

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

January, 2013 issue #53

Pt II Auburn Ski Club & Popularizing Winter Sports

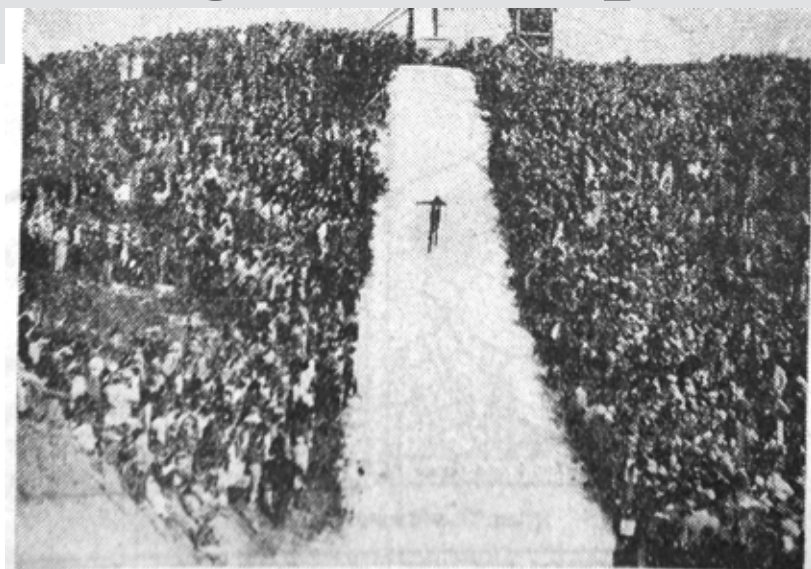
Last Month's lead was about the attempts by the Auburn Ski Club to popularize participant skiing and winter snow sports. The Auburn Ski Club had a lodge and ski area at Cisco Grove and was responsible for convincing the State legislature to keep Highway 40 open all winter (1931).

One of their ideas to popularize participant winter sports was ski jumping exhibitions in Berkeley in 1934 and 1935. The events drew thousands of people as you can see to the right, but did not do well financially. There were too many freeloaders.

Even though the 1935 event lost money again "Wendell T Robie and his competent aides feel repaid, for they believe they are doing a great deed for snow sports in California." (San Francisco Examiner January 14, 1935). The club decided to discontinue their annual event. They would try again at the 1939 Treasure Island World Exposition, but that's a different story and that's for next month. You'll have to keep your subscription current so you don't miss that.

Even though money was lost, the idea was not a loss.

"Many of the spectators had never seen "ski-jumping" and were thrilled. "As propaganda to persuade people in the bay district to take a fling at such snow sports in the high altitudes, the event



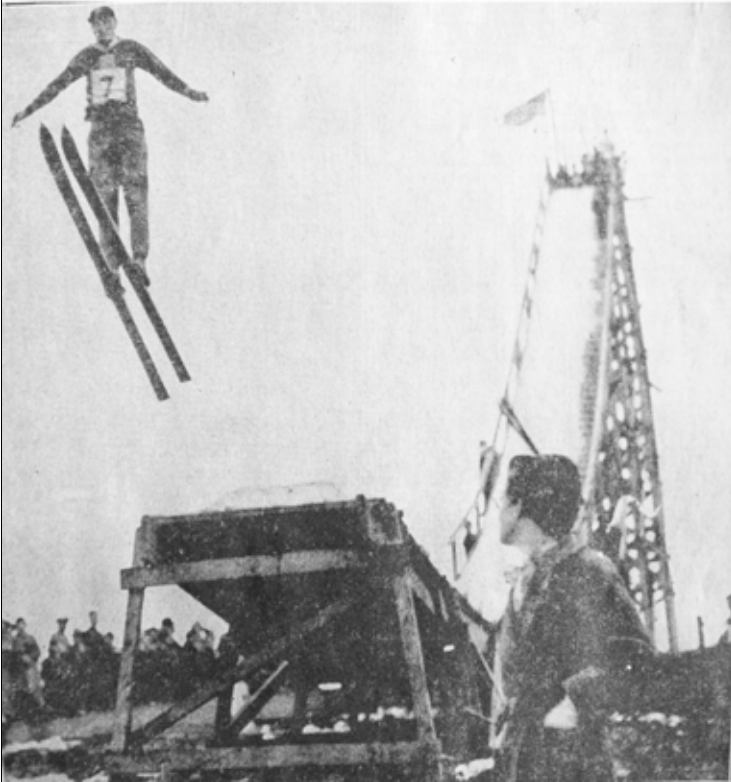
Down the Chute

WHEN THE Post-Enquirer exclusively told you last year that there would be 40 carloads of snow and skiing in the shadow of the Campanile, not even the U. C. authorities would confirm it. But the Auburn Ski club put on a regular big league ski meet, with Roy Mikkelson and other stars competing. Approximately 80 to 100,000 people came to see—and saw such action as above. January 6, 1935, is the date for the next tourney. Post-Enquirer photos of 1933 Berkeley ski meet.

"a great ribbon of white down the Berkeley hillside, curving at the bottom. Four thousand spectators inside the fenced-in area marking the paid admission territory. Additional thousands straining eyes from the reservoir atop the hills from the north fence side, and from vantage points down Hearst Avenue.

quote: Berkeley Gazette January 14, 1935
(picture above, Oakland Post Enquirer)

With the Sky Riders Flying Without at Trapeeze



Snow En Route for Ski Tourney at Berkeley

By ROY CUMMINGS

Winter is coming. Yes, I knew it has been here for some time, but it is coming with all its vengeance and icy blasts, with its white blanket and its crusted surface.

The winter I am talking about left the high Sierras today, six carloads of it, and it will arrive in Berkeley Saturday morning.

This winter means snow, clean pure snow, and it is coming to Berkeley for the most novel sports event ever attempted in the bay region.

San Francisco Call Bulletin January 11, 1934

Berkeley Snows Ski Jumpers— Crowd Loves It

But the Boys Take Over
Field as Experts De-
part Hastily

By R. S. CLAMPETT

They had a snow carnival in Berkeley yesterday—and plenty of hairy-chested Scandinavian ski enthusiasts came flying through the air, landing, helter skelter, here and there upon the quiet Berkeley hillside.

There's a snow fight, too, at the end of the festivities, which provides an opportunity for the youth of Berkeley—the same opportunity they seized a year ago when the first of these annual slush affairs was held.

San Francisco Chronicle
January 14, 1935

went over with a bang.” ([San Francisco Daily Commercial News](#) January 15, 1935)

“This business of engaging in snow sports during winter months is becoming quite a craze all over the country...a rushing business to the winter resorts in the high altitudes may be expected.” ([SF Commercial News](#) 1/15/35)

There was further memorable fun. At the conclusion of the ski jumping "pandemonium ensued" as the Berkeley youngsters got into the snow, "Following his last jump yesterday, it seemed that every youngster in the East bay swarmed onto the snow, and in a moment hundreds of snowball battles were in progress."

