



Donner Summit Historical Society

July, 2009 issue #11

*Newsletter*

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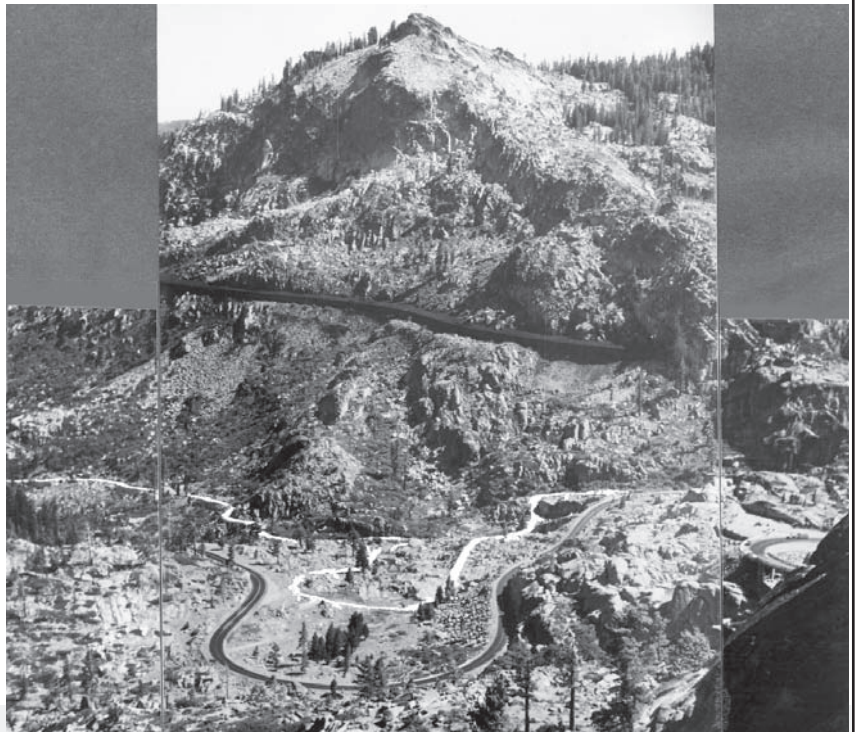
# Historical Society Project

## Along the Lincoln Highway

Our historical society is quite new. Look at the bottom of this page and note that this is only issue number eleven. We are not even a year old. Faithful “friends” or members know we have a stated purpose “... 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...”

Our website and newsletters are a start and we’re working on a big event for August 15 in downtown Soda Springs (details in our next newsletter).

A museum is a big long-term goal which we’ll cover next time too. The picture on this page nicely illustrates another goal: renovate the Donner Summit portion of the Lincoln Highway so it can be used by hikers and for special activities. The picture here came from newly donated documents by the Johnny Ellis family (see the April issue as well as the next one). This is a composite done by a method called “cut and paste” long ago which is why it looks as it does. That’s Donner Peak in the background and the dark winding line is Old Highway 40. The



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**Save August 15  
Downtown  
Soda Springs**

lighter curving line is the old Lincoln Highway (see the December issue). The picture was taken decades ago. A viewer of a picture taken today from the same vantage point would have trouble seeing the Lincoln Highway because of all the trees and brush that have grown.

The unifying theme of Donner Summit history is transportation: first transcontinental railroad, first transcontinental hiway, the Interstate, pipelines, fiber optic cables, telephone lines, etc. We are losing the Lincoln Hiway and so the Dutch Flat Donner Summit Wagon Road. We are losing some of our heritage but we can save it and we can use it. The idea is to continue to use the parts that are usable today which is the portion from Soda Springs Rd. on the west to Lake Mary and renovate from Lake Mary to just below the Rainbow Bridge. One or two times a year pre-1927 vehicles would be allowed to use the renovated route. Maybe re-enactments of wagon trains or other horse drawn vehicles would also use the route. Festivals like these would celebrate the transportation history of the Summit, bring tourism, and revitalize the local economy. At other times of the year the renovated route would be open to hikers and skiers who want to enjoy the outdoors, the spectacular views, and the history. If we don't renovate the route, we will lose it and so lose a piece of American history. It is fast growing over.

