

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

November, 2016 issue #99

Camp 5 & the MHRT

The Mobile Historical Research Team Searches for Chinese RR Workers' Camps.

For some months, June - October, 2016, the [Heirloom](#) explored the Chinese railroad workers on Donner Summit: life, the job, railroad building, danger, a book review, prejudice, and Summit Camp. Then in the October issue we started visits to the remnants of actual camps. With so much Donner Summit history waiting to get into the [Heirloom](#), though, we were only able to write about the visit to China Kitchen in the October issue. The visit was a bust.

We next went to visit what the railroad called Camp 5 and archeologists also call Windmill Tree Camp. This camp lies below Tunnel 13 and between the two parts of the loop the railroad makes in Coldstream Valley. On the ridge above there is a very strange looking tree reminiscent of a farm windmill.

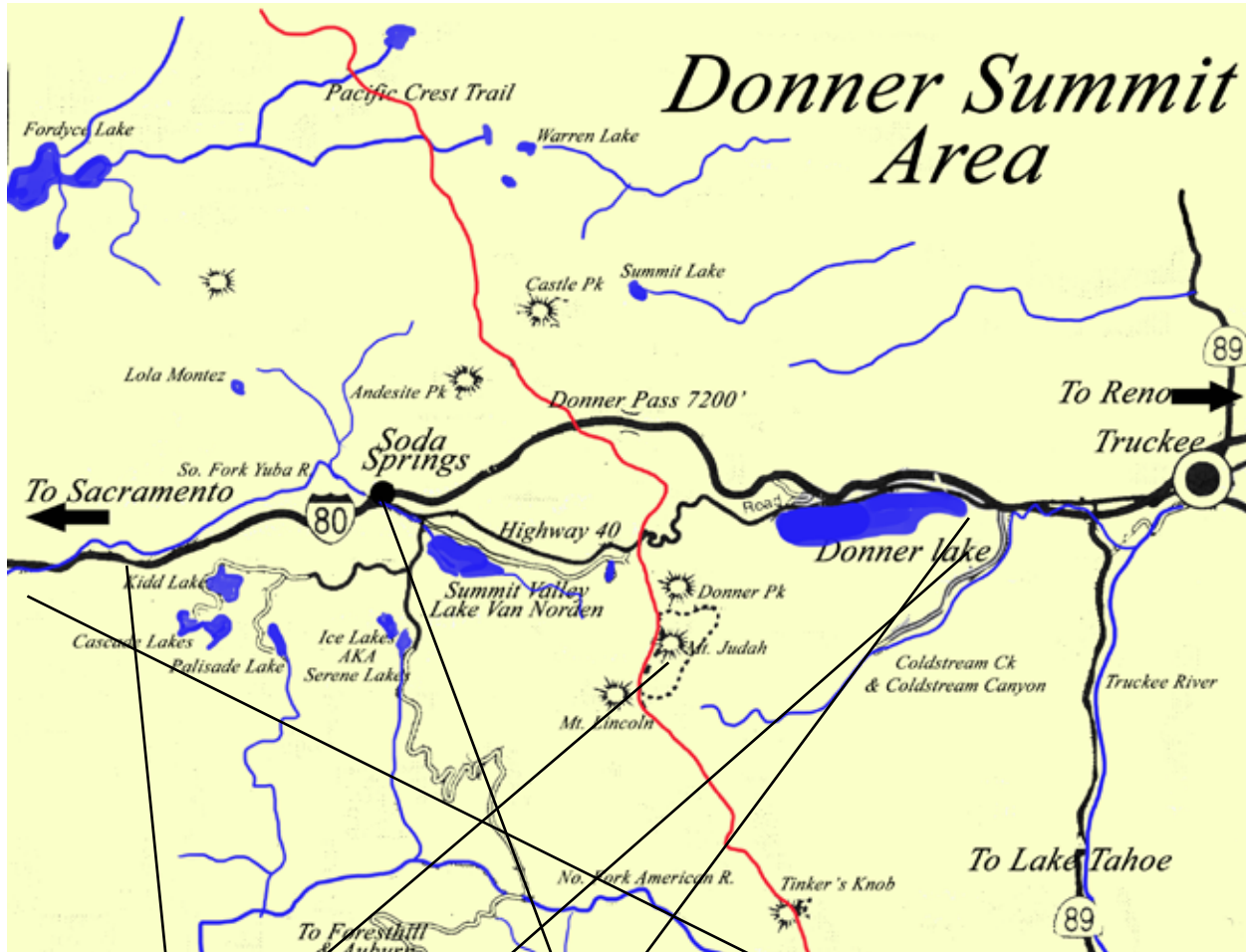
According to the archeologists this was a major camp and so the MHRT had great hopes of finding it and making a discovery or two.

Coldstream Canyon can be accessed from the Donner Lake exit from I-80. The road goes between two gas stations, almost immediately becomes dirt and goes through a gravel quarry. Once in Coldstream Canyon there are lots of opportunities for hiking, biking and just exploring. Get to the top of Schallenberger Ridge and there are great views (see the top of page 3). In 1846 Roller Pass was discovered which is at the end of Coldstream Canyon and below the east side of Mt. Judah. It was an excruciatingly difficult way to get over the summit. Take a look at our [Heirlooms](#) that explored Roller Pass (the index pages on each [Heirloom](#) page on our website). In 1846, Coldstream Pass was discovered which was much easier. It lies between Donner Pk. and Mt. Judah. From then on emigrants, and later freight wagons, used Coldstream Pass until the railroad built the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. Autos even used Coldstream Pass, see "Intriguing" in our May, '15 [Heirloom](#) for a 1915 trip.



Chinese pottery shard found at Camp 5

Story Locations in this Issue



In This Issue

Crampton's Lodge pg 7 DSHS pg 11 to see matchbooks Black or Cisco Butte pg 17 Mt;
Judah view pg 18 Camp 5 pg 1 Andover, pg 5

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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



There are great views from the top of Schallenberger Ridge which you can access from Coldstream Canyon. Here you see Mt. Lincoln on the left, Mt. Judah in the center, and Donner Pk. on the right center. Roller Pass is between Lincoln and Judah, Coldstream is between Judah and Donner and Donner Pass is to the right of Donner Pk.

The MHRT arrived full of hope only to be disappointed. We'd thought there'd be artifacts easily found but everything was covered with brush in the perfect spot for a camp - midway between the tracks and close to the river.

Then we saw a mountain bike trail. Mountain bikes had killed the vegetation in the track and removed the top bit of dirt. There, all along the track, were bits of Chinese railroad workers' history - all left on site by the MHRT. There were pottery shards and pieces of old bottles, among other things and some of which can be seen below.

Here you see some of the adventure. Then it was up to Tunnel 13. There used to be a turntable there. As we were walking up the road, a few hundred yards from what we thought was the Camp 5 site, a most beautiful shard of Chinese pottery was sitting right in the road in the open. That's what is on page one.

It makes one wonder what's under all that other brush the covers the area. Next month: Chinese camp at Big Bend.



Artifacts found after just a few minutes looking in the mountain bike trail.



