

# INDIVIDUALS WHO SHAPED THE SIERRA



## John S. Eastwood

Written by Roger Coats

John S. Eastwood, 1857-1924, civil hydraulic engineer, pioneer in power and logging, ranks as one of Shaver Lake's foremost visionaries.

There have been many people who have helped shape the Shaver and Huntington area, but no individual has had more impact on this part of the Sierra than John S. Eastwood. Eastwood was born in Minnesota and educated as an engineer. In the late 1800's he moved to California and opened an office in Fresno as a Civil Engineer and Surveyor.

C.B. Shaver and Lewis P. Swift hired Eastwood to design the flume that would carry water and lumber from their new sawmill, in the location that would become Shaver Lake, all the way to Clovis. It was at this time, after many field trips and surveys in the wilderness, that Eastwood became interested in the potential of the San Joaquin River Canyon for hydroelectric development.

At this time, electrical generation was in its infancy. In 1899, Eastwood's first effort at hydroelectric generation failed, and he and his partner lost heavily in the resulting bankruptcy. Still convinced of the potential of the canyon and the future of electricity, Eastwood roamed the upper San Joaquin River basin, calculating stream flows and elevations, seeking out the best generating sites.

In this backcountry travels, Eastwood became interested in the Big Creek drainage. He took his plans involving a vast system of reservoirs and tunnels to William G. Kerckhoff, who was affiliated with the Pacific Light and Power Company. Eastwood wrote, "It gives me great pleasure to inform you that I have completed the survey for a tunnel line to the junction of Pitman and Big Creeks, and I can place before you the most remarkable power project yet presented."

In 1910, work was begun on the Big Creek project, which at the time was the largest construction project in the world, rivaled only by the construction of the Panama Canal. The same year, Eastwood was dismissed from all association with the project, and in a stock maneuver he also lost all the stock he held in the company. At age 53, he was practically penniless. He was left with only the satisfaction that he had engineered the most ambitious hydroelectric project ever conceived by one man.

The multiple-arch Florence Lake Dam was Eastwood's design, and to some this will always be "Eastwood's Dam," but his name was never associated with a mountain, lake, or stream.