

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society and the most historically significant square mile in California.

September, 2022 issue #169

Donner Summit -

Magnificent



The view from the crest of the Sierra to the east, is inexpressibly, comprehensive, grand and picturesque.

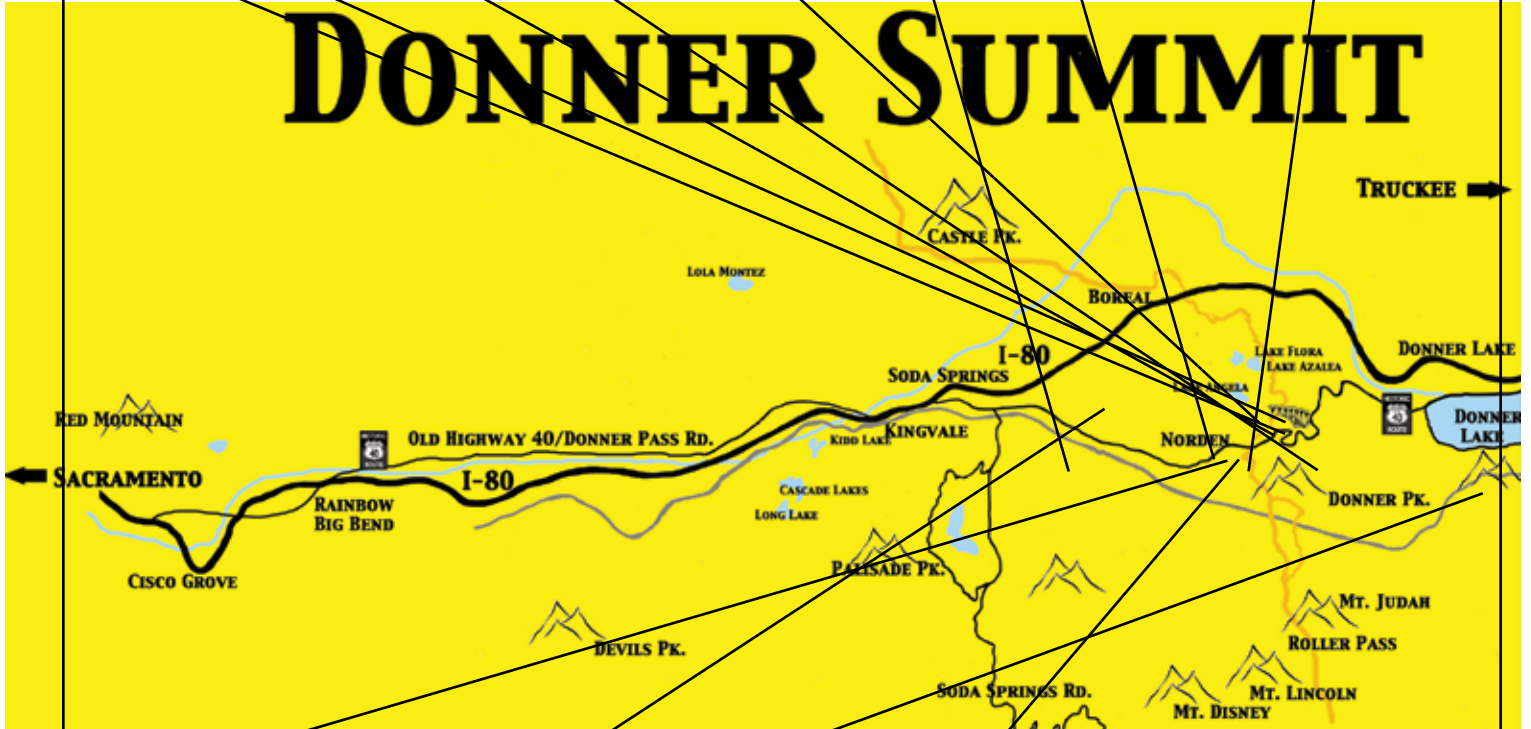
Edwin Bryant
What I Saw in California, 1846

And if you happen to motor by the way of Auburn, Colfax and the Donner Summit, there can be few sights in the world more beautiful and impressive than the one which greets you as you top the hump and suddenly see the whole world drop away below you, with Donner Lake in the middle of it, and the sharp switchbacks of the highway for a foreground. After that sight even Tahoe may seem an anticlimax...

Sacramento Bee September 14, 1929
Looking east from Donner Pass at Donner Lake. Sierra juniper in the left foreground

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Finding Your Way Through Donner Summit History

We've now passed 150 issues of the Heirloom: thousands of pages, thousands of pictures, and hundreds of subjects. You've probably begun to realize that you cannot keep all the history in your head. Even if you remember it all, retrieval is difficult.

Fortunately John Albert Index invented the index* and one of the choices we made back at the birth of the DSHS was to index all our Heirloom articles and pictures. We've diligently kept up the indices so that they are many pages long, full of alphabetized titles and subjects. Go to our website and to any of the Heirloom pages (one for each year) and you'll find links to the Heirloom indices.

One of the strengths of the DSHS is the incomparable historical photograph collection of Norm Saylor, our president. The collection is thousands of pictures and again the sheer number makes finding anything in particular, difficult. Avoid the long URL by going to our website and clicking on the "photographs" link and then to the "historic photo collection link." A third link, to the Flickr URL will take you to those thousands of searchable historical photographs of Donner Summit. Have fun.

*historical society humor

editor:
Bill Oudegeest
209-606-6859
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner Summit

Find us on 

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 Story

For years our research staff has been reading books, articles, web pages, and other sources having to do with Donner Summit. We started saving the quotes that showed the good taste of the people in the past as they raved about Donner Summit's magnificence. Here in our 169th [Heirloom](#) issue we decided to share more of them with our readers along with some contemporary photographs for illustration.

We blocked some pages in this September, '22 [Heirloom](#) issue and then went about harvesting scenic photographs. That proved hard because there are a lot of scenic photographs in the DSHS computers. We could easily have done a whole book rather than a few pages. Then we pulled out our collection of magnificence quotes. We started a new notes page and started to copy from our files and paste the best ones into the notes. Immediately a problem arose. We were copying and pasting everything. Everything was "best." We could easily have done a book of quotes to compliment the photographs.

You'll just have to take our word for it that these are **some** of the best but the "best" is a very large category.



"It is boundless mountain piled on mountain - unbroken granite, bare, verdureless, cold and gray..."

Albert Richardson on visiting Transcontinental Railroad in 1865.
[New York Tribune](#)
in [Beyond the Mississippi](#), 1869

Looking east at Summit Canyon and then Donner Lake from the most inspirational square yard in the most historically significant square mile in California - Donner Summit

"The scenery was of the grandest, yet of the most savage and desolate character. The very highest peaks were close to us, bare rock, except for splotchy covering of thin snow and a few stunted trees. In a deep gorge to the left Lake Donner, to the right lofty cliffs of granite. The air was cold and the wind strong, but I had borrowed a overcoat at the hotel, and with my gloves on was very warm."

Benjamin Avery CPRR AP correspondent on retainer rode a pony to Tunnel 6
[Sacramento Union](#) November 30, 1867



“The Alps, so celebrated in history and by all travelers and admirers of mountain landscape, cannot, I am satisfied, present scenery more wild, more rugged, more grand, more romantic, and more enchantingly picturesque and beautiful than that which surrounds this lake, of which the lake itself composes a part.”

Description of Truckee Lake (Donner) from Edwin Bryant’s book, What I Saw in California, 1846

