

Sensory overload on trot up Horsetail Falls



Horsetail Falls swooshes down through a wall of granite.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

If the drought continues for a number of years, one day it may be called “Ponytail Falls” instead of Horsetail Falls. But for now, the water is flowing as though there is no drought.

From a distance, especially driving west on Highway 50, the falls look like a horse’s tail – thus the name. It’s one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the area – from afar and close up.

This is one of those destinations where the end point can be anywhere one chooses because there are so many scenic vistas along the way.

There is designated a loop. While pretty, it doesn't go up to the falls. But there also isn't a sign saying when to get off this section of trail.



Pyramid Creek is either in view from or can be heard while on the trail.

Pyramid Creek is the early focal point. Downstream this water eventually ends up in the American River.

There was enough granite that AJ had booties on for the first time.

At times the trail is not well defined. Our group of 12 who was hiking there in June took a couple U-turns and crossed the

creek before we finally found our way to the end point we all agreed to. There we sat on slabs of granite eating our lunch, watching the water descend in all its glory. Absolutely stunning.

The water tumbling down comes from Lake Aloha. It's possible to hike there and to other lakes in Desolation Wilderness from this point. But this is only recommended for more advanced hikers.

Almost every year at least one person is seriously hurt or dies in this area because of climbing beyond his or her ability level, not respecting how cold the water is or the swiftness of the current.

Parking spaces fill fast, so go early – or don't go on a weekend. Our trek was about 4 miles round trip.

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Several pools are inviting, though the snow-fed creek is

quite chilly.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west toward Placerville. The trailhead is outside the basin. Parking is on the right at Pyramid Creek. There is a fee to park.