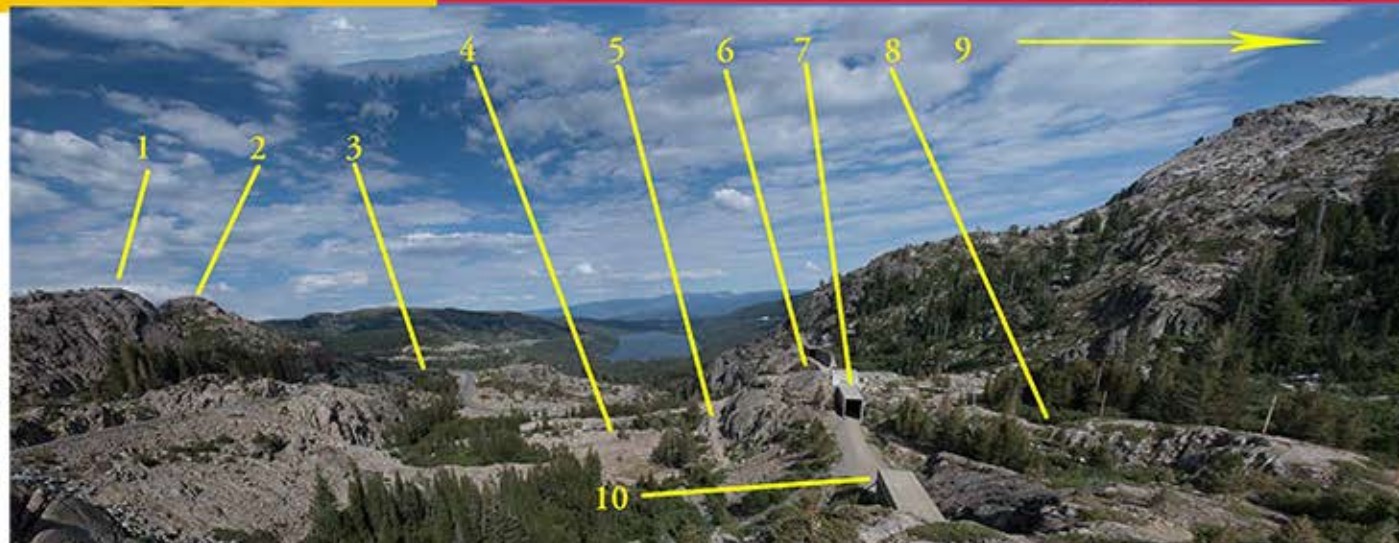




# Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

## The Most Inspiring sq. yd. ●



You are standing on the "Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard" in the "Most Historically Significant Square Mile" in California. From your perch in this square yard you can look out over the panoply of Donner Summit history.

Donner Summit is the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. Native Americans crossed for thousands of years, the first wagon train to come to California with wagons came over Donner Summit followed by many more. The first transcontinental highway, railroad, telephone line, and air route also crossed Donner Summit.

1. Mt. Stephens – named for Elisha Stephens the leader of the first wagon train to get to California with wagons. They had an ordeal climbing over Donner Summit. The women spent six weeks at Big Bend while the men went to California for help and were reduced to eating ox hides before the men returned. 17 year old Moses Schallenberg stayed alone at Donner Lake most of the winter. It's an amazing story

2. Stewart Pk. – named for George R. Stewart who wrote *Ordeal by Hunger* (Donner Party), *California Trail*, *The Opening of the California Trail*, and many other books.

3. Donner Summit Bridge – the 1926 bridge is the first bridge with a rising compound curve. It was built at the behest of the Forest Service to make getting logs out of the Tahoe area easier.

4. Petroglyph site – 2-4,000 years ago Native Americans left petroglyphs all over Donner Summit (bear paw example right) always in view of mountain peaks or great views and not where they camped. What they meant we don't but they must have had great significance because granite is among the hardest rocks on the planet and incising petroglyphs in it takes much time and effort.

