

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society



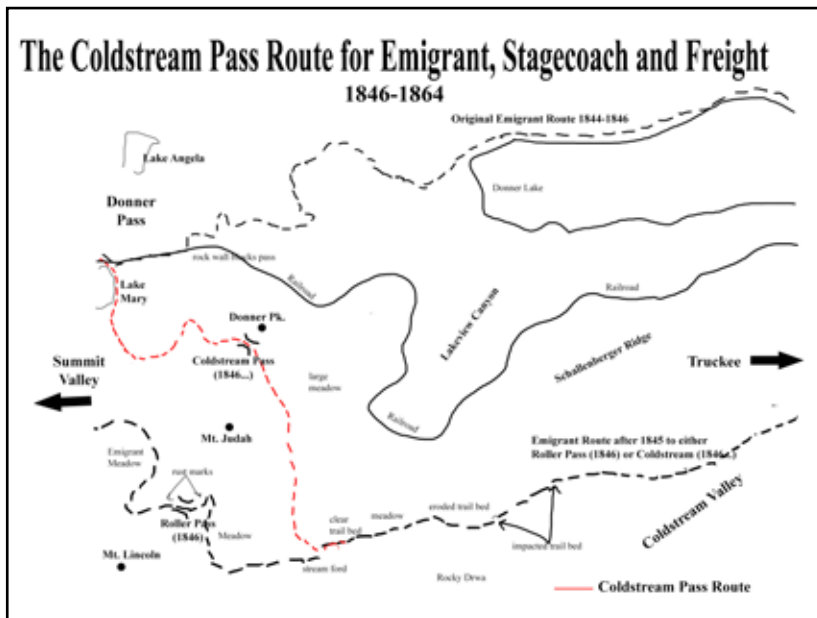
September, 2015 issue #85

Mystery Solved- Maybe

"Intriguing" Pt. II. or the Further Adventures of the MHRT

The title grabs your attention. In the May, '15 Heirloom there was an article called, "Intriguing" which followed the review of the 1915 book, Lake of the Sky by Wharton James. In the book he mentioned taking an "unusual trip" from Tahoe Tavern to Donner Summit but not via the established Lincoln Highway, which was basically the route of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. (a walk down Summit Canyon on the Lincoln Highway is highly recommended – see our Summit Canyon brochure at the DSHS or on our website for details).

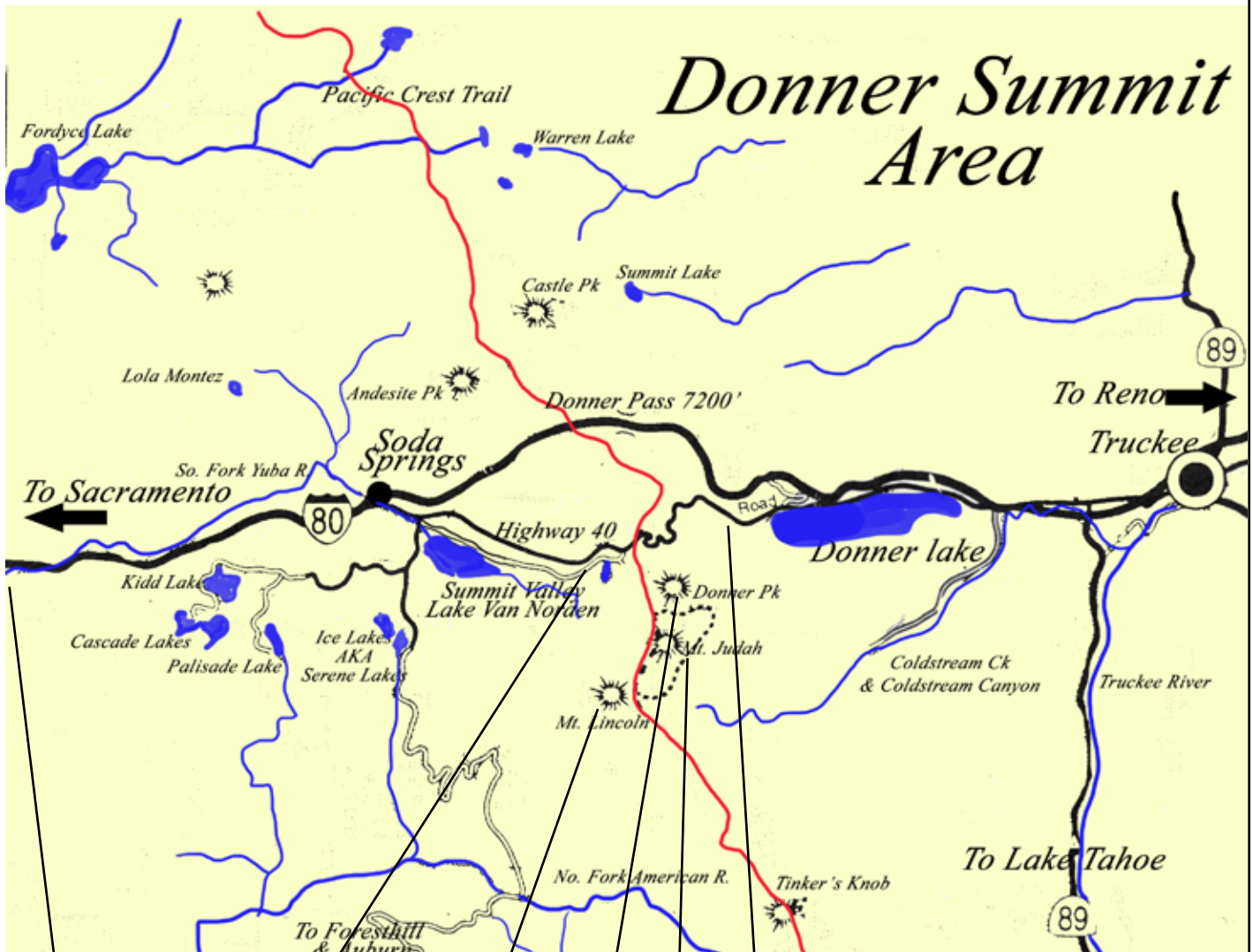
Instead Mr. James turned left at the foot of Donner Lake and headed into Coldstream Canyon following the "old emigrant and stage-road" that had "not been used for fifty years, but is full of interest." When James took his trip there were still lots of objects remaining to tell the "fascinating history. Over it [the route over Coldstream Pass] came many who afterwards became pioneers in hewing out this new land from the raw material of which lasting commonwealths are made." He went over Coldstream Pass between Donner Pk. and Mt. Judah, and then down into Summit Valley. He found "Starved Camp" of Donner Party fame and the "stumps of the trees cut down by the unfortunate pioneers." He said it was "always a difficult road to navigate" "But those heroes of 1848-49 made it, triumphing over every barrier..." In 1915 the road was almost obliterated but someone "most studiously observant" could follow the route. When the Dutch Flat Rd. was built, the road over Coldstream "was totally abandoned." "Now it is as if it never had been, save for its memories and the fragments of wagons, broken and abandoned in the direct conflict with stern Nature, and suggesting the heart-break and struggle the effort to reach California caused in those early days."



Above, map of the original emigrant route up Donner Pass, Roller Pass, and then in red, Coldstream Pass.

That short piece went a way to answering a question anyone interested in Donner Summit history would want answered. The first emigrants, the Stephens Party, came up the current Donner Pass from Donner Lake, having left half their wagons below. Not many wagons came over in 1845 and by 1846 Roller Pass had been discovered some miles to the south. The fact that half

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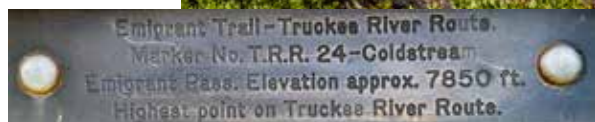
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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

of the Donner Party ended up at Donner Lake, and not on the route to Roller Pass, was bad luck. The snow must have hidden the trail. In 1846 so many wagons were waiting their turns to get up Roller Pass that some impatient people or some people just out exploring, found Coldstream Pass, between Donner and Roller. It was steep but not as steep as Roller and afterwards most everyone used Coldstream Pass. In fact something like 28% of all emigrant wagons heading to California came over what's been called generally Donner Pass, but meaning specifically Coldstream Pass.

The Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. was built from 1862 to 1864 as a toll road and to help build the railroad. It went down the original Donner Pass and required a lot of work to carve out of the canyon.

