

Tahoe wilderness anything but desolate



Trekking through Desolation Wilderness. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

FALLEN LEAF LAKE – With 63,960 acres to explore in Desolation Wilderness, it's not necessary for the quest to be a peak. But if being on top of the world is the goal, there are plenty of mountaintops to choose from – including Mount Tallac.

Last month mom, Sue and I started off about 7am to see how far we could walk in this wooded area that spans the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and Eldorado National Forest. We began the Sunday hike at Glen Alpine trailhead.



Cleo Reed and Sue Wood hiking in Desolation in July.

The rule is that you are supposed to fill out a form and attach it your daypack or backpack if staying overnight. This helps the U.S. Forest Service know where people are and how many are using this popular area. But there are no forms. I left a sheet of notepaper – just in case something goes awry someone might come looking for us.

It doesn't take long and I'm hitting myself. Sue and mom are swatting a bit, and we are all whining. Mosquitoes. They are everywhere. Later that night I'm scratching and those two are just looking at me.

It was so bad that Sue was asking backpackers on their way out if they had any bug juice they would share. Finally, one guy had some extra repellent wipes that we offered to pay good money for. He said take them; he wouldn't need them. I can't imagine how many welts I would have had if we hadn't applied some chemicals.

Another guy coming out was hiking with his Great Dane. All four paws were wrapped with what looked like human socks and the dog was limping. Later we saw a volunteer from and the chief of Fallen Leaf Lake Fire Department lifting the dog into a pickup to truck it out.

The start, and therefore end, of the trail is super rocky.

It's the worst part of the hike because when you are tired coming down, it's so necessary to keep paying attention.

Going up, though, the scenery is stunning. This is when you want your eyes focused ahead or even up higher when possible. (Except when climbing all those steps.) Desolation was designated a wilderness area in 1969. This means it will be protected to keep it essentially the way it was when first discovered.

Groups of pine cones in the treetops look like small bunches of bananas.



Wilderness surrounds Sue Wood, Kae Reed and Cleo Reed.

Indian paintbrush, yarrow and thistles are in bloom.

At times it feels like we are in a bowl of granite. It amazes us how in short order we are immersed in wilderness.

As we keep going the elevation starts to affect mom. The other time she felt like this she was in the Alps skiing between Switzerland and Italy. Altitude sickness was setting in. She was feeling lightheaded. We stop. Drink water. Eat. And we head back. Still, we did 7.5 miles on this trek.

Had we kept going, we would have ascended Mount Tallac. This is the route the Forest Service suggests for seniors (my mom

is 78) and those with bad knees. Still, hiking poles can be a good idea.

Plenty of lakes are off this route, too – Aloha, Susie and Gilmore to name a few.

--

Notes:

Trailheads in Desolation Wilderness:

Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit:

- Echo Lakes
- Glen Alpine
- Mount Tallac
- Bayview
- Eagle Falls
- Meeks Bay

Eldorado National Forest:

- Loon Lake
- Buck Island
- Van Vleck
- Rockbound
- Twin Lakes
- Lyons
- Pyramid Creek (Twin Bridges)
- Ralston

- Echo.

Getting to the Glen Alpine trailhead:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 89 north. Turn left on Fallen Leaf Lake Road. Follow the road around the lake, the store will be on your right, keep going, stay to the left when you have a choice to go right toward Stanford Camp. You will run into a parking area. It fills up fast on weekends, so arrive early.