

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

July, 2017 issue #107

1867 A Year in the Life of Donner Summit

Donner Summit did not always look like it does today.

Today Donner Summit melds natural beauty with development. One can go out hiking, biking, or cross country skiing and be inspired by wonderful views. One still sees animal sign of deer, martin, bear, and others. Wildflowers offer summer riots of color. There are 500 species of plants on Donner Summit. 115 butterfly species make Donner Summit home as do more than a hundred bird species. The photograph below looks out over the original pass to Donner Lake. Donner Pk. is just right of center.



At the same time "civilization" has made its presence known. There are streets, commercial buildings, camps, a few dams, and more than a thousand houses. There are telephone and power lines, a bunch of ski lifts, and a lot of trails.

Changes have come to Donner Summit episodically. At times it was a hive of activity with thousands of people and many commercial concerns and there was industry on Donner Summit. At other times the summit has been a sleepy backwater.

Here we will take a look at Donner Summit before civilization and then at one of the heights of activity, 1867.

Before Civilization

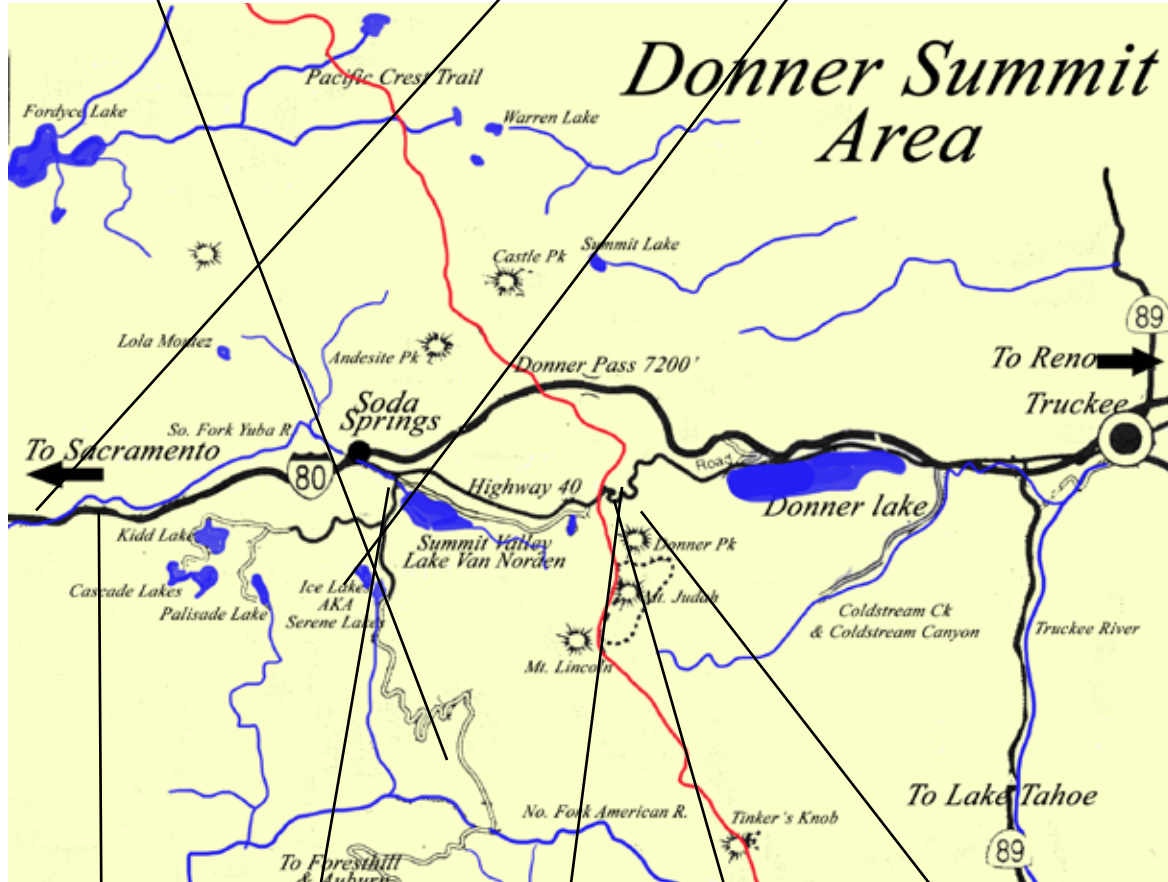
The best idea of what Donner Summit was like before the coming of "civilization" comes from early travelers. What the Native Americans thought we don't know because they left behind no written record. We can imagine they were enthralled by the landscape though. They did leave petroglyphs in dozens of places that are thousands of years old. Each petroglyph site is within view of a mighty peak. None are without those views and so we must imagine the Native Americans realized how special the views and mountains were and appreciated them. There are no petroglyphs in places where Native Americans camped but where there are no views. The Wabena Creek site (page 3), a few miles west of the Cedars on the Soda Springs Baker Ranch Rd., is a great example. The site sits directly opposite Snow Mountain and in between is a canyon in which the No. Fork of the

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Above: Snow Mountain across the 4,000' deep American River gorge from the Wabena Cr. petroglyph site. Below, petroglyphs at the site.



American River travels several thousand feet below. There are no grinding rocks within some miles indicating that there was no long-term settlement there. Native Americans came for the view, for Snow Mountain, and memorialized it with petroglyphs.

Our first understandable descriptions of Donner Summit come from the emigrants. Many of the first travelers who were keeping diaries, or writing about their experiences afterwards, remarked on the beauty of Donner Summit. Edwin Bryant, for example, arrived in California during the summer of 1846. Afterwards he wrote the book, *What I Saw in California*. He saw, "The Alps, so celebrated in history, and by all travelers and admirers of mountain landscape, cannot, I am satisfied, present scenery more wild, more rugged, more grand, more romantic, and more enchantingly picturesque and beautiful... The sublime altitude of the mountains, their granite and barren heads piercing the sky; the umbrageous foliage of the tall pines and cedars deepening in verdure and density as the forest approaches the more gentle and grass slopes along the banks of the [Donner] lake, the limpid and tranquil surface

of which daguerreotypes [early photographic technique] distinctly every object, from the moss-covered rocks laved by its waves to the bald and inaccessible summit of the Sierra – the scenic object... Descending the rocky ravine [from Donner Pass] a few miles, we emerged from it and entered a beautiful level valley [Summit Valley], some four or five miles in length from east to west, and about two miles in breadth. A narrow, sluggish stream runs through this valley, the waters of which are of considerable depth, and the banks steep and miry. A luxuriant growth of grasses, of excellent quality, covered the entire valley with the richest verdure. Flowers were in bloom; and although late in August, the vegetation presented all the tenderness and freshness of May. This valley has been named by emigrants "Uber Valley;" and

the stream which runs through it, ... sometimes pronounced Juba..."

