



Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2009 issue #12

Newsletter

More Goals Than One

The Donner Summit Historical Society has a number of goals that we are unwrapping a little at a time. Of course our general goal is to pass on the history of Donner Summit and you can read that again on our website. Last month we talked about renovating the Lincoln Highway from below Rainbow Bridge to Soda Springs for non-vehicular traffic.

In this issue we propose a museum/community center for Donner Summit. Transportation is the major historical thread that runs through the community: the railroad, the first transcontinental highway, etc. The museum effort would reconstruct the old Highway 40 highway department maintenance building which sat next to what is now ASI at the top of Donner Summit on old 40. The top picture right shows the building in 1945 from what is now Donner Ski Ranch (then Signal Hill). The lower picture shows a closer view.

The Society is thinking beyond just a museum. We want to include a community center, something needed on the Summit as a community focal point. We also envision some shops or tourist support facilities. You will want to read next month's 20 mile museum idea for a complete view of where we want to go. Meanwhile, go to page three to see what we're doing now.



Next issue: The historical society proposes a museum 20 miles long. Want to help?

Coming This Fall: Sugar Bowl turns 70 this year: what was life like in 1939, the first chair lift in California, Sugar Bowl's first year, the Snowball Express, Bill Klein's story, Red's story, Peter Picard, masses of pictures (some never published before), lots of fun.

We report with sadness that the subject of our last newsletter's main story, Jimmy Schull, died. Jimmy was the longest living full-time resident on Donner Summit having lived in our community since 1942. Our last issue's main story talks about Jimmy and his family, a family that helped make the modern Donner Summit. Jimmy lost a long fight to bone cancer. He will be missed.

Even though Jimmy was clearly suffering when we interviewed him in the Spring he was happy to share his family's life on the Summit and the many changes they made. Jimmy's telling of his family's story included many humorous events and one could imagine what fun it must have been to be Jimmy Schull.

Historical Society News

On July 5, Norm Sayler, right, president of the historical society, was presented with the 2009 Community Person of the Year Award at the annual Donner Summit Area Association picnic. The award, presented by last year's recipient and Placer County supervisor Jennifer Montgomery pictured below right, celebrated the many contributions that Norm has made over his many decades on Donner Summit.



Norm has lived on Donner Summit since 1954 continually helping everyone, never stinting in his contributions and always working to improve the Summit. He ran Donner Ski Ranch for decades as well as a variety of other commercial enterprises. He opened "the Ranch" to snowboarders and was the first ski area to do so. When Rainbow Bridge was slated for demolition he began an effort that resulted in its restoration (it is the subject of our logo on page 1).

Person of the Year

Norm worked to have Old Highway 40 designated as an historic route. He helped found the Donner Summit Public Utility District and the Summit fire department.

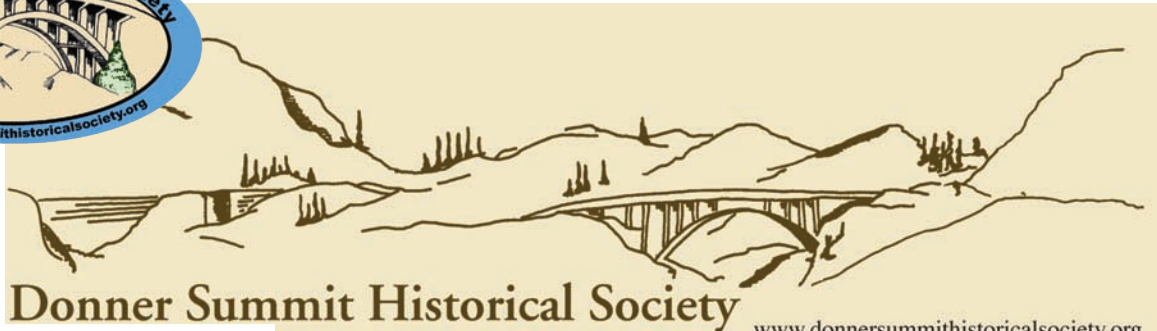


Pat Malberg, past president of the DSAA, says many of Norm's "endeavors have paid off for the betterment of all. He is always there to help - often behind the scenes - with his time, equipment, suggestions, and contacts., without asking to be paid. That's the kind of spirit he brings to all that he does. He has a sense of what's really important on the summit. I don't think I could say enough to acknowledge all he's done for us."

Although this sounds like an eulogy Norm is very much alive and still focused on the Summit community. Some dreams near to his heart are a community center/museum (see page 1) and a restoration of the Lincoln Highway from below Donner Summit to Soda Springs for non-vehicular traffic (see our last issue). He recently purchased the building on page 3 to serve partly as a museum and visitors' center.

