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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 9/1/2025

Veteran Ultra-distance Athletes to Retrace Historic 1844 Sierra Nevada Crossing That Opened California to Wagon Travel

Extreme athletes will follow route of forgotten pioneers who succeeded where Donner Party later failed, honoring the first wagon train to conquer the Sierra Nevada

Truckee, CA – This September, History Expeditions will undertake their most challenging adventure yet: retracing the remarkable 1844 journey of the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party's "Horseback Party of Six," the forgotten pioneers who blazed the first successful wagon route over the Sierra Nevada mountains into California.

The Survivors & Heroes Expedition runs September 29 - October 3, 2025, following the newly discovered 135-mile route taken by six brave souls – including two women – who split from their main wagon train near today's Truckee to forge an alternate path to Sutter's Fort. Unlike the tragic Donner Party two years later, all 52 members of the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party survived, with two babies born during the journey.

Why This Story Matters:

- First successful wagon crossing of the Sierra Nevada, proving California was accessible overland
- Extraordinary survival story featuring 18-year-old Moses Schallenberger's solo winter survival at Donner Lake
- Women's heroism showcased by Elizabeth Townsend and Ellen Murphy riding through winter wilderness
- Indigenous collaboration highlighting how Native American knowledge made the crossing possible
- Forgotten success overshadowed by later Donner Party tragedy deserves recognition

The Route:
The expedition follows the ancient Native American trade route from the Truckee River confluence near Donner Lake, south to Lake Tahoe, over Burton Pass at 7,140 feet, through the Rubicon and American River watersheds, descending nearly 6,000 feet to the Sacramento Valley. The original party took 26 days; the modern expedition will complete it in 5 days on horseback.

Media Opportunities:
The five-day horseback expedition offers compelling visual storytelling through dramatic Sierra Nevada landscapes, following ancient Native American trade routes used for thousands of years. Real-time GPS tracking allows virtual participation, while film crews document the physical and emotional challenges.

Key Dates:

- September 25-28: Pre-expedition briefings and preparation events
- September 29: Expedition launch at 7am from Donner Memorial State Park
- October 1-3: Summit crossing and descent through Rubicon and Georgetown Divide Wilderness
- October 3: Arrival celebration in Auburn
- October 6-31: Post-expedition presentations and media events

About History Expeditions:
History Expeditions discovers American West tales and trails lost to history and honors forgotten heroes of American westward expansion through extreme athletic reprises of historic journeys. The team previously completed acclaimed reprises of the Donner Party's Forlorn Hope, Donner Relief expeditions, Grosh Brothers & the Comstock lode and Snowshoe Thompson's mail routes. Their philosophy: "Researching clues left from primary sources and heading into the field to piece together the puzzle."

This expedition honors both the courage of 1844 pioneers and the indigenous peoples whose trail knowledge made their success possible.

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Learn More and Media Kit Download:
https://historyexp.org/2025-stephens-townsend-murphy/

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