

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

April, 2016 issue #92



Fourth Graders' (& Others')

Donner Summit Tour

If you know a current or prospective fourth grader, or even if you don't, this could be the family outing of the year.

If you were in California when you were in fourth grade you no doubt have fun memories of California history projects like building mission buildings out of sugar cubes, learning about Junipero Serra* (see page two for the asterisk), reading about Patty Reed's doll, playing "Oregon Trail," or visiting Sutter's Fort. We can pity those people not lucky enough to have attended fourth grade in California or to know about the Donner Summit Historical Society.

Donner Summit is integral to California history; even though it has no missions it is the most historically significant area in California and maybe in the entire Western United States. Native Americans crossed for thousands of years leaving behind mortars, petroglyphs, metates, and millions of basalt flakes from projectile knapping. The first wagon trains to come to California with wagons (as oppose to two wagon train groups that arrived in California after abandoning their wagons) went over Donner Summit as did thousands of wagons afterwards. Rust marks and grooves worn into the granite show the routes. The first transcontinental railroad went over Donner Summit followed by the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental air route, and the first transcontinental telephone line. Many of the emigrants who built California came over Donner Summit as did the first bicyclist to cross the Sierra and the country and then to go around the world. The first auto over the Sierra went over Donner Summit as did the first motorized vehicle crossing of the U.S. There's lots more. Over Donner Summit went the products of California to the rest of the country and the world. Donner Summit is extraordinarily historically rich.

That all makes Donner Summit a wonderful destination for curious fourth graders and here the Historical Society's MHGT (Mobile Historical Guide Team) lays out an itinerary tested by actual fourth graders.

Maybe you have a current or prospective fourth grader you'll want to take on this trip. Maybe you just want to pretend you are in fourth grade and experience it for yourself.

Fourth graders, prepare to be amazed: rock carvings, grinding rocks, how to drill into

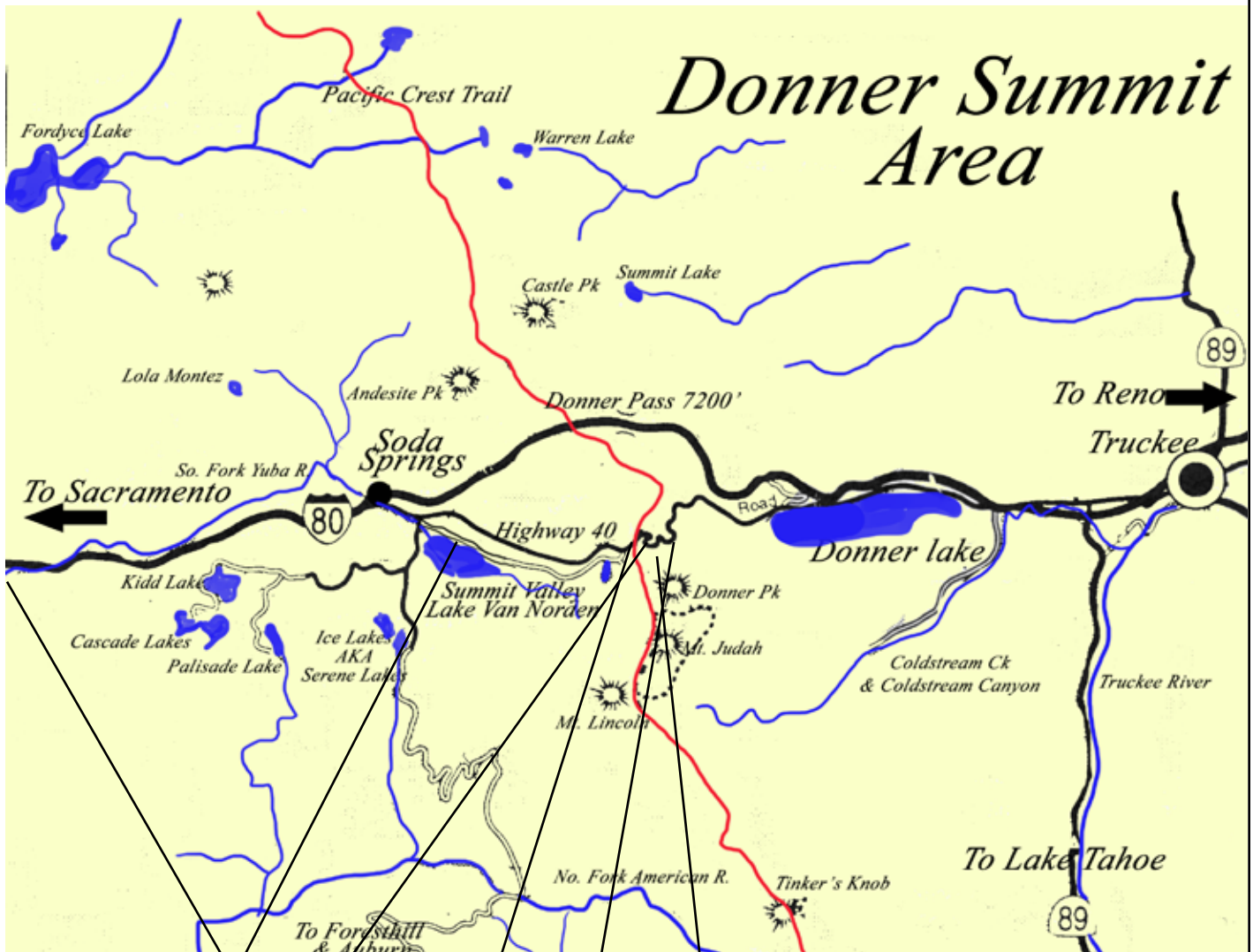
The Genesis of this Story

In November of 2015 the Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT) took a couple of fourth graders on a tour of Donner Summit. *THE* fourth grade learning enterprise is California history and the team thought that a "hands on" experience would make the school lessons more interesting and relevant. The MHRT had taken other, larger, groups of elementary students to unique Donner Summit historical spots but this was the first time for a basic, semi-comprehensive summit history tour.

The fourth graders liked the tour, particularly the icicles hanging on the rocks outside Tunnel 6.

It occurred to the MHRT that more fourth graders, their teachers, parents and even the general public would like the tour and so here it is, set down for posterity.

Story Locations in this Issue



In This Issue

Fourth Grade tour: Overlook page 3, Tunnel 6, China Wall, Petroglyphs,

Summit Valley mortars, Big Bend

* from page 1: Did you know that each state gets to have two statues in the Hall of Statues on the first floor of the Capitol in Washington D.C.? Junipero Serra is one of California's. Who is the second one of? See page 18 for the answer,

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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. In this issue all of the contemporary photos are the editor's.



granite and more. One fourth grader called it all, "AWESOME."

