



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

George R. Stewart Pk. ●

“He practically invented Donner Pass.”

Wallace Stegner

History

The distinctive dome-shaped peak to your north is “George R. Stewart Peak,” named for the “leading scholar and writer about the ... area, who spread its history and geography worldwide.”*

George R. Stewart’s best-selling epic *Ordeal by Hunger*, the story of the Donner Party, combined human history with geography from space and Earth. It has been called the first “Whole Earth book.” Much of the research for *Ordeal by Hunger* was done in the Sierra; after scholarly hikes, he would retire to his “scholar’s tent” behind his Dutch Flat cabin to write.

Storm, the first ecological novel; *Fire*; *The California Trail*; *Donner Pass and Those Who Crossed It*; and *U.S. 40*, were also about or included Donner Summit. Even *Earth Abides* mentions Donner Summit. In *Storm*, Stewart named his storm Maria (long i) as the chief character, which gave the wind its name and led to the naming of storms.

Stewart considered the land – the ecosystem – a character in any human story. That idea, “taught” through his best-selling books, helped inspire the modern environmental movement.

“George R. Stewart Peak” was named in 1984 by the U.S. Board of Geographic Names.

*Don Scott, author of *The Life and Truth of George R. Stewart*

A Good Story

George R. Stewart believed in vigorous field research. Daughter Jill (Jill Stewart Evenson) remembered her father’s hikes from their Dutch Flat cabin in search of the Donner Party Trail, (and his disappearance into the “scholar’s tent” to write when he returned). Son Jack (Dr. John H.) Stewart recalled joining his father’s wanderings over the Donner Summit and Yuba Gap country, seeking evidence of covered wagons; and how excited he was when they found traces of rust on the Sierra granite from iron-clad wagon wheels.

Wife Ted (Theodosia) remembered how much she worried over the chances he took. To get the feeling of a Sierra storm for *STORM*, for example, George Stewart once rode a locomotive cowcatcher through a snow flurry to the top of Donner Pass. Ted, who had driven to the Pass to meet him, found him almost frozen. But it paid off. By the time the research for his novel *STORM* was finished, he could feel the storm in his soul.

Later, George Stewart took his grandchildren, Anna, Edward, Eric, and Willie, on expeditions to exotic places, thus carrying on the family tradition.

Things to do right here

Climb Donner Pk. (from the PCT on the south side of Old 40) and look straight down 1000 feet to Donner Lake.

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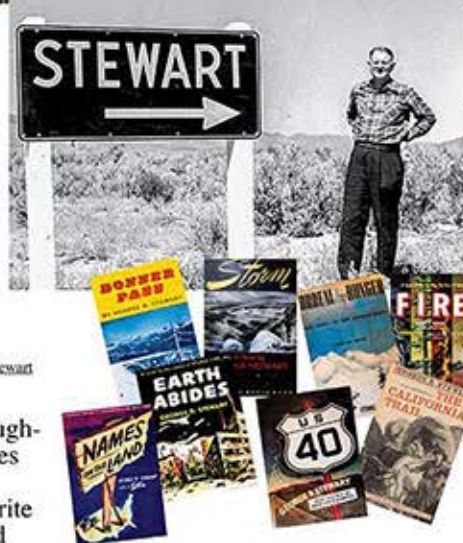
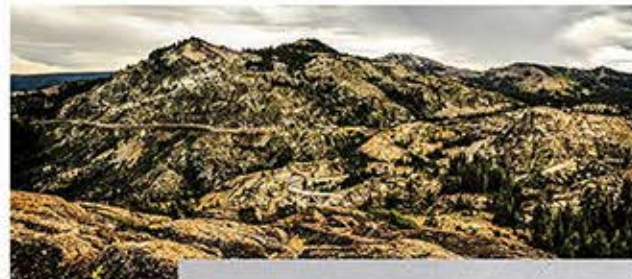
Willie Stewart
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Top and bottom pictures Donner Summit Historical Society, center picture, courtesy of Anna Evenson

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Top: the view from Stewart Pk. looking south. The Donner Summit Bridge is in the center, Donner Pk. and the snowsheds are above.

Center, George R. Stewart.

Bottom, a few of Stewart’s books.

