

The Donner Summit Airlloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

January, 2012 issue #41

Finding Sierra Ski-Ways Trails

Art Clark

Back in the 1930's, skiing was really taking off in the Sierra but it was cross country skiing and ski jumping rather than downhill skiing like today. As its popularity grew, the Forest Service, along with various ski clubs and organizations, marked numerous ski trails. Some were marked with orange metal triangles, some with larger wooden triangles, and some with both. Here and there, metal arrows were added when the trails made sharp turns. Usually, both sides of trees were marked so that the trail could be skied in either direction. Distance from one marked tree to the next varied depending on visibility, tree cover and terrain.

Over the years we've found 370 signs. We stopped counting miles long ago back at 300.

Art Clark

Although ski lifts were starting to appear, many skiers preferred to explore the mountains on their own, and would follow the newly-marked trails.

In the early days, riding the train was the only option to get to the Summit. When Highway 40 became a year-round route over the Sierras, it made the area accessible to many more people. In order to accommodate them, lodges and hotels sprang up. Ski clubs were formed, and some of them built their own facilities.

Fast forward to now. Timber operations, fires, road building and dying trees have all taken their toll on the markers. In some areas, they are few and far between. A few protected spots have well preserved signs.

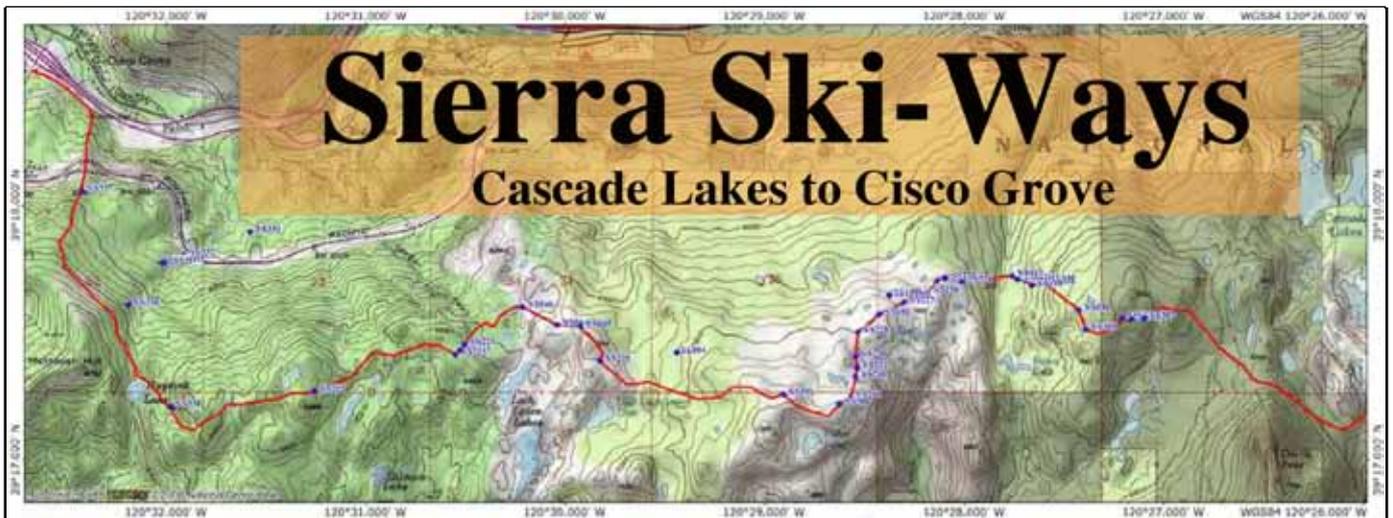
So, how do you find them? Initially, I had just stumbled across a couple of markers while out backcountry skiing. I asked other members of my club, the Nordic Skiers of Nevada County, if they knew anything about them. One member recalled that someone in the Forest Service had put some up. Other members remembered seeing them here and there.

Janet McMartin recalled seeing some near Nancy Lake, and on a club trip to that area we located them. She seems to have a knack for spotting them. Most of the wooden signs have long-lost their original orange paint and tend to

