



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Norm Saylor

History

More than 60 years on Donner Summit, Norm Saylor is an original. He gave up the “necktie” life in Sacramento and headed for Donner Summit in 1954, taking whatever jobs he could find, living in an old shed with just a light bulb for company. He cleaned and did odd jobs at the neighboring Snowflake Lodge and Soda Springs Hotel, earning meals and showers. When snow fell he did whatever he could to earn lift tickets.

Off to the Army in 1956, he was back on the Summit in 1958 to take a job at Donner Ski Ranch where he’d already helped build the Ranch’s first chairlift in 1955, the 6th chairlift in California. Lift tickets were \$2.50 and Norm was the manager for \$300 a month – when there was money. Over the years he would build another five lifts there and run the first ski area to allow snowboarding, permit free style skiing, and do night skiing. In the off-season the Ranch hosted rock crawlers, hill climbers, motorcycle trials, flea markets, wagon trains, and bike races. He felt fortunate to “get into Donner Ski Ranch and call it a home” as he helped the community. It was “such a wonderful way of life – so different from today.” Norm owned the Ranch for 46 years, having started accumulating stock for .25 a share. What had started as a job became a way of life.

Norm had learned tractors early on and that became a love of machinery. He bought and operated tractors, bulldozers, cranes and other heavy machinery which made him the person to call as people wanted to build on Donner Summit. One season alone, he dug the foundations for 57 houses in Serene Lakes.

Norm’s other love is local history and so he founded the Donner Summit Historical Society and opened the museum. The picture above right Shows Norm explaining things

A Good Story

One nice day, decades ago, Norm Saylor was riding his motorcycle outside of Truckee by the old airport. A Piper Cub flew down low and the pilot leaned out of the cockpit window. It was hard to hear and took a couple of tries but Norm thought he heard, “Water skiing.... I’ll pull you.” That was all Norm needed and he headed for Donner Lake.

There he stood in the back of the Contessa, the fastest boat on the lake. Dick Buek, the madman of Donner Summit, flew over dangling a rope for Norm to grab. Time and again they tried but the plane would just not go slow enough, or the boat fast enough, for Norm to grab the tow rope and hop out on skis. Then the plane coughed and sputtered. “Mad Dog” and the plane went into Donner Lake and half of Norm’s adventure was over. A comedy followed as Dick demanded rescuers ignore his girlfriend and save the plane. They pulled the plane almost to shore and then it sank. The next day Norm and Dick retrieved the plane and took it in pieces for repairs. The little Piper did fly again, but it never pulled Norm on water skis.

Things to do right here

sands of travelers a day, and when people patronized a rich and vibrant Summit community.

Sit down and listen to Norm Saylor as he recounts Donner Summit life from before the days of the freeway; from the days of Uncle Miltie, Hootin’ Scootin,’ and saving Frozen turkeys, when Highway 40 saw thou-

