

History in the middle of an alpine meadow



Meiss Meadow with the old house and barn in the distance.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A golden meadow stretches for what looks like miles. It's barren and beautiful at the same time. Stevens Peak (10,059 feet) and Red Lake Peak (10,063) are nearby.

A cabin and barn are remnants of civilization from an era long gone.

Meiss Meadow.

Besides being the starting point of the Upper Truckee River, this section of Alpine County was once bustling with cattle.

A couple women on horseback offer a glimpse of what this area might have been like a century ago. Hitching posts are still out front.

Water flowing in the river behind the house is good for the dogs that have come along with their people.

The buildings were constructed by Louis Meiss (pronounced mice) who emigrated from Germany in the 1800s with his parents. Meiss bought 1,000 acres – which included what is now known as Meiss Meadow – in 1878. It was all about cattle crazing at that time.

In 1936 the land was sold to another family. In 1965 the U.S. Forest Service acquired the property. The structures are of historical significance.

Today is it a hikers paradise. There are a few ways to get to Meiss Meadow – after all it is an intersection of the Pacific Crest and Tahoe Rim trails. For those on the PCT, they have 1,000 miles to get to Mexico or 1,400 more miles and they'll be in Canada.

We started on a recent Sunday from Big Meadows trailhead off Highway 89. Signs of fall are evident from the start as aspens and other flora are turning shades of yellow.

Big Meadows never disappoints. It's like being in a bowl of beauty with 360-degree views of Sierra serenity.

But the trail in front of us is a bit congested even though it's the off-season. Mountain bikers and horses share this trail with those on two legs. Numerous backpackers are headed home, most having stayed overnight at Dardanelles Lake. Once we get beyond the turn off for that lake we see very few people. We are headed toward Round Lake.

We don't fish, but reports are those with poles can find Lahontan cutthroat trout at Round Lake.

We stop briefly for a bite to eat and to let AJ have a swim. The chill in the air and slight breeze have us moving on soon.

The terrain after Round Lake changes from typical Tahoe pines to a more expansive, openness with varied foliage. It feels a bit more like the Alps with the meadows at this elevation. Though at the same time thoughts of "Little House on the Prairie" come to mind.

We stop again at Meiss Meadow; by the barn to enjoy the scenery. Then we walk a short ways toward Carson Pass to see the golden grasses in that section of the meadow. It's almost like there is too much to see, that you want to stay a little longer to make sure you capture it all in your mind. It's both peaceful and rugged.

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Notes:

- It is 2.7 miles from Big Meadows trailhead to Round Lake, 2 miles from Round Lake to Meiss Meadow. And it's another 2 miles to Showers Lake from the meadow.
- To get there from South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west, turn left onto Highway 89 toward Hope Valley. The Big Meadows trailhead parking is about 4 miles from the intersection of highways 50 and 89. The trailhead is back down Highway 89 on the other side of the road. There are a few wide spots to park on the highway.

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