

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

July, 2015 issue #84

## Adventures in History

# Death Defying Re-enactment

Inspired by last month's Then/Now by Art Clark of Charlie Chaplin's 1925 Gold Rush town at what is now Sugar Bowl.

### Re-Enacting History

History re-enacting is a popular activity. We see people dressed in Civil War uniforms having great fun reliving the Civil War without any of the attendant discomforts – like getting shot. It's a grown-up reason to get dressed up and do what kids get to do but without anyone rolling their eyes. There are also Revolutionary War, wagon train, and Rendezvous (1840's Rocky Mtn. fur trapper annual get-togethers) re-enactments, among others.

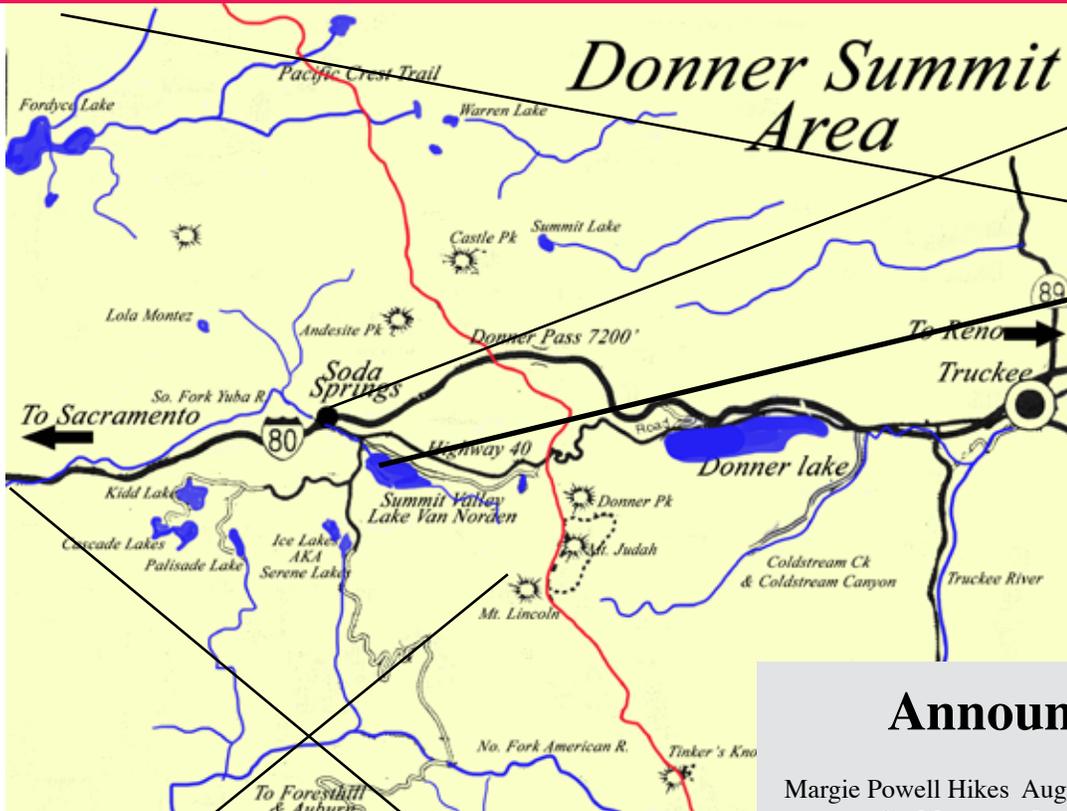
Donner Summit is so rich in history – the most historically rich square mile in California and maybe the entire Western U.S. – that we ought to be able to do some re-enacting and join the fun. So the DSHS made a list of possibilities.

We could re-enact the climbing of Roller Pass (see 11/11 [Heirloom](#)), the wagon train route over Donner Pass for a few years, with wagons and oxen. We're getting older though, and can hardly walk it. We have no oxen in the DSHS stables either. We could re-enact the Stephen's Party's crossing of Donner Pass, the first wagon train to get to California with wagons (1844 - see the [Heirloom](#) for 11/13 or the review of [Truckee's Trail](#) in 2/09). The Stephens Party, though, took apart their wagons to get up Donner



Pass and we might not get all the parts together correctly again. Then we'd be stuck in the pass with only part of a wagon and a lot of embarrassment. We could re-enact Native Americans carving petroglyphs or grinding mortars (2/13 or 6/15 [Heirlooms](#)) into granite but that looks exceedingly tedious and might take a hundred years or more for the mortars, anyway. We could re-enact the escape of part of the Donner Party, the Forlorn Hope, but our sensitivity to the feeling of the readers of this family oriented periodical preclude us from exploring the particulars of why we can't do that (finger food anyone?).

# Story Locations in this Issue



Tinker's Station pg 12

Meadow Lake, pg 12

Summit Valley, pg 12

## In This Issue

Palisades at Sugar Bowl pg 1, 3-7, 16

Cisco Grove pg 11



## Announcements:

Margie Powell Hikes August 15 and 16

9 AM meet at Lot 1 in Serene Lakes. (Take Soda Springs Rd. from Soda Springs to the end of the pavement. Turn right on Serene Rd., go 200 yards.)

3 hours, 2 miles, 300' elev. gain. Bring lunch, sunscreen, snack, water, sturdy shoes (we'll be on trails) Lots of stories.

Heritage Trail August 15, 16

[www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.org](http://www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.org)

Donner Party Hikes October 3, 4

[www.donnerpartyhike.com](http://www.donnerpartyhike.com)

New museum at the State Park at Donner Lake opens June 6

Lake Mary Dinner at Lake Mary, left, on Donner Summit - part of evening proceeds go to the DSHS July 26 Call 530-426-7002 for reservations

editor:  
Bill Oudegeest  
209-606-6859  
[info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

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

The list of rejects could get tedious in the telling so to “cut to the chase” the DSHS Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT) decided to re-enact a scene from Charlie Chaplin’s 1925 film, the “Gold Rush.” You can read the particulars of the movie in our August, ’11 [Heirloom](#) or on our 20 Mile Museum sign.

In short though, is the movie was about miners in the Klondike in 1898. The Palisades at what is now Sugar Bowl was the “stand-in” for the Chilcoot Pass over which miners had to go to get to the Klondike riches. 600 extras were hired in Sacramento and taken by train to Donner Summit to re-enact that episode (see the previous page and right). The MHRT thought that would be a fine foray into historical re-enactments and perhaps spark a tradition (although in this case it would be a re-enacted re-enactment – but a start.)

Re-enacting the Gold Rush scene requires little equipment, the Palisades are close by and how hard can it be? After all, 600 average Sacramentans did it as you can see to the right. The line going up the mountainside is the extras and the buildings at the bottom are a temporary movie-set town.



Just wait ‘til I tell you.

Gold Rush pictures in this issue come from The Gold Rush, the version with the expired copyright.