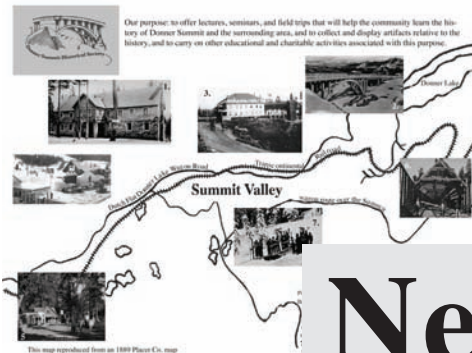
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New Literature & Stuff



Donner Summit Historical Society

www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org



New Building too

The Donner Summit Historical Society is on the move having developed new literature. The color above, slightly reduced, is part of the cover of our new brochure and above, much reduced, is in the inside. Naturally, old photographs abound.

Top left, much reduced, is our new sticker. We've also developed a map of Old 40 with historic sites. It will serve as a prototype for a much larger version to accompany and illustrate another vision of the society's. You'll have to stay tuned for the next issue to read about that.

We also have tee-shirts, designed by Nancy Oudegeest and produced by David Africa, sporting the DSHS logo. Stickers, literature and tee shirts have been available at the various public functions: Serene Lakes events, DSAA picnic, neighborhood get-togethers, and will be again at the DSHS **August 15th event (see the last page).**



To the right is the society's new building, purchased by Norm Saylor. A volunteer work crew is acclaiming Norm and the sign. One half of the building will be a ski shop carrying cross country and snow shoe equipment. This will be an expansion of his daughter's shop which is across the street. The other half of the building will serve as our first museum and as a community visitors' center. People will be able to browse Norm's extensive collection of photographs, get information about activities in the area, pick up literature, and ultimately have copies made of old photographs.

More will be coming so keep downloading your monthly newsletters.

What Might Have Been

Donner Summit is spectacular and has attracted attention for a long time. First it was a summer home for Native Americans. Then it was a place to travel through on the way to California. It became an integral part of the nation's transportation system and so its prosperity grew with the coming of the railroad and the first transcontinental highway.

Along the way people with large and small dreams made their mark on Donner Summit from the very first individuals who built cabins and the small groups who built ski lodges and businesses to the investors who developed the major ski areas. Most areas of the Summit developed a little at a time along the highway like Cisco, Kingvale, Pla-Vada, Rainbow, and Big Bend. Others were laid out like Serene Lakes. Still others had bigger plans. Sugar Bowl of course was developed, so was Boreal, and the various ski lodges.

Some people had big plans. The pages that follow are about them.

The genesis of this month's main story is back in April of this year. We ran the story of Johnny Ellis and the Dartmouth Outing Club on Lake Mary. We thought we were done with Mr. Ellis since we'd exhausted our materials.

Far away in Washington State, Bruce Matson was looking to pass on some family memorabilia so he was surfing the web. His father in law was Johnny Ellis, Summit pioneer highlighted in our April issue, and so when he came across the Donner Summit Historical Society's web pages and the April issue of our newsletter he was excited. He was so excited he almost immediately jumped in the car and headed for California. Before jumping in the car with his daughter and grand daughter he emailed the Society and then talked to Norm Saylor by phone.

Mr. Matson had a collection of Ellis materials which he was willing to pass on. Johnny's widow, who lives in Florida also has materials and is willing to pass those on as well. Mr. Matson drove down to California, met with DSHS and contributed his new (to us) and long stored materials. As our research department enjoyed what Mr. Matson had brought, an idea began to form. A lot of the new Ellis material was about a resort Johnny planned to build on Donner Summit prior to WWII. Johnny left the Summit for WWII and plastics (remember the Graduate?). He never returned to build his dream. Johnny's "might have been" would be fun to report on of course but that led to further thinking. What else "might have been" on Donner Summit? Perusing our extensive collections, we came up with a lot of what "might have been." There was the Army-Navy Club on Ice Lakes, Herstle Jones' ideas for what is now Donner Ski Ranch, the "Sierra Hump" fix, early ideas about Serene/Ice Lakes, and more recently, John Slouber's Olympic Village idea. The ideas span the decades from the 1930's to the 1980's.

