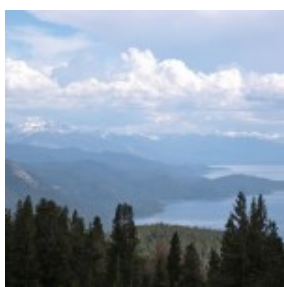


Setting the geographical record straight in the greater Sierra Nevada

By Guy Rocha

Padre Pedro Font, during an expedition to Spanish-controlled Northern California in 1776, named and mapped the Sierra Nevada for the first time.

Sierra means saw-toothed mountain range in Spanish, and Nevada means snow-covered. How many times have TV and radio commentators referred to the Sierra Nevada as the Sierra Nevadas or the Sierra Nevada Mountains? National news accounts – most recently CBS News' Sunday Morning airing on Nov. 27 – rank among the worst offenders. Reporters, too often, make a plural out of Sierra Nevada akin to the Rocky Mountains becoming the Rockies (that's acceptable in English).



From Mount
Rose -- the
Carson Range -
- looking down
on Lake Tahoe.
Photo/LTN file

Many times, a journalist or writer mistakenly referring to the Sierra Nevadas or the Sierra Nevada Mountains has compounded the problem by geographically placing nearby Carson City in

the Carson Valley (it's in Eagle Valley) and situating Reno in Washoe Valley (it's in the Truckee Meadows).

Here is something that might surprise people who have lived in the area for some time and know to call the Sierra Nevada the Sierra Nevada or just the Sierra: Technically the Sierra Nevada crest line and the mountains descending to the west and east are wholly and solely in California. It's true that the 19th century California-bound immigrants crossing the Great Basin upon seeing the huge mountain range looming in front of them assumed it was the Sierra Nevada.

An 1874 map of Lake Tahoe describes the feature as "Sierra Nevada (eastern Summit)." Another common name for the feature at the time was the "Eastern Slope."

Guy Rocha is the former Nevada state archivist.

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