

Rediscovering the Hockett Trail

Version 1.0

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Preface

I am writing this paper in order to rediscover, to the extent possible, the original Hockett Trail across the Sierras. I have searched “on and off” for several days online for about a year trying to uncover old records and books on the subject of the Hockett Trail. I only invested time in finding free online sources and did not find any obvious published works during my search (i.e. History of the Hockett Trail). By waiting so long to write up a report, this has allowed me access to other documents I would not have come across a year ago. For example, the USGS now has a historical map data base. Users can simply click on a quad and see what maps are available. Another example is a historical book printed in 1913 surfaced from Google Books and was offered freely to the public.

In addition to free online resources, I discovered and retrieved a map from the National Park Service, a photo of a hand drawn map from the USDA Forest Service, and historical topography maps of the area from the United States Geological Survey (USGS). I imagine years ago these resources were not yet easily available to past users who have tried to find the Hockett Trail. Just as these sources have now become available online, I am sure there are still others out there that will surface after this has been written.

When using the maps I primarily stuck with the USGS 1907 and 1909 maps as a guide. I then used the written descriptions found in the sources used for this document. If there was a discrepancy between

what was written and what was on the map, I checked it with the next available USGS map in my position which was made in 1956. I would then take into consideration all the sources and evidence I had before me along with some knowledge of the area. I then chose the route I thought would make the most sense as a result.

My goal is to make this document a starting point and hopefully stir discussion and additional research. I encourage critiquing of this document in order to provide helpful discussions. Discussions regarding making the document more accurate so users can one day retrace the steps that so many users before us did over 150 years ago.

Known Source Issues

Sources used for this document are maps and documents supplied by the USGS¹, National Park Service², and USDA Forest Service³. These documents and maps were found online. Other sources include historical magazine articles, books, and personal accounts.

There are discrepancies between all three of the Federal agencies regarding one main section of the Hockett Trail. This occurs around the Little Kern River drainage regarding a “northern route” and “southern route.” Minor areas are near Kern River Ranger Station and by Horseshoe Meadows. All these are discussed further in the document.

The USGS maps from 1909 and 1907 are on a scale of 1:250,000. The 1956 USGS map is a 1:24,000 scale map. The problems here are potentially some trails left off the older and larger scale map. This problem primarily occurred when the Hockett Trail arrived at the Little Kern River. I relied more heavily on written descriptions from the magazine articles and books I have used to come with my determinations of where the trail went.

Fairly recent publications versus older publications also have a major discrepancy between them. These books center on where the Hockett Trail goes once across Windy Gap and at the Little Kern River. Some say the trail goes over Coyote Pass and further east. Other publications say the trail went south to Trout and then back up the Kern River canyon. This is further discussed in the document.

Brief History of the Hockett Trail

The Hockett Trail is an historical trek across the southern Sierra Nevada mountains. It was used by pack trains, the army, and recreationalists for several decades following its completion. The trail was named after the founder, John B. Hockett, in 1863. It was being constructed at the same time as the Jordan Trail by its founder John Jordan. Mining in Owen’s Valley initially created the drive find a way across the Sierra. In 1865, a couple years following the completion of the Hockett Trail, traders created a wagon

¹ USGS Historical 1:125,000 Kaweah, 1909, and Olancha, 1907 (reprinted in 1936), Maps

² Challenge of the Big Trees. Online eBook. http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/dilsaver-tweed/chap3c.htm

³ Trails Across the Mountains: 1834 to 1864 [hand map]
http://goldentroutwilderness.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/1834_to_1864_historic_trail_map_sequoia.jpg

route over Walker Pass further south. Although it would take longer to complete the journey across the mountains, it was much safer and easier than the Hockett Trail. The Hockett trail still remained and allowed a variety of people to access this area of the Sierra Nevada mountains⁴.

As with the passage of time the use along the Hockett Trail has varied. Some sections are over grown or have disappeared causing new routes to be created. Most of the trail still exists today and can be retraced. The beginning and ending portions of the trail are now paved roads. The trail passes through both the National Park Service and USDA Forest Service jurisdictions, but primarily resides within the Forest Service's Golden Trout Wilderness.

Section 1 – Three Rivers to Hockett Meadows

The Hockett Trail started in the city of Three Rivers at Tharp's Ranch. The trail would turn east to south east and follow up the South Fork Kaweah River. This route is presently a road called S. Fork Drive. The road dead ends near the beginning of two present day trails. One trail continues heading east up the South Fork Kaweah, which is known as the Lady Bug Trail. The other trail, known today as the South Fork Kaweah Trail, south and east up along north side of Dennison Peak ridge. The Lady Bug Trail ends 1.4 miles up the river. The South Fork Kaweah Trail is 9 miles long and connects to a plateau where Hockett Lakes and Hocket Meadows reside. One may think the 9 mile trail is the old Hockett Trail when in fact is the Lady Bug Trail.

At the end of the Lady Bug Trail the Hockett Trail continued up the river for approximately another 0.15 mile, crosses the South Fork Kaweah River, and proceeds east up the ridge that divides the South Fork Kaweah River and Garfield Creek. This is based on two maps from the USGS in the years 1909 and 1956⁵ (see images 1 and 2). The trail in 1909 went up the South Fork Kaweah and along the ridge north of Slide Canyon (Garfield Creek). The trail eventually connected with other trails at the confluence of the South Fork Kaweah River, Tuohy Creek, and outlet flow from modern day Hockett Lakes.

