

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



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

September 2024 issue #193

## The 20 Mile Museum Story

"...inexpressibly comprehensive, grand, and picturesque. After congratulating ourselves upon the safe achievement of our morning feat, and breathing our mules a few minutes, we proceeded on our journey. A mile brought us to a small dimple on top of the mountain, in the centre of which is a miniature lake, surrounded by green grass."

What I saw in California

Edwin Bryant 1849 upon reaching Donner Summit

"Donner Summit is grand and unique and the Donner Summit Historical Society has embarked on a project to highlight the history and beauty of the Summit.

"The 20 Mile Museum will consist of interpretive signs placed on private commercial property and along Old Highway 40. Each sign will highlight the history of the location, display historical photographs and quotes, tell a good story, and list activities for that location."



That's how we introduced the idea of the 20 Mile Museum in 2011.

Regular readers who read to the end of the monthly Heirloom see the graphic to the right along with the rest of the ad here. Those driving along Old Highway 40 or nearby in late spring, summer, and fall, see at least some of the fifty or so signs like the one to the left.

The 20 Mile Museum signs are a creative outcome to some relatively recent Donner Summit history. Serene Lakes is a community, today, of about eight hundred forty houses. You can read about its history, "The Ice in Ice Lakes," on our website's "Story" page\*.

At the end of 2005 two developers showed up on Donner Summit in Serene Lakes having just purchased three thousand acres, including Summit Valley or Van Norden Meadow, surrounding Serene Lakes, as well as the Serene Lakes themselves. They wanted to build a high-end development with more than nine hundred residential units, restaurants, hotels, a swimming pool (one developer's wife suggested to a resident that it would be so nice to be able to swim in a pool rather than the lakes), and many other components. They wanted to build a tower at Pt. Mariah, for example, so people could better see the four thousand foot

### Take the Scenic Route Donner Summit's Old Highway 40



50 interpretive signs along  
Old 40

<http://www.donnersummithistoricalalso-society.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html>

\*<http://www.donnersummithistoricalalso-society.org/pages/Stories.html>

# Story Locations in this Issue

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## DONNER SUMMIT



## Finding Your Way Through Donner Summit History

We're closing in on two hundred 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 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. 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 FlickrR URL will take you to those thousands of searchable historical photographs of Donner Summit. Have fun.

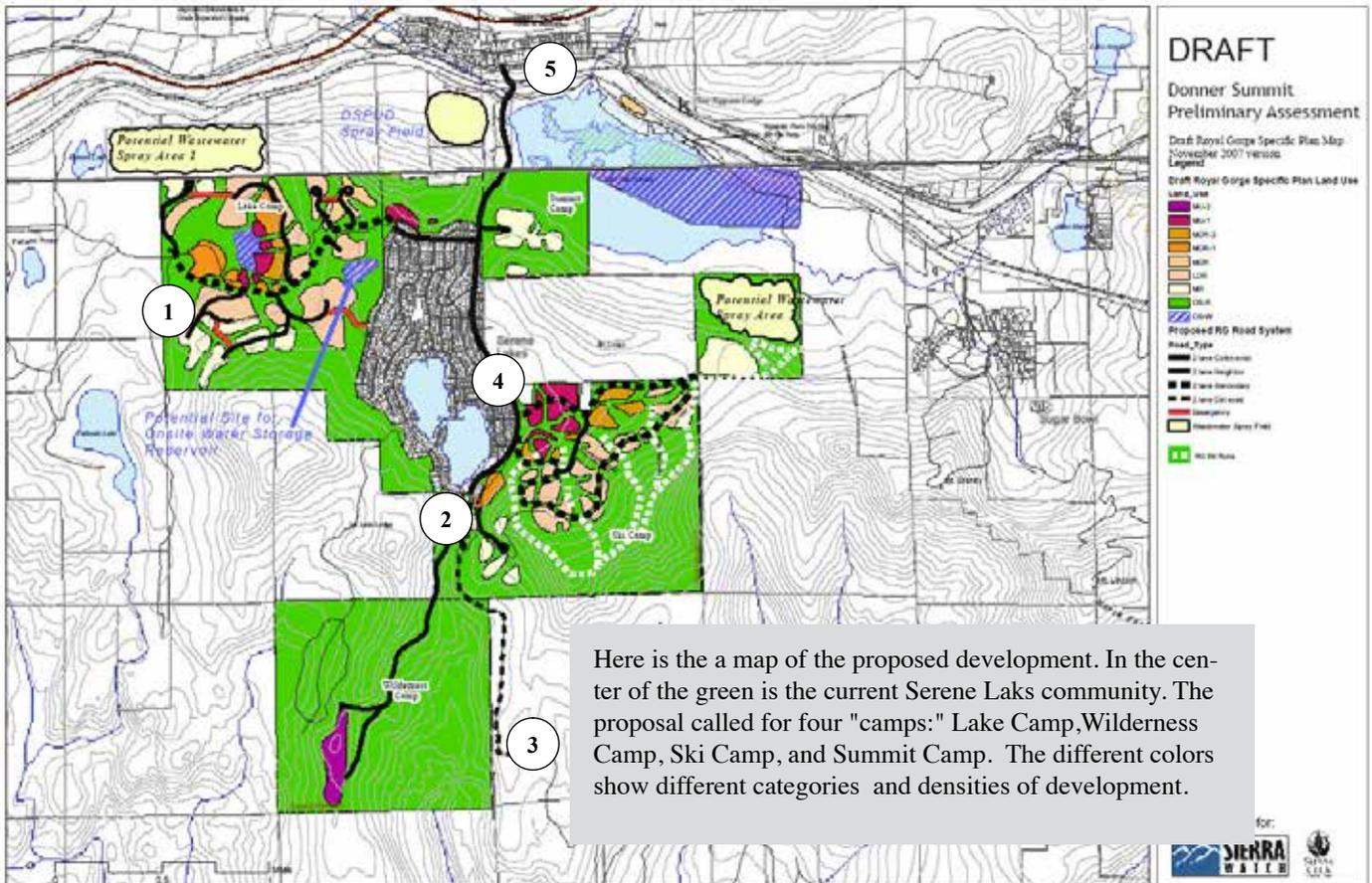
Find us on the the DSHS YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJenAxPCb47Y14agmVGI-zA>

Find us on FaceBook where we place a new historical picture daily.

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deep Royal Gorge. They wanted to dredge the lakes and excavate more lakes as well as a reservoir. They even threatened that they could drain the current lakes if they wanted. You get the idea - it wasn't a good one.

The people in Serene Lakes took umbrage at the idea and its various parts and began a counter campaign. They built a coalition of eight different groups in opposition and developed a number of different strategies to end the proposal, the developers having refused to make any adjustments to their development ideas. The entire episode would be a good story, part of Donner Summit history because it includes something that had never been done before. Keep reading. For now, there are so many components to the story that the collating of all our materials and writing of the history seems daunting.

In the end a souring economy, the local and Donner Summit opposition, lots of publicity, and legal hurdles, all ended the project. One great irony is that, here we are the source of water, the developers couldn't find enough for their new community. That's a story for another time. For our story here, one of the opposition strategies developed into the 20 Mile Museum.

