



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Roller Pass 24

“As we came up to it the appearances [sic] was exactly like marching up some immense wall built directly across our path, so perpendicular is the dividing ridge.”

Elisha Perkins on approaching Roller Pass in 1849

Things to do right here

To really appreciate the Emigrants' struggle to get over the Sierra you have to see Roller Pass and look over the edge. Just go forward from this spot. If you are really energetic scramble down the route. Keep walking down below to the meadow. Imagine wagons camped there, waiting, one at a time to make the trip up. As you struggle back up imagine helping to guide a wagon or carrying a child. Imagine doing it over and over.

If you still feel like hiking, take the Judah Loop trail which will take you to the top of Mt. Judah. Wow! What a view. The trail will go down the other side to just below Donner Peak. Hike up there, to the top, and look straight down a thousand feet to Donner Lake.

In early summer Summit wildflowers are also spectacular, particularly on the seeps on the north side of Mt. Lincoln just a quarter mile up the PCT from here.

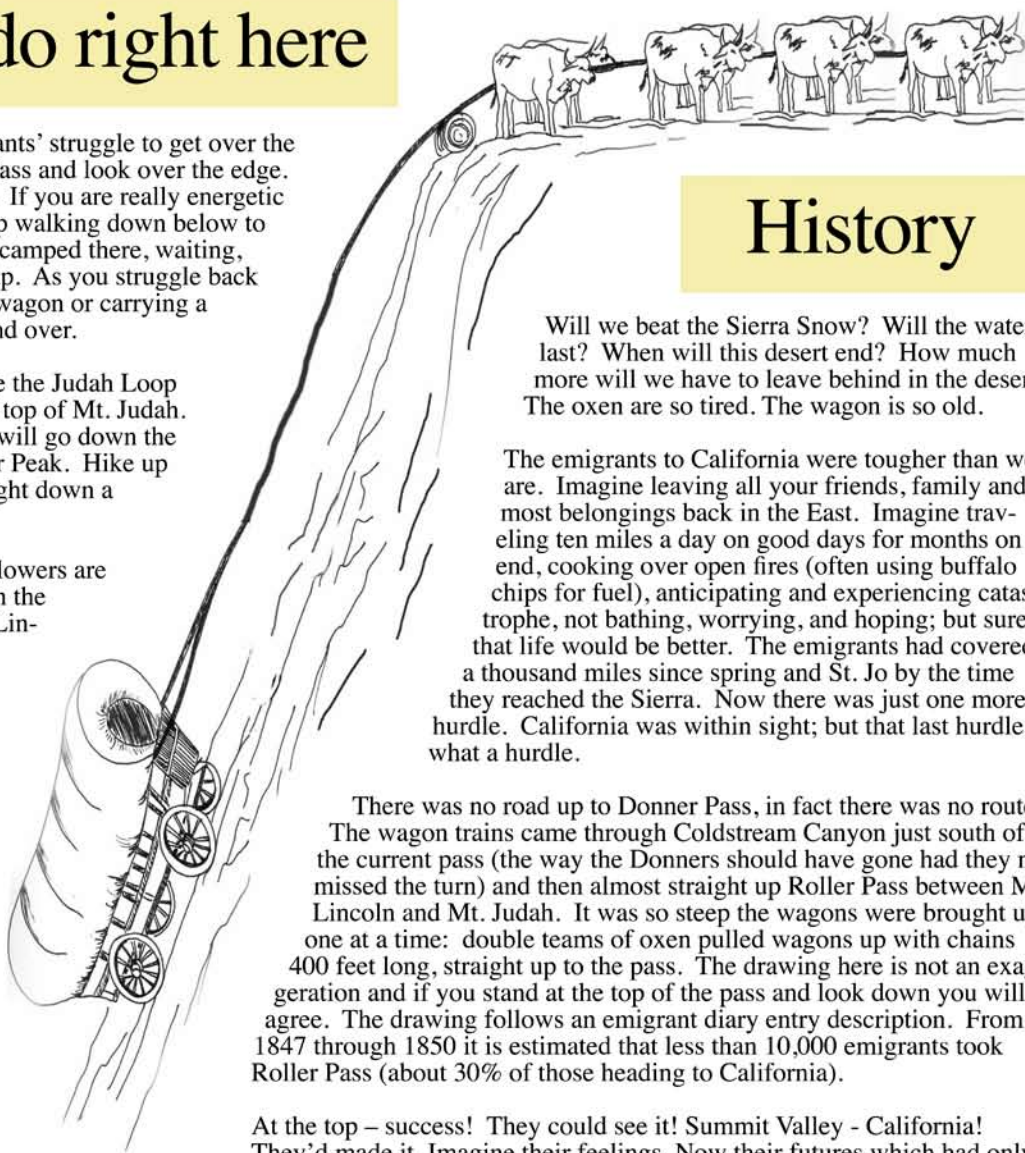
Donner Summit is magnificent!

