

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

June, 2014 issue #70



## The Kodak Picture Spot

### People in the Past Were Just Like Us



People enjoy the scenery of wide open spaces. They have been doing so probably forever. For early man that scenery served as a map and gave him perspective as he decided where to go. Scenery whetted his curiosity to see what was on the other side of the mountain or ocean and that drove him to explore and invent. Early man probably looked on magnificent scenery with awe and wonder as it helped define his place in the world - just as we do.

Modern man too enjoys wide open scenery. It's an escape from every day life. Our curiosity is piqued. We want to know what's out there. Our spirits soar when standing atop a mountain and contemplating surrounding beauty.

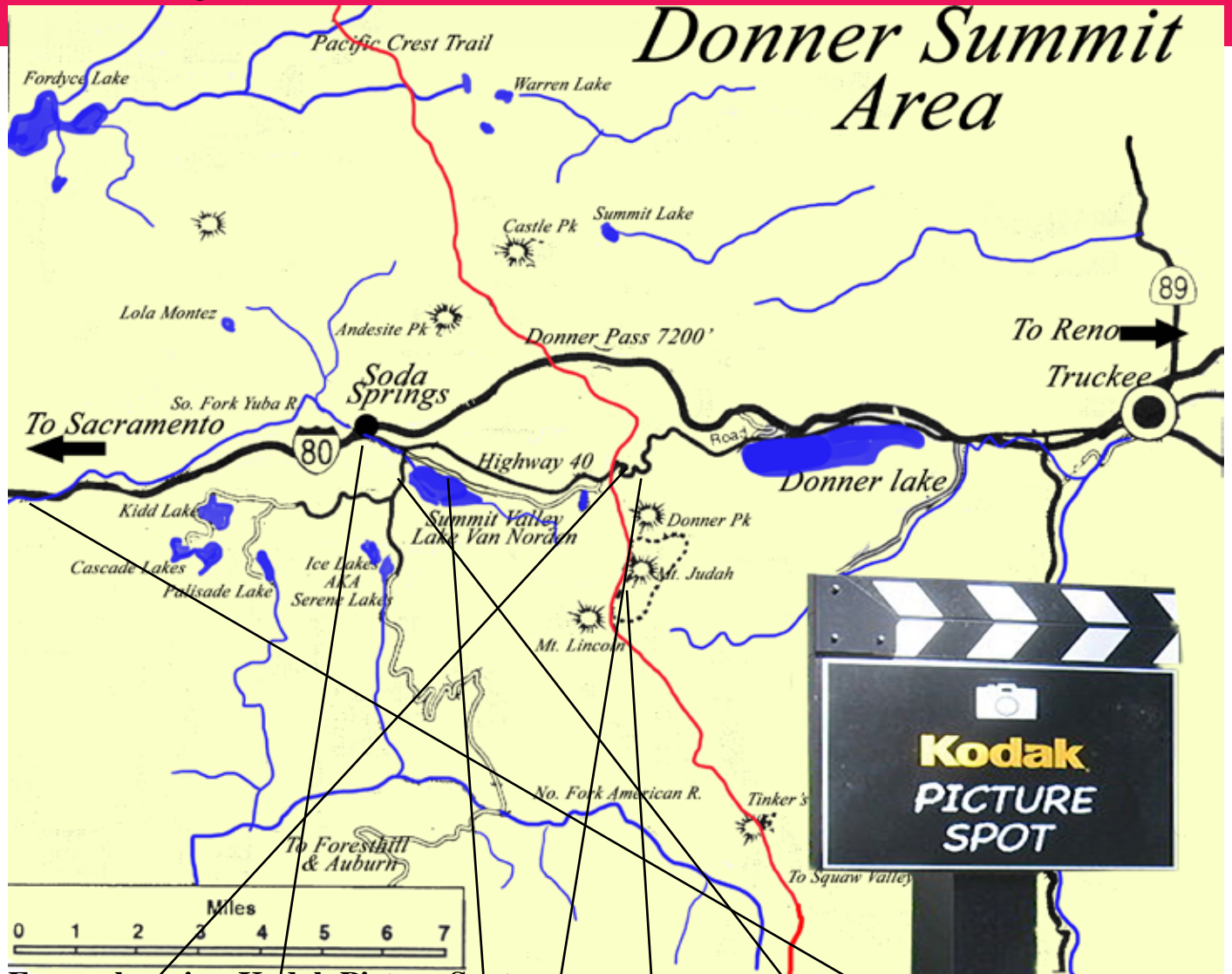
Donner Summit is spectacular. Standing on Donner Peak, recovering from the scramble over the rocks, our hearts are beating fast from more than the exertion. The surrounding peaks are grand and we want to get up there too. The ancient Juniper (Oct. '13 [Heirloom](#)), some thousands of years olds, give us perspective about our place. Looking straight down 1,000 ft to Donner Lake is breathtaking. On the other side, Summit Valley, the source of the Yuba River, stretches to the horizon. Snows blanket the peaks and wildflowers the ground around our feet. It is joy.

People have been enjoying Donner Summit scenery for thousands of years. Prior to the white man, none of that experiencing went anywhere beyond memories or skilfully told stories, but once civilization reached the Summit the beauty began to be recorded and saved for posterity and for those not fortunate enough to be able to experience it in person. Even before the railroad made travel to the summit relatively easy, painters had made their way up. Professional photographers arrived first with the railroad and began disseminating Summit beauty Not long after, the average tourist began snapping pictures and sharing them.



This 1913 postcard is courtesy of the Truckee Donner Historical Society.

# Story Locations in this Issue



Everywhere is a Kodak Picture Spot

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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



# Kodak Picture Spot

When our research staff came across the "Kodak Picture Spot" sign (pg 1 and the previous page) last summer while researching something entirely different, we immediately thought of Donner Summit. No one ever put up a "Kodak Pictures Spot" sign on the summit. There was no need. Everyone was already busy taking pictures for later vicarious enjoyment. We thought, what about a small Heirloom exhibit of what people have done. On the one hand that's easy because there is so much. On the other hand, it's really difficult. What should be included?

Everyone with a camera, a diary, or a paint brush who comes to Donner Summit takes some Summit home.

