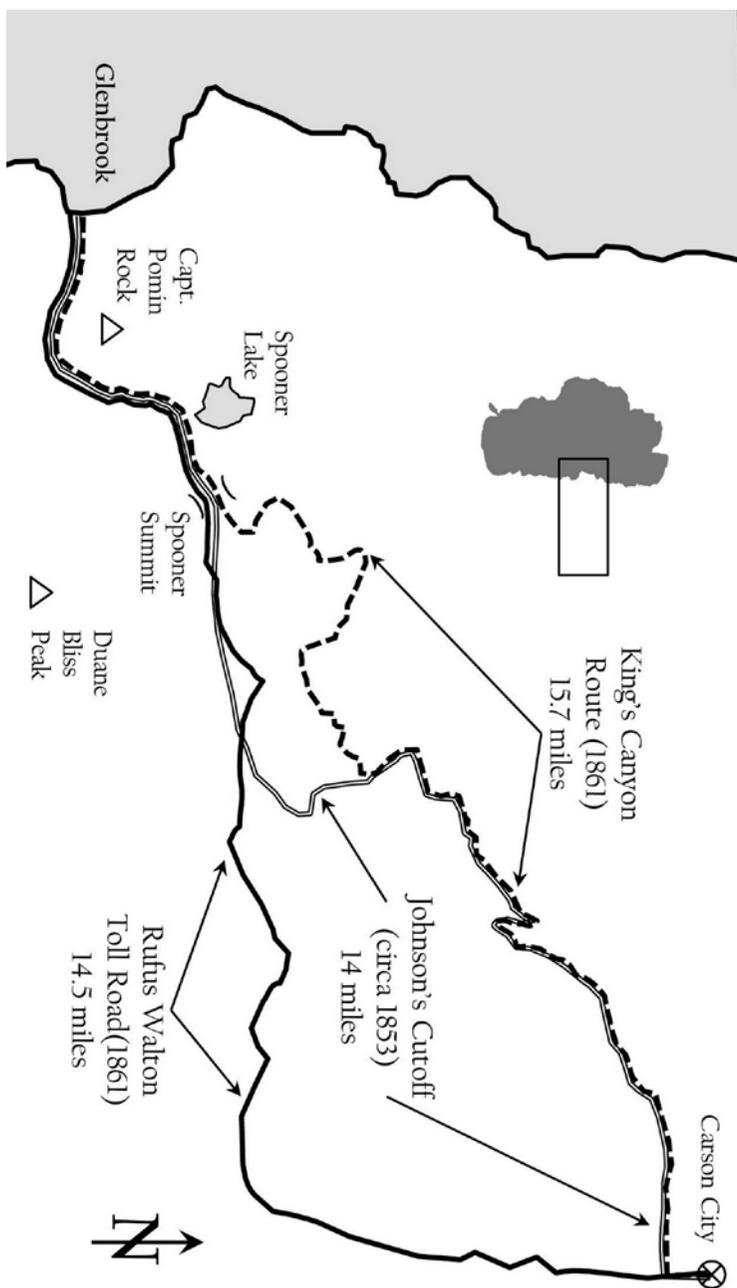


Figure 121. Map view of alternative routes from Carson City to Glenbrook in 1861.

Canyon Road, descend into Clear Creek canyon, climb out of the canyon and rejoin the Kings Canyon Road near Spooner Summit.

While the Johnson's Cutoff remains a very remote possibility, its distance, lack of a high-elevation view of the lake, availability of better alternatives, and lack of a well-defined trace relegate it to disproved status. In comparison, the Ash Canyon-Washoe Trail route was 11.7 miles, contains all the specific features noted by Twain, and is nearly the same distance he cited.

Logical reasoning tells us that if the first steps of a journey did not occur, then, the subsequent steps on the journey that depend on the initial steps could not have occurred. In other words, if Clemens did not go to Tahoe over one of three routes leading to Glenbrook, he could not have traveled across the East Shore from Glenbrook. Diehards in a state of self-delusion will not accept that Clemens did not travel to Glenbrook, so we continue our analysis to show the continuing discrepancies and contradictions that defeat the East Shore timber claim hypothetical story.

Deep Bend of Lake Was Not Glenbrook Bay

In *Roughing It*, Twain writes that after finding the skiff on the shore, they set “across a deep bend of the lake toward the landmarks that signified the locality of camp.” In Figure 54, one clearly sees the “deep bend of the lake” (Crystal Bay) Twain recounted and the visible landmark of Stateline Point that demarcated the location of the first night's encampment.

Some believe that Glenbrook Bay is a deep bend of the lake. Compared to Crystal Bay, it was not a deep bend and Twain used the term “bay” elsewhere in the text to describe portions of the shoreline that are small coves.

In Chapter 3, we learned that Twain knew that the term “bay” did not fit, and he likely drew upon his memories of the deep sweeping bends in

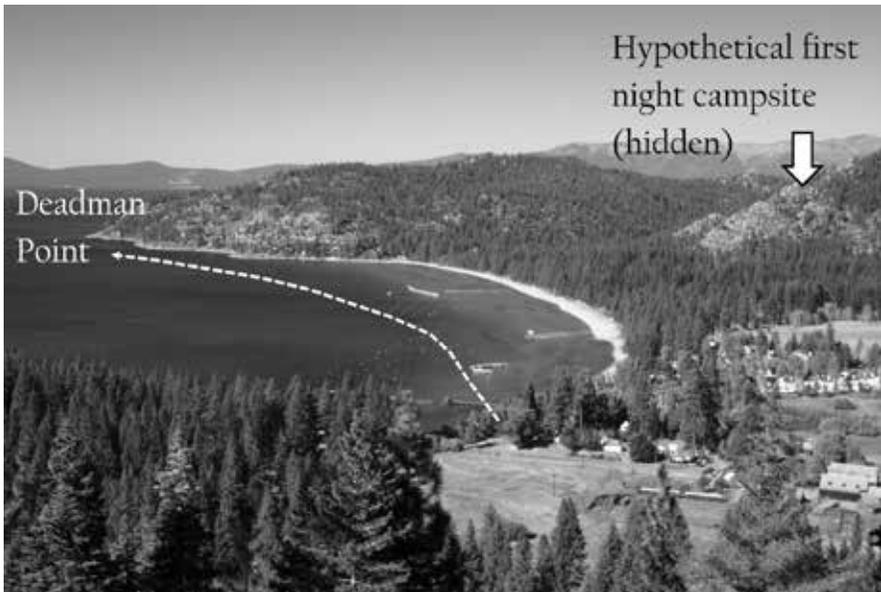


Figure 122. Overview of Glenbrook Bay shows a probable rowboat course out of Glenbrook Bay. Deadman Point obscures the landmarks that signify the location of the alternative first campsite.

the banks of the Mississippi River as inspiration for this descriptive phrase. Twain said they rowed “across” the deep bend, instead of rowing “out of” the deep bend that is the case for exiting Glenbrook Bay into the open waters of Lake Tahoe. The absence of the visible “landmarks that signified the locality of camp,” at the start, as Twain states, further disqualifies Glenbrook Bay. In Figure 122, an overview photo of Glenbrook Bay, it is clear one does not go “across” Glenbrook Bay, nor is one able to see any landmarks that denote the hypothetical East Shore campsite, as the extension of Deadman Point hides them from view.

From use of the terms “deep bend” instead of “bay” and “across,” contrary to a term implying “out of,” and considering the lack of visibility of campsite landmarks, we determine that Glenbrook Bay was not the location of Mark Twain’s “deep bend of the lake.”

Population Estimate Does Not Describe the East Shore

As we mentioned in Chapter 2, Twain erroneously estimated the population of Tahoe at a very low number. His faulty conclusion was a reasonable outcome as he was on the sparsely populated North Shore and would not have observed many other Euro-Americans. He wrote in *Roughing It*, “We did not see a human being but ourselves during the time...” In addition, he wrote in a letter to his mother, “... *there was no one within six miles of us...*” from the timber claim site. These are indicative of few or no encounters with other persons.

If he was on the East Shore and had followed the Kings Canyon-Clear Creek route to Glenbrook, he would have encountered a stream of wagons and pack trains from California carrying goods and travelers on the road between Walton’s Landing and Spooner Summit. Once at Glenbrook Meadow, he would have been in the middle of the lively activity associated with receiving shipments and passengers through Walton’s Landing. Glenbrook was within six miles of the hypothetical timber claim site, yet none of this finds its way into *Roughing It* or any of the letters for the simple reason that Clemens was never there in 1861.

From this, we conclude Sam Clemens did not pass through Glenbrook on his timber scouting trips.

Glenbrook Sawmill Was Not in Operation

After arriving at his first night’s campsite, Twain recalled in *Roughing It*, “Three miles away was a saw-mill and some workmen.” Some say this was the Lake Bigler Lumber Co. mill built at Glenbrook in 1861 and makes this their sole defining landmark that fixes the location as the East Shore. In Chapter 2, we showed that the sawmill was a misremembered or embellished feature of the story.

Considering the presence of workers at a sawmill as a critical indication of mill operation, we must conclude that the mill Twain referenced in *Roughing It* was not the Lake Bigler Lumber Co. mill at

Glenbrook because it could not have been in operation in September 1861.

This was a water-powered mill reliant on active surface flow in Glenbrook Creek. Recent historical flow records from Glenbrook Creek show that the creek was unusable by mid-May and dry by late July resulting in insufficient flow to power the sawmill.

In his letter to his mother, he mentioned the need for a Mr. Jones to relocate his sawmill to the area of his timber claim. Again, why would he think this was necessary if there was a functioning sawmill already near him?

The contradictory information and uncertainties make it impossible to use Twain's mention of a sawmill and its workmen in *Roughing It* as a defining factor in establishing Clemens' specific location. More likely, the mention is an embellishment or a fragment of an unrelated memory that Clemens incorrectly recalled along with other misremembered and fictional aspects in *Roughing It*.

Campsites Do Not Fit the Description

To support the assertion that Clemens camped north of Glenbrook on the East Shore, several mistaken assumptions must occur on the sequential order of the campsites.

To complicate further this reasoning, some implicitly assign an erroneous geographical meaning to Clemens' use of "upper camp" and "lower camp" to make their campsite sequence seem logical. Through speculation, they mistakenly affix "upper camp" as the northerly site and "lower camp" as the southerly site.