The scenery remained as civilization traveled over Donner Summit on the way to California. Benjamin Avery wrote two long articles about "Summering in the Sierra" in the January and February, 1874 editions of *Overland Monthly*, "The grandest of all the mountain ranges on the western side of the United States is the Sierra Nevada... with the most magnificent coniferous forest on the continent... The woods are grand with their drooping plumes – white on upper, green on lower surface – and the massive trunks are clad on one side with a thick garment of greenish—yellow moss extending to the limbs... Higher up, the treeless peaks and slopes of granite, dazzlingly white, send down roaring torrents. The sea-murmur of the forest has ceased; there is a hush in the air, except for the roar of waters... Nothing can be more charming than the woods of the Sierra summit in June, July, and August, especially in the level glades margining the open summit valley... The pines and firs... attain a height ranging from 100 to 200 feet... Their trunks are perfectly straight, limbless for fifty to a hundred feet, painted above the snow-mark with yellow mosses, and ranged in open, park-like groups affording



Old growth coniferous forest on Palisade Pk.



far vistas.... Huge bowlders [sic] of granite relieve the vernal coloring with their picturesque masses of gray, starred with lichens.... Thickets of wild-rose and other flowering shrubs occur at intervals, giving an almost patristic variety to the woodland scene. The crimson snow-plant (left) lifts its slender shaft of curious beauty.... Sparkling springs, fresh from snowy fountains, silver-streak these forest meadows, where birds come to bathe and drink, and tracks of the returning deer are printed. Once more the quail is heard piping to its mates, the heavy whirring flight of

the grouse startles the meditative rambler and the pines give forth again their surf-like roar to the passing breeze, waving their plumed tops in slow and graceful curves across the sky wonderfully clear and blue. Here beauty and happiness seem to be the rule, and care is banished. The feast of color, the keen pure atmosphere, the deep bright heavens, the grand peaks bounding the view, are intoxicating. There is a sense of freedom, and the step becomes elastic and quick under the new feeling of self-ownership. Love for all created things fills the soul as never before. One listens to the birds as to friends, and would fain cultivate with them a close intimacy. The water-fall [sic] has a voice full of meaning. The wild-rose tempts the mouth to kisses and the trees and rocks solicit an embrace. ...The spirit worships in an ecstasy of reverence. This is the Madonna of a religion without dogma, whose creed is writing only in the hieroglyphics of beauty, voiced only in the triple language of color, form, and sound... Plunge into the unbroken forests- into the deep canons; climb the high peaks; be alone awhile, and free. Look into Nature, as well as at Nature, so that the enjoyment shall be not merely sensuous but intellectual.”

Mr. Avery liked Donner Summit.

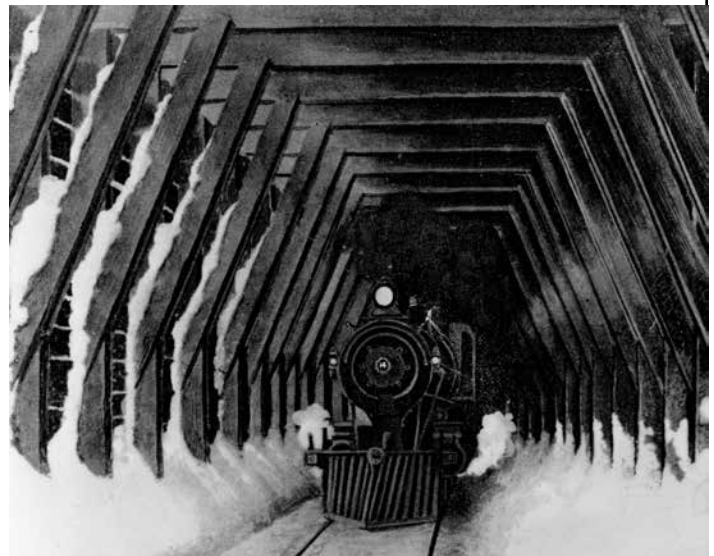
Perhaps more amazingly the beauty was also so striking in the midst of tragedy. The Donner Party was trapped at Donner Lake in 1846. In December of 1846 the “Forlorn Hope” (see the [Heirloom](#), January, '17, "Donner Party on Donner Summit") made its escape. 15 people snowshoed over the snow along Donner Lake and up to the pass on their way to California for help. On reaching the top 20 year old Mary Ann Graves remarked later, “We had a very slavish day’s travel, climbing to the divide” and then said, “The scenery was too grand for me to pass without notice.” She also reported that someone else said, “We were as near to heaven as we could get.”

That was Donner Summit before civilization arrived or just

after (in the case of Mr. Avery). Once the emigrants arrived things began to change. With the emigrants came settlement and then development. What a change there was as the [Sacramento Daily Union](#) noted on April 22, 1867, 150 years ago.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the scenery all through the canyon [Summit Canyon] is one continuous glorious masterpiece of painting... peaks rise to the hight [sic] of from 1,000 to 1,500 feet... and are all very thickly covered with timber, this last being largely due to the fact that until the railroad force came along, man, the vandal, had seldom disturbed this out of the way spot of loneliness and beauty.”

In the Februray, 1874 issue of [Overland Monthly](#) Mr. Avery followed up his previous article with a contemporary description of Donner Summit following the arrival of civilization. “At Summit Valley (which is associated with the relief of the tragically fated Donner emigrants, and is only three miles from Donner pass) there is an odious saw-mill, which has thinned out the forests; an ugly group of whitewashed houses; a ruined creek, whose waters are like a tan-vat; a big sandy dam across the valley, reared in a vain attempt to make an ice-pond; a multitude of dead, blanched trees, a great, staring, repellent blank...



“These [railroad snow]sheds, covering the track for thirty-five miles, are massive arched galleries of large timbers, shady and cool, blackened with the smoke of engines, sinuous, and full of strange sound... Standing in a curve, the effect is precisely that of the interior of some of Gothic cloister or abbey hall, the light streaking through narrow side-windows... A coming train announces itself miles away by the tinkling crepitation communicated along the rails, which gradually swells into a metallic ring, followed by a thunderous roar that shakes the ground; then the shriek of the engine-valve, and, in a flash, the engine itself bursts into view, the bars of sunlight playing across its dark front with kaleidoscopic effect... it must

Thousands At Summit Over Last Weekend

Taverns Filled to Capacity As Cars, Trains Bring Throngs

CONDITIONS IDEAL

Officers Busy As Autos Line Highways; Accidents Avoided



Another way of measuring the changes are the changes in railroad stops. In the old days trains used to stop many times along their routes. On Donner Summit there were stops at Cisco, Cascade, Tamarack, Soda Springs Station, Summit, Andover/Strong's, Eder, and more. As time went by stops were dropped and today the railroad stops nowhere on Donner Summit.

At one time Cisco (below left about 1866) was a town of several thousand people. The railroad town disappeared but later another Cisco rose along old Highway 40 on the other side of the river. That too disappeared and now there are just a few vacation homes in the neighborhood along with a gas station.

crush everything before it, and burst through every shed. The approach of a train at night is heralded by a sound like the distant roar of surf, half an hour before the train itself arrives; and when the locomotive dashes into view, the dazzling glare of its head-light in the black cavern, shooting like a meteor from the Plutonic abyss, is wild and awful. The warning whistle, prolonged in strange diminuendo notes that sound like groans and sighs from Inferno, is echoed far and long among the rocky crags and forests." "Summering in the Sierra" pt II Benjamin Avery Overland Monthly February, 1874

Those considerations led the editorial staff to consider what Donner Summit was like in some of the old days. Right now we are at the sesquicentennial of the building of the transcontinental railroad, the episode that caused the most initial change to Donner Summit. 150 years ago this year, in 1867, Donner Summit was greatly different from what it was just a few years before and what it is today.

Pristine Donner Summit did not remain with the arrival of civilization and since then it's been continual but episodic change. At various times there were a variety of industries on Donner Summit, the railroad being the biggest. Improvements in operation and equipment reduced the railroad population and activity waned. With the plowing of Old Highway 40 in winter in 1932 lodges, hotels, and other services to winter tourists arrived. In 1949 there were ten lodges, five gas stations, eight taverns and restaurants, four grocery stores, four post offices, and twelve sports shops in the wider Donner Summit area. Then along came the freeway siphoning off traffic and the downward spiral of the local economy. Today there are two gas stations, one post office, one restaurant, one store, one sport shop, and a few ski areas.

