



CANDLELIGHT TREK

SANGER AREA

MARCH 8, 2025/6030

Good Morning! Welcome to the Jim Savage Mariposa Battalion 1852 Candlelight Trek.

Be sure to keep your hands, arms, and body parts inside the roller coaster car at all times!

We start our trek today at Dan's Antique Truck Yard. Established in 1997, Dan's yard has an eclectic collection of old iron that perhaps only the truly discerning eye can appreciate. Anita sees it as yard art, and Dan's mom calls it junk, as do at least one of the neighbors. But to Hell with the neighbors, Dan was here first!

As we leave the truck yard, you might notice there are river rocks in the pastures down the street. Up on the hill to the south, there are even more. It's hard to believe that this relatively flat land was once the mighty Kings River. But up on the Hill, as well as on the lower parcel just before you turn onto Riverbend, there are thousands of river rocks of all sizes. This was the river bed a long, long time ago. Strangely, Dan's place has relatively few rocks. But, it has 11 distinctly different soil types on just 20 acres, according to the USGS.

Going south on Riverbend, you'll immediately see lots of orange trees. The trees on the left are owned by descendants of Yank Hazelton, a cattleman who brought the first orange trees to Fresno County in about 1890. Jim Savage Chapter has a monument to Yank Hazelton on Trimmer Springs Road on the way to Pine Flat Dam. It is directly across the street from Kings River Packing, which was started by one of Yank's grandsons.

After a couple of miles you'll go over Kirkman Hill. You'll see more citrus trees, and you'll cross over the Enterprise Canal, the east Branch Ditch, the Hansen Canal, Mud Creek, and the historic Fresno Canal created by Moses Church and the Fresno Irrigation Company in 1871. Church built this canal to deliver water to the ranch of A Y Easterby.

Easterby bought 5000 acres sight unseen in 1868, for the price of \$1.80 per acre, hoping to sell the land for \$5 per acre. Church lived in Napa at the time

and needed a place to graze his sheep. Easterby allowed Church to bring his sheep to Easterby's land and graze them there. Thinking that he may have purchased worthless desert, Easterby finally travelled to Church's camp for a visit. He was shocked to discover knee-deep grass and sunflowers. He immediately set about planting wheat for harvest in 1869. Sadly, the crop failed for lack of water.

Easterby was familiar with irrigation systems, so he hired Church to build a series of canals to get water to his ranch. Church diverted the flow of the Kings River down the usually dry Fancher Creek bed to Easterby's ranch, and ultimately built other canals to send water all over the area. Easterby planted 2000 acres of wheat, and in 1871 Leland Stanford came to the area with an inspection party as a prelude to building the Southern Pacific Railroad. Seeing this green "oasis," the only green they had seen since leaving Stockton, they decided there and then that a new town (Fresno) would be built here.

There are hundreds of miles of irrigation canals built by Moses Church. Jim Savage Chapter has a monument to Moses Church at the Fresno Irrigation District Office in Fresno.

We'll turn right (east) on Belmont and head towards Sanger. Sanger was originally called Sanger Junction by the Southern Pacific Railroad. Named after Joesph Sanger, secretary of the Railroad Yardmasters Association attended a convention in San Francisco in 1887. It was there that officials informed him that they had named a town after him. At that time, there was nothing there. But the SP had surveyors on site laying out the town so that they could begin selling lots for development.

At first Sanger was known for the wheat that was being grown and harvested nearby. Irrigation canals were just being built, so wheat was still a huge crop in the area due to the fact that it could be grown using just rain water. But in 1890, the Kings River Lumber Company built a lumber flume from Sanger up the Kings River to a spot known as Millwood. Here they set up a mill and town and began cutting the huge redwood (and other) trees that grew so prolifically in the area. At this point the flume was around 53 miles long from Millwood downhill to Sanger.

Trees were dragged by steam donkeys to the Millwood Mill, or they were hauled from the woods by train cars behind Shay locomotives. Eventually the

fluming operation would be extended to what is now Hume Lake, where a dam was built and a logging pond (Hume Lake) was created. There was a huge mill there with a logging railroad that ran far back into the mountains. As at Millwood, the logs were milled into boards at Hume Lake and sent down the flume to a yard in Sanger. There they would be sold or loaded onto train cars and sent all over the country. The extension of the Flume to Hume Lake made it the longest flume in the world at the time at 64 miles long.

In 1888, the SP built a depot in Sanger, located near 7th Street and L Street on the east side of the railroad tracks. This particular line was the East Side line, running from Fresno through Sanger and Reedley, and ultimately down the east side of the valley, picking up and delivering products and goods to the various small towns along the way.

Near what is now 11th street in Sanger, on the east side of the tracks was the Kings River Lumber Company yard. It was here that the boards were sorted and loaded onto the train cars, or sold outright to local people. In 1893 the company was reorganized as the Sanger Lumber Company, and in 1905 it was sold to the Hume Bennett Lumber Company. Of course, it was Hume Bennett who extended the flume to Hume Lake.

