

## LAKE TAHOE'S HIGHWAY SYSTEM: A SHORT HISTORY

BY

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Like many segments of the Lincoln Highway across the country, the access to Lake Tahoe and the loop around the lake has a complicated history. Toll roads are part of the story, as are lumber trails freighting routes and various construction projects carried out by state officials in California and Nevada and county governments on every side. A railroad right—of—way on the north shore later became State Route 9 connecting Lake Tahoe to the Lincoln Highway in Truckee, California and Cave Rock on the eastern shore is today the focus of a controversy over the tunnels, the activities of rock climbers and Native—Americans who consider the serrated up thrust to be a sacred site. And then there is the saga of the first motorists who ventured across the Sierra Nevada into the Lake Tahoe basin. What of them?

In December, 1862, the Nevada Territorial Legislature created the Lake Bigler Toll Road connecting Carson City to the Placerville Toll Road at the California Line which served the needs of the traveling public for the next twenty-five years. California lawmakers established the Lake Tahoe State Wagon Road across Echo Summit in 1895 and there was also the old Dutch Flat—Donner Lake Wagon Road on the north end of the lake. There were attempts to bring motorized vehicles across as the Twentieth Century dawned, but none succeeded until Alexander Winton, President of the Winton Motor Carriage Company, came up the Dutch Flat route over Donner Pass in May, 1901. He and journalist Charles B. Shanks intended to drive on to Cleveland, Ohio, but got only as far as the sand dunes north of Mill city, Nevada before giving up and arranging to have their vehicle shipped on east by rail

Just a year later, August, 1902, George A. Wyman rode a motorcycle across Donner Pass and on to Reno. Nine months later, May 16, 1903, he left San Francisco on a six—horsepower machine, intending to ride to New York City to collect a \$500 wager that he could make the distance within forty days. He reached New York City on July 6 fifty days out. He figured in twelve days not riding due to weather and mechanical problems, so collected his bet. The honor of having made the first such trip across the country did not earn him a place in history. He returned to California, dying in obscurity in Stockton on November 15, 1959.

Dr. Horatio Nelson Jackson, a Vermont physician, made the first automobile trip that same summer; 63 days, 12 hours, and 30 minutes, start to finish, thirty—six days of actual driving. His drive was north through California to Oregon and on east. There were also two other auto excursions which touched Lake Tahoe that summer, Thomas E. Fetch and Marius “Chris” Krarup made the first up over the Dutch Flat route and around the south end of Lake Tahoe and Lester Lee Whitman and Eugene Irish Hammond followed up over the same route.

Nevada officials established the Nevada Highway Department in 1917 to put to use federal highway funds appropriated by the U.S. Congress and road crews from Washoe, Ormsby counties were soon at work on stretches of the highway which ran through their jurisdiction. A road from Reno to Lake Tahoe by way of Mt. Rose Summit opened in August, 1921, and

California crews were working on their state's section on the northern and western sides of the lake.

The old bridge around Cave Rock was replaced by a tunnel in September, 1931 and a second tunnel was dedicated on October 16, 1957. Eleven days earlier, October 5, Marjorie Russell, the wife of Governor Charles Russell, opened the new Clear Creek Highway up from Carson City. In November, 1943, the Interstate Commerce Commission approved an order authorizing the abandonment of the fifteen-mile Southern Pacific branch line which had run between Truckee and Tahoe City on the north shore since 1900. Engines and rolling stock were reassigned and the trackage was torn up and sold for scrap in the spring of 1944. The State of California acquired the right-of-way, relocating a previous lumber road and constructing the present state Route 89 after World War II.

The subsequent history of Lake Tahoe's Highway System involves the resorts and casinos which were located there in the wake of World War II and the 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley which has led to the present-day ski and winter sport industry.