As opposition strategies were developed it became obvious that there could not just be opposition to the project. The opponents had to be for something as well. If not, it would be hard to garner outside support for the opposition as the residents would open themselves up to the charge of NIMBY-ism – we've got ours everyone else keep out. Indeed, the very first question the National Public Radio (NPR) posed to the Serene Lakes president during an interview was, aren't you all just a bunch of NIMBY's? Fortunately the president had developed a list of possible questions NPR would ask. He responded that the summit community was not against all development. In fact, it wanted development along old Highway 40, the commercial corridor. It wanted more businesses and amenities. It wanted more visitors. That had been born out by survey done by Serene Lakes of its, at that time, six hundred residents. The results of the survey were duplicated by the Donner Summit Area Association's survey of the whole summit area. The Summit population just didn't think the whole proposed development fit with the small residential neighborhood a mile away from the old highway, that is Serene Lakes. Nor was the proposal going to be good for the three thousand surrounding acres and the lakes.



We should first wrap up the development story so you're not in suspense before we get to the 20 Mile Museum story. The first part of the story's conclusion ended with the developers having to give up their development idea. For the second part, the part that had never been done before, Serene Lakes approached the local Truckee Donner Land Trust with the idea of purchasing the three thousand acres surrounding Serene Lakes in order to save the land in perpetuity. These last prospective developers were only the latest in a long line over the decades - including one idea to make Serene Lakes the water supply for San Francisco - but that's also another story for another time. Stay tuned.

The Land Trust was hesitant. That's not how things work. Normally a land trust sees land it wants to preserve and looks for money in the form of grants, donations and government money to buy the properties. With the purchase complete they then often divest themselves of the land by giving it to a governmental entity. On Donner Summit that's how Summit Canyon and Schallenburger Ridge became part of the Donner Memorial State Park. In that "normal" situation there is a discreet number of players: a property owner, the Land Trust and its donors, and the governmental entity that will end up with the land.

How, the Land Trust wanted to know, would this work with the Serene Lakes Homeowners' Association's hundreds of

members. Besides that we were talking about twelve million dollars which was more than Serene Lakes might raise so that meant pulling in Sugar Bowl's homeowners as well as various other entities. It had never been done that way. It would be too unwieldy.

The end of the story is a good one.

Serene Lakes countered the Land Trust saying the Land Trust had never worked with a committed and energetic homeowners' Association. Look at what we'd done in opposition to the developers so far. The next step was the Land Trust's. They put together various sources of money, including almost \$4,000,000 from Serene Lakes (and another \$4,000,000 from the Sugar Bowl homeowners) to purchase the entire three thousand acres. This has to be put into perspective because the Land Trust had a point. Sugar Bowl is a well off community with quite a few billionaires. Serene Lakes, at the time, was more modestly economically situated. It had been more of a blue collar community compared to other Tahoe/Truckee area communities. A not insignificant number of homeowners had built their own houses or at least finished off the shells themselves. Today that's changing but then, Serene Lakes' \$4,000,000 share seemed daunting.

Summit Valley eventually ended up going to the Forest Service. The rest of the land remains with the Land Trust.

## What led to the 20 Mile Museum?

Now, what led to the 20 Mile Museum? That goes back to the coming of the freeway, Interstate 80, in the early 1960's. Until then, all along Highway 40, there had been little communities, ski areas, hotels, lodges, restaurants, gas stations, and other businesses that catered to tourists and travelers. Travel along Highway 40 had been a leisurely affair given all the traffic and its two lanes. The many businesses provided travelers with rest stops, souvenir stops, and automobile repair opportunities. Interstate 80 today is four lanes and cars are more reliable. 21<sup>st</sup> Century travelers are in a rush and Interstate 80 gets them where they want to go and further from home than before. The coming of the freeway changed everything for those little communities along Highway 40.

Soda Springs, Donner Summit, was one of the victims of the coming of Interstate 80. What had been a vibrant community started a long downhill slide as businesses closed – see the following article and pictures.

Having been galvanized into action by the failed development and the summit surveys, people on Donner Summit began looking at ways to improve commercial prospects along old Highway 40. The basic problem, though, was that no one will build a new commercial establishment if there are no visitors and visitors will not come if they don't know

about the attractions and if there is no infrastructure to support their visits. For example, bathrooms are important as is parking.

Here a trip to Europe provided an answer. Bill Oudegeest and his wife were heading for Europe in 2010. They usually stay overnight in a hotel near the San Francisco airport to make departure day easy. An early morning walk took Bill past an inlet in the bay just north of Burlingame. It was serendipity. At the head of the inlet was a small sign noting



Interpretive signs alongside the Matterhorn in Zermatt, Switzerland.



that Liberty ships had been built there during World War II. It was a simple thing but that sparked an idea. There appeared to be only one place needing a landmark sign in the area of Bill's discovery, but he knew that Donner Summit was the most historically significant square mile in California. There were a million stories. There could be a million signs on Donner Summit telling the many stories. That of course had to be tempered to prevent sign pollution. The idea percolated across the Atlantic and to Zermatt in Switzerland. There, a walk alongside the Matterhorn – more serendipity. There were signs along the path telling the history of different spots. The steel sign stands looked very doable. See page 4.

Back at the hotel, the Gornergrat Kulm, elevation 10,000, with a spectacular Matterhorn view out the window, Bill pulled out his computer and emailed back to the board of the Donner Summit Historical Society. Being able to do something like that was still amazing in 2010.

The result was the 20 Mile Museum, the name of which shows the DSHS didn't fully recognize the possibilities. We'd thought twenty miles would be plenty, but the outdoor museum stretches from Newcastle to downtown Truckee and comprises about fifty signs. We can wonder, parenthetically, whether this might be the longest museum in the world, being a little more than seventy miles long. In any case, each sign tells the history of the location, gives a good story, and lists things to do right there. It has proved extremely popular with some people even chasing all the signs down in order to photograph them – even though a picture of each is on the DSHS website.

**What it Took**

Coming up with the 20 Mile Museum was serendipitous and in retrospect, easy. Implementing the 20 Mile Museum was more difficult. We brainstormed the topics for the first twenty-six signs we thought we could handle, up from suggestions of "let's just start with a couple." With the signs identified, each had to be designed and then manufactured. Manufacturing was done in New York at Fossil Graphics. Design was at the DSHS design studios. Permission from private property owners had to be obtained. For signs on the County right of way, permits had to be obtained from Placer and Nevada Counties. Here, the counties were very happy to accommodate the project and as years went by and more signs were added, they made amending the permits easy. The stands had to be designed (see the next page) and volunteer and paid welders tapped for manufacture. Each had to be painted. Aluminum was cut for the receptacles into which the signs would sit. With the signs designed and manufactured, and the holes dug, concrete was poured around aluminum receptacles, everything plumbed straight, and the sign stands installed.

