

Nev. makes another bid to name cove after Twain

By Martin Griffith, AP

RENO – Nevada officials have launched a new bid to give Mark Twain recognition in the state where he assumed his pen name 150 years ago, but it doesn't come without opposition.

The Nevada State Board on Geographic Names is again pushing a proposal to name a scenic Lake Tahoe cove for Samuel Clemens, Twain's real name.

But it no longer maintains the inlet should be named for Twain because he actually camped there in 1861.

The board's national counterpart rejected the request two years ago in a 5-4 vote, citing as a factor doubt about whether Twain camped at the spot.

Nevada board members now say they want to name the cove for Twain merely because of his association with Tahoe and the lack of a geographic feature in the state named for him. His book "Roughing It" put Nevada on the map and included an oft-quoted poetic phrase about Lake Tahoe.

"Whether or not the cove was Mark Twain's campsite does not matter in the national scheme to put a name to that cove," Bob Stewart, a member of the state board, told the Associated Press. "The very fact that he was associated with the Nevada shore of Lake Tahoe makes an unnamed point on Tahoe eligible for naming for him."

But Stewart, a historical researcher and former U.S. Bureau of Land Management employee, said he still believes Twain camped at the cove near Incline Village.

"Personally, I'm totally comfortable that this is the

campsite, but this is not the point of this nomination," he said.

David Antonucci, of Homewood, a civil engineer and history writer, maintains Twain camped on the California side of the lake. He has pledged to fight the new bid. His opposition was cited as a factor in the earlier decision by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

"It's just a backdoor attempt to accomplish what was earlier rejected by the national board," he said. "I don't think they're fooling anyone. You'd have to be naive to think if it was named Samuel Clemens Cove that the proponents would not promote that as the site where he camped."

The request also should be rejected because Lake Tahoe is the ancestral homeland of some Nevada tribes and Twain made racist statements against American Indians, said Antonucci, author of "Fairest Picture: Mark Twain at Lake Tahoe."

The national board also cited opposition by the U.S. Forest Service as a factor in its decision. But the agency has since sent a letter to the state saying it would not take a position on the new request.

While Twain wrote adoringly about Lake Tahoe, the Forest Service noted that "his legacy also is that he carelessly started a forest fire" at his camp there.

Twain accidentally started the wildfire in September 1861 while preparing to cook dinner. He and a companion staked a timber claim there, weeks after he arrived in Carson City, with his brother, Orion, then secretary of Nevada Territory. Twain later assumed his pen name as a newspaper reporter in Virginia City.

That first trip to Lake Tahoe inspired Twain to write the famous lines: "As it lay there with the shadows of the mountains brilliantly photographed upon its still surface, I

thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole earth affords.”

The state board will take final action on the proposal after holding hearings in January and May. The national board is expected to act on the request sometime next summer in advance of Nevada’s 150th anniversary of statehood on Oct. 31.