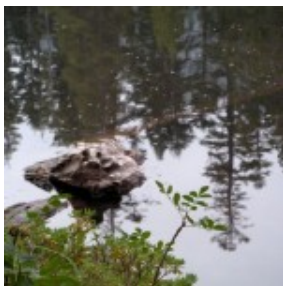


Trek to top of Mt. Tallac opens up another world

By Kathryn Reed

Something about Mount Tallac calls to people – more so in the summer than now.

Still covered in snow, the icon of the South Shore of Lake Tahoe that seems to be present no matter where one is, now requires an ice ax, crampons and an appreciation for Mother Nature if one is to trek to the top.



Floating
Island Lake

Soon, though, as the temperature begins to consistently rise, the snow will disappear – though not always completely. There have been years where splotches, sometimes even the cross, are evident until the snow begins to fly again.

Last August I made my second ascent of the 9,735-foot mountain. Though it's not the highest in the basin, it is one of the most beautiful. It's not even the most difficult to hike. (I don't need to slog up Freel Peak again.)

Tallac, though, is worth the climb. And worth doing multiple times.

It is just one of the many peaks people bag each year in the 63,960 acres called Desolation Wilderness.

Unfortunately, on this particular Friday the basin is socked in with smoke from some now forgotten wildfire outside the area. Still, the trail is full of hikers destined for the rocky summit.

Access to the trailhead can be obtained from a few areas off Highway 89. This time Sue and I opted to go in from Cathedral Road.



Sue Wood along the trail near Fallen Leaf Lake.

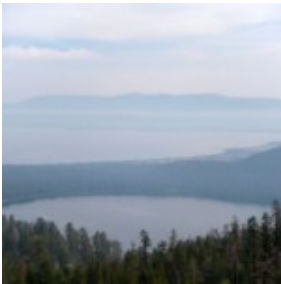
Not far in are some charred trees. They linger from a fire a few years ago (before the 2007 Angora Fire) that burned some of the area. The last time Sue was there she had a notebook in her hand and fire officials telling her she wasn't supposed to be there. Then a bit of fire retardant drifted toward her – staining her clothes for posterity.

This day was about enjoying the hike, the scenery and being one with nature. But even on Friday the trail is well used. Several people have stopped to snack at Floating and Cathedral lakes. The stillness of the water transforms them into reflecting pools.

A group from the Student Conservation Association is working with the U.S. Forest Service – which maintains Desolation Wilderness – to make part of the trail a little less steep. The work was to be completed last October.

Even though the trail (5 miles one way) is full of people, it's not anywhere as congested as Half Dome in Yosemite. On this Friday it was full of locals. Though a couple cousins from Maryland seemed to be sprinting up the mountain.

Unfortunately, people were able to get cell phone reception at the top. Somehow this seemed to negate the point – to get away from life below.



Fallen Leaf
Lake and Lake
Tahoe are
covered by
smoke in
August 2009.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

What little wind there was (usually the wind is significant at the top) just filled the senses with smoke instead of the usual clean mountain air.

Chipmunks scurry from one group of people to the next at the top in hopes of crumbs being left over.

Along the way birds chirp. Sage grouse hide in the brush, trying to avoid having their picture taken. We didn't know what it was until we looked it up at home. We thought it was a prehistoric chicken.



Sage Grouse

Normally, the views of Lake Tahoe are breathtaking from the summit. Today the smoke obscures the azure water. Fallen Leaf is also buried in the haze.

I guess it just means I need to get my hiking legs in shape to make the trek this summer – under sunny, clear skies.