

The Holiday Herald

23 December 2025

Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountains of California, Nevada and Oregon

*In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan.
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone.*

Christina Rossetti, 1872

2023

Dogs and snowshoers

Washoe County, Nevada

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Elevation 7,800 feet / 2,400 meters

Chickadee Ridge average annual snowfall 29 ft / 8.8 m

In the bleak mid-winter ...

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Underlined words link to them.

NOTES ON PHOTOS: Pages 14 and 15.

As I write this today, on the eve of Christmas Eve, there is no snow on our mountains because two necessary atmospheric ingredients usually available by November — low temperatures and high moisture — have been in short supply.

Snow and other trappings of northern European winter have been tightly woven into the fabric of my holiday since Pope Julius I decided in the 4th Century to make Dec. 25 the celebration of Jesus' birth. There's a detailed study of *why* the church went with that date in this piece on biblicalarcheology.org. But this is a newsletter I send to folks celebrating many sacred and secular holidays packed into this time of year. And if you live north of the Equator, yours are in winter, too.

Since I began doing annual holiday newsletters in 2009, this is the fourth time I've had to dig into my photo files from previous snow trips to illustrate them because I didn't or couldn't drive up into the hills: [2011](#), [2020](#) and [2023](#). Twice the reason was lack of snow; Covid was the reason for 2020.

Yesterday, our across-the-*cul-de-sac* (bottom of the bag) neighbors from France braved deportation by visiting in broad daylight with a bag of madeleines and said they planned to drive up to Tahoe today, where a recent forecast called for up to 8 feet / 2.5 meters of snow and high winds by Christmas Day. When winter begins in the Sierra, it can be with a bang. Maybe they'll return after the spring thaw.

Our next-door neighbors — parents and their newborn plus both sets of grandparents, all from China — are also traveling, and the folks from Lebanon on the opposite corner are off to their beach place in Monterey.

Our son Gordon and Esther, his wife, just lifted off from LAX bound for Philadelphia. They will spend Christmas with her parents, Ann and Frank, and sister Edie and her husband Martin. We spent Christmas 2021 with all of them at Ann and Frank's vacation house in Massachusetts, from where I did this [holiday newsletter](#).

Emily and I will spend Christmas at home with the stockings our in-laws made for us, and which are pictured on the last page of that newsletter. The last time enough snowflakes piled up to turn the ground white at sea level in the Bay Area was February 1976, nine years before we moved here. [Video proof exists](#).

My wish for you is that you enjoy whatever holiday is yours this season as much as I enjoy creating these newsletters.

Happy Holidays!



