

**The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler**

Keith A. Trexler  
none

# Table of Contents

<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>1</b>
<u>About the Author.....</u>	2
<u>Tioga Lake Dynamiting Controversy.....</u>	3
<u>Bibliographical Information.....</u>	4
<b><u>r Ther r Tiogar r Roadr.....</u></b>	<b>6</b>
<b><u>r A Historyr r 1883-1961r.....</u></b>	<b>7</b>
<u>r Ther r Tiogar r Roadr.....</u>	7
<u>r A Historyr r 1883-1961r.....</u>	8
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>9</b>
<u>Map of the Tioga Road.....</u>	9
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>12</b>
<u>Before the Road.....</u>	12
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>15</b>
<u>The Mines.....</u>	15
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>19</b>
<u>The Great Sierra Wagon Road.....</u>	19
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>24</b>
<u>Travel Prior to 1915.....</u>	24
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>29</b>
<u>Business Ventures.....</u>	29
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>34</b>
<u>The East Side.....</u>	34
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>37</b>
<u>Automobiles Arrive.....</u>	37
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>45</b>
<u>Reconstruction.....</u>	45
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>48</b>
<u>Post War Developments.....</u>	48
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>52</b>
<u>The Tioga Road Today.....</u>	52
<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler.....</u></b>	<b>54</b>
<u>SOURCES OF INFORMATION.....</u>	54

## Table of Contents

<b><u>The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler</u></b> .....	<b>59</b>
<u>About the Author</u> .....	60
<u>Tioga Lake Dynamiting Controversy</u> .....	61
<u>Bibliographical Information</u> .....	62

# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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*r Along the Tioga Road, Yosemite Creek, circa 1925 after a storm*

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r

- [Title page](#)

r

- [Map](#)

r

- [Before the Road](#)

r

- [The Mines](#)

r

- [The Great Sierra Wagon Road](#)

r

- [Travel Prior to 1915](#)

r

- [Business Ventures](#)

r

- [The East Side](#)

r

- Automobiles Arrive

r

- Reconstruction

r

- Post War Developments

r

- The Tioga Road Today

r

- Sources of Information

r r

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## About the Author

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r r Keith A. Trexler in Lehman  
r Cave, r c. 1960s (GBNP, NPS) r r

r r Keith A. Trexler was born September 17, 1931. r He was interested in ornithology and photography and joined the National Park Service. r Initially Trexler was a park interpreter in Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks. r He was Chief Naturalist at Lehman Caves National Monument in 1964 r (now part of Great Basin National Park, Nevada). r That year he witnessed and photographed the infamous cutting down of “Prometheus,” the then oldest living Bristlecone pine, in nearby White Mountains that year. He considered the event unnecessary, even though it was for glacier research, and later wrote about its destruction. r Trexler, as Chief Naturalist, wrote a booklet in 1966, r *Lehman Caves: Its Human Story From the Beginning Through 1965*. r Trexler served in the Yosemite Museum development program “with enthusiasm” during 1967 to 1970. r In 1974 he was on the Park Service’s Alaska Task Force evaluating lands to divvy up between the Park Service, oil company right-of-ways, r and Alaska Native corporations. r Specifically, he was part of a team that conducted field research of proposed areas and eventually proposed Aniakchak, Katmai, and Lake Clark national parks or preserves. r Trexler’s role included rewriting master plans for the proposed parks. r Trexler and others were killed in a plane crash in Alaska September 1975 r during an inspection tour of

proposed Lake Clark National Park.

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## Tioga Lake Dynamiting Controversy

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*r Dynamited stretch of glacier-polished granite on Tioga Road near Olmsted Point*

r Not mentioned in this Park Service-written history is the 1958 controversy over dynamiting a three-mile stretch of beautiful glacier-polished granite next to the Tenaya Lake shoreline and Olmsted Point. Photographer Ansel Adams and conservationist David Brower were particularly outspoken regarding the routing of this stretch of the road. The Sierra Club opposed the alignment, but not strong enough in Adams' and Brower's eyes.

r Ansel Adams telegraphed the following in 1958 to the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce and the National Park Service director:

r . . . I wish to lodge a most sincere and severe protest against the desecration of Tenaya Lake—which is being perpetrated by the ruthless construction of the new Tioga Road for the National Park Service by the Bureau of Public Roads. The catastrophic damage is entirely unnecessary and violates the principles expressed in the National Part Organic Act of 1916 . . . I consider this desecration as an act of disregard of these basic conservation principles which approaches criminal negligence on the part of the bureaus concerned. I urgently request you order an immediate cessation of work on the Tioga Road in the Tenaya Lake area until a truly competent group can study the problems and suggest ways and means of accomplishing completion of this project with minimum damage. I have never opposed appropriate improvement of the Tioga Road but in 40 years' experience in national park and wilderness areas I have never witnessed such an insensitive disregard of prime national park values. (Robert Turnage, "Ansel Adams: The Role of the Artist in the Environmental Movement," *The Living Wilderness* (The Wilderness Society, March 1980. See also Ansel Adams, "Tenaya Tragedy," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 43(9):1-5 (November 1958))

r

r r

r David R. Brower wrote shortly before his death in November 2000:r

r . . . I saw the trouble begin with an earlier development policy, Mission 66, when then-National Park Service Director Connie Wirth went to the American Automobile Association, not to conservationists, for advice.r What he let happen to Yosemite in the controversy over rerouting the Tioga Road was a disaster, which the Sierra Club let happen by not opposing it strongly enough.r Park service people should have been jailed for what they destroyed at Tenaya Lake . . . .r [I was not] successful in stopping the National Park Service from demolishing Tenaya's granite domes.r I have had more than one park ranger lament how right we were to have opposed that project and how our alternative would have been better. . . .r (David R. Brower, "Brower on the Yosemite Valley Plan," *S. F. Chronicle*, 11/20/2000)r

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## Bibliographical Information

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r Keith A. Trexler (1931-1975),r *The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961*r (Yosemite Natural History Association 1961, 1980).r 28 pages. Illustrated. 23 cm. Saddle stitched in paper wrappers.r Bibliography.r No copyright.r Originally published asr "The Tioga Road," *Yosemite* 40(3) (1961).r

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r r **Next: Title page** r

r r r r r

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r r

r

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

r r

r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/r](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/r)

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r r

r [Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > [Tioga Road](#) > r Title page > r

r r

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r r r

r r [Next: Map](#) • [Contents](#) r

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# r Ther r Tiogar r Roadr

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# r A Historyr r 1883-1961r

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r Published by Yosemite Natural History Associationr  
r in cooperation with the National Park Service.r

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r First published in June, 1961; revised 1975; 1980r

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## r Ther r Tiogar r Roadr

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# A History 1883-1961

by Keith A. Trexler, Park Naturalist

It has been called the “road to broken dreams.” Perhaps, through, its many miles of unexcelled scenic grandeur have fulfilled the desires, the deep-felt longing for contact with nature’s wilderness, even the dreams of many thousands who have passed over its often twisting, ever-changing course.

**Next: Map • Contents**

[http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/title.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/title.html)

[Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > [Tioga Road](#) > [Map](#) >

**Next: Before the Road • Contents • Previous: Title page**

***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)***  
**by Keith A. Trexler**

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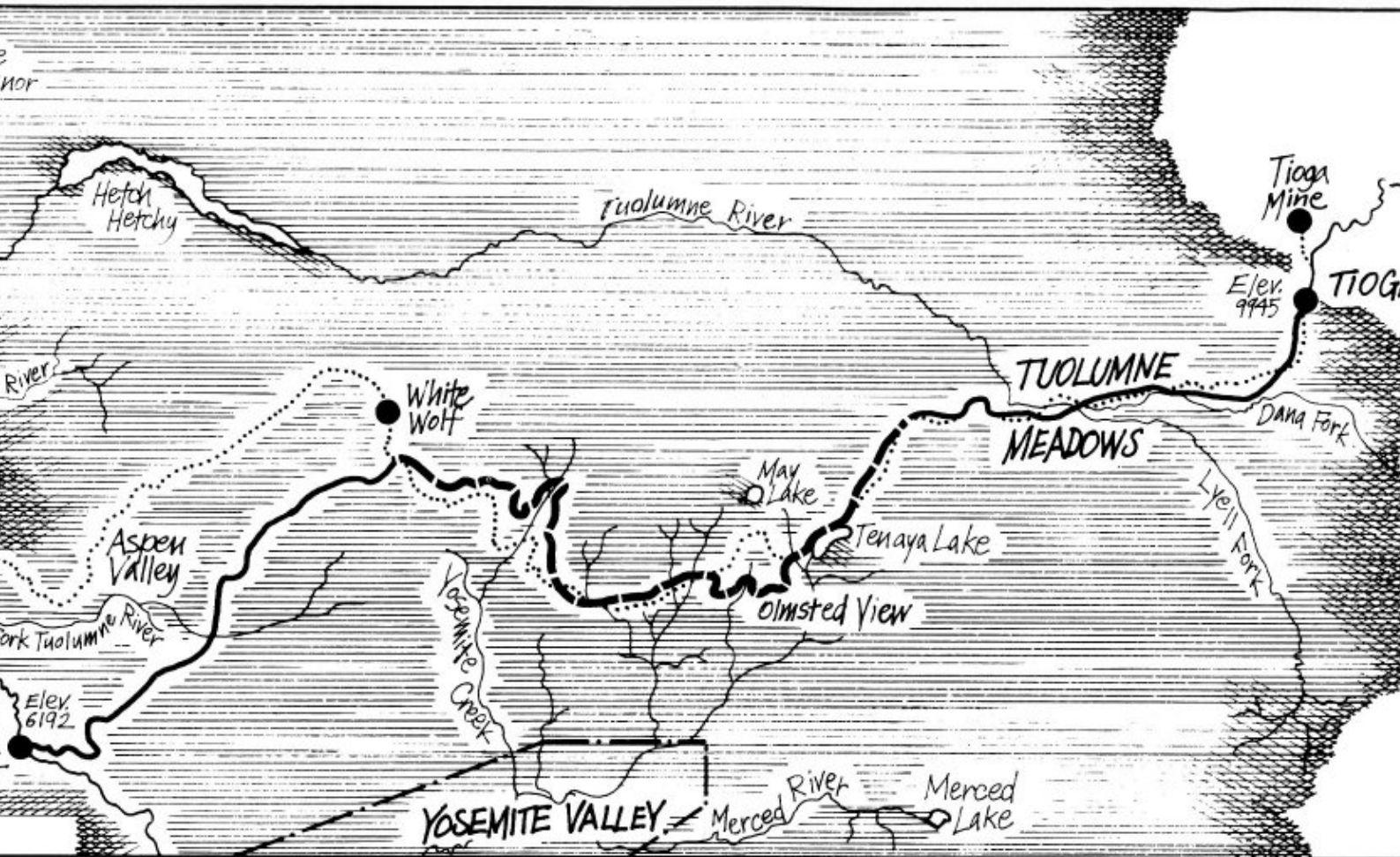
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**Map of the Tioga Road**