“Kindergarten, grammar school, high school and university boys became a swerving mass. Dogs barked, adults ducked – some too late – and officials ran. Great hunks of snow came to earth from the 85 foot tower with a sickening thud. Pellets of snow whizzed past and sometimes against heads. Youth reigned and their elders quaked in terror and also – pain.” ([Berkeley Gazette](#) January 14, 1935)

Capitalizing on the popularity of the event, during the competition the Southern Pacific announced an excursion to the snow to leave Saturday evening and return Monday morning. “Instantly, thousands of persons expressed their determination to be included in the party.” ([San Francisco Daily Commercial News](#) 1/15/35) This may have been the birth of the Snowball Express which would take skiers regularly to Donner Summit, to a specially built train station in the snowsheds at Norden. But that’s another story too.

editor:
Bill Oudegeest
209-606-6859
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

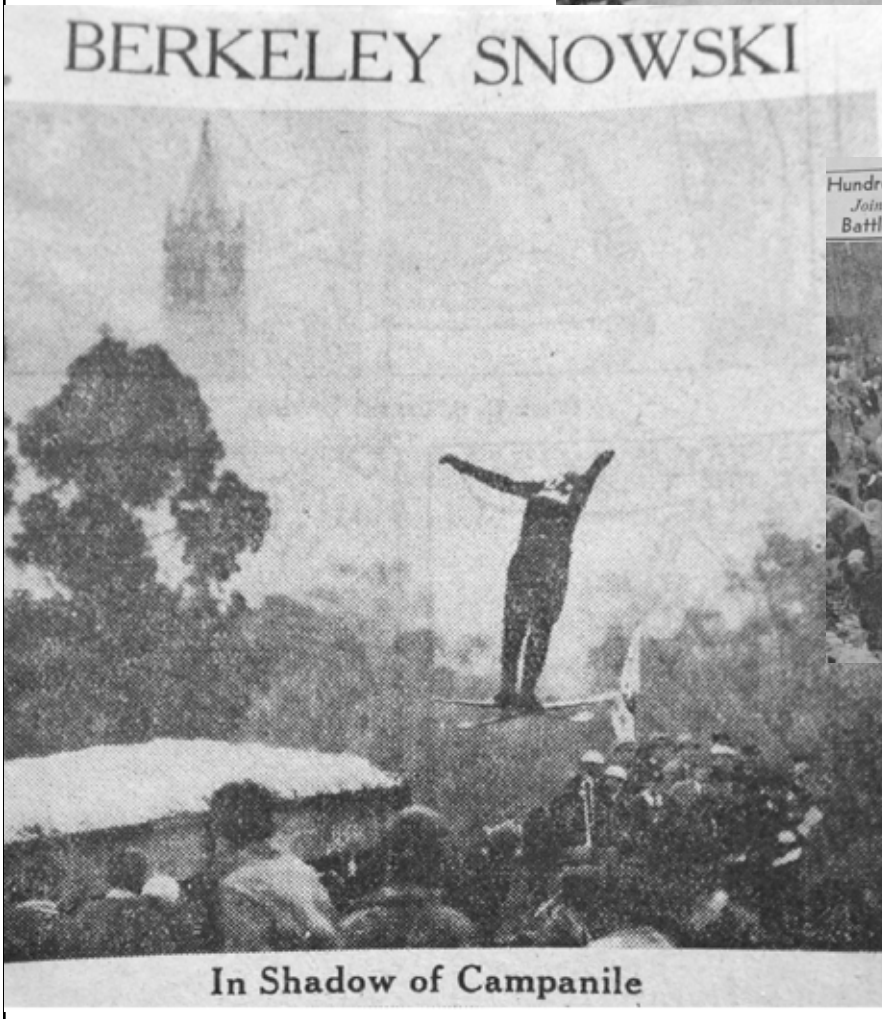
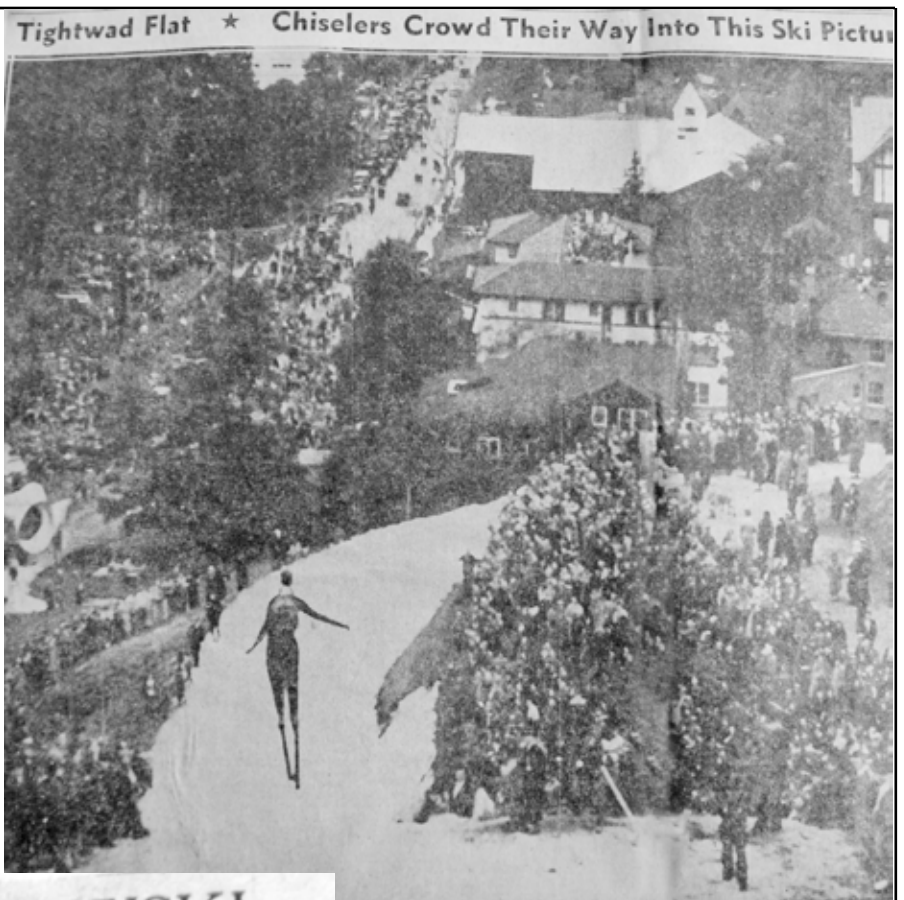
Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society



Contestants: Halvor Mikkelson, Rolf Wigaard, Paul Christiansen, Roy Nicholas (there are five in the picture but only 4 names left to right)

Right:
San Francisco Chronicle January 14, 1935

Below:
Oakland Post Enquirer January, 1934



This article would not have been possible without the help of Bill Clark, executive director of the Auburn Ski Club and the Western Ski Sport Museum at Boreal. He loaded our research staff down with a folders full of press clippings, pictures, and a couple of books of bound ski magazines. Thanks Bill.

