

Nevada looks at naming mountain after Fremont

By Martin Griffith, AP

On his historic 1843-44 expedition across the West, John Fremont named some prominent features in what became Nevada, including Pyramid Lake and the Humboldt and Walker rivers.

Now the explorer known as the Pathfinder could have his first geographic feature in the state named after him.

The Historical Society of Dayton Valley is asking the Nevada State Board on Geographic Names to designate a low mountain along the Carson River about 25 miles east of Carson City as Fremont Lookout.



The routes of some of Fremont's expeditions. Map/Kansas Historical Foundation

Society members Guy Rocha and Stony Tennant said extensive research shows Fremont stood atop the mountain on Jan. 20, 1844, to gain a view west of the Dayton Valley and the Carson Range above Carson City.

Hoping to find less snow to the south, Fremont and his California-bound group then headed on a more indirect route to

the Walker River near what is now Yerington before crossing the snowbound Sierra Nevada near Carson Pass a month later.

Rocha said while Nevada has streets and schools named after Fremont, a geographic feature that bears the adventurer's name is long overdue.

In addition to leading several expeditions that helped pave the way for the West's settlement, Fremont was one of the first two U.S. senators from California, the first presidential candidate of the Republican Party and a Union major general in the Civil War. Still, he's viewed as a controversial figure by historians.

"I'm personally not a big fan of John C. Fremont," said Rocha, Nevada's former state archivist. "But he was bigger than life and quite the early explorer in American history.

"To come into the American Great Basin under some pretty tough conditions and survive that expedition (of 1843-44) is impressive. Despite how I feel personally, he deserves his rightful place in history," he added.

Jack Hursh, executive secretary of the state board on geographic names, said he expects the request to win approval at the panel's May 14 meeting. Before the name becomes official, it would have to be approved again at a subsequent board meeting and then by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

"I can't imagine anyone opposing this," Hursh said. "That's a very appropriate spot to name after him because he stood at that location."

The state board seeks to honor people who have had a significant impact on Nevada history, Hursh said, and Fremont qualifies as an early explorer who named so many prominent features. Fremont also came up with the name Great Basin for the vast region of interior drainage that includes most of Nevada and much of Utah.

Rocha and Tennant used mileages in Fremont's journal and satellite imagery to locate the mountain that Fremont climbed. Tennant also climbed every mountain along a 12-mile section of the Carson River to pinpoint its location. Both the mountain and Fremont's 1844 camp are located on the south side of the river, just west of Susan's Bluff.

"I didn't know what to expect when I walked up there, but the view from the top was identical to what he described in his diary," Tennant said. "You can see the Carson River going out to a broad valley (around Dayton) and the Carson Range, which he described as the Sierra.

"I knew I was standing exactly in the spot where he stood and I felt a chill down my neck. There's absolutely no doubt this is the right location," he added.

The mountain is actually an ancient 5,003-foot volcanic cone at the northeastern end of the Pine Nut Mountains, Tennant said.