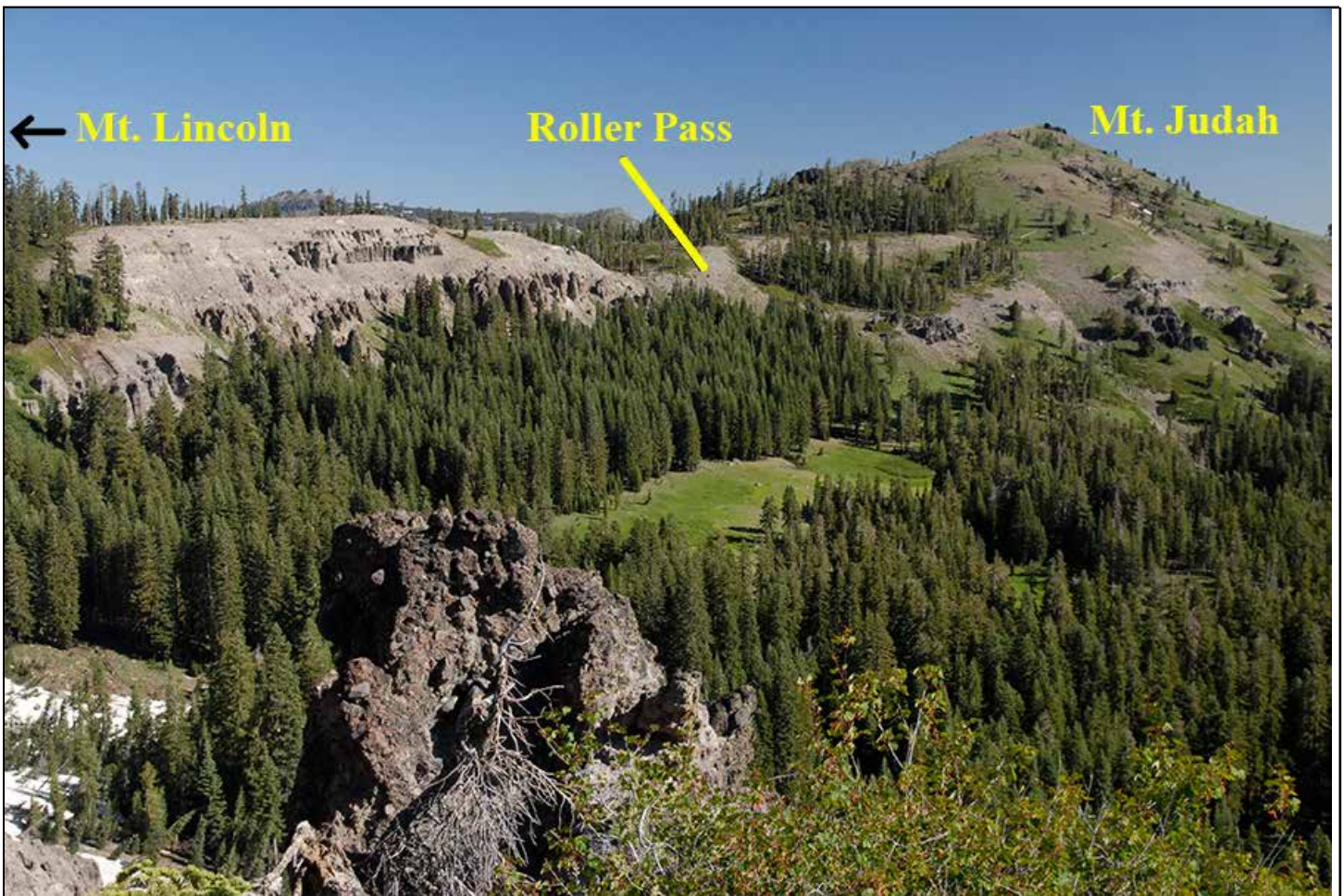
"I don't believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner Pass. As we stood looking down I had a floating sensation...I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes [Donner Lake] I had ever seen. Everything below us seemed suspended in shimmering light."

Thornton Round,
The Good of It All, 1914



“A short distance north of the pass I climbed the dizzy heights of a granite peak. The view was magnificent. Perennial snow, rock, chasm, forest, lake and stream; a veritable map of one of the wildest, grandest parts of America, spread out on every side.”

John Steele, Across the Plains, 1850



We climbed one of the highest peaks near the road and were well repaid for our troubles by the splendid view.

Eliza Ann McCauley, 1852

The east side of Roller Pass looking west

"The air has a fresh crispness about it that gives a new life to the visitor whether he has come from the fertile plains or the foggy city. And no wonder... there are seven thousand feet between you and sea level. Seven thousand feet nearer heaven and so much nearer purity. It is a relief to... look up to the stars, nowhere brighter than here, with only the dark pines closing in the distance... The air redolent with the perfume of fresh grass and wild flowers; and aromatic with pine needles. It is a physical pleasure to breathe, a 'delight to exist'... It is small wonder that a millionaire [Mark Hopkins]... should confess to be happier and healthier here than in the handsomest house on California Street. Nob Hill, to the sierras indeed."

California Spirit of the Times magazine June 13, 1885 pg 3-4



"Standing at the bottom and looking upwards at the perpendicular, and in some places, impending granite cliff, the observer, without any further knowledge on the subject, would doubt if man or beast had ever made good a passage over them. But we knew that man and horse, oxen and wagon, women and children, had crossed this formidable and apparently impassable barrier erected by Nature between the desert and the fertile districts of the coast of the Pacific."

Edwin Bryant,
What I Saw in California, 1846

Editorial Comment

Imagine the emigrants crossing the continent. The journey had generally been uneventful until they reached the desert. Resting at Truckee Meadows (today's Reno) they restored themselves and their surviving animals. Then they looked west and saw the Sierra Nevada. The crossing would be the hardest part of the trek and struck terror for some. Winter was coming, they had to rush to beat the snow. They were low on food. Their animals were weak. They were tired after months of travel. Now they had to cross the mountain range (Donner Pass above and Roller and then Coldstream below). Still, they had time and energy to remark on the magnificence of Donner Summit.



"Here the tourist has in store for him one of the chief joys of physical existence, provided he is strong enough to enjoy it. ... he may live in a region fit for the residence of the gods..."

Travels West
Wm. Minturn, 1877

"...You rise up and up, over Alp on Alp, till the external snows stretch all around you; then through another tunnel, emerging from which you find yourself on the Summit, with Donner Lake — said to be the loftiest sheet of water in the world — reposing in wondrous beauty beneath your feet. Here,... there is a royal feast of fat things for the imagination. It would be impossible to conceive of mountain scenery of more varied sublimity than meets the vision during this ride; where majestic, frowning peaks overhang you and bottomless abysses lie below, and where the splendor of snow and the music of sougning pines invite to 'Summer high in bliss among the hills of God!'"

New York Times report of June 18, 1869, published in the June 28, 1869 newspaper of the George Mortimer Pullman Excursion. At http://cpr.org/Museum/Newspapers/New_York_Times/1869-06-28.html



“Donner Summit has its beauty of high crags and gleaming granite; the view eastward across the lake [Donner Lake] is justly famous” and the beauty should be preserved from billboards and other things... What makes Donner Summit special is that “It has kept a rendezvous with history, and its interest to the person who passes here should be historical as much as scenic. At the summit, for instance, one can enjoy the beauty of the view, but can also see the remains of two primitive roads in addition to the present highway, can look across at the railroad, and can also know that the emigrant wagons were dragged up somewhere to reach the same gap.”

George R. Stewart Donner Pass and those who crossed It



Bonus Quotes

"I was frankly stunned by the beauty of the place – the blue lake below me was just turning to violet in the early-evening light; the snowy peaks surrounding it were tinted gold and pink in the alpenglow. Taking in the view, I recalled how Mary Ann Graves had stood near this same spot and, even though she was embarked on a life-and-death endeavor, paused to marvel at the sight of so much grandeur encapsulated in one vista."

Daniel James Brown, Indifferent Stars Above

Editorial Comment

Since Mr. Brown brings up Mary Ann Graves, above, we should tell a small piece of her remarkable story. She was part of the Donner Party's Forlorn Hope that left the lake in mid-December in quest to get to California for help for the beleaguered party. The Donner Party had been trapped at Donner Lake for six weeks by then. They were dispirited, tired, hungry, and scared. The Forlorn Hope wore homemade snowshoes three miles along the lake and then three miles up one thousand feet to the top of the pass. There Mary Anne turned around and despite the snow, despite the cold, despite the hunger, despite the exhaustion or tramping uphill on snowshoes sinking into the snow with each step, she turned and remarked, "The scenery was too grand for me to pass without notice." She also said one other person said, "we were as near to heaven as we could get." The Forlorn Hope's view was somewhere near the page 1 photograph.

"After breakfast the party, guided by Mr. Goodman, who, since his meeting the party at Ogden, had been most indefatigable in his efforts to make us all perfectly comfortable, proceeded through the long tunnel on the summit (1,659 feet) to the mountain tops overlooking Donner lake. Here the party were for a moment lost in silent admiration of the beautiful landscape reposing in serene beauty far beneath them. However awe-inspiring the scene and sublime the spectacle of so large a number of persons thus quietly doing homage to the great Creator, it could not long continue. The pent up feeling of the party must have vent, and so with one accord they sang – "Praise God from whom all blessings flow".

"The party then scattered among the rocks in search of lichens, mosses, and ferns, of which each lady brought away large selections."

"A Souvenir of the Transcontinental Excursion of Railroad Agents," 1870,

"Over the Sierra, on the San Francisco-Reno Run of the Transcontinental Air Mail, one is favored with a view of nature's grandeur that is unsurpassed... The Sierra, with their deeply cut canyons and crevasses and when heavily mantled with the winter snows, truly present an awe-inspiring sight from the vantage point of an airplane seat..."

"A Forced Landing in Sunny California"
Popular Aviation, March, 1929

The Fun They Had in the Old Days

Where the DSHS research team puts together pictures without a story with a story without pictures to describe compelling fun in the old days.

Our research department was trying to find the story behind the Studebaker automobiles here and on the next two pages, the pictures of which are from the Placer County Archives in Auburn. There are a lot of clues in the pictures pointing to a good story which made our historians wish that other people in the past had been as generous annotating their pictures. We have to work with what we have to work with, though.

Studying the pictures gave us a lot of information which you can delight in discovering with a magnifying glass or reading what follows. Someone went to a lot of trouble painting lots of clues on the automobiles. We see that the automobiles were the first over Donner Summit on April 22, 1926, they were Studebakers, the Auburn Chamber of Commerce was involved, Firestone tires and General gasoline were preferred, they came from the Verne M. Ford garage in Auburn, were headed for Salt Lake City, and the lead car was a scout car. The license plate on the scout car said it was a dealer automobile so presumably it at least, was owned by Mr. Ford who had the dealership in town. The following car was from Grass Valley.