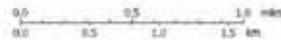




above at Kingvale Janet and Art in search of Sierra Ski
Ways markers



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



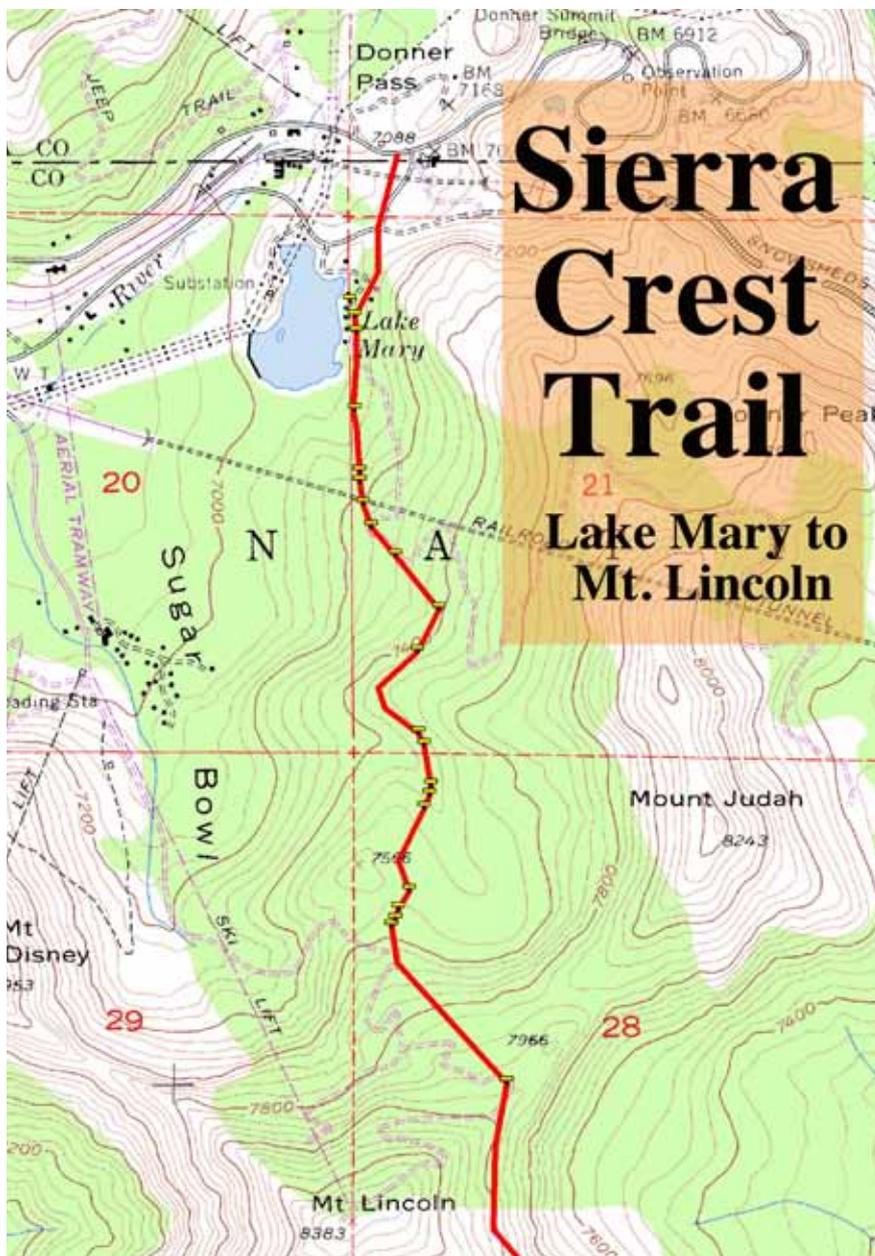
blend in. Her vision (and skiing ability) is better than mine, and we make a good team.

This started a routine: find a marker, get a picture of it, and record the location with a GPS. Once back at home, mark the location in a mapping program, and take a guess at where the trail went next. Download the supposed route to the GPS, and go ski! Instead of just wandering about, we would have a plan. As more markers were located, we would update the route and go another day.

Over the years we have found 370 signs at 270 locations. We stopped tracking miles covered in our quest at 300. Some trees have markers on both sides. A few of these trees are laying on the ground and were found in the summer.

We really didn't have a clue where the trails started or ended, until one day we ran across the Donner Summit Historical Society on the internet. In one of the newsletters, Bill Oudegeest had posted a 1936 Forest Service map that showed a number of trails. This was like finding a pirate's treasure map to us.

We started searching for these new trails, and racked up a lot of ski miles in the process. We located markers above Cisco Grove, Signal Peak, Loch Leven, Fisher Lake, Devil's Peak, Cascade Lakes, Soda Springs (Thanks, Bill!), Clair Tappaan, Lake Angela, Lytton Lake, Castle Pass and Round Valley.



Also in the DSHS newsletter were some clips Bill had gotten from the Truckee newspaper. Following his idea, I spent some time there myself and added to the list of references about Skiways.

Early this year I received an email from a Truckee USFS ranger who had read about the Skiways in the newsletter. He had found one of the markers and wanted to know more about it. That opened up a whole new area to look for them. None of the maps we had found showed the route, so we made several trips from the Truckee side, and found quite a few. Coming up from the Tahoe City side, we came up empty-handed several times, until we skied up from the Tahoe XC center. At a spot called Bear Trap Cabin, we found several, but were running out of daylight. On a subsequent trip, we located more between there and Starratt Pass (located between Painted Rock and Mt. Watson).

Another trip climbed the Western States Trail up from Highway 89 to the same pass, then down to Deer Creek, and then along Road 06 to Truckee and a bus ride back to the car. It was a very long day, but we found lots of markers as a reward.

We recently came across Ski Tours North of Lake Tahoe by Sam and Barbara Medford. This 1975 paperback had the route, and showed that it ended at Lackpine Street in Tahoe City. We hiked up from there and found a few more markers on the way to Bear Trap, and this completed that trail.

Earlier this year, on a club trip to climb Mt. Lincoln we located an old route from Lake Mary. The route crossed several Sugar Bowl runs, so we had to wait until the resort closed for the season to explore some of it. This portion was marked in February of 1940. Sometime later, the Sierra Club continued the trail south.

