

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

November, 2018 issue #123

## The Search For Soda Springs Station

Another Mission into Donner Summit History by the MHRT

Downtown Soda Springs today is at the blinking light and from there towards the freeway. The DSHS is at the blinking light attached to the Soda Springs Hotel building which is now condominiums, the new glass studio is next door. The store and post office are a few hundred yards west and the Donner Summit Lodge building is at the freeway exit next to the gas station. There's not much in downtown Soda Springs.

In the old days, when Highway 40 was the trans-Sierra route, there was lots of business. In 1949 there were 10 lodges, five gas stations, eight taverns and restaurants, four grocery stores, four post offices, and twelve sports shops. There was a lot more to Donner Summit and Soda Springs. That's a different story though.

Before that, before Highway 40, in the days of the Lincoln Highway and before, downtown Soda Springs was across the railroad tracks and was called Soda Springs Station. There people disembarked from the train and hopped on the stage to go down to the Cedars where there was a hotel called Summit Soda Springs. That's where the original Soda Springs was and is located, with its horribly tasting water. Nineteenth Century visitors, at least some of them, swore by the water, though, and drank it to improve health and vigor (see the April, '17 [Heirloom](#)). For a couple of years Summit Mineral Water was bottled there too, so the benefits of the water could be shared with those not able to travel to the source. That's another story though too. One day we'll get to Summit Soda Springs and the Cedars and you'll get to see a Summit Mineral Water bottle.

Poking around in the State library we came across photographs of some of the original buildings in the

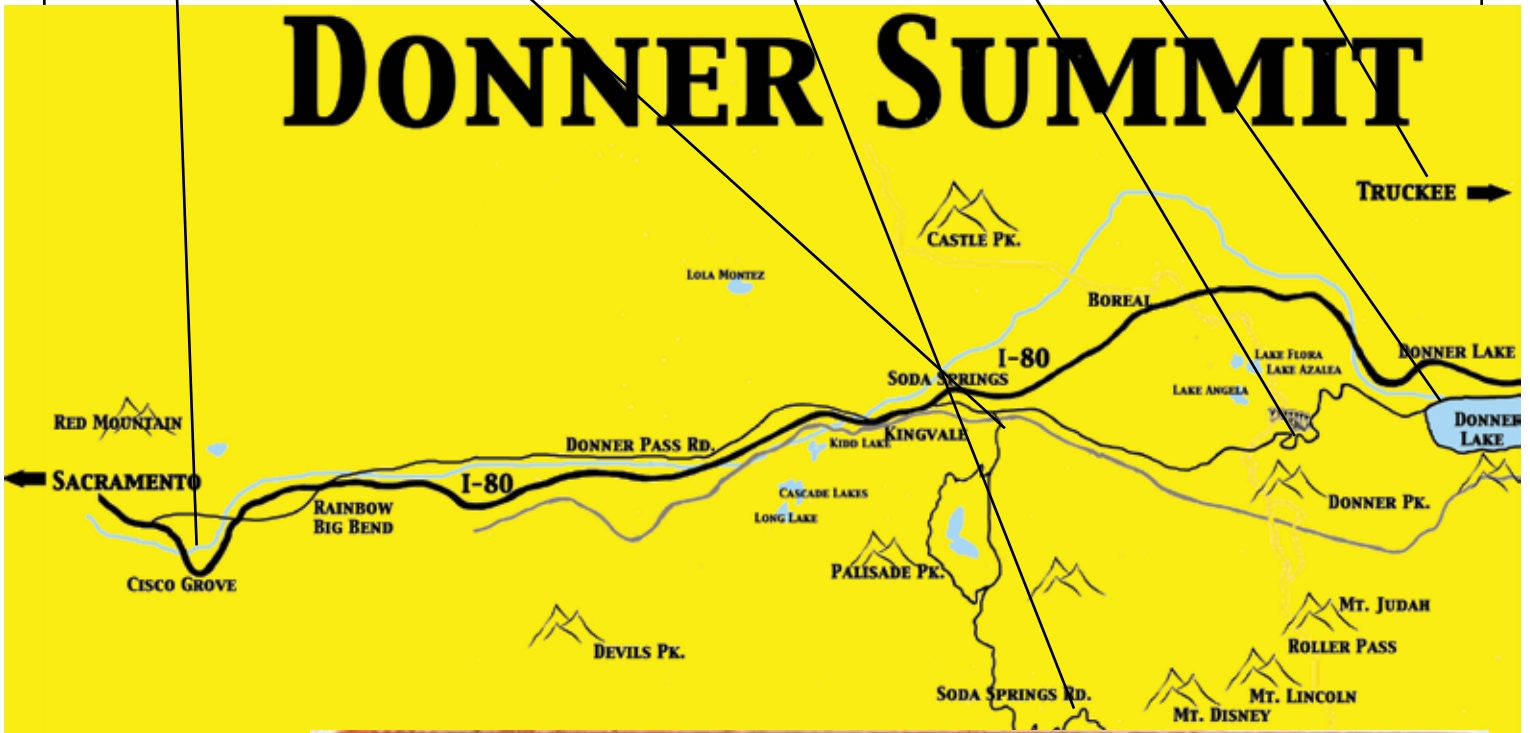


Carleton Watkins "Summit Valley Station" #4208 taken about 1874  
This is the saloon building, "A" on the following graphics. Snowsheds are in the background. Courtesy of the California State Library

# Story Locations in this Issue

Cisco Grove pg 17 Soda Springs Station pg 1 Summit Soda Springs text pg 1 Donner Lake text pg 14

Great Grandma at Donner Pass pg 18 Truckee



Carleton Watkins, "Summit Valley Station, CPRR" #4207 taken about 1874. This another view of the saloon building page 1

Courtesy of the California State Library. Note the snowsheds in the background.



