

Hope Valley's vast trail system goes on for miles

By Kathryn Reed

HOPE VALLEY – Two things about steadily climbing up are often true – a great view is usually the first reward, and then the trip down is often a breeze.

We found both to be true of our snowshoe in Hope Valley. This is one of those areas just outside the Lake Tahoe Basin that is worth visiting year-round. On this particular Sunday we park at the yurt where Joyce Coker operates Hope Valley Outdoor Center.



Kae Reed discovers a swing along the snowshoe trail.

Photo/Susan Wood

With more than 60 miles of marked trails, it has a variety of terrain to satisfy all levels of snowshoers and cross country skiers. Added bonuses include free parking and no trail fee. But Coker gladly takes donations. After all, it takes a tremendous amount of work to keep up this outdoor playground on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.

As we climb, the forest seems to surround us, to take us in, almost hug us. We forget there is a highway close by.

Although Burnside Road is drivable for a bit in the summer, in the winter no tires are going across the snow. We seem to have this oasis to ourselves. It's not until we head back that we finally come across other people out playing.

This being my first time here in winter, it all looks unfamiliar. And that's part of the fun. Despite Sue's reluctance to head downhill, I convince her to follow the signs toward Secret Meadow. I just like the sound of it. I don't care that it will mean a bit more work to hoof it uphill.

Meandering around in a loop, openings peak out to Hope Valley below us. Seeing the field of snow it makes me wonder what this meadow must look like in the spring and summer. Are there wildflowers? Is it grassy? Would it make for a great lunch spot? Is it as peaceful during hiking season as it is in snowshoeing season?

Continuing on a bit a smile crosses my face. I see a swing in the distance. I love to swing. That gentle rocking back and forth. With snowshoes on, it makes for an interesting dismount.

We continue on, circling back to the main road. We keep going up. A sign points to a vista. We go have a look-see.

I hope I never stop being awed by the majestic snow covered Sierra. The Carson Range seems to go on forever. Stevens Peak looms tallest from this vantage point. Maps and research are not consistent with its elevation – some say close to 10,000 feet, others have it topping that mark. The peak is named after J.M. Stevens who was a supervisor in Alpine County and ran a stagecoach in Hope Valley in the 1860s.

Sitting on the granite boulder having a bite to eat I take in

the scenery. It's sad to see the blackened trees still looking freshly charred, though they are in their third winter since the 2008 Burnside Fire.

Clouds are moving in and the temperature is dropping. It's time to start moving. We decide this is a good time to turn around.

Signs along the various trails are abundant, but not obnoxiously so. Maps are available in the yurt just in case that makes you feel more comfortable. Lessons, tours and equipment rentals are also available. More information is online.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west. Turn left onto Highway 89 in Meyers. Go over Luther Pass. At Picketts Junction (the four-way stop), go straight toward the yurt. Park. And don't forget to leave a donation.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)