



# Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

## Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road ●

### History

Only 17 hours from Sacramento to Virginia City. "Safety and comfort can't be beat." "By far the best road constructed across the mountains." "Half the maximum grade" of other

roads. "Constructed in the best possible manner." "Wide enough for teams to pass each other without difficulty." "Commodious hotels have been erected along the route." So said the ads for the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. when it opened in 1864.

Built beginning in 1862, the road went through Summit Valley here. It was built to carry freight and to supply the construction of the railroad. Today you can clearly see the route through the valley where it sits higher than the surrounding meadow. So much traffic packed the earth; that may be why, as the forest encroached on the meadow, trees did not grow on the route.

The railroad marketed the new toll road as a big improvement over the Placerville Rd. and it saw very heavy usage. In 1867, 85 train car loads of freight a day were unloaded at Cisco onto freight wagons to travel over the Summit on the Dutch Flat Rd.

The railroad made travel faster and cheaper so the road fell into disrepair.

By 1873 The Sacramento Daily Union said, "Along the route were the remains of many buildings which had been erected years ago, before the railroad was completed, but disused as soon as travel was transferred to the great passage-way. Large barns and hotels still stood as wrecks, their roofs crushed by the weight of snow, and in some cases only the blackened remains of large hotels... that had been consumed by fire..."

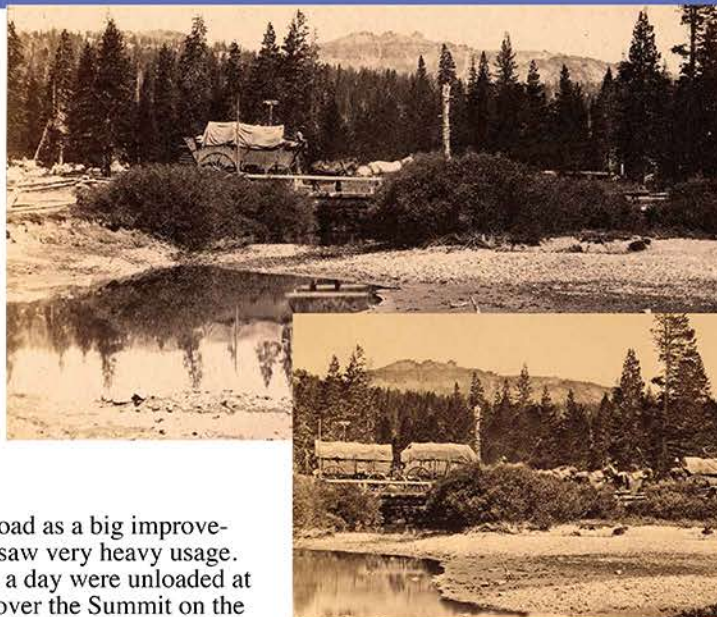
The first locomotive in California, the Sacramento, was hauled on wagons from Gold Run to the Summit to work as a donkey engine at the central shaft of the great summit Tunnel in 1867.

Missouri Bill hitched 10 yoke of oxen (20 oxen) to his logging wagon which had two foot wide wheels so it would not sink into the mud. The huge wagon load was such a scary sight to oncoming traffic that it caused one stampede and "raised hell on the trail." "There was trouble every day" and "stage horses would balk at the sight of her."

Eventually oncoming teamsters blindfolded their mules so they would not run off when they saw the engine coming. It took six weeks for the locomotive to get to Donner Summit on the Dutch Flat Rd.

### Things to do right here

Walk the remnants of the Dutch Flat Rd. here in Summit Valley. The remnants are clear about 100 yards south of this spot. There are Native American mortars to find, wildflowers to see, views to admire, clean air to breathe, and lots to photograph.



Pictured top: Alfred A. Hart, 1867, wagon on the Dutch Flat Rd. in Summit Valley at Castle Creek. Carleton Watkins, wagons at the same spot (probably also an A.A. Hart photograph of the same time). Pictured at left, Alfred A. Hart, 1867, Summit Valley from Mt. Judah. You can see the Dutch Flat Rd. in the back right - the white line.

### DUTCH FLAT WAGON ROAD.

These are made near the Mountains, by way of Dutch Flat and Donner Lake, can now be traveled by Teams without load, and will be open for

**JUNE 15th, 1864.**

**The Shortest, Best and Cheapest Route to Washoe, Humboldt and Reese River.**

**CHARLES CROCKER,**  
Proprietor of the Co.

Sacramento, June 6, 1864

pictures courtesy the Library of Congress

This sign sponsored by Ed and Kathy Bubnis, Serene Lakes.