“We arrived at the main difficulty from here to the summit is one mile it is as steep as the roof of a house.”

Joseph Hackney, 1849

“When we struck the main ridge of the mountains, every heart was filled with terror at the awful site [sic].”

William Tustin 1846



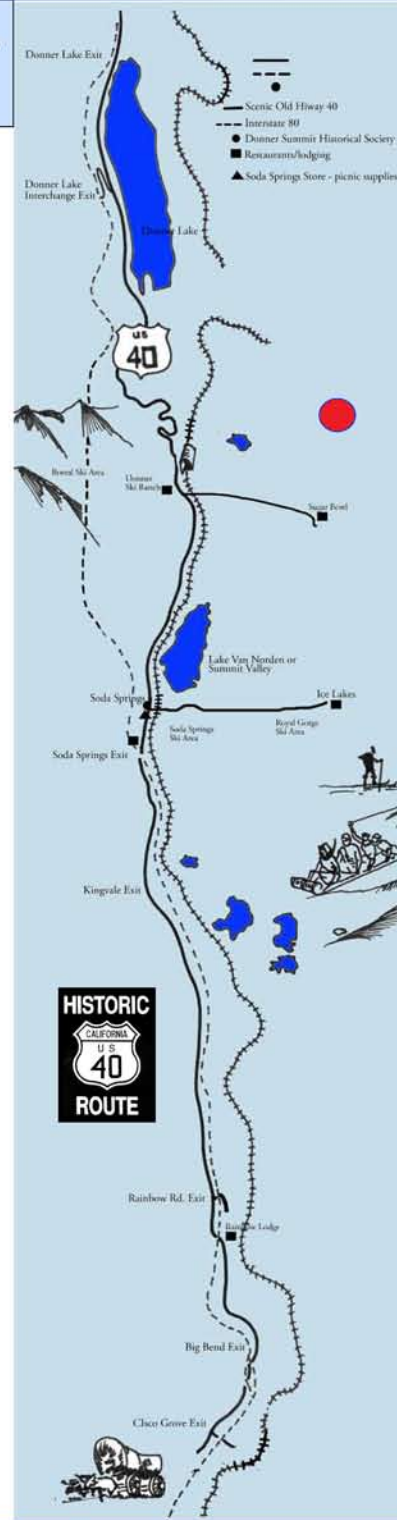
History

Will we beat the Sierra Snow? Will the water last? When will this desert end? How much more will we have to leave behind in the desert? The oxen are so tired. The wagon is so old.

The emigrants to California were tougher than we are. Imagine leaving all your friends, family and most belongings back in the East. Imagine traveling ten miles a day on good days for months on end, cooking over open fires (often using buffalo chips for fuel), anticipating and experiencing catastrophe, not bathing, worrying, and hoping; but sure that life would be better. The emigrants had covered a thousand miles since spring and St. Jo by the time they reached the Sierra. Now there was just one more hurdle. California was within sight; but that last hurdle – what a hurdle.

There was no road up to Donner Pass, in fact there was no route. The wagon trains came through Coldstream Canyon just south of the current pass (the way the Donners should have gone had they not missed the turn) and then almost straight up Roller Pass between Mt. Lincoln and Mt. Judah. It was so steep the wagons were brought up one at a time: double teams of oxen pulled wagons up with chains 400 feet long, straight up to the pass. The drawing here is not an exaggeration and if you stand at the top of the pass and look down you will agree. The drawing follows an emigrant diary entry description. From 1847 through 1850 it is estimated that less than 10,000 emigrants took Roller Pass (about 30% of those heading to California).

At the top – success! They could see it! Summit Valley - California! They'd made it. Imagine their feelings. Now their futures which had only beckoned, were in sight; nothing could stop them now. No more worry, but first: water, feed, rest and maybe a bath. For more about Roller Pass read our November, '11 newsletter at our website (below).



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