

Trek to Raymond Lake a contrast in landscape



Raymond Lake in Alpine County is about 1,000 feet below jagged Raymond Peak. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

HOPE VALLEY – With each step, it seems like the landscape is changing.

Smooth granite turns into coarse volcanic rock. Sandy footing becomes hardpack. Towering mountains and pines give way to 360-degree views.

If this is anything what the entire 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail is like, it might be something I would contemplate doing. But then again, considering how good the beer at the Jeep tasted and the hot tub at home felt, I'm pretty sure my adventures on the PCT will be limited to day trips.

Brenda and I start our trek on a recent Friday morning and never encounter another soul on the trail.

We begin at an elevation of 6,461 feet. Our destination of Raymond Lake is at 8,972 feet. Brenda's GPS had the trip at 5.5 miles going out and 5.3 coming back. We're not sure how we lost those two-tenths of mile on the return.

Distinct signs of autumn line the trail early on as leaves are already a yellow-orange.

We get to an overlook with a marker that says we are at 8,000 feet. While the view is a bit like being on top the world, clearly there are peaks around us that are much higher, like Reynolds Peak at 9,690 feet.

Looking down is a vast meadow – the one that is by Grover Hot Springs in the Markleeville area. Across the way a strand of water flows from the mountains. This is one of two waterfalls we see on our hike.

Part of the trail crosses Pleasant Valley Creek. In August it is not a big deal to cross, but reports are that it can be difficult in the spring.

A few wildflowers still sway, but most of the color is gone. Brenda has been on this hike once before and said the flora can be exceptional.

At times the trail is narrow, with a steep descent to one side. It can be a bit breathtaking for those, like me, with a little fear of heights. But Brenda got me through it. I would have turned around had I been on my own.

Going along we see what appears to be large granite rocks that have a hue of light red and purple, as though Mother Nature has splashed them with pastel paint. An orange, rough moss-like substance covers other rocks.

The only turn to pay attention to is clearly marked. One way

is to stay on the PCT, the other for Raymond Lake. We follow the arrow for the latter. Another three-quarters of a mile and we are at our destination.

At the shore of the lake there are enough disintegrated rocks to make sitting comfortable – though this isn't anything like soft sand. A breeze comes up and it's like flecks of light are dancing across the water.

We see a couple people at the far end of the lake who must have been camping. Permits are required for overnight stays, but not for day hikes.

Supposedly golden trout are in Raymond Lake, but we didn't see any.

Brenda walks around the lake while I sit and take in the scenery. The jagged spires that form Raymond Peak are 10,011-foot tall. It appears there are caves in the mountain, but they are too high up to explore. Some of the flat surfaces of the rock wall look like they could be a paradise for climbers.

It's a definite paradise for hikers.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west. Turn left onto Highway 89 to go over Luther Pass. Turn right on to Highway 88 at Pickett's Junction. Turn left on Blue Lakes Road. Turn left toward Tamarack Lake. At the fork, go left. Then there will be place to veer slightly to the right. There will be a big wide area to park before you get to Lower Sunset Lake. If you are down by that lake, turn around.

Part of this is a dirt road. While 4-wheel drive is not necessary, the road is not ideal for a typical passenger car.

The trail is to the right of the road we drove in on. Not far

up is a single-track trail to the left – take it. There is not a trail marker at the start or for this first left.

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