## The Re-enactment

It was a fine April day. The snow that had fallen a few days before had had time to settle on the old snow. It was fairly warm and the ski resort was closed for the season due to the year’s exceptionally light snowfall.

The MHRT met in the parking lot and, all accoutered with snowshoes, lunches, cameras, cramp-ons, and cell phones, headed across frozen mud and what was left of the snow. By the time we got to cross under the Christmas Tree lift, snow covered everything and the marching feet could sink to the knee in the snow. The higher we got the more loose snow there was. You might suggest we put on snowshoes but wait ‘til I tell you about that.

The team crossed under the Lincoln chairlift and started up the other side towards the Palisades. The end was in sight - visually, but there was still a long way to go physically. The hill got steeper, the snow got looser. Each step was an ordeal. Finally, Art Clark suggested we try something. Half the team would don the snowshoes and the other half would continue without. Our snowshoes are the old-fashioned kind, two feet long or so. That’s for historical verisimilitude and because we don’t have modern ones.

Here on the Palisades at Sugar Bowl we learned that snowshoes are not meant for climbing. They are unwieldy and do not dig into the slope leaving the wearer off-balance. Half the team continued with the snowshoes for a few hundred yards but it was excruciatingly difficult. Only inches of progress could be made with each step due to having to tamp down to get a stable footing. That meant having to lift the feet with the attached snowshoes, most often heaped with heavy snow, quite high to make the next steps. Eventually the half of the team in snowshoes dropped the idea and the snowshoes.



Left, movie crew at Sugar Bowl, Castle Pk. in the background. Right, extras awaiting their cues.



The Palisades at Sugar Bowl today with the chute used in 1925 by the "miners" and by the MHRT in 2015.

The snow got deeper as I said, and the climb got steeper and then steeper. On each step feet sank into the loose snow a foot and then more. Looking up it got even steeper and as we approached the chute, the narrow spot between the rocks, it was nerve-racking to look down. It was a close as to straight down as could be (see below looking down and looking up). We had to ignore the view behind us so we would not accidentally look down and panic. We're old men after all (it's an MHRT pre-requisite). It was death-defying.

On top of the effort of stepping, sinking, and climbing just a bit with each step, snow was rolling down from above. Eventually the loose snow became less deep, probably because it was rolling down, and the cramp-ons began to be useful as their tines went into the packed snow and ice below.

As we approached the steepest part, which was not quite vertical but close (see below), there began to be rumbles among the team. How are we going to get through there? Isn't that shiny stuff ice? The rocks on the side are loose. We're soaking wet. We're old. If we slip we won't stop rolling until we get to the forest below and then what? There was more, but discerning





Castle Peak in the distance and one of the interesting rock formations at the Palisades.

readers get the point and this *is* a family periodical.

At the 2/3 point we stopped and rested at a hastily constructed base camp – a very small flat area dug out with a pair of snowshoes. We could sit with feet dangling down, Castle Pk. in the distance.

The defeat at the 2/3 point was distressing. How could we rationalize it? How could we face our families? 600 average Sacramentans made it up exactly the same route in 1925. Had the mountains changed? This re-enactment did not seem so much fun anymore (and hadn't for awhile).

The team made its way down the slope (which, given the steepness, is not really the word to use). At the point where we could begin to traverse Art Clark took out the pictures he'd made of the 1925 ordinary Sacramentans climbing up the "Chilcott Pass" at what is now Sugar Bowl.



Stills from the Gold Rush. Left, how they moved the buildings; center, Charlie Chaplin directing; right, a wind machine which was a propeller on an airplane engine.



Standing in the snow in wet feet, leaning in to the slope so as not to overbalance the other way and roll down to the lodge, another analysis of the pictures was done. One perceptive member noted a line in a couple of the pictures. It was clear what the line was. Those climbers in 1925 had used ropes! Besides that, the Truckee ski club had gone ahead and carved a trail in the snow.

Why Charlie chose the almost steepest spot and through a narrow chute – who knows. There are plenty of other spots that would have been equally dramatic and easier but he was probably not thinking of elderly MHRT members 90 years in the future. Given the terrain though, no doubt whoever went up first with the ropes went to either side and then dropped the ropes down the chute so the average Sacramentans could climb up and re-enact the Chilcoot Pass crossing.



The DSHS will probably not be doing more re-enactments for awhile or until there is a younger MHRT.

For more on Charlie Chaplin and the 1925 movie, Gold Rush, see the [Heirloom](#) for August, '11

### Re-Enactment Pt. II

That was not the end of the story however. Art Clark is dedicated and could not just let things go. The untraveled part of the route gnawed at him. The gnawing lasted a week or so, and then he went up with a rope. He did not attack straight up but went to the side and then dropped down what we'll call "Charlie's Chute" from the top (see below and next page).

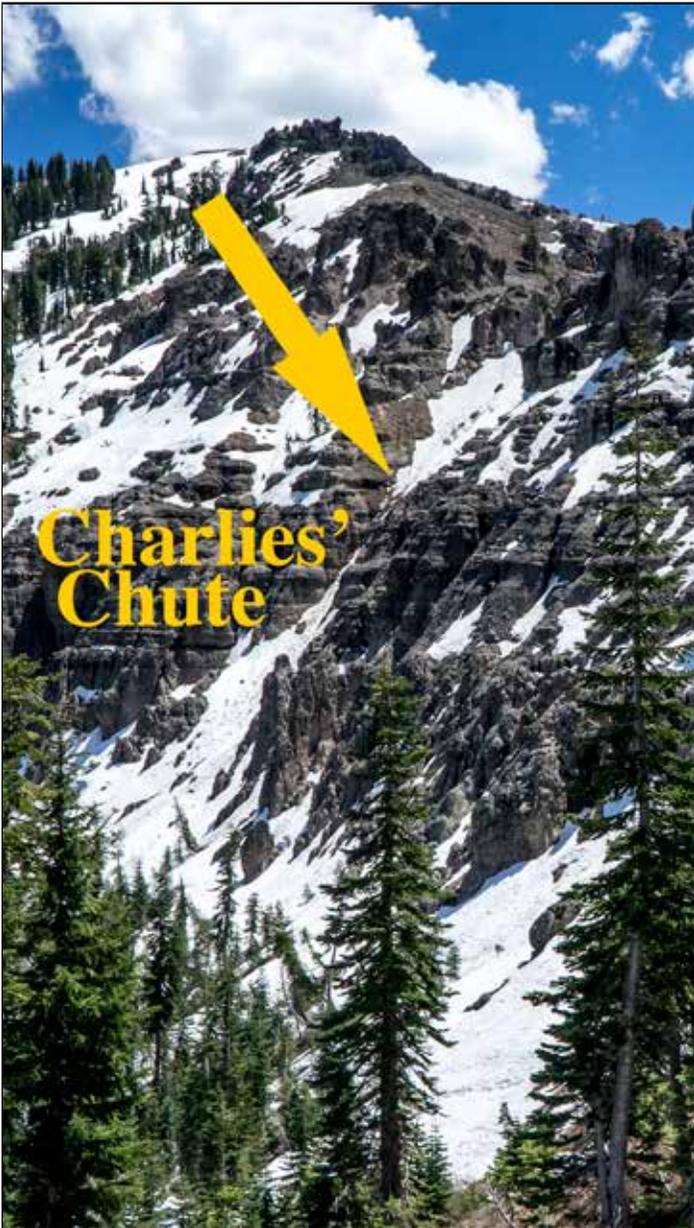
The rope was too short.