This year's great snow coverage gave us plenty of time to search, and we have found marked sections all the way to the Benson Hut on Anderson Peak. Early maps show the trail continuing past Squaw Valley, Five Lakes, Bear creek and out to the highway, so we have plenty of territory left to search. If anyone knows of markers in that area, we'd love to hear about them!

How many more trails are out there? Who knows - we're still looking!

"Then and Now's" Go to the Web

Not long ago we started a new feature, Art Clark's Then and Now's, which exhibit Art Clark's technical skills combined with his love of discovery.

Art goes to the locations of old photographs and then takes new images today. He puts those through his computer and develops morphs, or animations. The pictures change back and forth from the "Then" to the "Now." They are quite remarkable.

We can only show the static pictures in the newsletter - see page 8 this month. But now we can show the animations on our website. Go to www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org and click on "picture galleries" and then "then and now." You have some choices to click on and enjoy as old becomes the new.

The first sign we found was just below Castle Pass. It read "Sierra Skiways - Castle Peak-Norden. That was October, 2007"

Before nylon, plastic, gore-tex and carbon fiber, there was wool, leather, oilcloth and wood. Climbing skins for going up hill were made from sealskin - all the hair pointed back and kept the skis from slipping. Now it's all synthetic.

editor:
Bill Oudegeest
209-606-6859
info@donnersummithistoricalociety.org

The Norden Store and Lodge

Milli Martin, Homer Alaska

Great article about the lodges of Norden. (September 2011 issue) However, there was one more lodge, known then as the Norden Store and Ski Lodge “Ideal Resort Center in the Midst of all Winter and Summer Activities”, as written on the Lodge flyer, copy attached. The lodge was constructed on property leased from Lincoln and James Hutchinson, by the Lyon family of Sacramento, (owned a hardware store in Oak Park) in the early to mid 1920’s to accommodate the Highway 40 construction crews.

Those original buildings, that included a store, living quarters, cabins and a restaurant, were at the back of the property. In 1926, after the Summit Hotel burned, the U.S. Post Office was moved to this Norden facility. In 1930, the owners built a new lodge closer to the highway, moved the

business there, and added two dorm rooms in the new lodge. In 1938, Herb and Lena Frederick, (with partners Ernest and Katie Danzger, whom they bought out in 1941) purchased the entire facility, hired Emil Papplov (known as the Telemark King) to build a kitchen onto the rear of the new Lodge building as well as another small room to accommodate staff, and expanded the restaurant. The original back building became their living quarters and more dorms. They also put in water lines to the cabins and added toilets and showers. Those buildings could accommodate 20 guests, and the lodge 18. And sometimes a few more.



In the busy winter it was common for the Lodge to be full, as recorded by my grandfather in his diary, circ. 1939. Guests came by bus, train or car. Many of them arrived on the morning train and would come for breakfast at the lodge before going skiing. Per the flyer the Lodge provided ...”Groceries and Notions, Ski Accessories, Ski Rental, Restaurant, Dormitories, Gasoline, Oil and Car Accessories”. They were a full service facility. The Texaco gas station remained operational into the 1950’s.

Herb and Lena purchased the land from James Hutchinson in the late 1940’s. They were also caretakers, as was noted in the newsletter, of the Hutchinson Lodge. The Hutchinson access road went between the Norden Lodge and Garage, around the garage and then wound through the trees to the

Hutchinson lodge site. There was a locked chain across that road just behind Herb's big garage to deter unwanted auto traffic. The access road that exists today from Highway 40 across from the big parking lot, did not exist then.

There were tent platforms around the Hutchinson lodge, to the north and east between the lodge and the pond, and these had wall tents to accommodate the summer visitors, possibly the ladies, considering the lodge rules. As noted in a previous article (The Catfish Pond, Nov. 2010) I was once invited into Margie's tent (daughter of James), a large, bright and very nicely furnished wall tent. Thanks again for the great article. Better yet, the wonderful photo on page 5, that brought tears to my eyes. The front couple, dancing, are my Mom and Dad.



Picturesque Lake Van Norden

OUR RATES

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Dinner.....85c Lunch.....65c
Breakfast.....25c - 65c

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Skis \$1.00 per Weekday \$1.50 on Weekends
\$4.00 per Week

BOOTS

75c per Day — 50c With Ski Rental
Deposit Required on Rental Equipment

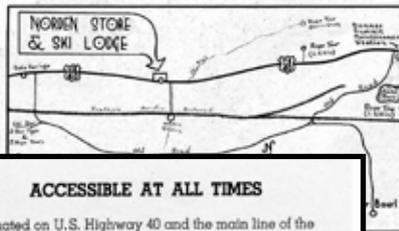
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SNOW AT ITS BEST

With always from 8 to 12 feet of snow on the ground, skiers need not worry about conditions.

IN THE HEART OF ACTIVITIES

Within a radius of two miles, numerous up-ski facilities are maintained. A mile and a half away lies the renowned Sugar Bowl with its elaborate appointments for the winter sports enthusiast. Tractor-propelled enclosed sleds run regularly from Norden Station to the Sugar Bowl. There are seven up-skis within a mile's radius. In all directions are found marvelous slopes for the amateur and expert.

