

A hiker's paradise at Homewood ski resort



Quail Lake at Homewood Mountain Lake is inviting to those who can tolerate chilly water. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

HOMWOOD – Straight up. That's one way to define what a black diamond hiking trail is.

Ski resort hiking is nothing like being in the forest or a state or national park. The routes don't follow the contour of the mountain. Switchbacks are unheard of. Instead, many of the trails are straight up or straight down – the better for when snow covers the dirt and skiers are making tracks.

But we didn't let the uphill climb deter us even though we whined a bit. AJ didn't seem to mind the vertical ascent as she ran in front of us.

This is the first season the owners of Homewood Mountain Resort have opened the trails to hiking. While the legend on the map rates the trails at “less difficult”, “more difficult” and “most difficult”, the majority falls into the latter. And one trail we came down was a double black diamond because of the steepness.

We parked at the main parking lot, walked through the neighborhood and started on the Homeward Connector trail.

It doesn't take long for a view of Lake Tahoe to come into view. That's the thing about Homewood – the views of the lake are the best of any ski resort. You are so close. When skiing the face it's like you are going to land in the water.

And while the hiking is free, various signs caution people that the trails are not patrolled. Trail markers are signs attached to a round of wood. This just adds to the funkiness.

Based on being at Homewood on Labor Day weekend it is obvious this West Shore oasis is still not on the radar for many people. We saw only handful of hikers.

More people were at the top of Quail lift where employees were setting up for that night's Farm to Peak dinner. While we don't know how the food was for the five-course dinner, we can attest to the view being outstanding.

Before we reached the top of the lift we had taken the Sunnyside Loop that took us to Quail Lake. Barely a ripple could be seen. The calmness and warm surface temperature lured us to take a dip.

AJ had beaten us to the water. She took a shortcut through the thicket.

Lily pads cover much of the lake. Dragonflies and minnows are the only wildlife we see.

Above us is a wall of ski runs – Main Cirque, 55 Chutes,

Wally's Folly and The Shoulder. While patches of color dot the mountain, winter seems so far away as we bask in the sun. The snowmaking machines at various locations, though, remind us opening day is coming soon.

A log is perfectly placed by the lake as a great rest spot to have a bite to eat.

We return to our climb. At times Rubicon Peak stands out above all others.

Most of the trails are soft dirt, wood chips or loose rocks.

We hook up with Homeward Bound trail that then leads to Cedar Ridge trail. Finally we are walking on level ground – not uphill. And this is where those picture postcard views of Tahoe come into view. It's like you are able to see the entire lake – all shores. To the north we see the boats at Sunnyside, to the south we can see the hut on the pier at Chambers Landing. And the smoke has lifted so we can see across to the East Shore.

It's amazing looking down at civilization – the bustling arts and crafts fair in the Homewood parking lot and all the boats on the lake – that we essentially have the mountain to ourselves. We will be back.

But first we must ease down the double black diamond Ore Car trail. This is when those with bad knees would need poles.

The perfect cap to the hike was a cocktail at our favorite bar in Tahoe – West Shore Café.

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Notes:

- Here is the Homewood hiking map.
- To get there from South Lake Tahoe, go north on Highway 89.

The ski resort is on the left in Homewood. Plenty of parking. Trails start from the north and south lodges. The north is the main area. The south is at the end of Tahoe Ski Bowl Way, which is off Highway 89.

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