



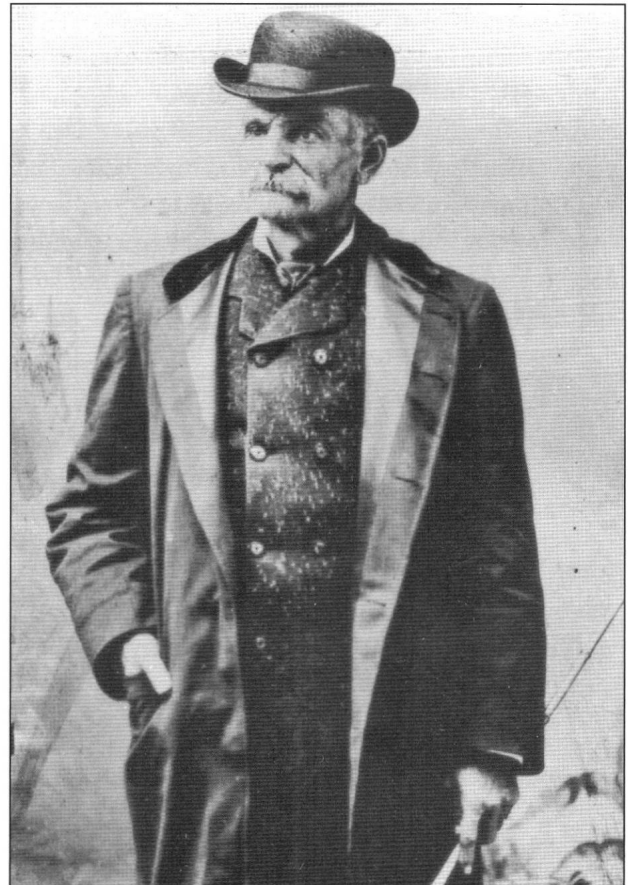
A VISIT TO FUNK HILL

By Bonnie Miller

Calaveras County's most famous robber was unquestionably Black Bart. Most school children know that he committed his first and last robbery at a remote location called Funk Hill, near Copperopolis. But how many people have ever been there, or better yet, could you even find this famous location on a map? It's been a long time since the exploits of a stage coach bandit graced the pages of *Las Calaveras*. Let's take a narrative trip and rediscover that famous location.

Picture yourself in the bustling goldrush era of 1883. Transportation was by way of true horsepower, as the iron horse hadn't reached the Mother Lode yet. If you wanted to get somewhere, you either walked, rode a horse, or took a stage. The stage coach provided the transportation for the important cargo, like people, the mail, and the gold upon which the economy was based. If you couldn't afford the exorbitant stage fees, then you were back to walking, riding a horse, or riding in an uncomfortable "buckboard" style wagon such as those used to deliver goods to the mining towns.

The Mother Lode was criss-crossed with a network of stage routes. Despite popular opinion, Wells Fargo did not actually run most of the stage lines, but in fact merely contracted with local stage companies to provide the services. A well used stage route in Calaveras County was the "Sonora-Milton" route, which brought passen-



Charles E. Boles, gentleman bandit, aka "Black Bart" circa 1883. Calaveras County Historical Society photo.



Wells Fargo's famous stage coach, the Concord Stage.

gers from Sonora, via Tuttletown, then north by way of Reynold's Ferry and then west to Copperopolis, then back northerly again on toward Milton. This is the route that passed the landmark known as Funk Hill, where Black Bart committed his last robbery that led to his capture.

It was the morning of November 3rd. After leaving Reynold's Ferry north of Tuttletown, the stage began the arduous climb up from Angels Creek. It was an unusual stage that morning, in that there were no passengers, and the Wells Fargo box had been bolted to the floor to confound any robbers who wanted it thrown down in a robbery. The driver Reason McConnell was travelling alone. There had been a breeze the night before, and young Jimmy Roller hoped that the crisp fall air would make hunting conditions favorable and encourage the deer to begin to move. Jimmy flagged down the stage and caught a ride part way up the hill, then jumped off as the stage neared the top. This remote location is where our story takes us.

