

Cascade Falls tricky to get to in the snow



A frozen Cascade Lake with Lake Tahoe in the distance.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

I made the right decision in not snowshoeing to Cascade Falls by myself. The conditions, at least a week ago, were sketchy in places.

The narrow, slick route had many people turning around – us included.

Originally AJ and I were going to go on a weekday. And while I would not have been alone, she doesn't know how to operate a phone to call for help. I know what this trail is like in dirt-granite-dry conditions; I wasn't sure what to expect with the winter-spring we've had.

So, the next day it was me, AJ and Sue. Starting off from the Bayview trailhead near Emerald Bay we had a choice to wear snowshoes or not. We opted to wear them thinking they would give us better traction when the trail narrowed.



Cascade Falls is bound to be even larger as the snow really melts.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

It's hard to know if that was the correct decision. One problem was the few barren patches were rocky and often involved manzanita. This was more challenging with snowshoes than the soft, super narrow trail.

We encountered three people who were wearing appropriate footwear (many people had tennis shoes) who made it to the falls. They said it was hard and long to get there.

This trail in summer is not long; it can be mildly hard with all the granite steps. (I was looking forward to avoiding that with the snow.)



Sue gingerly snowshoes over granite rocks.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

It finally got to the point where safety outweighed winter at the falls. We turned around. Still, it was a worthwhile trek on a gorgeous, spring day. Temps allowed for short sleeves.

Even if you don't make it to the falls, like us, the scenery is idyllic. Cascade Lake is starting to melt; the white icy-snow looking like frosting, and the edges a dark chocolate layer. (Maybe I was just hungry.)

It doesn't take long for the roar of the falls to ring through the air. And there were times we saw it in the distance.

With all of this snow, every waterfall will be plentiful for months to come. I'll be back.



It may be a while before the Bayview parking lot is accessible. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe take Highway 89 north toward Emerald Bay. Park near the Bayview trailhead. The parking lot is covered with snow, and therefore closed. The sign pointing to the falls at the far end of the parking is visible – you go left. Then follow the tracks. If there aren't any, you might not want to be breaking trail if you are unfamiliar with the area. You will be paralleling Cascade Lake – eventually.