Tahoe National Forest Boca to Loyalton Driving Tour

Not all roads listed on this tour are paved, and some may be difficult or impassable during bad weather. Use caution. Cell phone coverage is unavailable in much of the area. We suggest taking a print of this tour with you. Gas is available in Truckee, Verdi, and Loyalton.

As you drive through this beautiful country, remember that this area was the traditional homeland of the northern Washoe or Welmelti for countless generations. Small groups traveled through high mountain valleys during mild seasons to collect edible and medicinal roots, seeds, and marsh plants. Men hunted large game for food and hides, and trapped smaller animals. The Truckee and Little Truckee Rivers were important fisheries year-round for the Washoe. Fish were important staples of their diet, especially during annual spawning runs.

With increasing intrusion by Euro-Americans during the 1860s–1870s, traditional Washoe residential and food-gathering areas and a way of life were lost. The Washoe responded with a steady stream of protests and petitions to government officials. Although the Tribe was not federally recognized until 1936, in 1917 the Washoe acquired small tracts of land in Nevada on which to establish residential “colonies” and acquired lands in California for residential use and land preservation—very different from their traditional territory that probably covered more than 10,000 square miles. Today, the Washoe have developed a land use plan that includes goals of reestablishing a presence within the Sierra and re-vitalizing cultural knowledge, including the harvest and care of traditional plant resources and the protection of traditional properties. The Washoe still value their connection to the Boca and Loyalton area.

Preserve What Remains

Please respect this unique cultural and natural landscape. Observe and photograph, but do not disturb or remove the prehistoric and historic-period sites and artifacts that remain. Laws protect heritage resources on federally managed (public) land and penalties for disturbing them can include fines and imprisonment. Some of the laws protecting these resources include:

- The National Historic Preservation Act
- The Antiquities Act
- The Archaeological Resources Protection Act
- The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

If you see someone collecting artifacts on public lands, contact local law enforcement right away.
**Stop 1**

**Boca Townsite**  
Nevada County, California  
5,575 Feet in Elevation  
GPS Coordinates: Latitude 39.386109 Longitude -120.0941, UTM Zone10S 750269 mE 4363654 mN

**To get there:** Take the Hirschdale Exit from Interstate 80 approximately 6.5 miles east of Truckee. Turn north on Hirschdale Road and follow it across the Truckee River. As you cross the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, most of the townsite of Boca is located on the right (east) side of the road. The US Forest Service has developed a walking trail with interpretive signs. To access the trail, park in the dirt lot on your right (note the public restroom). Watch your step as you explore the area, and leave all historic materials undisturbed.

The town of Boca had its beginning as a construction camp and depot of the Central Pacific Railroad, established in 1867 when the first transcontinental rails were being laid over the summit of the Sierra Nevada. Judge Edwin Bryant Crocker, the older brother of Charles Crocker, one of the Central Pacific’s “Big Four,” named the town for its location at the mouth of the Little Truckee River: Boca is Spanish for “mouth.” The railroad depot became an important shipping center where lumber, sheep and cattle, and ice were transported to markets in San Francisco and the East Coast. The town grew to include a sawmill, hotel, school, brewery, and major ice-harvesting center. For a time, Boca Beer and Boca ice were known throughout the country. The town flourished for several decades, before a sharp decline in the 1920s as timber resources were exhausted, the river became polluted, and artificial ice production replaced the natural ice industry. By the late 1930s, when the Bureau of Reclamation and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built Boca Dam, little remained of the once-bustling town. The structures you see to the west between the road and the river were an office, lab, and garage used by Reclamation during the construction of the dam. Today they are still maintained by that agency.
Town of Boca circa 1905 (USFS n.d.:404-2).
Ice Harvesting at Boca 1868 – 1927

Before the era of electrification, the only way to harvest ice was by cutting it from frozen lakes and ponds. Ice was a luxury, but it was also critical for the preservation of perishable foods. By the 1860s, natural ice was increasingly used to ship western agricultural products across the country to eastern markets. California farmers found a national market after completion of the Central Pacific Railroad, shipping their products in ice-chilled railroad cars.