Itinerary Stop One - The Overlook

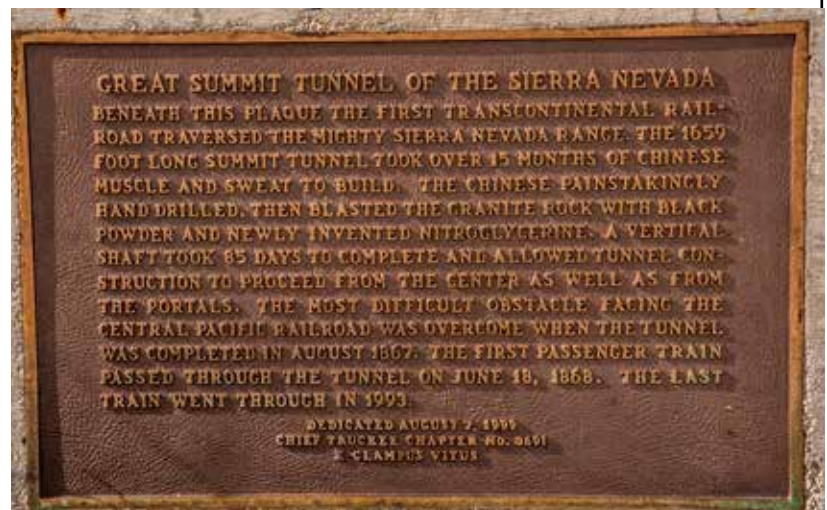
First stop is an overview of Donner Pass. Take the Soda Springs exit from I-80, just before Donner Summit, or approach on Old 40, Donner Pass Road, from Truckee and Donner Lake. At the very top of the pass is a large building (right), a parking lot, and a uniquely shaped building. Park at the south side where the narrow road leads downhill. Just to the right there is an historical marker (right, below). Take the trail behind the buildings that goes uphill two hundred yards or so to a magnificent view (above). Standing on the granite, gaze out on the view of Donner Lake and the mountains beyond. It's magnificent but that's just the first part. Up this draw came the Stephens Party, the first wagon train to reach California with wagons, in 1844. It was led by 81 year old Caleb Greenwood. We'll get to them a bit later. You can see the route of the first transcontinental highway coming up as well, going to the right of where you are standing. It was put together in 1913 with expectations that the maximum speed would be 35 mph for cars and the average speed for crossing the country would be 18 mph because not all stretches of the road were optimal (don't you love good words?). Look down at the Donner Summit Bridge and follow the road below it to the horseshoe curve. That's our next stop. Native Americans carved petroglyphs into the granite there thousands of years ago.

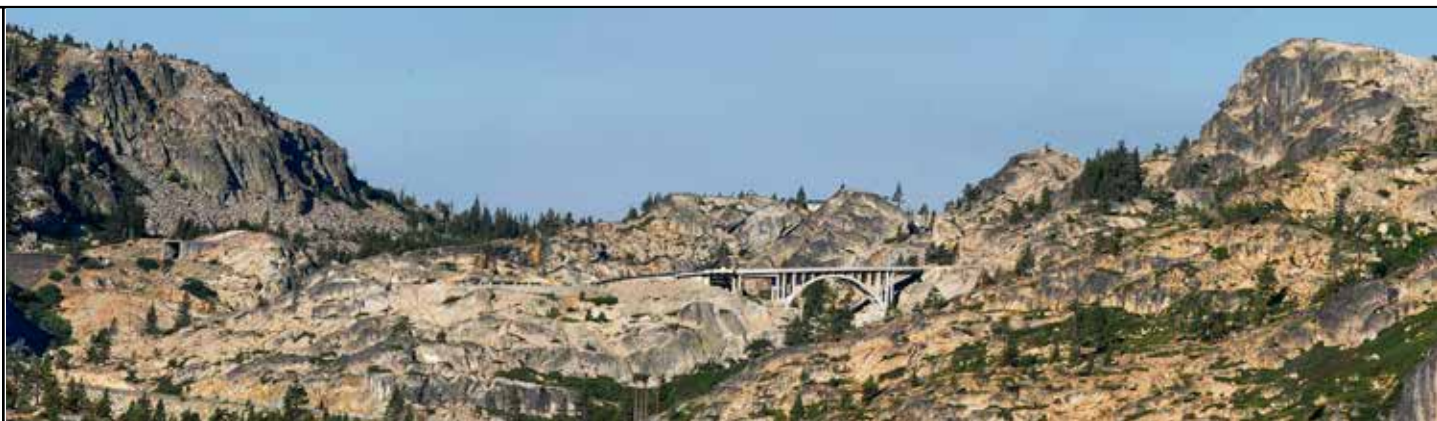


Before we get to that we have to talk about Moses Schallenberger and the Donner Party.

We should talk about the emigrants too and they'll be first. Thousands of emigrants headed for California. They wanted new lives. They wanted opportunity. They wanted to get rich. They gave up everything to come. They would likely never see family or friends again. They had to leave their favorite stuff behind. They would have to put up with heat, thirst, danger, Indians, accidents, murder, disease, and exhaustion. Some would die.

The trip across the country was no big deal until the emigrants got to the 40 Mile Desert in Nevada. People and animals were exhausted. Food was running low. Wagons broke. Animals died. Some people ended up carrying everything they owned and walked the rest of the way to California.





Once through the desert they were happy. They had survived. Then they saw the Sierra Nevada. It was a huge barrier. It was “steep as the roof of a house.” It struck terror in their hearts. They were so close to California. But first they had to get over the mountains and they had to get over quickly because by the time the emigrants reached the Sierra, winter and snow were coming. The Sierra was the hardest part of the whole journey.

The Stephens Party was the first wagon train to get to California with wagons. They got to the far end of Donner Lake. It was snowing. They had to get over the pass right away. So they left half their wagons at Donner Lake and took the other half up here. They had to take apart their wagons to get them up the rocks. Moses and two others offered to stay at Donner Lake and guard the wagons. They had no worries about food or snow. There was lots of game and the snow would melt. Then they found out. It snows a lot in the Sierra and it kept snowing at Donner Lake. It did not melt. There was no game because the animals had all left. They knew about snow. Moses and the two others decided to pack up and walk to California over the snow. At the top of the pass they built a fire on the snow and by morning the fire had melted down 15 feet to the ground. The three could not reach the fire but they had no food to cook anyway. Moses was sick and realized he had to get back to the lake, alone. Imagine how he felt leaving his friends.

