



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

China Wall •

History

“They were a great army laying siege to Nature in her strongest citadel.”

Beyond the Mississippi 1869

They worked sunrise to sunset, six days a week, 52 weeks a year. Had it not been for the Chinese workers brought from China, the Central Pacific Railroad would not have been built. More than 8,000 Chinese workers toiled for years to build the railroad from Sacramento to Utah. They endured avalanches, blasting accidents, rock slides, blizzards, icy cold, exhaustion, and prejudice. Ironically, it was first thought Chinese workers would not be acceptable. They were too small of course. Leland Stanford supposedly said though, “They built the Great Wall” didn’t they?

In the American West, they built a great railroad.

There were Chinese camps all along the rail route and artifacts can still be found. Of course the railroad is the biggest monument but here, China Wall is a great example of their work. The Sierra are rugged and to lay a rail route with a maximum 3% grade is difficult. Fifteen tunnels had to be blasted through solid granite at inches of progress a day. High spots had to be cut, trestles and bridges to span rivers had to be built, and low spots had to be filled in. China Wall is one such low spot, filled with rubble from the tunnel nearby. Today it would be easy: a few bulldozers could fill it in hours. The Chinese moved the rock and dirt and the filling was done by hand.

“I wish to call to 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.” Judge E.B. Crocker

Things to do right here

- Watch the climbers on the nearby climbing rocks or climb yourself.
- Walk through the 1913 underpass on the Lincoln Highway.
- Look at the Native American petroglyphs on the rock slabs.
- Walk the Lincoln highway; you can easily follow the route - it’s the dirt road you see going down the pass.
- Climb Mt. Stephens, the peak just north of Rainbow Bridge.
- Look along the old Lincoln Highway for ads painted on the rocks luring people to a hotel with “steam heat” in Truckee.
- Take the Pacific Crest Trail from Old 40 to I-80 and back (4 miles each way).



CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD—CHINESE LABORERS AT WORK.