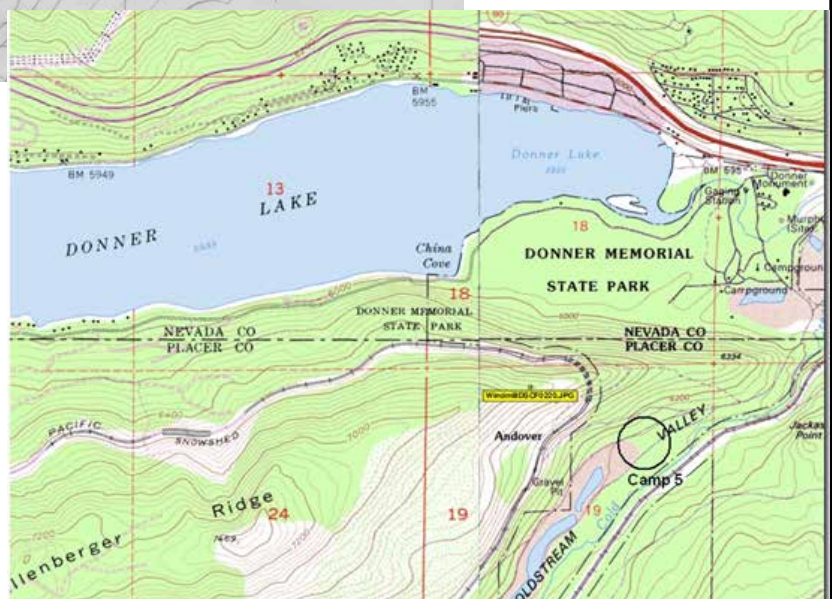
Exploring Camp 5 required some "derring due" by old men.

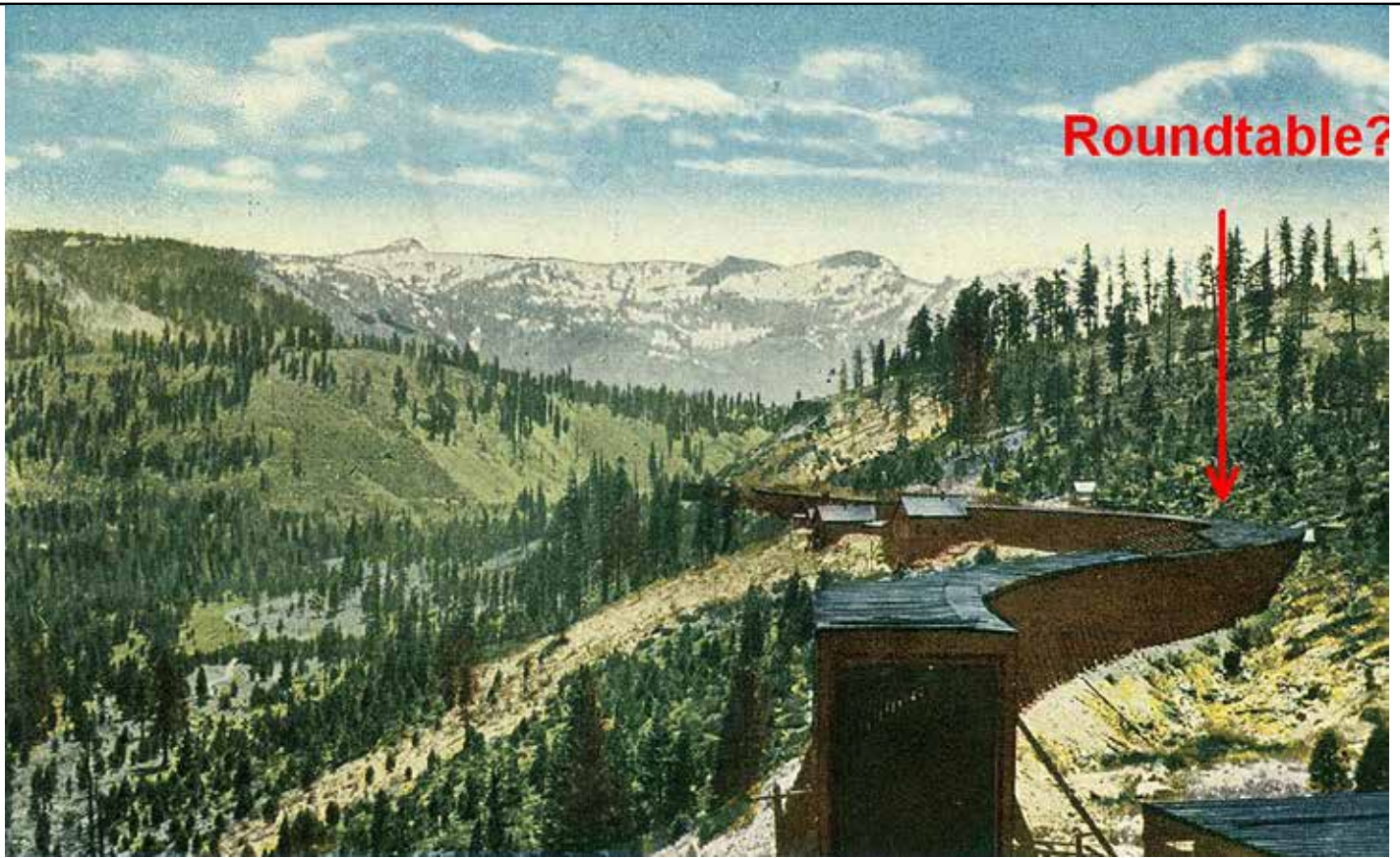


The map to the left is from the Bancroft Library and is undated. The Bancroft says it's about 1870.

The map shows Donner Lake, the entrance to Coldstream and the location of some hotels.

Modern topographic map from the USGS. The circle in the lower right shows approximate location of Camp 5.





Roundtable?

The MHRT also wanted to see about the turntable that was at one time at Tunnel 13. We knew that because of the article on the next page and wanted to see what remained. It turned out nothing remained, probably at least partly because now there are two tracks where there used to be one track. The turntable was probably removed once locomotives had more power and extra engines were not needed to get trains over the summit. The turntable was where extra "helper" engines could be attached to trains. The turntable enabled them to turn around. There were more turntables at the Summit and at Cisco.

We headed up to Tunnel 13 and found some great views like from the old postcard above with the wooden snowsheds and the single track. Here we see buildings at the Andover stop on the railroad in the distance and telescoping snowsheds in the foreground. Parts of the snowsheds were on tracks. When summer arrived the snowsheds on tracks were retracted to create fire breaks. Snowsheds were in constant danger of burning from sparks emitted from locomotives. See the August and July, '10 [Heirlooms](#).



The picture below is today looking towards the same view - taken by George Lamson

RAILROAD IMPROVEMENTS. [paragraphing added for readability]

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 difficult after reaching this latter point, until they arrive at Emigrant Gap, the terminus of the snowsheds on the west side of the Sierras [sic].

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 [sic] 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 [sic] tens of thousands of dollars in the wear and tear of locomotives and snow plows, and extra labor. Frequently in the Winter [sic] 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 [sic] on the west side of the Sierras [sic] 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. [sic]

Truckee Republican September 10th

Sacramento Daily Union September 12, 1874

(in the old days it was common for newspapers to copy some of their contents from other newspapers)

Relevant Reader's Letter:

Hi Bill,

I saw this article on the archaeological sites that wildfires can uncover and thought of you and the historical society. Hope we never have a fire in the Serene Lakes area, but something to keep in mind regarding uncovering history and artifacts if we do.