Moses spent most of the winter alone at Donner Lake in a small cabin that had no door and cowhides and branches for a roof. He was so lonely. “My life was more miserable than I can describe,” he said. Moses ate fox, coyote and crows. Roasted fox was delicious but the rest was revolting. For Christmas he had saved just enough coffee for one cup. That was his celebration. At the end of February he saw one person coming towards him over the snow. His sister had made one of the rescuers of the rest of the Stephens Party promise he would continue on to Donner Lake to rescue her brother, Moses. Imagine how he felt.

Schallenger Ridge (see the picture on page three), on the south side of Donner Lake, is named for Moses Schallenger who was only 17 years old when he spent the winter alone there.

Two years after Moses the Donner Party came along late in the season. It had already started snowing and although they tried to get over the pass they couldn’t and so most of the party was trapped at the far end of Donner Lake. Some of the party stayed in Moses’ cabin. There they stayed for a couple of months. There was almost no food to start and the longer they stayed the less food there was. Some of the party tried to escape and eventually a group called the Forlorn Hope did escape. 15 men, women, and a boy got over the pass. Five women and two men survived starvation, frostbite (toes falling off), freezing cold, and exhaustion to get to California and send help back to Donner Lake.

Imagine what the emigrants thought when they first saw the Sierra. They had to get themselves and their wagons over quickly because winter was coming. How do you get wagons and oxen up Donner Pass (above)?



Fortunately today we don't usually have to take apart our cars to get over Donner Pass.





The Forlorn Hope came right up here as did the various rescue parties going to the lake and coming back with survivors. Of the 83 members of the Donner Party, only 45 survived.

Suppose the Donner Party had not had their troubles. What do you think Donner Lake, Donner Pass, and Donner Pk. might have been named?

Left, the view from Stop #1 in about 1870. The lower right is the exit from Tunnel 6, next comes Tunnel 7 and then Tunnel 8. Note that Tunnel 7 today has lost its top which has been replaced with concrete. Removing the original rock roof allowed larger trains to travel the route. The buildings between the tunnels are snowsheds of which there were once forty miles protecting the tracks from the heavy snows. Note too, the small buildings to the right of the snowsheds.

Itinerary Stop #2 - The Petroglyphs

From here hop in the car and go down Old 40, driving past the Donner Summit Bridge to the first big curve. Pull off and park after you've done about half the 180 degree curve; you are aiming for the spot in the picture below. You'll see a 20 Mile Museum sign for petroglyphs (the signs come down in winter so if you come in late fall it may not be there) and you'll see a monument off the road to the right. Just above the monument, which explains the petroglyphs, there is a rock slab with many ancient drawings (see page 14).

Granite is one of the hardest rocks on the planet. Imagine how long it took to carve the petroglyphs into the granite. For that reason they must have been important to the Native Americans.

The petroglyphs are 2,000 to 4,000 years old. No one knows what they mean. Perhaps they are religious or magical symbols. Perhaps they are records of what had occurred. Perhaps they are wishes or predictions. There are no human or animal forms although there is one bear paw here. Can you find it?

Petroglyphs are in many places on Donner Summit. They are all in places where there are wonderful views of nearby mountain peaks. Mostly they are not found where the Native Americans were camping. We'll get to that later.

Native Americans have been visiting Donner Summit for thousands of years. They came in summer following game and better weather. There will be more about Native Americans in two stops.



Don't forget that during your historical peregrinations on Donner Summit to stop at the Historical Society at the blinking light in "downtown" Soda Springs.



Petroglyph comes to us originally from Greek: petro (stone) and glyph (carving)

Itinerary Stop #3 - Tunnel 6

Hop in your car and back to the top. Just opposite Donner Ski Ranch is Sugar Bowl Rd. Park where the two 20 Mile Museum signs are (they are removed in winter) just before the overpass. Walk across the overpass and look down on the left side. That's Tunnel 6 (below), the longest of the original Sierra tunnels for the transcontinental railroad. It was carved from the Sierra granite and took two years to build.

Bam Bam, quarter turn. Bam Bam, quarter turn. One Chinese worker held a drill bit and two others hit it with sledge hammers. After each two hits the man holding the bit would rotate it ¼ turn. They did this all day long every day of the week except Sunday. A crew of three could drill three two foot holes in eight hours. The holes were filled with nitroglycerine or black powder and then clay or dirt. A fuse was lit and everyone ran. The rock exploded and the pieces were carried out. The workers advanced only inches a day.



Go back across the overpass and then down underneath to walk through the tunnel. You'll really want a flashlight to spot the tool marks that are 150 years old.

It was a race. The Union Pacific was building a railroad from the east. The Central Pacific was building from the west, from Sacramento. The more miles of track they laid the more money they got. The Union Pacific was going like crazy. The Central Pacific was stuck. The Sierra was the hardest part of the country to cross, just as it had been for the wagon train emigrants, and 15 tunnels were needed, all in solid granite.

Left, three foot long drill bits like the ones the Chinese railroad workers used.



Above, the entrance today to Tunnel 6, the longest of the original Sierra tunnels.

To speed things up the Central Pacific started Tunnel 6 from the west and the east at the same time. They'd go twice as fast. They still only made inches of progress every day. So they bore a hole down the center so they could work not just from the east and the west from the outside in, but from the inside out. When you get to the center of the 1659 foot Tunnel 6 look up. There is the central shaft, 89 feet high. You can see the top from the parking lot at stop number 1 (see page three and the top of the next page). Flash your light on the north side of the tunnel below the shaft. Look for the drill marks of the Chinese workers. There are many here. Then look for some drill holes. The 1 ¼ inch ones were for nitroglycerine. The 2 ½ inch ones were for black powder. they are almost 150 years old.

Even working from the outside in and the inside out the Chinese workers only made progress of less than a foot a day.

At the top of the shaft a donkey engine, a steam engine, was used to pull up and let down men, equipment and supplies as well as to take out rock. That engine was called the Blue Goose. It took six weeks to move it from Gold Run to Donner Summit, only forty miles or so. The Blue Goose was so big and scary that mules pulling oncoming wagons had to be blindfolded or they would panic and run off.

When you get out of Tunnel 6 you are in the sunlight. When the railroad was built it was all in darkness here. A long building, a snowshed 40 miles long, covered the train tracks to protect them from snow.

