

## **KING'S CANYON ROAD**

Along about 1922 Carson City was right on the Lincoln highway, now U S 50 Tourism was beginning to be recognized as something that brought a buck or two into town, money that otherwise would have to be extracted from the people living there.

A personable fellow with the name of A B Gray came into town, starred up the Carson City Boosters Club, and appointed himself the Secretary and "Chief pusher". The local merchants fell for the idea and contributed to set up a headquarters on the Main Street. They also added to Mr. Gray's pocketbook sometime before he left town by the back road.

The "City Dads", officially the Town Council, liked some Gray's suggestions enough to provide a campground for the tourist as had been done by several of the more forward-looking communities in the West. A tour across Our State at this latitude was comfortable only in the summertime, and the shady refuge offered by the City, for as long as desired, was indeed an attraction to the weary traveler. Some outside toilets were installed. Plenty of free water was there for the taking, and little spaces were set aside for camping Motels hadn't come into being as yet, and though there might have been a something similar in the more populous parts of the country, we didn't have them in our part of the West.

People, when they toured around, would usually camp. They'd have a tent and some way of cooking and some would stop over for two or three nights before moving on. We would often visit them and get acquainted Most were nice pleasant people, Just Americans having a little fling for themselves and happy to take advantage of what Carson had to offer.

There were many varieties of grub boxes, mostly home made. The travelers brought along folded canvas tents, several extra 'cord' type tires and rims, tools, and red, white and blue, emergency cans containing gas, water, and oil All the cars had running boards then, and much of this junk was piled wherever there was room to tie it down

King's Canyon Road, officially called the Osterman Grade, was originally built as a toll road It started from the fountain and watering trough across from the state capitol, then ran West on King Street, past Judge King's brick house, the Wrinkle Mansion, the Presbyterian Church, the Carson Brewery, the Catholic Church and the High School.

Old Judge King, a huge fat man with a large yellow moustache and one leg missing, would often be sitting in his rocker watching who went by After a short distance the road was in the country for the next mile, between big cottonwood trees with level green fields on each side of the road and many of the fences covered with wild rose bushes. The Walsh and Winters Ranches bordered the road until the first little hill began on the south.

Ed Walsh's place, a white sprawling ranch house with barns and an orchard, was at the bottom of the hill. Trees of several varieties shaded the yard, and little irrigation ditches crossed the road. Ed was the son of Judge Walsh of Comstock fame, who had come across the Sierras from Downieville when he heard rumors of a silver strike at Virginia City. He bought up the first mining locations and made a big pile of money. Later on, Ed had a grocery store in Carson, just north of the Capitol and on the west side of Carson Street.

Carson was settled with many of the people who had made their fortunes on the Comstock. It was a better place to live in than Virginia City, as green grass and trees were

enticing to the miners after the barren hills of the Bonanza country

The first climb began after leaving the Walsh Ranch, but it didn't get very steep for another mile. A Lincoln Highway square post, all painted up fancy in red, white, and blue, sat at the first mile marker. It was well perforated with 22 caliber bullet holes, especially around any letter that looked like an "O"

There were two little ranches on the north side of the road, the first owned by a redheaded man named Ira Anderson, then eight west of it Ellis Folsom's ranch and dairy. A little further on was the Muldoon ranch on the edge of a round sagebrush covered hill. This place was on the south side of the road, too close to the sagebrush and consequently burned in a big forest fire in 1926.

A much steeper ascent began at this point as the road skirted along the gray hills and passed the Thorne Ranch, about three-fourths of a mile further on. The very old ocher-colored wooden road was still standing, and in much better shape than the low ranch house amongst the cottonwoods on the north bank of Throne Creek.

A short distance more and the road crossed Thorne's Creek, over a little wooden bridge, and continued up steadily increasing grade to the next crossing. This little bridge was about a thousand feet downstream from the "Falls", a small cataract maybe 50 feet high and fifteen feet across, which seemed to represent one of the wonders of creation to the unsophisticated youths of Carson. The first time I saw the falls I was ten years old. A gentleman named Mr. Loughran, who was about to take the Bar Examination and wanted to relax a little, took me and a slightly older boy, Richie Savage, along with the gentleman's girl friend, to the falls for a picnic.

Mr. Loughran had rented a horse and buggy from Richie's Dad, with Richie going along as the driver. We hiked the short distance to the falls over a steep trail, with our lunches and picnic gear, and had settled down to eat, when suddenly Mr. Loughran discovered he'd forgotten the film for his camera, he asked Richie if he would mind going back for it and seemed real pleased when I volunteered to go also.

I never figured out, until some years later, why Richie had made me crawl on my belly when we returned to where we had left Mr. Loughran and his lady, or what Richie was laughing at when he peeked over the top of the bushes. He never let me look because he said I was too young.

The road continued past the Quill and Heidenreich Ranches, and, after leaving the creek crossing, ran alone close to a narrow natural meadow which was green all summer but too rocky to do much with other than use it for a pasture.

Just above Heidenreich's ranch buildings the road turned abruptly north and the real steep climb started. A little ways further on there was a switchback, then several sharp curves for another two miles along the side of Steep Mountain, until finally the road leveled out a bit and wound through heavy pine and fir for the rest of the way to the summit.