⁴ Dilsaver, Lary M. and William C. Tweed. 1990. *Challenge of the Big Trees*. Sequoia National History Association, Inc. Online book. http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/dilsaver-tweed/index.htm

⁵ USGS 1956 Topography Map 1:25000 scale

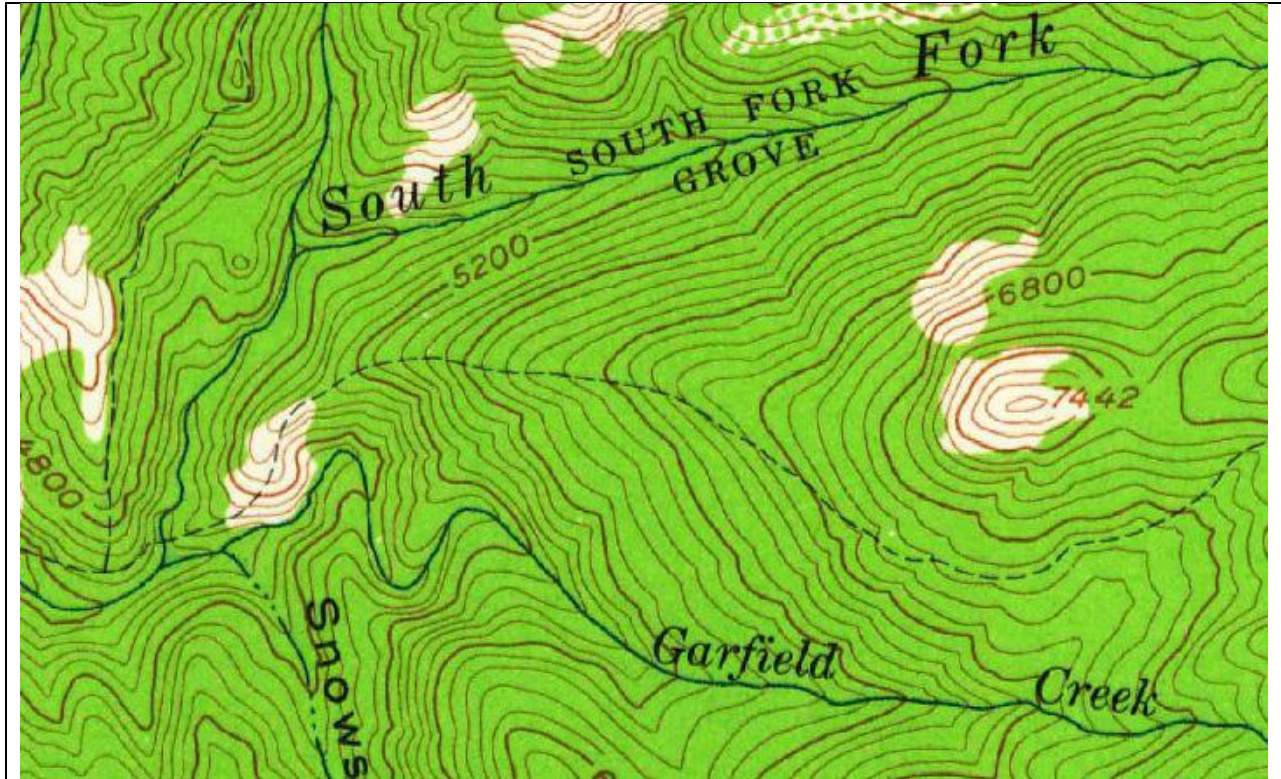


Image 1 – USGS 1956 Map showing Hockett Trail crossing South Fork Kaweah and climbing east up ridge near Garfield Creek.

