

Donner Summit's Scenic

Donner Summit is unique. It is culturally and scenically rich. The wide open vistas and rich history make it a recreation destination for skiing, hiking, backpacking, boating, wildflower and bird watching, enjoying history, rock climbing, and mountain and road biking.

Native Americans traveled the Summit thousands of years ago leaving the evidence of their presence in petroglyphs and grinding rocks.

Wagon trains began crossing the Summit in 1844 heading for California. The ill fated Donner Party crossed in 1846. The first transcontinental railroad crossed the Summit in 1867. The first transcontinental Highway, the Lincoln Highway, followed in 1913. One of the first interstates crossed the Summit in 1964.

1. Chinese Wall: built by the Chinese for the Transcontinental railroad in 1867. Leave Old 40 and hike over to it. Hike up the hill west away west and explore for Native American petroglyphs carved into the granite rock.

2. Tunnel 6: the 1867 railroad tunnel now with no tracks. Leave your car opposite Donner Ski Ranch and walk through it. Heading east when you come to the road that goes under the former tracks you have come to the Lincoln highway remnants from 1913.

3. Rainbow Bridge: Completed in 1927 it opened up transportation over the Sierra allowing trucks to cross the Sierra. It is the first bridge built with a compound curve. Leave your car at the parking area on the east side and admire the views of Donner Lake to the east. Donner Peak is immediately south and named for the Donner Party. A great hike is to take the Pacific Crest Trail to the top of Donner Peak and look straight down



Old Highway 40 Bypass

1000 feet to Donner Lake. The PCT can be accessed just down the dirt road that runs next to the Alpine Skills Institute at the top of Old 40. To the north of the bridge is Mt. Stephens, named after the leader of the first wagon train over the Summit in 1844. Looking down to Donner Lake, the south side ridge is called Schallenberger Ridge named after the 17 year old member of the Stephens Party who wintered by the lake while the rest of the party headed for California.

Just west of the Alpine Skill Institute is a square covering sitting on the ground. This covers an entrance to Tunnel 6. When it was being built by Chinese laborers time was key because the railroad got paid by miles completed and they were competing with the Union Pacific coming east for miles. So instead of tunneling from one end, they tunneled from both ends and from the square covering down so that four faces could be worked at once. Once the tunnel was completed, the opening served to allow steam engine smoke to escape. If you walk the tunnel, take a flashlight and shine it up when you get midway.

4. Taking the PCT up the hill towards Mt. Lincoln and you will pass Mt. Judah, named after the engineer who set the transcontinental train route. The Judah Loop, signed, is a spectacular hike with lots of wildflowers in early summer. Continue past Mt. Judah to the notch between Lincoln and Judah and you'll find a sign commemorating the main wagon train route. Go to the edge and look down. Imagine hauling wagons up that steep grade. Look at the sign to see how they really did it.

5. Donner Ski Ranch and Lake Mary across Old 40 on the Lake Mary Rd. are the sites of the first rope tows on Donner Summit circa 1936. The remains of one of those tows is just off the PCT where it levels out after switchbacking up from the Pass. The cafe at Donner

Ski Ranch serves meals and has cold drinks.

6. Sugar Bowl, built in 1939 is the site of the first chair lift in California. This is one of California's premier ski areas.

7. Soda Springs Hotel was built in 1927 and is now condominiums.

8. Lake Van Norden used to be a PG&E lake until the dam was breached in the 1960's. Now it is an important wetlands for migratory birds. If you park by the dam remnants and walk to the top, you can sometimes see bald eagles or other birds of prey circling overhead.