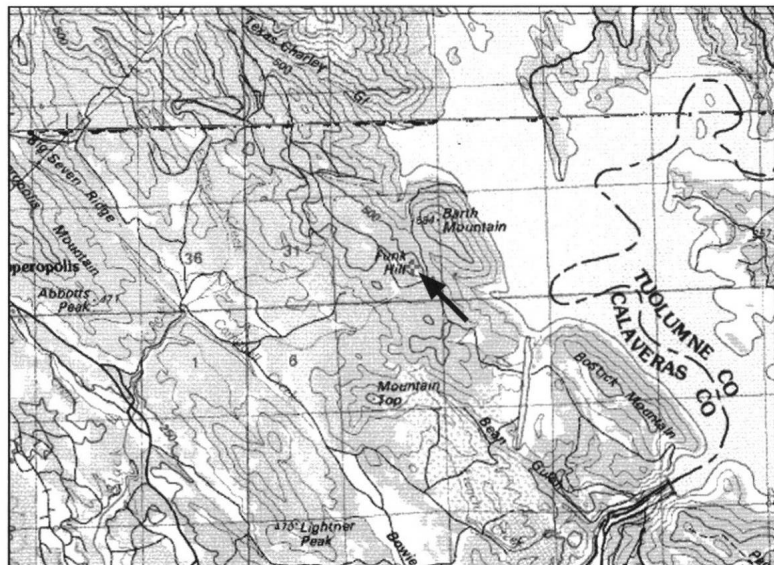
"Black Bart", of course, was not his real name but his alias. In the early 1870's the *Sacramento Union* had run a serial of adventure stories about a villain dressed in black who robbed Wells Fargo stages who went by the name of the famous pirate Black Bart. This is probably where our bandit got his idea for his name.

Charles E. Bowles, later Boles, aka Charles E. Bolton, aka Black Bart, was regarded by all who knew him as a real gentleman. He was born in 1829 in England, and he had a fine command of the English language. He was a Civil War veteran who sported a tattoo on his upper right arm, he

was married, and he was a dandy with a thirst for the finer things in life like good food and the better boarding houses and hotels. He had tried his hand at farming and mining and found them to be too much effort. He did not want to be constrained by the ties of lawful employment. To support his high lifestyle, he passed himself off as a mining engineer who had to travel in his work, and instead he took to robbery. His first attempt occurred in July of 1875 and was conducted at Funk Hill and it was a success. Emboldened, he went on to commit 27 more holdups in the subsequent eight years.

Black Bart was famous to Calaveras County because he was captured, tried and sentenced here, making him the county's most famous outlaw from the gold era. But of his colored career, only the two robberies were actually conducted here in Calaveras County, both his first and his last. And both occurred at Funk Hill.

Notoriety surrounded the man from his elegance, fine language and poetry. He worked alone without a gang. He staked out his robbery location and camped in the area the day before the intended holdup. This limited his robberies to only months of good camping weather. Since he never rode a horse, a stage could never suspect when a man wearing a flour sack over his head would just step out from behind a tree or rock on to the stage road in a remote location. After his robbery, he would disappear into the scenery just as mysteriously as he had appeared. Although he brandished a 12 gauge shotgun, he never fired a shot and it was subsequently learned that he had never loaded it.



Funk Hill lies in remote terrain west of New Melones Reservoir.

Where did that funky name come from?

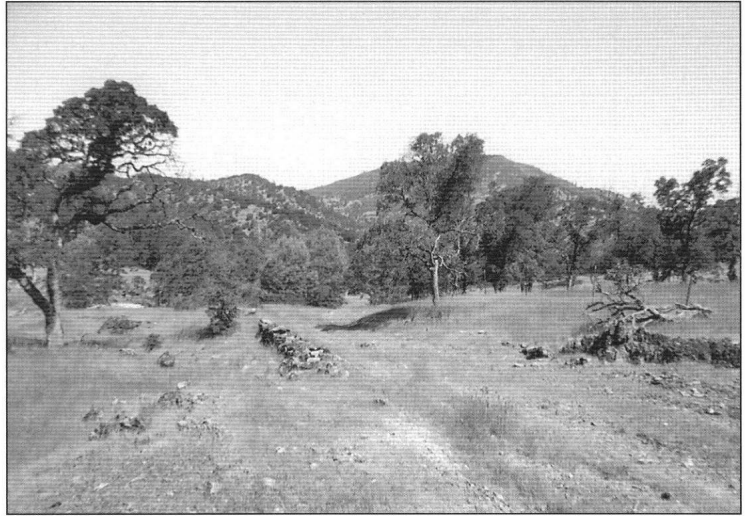
Funk is a German or Prussian name. Many immigrants of that heritage lived in Calaveras County by the 1860's, by which time the name Funk had affixed itself to the hill. The hill is closer to Copperopolis than it is to Angels Camp, so one would assume that the Funk family aligned itself with that community. However the Funk name did not show on the 1860, 1870 or 1880 registers or census records for Copper.

