

Marlette Lake a lengthy, worthwhile trek



Snow covers a frozen Marlette Lake. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

SPOONER SUMMIT – Sitting on the rocks I wished I were in a chair that spun around so I didn't have to get up to enjoy the 360-degree view of this slice of Sierra beauty.

On this particular Saturday in February we had Marlette Lake to ourselves. It was stunning, warm and relaxing – especially after hiking nearly 6 miles to get there.

While we started out with the notion we would be snowshoeing, the hardpack conditions were such that hiking boots were all we needed for most of the trek. It was nice to have the

snowshoes for the final descent to the lake and then climbing out. Poles were also good to have.



The abundance of aspen trees makes this a much different hike in the fall.

In winter, this trail is practically deserted – the complete opposite of summer and fall when hikers and mountain bikers are out.

With the return of cross country skiing out of Spooner Lake, part of the trail has been groomed for skiing. Snowmobilers had also laid down a path for us to walk on. Much of the trail is wide enough for at least two to walk side-by-side because this is North Canyon Road.

The bare aspens are like tall white, stick figures protruding from the snow.

Marlette's history is rich – dating back to the days when silver was being mined in Nevada.

The dam forming the lake was built in 1873. The height of it has been increased several times. It is now at 45-feet high. The lake itself is 45-feet deep.



Marlette Lake's rock outcropping, which is ideal for a lunch stop, is visible in the bottom of the photo.

While fishing at Marlette did not open until 2006, brook trout were introduced in the 1800s, Lahontan cutthroat trout in 1964 and rainbow trout in 1984.

The rock island where we stopped for lunch has a sign talking about some of the history, including the chimney that still remains on Rocky Point. It is the last remnant of what was a cabin built by James Mather Leonard and Jessie Hobart Leonard in 1933. They owned Virginia City Water Company, which

included Marlette Lake.

Before the couple built the cabin the other structures in the area were a caretaker's cabin near the dam and a Nevada Fish and Game cabin.

The state bought the water system in 1963 from the Curtis Wright Corp., which had bought it from the Leonards. The Marlette Water System, which still provides water to Virginia City, Gold Hill, Silver City and part of Carson City, also includes Hobart Reservoir.

The caretaker's cabin was supposed to be taken down in the late 1960s, but instead crews mistakenly took down the Leonard cabin. In 2005, the chimney was restored. In the informational sign was erected two years later on Jessie Leonard's 91st birthday.



Sue and Brenda make their way to Marlette Lake.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe take Highway 50 east. At the top of

Spoooner Summit, just beyond the Highway 28 junction, there is parking on the left. Trail starts there. You go past Spoooner Lake – it will be on you left – and the North Canyon Trail will eventually be on the right.