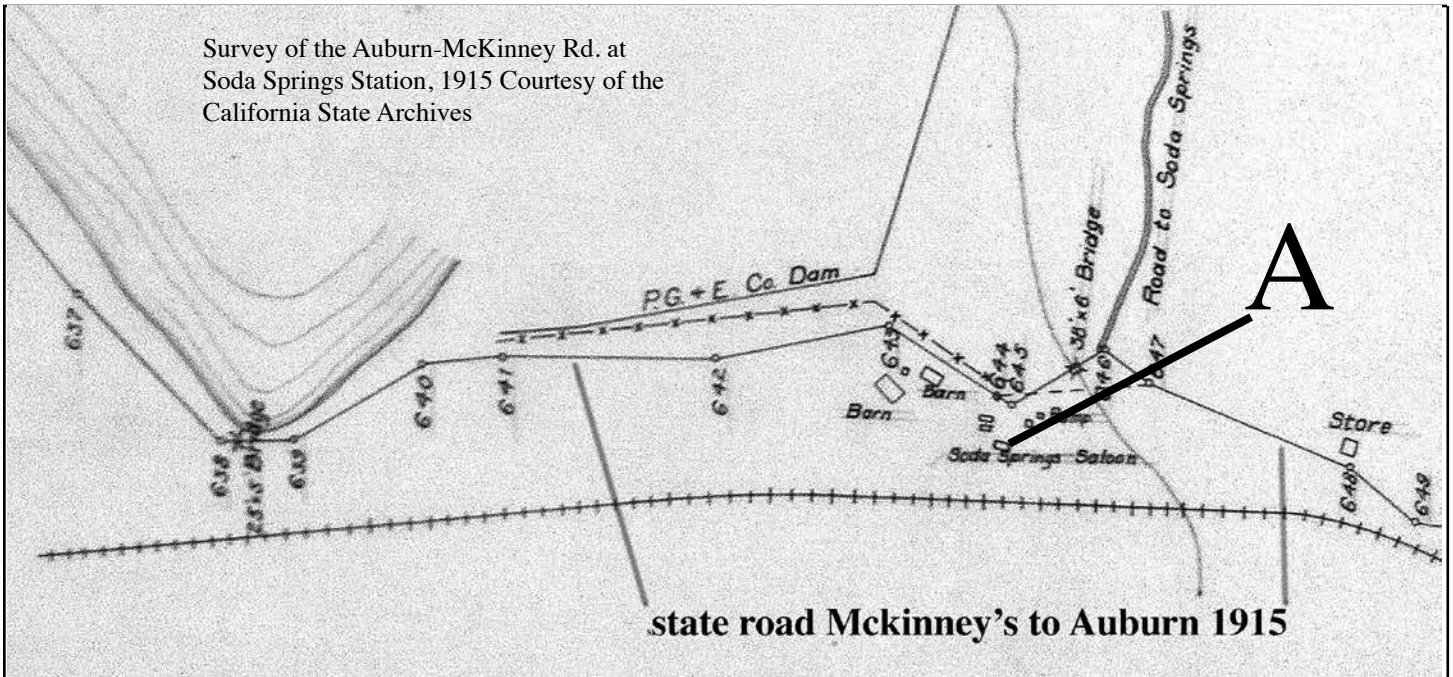
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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

Find us on 

Survey of the Auburn-McKinney Rd. at Soda Springs Station, 1915 Courtesy of the California State Archives



state road Mckinney's to Auburn 1915

downtown Soda Springs of yesterday (pages 1 & 2) and then of course the Norm Saylor Collection at the DSHS was the source for a couple of less old photographs as was the Placer County Archives in Auburn. Naturally we wanted to know where the original Soda Springs Station buildings had been situated. Where exactly was downtown Soda Springs in the old days? Where was the saloon in the pictures on pages 1 & 2 - location labeled "A" on the following map(s). To get a handle on that more information was needed and that appeared on a map found in the State Archives (here it should be noted that Rick Martel of [www.historicdonnertrail.org/](http://www.historicdonnertrail.org/) pointed us to that map). The map, excerpt above, is a survey of the Auburn-McKinney Road (McKinney was a location on the west shore of Lake Tahoe about 8 miles south of Tahoe City on the west side).

Our Then and Now guy, Art Clark, is the fellow to whom to turn to analyze old maps and their relationships to today. The map of the Auburn-McKinney Rd. would appear to be a good source for finding the original buildings because the surveyor tasked with the job of surveying the road, also surveyed some neighboring buildings and landmarks. That's how Art was able to find the Summit Hotel II. He used the surveyor's notes, listing the headings and distances, to go from a known landmark to where the hotel was. Indeed, using his work, Art was able to lead us to the hotel site. There we found the old foundations, the hole for the three story outhouse, broken crockery, a plethora of square nails, old timbers, the outline on the ground of a truss for the barn, etc. That's a past story though (see the July, '13 [Heirloom](#)).

Of course, giddy with delight, we could not be satisfied with the exercise until we'd extended it to Soda Springs Station where the map showed a number of buildings. Maybe they were the same ones in the old photographs and so the MHRT

(Mobile Historical Research Team) gave Art the task of finding the buildings.

Art is a perfectionist though. He wants his work to be of the highest quality. The readers deserve no less, he says. We would be satisfied with general locations, but Art wanted exact locations. The problem though, was that there was not a suitable landmark in the neighborhood of old downtown Soda Springs Station from which to proceed with the headings. Precision would be difficult. I suggested going back up the road to something sure but that would have been quite a ways back up the Lincoln Highway, the dirt road that runs along the edge of Van Norden. Working back, reading by reading for a long way, would have been inaccurate. Small discrepancies would be magnified. It would not work.

Years passed. We got older. Art did not lose his desire for precision. Then, during an MHRT outing up the Palisades at Sugar Bowl to reprise Charlie Chaplin's Gold Rush movie beginning, (see the July, '15 [Heirloom](#), "Death Defying Re-Enactment...") the discussion turned to my son, an architectural surveyor. He surveys large high-value buildings and land like the SF MOMA prior to its expansion. Art was intrigued. Here was precision via millions of data points. Points could be gathered and overlaid on the 1915 map. Some landmarks would match. We could site the buildings of Soda Springs Station.

My son is a busy fellow though, running his business and renovating his Napa house (to which he's drafted his father for "grunt labor.") Time passed and we got older. I said that.

Then in the fall of 2015 my son arrived with his 3d LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) scanner. Art arrived with his maps and various accouterments, the exact functions of

which are better left to professionals like Art. George Lamson also arrived with his camera for Heirloom documentation. We were off. Art compromised and chose the center of the current bridge of the Yuba River at the Soda Springs Ski Area. A bridge across the Yuba is marked on the 1915 map (although Art worried that the bridge location may have moved given all the work done in the area over the decades.)

In the 1915 survey book, the data was written the way surveyors like. In their style, a heading from one point to another might read N10°15'W. For use in Art's GPS and mapping program, this would be 349°45'. So, first, all his headings had to be converted to this format. Then it was just a matter of telling the mapping program to project that heading for a distance of XX feet and make a new point. Then, using the new point, repeat the above for subsequent points.

