

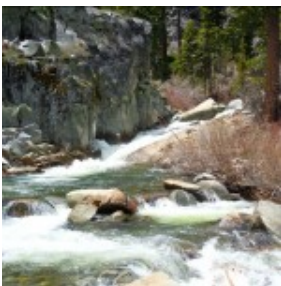
Eagle Falls spew forth like they belong in Yosemite

By Kathryn Reed

DESOLATION WILDERNESS – Water. It's going to be the common denominator for all hikes in and around the Lake Tahoe area for a while.

And that's a good thing when waterfalls are involved.

Rumbling water is a constant sound on the trek from the Eagle Falls parking lot to Eagle Lake. Sometimes it's roaring, sometimes a bit more faint – but always there.



Eagle Creek is running fast.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

With June 11 being National Get Outdoors Day, the \$5 parking fee has been waived by the U.S. Forest Service.

This area was revamped in 2005 with a walkway from Highway 89 to the trailhead which means no longer having to contend with vehicles to get to the path. Restrooms were put in at the same time.

We start our Saturday by checking out the lower falls from the other side of the highway. What a perfect lunch spot for one trio as they sit near the flowing water, gazing out at Emerald

Bay.

Our destination is upper falls and then Eagle Lake. The Forest Service website says it's a 20-minute walk to the lake. With all the Kodak moments along the way, we took at least twice that long. For those wanting a longer hike, a sign clearly states when to turn left to reach the three Velmas, Dicks, and Fontanillis lakes.

Starting off we take the loop to the right – which is longer than going directly to the upper falls. We don't care. Today is about enjoying the scenery and practically pinching ourselves that we live here.

It's just one of those magical places that even the most jaded person would have to pause to appreciate Mother Nature's handiwork.

Interpretive signs are on this section. I learn something new – Emerald Bay is 3 miles long and 1 mile wide.

Water is on the trail, making it a good idea to wear hiking boots.

Spanning Upper Eagle Falls is a bridge. Water rushes beneath me. It's hard to hear my own thoughts because of the thundering falls. Doing a 360, I marvel at the granite above me, the amount of water running on either side, the rocks being pounded by this snowmelt.

To do the loop, the bridge is where you'd turn around. But we aren't done.

Across the bridge we hit snow. Mostly it's dirt the rest of the way – but that white stuff is unavoidable at times.

So much snow this winter is causing waterfalls to spill from the sides of the mountain as though pores have opened. A sheet of granite looks like a streak of tears.

Granite is more dominate in this section of Desolation Wilderness than conifers. Spires of jagged rock line one wall of what feels like a canyon at times.

We stop for lunch before reaching the lake. Slabs of smooth granite beckon us to recline – until an aggressive critter smells our food. He reminds me of the “friendly” critters atop Mount Tallac.

Emerald Bay and Lake Tahoe are in the distance. If only there weren't a controlled burn at Zephyr Cove that day, the view would have been perfect. A touring helicopter flies by. Is it the required 2,000 feet above Desolation? Hard to tell. What point does the FAA start measuring?

Onward we go to the lake. It looks so beautiful, but so uninviting. I won't even dip my toe in her frigid waters. On a hot summer day people swim and paddle out to the little island. No one is doing that this day. This day we're still trying to have traction on slick snow.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, go north on Highway 89. The Eagle Falls parking area is on the left at the end of Emerald Bay before reaching the parking area for Vikingsholm. It costs \$5 to park. If going to Eagle Lake, be sure to fill out the permit for Desolation Wilderness.

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