Mr. Matson's fortuitous web surfing brought about some other things. Pictures appeared of remnants of Ellis' rope tow above Lake Mary, the first rope tow on Donner Summit. That led to some exploration and the discovery that pieces of it are still up there. You'll have to wait until the next issue for that. Then the Matsons decided to plan a family reunion on Donner Summit this year. Plans were drawn to dovetail that with The Historical Society's August 15th event in downtown Soda Springs. Along with refreshments, old photographs, an introduction to our new building, and stories, we'll also be recognizing significant Summit pioneers: Bill Klein (who helped change the face of skiing and who will be highlighted in the Fall), Dennis Jones (who built the first Summit ski lift - see our February issue), and Johnny Ellis. The presentation to Johnny Ellis will be to his wife who, 92 years old, is riding the train from Florida all by herself.

Of course a lot of people have had dreams for the Summit and we can see their successes. We will be writing about Sugar Bowl's 70th year later in the Fall. We've written about the Jones family who built Soda Springs Hotel, Rainbow Lodge, and Nyack. We've reported on others too and big ideas like the coming of the modern ski industry on Donner Summit. Now we'll take a look at some ideas that would have made the Summit much different from what we know today. Usually in history we study or explore what is and how it got to be there. The stories that follow are different - just another way of looking at Summit history.

Of course this all begs the question, what about the future? There are still dreamers - people of vision. Valen Brost has plans for the "greenest" development in the country opposite Sugar Bowl and will build the whole thing at once. Sugar Bowl expands slowly - organically some would say never more than they can assimilate at one time.. There is a small development planned for the Soda Springs Store and of course the historical Society has some ideas (see last issue, page one of this issue, and just wait until next issue!). They are not history though and they'll have to wait before we'll be writing about them.

Meanwhile, enjoy "What Might Have Been."

Johnny Ellis @ Lake Mary

Johnny Ellis arrived on Donner Summit from Dartmouth College in 1935 (see our April, 09 issue) and quickly saw possibilities on the Summit. Highway 40 was now plowed in the winter, the Rainbow Bridge improved travel, lodges and hotels had been built, skiing equipment and techniques were improving, and there were others getting into the ski business (see our February, 09 issue for Dennis Jones).



Johnny had heard about rope tows which would also change skiing and spark the ski "industry." People no longer just watched or climbed the hills to go down. They could be taken up the hills almost effortlessly. Johnny no doubt saw Dennis Jones' first Donner Summit ski lift which did not work very well. He also knew about the country's first rope tow in Vermont (see April 09 again) and copied it at Lake Mary. He later built a second tow there and a third on Signal Hill (now Donner Ski Ranch).



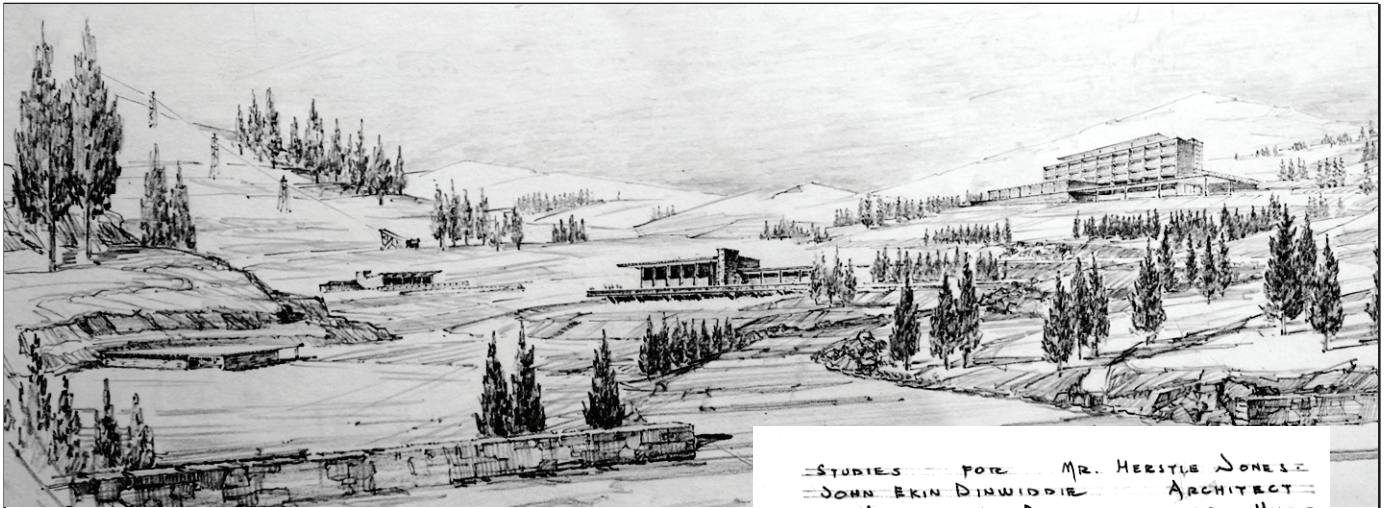
Johnny had gotten a taste of success. His rope tows were good business and Johnny's character took care of the rest. He was entrepreneurial and inventive, having started and expanded a business, helped found the Dartmouth Outing Club, adopted new technology, and subdivided the Johnny Ellis lots on Lake Mary. He also had a vision beyond the rope tows. He dreamed of a ski resort on Donner Summit.