Once approximate building locations had been determined, a series of tripods with balls on top were set out at building corners. Then the LIDAR 3d scanner came out and scanned the area making data points, recording everything including the tripods with the balls on top. That scan contains millions of data points which can be converted via software into a file that can be laid atop the 1915 map and so put current features onto the 1915 map. Unfortunately we were very late in the season and so had to put off further work, photographing with a drone and marking building positions with orange cones for photography, until later.

As the MHRT worked the fancy scanner and the dozen or so tripods with balls attracted the attention of passersby, a number of whom stopped. Suitably enlightened about the uses of modern technology to resolve history mysteries, they went on their ways.

The last part of the investigation came two years later after the scans had been converted into a large print-out that showed current landmarks and original building corners. George Lamson then took GoogleEarth and overlaid that onto the 1915 and 2016 surveys. To that "sandwich" he was able to derive distances and so in July, '18 the MHRT arrived back at the site with tape measures, traffic cones from the local water district, and a drone. We set the cones at building corners and George piloted his drone overhead to get pictures of the actual layout.

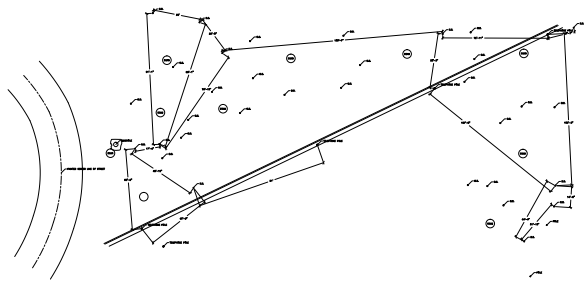
Next time you pass the Soda Springs Ski Area on the east side of Soda Springs Rd. consider how different things were. There was a hotel, a saloon, a couple of barns and some outbuildings. The stage was picking up passengers at the station and heading down Soda Springs Rd. for the hotel at Summit Soda Springs (until it burned in 1898). Individual travelers and stagecoaches were traveling the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Rd. along Van Norden and through what is now the main Soda Springs Ski Area parking lot. They were heading to or back from Virginia City and points east, or to and back from Sacramento and points west. It must have been a busy place. Later of course it became a stop on the Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental highway. Once Highway 40 supplanted the Lincoln Highway and the Summit Soda Springs burned down, Soda Springs Station became today's "downtown" Soda Springs relocated to the other side of the railroad tracks.



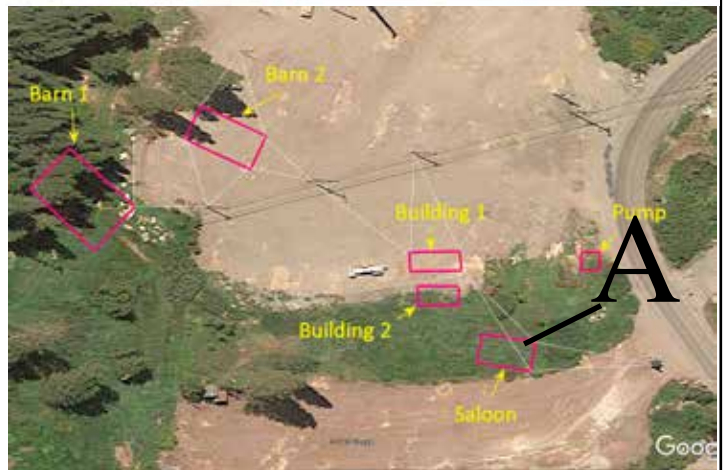
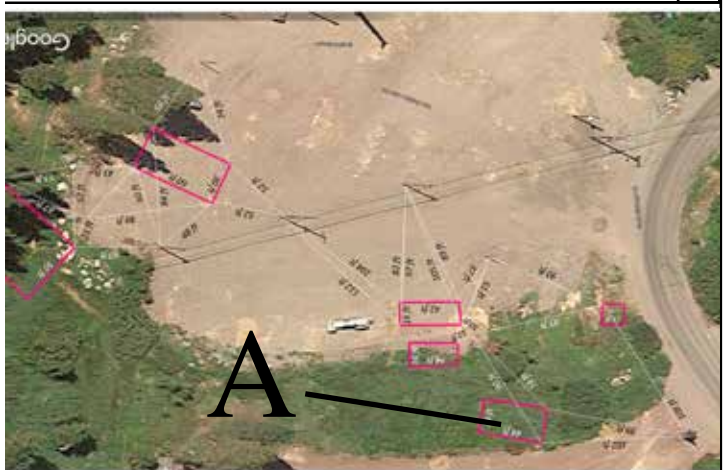
From top: Art Clark laying out his accouterments. Christopher Oudegeest laying out LIDAR equipment containers. Christopher Oudegeest with the 3d scanner set up. Christopher Oudegeest setting out small balls to mark building corners. Large balls "register" scans to put scans together. Photos by George Lamson



Closeup of Art's equipment.  
 Below: measuring.  
 Photos by George Lamson



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Right from Top:  
 Overlay the satellite view onto the 1915 survey.  
 3d LIDAR scan of the relevant area.  
 GoogleEarth with LIDAR Scan and buildings from 1915 map overlaid  
 Distances added to the above image



Above: Art Clark and George Lamson comparing print outs preparing to measure. Right top and Right: placing traffic cones to mark building corners.



George Lamson preparing the drone for action. Right: the drone in action.