Hope you're having a terrific summer!

Best,
Kristina Sepetys

And we respond that of course Kristina is right, thanks for the note, and it turns out mountain bike trails do the same thing.



Revisiting the Crampton Album 66 Years Later

In our May, '16 [Heirloom](#), we shared the Crampton album, pictures of the old Crampton Lodge that used to sit where the I-80 exit to Rainbow is today. We didn't share it all though. One story is the flood of 1950. It's hard for us to imagine today after years of successive drought, but sometimes there can be a great excess of rainfall. Look what it did in November, 1950.

The Flood of November, 1950

The Crampton Album has, as you can see lots of old pictures and family pictures. There are also some columns from local newspapers and a few snippets of other things. Two whole pages are taken up with news about a great flood in November of 1950. "Rain Swells River, Streams; Damages to Property Great" reads one set of headlines.

In one week in November of 1950 10.23 inches of rain fell. Total rainfall was 17.60 inches, more than 15 inches more than normal. The "Truckee River, fed by scores of feeder streams, went on a wild rampage and caused heavy damage from Tahoe to Reno." Bridges, buildings and roads were swept away. All roads leaving Truckee were closed. "Torrential streams rushing into Donner" swept away "A huge section" of Old 40 a mile up Donner Pass. "Four feet of water stood on the road at Cisco." The Donner Creek bridge on 89 was swept away closing the route to Tahoe. Cabins were shifted off their foundations and some were ruined between Truckee and Tahoe City. Washouts and slides stopped train traffic and at Andover (just east of Donner Summit – the buildings in the postcard on page 3) a slide closed the tracks. The City of San Francisco, the Gold Coast (names of trains) and a local were stuck at Norden. Powerhouses along the Truckee "were at a virtual standstill" cutting off electricity. Silt and debris had clogged the intakes. Donner Lake was at flood stage and water was pouring over the dam "at a rapid rate." An 18 ton bridge at Floriston was washed away trapping half of Floriston's cars in Floriston and preventing anyone from leaving (a woman was driving her car just onto the bridge when the ground gave way. Had the bumper not caught on a piece of the bridge the woman and the car would have been swept away too). Schools were closed early so children could get home before the flooding. Major hotels in Reno had four feet of water in their lobbies.

Fran Couillard wrote a column for the Sierra Sun called the "Summit Scene" and she continued the story of the flood in the scrapbook. Fran said people sat smugly on Donner Summit because the water rushed away downhill. Water was "swirling around in our various basements as it runs in one door and out the other on its way down." Houses at Rainbow were flooded. One fellow had three feet of "Yuba holdings in his cabin." Two people left Cisco "after running the river that is the highway below Crampton's." Fran "was induced" to go see for herself and found the car in water up to the floorboards at Kingvale Park. Just below the store they could not see the opposite bank of the river. Hampshire Rocks campground was under feet of water and what had been the highway was part of the river. The Yuba tossed tables and camping equipment about "like a crazy juggler and bore them away on her growling crest." Old timers said 1937 was worse but 1950 was bad enough.



Fran then went on to talk about local conditions. Heavy snow started shortly and an early ski season was in the works. "The water, altho [sic] waist deep, didn't keep scheduled parties from "going on as usual." Donner Ski Ranch got new operators, Jack Woodard and Tom Malta from L.A. There was another 60 acres of improved land for a ski run. \$15,000 had been spent on improvements. Sugar Bowl had added a "slalom tow" and interior decorating (at the lodge presumably) had been finished. The Auburn Ski Club had spent a lot of money on improvements which put "this oldest of clubs... right in there with the best of 'em." More chairs had been added at Soda Springs doubling capacity. The Snowflake Inn was again in operation (little building that used to sit in what is now parking lot 4 across Soda Springs Rd. from the Soda Springs Ski Area). Various other businesses were ready for winter.



There is a hand written section in the album presumably written by Ethel Crampton who wrote that a friend convinced her to go to Reno. They did, shopping and seeing a show. On the way back to the summit they learned the road was closed but kept on. At the foot of the summit the road was indeed closed by a gate. Another friend happened by and convinced the gatekeeper to allow the locals to go through. Water was rushing over the road as they went up to the summit. As they got close to home a truck "hauled them through" and the water was feet deep. Then the women got into a truck that got them through more feet of water to the porch of Crampton's Lodge. The water was up to the lobby floor.

The water washed away one gas tank and Ethyl's son, Jack, attached a truck and chain to a 500 gallon tank to keep it from washing away. "There was a telephone pole going around in our yard" and logs and tables (from the campground) were floating around. "It was awful," she said. "I tell you I bet there were prayers offered up to God."

On the next page Ethel continues, "The Smith house is the house next to [the] river and last one this side of Rainbow bridge. The house in the river Yuba ... had 4 1/2 feet of water in it..." the river took off the Dutch door and half the furniture. The newspaper also reported that at the Daisy Smith house a tree had been "yanked up.... From the sodden soil" and floated with the Yuba through Daisy Smith's window. "After exploring the inside of the house, it rested its head in the fireplace and left its butt complete with roots, hanging out the window." "Shelves four feet from the floor in the Smith house have been decorated for Christmas with pine cones, rocks, and silt." The basement of Rainbow Lodge was filled with water. A house had to have a bath with a fire hose to clean out "Yuba silt."

The flood cost millions of dollars in damage. El Dorado County was isolated. People were evacuated from many towns. Highways and roads were closed. The trains stopped. The National Guard was called out. In Reno water was six feet deep on roads. The Rock St. bridge was destroyed and a two story house sat in the middle of Sierra St. The Red Cross went to work and relief crews were everywhere. One picture in the scrapbook shows gamblers still gambling in water almost to their knees.



From the DSHS Archives

Get Ready for Winter

TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST
TRUCKEE DISTRICT

The Sierra Summit Recreation Area lies within the Tahoe National Forest adjacent to the U.S. Route 40, and embraces the mountainous region from Donner Summit east to Truckee and south to Lake Tahoe, along the main crest of the Sierra.

Across this summit, notably at the saddle between Mt. Lincoln and Donner Peak and the saddle at the head of the North Fork of Squaw Creek, Emigrant trains worked their way during the period immediately following the Donner Expedition, from 1848 into the 50's.

These historic routes were readily followed and the main one up Cold Stream and over the Mt. Lincoln-Donner Peak saddle into Emigrant Valley is now marked with metal signs that are easily followed in summer and by Skiway trail markers in winter.

This is still a Wilderness Area, inasmuch as access is by trail only. There is a county road along the west side from Soda Springs station to the American River, but to get into the area covered by this map one must travel on foot or horseback.

Resorts:

Accommodations are obtainable at Soda Springs Hotel and in hotels at Truckee. Hotels also furnish accommodations at Tahoe City and around the lake. Tourist Cabins and Hotels are available at Donner Lake, and there are Tourist Cabins along the highway 1½ miles west of Truckee.

At Donner Lake there is fishing and boating in summer.

Winter Sports equipment can be obtained at Soda Springs, Tahoe City and Truckee.

