

A secluded snowshoe through Van Sickle



Mount Tallac from Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Everything changes with a little snow and some things even get better – like the views from Van Sickle Bi-state Park.

While we are familiar with the trail, we were thankful others had gone before us. This way we didn't completely get lost – just a little sidetracked at the end.

This 725-acre park on the South Shore provides some stunning views of Lake Tahoe by snowshoeing just a short distance. The scenic outlook is 0.4 miles from the trailhead.



Sue Wood takes in the scenery along the trail.

The only problem this time of year is that it requires walking to get to the trailhead. The California Tahoe Conservancy and Nevada Division of State Lands, which own and operate the park, shut the gate in winter.

Sue and I walked in via Harrah's. There is a distinct trail almost directly across from the hotel-casino's back parking lot. It was a bit precarious to cross the street without a crosswalk; I can't even imagine what it would be like if that road ever becomes a four-lane federal highway.

We saunter up a little hill and then go left on South Tahoe Public Utility District's road before we take a left onto the park's road. A trail sign clearly indicates where the path really begins.

With part of the path last weekend a bit icy, it was great to have the claws of snowshoes to dig into the terrain. However, with the skimpy snow so far this season, patches of dirt had to be walked on, too.

Climbing to the vista is well worth the views of Tahoe and the mountain peaks. The casinos, Rabe Meadow and Round Hill stand out as well.

Tracks from other snowshoers, hikers and cross country skiers are evident. Even super wide bike tires have left their mark

in the snow. Still, on a Sunday we saw one person on the main road and heard a few people ahead of us at one point. It mostly felt like we had the park to ourselves.



Lake Tahoe

It's a great place for dogs, too.

Since the last time I was at Van Sickle more signs are posted telling people about the terrain as well as where to go. The Gondola Fire of 2002 is talked about because many of the still charred trees are in the park. The story of sugar pine plantings is also told.

We opted for a loop we had not been on, nor was there signage for it on our last excursion. We took the upper turnoff for the Cal/Neva Loop. It heads toward California, with a spur going to Saddle Road.

It's quiet, even secluded. The pines at one point give a sense of being enclosed in some far-off winter wonderland. The snow is softer, powder-like. Fewer people have been here.

Starting after noon allowed the temps to be warmer and for the afternoon light to provide colors and contrasts different than what Mother Nature casts in the morning.

The lake is glass-like – inviting – if only it weren't so darn cold.



Skiers ride the Heavenly gondola at the end of the day.

Soon we are reminded how close we are to civilization as the Heavenly gondola whirs above us.

We take the Barn Trail, knowing it will lead us to the main park road that will drop us off near the entrance where Park Avenue dead ends.

But we come to a fork and there is no sign, but tracks in two directions. Going forward is denser and intuitively the route to the old Van Sickle barn. We, though, go right where it is more open. Passing under the gondola again we know we are on the wrong path. We break trail a bit before hooking up with the STPUD road that will lead us back to where we started. It was fortunate someone had tied blue markers to trees.

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Notes:

- The Tahoe Rim Trail is offering a guided snowshoe in Van Sickle on Jan. 11 as part of National Winter Trails Day. More info is online.