



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Rainbow Bridge ●

History

The bridge “eliminated for all time the terrors of the Donner grade from the state highway system of California.”

Automobile travel could be a harrying affair in the old days and Donner Summit was a difficult route. You can trace the old route of the Lincoln Highway by looking up and down the hill. It’s the old dirt sections you can still see. By the 1920’s auto travel was increasing in popularity. People loved the freedom the auto represented. With more people traveling there was demand for fewer bad roads. Interestingly it was the U.S. Forest Service that undertook to improve transportation up to Donner Pass. The Forest Service wanted to facilitate the transportation of lumber out of the Tahoe Basin and the sometimes 18% grades on Donner Summit prevented transit. The Forest Service contracted to have Rainbow Bridge built. It was “a giant highway engineering feat...requiring two years of constant work” to build the bridge, the first with a grand and compound curve – a remarkable feat in those days. It was finished for \$37,304.32. Not only was lumber transport improved, but the bridge brought more people to Donner Summit and Lake Tahoe. Pictured here, top to bottom: the bridge in the late 20’s, 1933, and under construction.



A Good Story

Rainbow Bridge has been featured in movies like “True Lies” and in many television commercials and print ads. In the summer of 2007 a bear, pictured below, crawled up in the supports and achieved its 15 minutes of fame before being tranquilized and removed.



sign sponsored by Sarah Jane Meyerholz and Family

Things to do right here

- Check out the petroglyphs and China Wall on the west side of the curve just downhill.
- Scramble among the rocks.
- Watch the rock climbers.
- In winter watch daredevils ski and snowboard down the cliff faces of Mt. Donner just to the south.
- Enjoy the views of Donner Lake to the east.

pictures courtesy the Norm Saylor Collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society
 bear picture: courtesy of the Town of Truckee
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