The Sanger Depot Museum is located in the old Sanger SP Depot. But it is not on L Street, it is in the center of town just off of Jensen Ave, near the library and the Sanger City Hall. It was moved there in December 1977. The museum has an awesome collection of Native American baskets, created by the people that lived in this area. It also has some artifacts from the flume and lumber operation, and many, many photos. ECV Jim Savage Mariposa Battalion 1852 has a monument at the museum. This will be our first stop.

The verbiage of the Sanger Monument reads:

Sanger

Founded by the Pacific Improvement Company following completion of the Southern Pacific's East Side railroad in May 1888. Its name honors Joesph Sanger, Jr., Indiana rail executive. Sanger, supported by a rich farming district which later made it a fruit and citrus packing center, soon eclipsed neighboring Centerville.

In 1890, Sanger became an important part of a major Sierra Nevada logging operation, with a mill which operated nearly four decades. The 54 mile Millwood Flume (later extended to Hume) terminated here. Sanger's ties to the Sierra and support of the annual Yule pilgrimage to the General Grant Tree earned its designation as the nation's Christmas Tree City. The City of Sanger was incorporated on May 15, 1911. The SP depot, built in 1888 and now Sanger's oldest building, was moved to this location for use as a museum in 1977.

***Jim Savage Chapter E Clampus Vitus 1852
Dedicated July 4, 1988***

After our visit to the museum we will proceed to the corner of Bethel and Jensen Avenues. Nearby are several places to eat lunch including Big Momma's Drive In, Panda Express, Carl's Jr., True Teriaki, Me N Eds Pizza, Mountain Mike's Pizza, and McDonald's inside Walmart. We will gather again after lunch at about 12:45 pm and continue our trek.

We will head now for Reedley beach along the King's River. As we drive out of Sanger we will most likely travel down Central Avenue which becomes Goodfellow Avenue just as we exit Sanger. At this point we drop into the lovely Sanger river bottom area, home to small farms and horse operations. We'll cross the King's River and eventually pass a gravel mining operation. We will dead end into Reed Avenue.

At Reed we will turn right. You can't see it, but over the riverbank to the east is Reedley Airport. It was created in 1946 by the Reedley Flight Club.

To the east you will see three mountains. To the north is Jesse Morrow Mountain, the middle mountain with an S and an R on it is Campbell Mountain (or as some of the more hard of hearing folks in the area call it "Camel Mountain"), and the mountain to the south is Smith Mountain.

Jesse Morrow Mountain was the scene of a huge dust up in the early 2000's between CEMEX and the people who live in and around Sanger. CEMEX wanted to place an open pit gravel mine on Jesse Morrow Mountain. No one else liked that idea. The Choinumni Tribe were opposed to it because that mountain is their grandmother and has sacred sites on it. The other locals didn't want to see

that ugly scar on such a prominent and highly visual landmark. Ultimately it went to court. Do you see the open pit mine of the mountainside? If you don't, then you know who prevailed in court.

Campbell Mountain was named after an early day pioneer in the area, William Campbell. He had a trading post with a man named John Poole on the Kings River just west of where Hillcrest Farms now stands. Campbell did not treat the Choinumnis and other local tribes well. In fact, he and a man named Walter Harvey lead a group of white men to the Chief Wahtoke's Choinumni village near here and killed almost 90 women and children. When the warriors returned to their village, they were pissed. Campbell and Harvey fled in a panic.

Smith Mountain is named after James Smith, another early day pioneer who operated a ferry over the Kings River near Reedley beach. We will view the Smith's Ferry and Poole's Ferry Monuments at Reedley beach. If we have time, we'll walk across the street and visit James Smith's grave.

We will leave Reedley Beach and go back the way we came through Reedley. Eventually we will arrive at Hillcrest Farms. On the south side of Hillcrest Farms is the Jim Savage Monument. The story of Jim Savage is amazing and should have been made into a movie long before now. He was a trader who owned several trading posts in the mountains at various times. He travelled to California in the same wagon train as the Donner party. But when they took Hastings Cutoff and found that it wasn't really more than a cattle path and couldn't really handle wagons and such, the Donners headed back for Fort Hall. Jim Savage and some others continued forward and created the wagon road that become the Hastings Cutoff in four days. Had the Donner's stayed with him they would have been over the pass at least two weeks earlier.

Jim Savage fought in the Mexican War and was one of the carpenters present when gold was discovered while building Sutter's Mill. He would eventually learned many Native languages, marry at least five Native women (daughters and relatives of chiefs) and became a god-like figure to the local Native tribes. But eventually he would go to war with the Natives, and in the process of chasing Chief Tenaya of the Yosemite tribe he and his men stumbled

into a beautiful valley with high cliffs and dazzling waterfalls. They were the first white men to enter Ahwahnee, which we now know as Yosemite Valley.

Over time, Savage became a protector of the Indians again, and he died trying to protect them from the white men who stole their land.

Let's stop and have a look at the Jim Savage Monument.

