



Quarterly Newsletter of the Truckee Donner Railroad Society

Snowshed

Keeping Truckee's Railroad History Alive!

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Event Calendar

Winter Carnival, Model Railroad at Engel & Völkers "Flying A"	February 28 – March 2
MoTH Lecture Series "Logging Railroads" and "Hobart Mills" with Dan Cobb and Judy DePuy	April (date TBD)
TDRRS Board of Directors Meeting	April 2
Truckee River Railroad work day and picnic in the park	May 3

President's Letter

Dan Cobb

2024 was a good year for the Railroad Society, and we closed it out in fine fashion. At the end of November, we ran our "Truckee 1927" model railroad at Engel & Völkers' "Flying A" building, adding a little railroad joy to the annual tree lighting. On December 7th, we gave over 300 rides on the Truckee River Railroad "Santa Train" in the Regional Park. On December 18th, Jerry Blackwill hosted a potluck dinner for museum volunteers.

Winter tends to be a quiet time for the Railroad Society, but we still have quite a lot going on. We'll set up our model railroad once again at the "Flying A" for Winter Carnival, February 28th to March 2nd. Winter Carnival promises to be even bigger and better than last year, with winter sports events in the Regional Park and McIver Arena, presentations, contests, music, movies at the Community Arts Center, and a "Truckee Train Walk" led by the "Old Miner," Greg Zirbel.

For next summer, Bob Bell is planning to increase our Truckee River Railroad run days from 10 to 14, so we'll need lots of volunteers for that. Contact Bob or send an email to info@tdrrs.org if you'd like to help out – no experience is necessary and the smiles on the young passengers' faces are very rewarding.

Keeping the caboose museum open on its scheduled hours has been a challenge lately. Four 3-hour shifts are scheduled each weekend, and we could use more help filling them. Here again, no experience is needed, although a love of trains and the willingness to talk about them certainly helps. Contact me or Jerry Blackwill if you can help out, even if it's only once in a while.

We're also moving ahead with our plans to build a railroad museum in the regional park with our "Truckee 1927" model railroad as its centerpiece. The museum will include a workspace for presentations, workshops, and youth programs to teach the many skills and crafts associated with the hobby of model railroading. We'll shortly be wrapping up a "memorandum of understanding" with the Park District, engaging an architect to help us with the design, and developing an estimate of construction costs. After that we will be rolling out a TDRRS members' pledge drive to kick off our broader capital campaign.

To borrow a time-honored salutation from our Historian Emeritus, Nelson Van Gundy, "Keep your steam up!"

