

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

June, 2017 issue #106

At the time we were putting together the June Heirloom (February because we like to be ahead of things) one of the top stories in the news was "Fake News." This story, which we were going to put off for awhile, shows that people in the past were just like us today, that things don't change, and that the Heirloom is "up" on current events.

First a little background then further commentary at the end. As soon as there were automobiles there were drivers or "autoists" who wanted to test their capabilities and those of their new machines. There were endurance runs, records were set, and there were races, all of which were reported in the newspapers. There were also articles touting the conditions of roads and for Donner Summit, regular articles annually about when the roads would open for the season. The ultimate test of automobile and driver stamina was the transcontinental trek.

How fast could one drive from San Francisco to New York or vice versa? There were even rules so that records could be compared.

We've covered some of those trips. See the Heirlooms for June, '14 and various book reviews: Coast to Coast by Automobile (October, '12) Record Setting Trips (July, '15), A reliable Car and a Woman Who Knows It (February, '15).

We've even covered George Wyman who did the first motorized crossing of the U.S. on a motor bicycle in 1903 (June, '14) and Grace and Grit about women motorcyclists crossing the country (September, '15). The first try at a cross-country trip was by Alexander Winton in 1901 (June, '14). He got over the Sierra via Donner Summit and got stuck in the desert sands of Nevada. The first successful cross-country trips did not go over Donner Summit but it later became a preferred route.

People were setting records and there was lots of publicity. Other people were content just to push themselves. For example, there were 150 transcontinental travelers per year in 1913 and by 1923 there were between 20 and 25,000 cars per year. Those thousands were not setting records; they were challenging and enjoying themselves. Just to put it into perspective the Official Guide to the Lincoln Highway said it would take 19 days to cross the country traveling 10 hours per day at 18 mph in 1913.

Here is an article, about a fellow setting a record crossing the country and using the snowsheds to do it. Just reading the headline grabs your interest.

"Robert Hammond and his 'ghost car,' in which he claims he hurtled through the climate from San Francisco to New York in eight days, evidently have set New York city by the ears.

"Hammond, according to advices received last night from New York, told the Gothamites that he left the hotel St. Francis [San Francisco] at 12:01 o'clock on the morning of May 17; that an American Automobile Association official checked him out; that a

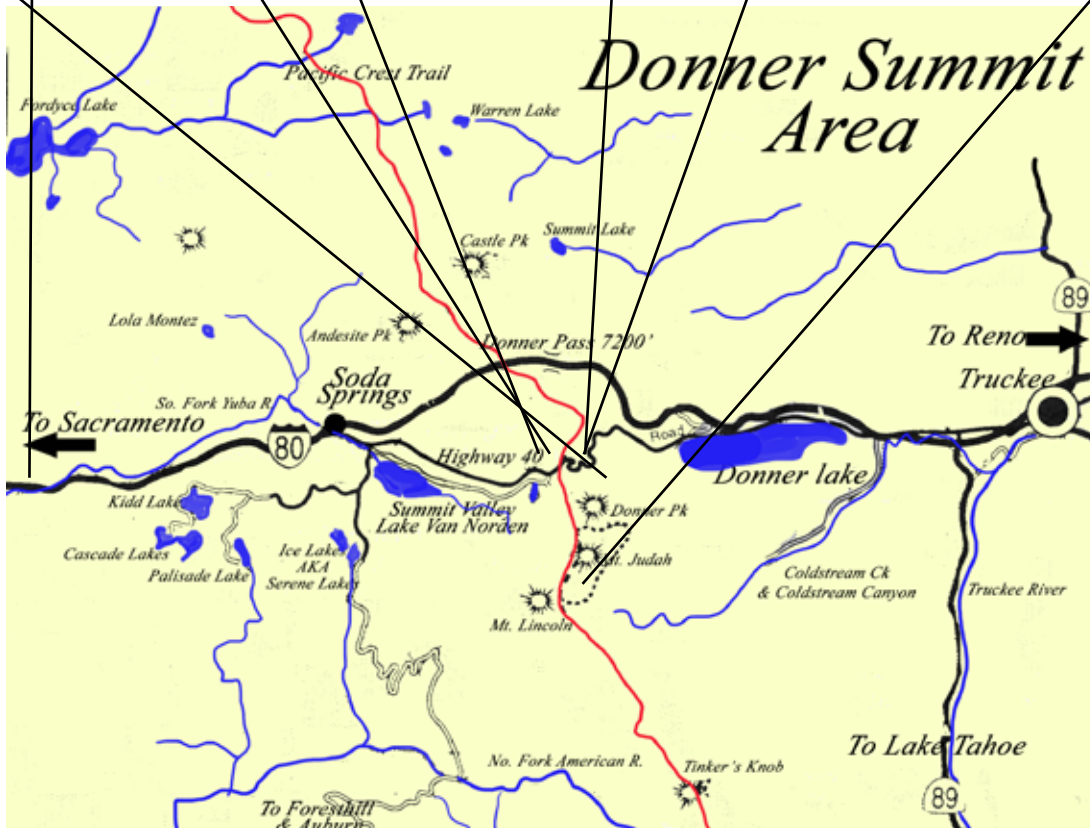
"Ghost Car" Flits Across Continent Like a Phantom

Robert Hammond Tells New Yorkers of Remarkable Record-Breaking Trip From San Francisco Via the Snowsheds of "Truckee, Arizona"

Actual headline from the S.F. Chronicle May 16, 1916

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In This Issue

crow saw him off that he sailed through the Sierra snowsheds of the Southern Pacific Company in an hour and a half, emerging just before he reached Truckee, 'Arizona.'

“Aside from the fact that the Truckee and the snowsheds are in California, several hundred miles from Arizona, and a few other mis-statements, Hammond’s story is correct. He has at least arrived in New York.

“Officials of the A.A.A. and of the California Automobile Association deny any knowledge of Hammond or his car, and two, Hammond’s story of driving through the snowsheds does not hang together. Even ignoring his contempt for geography, Southern Pacific official declare such a stunt a physical impossibility. They say they have no record of any automobile passing through the sheds. A thorough investigation of Hammond’s claim that he passed through the sheds is under way, as such a thing is against all rules of the company.

“Still, Hammond and his ‘ghost car’ seemed to have arrived at New York city on May 18.”

San Francisco Chronicle May 26, 1916

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Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner Summit



Further commentary on Mr. Hammond from 2017:

Using the snowsheds was forbidden by the Southern Pacific but it was done. George Wyman did (see above) and so did Thomas Stevens who was the first to cross the Sierra by bicycle, then the first to cross the country by bicycle and finally, the first to go around the world by bicycle (1885 – [Heirloom](#) March, '15 – [Around the World by Bicycle](#) book review). A family used the snowsheds to bike across the Sierra too during a railroad strike (you'll have to wait until that gets into the [Heirloom](#) – it's one of many stories just waiting – so keep up your subscription). So that part of the story is possible. Today there is a gate at Tunnel 6 preventing people from driving into the tunnel and the snowsheds because a few years ago some moron (technical term used by historians) drove through Tunnel 6, 7, 8, ... etc. and the snowsheds. He got to Coldstream Canyon where he tried to cross the tracks. He got stuck and stopped Amtrak. The gate went in the next day.

