

The Donner Summit

Heritloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2014 issue #72

First Automobile Over Donner Summit

Alexander Winton and Charles Shanks decided to make an automobile trip over Donner Summit.... in 1901. They were trying to be the first automobilists to cross the continent and planned on going from San Francisco to New York. It was only the second transcontinental attempt by anyone by auto.

They left the Ferry Building in San Francisco on May 20, 1901 and were seen off by a crowd of well-wishers as they boarded the ferry to cross the bay.

Winton was a prominent early automotive pioneer who owned the Winton Motor Carriage Company as well as many early patents. He had built his first car just five years before. Shanks had worked for Winton in publicity and was a reporter. The two had paired up in 1899 to set an automobile speed and distance record. The Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper was also a character in the story. They had challenged Winton to make a cross-country trip which the Plain Dealer would follow and report on as publicity.

There was a big difference between Winton and Shanks' first adventure together and the Plain Dealer dare. The previous speed and distance trip used roads. The U.S. had no cross-country roads in 1901 though. The U.S. had very few roads at all in 1901 and the road over Donner Summit was more like a trail than a road. It had been built for the railroad but once the railroad was completed decades before, most traffic used the new railroad and not much was done to the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd.

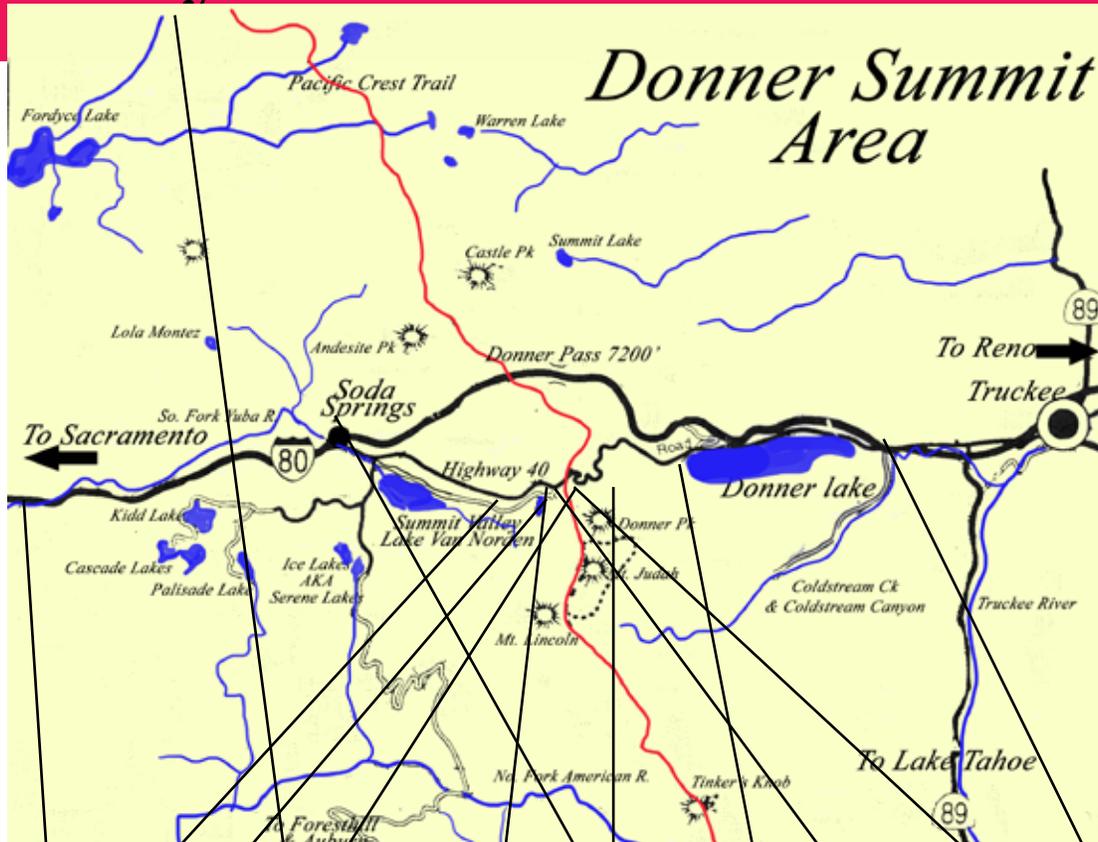
Winton was an expert driver however, and he was inventive and mechanical. He accepted the challenge to show off his automobile. He had already shown that the automobile was a "practical power carriage for road work" and a cross-country trip would just cement that being a "test of the real merits of an automobile." It would probably help him sell more Wintons.

Originally the trip had been set to start in May even though Winton had been warned about the summit snowfall. Shanks had already been to the Sierra and they thought automobiles could just travel over crusted snow. It was only after the postmaster at Towle added his snow warning that Winton decided to delay until stage coaches could make the passage.

The San Francisco Bulletin reported that Alexander Winton was ready for the trip, "The journey is full of difficulties, you know, but,' he added with a merry little twinkle in his eye, that bespoke the enthusiasm and confidence within him, 'I think we will be



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19 Placer County museums will be open for free the weekend of August 2, 3 for the 2014 Heritage Trail. Make it a history weekend traveling to the museums on Saturday and taking the Margie Powell hike on Sunday or vice versa.

For more information, check out: <http://www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.com/>



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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

able to make it.” [Quote from Coast to Coast by Automobile see the Heirloom for October '12 for a review or the DSHS website.]

A trip away from population centers in those days required some extra preparation. In addition to clothes and camping equipment, the pair carried extra necessities such as rope, block and tackle, an axe, a cyclometer, a Winchester, and two regulation army revolvers. They also carried a letter of introduction to the SP railroad that they could use to get assistance.

Winton and Shanks drove their open-topped Winton to the Carquinez Strait and the ferry there. As they crossed the strait it began to rain and soon after getting on the road again, the car was stuck. The block and tackle was used for the first time to extract the car from the “adobe mud.”

From Auburn the “climb commenced.” There was more rain and snow. There were rocks and boulders, unbridged streams, washouts, and fallen trees as they climbed into the Sierra. The travel in the Sierra was over rough trails that were not quite roads. By the time they had gotten to Gold Run they had averaged just over ten miles an hour, faster than a walking horse, but maybe a little slower than a stagecoach (see page 8 of our March '12 Heirloom for transcontinental travel times). SF Call May 20, 1901

On day three they traveled through Dutch Flat, Towle, Blue Canyon, Emigrant Gap, Cisco, and Cascade (all railroad stops). Getting closer to the summit they traveled along the Yuba River., “Up, and up we went, winding around and turning in many directions- but always up.” The grades got steeper and to make it worse rain and snow fell making the trails “dangerously slippery.”

