

# DONNER SUMMIT CANYON

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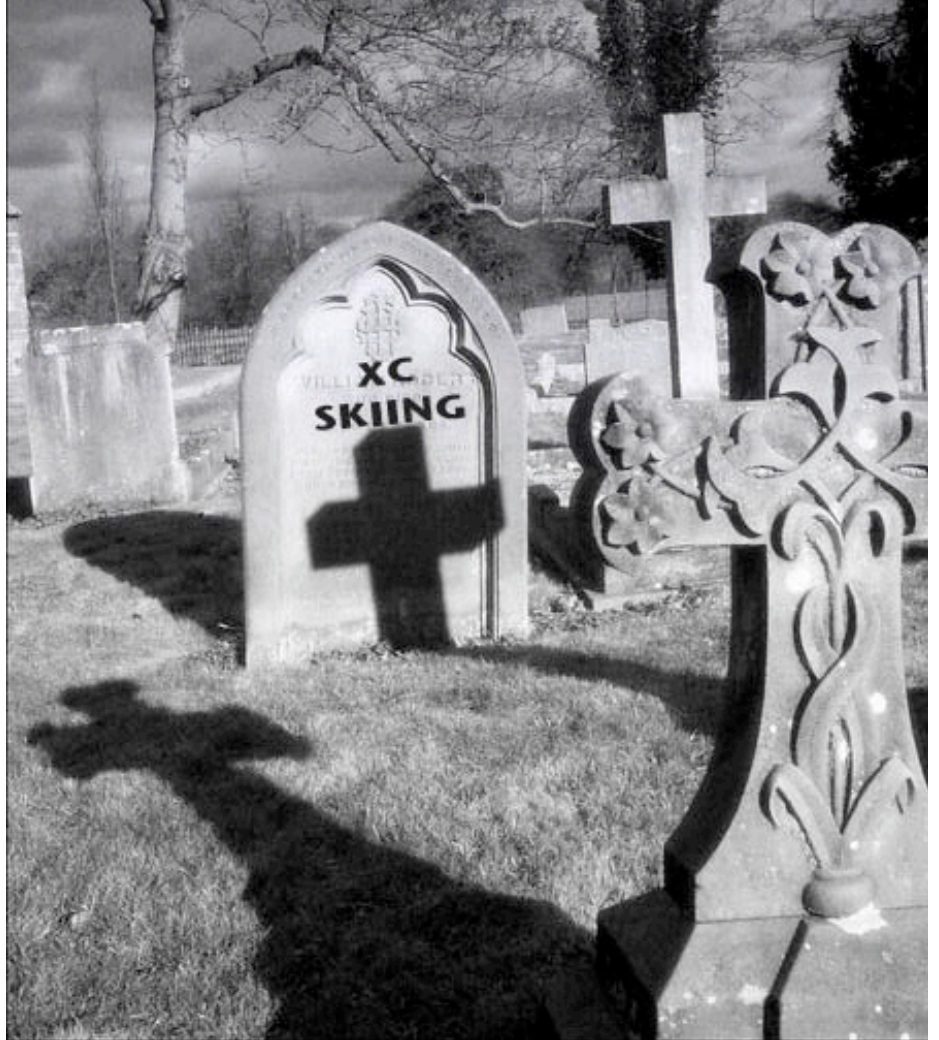
## DON'T PULL THE PLUG ON ROYAL GORGE

By KTG

In the October 1st Nevada Union article, 'Summit Impasse', Mike Livak offers a grim prognosis for the patient in his care, Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Resort. The article states, "when Foster and Syme bought Royal Gorge, the high cost to groom hundreds of miles of trails and the loss of a wilderness lodge to a fire a few years prior to the sale made the business unviable, Livak said." and "Without the wilderness lodge, Royal Gorge was a loser. This is a very modest operation. It requires a significant subsidy each year, Livak said."

If one weren't aware of the malignancy of Royal Gorge LLC's plans (see their Royal Gorge Future web-page) for the cross country ski resort, one could almost imagine Misters Foster, Syme, and their employee, Mr. Livak ministering tenderly to the ailing ski resort. A more apt analogy might be of Royal Gorge Cross Country as a patient on life support, about to have the plug yanked by relatives eager to divide up the spoils--an heirloom trail here, a scenic overlook there, all about to be despoiled by parking lots, condominiums, timeshares, and fractured-ownership dwellings.

Mr. Livak, and his employers would like to paint a pretty, frost etched Christmas card picture of white knights who providentially skied in to rescue a distressed cross country resort. If that were indeed the case, they would have sought to rebuild the venerable and fabled Wilderness Lodge, and perhaps some other lodging, on a scale that was both reasonable and respectful of the Summit, and oriented towards preserving cross country skiing. But no, in order to "rescue" the resort, they currently propose over 1000 dwelling units, hotels, restaurants, at least two artificial lakes, and what every cross country ski resort needs to remain viable, downhill skiing (there apparently being a shortage of downhill ski opportunities at Donner Summit).



Do Royal Gorge LLC's development plans presage the end for Cross Country skiing as we know it on Donner Summit? The omens are not favorable.