What Was Donner Summit Like – 1867

Donner Summit in 1867 was bustling. Activity was everywhere. The Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. had been completed in 1864 to serve as a toll road and to help the railroad construction. Thousands of vehicles and livestock had been using the road since its completion and would until the railroad got over the summit and down to Truckee. The railroad would not get to Truckee until 1868 which makes that a different story since this is about 1867. Stay tuned. In 1867 the road usage was at its height. End of track was at Cisco. Trains could go no further. They unloaded their passengers and cargo onto stagecoaches and freight wagons. At times 57 train car loads per day traveled the Dutch Flat Rd. from Cisco.

Cisco was not just the terminus of the Pacific Railroad. It was also the jumping off spot for Meadow Lake to the north. By 1867 the mining frenzy there was coming to an end though. [See the Heirloom in July, August, September, and October, 2014.]

Railroad work began in earnest on the summit in 1866. Workers had been chased away in the fall of '65 by the weather but by 1866 there were facilities to live in and tunnels to work in. Workers could survive the weather which could not affect the sheltered tunnel work faces. That was good because the weather during the winter of 1866-67 was horrible.

In January 1867 Dutch Flat Enquirer said, "...we are now in the midst of one of the most severe winters we have



experienced for years..." It advised the railroad that repair work resulting from weather should be put off until the rains stopped. There had been so much damage in some places on the transcontinental route that "the fills.... are so completely washed out that nothing but the rails are to be seen suspended in the air, resembling telegraph wires, being from ten to twenty feet high." That's a good visual to start with. (Parenthetically, that was also the winter that the stage got stuck in the mud at Gold Run for six weeks – but that's not Donner Summit and so should be ignored by readers which is why this little historical gem is parenthetical.) At the summit the weather was more severe.

John Gillis, a civil engineer for the CPRR read a paper before the American Society of Engineers in January, 1870 describing the weather that winter,

"Snow-Storms. — These storms, 44 in number, varied in length from a short snow squall to a two-week gale, and in depth from a quarter of an inch to 10 ft... This [the ten foot storm], the heaviest storm of the winter, began February 18th, at 2 P. M., and snowed steadily until 10 P. M. of the 22d, during which time 6 feet fell. The supply of raw material was then exhausted, but the barometer kept low and the wind heavy from the southwest for five days more, by which time a fresh supply of damp air came up from the Pacific... It snowed steadily until March 2d, making ten feet snow and 13 days storm. It is true that no snow fell for 5 days, but it drifted so furiously during that time that the snow-tunnel at east end of tunnel No. 6 had to be lengthened fifty feet.

"These storms were grand. ... the last snow would be damp and heavy, sometimes ending in rain. The storms ended, and clouds were scattered by cold winds blowing over the eastern range of the Sierra Nevada... The lowest temperature of the winter was from a wind of this sort, five and a half degrees above zero.

"Our quarters were at the east end of Donner Pass, but still in the narrow part. About the second or third day of a storm the wind would be a gale... and would plough up the new fallen snow to heap it in huge drifts... About thirty feet from our window was a large warehouse; this was often hidden completely by the furious torrent of almost solid snow that swept through the gorge. On the cliff above, the cedar trees [Sierra Junipers actually] are deeply cut, many branches of the thickness of a man's wrist being taken off entirely by the drifting snow-flakes.

"No one can face these storms when they are in earnest. Three of our party came through the pass one evening, walking with the storm - two got in safely. After waiting a while, just as we were starting out to look up the third, he came in exhausted. In a short, straight path between

two walls of rock, he had lost his way and thought his last hour had come."

Regarding the storms during the winter of '66-'67 Edwin Crocker said they were "The worst storms in the mountains ever known to white inhabitants." The Sacramento Union thought enough of the storms of the season to report on at least four: September 21, November 29, and December 3 of 1866 and April 8 of 1867. Note that list does not include Mr. Gillis' monster storm of February.

We should note here in a slight digression, that the winter of 2016-17, 150 years later, is just as horrible as '66-'67. We've had three huge rainstorms of 9", 9", and 7" and some huge snowstorms. One storm alone dropped 10' of snow at the tunnel elevation. So we know what it was like in the old days – except for the hot chocolate, snowblowers, snowplows, and graders we have today.

Railroad workers moved from their lodgings to the work faces in the tunnels through long tunnels dug into the snow. Railroad facilities such as storage and blacksmiths were dug into the snow too. Some workers did not see the sun for months. Workers had to constantly work to enlarge the snow tunnels because the roofs kept melting down.

In other 1867 news, on February 9, 1867, nitroglycerine was first used on Tunnel 6. Progress increased from 1.18' per day to 1.82' per day. Also in February the

central shaft of Tunnel 6 was completed – it had been begun the previous August – and workers could work from four faces in Tunnel 6 rather than just two. They could make a few more inches of progress per day.

In June there was a Chinese workers' strike. The Chinese had discovered that labor was in short supply and supply and demand ought to get them shorter work days and more pay. That story was in our June Heirloom so go into our archives on our website to see if the Chinese were successful.

There is an almost amazing story that happened in July, 1867. The railroad Big Four were in trouble. The Union Pacific, coming from the east was making great progress on their end of the railroad. They didn't have the Sierra to surmount or all the Sierra granite out of which to carve tunnels. They were laying track and collecting money. The Central Pacific

Despatch - A Snow Slide near Donner Lake Kills Thirty Chinese.

March 1st - 8:15 P.M. - A snowslide occurred on the Summit, on the Donner Lake route, crushing a house occupied by Chinamen, who were working in the Central Pacific Railroad tunnel, and killing some thirty of them.

March 2, 1867
Daily Alta Californian



Alfred A. Hart photo of the San Mateo.

was stuck in the Sierra. They were making progress of only inches a day. They endured the taunts of the Union Pacific which said they'd get to California before the Central Pacific even got out of the Sierra. That was not farfetched and the Big Four looked longingly at the flat land in Nevada. If only...

Then someone had the bright idea to start building towards and into Nevada even though the Sierra had not been crossed. When it was all connected up they'd collect a lot of money. To do that though, workers, equipment, and supplies all had to get out ahead. In July, 1867 40 miles of track, railroad car parts for assembly in Truckee, and a partly disassembled locomotive, the San Mateo (above), went over the summit. The Black Goose, the engine at the top of the Tunnel 6 central shaft had been practice apparently for transporting huge machinery along a narrow Sierra road, the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd.. That story of the Black Goose will one day get into the [Heirloom](#). You'll just have to be patient and keep up your subscription. More rails and equipment followed over



the summit in August, September and October of 1867. The San Mateo turned out to be practice too because a few months later, in February, 1868, two more locomotives and another 40 miles of track would go over the summit in the snow. Since that's in 1968 that's a different story. Stay tuned.

The hauling of the San Mateo over the Sierra summit was not the only Herculean task of 1867. China Wall (below) was under construction using the insides of the tunnels. The rocks in China Wall were all carried out from the adjacent tunnels, shaped and then fitted together without mortar. The rocks fit perfectly as you can see if you take a quick walk up.

Winters had proved to be more of a problem than Theodore Judah had anticipated (see "Snow is Not a Problem" in the February, '15 [Heirloom](#)) and the railroad began to experiment with snowsheds in the summer of '67. 5 miles of track were covered initially.