Summer Trail Trips

1. Donner Summit to Mt. Lincoln and Squaw Valley	11 miles
2. Donner Monument - Tinker Knob	7½ "
3. Donner Summit to Castle Peak	6 "
4. Squaw Valley to 5 Lakes	4 "
5. Deer Park to 5 Lakes	2 "

Winter Trips

6. Sierra Club - Sugar Bowl	2 "
7. Sugar Bowl - Mt. Lincoln	1½ "
8. Sierra Club - Donner Monument (via Sugar Bowl)	9 "
9. Mt. Lincoln - Anderson Peak	3½ "
" - Tinker Knob	4½ "
" - Squaw Valley trail summit	6½ "
" - Granite Chief	8½ "
" - Squaw Peak	9½ "
" - 5 Lakes	10½ "
" - Truckee River Highway at Bear Creek	14½ "

Highways:

Norden to Truckee	10 3/4
Truckee to Tahoe City	15

Note: Winter Trips indicated above are for experienced mountaineers and qualified ski travelers.

SIERRA SUMMIT
RECREATION AREA

TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST

CALIFORNIA

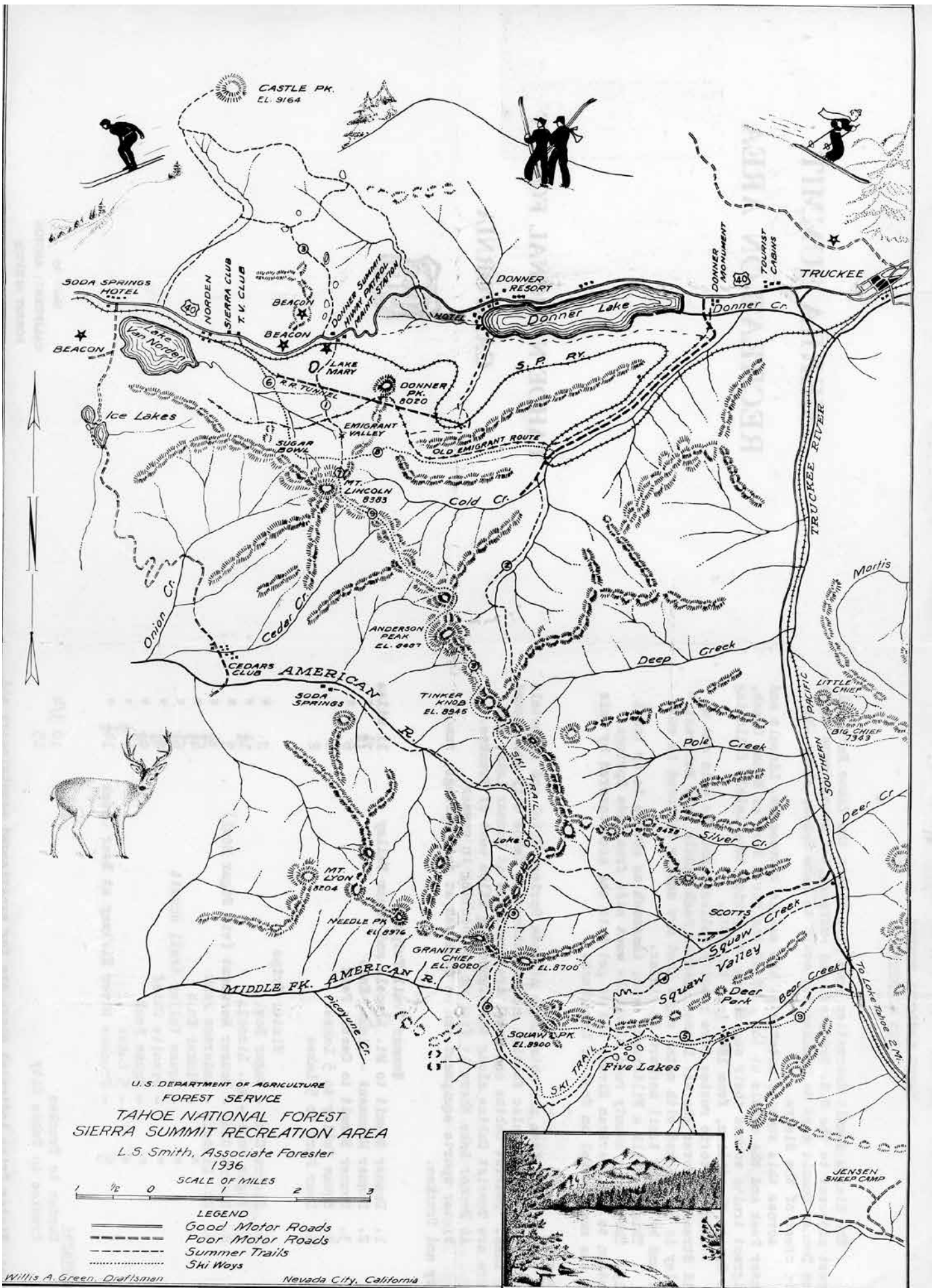


Issued by
CALIFORNIA REGION
FOREST SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

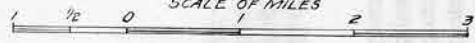
Using the key on the next page you can find the Sierra Ski Ways trails for good ungroomed cross-country 1936 skiing.

This 1936 USFS circular comes from materials donated to the DSHS by Milli Martin whose aunt and uncle, Herb and Lena Frederick, owned the Norden Store for many years. Check our [Heirloom](#) indices for stories and pictures about the Fredericks, the Norden Store, and Milli's time on Donner Summit.

See also our Sierra Crest stories including last month's rescued sign.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
 FOREST SERVICE
 TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST
 SIERRA SUMMIT RECREATION AREA
 L. S. Smith, Associate Forester
 1936



- LEGEND**
- Good Motor Roads
 - - - - - Poor Motor Roads
 - Summer Trails
 - Ski Ways



From the DSHS Archives

Highway 40 A Unique Trip

We have our Historic Route 40 brochure which will take you on an "old Time Sunday Drive from Rocklin to Donner Pass and Truckee. It's a fun drive and a change from the Interstate. It's not the only tour of Old 40 that you can take, though.



Norm Saylor has a unique collection which, as you peruse, will take you back to the old days on Highway 40.

Norm collects pictures and has thousands which you can view by coming into the DSHS. It will be almost overwhelming. Picture collecting is not uncommon. Another of Norm's collections is a set of several hundred matchbooks, some still with their matches from stops along Highway 40 from Sacramento to Truckee. He'd been collecting them haphazardly for some years, accumulating 60% of what he now has. Then in about 2011 a lady from Colfax (AKA Illinoistown) called saying the antique

store was going out of business and had a collection of matchbooks as well. That purchase provided many more.

Up until recently most of the collection was unviewable except for a few scattered in binders or a few on a display our display dept. made (<http://www.donnertsummithistoricalociety.org/pages/exhibits/matchbooks.jpg>) Then Judy Lieb of Serene Lakes and who is on the DSHS advisory board, decided to do something about it. She has been organizing and labeling Norm's various albums of historical photographs and from time to time she'd come across matchbook covers. Eventually she'd come across so many she decided to organize the matchbooks in one binder starting with

the Sacramento matchbooks and ending with the Truckee matchbooks. Paging through, is a fun trip along Old 40. See the lodges and hotels that used to exist when 40 was the route over the Sierra. See the interesting graphics and the old phone numbers and addresses.