In Appendix II, we demonstrate that Twain was referring to the height of adjacent terrain when he chose the "upper camp" and "lower camp" monikers. Here, he used "upper" and "lower" to describe the south and north ends, respectively of a bay on the Big Island of Hawaii. He did not intend a geographic, directional, or a hierarchical meaning.

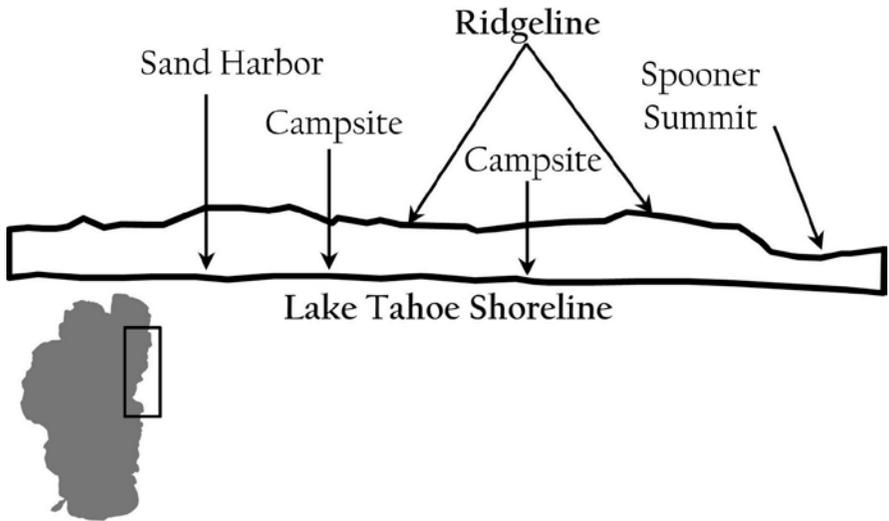


Figure 123. Elevation view of Carson Range ridge line above hypothetical East Shore campsites shows both sites adjoin similar high terrain.

Both the hypothetical East Shore campsites adjoin equally steep and high shoreline topography as shown in an elevation view of the campsites in Figure 123 and cross-section profiles in Figure 124. There is not a discernible height distinction between the sites and therefore, no justification to place upper camp toward the north and lower camp toward the south. Compare this situation to the North Shore destination. Here, the upper campsite is at the foot of the steep Stateline Point while the lower campsite is on the flat beach at the end of a valley that spills out to Lake Tahoe consistent with Twain's previous use as geographic terminology for his Hawaii excursion.

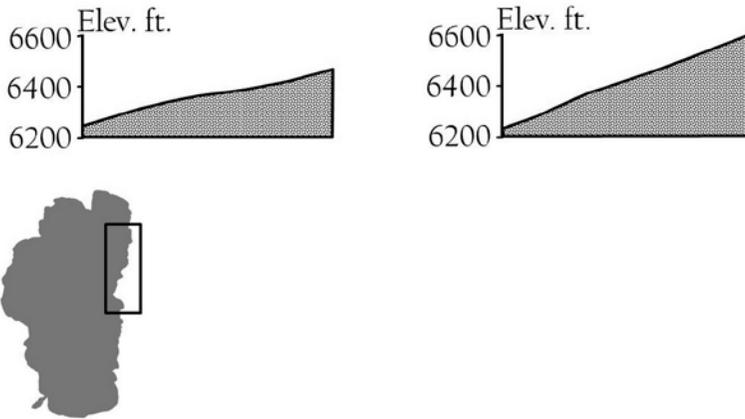


Figure 124. Profiles of the hypothetical cache site (left) and timber claim site show similar adjoining height.

Arbitrary choice of a direction from Glenbrook, failure to disprove other possible directions of travel, and confusion over the meaning and intent of upper and lower campsites, invalidates the rationale for East Shore campsites.

Campsite Chronology is Erroneous

Because of the mistake in identification of the campsites (reversing upper camp and lower camp), East Shore advocates are not able to fit correctly Twain's sequence of campsites to their locations on the East Shore. Comparative maps best explain this inconsistency. Recall that Appendix II showed that Clemens' description in his letter characterized "upper camp" as the cache site and "lower camp" as the timber claim location.

Figure 125 shows the Day 1 travel, starting from Glenbrook Bay. Clemens and Kinney rowed three miles to the cache site where they found food and supplies and spent the first night at the lake in this location.

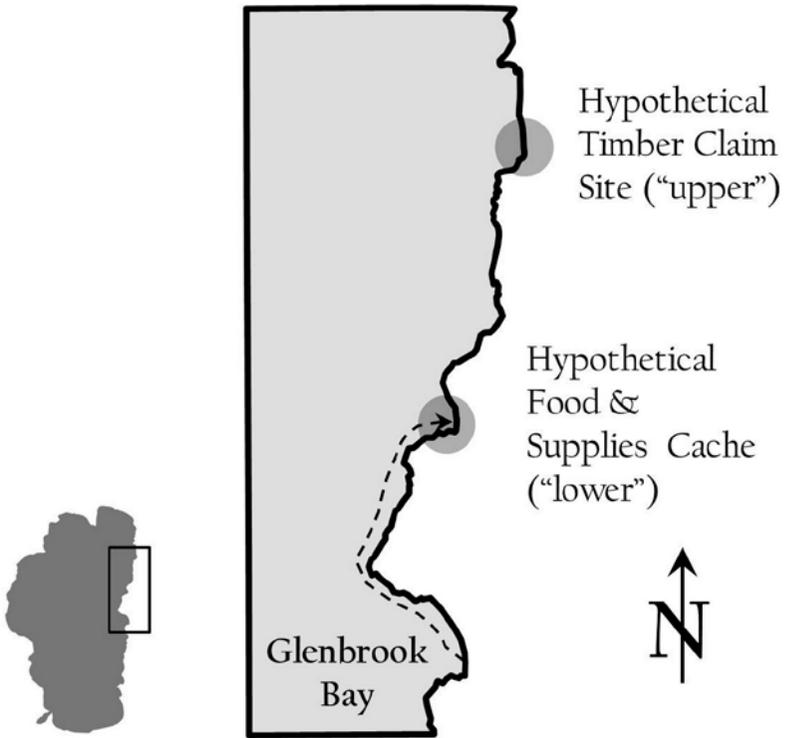


Figure 125. Theoretical first-day travel by skiff from Glenbrook to "upper camp" food and supplies cache site continued another three miles to a cabin.

Figure 126 shows the Day 2 travel per Clemens' letter. They started out in the morning from the "upper camp" cache site and travel by foot three miles to the "lower camp" timber claim and then another three miles to a cabin. The problem that arises with the East Shore scenario is that proponents start the Day 2 travel from the lower campsite (their definition for "southern"), meaning Clemens and Kinney bedded down at the cache site during Day 1 but miraculously awoke three miles farther north at upper camp (their definition for "northern") to begin Day 2. Proponents must make this erroneous step

to force-fit the chronology that follows to match the need to travel across six miles to

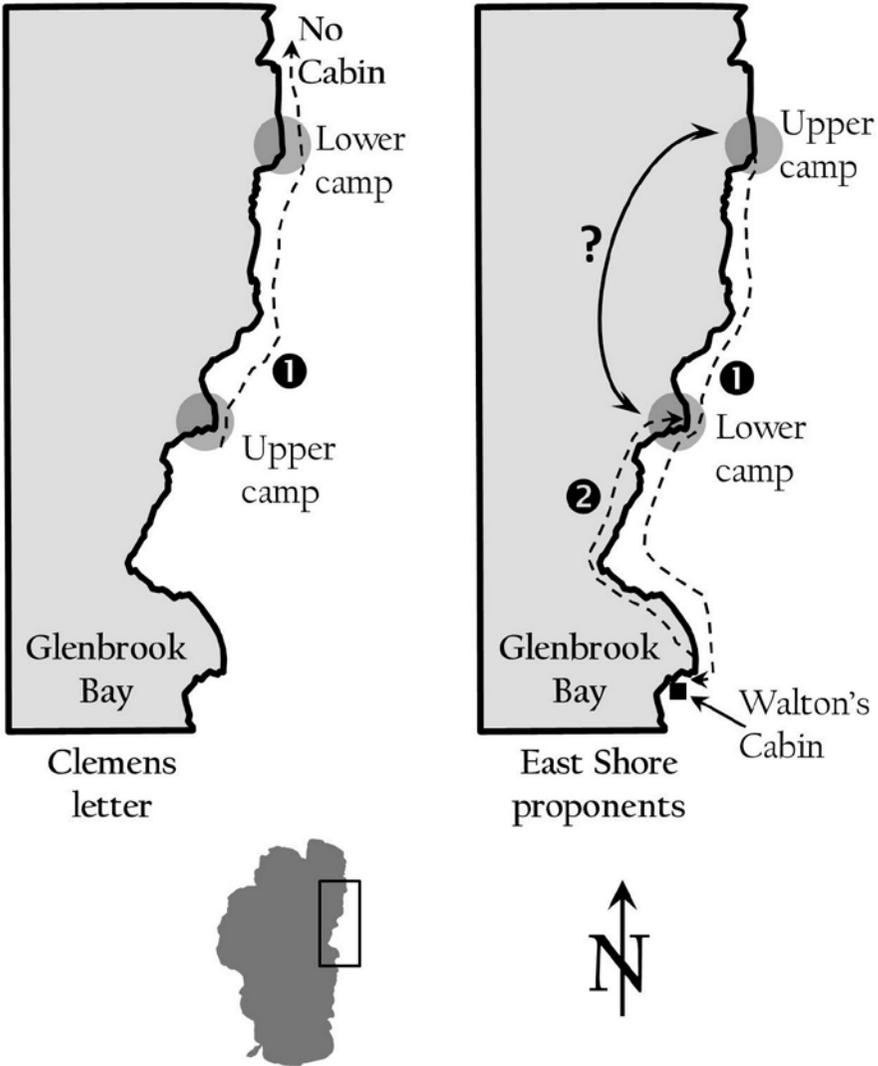


Figure 126. This comparison of campsites shows the sequence per Clemens' letter to the left and the East Shore scenario on the right; numbers denote necessary steps on second day of travel.

a cabin, since no cabin existed north of East Shore proponents' upper camp in 1861. Incongruously, they have the two men looking for food, but passing by their food cache on their way to the cabin and then double backing to the cache site – an impractical situation and indeed, impossible per Clemens' letter. Further, Clemens' letter says it was six miles from the cabin site back to the food cache, but under the East Shore timber claim scenario, it can only be three miles or less.