The MHRT was re-assembled with a longer rope and headed up again. This time - success. The whole route was covered, views and interesting rock formations were enjoyed, and then, the Then & Now in this issue, "Charlie Chaplin Dancing at Sugar Bowl" was made.

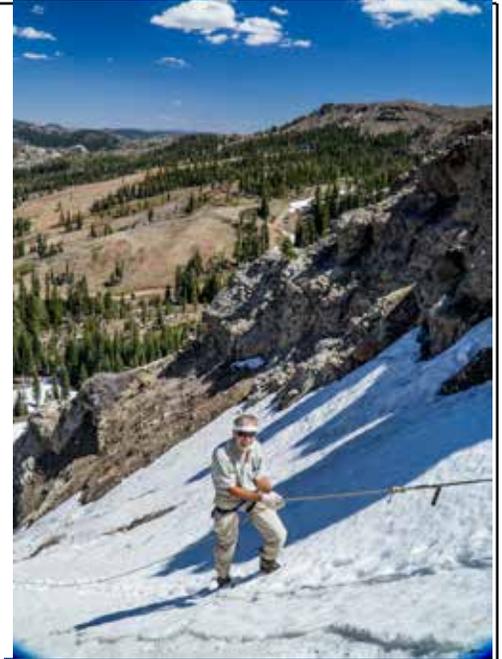
Charlie was having a little fun one day and, finding a suitable rock, he climbed up and began dancing. The MHRT had looked all over the mountainside for the rock with no success but this time, in Part II of the re-enactment, we canvassed closely. An engineer on the team did some common sense analysis about where the rock might be. Using that analysis as a clue, the team found the rock and installed Art Clark on top so he could do a little jig. Maybe no one had stood in that place since Charlie Chaplin 90 years before. Why would they have?

Art Clark in what we'll call Charlie's Chute, Castle Pk. in the background.





Right, Art Clark near the top of Charlie's Chute, above the point of the arrow in the picture at left.



## A Little Geology on Donner Summit

There are some really interesting rock formations in the Palisades. Here is an alcove in the rock and a little "window". The rock is all volcanic conglomerate deposited in mud flows some 30 million years ago. It's easy to see the striations of the different flows in the rock. The flows came from what is now Nevada. Then the Sierra began to rise about 5 million years ago pushing up the conglomerate which was like icing on the granite cake that lay below. The Sierra rose and erosion shaped the mountains with river courses carving into the conglomerate exposing the granite the lay underneath. Finally, the glaciers came and ice filled the river canyons gouging and moving rock and exposing more granite.

# 1<sup>st</sup> Transcontinental Telephone Line

Another First for Donner Summit.

## Atlantic to pacific by telephone

According to Popular Mechanics, April 1913 issue, page 576 in an article entitled, "Atlantic to Pacific by Telephone," by the end of the year it would be possible to connect the two coasts of the United States by telephone. Before the new lines were completed the longest telephone line in the world was between "New York, or Boston, and Denver." The new line would be 3,300 miles in length and it would cost \$18/minute to use. By the time the New York Times reported on the first transcontinental conversation in January of 1915 the cost had dropped to \$20.70 for three minutes.

Not according to the article but true nevertheless, the line went over Donner Summit, so the first transcontinental telephone line joined the first transcontinental railroad and the first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway (its route completed or laid out in 1913). The first transcontinental telegraph line had gone over Echo Summit following the Pony Express route but came over to join the railroad when that was completed.

By the end of the decade the first transcontinental air route, growing out of the transcontinental air mail route, would arrive going over Donner Summit as well. That's a clean sweep for Donner Summit.

For publicity Alexander Graham Bell made the "first" transcontinental long distance call from New York to San Francisco.\* That was January 25, 1915. He called his former assistant, Thomas Watson, and repeated the same words he'd used when he called Watson upstairs in 1876, "Mr. Watson--come here--I want to see you." Watson had run upstairs that first time but in 1915, it would have taken a bit longer, given his location in San Francisco.

Actually that call was made for publicity's sake and from the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco (100th anniversary this year). The actual line was completed in June, 1914 and the first call was made in July of that year. ATT held off publicizing the line though until the Exposition. That was good advertising.

Parenthetically, The California Historical Society has an exhibition about the Exposition in Downtown San Francisco until December 6 and is sponsoring another at the Palace of Fine Arts until January 10, 2016. The Donner Summit Historical Society has a very tenuous connection too. We were asked to make a 20 Mile Museum sign for the Wise Power House in Auburn. The turbine, still in the powerhouse, is the same turbine that was on display at the Panama Pacific Exposition. You can go to our website's 20 Mile Museum page and learn about it or drive along Ophir Rd. half way between the Ophir exit from I-80 and the Taylor Rd. exit.

\* actually it was a four-way call among Georgia, San Francisco, Washington D.C. and New York. Participants included the president of ATT and the President of the U.S.

There were 130,000 telephone poles on the transcontinental telephone route, some of which were on Donner Summit and some of which are still there below China Wall as proven by Art Clark. See page 14 of our February '15 Heirloom. You will be amazed.

**This is the 100th  
Anniversary  
of that first  
transcontinental  
telephone line - that  
went over Donner  
Summit**



Here is one real ticket to the Exposition in 1915 in case you have the opportunity to go. It comes from the editor's family archives. Grandma attended and left behind a book of tickets.

## Other Snowshed Uses Pt 1

# SCHEDULE FIXED FOR SCENIC TRIP

## Elaborate Tour Arranged to Start Next Saturday for Pleasure Place

R. R. L'HOMMEDIEU

This comes from the San Francisco Call on July 1, 1910. It was intended to go with an article about other uses for snowsheds. From February to May we covered all aspects of snowsheds and their designated uses, but there are still a few other aspects that deserve attention. Had the Gold Rush re-enactment not gone on for so long your curiosity could have been sated this month regarding snowsheds. Instead you'll just have to make do with this and wait for next month.

Here a regular column in The Call gave information about a coming trip to Lake Tahoe. We've distilled the article to focus on the important point - the use of the snowsheds.