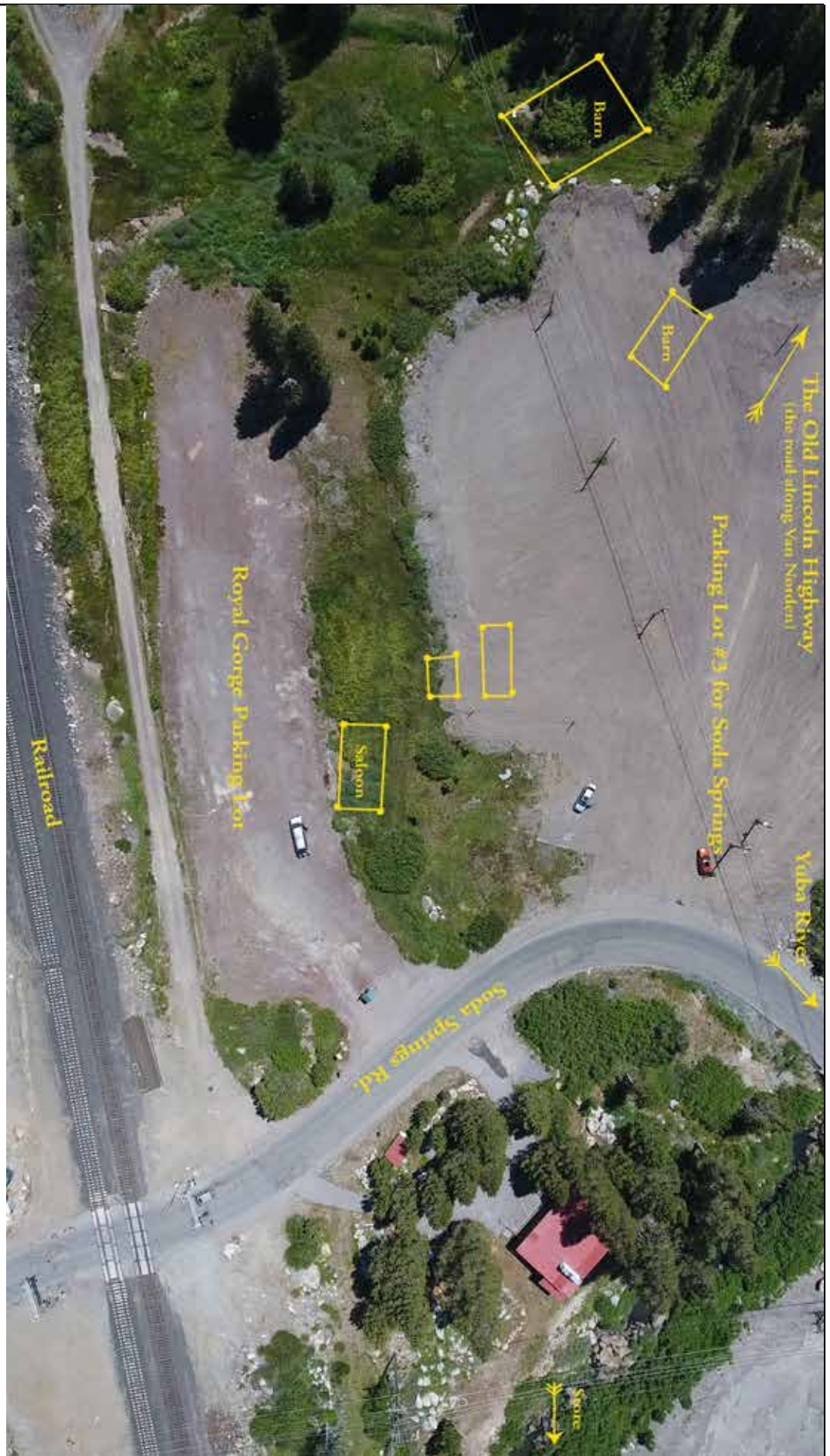
Art Clark and George Lamson hunting for landmarks.



Art Clark and George Lamson placing the saloon building corners

Here is our attempt at a composite of the various drone pictures' building corners. This was difficult since drone pictures were varying angles and altitudes.

Here you see the various buildings placed on today's parking lots on the south side of the railroad tracks. Note that we did not locate the store building which was somewhere out in the Soda Springs #1 parking lot. Someone might want to do their own investigating.



# Collage of Soda Springs Station over the Years



Soda Springs Station Saloon about 192. Note the snowsheds in the back.



Soda Springs Station Saloon from the Knezovich Collins Album at the DSHS. Taken about the same time as the one at top. Note again, the snowsheds in the rear.





Left: Soda Springs Station which sat across the river from the old hotel. Date unknown. Thanks to the Placer County Archives.

The sign says, "  
Soda Springs  
Station  
Rooms & Meals  
General  
Merchandise

and Under that,  
"SHELL  
GASOLINE"



Left: the inside of the Soda Springs Station at the railroad tracks. Date unknown.

Right: Snowflake Lodge Ski Shop which sat in what is now the parking lot #3 of Soda Springs Ski Area. The original saloon (page 1) location was directly behind. The slab of the Snowflake still sits just off Soda Springs Rd.





Here is the Soda Springs Station location in 1958. Bottom center is the Snowflake Lodge (see previous page) run by Lee and June Forester. Directly above on the left a ski shop owned by Helen Hogle (her husband, Milt, ran the Soda Springs Ski Corporation). Across the street is the Buek Ski Shop (See the "Madman of Donner Summit" in the May, '10 Heirloom. The building to the lower right is a house in which the Prom family lived at the time and which was owned by the Buek Family. The house is still there but the other buildings are long gone.

Eventually the road extending up between the two ski shops will be plowed in winter and open access to Serene Lakes.

Here's a little extra room. Take a look at the story, "Great Grandma at Donner Summit" on page 17.

Suppose you found an old photograph or, better, a lot of old photographs having to do with Donner Summit. Let us copy them and have the background story (ies).

[infor@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](mailto:infor@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

# A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains, 1872

## Isabella Bird

### Pt II: Donner Lake, Snowsheds and Keseburg

#### Letter II

A lady's "get-up" — Grizzly bears — The "Gems of the Sierras" — A tragic tale — A carnival of color.

[In part I in last month's [Heirloom](#), Isabella ran into a bear that spooked her horse. Isabella was thrown to the ground and the horse ran off. This letter has been edited for length and the addition of paragraphs. The letter is part of a series of letters Isabella wrote to her sister who stayed in England rather than travel the world as Isabella did.]

I dreamt of bears so vividly that I woke with a furry death hug at my throat, but feeling quite refreshed.

My horse was so excitable that I avoided the center of Truckee, and skulked through a collection of Chinamen's shanties to the stable, where a prodigious roan horse, standing seventeen hands high, was produced for my ride to the Donner Lake. I asked the owner, who was as interested in my enjoying myself as a West Highlander might have been, if there were not ruffians about who might make an evening ride dangerous. A story was current of a man having ridden through Truckee two evenings before with a chopped-up human body in a sack behind the saddle, and hosts of stories of ruffianism are located there, rightly or wrongly. This man said, "There's a bad breed of ruffians, but the ugliest among them all won't touch you. There's nothing Western folk admire so much as pluck in a woman."

I had to get on a barrel before I could reach the stirrup, and when I was mounted my feet only came half-way down the horse's sides. I felt like a fly on him. The road at first lay through a valley without a river, but some swampishness nourished some rank swamp grass, the first GREEN grass I have seen in America; and the pines, with their red stems, looked beautiful rising out of it.

