

Snowshoe on top of the Sierra Mountains



Snowy mountains for as far as the eye can see.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

KIRKWOOD – Temperatures hovering closer to zero than above freezing couldn't put a chill on the views that spilled forth.

For 360 degrees it was a winter wonderland. It was like being in the middle of the Sierra with mountains as far as the eye could see.



Elephants Back stands out across the other side of Highway 88.

Distinguishable landmarks dotted the landscape – Elephants Back, the runs at Kirkwood, Little Round Top, Round Top, Hawkins Peak and others.

Meiss Meadow didn't look much different than Caples Lake, which was covered in ice and snow.

The view to the sapphire colored Lake Tahoe may have been similar to what Gen. John Fremont saw when he first laid eyes on this alpine wonder.



Caples Lake in the distance is popular with ice fishermen this time of year. Photo/Kathryn Reed

What a glorious way to welcome 2016.

Five of us spent the morning of Jan. 1 on an incredible snowshoe in the Carson Pass-Kirkwood cross country ski area. Plenty of tracks could be seen, presumably mostly from backcountry skiers. For the most part we were breaking trail. We knew where we wanted to go, but there was no set path to get us there. That just added to the fun.

At the bug station in Meyers it was minus 7 degrees as we drove through. At the starting point it was 10 degrees and had warmed to 22 by the time we were done. What a thermometer would have read on the ridge with the wind howling to the point it seemed to take our breath away, well, it's probably better we didn't know.



Ice formations on rocks along the ridgeline. Photo/Donna Rockwood

That wind whipped ice formations onto rocks in what looked like works of art, especially with the orange lichen nearby.

At times the snow was so hard our snowshoes made no indentation, while other times it was like floating on idyllic powder, and in other spots it was a crusty layer we punched through.



Craig, Carolyn and Kae make their way through what much of the way was a powdery oasis. Photo/Donna Rockwood

From the trailhead we headed nearly straight up and then to the left toward the ridge we knew we wanted to trek along. Had we continued, Little Round Top would have added at least another three miles to our journey. We opted to drop down into a bowl.

At the bottom we hooked up with the groomed trails of Kirkwood cross country before we made our way to the maintenance station where we had left a vehicle.

In all, we went 6.55 miles. We started at 8,573 feet and reached 9,444 feet. We gained 1,654 feet in elevation, and descended 2,267 feet.



Frosty trees dot the landscape. Photo/Kathryn Reed

—

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe take Highway 50 west through Meyers. Turn left onto Highway 89. At Pickett's Junction, turn right onto Highway 88. Go past the parking area atop Carson Pass. We started at Meiss Trailhead, which is on the right. We left a car at the Caltrans maintenance station farther down Highway 88.