None of this is aimed at shoring up an ailing cross country resort. The two planned artificial lakes will require a large clear-cutting of trees, and will result in the obliteration of cross country trails. Parking lots, roadways, and driveways will certainly not add to the cross country skiing experience, as rubber mats just don't substitute for real

snow, and incessant traffic certainly doesn't substitute for icy solitude.

Mr. Livak, in a September 4th interview with the Truckee Times raised the specter of Royal Gorge not even lasting the season, "even the future of the cross country area is in doubt. Royal

See **ROYAL GORGE** on Back

## A TAXING QUESTION

By KTG

People interested in the doings of the Sierra Lakes County Water District, up at Serene Lakes (Donner Summit), can armchair quarterback by reading old minutes on the SLCWD web page. For quite some time now, closed-door sessions have revolved around the mysterious Placer County Parcel Number 069-020-068-000, aka the lake bottom for Lakes Serena and Dulzura, a small dam, and a bit of Serena/Ice Lakes Creek.

It seems negotiations have been ongoing for some time involving the lake bottom, either through outright purchase, or eminent domain. Talk on the trails is that years ago, the water board neglected to purchase the lake bottom when the opportunity arose, and the lake bottom's ownership tailed along with the Ice Lakes Lodge. Hence, when Todd Foster and Kirk Syme of Royal Gorge LLC purchased the lodge, they got a lake bottom in the bargain.

However, ownership of a lake bottom can be more of a burden than a blessing, especially when a public agency (SLCWD) possesses the rights to all the water in the lake, and then some. After all, what's a lake bottom without water? Well, more than just a big mud pit, apparently, because Royal Gorge LLC has been playing hard to get, and a special appraiser has been hired by the water district, at a cost not to exceed \$10,000, to value the lake bottom; the appraiser's wages may add up to more than the worth of the lake bottom. Oh, and speaking of mud pits, ownership of the lake bottom does not give Royal Gorge LLC the rights to dredge the lake, or raise the dam (flooding private property). SLCWD, as a public agency, has appropriate rights to the water, and the burden of ensuring water quality, and the duty to protect the Serene Lakes and Serena Creek habitat--Royal Gorge LLC merely has the privilege of owning a (for them) valueless piece of property.

You see, if you look the parcel number up on Placer County's on-line tax pages, a curious thing comes to light.

There is absolutely no indication that Royal Gorge LLC has ever been assessed, or paid a penny of taxes on the 85.8 acre parcel, listed under the category, "Rivers, Lakes, Reservoir, Canal." If this is indeed the case, and not the result of gremlins in Placer County software, it seems a bit thick of Royal Gorge LLC now to try to extract the last drop from SLCWD. And if it is also true that Royal Gorge LLC hasn't paid any taxes on an 85.8 parcel, please answer my taxing question: where do we line up to sign up for the same program?

*"Why should they charge the water district for value-less property they've never paid a cent of taxes on?"*

Read more at: [www.SaveTheSummit.com](http://www.SaveTheSummit.com)

**ROYAL GORGE** *From Front*

Gorge will open this winter, but says grooming its 100 miles of trails for an average of 30 skiers is not cost effective, Livak says."

Can this patient be saved? Yes, and if not as a money maker, I'm sure there are lots of organizations willing to explore running Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Resort as a nonprofit. Royal Gorge LLC, stop talking the cross country ski resort down in an attempt to convince Placer County nothing but condos are a viable business at the Summit. If you can't make a go of the resort (which you surely must have known prior to purchase), start talking to land-trusts who might be happy to rescue the resort. Please don't pull the plug on Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Resort.

**BREAKING NEWS**

**How much are the Royal Gorge lands worth?**

Here are the current tax assessments on Royal Gorge Lands:

Area	Acres	Assessment
Ski Camp	595	\$2,471,469
Lake Camp	703	\$2,913,743
Wilderness Camp	640	\$1,363,756
Summit Camp	500	\$1,527,375
Summit Station	5	\$1,592
Lake Bottom	83	0
Other	734	\$4,932,238
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,260</b>	<b>\$13,210,173</b>

**Notes:** These are the land values only, not building or other improvements. Improvements were another \$3.6M. The "other" category include Ice Lakes Lodge, Rainbow Lodge, Negro Canyon parcels, and other land not being built on. Summit Camp is the Van Norden parcels. Summit Station on Pahatsi was, for some unknown reason, not re-assessed in 2005 like the other lands and is still listed as owned by Royal Gorge Partners, not Royal Gorge LLC. Detailed tax records can be found on the "Documents" page of [www.saveserenelakes.org](http://www.saveserenelakes.org) as "Royal Gorge Tax Assessments"

**How much did Foster and Syme pay?**

If Ice Lakes Lodge is excluded from the property assessments, and building values are included, then tax appraisal records show F/S paid \$13.9M for the land and improvements. The liquor license transfer they filed in 2005 indicates the business value (not lands or asset value) was \$20.1M. That implies that F/S paid \$34M in 2005 for the Royal Gorge, Rancho Monterey and Rainbow Lodge lands and businesses.