Wendell Robie - Visionary

*40 Minutes
by
Wendell Robie*



PREXY OF SKI

WENDELL ROBIE, president of the Auburn Ski Club, announces plans complete for the second annual ski meet at Berkeley, near U. C. next Sunday afternoon.

Oakland Post Enquirer
January 3, 1935

**BOYS MENACE
SNOW SHIPPED
FOR CONTEST**

Berkeley Railroad Men Save
Supply Imported for
Ski Jumping Competition

Oakland Tribune
January 14, 1935



Snow coming to Berkeley was a delight for the kids as well as the spectators. Guards were set to guard the snow before hand and then afterwards, kids tore down the fences to get at the snow and a huge snowball fight ensued as you can see above. Roy Mikkelsen is in the inset.

If skiing was to become popular as a participant sport rather than just as a spectator sport there would have to be some visionaries who would do the popularizing.

On Donner Summit there were a number of those individuals. Dennis Jones built Soda Springs Ski Area. Johnny Ellis had three lifts at Lake Mary and what is now Donner Ski Ranch as well as plans for a resort and funicular up Mt. Judah. Hannes Schroll saw the "sugar bowl" and immediately said, "We have to develop this," he said. The "Sugar Bowl" is perfect for skiing. The "this" of course was Sugar Bowl and the first chair lift in California. The Hutchinson Brothers built Hutchinson Lodge and the Sierra Ski Club. Bill Klein changed the way skiing was taught introducing uniform teaching techniques.

Wendell Robie, left, was one of those visionaries whose vision would change at least a small part of the world. He owned the Auburn Lumber Co. and that proximity to the mountains and snow was an opportunity. He helped found the Auburn Ski Club, sponsored events, brought in skiers, and was responsible for Highway 40 becoming a winter-use highway. In many ways he opened the Sierra to skiing. Part of his legacy today is the Boreal Ski Area which sits on land owned by the Auburn Ski Club and the Western Ski Sport Museum.

Roy Mikkelsen Wins

Roy Mikkelsen's



Roy Mikkelsen won the 1935 event. He had immigrated from Norway in 1924 and found his way to California where he went to work for the Auburn Lumber Co. and Wendell Robie.

He was a famous ski jumper and was on the U.S. Olympic teams in 1932 and 1936. He was the National Champion in 1931 and 1935.

Roy was elected to the Ski Hall of Fame in 1964.

There is a statue of him at Boreal Ski Area.

BERKELEY SKI MEET IS WON BY MIKKELSEN

Auburn Jumper Outdistances Field Under Artificial Conditions

BERKELEY, Jan. 14.—Roy Mikkelsen, Auburn Ski Club expert who leaped 137 feet to outdistance a field of capable performers by a wide margin, stands out as the West's best prospect for a place on the 1936 Olympic Games team.



ROY MIKKELSEN.

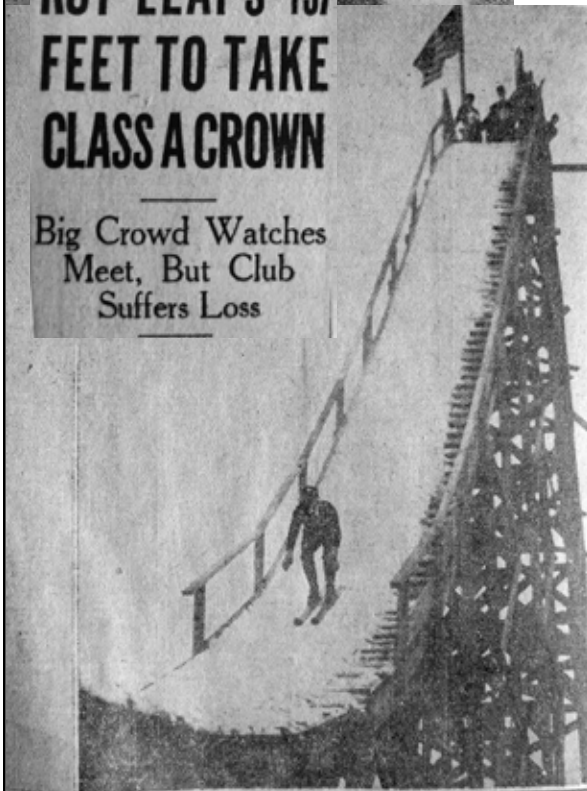
Jumping before several thousand paying customers, and many more who viewed the experts from a distance of a few hundred feet, Mikkelsen crawled through fences too rapidly for the police and national guardsmen to stop them. Mikkelsen made an exhibition leap of 139 feet after the meet.

The Auburn lumber clerk's performance was remarkable, in that he was leaping from an eighty-five-foot artificial runway of wood covered with snow on the green Berkeley hills. Mikkelsen has leaped nearly ninety feet better than his best jump yesterday, but experts say he has never jumped better in his life, considering conditions.

Sacramento Bee January 14, 1935

ROY LEAPS 137 FEET TO TAKE CLASS A CROWN

Big Crowd Watches Meet, But Club Suffers Loss



Man-Made Snowstorm Falls On Berkeley for Ski Sport

White Cargo' Brought 200 Miles From Sierra for Sunday Carnival—Pick of Coast Ski Jumpers Will Compete

AN artificial snowstorm, produced by a husky crew of workmen as they shoveled the contents of a snow train into trucks and spread it over the hillside at the head of Hearst-av, was taking place in Berkeley today. It marked the final touch upon preparations for the novel ski jumping tournament to be staged tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock. The snow arrived in good shape

San Francisco Examiner January 14, 1935

San Francisco News January 12, 1935

Beacon Hill A.K.A. Soda Springs



On these couple of pages is most of an old Soda Springs Ski Area brochure that sits in our archives. Beacon Hill is the old name for the Soda Springs Ski Area. It was called Beacon Hill because a beacon sat atop it to guide planes across the Summit on the Transcontinental air route (see our July, '11 issue). The hotel across the way, next to the Soda Springs Hotel, was called the Beacon Hill Lodge. It burned in the 1970's but the foundation is still there.

Beacon Hill was founded by Dennis Jones in 1929 when he cleared the first run which was 40 feet wide (see "The Remarkable Dennis Jones" in our February, '09 issue). He may have built the first rope tow on Donner Summit (there is a question about that since Johnny Ellis says he built the first one (see August, '09). Dennis did build the first lift though, an "Up Ski." (see what one looked like in our December, '11 issue).

Dennis was the son of Oscar Jones who built the Soda Springs Hotel. His uncle, Herstle, built Rainbow Lodge and Nyack Lodge. His sister Madelyn and her husband, Stan (Bud) Walton, built the Donner Summit Ski Ranch.

The Sitzmark, below, sat in the middle of the Soda Springs ski hill and was a little cafe. If you are a long time skier you know what a "sitzmark" is.

Soda Springs Hotel is easily accessible by automobile, train and bus. The hotel itself is located on Victory Highway, No. 40, which is open to traffic all year. Special highway patrols provide safety for motorists in all weathers.

Just 200 feet behind the hotel, is Soda Springs railroad station, on Southern Pacific's Overland Route, with trains leaving daily for the east and west. Buses drop guests at the hotel door.