Little things were learned along the way. There have to be plugs for the receptacles to keep dirt and rocks out when the signs are stored in winter. Someone had to make them. Another lesson is kind of humorous. When the aluminum receptacles were placed in the holes they first must have their bottom openings sealed with duct tape. Otherwise when the concrete is poured it works its way into the bottom of the receptacle and eventually fill it. It's frustrating to come back after the concrete had dried to



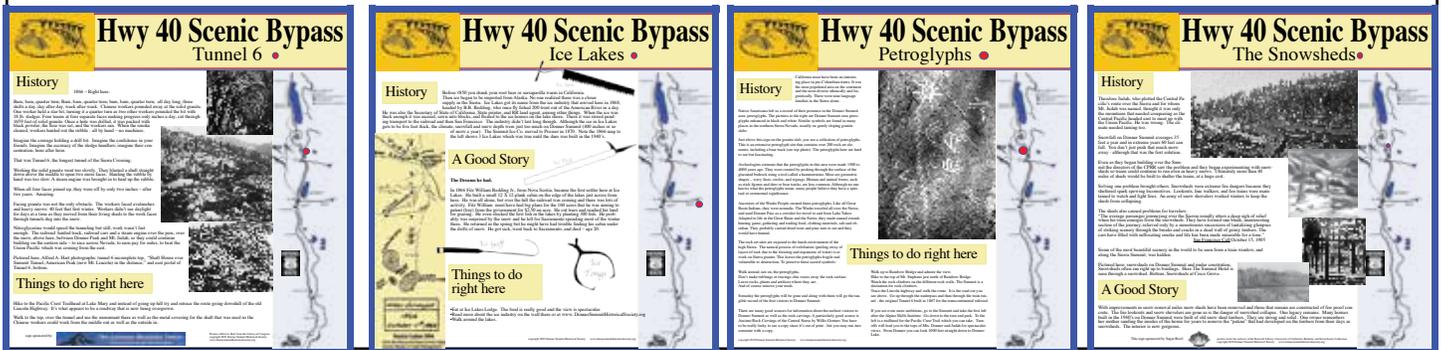
**20 Mile Museum**

**Take the Scenic Route Along Old Highway 40 on Donner Summit**



20 Mile Museum brochure available on the DSHS website on the "Brochure" page, in the brochure rack at the Lamson Cashion Donner Summit Hub, at the general store in Soda Springs, at the State Park, and the Welcome center in Truckee, as well as other high quality institutions.

Below, left to right: Tunnel 6, Ice Lakes, Petroglyphs, Snowsheds



install the sign and find the receptacle filled with concrete.

### Who Pays?

The idea of the signs was maybe the easiest part. Then there were all the component parts, see above. The biggest piece of the puzzle was how to pay for the project. Sign stands today cost a couple of hundred dollars. Then there's \$75 for powder coating. The signs themselves cost about \$315 each. Design is free. Labor is free. Here the community stepped up and continued to step up as new signs were added. Each sign is sponsored by someone, some group, or some entity. Sugar Bowl stepped up sponsoring five signs right away and convinced their charitable arm to contribute another \$5,000 for maintenance. There were some interesting sponsors too. A second-third grade teacher at the Expeditionary Academy in Truckee, Julie Brisbin, enlisted her kids two different years to get two signs going, one for the petroglyphs and the other for McIver's Dairy in Truckee. The Rotary paid for those signs.

### What Can Go Wrong

Actually lots can go wrong. The first iteration of sign design didn't work out. Two signs have been stolen, one twice. A large rock was smashed through one. A car ran off the road below the Donner Summit Bridge and took out another. Despite caps on receptacles in winter, someone filled two receptacles with pebbles and sand, jamming it all down so the signs couldn't be installed. Cleaning the receptacles out was tedious. A vehicle apparently made a three point turn into another sign at the Eagle Lakes exit from I-80. At the beginning someone put bumper stickers on some signs with disparaging comments about a local resident. That stopped when a witness told the local general store owner about it and she figured out who was who. She called the vandals down to the store for a talk and that ended that. Another lesson about snow was learned up on Roller Pass between Mt. Lincoln and

Mt. Judah. The sign stands are too heavy to haul long distances so up there we left the stand but took down the sign in winter. One winter there was rain on snow encasing the stand in ice. As the winter went on the glacial action of the snow and ice tore apart all of the welds on the sign. Now we have a removable top that slips over the steel post onto which the sign is attached. That top gets hidden in winter. One sign went up on the knoll behind what everyone calls ASI or the old Sugar Bowl Academy building opposite the Lamson Cashion Donner Summit Hub. Someone came up with a sledge hammer and changed its shape. Now there's a more rigid receptacle epoxied to the rocks. It's the best sign – see the picture on the next page.

### Annually

Annually the signs are pulled up in October and stored at Donner Ski Ranch, Sugar Bowl, and the Nancy O Glass studio. In spring, after snow melts, the signs are pulled back out and re-installed. It's at that point we discover what's transpired over winter. Some snow removal equipment operators are very enthusiastic in their work and scrape the ground. Of course that scrapes up receptacles too – see the pictures on page 9. So over time some signs have been moved to less hazardous locations. Some have begun to fade and so have been reproduced allowing us to change the text to reflect changes over the last thirteen years.

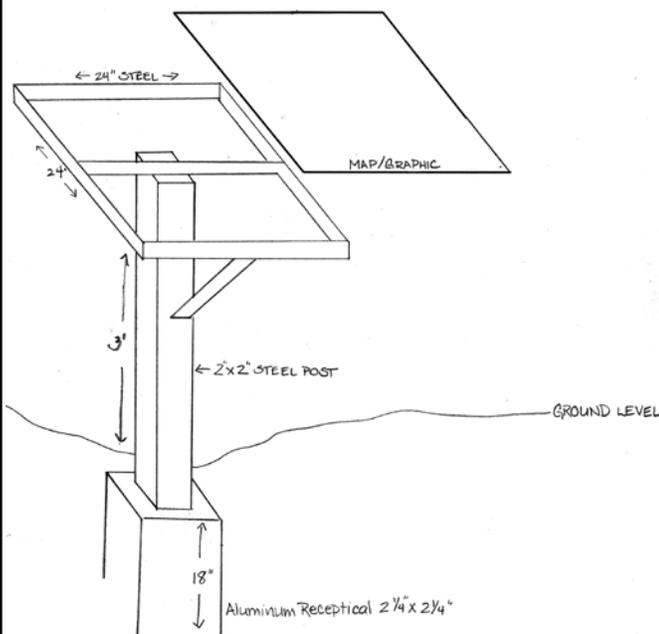
Page 6 shows the brochure that lists all the signs. You can pick it up at the general store, the brochure rack at the Lamson Cashion Donner Summit Hub, Nancy O Glass, the visitor's center at the state park, or the welcome center in Truckee. Then you can also go out discovering the stories of Donner Summit's unique and rich history. The signs are also on our [donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://donnersummithistoricalsociety.org) website.

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### Design of the Stands.

Each stand is made out of hard steel with the center of sign 36" off the ground. The signs are at 45 degree angles to the ground. A 24 gauge galvanized steel sheet sits on the frame, made of 1" square steel 1/8" wall tubing, with the sign and UV plastic cover sitting on top. The post is 2" X 2" 1/4" wall square steel tubing.

The aluminum receptacle sits below ground level so the sign can be removed in winter and so it does not affect snow removal machines. A locking bolt will secure the sign. Receptacles will be plugged when the signs are removed.

