

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

September, 2013 issue #61



## Crystal Harling<sup>2012</sup> "Meets" Marianne North<sup>1875</sup>

People have been visiting Donner Summit for thousands of years leaving behind petroglyphs, grinding rocks, square nails, graffiti, cabin ruins, an old dam, a transcontinental railroad, stories, some highways, and more.

Many artists visited Donner Summit and when the time comes we'll cover more of them and their work. Photographers visited too and we've been exhibiting the work of Alfred A. Hart and Carleton Watkins as well as others. Those old photos have been the inspiration for Art Clark's Then & Now's which have been in each Heirloom edition for a couple of years. Later in this edition you can see how he does his tricks.

So it was with real interest when Art and I met Crystal Harling.

Marianne North was a famous English artist who visited the summit and stayed in the Summit Hotel in 1875 (see our May, '11 Heirloom).

In 2012 The Truckee Donner Land Trust was just completing its purchase of Summit Canyon (see the Heirloom in October '11 and our Summit Canyon brochures on our website). They needed a map of the trails there. Art is a whiz with the GPS and we have a pretty good graphics department so we offered to put together the map for their kiosk (we also supplied the historical pictures - go visit the kiosks just up Old 40 from Donner Lake at the trailhead - again, see our brochures).

John Svahn of the Land Trust took us out showing us where the trails he wanted mapped went and the spots he wanted delineated (there are some really nice walks and one great view - see the brochures). When we got done and returned to the parking lot there was a lady unloading her art supplies. That looked interesting and feeling expansive we asked where she was headed. She



An old Cypress or Juniper Tree in the Nevada Mountains by Marianne North, 1875 Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England

said she was headed for the beaver pond to do some plein aire painting (that is what we sophisticates call painting scenery outside).

She said she'd painted all over the Summit area, spending "summers and most holidays in the Truckee area painting." During her many visits she had even redone a painting done by Marianne North. Who has heard of Marianne North? In England, probably lots of people know of her. She has many paintings at Kew Gardens and many of her works have been reproduced into greeting cards, etc. But who knows her on Donner Summit - or more specifically in Summit Canyon in a parking lot at the Land Trust's trail head? Well of course, being well-versed in all aspects of Summit history, we had and had even done an article in May, '11.

There followed a conversation about plein aire, Marianne North, Crystal Harling, and her following in the footsteps of Marianne North.

Just as Art does the photography Then & Now's, Crystal had done a Then & Now of Marianne North's tree but it had been inadvertent. She'd been looking for the most scenic Juniper close to Rainbow Bridge. Crystal said, " That one caught my eye. I painted that tree because of its shape, view of Donner Lake, and the way the sun sets on it late in the afternoon, giving me plenty of time to capture it on canvas."

Then she was researching early artists of the Sierra and came across a book about Marianne North, " It was then I realized I had painted the same tree. I also realized I had visited her gallery in Kew Gardens numerous years before." Crystal was " humbled and amazed that 125 years later that of all the beautiful junipers on the summit I had uncannily painted the same tree as Marianne North." Now that's a good story.

I had to find the tree. I had to find where Marianne North had painted in 1875 and I had to find Crystal Harling's tree.

Page one shows the original painting that Marianne North did in 1875 while visiting the Summit Hotel. She did a couple of other paintings during the same visit.

We tramped around Donner Summit going from



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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



Juniper to Juniper (they are Sierra Junipers) trying to match the painting to the trees.

It turns out photographers are a more honest bunch. They have no choice, presuming they don't engage in photo manipulation (and may I say here that Art Clark is honest as you'll see later on in this issue). Photographers capture what is there and that's reported on the film (or today's digital sensors).

Artists are not constrained by that reality. That made finding Marianne and Crystal's tree hard. Artists take their version of "poetic license" and move things around and that threw off the search.

At the top of the previous page is Crystal's tree and the lower picture is Crystal's photograph of her tree. You can see that Marianne North romanticized the tree a bit and moved the geography.

At first look you may say the trees are different and 138 years is a long time. Junipers grow slowly in the harsh climate they've chosen for themselves. Presuming that Marianne North did a painting on the Summit of a Juniper tree and that's Donner Lake in the distance, that's the tree. It would most likely still be there or its stump would be. We covered every inch of ground (rock actually) and this was the best candidate.