Judy enjoyed the trip along Old 40 because "those old matchbook covers are very interesting as many are from places no longer there. The graphics varied so much that it was fun to look at all of them and remember the time when matchbooks were everywhere and no one gave them a second thought. Our collection has covers from restaurants, bars, hotels, ski shops, ski resorts and gas stations. I never knew there were so many restaurants and Bars in Colfax!!... The most interesting ones to me were from Soda Springs - the old Soda Springs Hotel, Dick Buek's ski shop, Sugar Bowl, Soda Springs Ski Hill and Donner Summit Lodge."

Judy says Norm has even more matchbooks needing organizing and she'll get on that task once he gets them out.

Judy is also enjoying the photograph organizing. "Many of the postcards that we have are over 100 years old. Some have messages on them to loved ones and friends. I find it fascinating to look at them and love to do a bit more research about the places depicted. So when I label them, my laptop is next to me in case I need to find out more information. It is fun and I am always learning. We could use some more volunteers to help with this project as there are a lot of postcards!"

You may too- come on in just to look or to volunteer.

for more matchbooks:

<http://www.donnertsummithistoricalociety.org/pages/exhibits/matchbooks.jpg>



Behind the Scenes @ the DSHS

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BEER**

ON THE DONNER
TRAIL AT BIG BEND
NEAR SODA SPRINGS
CALIF.

BIG BEND 3



Trailside Lodge
AT BIG BEND NEAR
SODA SPRINGS, CALIF.
ON HI-WAY 40

CLOSE COVER BEFORE STRIKING MATCH

Ski the Top!



CLOSE COVER BEFORE STRIKING

Ski the Top!
**Donner
SKI RANCH**

U. S. HIGHWAY 40
TOP OF DONNER SUMMIT
CALIFORNIA

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California

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CLOSE COVER BEFORE STRIKING

Book Review

Marvels of the New West

Wm. Thayer, 1888

715 pages

Marvels of the New West is not the normal kind of book to be reviewed by the DSHS Heirloom staff. It first appeared as a footnote while doing other research (footnotes can be valuable sources for mining information and so we always scour the footnotes) and so it was put aside for future attention. In many 19th Century books there are references to Donner Summit * and it was thought that might be the case here. After all, isn't Donner Summit a marvel? Unfortunately there is nothing in it about Donner Summit.

Typically that would then put the book in a pile of other 19th Century literature. Marvels...., though, is a bit of a trip in a time machine to the 19th Century mind. What were people thinking in the old days? How did they look at what we take for granted today? What was their perspective on things? There was discussion around the Heirloom editorial table and in the end we decided to take on Marvels.... and add it to our collection of reviewed book. Presumably the readers of our Heirloom (or our website if that's where you're seeing this) are history buffs and not so wedded to Donner Summit history that they would see Marvels.... as anathema.

In 1888 the West was a mystery to most of the population of the country. The vast majority lived east of the Mississippi. Marvels of the New West was a correction for that and readers were treated to a rendition of wonders. The Marvels of the New West comes with lots of illustrations.

The modern reader of Marvels... sees the West not only through the lens of the 19th Century but through new eyes. The descriptions of nature are just as evocative for us as for the 19th Century reader. For example one 19th Century visitor to the west said, "It is not that everything is so big; that is the character of the whole country, everything in nature being on a much larger scale than we are accustomed to in Europe. But besides the Rocky Mountains and a water fall, - and a big one too, twice as high as Niagara, - there is the grandest old lot of geysers and boiling springs - in the world, ... [there are] what they call cañons,... the walls of which are such glowing colors... mammoth hot springs... They appear in terraces, tier upon tier." Another visitor said the "novelty and magnificence of the scenes are bewildering."

*Take a look at the book review section on our website or in the Heirloom indices. Across the Plains, 1850, is an example as is the 1846 What I Saw in California. We've used the snowshed pictures in Marvels... in other Heirlooms.



MARVELS OF THE NEW WEST.

A VIVID PORTRAYAL OF THE STUPENDOUS MARVELS IN
THE VAST WONDERLAND WEST OF
THE MISSOURI RIVER.

SIX BOOKS IN ONE VOLUME,

COMPRISING

MARVELS OF NATURE, MARVELS OF RACE, MARVELS OF
ENTERPRISE, MARVELS OF MINING, MARVELS
OF STOCK-RAISING, AND MARVELS
OF AGRICULTURE,

GRAPHICALLY AND TRUTHFULLY DESCRIBED

BY

WILLIAM M. THAYER,

AUTHOR OF OVER TWENTY STANDARD WORKS, INCLUDING "THE WHITE HOUSE
SERIES OF BIOGRAPHIES," AND "YOUTH'S HISTORY OF THE
REBELLION," IN 4 VOLS.

ILLUSTRATED WITH OVER

THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY FINE ENGRAVINGS AND MAPS.

NORWICH, CONN.:

THE HENRY BILL PUBLISHING COMPANY.

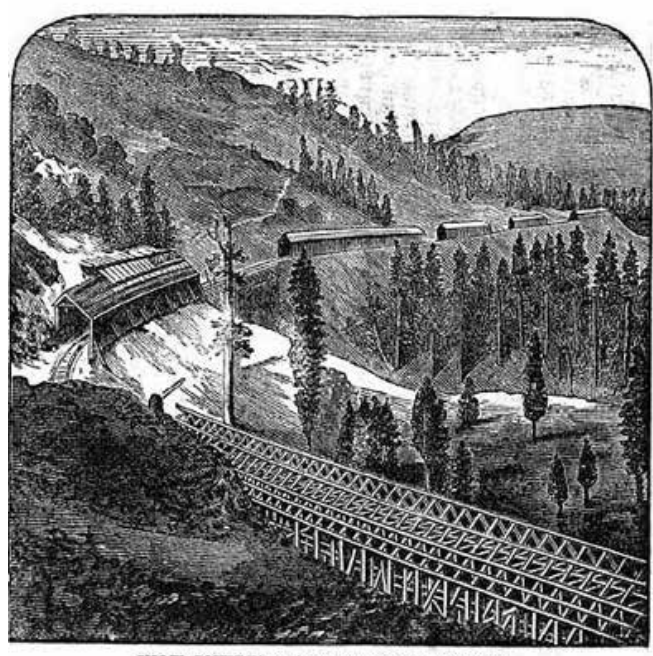
1888.

Marvels of the New West is another example of a book digitized by Google so future generations can have access. Digitizing historic documents and text in various forms opens a lot that was previously lost to obscurity or was inaccessible because the few libraries having particular sources were far away or did not allow access to non-affiliates. You can find this book for free on the internet and peruse the text and illustrations just as much as you would like.

Everything was on a magnificent scale in the west so much so that it was unbelievable to the easterner. “Were some well-posted citizen of the New West to present the actual facts about that domain to the inhabitants of the eastern states, a multitude of hearers would denounce him as a liar...” Kansas is ten times the size of Connecticut. Colorado is 100 times the size of Rhode Island. California is three times the size of all of New England. Nothing is done within these “marvelous boundaries” in a small way. “... nothing is too large or difficult... Enterprises are prodigious.” “Human plans are as large as the states.” “Marvels are constantly multiplying.” The New West’s inexhaustible resources, healthier climate, grander scenery and “Irrepressible spirit of enterprise” will attract millions and that population will “determine... the destiny our great Republic.”