DAYLIGHT THROUGH THE TUNNEL. - The following item, from the Sacramento Union, will gratify the reader: The east end of the Summit tunnel is open and daylight shines through its entire length. In a few weeks the bottom will be cleaned out and the track laid. Many predicted it would require three years to accomplish what has been done in one. The first locomotive east of the Sierra is now in running order, and will immediately commence the work of track laying. Twenty-five miles of road-bed ar ready for the superstructure.

Daily Alta California September 2, 1867

At the end of August Tunnel 6 was broken through and the first engine reached the summit. It would take three more months to lower the bottom of the tunnel so it would be tall enough for trains, and for track to be laid to connect Sacramento to the Nevada border. The first train to use tracks all the way to Truckee would come in January of 1868, but that's 1868.

Nothing like Tunnel 6 had ever been done and when it was finished in November. The [Daily Alta California](#) said, "Nothing is impossible anymore." (November 10, 1867)

In December, just before an excursion of bigwigs celebrated the conquering of the Sierra and the completion of Tunnel 6 by going through it on a special train, The [Sacramento Daily Union](#) (December 2, 1867) enthused, "... The company have great reason to congratulate themselves upon

the monument of American engineering, energy and enterprise which their road undoubtedly is. No other great public work has met with obstacles apparently more insuperable, and none has overcome its difficulties of various kinds, with more determined perseverance... in the East and in Europe they will fill the public mind with added respect for the practical genius of the American.” That was just for the tunnel. Imagine what they said after the completion of the whole railroad in 1869 (see the August, '12 [Heirloom](#)). We'll cover the excursion in December's [Heirloom](#).



Besides the railroad there were a lot of other things happening on Donner Summit in 1867. Lumbering was active both for the railroad and for buildings. The February, '74 [Overland Monthly](#) mentioned the “odious” saw mill (see above). Grazing was also common.

In 1867 a fellow named Macaulay started up a unique version of a common business. He decided to harvest ice on Donner Summit (see the May, '13 [Heirloom](#)). Typically ice was harvested on ponds as the [Overland Monthly](#) in February, '74 noted. Macaulay had a better idea given the amount of snow that falls on Donner Summit (averaging 34 feet per winter). He harnessed Castle Creek just where the railroad crosses. He piped water into a large building. The water was emitted from the pipes to run down ropes. As the water froze it formed icicles. When the icicles reached the size of 200 lbs. or so they were harvested and stored in a nearby icehouse. Macaulay patented his ice production method in 1868. Macaulay's company was called Summit Valley Ice Co. and it lasted for a few years until larger companies in the Truckee area out-competed it. The ice company had its own railroad siding. One summer generations later, Tom Macaulay, grandson of Tom Macaulay, found an ice saw near the location of his grandfather's ice house.

As people came across Donner Summit they saw how attractive it was, not just for scenery but also for settling and making a living. There were all the employees for the

"An artist ought to go to nature as a poet goes, selecting and combining in order to make his impression the stronger."

Wm. Keith

“One of these [Keith's paintings], representing a cataract near the summit, is marked by a freedom of movement, firmness of drawing and depth of color which evince steady progress in art...

[San Francisco Bulletin](#), 1867

hotels, railroad, lumber mills, the ice company, etc. There were also those who wanted to live on Donner Summit to graze cattle or sheep or run businesses related to the railroad and transcontinental travelers. People started buying land almost as soon as it was available. The railroad received, in addition to the 400' right of way, twenty alternating sections of land per mile. Much of that they sold (see the sidebar here). With the coming of the railroad, land on Donner Summit began to have some value and the Federal Government, which owned the rest of the land (the Indians didn't count), also sold land.

The beauty of Donner Summit was beginning to attract people.

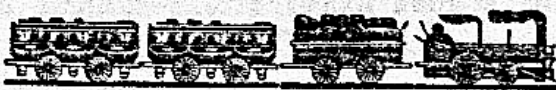
In 1867 the artist William Keith came to the summit to memorialize some of the scenes (Mountain Cascade above). He'd just taken up water colors and oil painting and did pretty well at it. He became a great American painter painting in different styles over a career that spanned fifty years. He painted Donner Summit scenes a number of times over decades but we're focusing on 1867 when he painted "Mountain Cascade" near Cisco which is a



spot you can still visit near the Cisco exit from I-80 between the west and east bound lanes. . Keith came back to visit Donner Summit staying at Summit Soda Springs Hotel later and did more paintings and illustrations along with other artists but that's a story we've been waiting to tell for a long time for which you're going to have to wait for a coming Heirloom. Just to give you a little foreshadowing so you are encouraged to keep you subscription up, Wm. Keith hung out with John Muir and, like Muir, was against Hetch Hetchy. Once they were stranded on an island in Mono Lake because of a leaky boat.

Finally, in 1867 Wm. Tinker built and operated Tinker's Station on Donner Summit (probably the building at the bottom of the previous page). From 1867 until 1873 the station of the Central Pacific was known as Tinker's Station because of the hotel there run by James Tinker. A particular physical attribute of his came to be known as Tinker Knob, the peak just east of Anderson, on the Pacific Crest Trail. Mr. Tinker also drove a stage from Soda Springs Station to Summit Soda Springs (the original Soda Springs) but that would be later and for a different Heirloom.

"From this road [Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd.] the scene was strangely beautiful at night. The tall firs, though drooping under their heavy burdens, pointed to the mountains that overhung them, where the first that lit seven tunnels shone like stars on their snowy sides. The only sound that came down to break the stillness of the winter night was the sharp ring of hammer on steel, or the heavy report of the blasts."



TO THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS!

THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY, having been earnestly solicited by many citizens to run an Excursion Train to the Mountains while the snow is still at its greatest height, and thus afford an opportunity for ALL to see the Sierras clad in wintry garb, will,

On Sunday, April 21st,

Run an Excursion Train from Sacramento to Cisco and return, One Hundred and Eighty-six Miles,

At the Low Fare of Three Dollars!

Tickets from Auburn and all Stations west at \$3; from Colfax and Stations east at \$2.

This will probably be the only opportunity this season to enjoy, at so cheap a rate, the "swift transition" from the flowers of the valley to the "Arctic realm of the Sierras."

Cisco is 5,960 feet above the level of Sacramento, or 680 feet over a mile in perpendicular height, and there is now a greater depth of snow than was ever before known, and the Scenery between Colfax and Cisco is grand beyond conception.

The Tickets will be ready for sale on and after Thursday—number limited to 2,000. Passengers not provided with Tickets will be charged \$4.

Cars will leave Sacramento at 8 A. M.; Junction, 8:45; Rocklyn, 9; Pino, 9:15; Newcastle, 9:50; Auburn, 10:05; Clipper Gap, 10:20; Colfax, 10:50; Gold Run, 11:20; Dutch Flat, 11:30; Alta, 11:40; arrive at Cisco at 1:20. Returning, leave Cisco at 2:30.

al7-td O. CROCKER, Superintendent.

Abstract of a Paper read before the American Society of Engineers, Jan. 5, 1870, by JOHN R. GILLISS, Civil Engineer, Member of the Society.

SUMMER '67 Snowsheds Get their Start

"It was decided...that the only means of protecting the road was by means of snow sheds and galleries, although the expense of building a shed nearly 40 miles in length was appalling and an unprecedented extra in railroad construction. In the summer of 1867 we built some experimental sheds. The snow shed building was commended in earnest in 1868.

"No sheds were built in the season of 1866, and the road was, with the exception of a few days, kept open to Cisco with plows, aided by a large force of men to shovel through the deeper drifts. The plows were driven with six and at times with as many as twelve of the heaviest locomotives, coupled together, and then they could in many places penetrate the compact drifts to the distance of only few feet.

