

Jack Littlefield Grave Site

B07 Map 7: T26N, R12W, S. 32

See trail HTNF-11 and the Jack Littlefield entry in People and Places section.

This overview focuses on the grave site and the events that can be identified on the ground related to Jack Littlefield's murder. Numerous histories have been written about this—arguably the most notorious of the many murders that took place in Long Ridge Country during the 1870s to 1890s.

See Keter 1994a and Carranco and Beard 1981, for a complete overview of the Littlefield murder and subsequent trial. See Appendix 5 ms03 for a detailed overview by Jack Ward of the Littlefield murder dated June 1962. See also Appendix 10 for in-depth articles from the 1895 *SF Call*.

Robert Thomas (forester MRRD), an avocational archaeologist, and I recorded this site (05-10-54-317) on September 5, 1987 during the Travis fire. The grave site was visited to insure that it was not disturbed by firefighting activities. The site was flagged to insure it was avoided during the fire as a tractor line passed just to the west of the grave marker (see attached images). The fire line basically followed the route of the Round Valley to Weaverville Trail HTNF-11 as it dropped off Antone Ridge to the north into the headwaters of Littlefield Creek. Later in the fall of 1987, I guided the great grandnephew of Jack Littlefield to the grave site so that he could pay his respects.

[Update: On a visit to Garberville in August of 2016 I discussed the gravesite with an individual who had direct knowledge of this event. During the 1987 Travis Fire he was on the crew putting in the fire line in this area. He indicated that they did hit the grave marker with the tractor but put it back in place. It appears, however, given the tractor disturbance plotted on the sitemap (see below) that it may have been moved slightly to the south. See photo below. In the photo below it appears the marker was hit and is just sitting on the surface of the ground. There may be more photos on file with the site record.]



Photo of tractor disturbance.

Note that from this angle the granite marker seems to have been directly hit by the tines of a tractor and replaced at about the same location.

(T. Keter 1987)

Max Rowley (A4: I#444) visited the Littlefield grave site in 1949. He indicated that the fence was already gone but that the headstone remained at that time. Edith Murphey was interviewed in 1954 in Covelo (MCHS) and Eric Smith has transcribed the interview. In the interview, Edith told the story about a trip with Sam and Lucy Young from Covelo to South Fork Mountain (probably in about the early to mid 1930s) while:

Riding through the Travis range we came to a grassy glade with many trees encircling it. I had been off gathering seeds and was just back on my horse when I saw the animals ahead of me each hesitate and turn their heads slightly to the right. I looked as they looked and there was a lonely grave surrounded by thick pickets. I called to Sam and Lucy and they came riding back.

Tell me about this grave
This is the Littlefield grave they said.

The fence did not look to date back to that long ago lynching, but they told me Frank Travis had put up the fence to keep his cattle from trampling on the grave.

On the morning Littlefield was murdered my companions and some other Indians had been out fishing or hunting when they heard a fusillade of shouts. They were heading for the river by way of this trail but something about the haste and number of shouts convinced the Indians it was a white man's quarrel, and they tried to find another way to continue their journey. But their horses, mountain wise, kept working around to use the trails they knew. They came suddenly on this little glade, so quiet now, but so recently the scene of sudden death. The horse stopped and there he swung before them. His wide brimmed hat lay on the grass. His chaps, his boots, his spurs—he still wore them, turning slowly as if to look at them. Frightened the little party melted away not long before the authorities came to cut down and bury Littlefield. The lynching tree was cut down, an old timer told me. A bit of picket caught my eye. A ground squirrel had nosed it out of the earth. It was roughly pointed to hold it in the ground for a marker and across the front, rudely carved, were the letters J.L.—a small thing to recall the man whose death occasioned a trail that is said to have bankrupted Trinity County.

When Littlefield was killed in 1895, the area where the murder took place and adjacent grave site were open oak woodland with scattered ponderosa pine (see images below). Today the oaks are being invaded by even-aged Douglas fir--most appear to be under 75 years old (in 1987). Also, as noted in Keter 1995, there is a single western juniper growing along the eastern side of the trail/fire line just to the south of the grave site in the open prairie. (This is the only juniper I have seen outside of the high country of the Yolla Bolly Mountains.

A hand-written note at the TCHS (a copy of this document--it is very hard to read and partly illegible--is in the B07 hard file) indicated that the picket fence was constructed around the grave site in 1925 as a provision in the will of his mother Marcia Littlefield who died in 1922. This is likely a more elaborate fence than that constructed by Travis and included the pink granite marker that marks the site today (see image below).