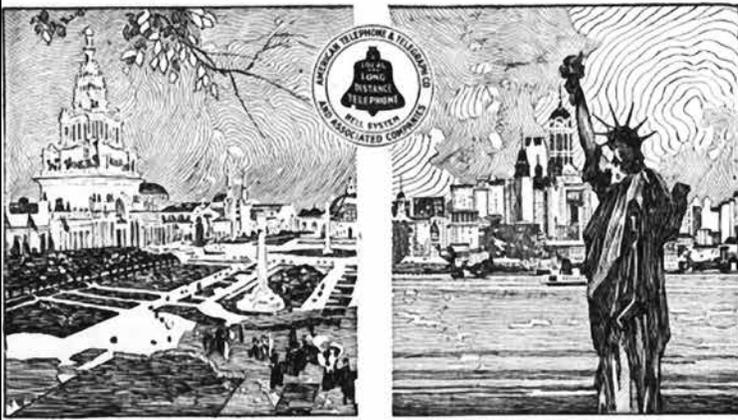
The trip was to leave San Francisco by ferry and travel to Lake Tahoe averaging 17 mph. On the way they'd go through Hayward, Dublin, Tracy, Banta, Lathrop, Stockton (luncheon), Sacramento and Auburn where they'd stay the night in a hotel. Their cars could be garaged at the Placer Auto and Machine Co.

Once in the mountains prospective drivers were warned, "Use care going through snowsheds and downhill some short turns, follow main road through woods and rocks to signboard, there take left road leading to Summit. A steady climb through snowsheds to the left good road to Summit house [sic]. Follow main road through snowsheds again, then very rough and steep, two mile grade to sawmill. Cross under mill track bear to the right. Good level road to Truckee for seven miles."

From Truckee it was a 15 mile drive to "Tahoe tavern" [sic] where they'd arrive after a second full day of driving.

The return trip retraced the original route. When they got to the ferry to San Francisco drivers were to "Check in on boat: assemble at motor club rooms, corner Van Ness and Golden Gate avenues San Francisco for photograph."

Traveling in the snowsheds does not seem to be any kind of big deal in 1910 at all and even the newspaper was reporting it and suggesting its use. Trains also used the snowsheds in those days! So "Use care going through snowsheds..." was good advice. Today it's difficult to get RR permission to officially use the sheds but this year the Donner Party Hike has permission - see page 2



## Creating a New Art

At the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, the exhibit of the Bell System consisted of two telephones capable of talking from one part of the room to another.

Faint as the transmission of speech then was, it became at once the marvel of all the world, causing scientists, as well as laymen, to exclaim with wonder.

Starting with only these feeble instruments, the Bell Company, by persistent study, incessant experimentation and the expenditure of immense sums of money, has created a new art, inventing, developing and perfecting; making improvements great and small in telephones, transmitter, lines, cables, switchboards and every other piece of apparatus and plant required for the transmission of speech.

AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY  
AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

One Policy

One System

Universal Service

As the culmination of all this, the Bell exhibit at the Panama-Pacific Exposition marks the completion of a Trans-continental Telephone line three thousand four hundred miles long, joining the Atlantic and the Pacific and carrying the human voice instantly and distinctly between New York and San Francisco.

This telephone line is part of the Bell System of twenty-one million miles of wire connecting nine million telephone stations located everywhere throughout the United States.

Composing this System, are the American Telephone and Telegraph Company and Associated Companies, and connecting companies, giving to one hundred million people Universal Service unparalleled among the nations of the earth.

Atlantic Pacific Rural Press March 27, 1915.

(The DSHS stops at nothing to bring the finest of historical research in primary sources to its readers.)



Here is a small part of an 1880 map of Nevada County showing Donner Summit.

Note the Serene Lakes were "Sereno Lakes" and were three lakes in those days.

The South Yuba Canal Co. owns the river into Summit Valley.

Cascade Lake is Donner Summit Lakes.

Cascade Station on the railroad was just below Cascade Lakes.

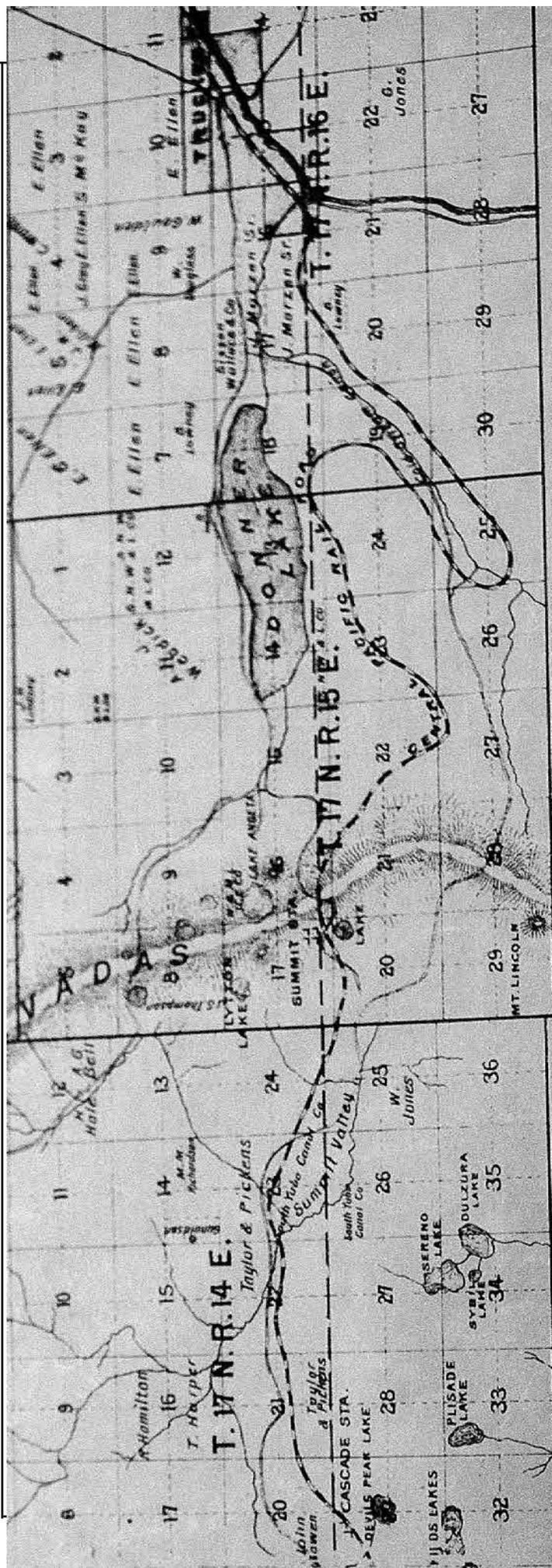
Kidd Lake is Devil's Peak Lake.

Summit Station is the RR station at the summit with Lake Mary nearby.

Mt. Lincoln was Mt. Lincoln and Lake Angela was Lake Angela.

Mt. Judah had not been named yet. That would happen when Johnny Ellis petitioned to have the unofficial Emigrant Pk. renamed in 1935.

Donner Peak is not named.



