

Drop in elevation provides scenic, easy hike near Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

GARDNERVILLE – Every now and then I don't know what to do in Tahoe. OK, it's more like every May and early November. Too much snow to hike, not enough to ski.

Two weeks ago was no different.

On what started as a sunny Sunday, we headed to the Carson Valley in search of new terrain where we could get our hiking boots a little dusty. The drop in elevation (4,476 feet) brought us close to terrain we don't find in the mountains.



Expansive views along the Faye-Luther trail. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Sagebrush is everywhere. The long spindly bitterbrush protrudes above other flora. A few of the rabbitbrush's yellow flowers are intact. A hint of fall lingers on the branches of trees lining Luther Creek.

Farther up, white alder, willow and Jeffrey pines fill the landscape.

Though we didn't see animals other than squirrels and horses, this area is home to hummingbirds, Bullock's oriole, yellow warblers and the California toad.

Dogs are allowed on leashes. The horse people weren't following this rule. Of course they also don't have to clean up after their animals even though they make bigger messes – and lots of them in this area.

Starting out from the Faye-Luther trailhead we check out the map at the entrance. Myriad loops interconnect in a relatively small area. A flyer tells us about the Carson Valley Trails Association – a 16-year-old nonprofit “working with partners to provide access to public lands through a recreational trail system for present and future generations to enjoy.”

Appropriately named, the Sandy Trail leads us from the parking area toward the mountains we just crossed. Not far in is a sign that points to California in the direction we are headed, to Nevada where we parked. I thought nothing of the sign as we went by. It made sense to me.

What I had a hard time accepting until I saw multiple maps is the sign was actually the state line. Most of our hike was in California even though most of our drive was in Nevada. It just didn't seem right. But I think the Bureau of Land Management knows which state its land is in.

An interpretive loop guides us along. We're slow as we read most of the signs. It's an education about who the trail is named after. The Faye family started a ranch near Luther Creek in 1863 and in 1905 was the first family in the area to have electricity.

Luther Creek starts its migration to the Carson Valley from Jobs Peak. Today it is used by farmers and never reaches the Carson River.

Ira Luther, who the creek and Luther Pass are named after,

settled in the area in the 1850s. He tried to get the Central Pacific Railroad to cross what is now Luther Pass.

Luther is credited with naming Douglas County after Illinois Sen. Stephen Arnold Douglas.

We venture off on the Grand View Loop – figuring out quickly how it got its name. Here on the western edge of the Great Basin and in the Carson Range views of the Carson Valley are vast, with the Pinenut Range in the distance to the east.

A grove of Jeffrey pines fills the trail by the same name.

Had we not been taking pictures and reading the signs we would have finished these three miles in no time. For the most part it's an easy hike. The trail gradually climbs at the start. Grand View is a bit steeper. But for anyone used to Tahoe, this is easy.

Next time, which is likely to be in the spring for wildflowers and butterflies, we'll start at the Jobs Peak Ranch trailhead to add a little mileage – assuming it's not too hot then.

Getting there:

From the South Shore, take Kingsbury Grade to the Carson Valley.

Turn right at bottom of the hill on Foothill Road.

We parked at the second trailhead on the right. This has shorter loops. The first trailhead (Jobs Peak Ranch) gives you a longer trek.

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