



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Donner Ski Ranch

History

The first ski lift on Signal Hill (now Donner Ski Ranch) was built by Johnny Ellis in 1937. This forerunner of the "Ranch" included two rope tows powered by

Model A automobiles sitting on blocks (the manila rope going around the rear wheels), and one on tow Mt. Judah above Lake Mary.

These lifts helped low cost, widely popular "downhill only" skiing spread rapidly around California from Donner Summit.

After World War II the land under Donner Ski Ranch was purchased from the railroad and developed into a modern ski area with the second "T" bar in California by Stan and Madelyn Walton. Donner Ski Ranch also pioneered later in a number of areas under Norm Saylor. It was first to offer night skiing and music for skiers. It was the first to encourage handicapped skiers and the first to allow snowboarders and telemark skiers.



A Good Story

Regarding the rope tow:

"Normally low gear was used, but just to liven things up the operator could shift to high gear and this would spill all but the hardestiest."

Johnny Ellis

On top of Signal Hill is one of the airway beacons that used to guide airplanes over the Sierra before instrument guided flight. Each beacon flashed a different rhythm of light so pilots knew where they were - keeping Signal Hill on the left and Judah on the right for example. Sometimes foul weather obscured the beacons and there were at least three plane crashes on Donner Summit.

One crashed Tri-motor was taken in pieces to Seattle where it was rebuilt. It then went off to fly in Alaska before ending up today at the Boeing Museum. To the right is a mail carrier that crashed into Van Norden Meadow.



First Rope Tow
Pay 50 cents
Keep your skis on
Grab a handle
Ride up and ski down all afternoon.
We don't count rides.

Things to do right here

The Pacific Crest Trail is just east of Donner Ski Ranch. One direction heads north from Highway 40 and from it you can explore views, peaks, and lakes even taking it the full 4 miles to the I-80 rest stop. There are lots of good picnic spots, for example at Lake Angela or Mt. Stephens, the small peak above Rainbow Bridge.

This sign sponsored by the Phil Hlerich, Norm Saylor, and Walton families.

Donner Spitz

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