Donner Summit Historical Society Newsletter

August, 2010 issue #24

August 14 11- 4 P.M.

2nd Annual Summit Pioneer Awards

Last year was the grand opening of the Historical Society in downtown Soda Springs and a tradition was started. Awards were given to three who helped develop Modern Donner Summit: Bill Klein, Dennis Jones, and Johnny Ellis. You can read about those Summit Pioneers in our newsletter archive using our newsletter article index: http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/PDF's/articleIndex.pdf

This year the Society has decided on three more who helped build the Summit: Hannes Schroll, center below; Dick Buek, right below; and The Auburn Ski Club. Go to page 9 to see why all three will be honored on August 14.

Terrific Fire Rages

Sheds charrred

Miles of Rails Twisted

Brave and Skillful Crews Work to Save the Great [rail]Road

Flames Level the Snowsheds

Cause Great Damage to Souther Pacific at Lakeview

3 thousand feet of woodwork and depot are destroyed

8/22/01 San Francisco Call

Fire in Snowsheds Shatters Cupid's Plans

a fire raging int he snowsheds prevented a pioneering physician from marrying his Minneapolis Bride

10/16/09 San Franciso Call

Fire in a Tunnel Near Donner Donner Lake

Souther Pacific trains will be delayed three or four days by the disaster

11/7/98 San Francisco Call

Ironically when Theodore Judah laid out the route of the transcontinental railroad over the Sierra he did not think that snow would be a problem He'd analyzed and knew that the snow would never pile up very deep. It could just be pushed out of the way. That though, is a separate story for later. Last month we covered Red Mountain and its fire lookout and that led us naturally to fires and the snowsheds. So this month we cover fires, how they were fought, the fire trains, a solution, and some literature aimed at adolescent boys.

Today the snowsheds sheltering the railroad over the Summit are concrete and their extent is much less than the original almost forty miles. The snowsheds do protect the railroad but when they were wood they were also vulnerable to destruction. A whole mini-Summit industry was devoted to their care and maintenance. There were carpenters of course but there was also an army of snow shovelers that kept the snow from piling too deep and causing collapse. Old newspapers often carried ads looking for snow shovelers. Even with the shovelers snowsheds sometimes collapsed, sometimes causing death. For example, the pictures that went with the Lake Angela Empty!? story in our last newsletter came from Jimmy Schuul. His uncle was killed in a collapse.

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Another part of the mini-industry was made up of track walkers who patrolled looking for fire, the lookouts on Red Mountains and the fire fighting crews. The boxes on these two pages are actual headlines pulled from old newspapers. FIres were so common, that the headlines were not hard to find. Note the damage listed, "3 thousand feet destroyed" and "1000 feet of snosheds." There are 5000 feet in a mile. Replacement of

Another Fire
A Large Section of Snowsheds Burned

9/8/88 Sactramento Daily Union

Wreckage Catches Fire and Flames Destroy snowsheds, trackage, valuable freight, and four carloads of cattle

10/21/04 San Francisco Call

Big Snowshed Fire

Between 7 and8 O'clock Thursday evening about 1000 feet of snowsheds.... between Soda Springs and Summit faded into smoke and ashes

12/4/86 Sacramento Daily Union

snowsheds was a continuing expense. The quote on the next page shows how powerful the fires were and why concrete sheds were a great advancement.

The Problem

The sheds are peculiarly liable to destruction by fire. The passing locomotives emit sparks which lodge in the timbers which are as dry as cracklings, and this is a frequent source of disastrous fires. Besides this, forest fires and burning brush often ignite the sheds. The pine lumber of which the sheds are built is fat with pitch and thoroughly dried by the combined heat of the passing locomotives Inside and the rays of the summer sun without. This makes excellent fuel for the flames. And when they are once started they spread with lightning like rapidity along the line of sheds, as if it were a train of powder. The long line of sheds acts as a huge chimney with a powerful draft, and not much time is required for a small blaze to develop into a fire of ugly proportions. The protection of the sheds from the ravages of fire is a matter of prime importance. The sheds must be kept intact, for otherwise the line, of travel would be hopelessly blockaded in the winter season.

10/15/05 San Francisco Call

The Solution

The snowsheds were so important to the railrand and so much had been invested in them (75,000,000 baord feet of lumber for example) that the railroad had a mini industry devoted to their protection from fire.

There were the two watchmen on Red Mountain who had one of the first telephones in the country which they used to call Cisco where telegraphers would telegraph fire locations. In addition to the watchmen there were also 24 men patrolling the sheds on foot, twelve at a time, each on three mile beats. Each hour the track walkers would key into an electric box to show they were on the job.

When fires were spotted, it was the turn of the fire trains, always kept with full heads of steam so they were ready to go. There were 4 fire trains kept at 14 mile intervals at: Blue Canyon, Truckee, Cisco, and Summit as Donner Summit was referred to. Each had two 6500 gallon tanks and 2.5 inch hoses. The hoses issued so much volume that many men had trouble holding them, it "takes all a man's strength only to hold the hose."

Work of the brave and skillful crews whose duty it is to save from flames the great covered way of the Southern Pacific over the Sierra Nevadas

One of the most extraordinary fires in the records of the sheds occurred at Summit In 1892. It was caused by a coal burner sparking, and before It finished it had consumed 3,000 feet of sheds and 14 cars of lumber. It also burned the Summit fire train. This is why the fire was extraordinary.