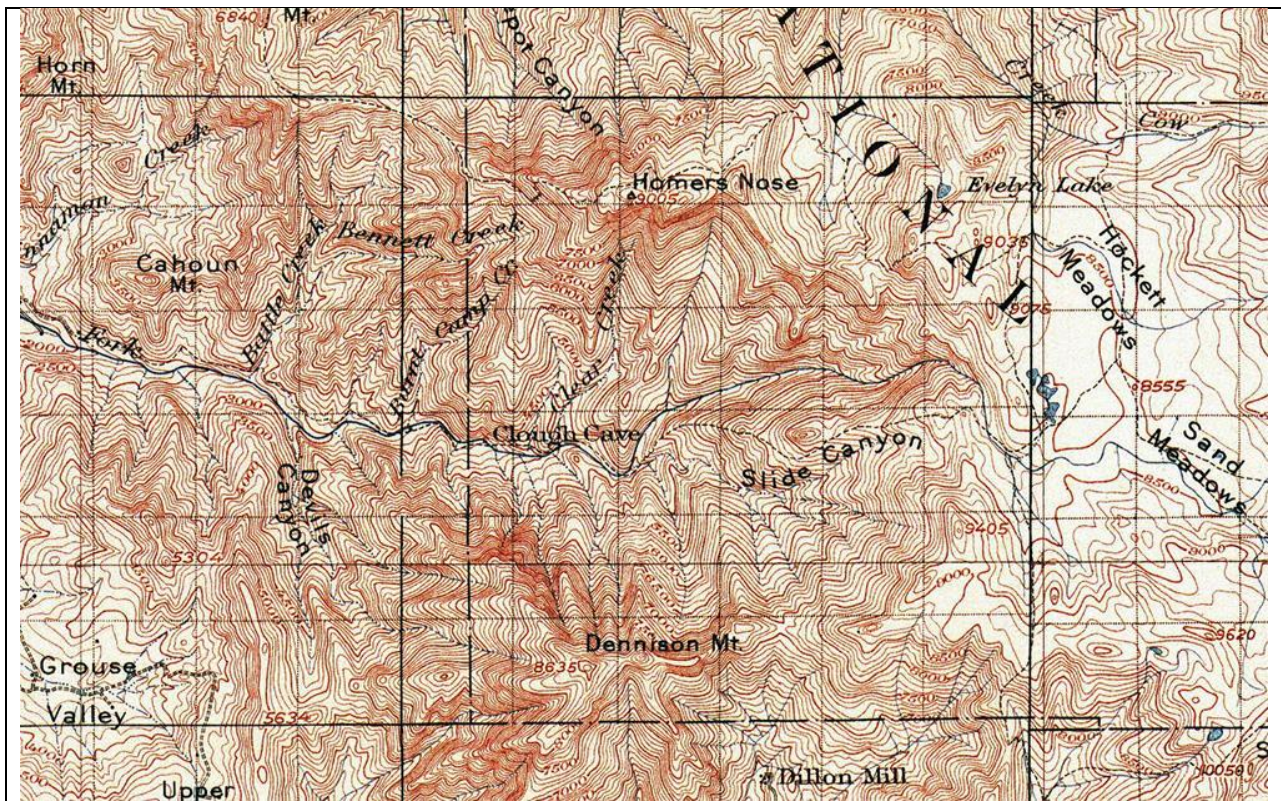


Image 2 – USGS Kaweah 1909 map with trail going up South Fork Kaweah and Slide Canyon

If a person was to try to retrace this path, the trail beyond Lady Bug to present day Hockett Lakes is no more. The tread may be visible in some areas, but the brush has taken over much of the trail. One could try to retrace and “bush whack” their way through. The alternative to this route is to follow the present day South Fork Kaweah Trail, which joins back in with the historical Hockett Trail just south of Hockett Lakes. The trail then goes north to a trail junction near Hockett Meadows.

Section 2 – Hockett Meadows to Little Kern River

Just prior to Hockett Meadows the trail junctions with a present day trail going southeast towards Sand Meadows. It is at this junction the Hockett Trail turns towards Sand Meadows and proceeds towards Windy Gap and down to where Quinn Horsecamp (see image 3). From there the trail went north to Wet Meadows and down to Little Kern River.

The USDA Forest Service map displaying various trail system shows the Hockett Trail going down to Quinn Cabin and then down the present day Newlywed Trail that follows Soda Spring Creek. Using the USGS Kaweah 1909 map, a trail down along Soda [Spring]Creek did not exist (see Image 3). The generalized National Park Service map suggests the trail crossed Windy Gap and then through Wet Meadows (see Image 4). Looking at the USGS 1909 Kaweah map, it would be easier to ascend over Windy Gap then going up the pass just west of Wet Meadows. The Quinn Horsecamp was likely a place to camp for the night as designated on the USGS map (see image 3).