We might never have known about the plans had Bruce Matson, Johnny's son in law, not brought a binder full of materials to California from his home in Washington State.

Reading through the materials one gets insight into the character of Johnny Ellis. Clearly he was an entrepreneur. He saw possibilities. He was willing to risk and take chances. He worked hard gathering information, considering alternatives, and making plans. He was also analytical. The binder is a study of his plans once he'd come up with his idea. It is full of photographs of the proposal from every conceivable angle, charts, studies, to do lists, notes to himself, as well as our first picture of Mr. Ellis. Reprinted here on these two pages is just a sampling.

Upper right the view from the lodge at the top of the runs. Right a sketch of the resort. Above, Johnny Ellis.





STUDIES FOR MR. HERSTLE JONES
 JOHN EKIN DINWIDDIE ARCHITECT
 OF MENDELSON DUNWIDDIE AND HILL
 233 SANSOME ST. SAN FRANCISCO

Herstle Jones and Signal Hill

Herstle Jones build Rainbow Lodge as well as the lodge at Nyack that sat where the current overlook sits and which was removed to make way for the freeway. Herstle too had grander plans. He owned what is now Donner Ski Ranch and had a resort designed. We don't know anything about it beyond the two and a half foot wide artist's rendition above that Mr. Jones commissioned in the middle 1940's. The picture above is what is now the "Ranch" ski hill on the left and the parking lot in the center. It is striking for its modern design.

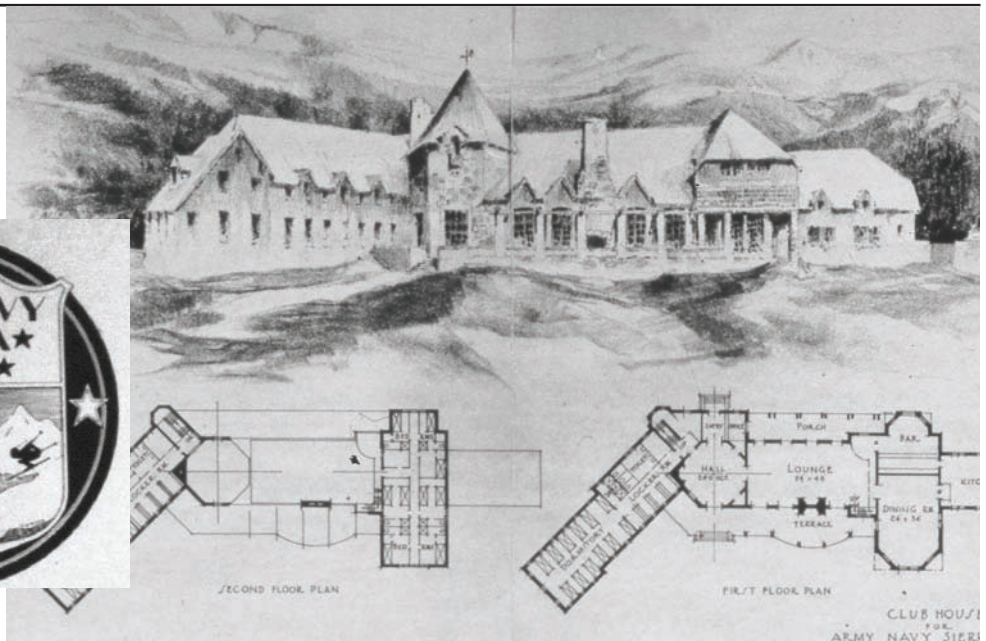


“The idea of a recreation center in the Sierra Nevada for the exclusive use of officers of the uniformed Services and their families originated among a group of officers on duty at the Navy Yard Mare Island, California.” Officers and their families would use the facilities for vacations and weekends. “Preliminary inquiries” determined the idea was viable. The Club would “maintain common buildings, including lodge, dining room and rental cabins.” It would be an all-season facility. The developers envisioned buying 1600 acres of land which was more than needed for the Club but in having the extra land, they would be able to protect the Club from encroachments that would detract from the advantage its quiet isolation provided. The extra land would also provide plenty of room for private cabins (see an example on the next page).