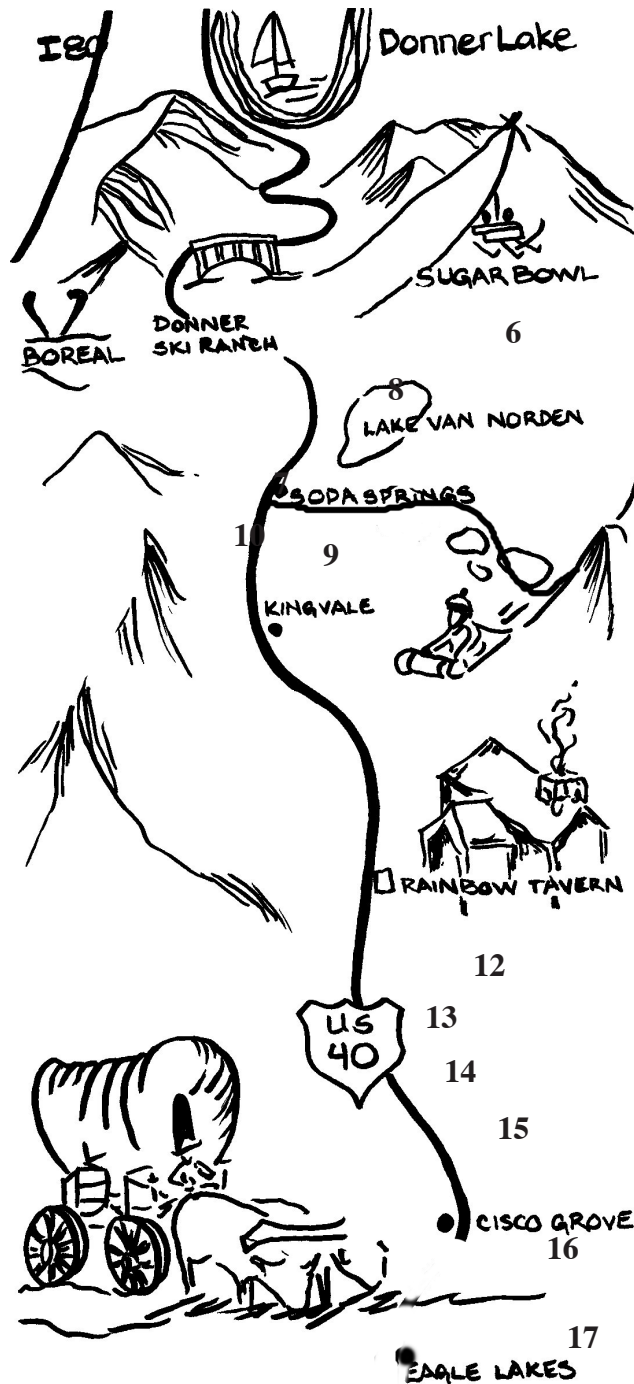
9. Soda Springs Ski Area, the oldest ski area in California dates back to 1938 when it was called Beacon Hill after the aircraft beacon what sat atop it. It was also the site of the first ski lift on Donner Summit, but it did not work so well.

10. Soda Springs, formerly a station on the railroad, was a top sheep shipping center in California. **The Soda Springs Store can supply your picnic needs and down the road the Donner Summit Lodge provides sit down meals.**

11. Ice Lakes (Serene Lakes) location of the first Summit ice harvesting operation from 1869-1872. The road past the Ice Lakes Lodge will lead you down past the Cedars historic settlement and ultimately to Auburn past turn offs to Gold Rush townsites. It's mostly a dirt road. Ice Lakes Lodge serves meals and rents rooms.

12. Rainbow Tavern was built in 1927. This is a good place to stop and park. Walk around the pond, walk into the lodge with its 1920's decor and look at the historic pictures on display in the bar. Rainbow serves meals and rooms can be rented.

13. Between Rainbow and the Big Bend ranger station is a pull out. Just north, towards the river, you can find a marker and part of the route of the wagon trains. Across Old 40 from the turnout out is a trailhead leading to Lock Leven Lakes, among others. That is a reward-

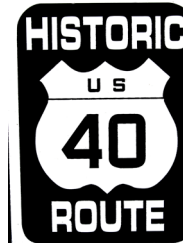


ing but uphill hike.

14. Big Bend Ranger Station has a museum inside and information. There is a trail out back so you can see where the wagon trains came down the hill to cross the river. You can even see old rust marks on rocks. Across Old 40 from the ranger station note the Lincoln Highway sign on the garage. Walk behind the garage to see a Lincoln Highway memorial and one of the markers placed all along the highway by the Boy Scouts in 1928. You can follow the Lincoln Highway for a ways west as it winds among cabins and along the Yuba River.

15. Traveling along Old 40 just west of the ranger station look across the river just before the overpass. The road remnants you see are from the Lincoln Highway.

16. Cisco Grove was the terminus for the railroad before it was completed over the Summit. Behind Cisco there was a railroad town which included a turntable to turn the helper engines. There is nothing left of the town now. If you go back across the overpass and turn left, the first right takes you to a dirt road. This was one access to a short lived mining town called Meadow Lake (1866-67). Thousands of people were drawn to Meadow Lake during its brief existence hoping to get rich. In winter snow showers (what we'd call skis) were the method of transportation to Meadow Lake.



17. Eagle Lakes turnout. Take this turnout off and turn left under the first overpass. Between the two directions of the freeway look to the right along the river. Here is a section of the Lincoln Highway you can walk. Fish are in the river and this could be a good picnic site. This part of Old 40 is not connected to the route from Cisco to Donner Summit. You will need to take the freeway from

Eagle Lakes to Cisco.

Just a few miles west on Highway 80 you come to the Highway 20 turnout which will take you to Nevada City with plenty of good view sites.