

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

January, 2022 issue #161

## A Note to Our Readers

We never do notes to our readers so this one must be important.

As the end of the month of August was approaching the Heirloom staff was getting ready to start this new Heirloom. We try to keep ahead of things at the DSHS because you just never know what's going to happen. I was feeling more than the usual "new issue" excitement because we've been sitting on a series of articles that I thought would take up a whole edition. The hook for the articles was to be we've done over, across and above Donner Summit in the last 148 issues, now let's go under (how's that for setting up some anticipation for you now?). The "sitting" had been ten years (120 issues) since the original research but for whatever reasons, under Donner Summit kept getting pushed back. But now, here was the time for the story to get its due. We opened up the January, '22 folder and found a bunch of things that had been squirreled away for this issue. As we started laying them in to our Heirloom template the pages started to fill and if under Donner Summit was added the issue would get way too long.

That's by way of introducing this issue. Like last month we have here another pot pourri of Donner Summit historical miscellany and this introduction can be the "anticipatory set" for next month when, for sure, we'll get under Donner Summit in the Heirloom. So keep up your subscription - at least for another month.

One of the items sitting in the January, '22 folder was a page from the 1884 edition of the Pacific Tourist Guide. A note had been appended saying "use in January." We never argue with previous editorial decisions and so here is an excerpt, timely talking about snow.

The 1884 Pacific Tourist Guide is available on the internet in various forms from pure text to images scanned from the original. 1884 was just fifteen years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad and reading parts of the guide takes us back to a slice in time very different from today. Since we're focused on Donner Summit, we'll limit our excerpt here to our neighborhood so we can see what it looked like one hundred thirty six years ago.

In 1884 Truckee was the "most important town in the Sierras" due to the lumber trade and proximity to various resorts. Twenty-four locomotives were based in its railroad roundhouse. The Pacific Tourist Guide said that Truckee would benefit from the addition of another industry, insurance, since the place had burned down in 1868, 1869, twice in 1870, and in 1874. The "Chinatown" also burned in 1875. Stages left Truckee for various locations. It took four hours and fifteen minutes to get to Sierraville and cost \$4. Loyalton took five hours and cost \$4 also. Stages also went to Webber and Independence Lakes both of which had "good hotels." At Webber Lake "the accommodations are excellent and the fish plentiful." Today the Truckee Donner Land Trust is renovating the old hotel, but that's an out of area digression inappropriate for here. The stage also left the Summit daily for Lake Tahoe and cost \$2.50.

One who... climb[s] to the top of the ridge through which the tunnel [6] leads, or some higher peak, will never be sorry, for all enchanting panorama will be unrolled."

Pacific Tourist Guide  
about Donner Summit

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## DONNER SUMMIT



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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

The streets in Truckee were particularly wide so residents could store the plentiful snow. Residents also shoveled snow off their roofs and Chinese workers then shoveled it into railroad cars. Then the snow was taken up the mountain to “throw it down some steep mountain side.”

Snowshoes in those days were thirteen feet long and “about six inches wide, turned up in the front like the runner of a skate, and waxed to make them slip easily over the snow. Near the middle is a leather that laces over the instep (a skeleton half shoe) and out of which the foot will slip in case of a fall or accident.”

The author goes on to expound on his trip to the Summit in the snow which is of course what we’re interested in. “As I watched the falling snow nothing could exceed its beauty. As it curled and shot through the air, the mountains were shut out with a gauzy veil and darker mists. Now and then I caught a glimpse of a clump of pines ...the long white boughs seemed bending as if conscious of the enormous weight that threatened every living thing.

“When the clouds broke suddenly away, a flood of golden light leaped from hill to hill. The tall pines, partly green but now like pyramids of snow, lift their heads above the mountain sides...” Then the snow started again, “Its hard crystals were driven so furiously as to make one’s cheeks burn, and give exquisite torture to the eyelids... The enormous snow-plows at length grappled with this monster of the elements...”

"From east and west came reports of avalanches, snow sheds down, trains wrecked and snow-bound, and soon the telegraphy refused to do its bidding."

“The ponderous engines... With five of them behind the largest snow-plow on the road, we started toward the summit. The snow flew and even the ground trembled, and every piece of short snow sheds was welcomed with joy and misgiving. The blinding snow, I thought, will cease to fly, but suppose that when crushed into ice like granite, it lifts the ponderous plow of 30 tons, or that we go crashing into the shed prostrate beneath twenty or forty feet of snow; or that an avalanche has come down... five boilers behind that may soon be on top of us.

“Never before did I realize the need of the snow sheds, but I often rebelled against the shutting out of nature’s mountain charms from the weary or unoccupied traveler."

“Let the discontented not forget that five feet of snow may fall in one day; that twenty and thirty feet may lie all over the ground at one time; that forty and fifty feet are sometimes to be seen...”

"The capacious reservoirs are the pledge of summer fruitfulness. A winter scene in these Sierras without even the sight of unfriendly bruin, will beget a fondness for the snow sheds that the summer tourist cannot imagine, and a better appreciation of the boldness and daring of the men who brave the hardships of these mountain storms, and peril their lives at every step for others’ safety.....” 'the wonderful works of God. " The feeding of the rivers and the purifying of the winds are the least of the services appointed to the hills. To fill the thirst of the human heart with the beauty of God's working, to startle its lethargy with the deep and pure agitation of astonishment are their higher missions."

“The Summit House is the largest hotel along the line of the road, accommodates 150 guests, and is one of the most popular in the Sierras." There is a day and night telegraph station.

“Summit Valley, with its bright pastures, and warm with life, while it touches bleak rocks, and receives the shade of the inhospitable pine or the drip of the snow one of the loveliest valleys at such an altitude lies toward the setting sun....

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ORADO MOUNTAINS, THE BIG TREES, THE GEYSERS, THE  
YOSEMITH, AND THE YELLOWSTONE.  
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The Pacific Tourist, 1884

“...Then there are a thousand other charms in the vast heights above, and vast depths below ; in contrasts of light and shade, form and color ; in mists hanging over the lake, and clouds clinging to the peaks; in the twilight deepening into darkness, or colossal pyres, kindled by the coming sun, and going out in the clear light of the day ; or, in the gloom of the forest mingled with the living silver of the moonlit lake.

Summit Valley “is two miles long and one mile wide, heads in the high peaks south of the hotel. It has pasturage during the summer for many cattle, and its springs and abundance of products fresh from the dairy make it a delightful place for camping out. Its waters are the source of the South Fork of the South Yuba River. The railroad, descends to the foot of this valley, keeping the divide on the north to the right, then, about three miles from the summit, crosses the most southerly branch of the Yuba. A few yards before the crossing is a summer flag station, or Soda Springs Station 192 miles from San Francisco. These springs are situated on the south side of the high ridge that forms the southern wall of Summit Valley, and are in the headwaters of the American River. They are numerous, flow abundantly, and are highly medicinal. Stages run to them both from the summit, and from Soda Station, and the ride is not surpassed, if equaled, by any in the Sierras north of Yosemite, in the number and beauty of the fine views it affords.