The worst “roads” of the trip were from Emigrant Gap to Donner Lake the residents of Emigrant Gap said.

“...if the machine could stand the punishment sure to be inflicted between the Gap and Donner Lake it would not be troubled by any point east of the Sierras... Leaving Emigrant Gap the game commenced in earnest. Unbridged streams were encountered and the machine took to the water like a duck in high spirits. Splash she would go in, and drenched she would come out. The water would many times come up as high as the motor and up would go our feet to prevent them getting wet.” [Quote from Scientific American August 1901 Supplement article by Charles Shanks]

When the New Hampshire Rocks were met trouble seemed to be ahead.

The pair continued on nevertheless.

Just beyond Hampshire Rocks, there was a “supreme and awful test.” The machine came up to Cascade Creek , which was running full with snow melt. Part way across the car hit something and the front end popped into the air. The front right wheel had come off. Shanks walked to the nearest railroad telegraph station a mile away and ordered a new part from Cleveland and then help. An hour later L.S. Kelley came up the 14 miles from Emigrant Gap.

The idea was to leave the machine where it was and go back to Emigrant Gap to await the replacement part. First they had to extricate the car from the stream though. They cut a sapling and while Winton “drove” Kelley and Shanks pried the front of the

TO NEW YORK
BY AUTOMOBILE
—+—
Chauffeurs Winton and
Shanks Will Start
To-Day.
—+—
Carry Letters From General
Shafter to General Miles,
Who Is to Meet Them.



They're Off.

car up so it could drive on three wheels up the opposite stream bank.

Winton and Shanks spent the night in Emigrant Gap but the next morning Winton was impatient and he soon was back at Cascade Creek repairing the automobile enough so it could continue until they could intercept the part.

Covering the final miles to the summit, in the rain, they twice slipped “off the snowbank into the ditches” and once almost overturned. They had to use their ropes to get back on track. The going was tough. Then it began to snow and hail. “Both of us [were] wet to the skin, but before leaving here we shall take time to dry out...”

On the summit the rain continued and residents at Summit Station warned them about a “fearfully steep hill” they would soon encounter. Winton and Shanks pressed on but the rain had softened the crust on the snow and as they descended “the machine sank through so deep that it could not be extricated with ease by ropes or shoveling.” They had gone only 17 miles from Cascade Creek and they had traveled all day.

They were stuck at the bottom of the “tunnel No. 6 hill.”

The men walked back up the hill to the Summit Hotel.

The next day “well disposed railroad men who could handle shovels most effectively... dislodged” the machine. Shanks later reported in the Scientific American August, 1901 supplement, that when he reminded Winton of “frightful experiences of that day” in the snow banks, Winton said the “abuse and hardship to which the machine was subjected,” were like an “ugly nightmare.” “During the entire day, working up there among the clouds, we were cold and drenched. When it did not rain it snowed and hailed.”

Just outside of Truckee there was a “terrific downpour” and they stopped in Hobart Mills where they spent the next day drying clothes. Winton also disassembled the motor and welded the crankshaft which had just broken, providentially in front of the blacksmith’s shop. They also strengthened the axle broken at Cascade.

Winton and Shanks were able to get past Reno and into the Nevada desert, but 530 miles from San Francisco they had to call it quits. The sand was just too soft and the block and tackle used too much. Later automobilists would carry temporary bridges made of canvas tarps and wood, or cotton filled canvas tires so they could navigate the sand.

The second attempt by anyone to cross the continent by automobile was over, but Donner Summit had been conquered by automobile for the first time.



Driving was fun in those days.

Pull out block and tackle, wade around in the mud, get soaked to the skin and chilled from the effects of the deluge, make fastenings to the fence or telephone post and pull. Pull hard, dig your heels into the mud and exert every effort at command. The machine moves, your feet slip and down in the mud you go full length. Repeat the dose and continue the operation until the machine is free from the ditch and again upon the road.



How things had changed since the days of the wagon trains

Imagine then the picture to be presented at this early day in the twentieth century. Two lone men, seated in a carriage, to which no horses, mules or oxen are attached. They start from the blue waters of the Pacific and head toward the other great ocean...

When night overtakes them and it is necessary to "go into camp" there is no killing of game or kindling of fires..."

They simply jump out and down from a motor carriage, pull out a small gasoline stove, upon which coffee is made; a can of corned beef takes the place of buffalo meat and in a few minutes there is a meal of corned beef, canned baked beans, crackers and coffee, with sugar and condensed milk. They will have blankets in which to roll for sleep, and instead of depending upon the early moving of horses to awaken them, chances are they will have an alarm clock to sound the signal of beginning of another day."

Ours is the first automobile ever to reach this altitude in the high Sierras. People here in Emigrant Gap... express grave doubts as to our ability to get through the snow up the several grades necessary to climb but we are going against it nevertheless.

About the Dangers

Ordinarily there would be great danger in speed under such conditions – and there may have been risk to life and limb at the time, but I knew Mr. Winton. I knew him for his skill that there was no call for nervousness with him at the wheel, so I sat back and enjoyed the scenery.

from Scientific American Supplement August, 1901

Hardship

Of Mr. Winton's heroic work in getting the machine this far along, too much cannot be said. That there is a whole piece left of the motor is not the fault of the rocks and snow covered roads and the elements with which we had to contend.

First Automobile to Nevada

"This auto is the first that has ever invaded the State and was respectively admire and feared by people and horses."

quotes above from [Reno Daily Nevada State Journal](#)

sidebars

from [Coast to Coast by Automobile The Pioneering Trips 1899-1908](#) Curt McConnell 2000 which used the [Cleveland Plain Dealer](#) issue from August, 1901 unless otherwise noted.



"that there is a whole piece left of the motor is not the fault of the rocks and the snow covered roads and the elements with which we had to contend." [Cleveland Plain Dealer](#).



Miscellaneous

Danger and Skill

Ordinarily there would be great danger in speed under such conditions - and there may have been risk to life and limb at the time, but I knew Mr. Winton. I knew him for his skill and that there was not call for nervousness with him at the wheel, so I sat back and enjoyed the scenery.

from Scientific American article

Travel to Donner Summit

Grades from Gold Run to this place [Emigrant Gap] were so bad that it has taken more than two hours to cover the twenty miles....Monday there was a three-inch snowfall preceded by a half-inch rainfall. As a consequence the trails are heavy and dangerously slippery.