Here we present a small portion of what we've collected of Donner Summit beauty as recorded by the famous and the not famous.



Top: postcard of indeterminate age  
 Above: Lincoln Highway over Donner Lake, 1920's  
 Left Alfred A. Hart, Donner Lake about 1867 Hart #127

At Summit a marvelous view is had in both directions, east and west. Westward the fall of the Sierra into the Sacramento Valley is apparently so gentle and easy as to lead one to wonder that he has risen so high, but eastward the descent is much more steep and abrupt. The rude granite in many places is almost barren though Sierran trees abound. The grade is easy, and the new grade and tunnel under the Southern Pacific tracks makes an added improvement. Almost immediately on emerging from this tunnel the full glory of the aster view is forced upon the attention. At one's feet, apparently, lies the placid surface of Donner lake, its pure blue giving one a premonitory foretaste of the richer blues that await him at Tahoe, while beyond are the mountains overlook the Great Basin of Nevada

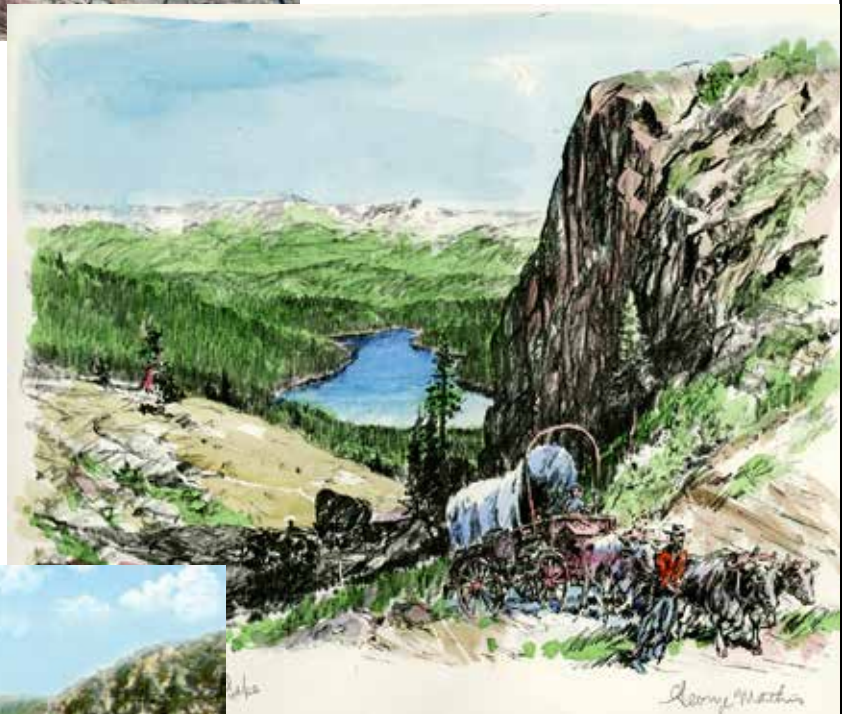
From the 1915 book, Lake of the Sky which is about the Lake Tahoe area



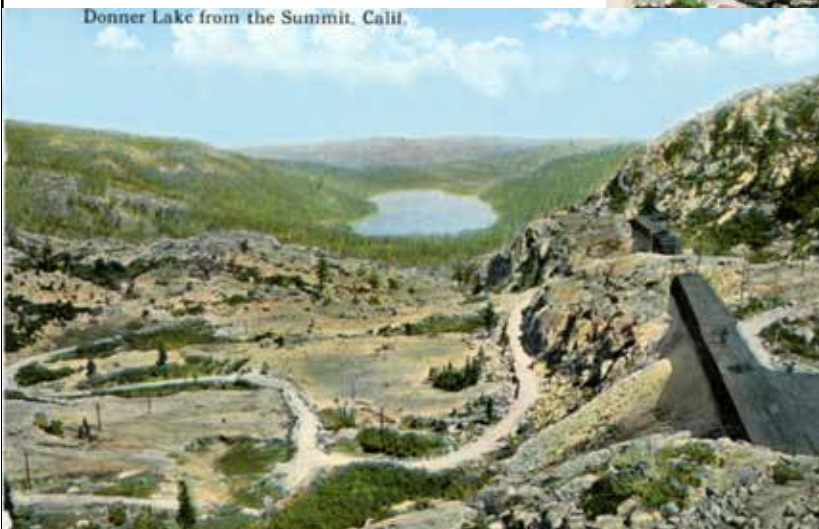
# Kodak Picture Spot



Above: contemporary view of Donner Lake from the summit by the author.



Above: drawing by George Mathis



Postcard Donner Lake 1918, Lincoln Highway

It is boundless mountain piled on mountain - unbroken granite, bare, verdureless, cold and gray...

Albert Richardson of the N.Y.Tribune who visited the transcontinental railroad in 1865 in Beyond the Mississippi which he wrote in 1869.

The view from the crest of the Sierra to the east, is inexpressibly, comprehensive, grand and picturesque.

from Edwin Bryant's book, What I Saw in California (1846), reviewed in the April, '13 Heirloom.

# at Donner Pass



Albert Bierstadt, View of Donner Lake California, 1871 Read more about Albert Bierstadt at Donner Summit in the March, 2012 [Heirloom](#).

Below: Thomas Hill, Donner Lake 1874



From Theodore Judah's general engineering survey of the route of the CPRR 1863

Summit Valley is a beautiful valley, near the source of the Yuba, about two and a half miles long and three-quarters of mile wide, yielding excellent pasturage for cattle hundreds of which are driven there each summer. From the summit, looking easterly, you appear standing upon a nearly perpendicular rocky wall of one thousand feet in height.

Immediately below is seen a valley, from one to two mile wide, extending up from the Truckee river to nearly beneath your feet. Donner lake about three and a half miles long by one mile in width occupies the upper portion of this valley, and its outlet is seen pursuing its course down to a junction with the Truckee. Two long ranges or spurs are seen on either side, parallel with, and enclosing the lake, reaching from the summit to Truckee river. Immediately beyond the river is seen the second summit of Sierra Nevada; while still further in the distance, the Washoe mountains are plainly visible.