“The hotel at the Springs is not an imposing structure, but it is kept in first-class style and is a favorite resort...”

We've mentioned our picture project in a couple of [Heirloom](#) issues. The project, manned by volunteers, has digitized a large proportion of Norm Saylor's (DSHS president) collection of historic photographs and ephemera. In this issue of the [Heirloom](#) there are a couple of the project's digitized items:

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Norden store photograph from the 1930's -	next page

# Memories of the Winter of 1952

Milli Martin

Our November and December, '19 [Heirlooms](#) had articles about the record year of snow on Donner Summit in 1952. Milli Martin, who lives in Homer, Alaska is the niece of Herb and Lena Frederick who owned the Norden Store and Lodge. There are lots of entries for that subject in our article and picture indices on our website on the [Heirloom](#) pages. Milli read our November issue and offered up some memories that we induced her to share. The parentheses ( ) are Milli's; the brackets [ ] are the editor's [mine].

Winter of 1952, as recorded by my grandfather Pappa, Opa Utermark, who lived with Lena and Herbert Frederick at Norden. He came to the U.S. From Hamburg, Germany in 1939 as a guest of Lena and my mother, was unable to return because of WWII, and became a citizen in 1949. He loved the U.S., and especially San Francisco, which he visited often.

When Bill [that's me – the editor of this august publication]

asked me to write about Lena housing the emergency rail crews [in the winter of 1952], I was happy to do that, but recalled, in reading Opa's diary years ago, he recorded that winter day by day. I thought the readers might find this of interest too.

January 12th, Herb's birthday, much snow, day and night, more snow. No skiers, a week end without guests. Only Emil [Papplau –see the July and February, '12 [Heirlooms](#)] for dinner.

Jan. 13th, Always more storm and snow. Power on and off and on again. Road and railroad are closed.

Jan. 14th. The Chicago fast train [City of San Francisco] is stuck, after an avalanche of snow, 300 passengers. 14 feet of snow and it keeps falling.



Norden Store in the 1930's

Jan.15th Train cannot be reached to get the people out. Is stuck at Yuba Gap. North trains coming with difficulty

Jan. 16th, All passengers are out. Having a beautiful day and on Wednesday, the store is open (Lena traditionally closed Wednesdays and stayed open on Sundays.) But road and railroad are closed.

Jan. 17th, A stranded lady was rescued (from the train) with a snow-cat. After all the others had been rescued. Otherwise, nothing new.

Jan. 18th Store is selling a lot of meat, bread, eggs and milk. Today it is a week that road and train are closed.

Jan. 19 There are 10 men from the railroad employed. They worked 13 hours to move 100 ft. with the Rotary blower. Open enough for emergency trains. (Assume this is when Lena started housing them)

Jan. 20 The City of San Francisco is out and a number of trains are running. Received the first mail in a week (Norden's mail always came by train in the 50's) Today is a new snow storm. People are being told not to come up.

Jan/ 21 Today the first daily newspaper in 10 days Still storm and snow, Everyone eats a lot, even had a reporter for dinner.

Jan. 22 The man that saved the lady on the 17th, died of a heart attack. 13 people in house. Weather is good. Mail and several trains are running and the road is cleared to the bridge.

Jan. 23 No free Wednesday, store is open. A new storm coming. After 11 days the first truck with bread from Colfax. (Store depended on some truck deliveries for supplies. Otherwise, meat, veggies and ice cream they brought up from Reno.)

Jan. 24 The cabins are gone, everything slid. Everyday, 18 people to sleep and eat. Sun all day, progress is slow at the summit. (some of the 18 were probably skiers staying at Norden.)

Jan. 25 Always more people. Herbert went to Truckee to get cash for payday. It took him 8 hours, he followed the Rotary down and back up.

Jan.26. Esther and Jack come for the first time this year.(at that time they were still Ski Patrol at Sugar Bowl.) Also, this week, no skiers. The area around Los Angeles reports flooding.

Jan. 27, Sunday We took a drive to Donner Summit, it goes very slow. The huge snow masses on each side of the road. Blue sky and sunshine.

Jan. 28th Emil left on the 26th for Arizona – he could no longer stand the deep snow. Norden's big garage collapsed at the back. All cars are out. [Large garages used to house cars on Donner Summit]

Jan. 29th Greyhound Bus to Reno came by. Always news of more collapsed roofs.

Jan. 30th, From the cabins things are being brought to the house. At the garage two men are shoveling, light snow and wind.

Jan. 31st Tomorrow 10 people leave us. 3 are already gone. Also the garage in Soda Springs is in danger from the snow.

Feb. 1st Day and night RAIN! The rotary has to be cleared. Nights, peace in the house, only 2 remain.

Feb. 3rd Good ski sun. On Hwy. 50 a 3800 ton avalanche and has to be removed to open the road.

Feb. 4th 14 new people from the railroad moved in.

Feb. 5th The new people eat good, and very pleased with Lena's cooking. The King of England died.

Feb. 6th Turkey dinner for all, Hwy. 50 still not open. Hwy. 40 is OK. And passable.

Feb. 7th Mildred's [That's Milli – the author] birthday. Herbert made it to Reno today, road not open to all yet.

Feb. 8th Today the road is open and for the first time since Jan. 11th the bus is running again. All trains have abandoned us since Monday.

Feb. 9th Hwy 50 is open, it was closed 30 days. 40 was closed 28 days. Friends from San Francisco were up to ski.

Feb. 11th New snow storm. The people are all back, though they do not work much.

Feb. 13th Today is Wednesday, a free day. But there is much to do. (he would help stock shelves after a delivery.) we have 16 to feed even though the store is closed.

Feb. 14th One man did not get his full nights sleep and is bouncing in my room. (Opa had a private room for himself. The bathroom was just across the hall from Opa's and next door to the other room.) Light snow.

Feb. 15th All are gone until Monday. Truck with supplies and skiers are coming.

Feb. 16th New snow storm, much wind and snow. 7 for dinner. The road was closed for 15 hours.

Feb. 18th All the men are back 12 still a snow storm Herbert dumped ashes, the snow is as high as the house. (They probably kept the fireplace burning all day.)

Feb. 19th Always more snow. Hwy. 50 closed again.

Feb. 20th Furious storm. Hwy 40 hard to travel, especially for delivery trucks.

Feb. 21st Hwy 40 open for 25 hours. Pretty day, new storms are forecast Skiers are being canceled. The men are leaving.

