



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

What Made Her Do It? ●

History

FIRST WOMAN TO SWIM DONNER LAKE

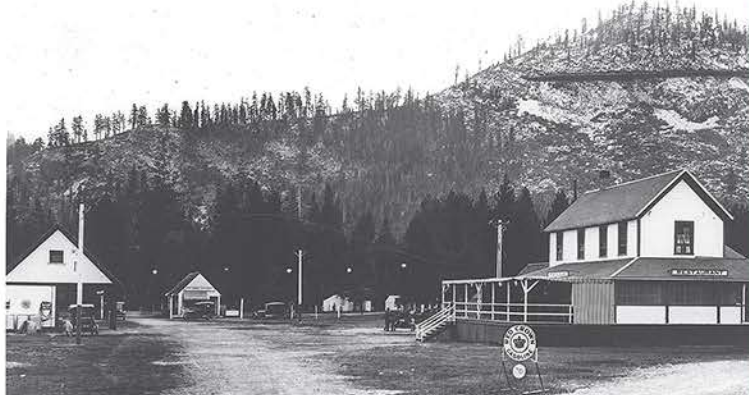
Today each August hundreds of swimmers take to the 65° water of Donner Lake and swim its 2.7 mile length. Each swimmer has lots of company.

On August 19, 1935 though, it was a different story. On that day 17 year old Barbara Gordon swam the lake accompanied only by two rowboats. She became the first woman to swim the lake and set a record beating the only other two previous swimmers.

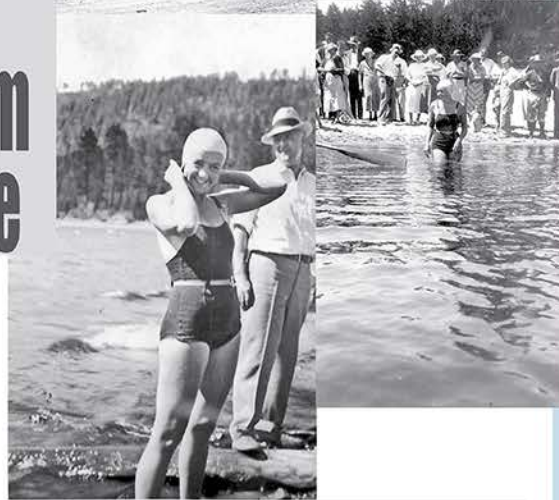
Why Barbara did it is a mystery but she set her goal the summer before, when she was only 16. In the 1930's women were just beginning to enter swimming competitions. Just 9 years earlier the first women to cross the English Channel both beat the records previously set by men. It was also a time when women were becoming famous in other areas. Amelia Earhart was setting flying records and Babe Didrikson was setting records on the athletic field. Barbara set one on Donner Lake.

For the month prior to her Donner Lake swim Barbara trained by towing a wooden rowboat the 1/3 mile length of Palisades Lake on Donner Summit at 6500' elevation. She towed that boat back and forth the length of the lake nine times each day.

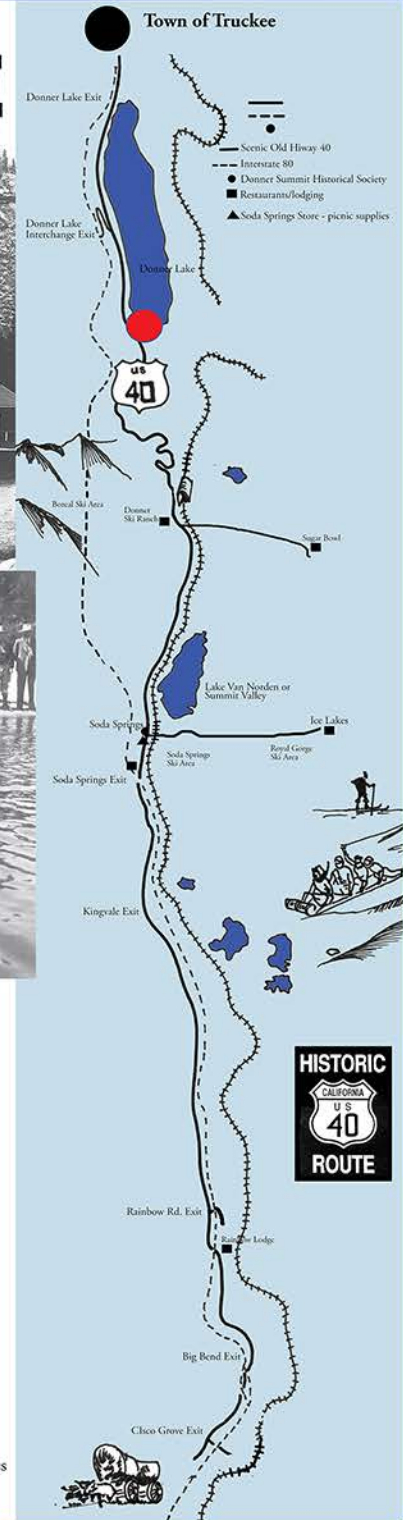
The science of swimming was fairly new in 1935. How to get the most efficiency out of different strokes was still being debated as was exactly how to do some strokes. So it must have been difficult without modern training, technique, and swimwear, and without others to spur her on, but Barbara did it, emerging from the water with "a smile a mile wide" after her one hour fifty minute swim. In 2013 the Sierra Nevada Masters presented the first annual Barbara Gordon Award to the fastest female swimmer.



Girl Completes Donner Lake Swim In Record Time



Barbara Gordon First Woman to Swim Lake



Things to do right here

spot is magnificent), bike around the lake or up Donner Pass and then down to Cisco Grove and back (a very popular road biking route), mountain bike into Coldstream Canyon, or just visit the museum and Emigrant Monument at Donner State Park at the other end of the Lake.

You may not want to swim the length of Donner Lake but there is plenty more to do here both in and around the lake and elsewhere. Rent a boat, go fishing, hike to a local peak (the view from Donner Peak back down to this

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 Top picture (west end Donner Lake Camp) courtesy the Truckee Donner Historical Society. The pictures of Barbara Gordon, courtesy of Janet Hill, Barbara's daughter.

This sign sponsored by Janet Hill, The Palisades on Donner Summit