

# Then and now: Whittell and the Thunderbird

Multimillionaire George C. Whittell Jr. built the Thunderbird Lodge in the 1930s. It stands 1.5 miles down the Nevada shoreline south of Sand Harbor State Park.



More beach area is visible because of the drought. Photo/Bill Kingman

Lake Tahoe water level is 3 feet below its natural rim of 6,223 feet, or about 6 feet below typical average. The water normally would be lapping at the deck chairs on that sandy alcove.



The original 1950 scale model of the boat. Photo/Bill Kingman

In 1940, Whittell took delivery of a 55-foot mahogany speedboat which he had commissioned. The Thunderbird had twin

550-hp Kermath engines and was designed by John L. Hacker. There are tow models on display at the Thunderbird Lodge.



The 1960s scale model of Harrah's remodeled Thunderbird. Photo/Bill Kingman

After purchasing the Thunderbird from Whittell in 1962, Nevada gambler Bill Harrah had the open rear deck enlarged, added a flying bridge, and replaced the engines with bigger twin Allison aircraft engines.

Upon its 75th anniversary, plus one month since its original delivery to Whittell, the Thunderbird was taken out of the water in August 2015 for its engines to be replaced and the bottom refinished. To do this, the yacht was taken southward by water to the Tahoe Keys Marina which has a hoist large enough to lift it. It then was trucked back to Incline Village for the refurbishing work.



A Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society postcard. Photo/Eric Jarvis

The Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society now owns the lodge and the yacht. History, information and many photos are on the **website**.

– *Bill Kingman*