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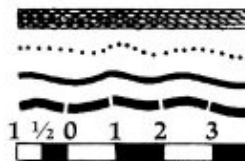
# The Tioga Road

Yosemite National Park, California

### LEGEND

- Park Boundary
- Great Sierra Wagon Road
- Sections Rebuilt 1936-1939
- Section Rebuilt 1958-1961

Map Scale in Miles



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r r [Next: Before the Road](#) • r [Contents](#) • r [Previous: Title page](#) r

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/map.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/map.html)r

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r Yosemite > Library > Tioga Road > r Before the Road > r

r r

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r r r

r r **Next: Mines** • **Contents** • **Previous: Map** r

r r r

# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)***

## **by Keith A. Trexler**

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### **Before the Road**

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r Trails have existed across the Sierrar since the first large mammals came hundredsr of thousands of years ago. Grazing animals — sheep, deer and even bear —r move up the Sierran slopes to find tenderr young shoots as snowlines recede. Othersr travel over the passes seeking salt. Johnr Muir noted that especially in rugged andr inaccessible terrain the trails of “whiter men, Indians, bear, wild sheep, etc., ber found converging in the best places.” (1)r

r r

r Next to appear were the pedestrian Indians,r whose midden piles near El Portalr show evidences of transsierran trade fromr at least as early as 2,000 BC (2). Indiansr did not travel for pleasure; their purposer was trade. Acorns, berries, beads, paintr ingredients, arrows and baskets werer traded by the west slope Miwoksr for ther Eastern Mono’s pine nuts, pandora mothr larvae, fly pupae, baskets, rabbit and buffalor robes, salt and obsidian. Findsr of these materials, not native west of ther Sierra, help us trace the early Indianr paths. Numerous highways of today, andr the Tioga Road, follow these aboriginalr trade routes. (3)r

r r

r The Mono Trail, an Indian footpathr from Crane Flat, through Tamarack Flatr via Tenaya Lake to Tuolumne Meadows,r was used by the first party of non-Indiansr to pass through what is now Yosemite National Park. Joseph Reddeford Walkerr and his party trekking over the Sierra,r probably used the Indian pathway, evidentr even though many parts were coveredr with snow. The group endured greatr hardships and took over a month to maker the crossing from Bridgeport Valley to ther San Joaquin. They were undoubtedly ther first white men to see the Giantr r Sequoias. (4, 5)r No records of man’s use of the trailsr exist for the next 19 years. In 1852 1st Lt.r Tredwell Moore and his troopers of ther 2nd Infantry, pursued a group of Indiansr wanted for the death of two prospectorsr in Yosemite Valley, to Tenaya Lake andr from there over the Mono Trail to Bloodyr Canyon. During the trip Moore noticedr r r rich-looking outcrops and brought backr some samples of gold to Mariposa. Amongr those who saw Moore’s samplesr was Leroy Vining, of whom we shall hearr more later. (5)r

r r

r Moore’s expedition reports interestedr James M. Hutchings in bringing the firstr tourists into the Yosemite Valley, and, accordindr to Brockman, “public interest inr mining opportunities east of the Sierrar was kindled, resulting in the developmentr and use of a trail in 1857, from Big Oakr Flat through the Tenaya Lake-Tuolumner Meadows region. This route approximatedr the old Mono Trail and was forunnerr of the present Tioga Road.” (6)r

r r

r In 1852 Leroy (or Lee) Vining led a group of prospectors over the Sierra via Bloody Canyon and generally explored the region. Although Vining settled in what is now Lee Vining Canyon he apparently did no mining. Instead he homesteaded about two miles up-canyon from the present power plant and built a sawmill, thus being the first to settle in the Mono area. For a time he supplied lumber to the eastside mining camps, but his career ended in an Aurora saloon where he accidentally shot and killed himself. (8)r

r r

r Although no rush followed Lt. Moore's discoveries, there was in 1857 an exodus from the Tuolumne mines to the Dogtown and Mono settlements near Mono Lake. (5) Much of the old Mono Trail was used by the gold-seekers and the route was well blazed and cleared by Tom McGee "following very closely on the old foot trail". Bunnell makes the point that Indian trails were unfit for pack animals. He felt they "had been purposely run over ground impassible to horses, . . ." (9)r

r r

r The early 1860's saw the coming of Josiah D. Whitney of the California Geological Survey. His description of the headwaters of the Tuolumne was published in 1865, with Tioga Pass (which he called MacLane's) being noted as 600 feet lower than the present route (Mono Pass) and perhaps a better transcontinental route. (10)r

r r

r In the summer of 1858 a party from Mono Lake, including a woman and a baby, visited Yosemite Valley. This group, perhaps the first to use the Tioga route purely for pleasure, journeyed over the Sierra via Tuolumne Meadows and Tenaya Lake, taking the Coulterville Trail to Yosemite Valley. (11) Other evidence indicates that the Mono Trail was being used for tourist travel, especially by hikers from Yosemite Valley heading for Tuolumne Meadows. (12)r

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r John Muir's first visit to this spectacular country was in 1869 with a band of sheep. In traveling to the meadows, John and his charges followed the general course of the present Tioga Road. (13) In the same year J. H. Soper and E. G. Field with only blankets and a "supply of crackers and sardines" hiked over Mono Pass, met a shepherd (Muir?) in the Meadows, and followed the trail out to Coulterville. (14)r

r r

r By 1870 railroads had come to within a few miles of the west end of the Mono Trail. In 1871 Copperopolis was a terminus of the lines from San Francisco. Travel to Yosemite Valley was increasing. More than likely, visitors took side trips over the trail to Tuolumne but no records exist of their trials and tribulations. The Big Oak Flat Road reached Crocker's in 1871 and Yosemite Valley in 1874, but still there was no road to Yosemite's high country. (7) An economic boost was needed.r

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

**r r Next: Mines • r Contents • r Previous: Map r**

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/before\\_road.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/before_road.html)r

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r r

r [Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > r [Tioga Road](#) > r The Mines > r

r r

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r r r

**r r Next: Great Sierra Wagon Road • r Contents • r Previous: Before the Road r**

r r r

# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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## **The Mines**

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r Although Lt. Moore's discoveries excited the Mariposa miners, nothing in their way of true mines seemed to come from the reports. Early in 1860 a prospecting party consisting of a justice of the peace, an ex-sea captain, a surveyor, a dentist and a professor was prospecting in their Bloody Canyon area. The dentist, Georger W. "Doc" Chase, remarked, while camped near Tioga Pass, that if they could but spend one more day in the area he could locate and claim "the biggest silver ledge ever discovered." The next day he placed a flattened tin can, on which he scratched the location notice with his knife, on Tioga Hill. The ore he carried out was never assayed as he and his partners arrived at Monoville just when the Auror



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**Great Sierra Mine Cabin, Tioga Hill**

r strike was made. Each made money but none ever returned to the "thundering big silver ledge" on Tioga Hill. (15)

r Some 15 years later, William Brusky, Jr., while herding his father's sheep, found a rusty pick and shovel and a flattened tin can, on which he could make out, "Notice, we the undersigned" and the date 1860. Having heard of the lost mine, Brusky took ore samples to his father, who tested them and pronounced them worthless. Young Brusky did not discourage easily. The next summer he "sank a small hole in the ledge and procured some better looking ore." It was not until 1877 that an assay found the ore to be rich in

silver.r

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r Claims were not actually made until 1878 when nine were established and the Tioga Mining District organized. (15) The "city" of Dana, site of the Great Sierra Mine, was given a post office in 1880. (16)r In 1881 the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company, financed with eastern capital, bought up all claims on Tioga Hill and started drilling a tunnel destined to go 1784 feet into the mountain, but never to produce pay dirt. (15)r

r r

r On February 25, 1882 the Great Sierra Tunnel was begun by twelve miners working three 8-hour shifts. Soon it was evident that drilling machinery would be needed. (17) This was purchased and shipped to Lundy, on the east side of the Sierra. The *Homer Mining Index* reported: "The transportation of 16,000 lbs. of machinery across one of the highest and most rugged branches of the Sierra Nevada mountains in mid-winter where no roads exist, over vast fields and huge embankments of yielding snow and in the face of furious windstorms laden with drifting snow, and the mercury dancing attendance on zero, is a task calculated to appall the sturdiest mountaineer; yet J. C. Kemp, manager of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Co. is now engaged in such an undertaking, and with every prospect of success at an early day—so complete has been the arrangement of details and so intelligently directed is every movement. The first ascent, from Miller Creek to the mouth of Lake Canyon, is 990 feet, almost perpendicular. From that r r r r



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**Machinery hauled over the snow in 1882; r  
r Great Sierra Tunnel at right.r**

r r point to the south end of Lake Oneida, a distance of about two miles, is a rise of 845 feet, most of it in two hills aggregating half a mile in distance. The machinery will probably be hoisted straight up to the summit of Mount Warren ridge from the southwest shore of Lake Oneida, an almost-vertical rise of 2,160 feet. From the summit the descent will be made to Saddlebags Lake, thence down to and along Lee Vining Creek to the gap or pass in the dividing point to tunnel, a distance of about one mile, is a rise of 800 feet, most of it in the first quarter of a mile.r r

r "The machinery consists of an engine, boiler, air compressor, Ingersoll drills, iron pipe, etc. for use in driving the Great Sierra tunnel. It is being transported on six heavy sleds admirably constructed of hardwood. Another, or rather a pair of bobsleds accompanies the expedition, the latter being laden with bedding, provisions, cooking utensils, etc. The heaviest load is 4,200 lbs. Ten or 12 men, two mules, 4500

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

feet of one-inch manila rope, heavy double block and tackle and all the available trees along the route are employed in snaking the machinery up the mountain. The whole being under the immediate supervision of Mr. Kemp, who remains at the front and personally directs every movement. It is expected that all sleds will be got up into Lake Canyon today, and then the work will be pushed day and night, with two shifts of men.”