Today we have fake news and we maybe think that it's a new phenomenon. Here Mr. Hammond is purveying fake news, and using Donner Summit's iconic snowsheds as a prop.

What happened to Mr. Hammond has been lost to history but it would be fun to know where Mr. Hammond ended up. Perhaps a reader out there has a subscription to Ancestry.com.

Originally the main article for May, '17 [Heirloom](#) was going to be about the first automobiles to use the road over the summit each year during snow melt, generally about May. May's issue got full quickly but we thought June would still be timely. Then June got full and all those snippets from newspapers and all that information has been forwarded to May, '18. Stay tuned.

Tahoe Circuit Made by Motor Chandler Performs Unusually Well in Trip to California District

There were awards and publicity for the first autos over the summit each year but according to this article from the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) on June 6, 1920 there was at least one other contest too: the first to circuit Lake Tahoe. W.H."Bill" Waterman drove his Chandler touring car to Lake Tahoe via the Auburn route.

Unfortunately he returned to San Francisco via the Placerville route so we won't report on that part of the trip.

He left S.F. on a Friday afternoon shipping his car by boat to Sacramento. The next day he and three others headed for the mountains along with 250 lbs of baggage. They arrived at the summit early in the afternoon and encountered little snow.

Then things got hard - see the picture to the right.

There were ten foot drifts of snow between summit and the snowsheds for 300 hundred yards. The four men "stormed" the snow doing "the hardest kind of work, calling for extreme of patience and endurance." "It was strenuous work both for the car and its passengers." They had to back up and fill depressions hundreds of times. They bunted great piles of snow, plowing and pushing with all the power of the engine plus man power of three husky men. It took three hours to cross the 300 yards and they wore out two sets of chains.



Then, having gotten over the summit it was all downhill to Donner Lake except that "we were obliged to construct two temporary bridges." They hurdled an eighteen inch gap. The "blow and strain" when the rear wheels hit the far end of the gap caused no effect although it frightened the driver.

"After leaving the snowsheds we hit about 200 yards of a dirt road. After that the road disappeared for a considerable distance. After much strenuous maneuvering we managed to reach a point on an old abandoned road which we followed to Donner lake [sic].

The citizens of Truckee were greatly surprised by Waterman's appearance in his Chandler. They didn't think a car like that could get through the summit snow.

Chinese Railroad Workers' Strike

Donner Summit 150 Years Ago This Month

No Danger of Strikes

White workers had not answered the call in sufficient numbers for the most ambitious engineering and construction project so far in the 19th Century, the building of the transcontinental railroad. There were other opportunities in California and Nevada and they took them. The "Big Four" of the Central Pacific turned to another source of labor.

The first transcontinental railroad could not have been built without Chinese labor. Eventually there were more than ten thousand Chinese workers working on the line. It was they who took the line over Donner Summit; blasted through solid Sierra granite making progress of only inches a day; filled canyons and cut hilltops to lay the rails; endured exhaustion, cold, accident, and avalanche; and who endured racism. The transcontinental railroad opened California to the world and the world to California. It made trade possible and migration easier. It was a major impetus for growth and development.

On June 25, 1867, 150 years ago this month, Chinese workers had all gone to their work sites from camps all along the route as usual, but sometime in the morning, from Cisco Grove, which was end of track, to Strong's Canyon (we'll get to its location next month) thousands of Chinese walked off the job. They went back to their camps; they were on strike. We don't know the Chinese version of events because they were mostly illiterate and if any sent letters back to China those letters have been lost. We do have the description of events but only from the railroad's point of view as reported in newspapers, in letters written by railroad people, or by testimony in front of Congress years later.

According to the [Sacramento Daily Union](#) on July 3, 1867 the Chinese railroad workers' strike had been instigated by "a placard printed in the Chinese language [that] was distributed along the line of the road a day or two before the strike occurred. This placard is said to have set forth the right of the workmen to higher wages and to a more moderate day's work [10 hours/day in general and 8 hours/day in the tunnels], and to deny the right of the overseers of the company to either whip them or to restrain them from leaving the road."

We have no idea who came up with the idea, what the planning was, how it eventually encompassed the whole line, or what the Chinese thought.

Chinese workers had always been paid less than white workers and in addition to pay, white workers received room and board. The Chinese were divided into gangs of workers. Each gang was responsible for paying its leader and cook,

paying for food, and even paying for tools. Chinese workers cost, in total, about 2/3 of what white workers did to the railroad.

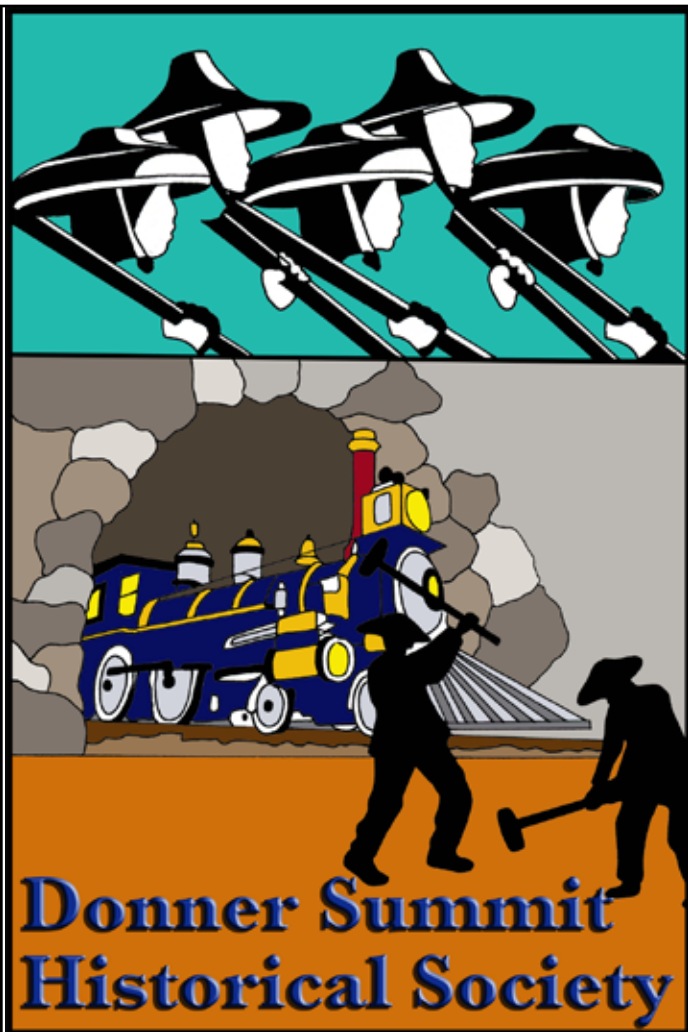
Chinese workers were paid \$25 per month in 1864. In the spring of 1867, because labor was in short supply compared to needs, their pay was raised to \$35 per month from \$31.