I hurried along, and came upon the Donner Lake quite suddenly, to be completely smitten by its beauty. It is only about three miles long by one and a half broad, and lies hidden away among mountains, with no dwellings on its shores but some deserted lumberers' cabins. Its loneliness pleased me well. I did not see man, beast, or bird from the time I left Truckee till I returned. The mountains, which rise abruptly from the margin, are covered with dense pine forests, through which, here and there, strange forms of bare grey rock, castellated, or needle-like, protrude themselves. On the opposite side, at a height of about 6,000 feet, a grey, ascending line, from which rumbling, incoherent sounds occasionally proceeded, is seen through the pines. This is one

of the snowsheds of the Pacific Railroad, which shuts out from travelers all that I was seeing.

The lake is called after Mr. Donner, who, with his family, arrived at the Truckee River in the fall of the year, in company with a party of emigrants bound for California. Being encumbered

with many cattle, he let the company pass on, and, with his own party of sixteen souls, which included his wife and four children, encamped by the lake. In the morning they found themselves surrounded by an expanse of snow, and after some consultation it was agreed that the whole party except Mr. Donner who was unwell, his wife, and a German friend, should take the horses and attempt to cross the mountain, which, after much peril, they succeeded in doing; but, as the storm continued for several weeks, it was impossible for any rescue party to succor the three who had been left behind.

In the early spring, when the snow was hard enough for traveling, a party started in quest, expecting to find the snow-bound alive and well, as they had cattle enough for their support, and, after weeks of toil and exposure, they scaled the Sierras and reached the Donner Lake.

On arriving at the camp they opened the rude door, and there, sitting before the fire, they found the German, holding a roasted human arm and hand, which he was greedily eating. The rescue party overpowered him, and with difficulty tore the arm from him.

A short search discovered the body of the lady, minus the arm, frozen in the snow, round, plump, and fair, showing that she was in perfect health when she met her fate. The rescuers returned to California, taking the German with them, whose story was that Mr. Donner died in the fall, and that the cattle



escaped, leaving them but little food, and that when this was exhausted Mrs. Donner died. The story never gained any credence, and the truth oozed out that the German had murdered the husband, then brutally murdered the wife, and had seized upon Donner's money. There were, however, no witnesses, and the murderer escaped with the enforced surrender of the money to the Donner orphans.

This tragic story filled my mind as I rode towards the head of the lake, which became every moment grander and more unutterably lovely. The sun was setting fast, and against his golden light green promontories, wooded with stately pines, stood out one beyond another in a medium of dark rich blue, while grey bleached summits, peaked, turreted, and snow slashed, were piled above them, gleaming with amber light. Darker grew the blue gloom, the dew fell heavily, aromatic odors floated on the air, and still the lofty peaks glowed with living light, till in one second it died off from them, leaving them with the ashy paleness of a dead face. It was dark and cold under the mountain shadows, the frosty chill of the high altitude wrapped me round, the solitude was overwhelming, and I reluctantly turned my horse's head towards Truckee, often looking back to the ashy summits in their unearthly fascination.

Eastwards the look of the scenery was changing every moment, while the lake for long remained "one burnished sheet of living gold," and Truckee lay utterly out of sight in a hollow filled with lake and cobalt. Before long a carnival of color began which I can only describe as delirious, intoxicating, a hardly bearable joy, a tender anguish, an indescribable yearning, an unearthly music, rich in love and worship. It lasted considerably more than an hour, and though the road was growing

very dark, and the train which was to take me thence was fast climbing the Sierras, I could not ride faster than a walk.

The eastward mountains, which had been grey, blushed pale pink, the pink deepened into rose, and the rose into crimson, and then all solidity etherealized away and became clear and pure as an amethyst, while all the waving ranges and the broken pine-clothed ridges below etherealized too, but into a dark rich blue, and a strange effect of atmosphere blended the whole into one perfect picture. It changed, deepened, reddened, melted, growing more and more wonderful, while under the pines it was night, till, having displayed itself for an hour, the jewelled peaks suddenly became like those of the Sierras, wan as the face of death. Far later the cold golden light lingered in the west, with pines in relief against its purity, and where the rose light had glowed in the east, a huge moon upheaved itself, and the red flicker of forest fires luridly streaked the mountain sides near and far off. I realized that night had come with its EERINESS, and putting my great horse into a gallop I clung on to him till I pulled him up in Truckee, which was at the height of its evening revelries—fires blazing out of doors, bar-rooms and saloons crammed, lights glaring, gaming tables thronged, fiddle and banjo in frightful discord, and the air ringing with ribaldry and profanity.

I. L. B.

## Isabella Bird

Isabella Bird, author of *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, her most popular book, was a famous 19<sup>th</sup> Century explorer, photographer, and author. She ended up in the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame, The Royal Scottish Geographical Society and was the first woman elected as a fellow to the Royal Geographic Society.

Isabella was born in England in 1831. She was sickly as a child and had health problems as an adult so her doctor prescribed an "outdoor life" and she began traveling in 1854, aged 23.

At a time when women were better seen than heard, Isabella charted a life of adventure, traveling the world, writing about it, and photographing it. She may have fallen in love with a one-eyed outlaw in Colorado, Rocky Mountain Jim, whose love she turned down because a drunken outlaw was not suitable, long term, for a lady. In any case she spent a lot of time with him. She eventually married someone else when she was fifty years old. A few years later she inherited a good amount of money when her husband died and decided to study medicine and become a missionary. She established a hospital and then joined up with British soldiers in the Near East and carried a revolver along with her medical supplies. She sounds fascinating.

Rather than let you continue on in suspense until December our editorial staff decided to include Isabella's third letter this month. It describes train travel and so, compliments the Pacific Tourist you will find later in this issue.

Letter III

A Temple of Morpheus—Utah—A "God-forgotten" town—A distressed couple—Dog villages—A temperance colony—A Colorado inn—The bug pest—Fort Collins.

CHEYENNE, WYOMING, September 8.

Precisely at 11 P.M. the huge Pacific train, with its heavy bell tolling, thundered up to the door of the Truckee House, and on presenting my ticket at the double door of a "Silver Palace" car, the slippered steward, whispering low, conducted me to my berth—a luxurious bed three and a half feet wide, with a hair mattress on springs, fine linen sheets, and costly California blankets. The twenty-four inmates of the car were all invisible, asleep behind rich curtains. It was a true Temple of Morpheus. Profound sleep was the object to which everything was dedicated. Four silver lamps hanging from the roof, and burning low, gave a dreamy light. On each side of the center passage, rich rep curtains, green and crimson, striped with gold, hung from silver bars running near the roof, and trailed on the soft Axminster carpet. The temperature was carefully kept at 70 degrees. It was 29 degrees outside. Silence and freedom from jolting were secured by double doors and windows, costly and ingenious arrangements of springs and cushions, and a speed limited to eighteen miles an hour.