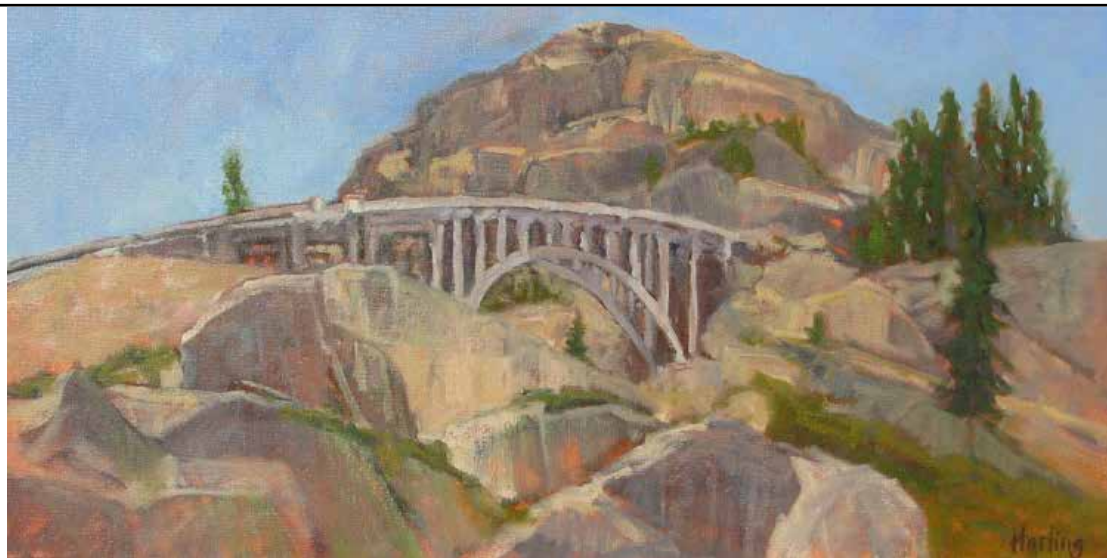
Here on this page are some pictures of Crystal Harling in action, painting Marianne North's tree.

If you want to visit the venerable old tree take your GPS to 39 19 091, 120 19 472 Park on Old 40 and hike up to the old weather station site, the first peak above 40 on the north side opposite the Sugar Bowl Academy building. Then head east along the rocks.

Crystal Harling lives in the Bay Area and painting is now her profession. You can see her work on display at High Camp Home on Donner Pass Rd. in Truckee. Take a look at Crystal's work at [www.crystalharling.com](http://www.crystalharling.com) and <http://crystalharlingart.blogspot.com/>







Another of Crystal Harding's paintings. This is Donner Summit or Rainbow Bridge.



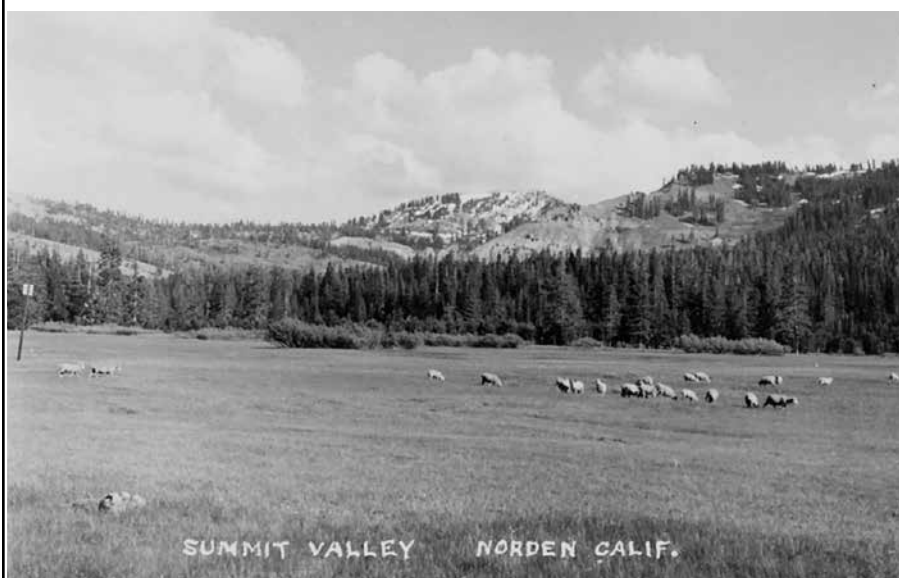
Many many famous artists visited Donner Summit in the 19th century as did many photographers. Above is another Marianne North painting from the time she visited the Summit Hotel in 1875. This used with permission from Kew Gardens in England. One day we will have an Heirloom exhibit of Donner Summit views by famous artists. Today it is not unusual to see photographers and painters capturing the same views their predecessors did years ago.

# Sheep Pt II

Last month we covered the sheep industry on Donner Summit, but it turned out to be a large subject and a variety of subjects is good. So rather than say everything about sheep last month our sheep researchers groups held some off for this month. That still has not covered it however, so in October we'll finish up and you'll be well educated.



