Fire leaves raw beauty along snowshoe trek



The Angora Fire forever changed the landscape of Gardner Mountain. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

FALLEN LEAF LAKE – Traipsing through the woods it all looked so different – partly because it was covered in snow, partly because we were going the opposite the direction we are used to and mostly because we were on snowshoes instead of a bike.

Riding from South Tahoe High School to Fallen Leaf Lake is a standard summer-fall mountain bike ride. But last weekend we left a car on 13th Street by the school and started on Fallen Leaf Lake Road.

But before we headed back toward the first car, the three of us took off for Fallen Leaf Lake via the campground. A family

of four from out of town, based on their accents, was taking photos near the glassy, picturesque lake with a snow-covered Mount Tallac in the background. We did the same.

While the shoreline is free of snow, we were happy to have our snowshoes for the remainder of the trek. Snow depth matters to some extent for snowshoeing, but fortunately going over a bare spot here or there doesn't require taking your equipment into the shop.

We cross to the other side of Fallen Leaf Lake Road and head south through the closed U.S. Forest Service gate.

With so many offshoots in this area it would be easy to not end up where you intended. However, it would be hard to get lost. A hard left and you will eventually be on Highway 89, going straight will get you to the Gardner Mountain neighborhood.

At the start we see tracks from a large vehicle, like a tractor. We're not sure what it was doing out there.

A small aspen grove with its white bark adds contrast to the dominant pines.

It doesn't take long and we are where the Angora Fire of June 2007 ravaged the landscape. Beyond the obvious remaining charred trees it is also so open here. The start of the route is denser – like what this whole area once was like.

We veer to the right to stay high enough so we will come out at the far end of the STHS' football field. Had we gone even higher we would have been able to see Lake Tahoe – something that wasn't possible before the fire.

Looking uphill the remains of the fire are more evident. It's hard to find a tree that is alive. A pile of logs is a reminder of how this area is still being restored.

We also pass the many markers for the pet cemetery.

Freel and Jobs peaks come into view directly in front of us.

At times the trail is wide enough so Sue, Brenda and I can walk together, while other times we are single-file.

It’s relatively flat, which is a good thing considering Brenda is dealing with a rather recently surgically repaired knee and I have a raw heel from a previous snowshoe.

But the bounty of beauty we are immersed in is what matters. It’s a good jaunt to get the snowshoe legs into shape for the season.

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