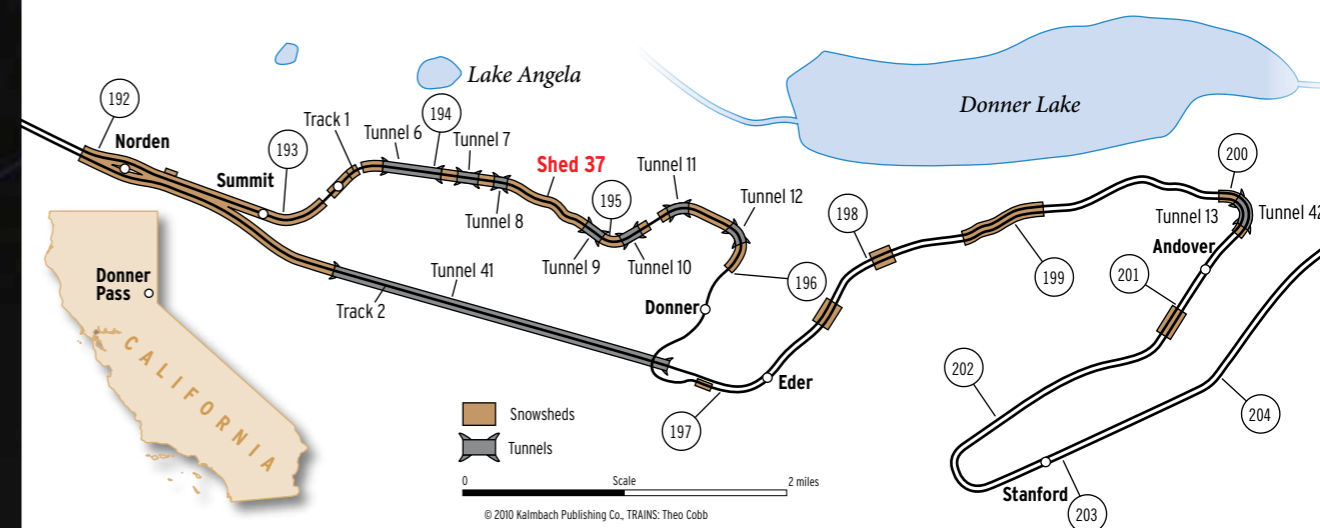


Snowsheds in the SKY

Traces of smoke linger in the air from a freight train that had rumbled through the last portion of Southern Pacific's wooden snowshed No. 37 on May 27, 1984. Shed 37 protected westbound Track 1 between tunnels 8 and 9, not far from the summit.



On location with the Southern Pacific crew that built snowshed 37 on Donner Pass

Story and photos by Shirley Burman and Richard Steinheimer

Dick Steinheimer knew an era was coming to an end in the Sierra Nevada. It was 1983, and the wooden snowsheds that had long protected Southern Pacific Railroad's mountain crossing over Donner Pass were disappearing, most of them torn down or replaced by concrete sheds. That spring I met "Stein." Knowing that I hadn't been to the railroad's summit, he was anxious to show me "the sights," especially the last of the old wooden sheds before they were gone.

After the snow thaw, we headed for "the Hill," hiking along the rails and sheds overlooking Donner Lake. I peeked under and inside the old wooden sheds, sometimes rained on

by dripping snowmelt, enveloped in smoke from locomotive exhaust, or eaten alive by mosquitoes. But mostly I stumbled along trying to keep up with Dick, the ever-consummate hiker and storyteller, as he told me about the heroic efforts of thousands of Central Pacific laborers who had built 37 miles of timber sheds and carved tunnels through solid granite 116 years before.

A year later in late June, Dick and I were coming back from Truckee and drove up old Highway 40 approaching the 7,017-foot summit, when we looked up and saw another wooden shed gone, heaps of freshly cut timbers strewn about the hillside. Entering the summit parking area, we hoped to find a railroad employee,

but no one was around. Noticing the Bridge & Building crew house trailers at the site, we decided to come back the following week. Dick had an idea for another story.

On July 5, we hiked out to the site where Shed 37 used to be, looking for a project boss. We both had letters of permission from Southern Pacific to be on the property. The Sacramento Division surveyors were at work, along with Dick Carter, Bridge & Building supervisor. I didn't hear the conversation between Stein and Carter, but after examining our letters, he gave us permission to photograph the construction site, probably thinking we'd show up a couple of times and be gone. Little did he know. We joined up with Carter's B&B crew in late July and stayed with them until the completion of a new concrete snowshed on Nov. 5, 1984. The shed protected Track 1, part of the original transcontinental rail line over Donner Summit, which Southern Pacific ceased operating in 1993. **I**



TRAINS Mouseover Gallery Run your cursor over these thumbnails to view captions and full-size photos.



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The first roof panel for concrete snowshed 37 goes on. The two laborers pictured will line up the roof slab holes with vertical threaded rods and then bolt the panel down.



Richard Steinheimer and Shirley Burman

SHIRLEY BURMAN has been photographing since the age of 12. She began her professional career in 1971, working as a news photographer, then for the federal Bureau of Reclamation. She was hired by the California State Railroad Museum in April 1978 to document the construction of the museum and restoration of its rolling stock collection, working there for six years. In 1983, she met Richard Steinheimer and found they had a common interest. They married in 1984, and worked together until Steinheimer was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2001. Her railroad photographs have appeared in numerous business publications including those for Amtrak, TTX Co., plus the *Southern Pacific Bulletin*, and *Modern Railroads*, as well as several books. Her interest in women's history led her to begin a railroad women's research project. Her articles and photos have appeared in *Railroad Heritage* magazine, *Journal of the West*, *Women's History Project*, *Vintage Rails*, and *Nevada Magazine*.

A master of both color and black-and-white photography, **RICHARD STEINHEIMER** followed a passion, spending 55 years photographing trains and the people who ran them, at all times of day and in all kinds of weather. His work in California's Silicon Valley won him awards and recognition. Starting in the mid-1940s, his favorite time to photograph was in the evening, when sea breezes moving in off the ocean cooled the night air, enabling him to make dramatic time exposures that captured the effect of billowing steam and locomotive smoke lit by flash bulbs. Later he added to his repertoire of photographic scenes, including storms with lightning, snow blizzards, sand storms, or fog. If the sun were out, you would likely find him napping. He authored several books and countless magazine articles. A retrospective of his photography, "A Passion for Trains," was published by W.W. Norton in 2004. This is his 31st TRAINS byline.