No Cabin Existed on the East Shore Where Clemens Said He Found a Cabin

Another critical clue is the cabin entered by Clemens and friend Kinney where they played cribbage and commandeered the owner's dugout canoe. From the campsite sequence chronology in Appendix II, we know that Clemens walked a total of six miles from his starting point at the hypothetical cache site on the second day. Figure 127 shows the points of interest on the East Shore north of Glenbrook Bay in 1861-65. No such cabin existed on the 1861-65 plat in a location six miles north of the Day 2 starting point. Thus, the East Shore does not fit Clemens' description for the location of the cabin.

Vacant Cabin Was Occupied and Was Not the Only Cabin on the East Side of the Lake

Ignoring, for the moment, the problem exposed in the previous section the moment, the nonexistence of a vacant cabin, East Shore advocates point to a cabin located near South Point at Glenbrook as the vacant cabin Clemens mentioned in his letter (Figure 120). However, we know that this cabin was the Rufus Walton home and occupied by him and his family as late as August when the artist Joseph Lamson visited the second time. Lamson recorded the visit in his diary.

Since business was brisk at Walton's Landing in the fall of 1861, Walton and his family would have been present when Clemens was in the area in September. Twain makes no mention of any other occupants of the cabin, and this precludes Walton's cabin as the unoccupied cabin entered by Clemens and Kinney.

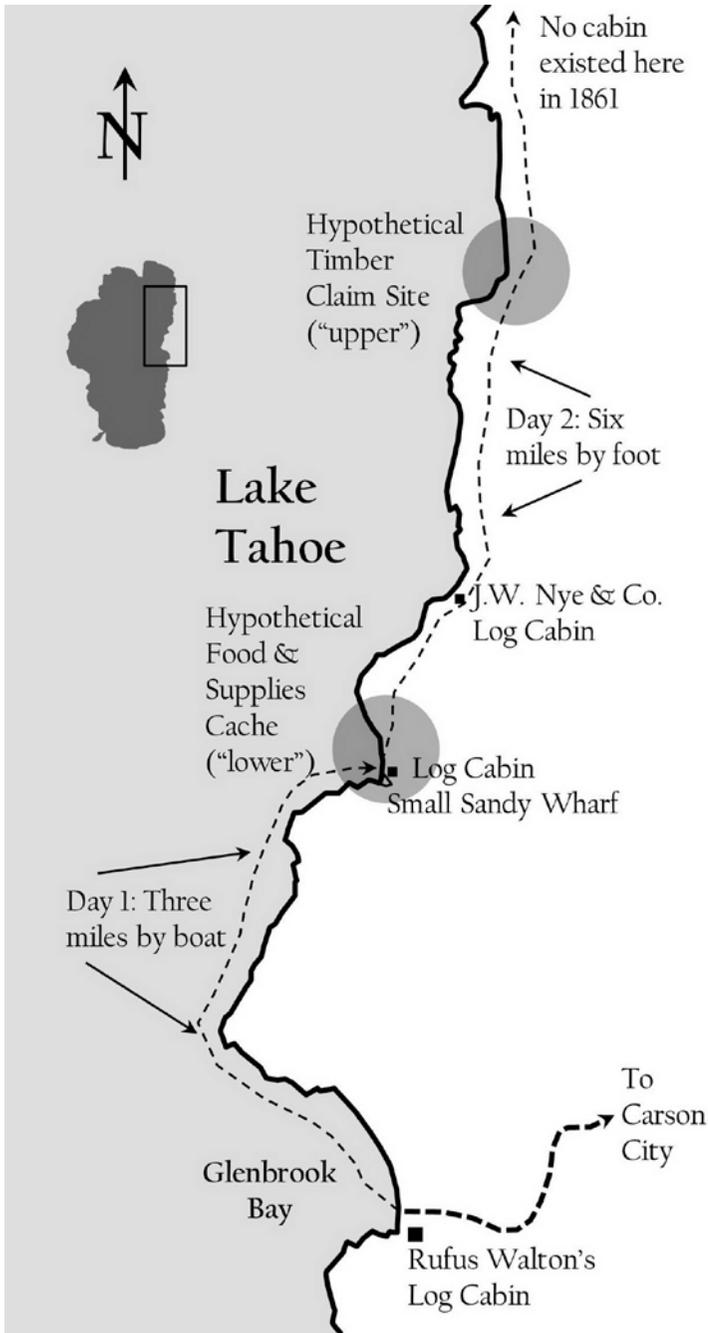


Figure 127. No cabin existed at the location described by Sam Clemens after he had walked six miles on Day 2.

Recall Clemens and Kinney took the cabin owner's dugout canoe, an act that would have engendered an owner's protest, and a mention in the letter, if the owner had been present.

East Shore proponents illogically argue that since Twain made no mention, one way or the other, of the cabin's occupancy, it leaves open the possibility that people were there. They go on to speculate that he did not mention any people in the cabin in the letter to his mother because she did not know them! Clemens and Kinney found no food in the cabin. This means that if people were there, they refused to share food, a significant transgression of western tradition and hospitality and an illogical outcome since the cabin served as a way station for travelers.

Another fact contradicting the Walton cabin as the vacant cabin is Clemens' statement in the letter that it was, "... *the only house on this side of the Lake.*" We know from the 1861-65 plats, there were three cabins visible on the east side of the lake, and these appear on Figure 120.

The lack of an unoccupied cabin, as Clemens described, and the presence of other cabins contradicts Clemens' observations and is evidence enough that the East Shore was not the scene of the timber claim.

Flat Granite Rock is Not Unique, Not at the Location Described by Clemens, and Not Exposed in 1861

Proponents suggest others should believe that a flat rock found on the East Shore at the hypothetical timber claim site was unique among all other rocks, so its existence was the "capstone" of their proof, but instead demonstrates their ignorance of the geology of Lake Tahoe. In fact, the flat rock alone does not prove the site because of the widespread occurrence of flat granite rocks on the north and east shores of Tahoe. Fracturing in this granite occurs at depth, beginning

as cracks due to extreme stress. The cracks open more widely as the rock reaches the surface and surrounding pressures are less, yielding common flat surface fracture planes because of the crystalline structure of granite.

Figure 128 is a photo of a field of flat surface granite rocks near Stateline Point. These are indicative of the preponderance of such rocks in the northeast quadrant of Lake Tahoe.



Figure 128. Field of flat surface granite rocks along the backshore at Stateline Point

Clemens' letter places the location of the flat granite rock on the site of the food and supplies cache he calls, upper camp. Figure 129 shows the location and identification of campsites and illustrates the wrong location for the granite slab by East Shore proponents.

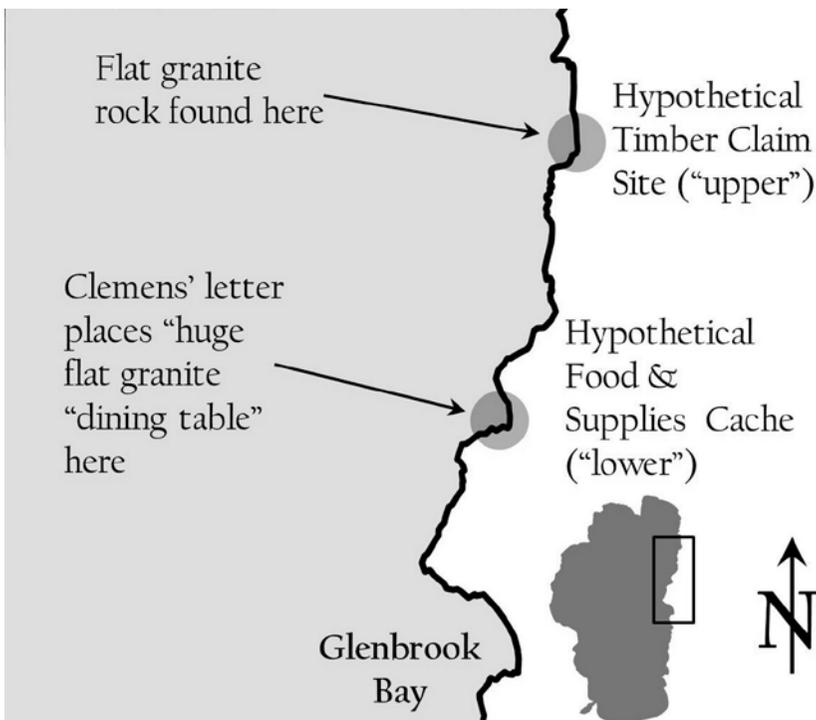


Figure 129. Location of flat granite rock conflicts with Clemens' description

Beach and Flat Granite Rock would have been Submerged

Assume, for the moment, that the sandy beach and flat granite rock did, in fact, exist. What would the water levels have been in September 1861 and would the beach and rock have been exposed? Referring to the information in the section, “We Were on the North Shore” in Chapter 3, we can establish the lake level at that time with a reasonable amount of certainty. The lake surface elevation in latter September 1861 was 6224.9 ft. L.T.D. Measurements taken at the hypothetical campsite place the beach and the bottom of the flat granite rock at 6224.1 ft. L.T.D. This means water about 9-10 in. deep would have surrounded the rock and covered the beach area. Consider that the lake would have had to drop at least 1 ft. more to provide 3-5 ft. of dry ground buffer from the water’s edge to avoid splashing by

wave action. This adds yet another inconsistency with the East Shore timber claim site hypothesis.

Two Men Could Not Have Slept on a Nonexistent Beach

The more recent proponents of the East Shore timber claim myth insist Twain camped and slept on the beach at his timber claim camp along a straight section of shoreline north of Thunderbird Lodge. The area in question has a 30 to 50-foot wide beach when the lake is four to five feet below its high-water mark. The beach was created in the mid-20th century by back shore erosion caused by unnaturally high water levels due to the construction of the Tahoe Dam in 1913. Before that, it was a boulder lined shore. Proponents mistakenly assert that this beach was present in 1861, when, in fact, it was not.

