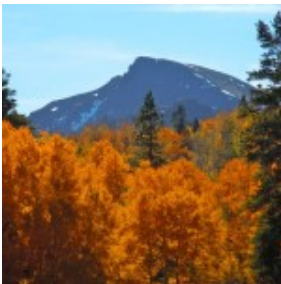


Leaf peepers find perfection throughout Hope Valley

By Kathryn Reed

HOPE VALLEY – It's here – that kaleidoscope of color Mother Nature dazzles leaf chasers with each autumn. This may be the peak weekend for colors in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Cresting Luther Pass near the cutoff for Armstrong Pass on Highway 89 the cars are parked on both sides of the road Saturday. Cameras are out. People are smiling and going "ooohhh" and "aaahhh". Yellow and orange dominate the landscape.



Elephant's
Back from a
trail off
Highway 88.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Looking across Hope Valley, pockets of aspens look like swatches of paint samples interspersed with the green conifers.

While some of the aspen leaves are still green, most have turned, with others already brown or fallen.

Some areas are like a carpet of leaves.

We pull over again, this time off Highway 88. Crossing a downed barbed wire fence we enter another aspen grove on the far side of the valley.

It's one of those Tahoe bluebird days so the aspens are even more electrifying when looking up.

People seem mesmerized by the leaves dancing in the gentle breeze. A different type of fool's gold, perhaps.

Jane Welles is near the highway painting what I'm photographing. Each fall she drives from her home in Nevada City to spend a few days capturing the Sierra autumn on canvas.

Driving up Highway 88 the usual line of cars is not at the old house. Colors here are past their prime – but still worth a stop.

We turn around.

Sue suggests we take a road to the left (about 4.3 miles west of Pickett's Junction). We stop a little ways up, though the Jeep would have been fine to continue on the road. We wanted a little exercise.

A woman along the way said ahead is a meadow, while back at the Y would lead us to a lake. Oh, that meadow – the views to Elephant's Back are magnificent.

Time for a bite to eat at Hope Valley Café. (It's beyond Sorensen's on the right.) Leesa Lopazanski has owned the place for the last four years. Pie is still a reason to go. But don't expect to get the recipe. She's not sharing.

We recommend the pumpkin – which she makes Southern style, with buttermilk.

"It makes it more fluffy," Lopazanski said.

It's not like any other pumpkin I've had before. Order a piece to go; we wish we had.

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