Twenty years before, John Thompson, a California farmer, had learned that the government could find no way to transport the bulky mail satchel to the settlers in Nevada. In 1875, he moved to Placerville, California, and climbed the heights of the great mountains. Here, the snow reached depths of thirty to forty feet, and Thompson carefully made skis to obtain medicine the doctor needed to save Sisson's life. He returned to Carson City with his precious cargo, and James Sisson not only recovered but also lived to a ripe old age.

In his travels Snowshoe had no path to follow in the snow. He kept to a general route, guided by the rocks and trees by day and by the stars at night. He was never lost. A friend once asked him how he could always arrive at exactly the right place, and he answered: "I can't be lost. I can go anywhere in the mountains, day or night, storm or shine." And then, tapping his forehead with a finger, he said, "Something in here keeps me right."

For Snowshoe Thompson, skiing was not a sport, as it is today. His skis, the first ever seen in the American West, were a means of transportation when no other means could be used. He was a gentle, modest man who said that what he did was "no more than to carry on the business of life." Of such fine character are true heroes made.