The question is that those interested in Donner Summit history would want answered is, after the emigrant wagon trains, what did people use to get over the Sierra before the Dutch Flat Rd. and then the railroad came along? Most trans-Sierra traffic until the railroad went over the Placerville route, basically what is today Highway 50. There would have been traffic to the north though, to Truckee or Virginia City from points northwest. What was their route over Donner Summit? Which pass did they take?



Mr. James answers that question when he went out one day to follow the “old emigrant stage-road” that had not been used in fifty years (1865 or so which is when the Dutch Flat Rd. went into use) and went over Coldstream Pass to Summit Valley. There must have been freight and stage traffic on that route over Coldstream Pass. Today the only traffic is hikers aiming for Donner Pk. (spectacular view all around and down 1000’ feet to Donner Lake) or the Judah Loop (spectacular views). A few mountain bikers go over the pass today and head down Lakeview Canyon to Donner Lake or Coldstream Valley and on to Truckee.

A second set of clues comes from Arthur Foote’s 1911 trip to win the Tahoe Tavern Silver Cup for taking the first automobile over the Sierra that season. F. D. Calhoun came to Grass Valley in 1929 and met Arthur Foote and the fellows who helped him with his win. Then he wrote about it.



He mentions that when Foote and compatriots arrived at the summit they stared down at where the road should have been. It was covered with deep snow on steep slopes. There was no way they could hold the car back from tumbling down the mountainside to Donner Lake. Nearby though, were the snowsheds and the roofs were clear of snow. Snowsheds acted as chimneys, which made fires a particular danger. The warm air rising through them and the trains traveling through them apparently melted snow quickly. The men hoisted the car to the snowshed roof and drove along it for three miles. When the “right-of-way disappeared into the face of the mountainside they took out the block and tackle again and lowered the Ford to the road which now left the railroad and continued parallel to the lake below until it reached the lake’s eastern end.”

“The railroad emerged from the tunnel into the drainage basin of Clearwater Creek [sic], and continued down that creek to the

Top: the emigrant marker on Coldstream Pass placed by the Trails West organization. Center, the plaque on the marker. Bottom, Coldstream Pass looking west. Castle Pk. is to the right.

Truckee River below. The wagon and stage road was now below the worst of the drifted snow and the into the “rain shadow area” of the Great Basin. The Ford rolled smoothly into the parking lot at the hotel at the eastern end of the Donner Lake.” There is no “Clearwater Creek” but there is Coldstream Canyon and Creek. The “wagon and stage road” appears to be the same road James took four years later. At the time of Foote’s journey the main route, the stage and freight route, was on the other side of Donner Lake so he could not have lowered the Ford to that road. Since he could see the railroad emerging from the tunnel into the drainage... he must have been in Coldstream.

This appears to be an academic question and it is, but there is more to where the route was.

There was a race between the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads to built miles of track. The more miles completed, the more money the companies got. The CPRR was stuck though at Donner Summit. It took two years to blast and dig Tunnel 6 out of the Sierra granite. Meanwhile the Union Pacific was flying along coming from the east. They even taunted the CPRR that they’d be at the California border before the CPRR even got out of the Sierra. The CPRR must have been desperate.

To solve that problem the CPRR decided to build track in Nevada. They could build quickly there and when the track was connected with the track stopped at Donner Pass after the tunnel was completed, they’d get a pile of money. To do that the company hauled miles of track, car parts, and three locomotives over Donner Summit. It was an amazing feat that we’ll cover in a future [Heirloom](#) (so don’t let your subscription lapse). How did they go over?

The first thought is that the equipment and materials went over the Dutch Flat Rd. but that seems unlikely. Each piece of track was 24 feet long and weighed 523 lbs (an interesting fact from Wendell Huffman of the Nevada State Railroad Museum). Material that long would have been trouble on the windy Dutch Flat Rd. The first locomotive over, the San Mateo, weighed 30 tons when ready for travel. It wasn’t ready for train duty when it went over the summit but it was still heavy. At the same time that road must have been clogged with freight on the toll road and wagons for the railroad. At its height, 87 train car loads a day were unloaded at Cisco and put on wagons to go on the Dutch Flat Rd. That’s a lot of traffic. Second the Dutch Flat Rd. was very windy and it would have been difficult even with no traffic to take locomotives over it. When the Blue Goose was taken up from Gold Run to the summit to work as a donkey engine at the top of the shaft at the center of Tunnel 6, oncoming mules had to be blindfolded so they would not bolt. Could the three locomotives sent to help build the railroad in Nevada have traveled the Dutch Flat Rd.?



Above: Coldstream Pass looking west. Below right, one of the emigrant markers. Who is unknown. Below, left, one of many trail blazes in the trees.



There was a better route than the clogged and windy Dutch Flat Rd.: the old Coldstream Pass route that would still have been in passable shape a few years after people had abandoned it.



Art Clark, left near the Trails West Emigrant Trail marker on Coldstream Pass and just above the Wedell cairn, below. (Emigrant Trail.... 1929 By P.M. Wedell San Jose)

The third locomotive went over the pass in the winter, February, 1868. When Arthur Foote and friends got to the pass in May, 1911, they stared down at where the road should have been. Donner Summit gets an average of 34 feet of snow a year and the steep slopes below Donner Pk. would have added more feet in avalanches. There were reports that while building the railroad snow was sometimes 50 feet deep. Avalanches trapped Chinese workers leaving some frozen until spring, but that's a different story. If Foote and friends could not hold their car back from tumbling into Donner Lake, how could a locomotive have been taken down in the winter? How could the workers have kept if from tumbling into Donner Lake and making a big splash? The solution was Coldstream Pass again, on sledges pulled by oxen with snowshoes.



Parenthetically, this issue has been niggling at the DSHS research staff for some years and they have searched for maps and other documentation at the State Railroad Museum library, the Searles Library in Nevada City, the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, the library at UNR, and the Placer County Archives. No luck although we were supplied with a receipt from a mule driver who took the Blue Goose to Donner Summit (you'll have to wait for that so don't let your subscription lapse).



On Site Research - the MHRT in Action

So, with all that as a background, the Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT) went out in June to see what there was to be seen of the old emigrant, freight, and stage route over Coldstream Pass. We had Charles Graydon's ([The Trail of the First Wagons over the Sierra Nevada](#), reviewed in the August Heirloom) maps in the GPS along with other information. We'd be able to keep ourselves perfectly on track.



We headed up the PCT and then towards Donner Pk. There's been so much activity there over the years there's nothing determinative left. We'd found previously some Wedell signs from the 1920's (Peter Wedell marked the Emigrant Trail making a

Above, Emigrant Trail sign placed by an unknown troop of Boy Scouts in an unknown year.

Left, possible road/trail route through the forest.



Left, one of a few trail ducks marking the Emigrant Route.

number of trips from the 1920's to 1950 or so. You can see his map in the April '14 [Heirloom](#), page 9). At the top of Coldstream Pass we stopped to see the Trails West Emigrant Marker and the Wedell cairn (still almost readable 85 years after its construction). Then we headed east, down to see what was left of the "old emigrant and stage-road".

As it turns out, someone has marked a lot of the old trail with orange ribbons and trail ducks. There are also a couple of old signs marking it but it all peters out well before the trail to Coldstream meets the route to Roller Pass. It was hard, or impossible really, to imagine Wharton James piloting his auto through the forest to Coldstream Pass. It was hard to imagine that stagecoaches came flying along but they must have. Certainly a lot of emigrant wagons traveled the route. Mother Nature has erased almost all evidence, except for what appear to be passageways in the forest.

We did not find much evidence but we did find riots of wildflowers, and a gorgeous lunch view 2/3 of the way from Coldstream to Roller Pass.

At Roller Pass we climbed up and having been tired of traipsing through the forest all day, we got a feeling for what the emigrants must have felt as they climbed the pass placing one foot in front of the other wishing the task would be done. We could not imagine getting oxen and then wagons and then all our remaining personal goods up too. Our almost empty water bottles and lunchboxes were enough (We in the MHRT have been known to exaggerate).

Here you find pictures of our trip and a map in case you would like to do a repeat.