On leaving Tunnel 6, look left immediately. Here is the original road used to help build the railroad and get over Donner Pass (pictured below left). Wagons and cars had to cross the railroad tracks and travel for a distance inside the snowshed. On coming to the tracks the driver turned off his engine so he could hear. Then he opened the big door. Still no train? He went across the tracks and then fifty yards down to open the other door on the other side. Still no train? He went back to his car, started up the engine and drove into the snowshed, across the tracks, down the shed, and out the other door. Sometimes there were accidents. The picture to the left shows an automobile leaving the snowshed just outside Tunnel 6.



Continue along the railroad route through the next tunnel, Tunnel 7. Next you cross the underpass that was built in 1914 to make crossing the

The east end of Tunnel 6 is at the right side where the snowsheds meet the rocks. Early autos had to drive fifty yards through the snowsheds hoping there were no trains coming before they could get out the other side.



Above, the top of the the Tunnel 6 shaft. See also page three.



Tool marks still on the walls of Tunnel 6.

Follow the road from the underpass downhill to the first curve. Look down at the rocks below where you are standing to see the sign painted on the rocks advertising to travelers of more than a hundred years ago. In the picture below, left, the sign was put through the Donner Summit Historical Society's MX1000 Historical Rejuvenator. The picture on the left is "after" and the picture on the right is "before."

Look off to the right to the paved road and you can see the petroglyph site, our second stop.



Underpass, built in 1914 to make crossing the tracks safer.

China Wall



CHINA WALL OF THE SIERRA
 CHARLES CROCKER, CONSTRUCTION CHIEF OF THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD (CPRR), CONTRACTED FOR A WORKFORCE OF APPROXIMATELY 12,000 CHINESE LABORERS TO PUSH THE CPRR TRACKS OVER ITS TRANS-SIERRA CROSSING ON ITS RACE EAST TO A MEET WITH THE UNION PACIFIC AT PROMONTORY, UTAH TERRITORY. A RAILROAD RETAINING WALL AND FILL, CONSTRUCTED OF SIERRA GRANITE, STAND SILENTLY ABOVE ON THE PASS AS A LASTING MONUMENT TO THESE ASIAN "MASTER BUILDERS" WHO LEFT AN INDELIBLE MARK ON THE HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST.
 DEDICATED AUGUST 11, 1984
 TRUCKEE-DONNER HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
 CHIEF TRUCKEE CHAPTER NO. 3691
 E. CLAMPS VITUS



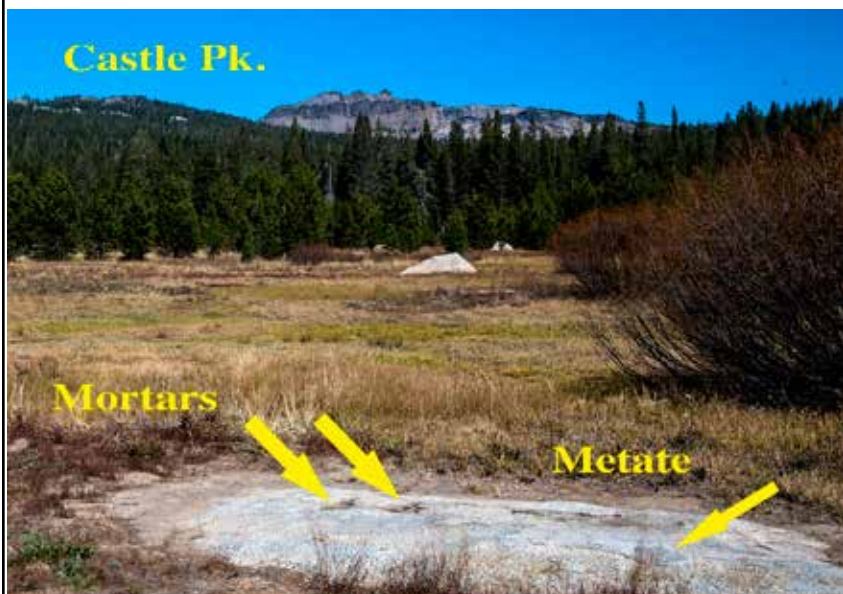
Above, China Wall. The rocks are held together by nothing but their weight and accurate placement. Look closely for tool marks like the drill hole to the left and the marks above which come from splitting the rocks. The rocks in China Wall came from the tunnels.

tracks safer (the two pictures on the next page). Walk along just a bit further and before Tunnel 8. Look down on the lake side of the old railroad bed. You are on top of the China Wall (next page). Here is an amazing wall built by the Chinese. There is no mortar holding the rocks together. Look for the tool marks that can still be seen along with some drill holes.

Itinerary Stop #4 - Native American Mortars

Head back to your car. Head down Old 40, Donner Pass Rd., to the blinking light. Turn left and cross the railroad tracks. Turn left into the dirt parking lot and look for the dirt road that is just to the left of the dam (right). It's easy driving. This is the original Lincoln Highway, the first highway across America. When you get to the bridge, go just a bit further and stop at the 20 Mile Museum sign for the Native American mortars. You are looking for the spot in the picture second from the top, right. Park. Then head south. You'll be walking parallel to Castle Creek on the east side. After you get out of the trees head for the large rock in the clearing a hundred yards ahead (right picture, third one down). Climb on top and find a Native American mortar thousands of years old. That's just a warm up.

Keep heading south a few hundred more yards. You'll cross an old road (fourth picture down on the right). Keep going looking for the rock below. On this "gossip" rock there are four mortars (below) and a metate. This rock



was a fancy kitchen appliance a thousand years ago. Native Americans ground larvae, insects, nuts, seeds, tubers, and other soft foods in the mortars. Granite is one of the hardest rocks on the planet. How long did it take to grind these holes into the rock? Remember, the Indians were only here in summers.

On the end of the rock without mortars rub your hand around to find a really smooth spot that's the size of a piece of paper or so. This is a metate used for grinding seeds into flour and maybe for treating animal skins.

While you are out in the valley look around and note all the large granite





Left photo by Carleton Watkins. Photo below by Alfred A. Hart.

Lower photo by Alfred Foote of Grass Valley.



boulders lying around. The granite is a hundred million years old but the rocks have only been sitting where they are for ten thousand years or so. They were scraped off mountain peaks by glaciers and when the glaciers melted the rocks were left behind. The Native Americans found them useful as kitchen appliances. One early American visitor, seeing all the light colored rocks lying around in the distance, thought they looked like sheep grazing in the valley. The boulders are called Glacial Erratics.

