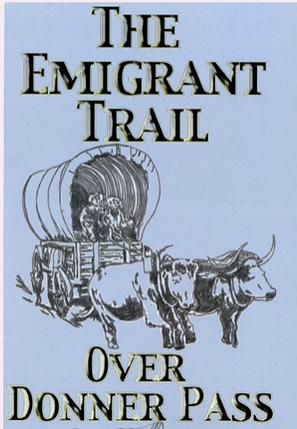


# Hiking To The Three Donner Passes

Last year the Donner Summit Historic Society published an 8- panel brochure for those wishing to hike and learn more of the three passes over the Summit. The brochure features a map and directions to Mt. Judah.



## Hike to Roller Pass (4 miles Round Trip)

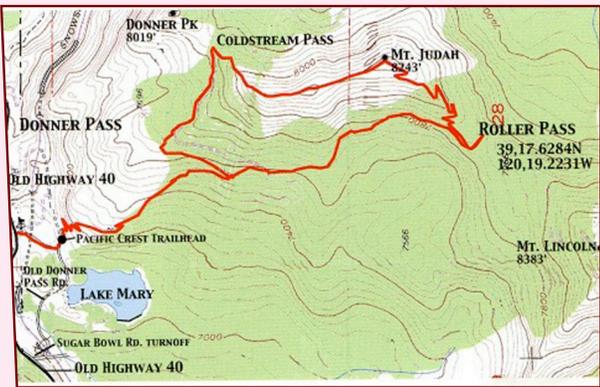
The Roller Pass hike is a fun hike. You have nice views of Summit Valley as you go up and you find a piece of California history at the top. You also have a great view of Coldstream Valley. Then it's all downhill on the way back.

### Pacific Crest Trailhead

Just opposite Donner Ski Ranch is the Sugar Bowl Road. Just down that, past the overpass and Tunnel 6 is Old Donner Summit Rd. Turn left and drive up to the parking area. The trailhead is at the sharp 90° turn just beyond. Take the Pacific Crest Trail two miles to the saddle between Mt. Judah and Mt. Lincoln. Instead of continuing on the PCT along the side of Mt. Lincoln, head further into the saddle, east. You will find markers for the Emigrant Trail. Take a look down the steep incline leading up from Coldstream Valley. They actually took wagons up that! They were a lot tougher in the old

days. As wagons waited to be pulled up one at a time, the others camped down below. You can hike down the incline and then back up to see what it was like. Imagine doing it many times as you helped oxen pull the wagons.

In early summer after snow melt, there are lots of wild flowers further along the PCT below Mt. Lincoln. You can return the way you came or at the first fork on the way back, a few hundred yards down the trail, you can turn uphill and go to the spectacular views on Mt. Judah. Then continue down the other side between Donner Pk. and Mt. Judah and go left. The trail will take you back to the PCT trailhead.



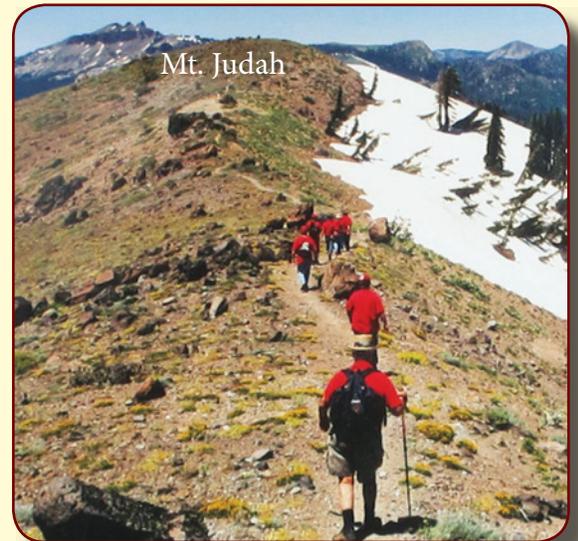
Courtesy Donner Summit Historical Society

Starting at the Donner Summit Pacific Crest Trail Head there is a steep, 1-mile climb to reach the sign shown at the right. Continue straight ahead along the Pacific Crest Trail on a more moderate grade to Roller Pass. While trudging up the mountain enjoy the fabulous views of Summit Valley.