“The Alps, so celebrated in history and by all travelers and admirers of mountain landscape, cannot, I am satisfied, present scenery more wild, more rugged, more grand, more romantic, and more enchantingly picturesque and beautiful. than that which surrounds this lake, of which the lake itself composes a part.”  
description of Truckee Lake (Donner)

from Edwin Bryant's book, [What I Saw in California](#) (1846)

Respectfully submitted  
THEO. D. JUDAH,  
Chief Engineer, C.P.R.R.  
Co.



# Kodak Picture Spot at Donner Pass

The scenery was of the grandest, yet of the most savage and desolate character. The very highest peaks were close to us, bare rock, except for splotchy covering of thin snow and a few stunted trees. In a deep gorge to the left Lake Donner, to the right lofty cliffs of granite. The air was cold and the wind strong, but I had borrowed a overcoat at the hotel, and with my gloves on was very warm.”

page 413 [Empire Express](#) (reviewed in the Sept. '12 [Heirloom](#)) Benjamin Avery, CPRR AP correspondent on retainer, rode a pony to Tunnel 6

For more works of art and quotes of Donner Summit featuring Summit beauty, stay tuned to the [Heirloom](#). There's lots more in the archives.



Above: Marianne North, View of Donner Lake, 1875

Read more about Marianne North's visit to Donner Summit in the May, 2011 [Heirloom](#)



Edwin Deakin Donner Lake from the Summit, 1876

# 1st Motorized Transcontinental Crossing

## May 16, 1903 – The First Transcontinental Motorcycle Trip

George Wyman left San Francisco on the first transcontinental motorcycle trip, a 3800-mile journey which ended in New York City some 50 days later. Wyman's ride aboard a 1.25-hp, 90cc, 120-mpg motorcycle was also the first transcontinental trip on any single motorized vehicle (railroads excluded).

Wyman was a champion bicyclist who had once pedaled his way around the perimeter of Australia. After returning to the Bay Area in 1902 he discovered motorized bikes and began racing. During a summer trip to Reno in 1902 to race, he got the idea that he could cross the entire country by motor bicycle.

It was tough work going any distance on a motorized bicycle in those days though. Motorcycles were not yet hi-tech. Wyman's cycle was a "California" and weighed 70-80 lbs. It was belt driven and could go only 25 MPH in the best conditions. The throttle was controlled by spark timing. There was no float to control gas entering the carburetor so periodically a valve had to be opened so the carburetor would have gas. For the trip Wyman only carried a set of warm clothes, a gun, a camera, money, a water bottle, and spare oil and gas.

Roads, where they existed, were terrible and about half of his journey was on the transcontinental railroad bed, bumping from tie to tie. He ran into flocks of sheep and was cussed at by shepherders. Sometimes the grades were too steep for his little engine and "the help of the pedals was necessary" The engine overheated and as he got close to the summit he met the "vilest road that mortal ever dignified by the term."

George lived in the Bay Area and did not know that 34' feet of snow falls on Donner Summit each year, nor did he know that it can take months for snow to melt. When he got close to the Summit he ran into snow. He floundered and found that the snowsheds were an acceptable alternative. Going through the sheds he came to stations and section houses all "built in the dripping and gloomy, but friendly, shelter of these sheds, where daylight penetrates only at the short breaks where the railway tracks span a deep gulch or ravine. He ended up pushing his motor bicycle eighteen miles through snowsheds buried under 15 feet of snow for seven hours.

He spend the night at the top, probably at the Summit Hotel since that was the only public accommodation there at that time. He visualized that the next day it would be "easy sailing," all downhill to Truckee - easy. It

"I was traveling familiar ground. During the previous summer I had made the journey on a California motor bicycle to Reno, Nevada, and knew that crossing the Sierras, even when helped by a motor, was not exactly a path of roses. But it was that tour, nevertheless, that fired me with the desire to attempt this longer journey - to become the first motorcyclist to ride from ocean to ocean."

George Wyman  
Motorcycle Magazine's first issue,  
June, 1903





## From Donner Summit to Truckee

The oil, however was not of immediate aid. It did not help me get through the dark, damp, dismal tunnel, 1,700 feet long, that afforded the only means of egress from Summit. I walked through that, of course, and emerging, continued to walk, or rather, I tried to walk. Where the road should have been was a wide expanse of snow - deep snow. As there was nothing else to do, I plunged into it and floundered, waded, walked, slipped, and slid to the head of Donner Lake. It took me an hour to cover the short distance. At the Lake the road cleared and to Truckee, 10 miles down the canyon, was in excellent condition for this season of the year. The grade drops 2,400 feet in the 10 miles, and but for the intelligent Truckee citizens I would have bidden good-bye to the Golden State long before I finally did so.



George Wyman on going over summit with first motorized vehicle, 1903

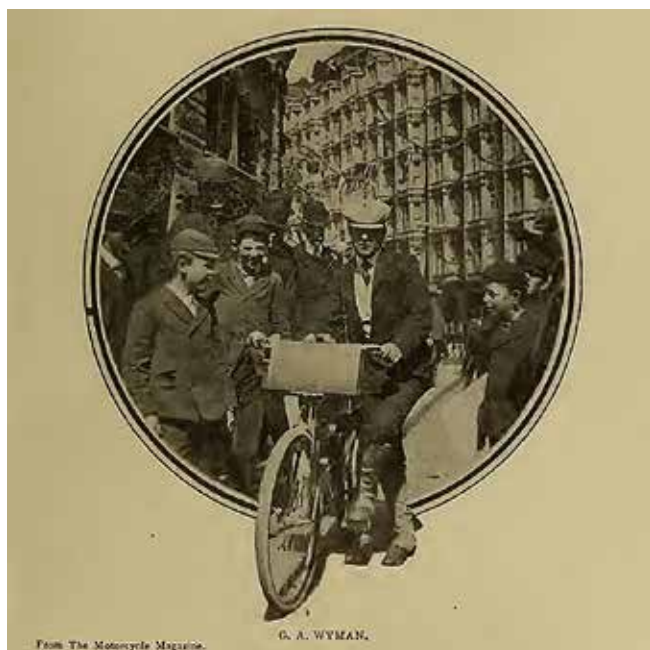
didn't turn out that way. First he discovered he'd lost his oil can and his machine could not last long without lubrication. He had to walk back through the sheds a mile and a half until he came across the can. The day had started badly and "The magnificent view that the tip top the mountains afforded lost its charms. I had eyes not even for Donner Lake, the 'gem of the Sierras,' nestling like a great, lost diamond in its setting of fleecy snow and tall, gaunt pines." Wyman took his motor bicycle and walked through that "dark, damp, dismal" 1700 foot long Tunnel 6 and then decided to get out of the sheds.

