

## **Nuggets from the Past**

By Norm McLeod

# **Expedition replaces old monument to a pioneer**

On May 8, a contingent of Gene Markley's Placer Conservation Group arrived in Foresthill from Auburn. They carried with them a latest replica of a stolen or vandalized lone grave marker that Markley described as follows:

"The grave was probably on the Michigan Bluff side of the Middle Fork Canyon. A photo of the original marker was taken by May Perry, county museum curator in the 1950s. This was used as our model for the trail marker. The trail went south from Michigan Bluff. It crossed the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the American River about ¼ mile down from the Rainbow Bridge. The old Mule Train Bridge is still there. The trail climbed in zigzag fashion to here and climbed the crest to Big Oak Flat and the Greek Store. Portions of the trail were used from the 1850s to the 1940s. Locals may call it the Tillotson Trail, after a local family."

The midsize, hardened concrete marker, hand-crafted by Bill Chandler

of Lincoln and made in the shape of a Greek Orthodox cross, bore this inscription:

1881 (the year he died)

Alonia (Eternal)

Hmnhmh (Peace)

Akelou Sotroso (the Greek's name)

Etoe 1810 (the year he was born)

The four-vehicle caravan drove to the Ralston Ridge Trail leading off the Mosquito Ridge Road, where we set out on the steep, switchback footpath to the ridge top, about 500 feet.

At the top, we rested, as we were all carrying tools, equipment, concrete mix and gallons of water for installing the gravestone at the site previously selected by Markley.

In single file we hiked west about a quarter-mile along a part of the original Mosquito Ridge Trail used by early miners. We halted at a spot where the overview to the west was unlimited, along the deep, curving Middle Fork Canyon. Also, directly across the gorge was the steep, high wall of the Michigan Bluff saddle, down which the old pioneer trail

zigzagged to the Mule Train Bridge.

Markley observed, "I chose this spot because I want people to see the wide, expansive view the miners saw and to feel their exhilaration in being a part of it all."

We agreed upon a suitable place directly facing an embedded flat-surfaced rock, adjacent to the trail, where a hole was dug and the marker installed in concrete.

The youngest of the group, a college student working for extra credits, twice returned to the trucks for pack-loads of quartz rocks that were placed carefully in adornment in front of the monument.

Markley, knowing exactly what effect he wanted, scattered dry leaves

over the installation to give it a natural look. A thoroughly dedicated historian, he had spent about five hours the previous weekend clearing the overgrown trail for us, restoring a path where there had been none.

The party, composed of nine men and women, stood silent in front of the implanted gravestone a moment or two, perhaps each in his own way thinking in terms best expressed in Markley's poem, which he shared with us:

"The breeze slides along the ridge,  
The trees protect the passage trail,  
Clouds drift in blue above.

It was a good place for Akelou Sotrofo to die,

He to represent all those who traveled by."