## **The route:**

The contemplated renovated route follows exactly the traces of the original from the "U" curve below Rainbow bridge up past the climbing wall next to the Chinese Wall, up past the historic Native American petroglyphs, to the grade crossing at the end of tunnel 6 (the original 1867 tunnel from which the tracks have been removed).

In about 1912 the underpass made the rail crossing easier and safer. It was one of the first underpasses in California. Below the underpass on the flat sections of rock Truckee businesses painted "billboards" for the newly motorized public. The last one is just disappearing. If I didn't know it said Whitney House Steam Heat, I would not be able to read it today.

After going under the underpass the route continues west. The road is still well defined though growing over. At the top the route joins Lake Mary Rd and goes around Lake Mary, down past the Alpineer and Oakland Ski Clubs to what is known as the Sugar Bowl crossing of the railroad tracks leading to tunnel 31 (which goes under Judah and exits in Coldstream Canyon).

After crossing the railroad tracks head west along Lake Van Norden past where the sheep corrals used to be (Soda Springs was a top sheep shipping center in the 19th century). At the sheep corrals a person named Lytton had a way station to supply horses with water. In summers Van Norden meadow dried up (there was no lake before the dam). Uphill in section 17 on the back of Donner Ski Ranch is a lake called Lytton Lake where Norm Saylor has found traces or wooden pipes that may have moved water to the way station below.

Continue across the concrete bridge on Soda Springs Rd. Before 1927 the road continued through what is now the Soda Springs Ski Area parking lot. Soda Springs Station and saloon were located there as well as the sheep shipping facilities. The current railroad crossing did not exist. Instead vehicles crossed the tracks further down the hill and then came out where Donner Summit Lodge is today.

**Donner Summit Historical Society**

**Special Event**

**August 15**

**Downtown Soda Springs**

**see our next newsletter for details.**

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# Our Longest Full Time Resident

## Tells Some of His Family's Summit Story

In our quest to write down Donner Summit's history Norm Sayler and I sat down with Jimmy Schull at DSL to talk about "the old days." Jimmy has been on the Summit since the early 1940's so he's seen a lot of change and knows a lot of stories. Most of the pictures here have come from Jimmy Schull's collection which he has donated to the Donner Summit Historical Society.

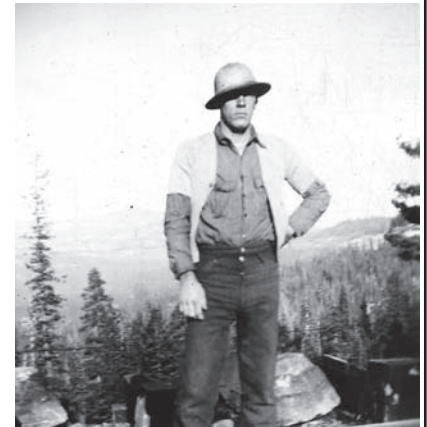
Asking Jimmy about Summit changes on the Summit over his lifetime, he rattled off the lodging on the Summit in the old days, west to east: DSL, Beacon Hill Lodge, Soda Springs Hotel, Crest Garage and Lodge, Norden Store and cabins, Aro's Chalet, Partell's, Heidelman Lodge, Cal Lodge, Ski Inn, Sierra Club lodge, Kiski Lodge and the House of Vandervoort (later Ski High and still later Talisman's). All had rooms, provided food and had bars. The establishments were kept full by the constant traffic on Old 40. There was also an active community club covering Cisco to the Summit with many community activities.

That list should give one a good idea about the vibrancy of the Summit community. Then in the 1960's the freeway was built and travel became easier. People used to come for the weekend but with the freeway they could drive up and back in a day and could travel to further destinations. Economic activity on the Summit dropped off. By 1964 there was an entirely different economy from what Jimmy had grown up with.

