

PASSIONATE PEDESTRIAN:

Author, Hank Meals

STORY BY PAMELA BIERY



Meals all smiles on Grouse Ridge Trail photo by Larry Miller

Must have been around 1994 or so when I pulled the book off the shelf and started leafing through pages of maps, words and photos. My son and I were visiting my brother James in San Francisco. The book was *Yuba Trails*, a guide to trails near our home in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. "Looks interesting," I said to my brother as we sat down to a quick breakfast of yogurt and cereal. "Take it with you," he said, "The hikes are out your back door." This began my *Yuba Trails* exploration—a hiking resource for a decade or so.

Yuba Trails, written by Susan Lamela and Hank Meals was first published in 1993. *Yuba Trails 2*, written by Hank Meals, was published in 2001 and includes historic hiking trails in the Yuba River and neighboring watersheds. Part guidebook, part trail map with sections on indigenous peoples and the history which has so shaped the land, *Yuba Trails 2* is extraordinarily useful as a handbook and introduction to dozens of hikes. A tribute to natural beauty, this book invites one to deepen their appreciation of both nature and history by providing back-

ground details and knowledge.

From Wild Plum Loop, near Sierra City to Pauley Creek by Downieville or the exquisite South Yuba by the historical mining town site of Maybert; *Yuba Trails* went with me, opening doors along the way by providing cultural, historical and botanical insights. Making a move recently to Nevada County, I felt compelled to contact Hank Meals and learn a bit more about his perspective as a writer and archeologist.

One of my questions was how he felt about sharing some very special places in

nature, wasn't he concerned they may be spoiled? "Though we knew that we were probably bringing new people to remote and relatively pristine areas which could potentially be damaging to the environment," Meal reasons, "the good far outweighed this risk. Trails need constituents to survive. Trails get constituents because people hike them. If people know trails and love them, there's a chance they won't be ignored, impacted or closed to public use."

Meals is confident he made the right decision. While continuing his work as a writer and photographer, he is actively involved in the community and the preservation of nature.

Meals gives talks for the South Yuba Park docents in Bridgeport, leads hikes with the Nevada County Land Trust, provides his expertise on professional historical and archaeological reports and lends a hand when possible to the North Columbia Cultural Center.

Every so often, someone bearing a dog-

eared, trail-worn copy of *Yuba Trails* stops Meal for an autograph "It's great to see these books around, and in people's day-packs or pick-up trucks." Asked about his concerns today, Meals talks a bit about trail erosion from excessive bike and off-road vehicle use. "I'm concerned about preserving trails for hikers." Quoting from *Wanderlust*, author Rebecca Solnit, says, "I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works about three miles an hour. If this is so, then modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought, or thoughtfulness." Meals concurs, "At a walking pace there is time to absorb some of the environment that you are passing through, time for contemplation or just letting the mind unwind." The pace of a footfall tends to not erode trails, and gives a moment's time to notice the details of a blooming flower or a singing bird.

Like so many in the Sierra, Meals is a Bay Area transplant, moving to Nevada County above Nevada City on Hwy 49. In 1975, Meals began working for the Tahoe National

Forest, where he was employed, off and on, over a twenty-year span. "With them I was able to improve my skills as an archaeologist, sharpen my abilities with map and compass and spend a lot of time outside, on public land." Since 1993, Meals has made writing, photography and archaeology his livelihood. His home is on the San Juan Ridge, where he still keeps his hiking boots by the door.

It is easy to see the appeal of slowing down to a walk and hiking a trail. Though several years have passed since *Yuba Trails 2* was published, this book remains a lasting tribute to the trails, culture and heritage of the Sierra Nevada. Take a walk. Travel a bit at the pace of thoughtfulness. 5H

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In Grass Valley — The Bookseller and Empire State Mine Park, In Nevada City — Wolf Creek Wilderness and Mountain Recreation:
In Bridgeport — Harmony Books and Tahoe National Forest Nevada City Ranger Station:
Also at South Yuba State Park.