Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass
Soda Springs Ski Area ●

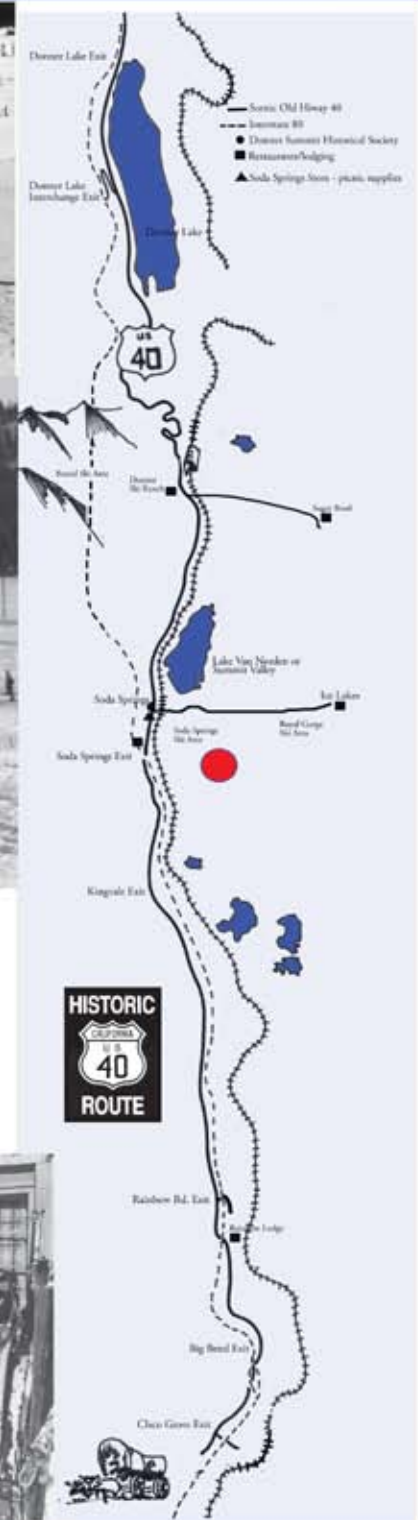Donner Summit Historical Society

History

"The St. Moritz of America" and "The Winter Colony of San Francisco Socialites" was what the San Francisco Chronicle called Soda Springs. The ski area here, called Beacon Hill in the old days because of the airplane beacon that sat atop it to guide airplanes, was first cleared by Dennis Jones in 1929. The 40 yard wide, Forked Tree Run, became the first California ski school and is the oldest California ski area in operation.

Dennis Jones had been bitten by skiing, to the disappointment of his father (who had built the Soda Springs Hotel), and wanted to be a ski bum. He'd learned to ski from a P.G. & E. lineman who "If he had lots of room, say 30 acres, he could make quite a turn." As a boy Dennis would ski to Truckee for a haircut and movie and then take the night train home. So it was natural he'd want to see if he could make skiing pay as a profession.

He did with Beacon Hill. "People would come up on the train and I'd rent them those skis. They'd go out there in the snow and get all wet, and within a half hour they'd come back in to get warm. Then I'd rent the skis to someone else... It was a perfect system." There were also Dog sled and sleigh rides. The first Summit ski shop was across the street.

Dennis also built the first ski lift on Donner Summit, the Up Ski (pictured right), which consisted to two toboggans, connected with pullies and ropes. A motor powered the affair, pulling one toboggan while the other went down. Skiers removed their skis and sat on the conveyance. It didn't work so well though. After some rope tows were built at Lake Mary, Signal Hill (Donner Ski Ranch now), and the Sierra Club Lodge up the road, Dennis built a rope tow to help skiers get up the hill. Later a "J" bar was built and finally the chairlifts were added. Along with better equipment and new techniques arriving in the 1930's, mechanisms to get skiers up the hills helped make downhill skiing popular. Pictured right: the Sitzmark Inn which sat in the middle of the ski slope. It was built by Dennis Jones.

SODA Springs   BOREAL

HISTORIC
CALIFORNIA
US 40
ROUTE