Jimmy arrived on Donner Summit shortly after his birth. Now he's the longest full time resident on the Summit. His parents, Kirby (top picture and left in the second picture from the top) and Lola Schull (right below)

came to Donner Summit in 1936 with the railroad, which was the major Summit industry. At first Kirby worked in a B and B gang (bridges and buildings crew). Hundreds of workers were divided into iron crews, train crews, B and B gangs, etc. as they managed the country's major source of transportation over the Sierra. Trucks would not become prominent until reliability and interstates were built.

Imagine the jobs the railroad provided besides actual train crews: station agents, (3 stations at Soda Springs, Norden, and the Summit) maintenance and repair, snow shovelers to keep the tunnels from collapsing, turntable operators (two turntables on the Summit and one at Cisco), crew support, building crews, etc. That large population required a community of support: stores, garages, restaurants and drinking establishments.



Persons desiring to make reservations write direct or telegraph

**JOHN C. QUINLEY**

NORDEN, CALIFORNIA

A deposit of \$2.00 per person in advance will insure week-end reservations.

Rates \$3.50 per day American Plan  
(Reservation Blank below for your convenience).

**JOHN C. QUINLEY**

DONNER TRAIL SKI LODGE

NORDEN, CALIFORNIA

I wish to make reservations for a party of ..... women ..... men for ..... days.

Will arrive by Auto Bus at ..... A.M. P.M. Train

Date ....., 194...

Enclosed please find deposit of \$.....

NAME

ADDRESS

Telegraphed Reservations will be Acknowledged.

# DONNER TRAIL SKI-LODGE



IN THE HEART OF THE SIERRA,  
ONE - HALF MILE FROM  
DONNER SUMMIT

Kirby's father worked for the railroad too in the locomotive shop in Truckee. The railroad was in his blood but Kirby had entrepreneurial spirit too. He and his wife, Lola, build the first lodge at the Donner Ski Ranch called Donner Trail Ski Lodge in 1938 (above). It sat on the north side of the hiway and at the west end of what is now the parking lot at the bottom of the current ski lift. There was a spring there and some of the concrete is still in evidence. The picture to the right shows the lodge under construction. Note that Highway 40 was concrete in those days. Note too that the reservation form above allows you to "telegraph" your reservations. That must be some old kind of fax?

The lodge was built from old snowshed timbers. A railroad supervisor told Kirby he could take any timbers that any two men could move. Kirby found the biggest railroad worker he could and then chose a very large timber. The big worker picked up most of the weight with Kirby taking the smaller part at one end. The supervisor nodded and then Kirby had a crew carry the timber to the building site. That piece would become a major roof timber.

The land under the Donner Trail Lodge was leased and when the land was sold the Schulls moved up the road to what is now just west of the Magic Carpet. There they built the Kiski Lodge (pictures on the next page). The Kiski was done in 1940-41 and included rooms and dormitory accommodations for 65 guests. All the home cooking was done by Lola which was a chore because she had severe rheumatoid arthritis.



Lodge business was brisk in winter but the other seasons left Kirby free to look for other work. He'd hurt his back on the railroad so he turned to other Summit work. He helped build the Magic Carpet, the Lincoln lift, the first lift at Sugar Bowl and its remodel into a double chair, the Soda Springs chair, and various houses in Sugar Bowl. Having the lift experience got Kirby a job at Disneyland in 1965 to help build a people mover there.

While Kirby worked in the neighborhood Lola kept the lodge going and the family together. Some summers Kiski Lodge was filled with construction workers such as those building the Lake Angela dam and the freeway.



Eventually Lola's health became an issue and she and Kirby moved down to Redding. Kiski Lodge burned in 1984.

Having grown up on Donner Summit Jimmy has lots of memories. Imagine the fun for a boy. Steam trains were continually going by under his window. The turntable was in operation below the Schull house. There were snowsheds to explore and play on in winter. Kids would climb the sheds after a big snow carrying shovels. Once on top they'd jump off into the soft snow and use the shovel to dig out.

When there was a heavy snow Jimmy and his brother were awakened a half hour early. They'd then break trail downhill to the Hensleys so the Hensley kids could get out to the school bus on the highway. Breaking trail is much easier down than uphill.



In summers there was so much to do: so many kids to play with, horseback riding (if all the horses were not rented), fishing and hiking. BB guns were popular.