Funk is a nickname for a smith, or can mean someone who works with fire or has a spark or flame to their character. The community of Copperopolis had a few blacksmiths but they went by far different names. There were certainly other Funks in California, but whether Funk ranchers or smiths in the Copper-Angels area were around in the early days has not yet been defined.

Do you know where that funky name came from? Perhaps a miner whose nickname was Texas Charley had the surname of Funk. Or perhaps a cowboy looking for lost cattle on this lonely ridge top was stuck in a funk, which seems as good a reason as any to name this location.

Funk Hill Today

The top of Funk Hill looks today pretty much like it would have 125 years ago. It is a knoll on the Bear Mountain Range, just northeast of what we know today as Fowler Peak, or Lightner Peak as it says on the map. Today it is privately owned ranch land. It is now surrounded by New Melones Reservoir and Bureau of Reclamation land to the east, and the Bar XX subdivision to the west. To reach this landmark today, one has to pursue some serious cross country escapades. Although Jimmy Rolleri and Reason McConnell are long gone, one may also still have to dodge bullets today, but for trespassing. Fortunately for this writer and her gang of hiker pals, we knew the right people.



Climbing the Reynold's Ferry stage road to Funk Hill, one can still discern the wheel ruts in the hard rock today. Photo by Bonnie Miller, May 2004.

Our modern-day Black Bart is San Andreas' Glenn Wasson. Glenn has been endowed with the secret knowledge of how to find Funk Hill, via the scenic route. The reason the route is scenic is that this route was described to him after the inundation of New Melones Reservoir,

which presents its own obstacles. First one must cross the reservoir over what would have been Angels Creek in Black Bart's day. Prowling the shoreline, one must locate the saddle between Barth Mountain and Bostick Mountain, at its convergence with Texas Charley Gulch. Although the terrain is steep here, it provides the most direct access to Funk Hill.

After disembarking from a leisurely boat ride, one must begin an almost mountain goat like ascent up the steep bank. This part of the adventure is where the less-sturdy soon drop out. It is necessary to scramble up the steep loose shale and duck and thrash through the thick foliage for over half of a mile, all while trying to remain upright. The distance of this scramble varies from year to year, depending on the water level at the time of one's lake crossing. Suddenly the hiker crests a slight shoulder in the hillside and discovers they are on an old roadbed running southeast to northwest. While catching one's



Jimmy Rolleri, the young man who was hunting deer and encountered more than he expected that cool November morning. For his efforts in capturing Black Bart, Wells Fargo awarded him a "cheap" rifle. Calaveras County Historical Society photo, circa 1890.

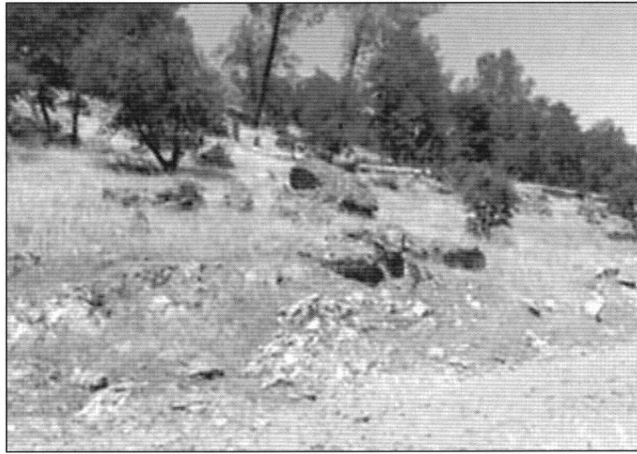
breath, it is quickly taken away again to realize that the past half mile was just spent crawling through, and often hanging on to for dear life, none other than our beloved poison oak.

After coming this far, what is to be gained by going back? It is preferable to stop this nonsense of crawling through brush and instead take this nice road. It is in fact the old stage road coming up from the former Reynold's

Ferry, which would have been a few miles back on Angels Creek, had there not been a lake in the way.

One continues to ascend north and west up the hard rock flanks of the Bear Mountain range. Wheel ruts are still easily discerned in the roadbed, even today. Despite the encroaching foliage, it is easy to follow the road for another mile or so before it turns sharply to the west. The road roughly follows a level contour for about a half a mile, then turns abruptly right back on its northwest path again. Leaving the sporting noises of the reservoir behind, one can almost imagine the clop of the horse's hooves along this ridge top. On the cool morning of November 3, 1883, this would have been a dry ridge top exposed to sunlight for most of the day. It is in this relatively quiet stretch of road between the two curves that Black Bart conducted his Calaveras County holdups. This is Funk Hill.