The Truckee area became a major focus of the natural ice industry, in part because of the pure, clean water of the Truckee River. The first harvest of natural ice at Boca was in the winter of 1868–1869. The Boca Mill and Ice Company dammed the Little Truckee to create an ice pond and built what may have been the very first large, commercial ice house in the area. The ice was cut from the pond by hand and transported to the icehouses through a system of flumes, conveyor belts, trestles, and steam-driven elevators. The icehouses were built along short spur railroad lines for easy transfer to the main Central (now Southern) Pacific line.

All of the ice companies in the Truckee Basin used similar methods for harvesting ice. As winter approached, the ponds were cleaned of debris in preparation for ice production. A horse-drawn shaving machine removed the top layer of snow-ice, leaving clear ice. Workers etched lines into the ice and an ice plow followed these guidelines, creating deeper cuts. After several passes with the plow, a four-foot-long handsaw was used to cut free large strips of ice, and workers known as “spudders” moved the ice into an open channel in the pond where the strips were chiseled into smaller blocks. At the edge of the pond, a worker known as a “switcher” directed the blocks onto the flumes and conveyor belts that carried the ice blocks to the icehouses for storage.

At Boca, the pond was harvested two or three times a year, usually beginning in December. A harvest lasted about 10 days, and it took about a month for new ice to form. During the ice-harvesting season, Boca Mill and Ice Company employed about 40 to 60 people—including Native Washoe and Paiute men who came in on the railroad. Most of the workers lived in the hotel annex, which served as a bunkhouse.

The natural ice industry declined in the 1920s, as rivers became more polluted and electricity made the production of artificial ice more economical. For a time, the two industries were in competition. In San Francisco, the Consumers’ Ice Company promoted its “distilled ice” in 1890 as more pure and safer than natural ice, and “absolutely pure and odorless, soft to the touch and delicious to the taste, as well as wholesome to the body.” The natural ice industry argued in response that their time-tested “natural product from pure mountain water, frozen by nature” was superior to artificial ice, which “has to undergo a chemical process and is frozen at a much higher temperature.” The new technology triumphed and the last natural ice harvest took place at Boca in 1927, the same year that an artificial ice plant opened in Reno.
Photo circa. 1920 showing workers harvesting ice at Boca and the icehouses on the east side of the pond. Notice the conveyor system for moving the blocks of ice from the pond to the icehouse (USFS n.d.:407-32).
Boca Brewing Company 1875 - 1893

In the 1870s, L. E. Doan, co-owner of the Boca Mill and Ice Company, started a brewery at Boca. Doan recognized that the pure water, readily available ice, and railroad access were ideal for a successful brewery. Of particular advantage was the ice, which allowed for the brewing of lager beer in the German tradition. Lager requires refrigeration immediately after brewing at near-freezing temperatures for a period of six months. Doan, along with fellow investors B. F. Bacon, Charles Thompson, A. B. Dibble, and J. B. Fargo, incorporated the Boca Brewing Company in July 1875 and bought a 320-acre parcel on the south side of the Truckee River for the brewery. The massive brewery was completed in 1876 at a cost of $110,000. It included its own ice pond and an icehouse that could store 4,000 tons of ice.

The Boca Brewing Company Brewery on the South Side of the Truckee River (USFS n.d.:402-28).
The brewery began production in early 1877, claiming to be the first one in California to brew lager. Other breweries established before 1877, such as the Sacramento Brewery (ca. 1856) in Sacramento and the Wieland Brewery (ca. 1868) in San Francisco, advertised their beer as lager, but they probably brewed a slow-fermented “steam” type beer, rather than a true lager.