New low winter rates, on the European plan, make "snow vacations in comfort" possible for the whole family. You will enjoy lodging at Soda Springs Hotel for the night—for the week-end—or for the season.

The SITZMARK

Sitzmark Ski Lodge, half-way up Beacon Hill, is the place to drop in for lunch, or for snacks between ski runs.

Eat on the sun porch and watch experts hurtle over the top of Beacon. Or take a table near one of the great windows that overlooks frozen Lake van Norden. Or toast your toes by the roaring fire, and stretch and talk.

Ask for information on dormitories and accommodations for private parties at the Sitzmark.



Winter calls you to new ski thrills on Beacon Hill

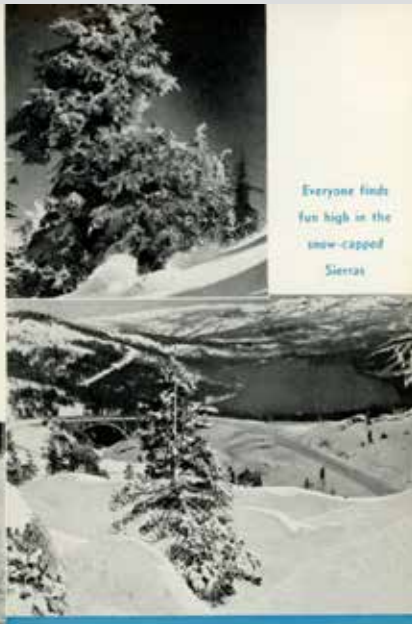


From the DSHS Archives

Soda Springs, on top of the high Sierras, is a vacation paradise in the center of California's finest winter playground.

Here ideal ski conditions prevail in the dry, keen air of a 7000 foot altitude. There are plenty of easy practice slopes for beginners, intermediate runs, and steep, smooth, timber-free courses for experts.

Two rope tows and a J-bar type ski lift carry skiers up the practice slopes and to the summit of Beacon Hill—a rise of 1500 feet from the Soda Springs Hotel. Radiating from the hotel are miles of mountain trails for cross country skiers. Skiing by floodlight, dancing, cards and indoor games furnish evening entertainment.



Everyone finds fun high in the snow-capped Sierras



SODA SPRINGS SKI SCHOOL

On the long slopes of Beacon Hill, just back of Soda Springs Hotel, is a complete ski school. Classes range from beginners' exercises to championship technique, under the skillful teaching and guidance of Earl Edmunds.

Rates for class ski instruction:

Single lesson	\$2.00
Whole day	3.00
Four lessons	5.00
Ten lessons	10.00

Soda Springs Hotel maintains a rental department and expert fitter for skis, poles, boots, etc.



The HOTEL

Soda Springs Hotel is famous for its friendly mountain hospitality—Western style! An open fire in the large lounge welcomes you. There is an attractive cocktail lounge, and dining room space for 160 hungry sports fans. The staff is eager to help with your individual needs, and ensure comfort and pleasure during your visit. Guest rooms are spacious, and a new addition, completed this year, increases the room accommodations. Within the hotel are a U. S. Post Office, telephone and telegraph service. Doctors and first aid assistance are immediately available.

WINTER RATES HOTEL, SITZMARK & DORMITORIES

• SODA SPRINGS HOTEL

44 rooms accommodating two in each room. 75 dormitory beds; 35 for women, 40 for men.

Rates on European Plan:

Single without bath	\$ 4.00
Single with bath	5.00
Single connecting bath	4.50
Double without bath	6.00
Double with bath	8.00
Double connecting bath	7.00

New Addition on European Plan:

Single without bath	5.00
Single with bath	7.00
Double without bath	8.00
Double with private bath	10.00

Dormitory Space:

For one per night (bedding furnished) 2.00

• SITZMARK SKI LODGE

Dormitory accommodations for 30 people. Ideal for week-end parties. Rates on application.

FOR RESERVATIONS, WRITE OR CALL
SODA SPRINGS HOTEL
 VICTORY HIGHWAY, U. S. NO. 40
 SODA SPRINGS, CALIF.
 J. O. JONES & SON, PROPS.

PRINTED BY E. J. S. A.

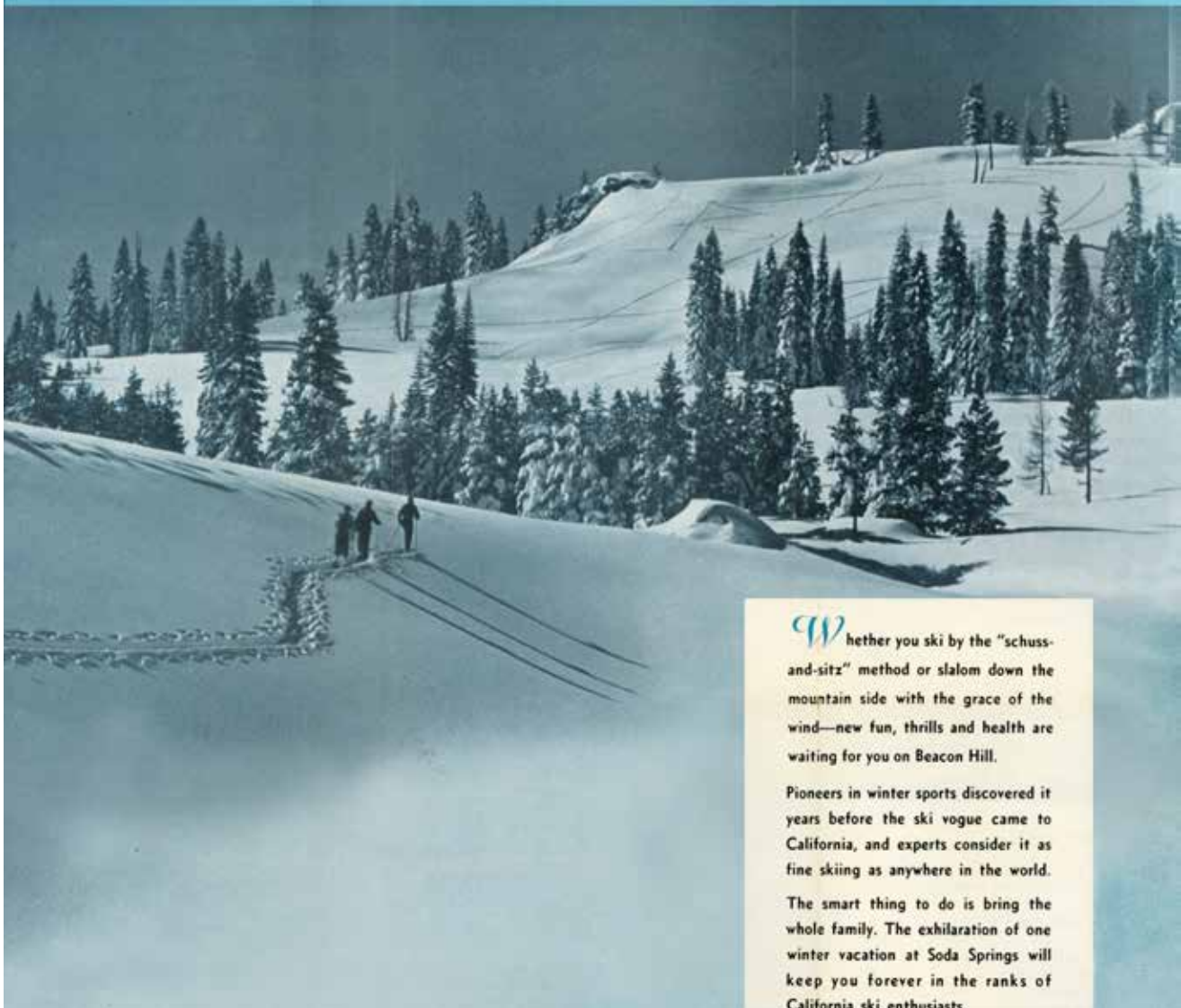
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"PhotoShopping" Beacon Hill ?