Bob Blackford's family shipped sheep from Soda Springs for generations. In the 1940's he said the family shipped 100,000 sheep a year. By 1977 that number was down to 2,500. Above, Bob Blackford, Sierra Sun, September 2, 1977



Top: Sheep grazing at Ice Lakes, just over the ridge from Summit Valley, in 1943. Today Ice Lakes, or Serene Lakes, is a community of 815 houses. The area here with the sheep is today trees and houses. The inscription on the back says, "Wilson Church sheep at Ice Lakes July 1943 north to Soda Springs on Driveway"

Center Left: sheep grazing south of Soda Springs station 1928. Bottom left: Summit Valley 1956 Those are cows on the left. Bottom right: Sheep grazing in Summit Valley on ground usually covered by Van Norden 1924 Placer County Archives. The three pictures in the center come from the Placer County Archives.



# A Cute Story About a Sheep Dog and a Little Girl



For the most part the sheep herders on Donner Summit were Basque. Old timers remember the Basques' wagons scattered around the valley each summer. The cabin above has a nice view of Summit Valley and sits on the south side. It was a sheepherder's dwelling.

Each summer Milli Martin visited her uncle and aunt, Lena and Herb Frederick, who ran the Norden Store. The building sits up Old Highway 40 from Soda Springs before Sugar Bowl and has a large garage to the right. It used to house a store and rooms. There were cabins out back for rent.

Each summer the Basque sheepherders camped in the valley with their sheep and visited the store. Milli has only vague memories of their visits but remembers the difficulties in communicating since many of the Basque spoke little English.

1946 was a special summer. One morning 8 year old Milli Martin opened the door of the Norden Store to see the most beautiful dog in the world. He'd been left behind by the sheepherders. Millie's aunt coached her in how to convince Milli's father that the family should acquire a dog and so Skippy became part of the family for 12 years.

He never lost his herding instinct. Once, early on during a family vacation, he spotted some cattle and raced away soon herding them into a tight circle. He was on a leash after that whenever there was livestock around.



worse, give him a good dose. So Dad, and his friend Karl spent the evening playing chess, checked the dog every hour, he was fine except for some swelling, and they happily partook of the whiskey."

Milli has one more story about Skippy:

"We did a lot of hiking in those days, and he loved it. Favorites were Sespe Creek, from Fillmore, or Cottonwood Creek, where we had a cabin in the Frasier Mountain area. One spring he was bit by a rattler. No vet, only a doc in the tiny town of Frazier, who let us try to suction the poison from Skippy's nose. Doc told my Dad, get a bottle of whiskey, check him every hour, if there is a turn for the

The pictures of Skippy top and Milli and Skippy at Donner Lake come from the Milli Martin at the Donner Summit Historical Society

# More Recent History

Visitors to and residents of Donner Summit may be wondering how some prominent buildings came to look the way they do.

Here we have some more recent history from the archives of the Sierra Sun, September, 2, 1977.

The top picture shows renovations to the Soda Springs Store by the then owners, Lyla and Oren Horst. They remodeled to add space and a unifying look to the "hodge podge" of previous additions. They expanded at the back and side " to make more room for the cheese store, for more storage, and for larger living quarter upstairs.



Below Larry Thompson and Gene Epp looking over where the expansion to the Rainbow Lodge would go. That expansion added "much needed conference and banquet facilities plus additional dining space."



Bottom right shows Ed Mueller at the Donner Summit Lodge. There the plans added a banquet facility and turned the lounge in the old building (now the center of the structure) into a teen center. The bar was going upstairs "to the new Redwood Loutnge."





# From the DSHS Archives

## Sand Harvesting

These two interesting machines may have been common at one time but today they need a little translation. When they built the cement bridge on Donner Summit for the new Highway 40 they needed sand of course. The sand for the bridge was harvested from Donner Lakes shore.

The tractor below, with its belts is set up to run machinery.



The machine to the right was used for loading sand on to trucks. Sand was dumped on the end of the incline. Then a motor powered winch pulled a blade along the incline scraping the sand into the truck bed.

The road was opened in 1926 the same year the bridge was finished.





# From the DSHS Archives

Equestrians riding along  
the shore of a full Lake Van  
Norden, ca. 1940's



If you are not viewing this on your computer as a two page spread, reduce the PDF so you can see both sides at once. If you've printed this out, place both pages together. This is a view of the Lincoln Highway leading down from Donner Summit to Donner Lake. It's titled, "Donner Lake from Summit Lincoln Highway copyright 1919 T.C. Wohlbruck Co. 251 Post S.F."

Look on the right side and note the snowshed emerging from Tunnel 6. It's wood. Note how wide the first part is. That is the original railroad crossing. Motorists had to stop and open the barn door type doors on each side, listen for trains, and then drive across the tracks and turn before emerging on the road again. This 1919 picture was taken five years after the underpass as completed to which the road is leading in this picture.