Funk Hill sits at 1736', so the view is panoramic



Black Bart staged himself behind the rock on the left, awaiting the stage as it approached from the right. *Photo courtesy of Wally Motloch, taken September 2007.*

myriad of radio towers sprouting from atop Lightner Peak like quills on a giant porcupine.

On the north side of the road sits a large rock, about the size of a small car. Black Bart hid himself behind this rock and propped sticks over the top to make it appear as though gun barrels were aimed at the stage. Then with his flour sack mask on, he stepped out from behind the rock and confronted the stage.

Bart requested that McConnell throw down the box, but since it was bolted to the floor of the stage, it was not possible. Thinking quickly, he instead politely requested that McConnell unhitch the team of horses and lead them away from the stage. Bart then spent a good half hour wrestling with the box until he had it loose. The effort apparently spent him. Later he told his arresting officers "I was so overcome with surprise and fatigue, that a ten-year-old could have captured me."

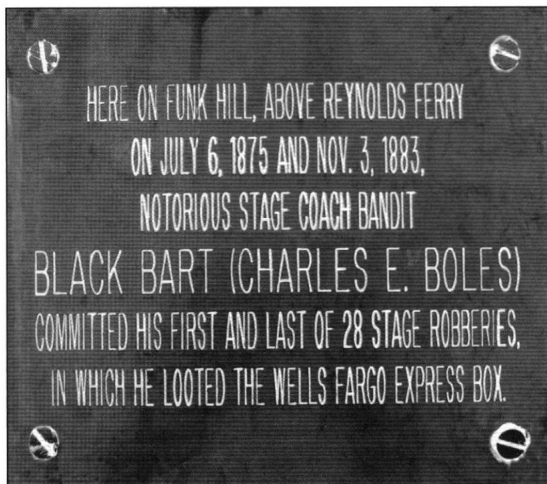
As history has recorded, although he successfully robbed the stage, he was wounded in a subsequent rain of bullets. There are varying accounts as to whether or not the stage driver Reason McConnell, or Jimmy Rolleri, the young man hunting deer actually made the injurious shot that connected with Bart's body. What is known is that the injury caused him to leave the scene hastily without covering his tracks. Evidence was found at his campsite (the famous handkerchief with the San Francisco laundry mark) that ultimately led to his arrest. Allegedly he also wrote a poem to have been left at the robbery scene which was seized as evidence, but was subsequently lost.

In 1950, Jack Morley, a former Wells Fargo shotgun messenger drove a stake at this location



Jack Morley, Wells Fargo shotgun messenger and Constable of Murphys, drives an iron stake into the ground in 1950 to mark the holdup site on Funk Hill. *Calaveras County Historical Society photo.*

to be sure it wasn't lost to time. George Hoepfer, who wrote the biography of Black Bart, made sure that the location wasn't forgotten, and endowed Glenn Wasson with the knowledge of the spot. In 1998 Glenn placed a brass plaque on the rock behind which Black Bart hid himself. Glenn later admitted that drilling and adhering the plaque to the rock took about as much work as it must have taken Black Bart to wrestle the Wells Fargo box from the stage. The thoroughly cemented plaque reads:



While in prison, newspaper reporters investigated Boles' past and discovered that he had abandoned his wife of many years. When she learned the truth of his demise (she had thought him dead after years of her own investigations that left her nearly penniless), she none the less forgave him and resumed communication with him. They corresponded until his release from prison. His abandonment of his family was considered by some to have surmounted his glamour as a gentleman poet bandit. Some who knew him thought less of him after learning the truth of his past. Yet others forgave him his misdeeds and continued to befriend if not admire him. One local rumor claims that he returned to Angels Camp to visit acquaintances before his mysterious disappearance.

After the sea sickness of the lake crossing, and the strain of climbing the nearly vertical hillside, as well as thrashing through the poison oak for miles, each visitor to this site is rewarded with their trip back in time. Or, if one looks further along the road, it is evident that the road is still in use today as access to the land for the ranchers. We realize that we could have foregone the adventure of the boat ride, the climb, and the guarantee of a future severe case of poison oak, if we had just

come to the site from the west and used the road. But we didn't want to impose on our hosts so much as to ask permission to bring in vehicles, and we wouldn't have missed the adventure in arriving here for all the gold under Black Bart's rock on Funk Hill.