The developers were planning ultimately on developing “one of the outstanding all-season mountain recreation centers in the country.” The attractions of the site on Ice Lakes (now Serene Lakes) included "an all weather highway (highway 40 began to be plowed in 1931-32), lake frontage, adequate water, wooded and open ski terrain, central location ...to good lake and stream fishing country, and areas...suitable for private cabins" “for sale to club members only.” Areas as described above “are rare” but existed in the "Donner Trail Recreation Area...less than an hour from magnificent Lake Tahoe."

The Club was incorporated on September 28, 1936. 25,000 of the poster sized brochures, from which the information and quotes for this story were gleaned, were produced. Reproductions are available from the DSHS \$75 for the two poster - front and back of the brochure - set.

Describing “Ice Lakes” the brochure said they are eminently suitable for boating and sufficiently shallow so they will warm up enough for swimming in summer. “Gentle beach slopes make the bathing here ideal and particularly safe for smaller children.” Besides boating, sightseeing, fishing, hiking and pack trips, as well as snow sports in winter the brochure touted



the possibilities of a golf course. "There is practically a natural golf course on the property, free of trees and underbrush, requiring no grading, which can be developed at a comparatively small cost." The lodge, pictured above, would be an "Artistically constructed building [that] when properly designed [would] cost no more and, in many instances far less than a miscellaneous type of construction, and add immeasurably to the beauty of the surroundings." Tyrolean building style was proposed. There would be cabins as well, "Each cabin can be individually designed to fit into its particular location, still harmonizing with the whole" and would be designed for beauty and utility so they would blend into the landscape to form a picturesque setting.

The initiation fee was to be \$100 with \$20 down and no less than \$5 a month. Annual dues would be \$20, payable quarterly.

Regarding skiing, the brochure said, "The fascination of this sport is that, unlike any other, the whole progressive process of learning is satisfying. The novice on a gentle practice slope, learning snow plough stops obtains quite the soul-satisfying enjoyment in mastering this simple maneuver, as does the expert in the execution of the spectacular christiania."

IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES

The immediate objectives of the Army Navy Sierra Club are:

- (1) To complete plans for and initiate construction of community club buildings in the summer of 1938, to be ready for the opening of the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939.
- (2) Provision of housekeeping tent cabins and necessary facilities for the use of Club members at the beginning of the 1938 summer season for use during that season.

The immediate objectives of the Operating Organization are:

- (1) Provision of improved camp ground facilities at a selected location on the Ice Lakes property for the 1938 summer season.
- (2) Provision of water mains and electric lines to cabin sites.
- (3) Completion of plans for providing at as early a date as possible facilities for boating, golf, riding, tennis, skiing, and other sports, and initiation of construction of necessary physical improvements in accordance with an orderly plan.
- (4) Assist purchasers of cabin sites in planning and carrying forward the construction of their cabins thereon.