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It took Kemp and his men more than two months, from March 4 until May 6, to move the eight tons a distance of about nine miles. It is said that Kemp’s remark at the end of the back-breaking task was, “It’s no wonder that men grow old!” (15)

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The machinery was installed and put to work immediately upon its arrival at the mine. Meanwhile, on March 13, 1882, a post office had been established at Bennettville, the company headquarters. (16) Miners swarmed to the area. More than 350 claims were located in the Tioga District alone. Bennettville was touted as an excellent location with ample room for 50,000 inhabitants, an abundant water supply and invigorating climate. (17)

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Other claims were found. The May Lundy about 10 miles north of Tioga produced \$3 million, though the Golden Crown, Mt. Hoffman and Mt. Gibbs groups followed the Great Sierra example. (15a) In 1881 the Sierra Telegraph Co. built a line from Lundy to Yosemite Valley via Bennettville. (15)

r r

On July 3, 1884 the boom was over. A financial “crisis” occasioned the Great Sierra’s Executive Committee to suspend all operations and soon Dana City and Bennettville joined the silent ranks of fabled western ghost towns. Although more than \$300,000 had been spent, as best we know no ore ever left the Shepherd mine for milling. (15)\* But a road had been built.

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(\*For the complete story of the mines see Douglass H. Hubbard’s *Ghost Mines of Yosemite*.)

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r r **[Next: Great Sierra Wagon Road](#)** • **[Contents](#)** • **[Previous: Before the Road](#)** r

r r r

r

r r

r

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

r r

r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/mines.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/mines.html)r

r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r

r

r r

r [Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > [Tioga Road](#) > r The Great Sierra Wagon Road > r

r r

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r r r

r r **[Next: Before 1915](#)** • **[Contents](#)** • **[Previous: Mines](#)** r

r r r

# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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## **The Great Sierra Wagon Road**

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r Expectations of success and needs for large quantities of supplies coupled with the near disaster of hauling mining machinery over the snow led the Great Sierran Board of Directors to consider the building of a wagon road to the mines. Although trail routes had been established to the eastern railroads via Lundy and Bloody Canyon, the new road was to cross the Sierra from the west with goods to be hauled from the railhead at r r r r r



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**At the end of the Great Sierra Wagon Road, Bennettville, 1898**

r r r Copperopolis via the Big Oak Flat Road. Civil Engineer R. F. Lord in 1881 estimated the total cost to build a road from near Crane Flat to the mines at \$17,000. (27) r r

r In the fall of 1882 the company gave the go-ahead and Charles N. Barney was assigned as engineer with William C. Priest as his assistant. Both the survey and construction began at once. H. B. Carpenter and H. P. Medicott conducted the road (and railroad) survey with a Mr. Hall and John V. Ferretti as chainmen. In addition to making the road survey the group was picking a line for a railroad “to make the shortest and most direct route from the east to San Francisco.” Years later the pass was considered for part of the Union Pacific route. (23) r

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

In July of 1882 the California and Yosemite Short Line Railroad had been incorporated in Sacramento to run from Modesto to Mono Valley via “old Leer Vining Creek or McLean Pass” with its “Principal place of business, Bennettsville, Tioga Mining District.” J. C. Kemper Van Ee, C. W. Curtis, O. H. Brooks and R. W. Woolard, all of the Great Sierran Consolidated Silver Co., organized their company with \$5 million capital stock with \$250,000 actually subscribed. California and Yosemite Short Line Railroad monies provided supplies, via Lundy, for the survey crew. (28)

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The survey party advanced to Whiter Wolf before snowfall. Work was resumed in the spring of '82, and Tioga Pass was reached in July. The Bodie *Daily Freer Press* noted that “Engineer Carpenter’s . . . survey (was completed) for the California and Yosemite Short Line Railroad from McLean’s Pass . . . to Mono Lake Valley” on July 20. (19) In August the *Free Press* commented on the fate of Tuolumne Meadows’ hospitable hermit, John Lambert: “Now, however, the spirit of civilization in the person of John L. Ginn, Chief Engineer of the Yosemite Short Line Railroad, has planted the survey stakes of a railroad line within a hundred feet of the hermit’s door, and it is a mere matter of time when his lonely reveries will be broken by their shrill whistle of the locomotive.” (20) Chainman John Ferretti recalls meeting John Lambert who was living in a hut that to him “looked more like a bear trap than a place for human habitation” over Sodar Springs. Ferretti was somewhat awed by the hermit but found him friendly, though saddened by the advent of the road.

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Another incident recalled by Ferretti



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**John V. Ferretti**

concerns one of the survey party’s mules. While camped on Yosemite Creek the mules had been stampeded by bears and one “had slipped into the little stream and hung itself.” Later, on the return trip, Ferretti found the construction gang camped in the same spot with the dead mule only a few feet upstream from their water point.

After completing the survey through Tioga Pass, the surveyors tied in the miner locations and disbanded. John Ferretti joined the construction gang as a blacksmith’s helper and general roustabout. His pay was augmented by pies, cakes and cookies slipped to him by Sing Lee, the camp cook. John’s final act on the job included splitting his big toe with an axe. The “first aid man” applied “a large chew of tobacco, took a rag and tied it up, guaranteeing that it would be as good as new in a few days. At that moment . . . It severed my

connection with the Tioga Road for all time.” (21)r

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r Construction progressed at an awesomer rate. Nearly one-half mile of finishedr road was turned out by the 160r man crew for each day on the job. (22)r The fall of '82 saw the road advancer from Crocker's to as far as the presentr park boundary, about two miles. (21) Onr April 27, 1883 work was resumed and itr was carried forward without interruptionr or accident until finally completed Septemberr r 4th, 1883.” In 130 days the 56 1/4r mile stretch was completed at a cost ofr \$61,095.22, or about \$1,100 per mile.r

r r

r From the columns of the August 11r *Homer Mining Index* we learn of constructionr progress and methods. “Ther Great Sierra Wagon Road is rapidly approachingr completion. Harry Medlicott'sr graders from this side have reached ther upper end of Tuolumne Meadows, whiler Priest's pick and shovel brigade from ther other side are on Rocky Canyon Creek,r leaving a gap between of little more thanr three miles, all of which is easy grading.r Priest's powder gang, following the picksr and shovels, reached Lake Tenaya Thursday and will skip the heavy blastingr along the margin of the lake for the presentr and follow up to the Tuolumner River, after which one hundred blastersr will be put on to finish the three-fourthsr of a mile along the lake. It is believedr that freight wagons will reach Tioga byr or before the end of the month. The constructionr of this road was a stupendousr and costly undertaking and the Easternr capitalists to whose enterprise and public spirit the people of this county and coastr are indebted for a great thoroughfare to ar hitherto inaccessible but rich and extensiver region, deserve to be rememberedr with gratitude.”r

r r

r According to one report (24) therer were 90 white men and 250 Chinese inr the employ of the company. Another alludes to 250 men (21) and a third a 160r man crew of Chinese. We are certain thatr at least 35 Chinese were at work on ther Tioga Road in '83 as a receipt for theirr hospital tax, paid for by the Road company,r is part of the Yosemite Museumr collections (26). Pay rates were phenomenal:r the Chinese received \$1.20 per day,r the Caucasians \$1.50 (25) The foreman,r James Lumsden of Big Oak Flat, wasr most pleased when his wage was advancedr from \$1.75 to \$2.00 per day inr recognition of his making “changes of hisr own accord which the surveyors afterwardsr said were more practical.” In additionr all hands were supplied with excellentr board. (24)r

r r r r r r r





r r r

r r r

**On the Tioga Road. about 1890r**

r r r

r Soon after the Great Sierra Wagonr Road was completed, “a big jollificationr was held in Sonora” with many prominentr men of the day in attendance. (24)r The road was built!r

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r r Next: Before 1915r •r Contentsr •r Previous: Minesr r

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/great\\_sierra\\_wagon\\_road.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/great_sierra_wagon_road.html)r

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r r

r [Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) >r [Tioga Road](#) >r Travel Prior to 1915 >r

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

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r r r

r r **[Next: Business Ventures](#)** • **[Contents](#)** • **[Previous: Great Sierra Wagon Road](#)** r

r r r

# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)***

## **by Keith A. Trexler**

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r r

### **Travel Prior to 1915**

r r

r But was it ever used for the purposer for which it was built? Probably not. Nor records survive to prove the point, but itr is known that no ore was ever shippedr out of the mines and special equipment purchased for use in the Shepherderr tunnel never got beyond San Franciscor where it was sold at auction after ther mines had closed.r

r r

r Priest's report of August 4, 1884, "allr clear from snow and being repaired"r leads us to believe at least some of ther Great Sierra Silver Company's businessr was conducted over the route. (43) Ther last mention of the road in companyr records is dated 19 October 1884, morer than three months after cessation ofr operations at the mines. "The road is inr very good condition and will probablyr remain so during the winter and spring.r Cross ditches have been put in all ther way from Bennettville to Crockers, and Ir r think \$1,000 expended next year after ther snow is gone will put it in as good ar shape as ever." (44)r

r r

r Although technically a toll route, nor collection gates ever were set up and ther road was used frequently by tourists,r army troopers and stockmen. Little mentionr is made of the physical condition ofr the road until 1894 when the *Homerr Mining Index* informed its readers, "Ar man who recently came over the Greatr Sierra wagon road reports it to be inr execrable condition. It should be kept inr tolerable condition if the company wishesr to hold it; but, as a matter of real fact, itr should belong to the Government and ber kept in prime order, as an eastern outletr to Yosemite Park." (45)r

r r

r However poor its surface, the Greatr Sierra Wagon Road was being used. Oner party remarked, "The road is very roughr in places, but is not impassable." Theyr recommended a light wagon be used inr attempting the route. (46) Another groupr reported "fallen trees and washed-outr roads had bothered us many times . . .r but in no case had done more damage tor us than to shorten our day's journey byr five or ten miles." Their method of travelr r r included unhitching the horses and transportingr the wagon across "difficult" stretchesr with block and tackle attached tor convenient trees. (47)r

r r

r Official reports decried the conditionr of the road, intimating it was somethingr less than a footpath, and a difficult oner at that. (32, 52, 56) Replies from the attorneysr of the owners, though admittingr the road had not been kept in excellentr condition, maintained that it was passabler for its entire length by wagons andr

## The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

horse travelers. (33) This war of worth continued for more than a quarter century.