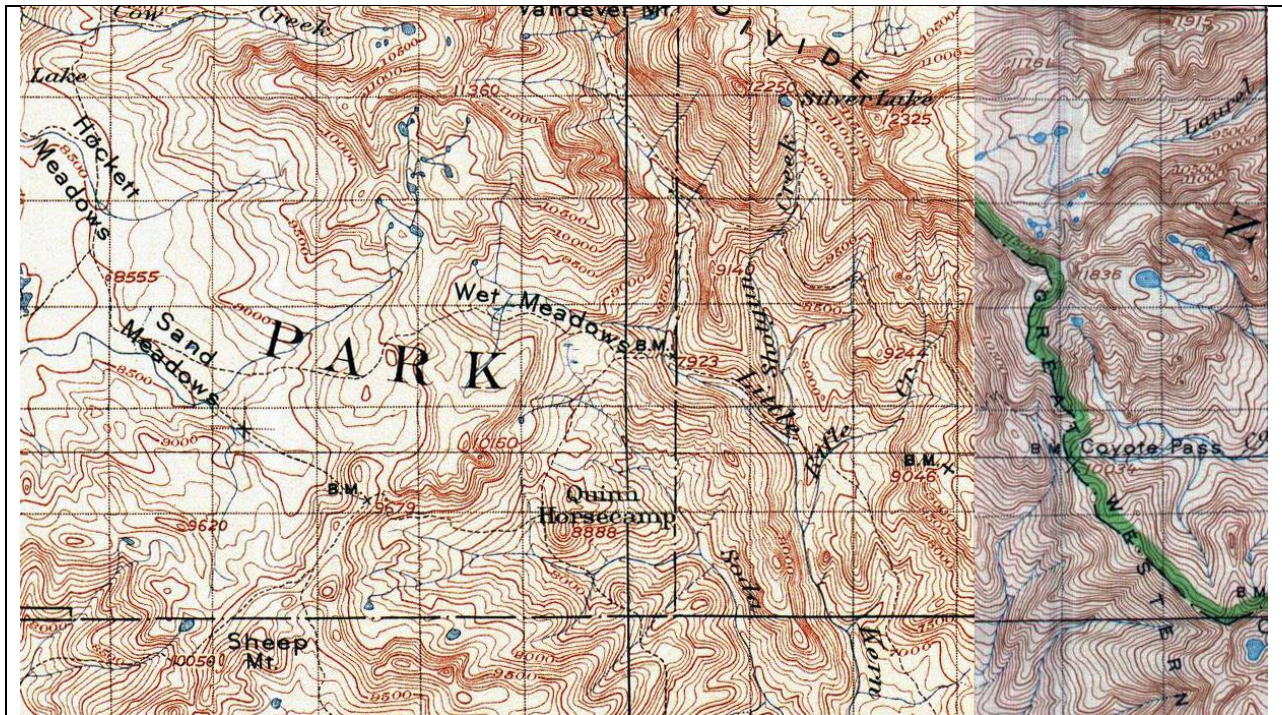


Image 3 – Trail system from Hockett Meadows to Little Kern River. No trail down Soda Creek.

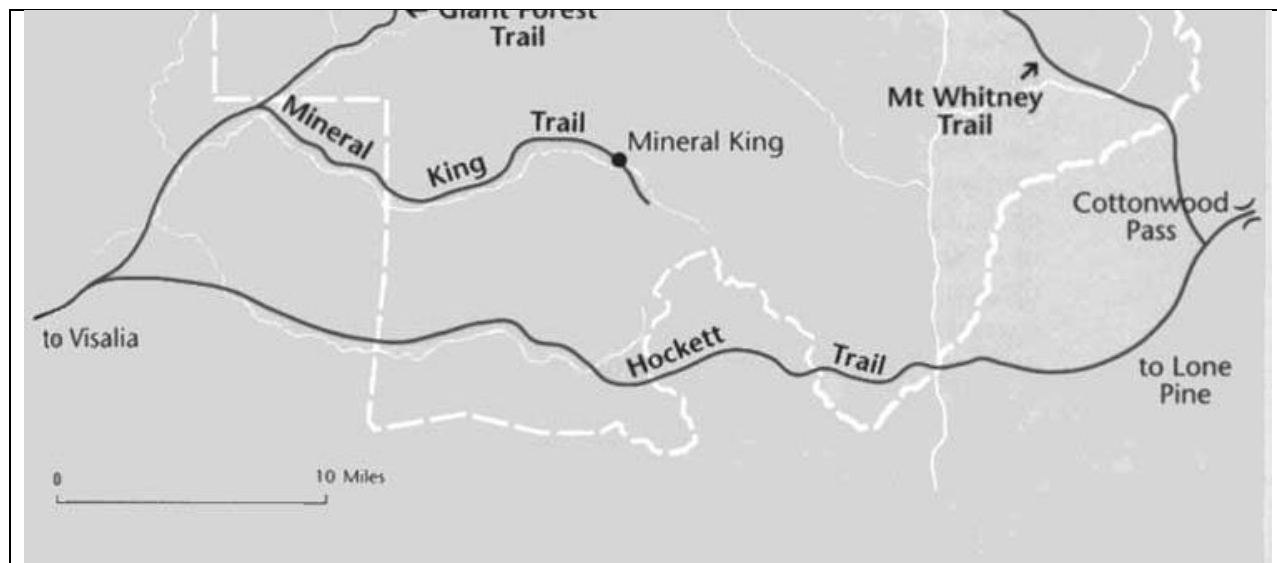


Image 4 – National Park Service generalized map of Hockett Trail location.

Section 3 – Little Kern River to Trout Meadows (South) and Little Kern River to Kern River (North)

Section 3 of the Hockett Trail is where sources differ on the exact route of the Hockett Trail. The USGS 1909 map shows trails going over Coyote Pass and down towards Trout Meadows (see images 3 and 5). The USDA Forest Service map displays the Hockett Trail splitting and going in both directions as the USGS map. The National Park Service has the trail going over Coyote Pass only (see image 4). A book published in 2000 by James Gregory Moore⁶ concurs with the National Park Service. The 1898 *Outtings*⁷ article from J. R. Moore says it went south to Trout Meadows as well as the book published by Eugene and Dodge⁸ in 1913.

Using those sources mentioned I believe the original trail went down to Trout Meadows. People could access the trail for longer periods of time by going the southern route to Trout Meadows. I suspect sometime after the Hockett Trail was built and then abandoned in favor of the Walker Pass route in 1865, users created a “short cut” over Coyote Pass. This route, i.e. northern route, would have been used later in the season, around late July to early August when the snow had completely melted. Coyote Pass sits at approximately 10,250 feet elevation. Snow would likely be along the trail and pass creating increased difficulty and higher risk depending on the mode of transportation. Excerpts from J.R. Moore’s 1898 article states he experienced snow blocking his path and had to take the old Hockett Trail near the end of June;

⁶ Moore, James Gregory. 2000. *Exploring the Highest Sierra*. Stanford University Press, California.

⁷ Moore, J.R. 1898. *Trouting Over the Old Hockett Trail*. *Outing* Volume 33.