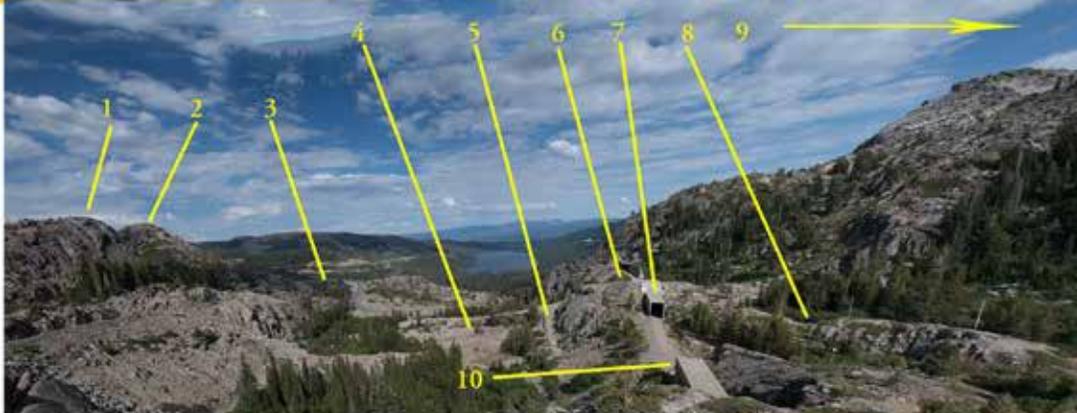


# Our Favorite Sign



# Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

## The Most Inspiring sq. yd. ●



You are standing on the "Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard" in the "Most Historically Significant Square Mile" in California. From your perch in this square yard you can look out over the panoply of Donner Summit history.

Donner Summit is the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. Native Americans crossed for thousands of years, the first wagon train to come to California with wagons came over Donner Summit followed by many more. The first transcontinental highway, railroad, telephone line, and air route also crossed Donner Summit.

1. Mt. Stephen – named for Elisha Stephens the leader of the first wagon train to get to California with wagons. They had an ordeal climbing over Donner Summit. The women spent six weeks at Big Bend while the men went to California for help and were reduced to eating on hides before the men returned. 17 year old Moses Schollenberger stayed alone at Donner Lake most of the winter. It's an amazing story.

2. Stewart Pk. – named for George R. Stewart who wrote *On the Border* by Hunter (Donner Party), California Trail. The Opening of the California Trail, and many other books.

3. Donner Summit Bridge – the 1926 bridge is the first bridge with a rising compound curve. It was built at the behest of the Forest Service to make getting logs out of the Tahoe area easier.

4. Petroglyph site – 2-4,000 years ago Native Americans left petroglyphs all over Donner Summit (bear paw example right) always in view of mountain peaks or great views and not where they camped. What they meant we don't but they must have had great significance because granite is among the hardest rocks on the planet and incising petroglyphs in it takes much time and effort.



Just up the granite a couple of hundred yards west are ads painted on the rocks about 1915 advertising the New Whitney Hotel to highway travelers. There are two spots, one demarcated by rocks. Can you find both? (see page 5)

5. The Lincoln Highway route after 1914 coming from the underpass – The Lincoln Highway was the first transcontinental highway and was put together mostly from existing roads. When the route was completed, the 1914 official guide to the Lincoln Highway said it would take 19 days to cross the country traveling 30 hours per day at 18 mph. Crossing the country on the Lincoln Highway was popular: there were 150 transcontinental travelers per year in 1913 and by 1923 there were between 20 and 25,000 cars/year.

6. China Wall – built by Chinese railroad workers in 1867-68 using the detritus from the tunnels. The rocks fit together exactly without any mortar. Get close and you can see tool marks and drill holes left by the workers 150 years ago.



7. Tunnel 7 – one of 15 tunnels over the Sierras for the transcontinental railroad to get over Donner Summit. This also shows a remnant of the snowsheds that used to cover 40 miles of track to protect against snow. Donner Summit averages 34" of snow each winter.

8. Route of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Rd., the Lincoln Highway, and the route of the emigrants until 1846. Just under the cliffs there is trail that leads from the Pacific Crest trailhead down through the 1914 underpass, under the mill road bed, across granite slabs and through forests all the way to Donner Lake. This is the route of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. built from 1862-1864 to serve as a rail road cut to help with the railroad building. It later became one of the roads used to make up the Lincoln Highway. Before is an early 1920's view on Donner Summit.

9. Off to the right is Donner Pk. named for the Donner Party, half of which camped at the east end of Donner Lake. This is a great hike and place for a picnic. Standing in the notch (right, picture from 1901) at the top you look 1,000 feet straight down to Donner Lake.



10. The east entrance to Tunnel 6 and a concrete snowshed remnant – Tunnel 6 is the largest of the original 15 Sierra tunnels. Inside on the walls you can find tool marks left by Chinese railroad workers. Half way along is the shaft that goes to the surface so that four faces of the tunnel could be worked at once. Even working four faces the workers only made progress of inches a day.

Donner Lake, of course, is in the distance.

Those very short summaries above maybe have you 2018 issue of the *Donner Summit Heirlooms* (don't miss the website to find 20 Mile Museum signs). The signs and rack contains a story, the history, and pictures also a page of Donner Summit brochures.



### What others have said about the view from the Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard in the Most Historically Significant Sq. Mile

"The view from the crest of the Sierras to the east, is inexhaustibly comprehensive, grand and picturesque. After congratulating ourselves upon the safe achievements of our exciting feat, and breathing our smiles in a few minutes, we proceeded on our journey."  
Edwin Bryant 1846  
What I Saw in California

"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 just felt as if 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 Rowland, 1914  
The Good of B.A.D.

"The scenery was too grand for me to pass without notice."  
Mary Ann Graves  
Foreman Hope  
Donner Party, December, 1846

"We were as near to heaven as we could get."  
Another member of the Foreman Hope Graves  
They also said:

We "had achieved a victory, having today completed the great work of making the pass over the Sierra Nevada."  
Thomas Van Deen, 1849

"You never see a set of fellows more happy than when we reached the summit."  
Wm. Todd, 1843

"Having reached the height of the last mountain range, so we could look forward from its summit to the land of our dreams, rest and hope, we gave three long and loud cheers. Looking down the steep gorge whence we had come, we bade adieu to its dark avenues, towering cliffs, sequestered shades, bright waters and rickety scenes. We felt a great relief in bidding farewell to the mountains, valleys, and deserts of the great interior, with its adventures, ownership, tragedy, sorrow, suffering and death – scenes which will linger in our minds as memorials of our journey across the plains."  
John C. Fremont, 1845

Since 2011 twenty-six signs have been added to the collection and two stolen, one twice, leaving about fifty signs. Each additional sign is sponsored by another family or group. For each, permission for placement was obtained from landowners, Placer or Nevada County, or even the Town of Truckee.

# What Can Go Wrong



In the top picture overenthusiastic snow removal machines have found one of the aluminum receptacles into which a sign fits. The machine has grabbed it and bent it over. In the second picture the machine has pulled the receptacle and the concrete out of the ground. In both the holes needed re-digging and new receptacles. The bottom picture shows one of the caps put on the receptacles to prevent dirt and rocks from fillinig the receptacle during winter sign storage. This is quarter inch thick steel. These need regular replacing. The box to the right shows the inventory of replacement caps.