The strike was a simple affair. As the week wore on other workers joined it but there were no demonstrations or protests. Charles Crocker said, "If there had been that number of white labors.... [on strike] it would have been impossible to control them. But this strike of the Chinese was just like Sunday all along the work. These men stayed in their camps. That is, they would come out and walk around, but not a word was said. No violence was perpetrated along the whole line."

James Strobridge, the construction superintendent, tried to threaten the workers to force them back to work but that was to no avail. They would not go back to work.

Charles Crocker thought that opium dealers and then the UPRR had instigated the strike but there is no evidence for that. There was simply a labor shortage as E.B. Crocker had said to Colis Huntington, "We have proved their [Chinese] value as laborers & everybody is trying Chinese & now we can't get them." That is why the pay had just been raised that spring. The Chinese just realized that there was a labor shortage and tried to make capitalism work. They'd seen that in June of 1867 there were not enough laborers to clear the remaining, compacted glacier-like snow that sat 10 or 12 feet deep on the summit, according to James Strobridge.

E.B. Crocker said in a letter to Colis Huntington during the strike that the Chinese were getting smart. There was a scarcity of labor but the CPRR could not accede to the demands "for they would soon strike again, and we would always be in their power." Charles Crocker said he'd rather shut everything down than give in at all. The CPRR then began to consider the idea of having the Freedmen's Bureau contract for former slaves to come and take the Chinese workers' places. Mark Hopkins said, "A Negro labor force would tend to keep the Chinese steady, as the Chinese have



Our 2012 poster celebrating the Chinese RR workers.

kept the Irishmen quiet.”

The CPRR then stopped all food trains and supplies from going to the Chinese strikers. The Chinese could go hungry if they would not work.

After a week Crocker went up to the work camps on Donner Summit and announced, in what he said was “a little war speech” during his 1876 Congressional testimony about Chinese immigration, there would be no change in pay or work hours. He was the one, he said, who made the rules and “not they for him...” (E.B. Crocker to Huntington at the strike’s end). Then he said, “I gave them until the next Monday morning at six o’clock to come back, and told them that every man who went to work then should be forgiven for the week’s strike, but that all others should be fined.... They well understood what fining meant for the week’s idleness...” He also threatened that those who did not return to work would not be paid for the work done in June. By this time the Chinese had raised their demands to \$45 per month. What did the Chinese think Crocker’s “little war speech” as a response? We don’t know.

"Without the Chinese, it would have been impossible to complete the Western portion of this great national highway."

Leland Stanford
one of the "Big 4", California governor and senator

"They learn quickly, do not fight, have no strikes that amount to anything, and are very cleanly in their habits. They will gamble, and do quarrel among themselves most noisily — — but harmlessly."

James Strobridge
CPRR Superintendent of Construction

"I wish to call your minds that the early completion of this railroad we have built has been in large measure due to that poor despised class of laborers called the Chinese – to the fidelity and industry they have shown."

Sacramento Union May 8, 1869

“The Chinamen were as steady, hardworking set of men as could be found.”

John Gillis,
"Tunnels of the Pacific Railroad", 1870

"You will be astonished when you come back and see the amount of work we have done.

"A large part of our force are Chinese, and they prove nearly equal to white men, in the amount of labor they perform, and are far more reliable. No danger of strikes among them. We are training them to all kinds of labor, blasting, driving horses, handling rock, as well as the pick and shovel..."

E.B. Crocker
In an 1865 letter to a friend

A good source to explore more about the Chinese RR workers:

Chinese Railroad Workers’ Project at Stanford University
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/>

We do know that, as Crocker's testimony continued, "...on Monday morning at six o'clock the whole country was swarmed with them, and we never had so many working before or since as we had on that day. They returned peaceably to work." E.B. Crocker said in a letter to Colis Huntington on July 2, 1867 that it was not quite that peaceful. He said the great majority gave up right away but some strike leaders "threatened to whip those who went to work and burn their camps, but Charley [Crocker] told them that he would protect them and his men would shoot down any that attempted to do the laborers any injury. He had the sheriff posse come up to see that there was not fighting."

Had the strike and the response happened in some area that was not so remote as Donner Summit or to a group the general public had more sympathy for, we might have had reporting that gives us more than the railroad's point of view. What were the Chinese thinking? What was the catalyst of the strike? Who were the leaders and what were their backgrounds? How did the Chinese react to the "war speech." Did anyone consider that it was illegal or at least unethical, to withhold pay for work done as Crocker threatened? Did anyone wonder at the tactics used keeping supply trains from bringing food to the Chinese? Were there other sources of food? Why didn't the Chinese walk off the job completely and leave for the nearest towns? What was the public's perception? How much did the strike affect the railroad construction? All we do know is what's written above. Well, we do know there was no more talk of the Freedmen's Bureau.

If you want to read more about the Chinese railroad workers on Donner Summit see our [Heirlooms](#) for June – September, 2016

Once construction started on the Transcontinental Railroad there was not enough labor. Whites wanted to work for themselves or for higher pay in the mines. A call for 5,000 laborers only produced a few hundred. Charles Crocker, one of the Big 4, suggested Chinese laborers. James Strobridge, construction superintendent was against the idea. Crocker countered saying, "Did they not build the Chinese wall, the biggest piece of masonry in the world?"

"As a class they are quiet, peaceable, patient, industrious and economical. Ready and apt to learn all the different kinds of work required in railroad building, they soon became as efficient as white laborers. More prudent and economical, they are contented with less wages. We find them organized into societies for mutual aid and assistance."

Leland Stanford in a letter
to President Andrew Johnson,
October 10, 1865

All the Gang Resume Work – Travel Over the Mountains

Cisco, July 2d --- The Chinese resumed work yesterday on the Pacific Railroad, from one end to the other. Nothing was conceded to them by the Railroad Company. They work now with greater energy than before the strike.

Travel over the mountains is very heavy. Three stages leave here daily loaded with passengers for Virginia City and eastern points. Freight is moving rapidly. The roads are splendid.

Daily Alta California July 3, 1867

BY STATE TELEGRAPH

End of the Chinese Laborers Strike --- The Movement Instigated by Designing White Men.

Sacramento, July 2d --- Charles Crocker, Superintendent of the Central Pacific Railroad, who returned last night from the work at Summit and Truckee River, reports that with the exception of one or two gangs, all the Chinamen have resumed work. No increase in pay, except increase made before the strike or decrease in time, has been allowed them. We haven't learned whether this resumption of work by Chinamen will stop orders sent East for several thousand freedmen, but presume not, as the Company can put on any number of hands they may be able to procure. The foundation of this strike appears to have been a circular, printed in the Chinese language, sent among them by designing person for the purpose of destroying their efficiency as laborers."