On the way back to the car see if you can get yourself into the spots where the pictures above were taken. The wagons in the picture with Castle Pk. in the background are on the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd., the road in the picture on page 9. It was built to help with the railroad construction. The ground is still so compressed that nothing grows on it 150 years later. It was on this road that the Blue Goose traveled. The wagon pictures were taken about 1869 while Tunnel 6 was being constructed. After the railroad was finished, the road was almost completely abandoned. Everyone wanted to take the train. The bottom picture is of the auto that won the race in 1911 to be first car over the summit that summer. The hill in the background is the Soda Springs ski hill.

This road was used so much that at one time 87 train car loads were unloaded at Cisco Grove and put on wagons to go over Donner Summit.

The railroad builders were in such a rush that they decided not to wait for tunnels, but rather to ahead and build the railroad into

Nevada. Along this road, three locomotives, 80 miles of track, and railroad car parts went on wagons went over Donner Summit to Truckee and beyond. Locomotives weighed about 12 tons. The rails weighed 100 tons to the mile. Each rail weighed 532 lbs. and was 24 feet long. The third locomotive went over Donner Pass in the snow. Oxen pulling a sledge, wore snowshoes made for oxen so they would not sink into the snow.

Itinerary Stop #5 - Emigrant Wagon Rust Marks

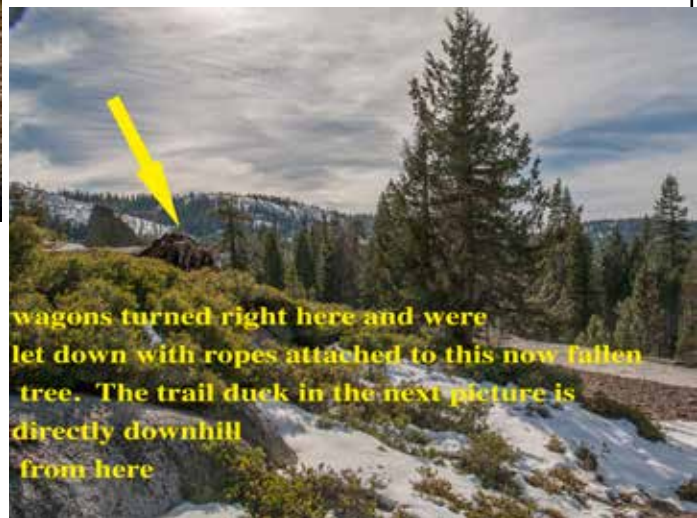
Back to the car. Head back to Old 40, Donner Pass Rd. Turn left at the blinking light. Go down to the freeway and take that, if you must, getting off at the Rainbow exit (or, if you are a real historian, just stay on Old Highway 40). You are heading for Big Bend, just past the Rainbow Lodge building. There is a parking lot and bathrooms on the right (pictured at right).



Big Bend was named for the big bend in the river. It was here that the women and children of the first wagon train, the Stephens Party, spent most of the winter. The men had gone off for help to Sutter's Fort. The women and children ran out of food and had to eat cowhides. The first white baby, Elizabeth Yuba (named for the river) Murphy was born here.

Park in the parking lot and head across the rocks on the north side of the road. Here is where the wagon trains went – thousands of wagons. So many wagons traveled here that their iron wheels left rust marks and grooves on and in the granite.

After you cross the rocks next to the road look for the large granite erratic (large rock left by the glaciers) in the second picture from the top. If you go right you'll find an emigrant trail marker. Turn left here. You are heading for the next photo down. Look on the far side of this granite slab for rust marks. The fourth picture down on the right has been enhanced to show rust marks. Keep going west aiming for the tree in the fifth picture down. Under the arrow is a fallen tree that was used





A "Trail Duck" is a pile of rocks also called a cairn, used to mark trails and guide travelers.

to let wagons slowly down the slope with rope. Turn just before the live tree looking for the scene below.

Go downhill. There are rust marks on the rocks but the best spot is just next to the trail marker (below) and below the "trail duck" (a pile of rocks - see the picture at the top of the next page).

Itinerary Stop #6 - State Park Visitors' Center

Now that you have an overview of Donner Pass and its importance, it's time to head for the museum at Donner Lake. Head towards Truckee on I-80 or take Old Highway 40. At the east end of Donner Lake is the State Park and just inside and to the left is the visitors' center. Before going in take a look at the large statue, the Emigrant Monument. The base of the statue is 22 1/2 feet high. That is how high the snow was when the Donner Party was trapped here.



A Visit to Donner Memorial State Park

After touring the historic sites on Donner Summit, you will enjoy a short trip down the hill to visit Donner Memorial State Park. A new visitor center opened on June 6, 2015 and celebrates transportation over Donner Pass. The first exhibits describe in detail the travails encountered by the Donner Party which was forced to over winter just below Donner Pass at Donner Lake during the winter of 1846-1847. The Donner Party was delayed in their journey from Illinois and arrived at Donner Lake at the end of October. In 1846, winter started early in the mountains and the party was not able to cross over to reach their destination on the west side of the mountains. The visitor center not only follows the story of the Donner Party but relates the story of other successful pioneers who came overland to reach California. The emigrant story is also told visually in the movie, "The Endless Winter" shown every hour.

The new visitor center also has an exhibit on Native Americans who lived in the Tahoe area before the arrival of the pioneers. They would come up to Tahoe during the warmer summer months not only from settlements in Nevada but also from California. The exhibit contains a hearth that was excavated near Squaw Valley and reconstructed in the visitor center. The next section of the visitor center tells the story of the railroad that connects the west and east coasts. The biggest stumbling block in building the railroad was the tunnel through Donner Pass. Many Chinese workers were brought over from Canton to chisel through the granite. There is a short movie, produced by the Chinese Historical Society



of America, describing the tunnels and the extreme efforts of the Chinese workers. The final section of the new visitor center deals with the automobile including a beautifully restored Ford Model T. Crossing Donner Pass became much easier when roads like the Lincoln Highway were developed. There is also a short movie that shows the early attempts to cross Donner Pass by car.

The next point of interest is the Pioneer Monument outside the visitor center. The monument was dedicated on June 6, 1918 by the Native Sons of the Golden West. The monument was built on the site of the Schallenberger cabin (built in 1844) and later used by the Breen family during their stay as part of the Donner Party in 1846. There are daily history walks that describe the monument and tell some little known stories. The history walk then follows the nature trail over to the Murphy cabin site. Finally, you can visit the beach at Donner Lake using the walking trail next to the museum.

To see more pictures from the museum go to our July, '15 [Heirloom](#).

Other trips.

