Carson Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Co.

Directions:

The trestle tour begins at Nevada Historical Marker 219. It is located on Highway 50 next to Glenbrook Drive in Glenbrook Nevada. Meet in the parking area for the marker.

Preparation:

This is mountain country. Please dress appropriately for the season. Weather is extremely changeable. Most of the tour is by car, but there are a couple of opportunities to "chase grade". The hikes are on sandy old grade. Water and snacks would be appropriate, as there are no food places along the way.

Approx 3 hours

1. History

Captain Augustus W. Pray and associates settled in the Glenbrook area in 1860.

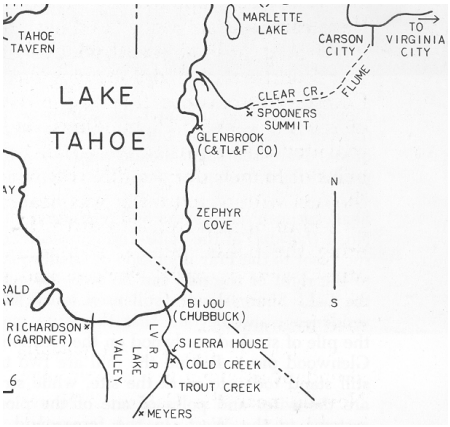
There were several ships that brought wagons traveling from Placerville across the lake to Glenbrook. Wild wheat and planted crops would provide feed for the teams traveling across Tahoe. Comstock strikes drove the need for lumber. Pray bought 700 acres.

By 1863, two hotels were built and Lake Bigler (Kings Canyon) toll road was finished over to Carson City. A steam powered sawmill was finished in late fall. This established the area as lumber provider to help meet the demand of the Comstock.

In 1872, D. L. Bliss arrived in the Tahoe area, and partnered with Henry Yerington and Darius Mills. The three incorporated the Carson Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company. Over the next couple of years, the company bought thousands of acres of land, several lumber mills, and Summit Fluming Company's V-flume.

In 1873, Bliss made an agreement with Matthew C. Gardner (Gardnerville named after him) to acquire 60 million feet of logs. Gardner built a standard gauge railroad along the west side of Lake Valley out to Lake Tahoe at what is now Camp Richardson. The logs were bundled and pulled across to Glenbrook.

By July 1875, Bliss finished the Lake Tahoe Railroad that ran 8.75 miles from Glenbrook to Spooner Summit. It had 2 switchbacks and 22 trestles. It rose 910 feet from the lake level. Each of 4 engines could pull 70 tons of cord wood or lumber up the hill to ride the flume to Carson City. This was the final link necessary to allow the area to produce lumber in the volumes needed by the Comstock.



Area covered by the Carson and Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company

With 10,000 acres of prime timber land in south Lake Tahoe, CTL&FCo. built a narrow gauge railroad up the east side of Lake Valley to an 1880 foot pier on Lake Tahoe. This allowed the logs to be towed by steamship to Glenbrook.

By the mid to late 1890's, the stands of trees were fairly well depleted. In addition, the ravenous demand of the Comstock was dwindling due to ore depletion.

In 1895, the visionary Bliss formed the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company. He spent the next couple of years building steamships, and a lodge (Tahoe Tavern) in Tahoe City. 1898 marked the final year of operation of the Lake Tahoe Railroad. It was pulled up and moved to Tahoe City to build the tourist railroad from Truckee to Tahoe City.

This marked the end of the Carson Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company operations. In all 80,000 acres of virgin timberland was cut to produce 750 million board feet of lumber, and 500 thousand cords of wood.

2. Glenbrook

From this spot, Glenbrook Bay can be seen. At the height of CTL&FCo production there were several mills in Glenbrook. CTL&FCo #1 (Rigby Mill) was built in 1873. It was north of CTL&FCo #2 (built in 1875) and south of Glenbrook Mill Company. Capacity of both CTL&FCo mills was 150,000 board feet per day. Mill #2 burned down in 1887 at which time Mill #1 worked 24 hours per day.

Steamships *Emerald* and *Truckee* towed rafts of logs from Sugar Pine Point and Lake Valley to Glenbrook Bay.

In the background, the narrow gauge Lake Tahoe Railroad left Glenbrook through Slaughterhouse Canyon before running through 2 switchbacks on its way to Spooner Summit.