When Shields, the engineer of the Summit fire train, got the alarm the fire was too near to wait for orders. Sacramento had not notified him that he had the right of way, but he took the responsibility and sent his train hurtling down to the rescue. At that time a high wind was blowing and flames were literally leaping 50 feet into the air. Also balls of fire were playing on the roof of the shed and bounding through the walls. With all this Engineer Shields found himself hemmed in by impenetrable flames. The fire was under the engine and sending jets of flame up through it, but Shields never faltered. He knew it was for him to save the situation. He did it. With remarkable coolness he backed the train through 70 feet of burning shed. Then a yell came from the fireman. "Track's spread!" he shouted. "Run, boys!" yelled Shields. "Train's a goner!" And run they did. A board was hacked off in a space below the flames and before the engine blew up engineer, brakeman fireman and volunteer crew had rolled, tumbled or slid down into a gorge, where they lay scared but safe. … But the story of the Blue Canyon train which started at the same instant for Summit is even more extraordinary.

Engineer Brown was guiding his train and in some manner it set fire to the sheds in the approach to Summit. Brown's firemen played the hose on the flames of, their own kindling until they were almost at Summit and here they found the situation unbearable. The fire train was literally between two fires. It could not go on and it could not go back. The rails looked like red hot, writhing snakes, and the heat was terrific. "Where's that blanked Summit train?" shouted Brown. "I don't see any water playing. Confound the Summit fire, anyhow. We'll drop back and stop our own private fire!" He did It, but when the excitement had cooled down there were only a few hundred feet of good track, on which the Blue Canyon train stood for two days till temporary tracks enabled it to get back to Its starting point. Three thousand feet of shed had burned.

So is the demon of the Sierra held In check. The sheds are his playground; rails, ties, and timbers his playthings. When the demon and all his imps are at play it is a brave sight. The roar of his laughter is terrific: the surge of his vast sighs of content sweep the mountain side. The brightness and glare of his eyeballs is awful to witness, and the swift rush of his feet bake the rocks. Legions of trees bow to his bidding: whole cohorts lend him their aid. For a brief period the demon enjoys a time of splendid and undisturbed madness. And then rushing down upon him, thundering through blazing sheds and pitchy tunnels, stopping for nothing, fearing nothing, come the conquerors, hurtling themselves straight into the heart of his domain, resolute, unafraid, powerful — the conquerors which but live to save life and property from his greedy clutch — the fire trains of the Sierra.

Fighting Fire in the Snowsheds

THE average passenger journeying over the Sierras usually utters a deep sigh of relief -when his train emerges from the snowsheds. They have formed one bleak, uninteresting section of the journey, relieved only by a monotonous succession of tantalizing glimpses of striking scenery through the breaks and cracks in a dead wall of grimy timbers. The cars have filled with suffocating smoke and life has been made miserable for a time. It is natural, then, that but little of interest should attach to the snowsheds. The ordinary traveler…knows little and cares less about the system which protects this valuable part of the railroad equipment from destruction by fire. For dull and uninteresting as the sheds themselves may be, they are, nevertheless, an indispensable and necessary part of mountain railroad construction. Upon their maintenance depend the safety and security of the leads of passengers and freight which form the heavy traffic over the mountain division. Accordingly, the preservation and protection of the snowsheds from the ravages of fire forms one of the meat interesting features of railroad administration In California.

The long line of snowsheds on the division between Sacramento and Sparks, Nev., begins at a point near Blue Canyon, and winds its tortuous way up the steep grades of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, over their summit, and down the eastern dope almost to Truckee. This stretch of forty miles of railroad is through the very heart of the Sierras, where the snows of winter fall to a great depth... and accumulate in great drifts, blocking and burying out of sight the ordinary highways of travel. To protect the railroad from this danger of interruption of communication and blockade of traffic, the snowsheds were built over the track... These sheds are ... substantially built, designed to withstand the fiercest onslaughts of nature's forces. The timbers are twelve and eighteen inches square, and the planks on the sides and roof an from two to four inches thick. The sheds are firmly braced and tied together, and anchored securely. The original cost of the snowsheds ...was once stated by Leland Stanford [as] $1,500,000. Last year the repairs and overhauling of the sheds was a charge of over $100,000. It Is little wonder... that the line of sheds is carefully watched and protected from fire.

The sheds are peculiarly liable to destruction by fire. The passing locomotives emit sparks which lodge in the timbers which are as dry as cracklings, and this is a frequent source of disastrous fires. Besides this, forest fires and burning brush often ignite the sheds. The pine lumber of which the sheds are built is fat with pitch and thoroughly dried by the combined heat of the passing locomotives Inside and the rays of the summer sun without. This makes excellent fuel... The sheds must be kept intact, for otherwise the line, of travel would be hopelessly blockaded in the winter season.

