

Foothills provide mountain biking, spectacular scenery

By Kathryn Reed

COLOMA – Hiking, biking and waterfalls – all in one day.

Blood, scratches and poison oak – all in one day.

Happy, irritated and in pain – all in one day.

The idea was to drop in elevation without going too far. Done. Then to mountain bike in a pretty area. Done. And to walk to waterfalls more than 100-feet high. Done.



Sue Wood on a bike trail May 7 outside Coloma.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

If only I hadn't fallen off my bike, landing smack in the middle of my back on a log about 7 inches in diameter.

The National Outdoor Leadership School says 50 percent of outdoor injuries come from falls. I think 100 percent of mine come from falling – or tripping. My back, left arm, right leg and both ankles have recovered from my tumble earlier this month.

Once I caught my breath, we kept pedaling along this rocky, single-track trail off Highway 49 near Coloma. Magnolia Ranch is part of the 362 acres that were acquired in 1996 by the American River Conservancy and Bureau of Land Management.

Green grasses more than a foot high and sprawling oaks are a welcome change from the muddy-snowy trails of Tahoe and all the pine trees.

Several trails for cyclists, walkers and equestrians leave from here. We head to the river trail. Rafters are making their way down the South Fork of the American River. Although they are in wet suits and helmets, the water looks appealing. It's hot in this part of El Dorado County on May 7.

Wildflowers are out – mostly lupine, a few poppies and some yellow bush with buttercup-like flowers.

Sweat beads on our foreheads as we pedal. It's more the sun than the exertion at this point.

Neither Sue nor I are gnarly mountain bikers and usually we start the season with something tamer than the trail we are on to get our legs, balance and arms all in sync. The rocks on the trail are testing us. I obviously failed one of the tests in a big way.

Still, even after landing with my head pointed toward the water, I got back on the bike. I'll admit we had to walk our bikes at times. Finally, the trail disappeared because the river is running so high.

This section ends at Folsom Lake.

A change of scenery often provides me with a much needed attitude adjustment this time of year. The fall required another attitude adjustment because it sent me into unpleasant whiney world.

Up the road a bit we arrived (by Jeep) at Marshall Gold

Discovery State Historic Park. The walk to the falls was just what I needed – loosening up the muscles that were stiffening and doing something other than cycling.

We met a group of guys coming off the trail who said don't go beyond the waterfalls because they encountered a lot of snakes. Great. Give me a bear or coyote any day, snakes are not the kind of critter I ever like to see.

Meandering along the trail, we finally hear water. Not knowing how far the falls are, we are skeptical about going farther. Snake fear has taken hold of me.

A couple comes by and encourages us to keep going.

Wow.

Dutch Creek Falls are really two falls that plunge more than 100 feet each into the creek that then feeds into the American River.

Laying on the rock, listening to the water tumble from above, wispy clouds float by, as half dozen hawks scan the area for lunch. If only it didn't hurt to be on my back, I would be in heaven.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west to Placerville. Turn right (north) onto Highway 49. Travel about 12 miles. Magnolia Ranch trailhead is on the left.

From there, head toward Placerville. Go back a short ways to Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park. Pay the \$8 to park near the museum. Cross the street and walk on Mt. Murphy Road, cross the Coloma Bridge (built in 1915), turn right on Bayne Road. The trail entrance is on the left across the street from a brown house. This is about 1.25 miles from the museum.

The waterfalls are another mile up on an old goat trail that is not maintained.

Both venues are in El Dorado County.

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