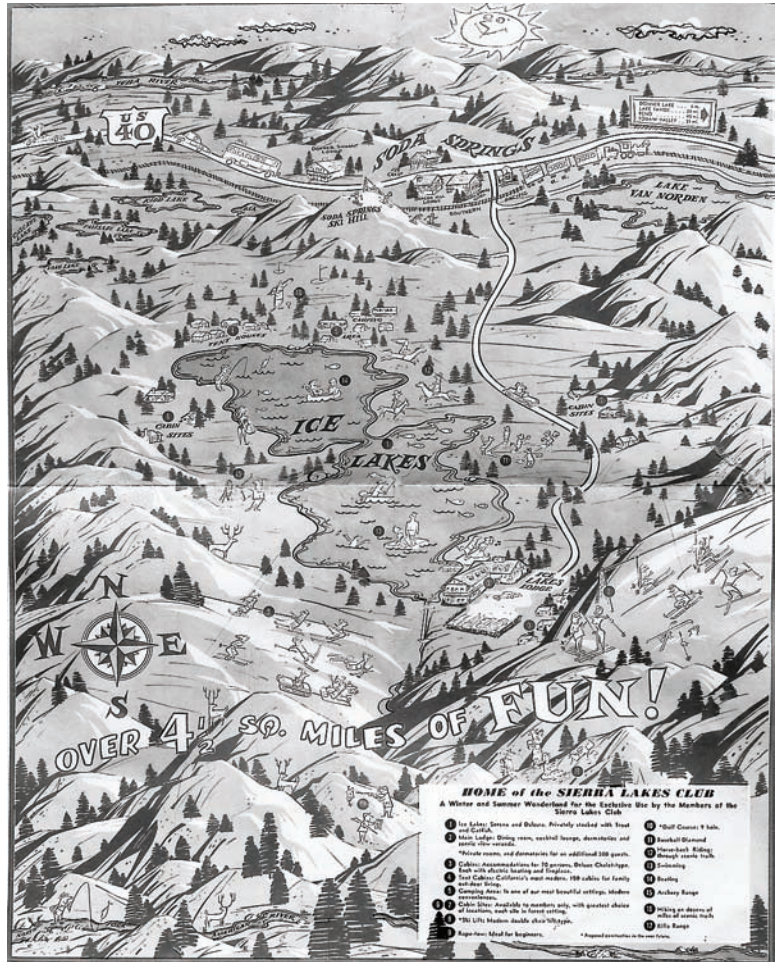


Ice Lakes Winter Wonderland

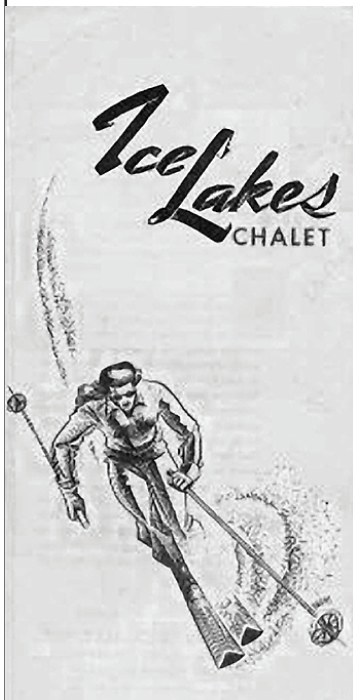
In 1957, according to Frank Allen, president of the Sierra Lakes Club, "the... story of the 'Vanishing Wilderness' has become a matter of grave national concern, and has become particularly critical here in California. ... We have found the answer in Ice Lakes Development."

Our idea is to set aside and to preserve this area for your family, my family, and other selected families like ours....we are...giving our children the assurance that they too will have a place in the mountains in the future.....most of this huge area will be left untouched in the very capable hands of Him who created it."

The Club would provide "wholesome family activity...at a nominal cost.... A nice average family should be able to enjoy the magic splendor of our Sierras [sic] without the tinsel... now so prevalent."



The development would include a lodge/club house (that original Serene Lakes Lodge torn down in 1997 to make way for the Ice Lakes Lodge), a chapel, ice rink, pool, chair lift, T bar lift, stables, general store, 9 hole gold course, camping area, tent camping area, chalets, and trailer area. The map above is one example of the intentions.



Activities would include: fishing, archery, boating, hiking, swimming, games, target shooting, skiing, ice skating, tobogganing, sledding hunting, and horseback riding.

Although the map shows a lot of development and the brochure's activities would indicate a lot, it was "neither the intent nor desire to build a 'city park' in the mountains. Our purpose is rather to provide facilities that will add comfort, convenience, recreation and enjoyment to a wild and beautiful area for a selected group of families. When all facilities have been completed, most of the property will remain untouched and in its natural state – a wilderness preserved."

Originally Serene Lakes was not set up as a subdivision (or the eight different ones it's turned out to be). It began as the Sierra Lakes Club, a resort that people could buy into by purchasing 12 year memberships. Those who bought in were to have the use of extensive facilities anchored by the old lodge. The idea of the twelve year memberships had disappeared by the summer of 1958 and new memberships at higher cost with undetermined terms were then offered.

The plans were ambitious and the idea was patterned on the many family camps that used to draw people into the Sierra in summer. There are still some in existence, such as the Cal camps, the Stanford camp, and various municipality family camps. The difference was that people bought into Sierra Lakes Club instead of renting like they do at the Lair (Cal

camp).

Besides the lodge and campgrounds, sleeping facilities would include eight small chalets "modern in every detail" available by reservation for \$3.00 a day for adults and \$1.50 for children. The rates included cooking utensils and dishes.

12' X 16' linoleum floored tent cabins with redwood sides were available for \$1.00 a day for adults and \$.50 for children. Each had electricity, BBQ, and "new innerspring mattress" on the double beds. Bunk beds were also included.

The club didn't last due to lack of membership. Even though people could buy property to put small "A" frames on the idea never took off and Serene Lakes went through a succession of different owners until finally metamorphizing into its present form, the various Ice Lakes and Serene Lakes subdivisions.

ICE LAKES Development
SERAENE LAKES, CALIFORNIA

TO OUR PROSPECTIVE NEIGHBORS:

We sincerely hope that you will enjoy this folder and that it will help you to understand and visualize what we are doing in our plans for the Ice Lakes Development.

As many of you know, I am sure the story of the "Vanishing Wilderness" has become a matter of grave national concern, and has become particularly critical here in California. There is an answer; however, and we feel that we have found that answer in the Ice Lakes Development.

