Upper Truckee River – a scenic mountain bike ride

By Kathryn Reed

Which way, now?

It's a constant thought and verbalized question every time we set out to ride along the Upper Truckee River behind Lake Tahoe Airport. With so many trails in the area, I would bet we've never done the exact route twice.

One of the things I love about mountain biking on the South Shore is the abundance of trails. And the scenery, well, I'm not sure it gets any better than Lake Tahoe.



Cycling along the Upper Truckee River is breathtaking. Photos/Kathryn Reed

As the seasons change, I always like to revisit some of my favorite places to pedal. The terrain doesn't look the same from one season to the next. The difficulty of the ride changes depending on whether the ground is wet or soft dirt, like now.

Entering off the end of Lodi Avenue near where Caltrans dumps snow in the winter, we meander through thick pines until it opens into a meadow. Forks in the road have us wondering which way to go. I follow the sound of airplanes.

Tires get squirrelly in what feels like sand beneath me. Even in a super low gear I don't seem to be going very far, very fast.

Up ahead is civilization. For a brief, albeit uphill ride, we go up Jicarilla Drive. We take the bikes into the forest at the dead-end. We know there is a trail here. She just isn't making herself readily known.

Left. There she is.

Oh, no. A more distinct trail goes left, but veering right is clearly the direction we want to go. Sue convinces me right is the correct way to head.

I'm not sure I'd recommend this trail to the person who isn't familiar with the area. For those who know the lay of the land, just head to where you think the airport is. I can't be more definitive on how to get there from this side because we zigged and zagged quite a bit.

Multiple meadows captivate us. At times the trail is wide and flat enough to ride side-by-side and have a conversation. Other times I seem to have a death grip on the handlebars, not knowing what's around the bend. And at the far end of the river on this section is a single-track route that has more rivets and jarring bumps than Venice Drive.

Taking the low route we get as close to the Upper Truckee River as we can. The airport is across the way. The wind beacon is flat. It's a warm September day when a slight breeze would be nice.

The water seems still, as though it's not even moving. And,

yet, it must be – that’s what rivers do.

A dad is teaching his son and daughter how to bait a hook and cast a fishing line. Tiny fish are in the water, but nothing one could call dinner. A crawdad, though, now that was catching the youngsters’ attention.

Up ahead on the trail a different father and son are on bikes headed in the direction we came from.

Splashes of yellow twinkle in the sunlight – fall is here.

Bouncing along the trail we are looking left, right, left, right – it’s all so beautiful.

Finally, we are at the end of the trail. We come out at the California Tahoe Conservancy land at Sawmill Road. Time to make it a road bike ride home.

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