



# News Release

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## Work Begins for New High Sierra Crossing Museum

### Museum to be Expanded to Tell the Greater Sierra Story, Draw More Visitors for Historic Tourism

The preliminary work for the construction of a new High Sierra Crossing Museum at Donner Memorial State Park will be getting underway this week.

“This new Visitor Center has been in the works for many years now,” said Scott Elliott, Acting Superintendent for the sector of State Parks that includes Donner Memorial. “After all the planning meetings with community members, it is exciting to see that this is now going to get underway. This represents a great opportunity for the park and the community to better exhibit the amazing history of Donner Pass and the whole region.”

This preliminary work will include the removal of about 100 trees in the area of the parking lot. This work will be a noticeable, albeit temporary, change to the character of the area, however, it is necessary in order to expand the existing parking lot to accommodate increased visitor demand as well as provide for appropriate bus and RV parking. When completed the site design calls for forest trees to be planted to surround the monument and screen out views of passing cars and neighboring commercial development.

The new museum that will begin construction later this year has been carefully planned and sited to respect the Donner Memorial. The larger museum planned will greatly expand what there is not room for in the old museum, providing added information on the Donner Party, but also including new information covering the historic experiences of other people and events, including:

- Native American History of the region
- Natural resource history through time
- History of the railroad development through the Donner Pass
- The construction of Interstate 80 and how transportation played a role in the development of California

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One of the major benefits possible with the expanded museum is that it will become more attractive to meet the growing demand for historic tourism. Many tour companies are now marketing such tours and a first-class museum that tells the greater story of life and events in the Sierra would be more attractive for visitors.

Funding for the project is separate from the current State budget crisis in California and cannot be used for things other than the kind of project proposed for the new museum. Funding is provided by the federal Highway Administration under the Inter-Model Surfaces Transportation Enhancement Act (ISTEA) grant administered by CALTRANS. Funds will also be provided by the 2002 State Park Bond.

The existing Emigrant Trail Museum is small, structurally deficient, not fully accessible under the Americans With Disabilities Act, and hard to maintain with high energy costs. Because of these deficiencies and because it is not large enough to tell the greater Sierra story, it is more cost effective to build a new museum, rather than remodel the old structure. However, the old structure will be used for offices and storage space and eventually removed as it ends its life span.

The construction plan calls for the existing museum to remain open through the construction process.

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