



Water Canyon Local History

Water Works

In 1877, two men from San Francisco came to Winnemucca with the purpose of establishing a municipal water system. Their endeavor, however, has highly self-fulfilling: they were manufacturers of sheet iron pipe, which was used for piping water into homes. In September, they purchased the water rights from W.W. Cross, an early rancher in the canyon. By November, the water system was up and running, supplying Winnemucca with water.

Three dams were built in the canyon to retain water, forming reservoirs. It is estimated that the three dams combined could hold 200,000 gallons of water for use in town. From the reservoirs, wrought iron pipes carried the water into town. Today, there are many remnants of those old pipes along the creek and scattered throughout the canyon.

This system was a blessing for the local citizens: for the first time they had running water in their homes and businesses. This water was also used for irrigation and to supply fire hydrants. The system, however, was far from perfect. During several large fires that plagued Winnemucca, there were delays, sometimes as long as 30 minutes, in fighting the fires because the water had to first be turned on at the reservoir before reaching the hydrants. The townspeople were understandably upset by this and blamed the water company for their losses.

The system provided Winnemucca with water from 1877 until as recently as the 1960's when the city began obtaining their water from the local underground aquifer. Today, Water Canyon Creek plays an important role in recharging this aquifer.

Recreation

People from Winnemucca and elsewhere have enjoyed Water Canyon for recreation since the 1870's. The shade from the trees provided much relief from the hot, summer sun. In the winter, more snow accumulates in the canyon than in town, making it an ideal place for winter sports.

In the 1920's through the 1960's there was a small ski lodge with gas-powered rope tow in the upper canyon. The lodge burned down in the 1960's. A short distance below the ski lodge is an area where the Boy Scouts camped in the 1950's and 1960's. Further up the canyon there is a tall stand of aspen known as "The Grove." This has been a popular picnic spot since the late 1800's. In 1906, it was reported in the local paper that the townspeople held a 4th of July picnic, where they enjoyed the cool shade and canyon breezes over a meal of fried chicken. Today, Water Canyon continues to offer many recreational opportunities. Many people visit Water Canyon to hike, camp and picnic in the lower part of the canyon and to hunt and ride ATV's in the upper part of the canyon.