

No trail – no problem on snowshoe trek

By Kathryn Reed

KIRKWOOD – Destination – unknown. Trail – none. Wow factor – off the charts.

Some of my most memorable moments have been when I had no idea where I was going. The journey, the discovery, the not knowing what lies ahead – it can be adrenaline pumping, mesmerizing and almost always comes with a story to tell.

This sense of adventure enveloped us as we forged through the woods on virgin snow earlier this month.

Craig broke trail for the four of us. A view – that's his big thing. And he delivered.

The day started with Plan A having to be scrapped because the south-facing ascent was all dirt. We wanted a snowshoe. Back in the truck and up the road a bit we went before we pulled over on the other side of Highway 88 to be on a north-facing route.

It's not supposed to be this difficult to go on a snowshoe in early March, especially near the Carson Pass.



Snowshoeing into the wilderness near Carson Pass brings dynamic views. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Early on we had to cross a stream. I don't trust my balance, especially with wearing a small pack that has snowshoes dangling off the back. Donna was gracious enough to get a picture of my back side as I crawled across. Fortunately, the other 12 crossings were not a big deal and allowed me to remain upright.

It didn't take long before we came across a mini waterfall that in some ways seemed out place on this trek.

We kept seeing this tall black peak that none of us had noticed before in all the times we had been in this area. The map told us it was Black Butte, elevation 9,031 feet. We headed in that general direction.

Snow consistency varied throughout the route – from powdery to heavy to crunchy to deep.

Not only did we not see anyone on our way up, there were no other tracks. It was as though we had been transported to the middle of this perfect oasis. It was one of those days that will be hard to top.

We kept going up. It was not a difficult ascent. The views were always picturesque. Red Peak seemed to be constantly behind us. Eventually Caples Lake, too, was visible when we turned around.

The rocks gave the area personality. They should have been under snow, especially the ones we passed on our way up.

Lunch was on an outcropping of rocks at 8,740 feet. Black Butte was directly to our right.

It was like a tease just sitting there – so close and yet so far. Another day, perhaps without snow, we'll reach the top of Black Butte. It was only 2.5 miles to get to our lunch spot. In all, we went 5.7 miles.

Instead of retracing our steps, we went over the other side of the rocks toward Woods Lake where we saw tracks from cross country skiers. The lone person we saw that Sunday was on skis by the lake.

A little glissading was in order, but it wasn't necessary. It just added to the fun.

We gingerly scampered across a small section of Woods Lake. At the time it was frozen, with just a little melting around the edges. I'm sure now three weeks later based on the warm weather we've had the conditions are much different.

Then it was time to follow the creek back to where we came from. More beauty.

It was just one of those magical days in the greater Lake Tahoe area when you can't imagine living anywhere else.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, go west on Highway 50. Turn left onto

Highway 89 toward Hope Valley, turn right onto Highway 88 at Picketts Junction. Park on the left where it says Woods Creek Fishing Access. Then start walking. We were not on the road long. Good luck.

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