

BLACK BART ROBS SUTTER CREEK STAGE—AGAIN!

“Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear...” Those words once introduced that masked man, the Lone Ranger. They are equally fitting to introduce Black Bart Hold-up Days in Sutter Creek on June 23-24, 2007.

The town’s first annual celebration takes you back 124 years to June 23, 1883 when the infamous highwayman Black Bart held up the Wells Fargo Stage on Main Street. The robbery netted him a total of \$755 in express boxes and U.S. registered mail. More importantly, it was his last successful robbery as his colorful career came to an end during his next attempt.

Two days of fun for all

Sutter Creek is an ideal location for a reenactment of a nineteenth century hold-up. Dubbed “one of the best preserved towns in California’s Gold Country” by Sunset Magazine, Main Street will look familiar to “Black Bart” (as portrayed by Larry Worman). Balconied buildings still shade familiar characters dressed in period attire. Even the horse-drawn stage he stops at 10 A.M., noon and 2 and 4 P.M. daily is authentic.

There’s fun for the whole family all weekend. Doc & The Foothill Vigilantes, a Western theatre group, put on gun safety and bull whip demonstrations. The Kit Carson Mountain Men’s encampment on Randolph Street shows off their expertise with tomahawks. At a camp nearby, local Miwok Indians display their history and culture.

Western music fills the air and artists and artists and authors are on hand to showcase their talents. Learn about gold fever and try your luck panning at Sutter Gold Mine. Children of all ages will enjoy up-close-and-personal looks at the stagecoach, wagons, horses, and champion steers. Saturday night mosey on over to the auditorium for a big dance.

When hunger pangs strike, amble into one of the indoor or outdoor restaurants. The venerable drugstore is now a not-to-be-missed ice cream and candy shop. Find stronger libations at wine-tasting shops, the restored 19th century American Exchange Hotel’s bar, or the Palace Saloon.

An overnight stay at one of the local inns allows you a chance to wander leisurely through one-of-a-kind shops, past historic Monteverde Museum and Knight Foundry, and along tree-shaded streets fronting tidy New England-style houses. For up-to-date postings about all events and activities, go to www.suttercreek.org.

More about Black Bart

Born in Illinois as Charles E. Boles, he was an intelligent, well-educated citizen. After serving in the Civil War, he immigrated to California in search of gold. Unable to find any legally, he decided to try his hand as a highwayman. After clerking for a time in

several stage offices to study shipments and schedules, he transformed himself into Black Bart in 1877 and made his first holdup.

With success came prosperity. He took the name of Bolton and quickly built a reputation in the San Francisco community as a non-smoking, non-drinking, God-fearing man with big business interests in the mines. When more cash was needed to support his lifestyle, he would come to the foothills and knock over a convenient stage.

Black Bart was credited with 28 stagecoach robberies between 1877 and 1883, and stagecoach drivers lived in dread of the day when Bart, dressed in a long linen duster with a flour sack over his head exposing only his eyes, would step out and call politely, "Will you please throw down your treasure box, sir?" No harm came to drivers or passengers. In fact, he never owned a single shell for his shotgun and could not have fired it even in self-defense.

Wounded escaping from a holdup near Copperopolis, he accidentally dropped a handkerchief with a San Francisco laundry mark that was traced back to Charles E. Bolton. Much to everyone's surprise, Bolton and Black Bart were one and the same. Bolton confessed to the crimes and told a strange tale of his life as a westernized *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He was convicted and sentenced to six years at San Quentin prison.

After his release, he headed to San Joaquin Valley in 1888. The last verified report found him in Visalia and still moving. There was a persistent rumor that Wells Fargo pensioned off the old man and sent him away after he agreed not to rob any more stages. No one will ever know for sure just what finally happened to Charles E. Boles, the most famous stage robber of Gold Rush history.