Daily Alta California July 3, 1867

Edvin Arvo Aro

Donner Summit's One-Armed Ski Instructor

by Kristine Parrish

Perhaps you have heard of the “one-armed ski instructor of Donner Summit.” Perhaps you haven’t but you’re intrigued to read more. Either way, I’d like to introduce you to an important part of Donner Summit’s history. My grandfather, Edvin Arvo Aro, was born in Berkeley, California on June 27, 1916 with a full-blooded Finnish heritage and the accompanying love of snow. Better known as Edvi, he spent his early childhood in California until he was around 8 years old. At that age, he and his family moved to British Columbia and Edvi learned to ski in the Canadian Rockies.

The first time Edvi skied in California was in 1932, after returning to the States to attend Auburn High School. He took third place in Class C at the National Ski Jumping Championships at Lake Tahoe that same year. Shortly thereafter he joined the Auburn Ski Club and became so proficient in downhill slalom skiing that he decided to become an instructor at Cisco in 1937. Two years of service in the U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division Ski Troops took him away from Donner Summit during World War II. His infantry training was completed in May of 1942, but Edvi was discharged in September of 1943 due to a broken leg suffered while rock climbing at Camp Hale. Around 1944, while skiing at Signal Hill (now Donner Ski Ranch) Edvi met Betty Fisher of San Francisco. They fell in love, married in 1946, and eventually had two daughters – my mother, Lynn, and aunt, Suzanne.

Together with Betty around 1946, Edvi moved away from Donner Summit to teach skiing at Yosemite. A photo of him along with several other instructors still hangs today in the Ahwahnee Hotel’s Winter Club Room. He and Betty were also featured in several 1940s print ads promoting Yosemite skiing. Around this time, Edvi became a certified member of the Far West Ski Instructors Association (FWSIA). Upon returning to the Donner Summit area around 1947 he sat on the board of directors, serving on the racing committee and examining board for new applicants to the FWSIA.



In 1947, Edvi was working as Assistant Ranger for the U.S. Forest Service at Big Bend. He was a ski instructor at the first ski school for Forest Service personnel since before World War II, working at McIntosh Lodge about a half mile from the summit. The lodge was formerly an Army Officers Club and had been established on Forest Service land during the war.

On November 23, 1949 Edvi accepted a new position with the Forest Service on Donner Summit. He was appointed to promote ski activities in the area, but he also conducted snow surveys and planned trail and development projects for the Forest Service. Along with Max Williamson, Chief Ranger at Big Bend, Edvi helped form a unified ski patrol for the entire Donner Summit area. This included Sugar Bowl, Donner Ski Ranch, Signal Hill, and Suski Ski Lodge. In 1950, he was elected President of the FWSIA.

Photos above of Edvi Aro, 1948. Left, Advi the joker (note the skis and poles) also 1948 from Kristine Parrish's collection.

On March 19, 1951 Edvi's father Toivo Aro died at the age of 58 while competing in the Donner Memorial ski race. The 25 mile race had been created in memory of the tragic Donner Party ordeal a century before and was in its third year. Toivo collapsed only one mile below the starting point at the top of Donner Summit. He was racing in place of Edvi, who had been injured in a Jeep rollover accident and was recuperating. Edvi did recover from the accident but his right arm remained completely paralyzed for the rest of his life. Amazingly, he taught himself to write with his left hand and returned to ski instructing. In 1952, he was director of the Aro Ski School at Donner Ski Ranch. In the winters he shoveled snow from the family's new house in Soda Springs, and even built extra rooms in the basement which he and Betty rented. Skiers and even construction workers building the new highway stayed at Aro's Chalet. In 1960, Edvi lit the Olympic torch at Soda Springs during its relay to the winter games in Squaw Valley, in memory of his father Toivo.



Sugar Bowl ski instructors, 1946. Mr. Avo is center bottom row.

Edvi and Betty lived in the Donner Summit area until about 1968, when they moved to Tahoe City. Together they gradually moved to warmer climates in Auburn and then Roseville, CA. Edvi died on May 24, 2000 at the age of 83. He had a great sense of humor, as evidenced by the beaming smile he wears in most photographs. He never took life too seriously, continued to pursue his passion for skiing despite his injury, and should serve as an inspiration to us all that physical limitations only have power over us if we let them.

A bit of serendipity

Reading Kristine's article struck something in memory. Indeed, in 2016 the [Heirloom](#) covered the Crampton's Lodge and scrapbook (May, June, July, and November's issues had references)

Turning to the scrapbook we found articles about Edvi's father's death, Edvi becoming president of the FWSIA, a few minor things, and the photo, right, which is captioned, "Eddi Aro goes into a high speed turn on a slope on Donner Summit just for pastime. When on duty he is recreation supervisor in the Tahoe National Forest and stationed at Big Bend. For many years Eddi has been a leading jumper and racer in the Sierra Nevadas" [sic].



Kristine Parrish, right, is the 30 year old granddaughter of Edvi Aro. Kristine grew up in Elk Grove, CA and spent many weekends with her parents in the Donner Summit area. She remembers swimming in Donner Lake with her childhood dog, receiving ski instruction from her mom at Soda Springs, and occasionally playing hooky from school to ski and later snowboard in the summit area on Fridays. Kristine went to college in Prescott, Arizona where she earned aviation-related Bachelors and Masters degrees and she now works full-time as an airline pilot. She lives in Seattle with her husband and high school sweetheart. She and her husband are passionate travelers and love exploring the world together. They also enjoy spending time outdoors, and have many happy memories snowboarding together at Donner Ski Ranch and Sugar Bowl.



From the DSHS Archives

Actually these pictures are not from the DSHS archives but from the Truckee Donner Historical Society archives.

The Truckee people were generous with their help and photographs when we were looking for pictures for a new 20 Mile Museum sign to go at the west end of Donner Lake that some elementary students are going to make - stay tuned.

To the right is the weather station that sat atop Donner Summit. You can read about it in the July, '11 [Heirloom](#). Note the biplane in the upper left. You can still visit the foundation remnants just off the PCT on the north side of Old 40.

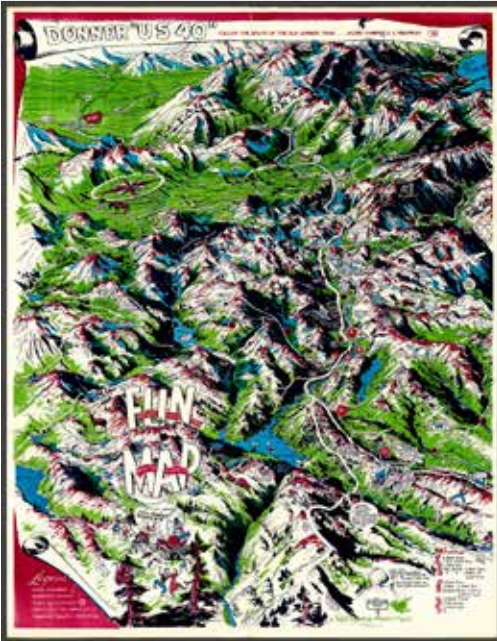


Left is the "Up Ski" that used to take skiers to the top of the hill used by the Auburn Ski Club at Cisco Grove. You can read more about it, see pictures, and see what one left on the hillside today looks like in our December, '11 [Heirloom](#)

OAKLAND-RENO AIRWAY

The Donner Summit radio range on the Oakland-Reno airway will be located 8000 feet high astop [sic] the Sierra "hump." Airway engineers for the department of commerce have selected a site for the mountain range near the airway's weather reporting station at the Summit. This range will guide flyers over the Sierra on the western dvision [sic] of the transcontinental airway."

