



Notable Norwegians

Jon Torsteinson Rue
Known as
John "Snowshoe" Thompson

Jon Torsteinson Rue, later known as John "Snowshoe" Thompson was born on a mountainside farm in Tinn, Telemark, Norway on April 30, 1827. His father died when he was only two years old and at age ten he and his mother left for America and lived in several midwestern states. By the time he was twenty four he decided to head to California during the great Gold Rush to seek his fortune and because he missed the mountains and tall pine trees of his native Norway.

But it wasn't the gold that made him famous. John "Snowshoe" Thompson took his place in history as the man who carried the U.S mail while skiing on ten-foot long homemade skis through 90 miles of dangerous slopes in the Sierra Nevada mountain range on a route from Placerville, California, to Genoa, Nevada.

For twenty winters he traveled the route at least two times per month, not only, carrying the U.S. mail, but also, medicine and many other supplies in an 80-100 pound mail bag which was strapped to his back. He used a single, sturdy pole, held with both hands, in front of him for balance much like a tightrope walker.

With 20-50 feet of snow depth it took him only three days to reach Genoa, Nevada from Placerville, California. The return trip to Placerville took only two days, as it was "easier". It is said that he flew down the mountains at speeds up to sixty miles an hour. During these years he is also credited with saving the lives of people who were snowbound in the mountains.

On May 15, 1876 John died of appendicitis and pneumonia at age 49. He is buried in the Genoa Cemetery in Nevada. For the twenty years of delivering the U.S. mail through the most difficult terrain and conditions, the U.S. Postal Service never compensated him.

A statue of John "Snowshoe" Thompson was dedicated on June 23, 2001 at the Mormon Station State Park in Genoa, Nevada in memory of and to honor the "Legendary Mailman of the Sierra". Other statues dedicated to the "Father of Skiing in California and Nevada" are located at Squaw Valley Ski Resort, the home of the 1960 winter Olympics, Boreal Ski Resort, and at Donner Summit, California.

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