# Book Review

## Martis Indians: Ancient Tribe of the Sierra Nevada

Willis Gortner, 1986 Portola Press 145 pages

The Martis Indians is a short (145 pages) scholarly work, listing many sources, by an amateur archeologist into this Ancient Tribe of the Sierra Nevada. This book is out of print, as is Mr. Gortner's other book, Ancient Rock Carvings, about Donner Summit petroglyphs (reviewed in our June, '13 [Heirloom](#)). The Martis are the people who made the petroglyphs and the many Donner Summit mortars and metates (see [The Heirloom](#), February, 2013). This companion book explains who produced the rock art.

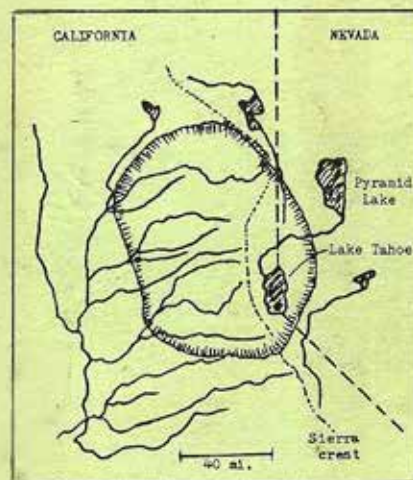
There is not a wealth of sources about Donner Summit's ancient Native Americans so we have to rely on these out of print books. You can obtain this book on the internet as well as in a number of libraries after an internet search. Locally, the Truckee library has two copies, one which can be checked out, and the other, which is in reference. The Foley Library in Nevada City also has a copy. None of the Placer County libraries has copies but a number of university libraries have copies.

The Martis arrived on the scene about 2,000 B.C. taking advantage of the change in climate that had occurred. The climate was cooler and there was more rain. Lake Tahoe had filled and was overflowing down the Truckee River to Pyramid Lake in Nevada. There was more food and a greater variety of food.

The Martis lasted until about 500 A.D. when the climate became drier. Maybe more importantly, simultaneously, the bow and arrow was developed by the area's Native Americans. The new weapon had more power, greater accuracy, and greater range. It must have changed hunting methods and the kinds food that could be acquired. It may have changed culture. Maybe new prayers were needed. New skills were needed. Maybe values changed. For example, the Martis had worked almost exclusively with basalt to craft tools and projectile points. Basalt cannot be crafted into the finer and lighter points needed on arrows so with the change to bows and arrows, chert and obsidian were valued. Those are not available on the Sierra Crest though. The nearest source of obsidian is the Tuolumne area near Yosemite, which necessitated trade or moving. The Martis had not done much trading prior to their disappearance, although they did trade for shells with California Indians.

The book describes the Martis Culture during the 2,000 years of their existence and covers: climate, description, possible ancestors, tools, petroglyphs, neighbors, culture, religion, family structure, housing, food, summer and winter camps, utensils, basketry, language, and social organization. Gortner hypothesized about some of those categories based on other groups' cultural behaviors but the information based on analysis of camping sites, tools, artifacts, and carbon dating, for example describing the changes in population and the changes in projectile points, is more sure. Through that study we can know that the Martis occupied both sides of the Central Sierra Crest, moving to the higher elevations in summer and back to the foothills in winter. The books cover shows a map of Martis lands.

## THE MARTIS INDIANS: ANCIENT TRIBE OF THE SIERRA NEVADA



**WILLIS A. GORTNER**

With a Foreword by  
Albert B. Elsasser



The Martis Culture is described as distinctive by the use of basalt and little obsidian; large heavy projectile points that are poorly chipped and variable in form; use of manos ( smooth oval rocks used on metates to grind seeds into flour); metates (large grinding slicks – for pictures of both see The Heirloom, February, 2013); boatstones (weights used to improve spear throwing using atlatls); hunting and seed gathering; basalt scrapers; no use of ceremonial objects; and flaked drills and awls. The culture was only discovered relatively recently, by R. F. Heizer and A. B. Elsasser, two California Indian scholars from U.C., while building a cabin at South Lake Tahoe in 1953.

An intriguing question arises in studying the Martis. Where exactly did they go and what became of them after 500 A.D.? That is just at the time that the bow and arrow came into use and when climate changed again. No other tribe immediately replaced the Martis. The Kings Beach Culture did not appear for another 500 years in some of what had been the Martis lands, for example.