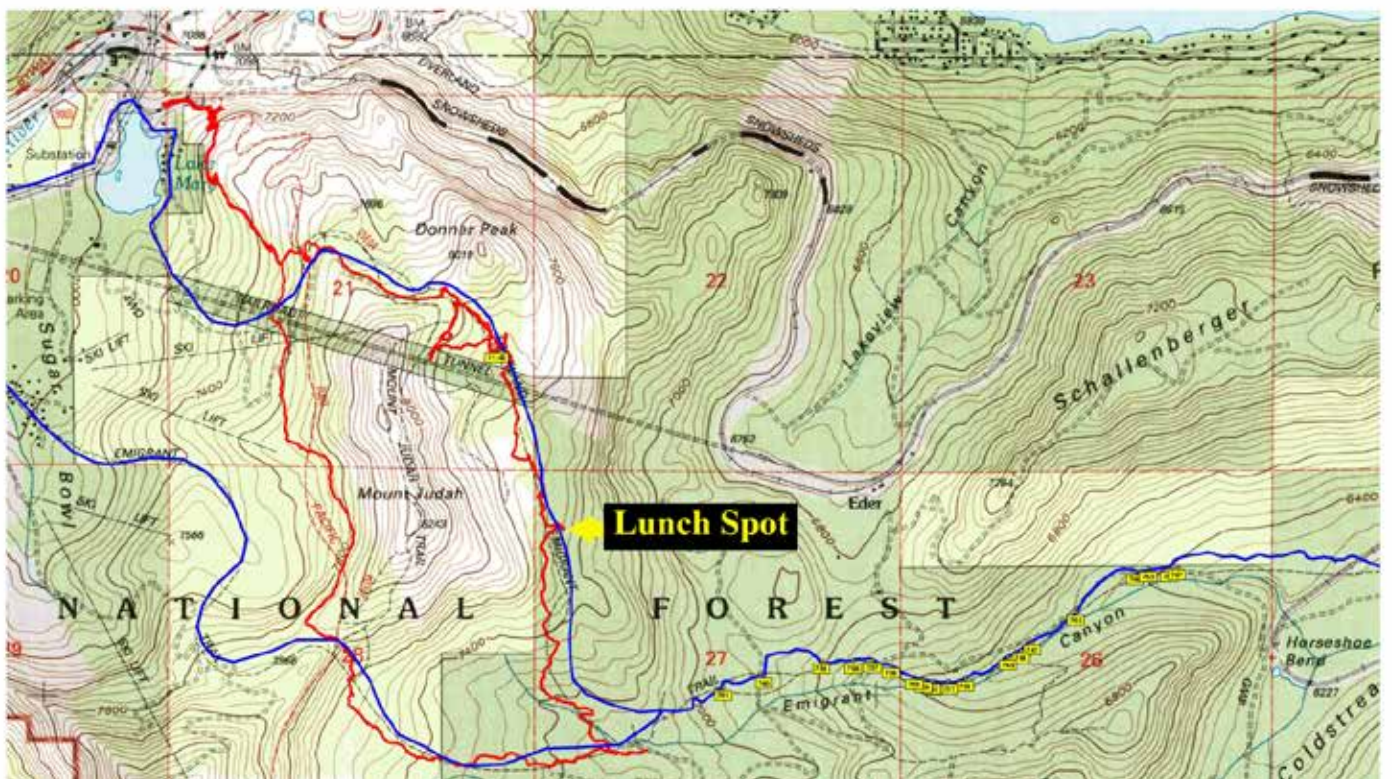
Below, the MHRT's route, in red. Blue is the route marked by Charles Graydon in [The Trail of the First Wagons over the Sierra Nevada](#).

Flowers next page:

Top row left to right, Linanthus bicolor or True Baby Star, Columbine, Mule Ear

Second row, Snowplant, Smooth Stickseed, also wrongly called Forget Me Not

Third row, Mule Ear, Lupine, and then Lupine





Good Lunch spot, below. A "riot" of wildflowers if you go at the right time of year. Location: N 39° 17.884' W 120° 18.505'
 The railroad is in the distance left with Schallenberger Ridge behind it. Coldstream Valley is to the right of Schallenberger.



RAILROAD IMPROVEMENTS.

The Central Pacific Railroad Company are making extensive improvements at Tunnel 13, seven miles from Truckee, and midway between Truckee and Summit station. Besides the new turn-table in process of erection, 400 feet of gallery [snowshed] is also being built. A side-track is already completed, and a telegraph office will soon be added, and then Tunnel 13 will be a full fledged station, In the Winter time the principal detention of trains on account of drifting snow has been between Truckee and Tunnel 13. Trains going west have no difficulty after reaching this latter point, until they arrive at Emigrant Gap, the terminus of the snowsheds on the west side of the Sierras. Immediately below Tunnel 13, Coldstream canyon emerges from the base of Tinker's Knob, a point of the Sierras nearly 10,000 feet high. In Winter terrible snow storms sweep down from this high point upon the railroad track, which follows down the canyon. During the past Winter the snow drifted on the track to the depth of three or four feet in as many hours. As there was no turn-table at Tunnel 13, snow plows and locomotives going up to that point from Truckee could not return, but were forced to go to the Summit before they could be turned around, thus making twelve or fourteen miles of extra travel and considerable loss of time, a very important item when a furious storm is raging and the track is being covered with snow at the rate of a foot an hour or more. The station at Tunnel 13 is located several hundred feet above the bottom of Coldstream canyon, around which the railroad runs in an immense curve, and a fine view can be had of nearly four miles of the track. Should a western-bound train get stalled by the snow in Coldstream canyon, the fact would immediately be known by the operator at Tunnel 13 and assistance telegraphed for to Truckee or the Summit. Heretofore trains have been snow-bound in the above locality for hours before their condition could be made known and aid sent forward. The improvements being made to Tunnel 13 will do much to prevent any snow blockade on this side of the Summit, and will save the company in a severe Winter tens of thousands of dollars in the wear and tear of locomotives and snow plows, and extra labor. Frequently in the Winter season, when there is little or no snow falling in Truckee or Summit Station, a fearful storm will be raging at or below Tunnel 13. A telegraph station at the latter point will enable the railroad company to be prepared for any contingency, and by the prompt use of the means within their power, keep the road in readiness for passing trains. Nearly all the obstruction from snow the past Winter on the west side of the Sierras was between Emigrant Gap and Blue Canyon, or perhaps as far down as Shady Run. An extension of the snow sheds at Emigrant Gap, a turn-table at Blue Canyon for snow plows and locomotives, and the laying down of steel rails, which improvements will be accomplished this season, will do much to prevent even any temporary snow blockade hereafter on the road over the Sierras.— Truckee Republican. September 10th.

Reprinted in the Sacramento Daily Union September 12, 1874, which is where the DSHS Historical Research Team (HRT) found it. It is formatted here exactly as it was in the newspaper. They did not have much "truck" with paragraphs in those days apparently. We'd have added paragraphs for easier reading but space is at a premium.



Yellow Crab Spider. *Misumena vatia*.

The MHRT did not find what it was really looking for, lots of evidence of the freight and stage road but since it was wildflower season there was lots to see. Above the flower is a special spider. She can change color and here mimics the flower color exactly. She also has two thicker legs that when spread, make her look like part of the flower. This was at the lunch spot.

Interesting Historical Fact in Case You Are Ever on a Quiz Show*

On each tunnel face while constructing their 15 Sierra tunnels the railroad used 150 lbs. of candles per month per face and 1500 feet of fuse.

*If you are on a quiz show, if you get asked the question for the answer above, and you win, please remember the DSHS with your winnings.

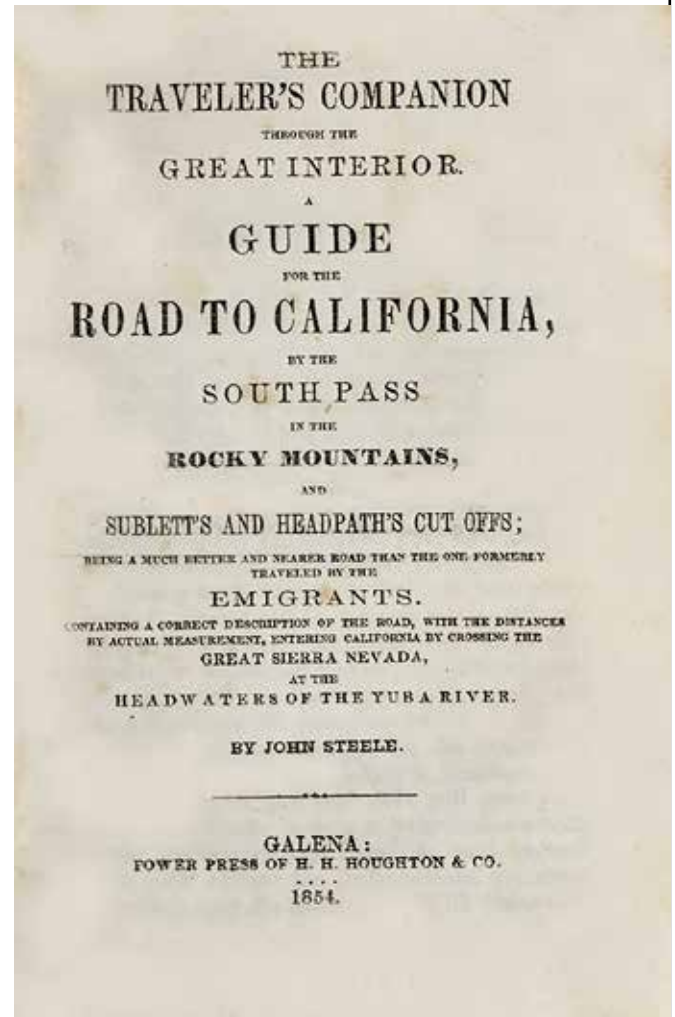
The Guide for the Road to California

- just in case you want to visit.

