

Pinyon trek a contrast in landscapes



The Pine Nut range is a dominate feature along the Pinyon trail. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

GARDNERVILLE – The sun danced in between the clouds, casting shadows across the land. At times it was like being in a bowl, with snowcapped mountains in nearly every direction.

While the weather was gloomy, the scenery was spectacular on this last Saturday of April. Wildflowers are already out in the Pine Nuts, just east of Gardnerville. Red, yellow, purple and white dot the landscape at the start of the trail. Even though there is not an abundance of flora, compared to the trails of Tahoe right now it was incredibly colorful.

The Pinyon trail is part of the network maintained by the

Carson Valley Trails Association on Bureau of Land Management property. This particular trek was 5 miles.



Flowers are in bloom along the trail.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Starting at 5,700 feet, the highest point is only 6,060 feet. The single track is well maintained. Signage is outstanding. This is important because there are trails that cross the main route that the newcomer might opt to inadvertently take. Most of those trails are for dirt bikes and the like, while the main trail is for hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians.

Much of the trail is a loop. Even this is marked so you know when it starts.

As the sun came out it was like a spotlight illuminating the snow covered Pine Nut and Carson ranges in the distance. Between the trail and mountains it was either flat or rolling hills – most of it green and lush.



The Carson Range with fresh snow. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Pinyon pines – Nevada’s state tree – and Utah juniper dominate the immediate landscape. These short trees, that look like their growth has been prematurely stopped, would not provide much shade. My guess is this area would be hot and not ideal for hiking in the middle of summer. Plus, there is no water, even this time of year.

What was a nice change compared to most places in the Tahoe basin is that dogs are allowed off leash.

A sign at the trailhead says people should pick up after dogs and horses. Too bad the wording is facing people as they are coming back to their vehicles. The equestrians AJ and I passed had left their messes for us to walk around.

An abundance of trails exist in this area. Most looked like they would be great for mountain bikers or all terrain vehicles.



Getting there:

The trailhead is about 30 miles from South Lake Tahoe. Easy access from Kingsbury Grade or Luther Pass depending on starting point.

Once in Gardnerville, turn on Muller Parkway going east. (There is a 7-Eleven on the other side of the street.)

At the roundabout go right onto Pinenut Road. Turn left on Pinenut Road 2. At the Y go right onto the gravel road. (The average passenger car would be fine on this road.)

The trailhead is clearly marked a couple miles farther on the left. There are on signs on each of the roads as well.