That’s stirring and that’s just the introduction. Close to concluding the introduction Thayer says, “This book is designed to enlighten those who have never visited the New West...[furnishing] marvels enough... to satisfy the more incredulous...”

Indeed, that’s what Thayer does with evocative 19th Century prose and lots and lots of illustrations. The list of marvels in the west is long. There is nothing in the Alps to compare to the “breadth and grandeur” of the Rockies. About Yellowstone, which had just become a park, an English visitor to the “wonderland” said, “... here I am, rubbing my eyes every day, to be sure that I am not in a dream... You never saw, nor could you ever imagine, such strange sights as greet us here et every turn.” “The marvels of Yosemite stand pre-eminent among the wonders of the west, [the] overpowering sense of the sublime, the awful desolation, the transcending marvelousness and unexpectedness that swept over us, as we reined in our horses sharply out of the green forests, and stood upon the high jutting rock that over looked this rolling, upheaving sea of granite mountains... such tide of feeling, such stoppage of ordinary emotions, comes at rare intervals in any life... All that was mortal shrank back; all that was immortal swept to the front and bent down in awe... Thousands of travellers and tourists make pilgrimage to it each year, and yet no pen, brush, camera, nor tongue has ever nor ever can, describe in all its variety of grandeur and interest, so satisfactorily as it reveals itself to the visitor.”



SNOW COVERINGS AND BRIDGE NEAR CISCO.

In a like way Thayer covers the marvels in other western states. Then he goes on to the marvels of Race talking about ancient races of North America, cliff dwellers, cave dwellers, petroglyphs, pottery, and pueblos including the oldest house in the United States, a house built in 1540 in Santa Fe.

Marvels of enterprise puts settlement into perspective. At the book’s printing it had only been a few years between “suffering and perils” of early explorers and the “pleasure parties rid[ing] in Pullman cars... and where, within thirty years, ...cities,... have risen like magic...” That must have been almost incredible to 19th Century citizens and must have served to galvanize them to greater accomplishments and the feeling that there was nothing that could not be done, that the United States was destined for greatness.

Throughout the text there are lots of little stories. One is John C. Fremont’s letters to his wife from his 1849 expedition. In those the modern reader gets a good idea of what it was like exploring the west before Pullman cars. “Hardships and sufferings almost unparalleled” when the expedition camped at 12,000 feet elevation. Blizzards paralyzed movement. The temperature was 0°. The snow was deep enough to bury animals. “Ten or twelve men variously frozen.” Dead mules were lying about.

There is a story of cannibalism by emigrant brothers and other emigrant travails. There are gold seekers' stories and the stories of Snowshoe Thompson and the Pony Express..

Unfortunately there is also the story of the treatment of the Native Americans and in that a defense of Col. Chivington who orchestrated the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado. Thayer defended Chivington and reported the depredations of the Native Americans saying Chivington removed the "cause of their [settlers] chief calamities" – he massacred 750 Indians. "Colonel Chivington stands by Sand Creek and we stand by him, as we think every faithful chronicler of history must do." This section too gives us insight into the 19th Century mindset although not a happy insight.

There is also the unhappy story of the buffalo. Thayer reports one observer seeing 112 carcasses of buffalo in a semi-circle around one man. He had shot all of the buffalo. There's a downside of "progress" of settling the west. "The buffalo melted away like snow before a summer's sun... nearly four and a half millions of buffalo killed in a short space of three years." "Congress talked about interfering, but only talked." Some things don't change.

There is one story that portrays the settling of the west vividly. Mrs. August Tabor met and then married her husband. He took her from civilized Maine to Kansas in 1857. They took the train to the end of the line and bought oxen, a wagon, tools, and seed. They took all of that and Mrs. Tabor's trunks and headed west. The trip was not pleasant but the destination was worse. It was desolate. The wind never stopped. The cabin was rude, 12x16 feet, and alone on the prairie. There "was not a building a stone, or a stick in sight." Their only furniture was a cook stove and a trunk. The bedstead was "an old tick filled with prairie grass." "I sat down on the trunk and cried." She was no doubt not alone in her feelings. Settling the west was tough.

Imagine the come down from the hopes of new marriage, new life, and the civilized comforts of Maine. It must have been depressing but those settlers expanded the United State. Mrs. Tabor made the best of it. She papered the inside of the cabin with old New York Tribunes. She'd brought table linen and silverware with them and began to prepare the first meal.

The Tabors started their pioneer farm but "no rain fell that summer." There was nothing to gather at harvest time. Mr. Tabor went to Fort Riley to work and Mrs. Tabor was left behind in constant dread of snakes and Indians, all alone.

They got a crop the next year but there was no market.

The Tabors moved on to Colorado and that journey must have been tough. Mrs. Tabor said, "What I endured on this journey only the women who crossed the plains in 1859 can realize." Sometimes they had to search for miles for enough buffalo chips to cook with. Indians continually followed them "begging and stealing." There were more moves and more hardships. Mrs. Tabor took in boarders, did baking, became post mistress, and weighed miner's gold. Mr. Tabor made a small success mining. With money they made they bought land in Kansas. They also set up a store in Colorado and apparently did well and became wealthy. Mrs. Tabor said a little less courage, fortitude and perseverance was all it would have taken for them to have failed. The story gives pause to think about the people who moved west to settle. They may have given up a lot and suffered even more to survive. Many didn't.

A large section of the book is devoted to the railroad, "the greatest marvel of our age. It changed the world... From that moment old things began to pass away, and all things began to be new. Progress was wonderful; and now it seeps onward more grandly than ever." What a change the railroad must have made both for travelers but also for the psyche of the nation. Travel that had taken months in wagons and then weeks by stage, took days. Travel that had been hardship and danger was now in comfort. The nation was brought together. News could travel fast. It must have seemed that time and distance had been conquered. Maybe Americans *could* do anything.

Thayer talks about the snowsheds of our Sierra and a huge snow plow the CPRR had (40,860 tones, 20 feet long, 10 ½ feet wide,



13 ¼ feet high that once was driven at 60 MPH by 10 locomotives into packed snow). There is the largest ferry in the world used for trains where the Carquinez Bridge in the Bay Area is today. The statistics of the ferry's size would make more sense if we knew more about the size of normal ferries. That brings up one weakness of the book. Thayer likes statistics and gives lots of them to bolster his argument about the West's size. It can be tedious but those can be skimmed.

Some of the marvels get a bit tedious too. The section on large buildings in the west is one such. That such grand buildings appeared so quickly after settlement is a wonder but the list of buildings in town after town is mind numbing. In San Francisco though, it's interesting to read about the Palace Hotel, the largest in the world. It's interesting to read about Golden Gate Park and Lick Observatory.

There are also sections on cowboys and stock raising, the Mother Lode, the Gold Rush, the Comstock Lode, mining and agriculture.