3. Narrow Gauge Grade Hike

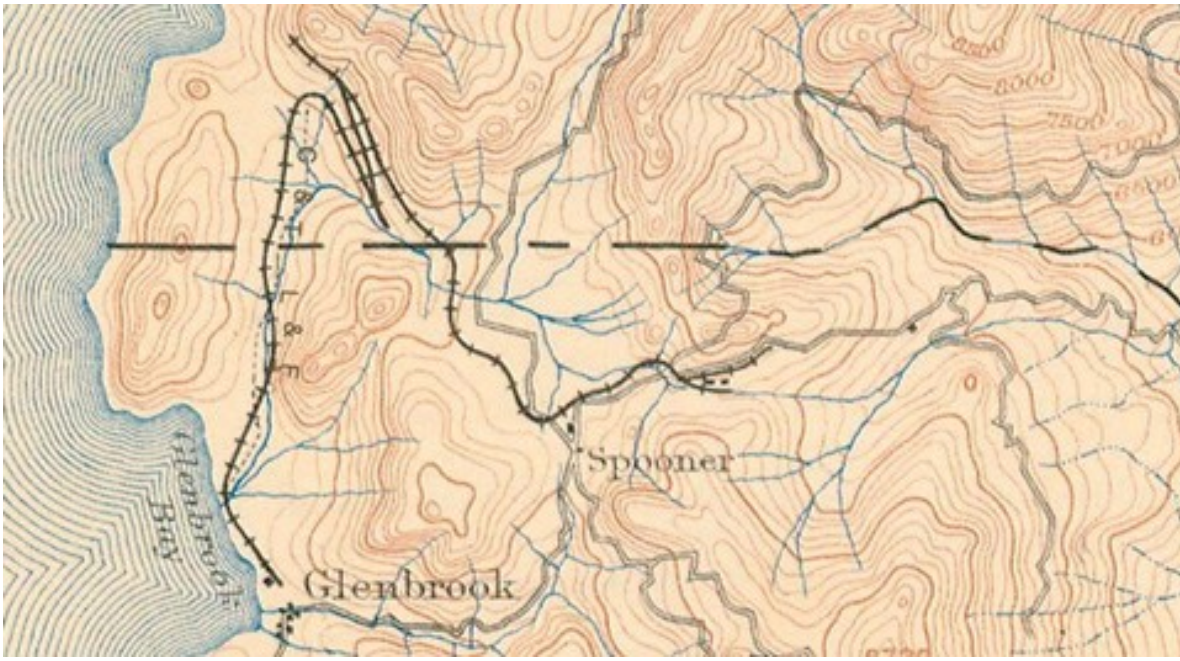
Lake Tahoe Railroad (the railroad of the CTL&FCo) was built solely to bring lumber from the mills at Glenbrook to Spooner Summit. The 8.75 mile journey up the hill proceeded at 10 miles per hour. The roster consisted of 4 locomotives and 40 something staked flat cars to carry the lumber and cordwood. The locomotives were wood fired, as there was an ample supply. Being an "island" railroad, no cabooses were required.

No passenger cars were owned by the line, but passengers would find a place on a log, or flatcar and make the ride. The company provided Sunday picnics for the people employed in the Glenbrook operation and their families.

The operation was advanced for its day, and many students, businessmen, and sightseers came to see it. The trip provided many spectacular views of Lake Tahoe, and provided all the thrills of narrow gauge mountain railroading. In 1877 one passenger fell to his death on such a ride.

The hike follows the grade from where it departs Highway 28 to the trestle switchback overlooking the lake.

"The tour covers the Carson and Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Co. line from Glenbrook to Carson City. It consisted of an 8.75 mile railroad and 12 mile V-flume."



4. Spooner Meadow

Operating a V-flume requires a lot of water power. Although more efficient than older square flumes, the lumber must constantly float down the flume. Water for the CTL&FCo flume came primarily from Marlette Lake.

Marlette Lake was formed by dams in three stages It was used to feed other lumber flumes, and provided drinking water for distant Virginia City. The first stage was done by the Summit Fluming Company in the late 1860's to create a lake of 500 to 600 acres. CTL&FCo purchased Marlette lake and the Clear Creek flume in the early 1870's. They raised the dam to a height of 24 feet to provide enough water for their expanded operations. In 1875 Virginia City and Gold Hill Water Company (VGHWC) purchased rights to water from the lake, and raised the dam to 37 feet. At that point the lake was about 2 miles long and 3/4 mile wide and held 2 billion gallons of water.

Water from Marlette Lake came down North Canyon in a square flume (water only) to 3 holding ponds created in Spooner Meadow. The holding ponds were used to regulate water to the V -flume that delivered lumber to Carson City.

5. Spooner Summit

Spooner Summit was the upper terminus of the Lake Tahoe Railroad. At 7148 feet, it is a little over 900 feet above Lake Tahoe and 2300 feet above the end of the flume in Carson City.

At the summit, the trainloads of lumber would be off-loaded to staging areas. The lumber would then be pushed into the flume for its ride down to Carson City.

There were stories of adventurous soles riding down these flumes on large timbers. In July of 1875, four men including New York correspondent H. J. Ramsdell, owner James Flood, superintendent Hereford, and a company carpenter made such a ride on the Pacific Wood Lumber and Fluming Company 15 mile flume.

"CTL&FCo had a policy of not cutting any tree smaller than 15 inches at the base. This left seed trees in the landscape that allowed the forests to re-grow more quickly."