EXPERT SKI INSTRUCTIONS

Here the Klein Brothers School for Skiers is maintained. These expert teachers conduct private or class instructions at pleasing rates. Other well-known teachers of the fine art of skiing, including the Hannes Schroll Ski School, are available in this locality.

ACCESSIBLE AT ALL TIMES

Situated on U.S. Highway 40 and the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad, Norden Store & Ski Lodge is always accessible regardless of any condition. On regular Greyhound schedule.

HIGHWAYS ALWAYS OPEN

The State maintains constant equipment on Donner Summit, which guarantees open roads at all times, regardless of weather. You may ski here with assurance that you will not be snowed in or suffer any inconvenience.

EASILY REACHED

Situated near the Donner Summit, Norden Store & Ski Lodge is easily reached by train or auto. The depot is only a few yards from the store, and a good walk is maintained. By auto, Norden Store & Ski Lodge is right on the highway—96 miles east of Sacramento, and 11 miles west of Truckee.

ACCESSORIES

Nothing that will add to your comfort and convenience will be found wanting. We make it a point to give satisfaction, and personal service is our watchword. We operate the Norden postoffice as well as the store and ski lodge.

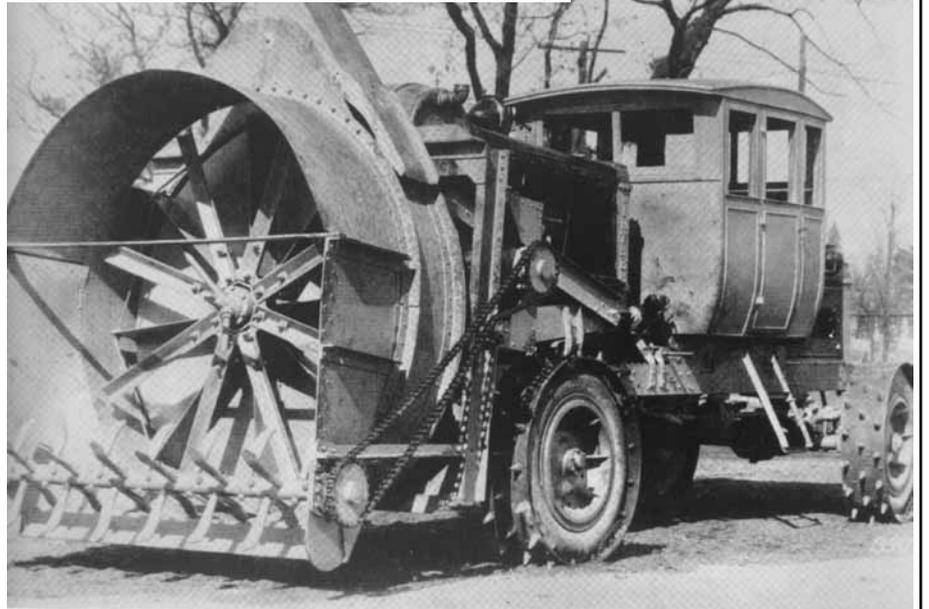
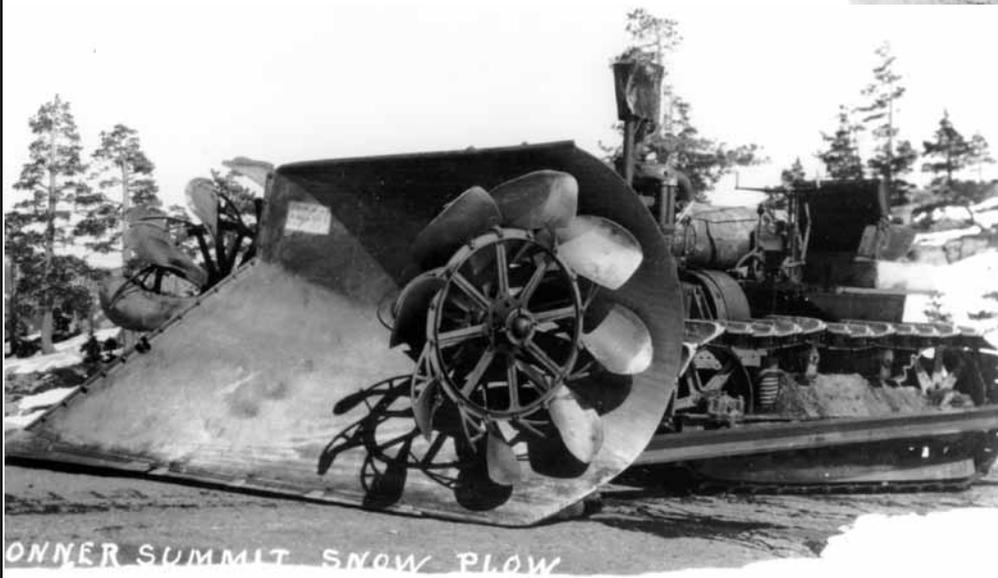
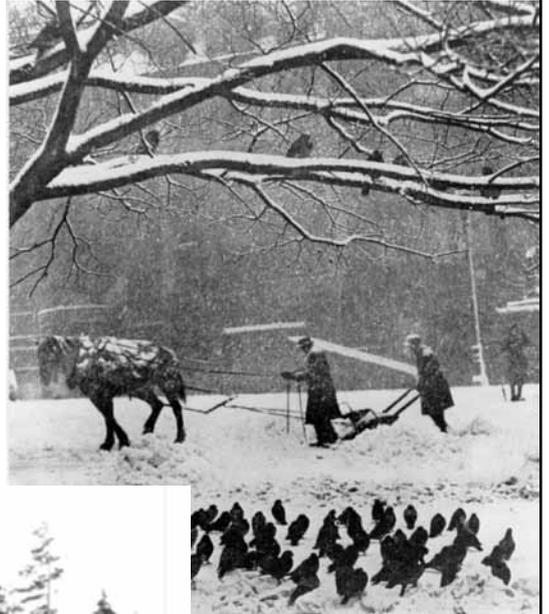
IN THE SUMMER, TOO