# From the DSHS Archives

## Mark Twain Discovers Snow at Cisco, May, 1868

I rather dread the trip over the Sierra Nevada tomorrow. Now that you can come nearly all the way from Sacramento to this city by rail, one would suppose that the journey is pleasant enough, but it is not. It is more irksome than it was before -- more tiresome on account of your being obliged to shift from cars to stages and back again every now and then in the mountains. We used to rattle across all the way by stage, and never mind it at all, save that we had to ride thirty hours without stopping.

The other day we left the summer valleys of California in the morning -- left grassy slopes and orchards of cherry, peach and apple in full bloom -- left strawberries and cream and vegetable gardens, and a mild atmosphere that was heavy with the perfume of flowers; and at noon we stood seven thousand feet above the sea, with snow banks more than a hundred feet deep almost within rifle-shot of us. We were at Cisco, the summit of the Sierras, where for miles the railway trains rush along under tall wooden sheds, built to protect them from snows and the milder sort of avalanches. We had been running alongside of perpendicular snow-banks, whose upper edges were much above the cars. At Cisco the snow was twenty or thirty feet deep. I said to an old friend who lives there:

"Good deal of snow here."

"No -- there ain't now -- but we had considerable during the winter."

"Without meaning any offense, what might you call 'considerable'?"

"Sixty-eight feet on a dead level, and more a falling!"

"Good morning."

"Good morning -- stay awhile?"

"Excuse me. My time is limited."

He spoke the truth. And yet he had the hardihood to spend two years there. Leaving Cisco, they sent us twenty four miles in four-horse sleighs, around and among the tremendous mountain peaks, grand with their regalia of storm-clouds. We swept by the company's stables on a level with their roofs, so deep was the snow.



Cisco Grove about the time of Mark Twain's visit.

Taking the advice of people I deemed wiser than myself, I had wrapped up myself in overcoats, and put on overshoes. But here in the midst of these snowy wastes the sun flamed out as hot as August, and I had to take off everything I could. It was a perfect tropical day. I got badly sunburned, and partly snow-blind, and I sweated more and growled more than I had in a year before. All this in a four-horse sleigh, in the midst of snow full twenty feet deep!

All I wish to say is, that I do not despise to go sleigh riding in the summer time. And the next time I have to do such a thing I mean to have a fan, and some ice cream, and a suit of summer linen along.

The railroad is progressing rapidly. It is promised that those who take the Overland well along toward July, shall go hence to Chicago in eight days. [Cisco was "end of track" while the summit tunnels were being finished.]

Mark Twain,  
from his letters, May, 1868

THE CHICAGO REPUBLICAN, May 31, 1868

See our July '14 [Heirloom](#) for other Twain experiences: Mark Twain on Donner Summit, at Meadow Lake, traveling by horseback in 1866, and taking a stage ride over Donner Summit to Virginia City.

# From the DSHS Archives

**"POLITICS AT TINKER'S** - A gentleman writes the Nevada *Gazette* from Tinker's Station, in Meadow Lake township, that there are but two Democrats living in the precinct; that one of those has not sense enough to get registered, while the other has formed a matrimonial connection with a female of African descent, who will probably "coerce" him into voting for Grant." [U.S. Grant was a Republican.]

Marysville Daily Appeal, July 8, 1868  
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Meadow Lake ca. 1868

Tinker's Station (the Tinker's above) of course was the hotel run by James Tinker who also drove the stage to the Cedars.

Truckee did not really exist in those days and the population in the area was at Meadow Lake, a gold mining camp, hence the township was not named Truckee but rather Meadow Lake. The picture above is by Alfred A. Hart, taken of Meadow Lake about 1868. You can read about Meadow Lake in our book review of Meadow Lake, Gold Town in the August, '14 Heirloom, the hike to Meadow Lake in the September, '14 Heirloom, or in the Meadow Lake to Phoenix Lake article in the October, '14 Heirloom. You can also read Mark Twain's impressions of Meadow Lake in the July, '14 Heirloom. Twain's brother, incidentally, lived in Meadow Lake for awhile.

1868 on Donner Summit was momentous. The Chinese had been working on Tunnel 6 for two years. They hewed the 1659 foot tunnel out of solid Sierra granite. It was an amazing feat as they attacked the rock from four different directions. In September of the previous year they'd broken through and daylight ran the length of the tunnel, but no trains. The initial tunnel had to be enlarged for trains. At the end of 1867 an excursion train took political bigwigs to the summit and through the tunnel. The first passenger train went through some months later and then track was connected that had been laid into Nevada and the first train ran to Reno in June. Donner Summit was close to being connected to the world and one could take the train from San Francisco to Reno and then Virginia City. In early 1869 the transcontinental railroad would be finished and California would be connected to the world via Donner Summit.

**"ON A PLEASURE TRIP** - A party of eight Sacramento ladies, accompanied by a sufficient number of gentlemen to render proper escort, left yesterday afternoon for Summit Valley, near Tinker's Station, to spend a few weeks "roughing it." They will reside in a little cabin which has been provided for them, and devote their time to amusement and health seeking."

Sacramento Daily Union July 13, 1871

Just a few years before it had taken months to get to California. Then it took weeks by stage. With the opening of the railroad the trip across the country could be done in 10 days at 25-40 mph. That would be in only a few months, May, 1869. Technology, the country, and Donner Summit were marching on.

# Book Review

## The Record Setting Trips by Auto from Coast to Coast 1909-1916

McConnell 2993 325 pages

Once the automobile was invented people wanted to use it and extreme users wanted to do extreme things like drive across the country. The first attempt to cross the country by auto was over Donner Summit in 1901 by Alexander Winton (see our August '14 Heirloom). The first successful trip was by Horatio Jackson in 1903 but he did not go over Donner Summit so he's irrelevant.

Once transcontinental travel could be done it was done over and over by professionals who tried setting cross-country records. They were supported by the automobile companies who wanted to demonstrate their wares. There followed some tours ("by luxury loving men, women and children... [in] a dozen Premier autos" and a "transcontinental automobile train"), families, and women – ordinary people.

This book traces the record setting trips by professionals but also goes into the more ordinary folks who followed showing that transcontinental travel was really for everyone, that by 1916 there were no "insurmountable difficulties in the way." In 1909 the record crossing was 31 days and in 1916 it was five days. Auto travel, in 1916, could almost compete for speed with the railroad. McConnell sums up the change over the eight years covered by the book by saying, "...the earlier transcontinental trips merely proved that it was possible to drive across the country in an automobile, from 1909 onward such trips increasingly illustrated how pleasurable coast-to-coast travel could be. In short, each of the eight journeys described in The Record-Setting Trips represented a public test of the automobiles' performance and reliability."

"Transcontinental runs are rapidly being relegated to the commonplace in motoring, ... sturdiness and flexibility of the modern automobile under unusually severe road conditions are strikingly demonstrated."