This is one of the inside panels of the Soda Springs Ski Area brochure. The wrinkles have been removed and there was a little re-arranging of parts with PhotoShop so it would better fit the page here. When we were looking at this initially we cocked our heads and puzzled. Well, it does look like Soda Springs, but then again it doesn't. Apparently they had PhotoShop in the old days too. The top is Soda Springs. The bottom is somewhere else pasted in, invisibly, to make a better advertisement.

Apparently we can't trust the people in the old days either.

A VACATION PARADISE ON TOP OF THE SIERRAS



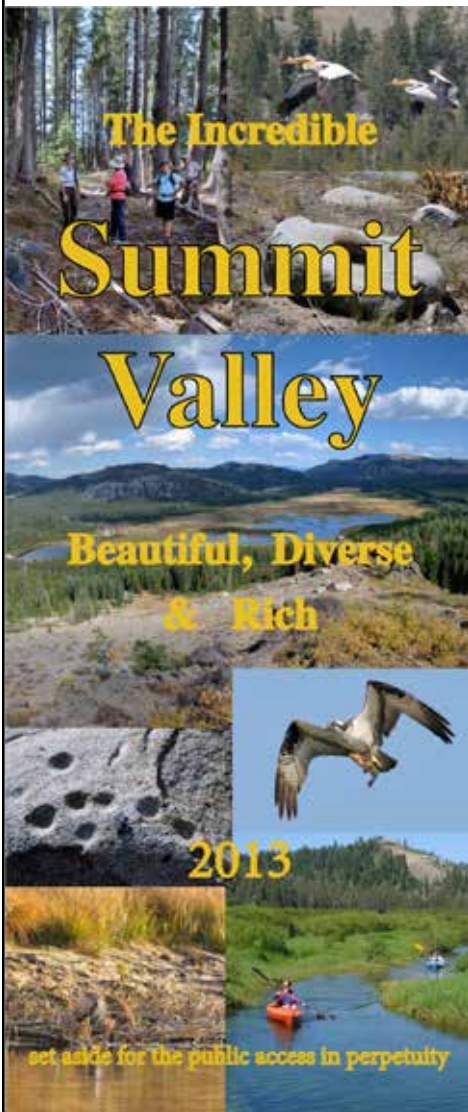
Donner Summit – Extraordinary

With the Land Trust having completed the Royal Gorge acquisition of 2900 acres of Donner Summit we have the opportunity to set aside for preservation and public access in perpetuity, something extraordinary.

In the Royal Gorge acquisition lands, which includes Summit Valley (Van Norden), there are many opportunities for recreation: mountain biking, hiking, walking, lepidoptery, photography, bird watching, plein air painting, and cross-country skiing.

The area is amazingly diverse biologically. There are over a hundred species of birds that visit Summit Valley and Donner Summit. There are 115 species of butterflies, 16 species of amphibians, 500 species of plants, and many dozens of species of mammals. Some of those species are “special Status.”

It is the history that really sets the area apart. Donner Summit is the most important historic spot in California and maybe the entire Western United States. Native Americans have been traversing Donner Pass and Summit Valley for thousands of years. They came to spend their summers away from the Nevada heat and to trade with California Indians. In Summit Valley there are over a dozen mortar sites, some with many mortars. The Native Americans had ground the mortars into the Sierra granite over many generations as they ground their seeds. There are many metates (larger grinding surfaces) scattered around as well. In one location there are also cupules (small depressions ground into the granite possibly for mystical reasons) and some petroglyphs.



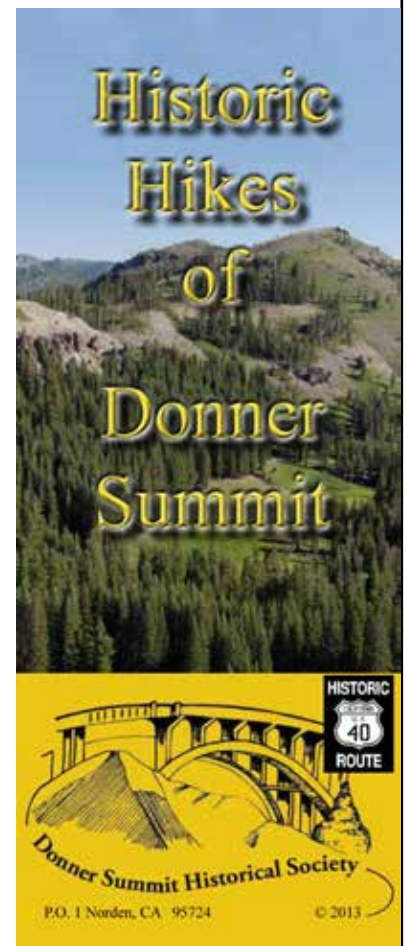
The first wagons to reach California came through Summit Valley after the emigrants had conquered the hardest obstacle on their journey: the Sierra and Donner Pass. The first transcontinental railroad goes through Summit Valley as does the first transcontinental highway and the first transcontinental telephone line. Overhead, the first transcontinental air route passed over Summit Valley, the route marked by beacons on the peaks surrounding the valley.

In Summit Valley there is a piece of the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. that was hidden for almost a hundred years by Lake Van Norden. There is also a beautiful remnant of the Emigrant Trail as it winds through the forest on the edge of the meadow.