From Norden the summer vacationist can enjoy all the advantages of a desirable outing. Hiking, fishing, hunting and a thousand other pleasures are at hand awaiting you.

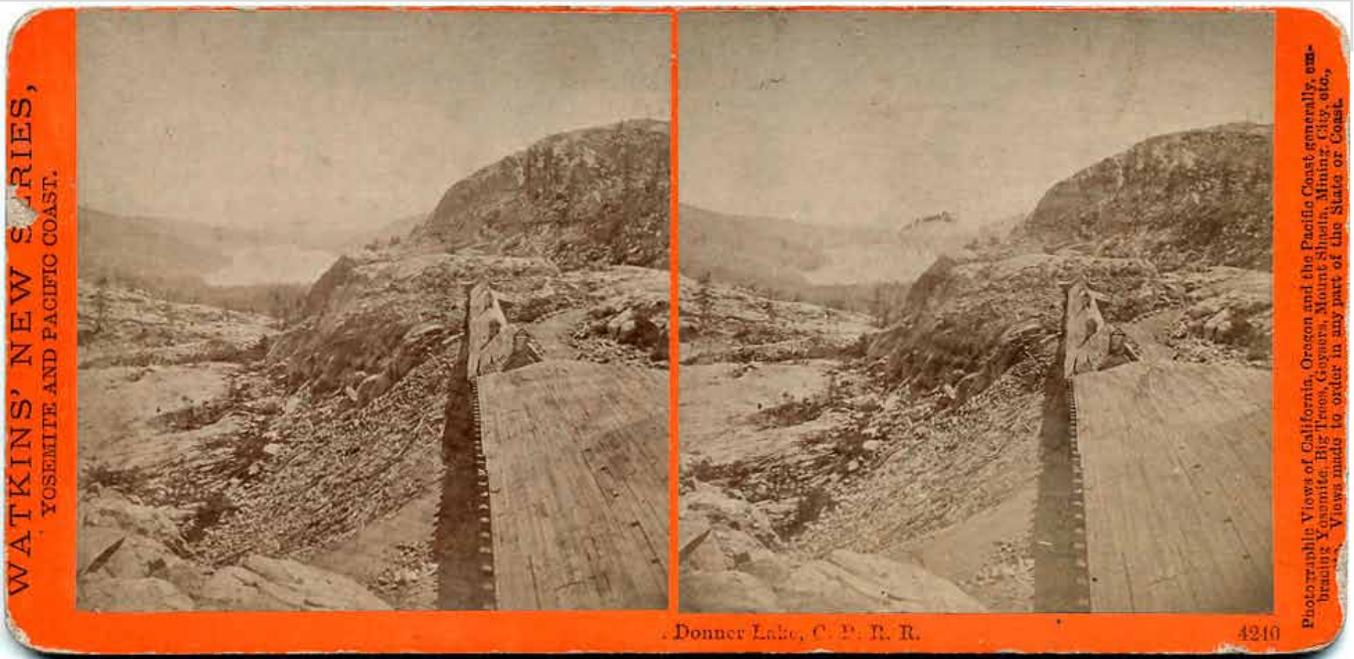
From the DSHS Archives

It being winter it seemed appropriate that this month's archives finds should have to do with winter.

What we have here now are some old Donner Summit snowblowers. In the old days snowbound mechanics rigged up ways to remove the snow. The bottom two pictures are of snowblowers on Donner Summit. The pictures are not dated so we can only guess as to their vintages. The top picture was included just for fun. It's not of any equipment on Donner Summit. It depicts 19th century snow removal in Central Park in New York. Why it's in the DSHS archives I don't know but it looks interesting.



Then & Now with Art Clark



Carlton Watkins was a well-known 19th century photographer. He took pictures to record the progress of the Central Pacific Railroad on Donner Summit. Above is a stereograph for a stereopticon. It gave viewers 3d views and was all the rage in the drawing rooms of the late 19th century. Here we have a view east from Tunnel 6 with Donner Lake in the background. Note the snowsheds in those days were wood which was a tremendous fire hazard because of the sparks emitted from the old steam engines. They were also liable to collapse due to heavy snows. So fire crews patrolled the sheds in summer and fire trains were on call put out the fires. In winter crews were maintained to keep the sheds shoveled. Look closely and you can see the road enter the shed on the left and leave on the right. We'll have a story about that coming up.

