



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

The Snowsheds

History

Theodore Judah, who plotted the Central Pacific's route over the Sierra and for whom Mt. Judah was named, thought it was only the mountains that needed conquering as the Central Pacific headed east to meet up with the Union Pacific. He was wrong. The climate needed taming too.

Snowfall on Donner Summit averages 35 feet a year and in extreme years 60 feet can fall. You don't just push that much snow away - although that was the first solution.

Even as they began building over the Summit the directors of the CPRR saw the problem and they began experimenting with snowsheds so trains could continue to run even in heavy snows. Ultimately more than 40 miles of sheds would be built to shelter the trains, at a huge cost.

Solving one problem brought others. Snowsheds were extreme fire dangers because they sheltered spark spewing locomotives. Lookouts, line walkers, and fire trains were maintained to watch and fight fires. An army of snow shovelers worked winters to keep the sheds from collapsing.

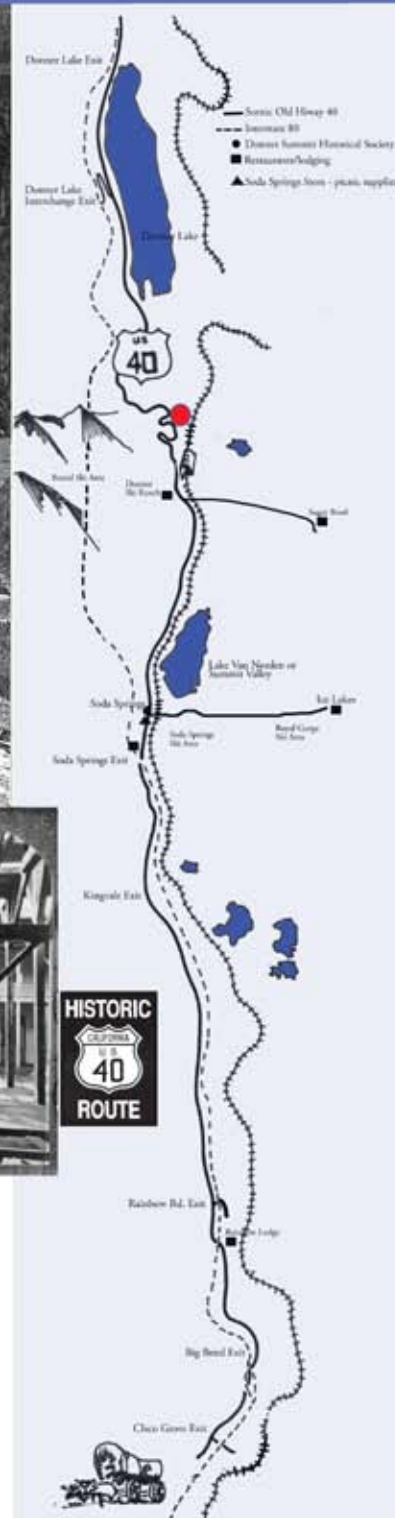
The sheds also caused problems for travelers:
 "The average passenger journeying over the Sierras usually utters a deep sigh of relief when his train emerges from the snowsheds. They have formed one bleak, uninteresting section of the journey, relieved only by a monotonous succession of tantalizing glimpses of striking scenery through the breaks and cracks in a dead wall of grimy timbers. The cars have filled with suffocating smoke and life has been made miserable for a time."
San Francisco Call October 15, 1905

Some of the most beautiful scenery in the world to be seen from a train window, and along the Sierra Summit, was hidden.

Pictured here: snowsheds on Donner Summit and under construction. Snowsheds often ran right up to buildings. Here The Summit Hotel is seen through a snowshed. Bottom, Snowsheds at Cisco Grove.

A Good Story

With improvements in snow removal miles snow sheds have been removed and those that remain are constructed of fire proof concrete. The fire lookouts and snow shovelers are gone as is the danger of snowshed collapse. One legacy remains. Many houses built in the 1940's on Donner Summit were built of old snow shed timbers. They are strong and solid. One owner remembers her mother sanding the insides of the house for years to remove the "patina" that had developed on the timbers from their days as snowsheds. The interior is now gorgeous.



This sign sponsored by Sugar Bowl



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