

## Donner Peak and Railroad Tunnels

Loop hike. Start 7100 ft (900 ft up, 1200 ft down, 300 ft up), approx. 10 miles on good trail or road except 10-15 minutes cross country. Bring flashlight and warm clothing.

At Donner Summit, there is "PCT Parking" just west of Sugar Bowl Academy (south side of Donner Pass Road); or, from the southwest corner of that parking lot, follow (the unmarked) Lake Mary Road a couple hundred yards to additional "PCT Parking" on the right. Backtrack a short distance to the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT).

The trail starts east and is carved into a granite buttress for the first few hundred yards, then climbs steadily through forest heading south with occasional nice views west. This section can be a garden of wild flowers early in the hiking season (June-July, depending on snow cover).

As you come out onto the first of Sugar Bowl's ski slopes (before the first ski lift and road), leave the PCT by taking a left at the trail junction. 6-8 minutes from the junction the trail levels out, then descends briefly. To the left at the level spot there are large granite boulders a couple hundred feet north of the trail; follow a spur trail to get a great view to the north.



*View from exfoliated granite on Donner Peak east to Donner Lake*

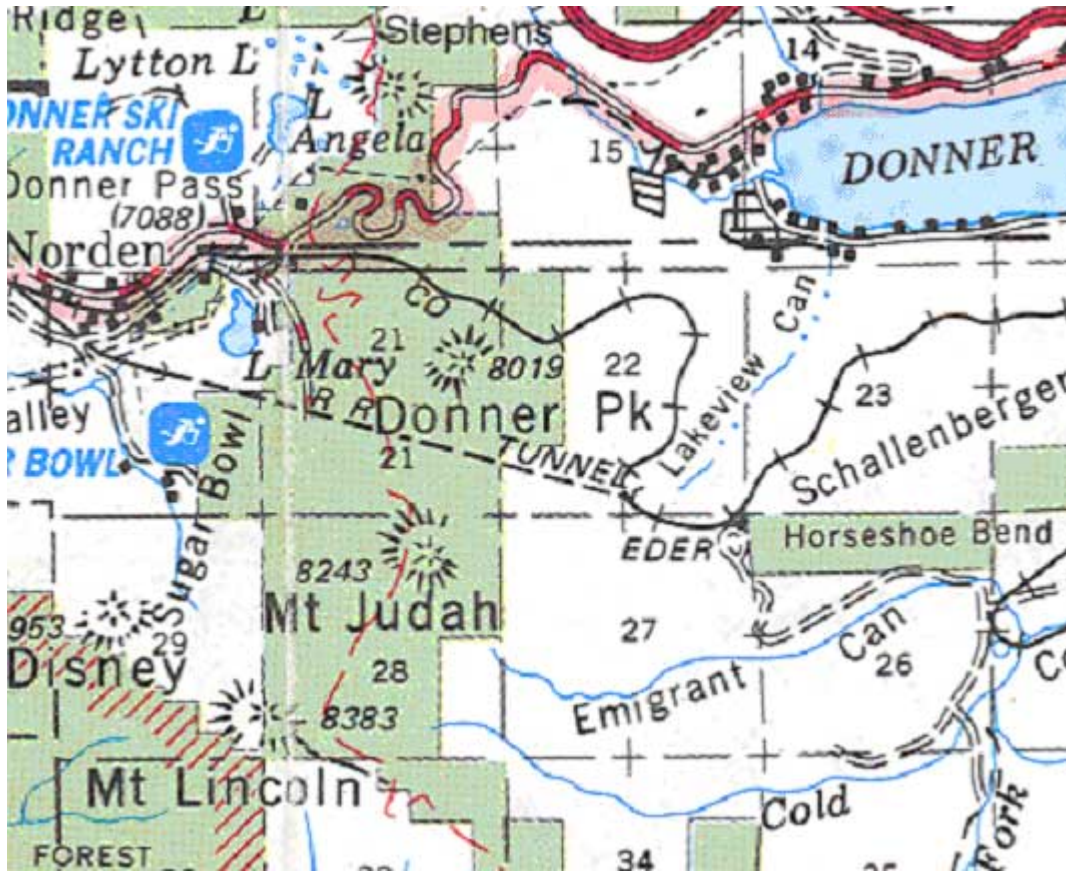
A short distance beyond the level spot, the foot trail merges with an old road, which takes you the remaining distance to a landing below Donner Peak. At the landing you can go left (NE) to the summit, right (SW) to continue on the Mt Judah Loop, or straight (SE). The trail southeast is indistinct at this point; you want to go that way, but only after a detour to the summit.