As I lay down, the gallop under the dark pines, the frosty moon, the forest fires, the flaring lights and roaring din of Truckee faded as dreams fade, and eight hours later a pure, pink dawn divulged a level blasted region, with grey sage brush growing out of a soil encrusted with alkali, and bounded on either side by low glaring ridges. All through that day we traveled under a cloudless sky over solitary glaring plains, and stopped twice at solitary, glaring frame houses, where coarse, greasy meals, infested by lazy flies, were provided at a dollar per head. By evening we were running across the continent on a bee line, and I

sat for an hour on the rear platform of the rear car to enjoy the wonderful beauty of the sunset and the atmosphere. Far as one could see in the crystalline air there was nothing but desert. The jagged Humboldt ranges flaming in the sunset, with snow in their clefts, though forty-five miles off, looked within an easy canter. The bright metal track, purpling like all else in the cool distance, was all that linked one with Eastern or Western civilization.

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

## The Pacific Tourist.

ADAMS & BISHOP'S  
**Illustrated Trans-Continental Guide**  
OF TRAVEL,  
FROM  
**The Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.**

CONTAINING FULL DESCRIPTIONS OF  
RAILROAD ROUTES ACROSS THE CONTINENT, ALL PLEASURE RESORTS AND PLACES OF MOST  
NOTED SCENERY IN THE FAR WEST, ALSO OF ALL CITIES, TOWNS, VILLAGES,  
U. S. FORTS, SPRINGS, LAKES, MOUNTAINS,  
ROUTES OF SUMMER TRAVEL, BEST LOCALITIES FOR HUNTING, FISHING, SPORTING, AND ENJOY-  
MENT, WITH ALL NEEDFUL INFORMATION FOR THE PLEASURE TRAVELER,  
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A COMPLETE TRAVELER'S GUIDE  
OF  
**The Union and Central Pacific Railroads,**  
AND ALL POINTS OF BUSINESS OR PLEASURE TRAVEL TO  
CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, NEBRASKA, WYOMING, UTAH, NEVADA, MONTANA, THE MINES AND MINING  
OF THE TERRITORIES, THE LANDS OF THE PACIFIC COAST, THE WONDERS OF THE  
ROCKY MOUNTAINS, THE SCENERY OF THE SIERRA NEVADAS, THE COL-  
ORADO MOUNTAINS, THE BIG TREES, THE GEYSERS, THE  
YOSEMITE, AND THE YELLOWSTONE.

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# Book Review

## The Pacific Tourist

Illustrated Trans-Continental Guide of Travel from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean

Reprint of the 1884 edition

378 pages

The book was originally written and developed by “forty celebrated artists, writers, explorers, and correspondents” Henry T. Williams, who compiled the information and supervised the book’s preparation, traveled for nine months gathering information and spending \$20,000.

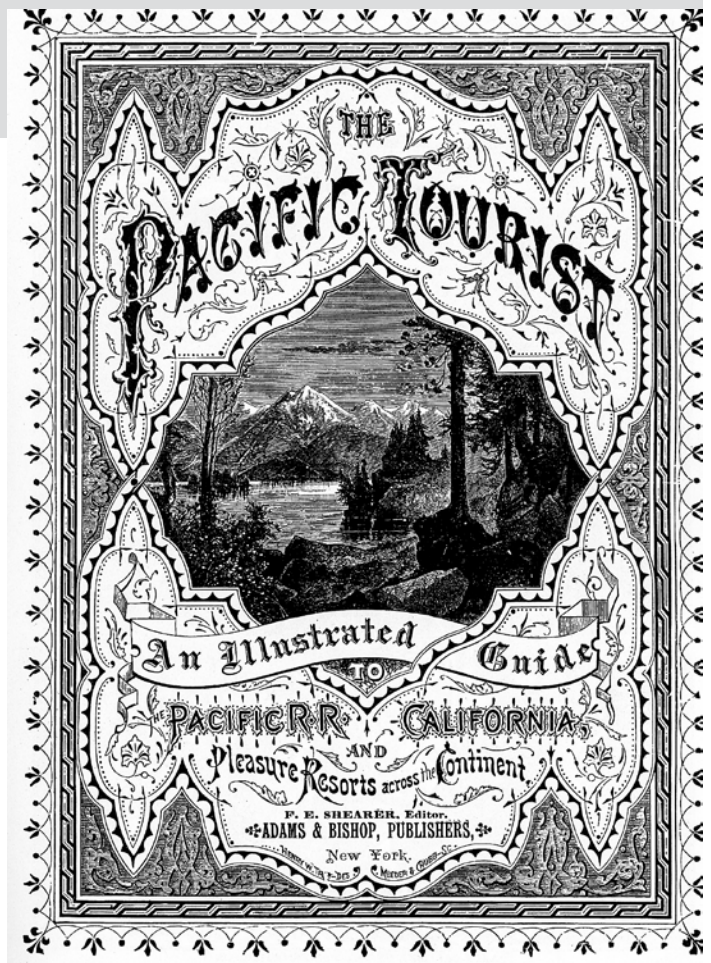
This is a travel book and best read as one travels across America in 1884. If you try to read it straight through in a couple of sittings it will get tedious as each stop on the railroad route is described one after another. It’s better in small doses especially when you get to Tahoe, Truckee and the Summit. Then you can savor it as your Palace Car travels over the Sierra. If you get the chance to travel by railroad across the country in 1884 this is the book for you.

“The grandest of American scenery borders the magnificent route of the Pacific railroads.” The Pacific Tourist describes it all and along with the scenery described is a slice of 19th Century life: train travel. That information and those hints will help with your travel. For example, upon switching to the Central Pacific in Ogden you have an hour so there is no need to rush.

“In no part of the world is travel made so easy and comfortable as on the Pacific Railroad. .... It is a constant delight, and to ladies and families it is accompanied with absolutely no fatigue or discomfort. One lives at home in the Palace Car with as much true enjoyment as in the home drawing-room... For an entire week or more, as the train leisurely crosses the Continent, the little section and berth allotted to you, so neat and clean, so nicely furnished and kept, becomes your home. Here you sit and read, play your games, indulge in social conversation and glee, and if fortunate enough to possess good company of friends to join you, the overland tour becomes an intense delight.”

