



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass Summit Valley

History

Summit Valley has been the scene of human activity for thousands of years because it is a natural crossing of the Sierra. Native Americans traveled the valley moving from winter to summer residences. They left grinding rocks and arrow heads in the valley and petroglyphs in many nearby locations.

The first European Americans were excited to find Summit Valley after their months' long journey from the East. Summit Valley was a perfect rest place after the hard Summit crossing. Imagine standing here in 1850 watching a string of wagons on the opposite side of the valley on their final leg into California. Summit Valley then became a commercial travel route with the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Toll Road.

Thousands of Chinese railroad workers arrived at the Summit in 1866 to build the transcontinental railroad. The railroad brought industry and eventually there were small communities along the railroad line. There were stores, lumber mills, dairies, ice harvesting companies, and many places for lodging.

The first transcontinental highway came through here in 1913 and that was succeeded by Highway 40 in 1928. Automobiles used this natural Sierra crossing as Americans began to travel independently.

Here you have mid-1860's photographs of Summit Valley produced by Alfred Hart. The top picture shows the railroad, snowsheds and a hotel with Castle Peak in the distance. The middle, taken from Soda Springs Rd. at Soda Springs Ski Area shows the valley with Donner Peak in the background as does the bottom photograph

Things to do right here

Summit Valley is mostly private property but nearby there are lots of opportunities for recreation. The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) crosses Old 40 at the Summit. The Judah Loop off the PCT to the top of Mt. Judah is a spectacular hike. The view from Donner Peak is amazing – 1000 feet straight down to Donner Lake. On the north side of 40 Lake Angela and Mt. Stephens beckon. You can also actually hike from Highway 40 to I-80 on the PCT.