Swift's Station was about two thirds of the way up the King's Canyon Road, and was located in a beautiful shady flat with big pines, Manzanita, and ferns and flowers all around. The old log buildings were in bad shape and the roofs had started to fall in, but the huge log walls looked about as good as ever. Shortly after the summit was reached, Clear Creek could be seen on the south, the rock and timber logging dam still there. Just a little ways more along the road and Lake Tahoe was visible in the distance.

Little springs had been piped into half barrels at several locations, on the way up for the use

of the teamsters in the early days. Later the motorists used this water to cool the Model "T"s radiators.

On several of our walks up the canyon' we saw Model "T" Fords lose their brakes and go flying by, blue smoke from the burning brake bands pouring out behind, and the frightened riders holding on with everything thing they could, praying they'd make it safely to the bottom. Many didn't. More than once we'd hear about a wreck on the grade and would walk up to look. It sometimes was a sad thing to realize people had been killed, and to see oranges and other gifts, which they had been bringing back to the folks at home, all scattered and crushed.

Alexander's big Pierce Arrow stage used a big police siren to warn the other cars, wailing away all the way up and down as he tore up to Glenbrook and back. It would be wonderful to hear again, but the old road is now almost impassible as the surfacing has been washed away by sixty years of snow and rain, and complete neglect will soon close it forever.

'Curran, Jack: Back to the Twenties. Publishers Above and Beyond 1994. His Memories of growing up in Carson City. Pp 87-90

### **The Ostermann Grade**

The Lincoln Highway in northern Nevada took several routes across the Sierra Nevada to Lake Tahoe. One such course followed Kings Canyon Creek in Kings Canyon in a westerly direction from downtown Carson City, past irrigated farms and through the forested mountain landscape to an elevation greater than 7,000 feet. Before the arrival of Euro-Americans, the road was a Washoe Indian trail. By 1862, however, the Territorial Legislature granted a 20-year franchise and the route became the Lake Bigler' Toll Road. In 1882, the road reverted to Ormsby County, which maintained it even after it became part of the Lincoln Highway in 1913. At some point, the name changed from the Lake Bigler Toll Road to Kings Canyon Road, after the geographical feature.

In 1921, the Board of Ormsby County Commissioners decided to rename the road once again. The proposal was to call the stretch of highway Osterrmann Grade after Henry "Harry" C.

Ostermarm, field secretary for the Lincoln Highway Association who had died in an automobile accident in Iowa in 1920. The resolution to honor Mr. Ostermann read:

Whereas, on account of the similarity of names travelers in this section become confused when told of the King's Canyon Road and the

Kingsbury Grade,<sup>2</sup> with the result that hundreds of tourists coming to this city have reported that they had missed seeing the most attractive part of Lake Tahoe on account of coming into the valley over the Kingsbury Grade; and

Whereas, it is apparent that conditions require that the road leading up King's Canyon be given a distinctive name that will distinguish it from any other road; and

Whereas, the late H.C. Ostermann, field secretary of the Lincoln Highway Association, during his lifetime took a great interest in the improvement of said road, and pronounced it one of the great scenic roads of the country; and

Whereas, through his efforts large sums were given to this state to aid in the improvement of the Lincoln Highway, and the work he did for Nevada will endure for all time; therefore:

Be it resolved by the Board of County Commissioners of Ormsby County, Nevada, in meeting assembled on August 5, 1921, that the name of the road leading up King's Canyon and known

as King's Canyon Road be changed to Ostermann Grade, in recognition of the service of the late H.S. Ostermann, as a road enthusiast and for the great good his efforts brought to this section:

The motion to adopt the resolution by Mr. Crow being stated by the chairman and put to vote was carried.

Responding to increased automobile traffic that followed the end of World War II, the cost of maintaining a steep mountain grade, and the influence of the Federal Highway Administration, the primary highway route from Carson City to Lake Tahoe shifted from the Ostermann Grade to the Clear Creek route to the south. The current road was set by 1957 and the Ostermann Grade was abandoned. The remains of the Kings Canyon stretch of the Lincoln Highway retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance in Lincoln Highway history.

## Clear Creek Route

At this time I don't have much knowledge of the Clear Creek route. We know that the canyon was used for lumber mills in the 1800's during the Comstock boom and that the road was constructed by the state, and opened for traffic August 19 1928. Construction was not completed for another year But, when did it become Highway 50?

Further references can be found in these news articles.

8/9/28 NSJ 2:4 NEW CLEAR CREEK RD TO OPEN SOON, DELAYS

LNDLDS &

MOTORISTS USING UNFINSHD ROAD

8/19/28 NSJ 4:1 EDITORIAL ON OPENING OF CLEAR CK GRADE

8/20/28 NSJ 6:3-4 CLEAR CK GRADE OPENED YESTERDAY TO

TRAFFIC, PRAISED,

STILL NOT CMPLT

8/9/29 LRM 1:8 AUG 20 DATE FOR EB SKEELS OF ROSEVILLE TO

COMPLETE CLEAR

CREEK