With all those clues it seemed like it would be easy to figure out what the event was that occasioned an early Donner Summit crossing with all the attendant effort that involved, what was in Salt Lake City, details of the trip, and why the people were going and who they were. We set off to search the local newspaper digital morgues with enthusiasm. We searched the local papers and then further away newspapers. No luck. It would almost make one think that they didn't go except that there is the proof in the collection of photographs in the Placer County Archives and there was

no PhotoShop in those days. The trip seems to have been a big deal, taking days over rough or non-existent roads and having sponsors and quite a few participants. How could the newspapers have ignored that?

Quite a few leads have not generated Heirloom stories though so the research department could not be terribly surprised. The



people in the past were just not as responsible as we'd wished they were.

So, here we have pictures without a story.

As our researchers were searching though, they accidentally came across the "Scooter Club" in newspaper articles which highlighted a "Scout Car." First, there was enthusiasm. Surely a connection has been found. "Scout Car" is not a common term. Unfortunately this "Scout Car" was from 1922 and not 1926 when Mr. Ford and his friends apparently went to Salt Lake City. The 1922 scout car, though, was Mr. Ford's. Apparently he did a lot of scouting. Nevertheless as articles



were collected, a story emerged which maybe comes under the heading of what fun they had in the old days. Unfortunately, although we came up with articles, we found no pictures. So here we have a story without pictures.

Can he DSHS editorial staff combine the two, one set of pictures without a story and one set of stories without pictures?

Verne Ford must have been an "adventurous guy. His name pops up in old newspapers many times mostly related to feats of automobile daring: being the first over Donner Summit more than once and then at least once on to Lake Tahoe and Big Trees. He also took his Studebaker over the Rubicon Trail which at least today is no mean feat. He must have been a nice guy too, bringing friends along on his adventures. We'd get more into Mr. Ford but he's not from Donner Summit. We

can see, from a number of newspaper articles that the 1926 trip was just a continuation of Mr. Ford's adventures.

The Auburn Journal (June 15, 1922) carried an article about one of Mr. Ford's adventures.

TWO HOURS UP AND TEN MINUTES DOWN

"...Over two hours was required to climb Mt. Lincoln, but the time required to come down did not exceed ten minutes in numerous cases. "

Stockton Daily Evening Record
July 1, 1922

"Members and friends of the Scooter Club, which annually goes to play in the snow at the summit and vicinity, will leave here next Sunday to spend the day there climbing Mt. Lincoln and sliding down on scooters, which, in spite of their name, are nothing more or less than barrel staves on which are mounted a short upright with a cross piece, on which the passenger sits

(or attempts to) and waits for the inevitable spill at the bottom.

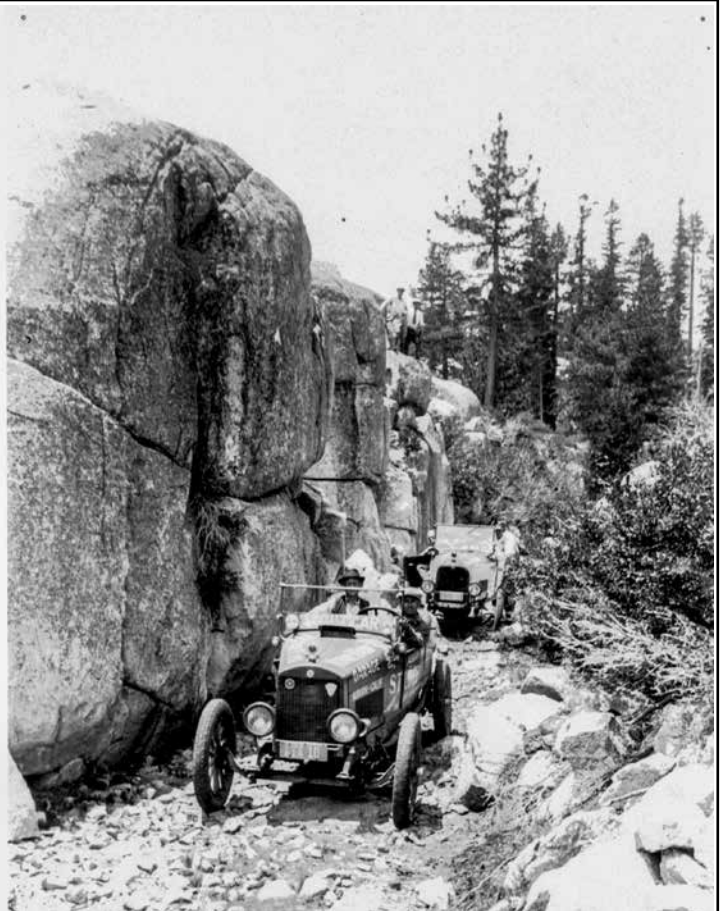
"According to E. T. Robie, one of the staunch members of the club, it takes him three hours to climb Mt. Lincoln and ten minutes to descend. Ten auto loads, carrying approximately fifty people, are expected to make the trip, including a number from Sacramento, San Francisco and other cities in the bay region."

You can see the Scooter Club had lots of connections. Here we should note that Sugar Bowl did not open until 1939 and the Lincoln chair lift not for another decade or so.

The next week both the Auburn Journal and the Newcastle News reported on the aftermath.

"Armed with 'scooters,' or small sleds made from barrel staves, the Scooter Club made its annual trip to the Summit last Sunday, nearly fifty members participating. Following the club's usual custom, Mt. Lincoln, near the summit was climbed and the descent was made via the 'scooters.' Autos from Auburn, Sacramento, Davis and several bay cities made the trip. Lunch was enjoyed on the shore of Lake Mary, a small body of water near the base of Mt. Lincoln. The auto Caravan returned Sunday night."

Imagine the fun: trudging through and into the snow with each step, uphill for a mile or so, gaining more than a thousand feet in elevation, hauling along a "scooter."



The article goes on to say that the adventurers were led to Donner Summit by a scout car, A Studebaker Light Six, "the same car which was the first to Summit this season, Verne Ford drove to the Summit Hotel Saturday evening, and opened the road to Lake Mary Sunday morning. He was accompanied by Budge Huntley, Jimmie Thurston and Carroll Hall." You can see where the Heirloom researchers could easily have gotten confused and conflated the 1926 trip, shown in the pictures here, with a couple of Studebakers being the first over the summit in 1922. The Heirloom researchers are rigorous and professional in their work and take their responsibility to our more than one thousand readers seriously. You can trust us to bring you the most accurate and best of Donner Summit history, despite red herrings along the way.

The articles went on to say that Mr. Ford's adventurous spirit was not sated with scooting down Mt. Lincoln. "Sunday afternoon Ford drove the scout car to Truckee after four hours of bucking the snow drifts between Summit Hotel and the subway under the railroad, on the Donner Lake side. The State Highway Commission has a tractor at work here, and the road will be worked into shape as



soon as possible.” He just couldn’t get enough fun. Driving over the snow down one thousand feet to Donner Lake was not an easy task for early drivers and no one does it today.

The articles recognize the difficulty of driving over Donner Summit in those days.

"Snow still blocks the road under Donner Peak, and the scout car was obliged to descend the old immigrant road, an exceedingly rough stretch, covered with large stones and having a steep grade. The bridge across the stream at the foot of this grade having been washed out, crossing was effected by means of two narrow planks scarcely wide enough for the wheels. After arriving in Truckee, Ford and his companions continued on to Lake Tahoe and Placerville, returning to Auburn early Monday morning."



Two narrow planks? First, who today carries narrow planks in their car just in case? People in the old days were tougher than we are.

Finally the articles list some of the participants and most of the men were accompanied by their wives. The cars must have been packed. There is no word about who actually got to the top of Lincoln and who just enjoyed a lunch down below on the shore of Lake Mary.

The Scooter Club advertised the Mt. Lincoln expedition as an annual event but the annual event only lasted for three years. There’s no word about why the event passed but, spoiler alert, the scooting did not get into the Olympics.

In the middle of July (Auburn Journal July 13 1922) the newspaper reported

"Scooter Club' Car Again in Limelight

The reputation of "S. L. S." the Studebaker Light Six owned by Verne Ford and driven by him as the first car to the Summit this season, the first car to make the round trip to Lake Tahoe by way of Colfax and Placerville this year, and as scout car for the 'Scooter Club,' is again in the limelight, Traffic Officers Lackey and Laporte are now using the car to chase speeders. On their first trip with the car they are said to have nabbed a speed-burner tearing off close to fifty miles an hour.

"The auto will be used on mountain roads by the traffic officers, as motorcycles were found to be dangerous in sandy or dusty roads. A number of complaints have been made to the traffic officers relative to reckless driving on the mountain roads, and the authorities plan to extend their operations so as to cover this territory."



STUDEBAKER builds more six-cylinder cars than any other manufacturer because Studebaker builds them better. We can show you 84 definite points of superiority in the Special-Six over Studebaker's nearest competitor.