Feb. 22nd Washington's Birthday not home. House will not change again, 1 lady and 14 to 16 men then 7 ladies and 16 men. The skiers came, and another snow storm. (I suspect Lena also rented out the apartment, I know she could sleep 16 in the 3 rooms upstairs and up to 6 or 8 in the apartment. Of those 3 rooms, 2 had a private bath, and those workers enjoyed a nice hot shower.)

Feb. 23rd Turkey dinner for 24, 12 workers and 9 skiers, 3 families. Good weather.

Feb. 24th Sun is out. First good week end. Lifts and others cannot run. Either Sugar Bowl or Squaw Valley. 9 workers remain. All others left.

Feb. 25th Herb to Reno and Truckee and brought much back. Good weather. 3 men shovel snow from the big garage 2 on top, 1 below.

Feb. 26th Good weather, a lot to unpack in the store.

Feb. 27th First time to Reno this year. Lost \$7.00. Back at 4 with a huge load. (Every time Lena and Herbert went to Reno they always stopped at Harrolds for an hour or so, and Opa loved to too. I think over the years L and H broke even, but Opa

lost a lot.)

Feb. 28th 11 at night a car accident in front of the store, a lady from the Sugar Bowl the car slid on ice and rolled down the hill. She suffered a fractured skull.

Feb. 29th All workers home until Monday and a new snow storm is forecast. The lady in the accident, died.

March 6th More snow. Over night the highway Rotary broke one of the store windows.

March 7th Always more snow. They hwy rotary does not care where he blows the snow, as long as he clears the road.

March 11th Norden reported 239 inches of snow. [That's almost 20 feet of snow]

March 14th Everywhere bad weather, day and night snow fall and bad storms

March 15th The road is closed, both directions. No skiers this week end.

March 16th Trains both directions are late still more snow and in San Francisco and Los Angeles a lot of rain. Snow Storm

March 17th A sunny day, but at night a new storm and overnight it got bad and the next morning is the is the worst day we have had. The men come back and the road is closed.

March 24th Warm weather, all roads are chain free.

March 26th Emil back from the south.

March 27th Always wonderful sunshine. The snow pack is dropping. falling apart.

March 28th This week end the men leave us. Rotary is clearing parking lot for Sugar Bowl.

March 28th, 1953 The Pratt's Garage burns in Soda Springs.

Then from Milli: Lena housing the emergency railroad crews. Thanks to this diary I know it started in mid January of 1952, she would have from 8 to 16 men a night from mid-January until the end of March. She fed them a wonderful dinner, when power was out she cooked on a three burner Coleman camp stove, Lena loved to cook and see her guests eat with gusto and that they did. She fed them breakfast and packed a sack lunch to take with them. She did that for almost 3 months.

The Norden house was a lodge when Lena and Herbert bought it. They kept those three big bedrooms even after remodeling, adding a separate apartment that she could also rent out. Two of the rooms had private baths and one shared a bath with her Dad, Opa. She could put up 16 a night in those 3 rooms.

During the worst of it in February, she ran out of clean sheets and the road was closed she had no way to get them to the laundry in Truckee, so she called the railroad and asked what she should do. They calmly told her, "turn them over and use them again." She happily complied. Suspect when Herbert made that 8 hour trip to Truckee for cash, he also hauled a load of sheets down and back up.

Paydays at the store would get intense, many workers hailed from Mexico and would cash their checks, buy the groceries they needed for the next two weeks and sent what money was left over home. Herb wrote a lot of money orders that day. And that year, I suspect the store ran short on some supplies, especially if they could not get to Reno or the truck could not come up from Sacramento. Many of the men who stayed with Lena that winter, returned in summer to thank her for her wonderful meals.

Even years later one would stop by to brag about how well they ate. At that time, my dear Aunt Lena was into her 60's, that store kept her working hard and I suspect that is what kept her going. 1966, the year I moved to Alaska, she retired, to her little house in Grass Valley, memories of that hard winter are what convinced her to leave the summit. She was not up to a repeat. Especially after that awful car accident on Mt. Rose in 1965.

When I think about what Lena did that winter, she was in her 60's then, and not a spring chicken.

Milli Martin

# Revisiting the Soda Springs Up Ski

The article pictured here comes from the February, 1937 edition of P. G. and E. Progress, just one of many things in Norm Saylor's DSHS collection. The article reports on a creative use of PG&E's electricity and so was good publicity. A motor driven "Pullback" had been installed at Soda Springs.

Soda Springs was the home of the California Ski School (see the ad on the next page), the first organized ski school in California. It was run by Dennis Jones who had also cleared the trees from Soda Springs ski hill and started that ski area. If you go all the way back, on our website or into your carefully bound Heirloom archives, you can find about Dennis Jones and the Soda Springs ski area in the February, '09 Heirloom.

Dennis wanted to popularize winter sports and he realized that to do that he had to broaden the appeal of skiing for regular people. Changing skiing methods (you really have to open up that February, '09 Heirloom) and instruction was one way. Another was to provide comfort and one way to provide comfort was to make it easier for skiers to get uphill. So in the mid-1930's Dennis built a ski lift on the Soda Springs ski hill. Before a lift the only way up was by muscle power, presumably making each earned downhill run more enjoyable. The article tells about the installation of this electrically powered lift on the two thousand foot ski hill. A quick check of the relevant USGS topo shows it's only about 400'. We'd call that today "fake news." The reporter was wrong about the height but probably right that it took 20 or 25 minutes of effort to get to the top using muscle power alone, depending on how aggressive that skier was. The new lift Jones installed took about three minutes to get skiers to the top, according to the article. A reputable publication like the Heirloom would check the facts by skiing up and down without the lifts but since this is being written in August and memories are not so good, we'll have to leave the facts as is.

Strangely, you'd think that an article about the new lift would include pictures of the new lift but that's not the case here. Above is all there is. Pictures that PG&E could have used are what the archives of the DSHS are for (see page 10). The article says the electrically powered lift had an 80 horsepower electric motor and 4500 feet of steel cable. There were two sleds attached to the cable. One went up while the other went down. Skiers removed their skis and sat facing downhill as the uphill sled took them to the top. The sleds weighed 1200 lbs., according to the article, but let's leave that for the moment. The sleds could hold twelve skiers and of course PG&E was touting this as a modern application of electrical power which they sold.

In the pictures above, that's Dennis Jones in the lower left and his wife is in the upper right picture (but which of the pair is not specified).

That's not all we can tell you about the "PullBack," also called an "Up Ski," or "Boat Sled." Dennis' lift did not work to his satisfaction and he later installed rope tows. The Auburn Ski Club, however, also had a Pullback at their ski area at Cisco Grove. That ski area was ruined after it was bisected by I-80 and the Club moved to Boreal. They left behind one of their sleds (next page) which is still on the hillside just below Tunnel 3. You can read about it and its discovery by the intrepid DSHS Mobile Historical Research Team in the December, '11 Heirloom. It does not appear to weigh 1200 lbs.