The sudden stoppage of such a train when moving rapidly under full steam necessarily caused heavy strains upon the machinery and an unusual wear of the iron in track by the slipping of the wheels. The only feasible plan that presented itself to obviate this difficulty was to protect the track by a structure that would withstand the accumulated weight of the falling and drifting snow."

testimony to the Pacific Railway Commission 1887
by Samuel S. Montague chief engineer

CENTRAL
PACIFIC RAILROAD

**OPEN TO CISCO,
93 MILES FROM SACRAMENTO,
FOR FREIGHT AND PASSENGERS.**

Trains leave Sacramento daily, (Sundays excepted,) connecting at Cisco with Stages of the PIONEER STAGE COMPANY for Virginia City, Austin, and all parts of Nevada. Also, connecting with the OVERLAND MAIL STAGES for Great Salt Lake City and all parts of Utah and Montana Territories. The Stages of the PIONEER STAGE COMPANY connect at Hunter's, on Truckee River, with

HILL BEACHY'S LINE

To Ruby City and Silver City, Owyhee. Also, Boise City, Idaho City, Placerville, Centreville, and all parts of Idaho Territory.

CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD,

In connection with the New Wagon Roads now open, via Humboldt River, will enable Passengers between Idaho Territory, Owyhee and California, to make the trip **IN FOUR DAYS**, being much less time than by any other route, and one-half the time formerly consumed via the Columbia River. Also, at much less risk and expense.

LELAND STANFORD, Prest. C. P. R. R. Co.

CHARLES CROCKER, Supt. C. P. R. R. Co.

SACRAMENTO, January 1, 1867.

The ads on these two pages from Bean's History of Nevada County, published in 1867. More next month.

Buying Land on Donner Summit

Buying land from the Federal Government was called "patenting" the land. With the first government survey of 1866 the land went on sale. People could buy up to 160 acres and then had to settle on the land. The land became the settler's only after residing on it for a year. The land had to be used for agriculture and went for \$1.25 or \$2.50 per acre. There could be no mineral nor could there be a town or military fort within one mile. In this way the government encouraged settling.

The first settler at Ice Lakes just south of Soda Springs Station, Fitz William Redding Jr., was twenty years old when he patented 160 acres of government land in 1866. His cabin is shown on the government survey. He cleared land and was going to graze animals. He also stocked fish in the lakes. He fell ill and died that winter and his father finished the patenting process.

Two fellows from Florida purchased other nearby land in 1874. Those parcels were 160 acres each and it looks like today, judging from the 1866 survey maps, they are the Royal Gorge headquarters neighborhood. Those two men, one of whom was Wm. Jones a future Donner Summit and Cedars hotel operator, didn't pay for their land with cash. Both used agricultural scrip to buy their land. That scrip came from the government's law funding agricultural colleges. Their home state of Florida apparently issued U.S. Government scrip to buy their Florida land for a college. The men bought Donner Summit land with their scrip.

A third method of getting government land is evident on the summit. Part of what is now Van Norden meadow was issued to Adam Morgenroth as a military patent sometime before 1875 for his services in the military. Veterans could purchase land only if they had been honorably discharged, had been privates or non-commissioned officers, and if they had served a year or more. The idea was to encourage enlistment as well as settle the west.

A man named Elisha Wood bought Soda Springs ski hill in 1871 and George Sheriff bought 160 acres that looks like it might include the Soda Springs hotel land in 1876.

Land not patented remained in the public domain and became today's National Forest lands.

CPRR selling land


Then the Central Pacific Company offer to all comers the Government land they received along the line of their road at the maximum price of \$2. 50 per acre. This land is rich in timber, granite, marble and lime, and is among the richest foothill (now known to be the best) land in the State. Every possible facility in the assistance of development is given to the industrious by the company. I have traveled much through the State the past year and on nearly every Land I have found solid and gratifying evidences of legitimate advancement, and on every hand I have seen such natural riches, blessings and advantages in the possession of our State as to make the conclusion inevitable that of all the States of our great and rich country there is not one to equal California. Her onward destiny seems unlimited : her reasonable possibilities boundless. Those whose destinies are linked with hers are indeed favored, and have opportunities within the reach of their hands— if these hands be but industrious such, I think, as no people on earth have had given to them. Growling, in the midst of such opportunities and blessings, must be esteemed as among the mortal sins, and should mark the indulger in the habit as a worthless specimen of his race. To these last conclusions about our destiny I will have the adherence of all, I think, who go up over the line of country through which the Central Pacific Railroad Company are building one-half of that road which, when united with the Eastern half, will give to our wealth and progress an impetus so great that even the most sanguine among us will find his calculations far exceeded by the reality

From the Sacramento Union April 22, 1867

TELEGRAPH STAGE LINE,

Carrying the United States Mails

Via Colfax, Grass Valley, Nevada City, through to North San Juan.
Connecting at North San Juan with PALMER, GREEN & CO'S Line of
Daily Stages to Campionville and Downieville.



Also, with KIBBEES LINE to Forest City and Alleghany Town.
Passengers Traveling by this Line will find it Comfortable, and will
be taken through without delay.

From Downieville to San Francisco in 24 hours.

AGENTS:

W. H. DAVIDSON,..... Agent at Nevada.
J. H. H. MATHENY,..... Agent at Grass Valley.
C. J. SHAW,..... Agent at Colfax and Sacramento.
A. J. PUTNUM,..... Agent at North San Juan.

W. P. L. WINHAM. W. H. CLARK.

WINHAM & CLARK,
DRUGGISTS,

DEALERS IN
DRUGS, MEDICINES, PAINTS, OILS, GLASS, VARNISHES,
Stationery, Kerosene Lamps, etc. Also—Fancy Articles and Perfumes.
Physicians' Prescriptions and Family Receipts carefully prepared, and
from good materials.

2d Street, between B & C, Meadow Lake.

DONNER LAKE HOUSE,
FOOT OF DONNER LAKE,

E. S. DREW,.....**Proprietor.**

Three miles East of Pollard's Station, California.
Fifty-seven miles from Virginia City, Nevada.
Seventeen miles from Meadow Lake, California.

Horses furnished for Pleasure Parties visiting any of the vallies or mountains.

Board Per Week.....\$14 | Single Meals.....75 cents.

TINKER'S STATION,
DONNER LAKE ROAD,

TINKER & FENTON,.....**Proprietors.**

Nearest point for the Celebrated Soda Springs.
A Bar, with the best of Liquors, connected with the House.

Board per Week.....\$10. | Single Meals.....75 cents.
Horses and Carriages furnished to Pleasure Parties.

Twelve miles from Crystal Lake, ten miles from Cisco, and six miles from Pollard's Station.

COBURN'S STATION,
DONNER LAKE ROAD,

JOSEPH McWILLIAMS,.....**Proprietor.**

Fifty-six miles from Virginia City, | Ten miles from Lake Tahoe,
Six miles from Pollard's Station, | Two miles from foot of Donner Lake.

Board per Week.....\$10. | Single Meals.....75 cents.
Horses furnished for Parties visiting Lake Tahoe and other places of Resort.