Oakland Tribune June 12, 1930



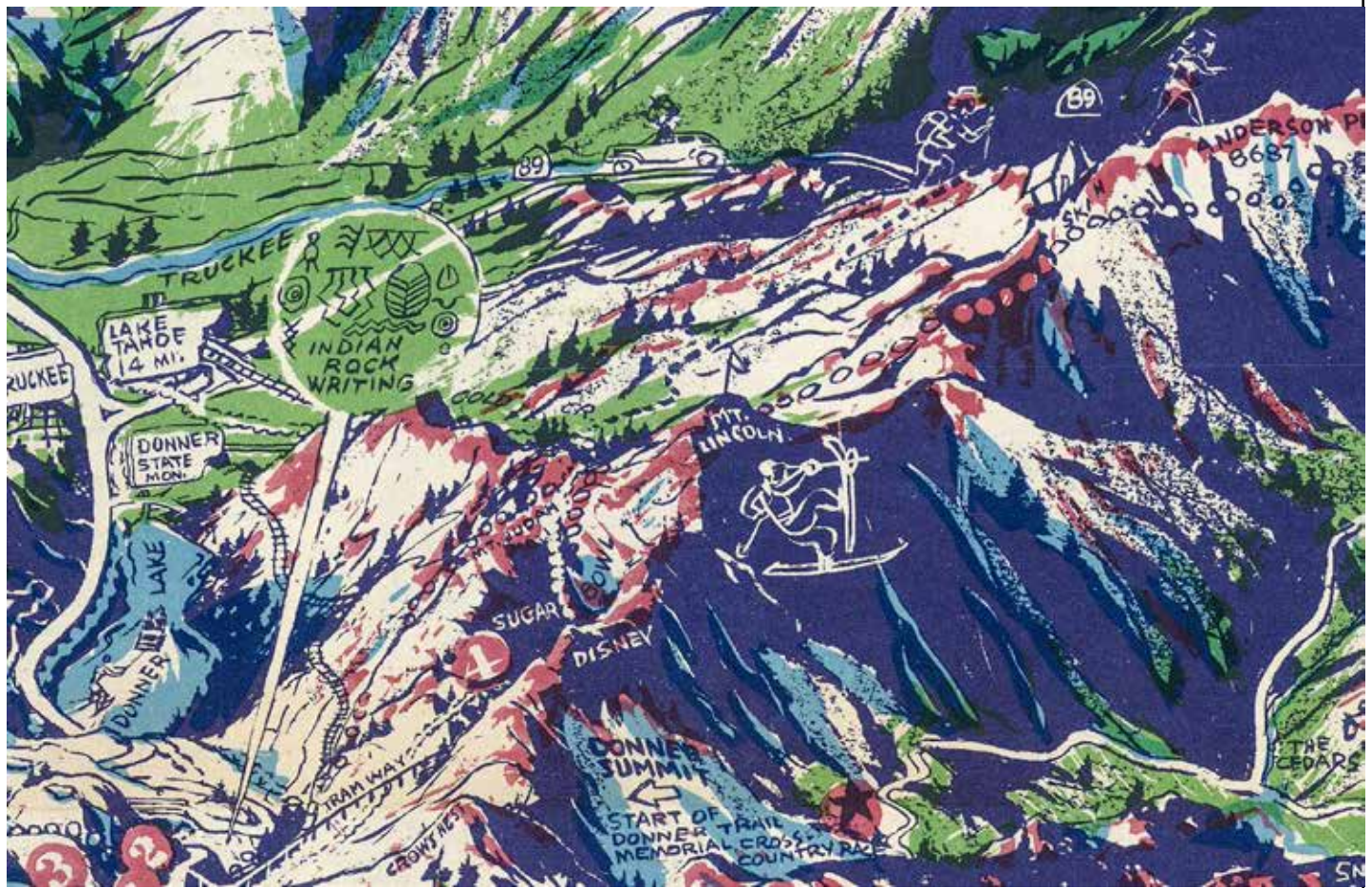
Donner Summit 1955 Fun Map by George Mathis.

Art Clark found the map, left, 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 # 1

The numbers below list the number of ski lifts at different resorts in the legend.

"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."

(David Rumsey Map Collection)



Book Review

Following Sarah

Sarah Davis' 1849-50 Journey from
Michigan to California

Robert Davis, 2013 152 pages

Robert Davis' great great grandparents traveled to California in 1850 and his great great grandmother left a diary. The diary has been transcribed a couple of times and Sarah's quotes have been used in various publications and on trail signs. Robert claims to have done a better job at transcribing but then he went a step further. He followed his ancestor's route using her diary entries to identify her route and camping spots along the way. This, along with lots of maps, allows the reader to follow along closely too. At times this gets tedious to anyone but a trail historian but the diary gives a nice description of the trip through the eyes of a young woman. We'll discuss Donner Summit later.

Davis also includes entries from other emigrant diaries, his own commentary, excerpts from interviews with Sarah by previous descendants, and analysis of others which flesh out Sarah's diary.

Sarah's entries describe the wonders of the journey but also the pathos.

(September 8, 1850) "sunday a butifull morning the sun shines bright and clear as cristal we have passed the most butifull sight I ever saw in my life a perfect meadow with ten thousand springs in it a gushing right from the mountains clear and cold some of them large anuf to cary any mill in operation..."

(September 12, 1850) "...we have passed one of the most butifull springs it comes right out of the banks and runs into the valey it was vary dusty all day to day we have now come in sight of a little creek and the most butifull grass I ever saw the water clear and runs swift the stream is covred with willows and they look lovely"

(September 22, 1850) "...we have now stoped to noon and I founde some of the handsomest flowers here I have saw In my life there are pleny of ducks and sage hens here we have had some of them and they are vary good now we have arrived at camp grounds it seems pleasant to stop plenty of grass"

(September 11, 1850) "we traveled fifteen miles in a butifull valey all day the grass is like a perfect meadow the catle is giten fat here we have still a vary dusty road it almost suffocates us there is plenty of Indians signs here all the time we still keepe in this valey all the time and don't know but we all ways will for their seems to be no hopes of giten out of here..."