Mr. Winton has to operate with great care to prevent going off the narrow trails into deep canons.

from Scientific American article

The race begins

The first automobile driven cross country was a Winton, which completed the trip in 1903. It went from San Francisco up through Oregon, avoiding the Sierra Nevada. In September of 1907, an effort was made to break the current cross country record of another Winton auto. Three men had left San Francisco on a Wednesday afternoon and had reached Donner Pass by Thursday afternoon. Charles D'arcy, G.W. Turner, and Roy Scott were part of a group of early day adventurers who took the new autos to their limit on rough mountain roads.

While coming down the road from the pass to Donner Lake they had an accident. They were speeding down the mountain road at 30 mph when the brakes failed. As they realized they were at the mercy of the machine, they guided it against the mountainside. The auto hit a rock and turned on its side. The three men were thrown from the seats. The front wheels were smashed and the rear axle was broken. Other parts were also badly damaged. They walked back up to the hotel at Donner Pass and telegraphed for new parts to be delivered. The men were bruised, but not seriously injured. Truckee resident Jack Blaney witnessed the crash and said that he didn't see how they escaped being killed. At the time of the accident, the men were ahead of their planned schedule by about four hours. Repairs were made and the auto and crew made their way east. Due to the accident, they did not break the record.

June 21, 2004 Sierra Sun

Automobilists Stalled in Snow.
TRUCKEE, Cal., May 25.—Alexander Winton and Charles B. Shanks, the Cleveland, O., automobilists, en route from San Francisco to New York, are reported here to have reached Summit last evening. As they have not arrived here yet, it is supposed they are stalled in the huge snow drifts above Donner Lake.

Oregonian May 25, 1901

(newspapers in those days sometimes just reprinted what they saw in other newspapers)

Now, at the request of the Plain Dealer, Mr. Winton will undertake a trip of much greater hazard, surrounded by more difficulties than an ever attempted in this or any other part of the world.

Coast to Coast by Automobile
Cleveland Plain Dealer

From the DSHS Archives



*Crampton's Lodge
on U.S. Hy. 40
7 mi. West of Soda Springs, Calif.*

Above: Crampton's Lodge which sat just where I-80 now crosses Donner Pass Rd. east of Rainbow Tavern.

Center: Donner Lake Camp at the west end of Donner Lake.

Below: Norden Store and Ski Lodge on Donner Summit between Soda Springs and the Summit



*DONNER LAKE CAMP CAL
U.S. 40 HIGHWAY*

**Norden
Store and
Ski Lodge**

**Norden,
California**



From the DSHS Archives

CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD.

WINTER ARRANGEMENT.

ON AND AFTER NOVEMBER 11, 1867, until further notice, the trains of the Central Pacific Railroad will run as follows:

Going East.

Passenger trains will leave Sacramento at 6.30 A. M., arrive at Cisco at 12 M., Accommodation and Way Freight Train at 2:30 P. M., arriving at Colfax at 9 P. M.

Going West.

Passenger train leaves Cisco at 6.45 A. M., arriving at Sacramento at 12.45 P. M.; Accommodation and Way-Freight Train leaves Colfax at 6:10 A. M., arriving at Sacramento at 1.16 P. M.

Through Freight Trains to and from Cisco daily. The morning passenger trains connect at Auburn with Stages for Yankee Jim's, Forest Hill, Michigan Bluffs, Greenwood and Georgetown; and at Colfax with Stages for Grass Valley, Nevada, San Juan, Camptonville, Forest City, Downieville and Iowa Hill; and at Dutch Flat with Stages for Little York, You Bet, Red Dog and Nevada; and at Cisco with Stages for Summit City, Austin, Virginia City and all points in the State of Nevada.

The 6.30 A. M. up train connects at the Junction with the cars of the California Central Railroad for Lincoln and Marysville and all points North.

All trains run daily. Sundays excepted.

C. CROCKER,

Superintendent C. P. R. R.

oc27

SUMMER ARRANGEMENTS.

ON AND AFTER THIS date the Omnibuses will run, in connection with the Sutter Street Cars, through to Fort Point. April 3d, 1868.
ap5-1m **H. CASEBOLT, Supt.**

Daily Alta California April 23, 1868 when "end of track" was at Cisco. Mark Twain would have seen an ad like this one - see our last issue of the [Heirloom](#).



Auto on Donner Summit on the Lincoln Highway, June 9, 1916. Auto travel in those days was luxurious, fun and full of adventure - maybe.

Book Review

Meadow Lake, ghost town site, sits north of Cisco and Fordyce Lake, and west of Webber Lake.

Meadow Lake Gold Town

Paul Fatout 1969 150 pages

There was always a strike waiting which was bigger and better, so many gold miners were continually on the move if current diggings weren't paying out. News of those bigger and better strikes traveled fast and was even exaggerated. Hearing that a strike had been made at Meadow Lake, above Cisco Grove, miners stampeded to the area. The stampeding encouraged more stampede and in no time a vibrant town was being built. This short book is the story of the Excelsior, or Meadow Lake District, beginning in 1864.

Henry Hartley settled in Meadow Lake about 1861. There he lived trapping and traveling to Cisco for occasional company. In 1864 he saw gold flakes in the black veins that threaded through the granite rock of the area. He and two friends began mining. By 1865 another company came to the area and began mining as well. The news was out.

People began to descend in hordes on the district to try their luck. Unlike other mining towns Meadow Lake was surveyed and the streets were laid out. The town did not grow simply by chance. The Meadow Lake townspeople had big plans and high expectations.

The book is full of details about the growing town. The best details are the quotes from newspapers and letters.

For example, "We do not hesitate in saying that this district is destined at no distant day to become the most famous for wealth yet discovered on this coast or anywhere else." People came and they built. "Summit City [Meadow Lake] had ten stores, five lumber yards, ten hotels, five blacksmith shops, four hurdy-gurdies, and numerous bars – 100, according to one reckoning...." "The price of lots soared to \$800."

Due to isolation and lack of machinery to process the ore the town grew in size but the residents did not grow in wealth to match their expectations. Then when they had roads and machinery the problem was a lack of gold. Residents just spent money rather than gathering gold. The burgeoning local economy was an illusion.

Fatout goes on to describe the town's history year by year and gives details of life there: the winters and the activities (mock trials, dancing, literary society, skiing). The stampede increased the next year in 1866 and the town was incorporated the same year.

In the beginning of 1866 there was a never ending stream of pack trains headed for Meadow Lake and there were piles of furniture, provisions, and merchandise awaiting pack train transportation. The horde had begun moving while the snow was still on the ground. The population swelled to 4,000 and beyond. Five new houses a day were being built.

