

Then and now: The winter that would never end

By Jan. 1, 1952, more than 20 feet of snow had fallen on the Sierra Nevada since October. Starting on Jan. 10, another 12-plus feet fell within a week.



Mt. Rose Highway in July 1952. Photo/North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Total snow depth that winter topped 50 feet at Donner Summit, and about 20 feet at South Shore. Interstate 80 did not exist yet. Road travel to Truckee and North Shore was via old two-lane Highway 40 which remained closed for a month. Access to South Shore was possible sometimes via Highway 50, but cause for wintertime travel to Tahoe was minimal in 1952.

The Southern Pacific Railroad streamliner City of San Francisco, which was headed west with 222 passengers, was stalled at Donner Pass snow for three days. [Click here for a classic newsreel account.](#)

Meanwhile, on the Nevada side of the Sierra, the Mt. Rose Highway in July 1952 had snow towering above vehicles six months after the big storms.



This is what Mt. Rose Highway looked like in July 2014. Photo/Bill Kingman

In the photo above it is possible to see the broadcast tower on Slide Mountain on the south side of the highway.

– *Bill Kingman*