(June 24, 1850), "I went to Sarah [her sister in law] she was no beter and I soon saw she would die and she did die before noon o how lonely I felt to think I was all the woman in company and too s[m]all babies left in my care it seams to me as if I would be happy if I only had one woman with me"

Another entry shows the pathos from a wider perspective. (June 13, 1850) "we nooned on the nebriska whare we had plenty of water we traveled on eighteen miles that day and camped on the Plat river I saw twelve graves to day it semes like a grave yard almost to me.... We past thirteen graves"

FOLLOWING SARAH

Robert E. Davis



Sarah Davis's 1849-1850 Journey from
Michigan to California

There are the problems of others, **(September 16, 1850)** "... this travel was vary dusty and harde on the catle one of them droped down in the yoke suficated with dust we have now overtaken a great many people and almost evry one of them out of provisions of any kinde..."

(September 30, 1850) "this day we struck the mane desert... The roads being vary bad it is a sight to see the destruction of property here" relating to the wagons and property left by previous emigrants.

Indians occasion comment,

(September 17, 1850)

"...the Indians are vary thick they have killed to men to day and took their ammunition and horses and left them for buzzards they devour them like we would sweete cake we have to have out a strong garde all the time or we would be killed and may be we will be killed yet we dont no"

(September 18, 1850) "...we thought we ware agoing to be devoured by Indians they surrounded us we though therrie was too or three hundred... we could see them skulkin evrywhare in the grass mr hemingway shot one..."

(September 19, 1850) "...we then went on a little ways and came to the river their we found a man that had bin killed by the Indians and his heart taken out..."

Chapter 5 brought Sarah to the Sierra on October 8, "...we have now a vary heavy snow storm the mountain is white in the snow and it is vary cold here I am almost frozen and the children..." The party passed "some of the handsomest pine trees I ever saw in my life some of them feet through..."

On the 10th of October they arrived almost to Donner Lake and the next day followed the trail up Coldstream Valley. They went up the pass and over into Summit Valley.

Now we come to the "bone of contention" with Mr. Davis – the crossing of the Sierra at Donner Summit.

(October 11, 1850) "... we crost siere Nevada mountain and it was vary steepe we had to duple our teams to git up and then had a vary harde time we founde plenty of snow here and plenty timber and plenty rock a little more than we like we have go over and found a bottom covered with grass and we founde a butifull creek here"

Mr. Davis then, as he did when there were previous questions about the exact route, analyzed the possibilities for crossing Donner Pass. Clearly it could not be Stephens Pass (current Donner Pass). No question there. Then he looked at the two

passes at the head of Coldstream, Coldstream Pass and Roller Pass. He settled on Roller saying that there is not much proof that emigrants used Coldstream Pass and besides there was an easier way up Roller. The "duble" teaming proved it. Besides since Sarah did not mention Lake Mary she had to have gone over Roller Pass. "Roller Pass then becomes the

more probably route taken," says Davis. Davis then described how emigrants got up Roller Pass: twenty yoke of oxen at the top pulling on chains going over logs to pull up each wagon. Then he says emigrants found an easier way – just go a little right and then back. Sarah didn't mention the big teams or

the chains so they must have taken the easier route up Roller Pass. If only the emigrants had earlier found the easier way up Roller.

Mr. Davis followed his ancestor's route west and does a good job spotting the route. When he got to Truckee though, he must have decided to skip a visit to Roller Pass. It does require a two mile hike but a visit would have shown him there is no easy way up Roller Pass. If one wants to do switchbacks one can at the beginning but then one has to go straight up or the wagon rolls over. Here we include a clever picture of a side view of Roller Pass adjusted so you can appreciate the incline (below).

"It is vary colde here and I am giting vary tired of my journey the mountains is covered with snow."

Sarah Davis, October 10, 1850



Roller Pass - Side View - there is no easy way up.

Sarah and her party must have taken Coldstream Pass which was in use by then despite Mr. Davis' doubts. Rather than interrupt our narrative stream here for analysis by the DSHS Emigrant Trail Study Committee we'll put that off for a few inches and conclude Sarah's journey.

Leaving Summit Valley on **October 12, 1850**, "this day we traveled sixteen miles and came to yubar river it covred with stones of all sizes and sorts from a hens ague to the size of a wagon the water is clear and good it is about six feete wide we have had the ruffeset roads I have ever saw in my life some places were solid rock and it was butifull to see it we passed over a mountain of all sizes and sorts we passes some handsome timber to day"

At the end is a short section telling what happened to Sarah and some of her descendants. It's nice to have that.

Then there are pages of bibliography which will give the reader a good reading list for further exploration.

The Crossing Donner Part of Following Sarah

It was gratifying to come to the end of Mr. Davis' book, following Sarah, and see that there is an [Heirloom](#) article in the bibliography, even though the author's name is misspelled and the link could not work. You can see the article by going to our website and finding the November, '11 [Heirloom](#) on the [Heirloom](#) page. There's an article called "What Do We Do Now?" In it the emigrants are confronted with the Sierra – "terrifying."

Not found in the bibliography is the February, '12 [Heirloom](#) which considers the use of Coldstream Pass vs. Roller Pass after 1846 in two places. In the first place is the following,"

"Many of the new trail revisionists say the emigrants never used Coldstream Pass. Not so, the following is a diary quote from Heinrich Lienhard's 1846 Diary published before 1943 (the year of Irene Paden's [Wake of the Prairie Schooner](#)—it is in her Bibliography) and entitled 'From St Louis to Sutter's Fort 1846.'"

"On p. 161 in the 1943 edition of the [Wake of the Prairie Schooner](#) she wrote, 'His own company struggled up through the Aspen woods, crossed Trout Creek, bisected what is now the highway [Hwy 40] near the Gateway Motel...' and then,

"Early on the fourth of October, we, the eleven owners of seven wagons, prepared to bring our vehicles over the summit. We did not have by far enough chains to attempt the same course [Roller Pass] followed by the preceding party. To the right was another way [Coldstream Pass], which was longer, but the steepest stretch much shorter. We thought we would make it this way." To see the entire trail from the Donner Family Campsite to the Summit refer to page 7 in the November 2011 [Heirloom](#).

"Another clue is that in 1924 Fred Bratto, owner of the Summit Hotel, probably followed the remains of the Coldstream route up the west slope. This is probably why he found Peter Weddell at the summit...."

Marshall Fey -----mfey@libertybellebooks.com

Then, on page 12 is another article, "Unfinished Business" which details how the State of California wrote a report which says in part, "...referring to the 10 most descriptive emigrant diaries. The Proposal includes 42 pages of text, 8 pages of photos of trail sites and two maps. One map, shows the "Probable Route of the Emigrant Road" and defines both the Roller Pass and Coldstream Pass crossings."

There is lots of disagreement over the exact route of the Emigrant Trail. We even covered one, in October, '11, which discussed the idea that the route went over the north side of Stephens or Donner Pass to near what is now Lake Angela and then to Lake Mary. Listening to trail experts argue is like listening to Democrats and Republicans so we'll leave it there. You should visit Roller Pass and you should use our new brochure for the Mt. Judah Loop Trail on page 17.