He emerged from the tunnel and "tried to walk. Where the road should have been was a wide expanse of snow - deep snow. As there was nothing else to do, I plunged into it and floundered, waded, walked, slipped, and slid to the head of Donner Lake." Apparently that was better though than another few hours in the snowsheds. In Truckee he discovered that the locals' knowledge of local geography was not accurate. He followed the directions of "the intelligent citizens, several of [whom] agreed on the route." After two hours and riding 21 miles, he'd only progressed six miles from Truckee. "After that experience I asked no further information, but sought the crossties..." which "shook me up not a little, I made fair time to Verdi." He traveled on the railroad ties.

He got to New York almost two months later on July 6 pedaling the last 150 miles.

## On using the railroad bed for travel

"The crossties of the roadbed proper are not laid with punctilious exactitude, nor are the intervaling spaces leveled or smoothed. They make uncomfortable and wearying walking: they make bicycle riding of any sort dangerous when it is not absolutely impossible. On the trestles themselves the ties are laid sufficiently close together to make them ride-able - rather "choppy" riding, it is true, but much faster and less tiresome than trundling."



From The Motorcycle Magazine.

G. A. WYMAN.

**"Like California It's Wonderful"**  
**The motto of the 1902 "California" below**





# From the DSHS Archives



What Winter used to look like on Donner Summit. Top is 1950's and the one below is 1947

S-19

Traveling Through the Sierra in Winter Time



**TINKER'S STATION,**  
DONNER LAKE ROAD,  
**TINKER & FENTON,-----Proprietors.**  
Nearest point for the Celebrated Soda Springs.  
A Bar, with the best of Liquors, connected with the House.  
Board per Week.....\$10. | Single Meals.....75 cents.  
Horses and Carriages furnished to Pleasure Parties.  
Twelve miles from Crystal Lake, ten miles from Cisco, and six miles from Pollard's Station.

Tinker's Station was the original hotel at Soda Springs Station (today's Soda Springs). The Tinker in this ad, left, is James Tinker who also drove the stage from Soda Springs Station to Summit Soda Springs (today's Cedars) where there was a hotel called Summit Soda Springs.

# From the DSHS Archives

The notice, right, comes from the San Francisco Call on July 1, 1911. In those days the annual road opening was occasion for an announcement.

## ROAD TO LAKE TAHOE IS OPEN FOR AUTOS

### Highway Can Be Traversed by Any Machine

[Special Dispatch to The Call]

SACRAMENTO, June 30.—The road from Sacramento to Lake Tahoe is now open to automobiles. A message today from Manager Gowling of the Summit hotel says the road over the summit is now clear and that the highway can be traversed by any kind of a machine. Several automobiles have crossed the Sierras, but all had to travel in snow.



Camping at Big Bend in the 1920's

Automobile in Summit Valley with Soda Springs Ski Hill (Beacon Hill) in the background. The car was there because it was on the way to winning the annual first car to Tahoe Tavern contest. The year was 1911 and the car was piloted by Arthur Foote or Nevada City. One day we'll do an article on this adventure.





# Book Review - Fearful Crossing

Fearful Crossing: The Central Overland Trail Through Nevada  
Nevada

Harold Curran 212 pages 1983

This book is not about Donner Summit history, although there is a short description and quotes of travels over Donner Pass. The book may still be of interest to vicarious historians on Donner Summit though because most of the early emigrants who came through the Donner Passes came through the "Fearful Crossing."

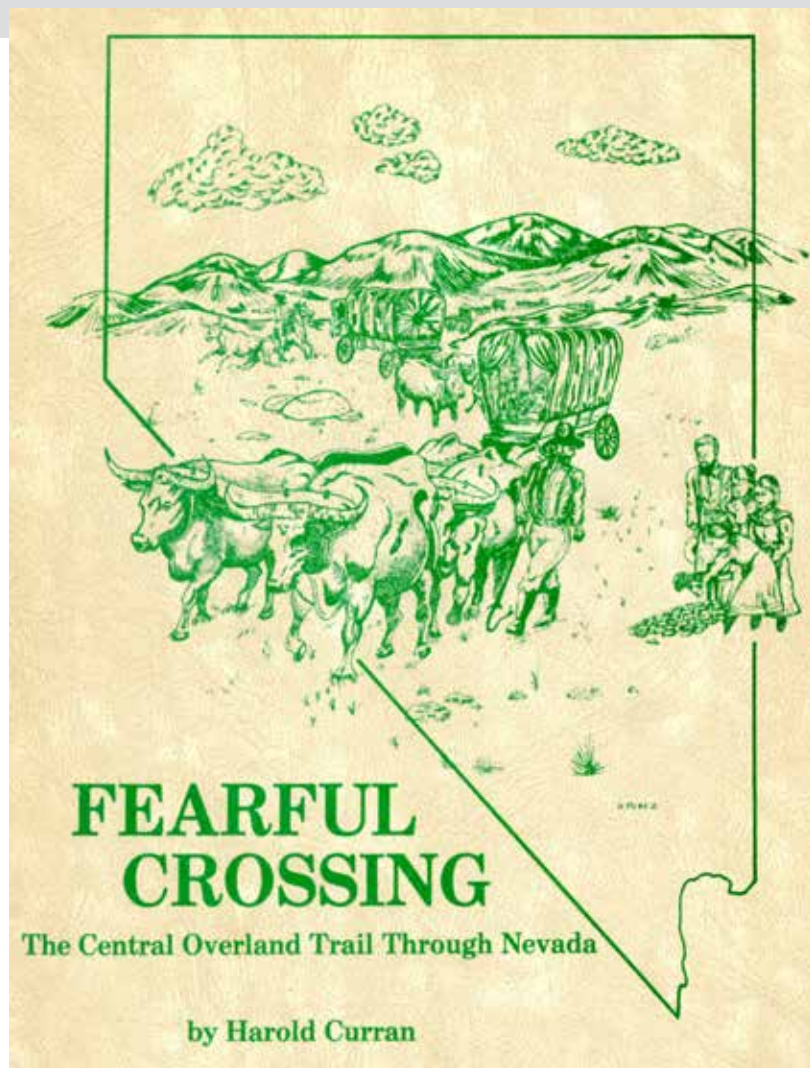
This book is good if one likes to read the actual words of the emigrants. The author has an extensive bibliography which provided sources for the many many quotes. That was a tremendous amount of research particularly in the days before the internet and the general use of the computer.

