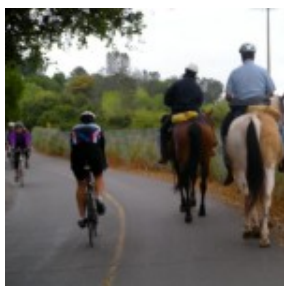


Folsom provides central location for fun without snow

By Kathryn Reed

FOLSOM – *Folsom, really?* That was the reaction I got before and after people learned about my whereabouts last weekend.

Yes, really, that's where I was for three nights. It provided the ideal location for a long weekend out of town that was close by, but completely different than the mountains.



The American River Trail exemplifies mixed use. Photos/Kathryn Reed

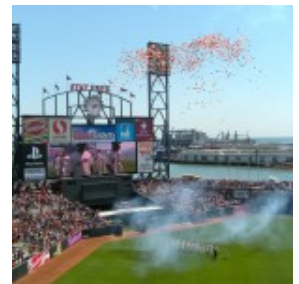
Flowers and trees are in bloom. Hills are a vibrant green. Birds are singing songs other than “cheeseburger.” And people are wearing shorts.

It was nice to experience spring – that season that seems to elude Lake Tahoe every year.

We drove down Thursday to shorten the drive for the following day's trek to San Francisco to catch the Giants' home opener. Staying at the Marriott Residence Inn allowed me the comfort to do a little work from the room, have a real kitchen to

avoid eating out each meal, a hot breakfast served in the common area, an indoor pool-hot tub to relax in, and be within walking distance to one of my favorite stores – REI.

The Giants didn't disappoint that Friday as they beat the Braves in extra innings.



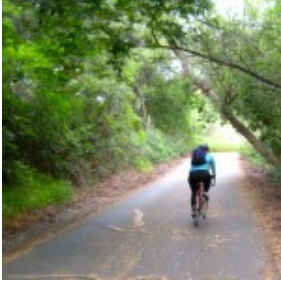
San Francisco
Giants run
onto the field
opening day,
April 9.

Something about the pageantry of opening day always gives me goose bumps.

Baseball signals the end of winter (except in Tahoe since there was snow to shovel that following Monday), the return of warm weather and garlic fries.

It's hard to believe the ballpark opened 10 years ago. It still looks and feels new.

The next morning we awoke to gray skies. But that didn't change our plans. We set off on our bikes from the hotel down Iron Point Road for about four miles until we crossed Folsom Boulevard. From there the bike path links to the 30-plus mile American River Trail that ends in Sacramento.



Sue Wood rides
along the
American River
Trail.

Even riding the city streets of Folsom was a pleasure. It, like South Lake Tahoe, is a Bike Friendly City. The difference is you don't have to snicker when you say "bike friendly" and "Folsom" in the same sentence.

Bike lanes are wide enough for two cyclists. The painted white lines for riders extend to intersections to avoid being caught up in right-hand turn lanes. Wayfinding signs are cute and easy to read.

This being my second time on the American River Trail from this starting point, we opted to head right. It took us around Lake Natomas, across a bridge (but not in vehicle traffic), to Folsom Lake where we turned around.

Trail users understand mixed use. Walkers are to the side, allowing cyclists to pass without hesitation. Equestrians, too, plod along as cyclists whiz by.

Off to the side for part of the ways are dirt paths where dog owners were more apt to be found.



Views along
the bike
trail.

Several parks, some with camping, spring up quite often. With all the oak trees, bright orange poppies and flowing water it was easy to forget I was not far from the urban, concrete jungle.

After the 28-mile ride it was time to soak in the hot tub.

That night we drove the four miles into old Folsom, where the monthly wine and art walk was taking place. It brought out locals and tourists to this area that is steeped in history and where storefronts are a reminder of the Old West.

Sunday morning it was about loading up on breakfast at the hotel because wine tasting was the activity for the day. We opted to do one day of the annual Passport Weekend put on by the El Dorado Winery Association. Sundays are less crowded.

Folsom, yes, it really is worth the short drive – for what it offers alone and what activities can be combined with it.