r r

r The army superintendents were especially vocal. Captain A. E. Wood started the ball rolling in his first report (1891) saying that although trees were down across the road and that it was badly washed in places it made “a good mounted trail, and as such is of much importance.” (48) Later reports reiterated and expanded upon Captain Wood’s observations, and, in addition, urged the Interior Department to purchase the rights to the route. (49, 50, 51) It was noted that “The foundation shows excellent work, intended to be permanent.” (50)

r r

r In 1896 a bill authorizing purchase of toll roads within the park was considered by the House but did not get to the floor for a vote. (58) The next year the cost of repairing the “extremely out of repair” road was estimated at \$10,000. (51) Two years later a bill was introduced in Congress to authorize surveys for a new road from Yosemite Valley to Mono Lake which apparently duplicated the Tioga Road which was then considered impassible. (60) The Acting Superintendent in 1898 was of the opinion that the road was government property by default. This is not a toll road and never has been; it has been abandoned by the builders for more than twenty years; if they ever had any rights they lost them by abandonment. The eastern half of the road is in such bad condition as to be hardly a good trail. I consider the Tioga Road the most important highway in the Park.” (56)

r r

r By 1899 enough interest had been generated that the army was directed to clear the road for a Congressional commission inspection. Their report contains an excellent description of the road at the turn of the century. “The grades vary from 0 to 10 percent and the width from 10 to 20 feet. The road, however, was skillfully laid out and it may safely be said that most of it has a grade of only about 3 percent . . .” It was “exceedingly well built, the bridges having fine stone abutments, and there is a particularly well-built section of sea wall along the shore of Lake Tenaya.” Most of the original surfacing was gone and the road was obstructed in numerous places by fallen trees. “It appears that no work in the way of maintenance has been done by the owner of the road for a number of years, though some slight work has been done by campers traveling over it.” The commissioners estimated the cost of constructing a similar road to be \$58,000, though the original outlay was found to be \$61,095.22 Their final assessment was that the road was in fair condition, that its value was \$57,095, that \$2,000 would suffice to put the road in original condition and that the Federal Government should purchase the road as soon as practicable. (59)

r r

r Fate, most likely in the form of the sinking of the battleship Maine, interceded and though the bill was read in the House, it was never passed. (54) A second bill was proposed in 1901 to purchase all toll roads within the Park for \$208,000, and it too failed of passage. (57)

r r

r In 1902 the Secretary of the Interior appointed a second committee to survey the park’s toll roads. They, like their predecessors, urged immediate government control of all park roads. (61) Superintendents’ reports for the years following upheld the committee’s views, with one exception — Major W. T. Litterbrant in 1913, in a notable example of short-sightedness, felt that trails and mules would be sufficient for park administration for the foreseeable future! (62)

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**Army cavalry patrolled the Tioga Road for 25 years**

r r r

r In 1911 the Sierra Club Bulletin under the heading “Old Tioga Road to be Acquired,” noted that “The Government brought suit . . . to condemn an unused toll road . . . to make it part of the new system of roads through Yosemite National Park. W. C. N. Swift . . . is named as defendant.” (63)

r r

r One of the most telling comments on the condition of the road is contained in a 1912 letter from Major W. T. Forsythe, Acting Superintendent of the park, to the Secretary of the Interior. “Several wagons passed over the road last summer, . . . but also last summer I had to order a gratuitous issue of rations to a destitute family who were moving by wagon across the park from the east side by the Tioga Road because their team became exhausted on account of the difficult road and their food supply gave out before they could get through. (64) What of the owner’s side of the story? Before answering we might well ask, as did Yosemite’s acting superintendent in 1913, “who were the owners?” (65) At a Mono County sheriff’s sale in 1888 W. C. N. Swift, as trustee, purchased the entire properties of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company for \$167,050. (15) For an additional \$10, Swift obtained the Tioga Road toll franchise from W. C. Priest, (31) who remained in charge of the road. (66) The mine properties and road were sold for taxes in 1895 to Rudolphus N. Swift, and remained the property of his heirs until 1915. (67) All during this period the firm of Wilson and Wilson handled the affairs of the road’s owners. Through them we hear the “owner’s side of the story.”

r r

r Immediately after Captain A. E. Wood’s initial blast, Wilson and Wilson offered to the Secretary of the Interior an affidavit from Road Superintendent Priest. “That said road is about 20 feet wide on an average and that teams may pass with convenience, with few exceptions, throughout the entire length of said road,

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

and that in the opinion of this deponent said road is the best road that has ever been built on the Western Slope of the Sierra Nevada . . ." (68) The battle is joined!

r r r r

r Wilson and Wilson's tenor was not so positive some four years later. They noted that the road had not been abandoned, but "we confess that they (the owners) have been somewhat neglectful by reason of the slight travel . . . upon the road." (66) It was the attorney's opinion that the road would have been kept in repair had a road been completed down the eastern side of the Sierra. (59) "If and when that eastern portion is completed the owners intend to resume their collection of tolls." The law firm urged the United States to purchase all the toll roads in the park and was of the opinion that this would have already been done "but for the extreme difficulty of inducing Congress to spend money on any new project, especially one which necessitates a regular annual expenditure for maintenance." (69)

r r

r In answer to charges that since tolls were not being collected the road belonged to the government by default, Allen Webster pointed out that the owners had spent thousands of dollars in repairs and that toll gates were not erected because of light travel. (70)

r r

r As the debate progressed others were brought in to testify on behalf of the road. Mrs. H. R. Crocker, whose home and place of business was Crocker's Station, the western terminus of the road, commented in 1907 that there was considerable travel over the road this season and "all are unanimous in their praise . . . Travelers had no trouble in getting over the entire length with team and heavy wagon." She reported some repairs to the road, including replacement of the Yosemite Creek bridge which had been out for eight years, by persons in her hire. (71)

r r

r Later correspondence from Mrs. Crocker repeats her original points, with the added suggestion that "something should materialize towards its (the road's) permanent repair." (72, 73) In 1908 Andrew P. Dron found the road to Soda Springs in "excellent condition." He noted that two or three bridges were out over small streams, "but their repair is not at all felt." All of the fallen trees are out of the road and . . . taken as a whole I consider it a better road as it is today without any work on it, than the Ward's Ferry road . . . to Groveland . . ." He made 38 miles in one day over the Tioga Road. (74)

r r

r With the suit of 1911 in progress further depositions were made. Mrs. Crocker was in the fore stating that "repair work (was done) in 1912 and the road opened as usual to travel. It has been opened and traveled by teams (both heavy and light wagons), people on horse back and pedestrians every year since its construction. It has never been closed to travel, except . . . when . . . blocked by snow. It is still in fair condition with the exception of two or three places at Lake Tenaya and Yosemite Creek . . ." (75)

r r

r Swift's attorneys proclaimed that considerable sums had been expended on upkeep of the roads (though no documentation of the expenditures was presently available) and that the franchise standards, i.e. a 100 foot wide roadway, had been lawfully maintained. They cited the fact that the counties through which the road

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

passed had always accepted ther Company's tax offerings, implying thatr all the franchise conditions were beinr met. The reason advanced for non-collectionr of tolls was that the Company didr not receive enough in returns to keep ar man on as tollmaster. Their final opinionr was that the United States had no claimr to the road except by lawful and fairr purchase. (33) The suit was never pressedr to completion and the debate remainedr unresolved until 1915.r

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r r **Next: Business Ventures** •r **Contents** •r **Previous: Great Sierra Wagon Road** r

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/travel\\_before\\_1915.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/travel_before_1915.html)r

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r [Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) >r [Tioga Road](#) >r [Business Ventures](#) >r

r r

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r r r

r r **Next: East Sider** •r **Contents** •r **Previous: Before 1915**r r

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# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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r r

## **Business Ventures**

r r

r Soon after completion of the Greatr Sierra Wagon Road William C. Priest ofr Big Oak Flat, at the request of the Directorsr of the Great Sierra Company, wasr assigned the right to collect tolls by ther counties of Mariposa, Tuolumne andr Mono. Rates established were: Freightr teams with two horses, \$5; single horses,r \$1.50; passenger teams, each horse,r \$2.50; footmen, \$1; horse and rider, \$2;r r r r r



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**The western portal, Crocker's Station, 1901r**

r r r pack animals, \$1.50; loose horses andr cattle, 50¢; sheep and goats, 10¢ each.r (29) A congressman quoted the rates asr working out to 3 1/2¢ per person per mile,r comparing favorably with the 3 1/3¢ onr the Big Oak Flat Road, 3¢ on ther Coulterville and 2¢ on the Wawonar Road. (30) No records exist of toll revenues.r The Swift heirs, successors tor W. C. N. Swift's purchase of the tollr franchise in 1888 for \$10, (31) stated thatr though considerable sums had been spentr on upkeep of the road no tolls had everr been collected. (33)rr r

r Other enterprises were more profitable.r Since the early 1880's H. R. Crocker had operated "Crocker's Sierra Resort"r stage stop on the Big Oak Flat Road, justr west of the present park boundary. Mr.r Crocker and his young wife with the helpr of ex-sea captain Allan S. Crocker, providedr excellent board, clean rooms



The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

and diverse entertainments to Chinese Camp and Yosemite Stage Company passengers, private travellers, campers, and even Indians from a nearby Miwok Rancheria.

r r

r Crocker's Station was construction headquarters during the building of the Great Sierra Wagon Road and later provided a comfortable stopping place for those using the road for business and pleasure. Many well known names grace the Crocker register, among them John Muir, Stewart Edward White, Edwin Markham and Herbert Hoover. The resort was considered by many "the showplace of the road." Although sold by Widow Crocker in 1910, the station continued to serve the Yosemite-bound until 1920, when several of the buildings were moved and the rest allowed to decay. (34)

r r

r Some ten miles northeast Jeremiah Hodgdon built, in 1879, Yosemite's first and only two story log cabin. (34) Unknown to Jeremiah, the cabin would later house some of the builders of the Great Sierra Wagon Road, would provide shelter for the cavalry patrolling Yosemite National Park, (38) and in the 1920's become the center of a busy tourist stop r r r r



r r

r r r

**Aspen Valley Resort, 1931.**

**r r Homestead Cabin, at left, now at Pioneer Yosemite History Center, r Wawona**

r r on the Tioga Road. In 1931 the Aspen Valley Lodge complex included the lodge, a rooming house, store, gasoline station, auto repair garage, laundry, restaurant and the old two story log homestead cabin in use as a storehouse. (35) A park entrance station and ranger station were located nearby. With realignment of the Tioga Road in 1937, profits dropped and closure of the facilities was assured when public use of the old road was discontinued in World War II. Private summer homes and a logging operation existed into the 1950's. Most of the land eventually became acquired for park purposes: the homestead cabin was moved to the Pioneer History Center at Wawona. r r

r Next stop on the line for the eastbound visitor was White Wolf, named by a sheepherder who saw a white wolf there. Settlement at White Wolf probably began with crude shelters for the Meyer boys and their ranch hands. Little is known of early developments, but in 1930 it was reported, "Mrs. Meyer is in charge of a