The Auburn Ski Club's "Pullback" on the hillside above where their club was headquartered at Cisco Grove. That's I-80 on the right.

Here we'll improve on the PG&E article by including some Pullback pictures from Cisco and Yosemite, kind of an UpSki scrapbook on page 10.

There are no pictures in existence of Dennis' machine.

This kind of lift never became popular because it was uncomfortable since people faced downhill, skiers had to remove their skis, it went very slowly, and its capacity was limited. Other lifts, rope tows, pomas, "J" bars, etc. were more convenient and so the Cisco sled was left on the hillside for train passengers to wonder about.



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The top three pictures are the Auburn Ski Club's Pullback at Cisco Grove. The picture below is close to the same perspective as the "now" picture at the top of page 9. The bottom two pictures here are the same idea at Yosemite.



# Another Donner Summit First

Devoted readers of the Heirloom know that Donner Summit is the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. It is the scene of important firsts: the first wagon trains to California with wagons, the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental air route, and the first transcontinental telephone line. There are many smaller, less earthshaking firsts too: the first bicycle across the Sierra, across the country and around the world; the first motorized crossing of the Sierra; the first transcontinental round trip by motorcycle; the first automobile crossing of the Sierra; the first transcontinental bike relay; etc. They've all been stories in the Heirloom and are accessible on our website, just look in the indices.

Here we have a 1995 Sierra Sun article about the first tickets sold to snowboarders at a ski are. Perceptive readers will realize that must have been somewhere on Donner Summit.

Norm Sayler, former owner of Donner Ski Ranch, signed a Burton Backhill snowboard "testifying to the fact that [John] Huddleston was the first snowboarder to ever buy a lift ticket in the Tahoe-Sierra."

The year was 1980, a time when snowboards were considered toys and no ski area would grant them access. Norm Sayler has always challenged conventional wisdom, though, and where other ski areas saw problems he saw opportunity.

By the time of the article in 1995, half of Donner Ski Ranch's business was snowboarders. Today the national percentage of snowboarders is 26.7% and in the Pacific Southwest it is 43.7% (figures supplied by Sugar Bowl for this story).

Snowboarding was not the only first at Donner Ski Ranch. The Ranch was also the "first Sierra resort to allow telemark skiing in the early 1970's

## SPORTS & RECREATION

Section B • February 23, 1995

**Snowboarding's ...**

### FIRST TRACKS

Donner Ski Ranch sold first ticket to boarder

**By TANYA BRANSON**  
*Sun News Service*

Surfer, snowboarder and now a school bus driver, Kings Beach resident John Huddleston has his claim to fame on his wall.

It is a Burton Backhill Board signed by Donner Ski Ranch owner Norm Sayler, testifying to the fact that Huddleston was the first snowboarder to ever buy a lift ticket in the Tahoe-Sierra.

Back in 1980, snowboards were called snow toys and Huddleston couldn't find a resort that would allow him to use his snowboard on their mountain. After being turned down by Squaw Valley USA and other resorts, Huddleston tried Donner Ski Ranch.

The ticket seller refused him, but then he asked to speak with Sayler.

"We've always been an advocate of let's use the snow however we can," Sayler said.

So they sold him a lift ticket. And the rest is history, as they say.

Fifty percent of Donner Ski Ranch's business is snowboarders and the riders are not just young people anymore, Sayler said.

"It's all walks of life. There are people in their early 30s, late 30s, people with gray hair," Sayler said.

According to Ski Industries America, snowboarding was 11 percent of the total ski visits nationwide in 1993-94, representing a steady increase since snowboarders were 5.8 percent of the skier market in 1990-91.

"As a ski resort operator, you know the boarders will come. If it's cloudy, if it's rainy, he's here. He's going boarding," Sayler said.

Ironically, Huddleston doesn't snowboard anymore. However, he was one of the first wave of snowboarders in the beginning.

A surfer from Southern California, Huddleston was taking waterkis and putting edges on them when he worked at Mammoth Mountain in 1970-72.

When he saw an ad in Powder Magazine for Jake Burton's Backhill Boards, he called Burton on the East Coast and said he was trying out the same type of thing in California.

Burton sent Huddleston three of his first snowboards made in Vermont in 1973 or '74, Huddleston said.

One went to Huddleston's girlfriend, another to his brother, Buffalo Huddleston, (one of the first certified snowboard instructors and a snowboarding legend living in Staata) and one he kept and tried out in the Sierra.

That's the one which still hangs on his wall.

"When I look at the spot now I just kind of chuckle," he said. "I had a strong feeling the sport was going to take off."

Although he was with the first wave of snowboarders, Huddleston said he was left behind when the sport skyrocketed.

"When the kids started snowboarding, they were a different generation of surfer," the 44-year-old said.

Saylor can't remember who exactly was the first snowboarder ever in the Sierra, although he remembers someone riding a snowboard-like contraption at Soda Springs in 1954.

Huddleston might have been the first snowboarder to use a board with actual bindings, but Sayler remembers Don Bostick, Chris and Bev Sanders (who later started Avalanche snowboards), Jim Zellars, Tom Burt and Terry Kuiswell all frequenting his slopes in the early 1980s.

"They all came here in the early days because we were open to it," Sayler said. "We were the one who recognized that it was a sport that was going to grow."

He admits, however, that while Donner Ski Ranch never required that a boarder be certified to go on the hill like some resorts did, the ranch did charge \$1 more for snowboarding in the beginning.

"It has been a very, very large piece of our salvation. It has kept us in business," Sayler said.

Donner Ski Ranch was also the first Sierra resort to allow telemark skiing in the early 1970s. Richard Wray, a cross country ski instructor at Northstar, asked to telemark at Donner Ski Ranch because Northstar wouldn't allow it. Wray eventually became a telemark instructor at Donner Ski Ranch, Sayler said.

He said Donner Ski Ranch also allowed ski bobbing (a type of ski bicycle) and was the first to have night lights in 1958.

However, with Sayler's perspective of 40-plus years in the ski industry, he says none of those ski inventors have changed the sport the way snowboarding has.

"The wave of boarding is just starting. It's easier to do and it's just a happening," Sayler said.

**As a ski resort operator, you know the boards will come. If it's cloudy, if it's rainy, he's here. He's going boarding.**

— Norm Sayler,  
Donner Ski Ranch owner

John Huddleston and his Burton Backhill Board signed by Donner Ski Ranch owner Norm Sayler.

(Photo by Pete Henshaw)

**SPORTS CALENDAR**

**Saturday, Feb. 25**

- 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. - TTHS boys' and girls basketball in Western Division action at Truckee against Manogue. Girls JV plays at 10 a.m.; girls varsity tips off at 2:30 p.m. Boys JV is at 10 a.m. and varsity is at 2:30 p.m.