A 1985 scientific study of the entire Lake Tahoe shoreline conducted for the California State Lands Commission explains that existing beaches at Lake Tahoe formed in one of two ways. The sediment discharges of nearby streams nourished the formation of beaches under natural, pre-Tahoe Dam conditions. Other beaches formed more recently, when the Tahoe Dam raised the lake to an unnatural level that initiated erosion of the otherwise stable waterfront cliffs and backshore. This is the case for the hypothetical campsite where higher water levels and an eddy current eroded the boulder lined shoreline into a sandy beach.

In this case, erosion from cliff-backshore sources supplied the sediment that created the beach we see today. Figure 130 illustrates before and after cross-sections at the hypothetical East Shore timber claim location.

Creation of the beach by cliff-backshore erosion is the case for this site where proponents contend Twain slept on a sandy beach. There

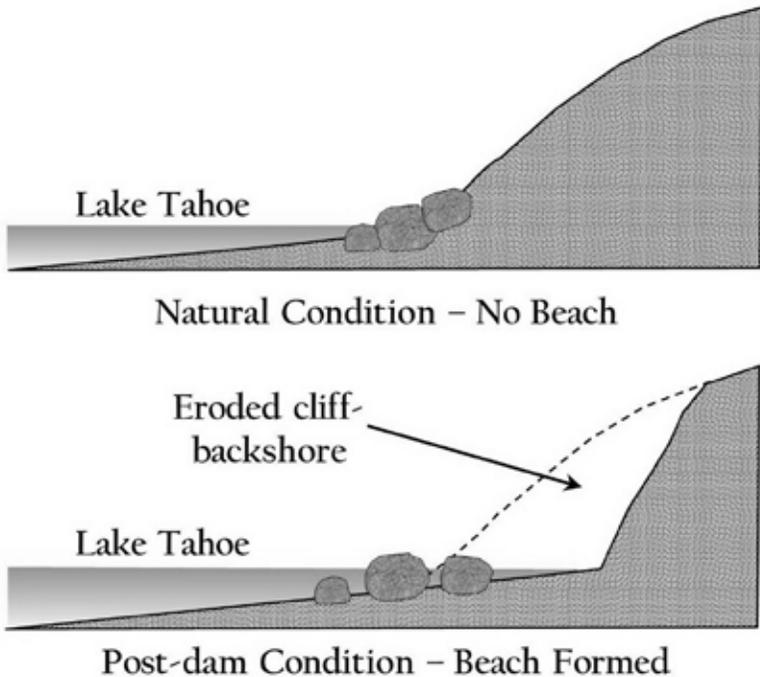


Figure 130. Cross-sectional view of beach in 1861 and formation of 30-50 ft. wide beach at hypothetical timber claim location after construction of Tahoe Dam

are no defined streams in the vicinity to supply the sediment necessary to have a naturally formed beach. Under natural conditions, nearshore water currents (Figure 131) swept northward what little sand that might have eroded off the hillside to Sand Harbor where it became trapped.

The loose assemblage of submerged boulders now resting as far as 100 ft. offshore from this beach roughly marks the former location of the shoreline under pre-dam conditions. The flat rock that proponents offer as the “capstone” of their argument was behind the boulder line. Therefore, in 1861 the backshore hillside high above the lake contained the embedded flat rock. When the dam raised the water level, wave action and an eddy current eroded the soil holding the

boulders in place, they collapsed onto the lake bottom, and water action further exposed boulders embedded in the pre-dam hillside. No beach existed here in 1861, and it would be difficult to have landed and moored a wooden skiff there without sustaining serious damage on the rocks.

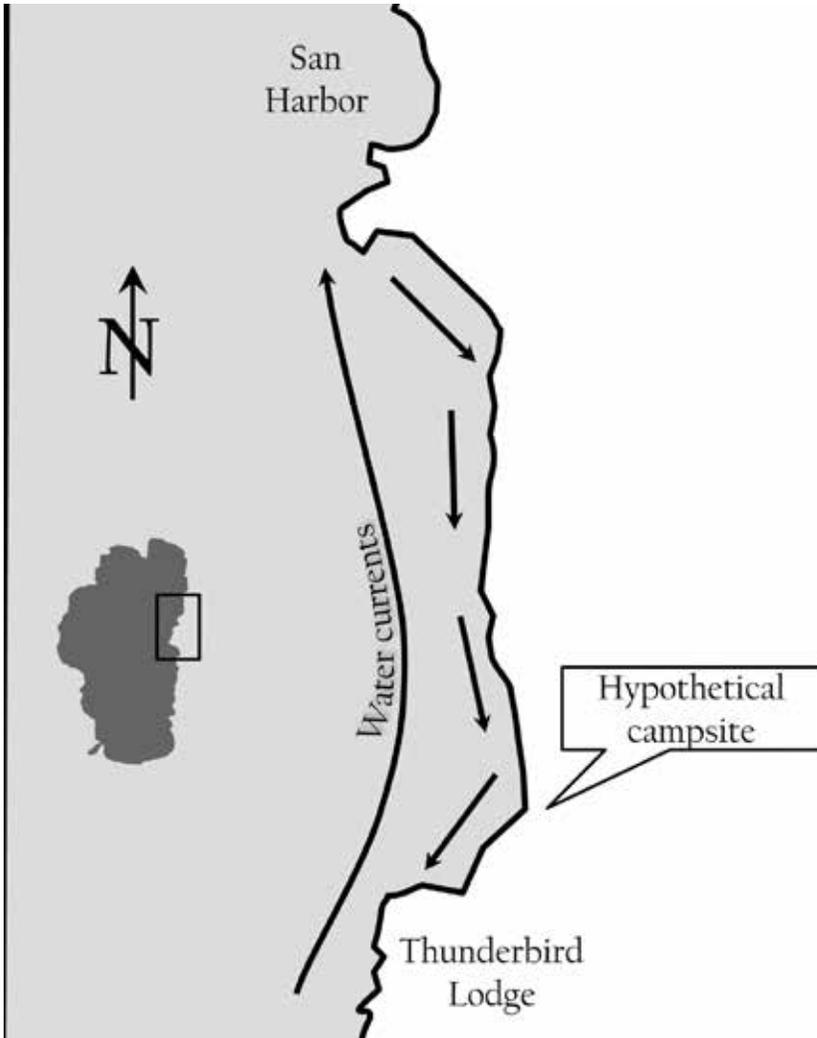


Figure 131. This illustration of nearshore water currents shows how the circular movement of water (eddy) counter to the main current and in addition to wave action eroded the 1861 boulder shoreline into a beach.

The historical mapping and photographic evidence are overwhelming and uncontroverted in its proof that no such sandy beach existed in 1861.

An 1861-65 Public Land Survey map (Figure 132) for the hypothetical campsite area shows the zone was rocky shoreline with no beach present. In addition, proponents incorrectly assert that this map shows a sandy beach at the hypothetical campsite. Here, proponents have misread the map by incorrectly identifying the small sandy beach (“Sand beach” “Good boat landing” on the map) southwest of the hypothetical campsite location as the timber claim campsite.

In 1918, the U. S. Reclamation Service performed the Lake Tahoe Shoreline Survey to document existing shoreline conditions. This was ordered in anticipation of defense of the Reclamation Service against claims of property damage due to shoreline erosion caused by the elevated water levels created by operation of the Tahoe Dam. A drawing prepared under this survey on July 3, 1918 covers the area in question. An excerpt is shown on Figure 133. The shoreline in the location of the hypothetical timber claim campsite is designated as “Rocky” with closely spaced contour lines indicating a very steep and nearly vertical bank. The bathymetric cross section shows 11.7 ft. of drop over 25 ft. of distance from the top of the boulders on the shoreline to their base on the lake bottom. This rules out conditions suitable for existence of a flat submerged beach that could be exposed at a very low lake level. This survey was conducted just five years after the Tahoe Dam began to impound water above natural levels. Therefore, it represents the actual natural condition of the shoreline before the onset of backshore erosion. This clearly proves there was no evidence of a sandy beach here in 1918.

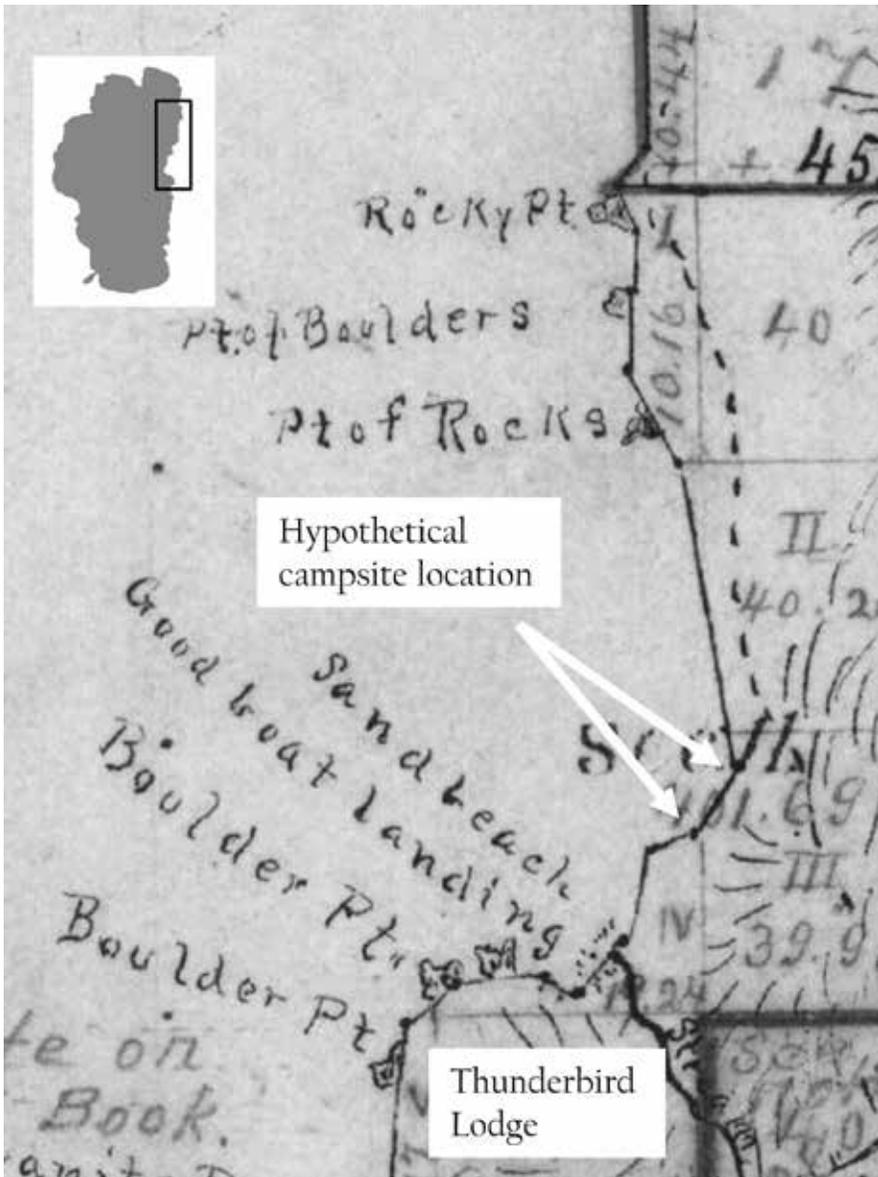


Figure 132. This excerpt of 1861-65 Public Land Survey plat of T15N R18E shows that government surveyors did not note a beach at the hypothetical campsite location.