In times of close competition, merit wins. Today competition in automobiles is keener than it ever was, because people are buying more carefully than ever.

Studebaker increased its sales 29% in 1921, though the industry, as a whole, showed a falling off of nearly 45%. 1922, up to May 1st, shows a gain in Studebaker production of 143% over the same period of 1921.

Studebaker sales records tell their own story. The buying public has declared for Studebaker superiority.

Touring, \$1475; Roadster (2-Door), \$1425; Roadster (4-Door), \$1475; Coupe (4-Door), \$2150; Sedan, \$2150. All prices f. o. b. factory.



VERNE M. FORD
DEALER

THIS IS A STUDEBAKER YEAR

Auburn Journal
June 22, 1922

Editor's Note: Regarding the pictures on the previous pages from the Placer County Archives, we really have no idea where they were taken. The cars are labled, "FIRST CAR OVER DONNER SUMMIT APRIL 22, 1926." Given Mr. Ford's proclivity for adventure the locations could have been anywhere.

STUDEBAKER CARS

VERNE M. FORD

Auburn, Cal.

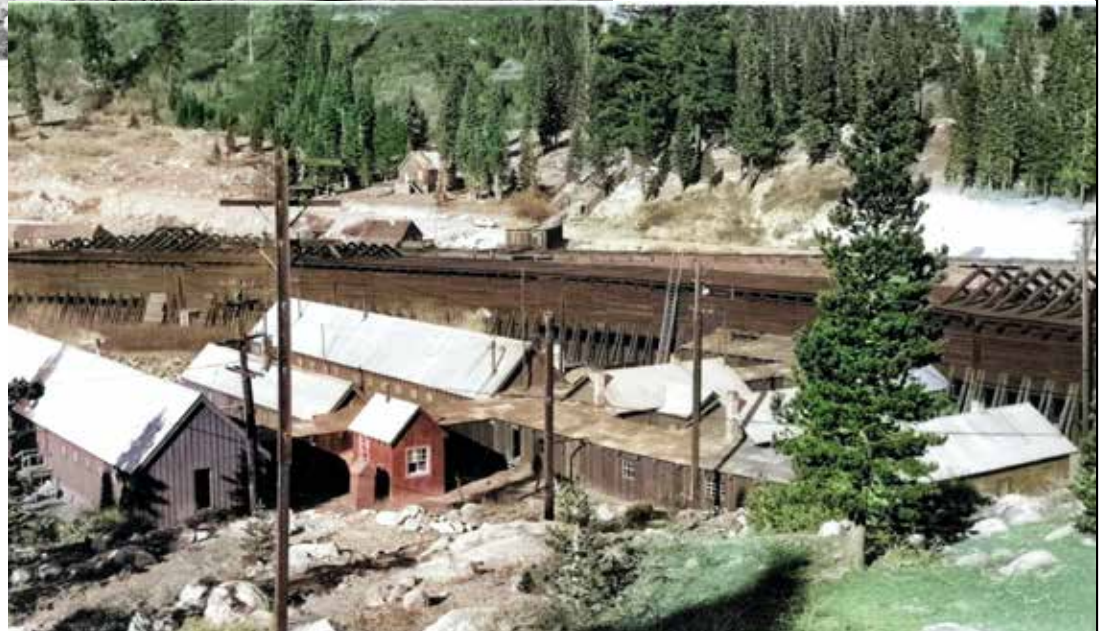
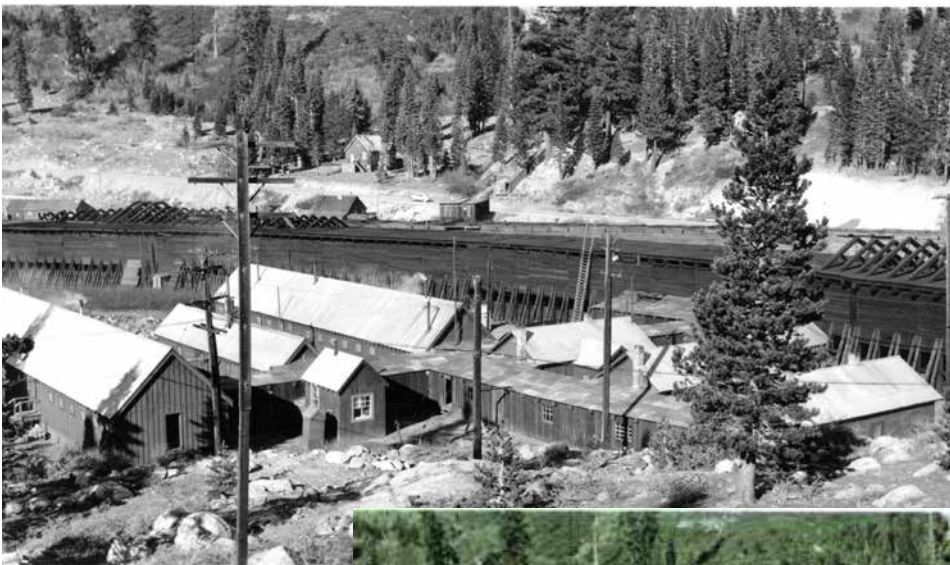
Newcastle News June 21, 1922

Goodyear Service Station

Colorizing History

In the June, '22 issue our lead article was by George Lamson sharing his work colorizing photographs in the Donner Summit Historical Society's database (see page 2 for digital access). If you don't remember George's article or didn't read it, here's the opportunity to go into our archives and pull out that issue.

George has been working at his colorizations trying to answer the question, "What if color could be added back to a Black&White photo to restore the missing visual information and make it more realistic to the original scene." It's an interesting idea. Unfortunately we did the June Heirloom after July and August's so they don't have more of George's work. With this issue we start a monthly feature. The picture here is of the Norden railroad complex of which nothing exists today. In the background are snowsheds and in the foreground workers' housing. Highway 40 is in the background and the car, right in the center, dates the picture to the late 50's maybe. One wag in our editorial department was going to say the dating of the photo was ascertained by looking at the glass insulators on the telephone poles. A more mature member of the team said our readership would never fall for it.



From the DSHS Archives



Donner Trail Memorial Race, 1951
The route went from Donner Summit to
Carpenter Flat below Emigrant Gap.

"We think of the Donner Party as the wrong turn two times, bad luck, bad decisions made in ignorance, dietary issues, dissension, mendacity, evil, horror-filled, and unbelievable hardship." And then there was murder too.

"It's also about tenacity, heroism, and the very best of the human spirit."

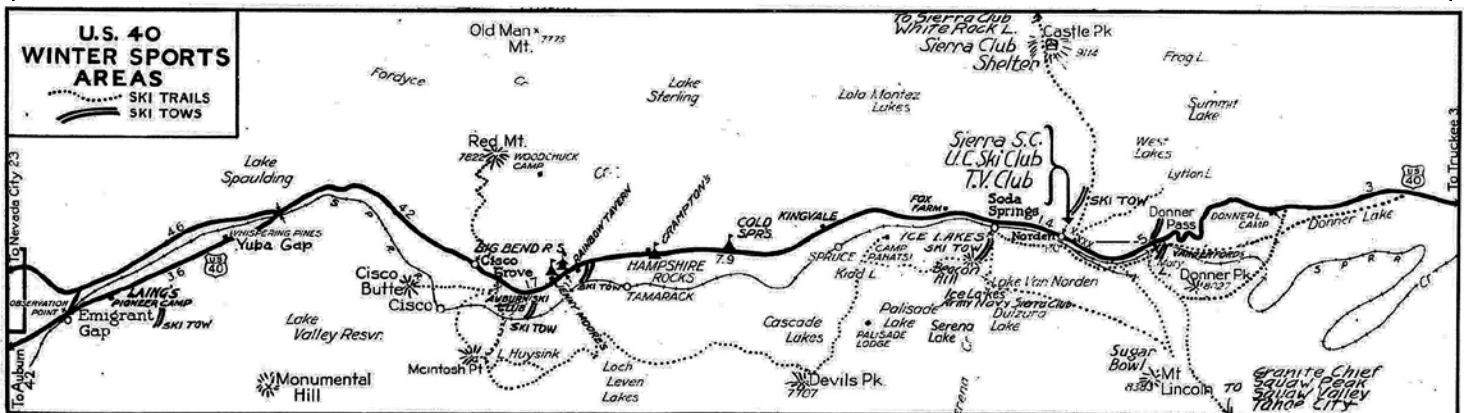
Those words come from, "Donner Party: Heroism, Pathos, and the Human Spirit" on the "Stories" page on our website. We thought we had a creative idea: reframing the Donner Party saga by focusing on the heroism rather than the sensational cannibalism. Then we came across the speech below.

"As we think of the hardships and the difficulties they encountered on their journey... the privations caused by hunger, thirst and cold... may their fortitude inspire us with fresh courage and undaunted faith in bravely meeting the problems which confront us in our day and generation."

These words are from the invocation by Bishop Noel Porter of Sacramento who keynoted the Donner Centennial memorial service at Donner Monument..." in Truckee.