2010

Lake Siskiyou

Mount Shasta City, California
Shasta-Trinity National Forest

Elevation 3,185 ft / 971 m

Average snowfall at lake level 7 ft / 2 m



2011

Charlotte and two sisters

Caples Lake, Alpine County, California

El Dorado National Forest

Elevation 7,802 ft / 2,378 m

Average annual snowfall 31 ft / 9.5 m

2012

Trains for Christmas

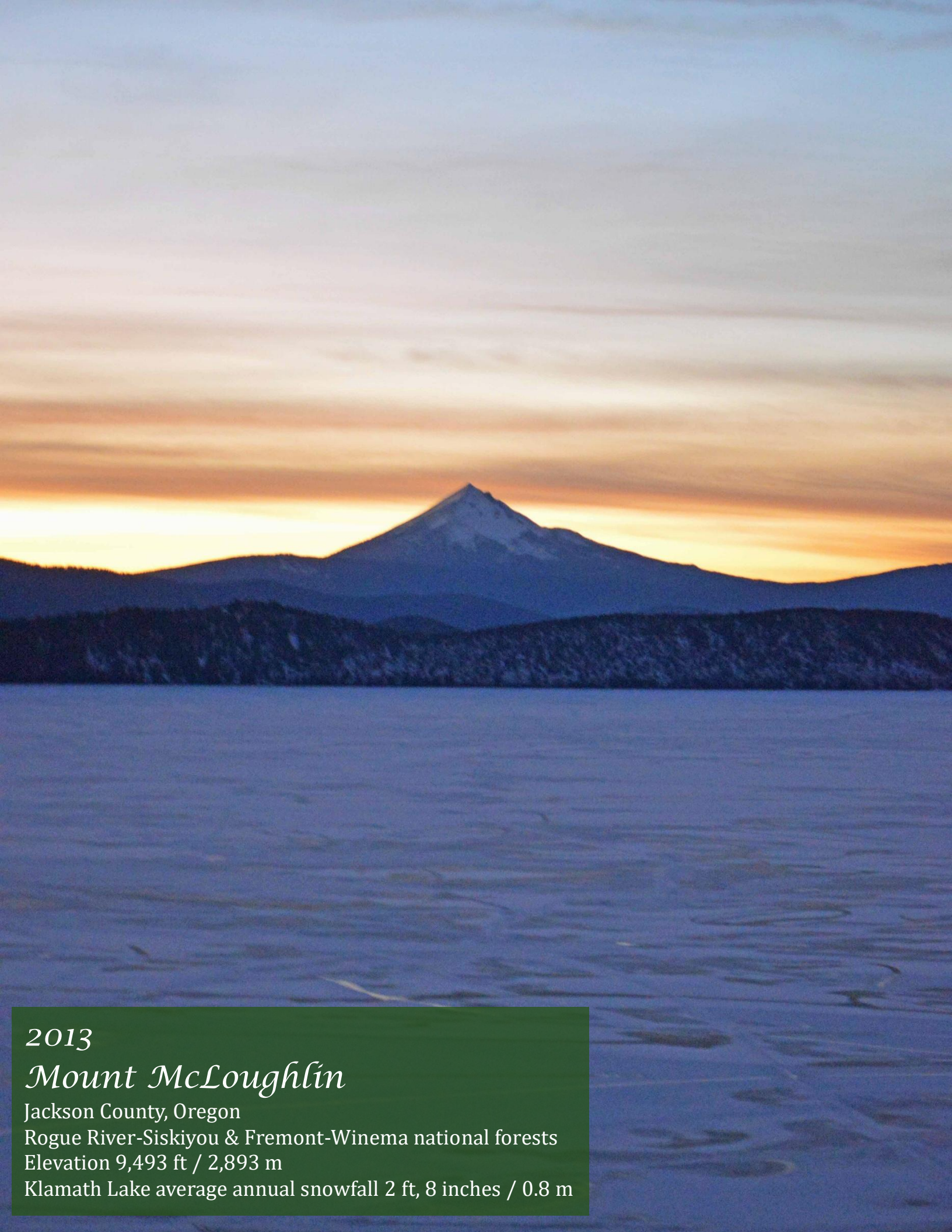
Truckee, California

Tahoe National Forest

Elevation 6,152 ft / 1,875 m