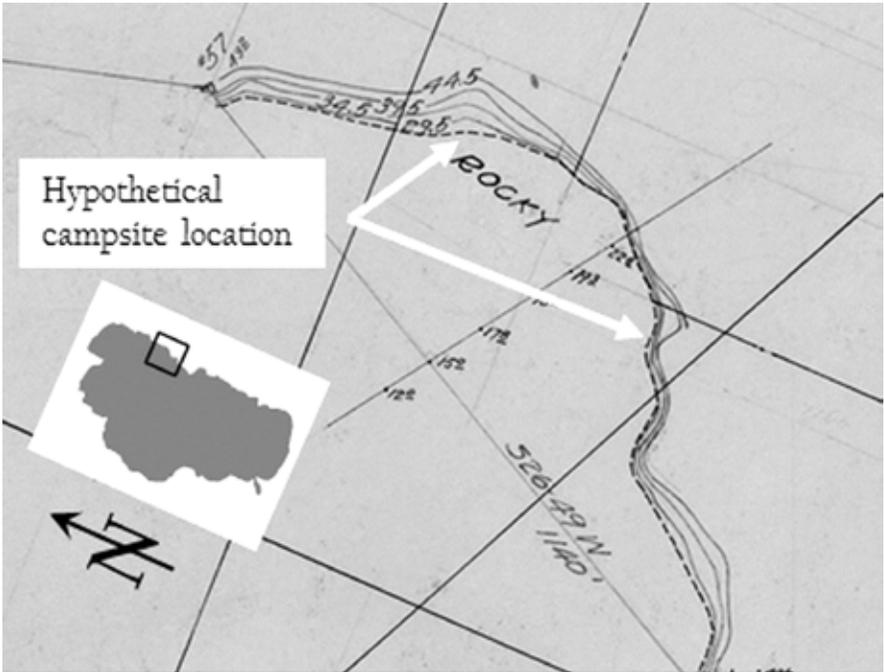


Figure 133. This excerpt of July 1918 shoreline survey map shows rocky shoreline, steep lake bottom slope, near vertical bank, and no beach at the hypothetical campsite location

We can take the historical 1861 and 1918 shorelines and superimpose them on a 3-D representation of the shoreline as it existed in 2010 (Figure 134). When we do this, the amount of shoreline retreat since 1918 becomes quite evident. The alignments of the 1861 and 1918 shorelines are essentially the same, demonstrating the 1918 shoreline survey represents the near natural conditions before the Tahoe Dam. We see that in some places, the 2010 shoreline has receded significantly at the hypothetical campsite and as much as 130 ft. landward as the direct result of backshore erosion. This illustrates how proponents have erroneously assumed the way Tahoe is now is the way it was in 1861, and futilely argue that the mid-20th century created beach was the same beach that Clemens camped upon.

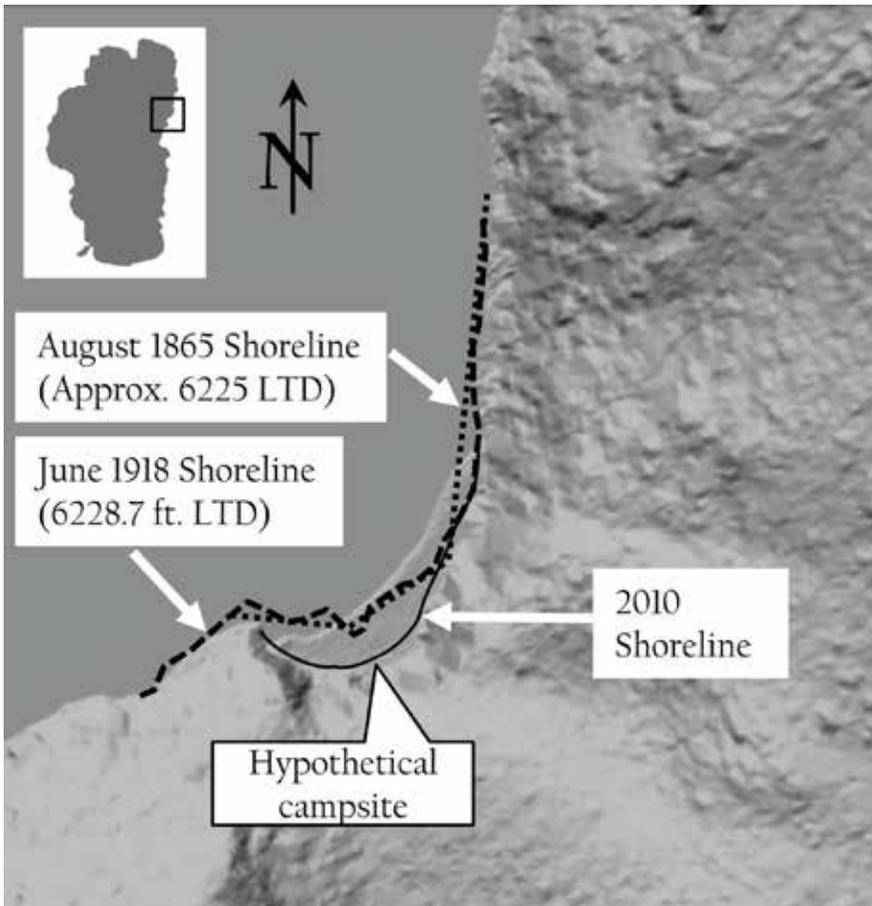


Figure 134. The 1865 and 1918 shorelines are superimposed on a shaded terrain image of the August 2010 shoreline, proving the significant backshore erosion that occurred and created the new beach.

An oblique aerial photograph (Figures 135 and 136) taken circa 1937 shows the hypothetical campsite in winter. Detailed examination of the photo depicts a boulder studded shoreline with no evidence of a beach. This is especially evident when one compares the aerial photo to a 2016 photo (Figure 137) taken from lake level. The recent photo shows a clearly visible gap in the boulder shoreline and an obvious scar from backshore erosion.

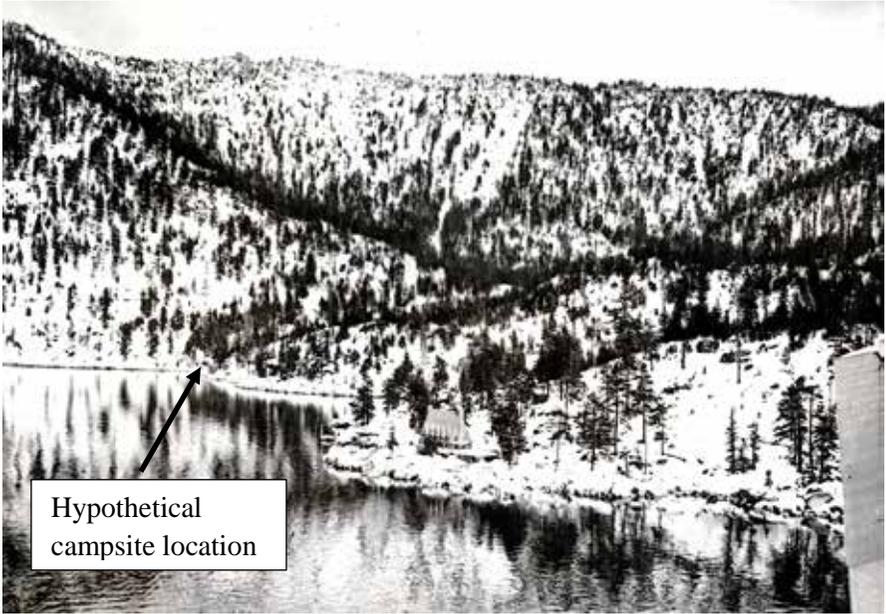


Figure 135. Oblique aerial view of the hypothetical campsite location (Courtesy of UNR Special Collections)



Figure 136. Cropped and enlarged portion of Figure 135 shows a boulder shoreline with no evidence of a beach waterline at the hypothetical campsite, marked by a dashed circle. (Courtesy of UNR Special Collections)