Fatout tells a couple of anecdotes, one about the makeup of hash and the other about how the printing press got to town. The hash ingredients by percentage were: "Hair 7, Gum boots 3, Potatoes 60, Flies 2, Yellow jackets 1, Pork, very old beef 10, False teeth 2." The press was too heavy for normal transportation so was transported by 40 Chinese. When the Chinese got close to town they were so exhausted they sat down to rest. The townspeople picked up the task and carried the machine while singing

Meadow Lake Gold Town

PAUL FATOUT



“Marching Through Georgia.”

There was lots of enthusiasm, lots of people, and lots of activity, “Before another year shall have rolled around, their [Sierra] solitudes shall echo the mingled clang of ponderous machinery, the shrill whistle of steam engines, and the shriek and roar of the flying Iron Horse.” (The transcontinental railroad was being built 10 miles south.) But there was almost no gold.

As 1866 wore on people began to leave. Building stopped, lot prices dropped and so did share prices. So when Mark Twain arrived at the end of 1866, he saw a deserted town, “...they have built a handsome town and painted it neatly and planned long wide streets, and got ready for a rush of business, and then-jumped aboard the stage coaches and deserted it!” The newspaper stopped publishing in 1867.

The gold never appeared, optimism waned, people left, fires destroyed buildings, and the winters were hard. By 1868 only 150 people were left. In 1869 there were seven families and 300 houses.

Over the years there were resurrections of enthusiasm as new ore processing techniques were advocated, tried, and then abandoned. Houses collapsed under the weight of snow and a fire in 1873 destroyed more of the town.



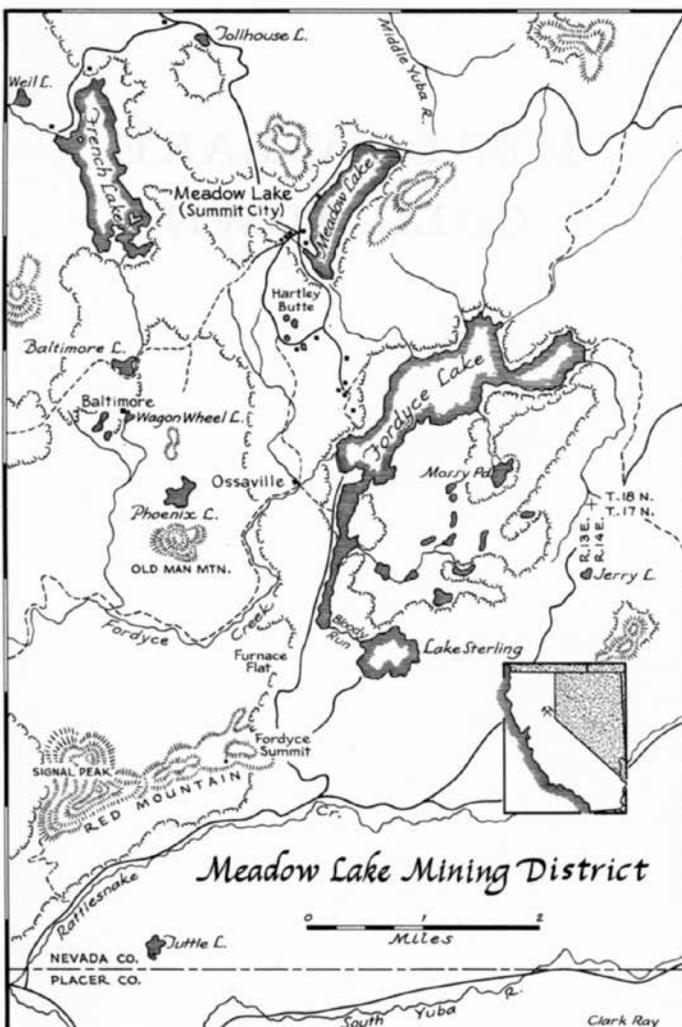
Henry H. Hartley.
California State Library, Sacramento, California.

Henry Hartley, the discover and founder, died in 1892 of opium poisoning. His wife suspected foul play but nothing was proved. She went on to infamy but that’s another story.

In all, Meadow Lake generated maybe \$200,000 in gold along with the dashed hopes.

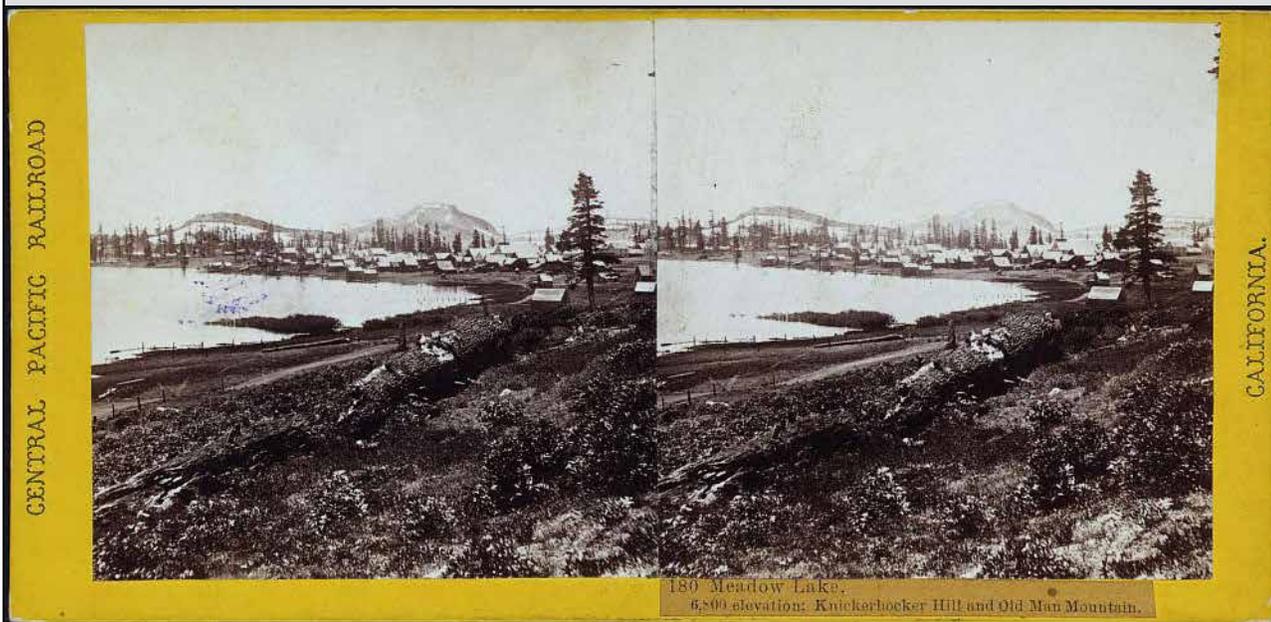
Fatout does an agreeable job telling the story. He includes many quotes and a few stories in the 150 pages. But the job is just “agreeable.” It could have been much better. For example, there are almost no illustrations. There is one map, a small woodcut, a picture of Hartley, and a picture of the lake in the 890’s. Just on our 20 Mile Museum sign for Meadow Lake we have more illustrations and pictures. Illustrations help make the story.