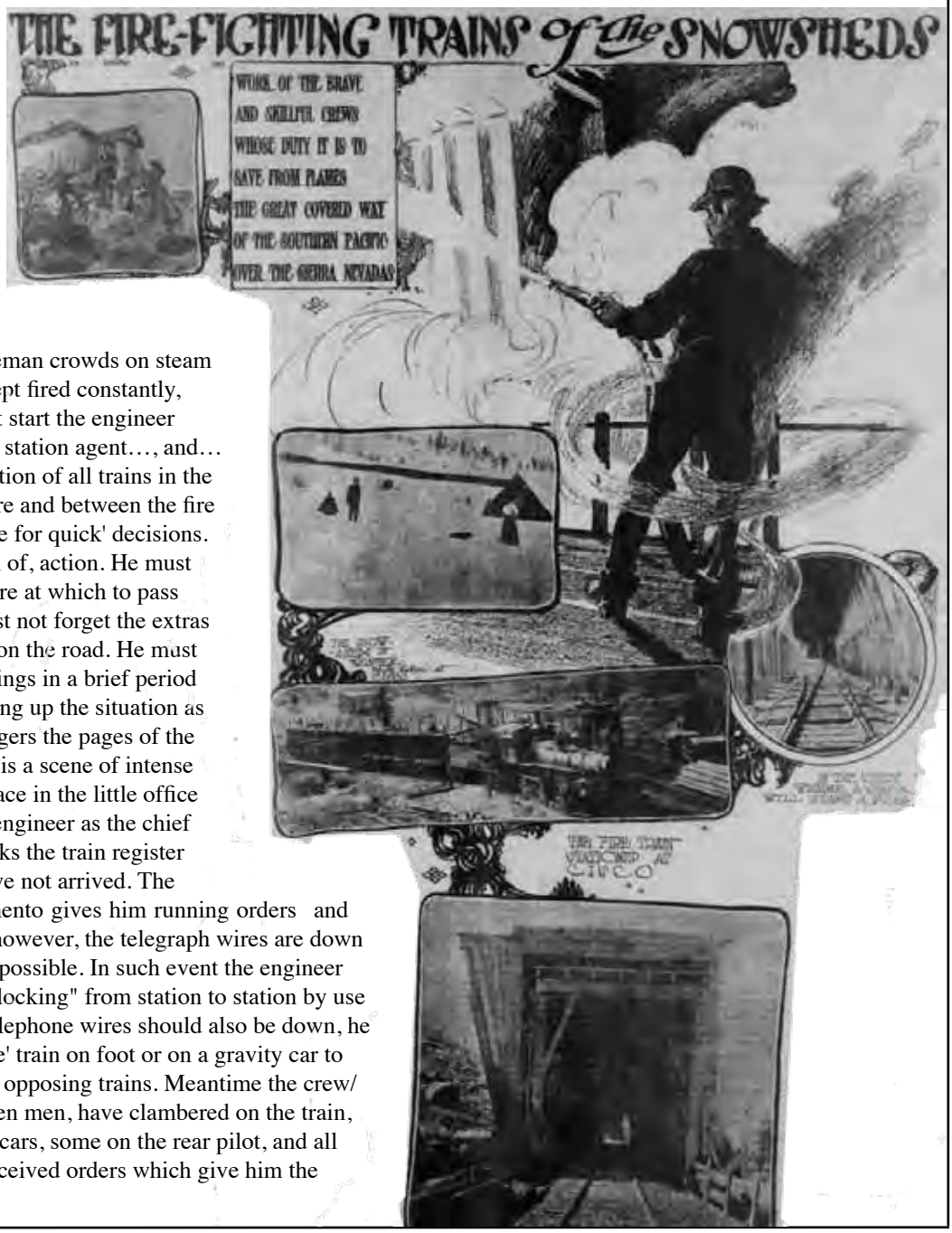
AND here, as elsewhere in the gigantic corporation, system and organization are necessary. A fire in the sheds is a costly blaze and one of the things most dreaded in railway circles, because of the danger to life and property involved and the interruption of traffic. The organization of the fire brigade must be and is as highly efficient and as thoroughly trained as any company in a metropolitan fire department. The system which secures this protection consists of two parts; first, the fire patrol, and second, the fire trains and their crews.... Eternal vigilance is the price of safety in the snowsheds, and herein is demonstrated the efficiency of the patrol. The track walkers are men constantly patrolling the track before and after trains pass through the sheds to inspect the condition of the track and to see that obstructions are removed to prevent accidents. Their beat is usually three miles in length. One of their most Important duties Is the detection of fire in the sheds. At short intervals along the line, about three-fourths of a mile apart, there are signal boxes, connected with the stations where the fire trains are located. When a trackwalker discovers a fire he turns In the alarm at the nearest signal box, and the alarm is registered at Summit, Blue Canyon and Truckee. The fact that fire has been discovered and an alarm turned in is at once reported to the superintendent of the division at division headquarters In Sacramento.

The main fire lookout is located on the top of Red Mountain, a high peak of the Sierras near Cisco. Red Mountain is about 8000 feet high. From Its summit almost the entire line of snowsheds is visible. A more suitable watch tower, than this lofty peak, rearing its head into the clear Sierra sky, could hardly be found anywhere. The exceedingly dry, clear atmosphere makes it possible to see distinctly for great- distances. The fire lookout is maintained day and night, and from this excellent point of vantage the first outbreak of fire can be located. With telescopes and field glasses trained on the sinuous line of sheds winding In and out among the mountains the lookout commands the situation absolutely. An incessant, unrelaxing vigil guards the line of travel from the attacks of the ravaging flames. The instant a fire is detected by the watchers Red Mountain the alarm is sent to the stations where the fire trains are held In waiting.