Jimmy started school at the new Donner Trail School which was finished in 1949. He remembers the old school which was out the back of the Donner Summit train station and across the tracks from his house. The kids were bused to Donner Ski Ranch and then walked through the snow tunnels to the school. The tunnels were quite wide because they were double tracked. There was enough space for two trains and space in between. If a train came while one was using the tunnel, one just stood in the middle. What a difference today when we drive our kids to the school door in SUV's.



Tunnel 6, at the Summit, had connected dormitories and houses for railroad personnel. Sixty to seventy people still lived there in the 1950's and another two hundred were in Norden.

School planning in those days was different. At the beginning of the year school was packed but with the coming of snow, section crews and families moved to lower elevations until spring. Then the kids would return to the Summit school. There were railroad crews' families living at Cisco too, uphill from the current facilities and the school bus would pick the kids up there.

In summers Tuesdays were good days because that's when the fish were dumped in the river by the State. Uncle Milt Hogel kept fishing rods and bait at the Always Inn for kids to use. The fishing was good "as soon as the State guy left."

Before the Magic Carpet Sugar Bowl people would call Herb and Lena Fredericks at the Norden Store to order food. The food would be loaded on a snow cat and hauled to Sugar Bowl. The Fredericks had to guess what would be needed and then go to Reno to buy it.

Snow tunnels for trains keep snow off the tracks but snow builds up on top. In the old days the railroad had snow removal crews who used what looked like one man cross cut saws. They'd saw the hardened snow into blocks and throw them off the tunnels (see pictures on the next page). In 1937-38 the crews were shoveling on the east side of the Summit when the whole tunnel collapsed (see picture to the right). The only fatality was Jimmy's uncle (see news article below right). The article says the accident occurred at tunnel 11 2.5 miles east of the Summit where 60 feet of snow had piled up above the snow tunnel entrance. Loosened snow fell killing one and injuring two).

One of Jimmy's first jobs was to help replace the wooden sheds with concrete. He drove a concrete truck, which in those days came in three and six yard capacities (ten is normal today). There was a concrete plant set up across from the Magic Carpet. Jimmy would fill his truck, drive up to the Ski Ranch where he'd drive up onto a train car. A small diesel would drive the car down to the work site where the concrete trucks would release their loads.

During the Korean War military personnel would travel to the Kiski Lodge for R & R. One day, just after a big snow there was a tremendous roar echoing off the Sugar Bowl cliff. "It was the most God awful roar you ever heard in your life." Trains made echoing sounds too, but this was much more than that. People came out on the deck of the lodge overlooking Summit Valley and there came a whole squadron of Air Force propeller driven fighters with straight exhausts. They roared down the valley. One fighter peeled off and circled around coming in low. A package ejected from the cockpit. Jimmy's father went down to retrieve the parcel which turned out to be a little man with a helmet, parachute and pouch where the parachute would be. Inside were reservation requests for the weekend for U.S.S. Boxer flyers. The kids eventually wore out the parachuted figure.

One exciting event for the kids was when the Soda Springs store went up in flames. It sat across from the current store and included a gas station. Once the fire was going strongly it spread to barrels which were stored nearby. "When those went off it was like bombs and rockets."



### SNOW BANK FALLS ON RAILROAD CREW 1938

TRUCKEE, Calif., April 17.—(AP) —A huge snow bank created by heavy winter storms caved in on a Southern Pacific building crew near the mouth of a Sierra tunnel today, killing one man and seriously injuring two others.

The crew of 25 was working just above the mouth of tunnel No. 11, 2½ miles east of Donner Summit, one of a series on the trans-continental line through the high Sierra.

Snow had piled up to a depth of 60 feet or more above the tunnel mouth and the men were clearing it away when a large mass broke away and struck some of the workers as it fell.

The body of Robert Schull, 32, of Norden, was removed shortly thereafter from the fallen mass and taken to Colfax, 30 miles distant. The two injured were removed to Sacramento.

Railroad officials said the snow mass had blocked westbound traffic for the time being but that eastbound trains would not be affected.

# We've Got it Easy Today



I thought I knew how to shovel snow having done a lot of it. I'm also thankful for our snowblower. They were much tougher in the old days though when there were no snowblowers.

