

Wildflowers cropping up along soggy bike trails

By Kathryn Reed

Wildflowers and mosquitoes are making their presence known in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Such are the benefits and hazards of a wet season.

The problem with pedaling in what is normally considered low-lying areas is water is still on the trails. This is leading to some sections having significant tire indentations and routes being created by cyclists to avoid the water.



Water on trails is creating an obstacle for mountain bike riders.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

These user created trails could be doing harm to the landscape, but are likely to be less problematic than ruts that create erosion problems and potential safety issues.

Recreationists don't know what trails are dry because with so much acreage in the basin it's hard for landowners to mark what is unusable. After all, just last week the paved trail

behind Meek's in South Tahoe was under water in various sections as Trout Creek breached its banks.

Behind South Tahoe High School is normally a dry area this time of year. And for the most part it is on these trails on Gardner Mountain with its offshoots behind Camp Richardson and ones leading to Fallen Leaf Lake Road.

But some sections are swampy. Some are small ponds. Some are just puddles.

The problem could be exasperated by the burned trees from the 2007 Angora Fire not absorbing water so the low lying areas are more wet than usual.

Despite the muddy conditions in sections, what makes this area great right now is the lupine is coming out. The purple against the green of the meadows necessitates stopping pedaling to admire the abundance of life in this charred area. But the buzzing of skeeters requires moving on pretty fast.

The yellow flowers on the mule's ear are sprouting. The distinctive red snow plants are in clumps. Groundcover of various colors is poking forth, too.

Each year since the devastating fire I'm amazed how the landscape looks different. It keeps getting better.

This is one of those bike rides that never has to be the same because there are so many routes. Usually we are up high enough to reach Fallen Leaf Lake Road. A week ago we had to dip down because the meadow we usually go through was more like a pond and was completely impassable.

This had us coming out right behind the stables at Camp Richardson. From there, we crossed Highway 89, got on the paved path and headed home.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe avoid accessing the routes via the high school football field this summer because of construction going on. Instead, off Highway 89, go in behind St. Francis Condominiums. Follow that path up. Then it goes off in all different ways. Hang on, be adventurous and have fun. Some parking is on the highway in this area if you need to drive to get there.