Fatout could have also included Meadow Lake business ads from the local newspaper or the History of Nevada County. He could also have written in a less workmanlike style to convey the optimism bordering on hysteria of the gold seekers rushing to cash in at Meadow Lake. Likewise it would have been nice to see pictures of Meadow Lake and environs today and Fatout could have said what happened to the other towns in the area that he mentioned. That would have necessitated a longer book but it would have been a better more engaging book. It’s all in how the story is told and such an interesting story about human nature could have been told in a less academic way. Mark Twain said Meadow Lake was “the wildest exemplar of speculation I have ever stumbled upon. Here you find Washoe recklessness and improvidence repeated.” Twain had a way with words. He knew how to tell a story.



Meadow Lake Gold Town is available as a used book on the internet or in some libraries. My used copy was only \$6. twain through in late October 1866 some months after Orion had left.

Then & Now with Art Clark

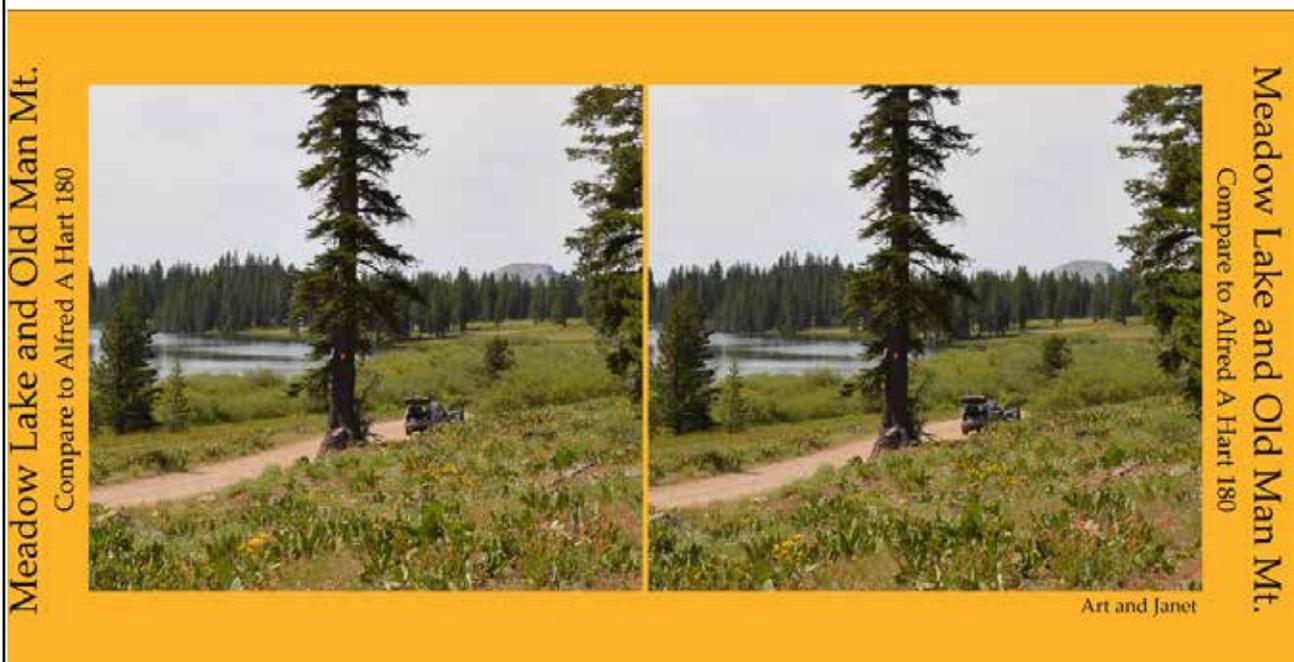


- Meadow Lake, 6800 elevation; Knickerbocker Hill and Old Man Mountain -

In 1866 Meadow Lake had 3000-4000 people, 600 structures, including 13 hotels, two theaters, a brewery, a bank, a stock exchange, a church, several saloons and a newspaper.

Today nothing is left, and the trees are returning.