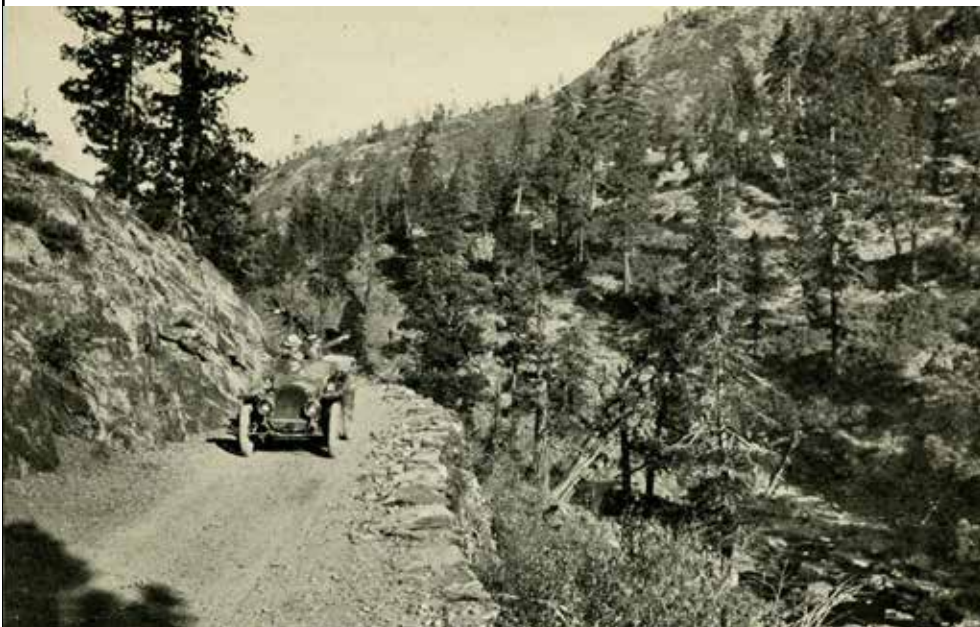
Acquiring Summit Valley and the whole Royal Gorge acquisition is an amazing achievement, accomplished in just a few months by a coalition of many groups led by the Land Trust. It will open previously private property to public access and the opportunity to enjoy what the Summit has to offer.

Next Month we'll begin a series of stories focusing in the incredibly rich history of Summit Valley. Right is a new brochure of the Historical Society that will go to print now that escrow has closed. It will be available when hiking season rolls around.

To the left is a new brochure, sponsored by many local businesses and the Historical Society. It includes information about Summit Valley geology, birds, butterflies, Native Americans, history, and wildflowers. Both brochures have maps and are large (17X16 and 17X14 inches)

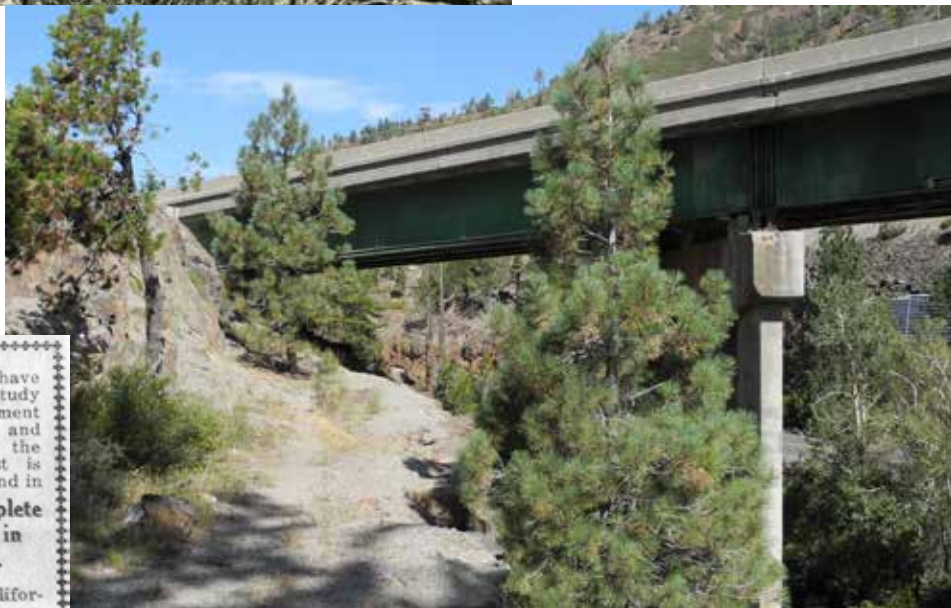


Then & Now with Art Clark



Across the Continent – 1915

Before Interstate 80, before Highway 40, there was the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road. Passing other traffic would have been a real problem, along with the livestock that was moved from winter to summer pastures along the route. Thanks go to Bill Oudegeest for figuring out the location just west of Big Bend at 39° 18.301'N 120° 31.579'Wt



For years we have made a careful study of skiing equipment and accessories and can assure you the best and newest is always to be found in

The Most Complete Stock of Skis in The Sierras.

We introduced Anderson Laminated Skis to California last year and believe these fine laminated skis and Northland solid skis excell all of European manufacture. In bindings we offer

HAUG, ANDERSON, SEEBERG and NORTHLAND all moderately priced.

Bindings are mounted by experts. Skis made or repaired in the most experienced ski shop in California.

SUMMER AND WINTER

You will find us the economical and convenient source of supply for all building materials required for mountain homes. Think of the health and pleasure the year around for the whole family with a ski cabin on the Auburn Highway.

Complete Plan and Estimate Service

Auburn Lumber Co.
AUBURN, CALIFORNIA

Then & Now with Art Clark



Lake Angela in the 1860's. Named for Miss Angela Starr King, who gave dramatic poetry readings and spoke on many issues of the time. The original lake level was lower, and more rocks & shoreline were exposed before the second and third dams were built. Mentioned on the Stereocard is Mount King, named for her brother, Thomas Starr King, an influential orator and minister. There is lots more about them in the May, '10 DSHS [Heirloom](#). Mount King is now Donner Ski Ranch or Signal Hill.

39° 19.540'N 120° 19.545'W

Book Review

Longboards to Olympics A century of Tahoe Winter Sports

Mark McLaughlin

It's ski season now in January so it's appropriate that this month's book review have something to do with ski season. So we consulted our review department's book shelves for something appropriate and found a book that's been languishing waiting for its review for some time.

The winter greeting in the Alps is 'Ski-heil.'...health and happiness...Come to the Sierra Nevada, where the air is grips and the sun is bright, where the only depressions are those that one takes with a flourish and whoop! Strap on your skis and shout with us, Ski-heil!"

Dr. Joel Hildebrand, 1935 Siera Club Bulletin

With that quote Mark McLaughlin takes to into Sierra ski and snow sport history.

This interesting book covers the history of Sierra snow sports from the first longboarders in an obscure part of California in the 1850's, to modern popular snow sports.

The book is full of pictures, old newspaper clippings and quotes, stories, and asides which make it very readable.