⁸ Menefee, Eugene L., and Fred A. Dodge. 1913. *History of Tulare and Kings Counties California with Biographical Sketches of The Leading men and Women of the Counties Who Have Been Identified with Their Growth and Development from the Early Days to Present*. Historic Record Company. Los Angeles, California.

We left Visalia on the 21st of June, and, as the snow in the Gap was not to be trusted so early in the season, were obliged to take the old Hockett Trail up the south fork of the Kaweah River, regulating our marches by the feeding grounds where pasturage was available for our animals. Our route, therefore, led us by Tuohey Meadows, Soda Springs and Trout Meadows, thence into the Kern, a much longer and far more difficult journey.

From Eugene and Dodge's book published in 1913 there is an account of the Hockett Trail and its route through the Sierras. The author states the trail joined in with the Jordan Trail, which was to the south of Coyote Pass. On page 127, the author writes the following, "Commencing at Three Rivers, proceeded up the south fork of the Kaweah, passing the Hockett lakes and meadows and joined the Jordan trail, continuing on its route to Big Kern."

Further evidence of the Hockett Trail going south to Trout Meadows and then north up the Kern River canyon can be seen today near the boundary of the Golden Trout Wilderness and National Park Service near the Kern River Ranger Station. Users traveling south along the Kern River will pass from the Park Service into the Golden Trout Wilderness. Just past the boundary of the Golden Trout Wilderness sign is a smaller sign in a tree stating users are on a historic trail titled Hockett Trail built in 1861.

These earlier published works state the trail went south to Trout Meadows and not east over Coyote Pass. However, as previously stated, I believe once the trail from Farewell Gap to Coyote Pass was created, users took that "short cut" or a "northern route" to save time and resources while crossing the Sierra Nevada mountains. It would have been done later in the season and this is why the USDA Forest Service shows the trail going in both directions.

Continuing on from the Little Kern River, the Hockett Trail paralleled the river for a short distance to the east. Once the Little Kern River confluence with Shotgun Creek, the river changed direction went south. The Hockett Trail continued east a short distance to Rifle Creek. From Rifle Creek, the trail went south towards Lion Meadows. The trail is still present today and known as Lion Meadows Trail. When the trail approaches Burnt Corral Meadows, it continues east towards Deep Creek and then to Trout Meadows. There is split in the trail just after Deep Creek but before arriving at Trout Meadow. The old Hockett Trail may have stayed on the northern path. However, users would have to double back if their destination was at Trout Meadows or they would cross the creek there (see image 5). Likely the original trail took the more southern path that lead directly into the lower end of Trout Meadows to junction with other trail systems.

