



OnTravel Radio/Podcast Interviews Lee Foster on His California Travel Books and Articles

Author's Note: This article "OnTravel Radio/Podcast Interviews Lee Foster on His California Travel Books and Articles" describes my recent interview with Elizabeth Harryman and Paul Lasley.

By Lee Foster

OnTravel radio/podcast editors Elizabeth Harryman and Paul Lasley recently interviewed me about my California travel books and articles on my website www.fostertravel.com for their program.

The interview can be heard forever at

<https://www.ontravel.com/2020/07/dreaming-of-travel-to-northern-california/>.

Among other outlets, their program feeds daily into the U.S. Armed Forces Radio Network audience of more than a million in 145 countries. While some of the listeners are military, many are civilian employees of the U.S. posted overseas in bases, embassies, consulates, and research facilities.

OnTravel is “Traveling with Paul Lasley and Elizabeth Harryman.” The production is also a podcast at OnTravel available on on iTunes, Spotify, SoundCloud, and other Internet sites. Use the keyword “OnTravel.” The mission is to promote travel by Americans wherever they find themselves. OnTravel is completely noncommercial.

Harryman and Lasley of OnTravel

Harryman and Lasley, a married team, are longtime players in the travel journalism tribe.



OnTravel Editors Paul Lasley and Elizabeth Harryman

Beyond OnTravel, Elizabeth Harryman is editor of the Southern California AAA magazine *Westways*. In that position she also watches over a cluster of other AAA magazines around the country.

Paul Lasley is a veteran content person in the Southern California radio/TV scene. He brings to OnTravel the “radio voice” expertise that makes the program so professional. Both have been good citizens in the elite travel journalism world, providing service and guidance to journalism organizations. Lasley is a past President of the Society of American Travel Writers (www.satw.org). Harryman is

the new President-elect for SATW for 2020.

When I do interviews such as this, I like to develop scripts that make the conversation simple and smooth. Of course, the actual conversation wanders where it will. However, I like to start with a plan that may be helpful.

Here was my script for our 23-minute episode:

Interview Script

Interview with OnTravel for Lee Foster, California Travel Expert and California Travel Book Author

Question: Our guest today is California travel expert and California travel book author, Lee Foster.

Lee lives in Berkeley and has been watching over California for decades.

His website www.fostertravel.com has more than 200 California articles, illustrated with his photos. That's in addition to about 300 articles on his worldwide travels, from Easter Island to Egypt, Bali to Boston.

Lee's work in travel journalism has won numerous awards, such as nine Lowell Thomas Awards, considered among the highest prizes in travel journalism. He has been named Travel Journalist of the Year.

Lee has also written and photographed 18 books in his long career, mainly travel books. We'll talk to him today about two of his latest travel books on California.

Photography has been an important part of Lee's travel journalism, both for his own books/articles and for other travel books. For example, Lee has had travel photos in more than 300 of the travel books published by Lonely Planet.

Lee Foster's Books

Question: So, Lee, tell us a little about your most recent California travel books.

LF: Thank you. My most recent books celebrate Northern California's natural beauty and human history. The two subjects come together in California, where man saving nature for posterity has been a major historic concept.

My latest book is [*Northern California History Travel Adventures: 35 Suggested Trips*](#).

It covers the most interesting places to explore in Northern California.

By Northern California I mean the territory from the Oregon border south through Big Sur and east through the mountains to Death Valley.

My other main California travel book divides the territory into 30 convenient regions. That title is [*Northern California Travel: The Best Options*](#). In that book you can look directly at an area, such as Lake Tahoe or the Napa Wine Country.

Why Is California Fascinating?

Question: Lee, as you continue to look at California, what is it about California that is so fascinating to you?

LF: I think there are two reasons. First, I love the extraordinary natural beauty of California, so magnificent and worth saving. And second, I admire the human energy and creativity of the many people who came to California, from the earliest days to the modern computer era.

These two themes actually come together in California. The state was the place where the idea of "saving nature" first emerged as a national cause.

The grandeur of Yosemite and the joy of a drive along the Big Sur Coast are two of my favorite nature experiences to recommend.

A notion of saving Yosemite for the benefit of all the people was a remarkable California contribution to American thought. That happened when Abraham Lincoln was president and proclaimed the "Yosemite Grant." Saving Yosemite helped get the idea of National Parks started.

California's recent political decision to preserve its coast, such as the lovely Big Sur Coast, was an important additional achievement. California saved its coast for all the people, rather than allow further uncontrolled development.