Our idea is to set aside and to preserve this area for your family, my family, and other selected families like ours. Here we not only have a place to go and to enjoy ourselves now, but, and this you may well feel is more important, we are also giving our children assurance that they too will have a place in the mountains in the future.

As we go along we are adding facilities for your greater convenience and enjoyment. This is important. Equally important, however, is the fact that most of this huge area will be left untouched in the very capable hands of Him who created it.

May we both enjoy this beautiful area together for many, many years to come.

Sincerely yours,
ICE LAKES DEVELOPMENT
F.A.A.
Frank A. Allen, President



Ice Lakes CHALET

The Ice Lakes Chalet is a modern, comfortable, and well-equipped chalet. It is situated in a beautiful setting, and is available for rent by the day or week. The chalet is perfect for a family vacation or a romantic getaway. It features a fireplace, a dining room, a kitchen, and a living room. The chalet is also equipped with a television, a radio, and a stereo system. The chalet is available for rent from May to October. For more information, contact Ice Lakes Chalet, Inc. at 1500 Mountain View Road, San Francisco, CA 94116. Phone: 415-778-1234.

ICE LAKES CHALET, INC.
1500 MOUNTAIN VIEW ROAD - SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94116
PHONE: 415-778-1234

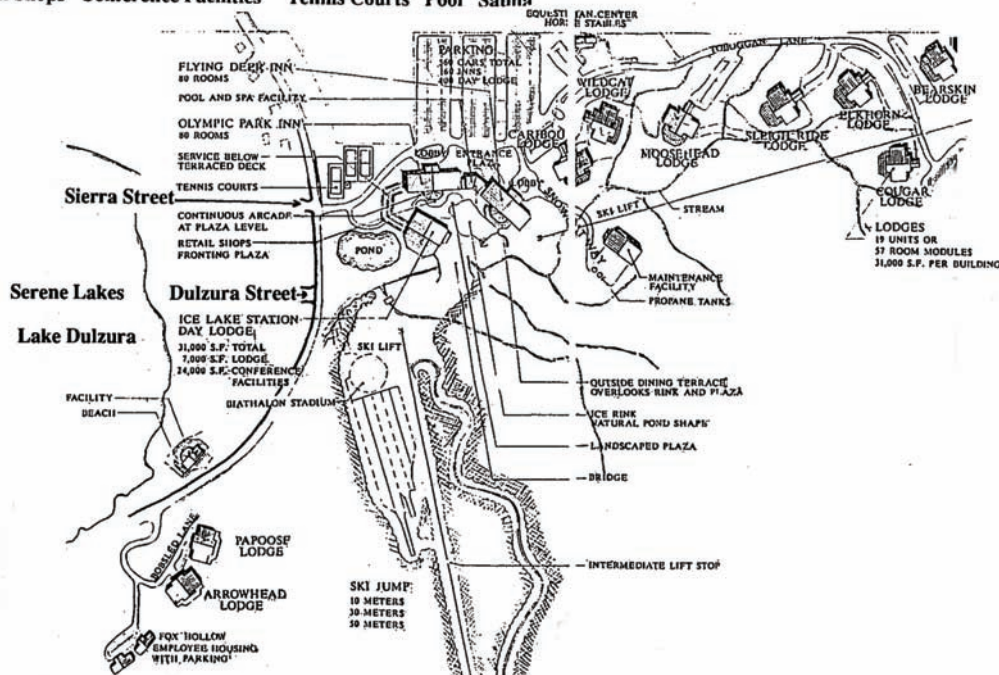
NEW ADDRESS:
1500 Mountain View Road
San Francisco, CA 94116

HOME of the SIERRA LAKES CLUB

A Winter and Summer Wonderland for the Exclusive Use by the Members of the Sierra Lakes Club

- 1 Ice Lakes: Serena and Dulzura. Privately stocked with Trout and Catfish.
- 2 Main Lodge: Dining room, cocktail lounge, dormitories and scenic view veranda.
*Private rooms, and dormitories for an additional 300 guests.
- 3 Cabins: Accommodations for 70 persons. Deluxe Chalet-type. Each with electric heating and fireplace.
- 4 Tent Cabins: California's most modern. 150 cabins for family outdoor living.
- 5 Camping Area: In one of our most beautiful settings. Modern conveniences.
- 6 7 Cabin Sites: Available to members only, with greatest choice of locations, each site in forest setting.
- 8 *Ski Lift: Modern double chair lift-type.
- 9 Rope-tow: Ideal for beginners.
- 10 *Golf Course: 9 hole.
- 11 Baseball Diamond
- 12 Horse-back Riding: through scenic trails
- 13 Swimming
- 14 Boating
- 15 Archery Range
- 16 Hiking on dozens of miles of scenic trails
- 17 Rifle Range

* Proposed construction in the near future.