1844-46 Donner Pass (Stephens Pass)

by Marshall Fey

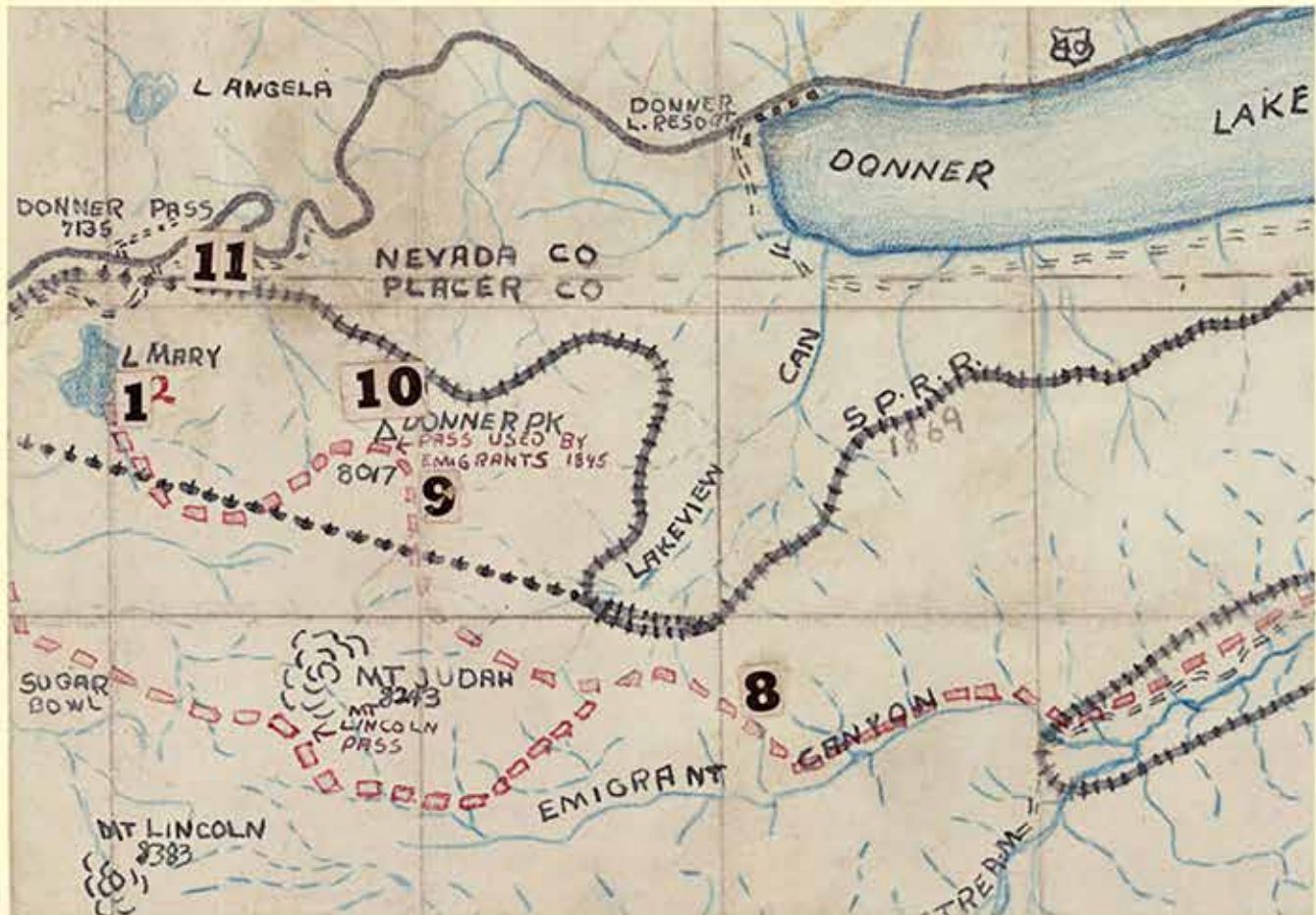
In 1920 Peter M. Weddell of San Jose, California read Eliza P. Donner Houghton's book, *The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate*. A year later, he read C. F. McGlashan's classic *History of the Donner Party*. He was hooked. Eager to learn more about the Donner Party, that summer he and his wife journeyed to the Sierra. Weddell would return to Truckee every summer for almost three decades to place homemade signs along the emigrant trails. Weddell's trail authority was McGlashan who had taken the Carson River Route to California in 1854. Moving to Truckee in 1872 and meeting many others who traveled the emigrant routes made McGlashan a *reliable* source.



The research "treasure," at the left, surfaced last year in the reopened San Jose History Center. It locates the emigrant trail with source captions from the Donner Family campsite to the three passes over Donner Summit.

This wooden framed 1952 Weddell artifact was dismantled so it could be scanned earlier last month. The map, the photos and their captions were then entered these into a Google Drive application making it suitable for research..

The bold numbers on the section of the map below show the locations of the sites of where the photos shown on the next page where taken. Print out these two pages to better reference the photo locations numbered on the map.



8 Entrance to Roller & Coldstream Passes **9 & 10** Coldstream Pass **11**. Donner (Stephens Pass) **1** (12) Lake Mary

1952 Weddell Donner Pass Photos and Captions 11 & 12



The photo from the summit shows Donner Lake, the China Climbing Wall and Highway 40 north of the trail

IMMEDIATELY UPON REACHING THE SUMMIT, THE WHOLE EASTERN SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN BURST UPON THE VIEW. DOWN THE MOUNTAIN WE COULD SEE A GREEN SPOT AT THE FURTHER END OF A BEAUTIFUL LAKE.

11

...Overton Johnson and Mr. H. Winter, Route Across the Rocky Mountains in 1843, p. 125.



Lake Mary is located a short distance west of the Pacific Crest Trailhead. It became huge after it was dammed.

A MILE BROUGHT US TO A SMALL DELTA ON THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN, IN THE CENTER OF WHICH IS A MINIATURE LAKE, SURROUNDED BY GREEN GRASS.

12

...Edwin Bryant
What I Saw in California, 1846, p. 204.



Both photos above show the vertical, ten foot high granite ledge the emigrants had to cross over. The hand in the left photo points to a possible rift in the ledge that is mentioned in Murphys diary. By disconnecting the oxen from the wagons allowed the oxen to get on top of the ledge via the rift. As Schallenberger described chains were then reattached to the wagons below. The trail climbed to the top of ledge, shown in the photo at right, passing by the site of the wooden train shed

WHEN ABOUT HALF WAY UP...THEY CAME TO A VERTICAL ROCK ABOUT TEN FEET HIGH...CHAINS WERE FASTENED TO THE TONGUES OF THE WAGONS AND CARRIED TO THE TOP OF THE ROCK, WHERE THE CATTLE WERE HITCHED TO THEM. THE MEN LIFTED AT THE WAGONS WHILE THE CATTLE MUTED....