If you enjoyed what you saw on this trip you will want to pick up the book, [Walking Through Donner Summit History](#) (below) which has many more walks and lots more stories. It's available on the Donner Summit Historical Society's website, at the bookstore in the museum at Donner Lake, in the bookstore in Truckee, at the general store in Soda Springs or at the Donner Summit Historical Society.

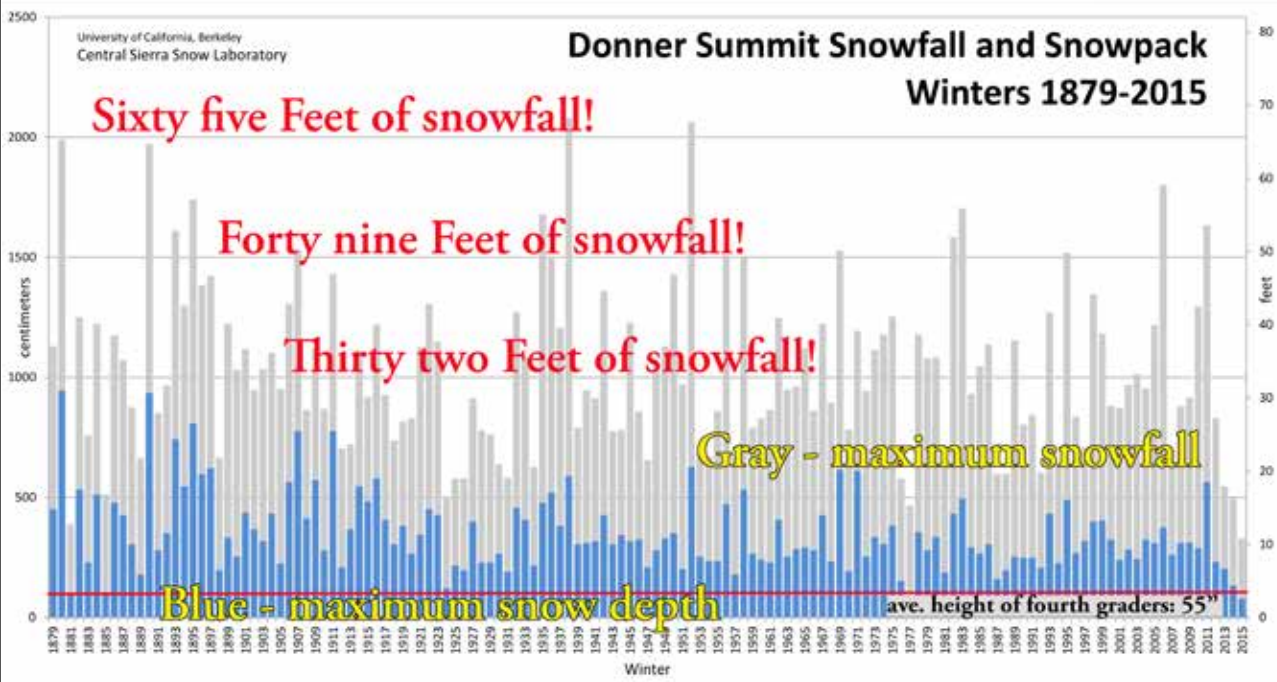
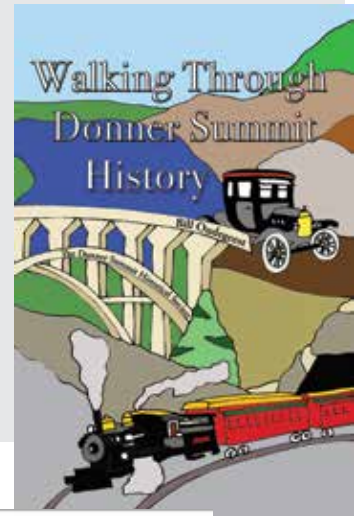


Chart of Donner Summit Snowfall courtesy of Randall Osterhuber at the Central Sierra Snowlab in Soda Springs.

How Much Snow Falls on Donner Summit?

Snow has affected people on Donner Summit ever since people first arrived. The Native Americans only lived on Donner Summit in summers. Winters were too harsh. The first emigrants in their wagon trains had to travel expeditiously across the continent so they could get over the Sierra before the snows closed the passes. Those who did not make it in time were in deep trouble, as well as snow. The transcontinental railroad wasn't even finished before the Big Four (the owners) realized something had to be done about the snow. They ended up building snowsheds on top of forty miles of track. Even then the route could not be kept open because avalanches wiped away parts of the snowsheds.

Automobiles could not cross Donner Summit in winter until 1932. Waiting for snow melt each spring was aggravating so locals had snow shoveling bees, hired workers to clear snow, or spread soot and ashes on the snow to speed melting.

Snow is not all inconvenient though. It brought the ski and snowboard industry to the summit along with lots of fun.

Fourth Graders on Tour

The DSHS Mobile Historical Guide Team (MHGT) has been leading various groups around Donner Summit for some time. We've taken groups of third and fourth graders to specific spots but we've never tried a whole summit tour - i.e. given fourth graders a broader view of the most significant historical spot in California.

Deciding to rectify the oversight and try out the tour, we found a couple of suitable fourth graders and embarked on the tour on the previous pages.

Here you can see the results. The tour was pronounced, "Awesome."

You might like to try it with your own fourth graders or pretend you have some fourth graders. No one will tell.

We didn't get the idea of testing the trip with authentic fourth graders until late fall but snow did not dampen the spirit of discovery and actually provides extra stimuli.

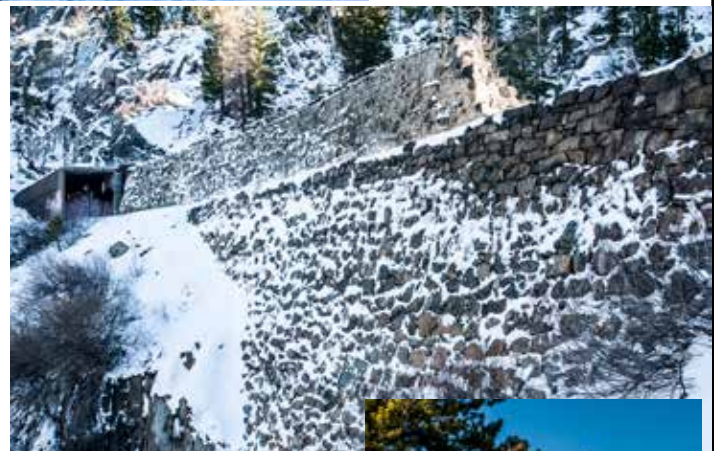
The MHGT thanks our two fourth graders, Joey Willis and Petar Zivkovic who traveled from Napa for the tour.