Sierra Sun 9/26/46
headlined "Donner Centennial Heralded as Success"

Ski areas all along Highway 40 in 1939. Even if some entrepreneur wanted to rebuild a ski area snow accumulation is not reliable enough below 6,000 feet. The bottom of Donner Summit's ski areas is about 7,000 feet.



TRAILS

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Auburn Ski Club to Mt. McIntosh - 2 trails — 1 3/4 and 2 miles. " " " to Devil's Peak 9 miles " " " to Mt. Lincoln 18 miles " " " to Cisco Buttes 2 miles " " " to Red Mountain 3 miles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big Bend to Loch Leven Lakes 1 mile Norden to Mt. Lincoln 2 1/2 miles Soda Springs to Boy Scouts 2 1/2 miles Soda Springs to Castle Peak 5 miles Norden to Castle Peak 4 miles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sierra Club to Sugar Bowl 2 miles Sugar Bowl to Mt. Lincoln 1 1/4 miles Sierra Club to Donner Monument 9 miles (via Sugar Bowl) Mt. Lincoln to Anderson Peak 3 1/4 miles Mt. Lincoln to Tinker Knob 4 1/2 miles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mt. Lincoln to Squaw Valley trail 8 1/2 miles Mt. Lincoln to Granite Chief 8 1/4 miles Mt. Lincoln to Truckee Highway at Bear Creek 14 1/4 miles Mt. Lincoln to Squaw Peak 9 1/2 miles Mt. Lincoln to Five Lakes 10 1/2 miles |
|---|--|---|---|

For some years in the late 1940's Fran Couillard wrote "Summit Scene" for the Truckee Republican. In the column she passed on all the news of Donner Summit. Here's an example.

SUMMIT SCENE

by FRANCES COUILLARD

Last week Slim Mabery of Donner Summit Lodge very kindly entertained the Camp Fire Girls at Camp Pahatsi. Slim donned one of his bright cowboy shirts, played his guitar for the girls at the dinner hour and sang some of his inimitable ski songs. Afterward he entertained them further with his very excellent colored slides. We think Slim made a hundred new ski converts.

We on the mountain partook of many barbecues during the last week. A very sumptuous repast was served at Ice Lakes for about fifty. The lamb was delicious and afterward we danced over the lake on a platform, of course.

Another barbecue that we heard about was served on the veranda of Sugar Bowl Lodge. Mrs. Gordon Hooley tells us that a western touch was added when one of our local chaps rode his horse up on the porch. Oh, well, we all know that the Sugar Bowl veranda is sturdily built.

We are told that Larry "Gratz" Powers, another of our ski instructors on the Mountain, is working for Carl Bechdolt at Tahoe Inn.

Byron and Dorothy Johnson with their new baby are also back in this area. The Mountain always claims its own and wish we had few more housing facilities up here to take care of all of our kids. Byron and Dorothy are trying very hard to fit their family in very crowded space and until they get their own little house habitable, they even have to pack their water. But they are home and consequently happy.

Barry Bruce, another young fellow who has had the mountain fever years, found it impossible to work the city. He finally chucked the whole deal and came back to the mountains. He is working hard for Bud Walton at the Donner Ski Ranch and he and Elva, his ex-chief storekeeper Spar wife, have fixed up Dr. Roy Jones' garage for a little home. It's attractive too. Says Elva, "It isn't much but it's the first place we've had to call our own since we married." Seems they couldn't find a thing in the crowded bay area and had to live with relatives.

Jack Pirtle came home from the service. He is living in the Roy Thompson's cabin until he can locate some place or the other to live. George Rudolf, he who sells ski togs up here in

the winter, is contemplating building himself a cabin on the highway.

Slim Maybery tells us he has to live someplace and it might as well be here, so he is dickering for a lot on which to put a place.

Some people by the name of Buik, whom we don't know are building a place up here that is perfectly round. We are intrigued. They come up on week ends and the whole family can be seen with hammers. They are now putting up a second story on their round house. Can hardly wait until it is finished.

Donner Summit Lodge has started on their new structure. Jack Wolert of Truckee is the contractor and with the number of men on the job we think, perhaps, they will beat their race with the first snows.

George Fraley tells us that he has hardly a highway lot left to sell and we know several people who have purchased same that are anxiously awaiting the time they can get the materials to build. We look for Highway 40 between Emigrant Gap and the Summit to be pretty densely populated before too many years.

A far sighted individual by the name of Carl Roemer has himself forward in the businessman's list by establishing beauty shop in the Soda Springs Hotel. Carl is also barber and our men folks no longer have to travel 14 miles for a haircut or to Colfax. From what we have observed of these hair cutting expeditions, we think the boys are going to miss their trips.

John and Celya Zahara San Carlos, ardent ski fans, are building themselves a little rope tow back off the highway. John and Celya are quiet couple whom we all are glad to see join our community. They are excellent folk dancers and all of their talents are not in their feet. They recently perfected system of glazing and baking lace. They have a kiln in their studio at San Carlos and turned out some beautiful cigarette boxes, plaques and other things in the gift line. They gave a plaque – an ivory affair with lace fluted edge highly glazed.

We think a fine gift shop on the Mountain would be an enterprise that someone should look into. We in the post office are constantly being harried by tourists who want to know where they can get mementoes of the area.

Truckee Republican
August 22, 1946

From the DSHS Archives

Man Missing As Fire Destroys Summit Resort

Two Other Fires Cause S.P. Trouble Near Norden

Starting from as yet undetermined cause on the second floor, fire Monday afternoon completely demolished the House of Vandeford on Donner Summit. and may have caused the death of a Mexican railroad worker who was among the 80 or more occupants of the resort hotel and was missing after the fire, according to Constable N. F Dolley who made the investigation.

The fire caused an estimated loss of \$25,000 at the lodge. A summerhome across the highway was also destroyed and the fire burned about a mile north through thick brush before controlled by the Southern Pacific fire train crews and forest service suppression crews. Traffic over Highway 40 became a problem... The home of George Backerick on the north side of the highway was lost with all its furnishings, but the Cline Coffee Shop adjoining Vanderford's was saved as were other near by structures.

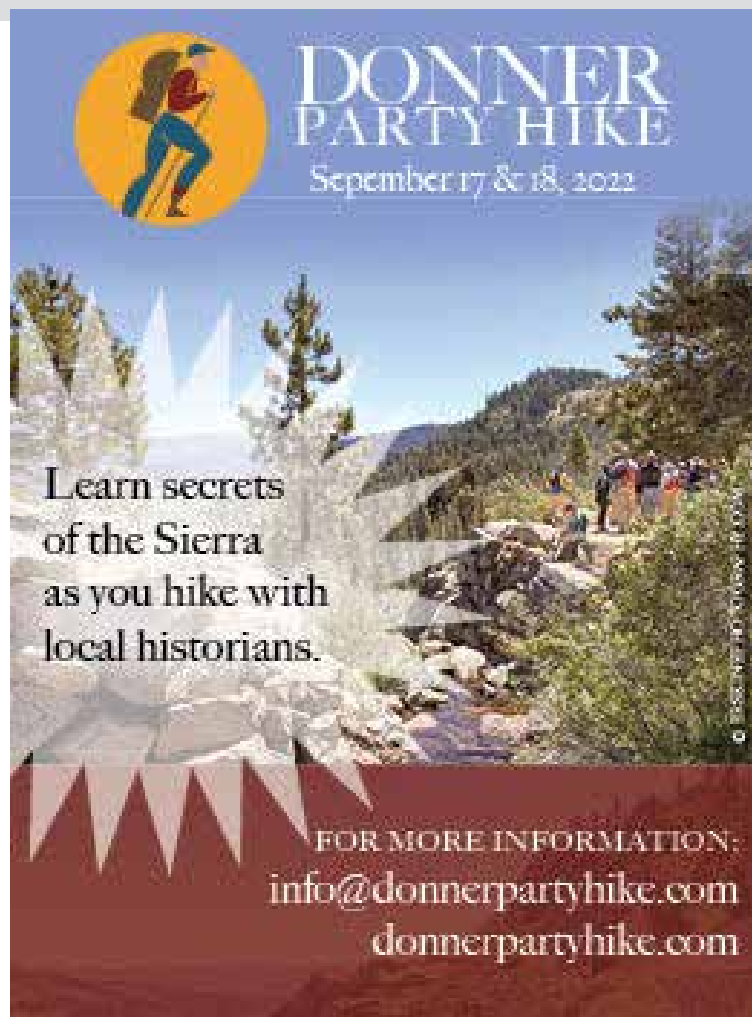
The lodge was a three-story frame building owned by Mrs. Jesse Vanderford and leased to Morrison-Knudsen Company to house track workers on the Southern Pacific.

A forest fire in the American river canyon east of Midas Monday night threatened Southern Pacific section houses before a fire train crew from Colfax brought it under control.

Traffic over both lines of the Southern Pacific was halted for several hours last Friday when fire of unknown origin destroyed the high bridge, nine miles west of Norden.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted an investigation of the fire which was discovered shortly after 2 p.m. Thursday by a bridge watchman. Although the frame of the bridge was of steel construction, the decking was made of wood and this was entirely destroyed. The bridge is 180 feet long. Southern Pacific fire trains were called to combat the blaze and all trains were held at Colfax, Reno and Truckee until repairs were made.