Below Art Clark has found the same spot today. The sheds that remain, only a few miles worth compared to 40 when Watkins was photographing them, are concrete.

We will be covering Mr. Watkins as well as other famous photographers who came to Donner Summit in the 19th century like Alfred Hart and Edward Muybridge – just keep your subscription current. To see more Watkins railroad photographs, go to: http://www.andrewsmithgallery.com/exhibitions/hart_watkins/front/images/AAH-1114.jpg

**Donner Lake, C. P. R. R.
Compare to Watkins #4240**



**Donner Lake, C. P. R. R.
Compare to Watkins #4240**

Art's Sierra Scenes

First Markings of the Donner Trail

Marshall Fey

Marshall Fey is an author and Emigrant Trail historian. His book, Emigrant Trails, was reviewed in our April, '11 issue. We have been corresponding with him via email about the Emigrant Trail over Donner Summit and he thoughtfully provided the following along with an article that will come next month that ought to lay to rest the controversy in trail circles about whether the Coldstream route, between Donner and Judah, was ever used by emigrants. Marshall has also written a book about the history of slot machines. His grandfather, Charles Fey invented the slot machine. Mr. Fey provided the pictures here.

The tragic story of the Donner party has created interest worldwide. The first person to research their trail, nearly a century ago, was Peter Mark Weddell (pictured on the next page). Fortunately, the historian kept a journal so the reminiscences of his great work are sharp and extensive. He did a rare interview in 1949 for an historical periodical dubbed, "The Pony Express." The following is an excerpt from this revealing article.

How it Began

After first reading Eliza P. Donner Houghton's book, The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate in 1920 Weddell was hooked. A year later he read C. F. McGlashan's classic History of the Donner Party. Eager to learn more about the Donners, he and his wife that very summer journeyed to the Sierra to learn more about the Donner tragedy.

Weddell Tells of Meeting McGlashan

"At noon on the 29th day of July, 1921, I met Mr. McGlashan, the author of the history of the Donner Party, at his summer cottage near the head of Donner Lake. In our conversation, Mr. McGlashan stated that in 1879, just after his book had been written, Nicholas Clarke, made -a visit to the scene of the tragedy. Mr. Clarke led a party on horseback, composed of Mr. McGlashan and other



Above: This segment of trail near the top of the Summit was still very evident in 1979, at the time of the photo. One of Weddell's numerous signs is on the tree at the left of the picture [with two closeups of other Weddell signs on the next page].

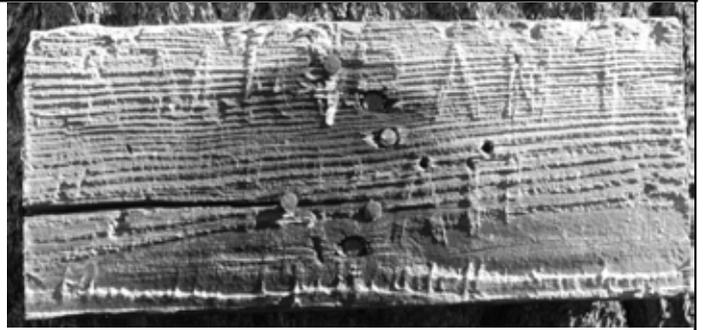


Left: The photo of this sign was taken in 1979. The author of this article does not know who or when it was placed in Coldstream Canyon. It has been gone for many years.



persons of Truckee, to the Donner Family Camp. Mr. McGlashan explained the location of this camp very carefully and I identified it afterwards without difficulty. I have kept it marked with sign boards.”

C. F. McGlashan continued to work with Weddell, until his death in 1931, on the preservation of the Donner Trail. Weddell stated in his 1949 interview, “He wanted to put bronze signs where my wood ones were located and pay half the expense. He was a lawyer and newspaperman at Truckee, with an office filled with newspapers, books and letters scattered everywhere. He always stopped his work when I arrived in Truckee, and we ran around in my car as far as we could and then walked. He wanted to include our work in his next edition of his book, but he died too soon.”



Weddell Marks Coldstream Pass in 1924

After marking the Donner Trail between the two camps [Donner Family] I began marking the trail (Emigrant Trail) from Donner Lake up to the summit. This heavily timbered eastern slope of the Sierra was logged out early in the lumber era of the region, and there were traces of logging roads everywhere - even short sections of the emigrant trail were used for logging if convenient for that purpose.

This confusion of old-road traces required no end of extra hiking, and I believe I tramped out every trace of roads on that mountainside in order to determine the true location of the emigrant trail.

Back at the time of this marking, there were some remnants of the old trail still remaining that could be observed by persons following the marking, “but they are entirely obliterated now. Thousands of the sheep were grazed in that part of the mountains and the herders followed my signboard markings with their droves of sheep clear to the summit.

When I came to know these shepherders they told me, with some enthusiasm, that they were trying to help me by having the sheep trampled out the underbrush and cleared the course. That was all true enough, and it did help in that way, -but it destroyed for all time every trace of the old trail. I regretted this somewhat for the reason that persons following the markings are always gratified to see some trace of the old trail.



