

# MCGLASHAN SPRINGS AND THE BUCKNAM TRACT

TAHOE DONNER'S LESSER KNOWN GEMS

IMAGES AND STORY BY BENJAMIN LEVINE, FOUNDER OF THE FRIENDS OF TAHOE DONNER TRAILS CLUB

I had studied every foot of Tahoe Donner's trail system. The best places, the finest views—I thought I knew them all. Then one morning I parked in an overlooked cul-de-sac, rounded a gate, and walked off to explore McGlashan Springs and the Bucknam Tract.

There stood massive boulders, carried down from the summit by ancient glacial forces that ground through the valley creating the moraine that formed Donner Lake. Radiant green cedars spread through the forest. Even some majestic old growth trees with furrowed, cinnamon trunks had here evaded logging and fire.

No, I did not know all the best places and all the finest views. But I keep returning to McGlashan Springs and the Bucknam Tract to discover more of them.

## MCGLASHAN SPRINGS

It is easy to lose oneself within these parcels, but it is difficult to get lost. They are perfect for wandering. While traipsing through the area

one fall day I happened across the 160-acre property's namesake artesian wells. Beginning in the 1920s, the McGlashan Water Company encased the wells and constructed pipes to direct water from them into town.

The oldest, most westerly well is cased in metal, six others in concrete, and one, the most southerly, is no longer cased at all. Old pipes still protrude from the soil. Today the springs flow unrestrained, trickling down and weaving together in a lush riparian zone that finally resolves into a small creek.

Born in Wisconsin in 1847, Charles Fayette McGlashan, the water company's founder, emigrated to California as a boy, and traveled to Truckee as a young man to serve as school superintendent.

Soon he was teaching himself law, conducting scientific research, writing a Donner Party history, editing the local newspaper, and immersing himself in the town's life. Truckee's untiring promoter, he had a prescient understanding of the important role that winter recreation would have for the area.



The view from the Bucknam-Sinclair Tract, looking west.

Not all his endeavors succeeded. His scheme to raise imported French frogs in local ponds ended quite badly, particularly for the frogs.

And not all his endeavors were admirable. Elected to the state assembly on a racist platform, he was also a leader in Truckee's Caucasian League, an anti-Chinese vigilante committee. After arson and outright violence failed to drive the Chinese from town, he spearheaded boycotts and exclusions that proved so successful in starving them out that he toured the state promoting the "Truckee Method" of persecution.

Before these torments, Truckee's Chinatown was second only to San Francisco's. The Chinese had come to these mountains to build the railroad, and they stayed to work as merchants, lumbermen, and ice-men. Many also labored in the region's charcoal industry, tending kilns around the clock for days on end. The remains of one such kiln can still be found at McGlashan Springs today.

Charles McGlashan died in 1931. Twelve years later the water company sold the McGlashan Springs parcel to the Truckee Public Utility

District, who held title until selling it to Tahoe Donner in 2011.

## THE BUCKNAM TRACT

An avid and accomplished butterfly collector, Charles McGlashan applied in 1914 to patent an entomological mount that he and his daughters had invented. One of the application's two witnesses was a man named William Alvin Bucknam. He owned the 240-acre property to the west of McGlashan Springs.

Compared to Charles McGlashan, W.A. Bucknam, born in Iowa in 1849, led a relatively quiet life. Listed as a merchant on 1890s voter registration rolls, he was commissioned as Truckee's postmaster by President Grover Cleveland in 1896. Laura Bucknam, his wife, apparently preceded him in the position. He later became a director at the Champion Cold Stream Ice Company by the early 1900s.

With boulders, cedars, and thickets of tobacco brush and whitethorn,

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the Bucknam Tract's eastern end is similar to McGlashan Springs. Heading west, the geography tilts steeply until settling into a sheer 45-degree angle in an old, manzanita-filled fire scar with a panoramic view of Donner Lake.

In 1911 W.A. Bucknam divided this property into tiny lots, each measuring 25 by 80 feet, which he then sold to San Franciscans as temporary refuge should another major earthquake strike. It was something of a swindle. If the next "big one" hit in the summer, then perhaps one could escape to Truckee and encamp on the property's more gently sloping sections. But what if it struck in the winter? He did find some buyers, and still today about five acres of privately owned, undevelopable lots remain within the property.

Ownership eventually passed to the Sinclair family, who gifted the land to Stanford University in 2005. Along with the town and the Truckee Donner Land Trust, Tahoe Donner purchased the property from Stanford in 2010.