**How much did they finance?**

In June of 2005 a trust deed was filed with the county stating that Royal Gorge LLC took out an adjustable rate loan from Bank Midwest NA for \$17M secured against the Royal Gorge LLC holdings. A 50% mortgage! Assuming an interest rate of around 6%, they are paying around a million a year in interest. Interesting?

**Royal , Royal Gorge-- Used to Be a Treasured Land.**

*(sung to tune of "Davy Crockett" )*

*Born in the Bay area in Foster Cit-ee,  
Built him a subdivision when he was only three,  
Raised in such wealth, and expecting the best,  
bought him a mountaintop to feather his nest.*

*Royal, Royal Gorge-- used to be a treasured land.*

*From a building family the other boy came,  
His sights set on large projects, all just the same,  
Office buildings have become such a bore,  
Let's buy us a mountain, and build oh so much more.*

*Royal, Royal Gorge-- used to be a treasured land.*

*Never met a government we couldn't buy,  
Well, anyway, we'll give it a try,  
If that don't work we'll get a fancy lobbyist,  
measure up our profits with all of the rest.*

*Royal, Royal Gorge-- used to be a treasured land.*

*Donner Summit means nothin' to us  
People who care for it are at the back of the bus,  
We'll dam and we'll build 'til the end of the day,  
Folks who're mad- for us they have nothin' to say.*

*Royal, Royal Gorge-- used to be a treasured land.*

*But people, they're funny- they fight for what's right,  
To preserve Donner Summit they'll work day and night,*

*Bumperstickers, lawsuits, letters to the man,  
To save Royal Gorge they'll do whatever they can.*

*Royal, Royal Gorge-- used to be a treasured land.*

**CROSSWORD ANSWERS TO THE DEVELOPER THEMED CROSSWORD PUZZLE**

We really were going to make a crossword, just like the New York Times, but, well, it didn't fit, and it's really hard to draw all the boxes. So we're cutting corners, and just giving you the questions and answers. Maybe next time....

- What word do the developers want to take out of cross country skiing? skiing
- What kind of devil don't you want to see on Halloween? devioler
- What is wet and looks like water, but is undrinkable? effluent
- What do you call a developer's sales talk? snowjob
- What do you call Serena creek with no water? dry
- What do you call the slopes at ski camp? bunnyslopes
- What happens if you raise the dam on Serena Lake? flood
- What sound does an emptying lake make? glug
- What is a dirty word to developers? timeshare
- What word is music to developer's ears? millions
- What do you do to trees in order to build condos? clearcut
- What enables you to ski across pavement? rubbermats
- What does a developer wear to look like a mountain man? flannel
- What suit does a developer hate? lawsuit
- What do you use to scare a developer away? garlic
- What does a developer love, but witches hate? water
- What happens to a fish if developers take the water? It \_\_\_\_ dies
- Ding dong bell, developer's found a \_\_\_\_ well
- What kind of water doesn't replenish if you pump too much? groundwater
- What do developer's think Summit residents are? pumpkinheads
- What happens when developers cut down all the trees? erosion
- What is a developer's worst four letter word? CEQA
- What's the worst word in the world for a fish? dam
- What's a developer's favorite vehicle? bulldozer
- What's the legacy of unchecked development? waste
- Bears like honey, and developers like \_\_\_\_\_ (rhymes)? money
- Take paradise and put up a \_\_\_\_\_ ? parking lot
- What word describes animals whose migration routes are cut off by a dam on Van Norden Meadow? dead
- What is worse than dead for animals, and happens with too much unwise development? extinct
- What part of the word "conservation" applies to developers who want to put over 1000 units at Donner Summit? Con
- What word is music to Summit resident's ears? landtrust
- Who will turn over in his grave if this development is approved? John Muir
- What breathes eternal? hope

**DEVELOPER PROOF YOUR HOME**

Developer activity is strongly on the rise in the Donner Summit area. Developers, unable to find water in the wilds because of drought conditions, have resorted to breaking down doors of cabins in search of water. Something as innocent as a garden hose left trickling, or a child's toy wading pool left out overnight, has proved an irresistible lure for thirsty developers. Once the developer becomes accustomed to quenching his insatiable thirst in your yard, he peers in through cabin windows, and upon seeing a water dispenser, a dripping kitchen tap, or, a favorite target, a fridge with a water and ice dispenser, he savagely rips off windows and doors in order to reach the water. Frustrated developers have been known to trash entire kitchens when enough water is not found.

Cabin owners are urged to lock up garden hoses and kiddie pools to discourage visits by developers. Windows should be covered, in order to prevent the developer from peering through and seeing a water source. And, authorities strongly caution, under no circumstances carry water bottles, sippy cups, or water guns in areas where developers are natural inhabitants. It could prove dangerous to humans, and developers alike.

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Only joking, but the plight of bears this year is no joke. Please educate yourself about protecting yourself, and our wild bears. Don't leave trash out. The excellent BEAR League, [www.savebears.org](http://www.savebears.org), can advise you about bear problems.