For a full account of the bandit's life and exploits, readers are encouraged to read the biography of Black Bart, *Black Bart Boulevardier Bandit* by the late George Hoepfer. George was editor of *Las Calaveras* from 1986 until 1998. He had a particular enthusiasm for stage coaches, robberies and the perpetrating bandits. In his prolific career as editor, one of his most meticulously researched articles was an account of the history of the stage coaches and their robberies in Calaveras County for the April 1991 issue of *Las Calaveras*. For more information on this subject, readers are encouraged to look up that richly detailed piece.

An itemized conjecture of the trial-turned-sentencing of Black Bart was developed by local attorneys Ted Laskin and Michael Arkin. This narrative appeared in the January, 1998 issue of *Las Calaveras*, and also comprises a chapter of their book on local legal history, *From the Depths of the Mines Came the Law*.

Curious tourists are reminded that if they wish to locate the rock and plaque on Funk Hill, this is privately owned property. Would-be historians are strongly advised to obtain permission before entering the property. As all good hikers do, take only pictures, leave only footprints, and leave all gates open or closed as you found them.



Black Bart's holdup rock has a plaque on it today, placed by Glenn Wasson in 1998, in memory of Bart's biographer George Hoepfer. This photo, and the previous photo of the plaque, taken in September 2007, courtesy of Wally Motloch.

Calaveras County Historical Society

30 No. Main Street P.O. Box 721 San Andreas, CA 95249

Officers and Directors

President	Jeff Tuttle, Mokelumne Hill
Vice President	Laurie Giannini, San Andreas
Treasurer	David Studley, Mountain Ranch
Secretary	Rosemary Faulkner, Jackson
Directors	Pamela Taylor, San Andreas Bill Claudino, San Andreas Gary Herd, Mountain Ranch Beverly Burton, San Andreas Duane Wight, Lodi
Honorary Director	Willard P. Fuller, Jr., San Andreas
<i>Las Calaveras</i> Editor	Bonnie Miller
Office Manager	Kathy Cochran
Office Assistant	Hallie Studley

Las Calaveras is published quarterly by the Calaveras County Historical Society. A subscription to *Las Calaveras* comes with membership in the Calaveras County Historical Society for \$22.00 per year. Non-members may obtain copies from the Historical Society office. The original historical material presented in *Las Calaveras* is not copyrighted and anyone is invited to use it. Mention of the source would be appreciated. Contributions of articles about Calaveras County are appreciated and may be submitted to the Historical Society for consideration.

The Calaveras County Historical Society is a non-profit corporation. It meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in various communities throughout the County. Locations and scheduled programs are announced in advance. Some meetings include a dinner program, and visitors are always welcome.

The Society operates the Calaveras County Museum which is open daily from 10:00 to 4:00 in the historic County courthouse located at 30 Main Street in San Andreas; and the historic Red Barn Museum at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, also in San Andreas, which is open Thursday to Sunday, 10:00 to 4:00.

The Society's office is located in historic San Andreas, the Calaveras County seat. Visitors are always welcome to stop by the office for assistance with research, and are encouraged to visit the museums while in the area. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00, and the telephone number is (209) 754-1058, or contact us at: CCHS@goldrush.com; Red Barn Museum (209) 754-0800.

Donations

The Historical Society is grateful for the following donation:

February 2008

Items from Turner house: rag doll and old red bonnet—Carol Curry, San Andreas

New Members

The Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

December 2007

Larry Cristofani, Oakdale
Vaughn Tribble, Murphys
Gary Teal, San Andreas
Tim Jetton, San Andreas
Lee Seaton, Angels Camp
Linda McClusky, Mountain Ranch & Richmond
Jennifer Brock, San Andreas

January 2008

Steven Cilenti, San Andreas
Mike & Kathy Dell'Orto, Mokelumne Hill

February 2008

Tom Beede, Sacramento
Patricia & Sanders Lamont, Camp Connell
Nate & Karen Huston, San Andreas
Lloyd Nordby, Valley Springs
Ernie La Carra-Babor, Rail Road Flat

Funk Hill Bibliography

Copperopolis Herald; 7/2001
Hoeper, George; *Black Bart Boulevardier Bandit*;
Word Dancer Press, 1995
Las Calaveras, 10/1952, 4/1995, 4/1991, 1/1998
Renwick, William; *The Autobiography of Reason*
E. McConnell, Graphics West Printing, 2007
Wells Fargo History Department; *Wells Fargo:*
Historical Highlights; Wells Fargo & Co., 1982
www.BlackBart.com