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CREATING A MOUNTAIN RETREAT: A HISTORY OF THE PINES RESORT

In 1977, two business partners purchased a cluster of rustic cabins on the shores of Bass Lake. They started renovations designed to transform the property into a full-service, year-round destination, and The Pines Resort was established. The legendary resort has since welcomed generations of families, business travelers and leisure guests, but Bass Lake – and the lodging it inspired – were merely a mountainside meadow just a century ago.

Building Bass Lake

Mono Indians inhabited the pine-studded Sierra foothills south of today's Yosemite Valley when soldiers from the Mariposa Battalion arrived in 1851. Crossing the valley that today includes Bass Lake, the soldiers spotted what they perceived to be Sandhill Cranes. They named the area Crane Valley, though the birds proved to be Great Blue Herons that are still common in the region.

Willow Creek, a tributary of the San Joaquin River, wound through Crane Valley and, in 1895, settlers decided to harness its waters for hydroelectric power. The San Joaquin Electric Company built a dam in 1901, but a rival company quickly purchased land upstream and diverted water from the project. The San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation purchased both competitors the following year and built the present 145-foot high dam in 1910.

While the new dam was being constructed and the Crane Valley Reservoir formed, the Madera Sugar Pine Lumber Company was laying narrow gauge track just a few miles to the north. Between 1899 and 1931, the company built a logging camp that housed 700 men, women and children. Over three decades, nearly one and a half billion board feet of lumber and were harvested there.

Some years later, pollution from a small local lumber operation killed the fish in the Crane Valley Reservoir. The government issued a hefty fine and the company, also charged with restocking the waters, chose to fill the reservoir with bass. Today's "Bass Lake" was born. Now owned by Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Bass Lake is still used for electricity, irrigation and recreational activities.

The Pines Resort and Ducey's on the Lake

When Robert Stern and Rudi Schulte bought the rustic resort in 1977, they set about replacing the existing buildings with 84 two-story cabins that are now the heart of The Pines Resort. They added tennis courts, meetings rooms and a series of docks along the shores of Bass Lake, and enhanced facilities property wide. Southern California's Greenlaw Partners purchased The Pines Resort in 2007.

Ducey's on the Lake, the signature diner of The Pines Resort, was founded in 1941 when Buddy Freeman built Freeman's Bass Lake Lodge about a mile west of the current Ducey's location. He sold his bar, restaurant and rental cabins in 1947; the property again changed hands in 1950, when Maurice and Marie Ducey of Fresno purchased and re-christened it as Ducey's Bass Lake Lodge. For nearly twenty years, the couple expanded the lodge and created a gathering place that charmed locals and travelers alike.

Ducey's became property of The Pines Resort in 1975 and continued to draw guests who enjoyed the authentic mountain lodge ambiance. However, in 1988, employees were preparing for the busy summer season when a grease fire erupted in the kitchen. Within four hours, the wooden structure was in ruins and all that remained were the slate steps, stone fireplace and wooden sign hanging streetside.

The original Ducey's sign and photos of the old lodge now hang in the entrance of the current Ducey's Restaurant, which was rebuilt on The Pines Resort property and re-opened in 1991. Retaining the warmth and charm of its predecessor, the current restaurant boasts historical Bass Lake photographs and handcrafted tables fashioned by a local artisan.

Movie Magic on Bass Lake

The Pines Resort and surrounding Bass Lake scenery have served as the setting for movies and commercial shoots for more than 50 years. Dan Ackroyd and the late John Candy came to The Pines in 1987, shooting "The Great Outdoors" during six weeks on site. Bass Lake was the backdrop for much of the 1946 Academy Award-winning film "Leave Her To Heaven," which starred Gene Tierney, Cornel Wilde, Jeanne Crain and Vincent Price. Scenes from "Meatballs 4," "Mouse Hunt," "The Giant of Thunder Mountain" and "Hiawatha" were shot in the area. And, several major corporations, including Cadillac, Honda, Chrysler, Wells Fargo and Budweiser, have filmed advertisements in the Bass Lake region.

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