10/15/05 San Francisco Call

Fire Trains

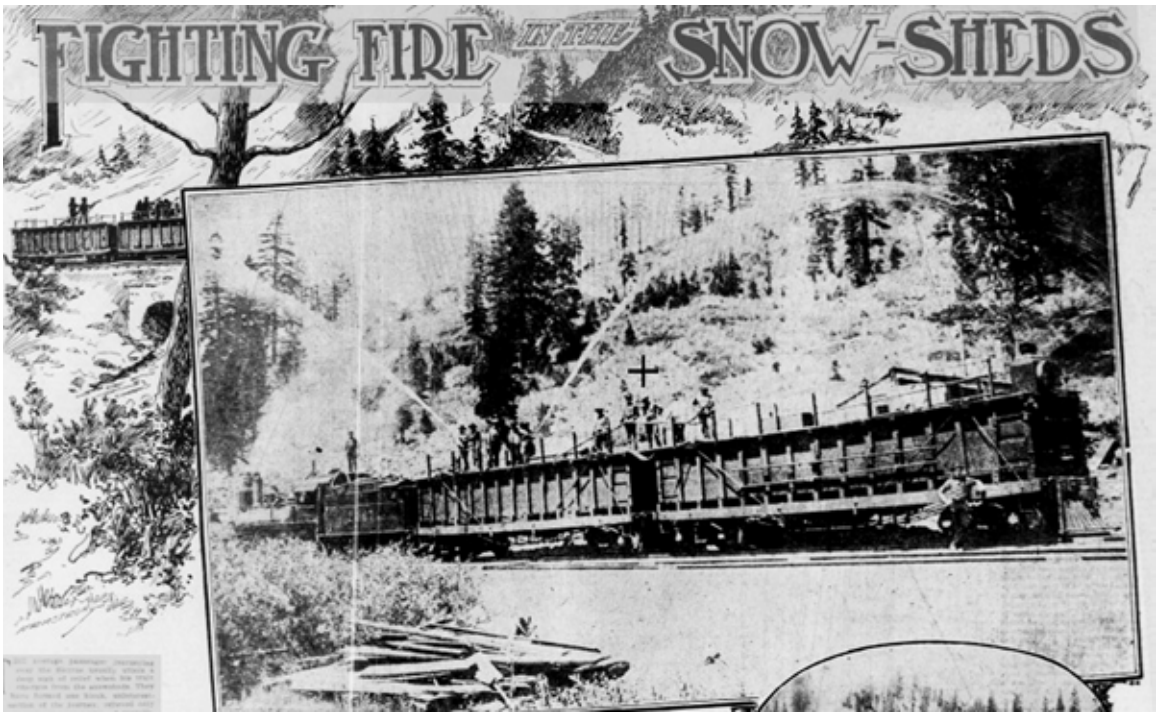
On the portion of the Sacramento division where the snowsheds are located there are three fire trains, one stationed at Summit, one at Cisco and one at Blue Canyon. Each train is made up of afire engine, which is a locomotive equipped with a powerful pump throwing three streams of water, a tender, and two water cars. The trains are also equipped with telegraph and telephone outfits. The cars have tanks capable of holding 18,500 gallons of water. They are fully equipped with fire hose, some of it on reels and some laid out on top of the cars, also ladders, axes, saws, ropes and pike poles. Around the top of the cars, on which the crew rides, runs a stout railing to keep the men from being pitched off when rounding curves on the way to the fires. The regular crew of the fire train consists of engineer, fireman and brakeman, who devote their whole time .to the fire train. When an alarm is turned in there are added to these a telegrapher, linemen, section men, and all others working for the company around the station who are not actually needed at home. It Is a time of genuine excitement at a station when an alarm Is received. The alarm, "Fire' In the sheds electrifies the air around the station. Where all was quiet before, relieved only by the throb of the engine of the fire train at… Intervals, now the scene is one of… activity. The shrill blasts of the locomotive whistle summon the crew, who came rushing from all quarters. The fireman crowds on steam In the engine, which is kept fired constantly, ready to i make an instant start the engineer rushes to the office of the station agent…, and… determines the exact location of all trains in the vicinity of the reported fire and between the fire and his station. It is a time for quick' decisions. He must map out his plan of, action. He must know where the sidings are at which to pass the regular trains. He must not forget the extras and specials that may be on the road. He must think of a multitude of things in a brief period of time. He is rapidly sizing up the situation as with feverish haste he fingers the pages of the time table and register. It is a scene of intense dramatic action taking place in the little office of the operator, with the engineer as the chief figure. The engineer checks the train register to see what trains due have not arrived. The superintendent in Sacramento gives him running orders and train rights. Sometimes, however, the telegraph wires are down and communication is impossible. In such event the engineer proceeds to the fire by "blocking" from station to station by use of the telephone: If the telephone wires should also be down, he sends a "man ahead of the' train on foot or on a gravity car to protect the fire train from opposing trains. Meantime the crew/ consisting of about a dozen men, have clambered on the train, some on top of the water cars, some on the rear pilot, and all await the start. Having received orders which give him the



absolute right of way over all other trains, - and the track being cleared, the engineer pulls open the throttle and the wild ride begins.

