

El Dorado Trail captures route of old railroad



El Dorado Trail goes from Camino to Folsom. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE – Spring in January. It's not something I want to get used to. But it is something I'm going to enjoy for hopefully what is just a brief interruption of winter.

Not wanting to endure ice on the trails, we opted to head off the hill last weekend in search of exploring new terrain at a lower elevation. We had seen a sign for the El Dorado Trail on one of our wine excursions and knew we would be back to explore.

What we didn't know is where it went, how long it was or anything about it.



AJ leads the way.

It's a trail in progress. But the completed section we were on is great. It's a paved multi-use trail – and is well used based on the walkers, cyclists and horse doo-doo.

Going out it is all uphill as we make our way toward Camino. An overpass crosses Highway 50 so then we are on the south side of the road. AJ didn't know what to make of the cars below her and got a little skittish. Dogs are allowed on the trail on leash.

What's interesting is how many times we have driven this stretch of highway and never knew there was a trail below us. We looked for it on our way home but could not see it.

The distinctive Apple Café sign on the hill is one of the few identifying markers for us to know where we are.

Benches along the way provide an opportunity to rest or just take in the scenery. The foothills, with the mix of pine and oak, stretch for miles. Several residences are above and below the wide path. More things not noticeable from the highway.

It's disconcerting, though, how dry everything is. What should be green is brown. And it's so warm – 68 degrees on Jan. 18. I could easily have been in shorts, as some people were.

At times the trail is shady, other times it is in full sun. I can imagine it would not be a great place to be in mid-summer because of the heat.

A man out with his dog told us when we hit the dirt trail we could keep going, but we opted to turn around at that point. Above us, though it's not visible, is where the Valero gas station in Camino is. We think round-trip it was a little less than 5 miles.

But there is much more to the El Dorado Trail than what we did. The paved portion continues on the other side of the road from where we started. According to websites I read, it is paved from Camino to just south of Folsom – 35 miles in total.



Views between Placerville and Camino.

The trail follows old railroad lines – Southern Pacific and Michigan-California railroads.

Work on the route started after the July 1991 purchase of the line from the Southern Pacific Railway Corporation by the Sacramento-Placerville Transportation Corridor Joint Powers Authority. The former rail line is a part of the Designated Cross State Bicycle Route that goes from San Francisco to South Lake Tahoe.

Friends of El Dorado Trails is working to extend the trail east. Their website says discussions are under way for the route to go to Pacific House east of Pollock Pines, then

follow the former Pony Express trail into South Lake Tahoe.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west. Take the Smith Flat Road exit near Placerville. Turn right on Smith Flat School Road. Take the first left on Smith Flat Road. Turn right on Jacquier Road. Parking lot is on right. There is a big sign that says El Dorado Trail.