

Highway 40 Old Time Sunday Drive

Rocklin to Donner Pass and Truckee - Skip the Freeway.



Our Old 40 Sunday Drive route has been set up in “legs” so that you can do any parts you want without having to do the whole. Each “leg” begins and ends at an easy to find location and each could make an interesting trip.

Leg 1: Rocklin to Old Town Auburn and the Auburn courthouse.

Leg 2: Old Town Auburn to Colfax.

Leg 3: Colfax to I-80 at Baxter

Leg 4: Cisco Grove to Donner Summit/Truckee

GPS coordinates are in (parentheses). Mileage from the start of each leg is in [brackets]. Use the museum list if you are interested in visiting the various historical societies and museums along the route. Their approximate locations are noted with “M’s” on the maps here.



Leg 1: Rocklin to Old Town Auburn

Leave I-80 at Rocklin Rd. which is exit 108 (38 47.260 121 13.323) Head north to Pacific Ave. [.8 mi] and turn right (38 47.457 121 14.144).

When you turn on Pacific Ave. you are on Old Highway 40. This starts the mileage at 0 for this leg. The route existed prior to 1928 but it was in 1928 that it received its designation as U.S. 40. It remained the main route over the Northern Sierra until the building of Interstate 80 in 1960. In previous incarnations the route, or parts of it, were the Victory Highway, the Lincoln Highway, the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon road, or simply wagon train or commercial routes.

Pacific Ave. will become Taylor and you will stay on it until you almost reach Auburn.

Wise Powerhouse. Built in 1915. Still inside is the original turbine that was displayed at 1915 Panama Pacific Exhibition. in San Francisco. See the 20 Mile Museum sign for its history.



Town of Loomis [3.0 mi] There are restaurants and art galleries in Loomis. Check out the city hall building (38 49.260 121 11.622). Griffith Quarry Historic Park [5.6] (38 51.067 121 09.849)

Just outside Auburn on Taylor Rd. you will come to Newcastle. You can turn off the old highway on to Old State Hwy [7.8 mi.] (38 52.475 121 08.273) just before the 1932 tunnel and drive through downtown Newcastle where you will find a delicatessen, art studios, the Cheese Shop and the Newcastle Packing Shed (small shops). This was the State highway before 1928. Afterwards Newcastle was bypassed.

Back on Taylor Rd. continue through the tunnel and stay on Taylor until it runs into Ophir Rd. and the Lincoln Highway [8.4 mi.] (38 52.753 121 7.575) Turn left on Lincoln Highway (Ophir Rd.).

P.G.& E. Wise Power House, below left. [10.2] Continue on The Lincoln Highway/Ophir Rd. which will sweep you on to I-80 just outside Auburn. The old route does not exist for just a short distance.

Immediately after entering the freeway, take the Maple St. exit [11.5]. You can go right immediately where you see the statue of the miner panning gold. In this part of historic downtown Auburn there are shops, restaurants and interesting things to see while walking around.



Leg 2: Old Town Auburn to Colfax

Maple Street is also a good place to start your trip on Old 40 so this will begin Leg 2 with the mileage starting at 0 again at Maple and Lincoln Way, the Maple St. exit from I-80 where the statue is.

Head up the hill on Maple St. from the Maple St. exit. The historic courthouse (38 53.818 121 04.587) is on the right after you turn right at the corner on to Auburn-Folsom Rd.

It was built in the early 1900’s. Inside there is a small free museum on the first floor.

Outside the courthouse note the structure at the Lincoln Way intersection in front of the museum. This used to be a water fountain that could serve two horses at once and sat in the intersection.

From the courthouse, go left at the light, Lincoln Way. Follow Lincoln Way turning left on “High St” which is still Lincoln Way and then in one block bear right at the “Y” at the clock tower. (38. 53.918 121 04.215). You are in modern downtown Auburn with more shops and restaurants.

The California Welcome Ctr. is at 1103 High St. 530-887-2111 www.visitplacer.com (hours: M-S 9:30-4:30, Sunday 11-4:30). There is lots of information there.

Follow Lincoln Way to the end of the downtown and it will bear left and run into El Dorado.