Above: petroglyphs and the monument (right); Left, on the Lincoln Highway below the underpass; Below, China Wall with fall snow; bottom, atop glacial erratic where there is a Native American mortar (see page 9)



Above, Native American petroglyph site below Donner Summit Bridge, China Wall (page 8) in the background.



Left, icicles are important, just below Tunnel 6 on the Lincoln Highway and below the underpass but above the sign on page 8.





Clockwise from top left: original telephone poles for the first transcontinental telephone line, Donner Lake in the background; Mt. Stewart in the background, going back into Tunnel 6; inside Tunnel 6; Petroglyph monument; finding rust marks at Big Bend; rust marks and groove at Big Bend; groove at Big Bend and fourth grade finger; atop the granite plug at Big Bend; death-defying climb up the granite plug at Big Bend; snowball fight in Van Norden;.

MX1000 In Use Again

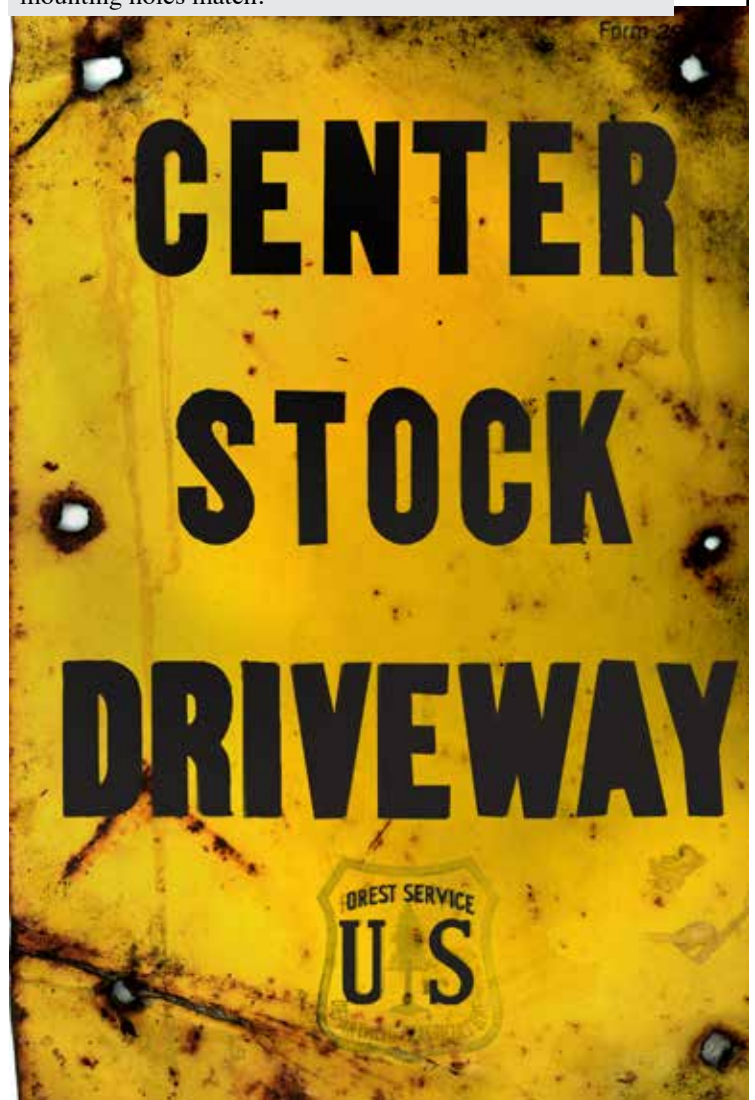
Loyal readers will remember last April's [Heirloom](#) in which we restored the Steam Heat ad which had been painted on the granite slab along the Lincoln Highway just below the China Wall and above the petroglyphs. Over the decades, since 1920, or so it had become unreadable. Our acquisition of the MX1000 Historical Rejuvenator solved that, restoring the sign to its pristine condition (right), except for a few stolen letters.



Surprisingly, some people did not believe what we'd done. The job was too perfect, they said. In our quest to maintain our unparalleled credibility in local historical matters (we're molding young children's minds after all - see page 1), asserting that most of what we say is true, this year we dialed back a bit. We set the MX1000 to Medium restoration and then found some "Stock Driveway" signs that the Forest Service put up decades ago. None of the remaining signs are readable but in a testament to the abilities of the MX1000, you can see the results, even set to "medium."



Left: original 2015 condition. Below, "restored" (at "medium" setting) condition. For doubters, note that the mounting holes match.



Flocks of sheep used to leave the Central Valley of California each spring for the high Sierra meadows. They followed stock routes. Shepherders came because sheep remained healthier, there were more live and multiple births, and the wool stayed cleaner. See our sheep industry articles in the August, September, and October '13 [Heirlooms](#).

Book Review

The Donner Party: Weathering the Storm

Mark McLaughlin

2007 179 pages

This is an interesting book which is surprising. It's not surprising that Mark McLaughlin wrote a good book. He's written other good books (See the January, '13 [Heirloom](#) for a review of [From Longboards to the Olympics](#)) and writes prolifically and well about local history on the web and in newspapers. He's a local eminence. What's surprising is that there has been so much written about the Donner Party, starting with news reports while the emigrants were still in the mountains. There followed sensational newspaper reports, a series of books starting with C.F. McGlashan in 1879, and extending to today (see last month's review of [Saving the Donner Party](#)). The subject fascinates people, or authors anyway.