In less than three minutes after the receipt, of the alarm the.train is speeding away to the scene of danger. Every pound of steam that can be safely crowded on is applied in the race with the, flames. The engine and cars sway from side to side as they swing around the sharp curves, and the train flashes past the stations and blockhouses. It is a thrilling and dangerous ride. The speed attained on these runs of the fire train often exceeds a mile per minute, and some of the stretches or road are not built especially, for such exhibitions of record-breaking time. It certainly is a test of grit and pluck to guide a train in such a meteoric flight. In a few minutes the train has reached the scene of the fire. Then comes the real work of the run. The engineer usually takes charge of the situation and directs the forces in the fight with the fire. The crew work together with rapidity and precision. The hose Is detached from the car and attached to the pump on the engine, and powerful streams are* soon; playing on -the burning sheds. The water supply is in the tanks on the cars which are a part of the train. …Fighting flre in the sheds is sometimes an ugly piece of work as the heat becomes intense, owing to the highly inflammable character of .the material of which the sheds are built, and the surrounding; brush and tree easily ignite and add to the extent of the trouble. The blistering heat frequently causes the heavy steel rails to warp and twist, rendering it necessary to lay new track before trains can pass over the burned stretches. The heavy loss entailed by destructive flres in the sheds which occur every year makes this branch of railroad maintenance a vital part In the economy of administration. The fire train and crew are most important factor in the various branches of … The test comes when emergency calls them Into action to protect the line of communication between California and vie East. It Is then that they demonstrate their value.

10/15/1905 San Francisco Call



Miscellaneous YouTube Fun

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVazhu1_B-g

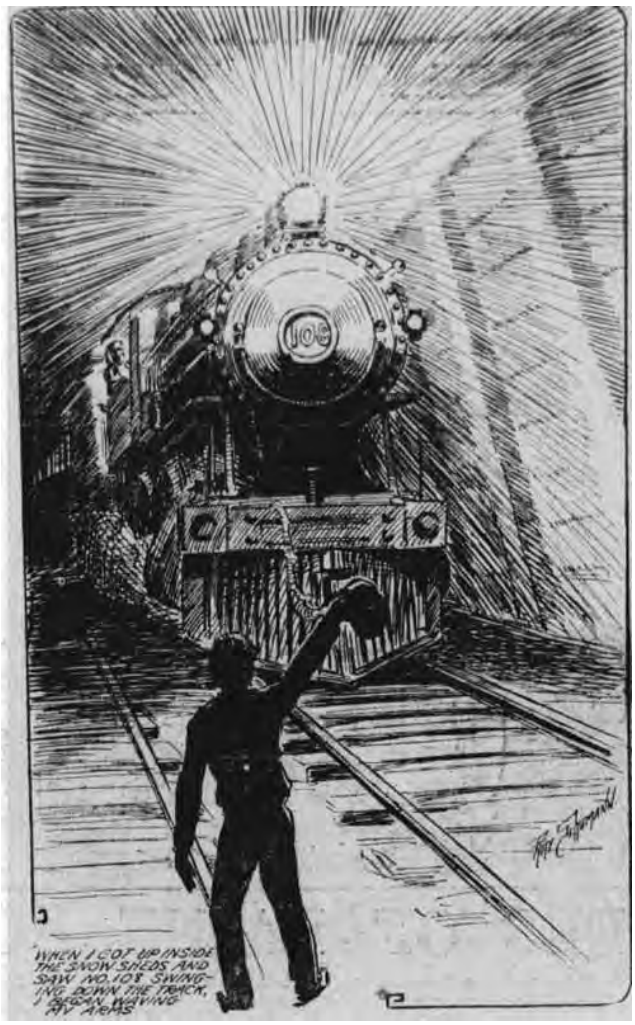
This is vintage footage (circa 1930) of ski touring and telemark at the top of Donner Pass before Sugar Bowl Ski Resort was even built. with pictures of telemarkers, sweeping vistas, Donner Summit Hotel and a trip to Tahoe from Soda Springs across Needle Peak. The film is 10 minutes long. It's accompanied by jazz. You've maybe never seen ski poles with such large baskets. If you are interested in videos from the 1960 Squaw Valley Olympics, got to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yr2CDRzRo4o&feature=related. Watch what comes up and look at the right side of the page for more links.

The Watchmen of Red Mountain

A popular form of literature for young people, before video, TV and electronic games, was stories that included morals or life issues wrapped in adventures. Boys who were honest and of strong moral character, regardless of obstacles, were successful in their endeavors. The Red Mountain snowshed fire lookout entered that literature, with moral a lesson in February of 1910 in the Junior Call, an insert in the regular newspaper.

The story opened with a 17 year old Jack Graham getting hired for the railroad fire lookout on Red Mountain. The superintendent is a little doubtful. Lookouts worked in pairs and Jack's predecessor had died of the fever. The predecessor's partner , Dave McLaughlin (also about 17) had been struck mute by the same fever. The superintendent suggested that Jack fire Dave as soon as he "learned the ropes."