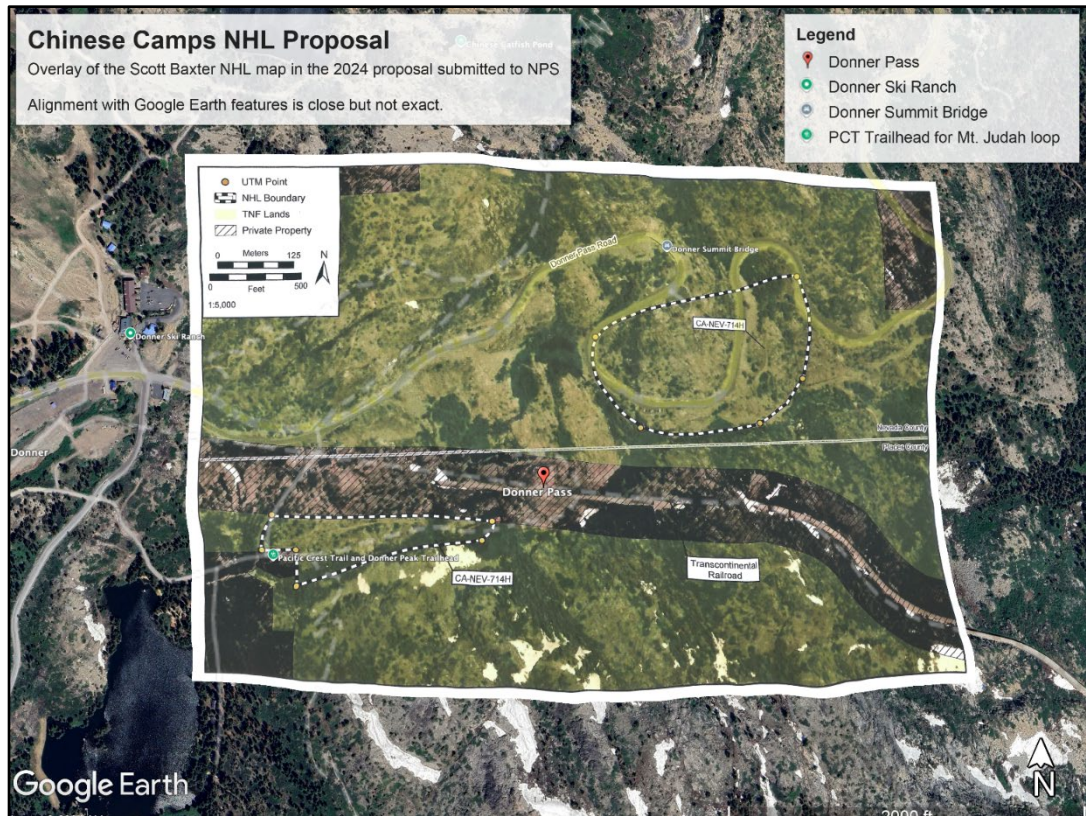
Summit Camp National Historic Landmark

Jerry Blackwill

Summit Camp, located in Placer and Nevada counties within California's Tahoe National Forest, was designated a National Historic Landmark on December 13, 2024. This U.S. Department of Interior recognition underscores the site's national significance in U.S. history, particularly highlighting the contributions of Chinese laborers to the construction of the transcontinental railroad. The 1882 Foundation, a nonprofit that promotes public awareness of the history of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, has said the construction of the tunnels was the greatest contribution Chinese Americans have made to the history of the United States.

Between 1865 and 1869, Summit Camp served as the largest and longest-occupied Chinese railroad construction camp on the transcontinental railroad. Hundreds of Chinese workers resided there while constructing tunnels and large rock retaining walls through the Sierra Nevada mountains near Donner Pass. The archaeological remains at Summit Camp provide invaluable insights into the daily lives, work conditions, and cultural practices of these laborers, who played a pivotal role in overcoming the formidable geographical challenges of the region.

These areas in the National Forest contain the remains of eight Chinese railroad workers camps. The railroad tunnels themselves are also important pieces of American history. They're not part of the National Historic Landmark designation because Union Pacific owns them and may use them in the future.



The designation of Summit Camp as a National Historic Landmark was sponsored by the National Park Service, Donner Summit Historical Society and railroad historian Phil Sexton. Additionally, other local organizations such as the Summit Tunnel Conservation Association and the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project played instrumental roles in advocating for this recognition. The Chinese historical project's Student Docent Cultural Ambassador Program conducted a yearlong letter-writing campaign, collecting nearly 400 letters to support the site's preservation.

Achieving National Historic Landmark status is the highest federal recognition of a property's historical, architectural, or archaeological significance. This designation not only honors the legacy and contributions of Chinese immigrant laborers but also ensures the preservation of Summit Camp for future generations. It acknowledges the site's exceptional value in commemorating and illustrating the history of the United States, particularly in relation to immigration, labor history, and the development of the American economy.

The recognition of Summit Camp as a National Historic Landmark serves as a testament to the enduring contributions of Chinese laborers in building the nation's infrastructure and highlights the importance of preserving sites that reflect the diverse narratives of American history.

Every Train Station Needs a Train Master: The Truckee Train Depot

Judy DePuy

Train stations were the hub for many towns, bringing in visitors, guests, freight, and everything else the town needed or wanted to export. When the Transcontinental Railroad was completed, there were numerous train stations along the rail line. Only a handful of these stations still exist. Their demise was due to the lack of a sustainable economy and the change from steam trains (which needed water at regular intervals) to diesel engines.

Truckee has been an important way-station for emigrants. Not only did we have the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road but we also had a toll bridge across the Truckee River. These 'conveniences' made it slightly easier for the traveler to go from the East Coast to California and back again. It was however the train station that was the most important part of the town. Truckee's train station is special in that it was the center of the town and has been able to reflect its changing character.

Trainmaster Offices. Who are trainmasters? Trainmasters are railroad officials who manage the operations of a specific part of a railroad. They are in charge of the trains that operate in a subdivision or division of a railroad.

Trainmasters are responsible for overseeing the equipment on the line, ensuring the proper equipment is in place for service, and managing train crews, including when they sign in and when they finish.



But the trainmaster did so much more in the mid-1800s. Before cell phones, radios and other electronic devices, the trainmaster got his order via the telegraph (which ran parallel to the railroad). Steam trains have never liked to stop unless they need water so, to communicate with the train engineer when a stop was not otherwise needed, the trainmaster used a railroad order hoop pick. This was basically a bamboo pole bent into a hoop with a clip to hold the paper orders of what the train engineer needed to do for the next couple of towns. It was a simple operation. The Trainmaster held out the stick for the train engineer to grab with his arm,

take out the orders and then throw the stick back onto the train platform. Communication complete.

Running on Time. The history of standard time in the United States began November 18, 1883, when United States and Canadian railroads instituted standard time within time zones. Before then, what the time of day was a local matter, and most cities and towns used some form of local sun-based system maintained by some well-known clock (for example, on a church steeple or in a jeweler's window). Use of standard time gradually increased because of its obvious practical advantages for communication and travel.

Truckee’s trainmaster office and the railroad depot have been a part of the community since 1885. By 1900 the current station and the need for the trains to run on time was clearly prominent. A fun fact is that across the United States watches were sold, set, repaired and made available to the public from the most often reliable place... the trainmaster’s office. The railroad wasn’t selling watches, it was the telegraph operators in the train stations who were. Rumor has it that it all started by a train telegraph operator (Richard) in Minnesota when a load of watches arrived from the East with no one claiming them. The manufacturer did not want to pay return freight charges so they asked Richard if he could sell them. And sell them he did! News got out and the train station became the place to buy an accurate pocket watch.