John Steele, 1854

Today, heading over Donner Summit is easy - even with kids asking plaintively "are we there yet?" It was not always easy getting over Donner Summit. Here is a good place to put in a little plug for our 2015 exhibits which are on our webpage. Two of the eleven are titled, "It Was Not Always Easy to Get Over Donner Summit (pt 1 and pt2).

Here is an extract from John Steele's 1853 Traveler's Companion. It's a guide for getting to California and gives some useful information for travelers who can follow his mileage notes. First it was interesting to see a source that talked about Donner Summit and where emigrants might have camped in the old days but on seeing the mileages another idea formed. Could we use them to pinpoint Steele's camping spots? We turned to Art Clark, who does our Then & Now's and who is a charter member of the DSHS MHRT (Mobile Historical Research Team). In this case he did not have to be too mobile beyond moving his mouse around. On the two maps here are Art's best guesses for the route Steele took and we've reprinted here a bit of what Art did. Art marked the camping spots with "EG's" and numbered them. He started by arbitrarily placing a "EG10" in Coldstream and then working west and east. He traced the route using the route outlined by Charles Graydon in his Trail of the First Wagons Over the Sierra Nevada reviewed in last month's Heirloom. Looking at the yellow rectangles with the "EG's" in them, we get a visual idea of how far the emigrants went in a day.



Art Says, "Some of it makes sense, some not. By the time it got to the summit above Verdi (EG3), the guide was different by about 5 miles, showing a longer distance. Probably still OK, considering that the guide rounded numbers to the 1/2 mile, and they were probably just estimates, anyway.

"As far as the points in between, who knows. The descriptions were somewhat vague." So much for the difficulties of modern historians.

Travel was difficult in those days and that's illustrated by Steele's cautions at the beginning of his book.

"Traveler are you bound for California... Then let me have your attention for one moment."

"I would not ask you even while we commune together, to forget those loved ones you leave behind. ... I would say to all, cherish the endearing memory of Parents, Children, Brothers, Sisters, Friends and Home. It will give your spirits a lofty tone, inspire your bosoms with noble self-sacrificing thoughts, and ingraft into your nature the independent principle of acting only for the right."

Steele goes on to give some general advice for dealing with "the unremitting toil you must endure, the many hardships you must encounter, and the dangers that will constantly assail you on your long adventurous journey" after leaving the "boundary of civilization."

The emigrant will cross "wide and deep rivers, desert plains, and bleak ranges of mountains." The emigrant will meet "rude and savage nations" who in their "inhuman sport" will attack emigrants. Sickness is lurking in the desert and in the "noxious vapors of the low lands, and the stagnant pools from which you may unconsciously drink."

So, he says, be prepared. Make sure the animals are healthy. Be sure the wagons are light and well made and not heavily loaded. "Take only the best quality provisions. Be sure you have an ample supply of flour, crackers, and well prepared bacon, for at least four months." Bring along a "judicious supply of groceries and medicines" and be sure each man has a rifle. Don't bring a pistol unless it's a Colt. When you meet the Indians be an "enlightened Christian" "In all your intercourse be kind, firm, and fearless, for, by so doing, you impress them with a nobleness of character, which they admire."

It sounds like the drug commercials on television. After touting the wonders of the drugs the viewer is cautioned the wonder drug can also cause heart murmurs, high blood pressure, diabetes, loss of energy...

Here then are passages in the Companion about the trip over Donner Pass. The first number in each entry is the distance from the previous entry and the second is the total distance.

From A Traveler's Companion Through the Great Interior Guide for the Road to California by the South Pass in the Rocky Mountains, and Sublett's and Headpath's Cut offs; 1854

After leaving Truckee Meadows, which is today Reno, emigrants were aiming for the Sierra the hardest part of the journey to California. The view of the mountains in the distance struck at least some emigrants with terror.

Leading up to the pass from Reno, the emigrants had to cross and recross the Truckee River twelve times with some fords just a quarter of a mile apart. Oxen hooves got soft and so the beasts, already exhausted, had even more difficulty traveling.

We pick up the story 1865 miles into the journey from latitude 41 degrees, 18 minutes, and 53 seconds on the "west bank of the Missouri River." The spelling is left as it was.



SUMMIT OF THE MOUNTAIN.- 3- 1865

The descent is somewhat steep. You cross several low ridges, on which is plenty of timber but little grass.

LARGE CREEK.- 5- 1870

Plenty of grass and timber. On leaving this you ascend a stony ridge.

MARSH VALLEY.-5-1875!

Good place to camp; abundance of wood, water and grass.

LARGE CREEK.-6- 1881}

Plenty of grass and willows. After leaving this the road is level, with the exception of the descent into the next valley, which is very steep.

ROCK VALLEY.-5-1886~

You follow up this valley a short distance, then turn to the right up a ravine, and again strike the valley near

DONNER'S CABIN.-3~-1890

This is one of the cabins built by that ill-fated party, who, being overtaken by the snow on the mountains, nearly all perished by cold and starvation. The remainder of the cabins were built about a mile above this at Truckie Lake, but they were nearly all burned by order of Gen. Kearney.

LAST CROSSING OF TRUCKIE'S RIVER.- 1- 1891

This is near Truckie's Lake. It is a delightful place to camp. There is plenty of grass and large pine timber. From this the road ascends by a gorge in the mountain. There are several springs on the way, and in some places good grass. Near the summit are two steep places, on which you will likely have to double teams.

PASS OF THE SIERRA NEVADA. - 7- 1898

Here the road bends to the left to descend~ it is very crooked, steep and rocky, and passes among large pine and fir trees.

YUBA VALLEY. 1 1902

This is a small prairie covered with a luxuriant growth of grass and clover, and surrounded with large pine trees. There is a small stream of clear, cold water running through it, which is the head of the South Fork of the Yuba River. The road after leaving this valley passes over large granite rocks.

SMALL LAKE.- 6-1908

This is not a good place to camp. Although the water is good and an abundance of timber, there is no grass here. After this you pass five other lakes; there is but little grass at any of them; the road is very rocky.

SMALL VALLEY.- 14-1922

This is very narrow, and is almost filled with large granite rocks. There is a stream of very clear water running through

it, but there is, however, but little grass.

FIRST CROSSING OF THE CREEK.-1922~

After this the road is almost impassable for wagons. You will probably have to swing them down over the high rocks with ropes.

SECOND CROSSING OF THE CREEK.- 6- 19286

The road continues very rocky, and ascends a high mountain.

POND ON THE MOUNTAIN. 4 1 932

This is on the summit, and as the road descends it is not so steep or rocky as was the ascent.

SMALL PRAIRIE.-6-1938!

Here you will find an abundance of grass and clover. The road for a short distance is level, and then ascends a ridge. The ascent is not difficult, but you must use the utmost caution in descending, or your wagons will be dashed in pieces.

BEAR VALLEY. 2 -1 941

This is a small fertile valley, through which runs a stream of pure, cold water. At the base of the mountains grow large pine and cedar trees. You are now in the Gold Region. This valley has produced some of the richest of the California Mines. On leaving the valley for Nevada City, you ascend a high mountain, and when on the summit you will find a good level road to

COLD SPRING.-15-1956

Here you will find a Hotel with all the necessary accommodations. Be cautious, however, that your teams do not eat of the poison oak, which grows here in abundance.

NEVADA CITY.-15-1971

This is a large town on Deer Creek, a small tributary of Yuba, and in the midst of a very rich mining country.

How did emigrants figure the miles?

Knowing the mileage was important to emigrants as they crossed the continent with emigrants' wagon trains. They had to know how many miles they traveled per day so they could get over the Sierra before snowfall. If they covered too few miles, they could repeat the Donner Party tragedy.

Miles could be estimated but results varied with the estimators. Another method was to count the revolutions of wagon wheels. That must have been incredibly tedious and fraught with error.