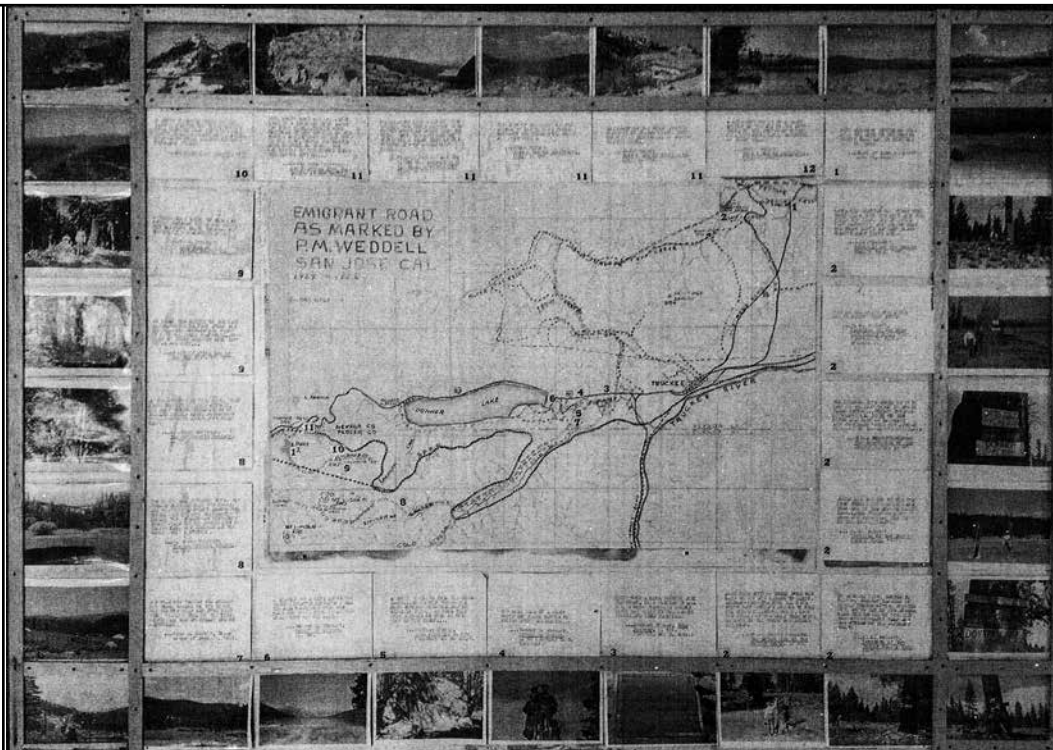
...Moses Schallenberger,
Ten Pictures from the Garden of the World, p.

11

WE COMMENCED THE STEEP ASCENT, CLIMBING IN PLACES NEARLY PERPENDICULAR PRECIPICES OF SMOOTH GRANITE ROCKS.

11

...Edwin Bryant
What I Saw in California, 1846, p. 203.

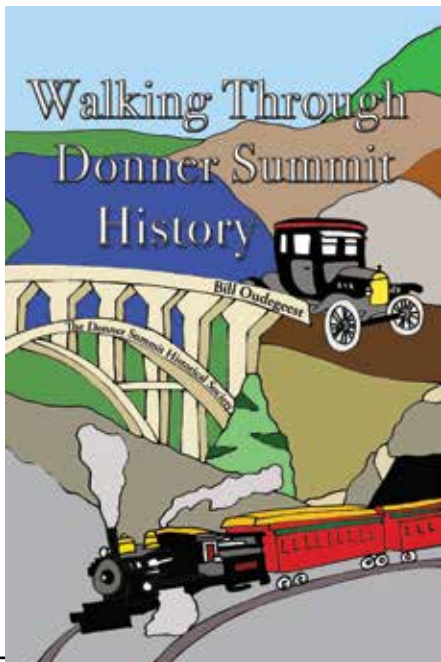


The original San Jose "find."

Marshall A. Fey, the author of the article on the two previous pages, has written for the Heirloom a number of times (take a look at our index under "Fey") but each time we neglected to include a little "bio" so here we rectify the oversight. Marshall is a charter member of OCTA, member of the CA-NV chapter of OCTA and Trails West, and life member of the Nevada Historical Society. He was first introduced to the emigrant trails in 1975 by his mentor, Walt Mulcahy, Trail Authority for the Nevada Emigrant Trail Marking Committee. This enabled him to give numerous guided tours over the Truckee and Carson River Routes for more than forty years. He has given slide presentations to historic clubs and written numerous trail articles for E Clampus Vitus. In addition, Fey wrote a previous article for the Overland Journal in the spring of 2004 entitled "The Truckee Meadows Trail Reconfirmed." In 2002 he co-authored Emigrant Shadows: His email is mfey@libertybellebooks.com

There's more. Marshall says he is better known, world wide, for the history of slot machines. His grandfather was the inventor of the slot machine in 1899, which he dubbed the Liberty Bell. Marshall operated, collected and revamped slots and wrote a book on the history of them, Slot Machines: An Illustrated History of America's Most Popular Coin-Operated Gaming Device.

The book sold over 30,000 copies and was printed in two foreign languages. The book received a national history award and recognition from two Nevada Governors.



It's summer and you may want to do some history walking.

Walking Through Donner Summit History is still available at the little store in Soda Springs, at the actual DSHS, on our website (<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/store.html>), at the visitors' center at Donner Lake and at the California Welcome Center in Auburn.

You can see the contents at the web page above.

Then & Now with Art Clark

This picture, to the right, was initially found by Art Clark on a FaceBook page, “A Tahoe and Northern Nevada History.” The DSHS research dept. traced it to Volume II of the [Saga of Lake Tahoe](#) which has been out of print for some time.

With the picture in hand it remained to find the location. Having intimate knowledge of an area is good and that knowledge delivered the renowned Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT)

to Tunnel 7 on Donner Summit. Tunnel 7 does not look like it did when it was carved from the granite along with, surprisingly, Tunnels 6 and 8.

Tunnel 7 had its top removed to allow for larger trains (Tunnel 6 was excavated down as you can tell if you look closely at the west end).

In the background of the picture is a distinctive geological feature that looks a lot like Mt. Stephens. Careful matching proved that to be the case, see below.

Also in the picture are two telephone poles. Noting the position of one in relation to rocks, the MHRT went to look to be sure the picture was oriented optimally. There were the remains of a telephone pole – from the first transcontinental telephone line (see the July, '15 [Heirloom](#))

Remains of the other telephone pole are not obvious. The top of Tunnel 7 was removed and a lot of rock was left lying around. On the other, near side, the photographer’s side of the tunnel, there is a lot of rock lying around from both the Tunnel’s top removal and the petroleum line that goes very nearby.

More pictures and a story to go with the auto are on the next page.





Above: close up of the telephone pole base used to orient the photo - to show the lengths the MHRT goes to for the readers. Evidence!

Right, the top of Tunnel 7 after its natural top was removed and graffitied concrete added. Mt. Stephens is in the background.



Regarding the Car in the top picture on the Previous Page

Each spring anxiety started to spread. When would the snow melt? When would the highway be open to bring tourists over Donner Summit to Truckee and Tahoe? Local merchants sponsored soot collection to spread soot on the snow for faster melting. They sponsored snow shoving bees. They hired snow shovelers to dig trenches so there would be more snow exposed to the sun and so it would melt faster. The County hired snow shovelers to clear drifts.

For years the Tahoe Tavern held an annual silver cup race awarding a river cup to the first auto over Donner Summit.

Autos would fight the snow. Ropes were wrapped around tires to act like today's chains. Planks or canvas were placed ahead of the cars and cars were driven onto the planks or canvas so there would be more traction. Planks and canvas were moved ahead to repeat the process. There was a lot of digging. Cars ran into drifts, backed up, snow was shoveled into the crevices made by the tires and cars moved forward again inches at a time. Travel during the day when snow was soft was hard so early morning travel was done over the harder ice crusts.

Then when the cars got to Donner Summit "autoists" would camp out or stay at the Summit Hotel. The road was covered with snow and so sometimes autos were pushed up on top of the snowsheds to drive there. Other times they'd get to the opening in the snowshed, that was used in summer to cross the tracks, and find the snow too high to enter. Here is an example of an auto being pushed to the top the snowshed to get over the tracks and then down to Donner Lake. That's what the silver cup winners of 1913 and 1914 did. This picture though is not of either of those two cars. The specifics are lost but it shows the technique. Note the tire marks on the shed roof.