*Four-legged hiker enjoys wildflowers en route to Donner Peak*

There is no single trail to the summit, but the general route is obvious. The summit is capped by piles of exfoliating granite. To reach the high point, keep to the left and walk up the slabs. Most of the more obvious paths end in gaps in the granite which, although interesting, are about 10 feet below the top. There are excellent views in all directions, though Mt. Judah blocks the horizon to the southwest.

Return to the landing and trail junction below the summit; the trail southeast is more obvious from this direction — in fact, the trail is an abandoned road. The trail holds its elevation for about 10 minutes (actually climbing immediately after leaving the landing), then drops in several sections as it moves south and east about 2 miles. This is a popular bicycle trail, coming up from Coldstream Valley; motorcycles are occasional users. Much of the land is privately owned and there has been logging, more obviously toward the end.

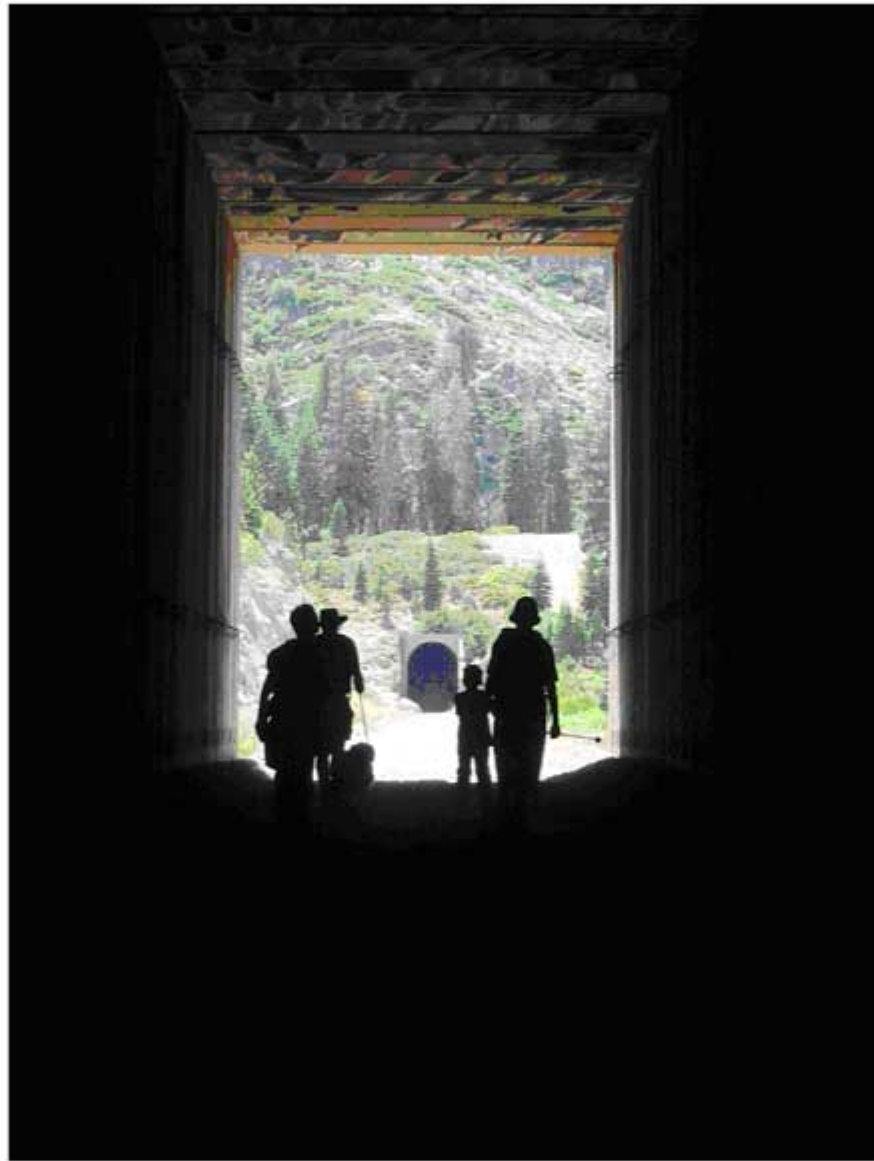


*Pacific Crest Trail is red north-south dashed line. Loop to Donner Peak and Mt. Judah is not shown. From Donner Peak our trail follows the section line south to a point east of Mt. Judah, then goes generally east, meeting a road which parallels the road north to Eder. The return follows the railroad line on the map; trains go through the new tunnel shown.*