Why Keep a Trainmaster Station? It was the trainmaster’s responsibility to share local conditions and even local information as to what was going on in town. The train station also turned out to be the hub of social events. For summer outings, in 1900 Bill Bliss built a narrow gauge railroad (along Hwy 89 from Truckee to Tahoe City) to take San Francisco visitors to Lake Tahoe. The guests bought their tickets in the trainmaster’s office and were taken to a pier and put on a steamer that went around Lake Tahoe. Passengers extolled about the elegance of the Lake Tahoe Railroad, which brought even more visitors to Truckee. Regretfully, the line was abandoned on November 10, 1943, due to the war and lack of passengers. Much of the line is now a bike path along the Truckee River from Palisades Tahoe (Squaw Valley) to Lake Tahoe.

Visit Truckee’s Trainmaster Office. Truckee did not become an official town until 1993 but the train station has been prominent in the town’s character. Truckee still sees 15-30 trains a day run through Old Town. Only 2 trains stop in Truckee: Amtrak running East and Amtrak running West. The other trains rumble through town at 25-35 mph. They are not able to stop for pedestrians so it is urged to give them great leeway.

The Museum of Truckee History shares stories about Truckee’s past, present and future. The trainmaster office has the order cabinet where shipments were tracked (heaven forbid!) in hard copy form. Also there is the fabulous wood burning stove that kept passengers warm in the cold winter fun, an original 1888 railroad map, and the lanterns to communicate when a train had to stop or proceed. Live a bit of Truckee’s past and visit the Museum of Truckee History. You will be amazed at how rough and tumble yet humble this town was and still continues to personify.

Truckee River Railroad 2025 Run Schedule

Bob Bell

The 2025 Truckee River Railroad run schedule will have 14 run dates, several more than we've ever done before! More runs mean more volunteer hours, so we hope that distributing the schedule now people will save the dates now.

Work day:	Saturday 7/19
Saturday 5/3	Saturday 7/26
	Saturday 8/2
Run days:	Sunday 8/10
Saturday 5/17	Saturday 8/16
Sunday 5/25 (Memorial day is 5/26)	Saturday 8/30 (Labor Day is Sept 1)
Sunday 6/1	Saturday 9/13
Saturday 6/14	Saturday 9/27
Saturday 7/5 (Independence day is 7/4)	Saturday 10/11

Volunteering and Membership

The Railroad Society could use your help in the following areas:

Truckee River Railroad (ride-on train) – Issue tickets, load the train, run the crossing gates, operate the trains as engineer or conductor, and help keep our riders safe. Training is provided and new volunteers are always welcome.

Museum Volunteer – Learn and share your knowledge of Truckee’s history and local railroading in the Truckee Railroad Museum (caboose) or the Museum of Truckee History. Volunteers work as individuals or pairs in three-hour shifts. Training is provided.

Newsletter Contributor –Contribute articles on local railroad history or other topics of interest for publication in our *Snowshed* newsletter.

Cosmetic Restoration of Railroad Equipment – We’ll hire professionals to do hazardous materials abatement and retore our wrecking crane to its full mid-century glory, but we can use some help with detailing and ongoing maintenance of the crane and the rotary snowplow.

Model Railroad – We need additional railroad modelers and builders to design and build structures, create scenery, run trains, and talk with visitors about Truckee’s railroad history. Join our committee and build “Truckee 1927”!

To volunteer, drop us a line at info@tdrrs.org. Memberships are open to anyone interested in preserving Truckee’s railroad history and supporting the ongoing activities of the society. To join, renew your membership, or make a donation to the society, visit our website at <https://tdrrs.org/membership> or scan the QR code.



<p style="text-align: center;">Board of Directors</p> <p>Dan Cobb — President and Historian Bob Bell — Executive Vice President and Treasurer Jerry Blackwill — Vice President and Museum Manager Steve Edelman — Newsletter Editor Chip Huck — Rolling Stock Restoration & Preservation Jay Jacobs — Webmaster Tom Smith — Truckee River Railroad Bill Ramsey Durk Stelter</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Our History</p> <p>Railroads of the Truckee area played a significant role in founding and developing the town of Truckee. From the blasting of black powder in the granite over Donner Lake, to the hissing of the first steam engines coming into town, to the whistles of lumberjacks in the mountains, to the crack of ice being loaded in the reefers, to the tourists flocking to enjoy the beauty of the area, Truckee’s story is very much the story of its railroads.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Our Mission</p> <p>Our mission is to preserve and celebrate Truckee’s colorful railroad history and to educate residents and visitors about the important role of railroads in making Truckee what it is today. We strive to enrich the experience of residents and visitors through railroad-related entertainment and education.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Truckee Donner Railroad Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization. EIN 91-1917864.</p>	