I bought the book using the internet because I came across a reference to it and the title sounded like it would be about the nightmare that was the emigrant crossing of the Nevada desert. The book is titled, Fearful Crossing after all. The first chapter is a good short summary of previous explorations to California and then Chapter II is headed with a quote, "The valley of the shadow of death, ... Who enters here, leaves hope behind." That is powerful and would be a good pre-cursor if that's what the book was about. The author mis-titled the book though. It is more a guide of the emigrant trails across Utah, Nevada, and into California on both the Truckee and Carson routes.

Many of the quotes are like, "In two miles we came to the lake west of the sink, along which we traveled for 10 miles on Lake towards southwest." or "A fine sheet of clear water, perhaps fifteen miles in length..." or "We came to a narrow slough connecting the lakes..." As the reader progresses through the book he/she follows the route of the emigrants. There are many maps which could help if one knows the geography well. There are only a few quotes or text about the "Fearful Crossing." This book is best for those wanting to explore the route today. If one wants to read about the "Fearful Crossing" through emigrant quotes there are other books better suited like [Emigrant Trails](#) reviewed in our April, '11 [Heirloom](#).

Even for route exploration today, unless one is very familiar with the geography, it would be hard using this book. The many maps have little context. They plot the route but do not show where the locations are in relation to what is in existence today unless one keeps a map of Nevada close by. Towns are noted on the map but Nevada towns are not well known. It would have been better to have insets of the state to show the location of the maps and/or to include wider directions with arrows.

All that said, the book is a good source for emigrant quotes and information about the location of the trail. The quote above, "The valley..." gives one an idea for the hardships the emigrants faced. They were already exhausted having traveled for months to get to Nevada. In their exhausted state they had to challenge the second hardest part of their trip, the Nevada desert. Of course the best (hardest), the Sierra, was saved for last, but that's a digression. Thousands of animals died on the desert and maybe a thousand people. Uncounted wagons, equipment and goods were abandoned as well, perhaps as much as \$3,000,000 worth.



The elements were a trial and unbeatable in some cases but then the Indians added to the misery by stealing oxen. Imagine exhausted emigrants waking, dreading another day on the trail, but thinking they'd be ten miles closer to California at day's end, and discovering arrows in their oxen or mules. The animals, wounded or dead, could not carry on and had to be abandoned. The Indians got some needed food and the emigrants had to abandon goods. In some cases people ended up walking the last bit to California carrying what they could in their arms.

There is information about Hastings and the Hastings cut off as well as the Donner Party, what a "sink" is, and where trails divide. There are lots of quotes.

By page 108 there is some description of the "Fearful Crossing." "The scene along the road the last few days, no one can describe and have anyone believe him. Hundreds of dead cattle lay strung along the road and in the road. Such a smell. It is worse by nite. Not only the dead cattle and their smell but he discord of men. Brother blaming each other for having lost their teams and leaving all behind. Some divided their teams and left their wagons, packed a few things on their backs and walking on cursing." (Andrew Soule 1854) "...for miles back along the road I had come, I could have stepped almost continuously from the carcass of one dead horse or ox to another; so great had been the number of animals that had here perished from hunger, thirst, and general exhaustion." (David Rohrer Leeper 1849) "The stillness of death reigns over this vast plain,..." (George Keller 1850) "Remains could still be seen of oxen and horses lying in pairs and partly covered with sand; of the wagons nothing was left but wheel rims and other iron." (Tosten K. Stabaek 1852) "...we crossed a desert of pure sand, free from all kinds of vegetation, the route plainly marked by mummified remains of cattle and horses that had perished of thirst and wagons abandoned because there was no team left to draw them. All kinds of household goods thrown away to lighten loads..." (Velina A. William 1853)

By page 164 the book has gotten to Donner Lake and Truckee. There are contemporary descriptions of what the Donner sites looked like, "whitened bones, half buried among withered pine leaves are sad memories of the event." (John Steele, 1850) "There were piles of bones around but mostly of cattle, although I

## Roller Pass Quotes:

The road from the Donner Huts has been changed, instead of going around Truckee's Lake as formerly, it begins to ascend the mountains immediately, being a savings of some 4 or 5 miles. The Lake is some 2 miles to the right & and was described to me by those who visited it as about 1 [mile] broad. The ascent to the pass from Donner Cabins is about 5 miles over rocks and steep bluffs...Up, up, we toiled wondering every five minutes how "the dickens" ox teams & wagons can get over here, & it is of the terrible "Passage on the Backbone." For half hour before arriving we could hear the shouts of teamsters urging their cattle up the step, & when we were near enough to see through the forest we could look up nearly over our heads & see wagons and cattle looking like pigmies, & as if almost suspended in the air. The "Pass" is through the slight depression in the mountains being some 1500 r 2000 feet lower than the tops in its immediate vicinity.

As we came up to it the appearance was exactly like marching up some immense wall built directly across our path so perpendicular is this dividing ridge & the road going to its very base turns short to the right & ascends by a track cut in the side of the mountain till two thirds up when it turns left again and goes directly over the summit. The distance to the top of the pass I should judge to be about 1/2 mile & in this short space the elevation attained is somewhere near 2,000 feet. Elisha D. Perkins 1849

From the place where we stopped at noon we could see the summit across the tops of the tall firs. We were very much astonished to see what appeared to be several covered emigrant wagons on the top of the trees and could not understand how they got there. Only later did we realize that wagons were not on the top of the trees but on the highest ridge beyond the trees.