The railroad had snow removal crews that kept the snow from piling too high on the snow tunnels which could result in problems like the picture on the previous page. Jimmy Schull described the crews cutting snow into blocks and dropping the blocks off the tunnel tops. That didn't sound like the snow removal I am used to on Donner Summit. Jimmy Schull's collection of Summit historical pictures shows he has it exactly right.

The packed snow would be sawn into blocks and then thrown down. If you look closely at these pictures you can see both some saws and blocks of snow (affectionately called "Sierra Cement" because of its high moisture content and consequent weight).

This does not look like a good career opportunity.



# One Day There Was No Water

Jimmy Schull has a lot of stories, having lived on the Summit and seen so many changes over the decades. He has accumulated a large collection of Summit historical pictures which he's donated to the historical society.



The three pictures here tell a story that might be titled, "One Day There Was no Water." Lake Angela has been used as a water source ever since the railroad came to town. There have been a couple of dams on the lakes to store the supply. The railroad used the water for steam engines and to fight fires in the snow tunnels.

Iron pipe transported the water from Lake Angela to the watering stations on the Summit where the steam engines could refill their boilers. Snow tunnels used to be made of wood and steam engine sparks would sometimes set the tunnels afire. To protect against that there were lookouts (there are the ruins of one on Red Mountain for example) that kept watch over the snow tunnels.

One day, in mid winter, a railroad crew went to fill up and nothing came out of the pipe. Was Lake Angela empty? Was it frozen solid?

Was there a pipe break? Were they imagining it? What if there's a fire?

There was no pipe break. Angela was full of water. The pipe and the lake were not frozen solid. There was plenty of liquid water below the ice and the intake was fine. One can imagine the men scratching their heads and worrying about fire and the trouble there'd be if the engines could not replenish their water.



It was some time before someone figured out that the ice cap on Lake Angela was causing a suction problem. The water could not get out and go down the pipe because the ice cap allowed no air in to replace the leaving water.

The pictures here show the solution. Crews hauled timbers up to Lake Angela over the snow and built a battering ram. They hoisted heavy timbers and dropped them on the ice to create holes for air to replace the water as it went to fill up the steam engines.





# From Donner Pass to the Pacific

Jack Duncan 2001 100 pages 24.95

“A Map History covering 150 Years of California’s Lincoln Highway, Victory Highway, US-40, I-80, Henness Pass, Pacific Turnpike and Dutch Flat Donner Lake Toll Roads from 1852-2002

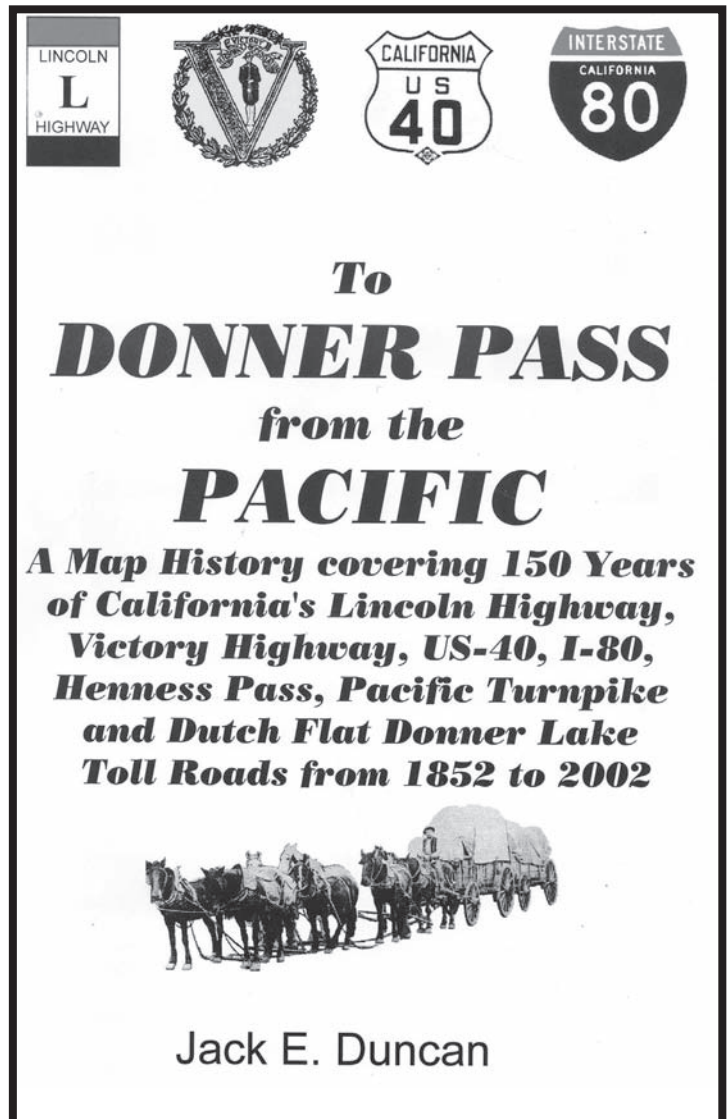
I suppose this book review should have been part of our articles about the Lincoln Highway and Rainbow Bridge in our December issue. But I didn’t know I had the book. I was doing some other research and came across the paragraph above referencing this book and I thought, Wow, that sounds like a good book to have. Apparently I thought so some years ago, because it turned out to be on my bookshelf. Such is life when subject to approaching decrepitude (yes, the word is made up but one must use humor when dealing with serious subjects and you get the idea).