Average annual snowfall 17 ft / 5 m





2013

Mount McLoughlin

Jackson County, Oregon

Rogue River-Siskiyou & Fremont-Winema national forests

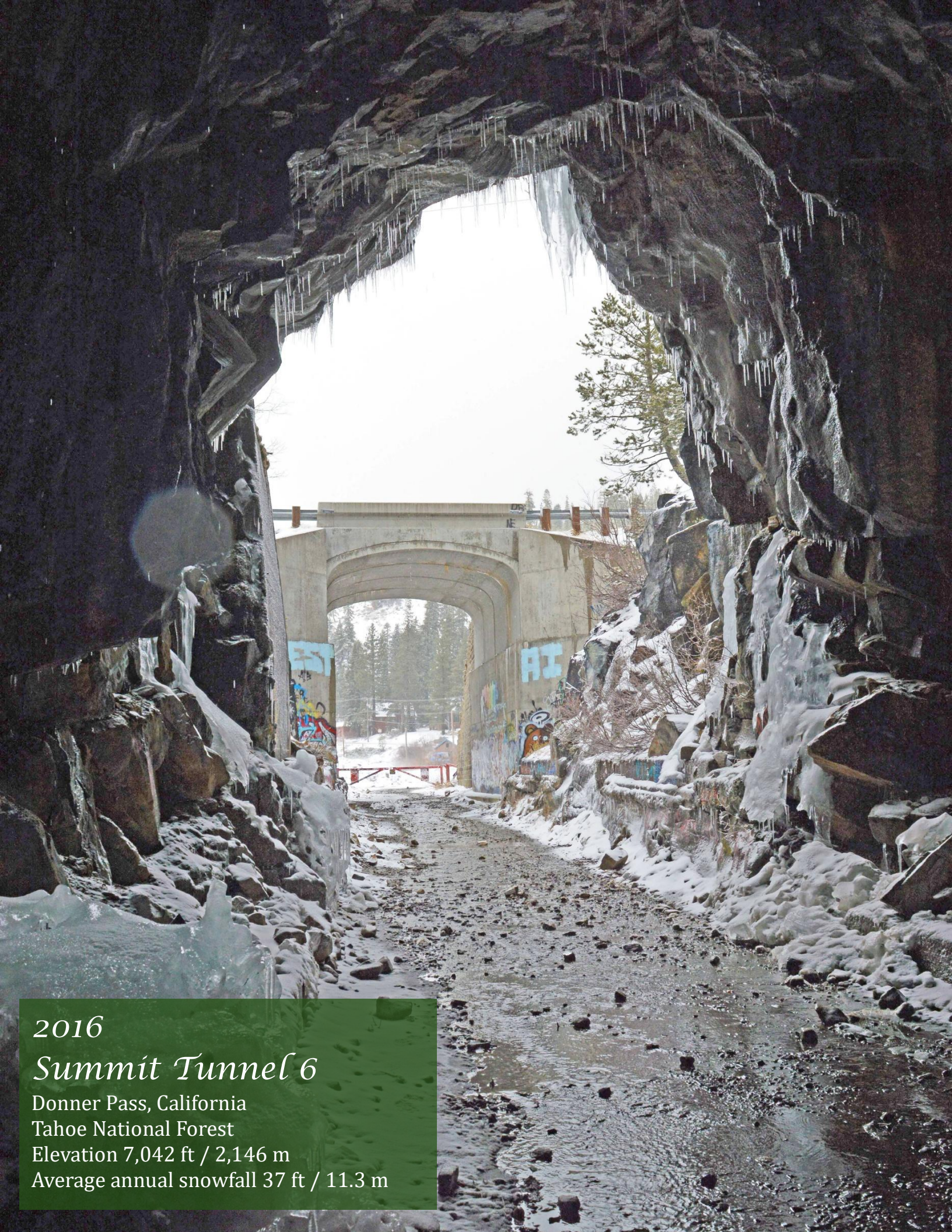
Elevation 9,493 ft / 2,893 m

Klamath Lake average annual snowfall 2 ft, 8 inches / 0.8 m



2015
Mother and child snow play

Spooner Summit, Nevada
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Elevation 7,050 ft / 2,150 m
Average annual snowfall 19 ft / 5.8 m