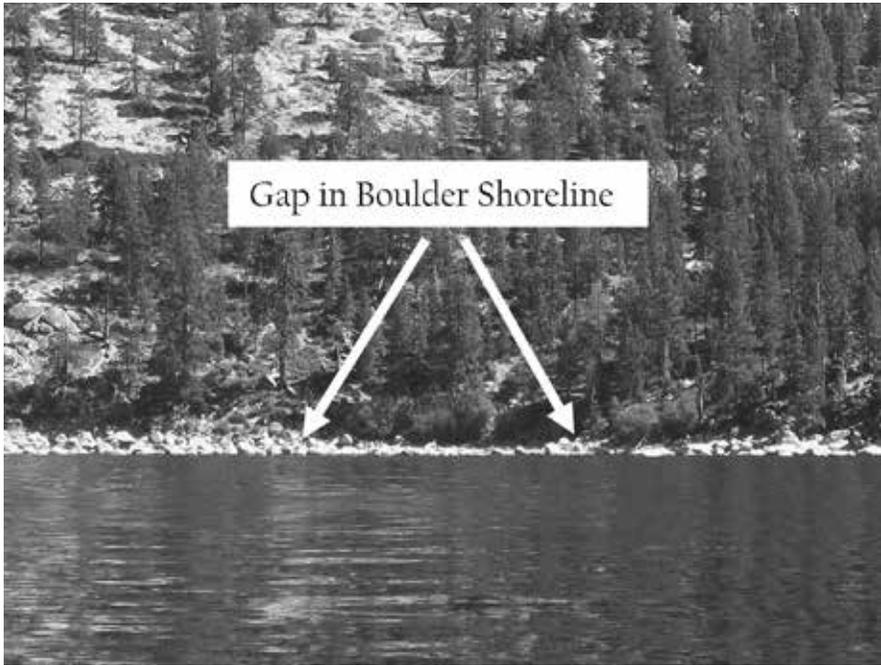


Figure 1371. Photo taken in 2016 showing erosion-created gap in boulder shoreline and backshore scar resulting in beach formation

Using scientific studies that document the shoreline formation process and classify the shoreline, confirmed by historical mapping and photography, we must conclude no beach that could accommodate two men sleeping at the hypothetical timber claim site existed in 1861. Clemens and his friend could not have slept on the shoreline since no beach existed. Proponents have argued that the 1861 survey plat shows a beach at that location, and 20th century shoreline erosion could not have created the existing beach after the Tahoe Dam construction. Both unsubstantiated assertions have been exposed as patently false. As for the flat rock that proponents cite as evidence, no such rock could have existed on a sandy beach that did not exist either. It was embedded in the hillside above and slid down when the supporting terrain was eroded away.

East Shore Forest Size Was Too Small

In *Roughing It*, Mark Twain described the forest at his timber claim site, “It was yellow pine timber land – a dense forest of trees a hundred feet high and from one to five feet through at the butt.” Devotees to the East Shore timber claim myth assert this description of the forest represents much of the Tahoe shoreline, including the East Shore. Scientific studies of the pre-contact forest conclusively disprove this unsupported statement.

Scientists examined Comstock-era stump fields on the East Shore at the supposed Twain timber claim site. The stump fields represented the condition of the forest before logging, as Sam Clemens might have seen it. None of the sampled stumps showed trees anywhere near the size described by Twain. The largest was only 2.8 feet. This is consistent with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency policy that classifies surviving old-growth East Shore trees as substantially smaller in diameter compared to old-growth trees growing on the North and West Shores.

The smaller East Shore trees, compared with the North Shore trees, are the result of harsher growing conditions on the East Shore influenced by lower moisture availability and fewer fertile soil conditions, even though the growing season is longer. Much larger trees more than five feet in diameter occur around Tahoe Vista on the North Shore.

Proponents cite a five-foot diameter fallen cedar near their proposed campsite location. The cedar has not been dated and probably reflects the accelerated growth that occurred when the surrounding forest was cut away for the Comstock. Loggers did not take cedars since they had no economic value.

The statement that the East Shore forest was the same size as described by Twain is not accurate, nor is it based on any historical research or scientific facts. Using the analytical determination that tree size was inconsistent with Twain’s description, we conclude that the

East Shore was not the location of the timber claim described in *Roughing It*.

Initial View of Lake Tahoe Could Not Have Occurred from Glenbrook

One of the important clues to location in *Roughing It* is Twain's vivid description of his first sighting of Lake Tahoe. The East Shore timber claim believers inexplicably ignore this critical clue to location or explain it away as a made-up scene by Twain. They downplay the importance of view description as a clue or imply what is not there, is there, if only one uses some imagination.

Twain's description has four key elements: The lake "...burst upon..." them into view, it appeared "...walled in by a rim of snow-clad [sic] mountain peaks..." looked like "...a vast oval..." and exhibited a reflection of "...shadows of the mountains brilliantly photographed upon its still surface..." As other writers have concluded from this passage, Twain was viewing the lake from a distant, high-elevation vantage point and did not doubt its veracity.

Along the original Glenbrook Canyon road, one traveled along the stream bottom where the forest and riparian vegetation would block the view from a distance. As one approached the Glenbrook Meadow, the observer would have gradually seen the lake through the well-spaced trees and sparse understory in the old-growth forest before emerging into the open meadow. The lake does not "burst" into view in this setting.

Once in Glenbrook Meadow, snowcapped mountains are viewable behind the narrow bay bounded by South Point and Deadman Point. However, it is impossible to have seen the "walled in rim" that Twain recalls because of the low elevation of the viewpoint and the panoramic constraint of the two points that define Glenbrook Bay. Further, these limitations and constraints did not allow the sense of the lake's "vast oval" aspect in Twain's description. Figure 138 is an illustration from the point of emergence from the forest into

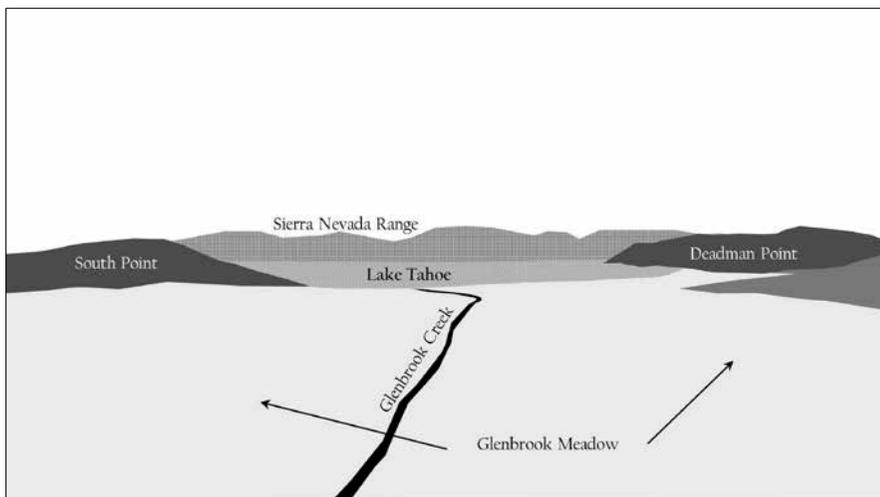


Figure 138. Computer-generated view from the edge of the forest at Glenbrook showing the constrained view of Lake Tahoe; trees have been removed to provide the best possible view.

Glenbrook Meadow and shows the low-level and constrained view from this location.

If we treat Lake Tahoe as a flat mirror by neglecting the minor effects of water surface curvature and refraction, we see that the Glenbrook Meadow observation point is too low and too close to afford a full and intense view of the snowcapped mountain range on the opposite shore. Figure 139 illustrates this point.

The proximity to the shore forces the reflected image to spread over the 12.1 miles of the lake surface, making it too diffused to be clearly visible with the naked eye.

We use knowledge of old-growth forest conditions, historical road alignments, topography, and basic physics of light reflection to analyze the lake view from the Glenbrook area. Here, it was impossible in 1861 to obtain a view from Glenbrook anywhere close to what Twain described in *Roughing It*.

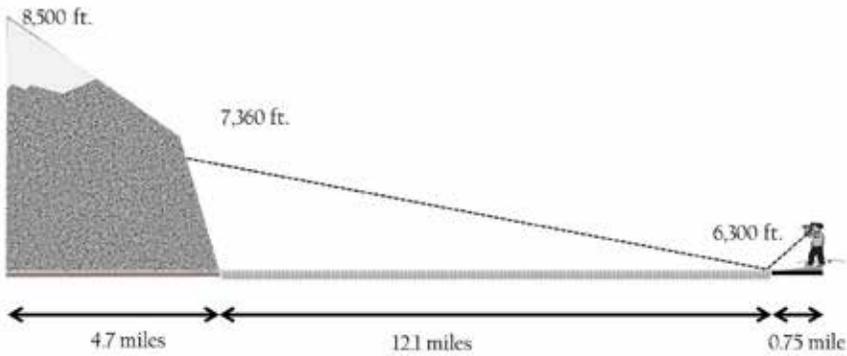


Figure 139. A full reflection of the Sierra Nevada from Glenbrook Meadow is not physically possible

On the North Shore, Not the East Shore

In *Roughing It*, Mark Twain places the setting of his timber claim adventure concisely: “We were on the north shore.” Undeterred, East Shore timber claim advocates invoke skewed revisionist geography to say Twain meant the East Shore when he wrote “north shore.”

In an earlier work, *Innocents Abroad*, Twain referred to seeing fish on the North Shore, “I speak of the north shore of Tahoe, where one can count the scales on a trout at a depth of a hundred and eighty feet.” This reference came from his initial timber scouting experience at Lake Tahoe. The timber scouting trips are the only possible sources of the North Shore geographical reference.

No records show that he traveled to the North Shore after his two visits in 1861. Two independent geographical reference statements using the term “north shore” and Twain’s experience in riverboat navigation make this clear: Twain means the North Shore when he says it.

