

5 lakes, lush flora make 12-mile hike memorable

By Kathryn Reed

MEEKS BAY – Only 172 more miles and we would have been in Tuolumne Meadows. It's a good thing we never intended to go to Yosemite National Park.

Plenty of people with the proper equipment were headed out of the wilderness with full packs. All ages, and many families had clearly spent at least one night under the stars.

Instead, this particular Sunday in August we spent the afternoon visiting the first five lakes out of Meeks Bay along the 180-mile Tahoe-Yosemite Trail. The entire trek ranges in elevation from 5,200 feet to 10,000 feet. Between the end points it crosses the Eldorado and Stanislaus national forests.



Stony Ridge
Lake along the
Tahoe-Yosemite
Trail.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

What sets this apart from so many routes in Desolation Wilderness are the abundance of ferns and other lush vegetation. Many West Shore routes are best accessed later in

the season because the snow lasts longer here.

A few wildflowers are still in bloom. (This was before last weekend's freezing temperatures.) It's the array of flora that is captivating.

With a good portion of the trail not being riddled with roots or rocks, it allows hikers to take in the beauty without worrying about tripping and falling.

Don't be fooled by how the trail starts. It's wide enough for a vehicle, flat and lulls one into believing this is an easy hike. I imagine the meadow is hiding a bevy of animal life that has taken cover with the plodding footsteps of humans.

Not far up, the trail juts to the right and becomes single-track. The hiking really begins. It's not hard – it's just not flat and wide.

Still, the mix of plant life in this section is mesmerizing. We are thankful for the tree canopy. Without it we would have created puddles of sweat.

Much of the time Meeks Creek can be heard rumbling nearby as it tumbles over rocks in its path. On occasion, it even comes into sight. It eventually flows into Lake Tahoe at Meeks Bay.

First stop is Lake Genevieve. The tranquil water beckons. Sue dips her hat to keep her head and therefore rest of her body cool as we carry on to the other lakes.

If you only have time for a short hike, this is a perfect spot to stop, have a bite to eat, even wade in to the alpine water.

Next up is Crag Lake. The rock island with a tree growing out of it makes me marvel at how Mother Nature works.

We skip Hidden Lake. It's a hike down. And what goes down must come up. We didn't want anything to do with that.

Shadow Lake is the least appealing of the five we came across. The plant life in it makes it seem unapproachable.

It was Stony Ridge Lake that called to us. After traipsing across downed logs we came to the east side. The manmade rock wall that looks like a dam of sorts is not crossable.

A slight breeze sends ripples across the lake. Sparkles of sunlight dance across the water. The clarity is stunning.

Perfect lunch boulders had us sprawled out as we soaked in the sun and scenery. The heat got the better of us and in the water we went. And I thought Lake Tahoe was cold. Sue was braver and went all the way under.

It was our secluded lake at least for one summer afternoon.

To get there:

From the South Shore, take Highway 89 to Meeks Bay. Just past the fire station that is on the right, there is parking on the left in the dirt. A small paved lot exists where the actual trailhead starts. Be sure to fill out the free Desolation Wilderness permit.

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