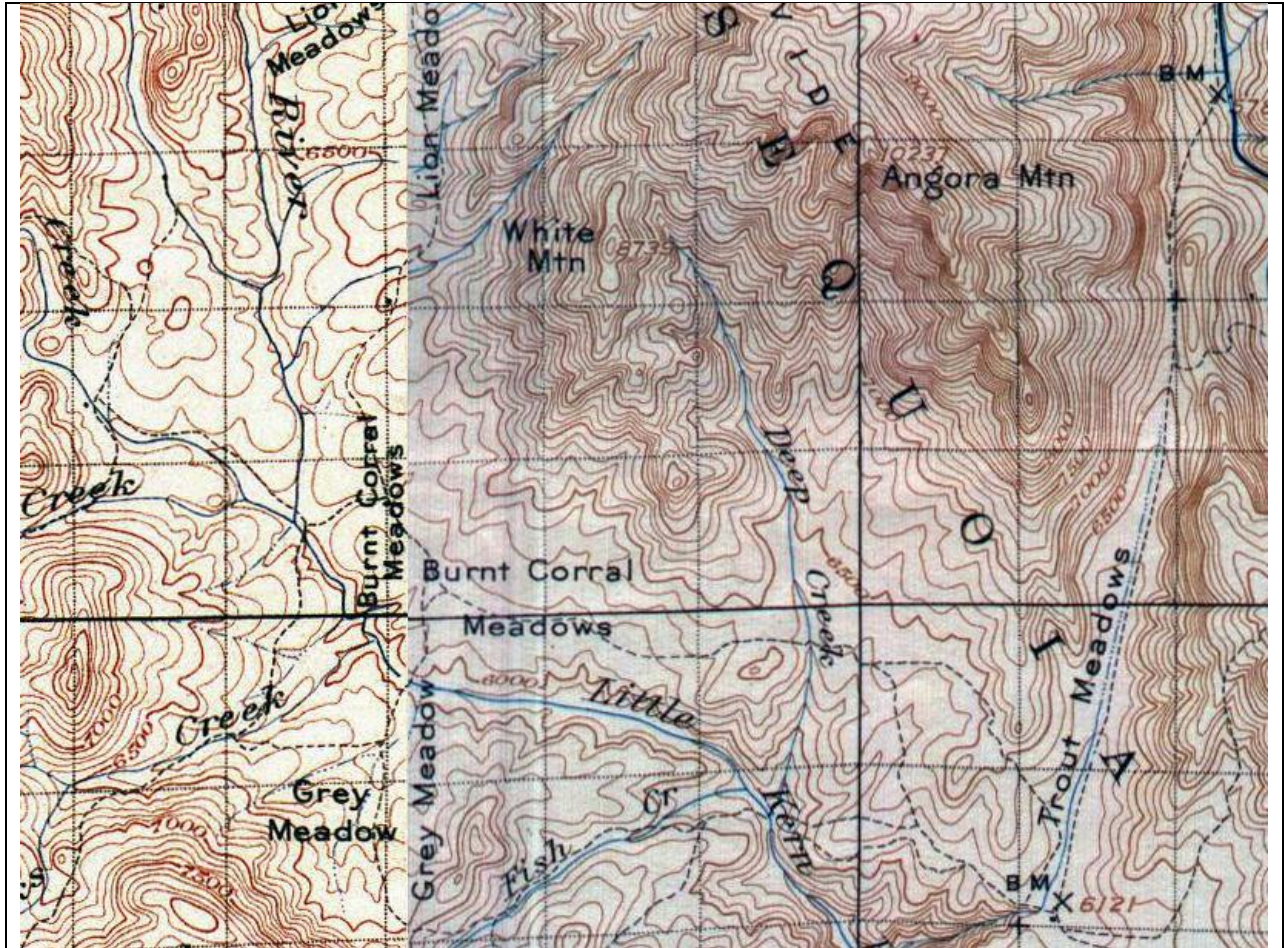


Image 5 – Hockett Trail traveling south though Lion Meadows to Burnt Corral Meadows and east to Trout Meadows.

Taking the northern route, the trail would have gone north along the Little Kern to join up with the trail leading east to Coyote Pass and eventually down to the Kern River/Golden Trout Creek junction. This would save several miles when compared to heading south to Trout Meadows then back north up the Kern Canyon.

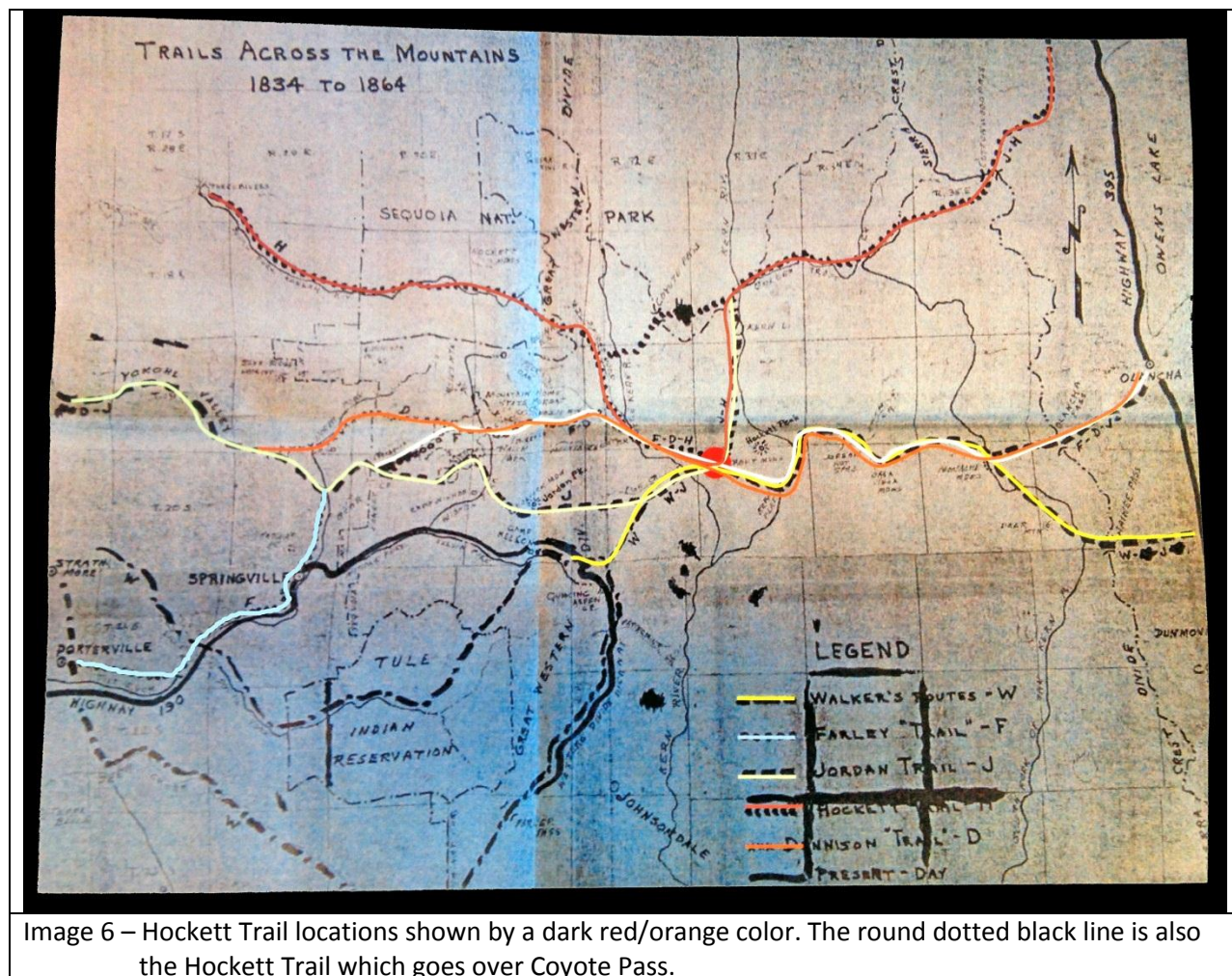


Image 6 – Hockett Trail locations shown by a dark red/orange color. The round dotted black line is also the Hockett Trail which goes over Coyote Pass.