From chapter 7, "Pushing the Railroads in the Matter of Time"

The 1910 trip was to break Whitman's own record of 15 days by having the four men alternate driving and driving as close to non-stop as possible. They would never go more than 35 mph to avoid accidents and tickets. They used a 4 cylinder Reo Thirty which cost \$1250.

THE RECORD -

SETTING TRIPS

By Auto from Coast to Coast, 1909-1916

Curt McConnell



STANFORD GENERAL BOOKS  
Stanford University Press  
Stanford, California 2003

The book covers eight journeys across the continent by automobile in detail using newspaper and magazine articles, journals, advertisements, and lots of pictures and quotes. It's a fun journey through the book if you are interested in the early history of the automobile.

A couple of the journeys went over Donner Summit and so we should focus on those.

The first of the "record setting trips" going over Donner Summit was in 1910. Lester Whitman was a serial transcontinentalist (a DSHS term for someone who crossed the continent many times in the old days). He and Eugene Hammond had crossed the country in the third car to cross in 1903. Whitman had crossed again in 1904 and 1906 and was ready, with Hammond and two others, to cross again in 1910.

The men did break the old record crossing the country in 10 days 18 hours and 12 minutes, knocking four days off the old record. They tried to travel 25-35 mph during the day and 15-25 at night. At the end they averaged 15.19 mph driving time.

The next “record setting trip” that went over Donner Summit was very different: “Millionaire Auto Party Leads Drive for Transcontinental Highway.”

This was an auto caravan of amateur drivers. They started their journey in June, 1911 taking about 40 people, including 12 women and 3 boys (different accounts reported different numbers). They took 10 Premier cars, one pilot car to guide the way, and a baggage car and left Atlantic City for San Francisco. They accomplished their feat using hotels covering 4617 miles in 35 days of running time.



Part of the millionaires' group in 1911 sitting on Donner Pass above Donner Lake. The pennant on the car says, "Ocean to Ocean."

For the other trips we really have only the maps and the log books to show they went over Donner Summit. The “record setting” drivers were not sightseers but the Millionaire group took pictures – e.g. the one of Donner Lake.

The purpose of the millionaires’ trip, besides recreation and meeting a challenge, was to advocate for a transcontinental highway. To that end they carried a flag from President Taft which they brought to San Francisco. Along the way they met various politicians looking for support. Of course two years later, the Lincoln Highway was inaugurated.

This trip had one important outcome. It was the first one to really show that amateurs could cross the country by automobile and not just professionals. It encouraged many more people to try.



Part of the 1910 by Les Whitman. It went over Donner Summit and this is a good picture.

The third of the “record setting trips” that went over Donner Summit was done in the summer of 1916 by five men driving in a Marmon in relays. They went almost non-stop with two drivers in the car along with a local pilot. The others traveled ahead by train. They did cross Donner Summit but left no impressions of it since they were in a hurry to get to San Francisco. The San Francisco Chronicle said only, “The run down the Sierra was negotiated at a good clip.”

They did set a record of five days, 18 hours and 30 minutes. The whole trip averaged 25.1 mph for 602 miles per day. The run from Reno to San Francisco was the second slowest leg, averaging only 20.6 mph. It helped that the journey was meticulously planned along with the help of local Marmon dealers across the country, the local pilots so they would not get lost, and the UPRR. That record was light years away from the first transcontinental trip, only 13 years before, that took 64 days.

Besides setting the record, the secondary objective of this trip was “to demonstrate the value of the auto in time of mobilization and to arouse interest in the building of military roads...” 1916 was the year before the U.S. entered WWI.



# Then & Now with Art Clark

## Charlie Chaplin Dancing at Sugar Bowl, 1925

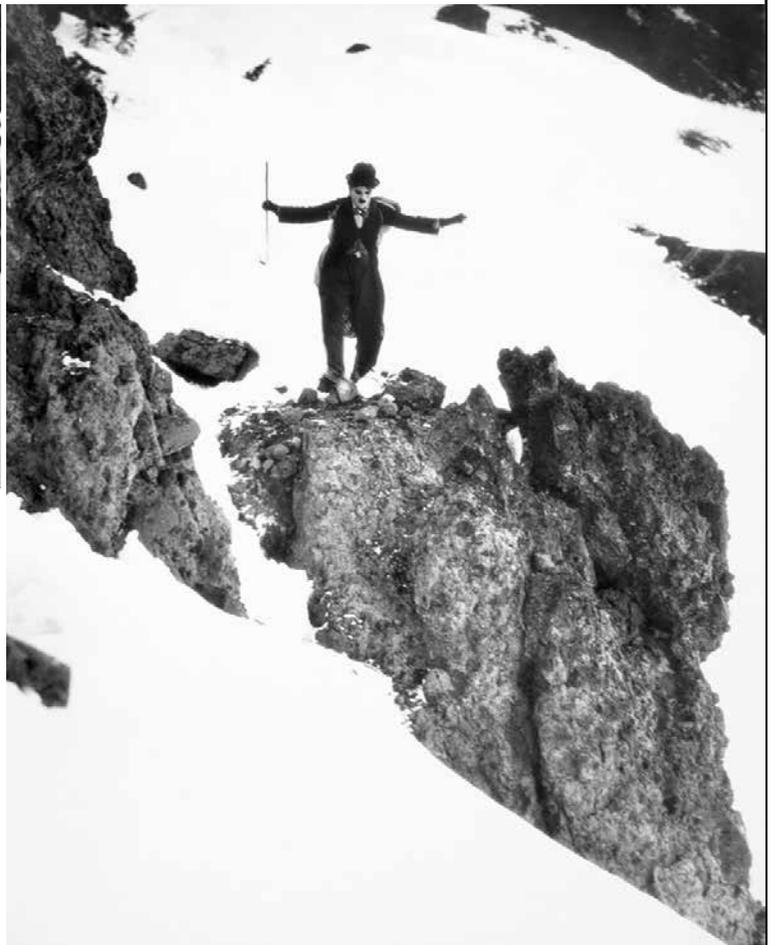


The movie "Gold Rush" was partly filmed at what is now Sugar Bowl in 1925. It was Charlie Chaplin's favorite movie and the highest grossing comedy at the time.

Here is Charlie dancing on a rock at the Palisades about a third of the way up the steep slope. In the "Now" below, that's Art Clark playing Charlie Chaplin.

You can read more about the movie in our August '11 [Heirloom](#). There are also two Gold Rush Then & Now's on our website's Then & Now page.

Location: N39° 17.551' W120° 20.199'



Had there been more snow the rock would stand out better but it took a couple of visits to find the rock. Going up the slope in snowshoes is tough work - sometimes death-defying.



