

Expansive views of Lake Tahoe from Snow Valley Peak

By Kathryn Reed

SPOONER SUMMIT – One of the hazards of wanting to get some incredible views of Lake Tahoe is that it takes a bit of climbing. But those 2,000-feet of uphill to get to Snow Valley Peak are worth it.

Fortunately, it's not one of those grueling routes that make you think housecleaning would have been a better activity. But it isn't something parents with little kids are going to want to try.

The six miles (one way) are part of Tahoe Rim Trail.



Brenda Knox on her way to Snow Valley Peak.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

“The trail beyond here is incredible,” Brenda Knox says of the area past our turn around point at Snow Valley Peak. She has done the entire 165-mile TRT.

Mount Rose would be the next exit point of the Tahoe Rim Trail. Sand Harbor isn't far away, but it's not visible from

the part of the trail we're on. Part of this route is used for the Tahoe Rim Trail's endurance run.

Even though the four of us did an out and back on this September Saturday, it's possible to do a circle by going down to North Canyon Road. This is the dirt road mountain bikers use to access the Flume Trail. It means having to circle around Spooner Lake at the end.

Now the fall colors should be in abundance.

We start our morning at 7,146 feet at Spooner Summit. Snow Valley Peak is 9,214 feet.

Several signs along the mostly soft dirt trail say "vista point" so hikers can go slightly off the trail for views of Lake Tahoe and the Carson Valley. Seeing both at once is always such a contrast in what this area has to offer – the liquid blue alpine lake v. the barren high dessert.

Camping in this area must be done in designated sites. Signs point the way. These are the rules of Nevada's Lake Tahoe State Park.

Up we go, passing beneath towering pines that are spaced so the terrain can be enjoyed without feeling closed in. Shrubs are close to the ground, including Manzanita.

The sign says 1.5 miles more as we are about to begin the trek across the ridge. The four of us agree it feels like a whole lot more than 1.5 miles.

A few wildflowers are out, but not many.

Lake Tahoe unfolds below us. This is one of those hikes where the size is so obvious. Often it doesn't look 22-miles long or 12-miles wide.

Directly across from us the mouth of Emerald Bay opens up, with the peaks of Desolation Wilderness looming over her.

From this vantage point it's obvious how Fallen Leaf Lake is at a higher elevation than Tahoe.

The wind is whipping. It's only Labor Day weekend and fall is definitely in the air. We take shelter behind a small rock outcropping to have lunch before making our way down. Marlette Lake is a short distance from us.

But it's the views of Lake Tahoe that make this 12-mile roundtrip hike worth doing over and over again.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe take Highway 50 to the top of Spooner Summit. Just past the turn off for Highway 28 is a small parking area on the left for the Tahoe Rim Trail. (You may feel like you're headed to the Carson Valley because it's just over the crest.) Park, walk. Trail goes to the right for the peak, to the left for Spooner Lake.

It's also possible to access the trail by parking at Spooner Lake, but it costs money to do that.

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