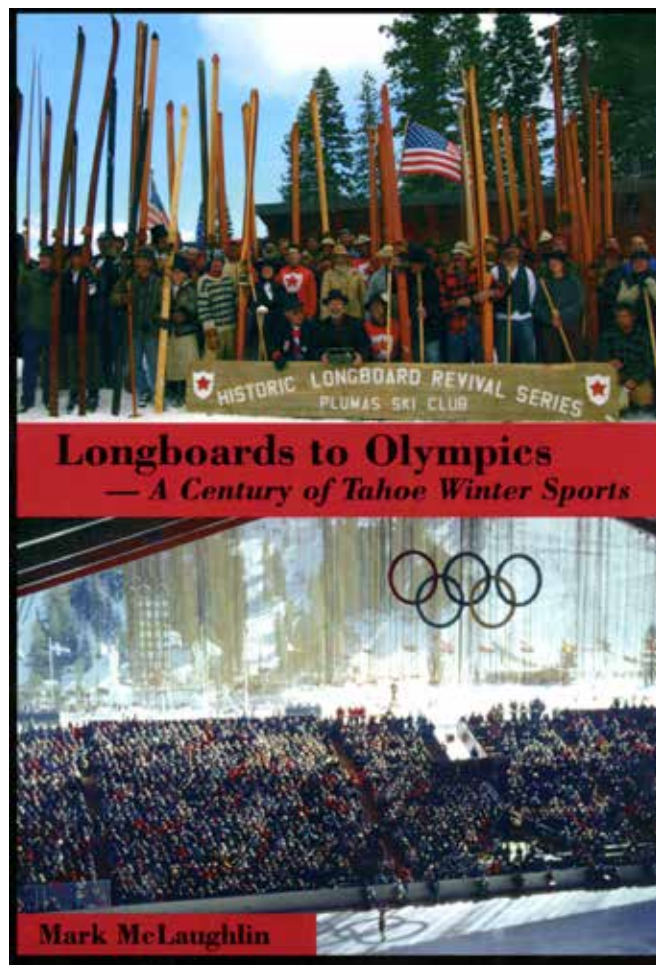
Traveling through history in the book we learn all kind of interesting facts. The first U.S. downhill skiers skied longboards nine feet long and four and half inches wide. They went up to one hundred miles an hour and could not turn. They used only a single pole they sort of sat on to use a brake.

Snowshoe Thompson carried mail across the Sierra on 25 lb. skies he made himself with 60-100 lb. packs of mail. He carried the first samples of ore from the Comstock Lode in Virginia City and he could cross the Sierra in two or three days.

You learn about "perhapsing" on a toboggan in Truckee. Perhaps you will survive and perhaps you won't. You learn about the "most thrilling ride on the Pacific Coast" at the Truckee Winter Carnival. Maybe the first mechanical lift in the west was in Truckee in 1911. The book covers Truckee winter movie making, 1932 July skiing at Sugar Bowl, how Boreal came to be, Hannes Schroll (Sugar Bowl founder), Berkeley and Treasure Island ski jumping in the 1930's, and more.

The books starts with the unorganized and mostly individual skiing in the 1850's north of Truckee and then moves through the incremental growth of winter sports today's organized skiing. On the way you read about the Truckee Ski Carnivals held to attract the general population, the coming of ski clubs, lodges and organized ski areas.

The 1930's was the "breakout decade" for winter sports. It had been individual up until then but with the 1930's there was a confluence of factors that made winter sports attractive and popular. Organized ski instruction began, entrepreneurs opened up small ski areas, ski lifts of different kinds were installed, lodges were built, the highway was kept open in winter, equipment



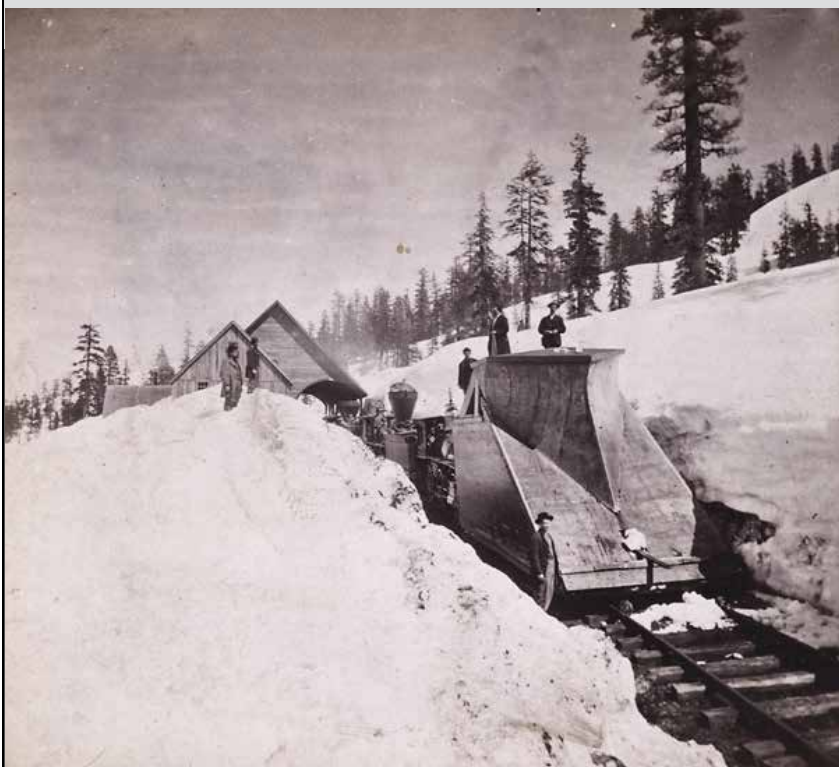
improved, and there were unique personalities who built an industry. Those personalities did all kinds of things to popularize winter sports from the simple forming clubs and building lodges and ski areas, to the Auburn Ski Club's holding of ski jumping demonstrations in the San Francisco Bay Area.

For those of us on Donner Summit, that section of the book is particularly interesting. McLaughlin covers the coming of Sugar Bowl, Donner Ski Ranch, Boreal, Hutchinson Lodge, the Sierra Club and Clair Tappaan; as well as the personalities such as Hannes Schroll who founded Sugar Bowl; Johnny Ellis who had a couple of rope tows on the Summit and Dennis Jones who started Soda Springs ski area, then called Beacon Hill.

The journey from individual skiers in the 19th century comes to an end with the founding of Squaw Valley, the ultimate in organized ski activities, and the 1960 Olympics with an exciting summary of the U.S. hockey team's gold medal.

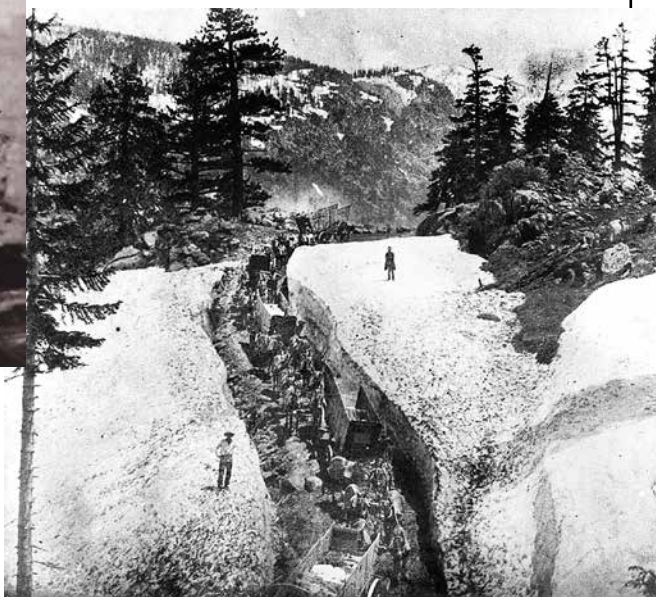
Mark McLaughlin is a local award winning author with numerous books and hundreds of articles about Tahoe area history and weather under his belt. You can find out more about him at his website, http://www.thestormking.com/Buy_Books/buy_books.html, "where Tahoe history comes alive" where you can also purchase his books.