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.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, “Odds & Ends” of Donner Summit. There are 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](#). In March we covered some stone work at Big Bend along the railroad. This month, we cover some of the drill holes in Tunnel 6 made by Chinese workers 150 years ago.

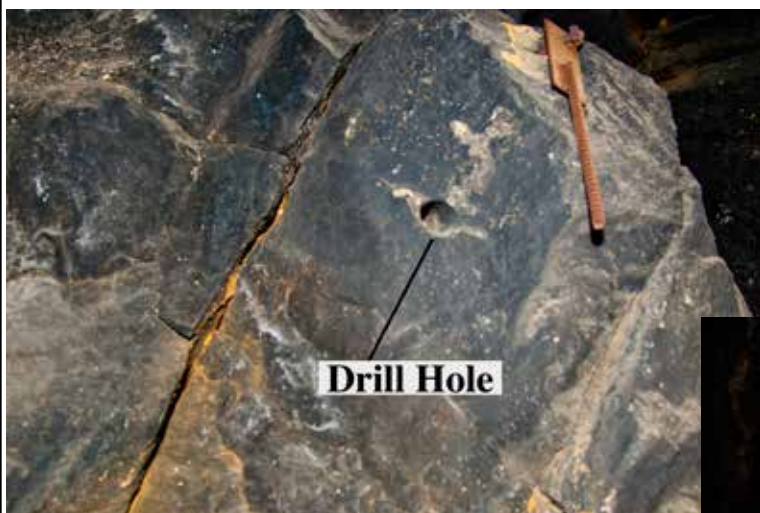
The best spot to look, because it's easy to find is just under the central shaft. Shine your flashlight on the north wall.

24 hours a day, day after day for two years the Chinese workers worked on Tunnel 6, the longest of the Sierra tunnels, as they worked their way through 1659 feet of Sierra granite.

To drill blasting holes into granite the Chinese pounded on drill bits. As the bit was hit it was rotated slowly. The granite was pulverized in very small amounts.

Once the hole was of sufficient depth it was filled part way with explosive, the fuse was inserted, and packing added.

Black powder was used mostly and holes for black powder were 2 ½ inches in diameter. For a short time nitroglycerine was used. Those holes were 1 ¼ inches in diameter.



“The drillers are all Chinamen, and most excellent hands they make, as will be seen when I state that a gang of three can drill three holes of one and a quarter inches in diameter and two and a half feet deep in twelve hours.”

Sacramento Union April 22, 1867

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

Then & Now with Art Clark

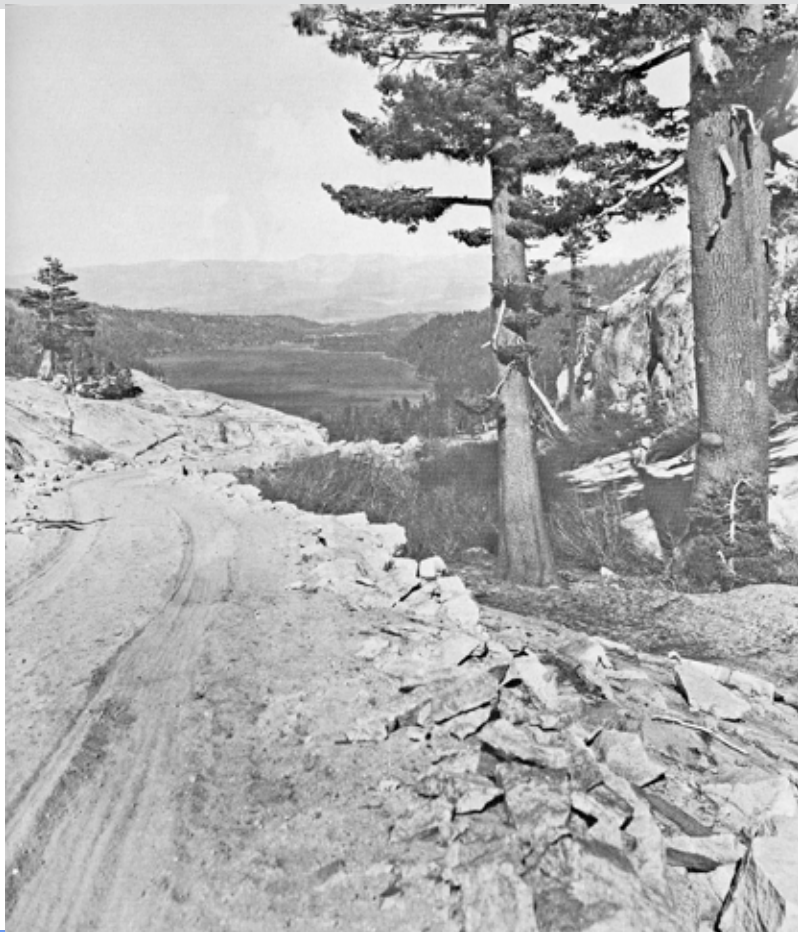
The Lincoln Highway was the first transcontinental highway and it went right across Donner Summit on the way from New York to San Francisco.

The picture to the right is the highway just after cresting Donner Pass. Below is the same scene today.

A fun trip is to take the Lincoln Highway from the top three miles downhill to Donner Lake. Have a car waiting down there and it's a great walk. You will pass all kinds of history: Lincoln Highway marker, wrecked cars, Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd., Tunnel 6, Native American petroglyphs thousands of years old, old ads painted on the rocks for Lincoln Highway tourists, interesting rock formations, rock climbers, etc. You can either end at the Truckee Donner Land Trust's kiosk or continue to Donner Lake's West End Beach.

Use the brochure to the right available either on the "Brochures" page of our website or at the DSHS and other fine establishments carrying local history.

The rock in the center distance has an ad painted on it. It says "Tamrak Resort Beds - Meals - Boats" - for more on that you'll have to wait for the April, '18 Heirloom We plan ahead at the DSHS.



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

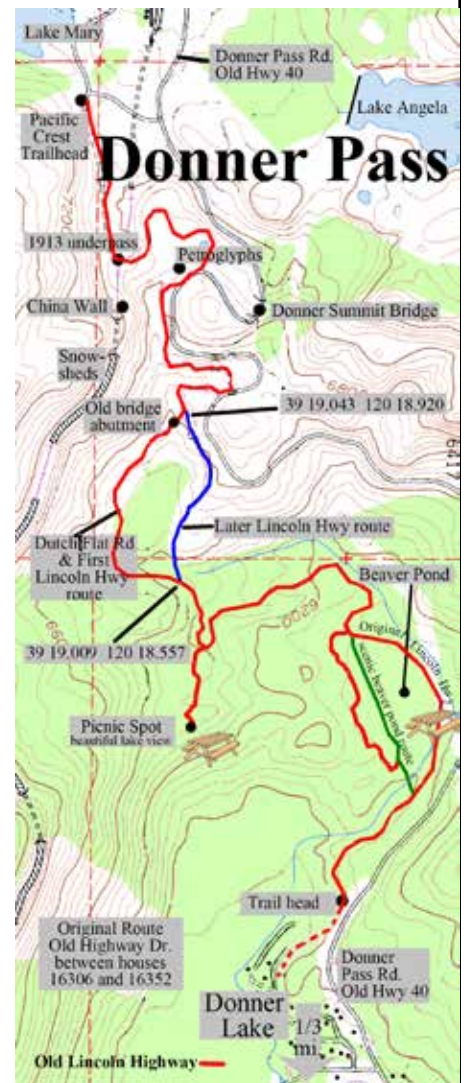
insect repellent

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.