Truckee Republican September 14, 1944



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FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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Old Time Sunday Drive

**Next Time
Take Scenic
Old Hwy 40
instead of I-80**



Historic Towns
Interesting Scenery
Fascinating History
Picnic Spots
A Slower Pace



Take a look at our guide to Old Highway 40: turn by turn instructions from Rocklin to Truckee, broken into four legs and including pictures and history. Available on line on the brochure page of donnersummithistoricalsociety.org, at the DSHS (at the blinking light in "downtown" Soda Springs, or the visitors' centers in Truckee and Auburn.



And while you are at it, check out the 20 Mile Museum - interpretive signs from Nyack to below Donner Summit on Old 40. Information at www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Book Review

Last Month, in August, we wrote about traveling the transcontinental RR and we had this book review ready to go but then discovered that its spot had been taken by an earlier placement of [Overland in 1846 V2](#). So here we fit this in with some nice art work from the book.

Out West on the Overland Train

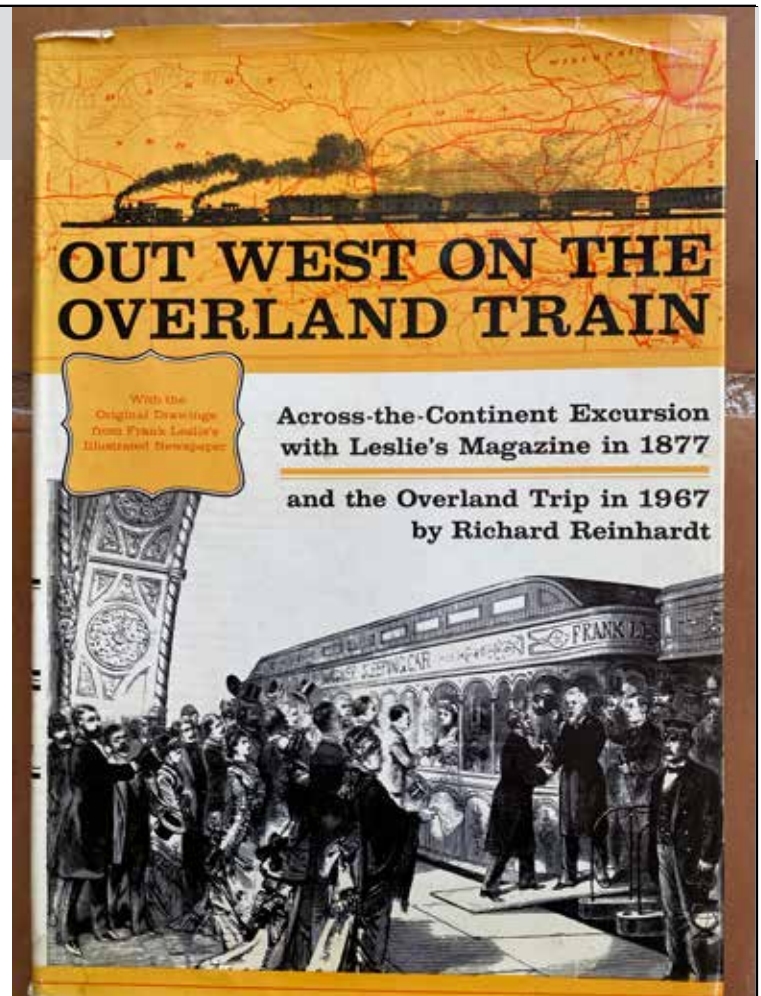
Across the Continent Excursion with Leslie's Magazine in 1877

Richard Reinhardt 1967, 204 pages very large format

This month's book is serendipity. Our research department had been looking for some access to Frank Leslie's publications in digital form but that was not working out. At the same time the book review department was reviewing [Overland in 1846](#) (see the December, '21 [Heirloom](#) for volume I) and we thought we should review Volume 2 as well and ordered it – maybe. [Out West on the Overland Train](#) was delivered instead; maybe there is a reason. Upon opening this large book it looked really interesting with wonderful pen and ink drawings. We include some of those here.

[Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly](#) was a popular eclectic 19th Century periodical and just one of Mr. Leslie's magazines. In 1877 he set out with a staff of writers, artists, friends, and his wife on a cross-country tour on the transcontinental railroad. The resulting newspaper articles, edited by the author make up [Out West on the Overland Train](#).

The assemblage of articles is a nice entry into 19th Century America and the West. The articles are enhanced by perhaps one hundred original illustrations from Leslie's newspaper. Even just paging through the book is interesting seeing what the American West was like as captured by artists in 1877. Then there's the added bonus of this book being published in 1967. The Author, Richard Reinhardt, took the train across the country too, repeating Mr. Leslie and his team's trip. 1967 is more than fifty years ago so we get a slice of the American West history not just in 1877, but also in 1967. Donner Summit is only

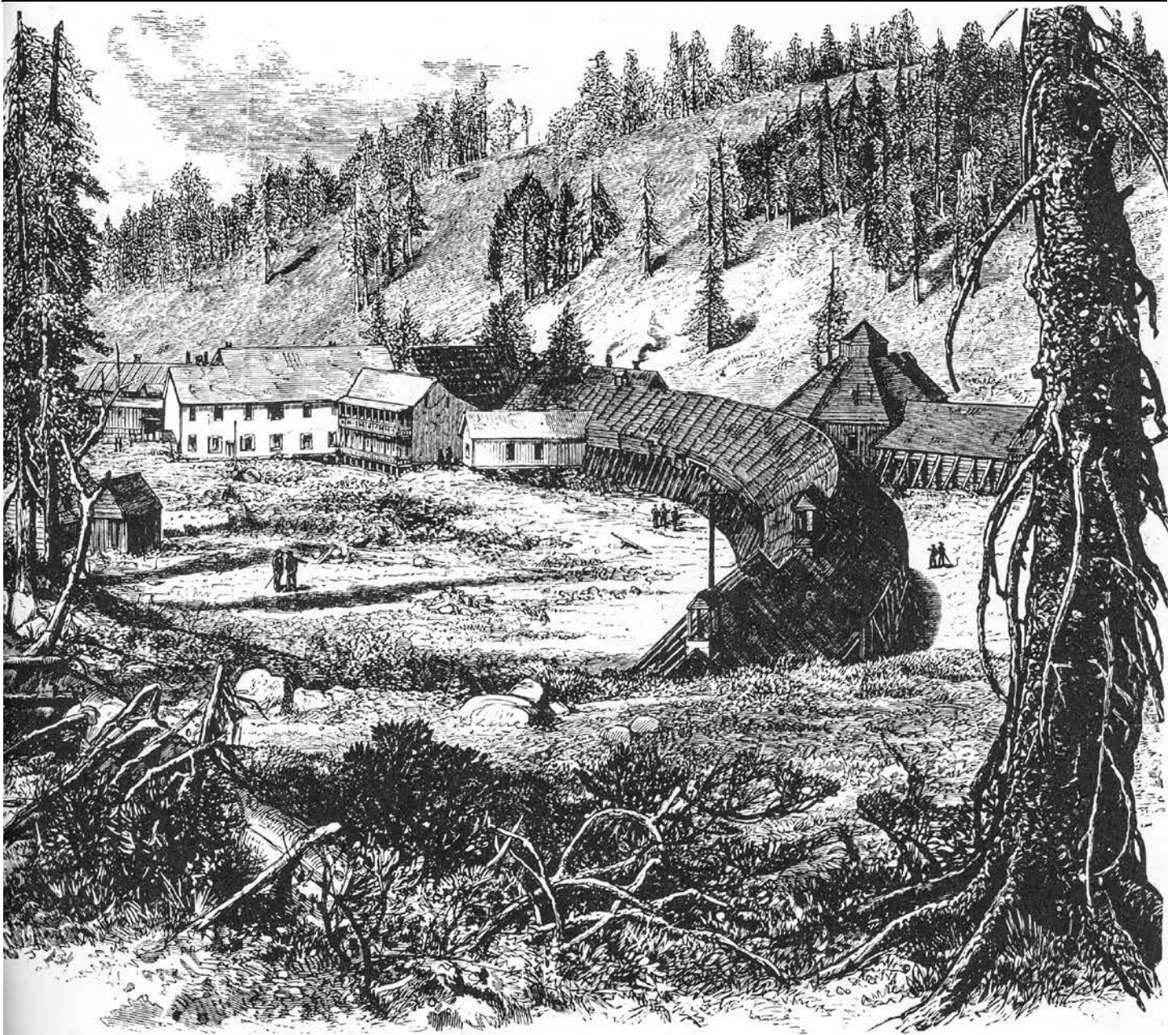


casually mentioned but there is a very nice picture of Summit Station (next page) in 1877 along with the Summit Hotel (first version, the building on the left side of the drawing). The book is divided into chapters and the chapters are mostly stops on the railroad. Each 1877 chapter is followed by its 1967 counterpart.

1877 was only eight years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad. There were 38 states in the United States. The West was mostly just territories and wild. The articles that came out of the transcontinental trip scratched an itch Americans had for the West. An ordinary train trip took seven days. The Leslie group's trip was a bit longer including a number of side trips. The articles ran in Leslie newspapers for two years.