# Then & Now with Art Clark

## Summit Hotel #1

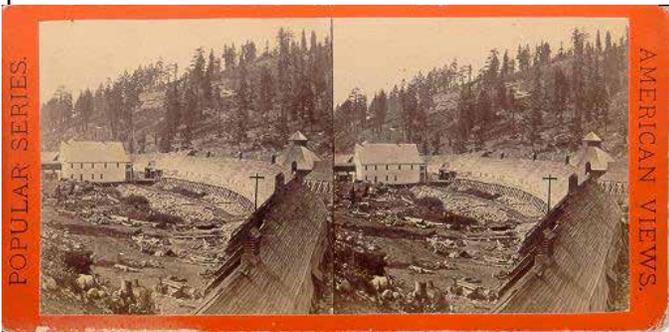


This is one of our more dramatic Then & Now's.

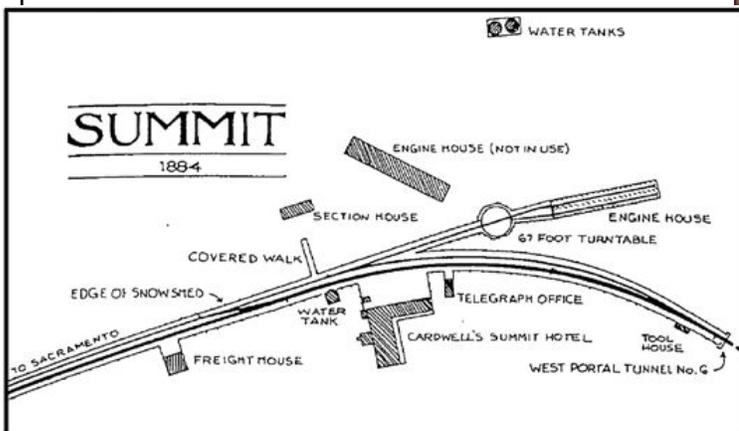
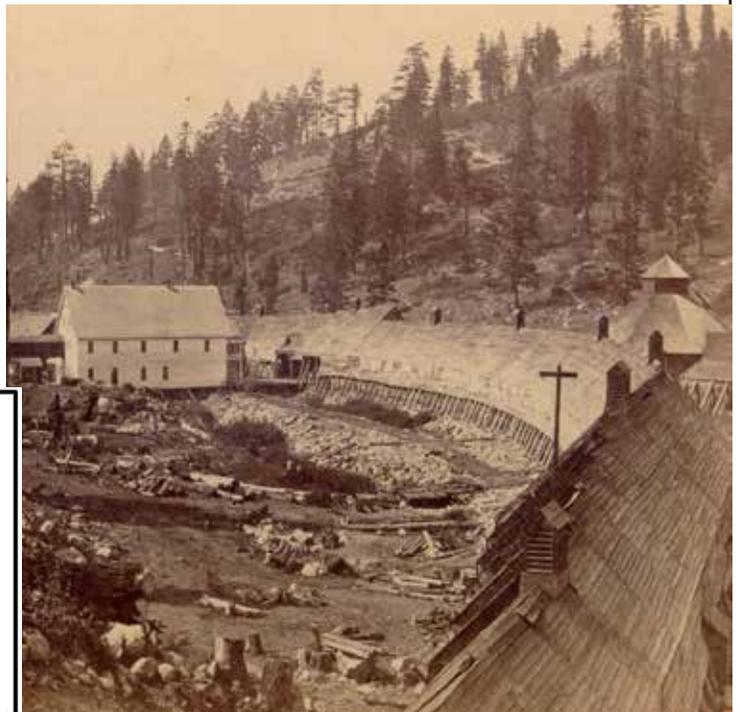
The first Summit Hotel sat right on the railroad across from what is now Donner Ski Ranch. The location is just west a few hundred yards from Sugar Bowl Rd. that goes into Judah Lodge. The top pictures here show the overpass on Sugar Bowl Rd. Behind the camera is Tunnel 6.

The hotel burned in 1892 and was replaced immediately a few hundred yards south. That second Summit Hotel burned in 1925 and was not replaced.

See "Art Clark Finds the Summit Hotel" [#2] in our 7/13 [Heirloom](#). Other articles about the hotels were in our 2/11, 4/11, and 5/11 [Heirlooms](#).



Below, Summit Hotel I layout in 1884.



**DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

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

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\_\_\_\_\_ Renewing Membership

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

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# Walking Through Donner Summit History

Dozens of stories of Donner Summit history, dozens of historical quotes, hundreds of photographs and drawings, and lots of maps.

218 pages ©2015

**Purchase a Copy:**

[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

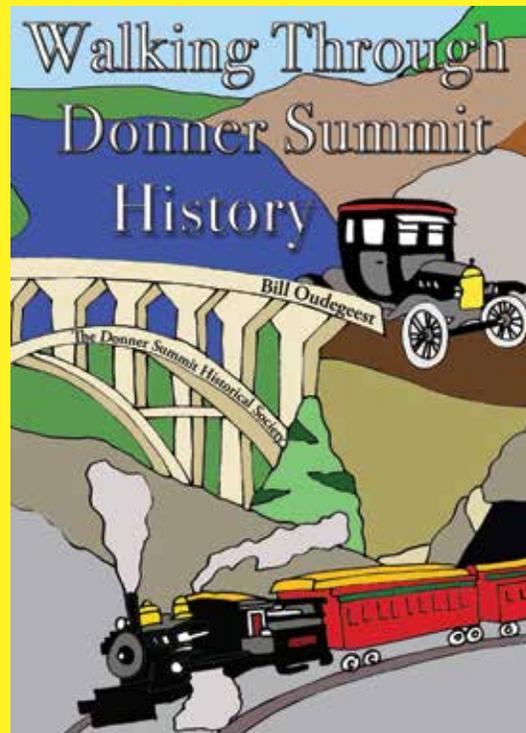
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- The Bookshelf in Truckee

**\$25** includes S/H and sales tax.



## From the Back Cover

Donner Summit is the most important historical square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. Native Americans crossed

for thousands of years. The first emigrants to arrive in California with wagons came over Donner Summit. The first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental air route, and the first transcontinental telephone line all crossed Donner Summit. The first person to bicycle around the world went over Donner Summit, as did the first person to make a motorized crossing of the U.S. and the first people to attempt to cross the country in an automobile. That's just a bit of the richness that is Donner Summit history.

Then there are the fun small stories: frozen turkeys roosting in the trees, the two-story out house at the Summit Hotel, blindfolded mules, and the Spider Dance.

You can walk through Donner Summit history, where it all took place. In the walks described here you will read the stories, "hear" history through people's words, and see the historical photographs that bring the history to life.

## DSHS Volunteers

## Slide Shows at the DSHS

If you've visited the DSHS at the blinking light in Soda Springs you've probably been amazed at the collection that Norm Saylor has amassed encompassing all things Donner Summit and then a bit more. The strength of his collection are the thousands of historic photographs which sit in dozens of binders ready for visitors' perusal.