Original sponsors  
Bill and Diane Zuendt  
Pat and Don Malberg  
Sugar Bowl  
Castle Peak Vacation Rentals  
The James Family  
Hutchinson Lodge and the Sierra Club  
Clair Tappaan Lodge and the Sierra Club  
The Hall Family  
Sarah Meyerholz  
The Leathers Family  
Gateway Mountain Center  
Soda Springs general store  
Boreal/Soda Springs  
The Hoelter Family  
Mark Himmelstein in memory of Margie Powell  
Summit Restaurant  
Tom and Louise Burns  
The Pelletrados Family  
The Powell Family





# Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass Red Mountain ●



## History

“The view from the look-out station is something grand.”  
August 8, 1889 Sacramento Daily Union

Fire! Fire at Cascade! Call Cisco.

Snowsheds solved one problem and opened up an industry of snow shovelers, maintenance workers, carpenters, line walkers and fire lookouts. 24 hours a day, high on Red Mountain, lookouts scanned the snowsheds from Donner Summit to Nyack looking for fires. Steam engines emitted sparks that lodged in the sun-dried pitch filled lumber. Fire could “spread with lightning like rapidity along the line of sheds, as if it were a train of powder. The long line of sheds acts as a huge chimney with a powerful draft, and not much time is required for a small blaze to develop into a fire of ugly proportions.” San Francisco Call, October 15, 1905

On spotting a fire, the lookouts called Cisco and Cisco telegraphed the fire trains which were always ready to go. Each had an engine, pumper, tender and tank cars and could direct three streams of water at once.

The views, at the lookout 2000 feet above you, are spectacular in every direction. Pictured here are the panorama of the snowsheds at the end of the 19th century (the black line is the snowsheds), the building at the top of Red Mountain circa 1910, the building today, and a close up of the snowsheds in modern times.



## A Good Story

The telephone was invented in 1876; within a year there was one on Red Mountain.

Red Mountain is named well. When you look at it from a distance, it's the red mountain top with the radio antennae. Sixty five million years ago Red Mountain was an island in the Pacific Ocean. Plate Tectonics put it where it is today.

## Things to do right here

- Indeed the 360 degree views from Red Mtn., 2000 feet above you here, are grand. The 3 mile hike is long and steeply uphill the whole way. The trail leaves from the back of Indian Springs Campground, just down the road from here on the right.
- Walk the old Highway 40 between the east and west bound freeway lanes along the river.
- Walk the old Lincoln Highway on the south side of the freeway and up the hill. The intersection there with the road going east-west, is the old Lincoln Highway (1913).

This sign sponsored by Sugar Bowl



Historical pictures courtesy of the Norm Saylor Collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society  
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Red Mountain



# Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass Sugar Bowl ●

## History

When Bill Klein, who would transform skiing himself, invited Hannes Schroll to Donner Summit from Yosemite in 1937, the ski industry was about to change. Hannes was a daredevil champion skier whose yodels as he tore down mountains could be heard for long distances. He was enthusiastic when he saw the Sugar Bowl. "We have to develop this," he said. The "Sugar Bowl" is perfect for skiing.

His family money disappeared just as he was talking to his mother about sending it from Austria so he could buy the land. It was the Anschluss and Hitler had taken charge of Austria and Hannes' money. Hannes turned to his Yosemite friends and they in turn turned to their friends and Sugar Bowl, the first California ski area built as a destination resort, was built. It included the first chairlift in the state and the second in the nation. The single seater (as opposed to the quads of today) ran to the top of Mt. Disney (3200 feet) in 6 minutes (today's quad takes 3 minutes). There was a lodge designed by a famous architect, rope tows, a skating rink, and ski touring. Skiers arrived by train and were transported to the Bowl first by horse drawn and then by tractor drawn sleighs.

## A Good Story

Hannes Schroll was larger than life. At the 1936 Mt. Rainier Olympic Trials, "I heard a yell high above me...like an eagle swooping down on a rabbit [it was] Hannes Schroll... yodeling at the top of his lungs! He jumped the first terrace like a deer going over a rail fence. Then he jumped another- and landed on one ski. His body was leaning over like an open jack-knife, and he was swinging his ski poles to keep from somersaulting. He must have skidded a quarter mile on that one ski, whooping and yelling all the time. As he passed me, his hat sailed through the air, and he whooped even louder he was that glad to get both his skis back on the snow. Before he stopped, he [d] passed No. 41, who had taken off ten minutes before." *Rotarian* 2/1936

Walt Disney was an initial investor in Sugar Bowl. One day his daughter wanted to ski. Hannes took her up Mt. Disney, put her on his shoulders, and skied all the way down.

## Things to do right here

Take the road into the Sugar Bowl where the sign says Judah Lodge. Come in for refreshment at the bar or have a meal in the historic Lodge at Sugar Bowl (built in 1939). The food is great and the historical pictures are interesting. Find out about the lodge, William Wilson Wurster the architect, and how the wagon trains climbed over Donner Summit on Roller Pass.

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This sign sponsored by Sugar Bowl



Above, the Sugar Bowl Sign

This sign for the petroglyphs below the Donner Summit Bridge was stolen twice and so, given the cost and risk, not replaced again.

# What was Donner Summit like before the Interstate's arrival?

The genesis of the 20 Mile Museum had to do with the revitalization of Donner Summit's economy and not primarily for history. We were just using history. Therefore, following "The 20 Mile Museum Story," we thought something about what Donner Summit was like before the coming of the Interstate ended the tourist careers of the little communities along Highway 40 would be interesting.

You can drive along old Highway 40 all the way from Sacramento to Truckee, with one short section where you have to get on the freeway. It's a fun drive as you go through little communities. As you move up the hill, though, the communities become fewer and smaller until there are no more on the grade after Gold Run. The coming of the freeway took away their reasons for existing. Automobiles became more reliable and faster. The freeway was four lanes instead of two so people could race up the hill around trucks. People didn't need to rest as often or fill up with gas as often. Water stops were no longer needed to conquer the long uphill grade. We should note, parenthetically, that there used to be little ski areas, rope tows, all along Highway 40. The Auburn Ski Club got its start near Baxter on Highway 40, for example. Those "mom and pop" ski areas are gone now in favor of large resorts but also because the rain/snow line has moved up the hill more than a thousand feet. There's not enough snow at the lower elevations even if there weren't detachable quads waiting up the hill with nice restaurants and black diamond runs.

As you drive along old Highway 40 above Gold Run look closely and you'll see the remnants of the old days. When you get to Cisco Grove which is where you can hop off the freeway and continue on Old 40 again, you cross the river. Just after the right hand turn look left and see the stone buildings (below). There's a 20 Mile Museum sign there to explain their significance. Continue on and look right and left. You'll see foundation remnants of the little community of Cisco Grove. The Gould Family used to own most of the land and they bulldozed the buildings after the freeway came so they could save on taxes. Later they donated the land for Gould Park, which includes the stone buildings. In other areas entities serving the tourists have burned down, like Beacon Hill Lodge or Vanderford's, or been repurposed, like the Soda Springs Hotel or Donner Summit Lodge.