After seven hundred pages of marvels Thayer concludes, The New West is a "veritable wonderland," "as crowded with opportunities as with marvels." "It seems as if God had concentrated His wisdom and power upon this part of our country, to make it His crowning work of modern civilization on this Western Continent." With the settlement of the New West "on this continent was to be built up the largest, richest, most intelligent, and powerful Christian nation on earth. A fearless, self-sacrificing, intelligent, hardy Christian race, disciplined by perils and hardship indescribable, could alone lay the foundations..." "The old nations of the earth," Thayer said quoting Andrew Carnegie, "creep on at a snail's pace; the Republic thunders past with the rush of the express. The United States, in the growth of a single century, has already reached the foremost rank among nations and is destined to out-distance all others... America already leads the civilized world." "The New West has made this result possible... the New West will decide the destiny of our land."

Thayer's Donner Party summary.

Aficionados of Donner Summit history no doubt know the story of the Donner Party that left for California in 1846. Half the party got stuck at Donner Lake and the other half, including the Donners, were at Alder Creek seven miles away.

Stories like that are sensational today and they were in the 19th Century. The story of the Donner Party was reported across the nation in newspapers and those reports did not strictly adhere to the actual events. It was not until C.F. McGlashan wrote his [History of the Donner Party](#) that a true version of the events was available to the public. McGlashan wrote his book in 1879, nine years before Thayer published [Marvels](#). Thayer's [Marvels](#) shows a lot of research given the illustrations he found or commissioned, the numerous quotes and stories, the information, and given the many many statistics. So it's surprising that he got the Donner Party story so wrong.

In Thayer's version the Donners got snowed in at Donner Lake and Mr. Donner was sick. The children, "under the guide and protection of the brave servants, succeeded in crossing the mountains after hardships and much suffering, and reached comfortable quarters." Mr. Donner, his wife, and a German had remained at the lake. When a search party dared to "penetrate to the lake... [and] they reached the rudely constructed cabin, a terrible sight met them. Mr. Donner and his wife were dead, and the German, now a raving maniac, sat before the fire devouring a wasted human arm. He was seized, and, after a fearful struggle, was secured; and he finally recovered to tell the story of that winter's suffering, almost without parallel in history." The next sentence goes off to the Multnomah Falls in Oregon so we are left with an incomplete and false story.

Mr. Thayer can be somewhat excused since the rendition above is quite like other Donner stories that appeared in newspapers after the event.

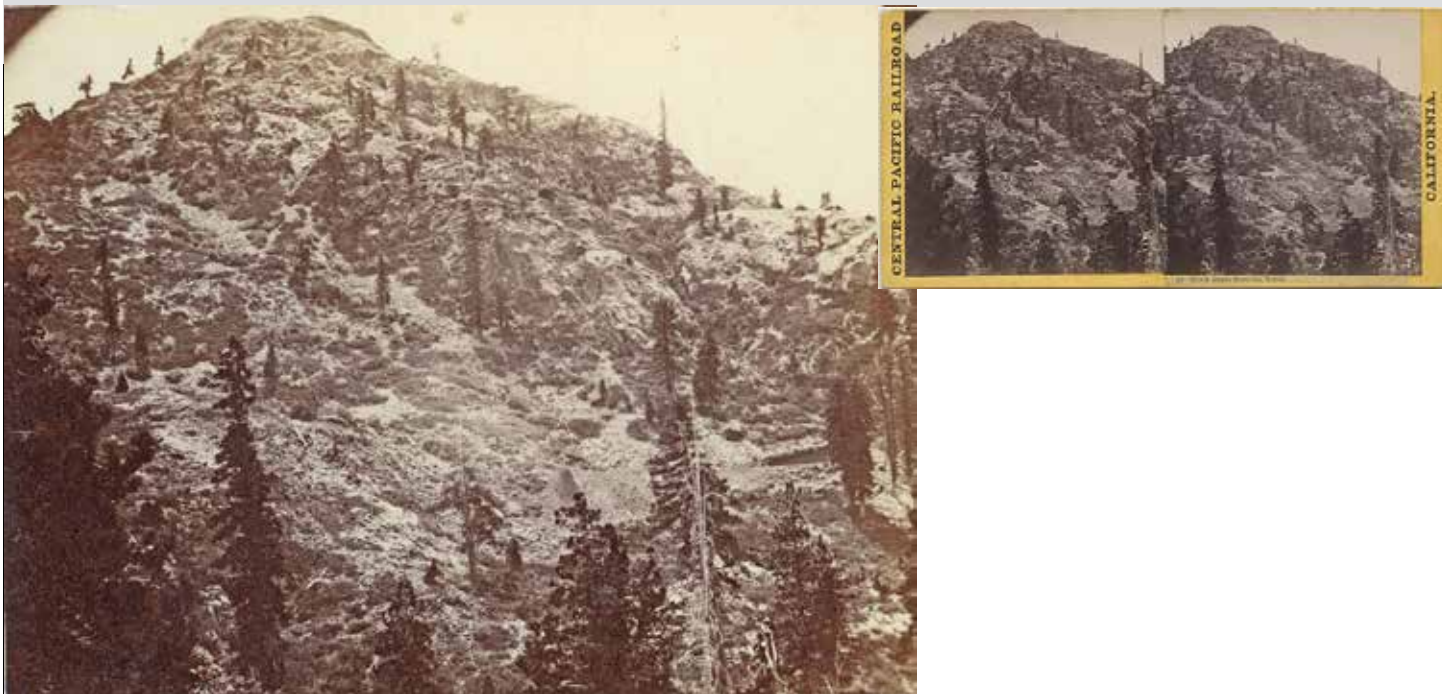
Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Saylor has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

You might even want to do a review for us.

Then & Now with Art Clark



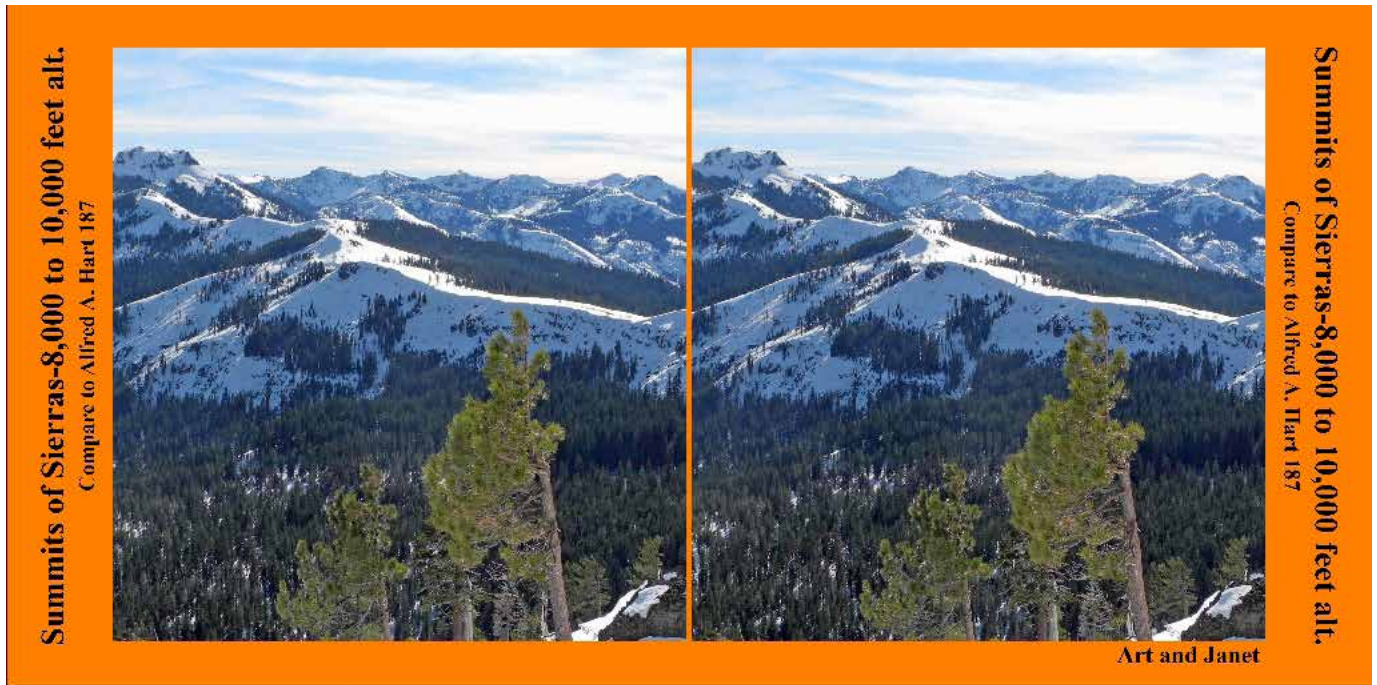
Alfred A Hart 98 - Black Butte (Cisco) from the North -

