



# Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass Tunnel 6 ●

## History

1866 – Right here.

Bam, bam, quarter turn; Bam, bam, quarter turn; bam, bam, quarter turn; all day long, three shifts a day, day after day, week after week. Chinese workers pounded away at the solid granite. One worker held a star bit, turning it a quarter turn as two other workers pounded the bit with 18 lb. sledges. Four teams at four separate faces making progress only inches a day, cut through 1659 feet of solid granite. Once a hole was drilled, it was packed with black powder, the fuse was set, and the workers ran. When the smoke cleared, workers hauled out the rubble - all by hand - no machines.

Imagine the courage holding a drill bit. Imagine the confidence in your friends. Imagine the accuracy of the sledge handlers; imagine their concentration, hour after hour.

That was Tunnel 6, the longest tunnel of the Sierra Crossing.

Working the solid granite went too slowly. They blasted a shaft straight down above the middle to open two more faces. Hauling the rubble by hand was too slow. A steam engine was brought in to haul up the rubble.

When all four faces joined up, they were off by only two inches - after two years. Amazing.

Facing granite was not the only obstacle. The workers faced avalanches and heavy snows: 40 feet that first winter. Workers didn't see daylight for days at a time as they moved from their living sheds to the work faces through tunnels dug into the snow.

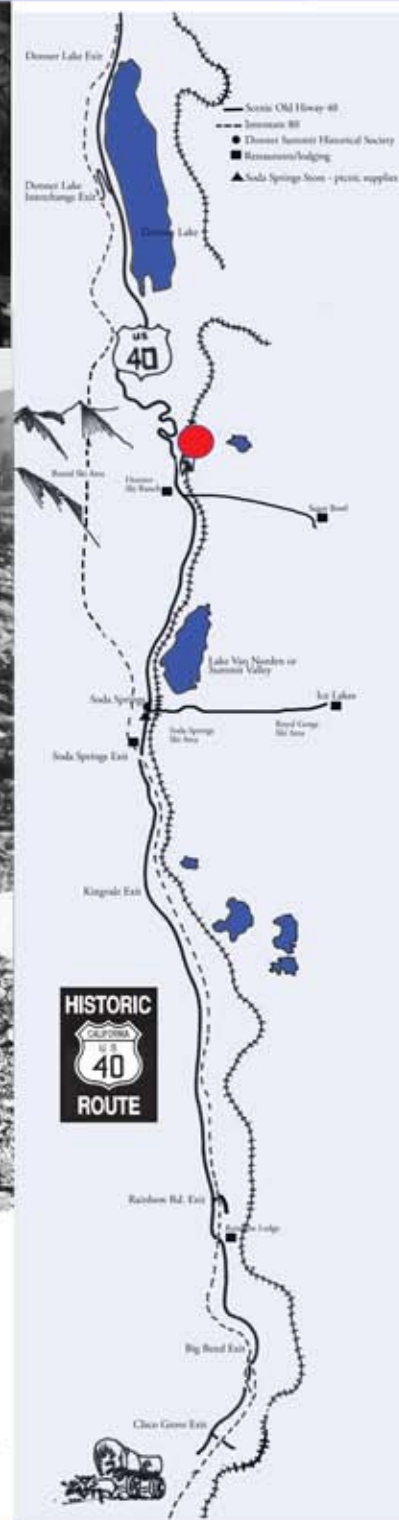
Nitroglycerine would speed the tunneling but still, work wasn't fast enough. The railroad hauled track, railroad cars and a steam engine over the pass, over the snow, above here, between Donner Peak and Mt. Judah, so they could continue building on the eastern side - to race across Nevada, to earn pay for miles, to beat the Union Pacific which was coming from the east.

Pictured here, Alfred A. Hart photographs: tunnel 6 incomplete top, "Shaft House over Summit Tunnel, American Peak (now Mt. Lincoln) in the distance," and east portal of Tunnel 6, bottom.

## Things to do right here

Hike to the Pacific Crest Trailhead at Lake Mary and instead of going up hill try and retrace the route going downhill of the old Lincoln Highway. It's what appears to be a roadway that is now being overgrown.

Walk to the top, over the tunnel and see the monument there as well as the metal covering for the shaft that was used so the Chinese workers could work from the middle out as well as the outside in.



sign sponsored by:



**The Gateway Mountain Center**  
Place-Based Learning and Adventure

Pictures Alfred A. Hart from the Library of Congress  
copyright 2010 Donner Summit Historical Society  
[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