Peter M. Weddell, age 60, stands proudly alongside the monument he had just finished atop Coldstream Pass. He continued to mark the route on both sides of the mountain wherever he found trail evidence. Fred Batto, whom he coincidentally met at the summit (see next page), took the photo.

Weddell Places a Cairn at the Summit

In 1924 I located the place where the trail passed over the summit of the Sierra. At this point I built a rock monument as best I could with the facilities at hand, leaving an opening in one side for a container and a statement. This was the first marker of a permanent kind.

When the mound was almost completed Mr. Fred Batto, owner of the Summit Hotel, and a member of the firm of John Batto & Sons, Vineland, California, appeared while I was at work. We were surprised to find ourselves in this remote spot, neither expecting to see the other. He gave me a helping hand in the finishing touches of the rough mound and took a snapshot or two, one of which I have. We spent a short time in pleasant conversation and I found him a very agreeable man to meet. Biding goodbye, he disappeared down the west slope, and I down the eastern side. I never saw him again. His hotel was burned to the ground not long afterward and I heard of his death a number of years ago.



Above: On an historic hike in 1998 member of the Transierra Roisterous Alliance of Senior Humbugs (past presidents of E Clampus Vitus) visit Coldstream Pass. Lee Schegg, an active member of the group and of DSHS, recorded the event. The author, also a member of DSHS, is the 4th at the left.



Above, the cairn in 1971 Standing next to Weddell's ageing rock cairn are Walt Mulcahy, Trail Authority for Nevada Emigrant Trail Marking Committee his son Keith, also a member of NETMC, and Keith's daughter, Yvonne. Weddells cairn had collapsed by 1970 due to the elements or by vandalism.

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P. M. Weddell Here For Yearly Visit

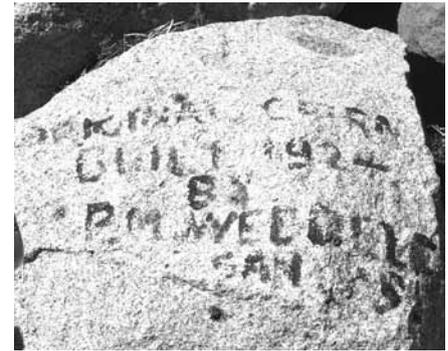
P. M. Weddell of San Jose, whose appearance in our town has become a matter of course for a number of years, arrived on Wednesday afternoon for his annual visit. Mr. Weddell for a number of years has spent his vacation marking the old Emigrant Trail.

In an interview with a representative of the Sierra Sun, Mr. Weddell said: "It is about thirteen years since I began marking the Emigrant Trail on the eastern slope of the Sierra from Alder Creek Meadows

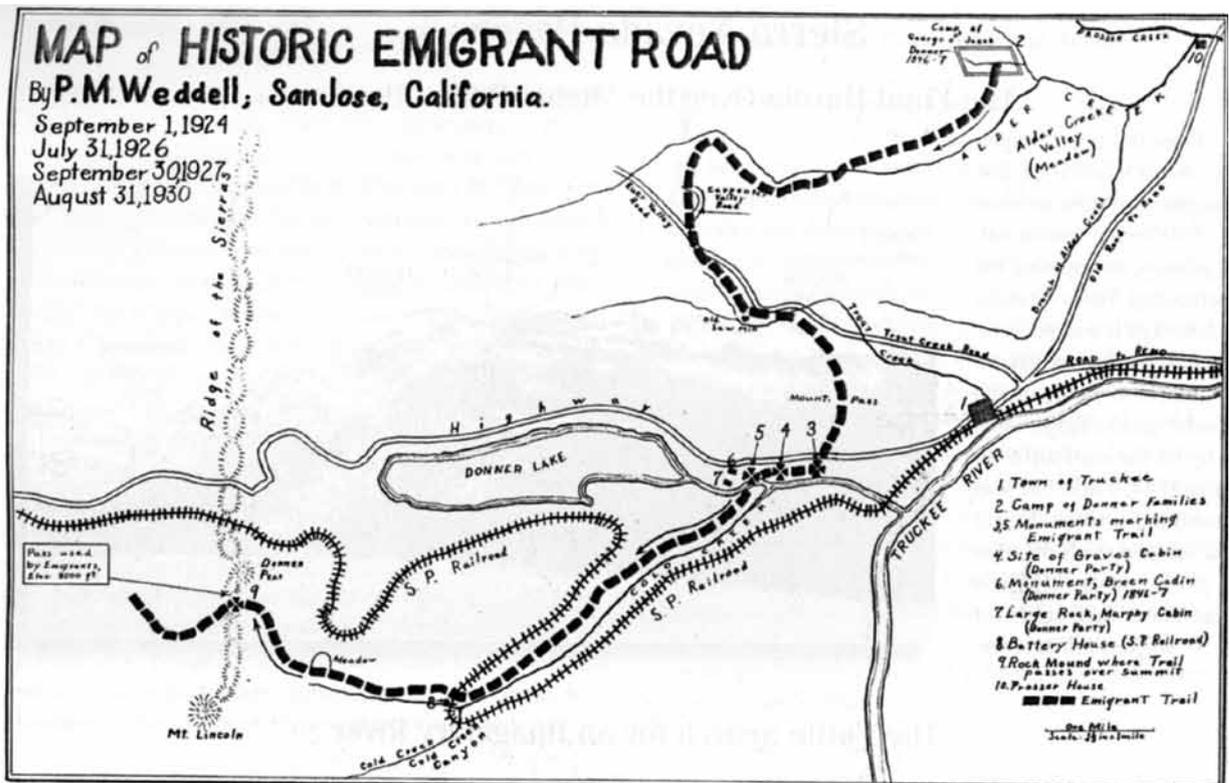
to the Summit and down the west slope to Mary Lake. During this time, some of the sign boards have been removed and taken away as souvenirs with only two or three cases of destruction of the signs. It has been my purpose, and is now, to replace all signs that have disappeared. This summer I shall try to repaint the older sign boards now fading out and dim with exposure to the elements. Again I want to express my regards and earnest consideration for the personal kindness and cooperative spirit of the people of Truckee and the valuable assistance of the Sierra Sun."

