

Finding inspiration on a Tahoe mountaintop



Sunrise on Mount Tallac is worth the climb no matter the hour one has to start. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

As the sky was getting light we could see our destination just a few steps away. We had made it in time to meet our goal.

It was the best sunrise I have ever seen.

Sitting atop Mount Tallac at 9,735 as the sun comes over the mountains and shines all her glory onto Lake Tahoe is something to behold. Pictures don't adequately capture all the hues Mother Nature paints across the sky.

The wispy clouds seemed liked jewels – necklaces and bracelets to accessorize the spectacle that was unfolding before us.

What a birthday gift.



Gilmore Lake from the top of Mount Tallac. Photo/Kathryn Reed

I wanted to do something memorable for my 50th birthday this year – in addition to my gift to myself of a three-day tennis camp last spring with my great friend Carolyn. It was important my actual birthday weekend be Tahoe-centric.

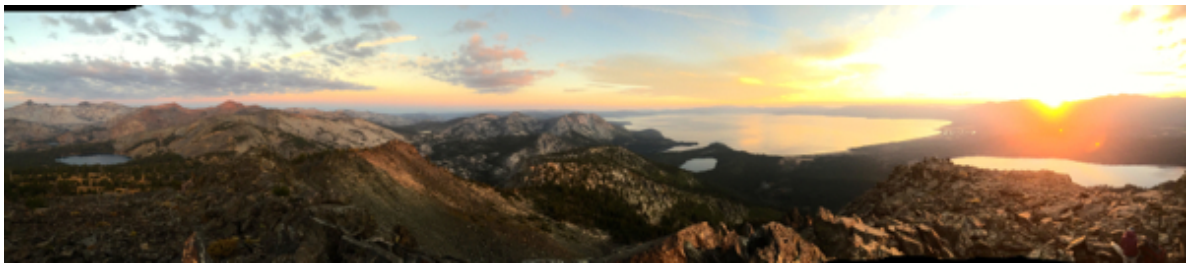
Climbing Mount Tallac under a full moon and being at the peak for sunrise are two things I've thought about doing for some time. Why not do both in one hike? My birthday weekend in September happened to be a full moon. Perfect.

I invited a few friends to make the trek with me. Two took me up on the adventure. Darla – who I've known since third grade – came up from the Bay Area, and Kele – a friend since we were in our 20s when we worked in Tahoe the first time I lived here – came down from Oregon. We left the house about 1am that Saturday and we were hiking 30 minutes later.

It was a good thing we all had headlamps because the full moon

was not of much assistance. The trees were in the way of that natural light. Then it eventually set and we were left in total darkness.

At times we shut off our lights to be dazzled by the Milky Way. This was a show unto itself. Most people only see something like this in a planetarium. It might be the only reason I would ever consider another attempt at backpacking.



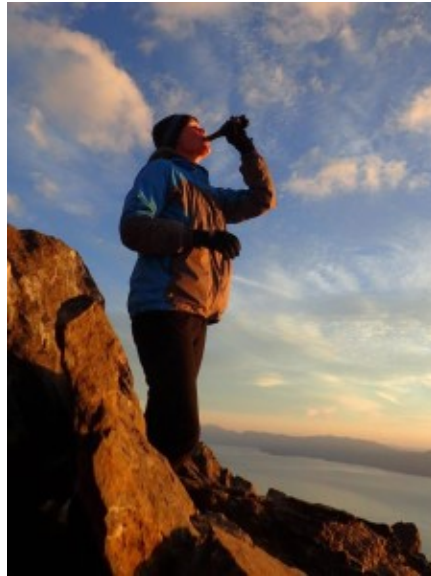
Desolation Wilderness lives up to its name.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

I don't take the stars I see for granted from my backyard, but this truly was more magical with zero ambient light.

Big spiders – and several of them – were the main wildlife out at this hour. And for whatever reason they were right on the trail. (They didn't look like friends of Charlotte's, but we still let them be.)

To say everything looks different in the dark is stating the obvious. Thank goodness for trail markers, otherwise who knows where we would have ended up. It was only near Gilmore Lake that we were unsure of the route. We figured it out on the second attempt.

We had started at the Glen Alpine Springs trailhead because this is the least steep of the routes. It is, however, the longest at about 12 miles round trip. We thought it wiser to go the easier route in the dark.



Drinking to the accomplishment and to being 50. Photo/Darla Sadler

The summit, well, it's one of those special places that can touch one's soul. For many reasons it was more magical this time. It was so wonderful that there were only four other people up there. (Other times it has been so congested with people yakking on their cell phones that it was hard to know this was wilderness.) They were celebrating a 25th birthday and thought it was cool 50-year-olds were doing the same thing.

And while they briefly made me feel my age, we proved age has a thing on youth. We gave them all of our hand warmers because we had gloves (they weren't prepared for the cold) and we were the ones with Prosecco to toast the occasion (they didn't have anything to celebrate with).

It was a toast to Tahoe, friendship, a great 50 years and a future of unknown possibilities.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe take Highway 89 north. Turn left on Fallen Leaf Lake Road. Weave around to where it dead-ends at the trailhead.

Fill out a permit and start hiking.