It's not an ideal situation since they are not labeled individually and the binders are not really labeled either. One step to a solution is the column to the right. Another solution is Judy Lieb who has volunteered over the years doing things like cataloging the book collection for which she had help from Gina Salomon. Judy's new project, with Norm's help, is to label the thousands of pictures, re-organize them, organize new pictures Norm has been buying, and develop some collections that can be turned into slide shows (see the column to the right). She and the local Serene Lakes mayor, Ralph Suter, and his wife have spent hours on the job and will be spending more as the summer goes by and Judy can be in residence. If you are interested in helping with the project send Judy an email at [judy\\_lieb@mac.com](mailto:judy_lieb@mac.com).

Another volunteer, Molly Beucus, has been working on organizing the museum in general including the stock of brochures for easy access. We now have more than a dozen brochures (see the brochures page on our website for brochures on Tunnel 6, Native Americans, Emigrant Trail, etc.) and organization has become important.

We can also use other volunteers, for example to review books for our Heirloom or to write articles or to do research. We can also use people to help with the Heritage Trail (see above) You may find new purpose to your life.

Norm Saylor's collection of historical photographs relating mostly to Donner Summit is incomparable. The photos number in the thousands.

They've always been a bit difficult to view since they are housed in binders. On a recent visit to the Lincoln Area Historical Society for a meeting a better solution was on display.

They'd mounted a television that could show a continuous slide show of local photographs.

A quick DSHS board meeting was held via the internet and a large television and a couple of USB drives were purchased. Then we set to work making our first slide show. It's now in action at the DSHS for visitors' enjoyment and Norm is working on selecting some of his favorites for future slide shows. We can see the idea expanding. Stop by and take a look.

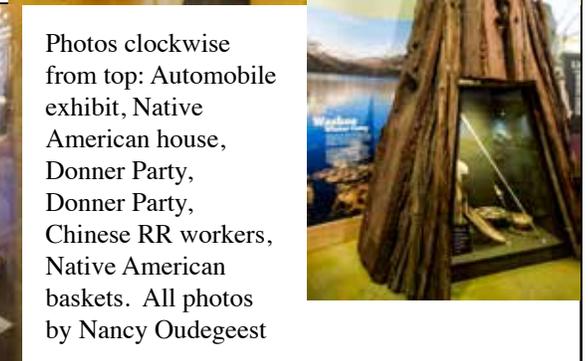
# New Museum at Donner Lake

On June 6 the new Visitors' Center at the Donner Memorial State Park was opened with gala festivities.

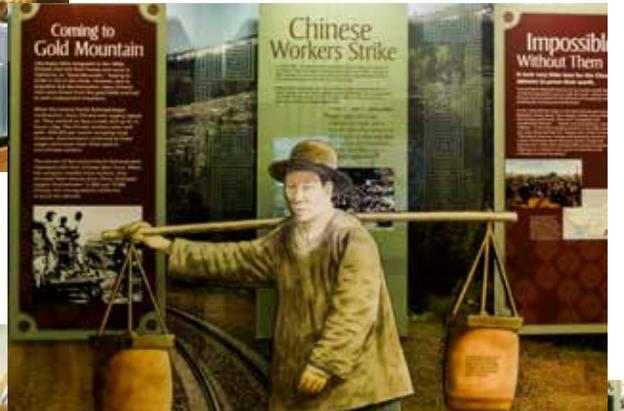
The new building has fine displays of local history and replaces the old museum which will now house storage and offices. The new building is called a "Visitors' Center" because it does not meet the apparently strict requirements to be called a museum. Displays cover many important aspects of local history: the railroad, the Chinese, the automobile, Native Americans, and the Donner Party. The auto displays include pictures supplied and enlarged by the Donner Summit Historical Society from Norm Saylor's incomparable collection.

There is one weakness in the displays and that is the lack of any mention of T.C. Wohlbruck who built the first visitors' center in his "canteen and service station" at what is now the State Park. He had historical displays and visitors could buy slivers of wood from one of the cabins occupied by part of the Donner Party. You can read about Wohlbruck, the Emigrant Monument, and see pictures of his in the October, November, and December '12 Heirlooms. You can also see our 20 Mile Museum sign on Old 40 opposite the monument.

The Visitors' Center also has a nice gift shop (below) where you can buy books, maps, postcards, etc. about local topics including our [Walking Through Donner Summit History](#) book.



Photos clockwise from top: Automobile exhibit, Native American house, Donner Party, Donner Party, Chinese RR workers, Native American baskets. All photos by Nancy Oudegeest

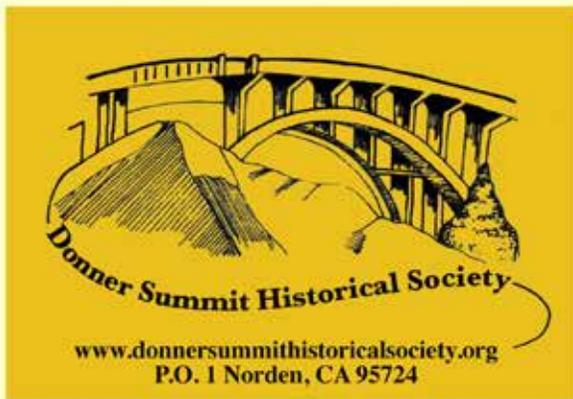


# New Brochure - A Scenic Byway

## A MOST SCENIC BYWAY



Get off the freeway and enjoy the California Sierra.



A publication of the Donner Summit Historical Society, ©2015

The Donner Summit Historical Society has produced a series of brochures about Donner Summit touting its wonders. The list is below.

For some time Norm Saylor, president, has been pushing for a brochure to correct a grave error. Ads, circulars and newspapers articles that tout the Yuba-Donner Scenic Byway either completely ignore Donner Summit or they give it very short shrift. You can hardly see Donner Pass or Donner Summit (the most historically important square mile in California) if it's even mentioned.

Our brochure department has been busy, as you can see from the list below making and keeping up with the demand by reprinting. Nevertheless this spring the challenge was taken up and the brochure to the left was developed, printed and disseminated. On one side (8.5" X 18") is the Scenic Byway and on the other (below), listing just a few of the Donner Summit area's highlights, is the route on Old 40 from Truckee to Cisco Grove.

Like all our brochures it's available on our website, at the DSHS, the Summit Restaurant, and the Welcome Centers in Truckee and Auburn.

- DSHS Brochures (all available on our website):
- Tunnel 6 The Most Interesting Unknown Historical Spot in California
  - Old 40 from Rocklin to Truckee
  - Native Americans of Donner Summit and Summit Valley
  - Historic Hikes of Donner Summit
  - The Incredible Summit Valley
  - Donner Pass - The Most Important Historic Square Mile
  - The 20 Mile Museum
  - The Lincoln Highway Through Donner Pass
  - Take the Scenic Route over Donner Summit
  - The Donner Summit Historical Society
  - The Emigrant Trail Over Donner Pass
  - The Snowsheds of Donner Pass
  - Summit Canyon at Donner Pass