

Mark Twain Trail through the West

By Christopher Reynolds, Los Angeles Times

Who flies to Reno on a spring evening, rents a car and heads into the mountains with no skis, no mountain bike and a backpack full of books? Me.

Why? Because in 1861 a 25-year-old Missouri riverboat pilot named Sam Clemens boarded a stagecoach bound for the same territory.

He was going to dodge the Civil War for a few months, work for the government, do some writing, maybe dig for silver. Instead he stayed for almost seven years, emerged as Mark Twain, gave us "Huckleberry Finn" and won global fame as that sardonic old man with the white hair and droopy mustache.

I wanted to see some of what he saw in those early travels – a dusty Nevada silver-mining town, the shores of Lake Tahoe, the hills of California Gold Country. And I wondered: After so much history, myth and marketing, how much Twain remains?

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