Above: article from the Sierra Sun 1/25/1935 describing one of Mr. Weddell's annual trips to Donner Summit for emigrant trail marking and research.

Right: The cairn, (pg 10) is almost gone today, but only the first word of the inscription on a rock at the base of the collapsed cairn is illegible. The remainder reads, "Cairn, Built 1924, By P.M. Weddell, San Jose."



Below: 1924 map by P.M. Weddell locating the emigrant trail route.



Book Review *Assembling California*

DONNER SUMMIT, ROCK SOLID!

DONNER SUMMIT! “The most marvelous square mile in American history!” I have heard this so many times lately, and it is true. The attention has always been The Donner Party, but there was also the Emigrant Trail; Fremont, Carson, and Bridger; native Americans and petroglyphs; the building of the Transcontinental railroad; and interstate 80, the nation’s first “all weather” highway. The list is practically endless.

But before all these wonderful accomplishments there was GRANITE. Before all these events, rivers flowed unabated from the Plains to the Pacific Ocean. Millions of years ago there was no Sierra Nevada mountain range, no impediment of rivers flowing west. What is so fantastic about our Summit is that it is only 3 million years old and still changing. In John McPhee’s book, *The Assembling of California* (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux) we can find out how Donner Summit and the Sierra Nevada were formed.

As a former Pulitzer Prize winner, author of twenty-seven books, and a long-time contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine, McPhee’s easily-understood-by-laymen’s-terms style allows us to understand a sometimes difficult subject. Plate tectonics, batholiths, and caprock andesite are not terms we use in our daily conversations, at least not for me.

“Often likened to a raised trapdoor, the Sierra has a long and planar western slope and...a plunging escarpment facing east.” “Hinged somewhere beneath the Great Valley (San Joaquin/Sacramento Valley - ed.), and sharply faulted on its eastern face, the range began to rise only a very short geologic time ago - perhaps three million years...and it is still rising, still active....”

We learn that in the geologic periods before the uplift, Pliocene era volcanic andesite flows “spread themselves over the terrain like butterscotch syrup over ice cream.” As the successive volcanic flows filled in the landscape to form a somewhat flat surface the trapdoor began to rise tilting up the hardened andesite which we can see in the road cuts along highways 40 and 80.

Although most of what we see of the terrain from Nevada to the Summit is volcanic cap, McPhee calls this a “vener” to what lies below, the monster Sierra batholith of solid granite.

Science calls a batholith a surface of at least forty square miles and no known bottom. At the Summit we sit near or on top of the Smartville batholith which has a surface of about twenty-five thousand square miles. McPhee says that it “lies inside the Sierra like a big zeppelin.” And some geophysists “say that it is six miles down.” At almost any place along Interstate 80 from you can reach out and touch the batholith especially around Big Bend.

To skip ahead a few million years the Pacific Plate started pushing into the North American Plate as in Plate Tectonics. If you hold your hands in front of you with your palms down and thumbs folded under gently push your left hand up over your right at an increasing angle with the right going farther under the left. This is how McPhee explains the concept, and how the Sierra range and Donner Summit were formed, and pushed up so much granite, over millions of years.

McPhee did much of his work on this book with the aid of UC Davis Geology Professor Eldridge Moores. With Eldridge driving an old pick-up truck McPhee sat in the passenger’s seat taking notes. At unexpected times Eldridge would stop the truck along a I-80 road cut and take samples - “as cars shot past us like F-18s....” What McPhee learned from his association with Eldridge puts the mysteries of the formation of Donner Summit in a better light for the layman.

Assembling of California covers all of California, spending time on earthquakes and volcanoes; the formation of the coastal ranges and great valleys. For instance, “fifty million years ago the town of Davis would have been in mud at the bottom of the Farallon Ocean, some thirty miles offshore, on the continental shelf.” I feel that to fully understand the dynamics of Donner Summit and the Sierra having a “rock solid” foundation is a must.

To totally enjoy the book I would suggest reading McPhee’s *Annals of the Former World*, a geological road trip along Interstate 80 from New Jersey to San Francisco of which *Assembling of California* makes up the fourth chapter.

Other books by John McPhee include *Uncommon Carriers*, *The Survival of the Bark Canoe*, and *Looking for a Ship*.

Reviewed by David (Rocky) Africa