No one knows what happened but Gortner did hypothesize. Some new Native Americans appeared in the Yosemite area just about the same time and their projectile points resemble the Martis'. Perhaps the Martis moved to Yosemite where the climate and game were better? Maybe they moved closer to the obsidian they would now need for their arrows? Yosemite is only 70-100 miles or so from the area the Martis used to inhabit.

For us, interested in Donner Summit, the Martis are interesting. They were the first inhabitants. They left behind many hundreds of petroglyphs in many areas using a distinct Central Sierran abstract non-representational style, and they left many mortars, metates, and cupules (pecked irregular depressions in rock with perhaps mystical significance - see The Heirloom February, 2013).

Another salient question is who were the descendants of the Martis in the area? A first thought would be the Washo which is what many people think, but there was a big time gap and differences between the cultures that Gortner thinks makes it improbable. The Washo are a desert people who never occupied the higher Sierra elevations. Maybe Gortner's title should have been "Martis Indians: Mysterious Tribe of the Sierra Nevada."

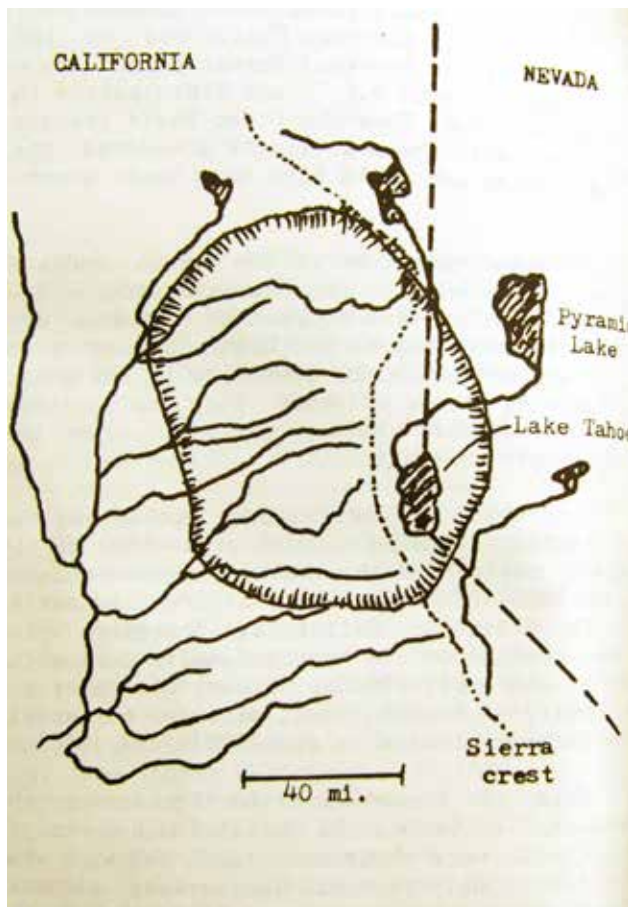
### What Did They Eat?

I went looking for Gortner's book after rereading Ancient Rock Carvings... because we'd discovered the wealth of mortars and metates in Summit Valley during the summer of 2012. It looked like the Land Trust and others would be successful in acquiring the valley and it would be open to the public. We thought it would be good for the public to know what was there. Here you may want to pick up "Summit Valley" a large free brochure describing the valley. It's available at fine establishments on Donner Summit and on the "brochure" page of [donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://donnersummithistoricalsociety.org).

As we discovered more and more mortars and metates, along with other artifacts, the question that was obvious was, just what foods were prepared using these food preparation tools? The Martis... describes food sources well.

Acorns were a staple food of the Martis but since there are not acorns at the higher elevations, they had to be transported. Acorns have tannins and some toxicity that need removing and that was done by soaking them or washing the meal with water.

The Martis also harvested pine nuts which came from pine cones as well as many other nuts and seeds. Nuts and seeds were ground into flour and then made into a gruel. Acorn meal was roasted or baked into tortilla type breads or made into mush using boiling stones.



Martis Indian Territory from The Martis Indians, information from Albert Elsasser

All kinds of game were consumed by the Martis from small to large.

Besides seeds and game they ate tubers, bulbs, fruits, berries, grubs, larvae, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and other insects. Interestingly, sugar pine sap was harvested for eating and seasoning. All of those foods could have ended up in the mortars for pounding in preparation to eating. Given that the mortars are some inches deep and that granite is one of the hardest rocks in the world, there must have been a lot of grinding and pounding, year after year, generation after generation.

## Houses?

Martis houses were semi subterranean shallow pits 7-15 feet in diameter with conical covers. The larger houses may have had supporting poles. They were covered with brush, hides, or bark.

# Then & Now - How To

Art Clark is a dedicated fellow and takes his editorial responsibilities seriously, even to the point of putting himself in danger for our readership. Below is Art scoping out different views so he can get the perspective just right for a set of Then & Now's. The product of the pictures below was in our Heirloom last month.