To take that journey into the old time, pick up our Historic Route 40 brochure which has turn by turn directions for taking the old road from Roseville to Truckee (right). There are also lots of pictures of what you'll see on the way. The brochure is on our website. It's quite large so you won't be able to print it but there is a text only version. You can find the actual brochures in the brochure rack at the Lamson Cashion Donner Summit



**HISTORIC**

**ROUTE 40**

**Old Time Sunday Drive  
Rocklin to Donner Pass  
& Truckee**

Thank back to Grandma and Grandpa. Think back to the old days when cars had lots of chrome and huge tail fins. Water bags hung from their fronts for the radiators. Burns and Allen or Jack Benny and Rochester were on the radio. There were Burma Shave signs along the roads and lots of billboards. There was plenty of time to read them too because traffic went more slowly. There were roadhouses and fruit markets and meat markets. There were even service stations with real service and air!

Take an old time Sunday drive at slow speed along Old Highway 40 from Rocklin to Truckee.

And be sure to take Grandma and Grandpa!

**Old Time  
Sunday Drive**

**Hwy 40 Scenic Byway**

Hub.

On the next two pages you will find stylized maps of Donner Summit showing the various businesses and ski areas along Highway 40. The first one is a slide from a PowerPoint presentation used to get a Transit Occupancy Tax grant from Placer County and then later for a presentation to the Nevada County Board of Supervisors.

# Donner Area - Your Winter Playground

In 1949

10 Lodges

5 gas stations

8 taverns

& restaurants

4 grocery stores

4 post offices

12 sport shops

- Donner Rancho, Donner lake
- Don-Lac Lodge Donner Lake
- Donner Lake Lodge, Donner Lake
- Donner Ski Ranch, Norden
- Vanderford's Lodge, Norden
- Sugar Bowl, Norden
- Hannes Schroll, Norden
- Kline's [sic] Ski Shop, Norden
- Norden Store, Norden
- Norden Lodge, Norden
- Kiski Inn, Norden
- Ski-Inn, Norden
- Soda Springs Service Station, Soda Springs
- Soda Springs Ski Corporation, Soda Springs
- Buek Ski School, Soda Springs
- Soda Springs Rope Tows, Soda Springs
- Zorish Ski Shop, Soda Springs
- Sitzski Lodge, Soda Springs
- Soda Springs Hotel, Soda Springs
- Ice Lakes Chalet, Serene Lakes
- Beacon Hill Lodge, Soda Springs
- Arv Ski School, Soda Springs
- Shi-Hive Norden
- Soda Springs Grocery, Soda Springs
- The Crest Soda Springs
- Donner Summit Lodge, Soda Springs
- Pratt's Garage, Soda Springs
- Marrott Enterprises, Soda Springs
- Steen's Motel, Kingsvale
- Griff-Lou Lodge, Kingsvale
- Kingsvale Park Garage, Kingsvale
- Crampton's Lodge, Rainbow
- Rainbow Lodge, Rainbow
- Trailside lodge, Big Bend
- Big Bend Inn, Big Bend
- Cisco Grove Lodge, Cisco Grove
- Cisco Grove Store, Cisco Grove
- Sierra Gift Shop, Cisco Grove
- Yuba Gap Lodge and Ski Tow, Yuba Gap
- Yuba Gap Lodge Emigrant Gap
- Laing's Ski Tow, Emigrant Gap
- Laing's Pioneer Camp, Emigrant Gap
- Nyack Lodge, Emigrant Gap
- Nyack General Store, Emigrant Gap
- Nyack Service Station, Emigrant Gap
- Lakeview Lodge, Emigrant Gap
- Skyline Lodge, Emigrant Gap
- Rancho Sierra Inn, Emigrant Gap
- Rancho Sierra Service Station, Emigrant G



# Donner Summit

All year HIGHWAY 40

# Ski Area



FOR PURE SKIING PLEASURE, make your reservation NOW for the famous Donner Summit area. Many comfortable lodges and resorts along all-year Highway 40 are waiting to serve you. Over a dozen ski lifts in operation, including one chair lift plus several J-bar and T-bar lifts. National Ski Patrolmen on constant duty. Chain and towing service. Long Ski season, starting well before Christmas and lasting into late spring. Ski instruction available under famous tutors. Nightly entertainment and dancing. Gay mountain atmosphere.

For reservations or information write any of the resorts shown on the map

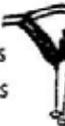
**SKI THE TRAIL OF THE FAMOUS DONNER PARTY**

Trailsyde Lodge no longer exists. Ski Hi no longer exists. Donner Summit Lodge is now employee housing for Sugar Bowl.

**TRAILSZYDE LODGE**

- ROOMS
- SHORT ORDERS
- SKIERS' DINNERS on Weekends Only
- BEER and SOFT DRINKS •

Located between CISCO GROVE and SODA SPRINGS ON HIGHWAY 40




WINTER SPORTS SUMMER SPORTS  
Ideal for All-Year Round Vacationing

**Donner Summit Lodge and Hotel**

TO REAR TO SACRAMENTO

GUIDE - MAP TO DONNER SUMMIT LODGE & HOTEL  
HIGHWAY 40  
SODA SPRINGS, CAL.  
TELEPHONE  
SODA SPRINGS 1941

Excellent Foods AMERICAN OR EUROPEAN PLAN  
One of the West's Finest Mountain Resorts - Every Room with Bath, Radio and Telephone



ATOP DONNER SUMMIT

**SKI-HI**



- \* Cocktails
- \* Good Food
- \* Folk Dancing

Saturday Cocktail Hour . . . from 4 P.M. 'til . . .

ERNIE and MARGO NORDSTROM  
Phone Donner Summit No. 1

**KINGVALE LODGE**



For Reservations go to [www.kingvalelodge.com](http://www.kingvalelodge.com)  
866 426-3560

51228 Donner Pass Rd.  
Soda Springs, CA 95724

Dancing Every Night Refreshments

**The Ski-Hi**

"THE HOUSE OF VANDEFORD"  
Atop Donner Summit on Highway 40  
Elevation 7,135 Feet Soda Springs P.O.  
Gene & Lois Woods Ernie & Margot Nordstrom

Kingvale Lodge is Sugar Bowl employee housing today.

**CRAMPTON'S Food Market** **CRAMPTON'S Food Market**

STOCK UP FOR WINTER

10 Cans Campbell's Chicken Soup	\$1.80
10 Cans Habitant Pea Soup	\$1.60
10 Cans Libby's Sauerkraut	\$1.90
10 Cans Mission Sugar Peas	\$1.50
10 Cans Pictsweet Golden Corn	\$1.90
10 Cans Del Monte Golden Corn	\$1.80
10 Cans Libby's Sweet Garden Peas	\$1.90
10 Cans Dinette Salad Vegetables	\$1.60
10 Cans Apricots in Heavy Syrup	\$3.40
10 Cans Peach Halves, Light Syrup	\$2.70
10 Cans Kingan's Corned Beef Hash	\$2.40
10 Cans Treesweet Grapefruit Juice	\$1.50
10 Cans Hunt's Tomato Juice	\$1.10
10 Cans Clam Chowder	\$2.70
10 Cans Pismo Minced Clams	\$3.40
10 Bottles Heinz Tomato Catsup	\$2.30
10 Cans Grated Tuna	\$3.10
10 Jars Best Foods Mustard-Horadish	90c
10 Cans Planters Cocktail Peanuts	\$2.70
10 Cans V-8 Vegetable Cocktail Juices	\$1.60
10 Jars Kraft Cheese Spread	\$2.40
10 Pounds of Wild Flower Honey	\$4.00
10 Pounds Farmer Bros. Coffee	\$4.90
10 Cans Sweet Potatoes	\$3.00
No. 10 Can of Pumpkin	45c
No. 10 Can of Sliced Beets	50c
No. 10 Can of Dewkist Prune Plums	75c
No. 10 Can of Solid Pack Tomatoes	85c
No. 10 Can of Sliced Peaches in heavy syrup	\$1.00
No. 10 Can of Mission Cut Green Beans	75c
No. 10 Can of Solid Pack Pie Apricots	\$1.20
No. 10 Can of Sweet Blossom Peas	75c