**Sunday, Feb. 27**

- The TTHS Nordic Ski Team kicks off a two-day competition at Boreal at the Auburn Ski Club in the state championships. Both varsity and intermediates will compete in the two-day event which tests freestyle and classic skiing.

**Tuesday, Feb. 28**

- 6:45 a.m. - The TTHS Alpine Ski Team fights North Tahoe High School for championship status at an all-day slalom race at Alpine Meadows.

**Wednesday, March 1**

- TTHS swim team begins practice.

**Tuesday, March 7**

- 3:30 p.m. - TTHS girls' softball at Colfax.
- 3:30 p.m. - TTHS baseball in a junior varsity and varsity scrimmage against Colfax at Colfax.

**Saturday, March 17**

- Take the mystery out of learning to cross-country ski in Lakeview Cross-Country Ski Area's Super Clinic March 18-19.

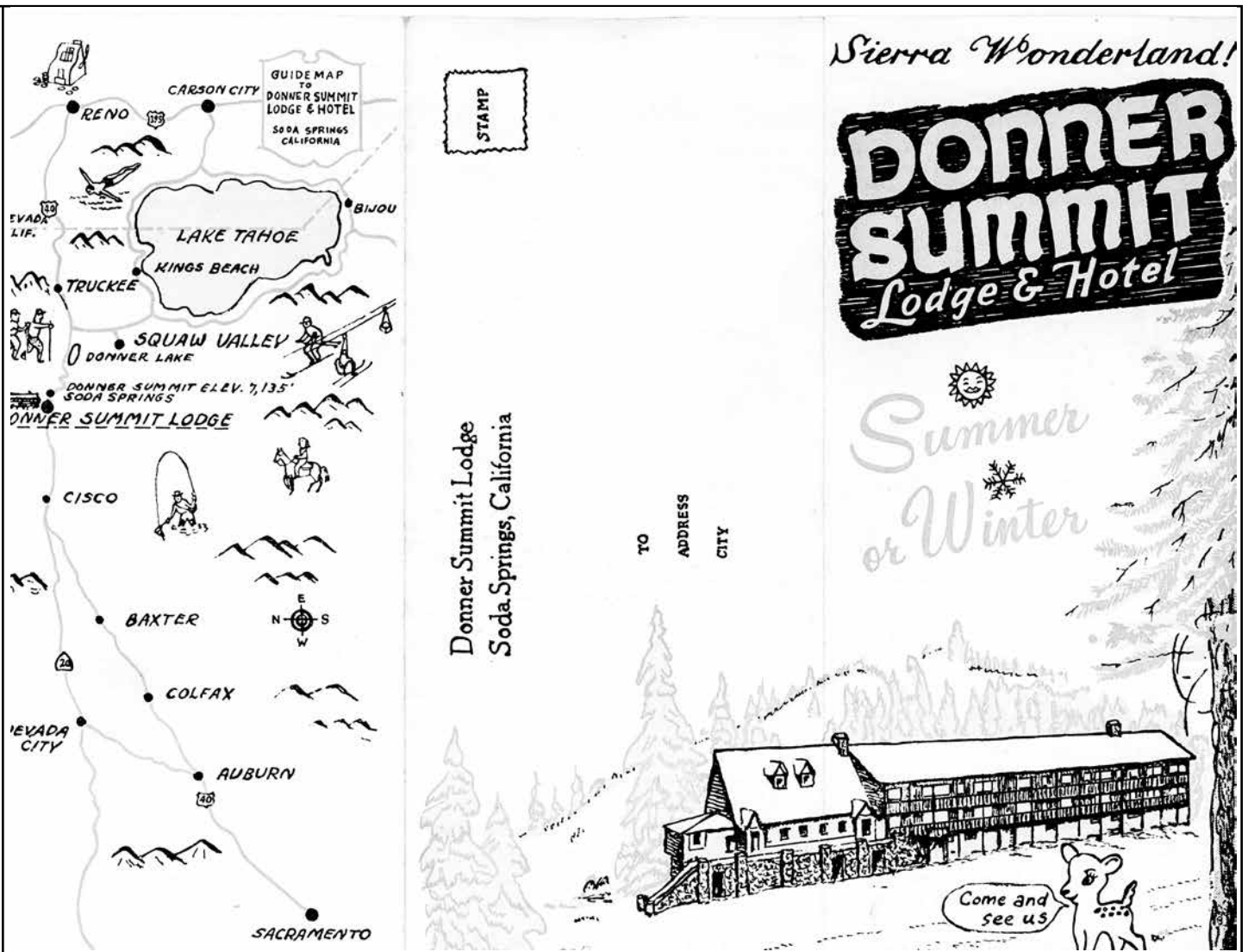
For information or to reserve a spot, call 583-9353.

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January, 2022

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Before the coming of the freeway in the early 60's there were hotels, lodges, stores, gas stations, bars, sport shops and ski areas all along Old Highway 40. It was the transcontinental highway after all.

The freeway enabled people to drive faster and so, go further. Automobile technology improved and cars did not have to stop as often. The little communities and businesses dried up on Highway 40, today's Donner Pass Rd.

On Donner Summit every lodge and hotel had brochures touting the wonders and opportunities of the area. Here is one, taken from the archives of the DSHS for Donner Summit Lodge.

Today Donner Summit Lodge is employee housing for Sugar Bowl. It sits right at the Soda Springs exit from I-80 on Old 40. In the old days it was a booming place, "In the heart of the High Sierras, on the historic Old Donner Trail..." The Lodge combined "friendly hospitality and luxurious comfort

for travelers and vacationers. This summer playground and winter sports wonderland is accessible the year 'round - just a few hours drive from any point in Northern California. The Lodge sat in the "heart of the Sierras, an oasis of comfort..." It "encompasses all facilities for a superb, relaxing vacation." The rooms were deluxe with wall-to-wall carpet, radio, telephone, and private baths. There were also suites and dormitory accommodations available.

Scenic beauty surrounded the lodge making stays memorable. The "Magic of the Sierra country" meant "refreshing and clean air, intimate surroundings, a cocktail lounge, a restaurant, a fireplace and trails for hikers.

"Snowy summits and long speedy slopes beckon skiers, expert and beginner alike." Chair lifts and rope tows were available in "this area, known throughout the west as Soda Springs ski-land."