Since Art has been doing the Then & Now's for the Heirloom for a couple of years and has filled a growing web page ([www.donnertsummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnertsummithistoricalsociety.org)) with his work our editorial board thought it would be a good idea to share how Then & Now's are done.

The large picture on the next page is an Alfred A. Hart photograph of a Sierra Juniper on Donner Summit just east of the Sugar Bowl Academy. It attracted Art's attention as a Then & Now subject because Donner Lake is in the background, there's a person in the photograph, and it looked like a good challenge.

As you would expect, the first step is to get into the general area of the photograph. The lake in background was a clue as was the hill or mountain side on the right. That looked familiar to Art. It leads up to Donner Peak.



From there it was a matter of walking around holding up the old picture and comparing it with the surroundings. Art is meticulous. He lines up his photographs perfectly with no artificial manipulation. Many of his Then & Now's as the morph with Flash animation on our website look like they just move from black and white to color and back again, so exactly has he matched the old scene with the new.

In this case Art made multiple trips to find the tree's location because photographs did not match as exactly as he demanded. On his last trip he brought a step ladder because the exact match required a little altitude. Why would Alfred A. Hart have brought a step ladder? Art reasons that there's been a lot of excavation and maybe Hart placed his camera tripod on a rock or there was no fill. We'll never know.

In this case the tree in the original photo is gone which makes it hard. There is also no stump remaining so that job is harder still.

Next Month: a "Then" for future generations to which to add a "Now."

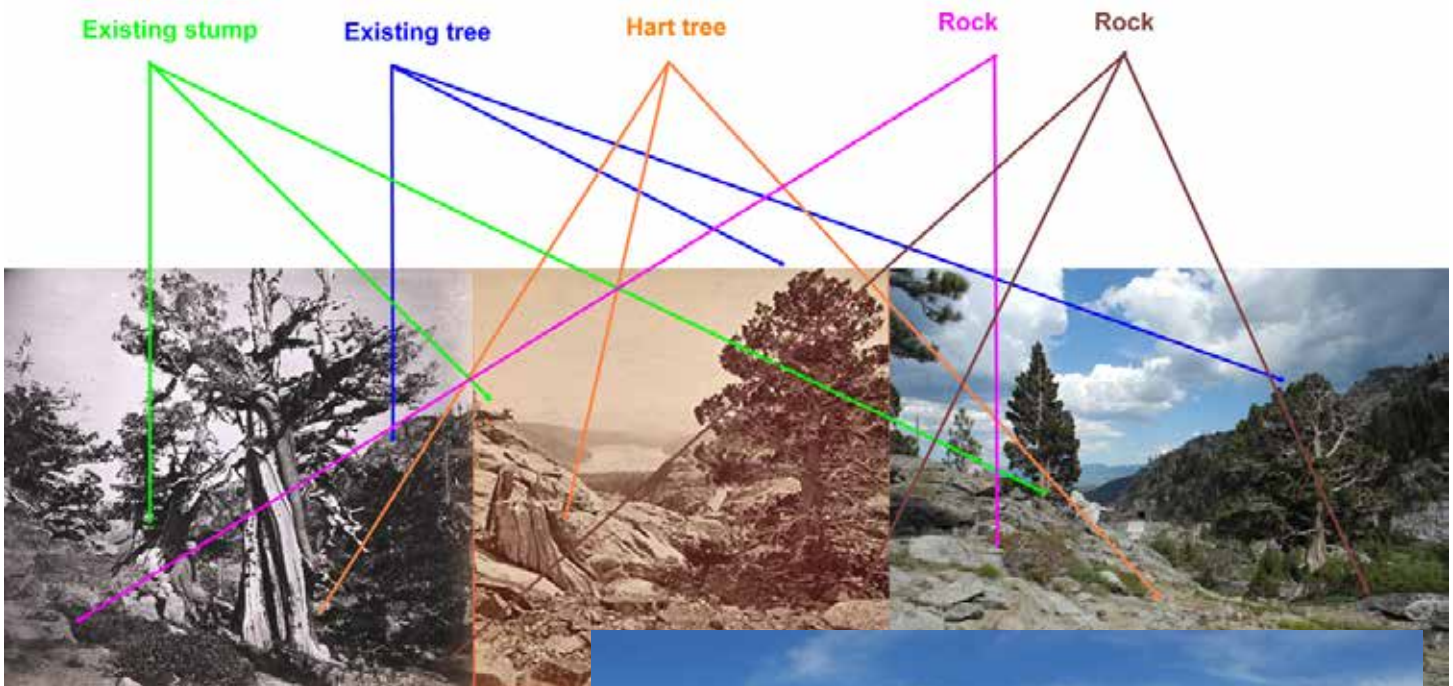






Above: Art inspecting the area.  
Right: comparing the historical  
photograph with the current  
situation. Right lower: Up on the  
step ladder getting the "Now" shot.