We immediately recognized the difficulty of crossing it. The combined efforts of twenty men would hardly be sufficient to drive up there. ...Up on top twenty oxen were hitched together by chains, one behind the other. Below, a wagon was fastened to the long line of chains and young trees..." Heinrich Lienhard 1846 There had not been enough chains so they'd included small trees in the length of chain and rope.

It was snowing...and in order to get the wagon over the precipitous slopes ten oxen were hitched to a wagon, then it was driven as far as it could go and then a chain was attached that worked on a roller on the top of the mountain. With a man at each wheel the summit was at last reached." Mary Jones 1846

"We put five yoke on a wagon, and had as many with it as necessary to keep it from sliding sideways. Then with five yoke on the summit letting down our long one hundred and fifty feet rope, and itched it with the leaders that were on the wagon, by this process we succeeded." Joseph Aram 1846

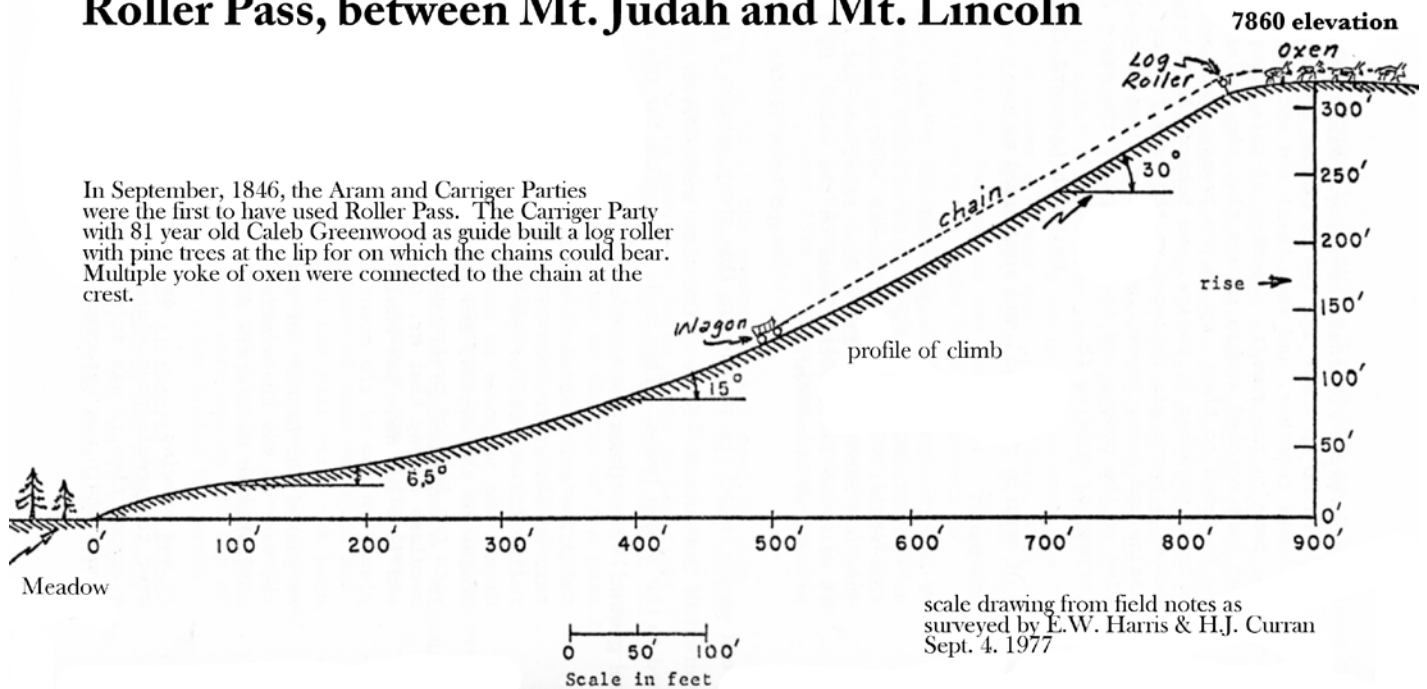
Our pilot, Mr. Greenwood, who had already informed us that we had arrived in California; advised us to follow the counsel of our fellow traveler Mr. Judson Green, who proposes to make a roller, and fasten chains to the wagons, and pull them over the mountains with the help of twelve yokes of oxen. I consider it needless to say that Mr. Greens' plan worked admirable,, and in a few days the whole of our party was safely placed on top of the mountain." Nicholas Carriger 1846



did find some half dozen human ones of different parts. Here was nearly the whole skeleton. Several small stockings were found which still contained the bones of the leg & foot..." (Vincent Geiger 1849)

A few pages later we get to Coldstream and Roller Pass with a wonderful diagram of Roller Pass (see below) along with some good quotes about crossing the pass (see the previous page). and then a wonderful quote concluding the crossing by one emigrant, "Looking down the steep gorge when we had come, we bade adieu to its dark avenues, towering cliffs, sequestered shades, bright waters and melancholy scenes. We felt a real relief in bidding farewell to the mountains, valleys, and desert of the great interior, with its adventure, romance, tragedy, sorrow, suffering and death – scenes which will linger in our minds as memorials of our journey across the plains." (John Steele 1950) That really encapsulates the mixed emotions the emigrants had.