Emigrants also utilized a variety of "roadometers." In 1847 William Clayton, who signed on to a Mormon caravan, invented a mileage measuring device, "a set of wooden cog wheels [affixed] to the hub of a wagon wheel, in such order as to tell the exact number of miles we travel each day." It took awhile to actually make the device and meanwhile the train was moving along. To prove the point Clayton counted the wheels' revolutions in a day coming up with 4,070 and showed the people who were estimating mileage were wrong. To make wheel revolution counting less tedious Clayton tied a red rag to a wagon wheel. He apparently received encouragement and a skilled carpenter in the wagon train company actually built the device.

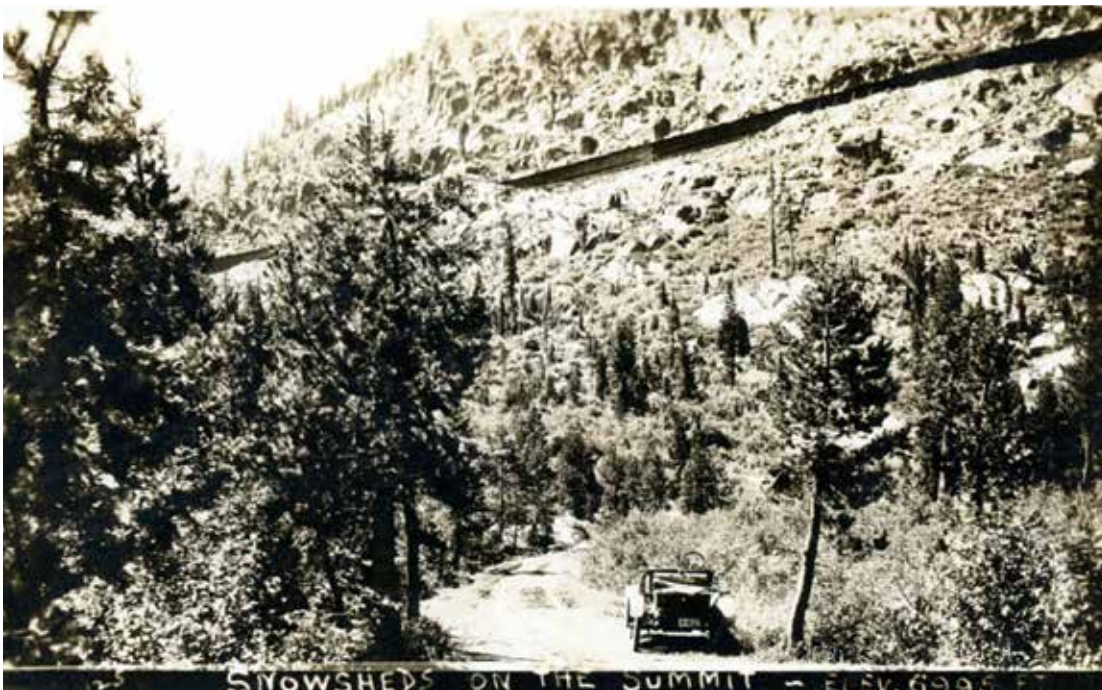


Eventually Clayton used a second odometer to get figures for the whole journey to Salt Lake and published an emigrants' guide, "The Latter-Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide."

Picture of roadometer here is from <http://www.five22drafting.com/california-trail-wagon-wheel-odometer/>

Others invented like devices and so overland travel became more accurate and a bit more safe.

From the DSHS Archives



"Snowsheds on the Summit elev 6995"
(The Lincoln Highway)

From the DSHS Archives

Summit Valley, 1879

Summit valley, one of the loftiest of the Sierra valleys, lies to the west, a broad, grassy meadow, dotted with trees and lying between two lofty mountains, about two miles long by one mile wide. It is covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, affording pasturage for large bands of cattle, during the summer. It is all occupied by dairymen and stock-raisers, at whose comfortable dwellings the tourist will find a hearty welcome. It is a delightful summer retreat; a favorite resort for those who prefer the mountains, with their cool breezes and pure water. The valley is watered by many springs and snow fed rivulets, whose waters flow to the American River.

This valley is becoming noted in a business point of view as well as being a place of summer resort. It is becoming celebrated as a meat packing station, it having been demonstrated that pork and beef can be successfully cured here during any portion of the year.

From Croft's New Overland Tourist Guide 1879 and 1884 editions, pg 156



Cisco Grove, railroad buildings, snowsheds, and other buildings, ca 1920's



"Along Highway 40 Near Donner Summit" The building's sign says, "Yuba Gap Lodge"

a patch from the Soda Springs Ski Area



Book Review

Grace and Grit

Wm. M. Murphy 200 pages 2012

This is a fun, short (200 pages) little book and so, even though there is only a little about Donner Summit included, it's worth a review.

At first look the story is about the Grace and Grit of a number of women motorcyclists in the early 20th Century. There are only three main stories though. Preceding those and within those there are lots of little facts and smaller stories about other women pioneers. The smaller stories and details are all interesting such as how to drive a motorcycle in the old days. Pedals were used to get the things going. There were no cranks. Gear levers were up by the gas tank, which meant that to change gears, one had to take a hand off the handlebars. There were people in the Midwest who would dig ditches across the roads or dig ponds and fill the resulting depressions with water. When autos came along and got stuck the farmers would charge to extract the automobiles. There is some history of roads, autos, personalities, and use of motorcycles during World War I

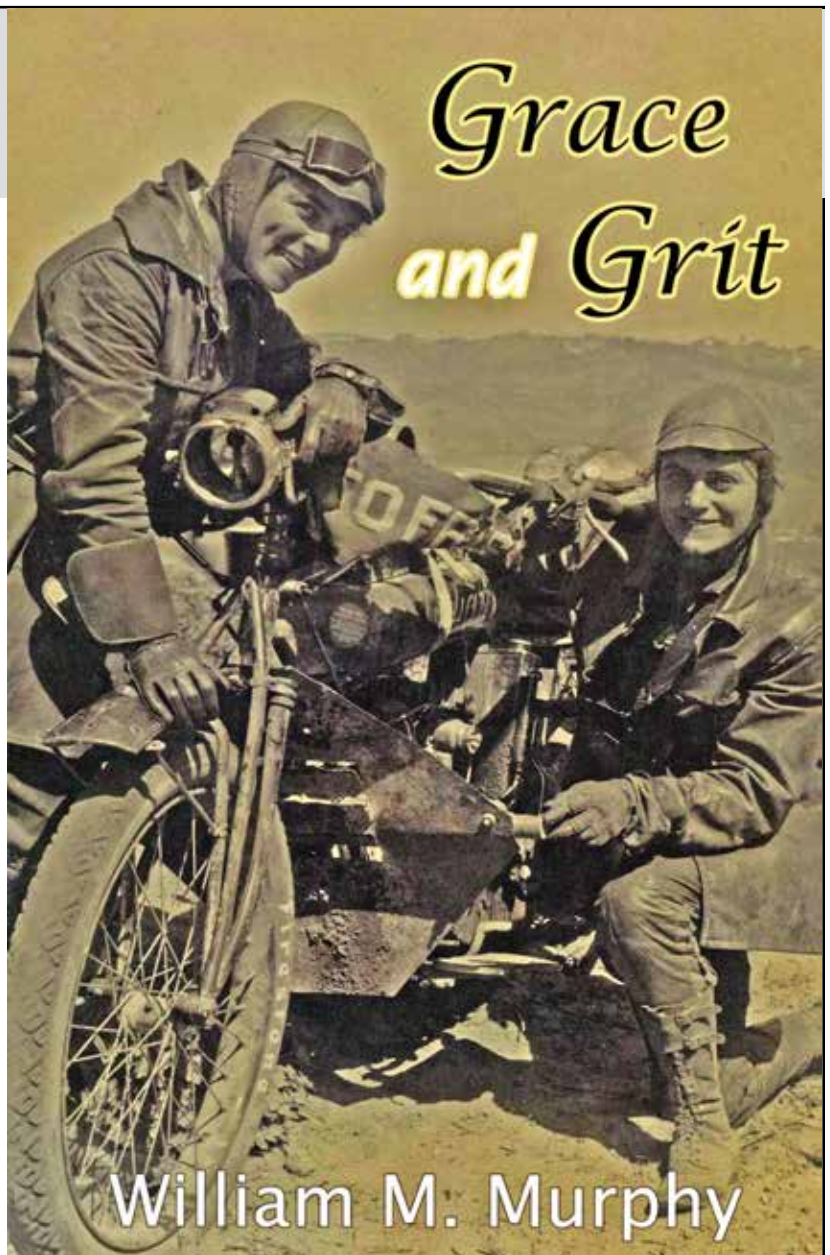
There are few pictures but the many stories and quotes do a good job of illustrating.

