



# Donner Pass

This narrow and natural Donner Pass at Donner Summit, leading westward into the Sierra Nevada and California, bears witness to the rich tapestry of ethnic, economic and cultural migrations that defined California's history and has played a significant role in our nation's history. There are grinding rocks and petroglyphs left by Native Americans. The first wagon train to reach California arrived in 1844 establishing the Emigrant Trail. Two years later surviving members of the ill-fated Donner Party crossed as later did many of those seeking their fortunes with the discovery of gold in 1848. In the 1860's, the Transcontinental Railroad, the fulfillment of the 19th century's Manifest Destiny, was constructed through Donner Pass paralleling the Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Road. When automobiles came into vogue in the early 1900's much of the old disused toll road became part of the the Lincoln Highway system, and was briefly called the Victory Highway following WWI. U.S. Highway 40, part of the first numbered system of U.S. highways, replaced the Lincoln Highway, only to be decommissioned once Interstate 80 was built in the 1960's. This part of Highway 40 is now known as Donner Pass Road. The history, environment, people and enterprises of the Summit area are fascinating and rich.

We invite you to enjoy and participate as the Historical Society saves and shares the Summit's rich history. If you have old pictures, stories, or memorabilia you would like to share or donate or if you would like a speaker for your organization or school, please let us know.

The Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501c3 non-profit - donations are tax-deductible.

Visit our website to read stories and *The Heirloom*, our free monthly historical publication which is full of stories and pictures. We also have a collection of brochures and exhibits of Donner Summit history.

Board of Directors:

Norm Saylor, Bill Oudegeest, Starr Walton Hurley, Jim Hoelter, and Cheryl Paduano

Front panel pictures: Getting around in the snow 1939, plane crash 1922, Norden Store 1938, Land Grant for 160 Summit acres in 1869 for \$2.50/acre, Dennis Jones the father of commercial skiing on the Summit, and Beacon Hill rope tow 1940's (now Soda Springs ski area).

# Many Crossings of Donner Summit



Native Americans crossed Donner Pass for thousands of years as they traded and moved from summer to winter residences. These are Donner Summit petroglyphs.

The first wagon train to cross Donner Summit was the Stephens Party which crossed in 1844. This first route was so rugged some wagons were left at Donner Lake and others had to be dismantled to get over the Summit.



The first Transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 and crossed the Summit using 15 tunnels and almost 40 miles of snowsheds. The sheds protected the trains from snowfalls that average 35 feet in a season.

The first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway was completed in 1913. It was superseded by the Victory Highway and then Highway 40 which became year-round in 1932. Automobiles can cross using the same routes as people have for thousands of years.





**HISTORIC**



**ROUTE**



Dutch Flat-Donner

Cisco Grove

6.

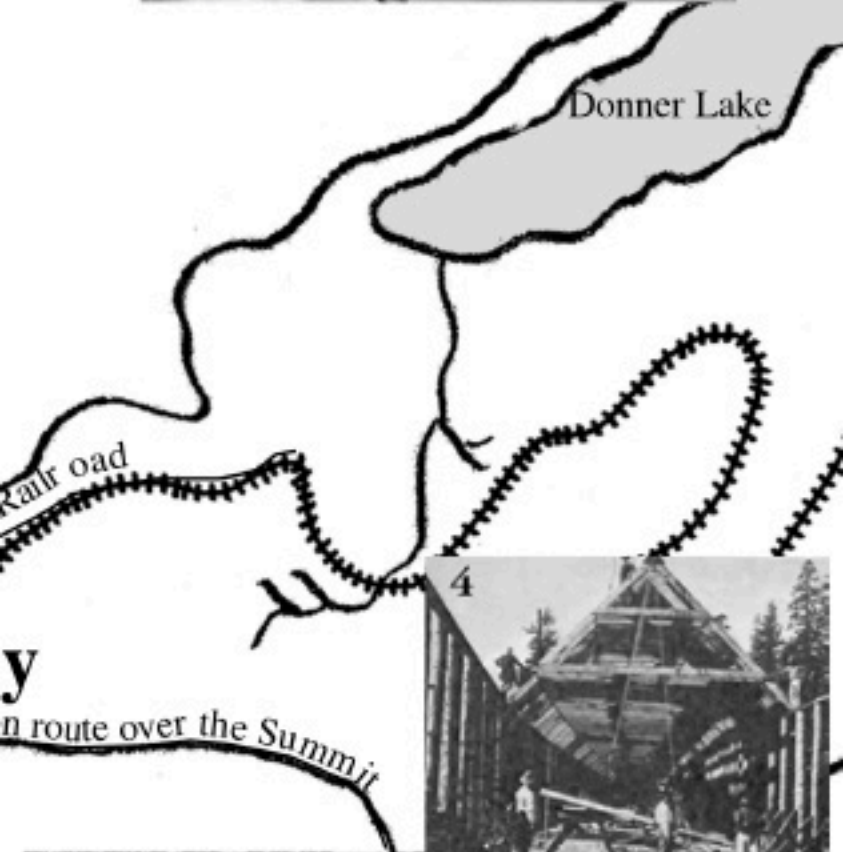


Our purpose: to offer lectures, seminars, and field trips that will help the community learn the history of Donner Summit and the surrounding area, and to collect and display artifacts relative to the history, and to carry on other educational and charitable activities associated with this purpose.



Soda Springs and the Donner Summit Historical Society museum at the corner of Old 40 (Donner Pass Rd.) and Soda Springs Rd. 21501 Donner Pass Rd.

Map reproduced from an 1889 Placer Co. Map



Pictures here: 1. Soda Springs Hotel at its 1927 opening, 2. Summit Hotel with its multi-story outhouse and the Dutch Flat Rd. in front, 3. Rainbow Bridge 1950's, 4. a very early picture of the Donner Summit snow tunnels on the trans-continent railroad, 5. the very first "ski lift" on Donner Summit: the Up-Ski on Beacon Hill (Soda Springs) circa mid 1930's. 6. Sierra Gift Shop Cisco Grove 1953. 7. Rainbow Tavern 1930's



Donner Summit Historical Society



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Historical Society & Museum**  
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free monthly Donner Summit history publication

*The Heirloom* - via email

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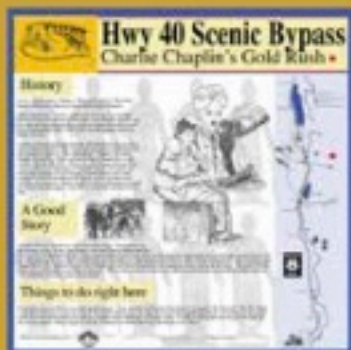
## Visit the 20 Mile Museum

The Donner Summit Historical Society's 20 Mile Museum, along Old Highway 40, celebrates the history of Donner Summit.



The 20 mile museum consists of thirty-four interpretive signs placed along Old Highway 40 from the Nyack exit, over the Summit and to just below Rainbow Bridge. Each sign highlights history, displays historical photographs and quotes, tells a good story, and lists activities for the location.

The signs highlight our unique history, share the beauty of Donner Summit, encourage visitation, and help revitalize the Summit economy.



The signs are sponsored by local



businesses and individuals who paid for their construction and placement.

Brochures are on line and on Donner Summit.

*The Donner Summit*  
*Heirloom*

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society



Read *The Heirloom*, monthly publication of Donner Summit history.

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