If you are interested in the whole of the Lincoln Highway in California and the various iterations of the highways you will really like this book. I’ll just focus on the Donner Summit portion which is good enough reason to buy this book.

The book is maps and pictures with a little text. You can see a picture of where the City of San Francisco train was trapped by the 1952 blizzard and then relate that to the map on the next page. Pictures of old cars crossing the Summit, including the first car to cross the Summit in 1911 are interesting as are other old pictures.

The primary reason for the book is the maps. Topographic maps are almost half the book. Each one delineates the trails and highways that crossed those sections of the maps: the freeway, Old 40, the Lincoln Highway, and wagon train routes. On each opposite page there are pictures and text illustrating the sections. Taking this book one could have fun tracking the old pieces of the routes. Since the wagon route diverges the most from the highways, you could have some interesting and even challenging hikes. It would just be fun finding abandoned portions of the Lincoln Highway which are closer to modern transportation. Old cabin and hotel sites, which are delineated, could also be good fun.

If you like history and the outdoors, this book could be an interesting starting point for many Summit outings such as the one on the next page.



# Along the Lincoln Highway



Reading [From Donner Summit to the Pacific](#) gets some to think about exploring. The maps are so accurate and the instructions so clear, that walking pieces of the old Lincoln Highway (or even the wagon train routes) is easy. Using the book I covered a couple of stretches on foot, by car and from a distance.

One short stretch can be entered across the street from the Big Bend Ranger Station. Just opposite the visitors' center you will see the "L" for the Lincoln Highway on the garage (above right). Go behind the garage to find a very short stretch of highway as well as a one of the original 1928 Boy Scout placed monuments and an informational display (pictured below here).



Go to the right and you'll be back on Old 40 but take the first left just a few yards further and you're back on the Lincoln Highway. Follow that around, staying on the road to avoid private property, and you'll find yourself walking along the river (below) past very old cabins (such as the one below), an old bridge abutment (below right), and in season, water falls. You can take this route up to the I-80

overpass where you'll either have to come back or hike uphill if you like cross country hiking. I suggest too, the route from Donner Summit down the east side, some of which is pictured on page 1.



Left is one of the wagon train trail markers placed by Trails West. This sits on the wagon route which is also the Lincoln Hiway described above. Each makers has a quote from a diary. This one says, "past on down the river and valley over ledges and rocky spurs of the mountain on the left... We nooned by the side of a small pond on the left...passed on down the descents on ledges – Augustus Ripely Burbank, Sep 14, 1849"



You can find another at the Eagle Lakes freeway turnoff (Indian Springs in the book). Go under the freeway south to where the road intersects an east west stretch of the Lincoln Hiway.