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

believed-to-be well-paying resort . . .” Twelve tents, a main building which housed a dining room, kitchen and small store, two tourist cabins, a power plant, and the ubiquitous gasoline station comprised the assessable property. (35) Relocation of the road and the tourist hiatus of the second world war brought the operations at White Wolf to a stand-still. After three years of very indifferent lessee proprietorship, the Yosemite Park and Curry Co., in 1952, with government purchase of the land and facilities, acquired the concession rights, and the following year opened the rejuvenated unit as one of the High Sierra Camps. 1960-1961 saw the improvement, by the National Park Service, of the public campground and access road.

r r

r Between White Wolf and Tenaya Lake, a distance of nearly 20 miles, no accommodations have ever existed, though camping was, and is, permitted in designated spots along the road. On August 1, 1878 an enterprising Irishman and one-time Yosemite guide, John L. Murphy, homesteaded the meadows abutting the south end of Tenaya Lake and a small portion of the north shore. Thirty days later he planted 52 brook trout from the



r r

r r r

**White Wolf, 1931**

r r r Tuolumne River; in 1882 a correspondent for the *Bodie Daily Free Press* reported, “the lake is swarming with fish, some already two feet in length.” Mr. Murphy was established!

r In 1881, Archie Leonard, destined to become one of Yosemite’s first rangers, put on a ten-horse saddle train between Yosemite and Lundy. (39) Business must have been good for Leonard and Murphy as numerous articles proclaiming their virtues of the trip and its accommodations appeared in the *Bodie* and *Lundy* tabloids. One reporter opined, “Laker Tenaya is destined to become a watering place of note . . .” (20) and Murphy’s is a place “where good accommodations will be found, where the scenery is particularly grand, picturesque and beautiful, and trout are abundant.” (40)

r r

r Another author commenting on “where to go and what to do” gives us an idea of what accommodations were like there. “The business of accommodating travelers at Tenaya has not yet reached sufficient

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

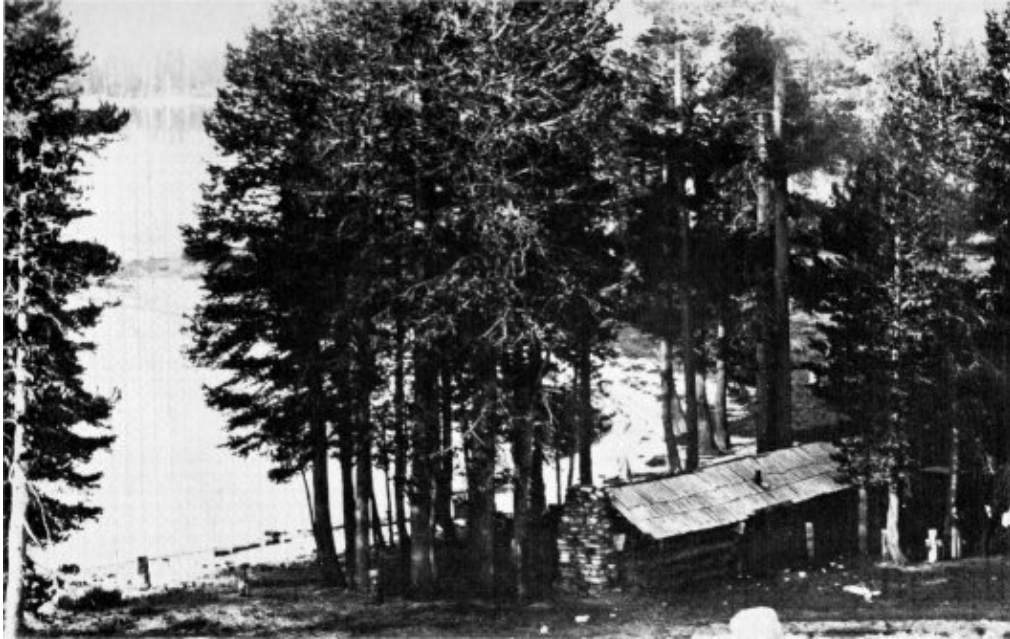
dimensions to warrant the establishment of a fully modernized hotel. Mr. Murphy has . . . maintained a 'stopping place' . . . that will be found quite satisfactory to all comers who are not excessively hard to please, and that may have a more piquant interest to persons to whom the shifts and devices of mountain life are matters of some novelty." (42)

r r

Murphy's hospice served as a stopping place for the Great Sierra Wagon Road surveyors as well as H. L. Childs' Bennettville to Yosemite Valley telegraph line construction crew. (20) Later visitors included Helen Hunt Jackson, John Muir and Galen Clark. Nothing is known of the operation from 1890 to 1916 when the Desmond Park Company set up a tourist camp on the site of Murphy's place. The Yosemite Park and Curry Co., Desmond's successors, closed their Tenaya operations in 1938 in favor of a more isolated location at May Lake, thus establishing another of the High Sierra Camps. (39)

r r

Although Tuolumne Meadows had been touted as an excellent camping spot since Lt. Moore's 1852 visit, little was done to oblige visitors to the area. Cabins were built in the 1880's by sheepmen r r r r r



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r r r

**Murphy's cabin at Lake Tenaya, August 16, 1896**

r r using the meadows for summer pasture. (38) John Lambert's reign as the "hermit of the Sierra" extended over a period of about 10 years during which time he offered what hospitality and help he could to the wayfarer and tourist. (42) Lambert homesteaded the Soda Springs property in 1885, (41) though he had spent his summers there since at least 1882 and perhaps earlier. Hermit John left the Meadows in 1890 after being snowbound and losing his profitable angora goat herd. After Lambert's murder below El Portal in the spring of 1896, his brother sold the homestead to the McCauley brothers of Big Meadows. They in turn sold it to the Sierra Club in 1912 (41); three years later the Parsons Memorial Lodge was built. (39) The Sierra Club occupied the property until December 1973, when it was sold to the National Park Service for \$208,750. The Club sold the property, because of "growing problems connected with managing the campgrounds, Parsons Lodge, and the nearby Soda Springs." (39a) "Neither the Club nor the Foundation are equipped or prepared to adequately meet the problems of running a campground within a public park,

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

with all the problems — overuse, sanitation, policing — that attend such an operation.”

The National Park Service operated the campground for three years, then closed it. The Yosemite Natural History Association presently provides information and interpretive services at Parsons Lodge.

Tuolumne Meadows Lodge was opened in 1916 by the Desmond Park Company and is currently operated by the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. In addition to the lodge there is now a store, restaurant and service station operated by the concessioner plus National Park Service ranger stations, campgrounds and a small museum. For the first few years of operation of the Tioga Road as a park route, the park entrance station was in the meadows; it has since been moved to Tioga Pass.

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**[Next: East Side](#) • [Contents](#) • [Previous: Before 1915](#)**

[http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/business\\_ventures.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/business_ventures.html)

[Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > [Tioga Road](#) > The East Side >

**[Next: Automobiles Arriver](#) • [Contents](#) • [Previous: Business Ventures](#)**

# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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## **The East Side**

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r Even before the Great Sierra Wagon Road was completed, suggestions and surveys for routes down the eastern escarpment of the Sierra had been made. At first only horse trails over the Mt. r r r r



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### **Lee Vining Canyon and the Lee Vining grade, looking toward Mono Craters**

r r r Warren divide and down Bloody Canyon connected the Tioga mines with the Mono valley. In 1899 the California Department of Highways urged the building of an eastside link in the Tioga route “to make Yosemite Valley, the high Sierras, and Lake Tahoe more attractive and accessible.” A bill, authorizing appropriations for construction of the section was passed by the California legislature in 1897, but did not become law because of a technical error. Highway engineers recommended the Lee Vining Creek route as the best and estimated construction costs for a 16 foot roadbed at \$30,000. (76) r r

r Money was forthcoming in 1899 and the Tioga Pass-Lee Vining line was selected. Construction began three years later. (77) By 1905 all but the five miles east of the pass had been finished. The cost—\$39,000. One bid of \$23,861 was received for the remaining section but work was delayed until an “understanding with the owners of the Tioga Road proper, regarding their non-resumption of the collection of toll” could be reached. (78) r

r r

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

The Sierra Club *Bulletin* of 1909 declared, "The new State road from Monor Lake to Tioga Lake was completed last summer and is reported to be a monument to the skill of the State engineers. It has a maximum grade of seven per cent, and is a good road for automobiles. The old Tioga road (not now available for autos) . . . should be repaired without delay, so as to afford one of the most wonderful trans-mountain trips in the world." (79) Maps in 1910 Yosemite National Park booklets show the Tioga route as a through road to the east, despite the Park Superintendent's warning that the "road is in wretched condition." (80) In 1913 the California State engineer, asking if the Tioga Road was in condition for travel, noted that the east side road is "in excellent shape." Major Litterbrant's reply was that "the Tioga Road through Yosemite National Park is impassable except for saddle animals." (81) (82)

During 1939 and '40 the Lee Vining Road between Tioga Pass and Laker Ellery was widened and realigned at a cost of \$78,000. "The completion of this improvement is regarded locally as one of the highlights of the 80 years of man's struggle against the barrier of the Sierras at this crossing." (83) The State's plans for the Lee Vining grade include realignment and widening. (84)

**[Next: Automobiles Arrive](#) • [Contents](#) • [Previous: Business Ventures](#)**

[http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/east\\_side.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/east_side.html)

[Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > [Tioga Road](#) > Automobiles Arrive >

**[Next: Reconstruction](#) • [Contents](#) • [Previous: East Side](#)**

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# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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## **Automobiles Arrive**

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**Tuolumne Meadows, 1915, from a 1913  
r Pierce Arrow Touring Car, one of first tor  
r travel the Tioga Road.r**

r r

r Although the first auto entered Yosemite Valley in 1900, it was not untilr 1913 that they were authorized legalr entry. On August 16, 1913 the first autor permit was issued by Ranger F. S. Townsley.r The car drove into the Yosemite Valley via the Coulterville Road (ther only one open to autos) and was promptlyr chained to a tree. (6, 85, 86) Accordingr to Townsley, auto travel began inr earnest in 1914 despite the more than 60r separate regulations aimed at limitingr vehicular traffic in the park. Not onlyr was oneway traffic the rule, but strictr schedules had to be met. Fines of 50 centsr per minute were assessed the haplessr driver who dawdled along the way. (86)r r Top speed permitted, on straight stretchesr only, was 10 miles per hour, with 6r m.p.h. as the limit where curves werer evident. (87)r

r r



The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

In January 1915, Stephen T. Mather, an enthusiastic booster of auto travel in the National Parks, accepted the post of Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior. One of his first concerns in the new job was to make park travel easier. "A cash primer was called for to set the process off. Mather thought about this and had a familiar reaction. He hauled out his checkbook. For a curtain-raiser to his park's administration he wanted to make some noise — preferably in Yosemite, which had high hopes for 1915, California being set for two "international expositions." Casting about for an idea, he remembered the Tioga Road, a broken-down east-west thoroughfare, fifty-six miles long (and privately owned) that bisected the park. Since the Tioga Road was the only potential automobile route across the 270 mile wall of mountain stretching from Walker Pass, back to Bakersfield, to Sonora Pass, south of Lake Tahoe, its resurrection would be both beneficial and widely acclaimed. Mather thought about all this and then began to show an inner turmoil, a characteristic mark of his approach to a weighty decision. He gave the impression of being carbonated.