Boca Brewing Company’s lager was soon known throughout the state. Saloons in San Francisco and Los Angeles mentioned the beer by name in their newspaper advertisements. Robert Eckert’s Congress Hall in Los Angeles proudly proclaimed, “Ice cold Boca Beer always on draught, the only real lager beer on the Coast. In order to increase its distribution, the company opened an office in San Francisco in 1883, facilitating exports throughout the United States and to Mexico, Central America, South America, Hawaii, Japan, and China. By the 1880s, the brewery was producing about 25,000 barrels of lager a year and employed around 40 people, most of them German immigrants.

The Boca Brewery continued to thrive into the 1890s despite an increasingly competitive market for lager beer. Boca lost its claim to being the only lager California in 1881 when the Fredericksburg Brewery in San Jose began brewing this type of beer using artificial ice. Fire destroyed the Boca Brewery in 1893, and it was never rebuilt.
Boca Brewery crew, circa 1880s. Note that several of the men are holding glasses of lager.
Boca Brewery photos on pages 9 and 10 are courtesy the Truckee-Donner Historical Society, Boca Collection.
Boca Dam and Reservoir

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Congress authorized the Truckee Storage Project. The main feature of the project was a 40,000-acre-foot storage reservoir near the former Boca townsite. The Truckee Storage Project was designed to irrigate nearly 30,000 acres in Truckee Meadows (modern-day Reno) in western Nevada while preserving the natural beauty of the Lake Tahoe Basin and its shore by reducing demand for irrigation water withdrawals from that lake. Since its completion in 1939, Boca Reservoir has become a popular recreational area for camping, boating, and fishing. Some remnants of the earlier ice industry can be seen just north of the dam when the reservoir levels are low.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) played an important support role in the construction of the Truckee Storage Project. The CCC was part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal” of federal relief programs designed to alleviate the suffering and hardships faced by many Americans during the Great Depression. Although the contract for construction of the Truckee Storage Project was not awarded until the spring of 1937, seasonal CCC crews from Reno did some of the preparatory work in late 1935 and continued during the construction season in 1936. Period photographs of the dam construction work show rows of tents for the CCC workers. Today you can see an example of their work in the stone walls at the top of the dam. The dam was completed in 1939.

Boca Dam Under Construction in 1938 (USBR photo 1938:81).
The Boca and Loyalton (B&L) Railroad

When the Lewis Brothers first opened their mill in Smithneck Canyon in 1886 (*Tour Stop 6*), they hauled the lumber by horse and wagon. In 1889, they were joined by a new partner, Captain John Roberts, who brought with him a fleet of steam wagons (traction engines) from his riverboat operation in Sacramento. The mill switched to these engines to haul lumber, but the traction engines belched black smoke and made a horrendous noise, frightening livestock, and igniting fires along the route. In 1899, the partners decided to build a logging railroad to move their lumber out of the woods.

The Boca & Loyalton Railroad was incorporated on September 25, 1900, and within a few months tracks had been laid from the Lewis Mill to Boca, following the Little Truckee River. At Boca, lumber could be transferred to the main railroad line that was then operated by the Southern Pacific. Next the B&LRR was extended northward down Smithneck Canyon to the town of Loyalton, where the headquarters and engine house were located. By November of 1901, the railroad had reached the Plumas County town of Beckwourth. Eventually there would be 15 spur lines into the forest between Loyalton and Boca, and both towns hummed with lumbering activity.

But the boom was short-lived. Several times the B&LRR defaulted on its bonds, and in 1915 the railroad went into receivership. It was sold at foreclosure in 1916 to the Western Pacific Railroad, which was planning to build a line through the Feather River Canyon. Once that route was completed, freight traffic between Boca and Loyalton declined. That section of the old B&LRR line was abandoned and the rails removed in 1917. Many parts of the railroad bed were converted into automobile roads—including Smithneck Road (*Tour Stop 4*)—and others exist today only as isolated cuts or earthen berms. You can see some of these cuts at the Boca townsite. Additional information on the railroad can be found at Tour Stops, 4, 6, and 7.
Stop 2

Stampede Reservoir
Sierra County, California
5,892 Feet in Elevation

GPS Coordinates: Latitude 39.475516 Longitude -120.163815, UTM Zone10S 749119 mE 4373552 mN

To get there: From Boca Dam, continue north on Stampede Meadows Road (paved) for about eight miles. Stampede Meadows Road becomes Stampede Dam Road as you approach the reservoir. There are campgrounds and pullouts along the way. You will pass Boca Rest Campground and Boyington Mill Campground on Stampede Meadows Road.