The description of the journey from New York to Chicago at 40 MPH is a bit tedious but after Chicago things begin to change. Travel is more luxurious and slower (20-30 MPH). There are little villages of prairie dogs to amuse everyone and there are good views. “... the tourist is full of glow and enthusiasm. He is alive with enjoyment, and yet can scarcely tell why.” We are interested in Donner Summit and crossing the Sierra, though, and so cannot spend much time here.

The book gives hints for train travel:



- Take along a companion otherwise your traveling companions might not be agreeable.
- Tip your porter a dollar – it’s worth it for his attention to things.
- Food at the eating houses along the way is excellent. The usual price is \$1.00.
- Bring along a lunch basket for long stretches and delays.
- The climate changes as you travel so have a variety of outfits and “always wear your underclothing.”
- You get a 100 lb. baggage allowance.
- Bring along books and papers “to while away your leisure hours.”

The cost of a berth from New York to Chicago is \$5.00. From Chicago to Omaha it’s \$5.00. From Omaha to Ogden, Utah its \$8.00 and from Ogden to San Francisco it’s \$6.00.

Meals can be had at railroad dining stations east of Omaha for 75 cents and meals on the UPRR and CPRR are \$1.00.

At Omaha you switch to the Union Pacific Railroad and “will find one of the most magnificent trains of cars made up by any railroad in the United States. Everything connected with them is first-class.”

There follows a description of towns along the route. For



Life on the Pacific Palace Car

example where place names came from; the mileage along the route; little facts about the places on the line; and stories about things like prairie fires, Indian attacks, prairie hens, how buffalo robes are made, "Grand Duke Alexis' First Buffalo", the Pony Express, the telegraph, bullwackers, Indian battles, wildlife, gold discoveries, etc.

Often there are little asides about what happened or curiosities along the route: a railroad bridge that expands and contracts due to the heat and does the expanding and contracting on rollers, Independence Rock, a coal mine fire, the Chinese ("emphatically a peculiar people, renowned for their industry and economy" followed by a rendition of their "peculiarities" even though "a repetition of them to any great extent is not needed here.")

There is even advice for those going west for health reasons, "A Word with Invalids." Do not wait too long to go west. Likewise don't go too far and don't go too fast.

Along with the text describing points of interest and other points, there are lots of pen and ink illustrations of the west.

The detail along the way sets the stage for arriving at Donner

Summit. What will they say?

At Ogden you transfer to the Central Pacific and you have an hour to take a meal and switch baggage. Here is also a digression about visiting Yellowstone.

There is the history of the Central Pacific (as well as a lot of information about other railroad companies across the continent). It's interesting to see the mileage of track laid during CPRR construction: 20 miles in 1863, 20 miles in 1864, 20 miles in 1865, 30 miles in 1866, 46 miles in 1867, 364 miles in 1868, and 191 miles up to completion in May, 1869. You really see the difficulty of getting started and crossing the Sierra.

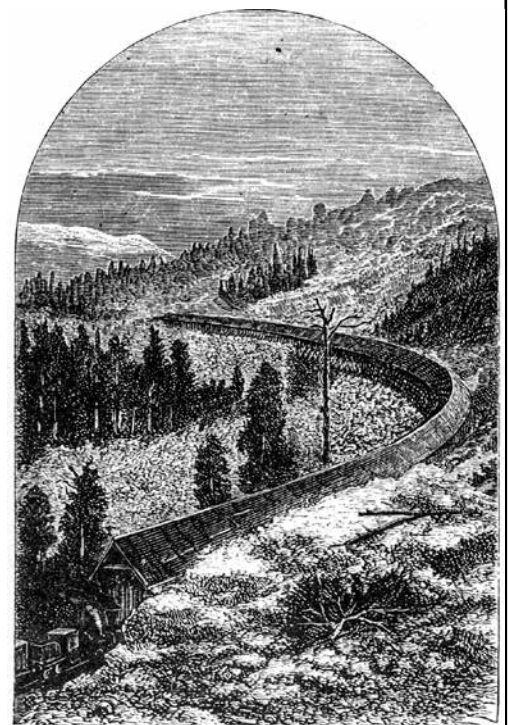
Getting close to Donner Summit there is a good description of Lake Tahoe: 3,000 feet deep with visibility down 80 feet. There are five steamers plying the waters. Glenbrook in 1884 is a commercial center and temperance town. It will cost \$20 a week to stay at the Lakeshore House Hotel in Glenbrook or at McKinney's Cottages (west shore 8 miles from Tahoe City.)

At Tahoe City the Grand Central Hotel is the largest hotel on Lake Tahoe accommodating 160 guest at \$3-\$4 a day depending on board options. There is a trout farm in Tahoe City and another half way to Truckee where you can fish paying for what you catch.

Truckee is the "seat of a large lumber trade" but which "would be benefited by the establishment of an extensive fire insurance business." The town was burned in 1868, 1869, twice in 1870, in 1874, and 'ChinaTown' in 1875." You would think that wide streets are for preventing the spread of fire but "in winter the more probable suggestion is that it is for the convenience of piling up the snow when the people shovel out their houses."

One of the asides after Truckee is "Starvation Camp" which is a story about the Donner Party.

By page 242 you reach the summit. First you go through Coldstream, "The fine view on the eastern side of the



SNOW SHEDS ACROSS THE SIERRAS.

Sierras not shut out by snow sheds from the traveler by rail.” Just before entering the sheds “a long line of purple pyramids and jagged precipices surround the valley, and if the road is not at the bottom of everything, the enormous face of the mountain seems to forbid the most daring attempt to ascend. But upward – still looking back to the valley of the Truckee far below...”

There’s a day and night telegraph station at Summit so you can send messages if you need. It is the highest point on the road surrounded by peaks two and three thousand feet higher. Summit House is the largest hotel along the line accommodating 150 guests, “and is one of the most popular in the Sierras.”

“One who lets the train go by, to climb to the top of the ridge through which the tunnel leads, or some higher peak, will never be sorry, for an entrancing panorama will be unrolled.”