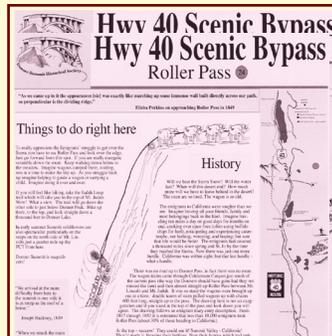


## Roller Pass

The vertical tree at the left of the photo at the left emphasizes the 35 percent grade. The crossing could only be made by using long lengths of chain and first driving the oxen to top of the summit or by using a windlass attached to a single wagon.



Mt. Judah



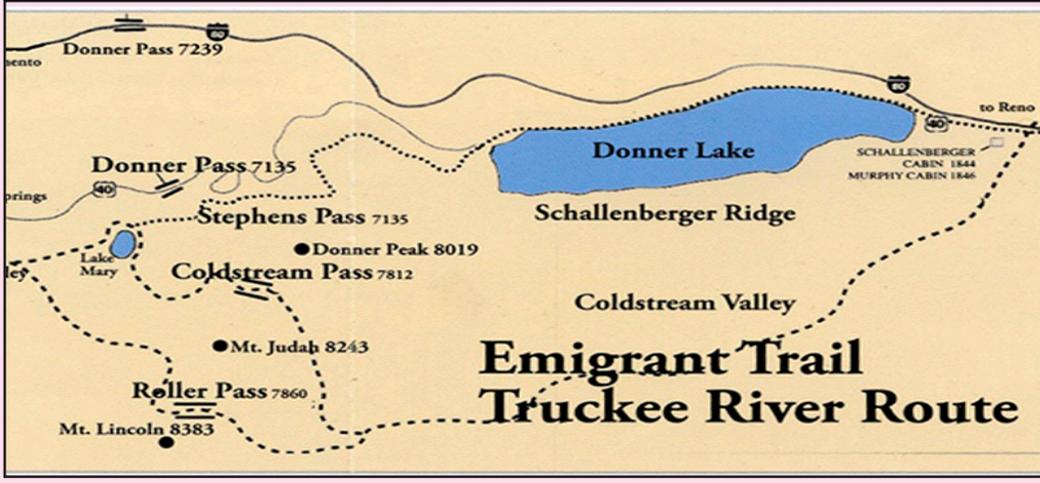
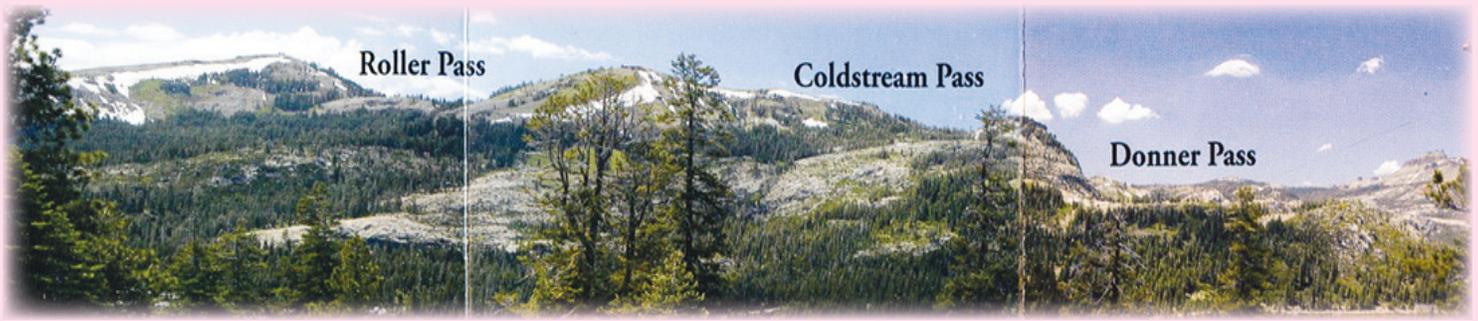
Courtesy DSHS

Roller Summit is marked by Trails West marker T-39 (upper left) and the Donner Summit Historical Society's interpretive panel Upper right). The latter has placed 43 of these panels on historical sites on or around Donner summit.

