

Skunk Harbor on snowshoes – breathtaking



Snow looks like frosting on the top of rocks at Skunk Harbor. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

In the distance a deep sapphire blue Lake Tahoe looked majestic. Up close the emerald cove was more rugged as the white caps hit the shore.

Seclusion mixed with vast views of Lake Tahoe – that's what the trek to Skunk Harbor is all about.

If only it had been warmer. But warmth and snowshoeing in winter are often elusive. Linger on the beach this time of year is much different than in summer, not so inviting. Ice hangs from some of the rocks along the shore. About a foot-wide stretch of sand is exposed.



The structures at Skunk Harbor are not open to the public. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Remnants of Skunk Harbor's past are visible. While the U.S. Forest Service now owns this swath of land on the East Shore, that wasn't always the case. Stone buildings near the waterfront once belonged to George and Caroline Newhall. They used it as a second home for their San Francisco friends in the 1920s.

George Whittell then became the land owner. He once owned most of the East Shore down to Zephyr Cove.

Pilings for what once was a pier protrude from the water.

Last weekend there was no clear starting point with all of the snow. It was a pretty steep first 15 feet, then it flattens out.



Lake Tahoe in the distance near the start of the trail.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Fortunately, a snowmobiler had laid a track for us, as had other snowshoers and cross country skiers.

While I try not to go off trail for erosion reasons when it's dirt, with all this snow it was so inviting at times to break trail, traipsing through the virgin snow. Sometimes it was fluffy, other places it was crunchy.

No matter where one looked, it was a winter wonderland. It doesn't take long for Lake Tahoe to come into view. The openness of the trail in many ways made me feel like I was much farther removed from civilization than I was.

Tracks led up a knoll that we scampered up to get what was a stunning view of much of the lake.

It's unfortunate such a lovely place has such a smelly name.

It's a gradual 1.5-mile descent from the highway to the beach. The uphill ascent doesn't feel so gradual. The elevation change is 560 feet.



Sue Wood makes her way through mounds of snow down to Skunk Harbor. Photo/Kathryn Reed

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe go east on Highway 50, up Spooner Summit.

Turn left onto Highway 28.

Parking is on the left in 2.4 miles. Nevada Department of Transportation clears the area so parking is not right on the highway.