

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



www.psrhs.org

July 2020 Newsletter

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A few months after Summit Tunnel 6 was holed through on Aug. 30, 1867, CP officials took dignitaries on an excursion to and through the tunnel. Read a first-hand account of that excursion on pages 5-6. Hart 197 image.

Scheduled Events & Notices



All Events Listed are Subject to Rescheduling due to CoronaVirus restrictions

Jul 23 NO MEETING IN JULY DUE TO COVID RESTRICTIONS

Aug 27 (TENTATIVE) PSRHS Monthly Meeting – 7pm – Program TBA

MONTHLY MEETING

There will be **NO PSRHS Monthly Meeting in July**. Our meeting room at Auburn Airport is still not available due to Coronavirus precautions. The status of the August Meeting will be announced in August's Newsletter. Meetings will resume once restrictions have been lifted.

PSRHS WEB CAM UPDATE

Installation is proceeding on the web cam that is being placed along the eastbound track near Applegate. The camera, overhead wire and repeating antennas have been installed, and the router and camera-to-wireless connections completed. The internet company should complete the relocation of their dish next week. The camera will then be turned on and "fine-tuned" before going live.

Watch our web site www.psrhs.org for updated information on the web cam availability for viewing.

Additional sites are under consideration for future web-cam installations. The mid-term goal is to provide a series of webcams that will allow PSRHS web site visitors to view the progress of trains as they conquer the grades up and over Donner Summit.

WEB SITE UPDATES

Speaking of the PSRHS web site, several sub-pages have been recently updated with information from monthly newsletters, etc., and more changes are in the works, including modifying or removing some old content and adding new content. If you haven't visited the web site recently check it out, and watch for information on accessing our new webcam.

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NCNGRR MUSEUM UPDATE

The NCNG RR Museum recently reopened to the public, with docent-led or self-guided tours, and free rides on the narrow gauge railbuses. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the museum is open only on Saturdays from 10am to 4pm, with social distancing practices firmly in place. Masks are required and every other seat on the railbus is unoccupied unless by family members. Due to the limited number of people that can be accommodated, reservations are recommended.

NOTE: The recently reimposed statewide restrictions on indoor events may impact the museum schedule. Check their web site NCNGRRMuseum.org or call 530-470-0902 to verify their hours.

EXCURSION TO THE SUMMIT 1867

After holing through 1659-foot Tunnel 6 at Donner Summit on August 30, 1867, It was several more months before track was laid and trains could travel through the tunnel. In fact, track was completed to a point about two miles past Tunnel 6 before winter weather settled in and halted construction at the summit.

In early December 1867, Central Pacific officials hosted an excursion to the summit for several hundred invited guests and political dignitaries. The train was able to pass through Tunnels 6, 7 and 8 to the west portal of Tunnel 9. The event was captured in an article in the Sacramento Daily Union. The reporter included information and observations along the route, along with a couple of incidents that happened to some of the passengers and crew on the excursion.

Read the complete newspaper account of this excursion on pages 5 and 6 of this newsletter.





Passing Scene – Double Stacks on the Donner Route

Last month's newsletter featured a photo of the first double stack freight train to traverse the Donner route in 2009 as it passed through Colfax. The image below shows the same train as it rounded Cape Horn on its eastward journey. Today mile-long trains are a common sight along the route. *Photo by Roger Staab*



Amazon Smile Fund Raising

We are now part of the Amazon Smile fund raising campaign. We receive a donation to the society based on your purchases. Please feel free to copy and paste the link below and include it in all your emails.

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/68-0488569>

From the Archives

June Mystery Photo (right): This Houseworth image shows a different perspective of the curved wooden trestle at Newcastle looking east. The trestle was filled in by 1876, and remained in service until replaced by a new fill to the left in 1911 to accommodate double tracks. *PSRHS collection.*



July Mystery Photo (left): What is the subject of this image, where was it located, and who was the photographer? Hint: It was not Alfred Hart. *PSRHS collection.*

Accidents/Other Incidents. See the following two pages for an 1867 newspaper account of the first excursion train to traverse the newly opened Summit Tunnel 6. The article includes a personalized look at both historical information and some interesting incidents that happened along the way.