The rounded rectangular shape of Lake Tahoe lends itself to the well-defined geographical zones of the shoreline, as illustrated in Figure 140. We know that Sam Clemens and later, Mark Twain, made many visits to Lake Tahoe and saw the lake from its north, south, and east

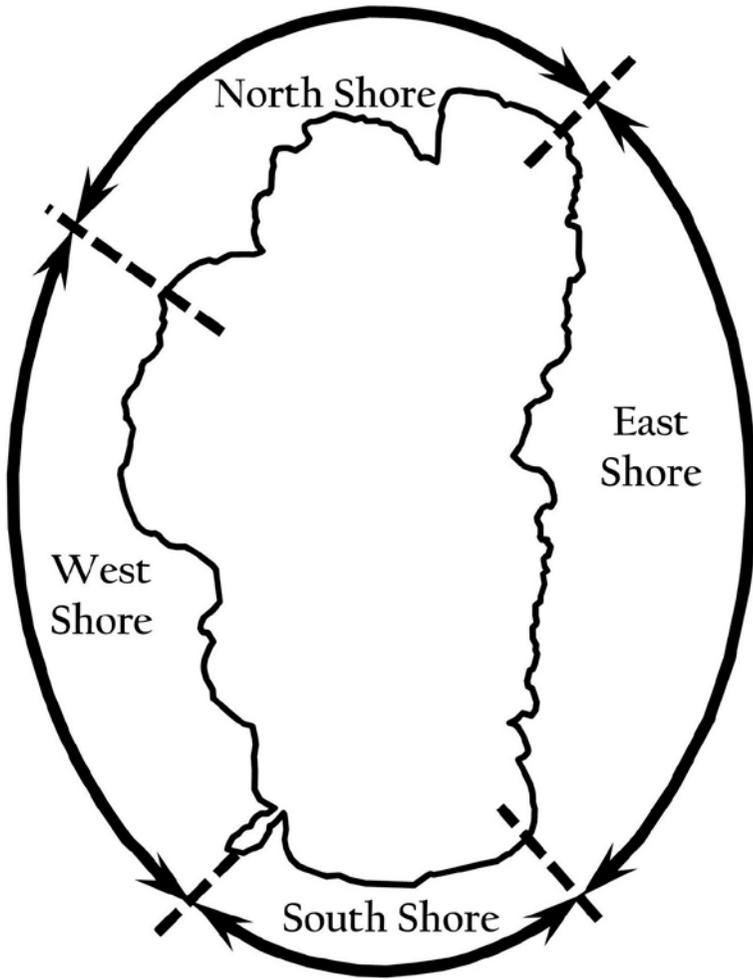


Figure 140. Diagram showing the natural division of geographic names for the Lake Tahoe shoreline

vantage points, including views from high elevations. These visits provided the perspective for him to understand fully the geography of Lake Tahoe. In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain affirmed his knowledge of

Lake Tahoe, “I measure all lakes by Tahoe, partly because I am far more familiar with it than with any other ...”

East Shore timber claim boosters create their own version of Tahoe geography and profess that the East Shore is really the North Shore, tantamount to declaring that up is down. They do this by dividing the lake into a northern half, and a southern half based on an arbitrary east-west dividing line running from Glenbrook to Homewood. Doing this ignores the convention of referring to the East and West Shores as distinct geographical areas. It crudely breaks the lake into two halves as though it were circular, and not a rounded rectangle. Applying their geographical principles, one could, with equal validity, divide the lake into east and west halves and thus, declare the North and South Shores nonexistent.

Another explanation offered by East Shore supporters for Mark Twain’s description of the setting as the North Shore instead of the East Shore is that Clemens misunderstood a compass reading. Those, whom believe this, assume without the benefit of any supporting evidence, that Clemens had a compass and misunderstood its meaning. They imagine he stood on the East Shore with the compass pointed to the magnetic north, leading him to believe he was on the North Shore, even though there is no mention of a compass, compass readings, or navigation by compass in any of the relevant Twain writings.

In 1861, the magnetic declination at Tahoe was about 16 degrees east of true north. The magnetic declination is the difference between the direction of the north end of a magnetic compass needle and true north. This amount of declination is enough to mislead a person as to their true location if they did not understand the difference between magnetic north and true north. To accept this as an explanation for the “north shore” statement, one must completely ignore Clemens’ training for a riverboat pilot who included navigation skills – and certainly – a basic understanding about the difference between magnetic north and true north. In *Life on the Mississippi*, he discusses

the use of a chart and compass as navigation aids in darkness, indicating his fundamental understanding of the critical difference between true north and magnetic north.

Neither irrational geographical revisionism, nor alleged incompetent compass reading by former riverboat pilot Clemens is sufficient to prove that the North Shore is the East Shore.

White and Gray Rocks Did Not Exist on the East Shore

In *Roughing It*, Twain writes of drifting in a boat while admiring the boulders on the bottom of the lake. He states, “There, the rocks on the bottom are sometimes gray, sometimes white.”

In Chapter 3, we examined the geology of the North Shore from Stateline Point and three miles west of location. The rocks in that area are, in fact, gray and white consistent with Twain’s description.

For the East Shore north of Glenbrook, there is only one natural source of rocks on the bottom of the lake: the white granite of the Carson Range. From this geology, we know the rocks on the bottom are white and do not exhibit any overall gray coloring.

However, it is not now possible to determine the color of rocks on the bottom of the lake because of the growth of attached algae due to human-caused pollution. Despite this well-known fact, East Shore timber claim advocates curiously maintain that the rocks on the bottom of the lake next to the East Shore are white and gray, even though they cannot see the color of the submerged rock and there are no naturally colored gray rocks visible above the waterline. There are dark-gray rocks on the hillsides above the wave run-up zone, but this color is from a lichen covering the rocks, and it does not flourish underwater.

We can objectively ascertain the color of submerged rocks by examining the natural above-water rocks sitting near the shore as an indication of the types of natural rocks that lie below the waterline. In this case, the above-water natural rocks along the North Shore from

Tahoe Vista to Stateline Point are white and dark gray. The above-waterline rocks along the East Shore north of Glenbrook are uniformly white.

Here, science and geology trump an illusion of what one wishes was true; white and gray rocks only occur naturally on the North Shore, at Stateline Point and west of that location. Mark Twain's description applies strictly to the North Shore and excludes any possibility that it was the East Shore.

Distance to Blue Water Was Too Far Away

Twain recalls in *Roughing It*, 'Sometimes we rowed out to the "blue water," a mile or two from shore. It was as dead blue as indigo there, because of the immense depth.' Recall from Chapter 3 that it is a known physical principle of water that all but blue and indigo colored light are absorbed at a depth of 100 feet or more in clear water, free of significant suspended matter. Microscopic particles in the water cause backscatter of the residual blue and indigo colored light toward the observer's eye. This is an important point: In 1861, at the 100-foot depth and deeper, the waters of Lake Tahoe showed their characteristic blue and indigo colors where the bottom is not visible.

This map in Figure 141 shows the occurrence of blue water as defined by the 100-foot bathymetric contour and the horizontal distance from the East Shore. As the map clearly shows, nowhere on the East Shore does the condition of blue water occur anywhere within one mile from shore and is usually within 0.2 mile from shore. In contrast, the blue waterline on the North Shore in Agate Bay (Figure 73) meets the 1-2 miles offshore distance mentioned by Twain.

At no point on the East Shore north of Glenbrook is the distance to blue water anywhere near the 1-2 miles cited by Twain. This characteristic alone eliminates any location on the East Shore northward of Glenbrook as a possible timber claim location.

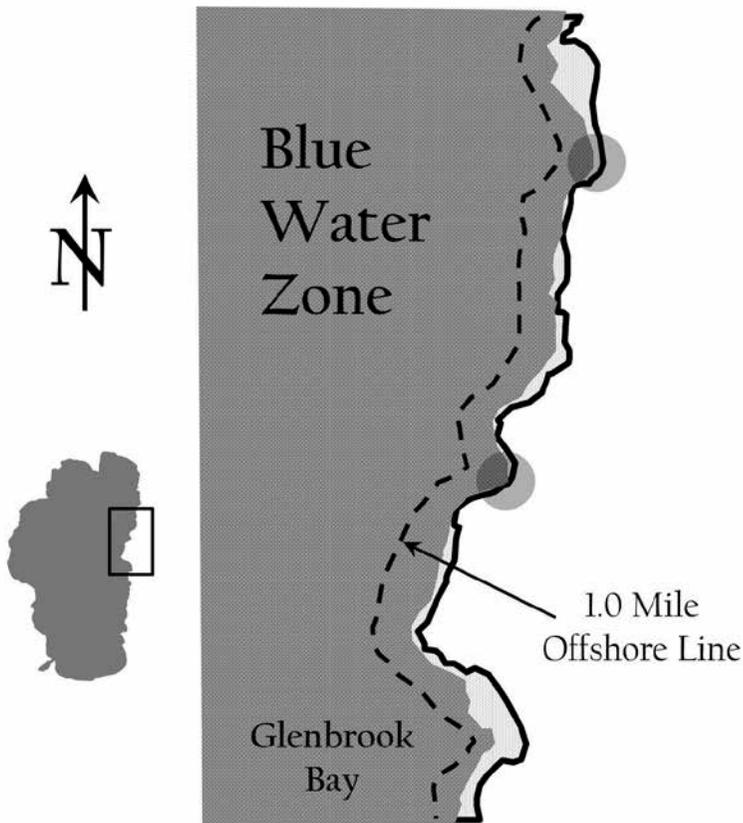


Figure 141. Map showing the distance to "blue water" on the East Shore is about 0.2 mile, much less than the 1-2 miles from shore cited by Twain.

Wildfire Scars Absent

When it comes to the wildfire described in *Roughing It* and the September 1861 letter, no one disputes that Sam Clemens accidentally started a wildfire at the site of his timber claim. Wildfires can leave a record of their occurrence in the form of a fire scar on tree trunks. Decaying stumps from the Comstock era are an archive of fire history and reveal a significant problem with the veracity of the East Shore

timber claim myth. Without knowing about previous fire scar research that was contrary to their theory, proponents made an absolute statement that a fire scar survey would prove their theory. In fact, just the opposite was true.

At the site where proponents say Clemens staked his timber claim, researchers found no 1861 fire scars on Comstock-era stumps, but did find fire scars recorded for 1855 and 1873. The absence of any 1861 fire scar record is a serious obstacle to prove that such a fire occurred. Curiously, proponents have cited 1861 surveyor's notes in the hypothetical timber claim area that do not make mention of fire scarred trees in their defense that Twain did not burn down the forest as he stated in *Roughing It*.

Researchers have not conducted a fire scar survey for the North Shore, but they have identified candidate stump fields, and fire scar studies may occur in the future.

Wildfire Advancement Description Did Not Fit

The East Shore timber claim scenario depends on Twain's description of the wildfire advancement in *Roughing It* to be possible from a boat sitting well offshore. However, we know from the letter of September 1861 that Twain observed the fire from the shore and not from an offshore boat, as he erroneously recalled in *Roughing It*. East Shore timber claim believers state that Clemens could observe the fire advancement from their site, but they erroneously assume he was far offshore in a boat with a better view of the mountainside.

Figure 142 shows a cross-section for the East Shore near the supposed timber claim site. It did not allow for a line of sight of the wildfire advancement following Twain's description of the well-spaced standing dead trees bursting into flames. A person standing upon a point on the old boulder shoreline cannot see farther than the steep hillside about 50 feet beyond.