The earth- and rock-filled Stampede Dam was constructed in 1970. It was a project of the Bureau of Reclamation and was built primarily for fishery enhancement. The water control provided by the dam facilitates the spawning of the critically endangered cui-ui farther downstream in the lower Truckee and Pyramid Lake—the only places in the world where this fish can be found. Cui-ui (*Chasmistes cujus*) is a lake sucker. It is a long-lived fish and can exceed 40 years in age and weigh over seven pounds. It was a critical source of food for the Native Washoe and Paiute people.

Recreation at the reservoir includes fishing (for kokanee salmon and rainbow, brook, brown, and lake trout), hunting, boating, camping, and hiking. Kayaking, paddle boarding, and canoeing are possible in the morning and evening, when the water is calm. Ice fishing is sometimes possible during winter, depending on conditions. There is single-family and group camping in developed campgrounds on the south shore of Stampede Reservoir. The Captain Roberts boat ramp is located adjacent to Logger Campground just west of the dam, off Dog Valley Road.

Some of the roads you are driving on for this tour follow old wagon roads. Early passengers on these roads could stop at hotels and way stations for food, temporary lodging, and even blacksmith services to re-shoe horses or repair broken wagon parts along the way. If you come upon the remains of structures or historic artifacts, do not disturb or remove them. Remember that all heritage resources on federally managed (public) land are protected by law. If you see someone collecting historic or prehistoric artifacts, contact the Forest Service or local law enforcement right away.
Stop 3
The Overland Emigrant Trail & Henness Pass Wagon Road
Sierra County, California
6054 Feet in Elevation
GPS Coordinates: Latitude 39.50672 Longitude -120.092177, UTM Zone10S 750008.27 mE 4377048.21 mN
To get there: From Stampede Dam, continue north along Stampede Dam Road (paved) approximately two miles until it dead-ends at Henness Pass Road (unpaved).

The road you see in front of you follows the route of an early wagon road, part of the Truckee River Route of the Overland Emigrant Trail. One of the most famous wagon trails in US history, the Overland Emigrant Trail carried hundreds of thousands of adventurers, settlers, and gold seekers to the American West between 1841 and 1869. The 2,000-mile journey began at various locations in western Missouri and ended in Oregon or California, depending on which fork was chosen: northwest along the Snake River in Idaho, or southwest along the Humboldt River in Nevada. The California Trail followed both banks of the Humboldt all the way to the western edge of the Humboldt Sink in northwestern Nevada, where it split into the northern Truckee River route and the southern Carson River route.

The Truckee Route followed the river west through what are now the towns of Sparks and Reno and on to Verdi, where the Truckee River turns south. Wagons followed the narrow river canyon south and then west along what is now Interstate 80; beginning in 1852, most travelers chose the less-arduous route to the northeast, paralleling the South Branch of Dog Creek up Dog Valley Grade to First Summit. From there the trail descended to Dog Valley, followed the southeast side of the valley along Dog Creek up to Second Summit, and then proceeded across Hoke Valley and on towards what is now the town of Truckee. Today, many segments of the trail have been covered by modern roads - including Henness Pass Road and Dog Valley Road.

Historians, archaeologists, and volunteers have made exhaustive surveys and reviews of immigrant diary accounts to identify remaining segments of the Truckee River Route through the Tahoe National Forest. It is important that you avoid damage to these fragile traces of our history. Improved sections of the trail, like Henness Pass Road, are easily drivable, but unimproved sections can be damaged or destroyed by motorized vehicles and should only be explored on foot.