From Roller Pass the Mt. Judah trail runs over the crest of the 8,000 foot mountain to Coldstream Pass, providing magnificent views of Donner Lake to the east and Summit Valley to the west.

Lee Schegg Collection

Lee Schegg Collection



While wagons were waiting to go one at a time up Roller Pass, emigrants discovered Coldstream Pass between Donner Peak and Mt. Judah. It was nowhere near as steep. No matter which pass the emigrants took it was a difficult passage. Imagine how happy they were to stand at the top—now it was all downhill to California.

Courtesy Donner Summit Historical Society

The items above have been reproduced from Donner Summit Historical Society’s brochure, *Emigrant Trail Over Donner Pass*. The map shows the location of the three passes on the Truckee River Route. Donner Pass has always been the name of the crossing of the first wagon trains, 1844-46. It wasn’t until 1979 that E Clampus Vitus placed a plaque stating it should be called Stephens Pass—naming it after of the party of the first wagon train to enter California.

### Visit Coldstream Pass

#### Most Used Trail Over Donner

In 1924, Peter M. Weddell stood proudly alongside the monument he had just finished atop Coldstream Pass. He continued to mark the route on both sides of the mountain wherever he found trail evidence. The photo, at the left, was taken by Fred Batto, who was hiking the trail from the west to the summit, ran into Weddell and helped him finish the Monument.

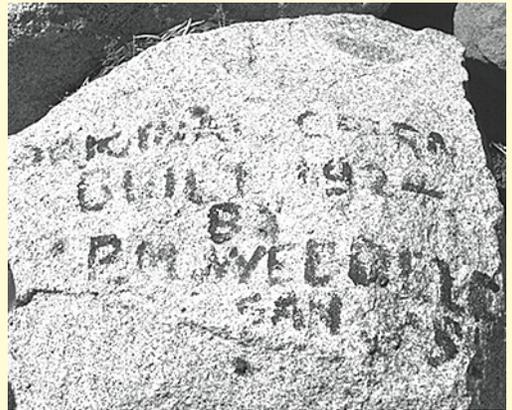


Visiting NETMC marker TRR 24-Coldstream Pass



Visit the pile of rocks in the center of the photo at the left. They are the remains of Weddell’s cairn—as it looks like today. The arrow points to the Nevada Emigrant Trail Marking Committee’s marker TRR 24, placed next to the ruins of the cairn.

In 2010, all but the first word of the inscription on a rock at the base of the cairn ruins is legible. The remainder reads, “Cairn, Built 1924, By P. M. Weddell, San Jose.”



# Looking West Into Summit Valley From Mount Judah



Lee Schegg Collection

Hiking along the crest of Mt. Judah one has a great view of Summit Valley. The emigrant trail, as well as the 1864 Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road and the Lincoln Highway, past through a Summit Valley forest near the location of the left arrow. The emigrant trail exited the Valley to connect with the Yuba River in the vicinity of the right arrow. Lake Van Norden can be seen above the left arrow. After crossing Mt. Judah the trail descends into the saddle below Donner Peak—the site of Coldstream Pass.

## By 1846 , Some Wagon Trains Opted to Use Coldstream Pass instead of the Roller Pass



Early on the fourth of October [1846], we the eleven owners of seven wagons prepared to bring our vehicles across the summit. We did not have by far enough chains to attempt the course followed by the preceding party. To the right was another way, which was longer, but the steepest stretch much shorter. We thought we could make this.

Heinrich Lienhard 1846

## Roller Pass became the Old Road by 1849



We camped one mile from the foot of the mountain. It was quite hard work to get up; we had eight yoke of cattle to the wagon. We did not go all the way up the old road, but a short distance we went a little to the right of the old road. They had to haul the wagon up with a windlass.