In case you don't know, the farm next door is Hillcrest Farms. They have a fabulous pumpkin patch in the fall, and really cool Christmas tree sale beginning the weekend after Thanksgiving, and the Reedley Railfair the third weekend of March. The property is laced with train tracks, actual scale live steam trains that your family can ride. It is a really fun place.

Now let's head for Vino Ave. We will turn left at Vino and Reed Avenue and head west to Jim Savage Road. We'll stop there and take a quick photo.

Now let's go to the fabulous metropolis of Minkler. Charles Ozro Minkler was a 13 year old boy in Iowa when he ran away from home and came to California. He first worked bundling and tying wheat sheaths on his arrival in the valley. Ozro, as he was known, would ultimately become a farmer in the Sanger area.

In 1892 he built a small shack of a store and the area around it became known as "Minkler." The family expanded the town enterprises into a saloon, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable, and a hotel. Located a few miles east of Centerville, the town became a staging point for teams heading into the Kings River watershed area of the mountains.

Ozro married Emma Bailey, and together they had two sons, William Orville Minkler and Charles O. Minkler (who was known as Charlie). Some of the Minkler grandchildren still live in the area.

As previously mentioned, the ATSF built the Wahtoke Branch in 1911 to serve the farms in the area and access the quarry at Piedra. At Minkler, the Wahtoke District wye'd into the ATSF Porterville-Orosi District, coming from Porterville. This line originated just north of Bakersfield and served many east valley towns including Porterville, Strathmore, Lindsay, Exeter, Woodlake, Seville,

Cutler, Orosi, Orange Cove, and Minkler. This provided access to national markets for locally grown agricultural goods. The railroad was abandoned in 1973.

In 1920, Ozro Minkler built a new, bigger store next to the small store. This store would sell nearly everything a farming family might need from groceries to Red Crown Gasoline and Sierra Ice Cream. Meat, cheese, canned goods, all had a special place. Of course, beer was also sold there, and the store still retains a special license that allows them to sell beer and have patrons drink their beer in the store.

1920 additions to the new store would include an adobe ice house and a wooden bait house, which are both still standing today, although the ice house was damaged and moved several feet backward after a car hit it in the 1970's. Ice was purchased from the ice house in Sanger in 300 lb. blocks that were perforated into blocks. When someone wanted to buy ice, the store clerks would chip away at the perforations with an ice pick until the blocks were separated from the large block. Red worms were available in the bait house, for fishing. The store would also serve as the Minkler Post Office for many years.

Ozro ran the store with his son William until 1935 when Ozro died. William continued to run the store until about 1940 when the store business was sold to Grace Russell. Grace leased the building from the Minklers, but owned the business.

In 1970, Sylvia Ashcraft bought the business from Grace Russell. She also leased the land from Charlie Minkler (Ozro's grandson), until about 1978 when she purchased the entire town. The name "Minkler Cash Store" was stipulated in the lease arrangement, and could never be changed.

This was a "cash" store, meaning that you could buy things there using money. Credit was given to certain local farm families. But this was not a "trading post." You couldn't trade their goods for farm products, as you could in some stores, hence the name Minkler CASH Store.

Many of the shelves in the store are original to 1920. The counter was added sometime in the 1940's by Grace Russell's husband, before he left her claiming that this business was too much work.

The current owner is Mary Novack, who is Sylvia Ashcraft's daughter. She ran the store with her mom, grandma, and sisters back in the 1970's. The store was then open all day seven days a week. At one point, Mary was scheduled to work on a Sunday, but she had a date that day. No one else was going to be available, so Mary begged her mom to let her have the day off. Her sisters also argued her case, and Sylvia finally relented and allowed the store to be closed. For the first time in over 50 years of operation, the store closed that Sunday, and has never opened on a Sunday again.

In 2004, Sylvia Ashcraft put the whole town up for sale on eBay. The asking price was \$600,000. Sylvia was 83 at the time and was in failing health, so she decided to part with the property. Happily for us, no one ponied up the money and the family still runs it to this day. The store has been run exclusively by women since 1940.

Across the street is a memorial garden, memorializing two local police officers who were killed in the line of duty during a shootout here with a crazy man that lived down the street.

In the Memorial Garden, last Spring we built a monument to the Minkler Cash Store. We dedicated it on April 7, 2024 at our Spring Doins.

As a side note, for the past three years, the Minkler Cash Store has hosted a St. Nicolas Day Parade. St Nick's Day is on the 6th of December, and people from the area decorate anything and everything they find and put it in the parade. Last year's parade had a couple of decorated tractors, a decorated little kid's Barbie car (complete with little kids driving it), several decorated vintage cars, a decorated cow, a few decorated Rhinos and Gators, decorated horse including a HUGE half Percheron half Shire) and a decorated fire truck (I wonder who that belonged to?). Needless to say, it was a blast!!! We think it is the shortest parade in California, if not the entire west.

Back on the road, we will head back to Dan's Antique Truck Yard for hysterical history stories, interrogations, our HOCO initiation, and dinner!!!!