Jack headed up the mountain on foot appreciating all the beauty he saw. Not long after learning the ropes, lightning caused a fire. The boys ran for the phone to call the telegraph operator at Cisco to call the fire train. The phone was dead. Oh no, what to do? A tree had fallen on the line. As the boys look down on the scene they can see the fire spreading on the dry wood. Oh no, a new danger: the spreading fire will burn the nearby trestle. No. 108, the 10:59 is coming. It's loaded with passengers.



The boys resolve to head downhill to Cisco. They'll warn the telegrapher in person. That soon proves too hard; they can't make it so decide to head for the tracks. If you have ever been to Red Mountain you will understand that some disbelief must be suspended here. This is fiction after all.

The boys head downhill following the wire. The forest is bewildering in the storm. Old landmarks are confusing now. The creek is a torrent. A stream is swollen with treacherous rolling rocks. A sharp wind blows out the lantern. Trees are blown down across the trail. Still the boys run unconscious of bruises and cuts. Getting close to the tracks, Jack makes a final leap and falls, hitting his head and breaking his leg. Dave runs on, but he can't yell any warnings; he's mute forget that even if he wasn't he couldn't yell loud enough to attract attention). The train and its unsuspecting passengers have no chance. They are doomed. Jack looks up from the ground; he hears the train roaring. Oh no, it will go over the missing trestle.

Jack wakes up in the hospital with his leg in splints. The train was saved. Dave had gotten to the tracks and waved and waved and... miraculously shouted. His voice had come back. Bravery is rewarded. Not betraying a friend is rewarded (because you see the initial handshake had started a friendship between the boys cemented when Jack sent a letter to the superintendent asking to keep Dave on and promising to do what Dave couldn't).

2010 Summit Pioneer Awards

Hannes Schroll

Like last year's and this year's other Summit Pioneer Awards recipients, Hannes Schroll made important contributions to Modern Donner Summit. When he was invited by Bill Klein (2009 Summit Pioneer Award recipient) to take a look at Donner Summit in 1938, he said, "We have to develop this." That development became Sugar Bowl. Finished in 1939, the Bowl was the first resort built as a destination ski resort in California. It had the first chairlift in California and the second in the nation. That all is well known along with the stories that go with the founding. You can revisit those by looking in our newsletter archive (on our website www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org) and reading the October, November, December, 2009 newsletters which celebrated Sugar Bowl's 70th anniversary.

Reading those newsletters will also tell you about Hannes' unique character. He was a champion and world record holding skier. The report of his skiing at the Mt. Ranier 1936 Olympic trials is a great story demonstrating his zest for life and doing what he loved with wild abandon. Other stories will give you insight into the character of this remarkable individual. He could go about the serious work of developing a ski resort and operating the business. He could see possibilities others couldn't see and then had the courage and fortitude to bring his visions to fruition. There was another side which made him even more interesting: the champion skier whooping and hollering down Mt. Ranier at times on one ski, the man

Dick Buek

Dick Buek was a local Donner Summit hero. He was a famous skier and one of only four Olympians from the Summit. The others are Hannes Schroll (1932), Starr Walton (1964), and Dennis Jones (1936 and Starr's uncle). Dick's Olympic games were 1952. He was a national downhill champion in 1952 and 1956 and was inducted into the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1974.

In the era of modern skiing that arrived in the 1950's, downhill became a premier event. Equipment and technique had improved so that skiers could go faster and straighter. Buek took advantage of the changes and excelled and was the first native American skier to be recognized in Europe and make them realize that the U.S. would have great skiers. He could go as hard and as fast as the top Europeans. There had been skiers before but none with the prominence of Dick Buek and so he gained recognition for U.S. skiing.

Was he the "madman" of Donner Summit as he was portrayed? Is skiing faster than almost everyone else crazy? Certainly one must have a certain personality and characteristics to take the chances and Dick Buek exhibited those. His various stunts, however, made him a legend on Donner Summit.

In the Spring of 1954 he was just back from Europe and showed up at the Soda Springs ski hill. His father ran the lift and their house was across the street. There was a Far West Ski Instructors' convention going on at the time and Dick decided he wanted to ski but he had

Auburn Ski Club

Without the Auburn Ski Club there would be no Modern Donner Summit.

California was the land of oranges and sunshine and movie stars in the old days. That was such a fixture in people's minds that when a proposal was made for California to host the 1932 winter Olympics, the response from Olympic officials was, "where?"

California is a diverse state. Not only is there lots of snow but there were always many people who wanted to enjoy it. One of those was Wendell Robie of Auburn, California. There was a natural connection between his joy in the Sierra and looking for raw materials for the family owned Auburn Lumber Co.

Wendell Robie thought there were great possibilities in winter sports in the Sierra, particularly on the Summit where there are a great number of ski days per year. He aimed to popularize winter sports. So the Auburn Ski Club was born in the winter of 1927-28 with Wendell Robie as president. The Club immediately began looking for places to ski.