r r

His associates were startled, but when they learned what was gurgling in him, they politely pointed out that the government could not make repairs on a road it did not own, and even if it could, it would not. "I'll buy the road, have it repaired myself, and donate it to the government," said Mather. They smiled. The United States of America is not an university or charity foundation. Giving things to the government was almost as suspect as making bank deposits to the account of a Cabinet officer or placing a bomb under a Senator's front porch. Congress must examine and pass upon every gift. "All right," said Mather. "My motives are pure." He had a special provision drafted for the Appropriations



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**“FIRST” DEDICATION OF TIOGA ROAD** - Stephen Mather is shown breaking the christening bottle on the \$15,000 rock representing the purchase price of the road. Those shown were at the dedication: l. to r. - Clyde Seavy, California State Board of Control; Horace Albright, assistant to Stephen Mather; W. Gillette Scott, Inyo County auto enthusiast and road promoter; E. O. McCormick, Southern Pacific Railroad; Mather; Congressman F. H. Gillett; Chief Geographer Robert B. Marshall, U. S. Geological Survey; Dr. Guy P. Doyle, Bishop; Dr. J. S. McQueen, Inyo County; Dr. Henry Fairfield Osborn, American Museum of Natural History; Dr. S. E. Simmons, Sacramento.

Committee authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to accept any donations of money, land rights of way, etc., for the national parks. That, he did not doubt for a moment, would do it. Fitzgerald surprised him. The Congressman, sure that only a black-hearted briber would want to donate something to the government, tore the provision up.

## The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

r “Mather had to look for help to the California Senator James D. Phelan and to an old Chicago friend, Congressman William Kent, then of Kentfield, California. The two Californians, with some difficulty, managed to wheedle Fitzgerald into relaxing long enough to approve a limited provision covering gifts to Yosemite, setting Mather free finally to go ahead on the Tioga Road, which, he learned, carried a purchase price of \$15,500. He made up his mind to raise as much of that as he could by subscription and to contribute the balance himself.” (88)

r r

r Calling upon his friends, Mather began to accumulate the purchase price. Julius Rosenwald, a Chicago philanthropist was good for \$1,000; Thomas Thorkildsen of San Francisco donated another \$1,000, while the Modesto Chamber of Commerce and Sierra Club collected about \$6,000. Mather donated the balance. (88) He then arranged for the Tuolumne County Surveyor to begin clearing of the old road and asked William E. Colby, his friend and fellow Sierra Clubber, to purchase the road from the Swift estate as Mather, being a government employee, was not in a position to donate the road to the United States. (89) Authorization to accept the road came from Congress on March 3, 1915 and formal title was transferred to the U. S. on April 10, 1915 for a consideration of \$10. (90)

r r

r Mather next organized the first of his famous “mountain trips,” outings designed to convince the influential or wealthy participants of the need for more and better National Parks. Robert Shackland’s description of the group’s ride up the Lee Vining grade on their way to the dedication of the Tioga Road is a classic comment on that stretch of the highway. “Coming over the Lee Vining Road, they followed an interesting road just a fraction more than one-car wide with an unfenced drop-off of as much as two thousand feet. Local men were at the wheels, and the one handling the open Studebaker that contained E. O. McCormick, Emerson Hough, and Horace Albright had not yet, though a native, become bored with the scenery. He would glance ahead briefly to gauge the curves, then rise from his seat, twist around, stare off over the grisly precipice into the distance, and, with a hand he kept free for the purpose, point out features of the landscape. McCormick, up front, was mute with terror. In the rear, with the door open, Albright and Hough sat crouched to leap. Albright was trying to keep one hand on the open door and one foot on the running board and at the same time hold off Hough, who was clawing at him and hoarsely whispering over and over: “G\_\_\_ d\_\_\_ that scenery-loving cuss, G\_\_\_ d\_\_\_ that scenery-loving cuss!” To their surprise, however, they made the top of the range. There Mather formally dedicated the Tioga Road to public use, breaking a champagne bottle filled with Pacific Ocean water at a spot where it would flow both east and west. The night was spent camping with the Sierra Club at Tuolumne Meadows, and the next morning the party started on its final run, to the Yosemite Valley. It broke up there on Thursday, July 29.” (88)

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r The 1915 report of the superintendent of National Parks noted that the Tioga Road had been acquired, was being rehabilitated this summer and was formally opened July 28. “When same has been put in shape it will be the most popular pass for transcontinental tourists through the Sierra Nevada . . .” (91) During the 1915 season 190 cars entered the park via Tioga Pass and the comment was made that a visitor to the park could now travel 260 miles of road, at elevations ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 feet, for the \$5.00 entrance fee. (92)

r r

r The following year 578 westbound autos checked in at Tuolumne Meadows. (93) After more than \$30,000 had been spent rehabilitating the old mining road it became apparent that the route needed a thorough

## The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

reconstruction, with some realignment, to bring maintenance cost down to a reasonable level. Mather asked Congress for \$75,000. (94) The money not forthcoming, park officials began maintaining the road as best they could.

r r

r Gabriel Sovulewski's construction reports, 1916 to 1922 (95), helps us recreate the tremendous task of keeping the undoubtedly decrepit road in shape for auto travel. In 1916, 24 men and two teams of horses were assigned to the road which was "in many places badly washed . . . (with half mile sections) . . . almost destroyed by dangerous washouts." Yosemite Creek bridge was gone and was replaced by a "permanent" structure. In addition more than 30 trees were down across the road between Tenaya Lake and Tuolumne Meadows. By the end of the season the roadway was placed "in very good condition considering the state in which it was found in the spring . . ." The public speaks "very highly of the park roads, and there has been nothing but praise for the Tioga Road, though conditions are far from satisfactory and not as we would like to have them."

r r

r During the 1918 opening, 1200 pounds of powder was used to blast 150 trees off a five mile section of the road. Later that season damage from thunder storms was frequent and costly, nearly \$6,000 being spent to keep the road passable.

r r

r By August of 1922 Sovulewski considered the road in excellent condition. However that fall, severe storms undid all the work and soon it was evident that the road was being destroyed "faster than we could keep up with repairs." There was no question now, there must be realignment and reconstruction. Preliminary plans were laid in the late '20s, but the job would not be complete until 1961. r r r r



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**Bus travel over Tioga to Lake Tahoe became popular in the 1920's**

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**Stephen T. Mather and W. B. Lewis  
r studying road location in 1925r**

r r r Meanwhile the road was in ever increasingr use.r r r

r Entrance stations were set up in Tuolumner Meadows and Aspen Valley inr 1918. In the same year a Californiar Motorist article praised the road but reproduced a map showing 20 per centr grades near May Lake. Top speed onr straight stretches was 20 m.p.h., withr reductions to 8 m.p.h. when ascendingr and 12 m.p.h. when descending hills.r (96)r

r r

r Steve Mather's annual report for 1918r praised the road in no uncertain terms.r "Again last summer did the Tioga Roadr amply justify its purchase and presentationr to the park system. Again did itr prove the need and popularity of a motorr gateway to the upper wilderness . . .r Fifty or sixty automobiles a day traveledr the Tioga Road last season" with manyr drivers making the complete trip to Laker Tahoe. "It will be noticed that Yosemite r National Park as a park, that is, withoutr any special consideration or use of ther Yosemite Valley, also seems to be comingr into its own. This is a good sign." (97)r

r r

r The Tioga Road gained popularityr throughout the 1920s. Each summer ther opening of the road was attended by fishr fries and celebrations with local dignitariesr in attendance. (98) From aboutr 1925 onward an intense interest in earlierr opening dates, mostly on the part ofr businessmen from east of the Sierra,r began. Park Superintendents were cautious,r replying that early openings werer too costly when considered in terms ofr the price of snow removal and increasedr maintenance. (100)r

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

r Newspaper and magazine ads of their day, as well as government produced leaflets, entreated every citizen to visit hisr national parks and especially to travel “the world’s greatest mountain tourr through Yosemite to Lake Tahoe.” (99)r The finest accommodations were available on the route as well as comfortabler campsites and excellent trout streams.r (101)r

r r

r Everything was not as advertised,r however. “All motorists with camping outfits are obliged to undress completelyr and be fumigated for a full hour.” Hoofr and mouth disease had struck Californiar and the foregoing applied to those headingr into Nevada from points west. Their circular to all park personnel continued,r “This information should be given for those inquiring regarding conditionsr along the road. Giving of this informationr is bound to result in discouragingr travel east of Tioga Pass!” (102)r

r r

r Another, not quite so personal factorr was beginning to discourage travel overr the Tioga Road. The nation’s highwaysr were being improved and expanded at anr amazing rate and the motoring publicr was becoming accustomed to smoothr well paved thoroughfare with high gearr grades and easy curves. The Tioga Roadr was not such a route. It remained an all-dirt road until 1937. It was as Gabriellr Sovulewski put it, “only an old-fashionedr wood-road.”r

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r r **[Next: Reconstruction](#)** •r **[Contents](#)** •r **[Previous: East Side](#)** r

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/automobiles\\_arrive.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/automobiles_arrive.html)r

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r **[Yosemite](#)** > **[Library](#)** >r **[Tioga Road](#)** >r **Reconstruction** >r

r r

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

r r r

r r [Next: Post War Development](#) • r [Contents](#) • r [Previous: Automobiles Arrive](#) r

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# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