2016

Summit Tunnel 6

Donner Pass, California

Tahoe National Forest

Elevation 7,042 ft / 2,146 m

Average annual snowfall 37 ft / 11.3 m

2017

Atop the clouds

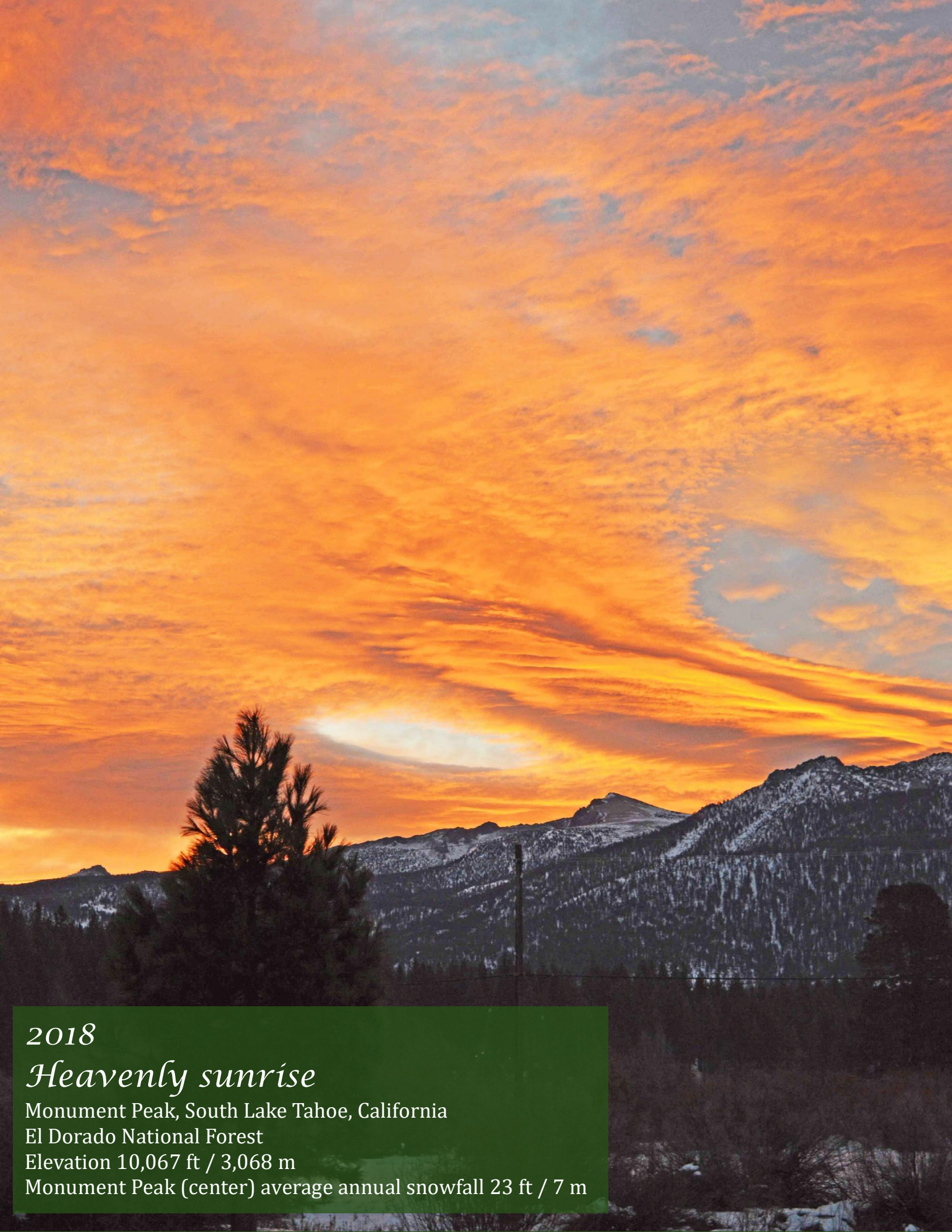
Donner Pass, California

Tahoe National Forest

Elevation ~7,000 ft / 2,134 m

Average annual snowfall 37 ft / 11.3 m





2018

Heavenly sunrise

Monument Peak, South Lake Tahoe, California

El Dorado National Forest

Elevation 10,067 ft / 3,068 m

Monument Peak (center) average annual snowfall 23 ft / 7 m



2019
Room at the inn

Soda Springs, California
Tahoe National Forest
Elevation 6,768 ft / 2,063 m
Average annual snowfall 32 ft / 9.8 m



2021

We'll find it in the spring

Weed, California

El Dorado National Forest

Elevation 3,425 ft / 1,044 m

Average annual snowfall 7 ft / 2m



2024

Manzanita Lake

Lassen Volcanic National Park, California

Elevation 5,900 ft / 1,800 m

Average annual snowfall 16 ft / 4.9 m

Notes on photos

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Click on underlined text.

2023 / DOGS AND SNOWSHOERS — Just below Nevada's 10,785-foot / 3,287-meter Mt. Rose ski area at the northeastern corner of Lake Tahoe, this meadow on Chickadee Ridge attracts hikers in summer and cross-country skiers, snowmobilers and snowshoers in winter.

2010 / LAKE SISKIYOU — This reservoir on the edge of Mount Shasta City was created in 1969 by the Box Canyon Dam across the headwaters of the Sacramento River, from which this photo was shot. To see the lake in summer from a perspective showing Mount Shasta itself, see Page 4 of my 2023 Fourth of July newsletter.

2011 / CHARLOTTE AND TWO SISTERS — Pre-Christmas snow was very light this year, as you can tell from my holiday newsletter, which had pictures of frozen lakes surrounded by brown landscape supplemented by snow pix from earlier years.

2012 / TRAINS FOR CHRISTMAS — This father and son were about to board the *California Zephyr* to return home down the hill to the Bay Area after a family snow vacation. *Zephyrs* run daily each way between Emeryville and Chicago through Salt Lake City and Denver, among other stops, and take three days and two nights to cover the full route.