Membership Information

Individual Members = \$25.00/yr
Each Additional Family Member = \$5.00/yr

- Monthly Meetings (4th Thursday) and Newsletter
- Member Activities, History Pubs and Field Trips
- Display and Restoration Projects

PSRHS, P.O. Box 1776, Colfax, CA 95713
or join/renew online at www.psrhs.org

Reader comments, additional details, etc., are invited on any newsletter items or photos. Please forward comments, suggestions or information for inclusion in future issues of the newsletter to:

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Excursion to the Summit – *Sacramento Daily Union*, 9 Dec 1867

(Ed. Note: This article was transcribed verbatim from the newspaper except for adding paragraph breaks)

The Excursion to the Summit – At seven o'clock Saturday morning a train of thirteen cars left the depot of the Central Pacific Railroad Company on an excursion to the Summit, given by that corporation to the Legislature, State officers and Sacramento Pioneers. The train was composed of ten passenger cars, two baggage cars and one platform car – the baggage cars being arranged respectively as eating and drinking saloons, the Railroad Company providing a collation and also a plentiful supply of "something warm". All these cars were filled with people, the number of excursionists being estimated at between seven and eight hundred. The last two passenger cars were occupied by ladies and their escorts. The weather was not as propitious as might be desired, and various people prophesied of rain and a disagreeable trip, to which prophesies Superintendent Crocker added a promise that he would carry the whole party into a snow-storm on the mountains. Leaving the city, the train sped on its way, stopping but for wood and water till Colfax was reached, where the locomotive Idaho was reinforced by the Tamaroo. From thence onward the platforms of the cars were crowded by those desirous of viewing the beauties of the mountain scenery. Cabins along the route, some moss-covered, roofless and falling into decay from age, and others more recently built, but now deserted and half torn down, furnished the subject of many little stories by Pioneers and others who had passed years of their California life searching for the precious metals.

By-and-by the first good view of the Cape Horn precipice was obtained, nearly sixty miles from the city. The ascending grade at this spot is at the rate of one hundred and five feet to the mile. Many a passenger instinctively clutched his object of support tighter as he gazed at the sublime view from the curve, and recognized the fate that would befall the unlucky wight who by any possibility might be precipitated from that hight (*sic*) to the little valley 1,600 feet below, where the American river glided by. Onward rolled the train, passing through the Hornet Hill cut, nearly 1,000 feet in length and 50 deep, the substance penetrated being composed of schist, slate and hard clay. Not far from this cut is Blue Canyon – presenting scenery and atmospheric coloring worthy of the brush of the "Heart of the Andes" artist himself. Here it was necessary to build the road across a gap 600 feet long, with a depth at the center of 85 feet. For this purpose 120,000 cubic yards of earth were used.

At Emigrant Gap the train that left Sacramento half an hour previous to that carrying the excursionists was lying by waiting for the latter to pass. After a moment's stoppage, the excursion train started, but the sudden jerk given by the engines was too much for one of the passenger cars, the "bumper" of which pulled out completely, tearing away with it a portion of the woodwork about the railing of the platform. A man who was passing from that car to the one preceding it, having his hands on the railing of the forward car, suddenly found himself dragging on behind it, having been pulled overboard. As the train had not acquired much headway, his hurts were limited to a strained ankle. The damaged car was switched off and left, another car being put in its place.

The weather at Emigrant Gap was very unpleasant. Rain fell in that disagreeable style known as Scotch mist, and the wind blew cold and drearily through the canyon. From this point the weather grew colder, and after leaving Cisco the rain turned into snow, small patches of which soon made their appearance along the side of the track. The trees, too, which were fine large sugar pines, firs, etc., in the cape Horn neighborhood, became stunted and sparse with increased elevation. Cuts through the solid rock grew too numerous to attract attention, though the empty powder kegs strewn along the road spoke eloquently of difficulties met and overcome.

