Why the Squaw Valley Palisades are flat

A tunnel to the right is about 8-feet high and one-quarter mile long. Photo/Squaw Valley

By Abby Stevens, Moonshine Ink

Once you get to the top of the Palisades at Squaw Valley, you might wonder why the terrain becomes a perfectly flat area, about the size of a football field – but then again, maybe you are just thinking about which epic line to take.

The top of the Palisades, or geographically Squaw Peak, is accessible after a short hike from the Siberia chair lift and widely known for access to a set of six chutes. There are a surprisingly few records on how the set of cliffs was flattened.

In 1936, the Federal Aviation Administration designed a short-range navigation system called Omni Directional Radio Range (VOR) in which radio signals from a network of fixed ground radio beacons are transmitted to aircrafts and allow pilots to determine their location in the skies. By 1946 the system was deployed and VOR became the standard air navigational system

in the world used by both commercial and general aviation, according to Hardy Bullock, director of Aviation & Community Services at the Truckee Tahoe Airport. At 9,000 feet, Squaw Peak was the perfect place to put towers to direct airplanes to Truckee, the Bay Area, down toward Southern California, or up toward the Pacific Northwest – the only issue was the peak wasn’t flat enough for the infrastructure.

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