The main part of the book is about four women motorcycle pioneers and one's mother. There is a lot of detail about the trips, two across the country and one around the country and the Caribbean.

Effie Hotchkiss took her mother and her motorcycle across the country in 1915 missing out on publicity because she was maybe overshadowed by WWI and the Lusitania sinking. They arrived in San Francisco for the Panama Pacific Exposition. Effie's trip was the first round-trip of the continent by motorcycle. Effie and her mother did cross the Sierra on the way back across the continent but whether the route was over Donner Summit or not is unknown. We can pretend it was and so, enjoy the story.

Effie must have been a pistol and the author, Wm. Murphy, does a great job of communicating Effie's unique personality and sense of humor through descriptions of her life and quotes Effie made in her own writing and in newspaper accounts. There were stories of her early life, baking weekly cakes for the neighboring fire department personnel who were supposed to be helping her become a lady, her purchase of one motorcycle after another, and her attempted elopement. Of course her decision to travel across country on a motorcycle and sidecar, taking along her 215 pound mother, says a lot about her too.

She decided she needed a pistol for the trip. New York's purchase laws were a bit strict but the salesperson noted that it would be easier in New Jersey. So Effie reflected that New Jersey did not seem to care who got shot as long as it was done



in “good clean fun.” Effie’s humor is also evident in her description of her mother’s continual “tatting,” “I loved my mother very much but was often tempted to commit mayhem with that tatting shuttle.” A rain storm occasioned, “A resurrected Noah dashing by in his ark would not have been too surprising. The motorcycle had learned to swim...” Effie did not apparently swim well but her mother did and Effie thought her mother might save her in the deluge if the tatting did not get in the way.

Effie showed her inventiveness. A ruined tube prevented a normal flat tire fix so Effie sliced up a blanket and stuffed it between the tire and the rim. Effie and Mom were able to get to the next town where Effie was able to buy a tube with five patches on it for the price of a new tube at home. Effie said she’d gotten the better deal because she’d have paid double what she had.

In San Francisco Effie ran over a man’s foot. Eventually he came to New York to visit her and sealed the deal to marry her by giving her a shotgun. She was impressed he did not try to give her some “frilly feminine” thing. “I wanted him for keeps,” she said. She went off to Oregon to live the life of a rancher without a motorcycle. She took her mother along.

The Van Buren sisters are the last story and they did go over Donner Summit but apparently found nothing remarkable about the crossing and did not mention it. Augusta and Adeline Van Buren must have been a pair of pistols; they were certainly not what we’d think of as traditional Victorian ladies. They boxed, canoed, swam, dove, ice skated, etc. and won prizes and medals for their endeavors.

In 1913, when Augusta was 29 and Adeline was 23, they became motorcyclists and that meant becoming motorcycle mechanics as well. In 1916 they decided on a transcontinental trip. They wanted adventure, wanted to use the publicity to get America ready to join the war raging in Europe, and wanted to prove women could play a part. Augusta and Adeline wanted to be military dispatch riders. Here it’s convenient to talk about one of the strengths of the book. There are plenty of asides that explain or elaborate on issues. In this case there is a good summary about dispatch riding with quotes from contemporary dispatch riders. There was even one female dispatch rider from Ireland. It was dangerous work; it was not just riding a motorcycle around as my grandfather described his experiences (parenthetically it turned out my grandfather was not a dispatch rider as he’d said. In reality he was part of a machine gun crew but thought motorcycle riding would better allay a youngster’s - my - questions about the war.)

There are lots of details about the cross country trip including how tiring it must have been. They were “so tired from struggling through the muddy conditions that they sometimes fell asleep while riding, falling over in the mud.” There was a side trip up Pike’s Peak. There was heat, storms, rain, and desert. Arriving in Nevada there was a sign said lost travelers should light large bonfires of sage brush to hope for rescue. The sisters did get lost and were saved by a lone prospector who had water and directional knowledge. Getting to Donner Pass was anti-climactic because the roads improved so much in California. They were “among the best.” One newspaper article gave some idea of the general ride, “Impossible roads, unseasonable weather and difficulties in untold numbers were encountered at every turn. Washouts, mountains slides, desert wastes and wrecked bridges delayed but did not deter them.”

Adeline’s daughter also noted, although the sisters did not, that Augusta and Adeline were arrested a couple of times for wearing men’s clothes. The author thinks “arrest” was used loosely and is not convinced it happened since dozens of newspaper accounts never mention it. It makes a good story though, and given that a family member reports it, some credence can be given.

The sisters finished their ride. The Army refused to use women or enlist the sisters. They continued to ride motorcycles; got married, had children, and one took up flying.

Then & Now with Art Clark

Lady on the Rock

I wish I had a dollar for every time someone said, "Ask Norm Saylor, he'll know."

Recently Bill Oudegeest came across an old image of a woman standing on a rocky outcrop [See From the Archives of the Soda Springs General Store, Heirloom, 8, '15 -ed.]. There wasn't any info on it other than that it was supposed to be somewhere near the Summit.

My first thought was that it was taken somewhere near Castle Peak, with Donner Lake in the background. Checking pictures I'd taken from Castle were disappointing. I could barely see the lake, and it looked too far away.

I had some other pictures from the end of Boreal Ridge, and I knew there were rocks like that up there. A hike along that ridge dispelled that idea: too close to Donner Lake and the rocks were not big enough.

Asking around got some more suggestions, like Mount Lola or Mount Judah. I also thought maybe it wasn't Donner Lake, so how about Crow's Nest or along that ridge somewhere?

I stopped in to see Norm at the Donner Summit Historical Society Museum. He looked at the picture and said, "That looks like Disney down there, with Lake Van Norden behind it, so it must be taken from Lincoln."

So easy!

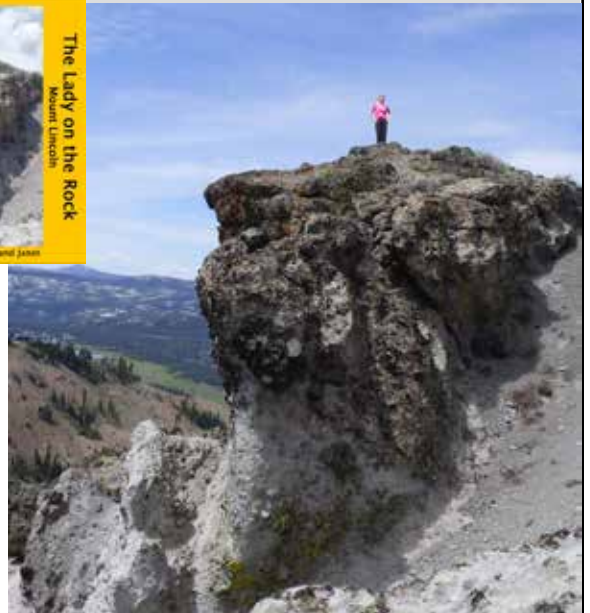
A hike up Lincoln confirmed it. The rock is still there. We've probably all stood on top of it, looking out toward Snow Mountain. Or at least been close.

On top of Lincoln at the south end is a small two-story block structure. About a hundred feet further is THE rock. Next time you are up there skiing or hiking, have a look. While you're looking, note how small Lake Van Norden is now.

Top of the rock N 39° 17.259 W 120° 19.765

The lady on the rock in the "now" version at the top of the page is Art's hiking companion, Janet McMartin.

The picture at left came many months after the above. In late August Art induced some of his hiking club buddies to the top of Mt. Lincoln after visiting Anderson Pk. Here they are reprsing the "Lady on the Rock."



Then & Now with Art Clark

This photo came from an album the DSHS was allowed to copy owned by Bill and Diane Kirkham of Serene Lakes. Here is the family coming to California stopping with a view of Donner Lake in the background.

The location is at the junction of the northern and southern DFDLWR, just above the washed-out bridge, N 39° 19.039' W 120° 18.936'

The photo spot has been chewed up pretty well by the various pipelines and cables. Glad they didn't wipe out the tree.

I sat down to take the picture in an attempt to get the rock behind him to line up correctly.

I think they are the same tree. I found an original of the stereo card online and bought it, below. This was a scenic spot in the 1920's, in 1870 or so, and still today.

Art Clark

Since Art found the stereo and it's a nice walk, our editorial staff decided to add a page to the [Heirlooom](#) for this month. So, go to page 18 for more.



Then & Now, cont'd.



Art Clark, in doing the Then & Now on the previous page remembered an old stereograph he'd seen and went internet searching for it. Above is the result of his search. The photo was taken probably about 1869.