There was more. In the "Fireside Room, cool in summer or



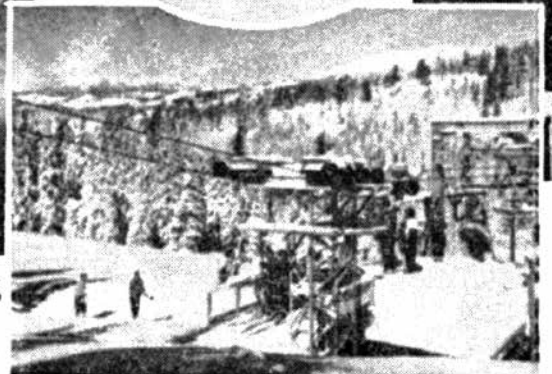
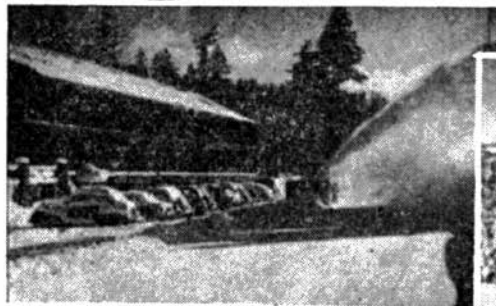
**A** vacation at Donner Summit Lodge, the jewel of the Sierras, (Soda Springs, Calif.), will be one you and your family will never forget . . . a modern, deluxe lodge that has earned itself a truly fine reputation for summer and winter vacations . . . wall-to-wall carpeted rugs, radio, private bath, luxurious suites . . . and the food — excellent, whether you desire just a sandwich or a full-course dinner . . .

cozy in winter" guests could hear stories of "the hunting trail, the ski run, streams where the fish are biting." Cocktails were a must and the chef's cuisine was "to be remembered."

There were lots of outside activities available: mountain lakes abounding with large trout, hiking trails to challenge beginners and experts, excellent hunting, beautiful picnic spots, swimming, barbeques, and pack trips. Gaming tables were just a few minutes away as was the "splendor and finery" of Lake Tahoe.

Wait, there was more. Employees deemed it a pleasure to serve. Rates were reasonable. There was Greyhound service to the front door. The sun porches, long balconies on the upper two floors, provided views of mountain grandeur or the highway and railroad traffic "Which now make the Donner Trail a principal route of transcontinental travel."

Call GA 6-3640



# From the DSHS Archives

“Tunnels of the Pacific Railroad” from Van Nostrand’s Eclectic Engineering Magazine, 1870.

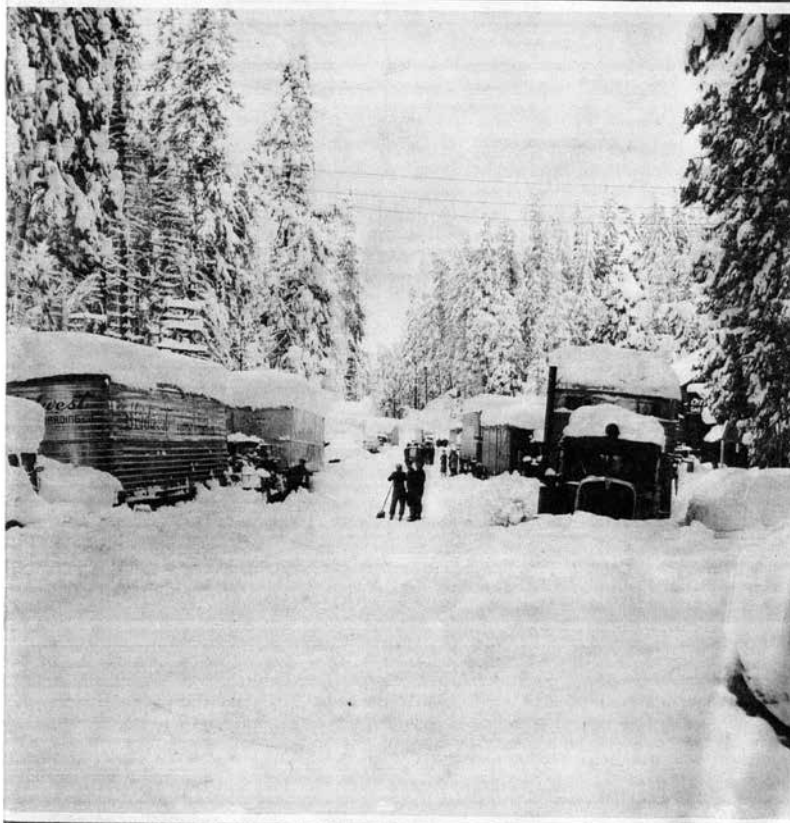
Snowfall during  
the building of Tunnel 6

## Appendix C.

*Snow Storms at Donner Pass, California, Winter of 1866-67, during which most of the preceding work was done.*

MONTH.	NUMBER OF STORMS.		DEPTH OF SNOW.		
	1' and over	Under 1'.	Fallen during Month.	Average Depth.	Maximum Depth.
November, '66.....	3	..	4 6	1 0	1 6 Nov. 4.
December, '66.....	4	5	10 10½	5 0	9 0 Dec. 20.
January, '67.....	3	7	11 00½	8 0	10 6 Jan. 24.
February, '67.....	3	5	10 3½	10 0	12 8 Feb. 23.
March, '67.....	2	9	4 2½	12 6	14 4 Mar. 2.
April, '67.....	1	1	3 6	13 0	15 1 Apr. 13.
May, '67.....	....	1	3	8 6	11 0 May 1.
June, '67.....	....	..	....	3 0	6 0 June 1.
Sums and means ...	16	28	44 7½	7 0½	

**BLOCKADE**  
ALL CENTRAL TRANSCONTINENTAL ROUTES  
CUT OFF FOR WEEKS THE WINTER OF 51-52



LOOKING WEST AT BAXTER, CALIF. STALLED TRANSPORT TRUCKS DUE TO SNOW CLOSING OF DONNER PASS. DATE ABOUT JAN. 14.

This magazine cover helps illustrate Milli's story on page 4

# From the DSHS Archives



## Donner Sky Chair

Donner Sky Chair is the name given to the 6th chair lift in California\* which was at Donner Ski Ranch. It not only took skiers up but allowed tourists to see the magnificent view of Donner Lake when it was not ski season. Rudy Talso's dog team is in the foreground of the sign of which there were 3 so travelers could see the attraction from either direction on Highway 40. Rudy was the first to manage DSR (1955-56). Norm Saylor took over in 1958.

Norm has a story of when the Sky Chair was new a busload of tourists came by in the summer and wanted a ride to see the view. They all loaded on and got to the top where they admired the view. Then they all loaded back on. The machine was meant to haul people up and not large weights going down, as a busload of people was in those days and still would be. The brake didn't work that way and the lift started to speed up. Norm pulled people off as they reached the bottom as fast as he could and pushed them on to the uphill chairs until the weights equalized and the machine could be stopped.

\*Early chair lifts in California: #1 Sugar Bowl, #3 Soda Springs double, #4 Snow Summit (So. Califo) double, #5. Mammoth, #6 Donner Ski Ranch

Here we have a picture of the view from the top. That's Lake Angela in the foreground and Donner Lake in the background.

