



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Summit Valley Sheep Pens

History

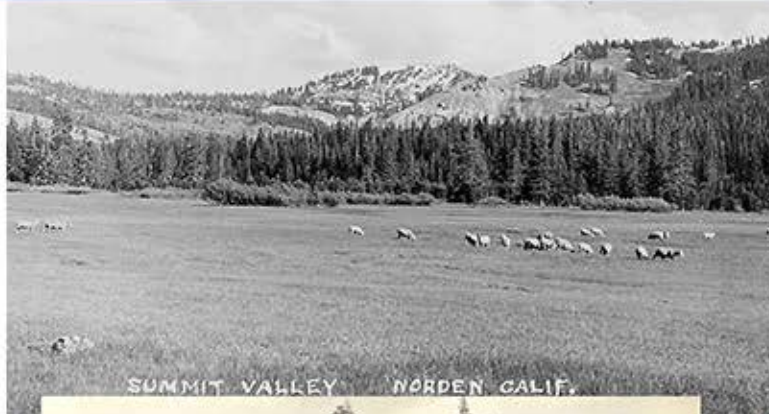
"The sound of the bells when it was quiet (no trains), was magical to hear."

The tinkle of bells on the lead sheep was once a common sound in Summit Valley late in the summer and fall.

Lake Van Norden filled with water with each winter's snowfall. As summer progressed P.G. & E. let water out to even out the flow to the Drum Forebay Power Plant down the Yuba River. As the water flowed out the grass grew. Just as the grass had grown the Basque sheepherders arrived with their flocks and set up camp.

The sheepherders had started their journeys in the Central Valley in the spring and then worked their way up the canyons to the Sierra Summit meadows, including Summit Valley. Here the sheep fattened on the new grass in preparation for the rest of their journey on the railroad.

Summit Valley, and Soda Springs, was for decades one of the top sheep shipping centers in the United States and sheep continued to move to Summit pastures into the 1970's. When Interstate 80 was built it included an underpass for sheep so they could get to the meadows under and north of Castle Peak.



A Good Story

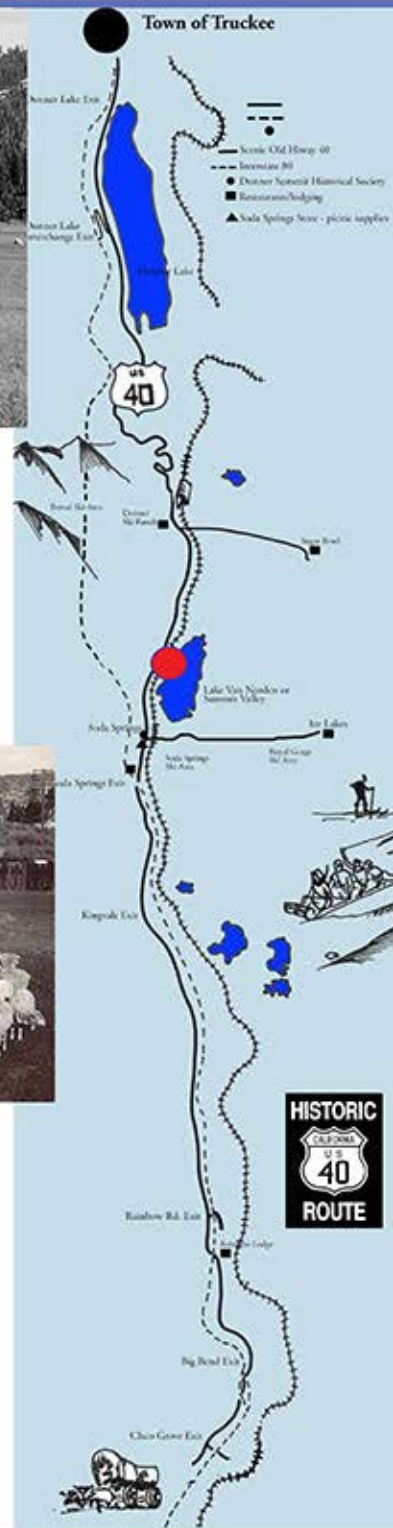
In 1946 8 year old Milli Martin opened the door of the Norden Store to see

the most beautiful dog in the world. He'd been left behind by the sheepherders. Millie's aunt coached her to convince her father to keep the dog and so Skippy became part of the family for 12 years. He never lost his herding instinct. Once, early on during a family vacation, he spotted some cattle and raced away soon herding them into a tight circle. He was on a leash after that whenever there was livestock around.



Things to do right here

Take a walk among the wildflowers. Walk along the water's edge and see how many bird species you can spot. Follow the Yuba River to its source above Sugar Bowl. Walk over to the shepherd's cabin and see what accommodations were like (directly across the meadow from here). Imagine the time when Basque sheepherders' wagons dotted the valley floor and sheep grazed the meadow.



Top: sheep grazing in Summit Valley (Mt. Judah in the distance).
 Donner Summit Historical Society Date unknown. Note the cattle to the left.
 Center: Sheep grazing in the meadow 1928
 Bottom: Bob Blackford's sheep corrals at Soda Springs, 1942
 (center and bottom photos courtesy Placer Co. Archives)
 Left: Milli and Skippy 1946 at Ice Lakes, courtesy Milli Martin

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This 20 Mile Museum sign is in memory of Herb and Lena Frederick (Milli's uncle and aunt who ran the Norden Store for decades.