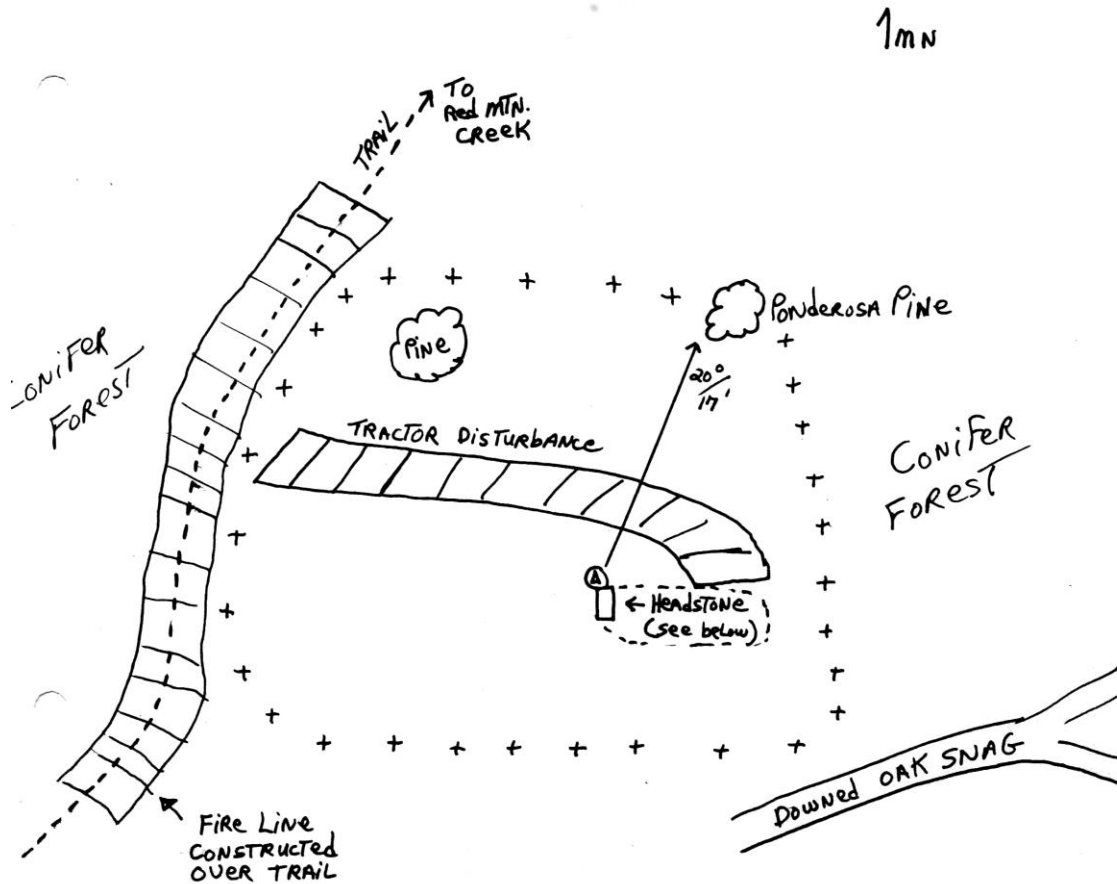
In 1987 all that remained was the pink granite gravestone--the old picket fence that surrounded the grave was no longer visible (the fire may very well have destroyed any remaining evident of decaying lumber: see Images B07: 10-15).

George Ward (1962: Appendix 5: ms03 hard copy files) in a history of the Littlefield murder wrote that:

Close beside a seldom used trail in a timbered canyon in Southern Trinity County there is a lonely neglected grave. At one time there had been an enclosure of split pine railings which had given way and fallen in. There is also a small red granite marker bearing the legend: Alfred D. Littlefield 1859-1895. The grave was dug in the shade of a large yellow pine, and the skeleton remains of an old manzanita testify that the area was more open at that time than it is now. The present jeep road [HTNF-11 Spur B] follows the ridge on

the east and the only passerby is the rider on horseback looking after his stock.

...An old packer, Dave Willburn, had brought a coffin all the way from Hettenshaw and a grave was dug in the shade of a large yellow [ponderosa] pine where the body was given a decent burial.



Site Map B07-01

Grave site map: based on the original site map. The trail was about 25' west of the grave marker and was overlain by the fire line--many of the blazes should still remain. (T. Keter 1987).

Ivan Jeans (B07 hardcopy file only), a resident of the upper Mad River area, wrote about his passing the gravesite in 1921. The letter is dated Feb., 12, 1984.