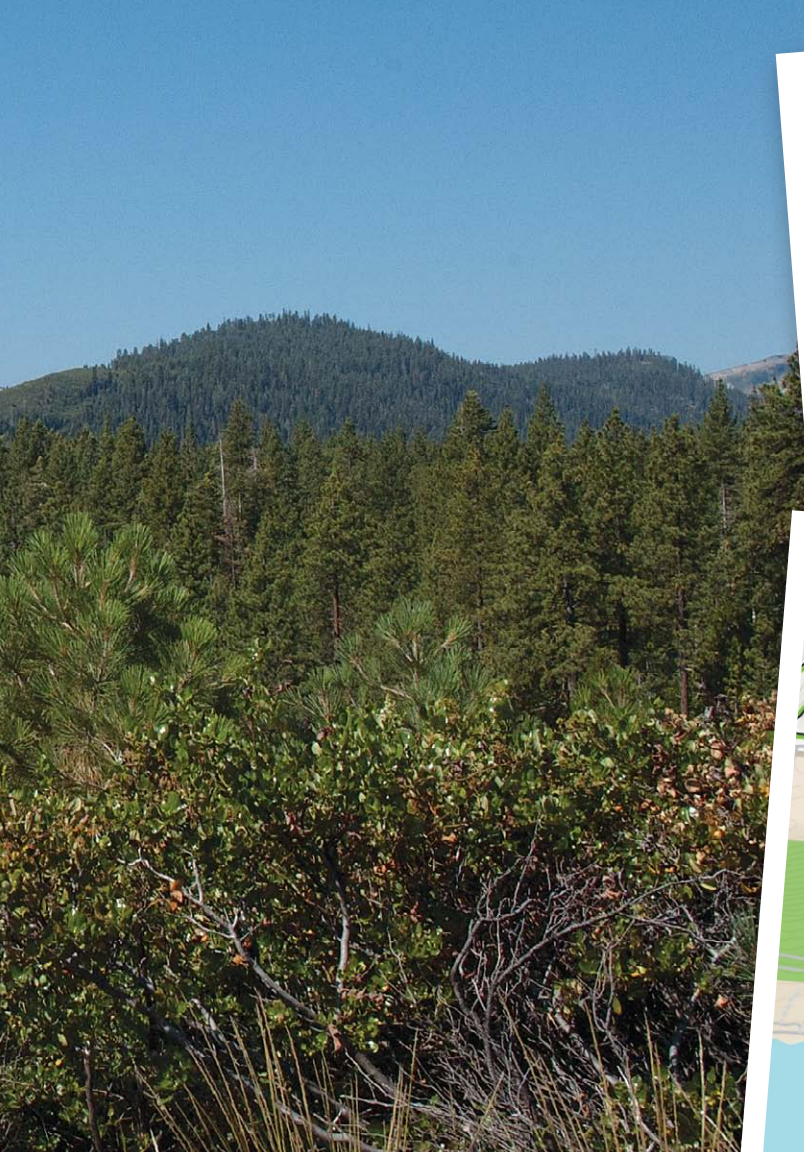
At least one trail will traverse the Bucknam Tract's difficult western end. The Donner Lake Rim Trail will enter the parcel at its northwest corner and then sweep down into and across McGlashan Springs. That trail should be the first of several throughout these properties. Once they are built, these areas will offer among the best short- and mid-

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length hiking in Tahoe Donner. Construction will begin once trail alignments are approved and volunteers are mustered.

## THE SECRET

I have seen some remarkable sights in McGlashan Springs and the Bucknam Tract. Elaborately undulating ice fields flowing from the springs in winter. A bounty of crimson snow plants. A mother bear, who had almost certainly denned nestled under a nearby boulder,

leading her brood of two yearlings and a dawdling roly-poly cub to water. Startling and rare Washington lilies that sphinx moths pollinate at dusk.

As I walked back that first morning I wondered if I should tell anyone of what I had found. Perhaps this was something best kept to myself, to be whispered only to those initiated few who had already discovered the

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**Left:** A view of Tinker Knob and the Pacific Crest from McGlashan Springs.

**Top right:** One of the original artesian wells in McGlashan Springs.

**Bottom right:** Map showing the McGlashan Springs and Bucknam Tract boundaries.

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secret for themselves. But it is difficult to remain quiet about McGlashan Springs and the Bucknam Tract.

—Benjamin Levine is the founder of the Friends of Tahoe Donner Trails club (tdtrails.org). When not exploring the region's beautiful forests, meadows, and ridgelines, he can be reached at tdtrails@gmail.com.

## VISITING AND VOLUNTEERING IN MCGLASHAN SPRINGS AND THE BUCKNAM TRACT

No trailheads or official trails exist yet within either property. There is, however, limited parking in the Bermgarten Road cul-de-sac off Skislope Way, as well as a web of dirt roads and bootleg trails. Although steep in some locations, the roads do provide access for a wide variety of hiking abilities. Because many are in poor condition, caution is advised while exploring the bootleg trails.

Please note: Construction work on a fire break will begin in the McGlashan Springs area on August 15. Visitors should take caution and watch for heavy equipment.

A partially dismantled barbed wire fence surrounds the main line of springs. Until Friends of Tahoe Donner Trails can organize a volunteer effort to remove this hazard, caution is urged there as well.

The ecological and archaeological integrity of these properties is now Tahoe Donner's responsibility. Unfortunately, not all visitors have been protecting that integrity, and artifacts have already been stolen.

Although a parking lot is planned, for now winter use is limited by parking restrictions. In time, however, McGlashan Springs and the Bucknam Tract will no doubt become popular destinations for backcountry skiers and snowshoers.

Please contact the Friends of Tahoe Donner Trails club if you would like to volunteer in McGlashan Springs and the Bucknam Tract. The club expects to be active there for many years with both cleanup efforts and trail construction.

For more information about these areas and the trails club (including the planned adopt-a-trail program and the educational weed walk with the Truckee River Watershed Council on August 10), please visit TDTrails.org or email the club at TDTrails@gmail.com.