The book is a travelogue across America by train in 1877 full of descriptions, observations, and stories illustrated by pictures. We must wonder at the veracity of some of the reporting though. For example on visiting the water works in Chicago there is a descrip-

With the coming of the transcontinental railroad “a new era dawned on the history of travel. Space was no longer an obstacle. Time was, to a certain extent, controlled, and the attention of thinking men was directed to the comfort of the traveler...” The Leslie group noted that they traveled along at 20 mph.



SNOW-SHEDS AT SUMMIT STATION — THE END OF THE UP-GRADE ON THE C.P.R.R

tion of the intake for Chicago's water system, some of the water, "purer than the rest, was filled with minute and innumerable fish. The finny tribe became ingredients in the dishes and beverages of every repast. Even the cows were noted for the vast number of minnows in their milk... Fish-spawn floated in the air. It got into casks and barrels and bottles, in spite of all possible precautions. The fish hatched out in the strongest old whiskies...." You get the idea.

Other observations are really colorful. Talking about passengers in the "sufficiently commodious 'Emigrant House'" waiting room the newspaper says, "women, children, aged grandfathers, border ruffians, dogs, gambling sharps, peripatetic vendors, soldiers, thieves, and pickpockets are jumbled together in a heterogeneous mass. A confused babel of sounds

and the clinking of glass denotes the every present proximity of the drinking bar and its deluded votaries. A mother dandles a child in her arms, two ferocious-looking loungers within a couple of feet of her are dilating on the merits of their six-shooters; and within a yard a railroad sharp has pinned a grizzle-haired miner to the wall with the enraptured sight of his bogus chains and lockets..."

There are lots of stories about noteworthy events that transpired in particular spots. After a description of Native American fights Mr. Leslie says, "It is well that these battles leave no scars behind them or the whole surface of this lonely land would be darkened with ugly reminder of bloodshed." There are snippets from contemporary newspapers such as about Nebraska Arbor Days where the State encouraged the

FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER



Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1877, by FRANK LESLIE, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

No. 1,136—Vol. XLIV.]

NEW YORK, JULY 7, 1877.

[PRICE, WITH SUPPLEMENT, 10 CENTS. \$4.00 YEARLY. 12 WEEKS, \$1.00.]

populating of the prairie with trees; the “little terror of the plains,” a particularly bad man; a scalped man who liked to tell his story and show off his scars; bits of advice like where to get liquor in the “oasis in Temperance desert” Denver (see page 21); and a comparison between Chinese and Irish (with 19th Century prejudices). There is a big digression to describe the Mormons.

The meal stops were typically twenty minutes which enabled the tourists to walk about. In Sidney, Nebraska there’s a nice description as an example of descriptions of other stops, “Higher up the bluffs, the sod-roofed dugouts are seen, each bristling with a rusty stovepipe in lieu of chimney and some boasting a roughly glazed window beside the low doorway. There is a goodly show of clothes lines up among these simple habitations, with flapping linens dancing about in the wind; a horse or two tethered along the bluff, rubbing his nose on the sterile soil; a wandering cow; and, of course, children; but here as elsewhere, we are obliged to take the female population on trust, for not a solitary representative do we see.

“The female members of our party brave the savage winds on the platform and stare wildly about in search of desperadoes. Every man, being possible murderer and a most probable gambler, is invested with a dark and awful interest, albeit most to them are sober, quiet-looking citizens, a little given to excess hair, eccentric as to hats, and utterly rejecting ‘biled shirts,’ but by no means villainous in physiognomy...” They interview one of the inhabitants, “they gambles and fights

most all the time, and they kills somebody among ‘emselves every now’n’ then...”

The descriptions are not just of the physical but also serve as social commentary. Sidney was apparently a jumping off spot for gold in the Black Hills. Observing the people headed to the gold fields, “whether they will be as successful as the Argonauts of ’49 is still a question; but one pities the women who cast their lots with them - tired, desponding - looking women, young and old, carrying heavy [sic] babies and herding offspring of larger growth - whom one sees wearily sitting about the outfitting shops or - among the shabby boxes and bundles outside.”

It turns out that Sidney (see page 21) was “where Union Pacific conductors used to warn passengers not to get off if they valued their lives.” There was not much in Sidney in 1967, hence only a one minute stop.

In Chapter 13, titled “The Gracious Life of the Place Car Traveler 1877: Oyster Soup by Lamplight” it turns out that traveling by train was as comfortable as a hotel and not like the warnings one lady received that said it would turn her dark like an “Ethiop” and prevent dressing, undressing, and bathing like a Christian. Nor were the other “discomforts and dangers” likely. Instead, the reality was “majestically working” porters, berths “spread with fresh, clean sheets, and heavy rugs, piled with little square pillows, and duly shut

"And there comes a real Adonis of scouts: a tall brown, broad-shouldered hero with a dash of the dandy about him in this weather-stained buckskin suit, fringed and beaded at the seams, the bright necktie knotted low at his handsome throat, the sealskin cap tossed to one side on the long, wavy hair, and an aristocratically small foot fitted to an exquisite nicety in his cavalry boots."

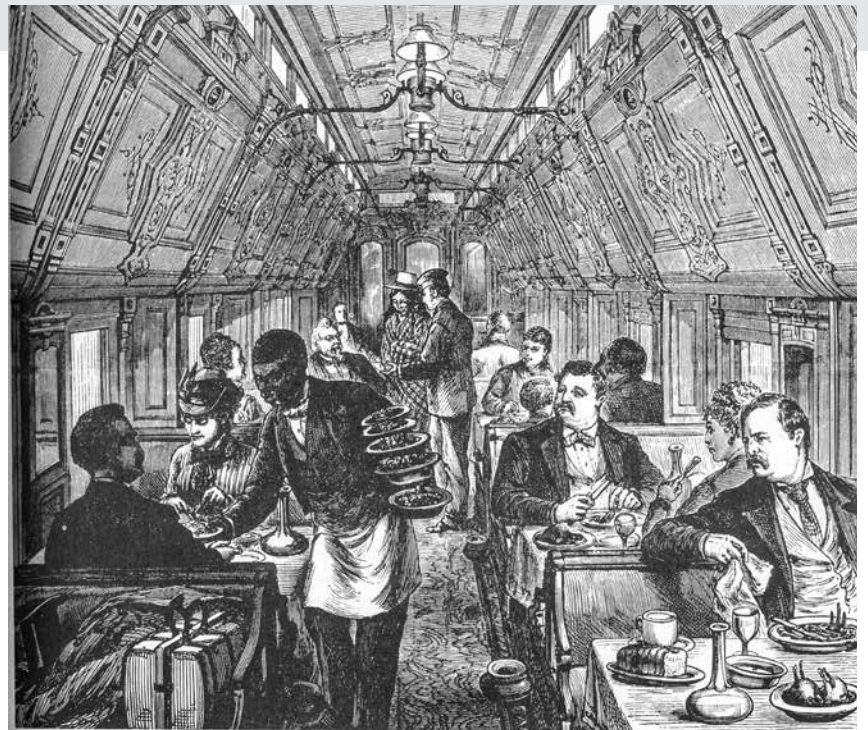
“Breakfast comes by dainty courses: fish, fresh-caught at the last station on our way; beef steak and champignons; not rolls and cornbread; broiled chicken on toast; and potatoes stewed in ream or fried Saratoga fashion, with the best of coffee and tea, or a glass of milk, half cream.”

with “voluminous curtains.” Sleep was easy but competed with the scenery that was “full of fascination” and “new risen sunshine across your pillows.” Sleep took passengers easily though, “the slight monotonous rocking of your easy, roomy bed, and the steady roar and rattle of the train lull you into dreamland as a child is rocked by his nurse’s lullaby.”

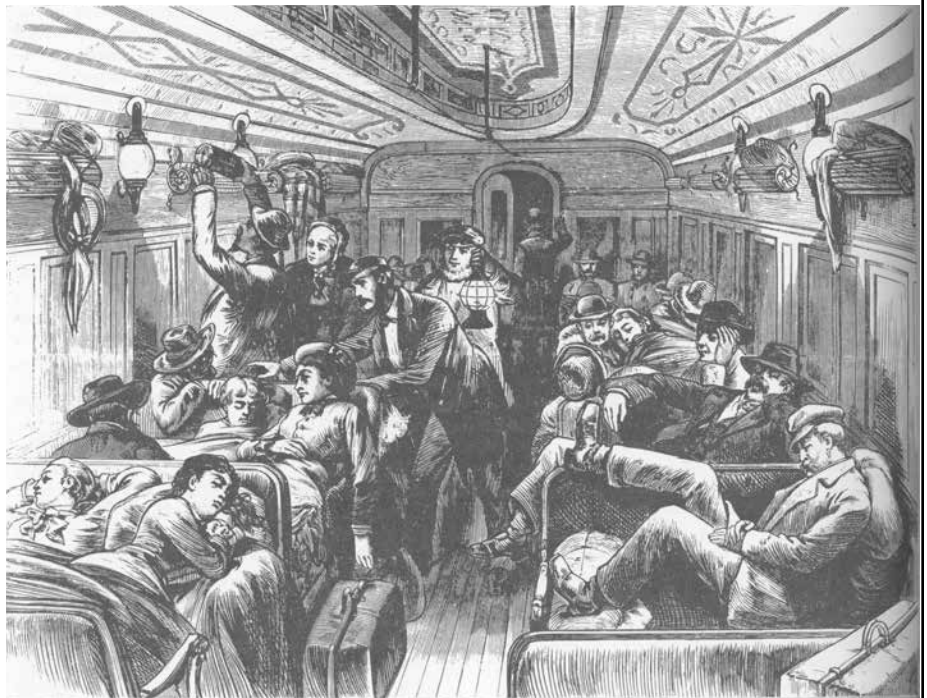
Another chapter tells how people who don’t have sleeper cars travel which is not so comfortable. See the picture here, below right.

