



March Club Trip

This month's trip will be our sledding trip with chili lunch. You will need to bring a can of chili to add to the pot, \$5 cash for the parking fee at Happy Jack and of course your sleds. We will leave the Kings Soopers parking lot on north College and Willox promptly at 9am.

**Club Dues are due.
\$45**

PayPal on the club website
is set up and ready. Visit

www.mountaineers4x4.org

**Check Out Trails on:
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Haystack Rock

From Strange But True, Colorado by John Hafnor

Way back in the 1860s when Fort Collins was just an Army post, purchasing and protecting a hay supply was critical to a horse-mounted post. During that period, a farmer showed up at the fort offering to sell a large haystack a couple miles to the north. The post commander sent out a procurement officer to verify the existence of the haystack, and then paid the farmer in full for his hay. When subsequently trying to bring in the hay, Fort Collins soldiers learned their

Last Meeting

This was our first auction of the plates. Congrats to Cotton.

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"haystack" was really just a large haystack-shaped boulder covered sparingly with hay. The military had been duped and ever after this boulder would be known as "Haystack Rock." Today Haystack Rock has become a sort of First Amendment billboard as well, painted with ever-changing statements, school slogans, marriage proposals, graffiti and more. Haystack Rock is easily recognized close by Highway 287, just a few miles north of Laporte.



Larimer County's Notorious Jack Slade

Joseph Alfred Slade was born on January 22, 1831. His father founded the town of Carlyle, Illinois and then served in the U.S. Congress. It is said that Jack had a fiery temper and in his early teens a man upset him so bad that Jack picked up a rock and threw it at the man and it killed him. This is said to be the first of many men he would kill during his lifetime. Slade left his Illinois home in 1847 as a 16-year-old private in the army that occupied Santa Fe during the Mexican War. He was a small fry (standing only 5' 8" with long red hair) among soldiers described by one observer as "the dirtiest, rowdiest crew I have ever seen." He drove Army wagons on the Santa Fe Trail between Santa Fe and Leavenworth, Kansas, learning a trade that would become his lifeblood.

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In the 1850s, Slade worked as a wagon master on the Overland Trail between the Missouri River and California, meeting his future wife at the end of one run. Virginia was a tall, striking, dark-haired former dance-hall girl who could match her husband's hell-raising. In the summer of 1858, Jack led a train of more than 100 wagons that provided 465,500 pounds of provisions for the mail stations of John Hockaday's new stage coach line between St. Joseph, Mo. and Salt Lake City. That winter Slade became the division agent (superintendent) for the westernmost stretch of Hockaday's line, a 475 mile route from Salt Lake to Horseshoe Station in present day Wyoming.

In the fall of 1859, Slade was transferred to the central division, the most dangerous stretch of the struggling stagecoach line. Which in the interim had been sold, reorganized and renamed the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company. The Pony Express, a horseback relay system that would work with the stage line to deliver the mail, also began to take shape in 1859. Slade bought the right kind of horses (fast but tough) to make the Pony Express work (which it did from April 1860 until October 1861). But his main orders were to "clean up the line" – which meant, above all, replacing one Jules Beni, the corrupt and incompetent station keeper at Julesburg. Beni had been allowing his outlaw friends to steal company stock which he would then "retrieve" for a reward charged to the company.

After taking over, Slade quickly established order by conspicuously capturing and hanging few robbers and horse thieves and letting word of mouth drive out the rest. But in March 1860, his nemesis ambushed him as he entered the restaurant at Julesburg Station. Beni fired as many as a dozen times with both revolver and shotgun before fleeing to Denver. "I never saw a man so badly riddled," said station master James Boner of Slade. "He was like a sieve."

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Remarkably, Slade survived the barrage. In a tribute to his value, the Central Overland transported him almost 1,000 miles by stagecoach and rail to St. Louis, where surgeons removed some of the lead from his body. By June, Slade was back at work, his domain as superintendent extended to cover nearly 500 miles from Julesburg west.

The code of the west demanded Slade exact revenge for the shooting. The Central Overland's new owner, Ben Holladay impatiently implored him to "get that fellow Jules, and let everyone know you got him." Yet for more than a year, while scourging his division of outlaws, Slade made no moves to pursue Benii. Then in August 1861, the 52 year old Beni foolishly returned to Slade's division to secure some stock, all the while spouting threats and boasting he was "not afraid of any damned driver, express rider or anyone else in the mail company." Slade posted a \$500 reward for his capture and sent four riders after him while Slade followed in a stagecoach.

According to the most reliable account of what happened next, two of Slade's men overtook Beni, wounded him in a gunfight and captured him. They then bound Beni to a pack horse and started out for the Cold Spring Station (in present day Wyoming). To their dismay, Beni died before they arrived. Fearful of losing the posted \$500 reward – and of arousing Slade's wrath – once at Cold Spring, they tied Beni in a seated position to the snubbing post in the corral. Soon thereafter Slade pulled into Cold Spring. "I suppose you had to kill him" Slade remarked, "And if you did, you do not get any reward." The men insisted Jules was not yet dead, only wounded and said "he's out in the corral."