2013 / MOUNT McLOUGHLIN — Because of another California low snow year, I drove to Klamath Falls and Crater Lake National Park in Oregon to find some. This picture was shot looking west across frozen Klamath Lake toward the sunset and Oregon's southernmost volcano, whose peak is what the elevation statistics refer to. It is named for John McLoughlin, a trader for Canada's Hudson's Bay Company who later was prominent in the effort to make Oregon a U.S. territory.

2015 / MOTHER AND CHILD SNOW PLAY — The Sierra Nevada ("snowy mountain range" in English) and the volcanic Cascade Range both have 14,000-ft / 4,270-m peaks, some covered with glaciers, so there's always some now snow up there, even in summer. Not so many people, though. Both California and Nevada's highway departments both maintain "snow play" areas along major mountain roads where flatland families can bring sleds or build snowmen. Some have trails for snowmobiles and cross-country skiing. This one was on Lake Tahoe's eastern shore at Spooner Summit, just north of Stateline, Nevada, on U.S. 50.

2016 / SUMMIT TUNNEL 6 — This tunnel was blasted through the crest of Donner Pass after two years' work by imported Chinese workers building the western portion of the Transcontinental Railroad from Sacramento to Promontory, Utah. It was used from 1868 to 1993 and reduced travel time from Iowa to California from months by wagon train to four days by railroad train. The *California Zephyr* and other trains used it until the railroad was re-routed through a new set of tunnels. I hiked through it for the 2016 holiday newsletter.

2017 / ATOP THE CLOUDS — A couple of hundred yards/meters from Tunnel 6 on U.S. 40, which goes over the top of the pass, is this overlook to the east over Donner Lake, which is hidden beneath the clouds. You can see the lake emerge in this [time-lapse video](#) I shot in 2022. Go to the 1:33 mark.

2018 / HEAVENLY SUNRISE — The Heavenly ski area covers the top of this ridge at South Lake Tahoe and straddles the California/Nevada border.

2019 / ROOM AT THE INN — Soda Springs is an unincorporated settlement of fewer than 100 permanent residents just east of Donner Pass and bisected by the railroad. It has a small downhill ski area that's the oldest in the state and the largest cross-country skiing resort in North America with 87 miles / 140 kilometers of trails. Soda Springs Station, this building, is now a condominium complex but the original hotel dates to 1925. The first accommodations in Soda Springs were built by [Mark Hopkins](#) and [Leland Stanford](#), money men behind the Transcontinental Railroad, who built a winter resort in the 1880s.

2021 / WE'LL FIND IT IN THE SPRING — Weed, a town of fewer than 3,000 residents at the foot of Mount Shasta, has a little agriculture but forest products and tourism are the heart of its economy. It was named for its 1901 founder, lumber mill owner Abner Weed, but these days people like the name for its cannabis connection. The town motto is "Weed like to welcome you," and visitors snap up T-shirts inscribed with "I Love Weed, California." Earlier this year, the state highway department, fed up with the expense of replacing a frequently stolen sign that pointed to COLLEGE in one direction and WEED in the other, replaced it with one pointing to the College of the Siskiyous and Central Weed / Klamath Falls.

2024 / MANZANITA LAKE — The vast majority of the half-million annual visitors to Lassen Volcanic National Park come from May to November and enter at its northwest or southwest corners, where state highway 89 crosses the park boundary on a circuitous 30-mile / 48-kilometer route that almost circumnavigates the volcano for which the park is named. Most of the highway is closed in winter, blocked by 30-40 feet / 10-13 meters of annual snowfall. Manzanita Lake is less than a mile inside the northwest corner. I did not have skis or snowshoes for the short hike along the shore where I also shot the cover photo for my [2023 Fourth of July newsletter](#), in which you can see Lassen Peak.

2022 / KIRKWOOD INN & SALOON — It's a shame, but this place recently closed permanently. It was built in 1864. I shot its interior in 2014 for the cover of that [holiday newsletter](#). The inn's story is told on the last page.



2022

Kirkwood Inn & Saloon

Kirkwood, California

El Dorado National Forest

Elevation 7,800 ft / 2,400 m

Average annual snowfall 31 ft / 9.5 m