By 1931 they had some land near Baxter on which there was a 75 foot ski jump and a toboggan and ski run. Dues were $1 a year. In 1933 the Club moved to Cisco on 125 acres of land they bought for $10 an acre and where it had a building (the foundation ruins are still evident across from the old stone buildings, the Forest Souvenir shop, on Old 40), a ski jump (at 300' the longest in the U.S.), and a ski run and rope tow

Hannes Schroll cont'd

who took Walt Disney's daughter to the top of the mountain and skied down with her on his shoulders, and the man who could greet early risers at the Sugar Bowl Lodge by yodeling loudly at the top of Disney and skiing straight down to the deck.

In building Sugar Bowl, Hannes Schroll changed the face of the Summit and helped usher in the modern era of winter sports.

Dick Buek cont'd

only loafers on his feet. He put on skis anyway slipping his feet into the toe irons and then tying on with the long thong bindings. He took some runs "striking awe into the watching instructors," according to one witness. How could anyone ski in loafers? He did three runs and then off he went.

Dick went to Sun Valley and got a job on the ski patrol. Before starting the job though, he decided to take a couple of runs. He went up to the lift with no ticket and hemmed and hawed…. he just wanted to schuss the Rock Garden, a run no one schussed before. It was rough and steep. The lift operator let him. Pretty soon, down came Dick asking to take another run. The lift operator was amazed and watched Buek come straight down again.

In 1956, he'd been in a motorcycle accident in the Bay Area. He'd gone under a truck and had not been expected to live. He lived and went on to win the national championship for the second time, but this time, almost only on one leg.

He was a great skier.

In the summer of 1954 Dick was working at the Soda Springs ski hill with Norm Sayler. The hill was then managed by Milt Hogel. Norm and Dick were sent to work with a cable splicer, John Johansen. Johansen was willing to teach them most of what he knew, but kept a few cable splicing secrets to himself, trade secrets he called them. Later in the summer, Milt asked if Norm and Dick could put a new cable on the "J" bar. Dick was sure he could splice it. He'd figured out the "trade secrets." Dick was clever.

Dick had a Piper Cub airplane. He'd just been drafted and wanted some excitement before going in. He decided to fly south. Since the plane had a small range, Dick had to land on roadways and go searching for gas. He'd fill the tanks and fill on board containers. While flying he'd figured out how to get gas from the on board containers into the plane's regular tanks. On his way south to South America to do some skiing, rebels commandeered his plane in Nicaragua. They used it to bomb the Capitol. The CIA brought Dick back to the U.S.

There was the story of Dick trying to pull a water skier with his plane on Donner Lake. He ran out of gas and crashed. You can read it in our May, 2010 newsletter.

Another flying story has Dick in a plane returning from Reno with a boat part and a friend. He did some rolls and looked at the gas gauge. Gas was low so they followed Old 40 up the canyon to the airport (which in those days was where the fruit inspection station is today). "Let's see how much gas we have," said Dick. He pulled out his watch and 23 seconds later, the engine quit. Dick glided the plane into a landing at the airport.

Dick helped Norm Sayler get a motorcyle fixed in our October, 2008 issue.

On Donner Summit Dick lived at what is now the Always Inn, just across the bridge from Soda Springs, backing on to the ski hill. Across the street he helped build the Buek Ski Shop.

Sometimes Dick would land his plane on the Lake Van Norden Rd. near his house, for convenience sake. After all, it was a long way to the aiport.

Around the Summit Dick was known as a good man as well as a legend skier. It was that second descriptor that earns him his Summit Pioneer Award. As a famous skier, he attracted a lot of attention. People come from around the world to visit Donner Summit and Dick Buek. He raised the profile of the Summit. He gave Soda Springs world-wide recognition. It was because of Dick Buek that Warren Miller referred to Soda Springs in some of his ski movies.

You can see a portrayal of Dick Buek, played by Beau Bridges, in "The Other Side of the Mountain" which is the Jill Kinmont Story. Jill was a champion skier who was paralyzed in an accident. Dick visited her during her rehabilitation many times. He was a favorite of hers.

Even though he was a superb pilot, who owned two planes, Dick crashed into Donner Lake a second time. He'd been practicing stalls with a passenger. Perhaps there was ice on the wings. One friend thinks perhaps his passenger froze at the controls as the plane stalled. Dick was 27; it was November 3, 1957. What could he have accomplished had he lived longer?

Was Dick Buek a "madman" or was he something more?

Auburn Ski Club cont'd

where the freeway now sits. In 1937 they even had the first night skiing in Northern California. When the State decided to build the Interstate, the Auburn Ski Club lost their property but were able take the settlement and buy 600 acres at what is now Boreal.

The Auburn Ski Club did a number of things to popularize winter sports. One was to sponsor competitions and teams. Second, they hosted demonstrations of ski jumping. For example they built a ski jump at the 1939 Golden Gate Exhibition on Treasure Island. The exhibiition highlighted famous ski jumpers. For one event in Berkeley, they hauled snow by truck from the mountains. For the Treasure Island affair they used machine made "snow." These activities raised the visibility of winter sports and built popularity.

All of the demonstrating and sponsoring was for naught however, if the public could not get to the snow. Realizing that Highway 40 was the path to great Summit snow, the Club organized an outing for State legislators in 1931. On January 18, 1931 65 automobiles left Auburn for Sacramento to pick up the legislators and their families for a day in the snow. A motorcycle escort led the way into the Sierra. The legislators, and thousands of people who followed along, saw exhibitions of skiing and ski jumping. Despite prohibition, they enjoyed alcohol too. Some legislators even tried skiing.