Some sources tell us that the Henness Pass route was pioneered by Joseph Zumwalt in 1850 on his way westward to the North Yuba diggings; others say that emigrant guide Caleb Greenwood and his two sons “marked” the new route in 1845. Regardless of which account is accurate, Henness Pass soon became the preferred route for emigrant wagons...
crossing this part of the Sierra Nevada range.

After the Comstock silver strike in 1859, improvements to the Henness Pass Wagon Road facilitated travel between Virginia City and California’s northern mining towns. It was second only to the Placerville/Carson route in the volume of passengers and freight traffic traveling over the Sierra. The Henness Pass Wagon Road joined the Overland Emigrant Trail a few miles west of Second Summit.

The full route of the Henness Pass Turnpike and Toll Road, as it later came to be known, proceeded from Verdi, Nevada, over First and Second Summits, along the edge of Sardine Valley and Davies Creek, down the Little Truckee River to the northern edge of Webber Lake, then westerly over Henness Pass, through Jacksons Meadows, and up the ridge between the North and Middle Forks of the Yuba River to Downieville. After the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1868-1869, traffic on the Henness Pass Wagon Road dropped considerably; even so, the road network continued to serve as a regional feeder line for freight between Truckee and Verdi. Used and maintained continuously since the early 1850, today it is still a main east-west travel corridor through the Tahoe National Forest.

For additional information, visit the Oregon-California Trail Association (OCTA) web site at http://www.octa-trails.org.
Stop 4
Smithneck Wagon Road & the Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber/Hobart Estate Narrow Gauge Logging Railroad
Sierra County, California
6097 Feet in Elevation

GPS Coordinates: Latitude 39.511767 Longitude -120.143510, UTM Zone10S 745576.32 mE 4377467.06 mN

To get there: From the intersection of Henness Pass and Stampede Dam Roads continue left (west) on Henness Pass Road approximately 3.2 miles along the southern edge of Sardine Valley to the intersection with Smithneck Road (unpaved). At this point, Henness Pass Road will turn left (west) and Smithneck Road will continue north.

Smithneck Wagon Road

Two connections to the Henness Pass Wagon Road were made in about 1860 near Bear Valley. A toll road from Truckee to Sierraville via Lemon Canyon and Sardine Valley was built in the late 1850s or early 1860s. The Verdi Lumber Company used portions of this road for its logging railroad grade sometime around 1915 and into the early 1920s. A second toll road, completed in the early 1860s, ran south from Loyalton along “Smith’s Neck” Creek to connect with the Henness Pass Wagon Road at Sardine Valley. The route of today’s Smithneck Road roughly parallels or overlaps the alignment of the historic Boca and Loyalton Railroad for most of the way along Smithneck Creek to its headwaters in Pats Meadow (see Tour Stops 1, 5, 6, and 7).

The Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber/Hobart Estate Narrow Gauge Logging Railroad

Just north of this spot, two temporary lines of the Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber Company (SNW&LCo.) narrow gauge railroad once followed drainages up to remote lumber camps. The SNW&LCo. had a booming business on the north shore of Lake Tahoe from 1878 until the mid-1890s, when they had depleted their timberlands there. They traded 5,000 acres of land to the Truckee Lumber Company for the same amount of land to the north of Truckee, and moved their operations to a new lumber camp at Overton (later renamed Hobart Mills). The new camp would be connected to Truckee by seven miles of standard gauge railroad. From Overton, the SNW&LCo. built a narrow gauge logging railroad to reach to their many camps in the forest. These “feeder lines” were temporary and subject to frequent changes as areas were logged over. They were lightly constructed, and little remains today to mark their routes.