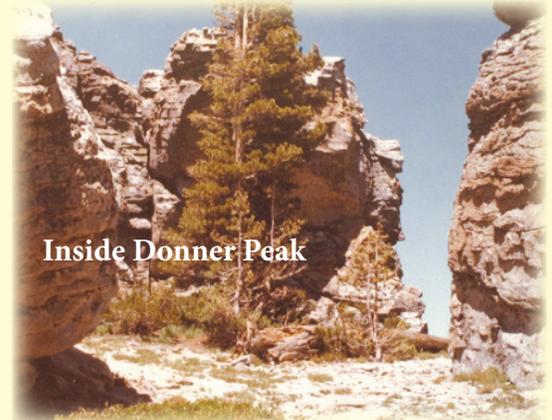
Eliza Armstrong 1849



Looking east from Coldstream Pass shows the foot of Donner Peak at the top left of the photo, TRR 24 in the foreground and a hand in the background points to the rock ruins of Weddell's 1924 cairn.

## Its a Short, Steep Hike From Coldstream Pass to Donner Peak, but extremely rewarding

While waiting to haul their wagons up Coldstream Pass some emigrants would climb nearby Donner Peak to get a better view of what might lay ahead.



### Inside Donner Peak

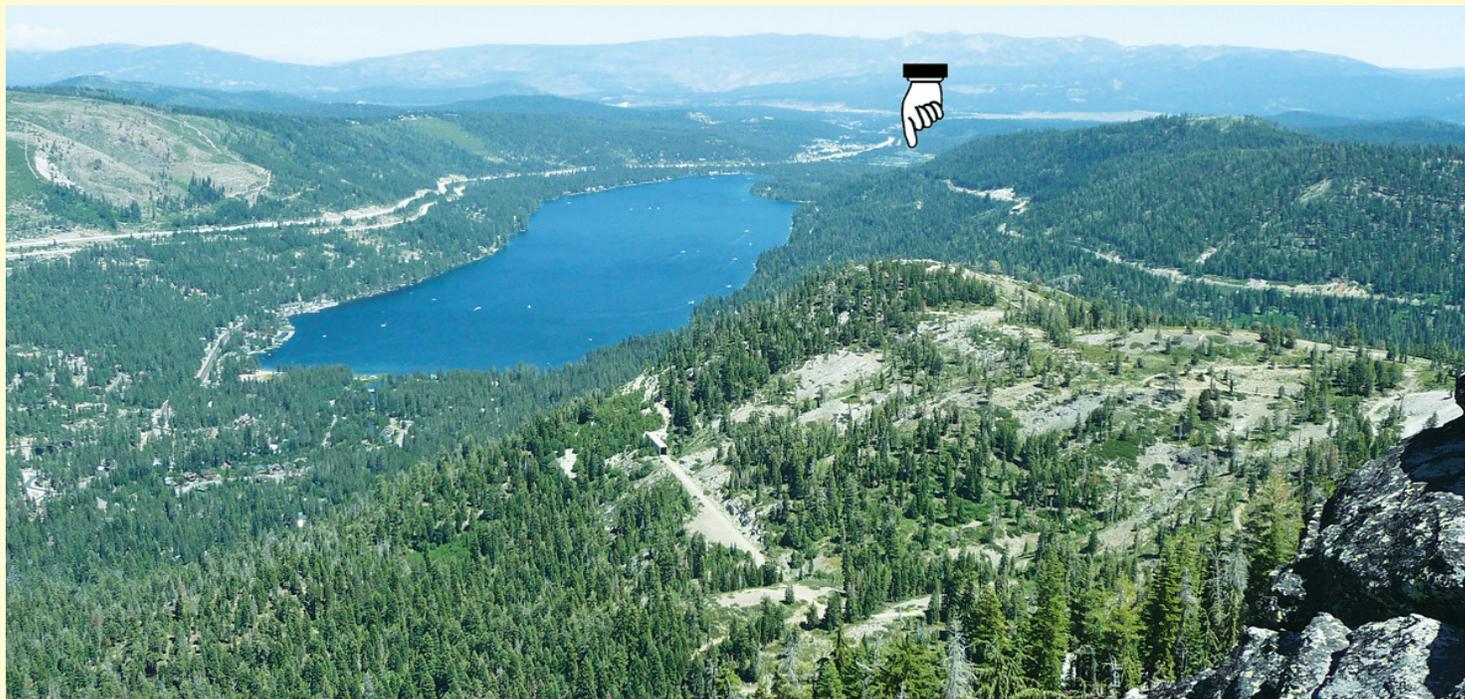
Donner Peak has a room-like appearance formed by pieces of huge granite rock.