The picture comes from the December, '16 Heirloom in a story about the concrete arrow from the transcontinental air route that is up there. Doesn't that pique your curiosity?



# Book Review

## **From the Valley to the Summit**

The Inseparable Connection Between the Sacramento Shops and the Transcontinental Railroad  
Stephen Nemeth 2019 250 pages

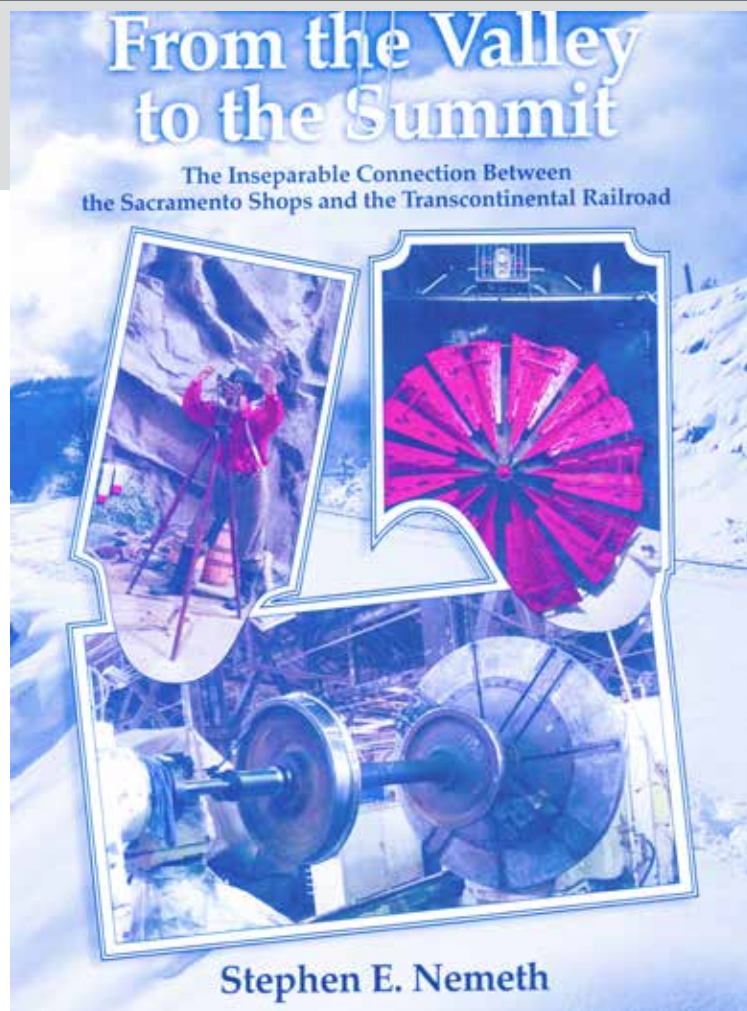
Every once in a while the DSHS post office box has a little jewel in it and that was the case when From the Valley to the Summit arrived. It is a unique compendium of local railroad information, mostly through reprints of the SP Bulletin with some added text at the beginning of each chapter. Because of the many stories about the railroad, along with a lot of detail, this is a professional train buff's dream but it's also attractive to the amateur train aficionado as she pages through the many stories. Just paging through is a treat because the SP Bulletins, being reprints, have the main story, such as the development of refrigeration, but then also the other articles that went along with that story to fill the issues. For example, the SP replaced two kittens for two little girls (the kittens were killed by a train because it's hard to fence kittens, according to the Bulletin). In other spaces there 1920's humor, etc.

The premise behind many of the stories, having to do with the Sacramento shops, and the secondary title, The Inseparable Connection Between the Sacramento Shops and the Transcontinental Railroad is that to look at California development you have to consider the railroad. In order to consider the railroad, you have to consider the Sacramento locomotive works, or the shops, "The first major industrial complex in the West" and at one time the largest manufacturing entity west of the Missouri River.

The book is an eclectic set of stories including:

- Railroad watches and the history of railroad time
- Refrigeration
- Reminiscences of old timers of railroad operations and day to day life
- The story of Tunnel 6
- The Pullman Strike
- Fighting and preventing fires and Red Mountain and how it worked.
- Fuel economy
- Ice production
- Ground breaking ceremonies

Chapter 11 gets the reader, or the amateur paging through the book, to Donner Summit, snow removal and the snowsheds. Here we learn that our snow is much superior to other snow because of the water content. Our special snow then required



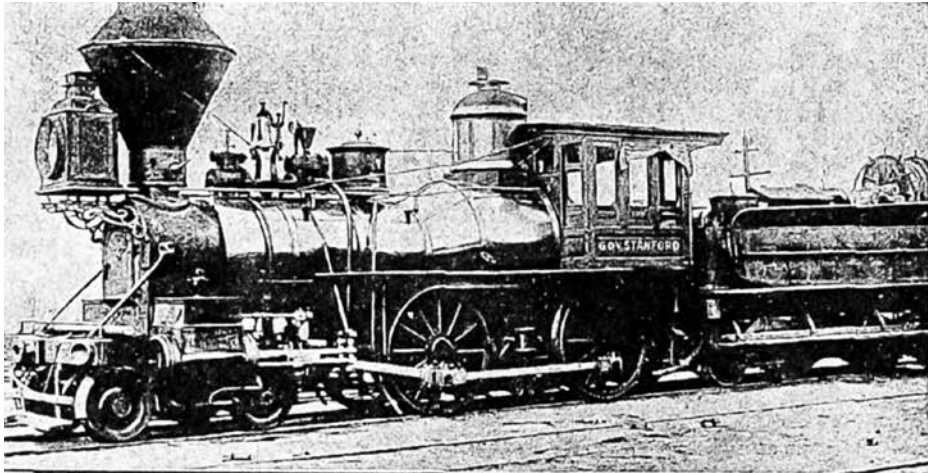
the development of bucker plows and rotaries both of which are detailed.

