

Cycling through nature's beauty

By Kathryn Reed

With each pedal rotation, the crisp morning air seems to get warmer. Clearly, it's not and it's just the exertion and exhilaration of mountain bike riding through the forest that are warming my body and soothing my soul.

It's mornings like this that I remember why I love living in Lake Tahoe. The smell of fall is the air " that damp wetness " those decaying leaves.



Sue Wood
mountain bikes
Oct. 25 to
Fallen Leaf
Lake.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

The dichotomy of nature's beauty this time of year and the fact that it's the process of death is not lost on me.

So many of the aspens and other foliage turning color don't seem to care they are at their most beautiful just before going dormant for the winter.

I seem to understand.

I want to embrace the spectacle before me. To roll in the leaves. To inhale deeply and not exhale. To keep pedaling. I want to be one with nature before winter covers the landscape, before the shoveling begins, before the desire to cocoon sets in.

On this last Sunday of October, I head into the Gardner Mountain area from Highway 89 in South Lake Tahoe, climbing slightly before heading north. It's black. It's what's left from the June 2007 Angora Fire, when more than 3,100 acres of Forest Service land was charred. (The 254 houses that were lost in that fire are not in this area.)

But Mother Nature is resilient. Flora is coming back. More of that dichotomy of beauty and death woven together.

Pedaling on, it's like a line was drawn with black and green crayons, what burned and what didn't.

More yellow dominates this part of the dirt trail. A little uphill and we exit out of the forest to Fallen Leaf Lake Road.

A few hundred yards up is a massive meadow " aspens are everywhere.

We take the trail near the campground to Fallen Leaf Lake even though we'll have to walk our bikes a bit because we're not technical riders. Then we zip down to the lake.

The shore is full of people taking pictures, taking in the views of Mount Tallac and splashes of yellow around the lake.

Back on our bikes, we dart around the vacant campground before finding an indirect route that leads us to Highway 89. Crossing it, we hook up with the Camp Richardson bike trail.

Wanting to avoid people, we stick to the dirt trails around the visitors center and through the Tallac Historic Site. What a site it is with all the color.

It's time for a bite to eat " fries and a bloody Mary are lunch at the Beacon. Enough fuel to get us home.

It's a fairly quick ride, though definitely scenic, as we leave the bike path again and head for the meadows between Pope Beach and Tahoe Keys.

Just another day in paradise.

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