Building the railroad along a steep section of granite required a lot of blasting to create a roadbed. This photo appears to have captured the leading edge of the project as it worked its way toward Donner Summit. On the right side the rubble can be seen sliding down the mountain while on the left the slope is untouched. The "now" picture shows the current route protected by snowsheds.

Photo shot from along the Emigrant Trail at 39° 18.866'N 120° 33.406'W



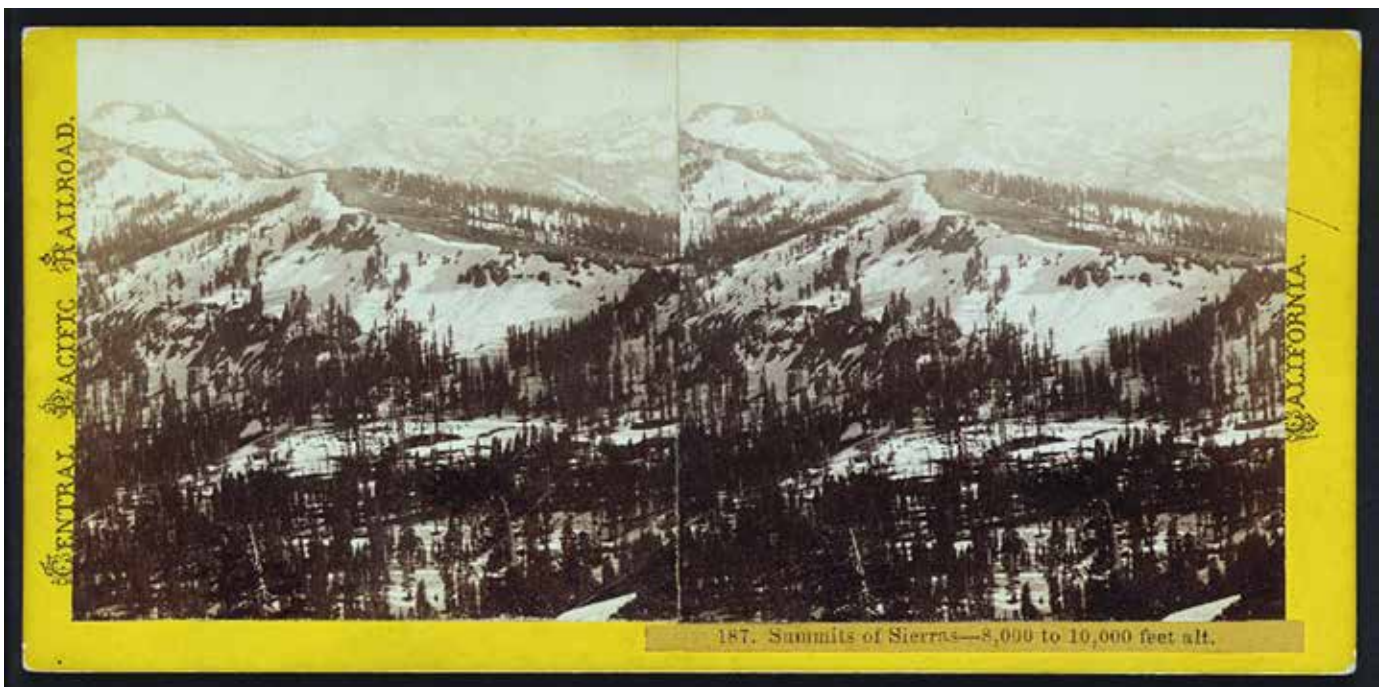
Then & Now with Art Clark



Summits of the Sierras - Hart #187

This view from the south end of Mount Judah was taken by Alfred A Hart. Visible (L-R) are Tinker Knob, Anderson Peak, Granite Chief, Needle Peak, and Lyon Peak. The Pacific Crest Trail follows the near ridge.

Photo location 39° 17.879'N 120° 18.936'W



DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org

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

**DONNER SUMMIT ROAD
CLOSED FOR WINTER**

Sacramento, Nov. 21. AP - Attempts to clear the Donner summit road across the Sierras have been unsuccessful, and equipment has been withdrawn the State Division of Highways announced here today. [unreadable] said deep snow will keep the road closed all winter unless a period of unusually warm weather occurs.

L.A. Times November 22, 1930

Editor's Note: Starting in 1931-32 the roads would be kept open all winter opening more of the Sierra to winter sports. One day the Heirloom will do that story.

Fan Mail

Hi Bill:

Arrival of the September Heirloom reminded me that I had not yet told you how much I liked the Summit Camp article in the August Heirloom.

You and your research team did a fantastic job.

Chuck [Oldenburg who inspired the series on Summit Camp and the Chinese on Donner Summit]

Your usual fantastic job, Bill !

It takes my car more than an hour to get to where the pioneers struggled over the mountain passes, but with your great writing, I am ALWAYS there.

Thanks very much !

--Richard Fuller

Behind the Scenes @ the DSHS

In the September, '16 Heirloom you read about snow plows destroying 20 Mile Museum receptacles. Last month you read about Ed Bubnis making new caps for receptacles in winter. This month, more.

It wasn't just snowplows that wreaked some havoc on 20 Mile Museum sign stands. On Roller Pass we have a sign, coincidentally, marking Roller Pass. The sign comes down each winter but the stand stays because the stands are too heavy to carry far. Last winter the snow and ice wrapped around the stand frame and broke it apart. There was a lot of rain that then froze so maybe that's what caused the damage to the four year old stand.

B.J. Pierce who has made a number of our stands and gets a few re-painted with powder coats each winter, volunteered to make a removable stand top. It's beautiful.

It takes a community to keep worthwhile enterprises running.



Here's the beautiful new removable top frame. We can just slip this onto the upright for summer and slip it off for winter.



Here's what snow and ice did to the top of the old stand.