Map from the brochure "Summit Canyon" or "Lincoln Highway," both of which are on our website's brochure page.

New Brochures for 2017

We have lots of brochures at the DSHS that can guide you around the history of Donner Summit. They can take you to Tunnel 6, down Summit Canyon to Donner Lake (pg 15), around Van Norden, or up to Crater Lake and lots more. You can see Native American grinding rocks, the old Lincoln Highway, the Dutch Flat Rd. etc. Below is a nice collage of the brochures.

You can pick up the brochures at the DSHS, at the Summit Restaurant, at the California Visitors' Center in Auburn, or on the internet. Our "Brochures" internet page will get you to PDF's of each brochure which you can download.

Each year we've added to the collection (see the graphic below left). This year we've added two. One is for the history of Lake Van Norden (see also the Summit Valley brochure for a different description of the valley) which goes with the article, "Van Norden Update" which was in the April, '17 Heirloom.

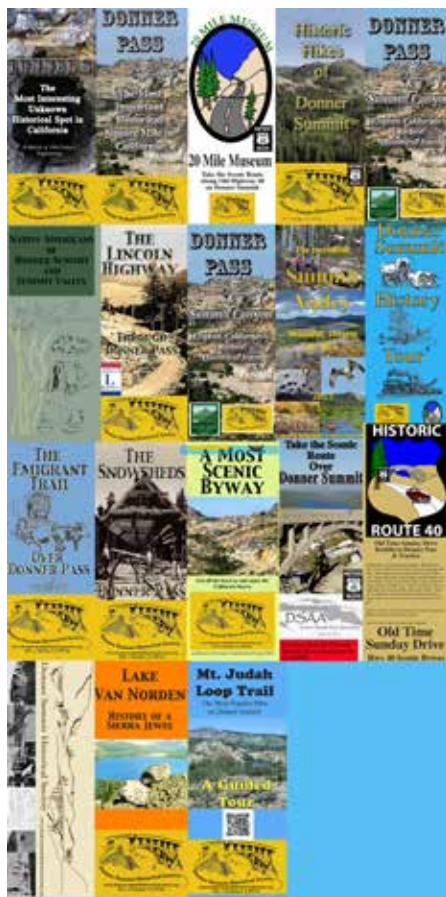
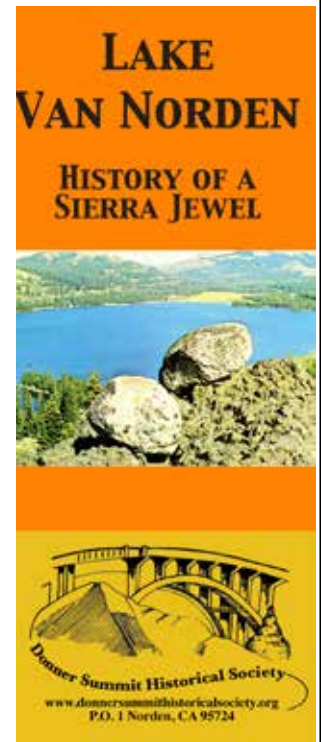
The second brochure for this year is an experiment, something we've not done before. So here you can help us. Download or pick up the Mt. Judah Loop Trail brochure. You can play with it at home or use it on the Mt. Judah Loop Trail, the most popular trail on Donner Summit. The brochure will lead you on the loop and tell you most of the great stories that go with. You'll get stories about Theodore Judah, how to get to the source of the mighty Yuba River, Roller Pass, Peter Weddell and the marking of the Emigrant Trail, the

Sierra Junipers, etc. You will get to those stories by using your smart phone on the QR codes.

QR code readers are free for smart phones.. You just open the QR code reader app, point your phone's camera lens at the code and up will pop a web page. You can try it on the QR code on the front of the brochure, below right.

Let us know how you like these and whether we should do others.

Right, QR Code on the Mt. Judah Loop Trail brochure's front panel.



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 _____

____ Individual Membership - \$30 (Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

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

____ Patron - \$500 _____ 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>



Donner Summit Historical Society



June 1, 2017

Board of Directors

Norm Sayler
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John Loll
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Annual Fund Raising Drive.

As we come to the close of nine years of operation we can look back and see lots accomplished: a museum, 106 issues of the Heirloom (more than 750 subscribers), forty-six 20 Mile Museum signs, more than a dozen brochures, hikes led, presentations given, stories told, website redone and maintained, FaceBook page started and maintained, and explorations done.

This year we added two brochures to our portfolio. One is about the history of Van Norden and the other, Mt. Judah Loop Trail, is a new idea. We've included that one here so you can see how innovative an historical outfit like ours can be. The funny shapes on the brochure are QR codes. You can get a QR code reader for free for your smart phone. Point the camera lens at the code and up will pop a web page. In this case each of the QR codes links to a web page for a particular spot on the maps. You will be able to read about the stories for the many coded locations while hiking the trail, or while you're sitting in your living room wishing you were out hiking.

So, we've been busy.

There's still lots to do: stories awaiting space in the Heirloom, brochure subjects wanting exposure, hikes to lead, presentations to give, stories to tell. There's a story about piracy on Donner Summit coming. There's a story coming about the original buildings in Soda Springs. There's another about a fellow tunneling from Tahoe to the Cedars to move water to San Francisco. There's so much.

We need help as we go forward. We pay rent for the museum building, we pay insurance, and we print brochures. This year we printed or reprinted a dozen brochures. Various discerning establishments hand them out and help pass on the stories of Donner Summit.

Please take a few minutes to renew your membership using the enclosed form. You can also go to our website and click on one of the "membership" buttons. There you can renew via PayPal.

Try out the Mt. Judah Loop brochure and tell us what you think.

In other news the Margie Powell Hikes will be on August 12 and 13. We'll be going down Summit Canyon. Details are on our website. The Placer County Heritage Trail Museum Tour will not be just on one weekend this year. It will be all summer long with the 23 different museums having different open dates. Details are on our website. Our weekend is TBD.

Thank you for your help,

Norm Sayler
President

Speaking of Brochures



Here we have a FedEx truck making a delivery to the DSHS Historical Resources Center. The pallet contains 698 lbs. (see below) of new brochures of Donner Summit history to replace our inventory. Our brochures turn out to be quite popular with visitors, some of course more popular than others.

You can check out our full inventory on the "Brochures" page of our website.

Note too the efficiency of the DSHS. This delivery was at the end of February (see the high snow on the right) - already getting ready for summer.

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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>