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Finally the great Summit tunnel was reached at about half-past two o'clock, at an altitude of 7,042 feet above the level of the sea, and the first passenger train to cross the Sierras entered and passed through, amid loud cheers and much enthusiasm. A little further on and two other tunnels, of much smaller dimensions, were likewise passed through, and the train stopped at the mouth of the ninth. Unfortunately, for some reasons, the snow was falling thickly, and the fine view which might have been obtained of Donner Lake and the surrounding country was very much curtailed. Still the scene was one long to be remembered, the snow storm giving an unusually stern, majestic look to the huge mass of rock known as Donner Peak, which towered on the right of the train, and adding a peculiar wildness to the valley on the left, in which lay Donner Lake, distant about a mile and a half. It was interesting to note the expressions dropped by the visitors to this mountain spot, many of whom had never seen a snow storm before, owing to a residence in the South previous to migrating to this State, and others who had not seen such a thing for years. Many of the excursionists walked on through the ninth tunnel; others climbed to the tops of rocks to gain a higher point from which to view the scene; while a more numerous body engaged in snowballing with great zest, much to the demoralization of the high-crowned hats and immaculate shirt-collars.

There will be no lack of tunnels on this road. The first reached coming from Sacramento (which was likewise the first pierced) is at Grizzly Hill, 76 miles from the city. It is 500 feet long, and, like all the others, 18 feet high by 16 wide. The second is 300 feet long; third, 300; fourth, 100; fifth, 100; sixth (Summit) 1659; seventh, 160; eighth, 375; ninth, 216; tenth, 509; eleventh, 577; twelfth, 342; thirteenth, 870; fourteenth (on Truckee), 128; fifteenth, 80. On the line of the Truckee about 24 miles of road is constructed, between which and the main road but six miles remain unfinished, on which a large force of men are employed.

Leaving the ninth tunnel at 8 o'clock, the train soon passed over the intervening mile and a half to the main tunnel. When nearly through this latter, the cars stopped. Though usually there is a strong draught of air through the tunnel, there was none then, and the smoke from the locomotive filled it to suffocation. Great consternation prevailed. The doors and windows of the cars were shut to keep out the smoke, but the air inside soon became so vitiated that it looked as if bad were made worse. Reports of various kinds were circulated as the cause of the accident, some asserting that numerous cars were off the track, and others that it was an invention of the railroad company to give the excursionists an idea of the vastness of the work. After about fifteen minutes delay the difficulty was found and the train moved out of the smoke. It appears that some person had pulled the connecting pin from between the third and fourth cars, thus allowing the engine to go off with three cars and leave the rest behind. Directly after this it was announced that A.P. Smith had had his pockets picked of his watch and chain, and this fact leads to the impression that the difficulty in the tunnel was caused by pickpockets, who wished to practice their operations during the opportunity thus afforded. Two men who had got on the train at Cisco going up, without tickets of invitation, were examined to see if the stolen property was on their persons. Nothing was found; notwithstanding which the train was stopped and the men put off.

When nearing Yuba Pass, a fireman on the locomotive Yuba (which engine brought the train to the city) walked out on the engine to oil the valves, but, the footboard being icy, fell overboard. The train was stopped immediately, when the fireman was seen running to catch up; having fallen on a soft spot, he was not hurt, and fired the engine to the city.

At Colfax another passenger car got out of order in consequence of one of the "bumpers" pulling out. The car was speedily switched off, turned around and brought down at the rear of the train. Both of the damaged cars were of the stock brought from the Lincoln road. At five minutes before ten the excursionists got back to Sacramento, tired and hungry. The ladies, who had kept in their cars for fifteen hours, on account of the stormy weather, were much fatigued. Notwithstanding all the drawbacks, however, every one was pleased with the trip.