Above: views comparing features in the photographs to what is now existing.

Right the "Now."

Below, the "Now" put onto a stereo slide to mimic the stereographs or stereoscope images Hart often made for authenticity.



Cedar (Cedar) Trees on the Summit  
Donner Lake below. Compare to Hart/Houseworth 784

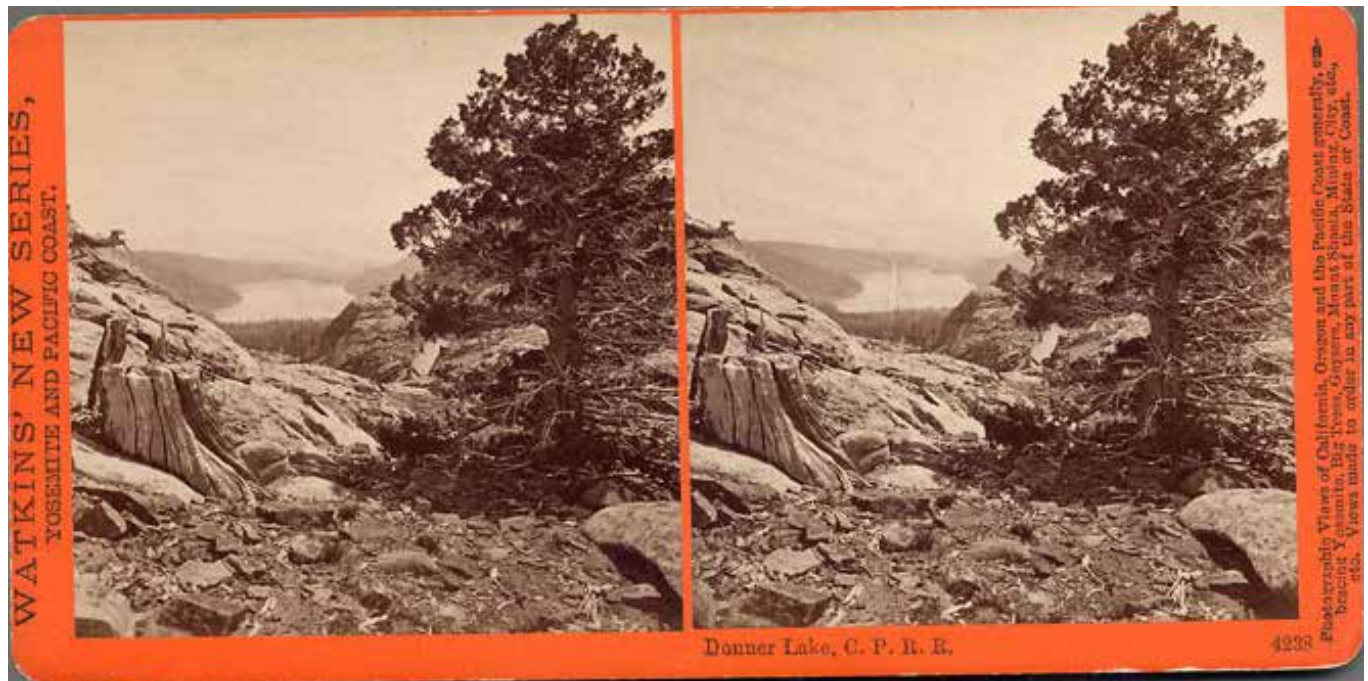


Art and Janet

Cedar (Cedar) Trees on the Summit  
Donner Lake below. Compare to Hart/Houseworth 784



# Then & Now with Art Clark



Carleton Watkins - #4238 - Donner Lake, C. P. R. R. -

Between 1875 and 1885, Watkins revisited many areas and re-shot some photos. He called them his "New Series."

This view is looking east from the Summit, and the east end of Tunnel Seven can be seen just under the left side of the tree, which has grown considerably in 140 years. Donner Lake is in the distance.

Photo location 39° 18.957'N 120° 19.501'W





# 2nd Annual Margie Powell History Hike

Margie Powell was the inspiration and energy behind the founding of the Historical Society five years ago.

She passed away two years ago and her friends decided an annual history hike in her memory would be fun. We knew she'd be watching and enjoying.

Last year's first annual went up Summit Canyon. There were 128 participants. This year we thought we'd do the hike twice in mid-August. This year's hike was in the Land Trust's newly acquired Summit Valley and went two miles along the north edge. We talked about the Lincoln Highway, the dam, the Dutch Flat Rd., Native Americans, the sheep industry, and the Emigrant Trail. You can see the route to the right. We saw historical artifacts.