These Prices ONLY While Present Stocks Last

**CRAMPTON'S FOOD MARKET**

10 Miles West of Truckee on Highway 40 and Opposite Hampshire Rocks Public Camp - Look for Neon Sign

**Ski** at **SODA SPRINGS**

Double Chair Lift  
J-Bar Lift - Free Parking  
Slopes Packed Daily  
by Sno-Cat  
Run the "Flying 40"  
Eat at the "Snowflake"

**CERTIFIED SKI SCHOOL** WHERE THE INSTRUCTORS ARE SKI INSTRUCTORS

SKI THE RELAXED WAY WITH **BUEK** THE DIRECTOR CARL BUEK CO-DIRECTOR GRATS POWERS

**BUEK SKI SHOP**  
Soda Springs - Calif.

The Western Magazine of Skiing 13

Soda Springs Ski area touts itself as the oldest ski area in California. This ad is from 1953. Note the separate business, Buek Ski Shop which does not exist..

The Beacon Hill Lodge sat one lot west of the Soda Springs Hotel. This ad is from 1946. It burned in the 1970's

Left, Crampton's sat where the westbound Rainbow exit from I-80 is today.

For the Best In Recreation

**Come to the High Sierra**  
and for the Best on the Sierra Come To



**Beacon Hill Lodge**

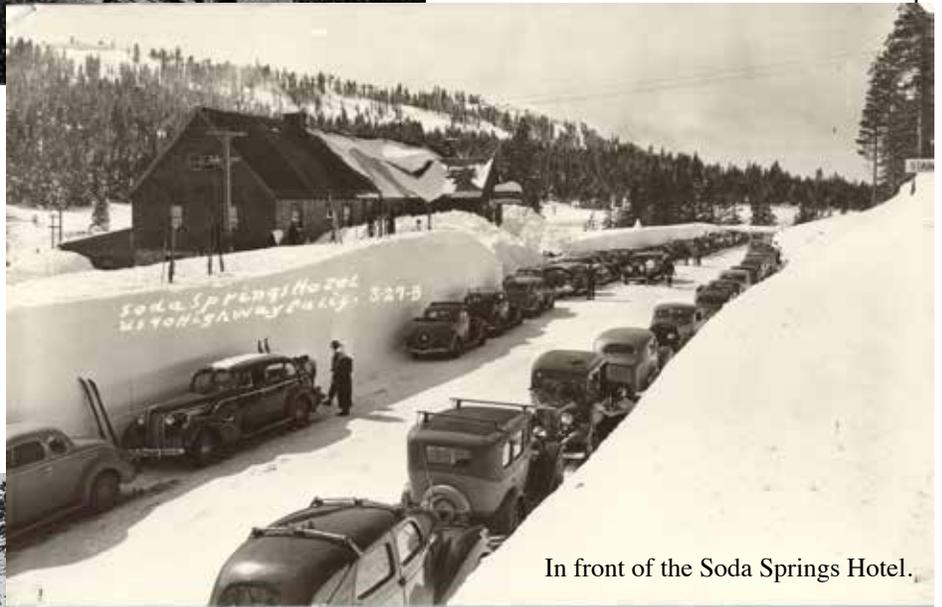
Elmo Moriano, Manager SODA SPRINGS, Calif.



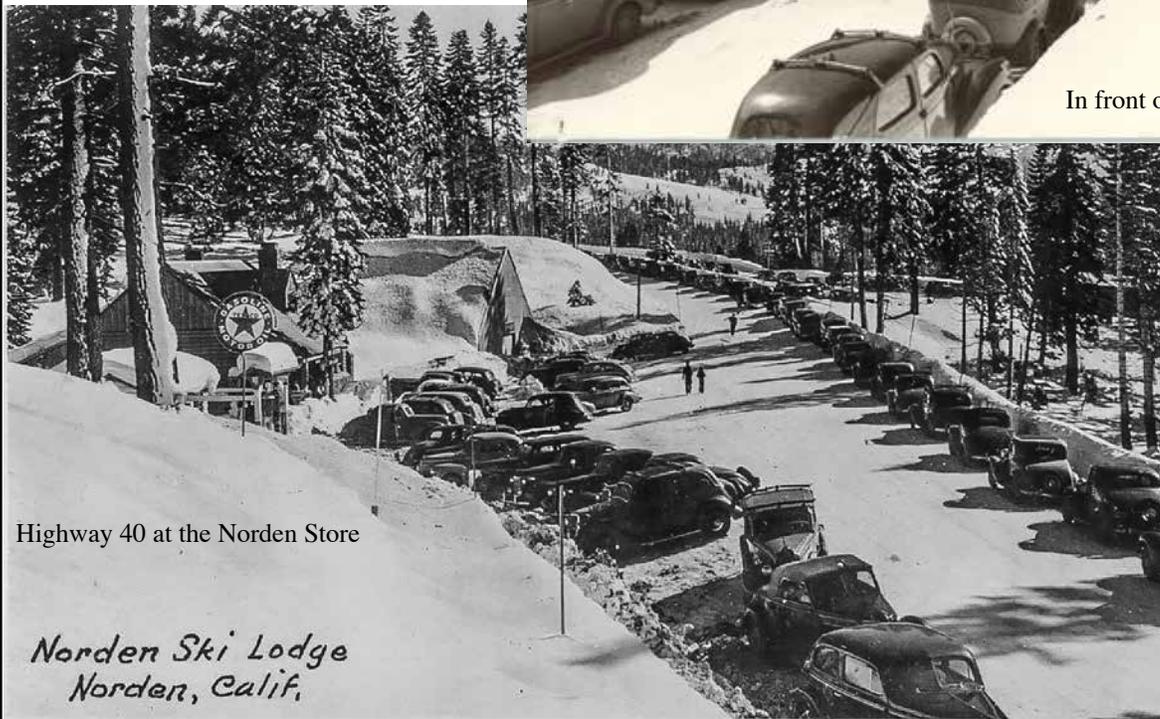
# What Was It Like Before I-80?



Winter traffic on Highway 40.



In front of the Soda Springs Hotel.



Highway 40 at the Norden Store

*Norden Ski Lodge  
Norden, Calif.*



Parking on Highway 40

Editorial note: Of course only a few people would like Donner Summit to return to the days before I-80. Likewise only a few people think that today there are too many people and we need to keep people out.

Most people would like to see a modest increase in the local economy with that increase set along old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd. leaving the residential areas residential.