When Slade walked out back to the corral and saw Jules' inert body lashed to the fence, he said "The man is dead." Again the men insisted that Bini was only playing possum, "I'll see whether he's playing possum." Slade said, taking his

knife and slicing off an ear. When Jules did not flinch, Slade remarked, 'That proves it, but I might as well have the other ear,' and took that as well. From that day on, Slade wore Jules Beni's ears on his watch fob or carried them in his pocket.

The Overland Stage route followed the Emigrant Trail across central Wyoming. In 1862, increased traffic to Denver combined with Indian raids prompted Overland owner to abandon the central Wyoming route in favor of one through Colorado. For his headquarters, Slade selected a station located almost in the middle of his division. Its setting was one of the most beautiful on the entire line, situated in a small valley near Dale Creek. Slade named the place Virginia Dale in honor of his wife Virginia. The station was constructed in June of 1862, and remains standing. Today its location is in Virginia Dale on private property and it is one of the earliest dwellings still standing in Larimer County.

Shortly after Jack Slade established Virginia Dale, there seemed to be a noticeable change in his mood. After the stations were established and the line was functioning smoothly, Slade's drinking increased. In the process, he began to neglect his responsibilities. When inebriated, he rode his horse into saloons, shot glasses off the shelves and picked fights with his best friends, one of whom he shot and wounded. On one occasion, he killed a sleeping dog; on another, he cut the ear off a mule. His name, as one acquaintance put it, "became synonymous for all that is infamous and cruel in human character." It wasn't uncommon for him to stop in Laporte on the way to Denver, get drunk and put everyone in fear for their lives. Often in this condition he would climb up next to the driver, order him to lay on the whip, and travel from one station to the next at a dead run. This would not only exhaust the animals, but would frighten the passengers. At the next station, he might harass passengers and employees, and in general making life miserable for all present. He gathered about him a group of other employees who, either through sheer enjoyment or fear of Slade joined in his drunken revelries. Although Slade was doing his fair share of drinking, ironically he didn't approve of his drivers drinking while on duty. A few had become intoxicated and wrecked some of the stages.

George Sanderson was selling Liquor in Laporte and was using the stage station as a bar. Slade sent orders to Sanderson to cease selling liquor, and Sanderson ignored Slade's order. Many men had lost their life at the hands of Jack Slade, but Sanderson may not have known of the division agent's reputation. Slade rode into Laporte with his men, wrecked the interior of the liquor shop and disposed of its offending fluids. They apparently delivered more mental anguish to Sanderson than bodily harm, and later Slade paid for the damages in full. Those who knew Slade best agreed that he was an exceptionally competent division agent and a considerate gentleman –

when sober. He was compelled to manage one of the wildest portions of the line with an iron hand, but Laporte was the seat of an organized county where such antics were unacceptable.

For his actions, Slade was indicted by a Denver grand jury on February 23, 1863. Slade was arrested and taken to jail on Larimer Street to wait for a hearing. In a plea bargain, the Overland agreed to discharge Slade in exchange for his release. The once efficient division agent, Joseph Alfred "Jack" Slade, was summarily fired.

Jack and Virginia gravitated to the newly discovered goldfields around Virginia City in recently created Idaho Territory (now Montana). Here Slade demonstrated his resourcefulness by running a freighting business, operating a dairy farm and carving a toll road out of a precarious hillside along the final stretch of the Bozeman Trail. In the fall of 1863, he saved Virginia City from likely starvation by organizing a freighting expedition to retrieve a cargo of provisions a steamboat had unloaded at Fort Calpin on the Milk river – more than 350 miles to the north through uncharted territory. The expedition's success made Slade a local hero, leaving him well off financially and in a celebratory mood as winter approached. So at a moment when everyone else around Virginia City seemed preoccupied with organizing vigilante companies to catch and hang robbers, Slade resumed his old destructive drinking habits.

When sober, Slade assisted the vigilantes in their work and remained on good terms with their leaders. But when drunk, he was not merely a threat to property, he was also an obvious threat to the vigilantes, Virginia City's self-appointed guardians of civic order. These men were preoccupied above all with sending the message that they were not to be trifled with. That was precisely what Slade, under the influence, began to do, and very publicly too. Warnings and fines did nothing to stop his drunken antics. During a two day binge in March 1864, he destroyed two brothels; slandered the vigilante leaders in a raunchy song; rode his horse into a saloon and forced a bottle of wine down its mouth; ended a theater performance with a command that the lead actress take off the balance of her dress; turned over a wagon's worth of milk into the street; and took his friend Judge Alexander Davis temporary hostage.

El Guapo





NOTHING LEFT BUT THE END!!