Shore of Emerald Bay via snowshoes

By Kathryn Reed

EMERALD BAY STATE PARK – While it would have been nice to be able to start a fire at the campsite to warm up a bit, it was even better having the entire campground to ourselves.

As we descended to the shore of Emerald Bay, we were walking through a blizzard. Not everyone realized the bay was to our left as we snowshoed down. The visibility was that poor on Saturday.

Emerald Bay on Feb. 23 from Eagle Point Campground. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Freshies were gradually accumulating on the already snow-laden picnic tables in Eagle Point Campground.

(When we got back to South Lake Tahoe that afternoon there was no evidence it had snowed there.)

Trekking through this 100-spot campground on snowshoes is ideal. Seldom is anyone else there. The solitude and tranquility are abundant. But it’s the scenery that will give you pause and reason to take a camera.

Pines and cedar loom tall. Only the crunching of snowshoes can be heard.

Early on there is an opportunity to hook up with the Rubicon Trail. We go to the right, the opposite direction. Mostly we follow the snow-covered road. At one point we meander off to get a view of the water below.

And then when we do reach the bottommost campsite, we break trail to reach the bay.

There, the water laps against the rocks. Icicles have formed on some of the vegetation. On the far side of Lake Tahoe blue sky is peaking out. A couple boats ply the water.

Looking around, it is easy to understand why in 1969 Emerald Bay was designated a National Natural Landmark. This campground is part of the larger Emerald Bay State Park, which includes the whole bay and Vikingsholm. The state acquired the land in 1953 from Placerville lumberman Harvey West for half the amount of what it was appraised at. (The campground was closed last season for upgrades.)

The only thing that could have made the excursion better was if an eagle had soared overhead.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 89 north. Once you go through all the hairpin turns and are about to get on the stretch where Cascade Lake is on the left and Emerald Bay is on the right, the campground is on the right. Without snow, there is ample parking off the road.

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