Genius of the California People

Beyond nature, California's genius is its people. Two of my favorite early pioneer sites in California are the Russian settlement of Fort Ross on the Mendocino Coast and the agricultural outpost called Sutter's Fort in Sacramento.

Thinking of the human contribution, in my own Bay Area, there are also local places to celebrate. I love to visit again the Victorian Architecture of San Francisco or hang out around the Golden Gate Bridge, one of the most beloved human artifacts ever created in the world. I love to cross in the morning from Oakland to San Francisco on the Bay Ferry, savoring the Bay Bridge and the skyline of San Francisco.

Our most recent phase of Bay Area culture, the Silicon Valley revolution, is fascinating to me also. I see this at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, the nearby Intel Chip Museum, and in a visit to Apple Park, in Cupertino.

At Apple Park folks love to pause on a balcony looking out at Apple headquarters. Visitors absorb the aura, and maybe even channel the spirit of Steve Jobs. The faithful can don special tech eyeglasses for a virtual reality tour of a model of the adjacent complex.

Is the Travel Experience in California Getting Better or Worse?

Question: Lee, some folks say the consumer experience of travel in California is getting worse, and some say better. Where do you stand?

LF: In many incremental ways I think the travel experience in California is getting better.

I did a lot of trips around California in the two years before the Coronavirus hit.

On the nature aspect, here are two examples of improvements I enjoyed.

The Mariposa Grove of mammoth inland sequoias trees in Yosemite, which was the original reason that Yosemite was saved, is now better managed. A visitor now goes in and out on a Park Service shuttle rather than in a private car. The visitor walks amidst the big trees without cars present. This meditative experience is better for visitors, and healthier for the trees, whose roots are not compacted with the weight of cars and pavement.

On the Big Sur Coast, I hiked the new Garrapata Trail, a few miles south of Point Lobos. This coastal cliff seaside trail took about 15 years to create, with all the political permits and construction. Now it is finally open and welcomes visitors. It is joyful to walk this trail along the bluffs, adjacent to the ocean, far from the roadway.

Similarly, the state historic park system keeps improving the two forts I mentioned, Russian Fort Ross and John Sutter's Fort in Sacramento.

Coronavirus and California Travel

Question: Of course, due to Coronavirus, people aren't traveling much right now. How does this affect you?

LF: This is clearly a time of great adversity in the lives of OnTravel listeners and affects the survival of travel itself. Moreover, the survival of all those who provide us with travel experiences is at risk. It makes me think of the adversity in the lives of many early Californians whom I admire.

Adversity is a fairly universal human experience. Therefore, as I understand better the adversity faced by these early Californians, it is a little easier to endure my current adversity.

For example, at the Russian Fort Ross, the final Manager, Alexander Rotchev, endured a difficult time in the late 1830s. Above all, he internalized that Fort Ross was a failed enterprise. Rotchev had the task of explaining to the Russian Czar and all the other investors why the enterprise failed. The rationale of the Fort Ross settlement was as a for-profit undertaking.

Russians hunted out the sea otter furs, the main asset. The Russians also failed to grow enough food successfully, needed to support the Russian colony in Sitka, Alaska. Moreover, as control of California shifted from Spain to Mexico, the political changes adversely affected the Russians. Manager Rotchev had to make the judgment call that Fort Ross was a failed enterprise. All the Russians sailed back to Alaska and Russia.

John Sutter Destroyed by His Gold Discovery

Another historic visionary I admire is John Sutter who established Sutter's Fort in Sacramento. He had a true and correct vision of California's future—as a great agricultural utopia. He assembled all the craftsmen needed for this vision. But then he accidentally destroyed himself. His own sawmill guy, operating on the American River at Coloma, was the agent. James Marshall noticed some shiny small rocks in the millrace, a water chute in the milling operation.

Could those small rocks be gold? Marshall sent them to Sutter, who tested them. Yes, they were gold. Sutter tried to suppress the news, but the secret got out. In the next years, hordes of fortune seekers came to San Francisco. They took boats up the Sacramento River to Sacramento. Then they proceeded east across John Sutter's lands to the foothills with dreams of gold in mind.

There was no law and no order. The hordes slaughtered all of Sutter's cattle and ate all his crops, driving him into bankruptcy. Certainly, Sutter knew that he had destroyed himself.

Consequently, when I think of these remarkable early Californians and the adversity they endured, I have more hope. Certainly, I find it a little easier to deal with my own Covid-19 era adversity, as a citizen, today.

Summary for OnTravel

Question: Thanks, Lee, for your thoughts and books/ebooks and articles. We hope to

encourage our OnTravel listeners to enjoy the natural beauty and human history of the Golden State.

LF: Thanks to OnTravel.