Just up the granite a couple of hundred yards west are ads painted on the rocks about 1915 advertising the New Whitney Hotel to highway travelers. There are two spots, one demarked by rocks. Can you find both? (see page 5)

5. The Lincoln Highway route after 1914 coming from the underpass - The Lincoln Highway was the first transcontinental highway and was put together mostly from existing roads. When the route was completed, the 1914 official guide to the Lincoln Highway said it would take 19 days to cross the country traveling 10 hours per day at 18 mph. Crossing the country on the Lincoln Highway was popular: there were 150 transcontinental travelers per year in 1913 and by 1923 there were between 20 and 25,000 cars/year.

6. China Wall – built by Chinese railroad workers in 1867-68 using the detritus from the tunnels. The rocks fit together exactly without any mortar. Get close and you can see tool marks and drill holes left by the workers 150 years ago.

7. Tunnel 7 - one of 15 tunnels over the Sierra for the transcontinental railroad to get over Donner Summit. This also shows a remnant of the snowsheds that used to cover 40 miles of track to protect against snow. Donner Summit averages 34' of snow each winter.

8. Route of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Rd., the Lincoln Highway, and the route of the emigrants until 1846. Just under the cliffs there is trail that leads from the Pacific Crest trailhead down through the 1914 underpass, under the railroad bed, across granite slabs and through forests all the way to Donner Lake. This is the route of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. built from 1862-1864 to serve as a toll road and to help with the railroad building. It later became one of the roads used to make up the Lincoln Highway. Below is an early 1920's view on Donner Summit.

9. Off to the right is Donner Pk. named for the Donner Party, half of which camped at the east end of Donner Lake. This is a great hike and place for a picnic. Standing in the notch (right, picture from 1901) at the top you look 1,000 feet straight down to Donner Lake.

10. The east entrance to Tunnel 6 and a concrete snowshed remnant - Tunnel 6 is the longest of the original 15 Sierra tunnels. Inside on the walls you can find tool marks left by Chinese railroad workers. Half way along is the shaft that goes to the surface so that four faces of the tunnel could be worked at once. Even working four faces the workers only made progress of inches a day.

Donner Lake, of course, is in the distance.

Those very short summaries above maybe have whetted your appetite for more. Consult the May, 2018 issue of the *Donner Summit Heirloom* ([donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)). You might also want to use the website to find 20 Mile Museum signs. Many of the above subjects are also subjects of those signs and each contains a story, the history, and pictures. There is also a page of Donner Summit brochures.

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### What others have said about the view from the Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard in the Most Historically Significant Sq. Mile

"The view from the crest of the Sierra to the east, is inexpressibly comprehensive, grand and picturesque. After congratulating ourselves upon the safe achievements of our morning feat, and breathing our miles in a few minutes, we proceeded on our journey."

Edwin Bryant 1846  
What I Saw in California

"I don't believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner Pass. As we stood looking down I had a floating sensation...I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes [Donner Lake] I had ever seen. Everything below us seemed suspended in shimmering light."

Thornton Round, 1914  
The Good of It All

"The scenery was too grand for me to pass without notice."

Mary Ann Graves  
Forlorn Hope  
Donner Party, December, 1846

"We were as near to heaven as we could get."

Another member of the Forlorn Hope  
(according to Mary Ann Graves)

They also said:

We "had achieved a victory, having today completed the great work of making the pass over the Sierra Nevadas."

Thomas Van Dorn, 1849

"You never saw a set of fellow more happy than when we reached the summit."

Wm. Todd, 1845

"Having reached the height of the last mountain range, so we could look forward from its summit to the land of our dreams, toil and hope, we gave three long and loud cheers. Looking down the steep gorge whence we had come, we bade adieu to its dark avenues, towering cliffs, sequestered shades, bright waters and melancholy scenes. We felt a great relief in bidding farewells to the mountains, valley, and deserts of the great interior, with its adventures, romance, tragedy, sorrow, suffering and death – scenes which will linger in our minds as memorials of our journey across the plains."

John Steel, 1850  
Across the Plains

