

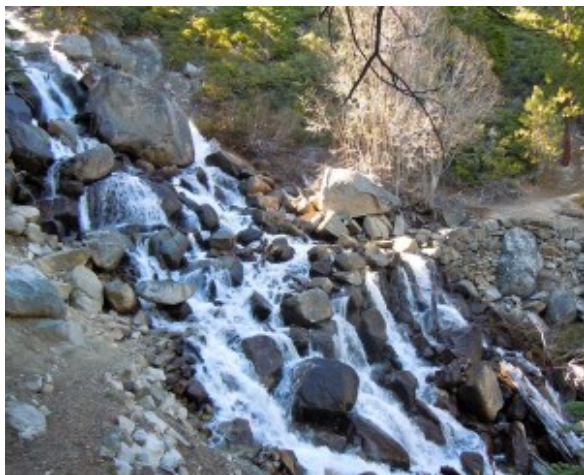
Splendor of the falls worth the trek up Hawley Grade

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Express delivery of mail was probably slowed down a bit this time of year as men on horseback crossed the Hawley Grade Falls.

Also called the Upper Truckee Falls, this trek in Meyers used to be part of the Pony Express route. It was used from April-November 1860 after which time the trail was altered to go along Johnson Pass Road.

While no falls in California are raging like they were a year ago, enough thundering water is descending at a rapid pace that Kim and I chose not to cross the falls.



The trail cuts right through the Hawley Grade Falls.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Evidence of the winter's high winds is in abundance with large trees blocking the trail. We did not let it impede our progress as we scampered over them to keep walking to our destination.

In 2008, a 75-foot section was taken out in a landslide. The U.S. Forest Service stabilized the lower slope, though the upper looks like it could use some attention.

As we keep going, the roar of the falls bounces off the towering pines. Soon the cascading icy water comes into view. It's like a series of mini waterfalls tumbling over granite boulders to form one long fall that eventually reaches the Upper Truckee River.

Manzanita is just beginning to bloom. Closer to the river the distinctive red willow branches are clustered together.

Much of the trail is dry, though spots are muddy.

An abundance of butterflies flit about near the base of the trail. We hear something scurry in the brush.

Kim's dog Joe on a previous hike up Hawley Grade ended up at the vet's office after tangling with a porcupine.

One of the best things about going this time of year is the absence of mountain bikers. They prefer when the water is a trickle or non-existent so they can keep going up to Echo Summit or descend from there into Meyers.

Hawley Grade gets its name from Asa Hawley, a pioneer on the South Shore. This was reportedly the first graded wagon road crossing the Sierra.

Besides being a National Recreation Trail, this route is said to be an area where Snowshoe Thompson saved someone's life.

It's a relatively short hike to the falls, with an elevation gain of about 900 feet. Sturdy shoes are recommended. It's narrow in spots, but most people who live in Tahoe will be able to do this hike.

Getting there:

Go west on Highway 50 to Meyers. Pass through town. Turn left on South Upper Truckee Road. Go almost to the end. On the right, at least last week, the gate is closed. (This is before the bridge.) Park near the gate and start walking. If the gate is open, drive as far as you can go.

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