"Here in the Sierra is a ski country made to the liking of the most exacting (skier), with wide open snow fields only a few feet from your car, inviting ski expeditions in every direction."
Challenging the Mountains The Life and Times of Wendell T. Robie page 81

Over two thousand cars had followed the legislators to the Sierra, to the end of the plowed road. The resulting traffic jam as everyone tried to leave, must have made a big impression on the legislature, because they quickly voted "sincere thanks… to… Auburn Ski Club" and later passed a bill to plow Highway 40. What is now the Sugar Bowl Academy at the top of Old 40 on the Summit, was the dormitory and maintenance building for the snow plow operators. Making Highway 40 into an all weather highway, opened the Summit to winter visitors. More lodges would be built to house skiers and ski areas would open all along Highway 40, for example: Rainbow, Kingvale, Soda Springs, Clair Tappaan, Lake Mary/Signal Hill (now Donner Ski Ranch), and of course, Sugar Bowl.

The Auburn Ski Club opened the Sierra to winter sports and that's a pretty good legacy.

"Here in the Sierra is a ski country made to the liking of the most exacting (skier), with wide open snow fields only a few feet from your car, inviting ski expeditions in every direction." page 81

"Last year, 23,000 motorists visited the Auburn winter sports area, with Sundays breaking all records for travel on the Auburn-Tahoe Highway. Such a road leading to the mountain snow areas marks a path to a new appreciation of the value of life in California. California, long heralded as the 'Land of Sunshine and Flowers,' can well be proud of her winter sports facilities. Certainly, no state west of the Rockies is better suited for snow sports. Here, in the same day, one can gather wild flowers and throw snowballs. Praise her for fruit and flowers, but add a lusty cheer for her newest and most promising attraction – scintillating snow sports."

Wendell Robie in National Motorist
quoted in Challenging the Mountains

Heritage Trail Shuttle Buses

You won't want to miss the 3rd annual Heritage Trail on August 7th and 8th which features 19 museums from Roseville to North Lake Tahoe. Admission is free and all locations are open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. both days.

We are offering three Bus Tours this year. Two of the tours depart from and return to the Gold Country Fairgrounds in Auburn. The Saturday tour, Discover the Mountains, will stop at the Big Bend Visitor Center, Golden Drift Museum, Colfax Area Heritage Museum, and the Forest Hill Divide Museum. The Sunday tour, Explore the Valley, stops at the Griffith Quarry Museum, Maidu Museum, Roseville Historical Society Carnegie Museum, Roseville Telephone Museum and the Rocklin Historical Society Museum. This year Tsuda's Old Town Eatery will take your lunch order, box it up and bring it to the bus for you! Call them at 530-823-2233 to place your order.

This year for the first time we are offering a Mountain-Lake Bus Tour on Saturday. It will leave from the Sugar Bowl parking area on Donner Pass Road (56 miles east of Auburn). The stops include the Donner Summit Historical Society Museum, Western SkiSport Museum, and the Gatekeeper's Museum and Watson Cabin in Tahoe City. All passengers on this tour will need to bring a sack lunch.

Call 530-889-6500 to reserve your spot on any of the three bus tours. They fill up fast, so call today. For the most up to date information on The Heritage Trail, visit www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.com .

D.S.H.S.

2nd Annual

Donner Summit Historical Society

Summit Pioneer Awards

Aug. 14 2 PM

honoring:

The Auburn Ski Club

Without the Auburn Ski Club there would be no modern Donner Summit.

Dick Buek

Was he the "madman" of Donner Summit:?

Hannes Schroll

"Austrian skimeister"
Daredevil
Champion skier
Visionary & Sugar Bowl founder

Refreshments 11-4 P.M.

Downtown Soda Springs at the blinking light

"Members of the Donner Summit Historical Society can take great pride in the support they provide for our Soda Springs museum which opened last year, for our 20 Mile Museum along old highway 40, our programs, and for this newsletter. We invite you to become a new member or renew your membership if you haven't already done so."

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org

Membership 2010

I/we would like to join The Donner Summit Historical Society and share in the Summit's rich history.

_____ New Membership

_____ Renewing Membership

_____Individual Membership - $30

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

CITY _____STATE____ZIP _____

(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

_____Family Membership - $50 _____Friend Membership - $100 _____Sponsor - $250

_____Patron - $500 _____ Benefactor - $1000 _____Business - $250 _____Business Sponsor - $1000

Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Sugar Bowl Lake Mary Evenings

Each Saturday evening until the end of August (except 8/14), Sugar Bowl will again be putting on evening entertainments at its Lake Mary facility.

The Lake Mary facility is on the shores of Lake Mary. Good buffet dinner is served and entertainment around the campfire follows.

Reservations are recommended.

Each evening will benefit a local non-profit:

7/10 Truckee Donner Historical Society
7/17 Truckee Donner Land Trust
7/24 Kid Zone
7/31 Sugar Bowl Academy
8/7 Arts for the Schools
8/21Pacific Crest Trail Association
8/28 Donner Summit Historical Society

Menus and other information at: http://www.sugarbowl.com/summer-dining