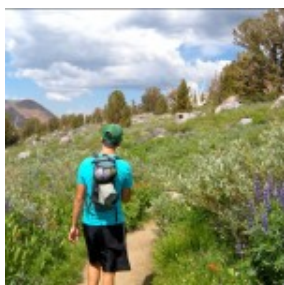


Fields of endless wildflowers beckon hikers to Sierra trails

By Kathryn Reed

HOPE VALLEY – It's like a convention of wildflower enthusiasts along the trail to Winnemucca Lake. Everyone seems to have a camera. People bending over to inhale what scent these wonders of nature are casting off. A certain excitement fills the air.

Maybe the long winter has everyone giddy about spring arriving – even though on this particular Saturday the calendar says July 24. Even the weather and flowers seem to operate on Tahoe time.



Oliver Wong
hikes through
wildflowers
near
Winnemucca
Lake.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Parking at the Carson ranger station in the Eldorado National Forest on Highway 88 is an indication the trail is going to be crowded. I end up on the street and not paying the \$5 fee because no slots are available.

Normally a congested trail is exasperating. But with my nephew in town for the weekend, the day of the hike was predetermined. The abundance of natural beauty is so intoxicating the other trail users can't bother me.

Splashes of rich purple lupine are everywhere, along with the bright yellow mule's ear.

This 1.8-mile trek to Winnemucca Lake in the Mokelumne Wilderness seems to take forever. I can't stop taking pictures.

People are circling Frog's Lake, some lingering long enough to swim – though it's predominately small children who don't know they can say no to cold water.

"It's a great area to look at stuff," says Janel Johnson, a botanist with the Nevada Native Plant Society, who is leading a wildflower hike that day. She is telling her followers about flowers I've never heard of – like penstemon, potentilla and green gentian.

"The rock outcroppings by Frog's Lake have a whole different set of flowers," Johnson says. She also remarked how the wildflowers are blooming about two weeks later than they did in 2009.

To this non-flower knowing hiker she explains the spindly pink flowers are actually wild onions.

Meandering on this trail that is full of adults, children and leashed dogs, are fields of Indian paintbrush and lupine. Wild irises poke above some of the other lush flowers. It's as though every color of the rainbow is represented in the various fields of flora.

A guy is walking up the trail with a snowboard in search of terrain to ride. A group of Cub Scouts is on a quest for outdoor related badges.

A dad points out miners' lettuce to his son and talks about a time when mule's ear would be boiled and consumed.

Finally at Winnemucca Lake we stop for a bite to eat – what we brought with us, not what we found along the trail.

Patches of snow dot Round Top, the mountain at the base of the lake. A few people are wading into the water. We don't stay long – a thunderhead is almost directly over us.

Luckily, we were out of the wilderness area before the clouds open up and only get pelted by rain and hail a bit in Meyers – such are the hazards of a topless Jeep.

To get to Lake Winnemucca: From South Lake Tahoe go over Luther Pass (Highway 89), in Hope Valley turn right onto Highway 88, go to the top of Carson Pass – parking area on your left. Pay \$5 to park. Trail is to the right of the visitor center. It's an easy 1.8 miles one-way to Lake Winnemucca. You get to Frog's Lake first. Going farther you will hit Round Top Lake, Fourth of July Lake and Woods Lake. Part of the route is the Pacific Crest Trail.

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