## Roller Pass, between Mt. Judah and Mt. Lincoln



## What to Take Hiking and Riding in 1915

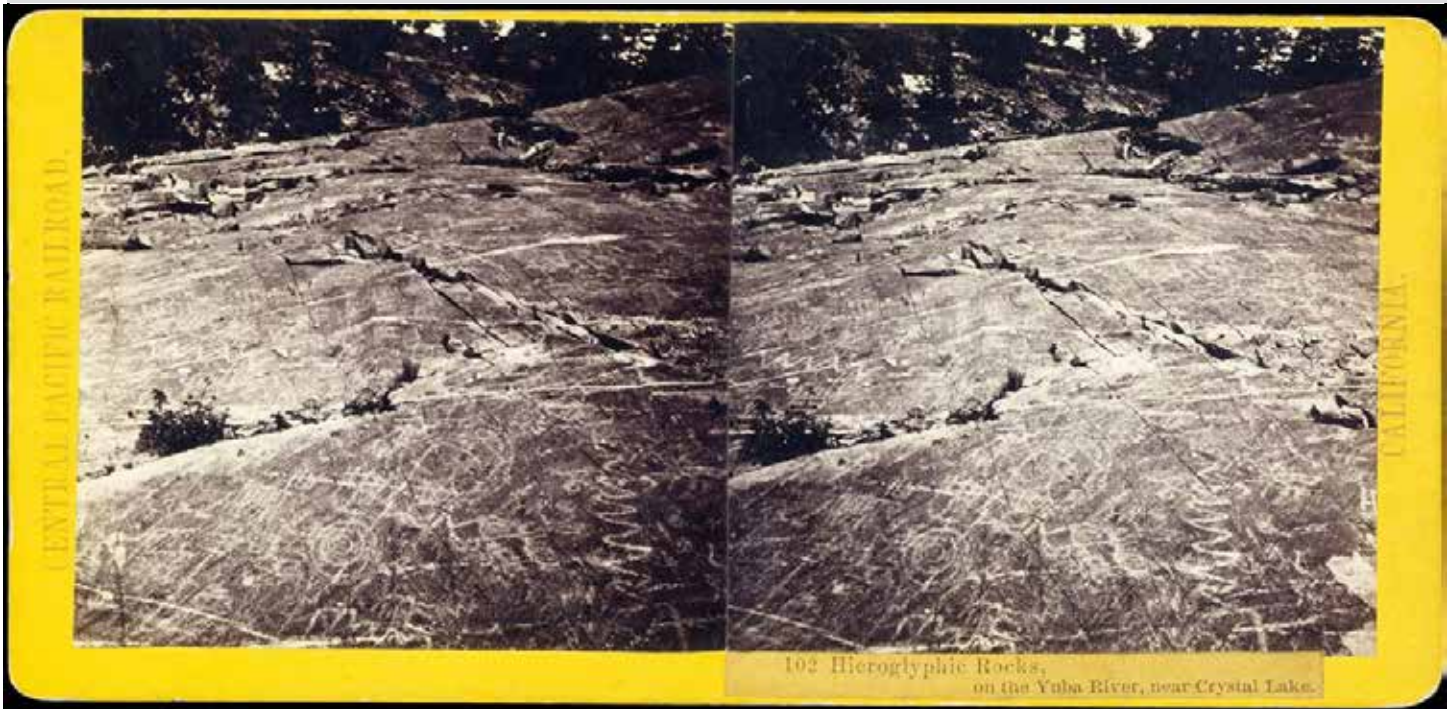
Today many history aficionados enjoy re-enacting historical events. There are Civil War re-enactors, Wild West re-enactors, and WWII re-enactors for example. There is also the Steam Punk culture which focuses on the Victorian Era.

Some readers of this august publication may want to experience local historical verisimilitude by re-enacting old ways of life on Donner Summit. You might like to pilot an old car along old stretches of the Lincoln Highway, try to incise petroglyphs on local granite, take a wagon up Roller Pass.

For those just starting out in the re-enactment game, consider this simple exercise. The 1915 book, Lake of the Sky, which is about the Lake Tahoe area and which we'll review at some point, includes some snippets of advice. Here is what to take hiking and riding in 1915.

My friends often ask me what food and drink I take along on such hiking or riding trips. Generally the hotel provides a luncheon, but personally, I prefer a few Grant's crackers (a thick, hard cracker full of sweet nutriment, made at Berkeley, Calif.) a handful of shelled nuts – walnuts, pecans, or almonds, a small bottle of Horlick's Malted Milk tablets, a few slabs of Ghirardelli milk chocolate, and an apple or an orange. On this food I can ride or walk days at a time, without anything else. Grant's crackers, Horlick's Malted Milk tablets, and Ghirardelli's chocolate are the best of their kind, and all are nutritious to the full, as well as delicious to the taste. For drink I find Horlick's Malted Milk the most comforting and invigorating, and it has none of the after "letting down" effects that accompany coffee drinking.

# Then & Now with Art Clark



Alfred A Hart 102 Hieroglyphic Rocks, on the Yuba River.

Between Cisco and the Eagle Lakes exit, the South Yuba River winds under and around Interstate 80. This spot happens to be between the east and westbound lanes. At some point between 1865 and now there was a lot of wear and tear from tires on these rocks. Sadly, the petroglyphs are mostly gone, and instead there are gouges from tire chains.

Photo location 39° 19.034'N 120° 33.518'W





# Then & Now with Art Clark



## Lake Van Norden 1950's - The case of the missing rock -

When the dam was in full operation, Lake Van Norden was pretty big. it was not that deep, but it was long and wide. Boating was popular, and Norm Saylor [president and founder of the DSHS] even had a ski jump, visible in the old photo [lower left, the dot above the peninsula].

Also very prominent in the 1950's postcard above, were the two large 8-foot-long rocks atop a volcanic pedestal. They are also visible in Alfred A Hart's photo from the 1860's (See "Summit Valley from Lava Bluff Hart 109" on the Then & Now scenery page of the DSHS website).

Sometime in the last fifty years, one of the rocks disappeared as you can see in the contemporary picture to the right. It's been suggested that someone used a bulldozer to dislodge it, but that would have been difficult due to the steepness of the pedestal.

The slope below this point is also very steep, and a search of the area didn't reveal the missing rock. Abducted by aliens? College prank? Who knows?

Photo location 39° 18.944'N 120° 22.





# Rainbow Tavern Today

In our April '14 [Heirloom](#) we noted that Rainbow Tavern was re-opening under new management and we covered some of the history.

Now that Summer is here, the Tavern is really and completely opened for business with the restaurant operating full time. The owners, Craig and Wendy Mitchell, has been busy with remodeling, fixing, and improving. The Tavern re-opened initially as a B & B but now that the kitchen has been redone, equipment installed, employees and manager hired, and the liquor license obtained, the Tavern is ready for business - completely.

People have been hoping for the reopening and indeed, while our photographer was there getting these pictures, quite a few people, driving Old 40, stopped by to see if the restaurant was open. One fellow arrived with his girlfriend and excitedly pulled her from room to room marveling as how nice it all looked and exulting that he'd been coming for decades and was so happy it was re-opening.