To go with that we include to the left the map from our Summit Canyon brochure (cover inset on the left). It's a highly recommended brochure, as are all our brochures. The walk down Summit Canyon to a car you've strategically placed there because you're hiking with friends, is also recommended. It's all downhill on the old Lincoln Highway, the views are grand, and you'll see artifacts on the way (petroglyphs, signs painted on rocks, and drill holes in granite.)

The spot in the Then & Now is at the top of the blue line at the dot, "Old Bridge Abutment ."

Then, just for fun, the spot is a good view today too. Below is a photograph taken not too far uphill from the The & Now by the editor.



Reprising a Visit to Warren Lake



Faithful readers will remember the acquisition of a mystery photo album made in 1901 that chronicled a bicycle trip from Sacramento to Truckee. The unknown riders took the train tracks up the mountains because the grade is even, not more than 3%, and was no doubt in much better shape than the roads. Thornton Round, who took his family west on an auto trip in 1914 said two things about the travel over the summit. First he said, "I don't believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner Pass. As I stood looking down I had a floating sensation...I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes I had ever seen..." He also said, crossing the Sierra "turned out to be the toughest one hundred miles I have ever driven..." His trip was after the development of the Lincoln Highway and some attention has presumably been paid to the route. 1901, the year of our album, was way before.

Art Clark, our intrepid "Then & Now" explorer remembered the bike trip album and decided to make a visit to Warren ("Warner" in the album) Lake. You can see the resulting "Then & Now" on the "Then & Now" scenery page on our website*.

As Art tells it, he'd seen the pictures and although he was always looking for new hiking destinations, the captions in the picture threw him off. The photo says, "Warner L at head Carpenters; (fish shooting below) Carpenter's to left about 3 miles (upper dairy). One can

see Castle Pk. in the distance toward the right side of the picture. Then he went hiking Carpenter Ridge to place a Geocache

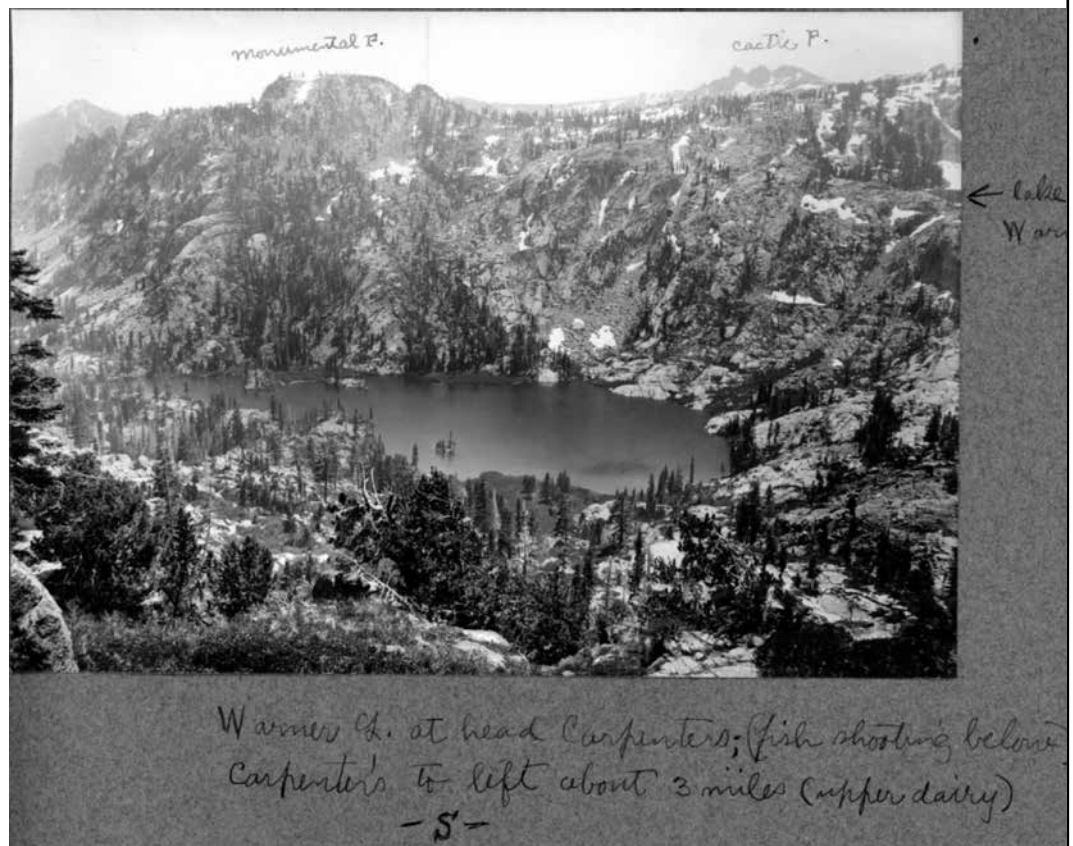
(Art is an avid Geocacher). While up there he thought about the photo album (Art has a tremendous memory for outdoor spots) Castle Pk. was just peeking over the ridge and that gave Art the incentive to solve the puzzle of the lake. He played on Google Earth and then drove up to find the lake. If you want to visit and see what the guys in 1901 found, directions are below.

If you want to see more pictures from the album go to our March, '14 Heirloom or to the exhibits page on our website. One of the 2015 exhibits is about the bike trip.

Directions:

"Basically, park at Boreal SnoPark, get on PCT northbound, head toward Summit Lake, turn left at Warren Lake trail.

We lost the trail several times dropping in to the lake. The trail is marked on the topo, but it's just a vague curvy line. After going around the lake, we couldn't find where it was supposed to go up, so we just bushwacked up and over to Paradise Lake.



Crystal Lake - Today's Eagle Lakes exit from I-80 - south side of the freeway.

No real trail between the two lakes. There is a trail from Paradise down to the PCT. Turn left, on southbound PCT, to Basin/Round Valley & Peter Grubb hut, then up to Castle Pass. From there you can either follow the PCT or walk the road down, go under the freeway and back to the Boreal SnoPark."

Warren Lake

Distance: 6.5 miles one way

Elevation changes: +1,400 feet and -1,400 feet (7,200' - 8,600' - 7,200')

Trailhead: Pacific Crest Trail trailhead at Donner Summit

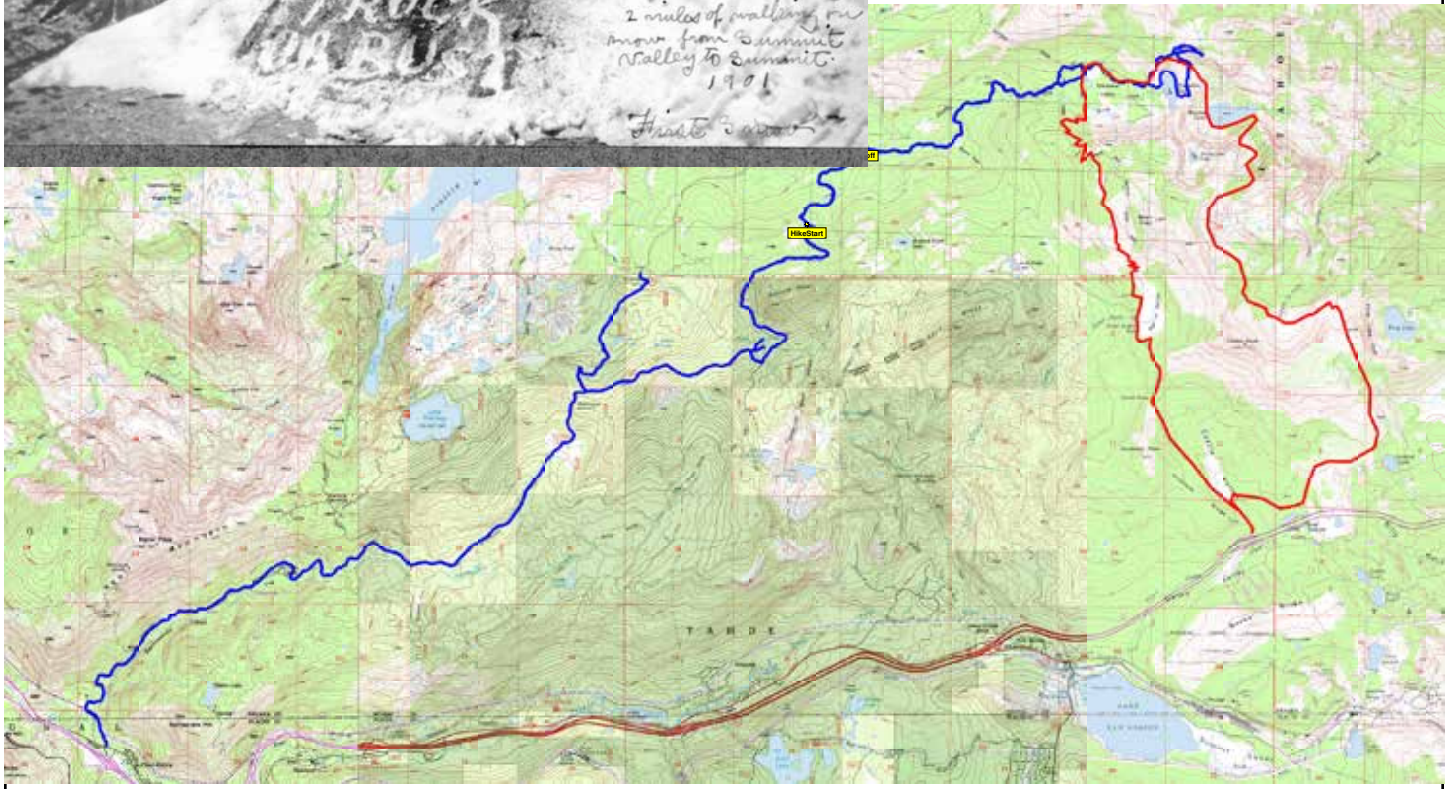
After a steady climb the Warren Lake trail carries you past a great vista point overlooking Frog Lake and a panorama of Nevada countryside to the east. Then the trail descends as much as you have climbed to quiet Warren Lake nestled deep in a cirque below 9,000-foot Basin Peak.