Section 4 – Trout Meadows to Groundhog Meadow

The Hockett Trail goes north from Trout Meadows. The trail dives down into the Kern River canyon and follows along the west side of the river passing by Kern and Little Kern Lakes. Once at the Kern River Ranger Station the trail then proceeds north for about 0.75 miles. If the northern route was accessible, the trail would join the southern route at present day Kern River Ranger Station. The trail goes east across the Kern River, climbs up Golden Trout Creek, and out of the Kern Canyon. As previously stated from the 1913 history book, "...it [Hockett Trail] continued up the stream to a point near the lower Funston meadows, whence crossing and ascending the wall of the Kern canyon..."⁹

The USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, and USGS maps all show a trail system existing and being labeled as the Hockett Trail. There is no problem from this point on in rediscovering where the Hockett Trail went. Image 7 below shows the USGS 1907 Olancha map and the trail system at that time.

⁹ Menefee, Eugene L., and Fred A. Dodge. 1913

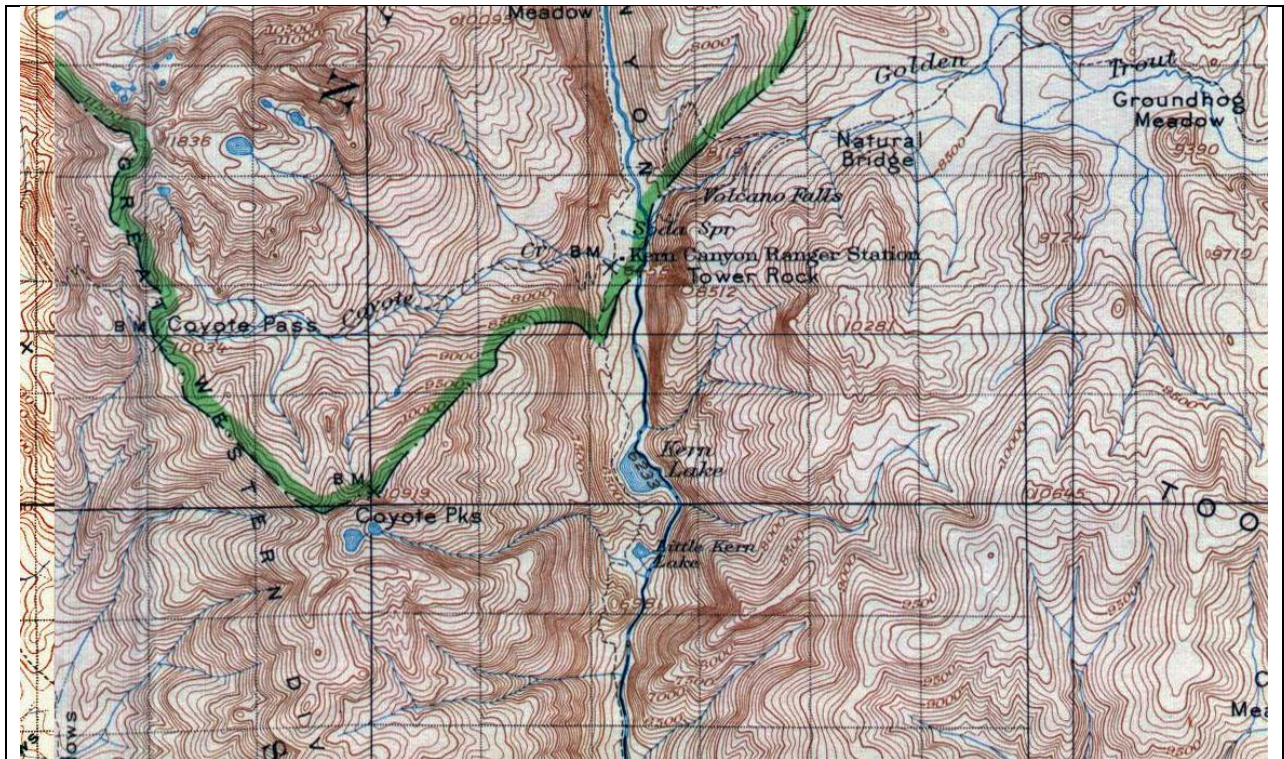


Image 7 – Hockett Trail northern and southern route junction with modern day boundary between USDA Forest Service and the National Park service.

Section 5 – Groundhog Meadow to Horseshoe Meadow

The last section of the Hockett Trail follows the Golden Trout Creek east out of Groundhog Meadow and then north into [Big] Whitney Meadows. The trail went along the west side of [Big] Whitney Meadows and then headed east along the northern portion. The trail followed a drainage, called Stokes Stringer today, up to Cottonwood Pass. The trail continued downhill into Horseshoe Meadow. However, the trail did not follow the meadow and instead went over a small ridge into Cottonwood Creek. Once across Cottonwood Creek, the trail followed the stream. From this point the trail follow the road that exists today down to Lone Pine/Independence (see image 8).

