West Shore hike captures Tahoe's raw beauty



Sue and AJ enjoy lunch with a view of Granite Chief Wilderness Area. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

HOMEWOOD – Variety is what the trail to Twin Peaks is all about. The terrain and views seem to change around each bend.

Rugged at times, lush at others. Granite and volcanic rock. A few remaining wildflowers and a field of brittle dry mule's ear. Wide-open expanses, closed-in by towering pines. Lake Tahoe in the distance.

This West Shore hike in the Desolation and Granite Chief wilderness areas also at times follows the Tahoe Rim Trail and Pacific Crest Trail.

The Barker Pass trailhead is at 7,500 feet. The end point is at 8,878 feet. But most of the climb is gradual, so the elevation gain is not a deterrent. There is a small stretch that requires going down a bit after climbing. This is never

ideal because it means on the return there will be an uphill segment.

Not far in there is a side trail to the right. This provides the first view of Lake Tahoe. While it would have been easy to stop there and call it a day, we were glad we didn't.

Not too much farther we come across a rock outcropping. The narrow trail with a significant vertical drop makes it not the best place to be for someone with a fear of heights. A little handholding and I get through it. More spectacular views of Lake Tahoe are the reward.

It would have been possible to climb the rocks, but we didn't want to take the time and we had a dog with us. The mostly single-track trail is well maintained. At times it is soft dirt, other times it's rocky. We are surprised to find water in a couple sections. This delighted AJ so she could stay hydrated without her people's assistance.

The water provides for lush vegetation like ferns.

It's a Saturday in early September and we see few people. One guy is on the PCT headed south. We are happy to just be doing what we estimated was a 6-mile round-trip.

No bikes or motorized vehicles are allowed, though we could hear dirt bikes at the start of the trip on the road we came in on.

We get to the peaks and stop for lunch on the saddle. The vastness of Granite Chief Wilderness Area is mesmerizing. It looks like the forest goes on forever. It's easy to feel very small and insignificant, but also very appreciative to be able to embrace Mother Nature's raw beauty.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe take Highway 89 north. Beyond Homewood and before Sunnyside in Tahoe City will be a sign for Kaspian Campground. Turn left there. The road goes for about 7 miles. Veer to the left and don’t go straight on the dirt road. At the end of the hill the pavement turns to dirt. Go beyond the start for the trek to Ellis Peak. Parking for the trailhead will be on the right.

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