

February 2022



Dear Club Members,

This month's theme is an amalgamation of 3 anniversaries, all of them related to temperature. On 3rd February 1947 the coldest temperature ever recorded in Northern America occurred. In Snag, Yukon, Canada the thermometer plummeted to  $-63^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The temperature was so low that it fell below the scale on the thermometer of the weatherman stationed at the airport. In the end they filed a mark in to the glass which was then sent off for calibration. The airstrip was abandoned in 1967, improvements in aircraft meant that the network of maintained airstrips between Edmonton and Fairbanks was no longer needed. Snag recorded such a low temperature due to its geography, cold air forms in the surrounding peaks and flows downhill where it is trapped by the surrounding mountains.

This month also marks the 150th anniversary of the rescue of the surviving members of the Donner Party Tragedy. The Donner Party were a collection of families who were travelling west across America aiming to settle in California. Like so many people in America in this period they bought wagons, and grouped together travelling hundreds of miles in search for a better life. The volume of wagons making this journey was so huge that there are still wagon wheel ruts clearly visible in the grasslands the trails travelled through. On the well travelled routes, most of the journey was relatively easy, but the final 100 miles required the crossing of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Overtime many different routes were developed, all claiming to be quicker or easier. The wagon trails had to be sure to leave Missouri early enough in the year to reach these mountains before they became impassable with snow. Crucially in 1846 the 9 wagons of the Reed and Donner families were the last to leave.

The party had originally set out from Springfield, Illinois, and arrived at Fort Bridger in Wyoming in mid-July. At Fort Bridger they departed from the usual route, and were convinced to take the Hastings cut-off. This was promised to be 300 miles shorter, but would actually add 125 miles to their journey, and also take them south of the Great Salt Lake, and through the surrounding desert. The journey across the desert took 5 days instead of the promised 2, and in doing so they lost several oxen and wagons. They then had to find a route through the Ruby Mountains in Nevada, before reaching the Humboldt river where the cut off joined the traditional California trail. It was now mid-September, and the party arrived at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada low on food, and had cached all their possessions except the ones they needed for immediate survival. On October 31st their progress was blocked by snowfall in what is now called Donner Pass. Recognising that no route through would be possible until spring they built crude cabins by the lakeshore. By December 16th a number of the party had already died, and 10 men and 5 women set out on homemade snowshoes. Two of the men and all the women managed to reach Fort Sutter in Sacramento, and a rescue party set out on January 31st. The rescuers reached the camp on February 18th, and managed to bring out 23 of the survivors, 17 of whom were children. Several further rescue attempts were made, but the last survivor wasn't escorted over the mountains until April 21st.

In total 81 people had been stranded by the weather at the lakeside camp, more than half of those were under 18, and 6 were infants. Children made up the vast majority of the 45 survivors.

The settlers were already short of food when they became trapped, and resorted to eating anything they could. Leather and raw hide were boiled, and they even resorted to eating their dogs. As winter drew on however, and members of the party started dying many of the survivors resorted to cannibalism in order to live until spring. There is some debate about to what extent this occurred, or even if it occurred at all, but many survivors openly stated that it happened at the time of the tragedy.

So far our themes have centred around cold, and this is where our 3rd anniversary comes in. In 1822 on 16th February the biologist and statistician Francis Galton was born. He was a Victorian era polymath, and connected to our theme, he was also a key player in the development of the science of meteorology, devising the first weather map. Visual representation of data is key to help us understand what is really happening in science and using colour as a code for numerical value instantly lets us understand just how warm or hot it's going to be. We instinctively think of blue as being cold, but what happens when the temperature reaches the lows as seen in Snag, or those experienced by the Donner Party? There's no set standard, but lots of the maps use purple, so that's our colour theme for this month!

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading/ Watching-

Snag weather station-

<https://www.adn.com/our-alaska/article/yukon-recorded-coldest-temperature-north-america/2010/02/07/>

<https://www.cahs.ca/home/448-yukon-the-coldest-place-in-north-america.html>

Donner Party

Pen Hemmingway talks about the surviving textiles of the Donner Party Tragedy-

<https://theknittinggenie.com/2019/09/09/the-donner-party-and-the-doll-podcast/>

National Geographic- Beyond Cannibalism-

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/donner-party-cannibalism-nation-west>

10 Things to know about the Donner Party Tragedy

<https://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-donner-party>

Encyclopaedia Britannica Summary-

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Donner-party>

Video Summary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5xMpsYdzgq>

Reading of "The Expedition of the Donner Party and it's Tragic Fate. The book written by survivor Eliza P. Donner HOUGHTON (1843 - 1922)

<https://youtu.be/xozDs6MBpmM>

BBC Witness History Podcast

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03b2mj6>

Francis Galton

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis\\_Galton#Personal\\_life\\_and\\_character](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Galton#Personal_life_and_character)

Francis Galton as a man of his time-

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/03/eugenics-francis-galton-science-ideas>

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