

## Camp Connell

The area known today as Camp Connell was first used by Native Americans hundreds of years ago. Its location on San Antonio Creek was along a trading route between bands of Miwok, Piute, and Washoe, and was a popular summer encampment.

Camp Connell was established in 1928 by Jack and Noreen Connell, who had purchased the Dorrington Hotel property in the mid-1920s. With auto traffic increasing and the old hotel in need of repair, the couple decided to build the Camp Connell Store, complete with gasoline station (still operating today as one of the oldest Chevron stations in California), general merchandise store, rental cabins, and a campground. Camp Connell quickly became a stopping place for travelers along the Ebbetts Pass Highway, as well as a gathering place for local residents and cattlemen. The Connell's continued to expand the store and added a café to serve the increasing number of visitors. By 1934 the Post Office was moved to the store from Dorrington and became "Camp Connell Station." The store served as a community center where local residents and vacationers alike would come to share news and leave messages, much as it is today. Occasionally, Circuit Court was convened in the building.

The campground was closed in 1949 and the property was subdivided into lots selling for \$600 each. The cabins remained a part of Camp Connell until the 1960s, when the highway was realigned to accommodate the ski resort and village at Bear Valley, as well as the development of Big Trees Village subdivision. Portions of the old highway remain on the store property, as the two access points.

The Anderson's owned the property for several years, keeping the traditions, the store and the cafe open to serve the increasing traffic and visitors who were here for the lumber industry, and to view the Big Trees. Grover Anderson, a very talented local musician plays at the Beer Gardens at Camp Connell, and is a descendant of the Andersons. The Anderson's sold the property to the Hoags Ed and Jenny. During the Hoags tenure, the property continued to be subdivided, and shrank again in size. The Hoags sold to the Tulipani's, Nicholas and Marie, in 1975.

The Tulipani's are most known for the friendly Nick, and Marie Tulipani. Who helped to make Camp Connell what it is today. For 41 years the

Tulipani's owned the property, but sold the business to Dick Seaman's in the early 1980's. Dick used to have raffles for all kinds of sporting goods, and was well known throughout the area until 1994 when he decided to leave the area, and transferred his business interests back to the Tulipani's.

During this time, the Tulipani's employed their daughter Donna and her husband Tom to manage the place. Seeing the popularity of the Bear Valley Music Festival, Donna and Tom created "Tommy's Backyard" (now known as The Beer Garden at Camp Connell). They hosted live music, and huge plates of food, and continued to have a diner operating (now as an independent business), The Post office had moved to Dorrington in this time, but as time changes, sometimes it changes back. The post office would move back to Camp Connell and be in the old Diners place for 17 years.

At the end of 2016, the Tulipani's sold the place to their son Dan who currently owns and operates the business to this day. The Gas Station is still the oldest continuously operating Chevron Stations (previously Standard Oil) in California. The rich history is still apparent in all the old photographs still on display. There are some of the artifacts from the day which remain, and the feeling of a time still resides. The Diner is currently under construction, but the pub inside (the only Gas Station with a Pub in Calaveras County) serves hot Italian Panini Sandwiches, and a legendary French Dip.