"I tried to grab my hat and hold on as well as possible, which turned out to not be very well as my bowler went skimming off into the awful void below us. I now bunched up into a knot with my eyes closed, clenching my fists until the knuckles showed white, and my prayers came out in a rush of words. I was waiting intensely for eternity."

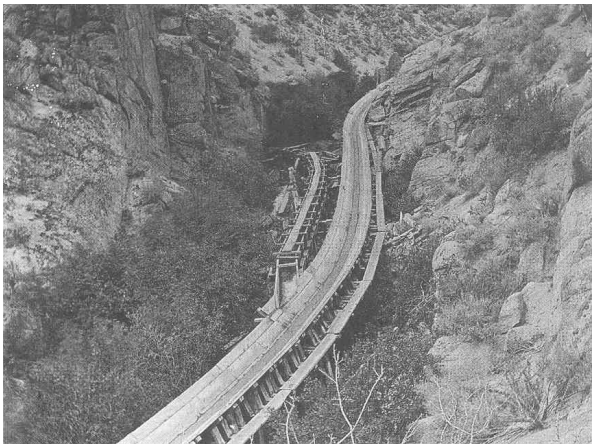
6. Clear Creek Canyon

In the 1860's the only way to get lumber from the mills in Glenbrook down to Carson City was by way of Bigler Toll Road. It was a 17 mile trip traveling from Spooner Summit down King's Canyon on the toll road. Heavy ox carts carried the lumber down while "hanging on the edge of a cliff".

In 1862, entrepreneurs, Thomas and John Elliot bought a right of way for a flume from Spooner Summit down Clear Creek Canyon into Carson City.

The Elliots formed the Summit Fluming Company in 1868 and completed the flume down Clear Creek Canyon in 1869 . Using the latest technology, the V-flume, the fluming company was carrying lumber for many companies in the area. At this point ox teams carried lumber up to Spooner Summit.

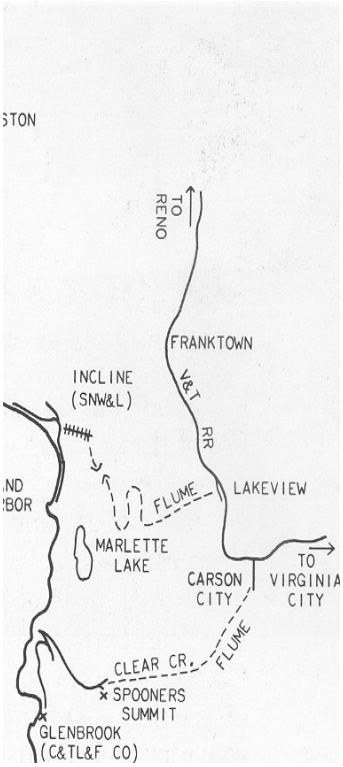
In 1872 CTL&FCo purchased the flume.



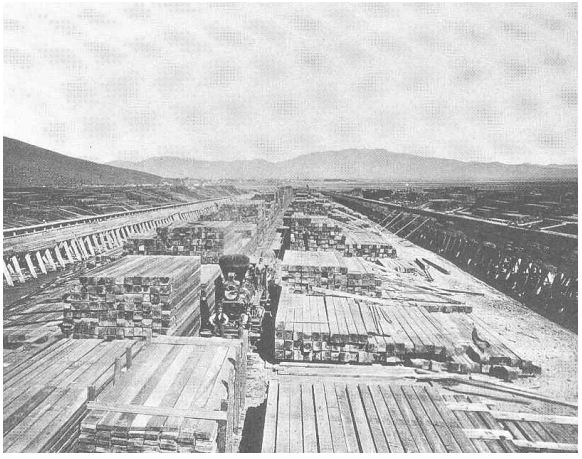
The flume's primary source of water was the holding ponds in Spooner Meadows. As can be seen in this inset picture, water was picked up from Clear Creek, and fed into the flume to replenish the water level.

The flume technology proved very reliable and efficient, and lasted until the end of operations for the CTL&FCo in 1898.

7. Carson City Terminus



The flume terminated in a large lumber yard at the south end of Carson City. The yard was located a half mile south of today's junction of Highways 50 and 395. Extending for nearly a mile in length and a half mile in width, the yard provided vast amounts of lumber storage. A spur from the Virginia & Truckee Railroad serviced the large lumber yard. The V&T ran to Reno to interchange with the Central Pacific, and also to Virginia City to supply the Comstock. Cord wood went out to heat homes, and a lot of the lumber went to feed the hungry mines with support material. In the early days, the mines had serious problems with soft, shifting earth causing cave-ins. German engineer Phillip Deidesheimer was brought in to help solve the problem. He devised a square set post arrangement that formed a honeycomb of protection around the miners. The system was adopted throughout the Comstock.



This honeycomb of supports created a huge demand for lumber from the CTL&FCo and others. In addition to supplying the mines, there were many buildings required to house and feed all the miners.