In 1917, the SNW&LCo. was dissolved and their properties transferred to the Hobart Estates Company, a principal stockholder. Operations continued to expand in the 1920s and early 1930s. Feeder lines crossed and used segments of the defunct Boca and Loyalton Railroad grades, moving one set of rails in to convert from standard gauge to narrow gauge. This can be seen in rare existing ties with three sets of spike holes. By 1936, the timber in the area had been cut over, and the once-booming town of Hobart Mills, along with the logging railroads, was largely abandoned. Hobart Mills remains in private hands today, though nothing is left of the historic town or mill.
Stop 5
Pats Meadow & Basque Shepherding 1850-1970
Sierra County, California
6270 Feet in Elevation
GPS Coordinates: Latitude 39.559784 Longitude -120.146224, UTM Zone10S 745173.77 mE 4382789.90 mN

To get there: From the intersections of Smithneck and Henness Pass Roads, continue north on Smithneck Road approximately 3.65 miles to Pats Meadow. Archaeologists have found evidence of Basque sheepherders near Pats Meadow.

During the 1850s, more than 500,000 sheep crossed Nevada on their way to California markets. By the 1860s the trend had reversed, as millions of California sheep were driven to the mining camps of the Great Basin and railheads in the Plains. Bands were large, numbering at least 1,000, and seasonal trips of the herds sometimes covered several hundred miles.

“From June until October every mountain side is covered with droves of sheep driven here by the wool growers to take advantage of the excellent pasture … Truckee is the supply point and headquarters of these drovers and herders.”

W. F. Edwards 1883

Once the railroad arrived, sheep were transported by rail to and from Truckee. Later, sheep were trucked out of Hobart Mills. Many young Basque men from Spain and France had emigrated in search of better job opportunities and found work as herders in the sheep industry in the western United States; some eventually acquired herds of their own. Basque sheepherders had become indispensable to large stockowners by the 1900s. While wartime demand increased the number of livestock permitted on public lands World War I, immigration restrictions after the war set a low quota for Spanish Basques and caused a severe shortage of herders. Herd numbers dropped during the Great Depression but rose again during the 1940s. Despite these fluctuations in the production of sheep and wool, the Basque tradition of shepherding continued in the Truckee region through the 1970s.
Stop 6
The Lewis Mill Site
Sierra County, California
6205 Feet in Elevation
GPS Coordinates: Latitude 39.570896 Longitude -120.15622057, UTM Zone10S 744275.86 mE 4383996 mN
To get there: From Pats Meadow, continue north on Smithneck Road approximately one mile to the Lewis Mile Site. The nearest public restrooms are located approximately 4.63 miles north of Lewis Mill on the west side of Smithneck Road. It is 4.27 miles north to pavement. Several interpretive signs mark the location of Lewis Mill.

Logging and Lumbering
Logging and lumbering have been economic mainstays of the Sierraville-Truckee region since the 1870s. Commercial logging began in the area after the discovery of the Comstock Lode in Nevada in 1859. When production in the mines began to fall off in 1867, the lumber business also began to suffer. However, as the Central Pacific Railroad reached Donner Summit in 1866-1867, a number of mills established operations in the Truckee Basin to supply the railroad with cordwood for fuel, lumber for construction, and ties for the roadbed. The Truckee area soon became a major lumbering center. Nearly 20 sawmills were operating in the area during the late nineteenth century, along with planning mills, box factories, sash and door factories, a furniture factory, and shingle mills. To the north at Loyalton, the first sawmill was constructed in 1868. It was the size of a small schoolhouse.

The Lewis Mill
In 1886, Lewis brothers Dick, Horace, Hiram, and W. Spurgen, along with partners W. O. and F. F. Peck, built a sawmill on Smithneck Creek about nine miles south of Loyalton. In the early years, they hauled their lumber by horse and wagon over the mountains to Verdi, where they had a box factory, but within a few years, they had constructed a logging railroad, the Boca & Loyalton, to connect the mill to those towns. Smithneck Road now partially follows the old railroad route. A local newspaper of the time described the mill this way:

“The mill itself had a fine yard for decking logs and for drying lumber. The circular saw and the carriage were powered by a fifty horsepower steam engine, running under 100 pounds of pressure. The mill cut 28,000 [board] feet a day and employed thirty-five men, including the lumber-pilers and woods crew” (Sierra Valley Leader, October 4, 1889). By 1904 another local newspaper would describe the operation as a “model sawmill” (Plumas Independent, January 4, 1901).

