



# Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

## Wise Power Plant

### History

At one time canals laced the Sierra foothills and the mountains above. Many still exist as do the reservoirs the canals linked. Originally the canals were used to funnel water to hydraulic and placer mining. The system was well in place when the courts ruled hydraulic mining illegal in 1884. Farmers and townspeople, whose lands and towns had been devastated by floods resulting from the dirt washed downstream, were ecstatic. The canal owners must have felt differently. What use would the canals be? Fortunately at that time there was a growing need for irrigation of orchard crops. The canals could still be used. Then along came electricity and canals' usefulness was cemented as they carried water to power plants.

Wise Power Plant is one of those plants. It was built between 1913 and 1917 to generate electricity from water flowing from Fordyce and Spaulding lakes. Wise was connected to the PGE "Pacific Service" system on March 4th, 1917. The electricity generated went to Stockton, then to Cordelia, and finally to the Bay Area. A by-product of the electrical generation was water for "irrigation of immense areas of deciduous fruit lands in one of the best productive sections of our state."

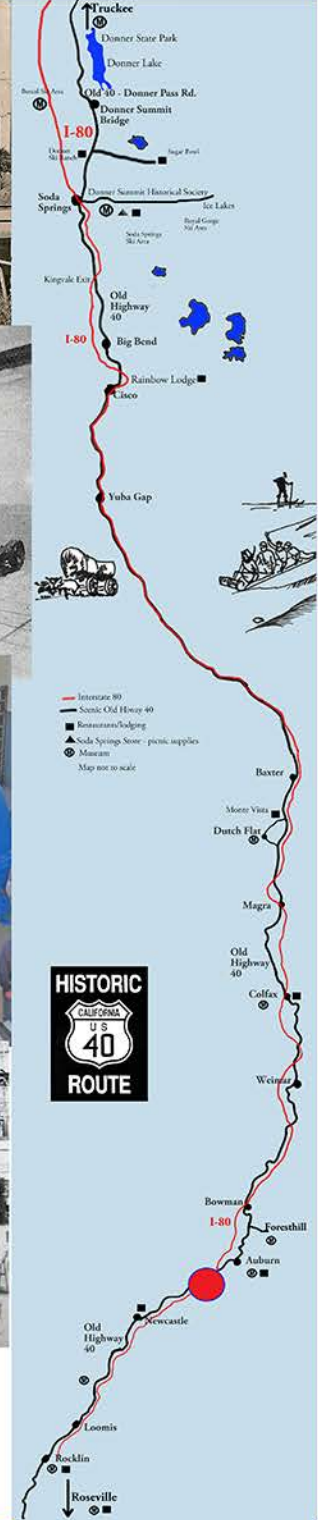
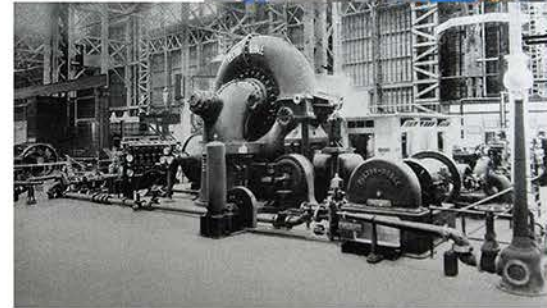
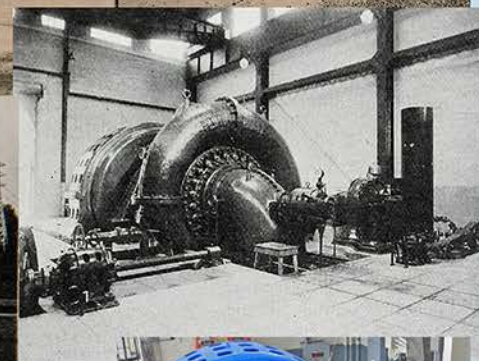
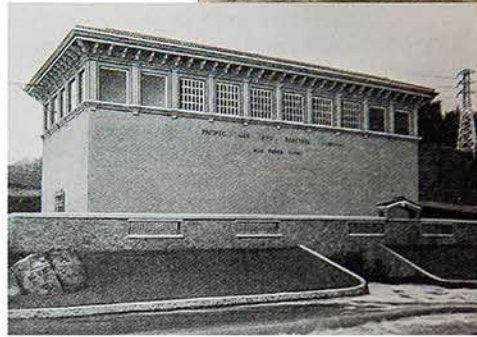
The plant is named for James H. Wise, general manager of P.G.&E. and who was in charge of the Lake Spaulding Power Plant, which at the time of completion was the largest power plant in the State (San Francisco Call September 17, 1912)

### A Good Story

The turbine, or "runner," in the Wise Power Plant, a Pelton Doble built in 1915, "is famous as the largest horizontal-shaft, single-discharge turbine in existence." As such it "occupied a prominent place among the exhibits in the Machinery Hall" at the 1915 Panama Pacific Exhibition in San Francisco. It was a "keynote of the entire exhibition." When installed in the plant it generated 20,000 hp. (Pacific Service Magazine, March, 1917). The turbine is still in operation today - the blue machinery to the right.

### Things to do right here

Continue your journey today on Old Highway 40 without using I-80. It's possible and enjoyable. Visit old towns, historical monuments, and grand vistas. It's an old time Sunday drive harkening back to when things went slower and there was time to enjoy the sights could be enjoyed. The map at right shows Old 40 in black.



Pictured top: Wise Power House on the Lincoln Highway, The Pelton Doble turbine installed in 1917, The Wise Power House in 1917, The Pelton Doble turbine today still in use (blue machinery), and The turbine on display at the Panama Pacific Exhibition in 1915

pictures courtesy the Norm Saylor Collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society Auburn Journal, and from Pacific Service Magazine September, 1917 and July, 1915

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