The Tavern is a classic historic Sierra lodge. The common rooms are all wood and stone and the atmosphere is warm and inviting. Since you are reading this you are interested in history and Rainbow Tavern is historic. You should visit for a meal, to enjoy the architecture, and see the displays of dozens of historic photographs, some of which you can see here. It's a trip inot the past, when life was a bit different and auto travel was slower.

You can get to Rainbow Tavern from I-80 taking the Big Bend exit #168. Of course if you just stay on Old 40 you'll go right past it like the travelers in the old days did.







On the previous page are photographs of the common rooms. From the top: the main dining room, a table setting, the second dining room, and the bar.

Above is one of the many displays of historic photographs.

Top right, the first car over the Summit (1925). That was a big event in those days.

It meant winter isolation was over and tourists and business would soon be coming. Old 40 was not plowed until 1931.

Center Right, skiers on Donner Summit 1920's

Bottom Right: Old time skiers ca. 1910

Near right:  
Donner Summit 1929

Bottom left:  
Donner Summit 1936



DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

[www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org)

Membership

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

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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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## Over Donner Summit, 1849

Benjamin Hoffman left West Virginia in 1849 headed for California. He kept a diary on his way over Donner Summit to his new life. This excerpt comes from the newsletter, Trail Talk, "A Newsletter of the California -Nevada Chapter of the Oregon-California Trail Association ([canvocta@gmail.com](mailto:canvocta@gmail.com) or [canvocta.org](http://canvocta.org)) Since you are history minded, you may want to join the California-Nevada chapter of the Oregon California Trails Association.

Monday 20 August

We started at daybreak this morning and crossed the river again, making twenty-seven times in a distance of about thirty miles (Truckee River below Truckee). About noon today we reached the base of the Sierra Nevada mountains. These mountains are clothed with fine timber, pines, firs and cedar trees. Pine trees can be found here eighteen feet in circumference and fifty or sixty feet without a limb. The cedars are also very large. We traveled six or seven miles over the mountains, then halted for breakfast in a little valley surrounded on every side by mountains of a tremendous height, where we remain until three o'clock in the evening, when we again marched on a few miles farther and halted for the night.

Tuesday 21 August

We broke camp very early this morning and crossed a high range of mountains... After dinner we resumed our march and arrived at the Donner cabins this evening, the place where the Donner party perished in 1846. It is truly an appalling sight. The ground is scattered with human bones...God save our party from a like fate.

Wednesday 22 August

The days was spent in crossing the highest peak of the Sierra Nevada mountains. We passed Truckee river. ... We passed up some of the highest precipices of rocks that were almost impossible. We were obliged to double-team and pull with ropes. The first emigrant drew up their wagons with a windlass. We all arrived safe at the top before sundown. The road down is not quite so bad. We were after night getting into camp.

Thursday 23 August

We remained in camp until two o'clock p.m. to rest from our hard labors on yesterday. At that hour we started again and made about seven miles over a terrible road, passing what is called Seven Lakes on the top of a very high mountain.



# SUPERVISORS PLAN GREAT HIGHWAY

Placer Board Tours County in  
Auto to Gather Data for  
Splendid Road

[Special Dispatch to The Call]

TRUCKEE, June 27.—The Placer county supervisors are making a tour of the county in an automobile with a view to taking steps toward the improvement of various roads which will form a complete highway from the Sacramento county line to Lake Tahoe and to the Nevada state line.

Those in the party which arrived today are: J. J. Brennan of Loomis, J. W. McFadden of Forestdale, Charles Geisendorfer of Welmer, Moses Predom of Auburn and H. S. Williamson of Lincoln.

It is the intention to build a highway for automobiles that will draw travel to this county. The highway will be through Roseville, Auburn, Loomis, Newcastle and other towns of the county along the railroad.

Above: S.F. Call 6/28, 1910

Below: S.F. Call 6/27/1910

# AUTOISTS MAKE TRIP TO TAHOE

Motorists by Hundreds Leave  
Sacramento Every Sunday  
for Sierra Nevada

[Special Dispatch to The Call]

SACRAMENTO, June 26.—Motoring parties are the rage these warm days, and every Sunday more than a hundred machines leave Sacramento for Lake Tahoe and points in the Sierra. Parties report good roads, and every weekend finds more recruits making the run into the higher altitudes for rest and a breath of cool air. About 50 machines, carrying several score businessmen and their wives, left yesterday for points around Lake Tahoe, and this morning it is estimated that almost a hundred machines started over the Folsom road toward Placerville and the lake.

# Margie Powell History Hike 2014

Margie Powell was one of the founders of the Donner Summit Historical Society. She loved the local history.

She passed away three years ago. In her memory the community began the Margie Powell History Hikes which have proved really popular.

The 2014 hike will go downhill from the PCT on Donner Summit to the Land Trust kiosks on Old 40 (trailhead in the map to the right). Along the way we'll tell the stories of the local history: the Emigrant Trail, the Stephens and Donner Parties, The Lincoln Highway, China Wall, 1913 underpass, Old 40, Rainbow Bridge, petroglyphs, and turkeys. We'll see old signs painted on rocks, wonderful scenery, and historic sites. We'll eat lunch at a beautiful view site.

Best of all, we'll organize so car shuttle back to the top so the most interesting and historic hike on the summit will also be the easiest and most fun.

There will be two hikes: **August 2 and August 3**. Meet at the Sugar Bowl Academy at the top of Old 40 at 10 A.M. Download the brochure with the map to the right. It on our brochure page at the DSHS website, called Summit Canyon.

The 2015 Margie Powell Hike will be at Big Bend: Stephens Party, first white baby born in California, Emigrant Trail (rust marks on the rocks), Lincoln Highway (we'll walk pristine sections, and then end up at Rainbow Lodge, an historic old time lodge. Dates still to be decided.

\*The PCT is just off Old 40 on Donner Summit. Take the Sugar Bowl Rd. turnoff to the Old Donner Summit Rd. Drive up to the PCT trailhead. Parking is just below it or uphill towards Sugar Bowl Academy. The Academy has also given permission for people to park there for the Margie Powell Hike (white buildings at the top).

