

Star Lake – a stellar hike in the Sierra



Star Lake is at an elevation of more than 9,000 feet.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

“Are we there yet?” is never a good question because inevitably the answer is “no” and the destination is still a ways off.

Such was the case with the hike to Star Lake a week ago. High Meadow trailhead is up, straight up, no switchbacks, on an old pitted road that is more suitable for a four-wheel drive vehicle than legs.

Enduring this stretch of trail, though, was well worth it. Star Lake is a jewel in the Sierra. As Rosemary said, it must

have gotten it's name from being so high it's like the stars would be within reach if it had been nightfall.

The lake is at 9,100 feet.

Carolyn, who was wearing her FitBit, recorded 35,375 steps for the entire hike (which included walking around her house that morning) – as well as having logged 14.53 miles.



Carolyn, Rosemary, Brenda and Sue on their way to Star Lake.

Before reaching High Meadow we turned off to the right toward Star Lake. (There's now a sign there.) The trail became single-track, more gradual – even level at times, with the lodgepole and Jeffrey pines being interspersed with some juniper trees higher up. At one point the five of us walked through a quartz field; not a common sight in Tahoe.

Intermittently views of Lake Tahoe and the entire South Shore unfolded below us.

Water flows in a couple spots, which AJ was appreciative of.

Our destination – Star Lake – was too cold for our gang to swim in, but that didn't stop others from cooling off. A couple tents were in the area, with openings to views of the jagged mountains surrounding the lake. Plenty of beach-like areas surround the water – perfect for a lunch break.



A fertile environment, including numerous ferns, along Cold Creek.

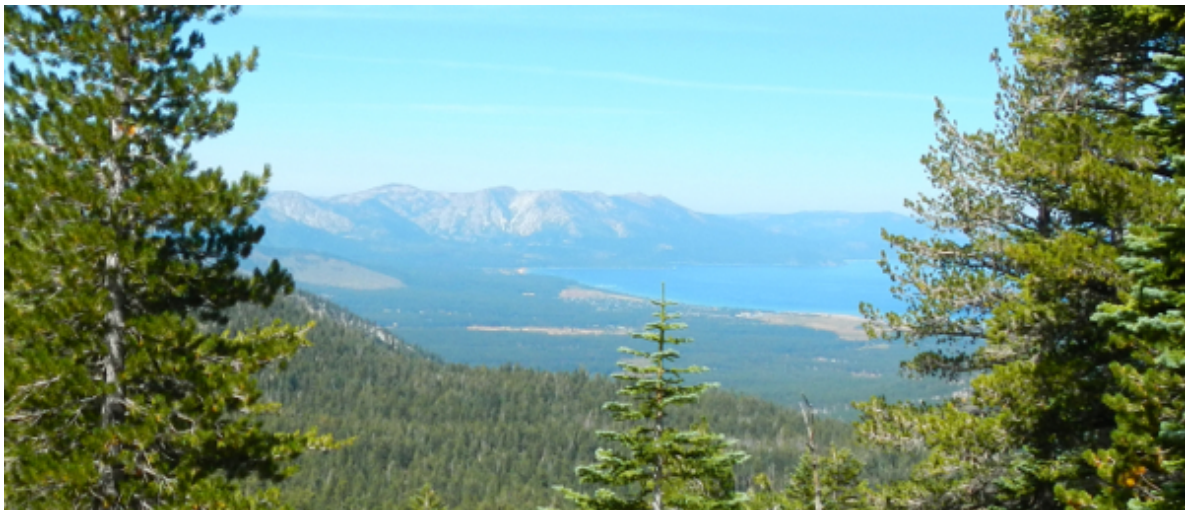
We were able to make a loop to avoid the road on the way back. We turned right toward the meadow on our way out.

The U.S. Forest service in 2012 completed a three-year, \$2 million **restoration of the meadow** that realigned Cold Creek to more of its natural meander.

A slew of trails are in the area – including the Tahoe Rim Trail. It's popular with mountain bikers. But one needs to be in good shape and able to navigate challenging terrain.

“After three seasons of work, the Monument Pass trail was completed in 2014. The trail connects from High Meadows to the Tahoe Rim Trail at Monument Pass with interesting rock formations, aspen groves, and views of Lake Tahoe. The Star Lake Trail was completed in 2012 and was rerouted from the original road, which was overly steep with a fall line alignment. The trail gently climbs for approximately 3.8 miles to Star Lake and the Tahoe Rim Trail,” Garrett Villanueva, trails expert with the USFS, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Monument Peak – which is the backside of Heavenly Mountain Resort – is on one side of the meadow at 10,067 feet. The meadow is at an elevation of 7,834 feet. Across the other side of the meadow are Freel, Jobs and Jobs Sister.



Lake Tahoe from the trail.

The foliage is more dense and lush along the Cold Creek trail. Near the top the aspens look healthy, whereas closer to the bottom the leaves have black splotches, with many branches barren. Still, this is so much prettier than the road we went up on in the morning. It's also longer, but well worth it.

There were more “Are we there yet?” on the way down, but no

one was complaining about having spent another glorious day hiking in Lake Tahoe.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe – get onto Pioneer Trail. Turn onto High Meadow Drive. This is the corner where Sierra House Elementary is. Drive as far as you can. Take the main trail that looks like a road.