

# Kings Canyon reveals Carson's rural side



Dry, short grasses dot the landscape in the Kings Canyon area of Carson City. Photos/Kathryn Reed

## By Kathryn Reed

CARSON CITY – Despite a more than 20-foot waterfall tumbling down less than a half mile from the trailhead, the Kings Canyon area is so dry it looks more like summer than winter.

Dry sage and anemic manzanita dot the landscape early on. Ironically, it's this dryness that has driven us east, out of the basin in search of alternative winter recreation because there are so few snowshoeing opportunities right now in Tahoe. Even on this trail there ought to be more than the one patch of snow we saw.

This swath of land known as Kings Canyon is owned by the U.S. Forest and has been public property since 1997.

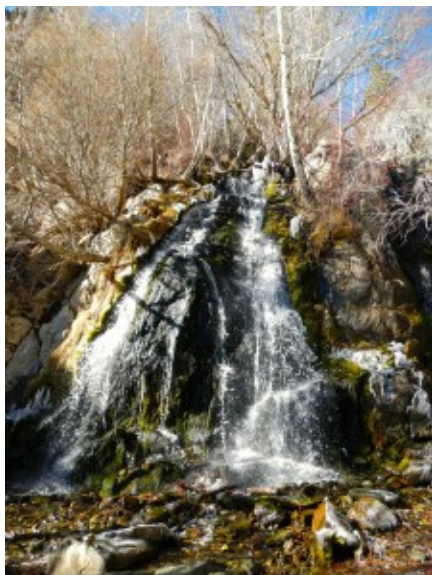


The five dogs lead their people uphill.

Way back when this land was home to the Washoe Indians. The canyon became a gateway to Lake Tahoe during the Gold Rush. Lumber was brought through the canyon during the Comstock era to build the silver mines of Nevada.

The area gets its name from Benjamin King, a doctor who built a ranch in the 1800s. Today there is a huge, modern house at the start of the trailhead. Other residences line the road leading up to what is the base of the Sierra.

Pete and Raymond Borda started a sheep farm on the land in 1947. They would drive sheep between Carson and Dayton until the 1970s. By then Carson City had experienced a population boom that prevented the drives from crossing the highway. Family members opted to donate their land for the public to use.



Plenty of water still cascades from the waterfall.

Today an extensive trail network exists. After checking out the waterfall (it's 0.3 miles from the trailhead and dead-ends there), we headed out on the North Kings Canyon Upper Loop Trail. The marker said it is 1 mile. It is single-track dirt with small rocks that make it necessary to look down a bit. This trail doesn't allow bikes or horses, but they are OK on the fire roads. We estimate having hiked 6 miles roundtrip.

It's a pretty steady climb, but it doesn't take long for good views of Carson City to reveal themselves.

We come to a fork where we head left onto what looks like a fire road. This was the first time for me, Rosemary and Brooke to explore this area. And none of us had a map, so we winged it when it came to deciding where to go. We were pretty sure we wouldn't follow the early pioneers and walk all the way to Tahoe. Plus, we had five dogs among us to be the trail leaders.

This road, though, had few turns. It kept going up. Luckily, the temperature was ideal considering the sun was beating down on us and we had no shade. This would not be the hike to do in mid-summer.

But soon we were among the trees and the mercury dropped substantially. Ice at various spots where there was water was a clear reminder on this Saturday in January that it really is winter.

The foliage is healthier here where water is more abundant. But there are also stark reminders of the 2004 Waterfall Fire that burned 8,700 acres. It started from an abandoned campfire.



Ice and a bamboo-like plant at one of the creeks.

While there is a warning at the trailhead this is bear and mountain lion territory, wildlife was scarce on our outing. One magpie was spotted and we heard a chipmunk or squirrel.

We finally hit a plateau where we ran into a couple from Carson City who told us the route we were on would take us to Ash Canyon. We took their advice to go a bit farther to get a great view of Carson City and then turn around.

They told us about a different route back. Had it not been for their multiple cairns and arrow drawn in the dirt, we would never have seen the abrupt right turn onto the single-track. This dirt trail was a more gradual descent without rocks compared to the path that got us to this point.

At various times the drop-offs are rather daunting. We tried not to look down. It would be a long, painful tumble.

Views are beautiful and vast.

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**Getting there:** From South Lake Tahoe take Highway 50 east to Carson City. Turn left at the base of Spooner Summit in Carson, left on West 5th Street, right on Division Street, left on West King Street. The road dead-ends at the trailhead.