Photo location 39° 24.989'N 120° 29.843'W



Then & Now with Art Clark

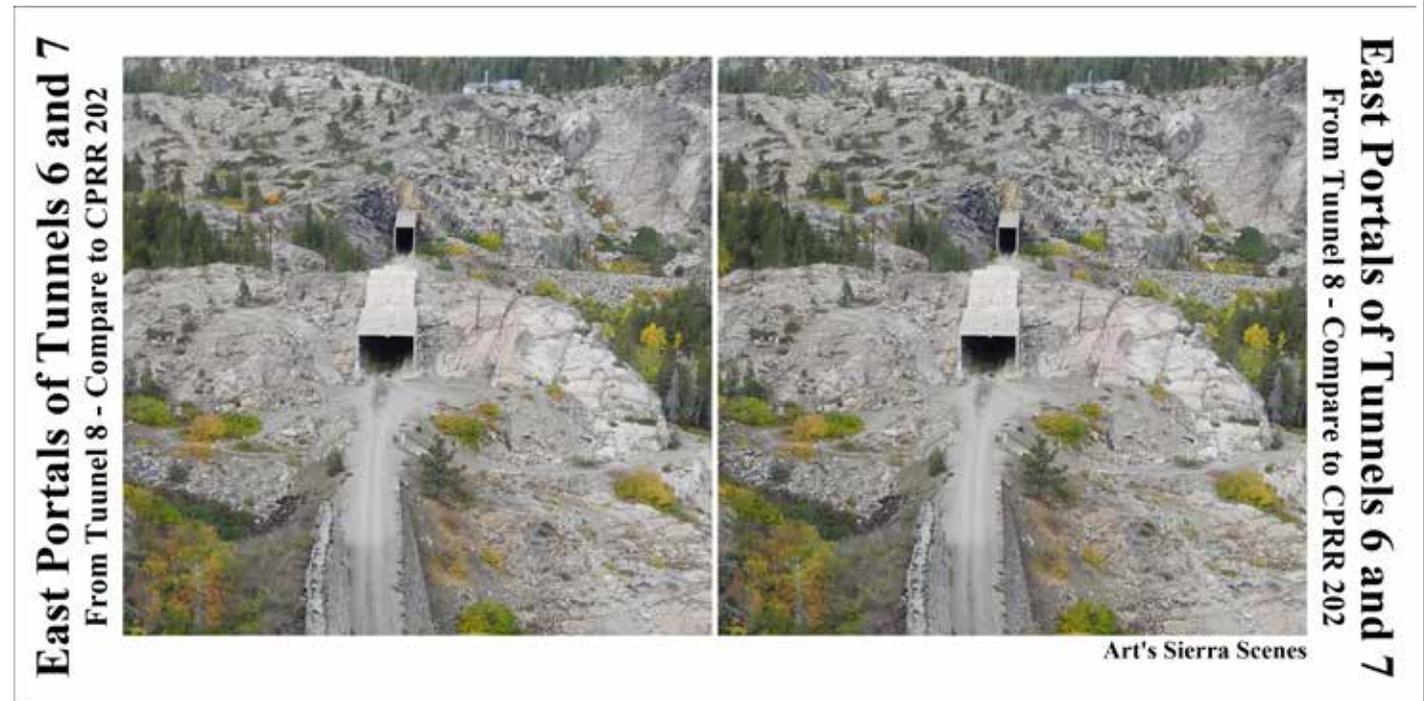


Original text on Stereocard reads "202. East portals of Tunnels No. 6 & 7, from from Tunnel No. 8."

This photo was shot by Alfred A. Hart during the construction of the tunnels near Donner Summit. At the top is visible a plume of steam from the engine used to hoist rock out of the vertical shaft in the middle of Tunnel 6. This is adjacent to Sugar Bowl Academy/ASI.

At the bottom the China Wall is being built between Tunnel 7 and 8. To get the photo, Hart had to haul heavy camera gear to the top of the bluff above Tunnel 8.

Photo location 39°18.926'N 120°19.106'W



What's in Your Closet?

Bill and Diane Kirkham were cleaning out some old family things and came across some albums of pictures, some of which were of Donner Summit.

The Serene Lakes couple immediately thought of the DSHS and asked if we were interested. Of course we were and are.

Bill scanned the photos and then provided us with a CD. You can see some of them here.

If you come across old photos, or other other things, we're in the the business of saving Donner Summit history and telling the many stories.

If you can't scan, we can do that and return your photos to you almost immediately.



What we have here

Top, a family camping on Donner Summit, exact location unknown but there was a campground in the forest at Lake Van Norden until the dam was breached in 1976. The campground sat astraddle of the Lincoln Highway and then County road is is right where we have a 20 Mile Museum sign for the grinding rocks.

Center is a couple with the Summit Hotel II in the background.

In 1893 the hotel burned to the ground and Summit Hotel II, in the background above, was built a few hundred yards away. It had 87 bedrooms, a dining room, billiard room, club rooms, a post office, a dry goods store, a grocery, and a meat market. It also had one bathtub and a two story outhouse (women on the second floor and men on the first).

The hotel burned in 1927. If you are clever you can find the site where there are still a few artifacts.

Bottom is an auto at Donner Summit on the Lincoln Highway. Donner Lakes is below and behind.



DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org

Membership

I/we would like to join The Donner Summit Historical Society and share in the Summit's rich history.

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

____ New Membership

MAILING ADDRESS _____

____ Renewing Membership

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

____ Individual Membership - \$30

(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

____ Family Membership - \$50

____ Friend Membership - \$100

____ Sponsor - \$250

____ Patron - \$500

____ Benefactor - \$1000

____ Business - \$250

____ Business Sponsor - \$1000

Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

If you would like monthly newsletter announcements, please write your email address below VERY neatly.

Margie Powell History Hike - 2014

Margie Powell was one of the founders of the Donner Summit Historical Society. She loved the local history.

She passed away three years ago. In her memory the community began the Margie Powell History Hikes which have proved really popular.

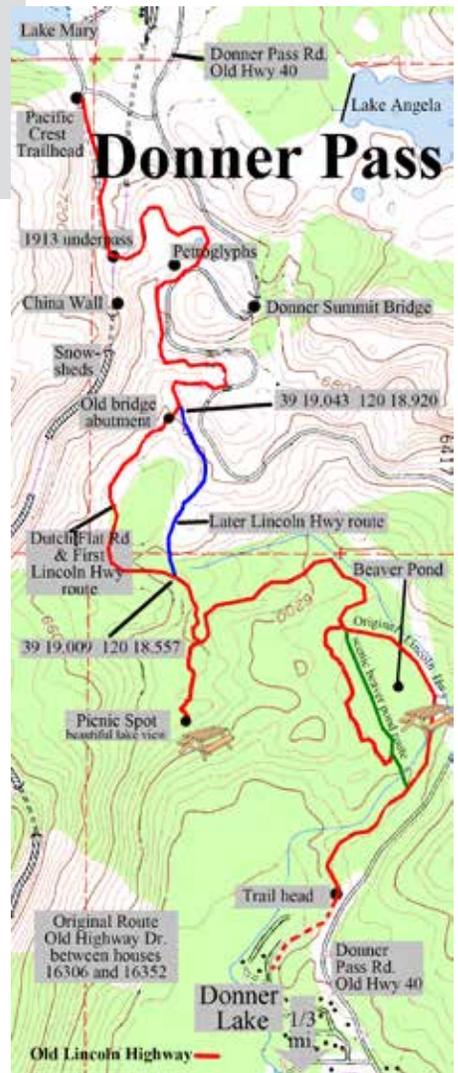
The 2014 hike will go downhill from the PCT on Donner Summit to the Land Trust kiosks on Old 40 (trailhead in the map to the right). Along the way we'll tell the stories of the local history: the Emigrant Trail, the Stephens and Donner Parties, The Lincoln Highway, China Wall, 1913 underpass, Old 40, Rainbow Bridge, petroglyphs, and turkeys. We'll see old signs painted on rocks, wonderful scenery, and historic sites. We'll eat lunch at a beautiful view site.

Best of all, we'll organize so car shuttle back to the top so the most interesting and historic hike on the summit will also be the easiest and most fun.

There will be two hikes: **August 2 and August 3**. Meet at the Sugar Bowl Academy at the top of Old 40 at 10 A.M. Download the brochure with the map to the right. It on our brochure page at the DSHS website, called Summit Canyon.