Turn right and you will immediately go under the railroad. The old RR station to the right on the other side of the tracks is the current Chamber of Commerce.

Emerging from the underpass on El Dorado, turn left at the signal and continue on Lincoln Way.

Stay on Lincoln Way past the Foresthill Rd. intersection (the signal) and I-80 overpass [2.4 miles from the courthouse]. Here there are fast food restaurants, gas stations, a supermarket, and stores.

You can turn right at the signal, Foresthill Rd. The road will take you on a nice side trip to Foresthill, Michigan Bluff, Gold Rush town sites and lots of roads for exploring (including the most northern stand of Giant Sequoias in the State). Foresthill, 15 miles away, also has a small museum.

Instead of turning at Foresthill Rd., just after the fast food restaurants on Lincoln Way you will pass Lou La Bonte’s restaurant which has a collection of historical photographs, and Ikeda’s Fruit Stand which has great produce and pies, among other things.

Continuing with our route, stay on Lincoln Way until you go left on Bowman Undercross Rd. [3.1]

Go right after the overpass on Bowman Rd. Here you will see Machado’s Produce Stand off to the left. [3.3 miles from the courthouse]

As you continue Old 40 meandered back and forth across and along the I-80 route but you will stay on the north side on Bowman Rd.

Turn right at the intersection with Dry Creek Rd. [5.2] (It’s Dry Creek going left and Lake Arthur Rd. going right). You will pass Lake Arthur dam, built in 1909.

In Clipper Gap [6.5] just east of Lake Arthur, there is a motor court and gas station from the US 40 era. Just east there is a large two story home which was the superintendent’s home when there was a blasting powder factory at Clipper Gap.

Turn right at the next signal. Continue to the Clipper Gap/Placer Hills overpass/exit (exit 125). (38 58.227 121 01.150). At the intersection with Placer Hills Rd., cross the freeway to Applegate Rd. and go left. You will be passing Lake Theodore. You are on the south side of the freeway.

At Applegate [9.3] look to the left and you’ll see a classic bungalow style motel, the Applegate Motel.

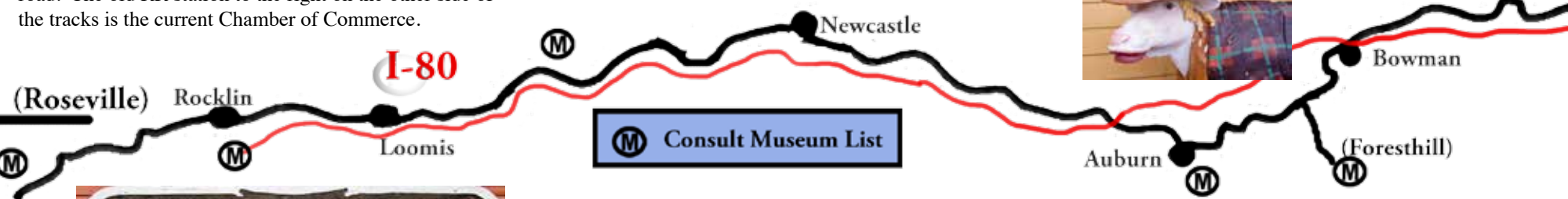
At the Heather Glen overpass, exit 129, [11.1] (39 01.134 120 58.986) Old 40 again meandered along the now I-80 route but you will stay south of the freeway on Applegate. Continue until Applegate crosses the freeway and bear right. You will be on Giesendorfer Rd. On the way along Applegate keep your eyes out for the railroad underpass dated 1927.

U.S. 40 continued to meander along the I-80 route here and cannot be followed exactly. The easiest thing to do is continue on Giesendorfer to where it ends at W. Paoli. You will go past the Weimar Institute. [12.4]. (39 2.088 120 58.527) It was a tuberculosis Sanitarium in 1919.

Go right to go over the freeway and turn left immediately (this is also the W. Paoli Ln. exit 130). Take the first hard left to stay on Paoli Ln. and follow that the very short distance to Ponderosa Way. [12.7] (39 02.118 120 58.347). Go left.