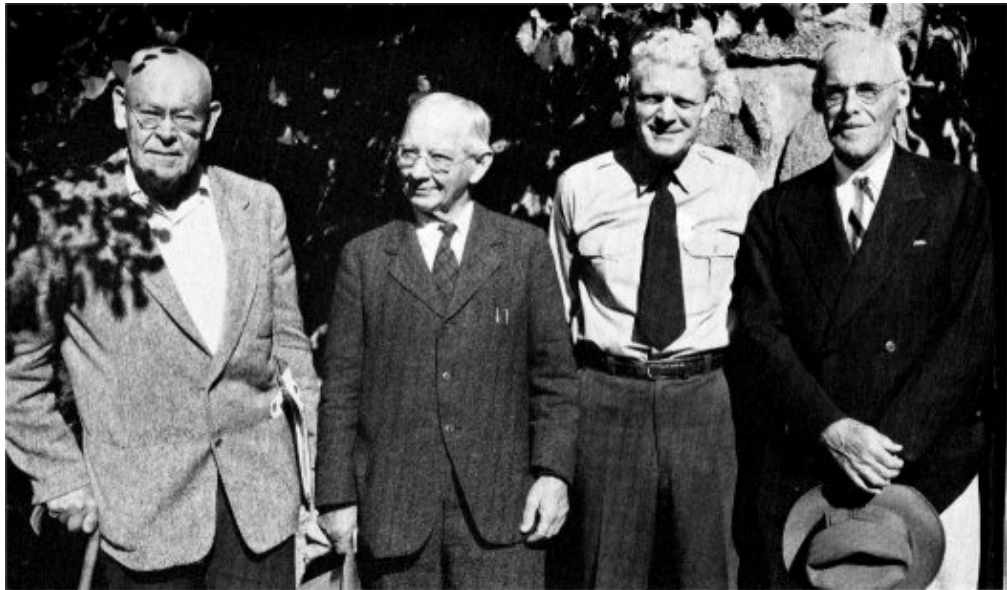
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## **Reconstruction**

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**Yosemite Advisory Board, 1953, with Supt. John C. Preston**  
**r l. to r., W. E. Colby, F. L. Olmsted, Mr. Preston, J. P. Buwaldar**

rr

r As early as 1925 consideration hadr been given to realignment and reconstructionr of the Tioga Road. In that year Director Mather visited Yosemite tor walk-out suggested routes with Parkr Superintendent Washington B. Lewis.r (103) In the years following, variousr routes were studied and rejected, withr the Park Service submitting each forr detailed review by conservationists, engineersr and other interested groups.r

rr

r Among the consulting groups was ther Yosemite Advisory Board whose threer members were imminently qualified tor pass judgement on the various proposals.r Chairman of the Board Frederic Lawr Olmsted, whose father, the “Father ofr American Landscape Architecture,” wasr instrumental in the setting aside of ther Yosemite Grant, was in his own right ar world famed landscape architect, anr expert on parks and park developmentr and former director of the Californiar State Park Survey. (A prominent overlookr on the new road has been calledr Olmsted View.) The second member ofr the Board, Duncan McDuffie, had servedr as Chairman of the California Stater r Parks Council, was past president of ther Sierra Club and recipient of the Corneliusr Amory Pugsley medal for Americanr Scenic and Historic Preservation. Professorr John P.



## The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

Buwalda, geologist and departmental chairman at California Institute of Technology, was the member of the group perhaps best able to advise on the Yosemite landscape, having done considerable scientific study in the area.

r r

In 1932 a preliminary field survey was made with the tentative route marked and declared open for inspection. Several field trips were made by interested groups and by 1935 there was general agreement, including the concurrence of the Sierra Club (104), that the present route of the realigned Tioga Road would be the one followed: (See map.)

r r

Meanwhile, work had begun on the eastern and western sections. In 1932 contracts were awarded for construction of the Tioga Pass to Fairview Dome section. Funds for the job, \$250,000, were allocated from monies received from San Francisco as "rental" for the Hetch Hetchy area. (106) Fifty thousand dollars from the same source was to be made available for the Crane Flat to White Wolf portion, with work to begin in the spring of 1935. (107)

r r

Paving of the 11.6 mile stretch of the new Tioga Road from Cathedral Creek through Tuolumne Meadows to Tioga Pass was completed in the fall of 1937 and for the first time in its history the one-time wagon road had a dustless section. (108) During 1938 the 21 mile McSwain Meadow (White Wolf intersection) to Cathedral Peak section of the unchanged bed of the Great Sierra Wagon Road was oiled for the first time, (109) and with the completion of 14.5 miles of new road between Crane Flat and McSwain Meadows on July 18, 1939, an era had ended. (110) Although nearly a quarter-century would elapse before the 21 mile central section of the old road was replaced, clouds of dust no longer obscured the vistas or irritated the adventuresome motorist.

r r

Clouds of a different sort appeared on the horizon. World War II brought to a halt the further development of the road. Lack of maintenance funds during wartime caused the closing to the public of the Aspen Valley section of the old road.

r r

A couple of "war stories" bear repeating. After the road was closed for the winter in 1942, a man with his wife and three children managed to plow his car through the drifts, after breaking the Tioga Pass gate. He was met by a ranger at Crane Flat and it was decided the best course of action for disobeying the road closure was to have the visitor return to the pass in his own car and repair the gate, a round-trip of 148 miles. "The visitor had intended to drive through the park without stopping, but he became so delighted with the trip back over the Tioga Road that he decided to stay in the park for several days longer. Ranger Givens, who accompanied the man to Tioga Pass, states that the man was a real lover of the mountains and that he enjoyed his punishment immensely. Not only was he taught respect for park regulations, but it is certain that this punishment left nothing but good will for the Park Service in his mind." (111)

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

After a hiatus of more than 50 years, cattle again were driven over the Tioga Road in 1943. Permission had been granted because rubber and gasoline shortages made truck transportation of the Aspen Valley herds an impossibility. (112)

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**rr Next: Post War Development • rr Contents • rr Previous: Automobiles Arrive r**

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/reconstruction.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/reconstruction.html)r

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r [Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > [Tioga Road](#) > Post War Development > r

rr

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rrr

**rr Next: Today • rr Contents • rr Previous: Reconstruction r**

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# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)***

## **by Keith A. Trexler**

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### **Post War Developments**

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r Following World War II, travel to the parks resumed its upward trend and by 1950 use of the Tioga Road had increased more than 30 per cent above the pre-war level. Correspondence increased, too, both favoring and condemning the middle 21 miles of the Tioga route. While some feared damage to the park's scenic values would result if the route agreed upon in 1935 was built, many more feared the old road itself and worried about the more personal damage to themselves or their cars while negotiating the "horse-drawn" alignment of the remaining section of the Great Sierran Wagon Road.

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r The latter point of view became dominant as the travel picture changed. Larger cars and increased use of house and camping trailers made the old road a nightmare for many drivers and passengers alike.

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r The American Automobile Association warned, "It is not unusual to find people . . . unused to mountain roads, who just go to pieces, freeze at the wheel and park their cars in the middle of the road to wait for the Park Rangers or a kindly motorist to drive their cars the rest of the way." (115) And such was the none too happy picture on many a crowded summer day.

r r

r The general tenor of the many complaints being received was that the road was not only frightening to drive but was completely unsafe, a trip over it being tantamount to committing suicide. The facts do not bear this out. In actuality accidents on the old 21 mile section were so few that "a statistical analysis is all but impossible. Our records are not complete for the early days of use, but it is believed that no lives have been lost on the narrow highway since automobile travel was initiated in 1915." The primary problems were road jams on steep slopes due to vapor lock, "dented fenders, house-trailers caught between trees, mechanical failures and the overheating of many people's tempers when a speed of 20 miles per hour was alien to their experience on a narrow mountain highway." (116)

r r

r Other complaints were more reasonable and to the point. "While perfectly safe (since one must drive it slowly), it imposes undue anxiety on the driver." (113) "I feel this road is . . . unsafe for inexperienced drivers." (114) An experienced driver summed up the general feeling against the road thusly, "These 21 miles are the most exasperating I have ever driven. I will personally guarantee there isn't a trickier road anywhere. It is a good deal like a roller coaster, only rougher! But if your car's in good shape and you are

## The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

confident of your driving skill; if you are looking for an adventurous route and breathtaking scenery, there's no better place to find them than along the Tioga Pass Road." (115)

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r If the Tioga Road was to adequately serve the public it needed immediate improvement. Although the routing had been long approved, World War II delayed action and considerable discussion was to ensue before construction began.

r r

r During the late 1940's and early '50's, a series of alternate routes were suggested by individuals and conservation groups. One plan, the "high-line" route via Ten Lakes and the northeastern slopes of Mt. Hoffmann was proposed by Superintendent Thomson. The Park Service again sought the advice of foremost experts in the field.

r r

r William E. Colby, an esteemed San Francisco lawyer, noted conservationist and Sierra Club officer, in concert with fellow Yosemite Advisory Board members J. P. Buwalda and Duncan McDuffie replied, "This is a subject to which the Yosemite Advisory Board has given very careful consideration over a long period of years. The proposal to route the road north of Polly Dome is, in our opinion, a grave mistake, because it would intrude a road into an area that is now and will remain wilderness in character if the road is not built." The Board endorsed the Park Service's original plan throughout.

r r

r Accordingly, it was determined that the 21 mile central section of the Tioga Road would follow the route as proposed by the Service and as strongly endorsed by the Yosemite Advisory Board. There remained, however, the question of standards: what would be the most appropriate construction standards for the new central section and who would be the best qualified person to undertake this study? Director Wirth was able to secure the services of the country's most outstanding authority in this field in the person of Walter L. Huber. Mr. Huber was not only a noted consulting engineer and past president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, but a nationally recognized authority in the field of conservation. He was a former president of the Sierra Club and present chairman of the National Parks Advisory Board. Mr. Huber had often been called to advise State and Federal agencies contemplating construction where esthetic considerations were important.

r r

r After field and office studies Mr. Huber advised, "I feel that the Tioga Pass road is and must remain essentially a park road. For this purpose I consider the 20 foot width of pavement to be satisfactory, i.e., two 10 foot width travel lanes. For the "Section in Through Fills," I would recommend that the 3' 0" shoulder on either side of the pavement be widened to 4' 0". I note that this is to be a stabilized base native grass shoulder." I hope this specification will be retained with insistence, otherwise, shoulders are soon coated and from the motorists' viewpoint look the same as pavement; thus we have in effect a 24 foot pavement without shoulders and once the motorist is over the edge he is often in trouble." He approved the Park Service standards on the remainder of the road, i.e., 2 foot shoulders. (117) These recommendations

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**Clouds Rest and Half Dome from Olmsted View**

were accepted by National Park Service and Bureau of Public Roads officials and were incorporated in the final road plans. (119)

Actual construction began in 1957, with contracts let that year for clearing and grading 6 miles on the west end of the 21 mile section and 4.5 miles of the easternmost portion. (121) At that time the total cost of re-doing the 21 mile section was estimated at \$4,658,000. (120)

Preservation of scenic values was uppermost in the minds of all connected with the project. If slight realignment would save an unusual natural feature — an ancient juniper, a lodgepole pine grove or glacial erratic boulder — the change was usually made. (121)