This year 82 people hiked on Saturday and 51 on Sunday. There is a hunger for the stories of Donner Summit.

Maybe you have hike suggestions for the third annual?



Left: hiking across the meadow and below, picnicking afterwards.



**DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

**Membership**

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     
  Family Membership - \$50     
  Friend Membership - \$100     
  Sponsor - \$250

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  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.

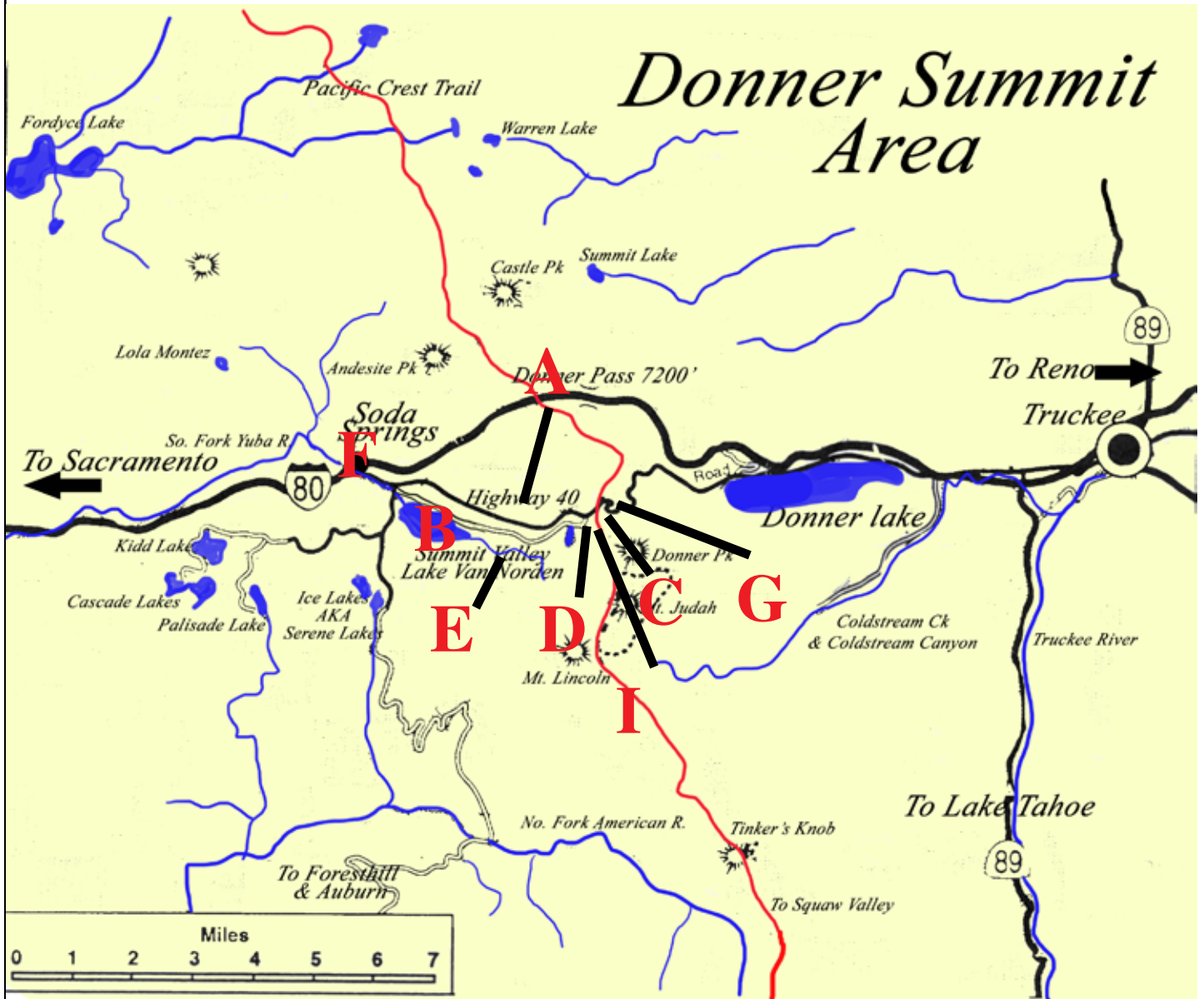
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# NEW IDEA

Herbert Milikien is an Heirloom reader who lives "in the valley far below." He suggested that no everyone has the knowledge of Donner Summit geography and a map would help make the stories make more sense. So here is our first attempt. We'll overlay letters and the key will identify the places from our stories.

thanks Herbert



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