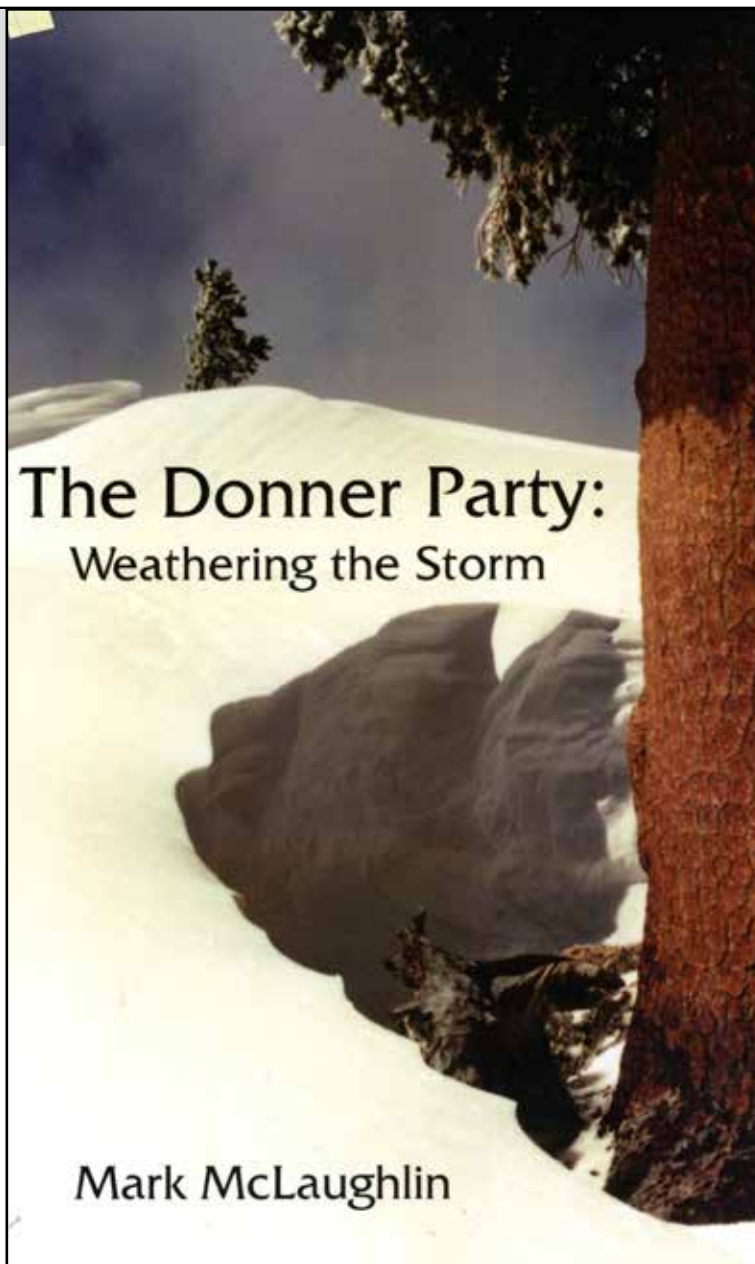
Last month's review of [Saving the Donner Party](#) pointed out some errors. Some of the author's evidence was tree rings which he used to extrapolate into weather experienced by the Donner Party. In checking that and other assertions in [Saving the Donner Party](#) we went to the bookshelf for reference. One book sitting there was Mark McLaughlin's [Donner Party: Weathering the Storm](#). It has an entirely different emphasis than other books about the Donner Party.

Mark's expertise is local weather; he is the Storm King after all. That's the emphasis of this Donner Party book. The focus on the weather and storms makes the emigrants' plight seem more dire than the simple recitation of who was where, doing what, when, and quantifies the emigrants' troubles. The snow falls and that affects the emigrants. It was hard to get around. It was hard to get wood. Livestock were buried.

McLaughlin tells the story of the Donner Party and tells it well. The general details of the story do not need to be repeated here. He matches the weather to the emigrants, though, and that makes for a good story. To do that he collates weather information from people to the west in California such as the navy and the army with Patrick Breen's diary (at Donner Lake) in which Breen noted the daily weather information.

For example, Fremont took troops south and the troops were caught by a storm. "The hurricane raging above our heads began to form torrents and cascades along our track. The narrow mule-path we were following became the bed of a foaming mountain river..." Shoeless and coatless, and hugging their arms under their thin blankets, many of them sank down, benumbed and exhausted. One man said, 'It was as if the ocean which lay at the foot of that mountain had lifted up and poured bodily over them.'" That storm, of course, was soon to hit the Sierra and the emigrants at Donner Lake. Just a bit later Patrick Breen reported a steady rain followed by two feet of snow and, according to McLaughlin, "another day of slow starvation." The snowpack was nine feet deep after the storm. When the emigrants cut firewood it fell into the loose snow and was buried. Emigrants were eating "boiled strips of ox hides...disgusting gluey residue." That was at the lake.

The Forlorn Hope was caught in the storms without shelter and they were on the west side of the summit where the storms were



more intense than on the east, over the Sierra Crest. The navy in Monterey reported in the last week of December, 1846, more rain. It would soon be going east to meet the Forlorn Hope and make their travel more difficult and more miserable.

With temperatures low and rain and snow coming with storm after storm, the feeling of desperation at being trapped, without food, being crammed into small primitive cabins at Donner Lake and tents at Alder Creek, and worrying family members, existence must have been miserable.

Using his weather knowledge Mark gives general information, for example explaining the formation of dense fog at Donner Lake, or that the average low in winter was 14 degrees and the average maximum was 40 degrees. This is important because it sets out the conditions for the emigrants at the lake. It was cold and it was damp. The emigrants probably never get really warm or really dry.

There are other topics as well: Manifest Destiny, the background of members of the Donner Party, John Sutter, Lansford Hastings' book that steered the Donners wrong, and what was happening in California at the same time (Bear Flag Revolt, John Fremont." These all round out the narrative.

There are nice contemporary and historical pictures in the book.

McLaughlin makes good use of quotes too to humanize the story, "The Snow came with blinding fury and being unable to build cabins we put up brush sheds, covering them with limbs from pine trees." (Jean Baptiste Trudeau talking about the Alder Cr. Campsite). "All lay down on the snow, and from exhaustion were soon asleep. In the night, I felt something impeding my breath. A heavy weight seemed to be resting upon me. Springing up to a sitting posture, I found myself covered with freshly-fallen snow. The camp, the cattle, my companions had all disappeared. All I could see was snow everywhere. I shouted at the top of my voice. Suddenly, here and there, all about me, heads popped up through the snow." (Louis Keseberg)

At the end there are some extra sections which add to the story: what happened to whom afterwards, archeology and new discoveries resulting from archeological searches, a discussion of snow depth and the winter of '47, and a host of quotes to support theories for more and then less than normal snowfall during that tragic winter at Donner Lake.

Answer to page two's question.

Junipero Serra is one of California's two statues in the Hall of Statues in the nation's Capitol. The other statue is of President Reagan who was California's governor before being the U.S. president. Mr. Reagan replaced Thomas Starr King, a famous minister who, according to President Lincoln, "Saved California" for the Union during the Civil War.

When Mr. Reagan replaced Mr. King, Mr. King was brought to California and occupies a spot on the State Capitol grounds. See our May' 10 Heirloom for more information.

All in all it's a satisfying book even if you've read about the Donner Party before

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