## Thousands At Summit Over Last Weekend

Taverns Filled to Capacity As Cars, Trains Bring Throng

CONDITIONS IDEAL

Officers Busy As Autos Line Highways; Accidents Avoided

January 18, 1940



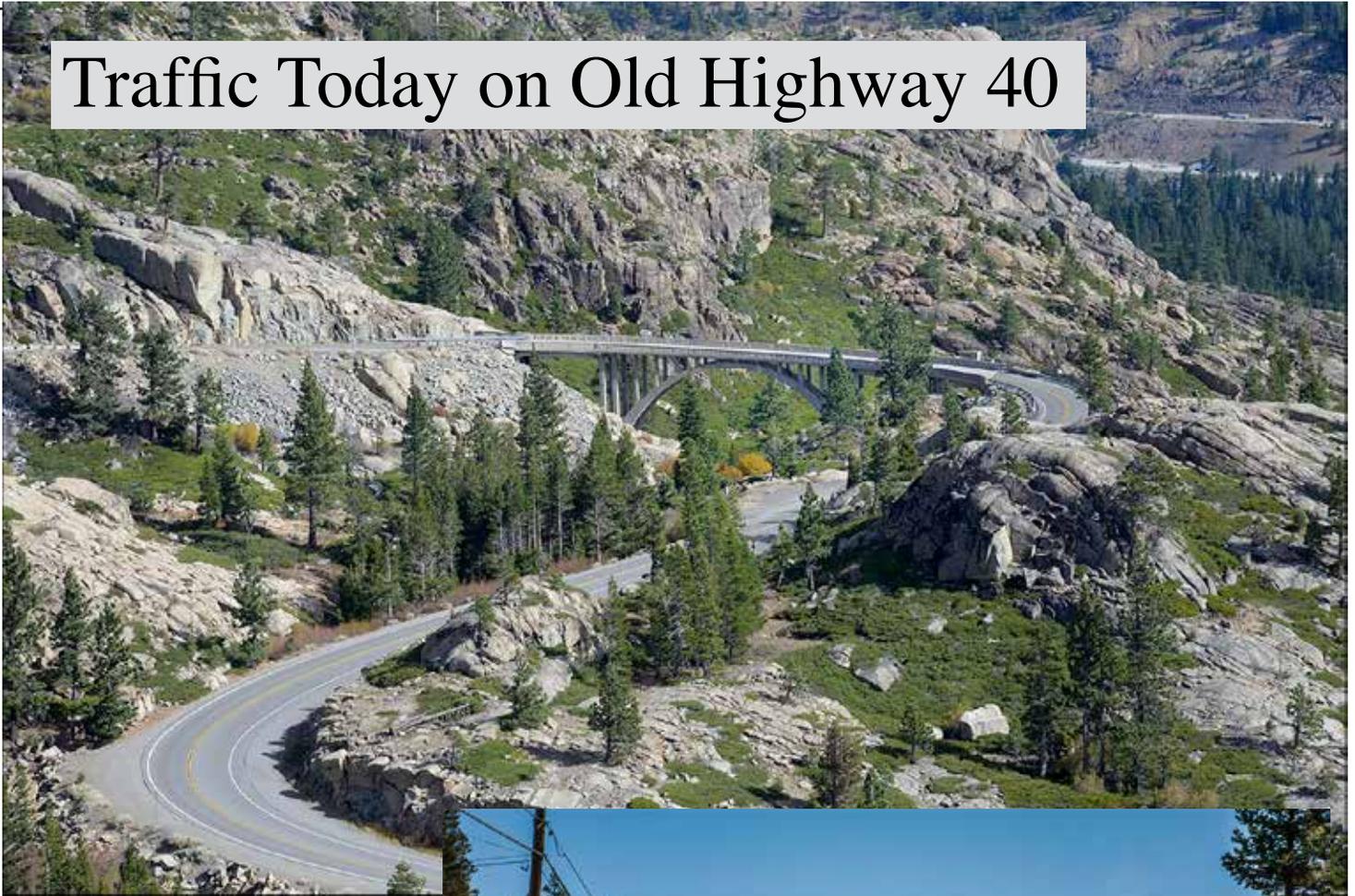
Highway 40 at the Soda Springs Hotel in 1938.



**REAL COOL**—Cars line up on Highway 40 near Donner Summit as heavy snowfall interrupts flow of traffic. This jam was complicated by collision which blocked right of way entirely for a while. Scene is looking west from Donner Ski Ranch.

San Francisco Examiner 1/28/58

# Traffic Today on Old Highway 40



Traffic on Donner Summit today is much different from before the freeway.



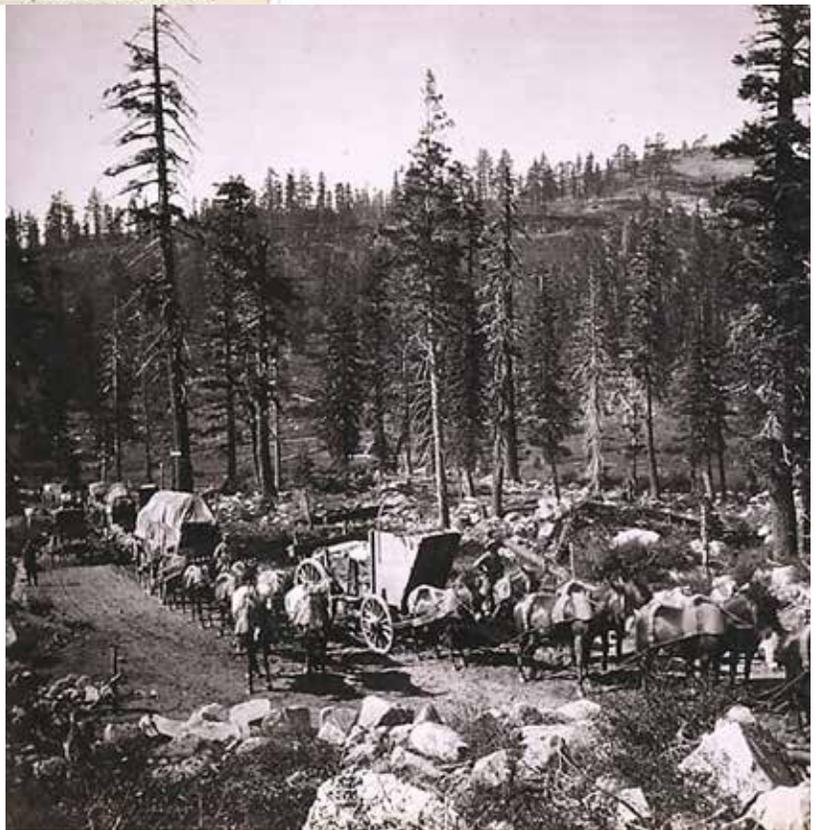
Interstate 80

# Just for Fun - Old Time Traffic



183. Main Street, Upper Cisco, 5,911 feet elevation.

Traffic on what would eventually become Donner Pass Rd./Highway 40/Lincoln Highway. This is the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd., built by the railroad as a toll road to facilitate building the railroad. Above is Upper Cisco, above where the gas station is today. To the right is the Dutch Flat Rd. near Cisco. Traffic was heavy until the coming of the railroad and then it was abandoned until the route became the Lincoln Highway.



# Donner Summit Historical Society

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

## Membership

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

- new membership
- Renewing membership
- Individual Membership \$40
- Family Membership \$60
- Friend \$100
- Sponsor \$250
- Patron \$500
- Patron \$500
- Benefactor \$1000

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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

**You can also go to our website and use PayPal or a credit card.**

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

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