



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Mt. Judah ●

“If only the Sierra might be pierced.” Atlantic Monthly December, 1867

History

“Crazy Judah.” Theodore Judah had some strange ideas. He wanted to build a railroad across the continent. People knew it could not be done. The grades would be too steep. Locomotives couldn't make it up the hills so the mountains, especially the Sierra, couldn't

be crossed. After all, the Sierra crossing was the hardest part of the wagon train journey and wagons could go where trains couldn't. Judah also thought he could build the railroad in half of the time some 'experts' knew it would take.

Not only did Judah want to build the railroad, he wanted to start the western portion in California – 3,000 miles from the needed materials and supplies. Everything would have to be shipped around Cape Horn.

San Francisco financiers laughed at him.

It took planning, wheeling and dealing, cajoling, wooing investors, breaking with conventional wisdom, multiple survey trips, and convincing Congress. Judah, as chief engineer, studied six possible routes and settled on the one over Donner Summit. It was the least difficult but it would still take 15 tunnels, carved through the Sierra granite, before the Sierra was finally pierced.

Theodore Judah never got to see the completion of his vision. He died of yellow fever in 1863, the year construction started. In 1869 the railroad was completed using the route Judah had surveyed. Travelers could cross the country at the unheard of speed of 22 miles per hour. Where the wagon trains had taken 4-5 months and stagecoaches 25 days, railroad passengers could cross the whole country in ten days.

A Good Story

Mt. Judah was called Emigrant Peak until the 1930's and stands directly ahead of this sign.

Johnny Ellis had big plans. He subdivided the land around Lake Mary, at the base of the mountain, and built three Model A powered rope tows. It cost 75¢ a day to ski. Johnny Ellis was also going to build a funicular up the mountain but WWII got in the way.

It was Johnny Ellis who re-named the peak Mt. Judah. There are still pieces of his original rope tow on the mountain. Look closely and you may find them.

Things to do right here

The obvious thing to do here is to take the marked Judah Loop trail from the PCT. It will take you to the top of Mt. Judah. The wildflowers are beautiful and the 360° view is spectacular. Take some flavored syrup and make snow cones from the snowbank below the north side of the peak. If you have time, take a side trip to the top of Donner Peak, sit on the rocks, and let your feet dangle 1,000 feet above Donner Lake.

This sign is placed in honor of Bill and Louise Anderson of Serene Lakes, by their children, Donald, Jennifer, Jean and Matthew. For over forty years, Bill and Louise, right, cherished these mountains and their rich history..

