

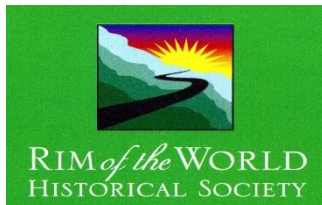
# MOUNTAIN MILEPOSTS #1138

By Bill Pumford, Image from United States Forest Service

## SHEEP RANCHING IN THE SAN BERNARDINO MOUNTAINS

Rarely does anyone associate the raising of sheep with the San Bernardino mountains but it did occur here during the latter part of the 1800s and early 1900s. During the mission period in Southern California in the early 1800s sheep were commonly grazed near the actual missions for protection of the animals. After the Gold Rush began in 1849 the value of sheep greatly increased as did the size of the herds. In the late 1860s the San Bernardino mountains began to be used to graze sheep after the valleys below experienced a series of flood and drought sequences between 1861 and 1864. One of the early ranchers to drive his sheep into the mountains was Dr. Benjamin Barton who had his sheep driven from his ranch outside Redlands up the Santa Ana River to the area now known as Barton Flats. The sheep were driven into the mountains in the spring and back down in the fall. By the late 1800s there was an estimated 30,000 sheep grazing in the San Bernardino mountains. In 1900 the Forest Service contracted with Theodore P. Lukens, a renown conservationist and seed expert, to investigate the effect of fire and cattle and sheep grazing on the relatively new San Bernardino Forest Reserve. He wrote a diary during his travels in the mountains and concluded that overgrazing by both cattle and sheep was having a disastrous effect on the mountains. Shepherders as they drove the sheep down the mountain in the fall would often set fires to remove wood and allow new growth to occur for the next season. Due to the abundant meadows around Big Bear more grazing was done there although Little Bear Valley had its share of grazing as well. Eventually the public and the Forest Service started limiting the amount of grazing that could be done in addition to the expansion of civilization in the mountains which reduced size of the herds.

**Our Mountain History Museum located at 27176 Peninsula Drive in Lake Arrowhead is now open every weekend for the season with lots of new exhibits, activities and interactive displays. Visit us Friday 12-4 and Saturday/Sunday 10:30-4:30. Check out the website for events and additional information.**



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