The 2015 Margie Powell Hike will be at Big Bend: Stephens Party, first white baby born in California, Emigrant Trail (rust marks on the rocks), Lincoln Highway (we'll walk pristine sections, and then end up at Rainbow Lodge, an historic old time lodge. Dates still to be decided.

*The PCT is just off Old 40 on Donner Summit. Take the Sugar Bowl Rd. turnoff to the Old Donner Summit Rd. Drive up to the PCT trailhead. Parking is just below it or uphill towards Sugar Bowl Academy. The Academy has also given permission for people to park there for the Margie Powell Hike (white buildings at the top).



Check out the new menu at the Summit Restaurant, at the Soda Springs exit from I-80.

This season's menu has all the food of course, but also historical articles about the Donner Summit Snowsheds - something we have not yet covered in The Heirloom.

Donner Summit Lodge Open Every Day

Summer Hours: Sat/Sun 8 A.M. - 8:30 P.M. MTTHF Noon-8:30 P.M. The bar is open until the crowd is gone.



Donner Summit Lodge, A Short History

Ever since the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. was built in the early 1860's to service the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, there have been hosteries along the route over Donner Pass.

The first auto to cross Donner Pass crossed in 1901 and the first motorcycle in 1903. The first successful motorized "transcontinental" crossed the country using Donner Pass in 1903. With the arrival of the automobile, lodges began to spring up to service automobiles and provide relief for the "automobiles".

By 1913 the first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway, was in operation and auto traffic increased considerably. Small lodges and service stations were built along the route and early automobiles would have gone right past what is now Donner Summit Lodge. Once the highway was open in winter the lodges offered accommodations for snow sport enthusiasts.

Donner Summit Lodge was built in 1938 to take advantage of the growth of traffic over the, by then, year-round Highway. The lodge was expanded twice from the picture above, first after World War II and then in the 1970's. Additions made to both ends of the original lodge. The sign on the edge above says, "Donner Summit Lodge Fine Food Ski Stories Cabins."

Snow - Not a Problem on Donner Summit

That's kind of what Theodore Judah said. Judah was chief engineer for the Central Pacific Railroad and laid out the route over Donner Summit. Mt. Judah is named for him (the Judah Loop is a GREAT hike - the views are spectacular).

Judah had studied the trees on the summit and noted where the moss started growing. He thought that was a high as the snow went and since the snow would not all fall at once he was sure the railroad could just push the few inches that fell at any one time, out of the way.

Donner Summit gets an average of 34 feet of snow each winter. In some years more than fifty feet fall. The first winter they were building the tunnels, 1866, there were 44 storms and 60 feet of snow fell. The ski areas were probably very happy. Snow falls on Donner Summit in feet, not inches in a normal winter.



Not only does a lot of snow fall but the snow on Donner Summit is affectionately called "Sierra Cement." It is really heavy.

Even before the railroad was completed in 1869, the builders started building snowsheds to protect the track and eventually 40 miles of sheds were built. The sheds became an iconic symbol of Donner Summit.

In the picture above you can see the snowsheds stretching across the center of the photograph, across the face of Donner Peak.

Summit Restaurant does catering too. Call 426-3904



Keeping with tradition started in 2009 we've developed a new poster for 2014 featuring the iconic snowsheds of Donner Summit.

Until we do a series of articles on the snowsheds (which will be coming) you can pick up our new "The Snowsheds of Donner Summit" brochure available at the DSHS, The Summit Restaurant, or the visitors' center in Truckee.

You can see our other posters on our website.

THANK YOU DSHS MEMBERS AND DONORS FOR YOUR 2013 SUPPORT

We are very grateful for last year's financial support from the individuals and families listed below. During the past year 163 families and individuals joined as new members or renewed their DSHS memberships.

Our members' 2013 financial support made it possible for us to add 7 new locations to our 20 Mile Museum and produce educational brochures about Donner Pass, Summit Canyon, Summit Valley, historical hikes, and the area's Native Americans. We were also able to purchase a scanner and a laptop computer and have begun the process of cataloging, scanning, and thereby preserving Norm Saylor's invaluable collection of historical photographs and memorabilia.

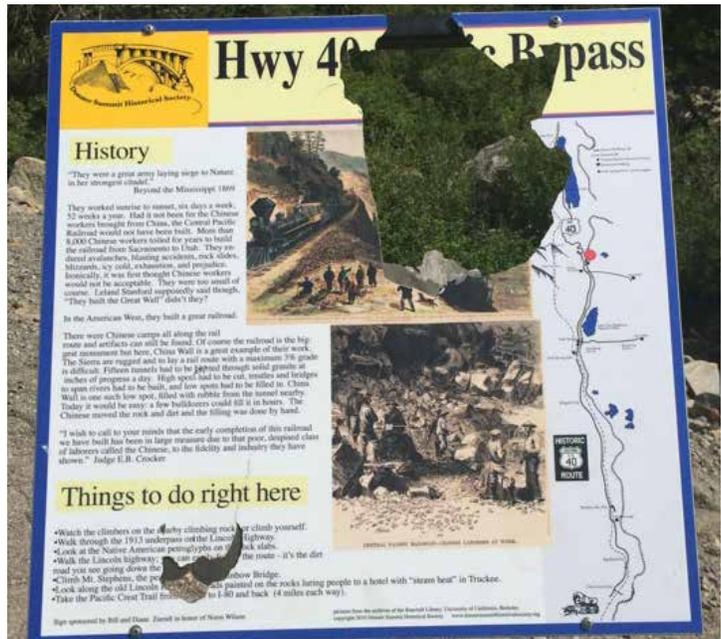
Last month we mailed our 2014 membership renewal request to our members and donors. If you haven't yet renewed your membership, please consider doing that now. If haven't become a member and are one of the 668 subscribers enjoying our free Heirloom monthly historical newsletter, we encourage you to join our growing list of member supporters. A membership form is included elsewhere in this newsletter. Send your contributions to DSHS P.O. 1 Norden, CA 95724

This year we are reprinting the Native American and Tunnel 6 brochures as well as a new version of the 20 mile museum brochure. Our brochures are in high demand, and your financial support enables us to continuing producing them.