The Forest Service and Park Service concur with this route and the older USGS maps show trails in the area. Eugene and Dodge also talk about how the last half of the Hockett Trail followed the path mentioned above. Whitney Meadows is known as Big Whitney Meadow today.

...whence crossing and ascending the wall of the Kern canyon, it made its way via the Whitney meadows to the crossing of Cottonwood creek, near the lakes, and thence down to Independence. This trail, though altered to eliminate steep pitches and other difficult sections, is followed today, practically as laid out fifty years ago.

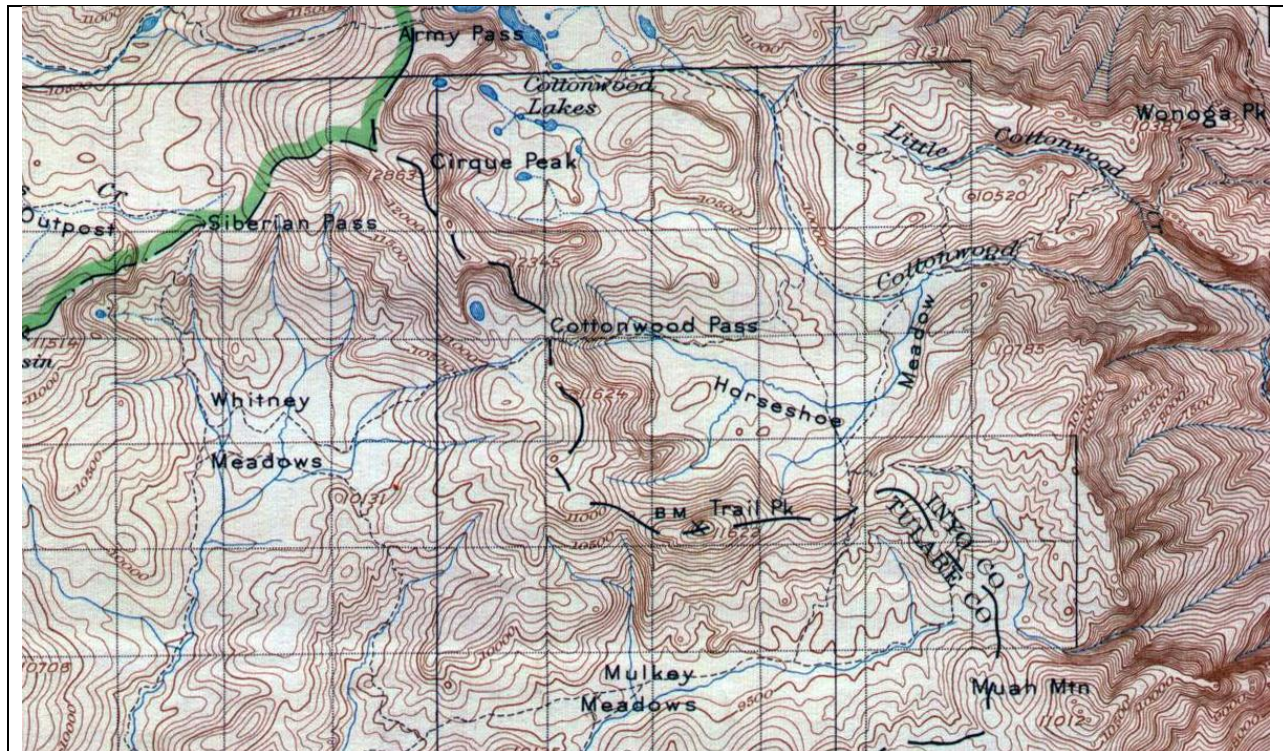


Image 8 – Hockett Trail going to [Big] Whitney Meadows to Cottonwood Pass then down to Horseshoe Meadow and ultimately down the modern day road to Lone Pine.

Summarizing the Hockett Trail's Path across the Sierra Nevada

The Hockett Trail started in Three Rivers, California. It followed up the South Fork of the Kaweah River and climbed up the ridge just above Garfield Creek to the confluence of Hockett Lakes outlet flow, South Kaweah River, and Tuohy Creek. From there the trail went northeast for about a mile and then went southeast through Sand meadows to Windy Gap. The travel dove down into the head waters of Soda [Spring] Creek, but quickly went north over a small saddle to Wet Meadows. The trail went east downstream to the confluence with Little Kern River. The trail followed the river for about a mile, crossed Shotgun Creek, and proceeded down the eastern side of the Little Kern River. The trail never saw the Little Kern River again as it went south through Lion Meadows, then east at Burnt Corral Meadows, and eventually dropped down into Trout Meadows.

Once at Trout Meadows the trail went north and into the Kern River canyon. The trail stayed on the west side of the canyon, just like it does today, and stays that way until the Kern River Ranger Station within the National Park Service jurisdiction. It proceeded about 0.75 miles of the Ranger Station to Lower Funston Meadow. The trail went east across the Kern River and up along the northern side of Golden Trout Creek. The trail continues following Golden Trout Creek to its headwaters in [Big] Whitney Meadows then goes east over Cottonwood Pass. The trail descends into Horseshoe Meadows, but quickly leaves the meadow and moves north towards Cottonwood Creek. The trail goes east down Cottonwood Creek to the modern day paved road and follows the road down the mountain.