

**"When we reached Sierra Nevada mountains they looked terrible."**

**David Findon 1845**

1914 to make crossing the tracks safer. Walk along just a bit further and stop before Tunnel 8. Look down on the lake side of the old railroad bed. You are on top of the China Wall. Here is an amazing wall built by the Chinese. There is no mortar holding the rocks together. Look for the tool marks that can still be seen along with some drill holes.

#### Stop #4 - Native American Mortars

At the blinking light in Soda Springs turn and cross the railroad tracks. Turn left into the dirt parking lot and look for the dirt road that is just to the left of the dam. It's easy driving and is the original Lincoln Highway, the first highway across America. When you get to the bridge, go just a bit further and stop at the 20 Mile Museum sign for the



Native American mortars on the right. Walk south parallel to Castle Creek. After you get out of the trees head for the large rock in the clearing a hundred yards ahead (above). Climb on top and find a Native American mortar thousands of years old. That's just a warm up.

Keep heading south a few hundred more yards. You'll cross an old road.

Keep going looking for the rock and the view pictured to the right. On this "gossip" rock there are four mortars and a metate. This rock



was a fancy solid granite kitchen appliance a thousand years ago. Native Americans, living here only in summer, ground larvae, insects, nuts, seeds, tubers, and other soft foods in the mortars. Granite is one of the hardest rocks on the planet. How long did it take to grind these holes into the rock?

On the opposite end of the rock from the mortars rub your hand around to find a really smooth spot that's about the size of a piece of paper. This is a metate used for grinding seeds into flour and maybe for treating animal skins.

While you are out in the valley look around and note all the large granite boulders lying around. The granite is a hundred million years old but the rocks have only been sitting where they are for ten thousand years or so. These glacial erratics were scraped off mountain peaks by glaciers and when the glaciers melted the rocks were left behind. One early American visitor, seeing all the light colored rocks lying around in the distance, thought they looked like sheep grazing in the valley.

On the way back to the car see if you can get yourself into the spot where the picture here was taken. The wagon in the picture is on the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. built to help with the railroad construction. The ground is still so compressed that nothing grows on it 150 years later.



The auto at the top of the next column won the race in 1911 to be the first car over the summit that summer. The

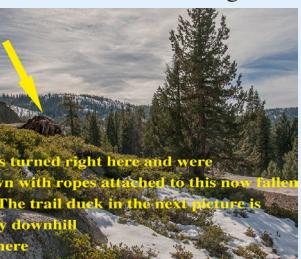


hill in the background is the Soda Springs ski hill.

The railroad builders were in such a rush that they decided not to wait for tunnels, but rather to go ahead and build the

railroad into Nevada. Along this road, three locomotives, 80 miles of track and railroad car parts went on wagons over Donner Summit to Truckee and beyond. Locomotives weighed about 12 tons. The rails weighed 100 tons to the mile. Each rail weighed 532 lbs. and was 24 feet long.

The third locomotive went over Donner Pass in the snow. Oxen pulled this on a sledge and wore snowshoes made for oxen so they would not sink into the snow.



#### Stop #5 - Emigrant Wagon Rust Marks

Head back to the freeway, getting off at the Rainbow exit (or, if you are a real historian, just stay on Old Highway 40). You are heading for Big Bend, just past the Rainbow Lodge building. There is a parking lot and bathrooms on the right just up from the fire station.

Big Bend was named for the big bend in the river. It was here that the women and children of the Stephens party, the first wagon train, spent most of the winter. The men had gone off for help to Sutter's Fort. The women and children ran out of food and had to eat cowhides. The first white baby, Elizabeth Yuba (named for the river) Murphy was born here.



After you cross the rocks next to the road look for the granite erratics. Turn left here looking for the views in the previous column (if you go right you'll find an emigrant trail marker). Look on the far side of the largest granite slab for rust marks. The picture in the previous column has been enhanced to show rust marks. Keep going west aiming for the tree. Under the arrow is a fallen tree that was used to let wagons slowly down the slope with rope. Turn right just before the live tree and head downhill fifty yards. Look for the scene to the left which is looking uphill.

There are rust marks on the rocks but the best spot is just next to the trail marker in the tree ( shown left upper right in the picture) and below the "trail duck".

#### Stop #6 - State Park Visitors' Center

Now that you have an overview of Donner Pass and its importance, it's time to head for the museum at Donner Lake. Head towards Truckee on I-80 or take Old Highway 40. At the east end of Donner Lake is the State Park and just



inside and to the left is the visitors' center. Before going in take a look at the large statue, the Emigrant Monument (and our 20 Mile Museum sign). The base of the statue is 22 1/2 feet high. That is how high the snow was when the Donner Party was trapped here.

#### What Next for adventurous Historians?



Check out the 20 Mile Museum. Read the *Heirloom* - free [www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org)

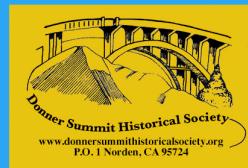
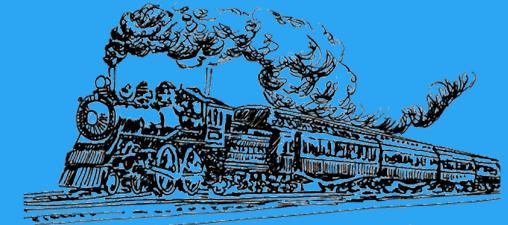
# Donner Summit



## History



## Tour \*



\*particularly for 4th graders who study California history