Summit Valley is bright with pastures and “warm with life.” “Devil’s Peak, ... a bold cliff rising out of wild surrounding; and following the ridge eastward with the eye, and around toward the point of vision, there are Old Man’s Peak, ... Mount Lincoln, Donner Peak,” “Then there are a thousand other charms... in contrasts of light and shade, form and color; in mists hanging over the [Donner] lake, and clouds clinging to peaks; in the twilight deepening in darkness, or colossal pyres, kindled by the coming of sun, and going out in the clear light of the day; or, in the gloom of the forest mingled with the living silver of the moonlit lake.” Even “persons of feeble constitution may enjoy all the varied charms” of the summit.

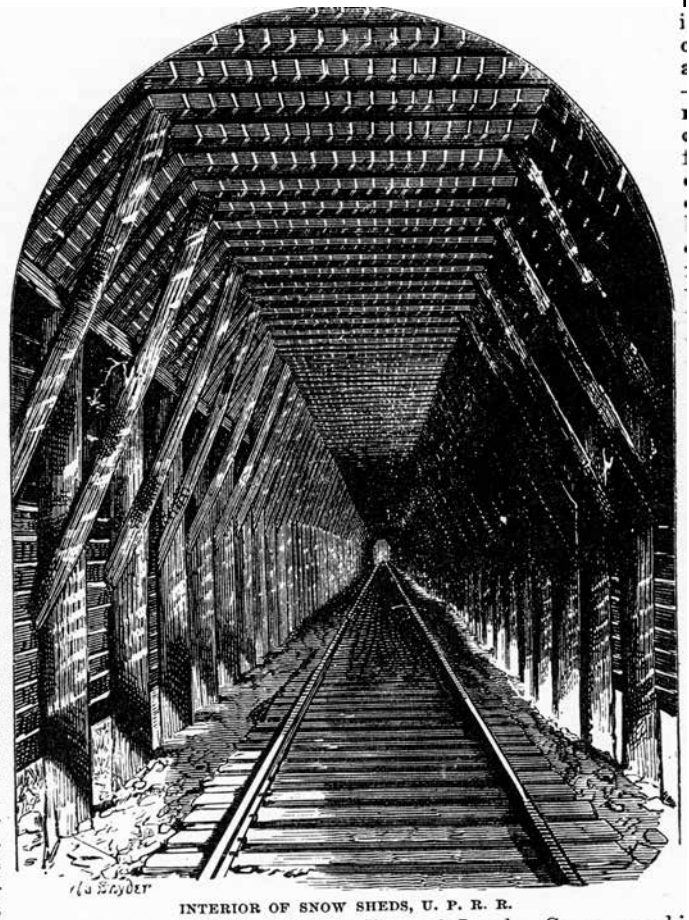
At Soda Springs Station “Stages run to the “highly medicinal springs” and “the ride is not surpassed, if equaled, by any in the Sierras north of Yosemite, in the number and beauty of the fine views it affords.” The hotel at the springs “is not an imposing structure, but it is kept in first-class style and is a favorite resort.”

The train ride from the summit down passes “great ridges and canons... their extent alone impresses the beholder with awe, but the snow sheds allow no satisfactory view.”

Each little railway stop on the route over the summit is described: Strong’s Canon, Summit, Summit Valley, Soda Springs Station, Cascade, Tamarack, and Cisco.

Then there are all the stops on the way to San Francisco where the city is described including “cable-roads” (cable cars) and all the things to do there.

Toward the end there is a chapter on the Chinese and here another kind of history presents itself, the prejudices of the 19th Century: “These queer looking people, with loose garments, umbrellas hats... and dangling pig-tails, are the hated of the Paddy, the target of hoodlums; the field of the



INTERIOR OF SNOW SHEDS, U. P. R. R.

missionary, the bomb for the politician to explore, and the sinew for capital. They are called the essence of all that is vicious, villainous, and certainly are opinionated. They are everywhere; even the boys say they cannot throw stones without hitting them.” [sic] There follows ten pages about the Chinese: appearance, characteristics both good and bad, religion, food, etc. Unaccountably at the end of the chapter are ten pages aimed at those staying in the west. There are descriptions of Yosemite, Big Trees, the Geysers, Shasta, Los Angeles, etc. so one can have lots to do.

This book is available in some libraries in the original or on the Internet for the 1970 reprint.

## 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.



# Then & Now with Art Clark

## Great Grandma at Donner Pass

Rick Mullaly and his wife live in Colfax. One day they stopped at the new glass gallery in Soda Springs and mentioned an historical photograph they had. They emailed the picture to the DSHS (right).

Here's the story so far from the accompanying email: Good afternoon 20 mile museum. Attached ... is a picture of my Great Grandmother and her Grand daughter (my aunt) taken somewhere up on Donner Summit. To the right of their picture on a large boulder are the hand painted words, "Truckee Garage" with an arrow pointing it's direction. And now for what I know about the picture. My aunt (the baby), Great Grandmother and my Grandfather on my Dad's side (not pictured) traveled from San Jose, CA to Reno, NV and back somewhere circa 1918-19 as the motorcycle is a 1917-18 Harley Davidson JD model with sidecar... I have tried to find the spot where this picture was taken by using the background in the area, specifically historic US 40 in and around the summit using the mountain top in the photo. I have yet to be successful. The road and the boulder may be gone but unless the mountain in the background has crumbled to the ground it should still be a good landmark. I plan on continuing to look for it.



Naturally Art Clark took up the challenge of finding the location and, of course, he found it.

To find this spot take Old 40 to directly below Donner Summit Bridge where you will see a 20 Mile Museum sign for the snowsheds. Just a little further off the road is a concrete Lincoln Highway marker. Look for the view to the left. Below you see there are only a few spots of what might have been white paint in 1918 and what was the "G."



# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



Look around Donner Summit and you can find history almost everywhere. Head down to Cisco Grove just east of our 20 Mile Museum sign at the stone buildings and look around. There are foundation remains of Cisco Grove all along the road. At one time it was a thriving little community focused on tourists on Highway 40. When I-80 came along the traffic bypassed Cisco Grove and the town withered. The Gould Family (the park on the river there was donated by the Goulds), eventually tore down the buildings to save on taxes.

At one time Cisco Grove had a souvenir stand (the stone buildings), a store, gas station, cabins for rent, and a lodge. The Auburn Ski Club was there too until I-80 cut the ski runs.

Cisco Grove is not to be confused with Upper and Lower Cisco of railroad building days when several thousand people lived in the town. Once the railroad was done in 1869 Cisco withered as people moved away.

The picture at right is of Cisco in the 1950's.



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 the one to the editor - see page 2

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

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\_\_\_\_\_



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