

3 waterfalls tumble through scenic river canyon

By Kathryn Reed

MCLOUD – It's October in a dry water year and we're in search of waterfalls.

Wow!

The amount of water descending last weekend from the three falls along the McCloud River was thundering. I can't even imagine what they would be like in the spring – especially in a normal snow-rain year.



The McCloud River offers three distinct waterfalls. This is Middle Falls. Photos/Kathryn Reed

According to the U.S. Forest Service, "The Upper McCloud River is spring-fed, not dammed, and flows steadily all year through a basalt canyon lined with forest of Douglas-fir, white fir, Pacific yew, ponderosa pine and incense-cedar."

If it weren't for the abundance of fall colors, just looking at and listening to the water it would have seemed like this were a different season. Each waterfall is spectacular in

itself.

For a 3.8-mile round-trip hike, this is one of the best for scenery in such a short distance. Where else are three waterfalls in such close proximity?

Black oak, vine maple and Pacific dogwood brighten the forest with their yellow, pink and orange. While the color is not as vibrant as Tahoe has been this fall, the variety of foliage was a welcome change.

Sometimes the trail is like walking through a dense forest, while other times there's an airiness with blue sky as the canopy.

Lava rock is in abundance.

This is a rather easy hike in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest that ascends 300 feet to a maximum elevation of 3,600 feet.

Heading back we get a glimpse of Mount Shasta.

Plenty of fly fishermen (and women) are casting lines in hopes of snagging a trout. Most are releasing their catches. It's such a popular fishing hole that two vehicles from an Oregon outfitter are in the parking lot.

With temps routinely hitting the 90s in the summer, the swimming holes welcome those who want to cool off. People are also known to use the cliffs as an entry point into the river.

Even though overnight temps were freezing and this area got snow when Tahoe did last week, some of the campground spots were taken by RVs and tents.

The Forest Service acquired this land in 1932 from the McCloud River Lumber Company. Originally, it was the seasonal home of the Wintu Indians. The campground gets its name from T.B. Fowler who homesteaded in the late 1800s. He eventually built

a hotel along the river that burned to the ground in the early 1900s.

Getting there:

McCloud is about an hour north of Redding.

From South Lake Tahoe, get onto Interstate 5. Then go toward McCloud on Highway 89 for 15 miles. Turn right at the Fowlers Campground sign. Park in the day parking and start walking.

It's also possible to drive to each of the falls and walk just a short ways.

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