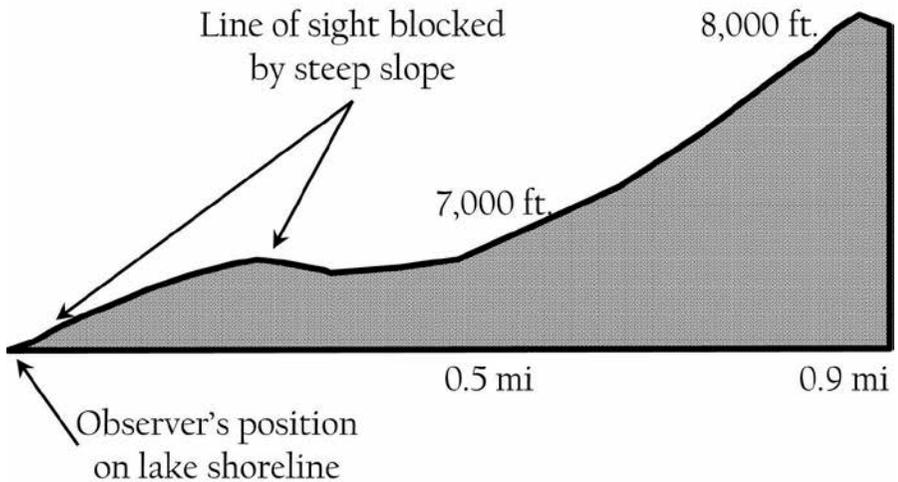


Figure 142. Cross-sectional view of hypothetical timber claim site showing inability to see wildfire advancement as described by Clemens and Twain.

Boulders at Supposed East Shore Timber Claim Were Not Present and Are of Insufficient Size

East Shore timber claim supporters point to a field of submerged boulders scattered offshore of their supposed campsite as the boulders that Clemens and Kinney drifted over. In fact, these are mostly the remnants of the boulder shoreline that collapsed into the lake after the construction of the Tahoe Dam. The field did not exist in 1861 as extensively as it does now. In any event, the size of these boulders does not measure up to the size description given by Twain and are far smaller than the massive boulders found offshore of Stateline Point.

Twain Biographical Writer: Carnelian Bay Was the Location

In Chapter 3, we detailed the statement by author George Wharton James in the 1914 book, *California Romantic and Beautiful*. Here, he

stated Twain was camped not far from Carnelian Bay. This conclusion is extremely damaging to the East Shore timber claim myth. This is because it is the only instance where a person who met Mark Twain and researched his early writing career in the West, had identified a specific location.

East Shore timber claim devotees fall back on an arsenal of logical fallacies and misrepresentation of history to counter James. One adherent summarily dismisses the 1914 statement in *California Romantic and Beautiful* as not valid because publication occurred after Twain's death. In this one proclamation, he dismisses as invalid not only James, but also by implication, the 40-plus scholarly biographical works written about Twain after his death. The same adherent engages in an *ad hominem* attack against James by characterizing James as a "California booster." This insinuates James would deliberately lie about Mark Twain to benefit California, in spite the fact he had written extensively about Nevada's history and lectured there at least twice, including one lecture before the Nevada Historical Society.

Another adherent says James was including the East Shore when he cited the Carnelian Bay location as the closest location. His flawed reasoning? People traveled only by boat in 1914, so locations were broadly geographical or geography magically changes when you are in a boat compared to land. This questionable rationalization is wrong on all counts.

First, a wagon road nearly encircled Lake Tahoe in 1914 except for the section between Incline and Glenbrook. Resort owners relegated their steamers mostly to tour boat status and longer distance transportation on the lake. Further, people were previously mobile using carriages and wagons and automobile tourism was already in full swing by 1914.

As early as 1906, automobiles were being barged across the lake from Tahoe Tavern to Glenbrook. In 1908, Al Sprague built his Al Tahoe

Hotel where it was, “advantageously located on the State and National automobile boulevard.” In 1911, the Tahoe Tavern held an auto derby, awarding a cash prize to the first automobile to arrive at the hotel for the season.

Second, James published a map (Figure 79) of Lake Tahoe in 1915 that showed Sand Harbor and Glenbrook, two locations much closer to the imaginary East Shore campsites. Therefore, James was aware of the specific geography of the North and East Shores. He would have used these latter localities as geographical reference points if he meant the East Shore.

As the only precise location given by a person who spoke in person with Twain, James’ writing is particularly problematic for fervent East Shore timber claim supporters. James’ description stands as the only credible and sourced statement of the specific location of Mark Twain’s timber claim.

Concluding Summary and Comparative Analysis

As a final proof and for demonstration of the preponderance of evidence principle, we compare in a tabular form the various indications from letters and book text to determine the location of the early trips to Lake Tahoe and the unrealized timber claim. The findings for the North Shore column came from information presented in Chapter 3.

| Evidence | East Shore | North Shore |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| Route reasonably close ($\pm 10\%$) to cited distance of 11 miles | No | Yes |
| Route surmounted two summits | Yes | Yes |
| Route crossed a valley | Yes | Yes |
| Route followed all or part of a passable on foot alignment | Yes | Yes |
| Deep bend of lake with visible landmarks that located first campsite | No | Yes |

| Evidence | East Shore | North Shore |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Population estimate consistent with location | No | Yes |
| Nye & Co. cabin and Brigade cache in rocks are geographically separated locations | No | Yes |
| Beach at Brigade cache site | Yes | Yes |
| Campsites fit upper and lower description | No | Yes |
| Flat granite rock at first night's campsite | No | Yes |
| Cabin existed six miles from second-day's starting point | No | ? ¹ |
| Cabin was unoccupied | No | Yes |
| Forest size consistent with description | No | Yes |
| Lake Tahoe "bursts" into view | No | Yes |
| Initial view of lake was a "vast oval" with "walled in rim" | No | Yes |
| Reflection of mountains in initial view of lake | No | Yes |
| "We were on the north shore." | No | Yes |
| White and gray rocks on lake bottom | No | Yes |
| Distance to "blue water" 1-2 miles | No | Yes |
| Beach at second (timber claim) campsite existed in 1861 | No | Yes |
| 1861 wildfire scars found | No | ? ² |
| Advancement of wildfire visible from campsite | No | Yes |
| Field of massive boulders offshore in 1861 | No | Yes |
| Habitat conducive to Sierra big horn sheep sighted by Clemens | No | Yes |

¹ The cabin does not appear on any 1861 or earlier maps. Detailed mapping of the area did not occur until 1865 when the cabin was shown for the first time.

² No comprehensive wildfire scar surveys have been conducted in this area.

| Evidence | East Shore | North Shore |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Site identified by a biographical writer who spoke with Twain | No | Yes |

| Summary | East Shore | North Shore |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Evidence is in Support | 4 | 23 |
| Evidence is in Opposition | 21 | 0 |
| Evidence is Unknown | 0 | 2 |
| Preponderance of Evidence in Support | No | Yes |

Note: “?” indicates unknown

Using the preponderance of evidence principle, we find the overwhelming amount of confirming evidence falls in favor of the North Shore as the location of the campsites, timber claim, and wildfire.

Epilogue

On September 14, 2010, the Nevada Board on Geographical Names held a hearing on whether to name a random inlet on the East Shore after Sam Clemens. The analysis contained throughout this book was presented on the record to disprove the proposed location and was not rebutted. They voted to move forward using the flawed reasoning that Mark Twain was in the general region around Lake Tahoe anyway, and the board was not interested in settling a historical dispute over the location of his campsites.

In the aftermath of the naming action, news stories and photographs appeared that identified the inlet as the actual site of Clemens’ timber claim and wildfire and cited the board’s action as a reference. Consequently, this myth found renewed life through repetition in mainstream media who failed to fact check the issue adequately. However, on May 12, 2011, the United States Board on Geographical

Names rejected the proposed naming, citing these reasons, “negative recommendation of the U.S. Forest Service and reasonable doubt regarding the location of Samuel Clemens’ campsite.” The US Board on Geographical Names did what its Nevada counterpart was afraid to do.

After failing to prove their case by convincing others of their interpretations of Mark Twain’s description of surroundings, proponents changed their approach. They abandoned any attempt to show that Twain’s descriptions were consistent with an East Shore campsite. They summarily dismissed most of these as “made up” and instead focused on cherry picking his words, tenuously connecting these to mostly unrelated historical information, and interpreting these in a way favorable to their view. The result was a counterfactual essay that presented a hypothetical account of Twain’s timber claim story. The essay was neither factually justified, nor followed the rules of classic logical thinking. A critique of this essay would be largely repetitive of this chapter. Instead, interested readers may obtain a free copy of the detailed critique at the website TahoeFacts.com.

A second attempt to name the cove was initiated by the Nevada Board on Geographical Names in December 2013 under the cover of the Nevada Statehood Sesquicentennial Celebration. Even the hapless Lt. Governor got sucked into publicly supporting this subterfuge. This time the board implicitly acknowledged its inability to prove the validity of the location. They simply said they were naming the same cove after Clemens, but were not asserting that he camped there. Statements by a Nevada Board on Geographical Names representative exposed this ruse as he asserted to the Associated Press this was the actual campsite. The board tabled the motion indefinitely by a near unanimous vote after vehement opposition by the Washoe Tribe of Native Americans and scientific evidence in the record that the beach where Clemens is alleged to have camped did not exist until the mid-20th century. Washoe Tribal members resented the naming because of

unrepentant racist views toward the Washoe Tribe and Native Americans expressed by Mark Twain.

Several Nevada-centric publications and publishers have repeated the questionable East Shore timber claim scenario. Some of these are, *A Short History of Lake Tahoe* by Michael Makely, *Nevadans: The Spirit of the Silver State* by Stanley Paher, two articles for the magazine, *Nevada in the West*, and two papers in the now-defunct Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. Some websites continue to repeat this myth or its variations, including the highly regarded TwainQuotes.com.

A final admonition to Mark Twain scholars and enthusiasts: Carefully examine and weigh the evidence. Do not be fooled by clever use of the inherent inaccuracies, contradictions, exaggeration, and incompleteness of historical records to manufacture false stories and deceptive site names that claim to have a Mark Twain association. They are a misrepresentation of the life and experiences of Mark Twain at Lake Tahoe that taints his literary legacy and tarnishes the factual basis of history.

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