The trail finally levels out. There is an old loggers' staging area on the right, a junction with a dirt road, and a stream crossing (probably the creek draining Emigrant Canyon) roughly where section number "27" is shown on the map. At the dirt road, take a left and head north. This is a transition part of the hike (from "natural" to "historic") and not very scenic.

After about 10 minutes there is a faint abandoned road bearing right (lots of small pines sprouting in the old roadbed). The main road makes a broad, almost U-, turn to the left with several spurs on the right. You want to keep going generally north. The bad news is that there is no trail, so cross country is the only option. The good news is that it's only about 10-15 minutes, you will hit the abandoned railroad bed almost any way you do it, and it's downhill.

Option 1: Take the faint abandoned road, then bear left after about 100 yards, and work your way down through manzanita and shrubs into forest to the railroad bed. Option 2: take the next spur from the main road (ignoring logs placed across the spur) and work your way down through the forest. The railroad bed looks like a high-quality two-lane dirt road. Head left (west northwest). On your right you may see the entrance to the new tunnel, which takes a single track all the way through Mt. Judah.



*Hikers silhouetted at exit from first tunnel*

There are several tunnels. Of the three this hike visits, each is more concrete snowshed than tunnel, but all are impressive. Even the snowsheds required removal of huge quantities of granite. This first tunnel is the darkest; vision improves with time, but a flashlight is really handy because it is impossible to see anything but faint light from the ends when you're in the middle of this one. Warm clothing is also a good idea because the tunnels are very cool, even in mid-summer.



*Tunnel interior with light from vents and opening in snowshed wall*

The second tunnel is the shortest of the three; from its exit to the entrance to the third tunnel is less than 100 ft. The third tunnel is the longest; it exits directly onto the China Wall constructed by Chinese laborers without mortar. Two more tunnels are straight ahead from China Wall, but drop to the left (south) side of the elevated railroad bed and follow the foot trail back to the PCT.

The fifth tunnel (actually Tunnel #6 as counted during the original construction) is the longest bore. It is about 1700 ft from one end to the other and was the most difficult to cut. This was the only tunnel where the builders agreed to frequent use of the recently invented (but still highly dangerous) dynamite. Near the middle there is a vertical shaft, now covered on top by a metal plate. You can hike through the fourth and fifth tunnels, which will bring you out under Sugar Bowl's road to the Mt. Judah Lodge; but then you will have to circle back to pick up your vehicle(s) near the Sugar Bowl Academy.

<b>GPS Readings<sup>o</sup></b> <b>(solo hiker with dog, moving relatively quickly on 2006-11-05)</b>				
<b>Location</b>	<b>Time (UTC)</b>	<b>Elevation</b>	<b>Latitude (N)</b>	<b>Longitude (W)</b>
PCT, Donner Pass	16:25	7115' (start)	39° 18.878	120° 19.628
Donner-Judah Tr jct	16:52	7553'	39° 18.368'	120° 19.373'
Saddle at Donner Pk	17:10	7862'	39° 18.417'	120° 18.874'
Donner Peak summit	17:20	8034' (max)	39° 18.532'	120° 18.745'
Logged area	18:00	7370'	39° 17.591'	120° 18.488'
Road junction	18:15	6953'	39° 17.482'	120° 17.914'
Begin cross country	18:47	6914'	39° 17.910'	120° 17.954'
Railroad bed	19:00	6783' (min)	39° 17.973'	120° 17.746'
Enter first tunnel	19:24	6859'	39° 18.686'	120° 17.710'
Enter second tunnel	19:45	6899'	39° 18.673'	120° 18.256'
China Wall	20:07	6987'	39° 18.933'	120° 19.251'
PCT, Donner Pass	20:22	7074' (return to start)	39° 18.880	120° 19.634'

\* GPS readings taken without allowing for settling time. To gauge accuracy, compare the first and last rows, which were taken at the same point about 4 hours apart.