That location is just at the east end of Tunnel 7. Hikers today can put themselves right where the picture was taken before going to the underpass which is just to the right.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit Stone Buildings at Cisco Grove

This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, “Odds & Ends” of Donner Summit. There a lot of big stories on Donner Summit: making it the most important historical square mile in California. All of those episodes* left behind obvious traces. As one explores Donner Summit, though, one comes across a lot of other things related to the rich history. All of those things have stories too and we’ve been collecting them. Now they’re making appearances in the Heirloom. Last month we covered the drill holes in Tunnel 6 left by Chinese railroad workers. This month, the stone houses at Cisco on Old Highway 40.

Get off I-80 at the Cisco exit and go to the north side, opposite the gas station. Turn east, just go a little way, and you'll come to a couple of stone buildings. They were part of the Forest Gift Shop that catered to tourists driving Old Highway 40.

The gift shop, and other buildings were the second incarnation of Cisco Grove which grew up along the first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway which later became Highway 40.

The first incarnation of Cisco was the end of track during the building of the railroad when thousands of people lived at Cisco. That Cisco was on the other side of the freeway, above the gas station.

We have a 20 Mile Museum sign between the buildings.



Look around and you'll see other building remnants: walls, a large fireplace, foundations, etc. also from an older Cisco.

*Native Americans; first wagon trains to California; the first transcontinental railroad, highway, air route, and telephone line, etc.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org

Membership

I/we would like to join The Donner Summit Historical Society and share in the Summit's rich history.

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

____ New Membership MAILING ADDRESS _____

____ Renewing Membership CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

____ Individual Membership - \$30

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

____ Patron - \$500 ____ Benefactor - \$1000 ____ Business - \$250 ____ Business Sponsor - \$1000

Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

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



Take the Scenic Route: Donner Summit's Old Highway 40



Pick up or download the brochure

46 interpretive signs along Old 40
<http://www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html>



Above, another detail from the map.

Donner Summit 1955 Fun Map by George Mathis.

Art Clark found the map, a portion of which we shared last month, at the David Rumsey.com map collection. The map has many cute illustrations of what you can do on Donner Summit if you're ever there in 1955. This summer we'll run snippets of the map so you can enjoy Mr Mathis' work. Below is snippet # 2

The numbers below represent ski lifts at different resorts in the legend.

This section centers on Big Bend. Note the old stage station, the road to Summit City (Meadow Lake), the Donner Party escape group encampment, the unmarked grave (which is marked but with no occupant's name), the end of the railroad for the years they were building Tunnel 6, and McIntosh Hill (Auburn Ski Club's ski hill when they were at Cisco before they came to Boreal).

"Illustrator George Mathis (1909-1977) was a west coast artist who was nationally renown for his work on the Old West and Space. After living in the Bay Area from 1931-1948 he and his family moved to Nevada City, California, where he made this map... Between 1960 and 1970 George Mathis... worked in Sacramento for Aerojet Corporation,... and he became one of the better known space artists of the time. His illustrations include Gemini and Apollo space missions. His work is housed at Washington State University Library."



Margie Powell Hike 2017

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

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

The 2017 hike will go downhill from Donner Summit to the Land Trust kiosks on Old 40. Along the way we'll tell the stories of the local history: the Emigrant Trail, the Stephens and Donner Parties, The Lincoln Highway, China Wall, 1913 underpass, Old 40, Rainbow Bridge, petroglyphs, and turkeys. We'll see old signs painted on rocks, wonderful scenery, and historic sites. We'll eat lunch at a beautiful view site. Of course, like all of our hikes, it will be illustrated with dozens of historic photographs.

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

There will be two hikes:

August 12 and August 13.
Saturday and Sunday

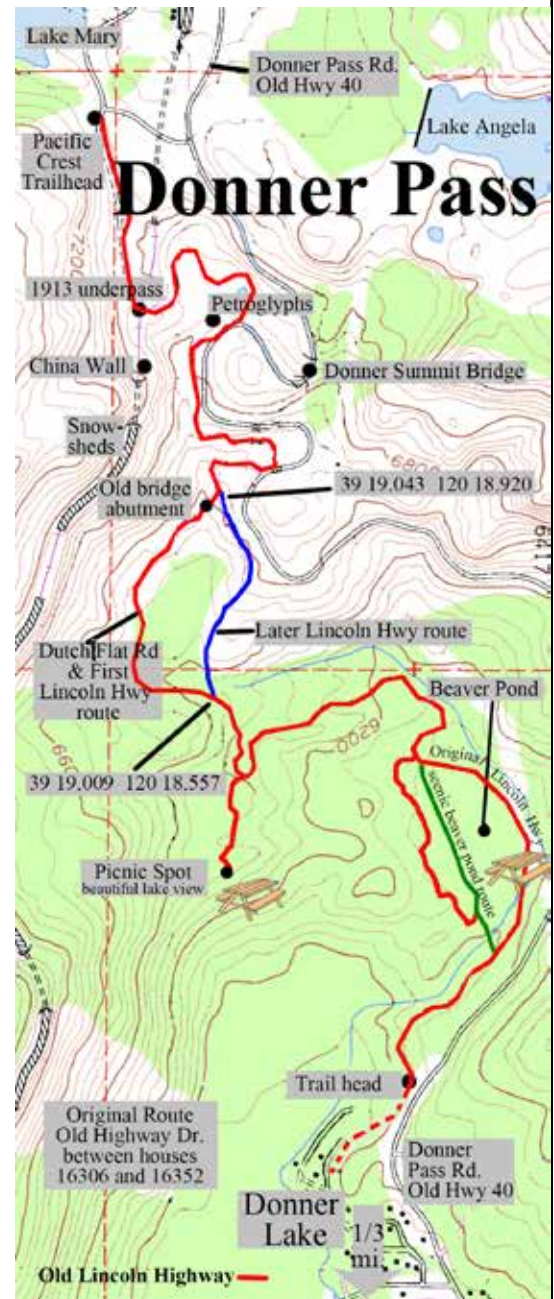
Meet at the Sugar Bowl Academy* at the top of Old 40 at 9:30 A.M.
Download the brochure with the map to the right. It's on our brochure page at the DSHS website, called "Summit Canyon."

Bring:

comfortable shoes - no flip flops
water
sunscreen
insect repellent
camera
hat

Lunch

*The Sugar Bowl Academy is the large building on Old 40 right at the top. If you go east from there it is steeply downhill to Rainbow Bridge. If you go west from there the next thing to see is Donner Ski Ranch on the right.





June 17	<i>Auburn</i>	Bernhard Museum Gold Rush Museum Benton-Welty School Rm	10-4 10-4 10-4
June 24	<i>Lincoln</i>	Lincoln Area Archives Museum Fruitvale School	10-4 10-3
July 1	<i>Tahoe City</i>	Gatekeepers Museum Watson Cabin	10-5 10-5
July 8	<i>Auburn</i>	Placer County Museum Auburn Chinese Joss House Gold Country Medical History Museum	10-4 10-4 10-4
July 15	<i>Penryn/Rocklin</i>	Griffith Quarry Museum Rocklin History Museum	8-12 10-4
August 5	<i>Roseville</i>	Roseville Historical Society Carnegie Museum Roseville Fire Museum Roseville Telephone Museum Maidu Museum and Historic Site	10-4 10-4 10-4 10-4
August 12	<i>Colfax/Dutch Flat/Norden</i>	Colfax Area Heritage Museum Golden Drift Museum Donner Summit Historical Society Museum	10-4 10-4 10-4
August 26	<i>Rocklin</i>	Sierra College Natural History Museum	8-12
Sept. 1	<i>North Auburn</i>	DeWitt History Museum	4-7
Sept. 2 & 3	<i>Foresthill</i>	Forest Hill Divide Museum	10-4

For information: <http://theheritagetrail.blogspot.com>