Jim Hoelter, Treasurer

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 Riedel Donna & Tina
 Ruffa Mary Ann
 Ruffner Bob & Sharon
 Rugg William & Letitia
 Ryder Robert
 Sanchez Judy
 Schallau James/Marjorie
 Schenk William
 Schumacher Dale & Vicki
 Serene Lakes Realty
 Setzer Ron
 Shaw John
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 Shore Shira & William
 Simonson Richard
 Simpson Richard
 Singer Bev
 Smith Winifred
 Snuggs Jeane
 Soda Springs General Store
 Spencer George
 Stephen Craig & Christina
 Sternlicht Mark & Claire
 Sugar Bowl Lake Mary dinner
 Summit Restaurant
 Suter Ralph & Brenda
 Thauvette William & Mary Alice
 Toner Sheila
 Traweek Sarah & Braynard
 Truckee Donner L.T. Perry Norris
 Westbrook Keith & Kelly
 White William & Barbara
 Wilcox Kathleen
 Wilson John E. or Noel G.
 Zanetti Robert
 Zuendt Bill & Diane



Our Chinta Wall sign

Above is a picture of our China Wall 20 Mile Museum sign. It was vandalized by someone with a strong arm just before July 4 weekend. We sent off a request to the graphics company that produced it for a duplicate. Fortunately they still had the digital files for the sign on their computer.

That weekend Bill Zuendt, who sponsored the sign when it was first put up, discovered the vandalism and offered to pay the cost of replacing it. That was a nice response to the bad news of having to replace the sign.

Then, the next weekend, the CHP called our treasurer, Jim Hoelter, and said there'd been a car accident and one of our signs had been ruined. Our DSHS emergency response team headed out to discover that the above China Wall sign had been yanked out of the ground and that the nearby petroglyphs sign had been cracked, had a hole added, and its metal frame broken at three weld joints. The car tracks showed the car had gone off the road after hitting our signs.

So we had to replace a second sign, replace its stand, and replace the ground receptacle for the first sign.

That was bad news but it does show where some contributions go.



Explore scenic Donner Summit with local historians on interpretive walks and hikes. As you trace the steps of the emigrants, imagine the clip-clop of oxen and the rumble of wagons of the countless pioneers who scaled the mighty Sierra Nevada in search of a better life.

Learn about the success of the Stephens Party; the tragic events the Donner Party endured; and the importance of the transcontinental railroad. It's a day of vistas, history and camaraderie as you trace the steps of the past.

SATURDAY HIKES

Choose from one of 5 hikes ranging from 3.5 to 6 miles with varying degree of difficulty. Explore the trails, see petroglyphs or the China Wall. Stroll through meadows or discover hidden Sierra lakes.

SUNDAY WALKING TOUR

Learn about the grueling mishaps of the Donner Party and the archeological finds that remain. Then, it's on to Donner Memorial State Park to view the Murphy Cabin Site and Pioneer Monument.

LODGING PACKAGES

Area lodging packages are available for participants.

REGISTER TO SECURE YOUR SPOT IN TIME

Tour size is limited. Reserve your spot on the trail by September 26 for early savings.

For more information:
info@donnerpartyhike.com
donnerpartyhike.com



Produced by Just Imagine Marketing & Design

Donner Party Hikes

For 21 years the Truckee Chamber of Commerce has been sponsoring the Donner Party Hikes. It's a very popular event drawing hundreds of people who choose among six different history focused hikes around Donner Summit. A lunch follows the hikes and there is always a good speaker. Last year Ethan Rarick, author of *Desperate Passage* (reviewed in the May, '14 [Heirloom](#)), spoke about his new treatment of the Donner Party. It was a wonderful talk.

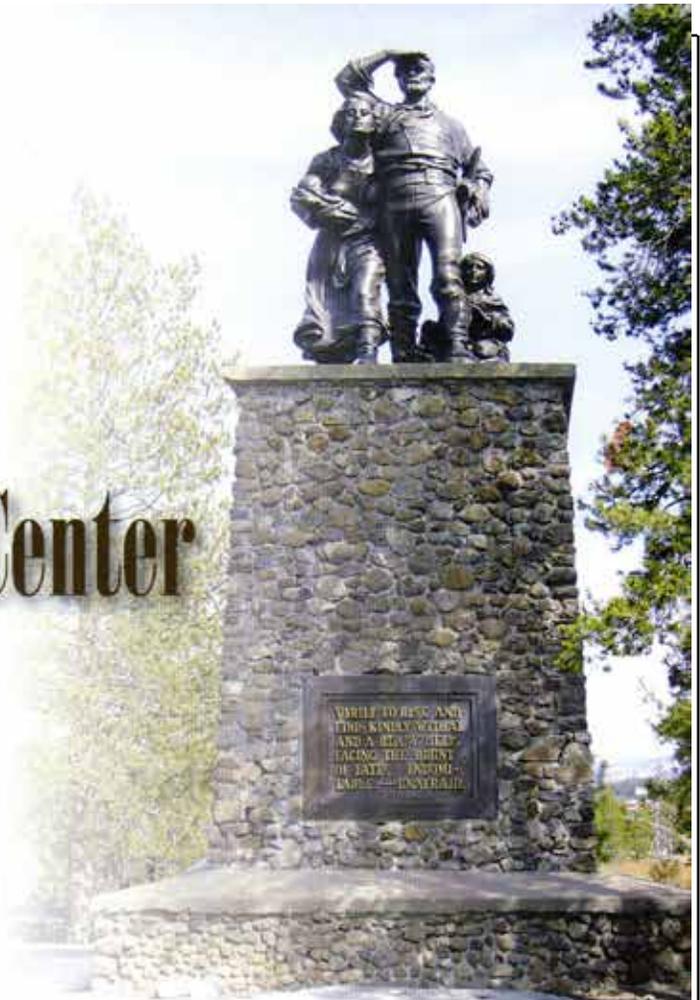
The Chamber of Commerce decided that it did not want to sponsor the Donner Party Hikes again and offered the event to Kathy Hess of Just Imagine Marketing & Design. Kathy has been organizing and conducting the event for years. The DSHS offered to help and Kathy accepted. So this year there will be Donner Party hikes again - something to mark on your calendar for October 4 and 5. Above you can see Kathy's initial publicity. For more information you can go to donnerpartyhike.com. You can also go to the DSHS website where we have some information but then the link there will just take you to donnerpartyhike.com.

FUNDRAISER TO SUPPORT

Donner Memorial Visitor Center

Saturday, August 16, 6 pm

Celebrate our pioneer heritage while touring the new visitor center before the interpretive exhibits arrive.



*Facility Tour & Exhibit Previews
Chuckwagon Dinner
Spiritual Dedication by Members of the Washoe Tribe
Live Music by Richard Blair
"Get in the Pioneer Spirit" Costume Contest
Square Dancing*

Reservations & Information:

Sierra State Parks Foundation

530.583.9911

\$45/person. Limited number of tickets available online at www.sierrastateparks.org.