Art and Janet's trip was, round trip, 16 miles.

* <http://www.donnertsummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/ThenNowGIFs/WarrenLake.html>

Left, "Truckee or Bust" from the 1901 album



Margie Powell Hikes, 2015

Margie Powell was an integral part of the Serene Lakes community on Donner Summit until her passing in 2011. She was also the energy and push behind the founding of the Donner Summit Historical Society. To memorialize here we've conducted annual history hikes she would have enjoyed.

This year's hike went along the back of Serene Lakes, formerly Ice Lakes, on Donner Summit. We talked about wagon trains (28% of all wagons coming to California when through what is now Serene Lakes), a railroad, the ice industry, various development schemes (an airport, golf course, Army Navy Club, etc.), Benjamin Bernard Redding, the first settler in Serene Lakes (1866), fish stocking, Galapagos turtles and the saving of B.B. Redding and company, singing temperance songs in the Atlantic, catching 200 fish in one day in the No. Fork of the American River, the original Summit Soda Springs and Mark Hopkins, the 1908 proposal to dam the valley with a one hundred foot dam to supply San Francisco with water, Native Americans, and more.

Our history hikes are "illustrated" hikes. For this one the DSHS photographic collection supplied about sixty photographs, literature, and maps, some of which are here at much reduced size.

Next year's hike: Roller Pass as You've Never Seen it Before - lots of stories leading up to Roller Pass.



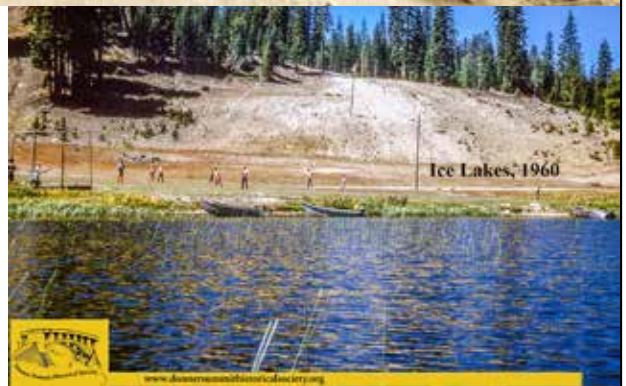
Above, Margie Powell hike, 2015; photo by Nancy Oudegeest

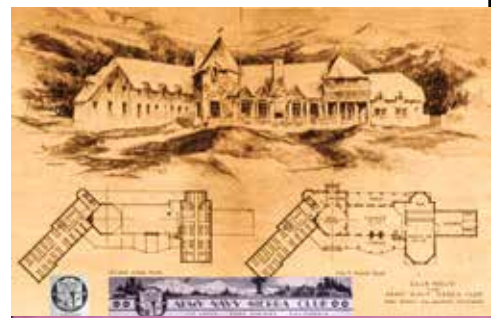
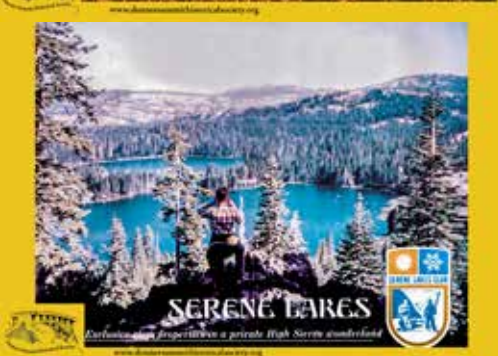
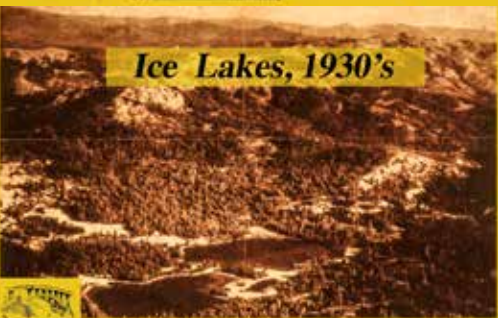
Here and on the next page are a few of the 60 or so illustrations from the Margie Powell hike, 2015:

Top: There's a road there now in front of what was then the rope tow and behind the baseball diamond.

Center: from the original 1866 Gov't survey.

Below: Summit Soda Springs - the actual Soda Springs, photo taken about 1869





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More Pictures, top to bottom left then right:

Serene Lakes ca. 1960's

The Army Navy Club proposal ca. 1938

Ice Lakes, ca 1869

Norton Bush, famous California artist rendition of original Soda Springs,

Summit Soda Springs Hotel

the deed to Serene Lakes, 1866

Tent cabin, Serene Lakes, 1958

Fossil in creek rock - 25-30 million years old

Ice Lakes, 1930's before the dam showing three lakes instead of two

Summit Ice Co. ca. 1870

Serene Lakes Lodge, 1958

Serene Lakes postcard ca. 1960's

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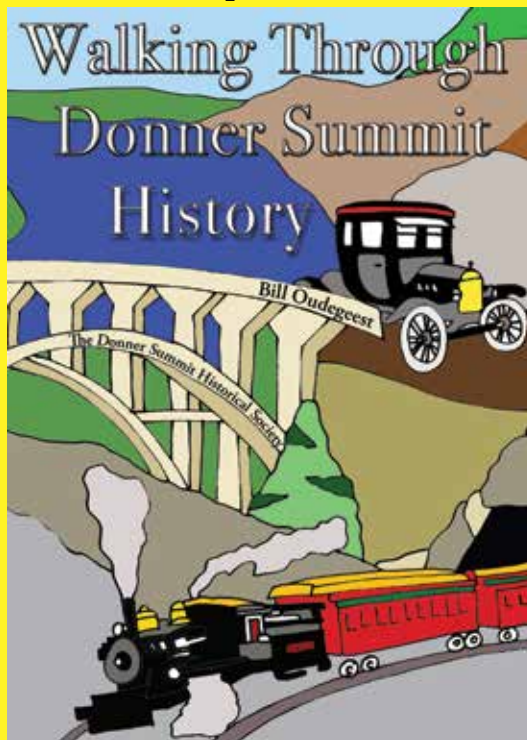
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- Soda Springs Gen. Store
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\$25 includes S/H and sales tax.



From the Back Cover

Donner Summit is the most important historical square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. Native Americans crossed for thousands of years. The first emigrants to arrive in California with wagons came over Donner Summit. The first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental air route, and the first transcontinental telephone line all crossed Donner Summit. The first person to bicycle around the world went over Donner Summit, as did the first person to make a motorized crossing of the U.S. and the first people to attempt to cross the country in an automobile. That's just a bit of the richness that is Donner Summit history.

Then there are the fun small stories: frozen turkeys roosting in the trees, the two-story out house at the Summit Hotel, blindfolded mules, and the Spider Dance.

You can walk through Donner Summit history, where it all took place. In the walks described here you will read the stories, "hear" history through people's words, and see the historical photographs that bring the history to life.