More from the DSHS Archives



Above is one of the first snow plows used by the railroad on Donner Summit. Up to ten locomotives would be hooked up behind to push the "bucker plow." The huge plow would gain speed and slam into the snow. The "Sierra cement" can be so dense that even with the great momentum the plow would be brought to a stop. The engines would then back up, move forward, gain speed, and slam into the snow again.

Our Sierra cement is the result of warm storms crossing the Pacific and dropping very dense snow on the mountains. By the time storms get to the Rockies, they are much drier and so the snow is much lighter..



Above, an Alfred A. Hart photograph of freight teams on the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org

Membership 2013

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

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

_____ New Membership

MAILING ADDRESS _____

_____ Renewing Membership

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

_____ Individual Membership - \$30

(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

If you would like monthly newsletter announcements, please write your email address below VERY neatly.



California Ski News January 1, 1935



Highways Of Time

<http://www.youtube.com/>

This is a video about the creation of Interstate 80, and the role Placer County played in it.

Thanks to Nick Chickering of the Cedars for the notice.



Above, "Method of traveling on Snow Shoes" which is what the long skis were called in the old days. The one pole was used for balance and braking. Tremendous speeds could be achieved with the 10 or 12 long skis. You can see some examples at the DSHS. Possibly the buried buildings are the old Summit Hotel.



SUMMIT RESTAURANT AND BAR

Phone: 530-426-3904

<http://summitrestaurantandbar.com>

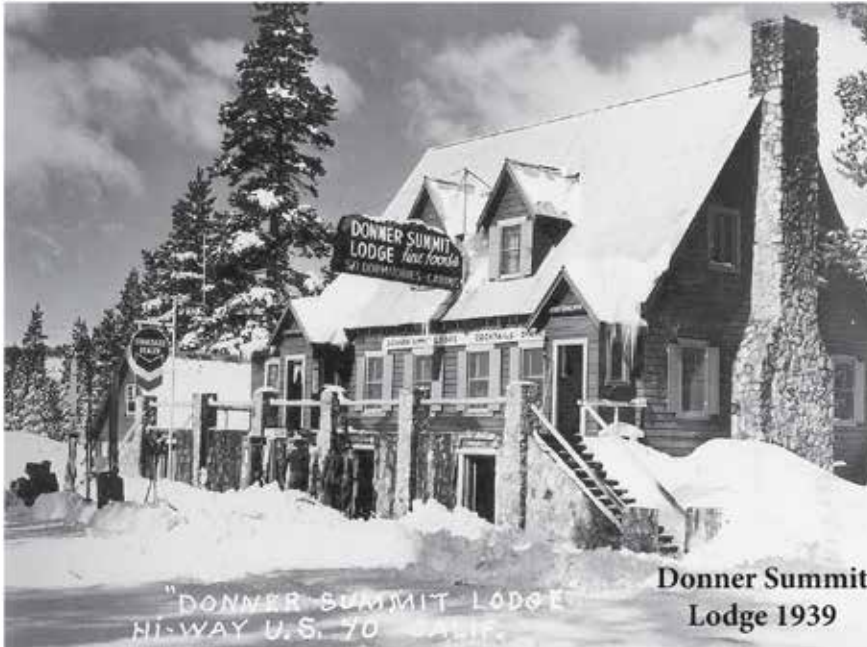
email: maria_at_the_summit@yahoo.com

Established - 2001

Soda Springs, CA

Volume I Issue 1

Winter, 2013



Extraordinary Donner Summit

Donner Summit or Donner Pass is extraordinarily rich and historically it is the most important location in California and perhaps the entire Western United States.

Recreational opportunities abound: rock climbing, downhill skiing, road biking, snowboarding, mountain biking, hiking, lepidoptery, photography, bird watching, plein-air painting, and cross-country skiing.

The area is amazingly diverse biologically. There are over a hundred species of birds that visit Donner Summit. There are 115 species of butterflies, 16 species of amphibians, 500 species of plants, and many dozens of species of mammals. Some of those species are "special Status."

Donner Summit is the Sierra Divide and the source of three major rivers: the Truckee, the Yuba, and The American.

It is the history that really sets the area apart. Native Americans have been traversing Donner Pass and Summit Valley (Van Norden) for thousands of years. They came to spend their summers away from the Nevada heat and to trade with California Indians. In Summit Valley there are over a dozen mortar sites, some with many mortars. The Native Americans ground the mortars into the Sierra granite over many generations as they ground their seeds. There are many metates (larger grinding surfaces) scattered around as well. In one location there are also cupules (small depressions ground into the granite possibly for mystical reasons). Petroglyphs, which are thousands of years old, are in many locations.

The first wagons to reach California came through Summit Valley after the emigrants had conquered the hardest obstacle on their journey: the Sierra and Donner Pass. The first transcontinental railroad goes through Summit Valley as does the first transcontinental highway and the first transcontinental telephone line. Overhead, the first transcontinental air route crossed the Summit, the route marked by beacons on the surrounding peaks. Soda Springs Ski Hill is called Beacon Hill because a beacon was located there.

In Summit Valley there is a piece of the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. that was hidden for almost a hundred years by Lake Van Norden. There is also a beautiful remnant of the Emigrant Trail as it winds through the forest on the edge of the meadow.

Donner Summit Lodge Open Every Day

Winter Hours: Sat/Sun 8 A.M. - 8:30 P.M. MWFTH Noon-8:30 P.M.
Taco Tuesday: 4 P.M. - 8:30 P.M. The bar is open until the crowd is gone.

Short History of Donner Summit Lodge

Ever since the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. was built in the early 1860's to service the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, there have been hostleries along the route over Donner Pass.

The first auto to cross Donner Pass crossed in 1901 and the first motorcycle in 1903. The first successful "transcontinentalists" crossed the country using Donner Pass in 1903. With the arrival of the automobile, lodges began to spring up to service automobiles and provide relief for the "autoists".

By 1913 the first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway, was in operation and auto traffic increased considerably. Small lodges and service stations were built along the route and early automobiles would have gone right past what is now Donner Summit Lodge. Once the highway was open in winter the lodges offered accommodations for snow sport enthusiasts.

In the first decades of skiing people stayed in the small lodges and the night life after skiing was vibrant. Since many of the accommodations and dining were communal, people socialized in the common areas.

Donner Summit Lodge was built in 1938 to take advantage of the growth of traffic over the, by then, year-round Highway 40. The lodge was expanded twice from the picture above, first just after World War II and then in the 1970's.

The Summit Restaurant and Bar, which sits right at the Soda Springs exit from I-80, has a new menu.

Our graphics art department helped out Maria Montano, owner of the Summit Restaurant. She wanted a newspaper like menu with stories in addition to menu items. So that's what we developed.

You can enjoy more summit history along with really good food. Stop in for a bite.