A short distance north of the pass I climbed the dizzy heights of a granite peak. The view was magnificent.

John Steele 1850

# An Historic View West From Donner Peak Towards Donner lake

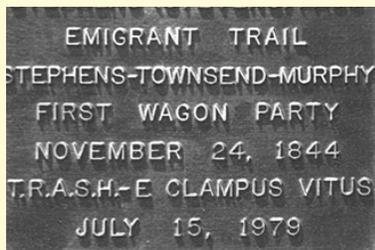
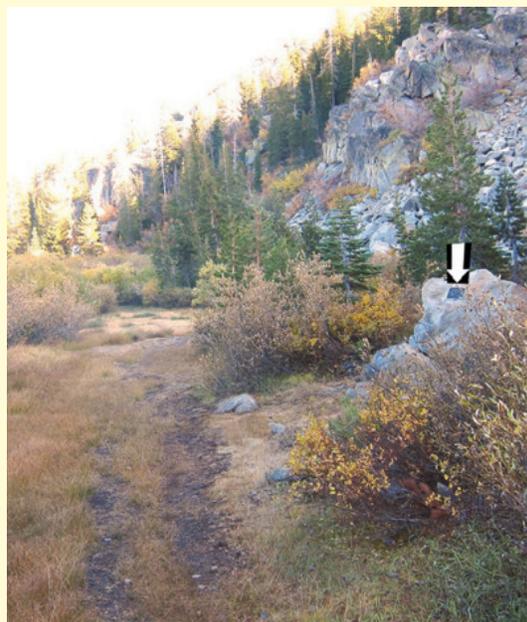


Lee Schegg Collection

Looking west from Donner Peak you can see portions of a road along the northern shore of Donner Lake that leads to Donner Pass. This was the route of the first wagon trains, 1844-46. This section of the emigrant trail evolved into Highway 40 and is known today as Donner Pass Road. After 1846, the emigrants turned right at the entrance to Coldstream Canyon to access Roller and Coldstream passes. This site is pointed out by the hand at the top of the photo. The 1964 freeway is obvious at the upper left of the photo. The cut along Schallenberger Ridge in the upper right of the picture is the route of the train and an abandoned snow shed and railroad bed can be viewed in the center of the photo.

## A Short Hike Atop Donner Pass (Stephens Pass)

After hiking down the mountain from Coldstream Pass you will return to the starting point — the Pacific Crest Trail Head. A few yards to the right of the PCT trailhead sign you will see the Donner Pass trail (pictured at the right). Proceed 0.2-mile east and on your right you will come to a large rock with a small plaque mounted on it, (pictured below). This is the mid point of the 0.4-mile, almost level, crossing at the crest of the summit. This section was so ideal that it was later used by the 1664 Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road and the Lincoln Highway from 1913 until 1924.

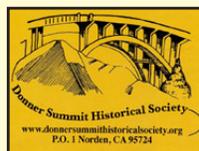


### Plaque honors Stephens

The plaque above is on the rock pointed to by the arrow in the photo to the left. It was placed because it is only rightful to name the pass for the Stephens Party—the wagon train that blazed the trail over the summit rather than to name it after the Donner Party that never reached the pass.

### California Historical Landmark 799

At the bottom right of the above photo is a cement post that once held a California Historical Landmark 799 sign—identical to the one pictured at the right. In 1976. The state placed an Overland Emigrant Trail 1844 marker at Johnson's Ranch, Wolf Creek (near Grass Valley), the Big Bend Visitors Center, Donner Pass and on the Alder Creek Trail near Truckee.



For more hiking information or trail research visit the nearby Donner Summit Historical Society at 21501 Donner Pass Rd., Soda Springs