At this time Director Wirth pointed out, “There were changes made in the plans for the Tioga Road which took into consideration several of the suggestions made by the conservation people . . . I think the final decision was a good decision which took into consideration the many problems confronting us. No road ever reconstructed in the National Parks has had the detailed study and consideration that has been given to the Tioga Road. The route and standards were under intense study for 31 years . . .” (122) (123) Associate Director E. T. Scoyen summed up, “When the debris of construction operations is cleaned up and the project fully completed, I am sure there will be virtually unanimous approval of this road which is designed to present to the motoring public a sample of high Sierra park wonderland . . . I am sure that hundreds of thousands in future years will be thankful for this opportunity to receive enjoyment and inspiration from superlative scenery.” (125)

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

r During the winter with construction halted, plans were completed and bids were let and accepted for the remaining 10 miles of the 21 mile section. (118)r

r r

r The full 21 mile central section was completed and officially opened to the public on June 24, 1961. The cost was \$5,491,000. The cost of the western and eastern sections was \$1,450,000, or a total cost of \$6,941,000 for the 46 miles from Crane Flat to Tioga Pass.r

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r r **Next: Today** • r **Contents** • r **Previous: Reconstruction** r

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/post\\_war\\_developments.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/post_war_developments.html)r

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r r

r [Yosemite](#) > [Library](#) > [Tioga Road](#) > The Tioga Road Today >r

r r

r

r r r

r r **Next: Sources** • r **Contents** • r **Previous: Post War Development** r

r r r

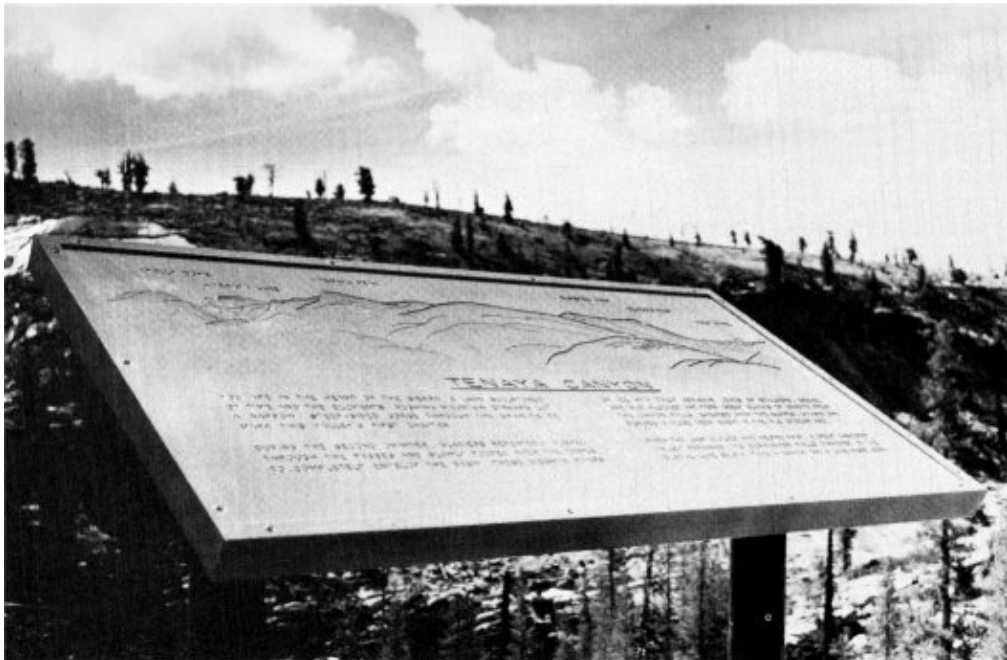
# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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## **The Tioga Road Today**

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**One of several interpretive signs at Olmsted View**

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r The Tioga Road today is the most scenic route in all California and one of the most outstanding park roads in the entire National Park System. It has been carefully designed and built to display the dramatic park values of the Sierran Nevada. The road is the highest trans-Sierran crossing with an elevation of 6,192 feet at Crane Flat and reaching 9,945 feet 46 miles later at Tioga Pass. It is designed for leisure travel (commercial trucking is not permitted), with numerous turnouts and overlooks where the park visitor may stop in safety to enjoy the superb scenery. At each of these vista points, the visitor will find interpretive signs which introduce and acquaint him with that which he views. The interpretive texts, which have been carefully prepared by the park's naturalist staff, have met a hearty welcome from park visitors.

r r

r Sections of the old Tioga Road have been retained "as is" for those lovers of the old west who like to get away from the main route. One such section leaves the new road just east of the White Wolf intersection and winds and twists five miles down to Yosemite Creek where the visitor will find the same primitive

The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

quality campground which has served travelers on the old Tioga Road since it was first constructed. An additional two mile section of the old road climbs via Snow Flat to the May Lake Trail Junction. Other shorter sections still serve their primitive campgrounds along the old road, all of which have been retained.

r r

r What has the visitor's reaction been for the new road? It has been favorable and has drawn expressions such as "Now you can see something," "What a relief," "It's a pleasure to drive it," are common. The greatest number of visitor bouquets are probably received on the numerous vistas and turnouts with their interpretive facilities which help the visitor to understand and appreciate the natural features and park values.

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r r **Next: Sources** • r **Contents** • r **Previous: Post War Development** r

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r [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga\\_road/today.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/tioga_road/today.html)r

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r r

r [Yosemite](#)"> > [Library](#)"> >r [Tioga Road](#)"> >r Sources of Information >r

r r

r

r r r

r r **Contents** • r **Previous: Today** r

r r r



# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)***

## **by Keith A. Trexler**

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

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r Cover photo: Along the Tioga Road, Yosemite Creek, circa 1925 following storm.r

r PHOTO CREDITS:r Inside cover,r pagesr 3,r 4:r D. H. Hubbard, NPS;r 5,r 11:r C. C. Thompson;r 17:r R. H. Anderson, NPS;r 18:r F. W. Frost;r 22:r H. M. Albright;r 23:r R. N. McIntyre, NPS;r 26,r 27:r K. A. Trexler, NPS;r 12,r 13:r NPS;r 6,r 7,r 9,r 16,r 21:r unknown.r

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r r r r

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r r

r r [Contents](#) r • r [Previous](#): [Today](#) r r

r r r

r

r r

r

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

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r r r

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r r **Next: Title page** r

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# ***The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980)*** **by Keith A. Trexler**

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*r Along the Tioga Road, Yosemite Creek, circa 1925 after a storm*

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r

- [Title page](#)

r

- [Map](#)

r

- [Before the Road](#)

r

- [The Mines](#)

r

- [The Great Sierra Wagon Road](#)

r

- [Travel Prior to 1915](#)

r

- [Business Ventures](#)

r

- [The East Side](#)

r

- Automobiles Arrive

r

- Reconstruction

r

- Post War Developments

r

- The Tioga Road Today

r

- Sources of Information

rr r

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## About the Author

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r r Keith A. Trexler in Lehman  
r Cave, r c. 1960s (GBNP, NPS) r r

r r Keith A. Trexler was born September 17, 1931. r He was interested in ornithology and photography and joined the National Park Service. r Initially Trexler was a park interpreter in Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks. r He was Chief Naturalist at Lehman Caves National Monument in 1964 r (now part of Great Basin National Park, Nevada). r That year he witnessed and photographed the infamous cutting down of “Prometheus,” the then oldest living Bristlecone pine, in nearby White Mountains that year. He considered the event unnecessary, even though it was for glacier research, and later wrote about its destruction. r Trexler, as Chief Naturalist, wrote a booklet in 1966, r *Lehman Caves: Its Human Story From the Beginning Through 1965*. r Trexler served in the Yosemite Museum development program “with enthusiasm” during 1967 to 1970. r In 1974 he was on the Park Service’s Alaska Task Force evaluating lands to divvy up between the Park Service, oil company right-of-ways, r and Alaska Native corporations. r Specifically, he was part of a team that conducted field research of proposed areas and eventually proposed Aniakchak, Katmai, and Lake Clark national parks or preserves. r Trexler’s role included rewriting master plans for the proposed parks. r Trexler and others were killed in a plane crash in Alaska September 1975 r during an inspection tour of

proposed Lake Clark National Park.

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## Tioga Lake Dynamiting Controversy

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*r Dynamited stretch of glacier-polished granite on Tioga Road near Olmsted Point*

r Not mentioned in this Park Service-written history is the 1958 controversy over dynamiting a three-mile stretch of beautiful glacier-polished granite next to the Tenaya Lake shoreline and Olmsted Point. Photographer Ansel Adams and conservationist David Brower were particularly outspoken regarding the routing of this stretch of the road. The Sierra Club opposed the alignment, but not strong enough in Adams' and Brower's eyes.

r Ansel Adams telegraphed the following in 1958 to the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce and the National Park Service director:

r . . . I wish to lodge a most sincere and severe protest against the desecration of Tenaya Lake—which is being perpetrated by the ruthless construction of the new Tioga Road for the National Park Service by the Bureau of Public Roads. The catastrophic damage is entirely unnecessary and violates the principles expressed in the National Part Organic Act of 1916 . . . I consider this desecration as an act of disregard of these basic conservation principles which approaches criminal negligence on the part of the bureaus concerned. I urgently request you order an immediate cessation of work on the Tioga Road in the Tenaya Lake area until a truly competent group can study the problems and suggest ways and means of accomplishing completion of this project with minimum damage. I have never opposed appropriate improvement of the Tioga Road but in 40 years' experience in national park and wilderness areas I have never witnessed such an insensitive disregard of prime national park values. (Robert Turnage, "Ansel Adams: The Role of the Artist in the Environmental Movement," *The Living Wilderness* (The Wilderness Society, March 1980. See also Ansel Adams, "Tenaya Tragedy," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 43(9):1-5 (November 1958))

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r David R. Brower wrote shortly before his death in November 2000:r

r . . . I saw the trouble begin with an earlier development policy, Mission 66, when then-National Park Service Director Connie Wirth went to the American Automobile Association, not to conservationists, for advice.r What he let happen to Yosemite in the controversy over rerouting the Tioga Road was a disaster, which the Sierra Club let happen by not opposing it strongly enough.r Park service people should have been jailed for what they destroyed at Tenaya Lake . . . .r [I was not] successful in stopping the National Park Service from demolishing Tenaya's granite domes.r I have had more than one park ranger lament how right we were to have opposed that project and how our alternative would have been better. . . .r (David R. Brower, "Brower on the Yosemite Valley Plan," *S. F. Chronicle*, 11/20/2000)r

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## Bibliographical Information

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r r **Next: Title page** r

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The Tioga Road; a History 1883-1961 (1961, 1980) by Keith A. Trexler

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