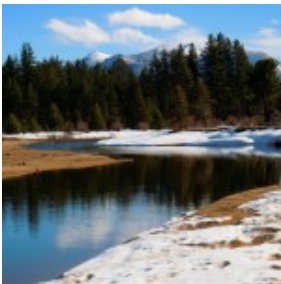


Gliding along Baldwin Beach in a blissful state of mind

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – I'm confused. The snow under my skis clearly means it's winter. But the temperature makes me wish I were in short-sleeves and has me reminiscing of summer days at the beach at Tahoe. The few feet of sand next to the lake have me thinking a towel and book would be a good thing to bring along next time.

It's one of those December Sundays when it feels more like a warm spring day. The snow has softened enough by late morning to have a little give and make gliding pleasurable.



Taylor Creek's tranquility is mesmerizing.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe is like glass – beckoning anyone foolish enough to come play with her. But we know better. She is no friend this time of year – this icy bowl of water.

We park at the turnout for Baldwin Beach off Highway 89. The U.S. Forest Service does not plow the access road. It's OK to park there, but pay attention to areas along this stretch of the South Shore because there are “no parking” signs in

certain places.

Outdoor enthusiasts have laid several tracks. An etiquette reminder – if possible, don't walk in the tracks of cross country skiers. Even more important, pick up after your dog – especially because dogs aren't allowed at Baldwin.

Meandering down what feels like a forested tunnel of sorts because of the thick conifers on either side has altered my state of mind. I'm lost in this wonderland. Inhaling, exhaling. Oh, that mountain air.

Less than a mile in the terrain opens and Lake Tahoe's deep blue waters are just a few glides away.

We head north along the beach. Mount Tallac is to our left all covered with snow. It looks like February. It seems too early – and technically it's not winter – for this icon to be awash in white.

No one is in sight, yet the tracks prove plenty of people have beaten us to this little slice of Tahoe splendor. We go as far as we can. A creek prevents us from crossing. Although the water level is low, there is no way not to get our feet wet. No matter the outside temperature, wet feet are a recipe for frostbite.

At times this inlet can be crossed on the ice. But crossing any ice in Tahoe is tricky because of the freeze-thaw factor. When the area is a crossable, it becomes a bit of an architectural tour with all the shoreline homes.

This Sunday we turn around and head toward Taylor Creek. A large predator bird is circling in the distance – perhaps a hawk of some sort.

A couple is on the other side. They, too, have reached Mother Nature's barrier.

Back we go. Taking it all in.

It's one of those incredibly easy cross country ski outings because it's all flat. No chance of getting lost with the lake on one side. But it is one of the most scenic places to visit – even more so in the winter than summer.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 89 north. Pass Camp Richardson. Go about one mile. Park on the right where the sign says "Recreation Area Closed for the Season." If you hit Cascade Properties, you went too far.

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