The Leslie party crossed the Sierra at night . A few stood on the rear platform with a “few extra wraps and a cigar apiece” to brave the winds and “an airy exposure.” Then they hit the snowsheds, “very much in our way at this stage of the journey... we wish that they had never been built, or at least were portable commodities... long gloomy tunnels, winding along for miles, with only here and there an opening that serves to show us in one little glimpse what sort of world this is... There is scarcely a break in the monotonous succession of sheds, and it so happens that some of the finest points of scenery are congregated along this section of the route.”

Then on to Colfax and San Francisco where there are chapters devoted to the city, Chinatown, and rich people.



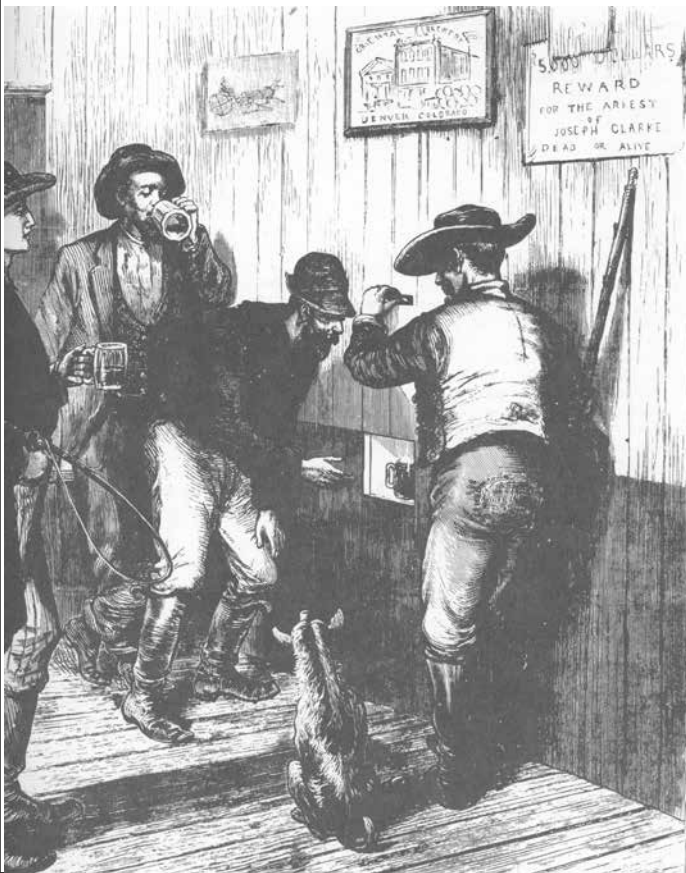
Dining at twenty miles-an-hour



The discomforts of travel; weary passengers settling for the night.



A Sidney fitting out store for Black Hills Emigrants



Oasis in the temperance desert in Denver

Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Sayler has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

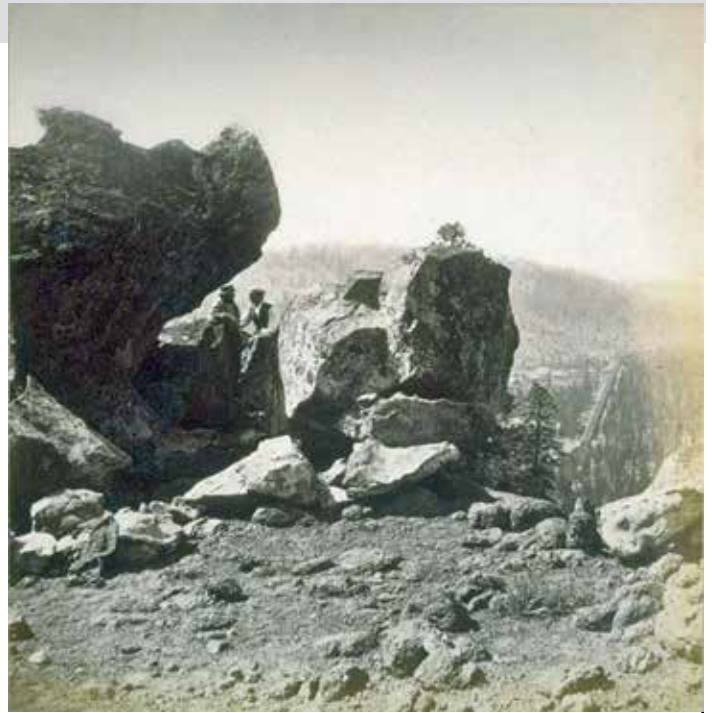
You might even want to do a review for us.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

Rhino Rock

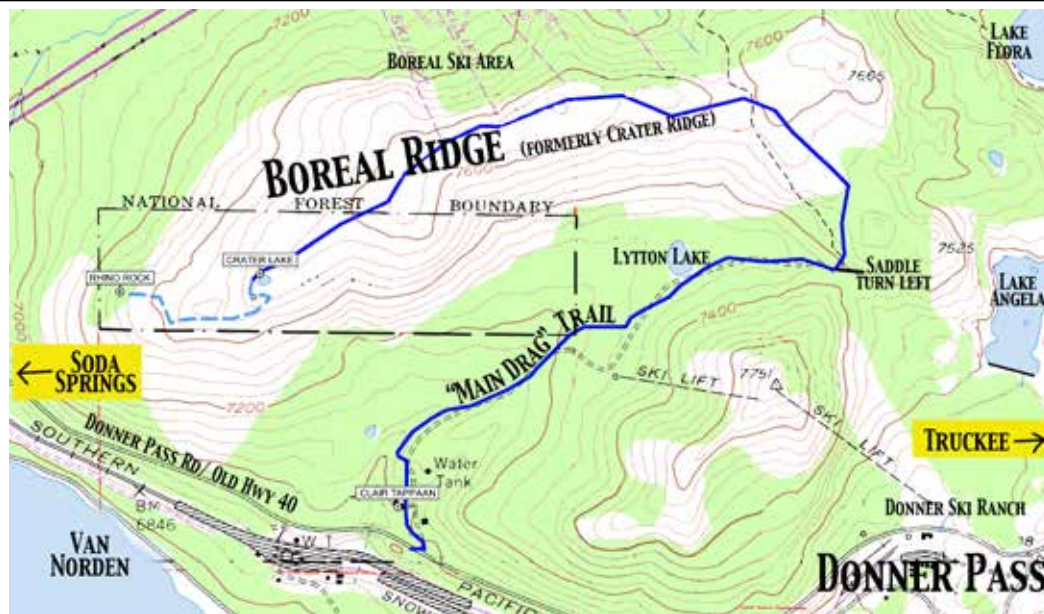
Our regular subjects for Odds & Ends are things left behind by people: dams, roads, ski lifts, etc. Here we have an oddity left behind by Mother Nature. Eadweard Muybridge (spelling vary even by Mr. Muybridge) photographed the unique rock in the 1870's. Art Clark, our Then & Now man, did a reprise a few years ago. His is the color photograph.

To get to Rhino Rock on top of Boreal Ridge, you first need to get to Crater Lake and then go west a ways, several hundred yards. If you have a GPS, Rhino Rock sits at the coordinates in the sidebar here along with Crater Lake's. On the next page is a nice map. You can carry this with you or just pick up one of our "Historic Hikes" brochures either at the discerning local establishments or the "Brochures" page on our website.



Rhino Rock:
39° 19.467'N
120° 21.710'W

Crater Lake:
39° 19.478'N
120° 21.408'W



Leave from the front door of Clair Tappaan Lodge taking the "Main Drag" trail. It's uphill all the way, but then coming back it's easy.



Crater Lake on Boreal Ridge today

This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, "Odds & Ends" of Donner Summit. There are a lot of big stories on Donner Summit making it the most important historical square mile in California. All of those episodes* left behind obvious traces. As one explores Donner Summit, though, one comes across a lot of other things related to the rich history. All of those things have stories too and we've been collecting them. Now they're making appearances in the Heirloom.

If you find any "Odds & Ends" you'd like to share pass them on to the editor - see page 2

*Native Americans; first wagon trains to California; the first transcontinental railroad, highway, air route, and telephone line, etc.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Donner Summit Historical Society.org

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50 interpretive signs along Old 40
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