You are now headed for historic Colfax. Ponderosa Way becomes Canyon Wy. Take Canyon Wy. to the Colfax overpass, exit 135 (also highway 174) [17.5 from Auburn or 4.9 from exit 130] (39 05.744 120 56.956) and go left turning right on S. Auburn St. just across the overpass.

Follow South Auburn St. veering left and down the hill to downtown Colfax [18.1].



Colfax is named after the 17th vice president of the United States, Schuyler Colfax. There’s a statue in the plaza by the historical society. Enjoy historic downtown Colfax where you will find shops, restaurants, and the Colfax Historical Society/museum in the current train station (39 06.307 120 57.002) across the street from the historic Colfax Hotel.

There are public restrooms at the old train station now called Colfax Junction, which also has shops and a candy store. Colfax Junction is across the street from the downtown stores.

Leg 3: Colfax to Baxter & I-80

Colfax is exit 135. Here we will reset the mileage to 0. Head east on Main St. to Highway 174 and turn left when Main St. dead ends. [.3 miles from downtown Colfax at Main St. and Grass Valley Rd.]

You will now follow Rollins Lake Rd.

Stop and see the Cape Horn Promontory View next to the Red Frog Bar. [0.6 miles from Colfax] Cape Horn is famous because Chinese workers cut the rail bed into an almost perpendicular face. They did not hang by baskets, however, as the sign says.

Stay on Rollins Lake Rd. veering right when Hwy 174 goes left.

If the lake level is down when you get to the Rollins Lake Bridge you may be able to see some cabin floor slabs along old Red Dog Rd. just south of Rollins Lake. You may also see a concrete highway bridge which is usually submerged. If you want a nice stopping point, stop at Rollins Lake at the Long Ravine Resort. Turn on You Bet Rd. Here there is a store, campgrounds, picnicking, swimming, boating, duck feeding, etc. for a \$6.50 day use fee.

Stay on Rollins Lake Rd. unless you’d like a side trip along the even older Victory highway route, the Norton Grade Rd. (39 07.263 120 56.835).

This is a scenic but curvy 3.8 miles and will bring you back to Old 40 at the Magra Rd. I-80 exit. (39 08.872 120 54.521)

As you continue on Rollins Lake Rd. you will come to an overpass [5.3] (Secret Town Rollins Lake Rd. I-80. Cross the overpass and until you cross the freeway and turn right. This is Gold Run Rd. [9.3miles from Colfax])

Stay on Gold Run Rd. for .4 miles and then turn left on to Lincoln Rd. [9.7] (39 10.505 120 51.499) Just across the railroad tracks turn right on Lincoln. You cannot follow the oldest part of the route because it runs into private property.

Turn left on Ridge Rd. [11.3] unless you make the side trip to the Monte Vista Inn (.1 mile to the right).

The Monte Vista Inn is at the Dutch Flat exit 145 (39 11.410 120 49.893)

Going left at the intersection [11.3] of Gold Run Rd. and Ridge Rd., not going to the Monte Vista Inn, you are heading towards the Dutch Flat turnout [11.5].

A visit to Dutch Flat [12.6] is worth it to see its historic “downtown,” general store, old hotel, and museum run by the Golden Drift Historical Society. You can continue through Dutch Flat to get back to the Highway 40 route (2 mile loop) or you can retrace your steps to the turnout from Ridge Rd.

Back at Ridge Rd. [14.1 from Auburn], however you have gotten back to it (through Dutch Flat or retracing your route), turn left.



While you are traveling Scenic Highway 40, explore the 20 Mile Museum.

Extending from Auburn to Truckee on Old Highway 40 the 20 mile museum consists of dozens of interpretive signs. Each sign highlights the history, displays historical photographs and quotes, tells a good story, and lists activities for the location.

You can download a brochure, just the text, or see the signs at www.donnertsumthistoricalsociety.org. You can pick up a brochure if you come into the Historical Society in downtown Soda Springs at the Soda Springs exit from I-80. You will find the Society at the blinking light. The brochure is also at the visitors’ centers in Truckee and Auburn and at the State Park in Truckee at Donner Lake.

This brochure is published by the Donner Summit Historical Society © 2015
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