John Slouber & Olympic Park

When John Slouber owned Royal Gorge he planned an Olympic Park in 1991 that he thought would meet Royal Gorge's need for "beds" on the Summit. Business would be sustainable he felt if patrons had places to stay. So his idea was to develop the east side of Serene Lakes. He would build a number of lodges, restaurants and recreational facilities that would "make as little impact on the environment as possible and provide visitors and local residents with enhanced recreational meeting facilities." It would have covered 68 acres and been designed in a Tyrolean/Tahoe style. John had studied the market and found that most cross country skiers did not like to ski all day. They wanted to experience other activities. This resort would provide that. John also saw that what he was selling was open space so he did not want to impact that. He wanted a low profile/minimum land use concept and so have as little impact on the environment as possible. He saw his Olympic Park idea becoming a "world class destination resort."

The facility was to have included retail shops, restaurants, the ice lakes trail head, hotel type rooms (510 rooms in Condotel and 160 in lodges), ski jumps, a biathlon stadium, an ice skating rink, a luge run, beach pavilion with dock and pool, a sauna, tennis courts, five lodges, and two lifts. The resort would accommodate 1100 visitors a day in winter and 3-400 in summer. John Slouber was expecting that the whole development would be completed in 10-12 years. "Traffic is a problem but not insurmountable" since most of the problem would be dealt with by improving snow clearing and expanding the shuttle service.

People would be able to buy rooms in the lodges guaranteeing access but not necessarily particular units. These were to be called "Condotel" rooms. If people did not use all of them time they could receive a return on their investments as Royal Gorge rented out the rooms.

Olympic Park fell victim to an economic downturn and financing was not available.

Southern Pacific & the Sierra "Hump"

This idea really intrigued me as I considered how different the Summit would have been had this 1940's project been carried out. Unfortunately I've exceeded my allotted ten pages for this issue and so will put the "hump" off until the next issue. Anticipation is good - for you - and you got two "free" pages in this issue. So wait until next time. Besides, reading about the "hump" reminded me of another eco engineering proposal which I've got to go find in old materials. A month with the archives in preparation will serve.

August 15

Historical Society Opening Celebration - our new bldg - our old photos
Downtown Soda Springs
(corner of Old 40 and Soda Springs Rd.)

Refreshments
Summit Pioneer awards (2PM):
Bill Klein Johnny Ellis Dennis Jones

Gala Anniversary Celebration Clair Tappaan's 75th Anniversary August 14-16 19940 Donner Pass Rd. Soda Springs

Hikes, s'mores and brandy around a campfire, stories from long-time users of the Lodges, music, and lots of new activities will commemorate two anniversaries. The Sierra Club owns two lodges at Donner Summit in the Sierra Nevada that this year celebrate significant birthdays: Clair Tappaan Lodge will be 75 years old and Hutchinson Lodge will be 85. Hutchinson is a smaller lodge located across the ravine and is less known than Clair Tappaan Lodge (CTL).

Single day and three day fees as well as separate event fees (music festival on Sunday)
For the full price schedule and details about the weekend, please see <http://motherlode.sierraclub.org/sierranevada/gala.html>

Donations received for the event will go into the CTL Account at the Sierra Club Foundation. Funds will be used to help underwrite schools and other groups that want to bring students to the Sierra Club at Donner Summit for environmental education but can't afford the full price.

Help Needed

The Donner Summit Historical Society needs help. Our general goals are ambitious, "to offer lectures, seminars, and field trips that will help the community learn the history of Donner Summit and the surrounding area, and to collect and display artifacts relative to the history, and to carry on other educational and charitable activities associated with this purpose" Our specific goal to build a museum/community center on Donner Summit is even more immediately ambitious. Then, just wait until next month to see what's in store. If you think we're going in the right direction with our website, newsletter, activities, and goals, then please consider a tax-deductible donation using the form below.

Donner Summit Historical Society "Friend" contribution

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

phone: _____ email _____

I could help with:

fund raising _____ mailings _____ publicity _____ I have stories to pass on _____ I have pictures you can copy _____

I'd like to write newsletter articles _____ cataloging _____ grant writing _____ I could donate a computer _____
mail to: Donner Summit Historical Society P.O. 1 Norden, CA 95724

I'd like to be a supporter:

_____ \$25

_____ \$50

_____ \$100

_____ Other