One of the most notorious [murders in the Long Ridge country] was the Jack Littlefield murder, in 1895. When in 1921 we passed the grave, I was quite impressed by the version told by our guide, Gus Russ. "They hung him on that limb and then shot him full of holes" is somewhat at variance from the

trail and newspaper record, but it probably satisfied Gus, as it scared heck out of me.

[This MS also contains the names and dates for 10 other murders that occurred within the NFERW from the late 1800s to 1912.

Images

Images B07-1 to B07-4 are all from the original murder investigation and can be found at the TCHS. Images B08 to B15 were taken by the author in the fall of 1987.



Image B07-1

Sherriff Tom Bergin (L) standing about where Littlefield was stopped. View to SW to the head of Antonte Ridge. Note how open the area is at that time.



B07-2

Site of where Littlefield was hung. Sheriff Tom Bergin (left) is standing in the shallow grave. Sid Willburn is standing by the fallen tree where Littlefield was hanged. Foreground on lower right Jim Willburn is lying on the ground where he was shot. (TCHS see also Carranco and Beard 1981: 274).



Image B07-3

Trail HTNF-11 near the grave site (TCHS)



Image B07-4

Approximate location of Littlefield's grave.
Note the small conifers--mostly ponderosa pine and larger ponderosa Pines.
(TCHS)

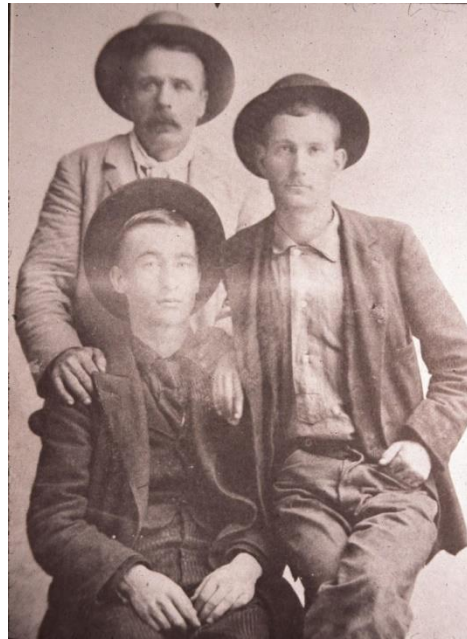


Image B07- 5

Jack Littlefield upper left with friends Jim Hastings and Enoch Pollard.
(nd,: Mendocino Historical Society)

B07

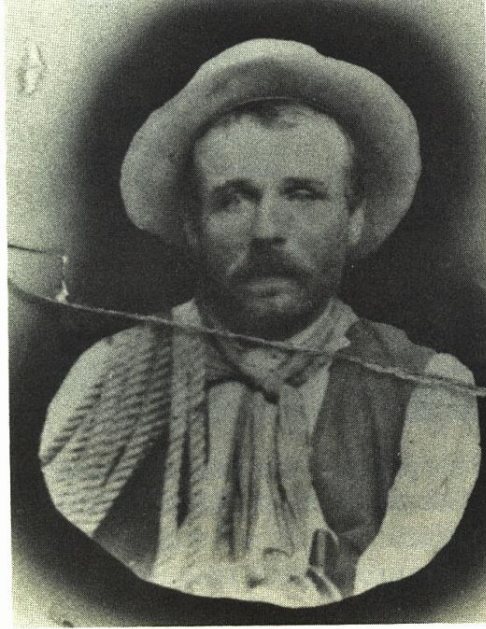


Image B07-6
Jack Littlefield; note the rope on his right shoulder.
(n.d.: MCHS)



Image B07-7
Jack Littlefield grave site and portions of collapsed fence.
Note the headstone is just to the right of the vertical pole to the far right.
(c 1940s no exact date TCHS)

B07



Image B07-8
Pink granite headstone.



Image B07-9
B&W showing the "D" in Littlefield's middle name.



Image B07-10

Headstone after Travis fire.

The entire area was burned--there was no evidence any fencing.



Image B07-11

View to north along fire line (trail) during the Travis Fire.

Flagged area to right is the gravesite.



Image B07-12

Travis Fire: view to south and east along fire line. Note the invasion of young conifers into the area. The gravesite, to the left of the fire line, is flagged.



Image B07-14

Travis Fire: along old trail/fire line just to south of the grave site (flagging mid center of photo). Note the dense understory of young conifers.

B07



Image B07-15

Lone juniper growing to the south of the gravesite and west of the trail.
The tractor line from the Travis Fire is behind the tree.