Where the amateur buff will get turned off by the many details and just page by, the professional will happily feast. There is a surfeit of facts. The Southern Pacific had the need to buy one locomotive per day. To build the snowsheds 900 tons of bolts and spikes were used on 37 miles. Carpenters were paid \$4 a day and laborers \$2.50. 44,639,552 board feet of lumber were used and 1,316,312 lineal feet of round timber. It was thought that eucalyptus trees cleaned the air of malaria (due to the "odorous antiseptic emanations from its leaves") and so the trees were planted around the Sacramento shops. The locomotive C.P. Huntington was locomotive #3 and placed into service in 1864. It "could haul four cars carrying 22 tons each at 35 miles an hour up a grade of 26 feet to the mile." Snowshed fires could burn 100 feet of shed in a minute. The Governor Stanford (see picture on the next page) was locomotive #1 and had cylinders 16" in diameter, weighed 28 tons and had a piston stroke of 22". In the development of rotary snow plows we learn about the number of bearings, how windows were de-iced, RPM's, the number of motors, the addition of universal joints, and the conversion to electrical power. This is the book for you if you need to



Advice for transcontinental railroad travelers in the early days of transcontinental travel:

Excellent hotels are located at convenient distances along the route. Meals can be obtained at these hotels for .75 in coin or \$1 in currency. Those who cannot pay these reasonable prices, emigrants for example, bring along baskets of provisions. Those can be replenished along the line. At principal stations milk, hot tea and coffee can be purchased. In a corner of the food basket reserve room for a comb, brush, towel, soap, tin cup, small basin, sponge, mirror, tooth-brush, "etc. etc." First class passengers can reserve a berth but others have to make do with a blanket as best they can, but second class is never full so there's room to stretch.



The Governor  
Stanford

prepare for a railroad quiz show.

We learn about Mallets on the Sierra route (weighing 400,000 lbs.), the grades out of Colfax, the frequency of sidings, and something about "drivers" and "consolidations."

California was called the "orchard and garden of the United States" in 1923. During the eight previous years 218,526 freight cars of grapes were shipped out. In 1923 the SP "handled more than 176,000 cars of perishable freight." 176,000 cars is an enormous number requiring 3,520 trains of 50 cars each which would cover 1,753 miles of railroad. That would occupy the entire main track from Los Angeles to Ogden, Utah. Even then that would not be the end because the engine would be another 146 miles east of Ogden. Those are statistics with which to wow your friends or amateur train buffs.

One SP Bulletin from 1928 contained an interesting fact about the laying of 10 miles of track in one day at the end of the construction of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Relays of men were provided for the laying of the track. When the first relay team came to spell the original, starting team the "Latter refused to be replaced and therefore the same men handled the entire ten miles of iron rails in that

one day." They were paid four days' time for that one day. We should note here that the story-teller does not mention that the teams were all Chinese.

Given that these reproduced SP Bulletins are from their time we also get the "times." For example, one old timer reminisced after 57 years on the railroad, about the parade and celebration upon the completion of the railroad in 1869. He talked with pride about the wagon carrying the Irish railroad workers who had done the feat of laying ten miles of track in a day. He doesn't mention that the actual work crew was all Chinese and that the Chinese were not invited to the celebration or allowed to be

#### About Sierra storms

"No one can face these storms when they are in earnest. Three of our party came through the pass one evening, walking in the storm - two got in safely. After waiting a while, just as we were starting to look up the third, he came in exhausted... he had lost his way and thought his last hour had come."

in the parade.

The problems are few. You've really got to like trains to read it all. The reproduction of SP Bulletins does not reproduce high quality pictures. If the answer is not in the SP Bulletins we don't get it. For example, the Pullman Strike is covered but we don't know who won or what the results were.

A story from the Sacramento Union February 2, 1869 (from Appendix 2 fo From the Valley to the Summit which is a collection of newspaper articles about the beginning of the transcontinental railroad).

It was called “Snow Life.”

The storm came in stopping railroad traffic on February 16, 1869 which was a Tuesday. The passenger train was pulled onto a siding pending the arrival of the snowplow pushed by five locomotives. When morning came the passengers “found us in the midst of a boundless waste of snow, at least two and one-half feet having fallen during the night, and more coming.” “Patience weakened...” “growling was indulged in... toilets were made of snow water.” A good breakfast enabled the passengers to wait with more composure.

The locomotives and snowplow arrived. The passenger train went back down the hill but the correspondent and the fellow with the mail got on the front locomotive of the snowplow assemblage and stayed. The front engine whistled twice and that was followed by ten more whistles from the following engines. The procession plowed forward slamming into the snow occupying the track. “The snow was turned in huge furrows...” The engines proceeded but the snow began to fall more heavily. “The locomotives wheezed and labored...” and came to a stop. The engines took the plow a half mile back down the track and then with the speed of the wind charged forward into the snow again. Throttle valves were pulled wide open and “every pound of steam let on the cylinder...” They struck the snow and moved a few rods (16 2/3 feet in a rod). The train was brought to a stop. Back and forth, charging into the snow and backing up to get runs, it went on for hours. One engine became disabled. Snow increased. It took until dark for the plow to force its way to Blue Canyon. The mail had to go through and so the fellow with the mail went out by himself “crawling and swimming almost to the station...” Then the mail was taken by two other fellows “hardy men of the mountains” who took it to Cisco. There two more took it to Truckee and operating trains.

The whole next day was spent trying to work the locomotives and their snow plow through the snow. On Friday two more engines arrived and “rushed again to the fray.” Finally they arrived at the sheds of Emigrant Gap having gone four miles through snow “five to twenty feet in depth.”

That storm convinced the reporter that snowsheds were a necessity all along the track.

A day later, on Sunday, a large force of men arrived and started shoveling snow. A half mile of track was cleared. The reporter decided to walk to Cisco, nine miles away, at 2 AM Monday. Pits had been dug in the snow as part of the snow clearing for the first four miles. They were eight feet apart and four feet deep. The reporter and companion fell into each pit, scrambled up and out and then into the next. It took four hours of “tedious walking” until they got a mile west of Cisco and found the bridge carried away by a snow slide. A hundred men were at work rebuilding.

The train the reporter and his companion had left behind did not get through until Tuesday, “making the time from Alta just one week, and every man on the road working his level best.”

Aren't we glad we live today?

Photograph of ice cream being sold at a train station in Sacramento during the 1910's.



# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

The Mobile Historical Research Team at the Cascade Creek Railroad Bridge



carved stone buttresses, above, and being admired by MHRT team member Art Clark, below.



Look at the fun you can have exploring historic sites on Donner Summit.



Your editor showing a sense of scale.

The bridge in use today.

Photographs by George Lamson

This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, "Odds & Ends" of Donner Summit. There are a lot of big stories on Donner Summit making it the most important historical square mile in California. All of those episodes\* left behind obvious traces. As one explores Donner Summit, though, one comes across a lot of other things related to the rich history. All of those things have stories too and we've been collecting them. Now they're making appearances in the [Heirloom](#).

If you find any "Odds & Ends" you'd like to share pass them on to the editor - see page 2

\*Native Americans; first wagon trains to California; the first transcontinental railroad, highway, air route, and telephone line, etc.

**DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
Donner Summit Historical Society.org

I/we would like to join The Donner Summit Historical Society and share in the Summit's rich history.

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\_\_\_\_\_

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Pick up the brochure at the DSHS  
 or download it at:  
<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/brochures.html>



**50 interpretive signs along Old 40**  
<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html>