The Lewis Mill (also known as the Lewis Brothers or Lewis and Peck Mill) once covered about 91 acres here along the confluence of Smithneck and Rock Creeks. While almost nothing is left of the actual sawmill, there are still archaeological features and artifacts in the area. Laws protect these cultural remains. Watch your step and take only photographs.
Stop 7
Loyalton and Sierra Valley
Sierra County, California
4,930 Feet in Elevation,
GPS Coordinates: Latitude 39.676666 Longitude -120.2430577, UTM Zone10S 736455 mE 4395505 mN

How to get there: Loyalton is located on Highway 49 about 9 miles north of Lewis Mill and just 10 miles south of the intersection of Highway 49 and Highway 70. As you continue north along Smithneck road the Boca and Loyalton Railroad grade is visible in some places along the west (left) side of the road.

Loyalton, located on the southeast side of Sierra Valley, was originally known as Smith’s Neck, but the name was changed during the Civil War to show the residents’ loyalty to the Union. The construction of four sawmills in the late nineteenth century ensured that logging and lumbering would be major economic forces in the town, along with farming and ranching.

The completion of the Boca and Loyalton Railroad (B&LRR) in 1901 brought a building boom to the newly incorporated City of Loyalton. Within a year, seven lumber mills and box factories were operating in the city. Besides carrying timber, lumber, and ice, the railroad provided daily passenger service and mail delivery. By 1908, the B&LRR had 133 employees and operated seven steam locomotives. The railroads freight station is still standing and today serves as the City of Loyalton maintenance building (on the west side of Railroad Avenue south of Main Street).

Sierra Valley is the headwaters of the Feather River and is scattered with natural artesian springs that provide water even in the dry months of summer. During the Pleistocene (before 11,000 years ago), the basin was covered with a lake, known to modern geologists as Lake Beckwourth. The lake probably dried up at the end of the Pleistocene, leaving behind the lakebed sediments that make the valley such a rich agricultural area. In the springtime, this valley is carpeted with blue camas and other wildflowers.

“Sierra Valley is a large and level plain, about forty miles long and ten miles wide, lying nearly north and south. It is covered with nutritious grass, and abounds with springs of fresh and mineral waters; some of the latter are of high temperature and virtue. Its northern, southern, and western sides are enclosed by hills clothed with fine oak and pine timber.”

John A. Brewster, Surveyor General of California 1856
Driving Tour Compiled by:
Tammara Norton, Far Western Anthropological Research Group, Inc.

Special Thanks to:

Local Residents:
Lee Adams, William Copren, and Susan Young

Archaeologists:
Sharon A. Waechter, Far Western Anthropological Research Group, Inc.
Carrie Smith, Tahoe National Forest
Michael Baldrica, Retired, Tahoe National Forest

Historical Researchers:
Stephen Wee, Heather Norby, and Steve Melvin, JRP Historical Consulting, LLC

Museums and Historical Societies:
Truckee-Donner Historical Society, Truckee
Milton Gottardi Museum, Loyalton
Sierra County Historical Society, Sierra City
CSU Chico Digital Photo Collection, Chico
Scott Lawson, Plumas County Museum, Quincy
Nevada County Museum, Nevada City
Sheryln Hayes-Zorn , Nevada Historical Society, Reno

Newspapers:
Tahoe Daily Tribune, Sierra Booster, Mountain Messenger, and Auburn Journal

Funding Provided by:
Sierra Pacific Power Company/NV Energy, working in partnership with the Tahoe National Forest

August 2018