

Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship's Lost Sierra Recreation Guide



LOST SIERRA RECREATION GUIDE

A guide to outdoor adventure in the Lost Sierra.



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THE SIERRA BUTTES TRAIL STEWARDSHIP LOST SIERRA RECREATION GUIDE

Inside you will find an outdoor recreation guide and historical tour of the Lost Sierra located in Sierra, Plumas, Lassen and Butte counties. An uncrowded, unpretentious playground of outdoor adventure and majestic beauty awaits you. Get exploring!

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THE LOST SIERRA



Cover: Mountain biking in the shadow of the Sierra Buttes, Tamarack Connection Trail. Photo: Patrick Cavender

Below: Sunset on Lake Davis near Portola. Warm water, great fishing and Bald Eagles - just another beautiful Lost Sierra gem. Photo: Ken Etzel



Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that builds and maintains multiuse trails in the Tahoe, Plumas and Lassen National Forests. Visit us at SierraTrails.org.

The Lost Sierra Recreation Guide is produced by the Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship to promote recreation in the Lost Sierra region of California. Our goal is to improve the local economy through outdoor recreation on multiuse trails.



The Queen Lookout ↑

The Sierra Buttes lookout is adventure for the entire family. 6 miles hike out and back, with 1800 feet of elevation gain, then 180 steep stairs on the top of a mountain make for a thrilling climb. Like all the lookouts... the views are worth it. You can see all the way to the Sacramento Valley and Mt. Lassen 100 miles away on a clear day.

THE LOST SIERRA, LAND OF THE LOOKOUTS

In a modern world dominated by technology, when it comes to monitoring and detecting new forest fire starts, there's still a place for humans; in a tower on the top of a prominent peak.

By Kurt Gensheimer

For more than a century, the U.S. Forest Service has constructed and manned thousands of lookout towers on top of mountains across the American West, but in the last few decades those numbers have shrunk into the hundreds as aircraft, remote cameras and other technological innovations have replaced the human eye.

Famous writers like Edward Abbey and Jack Kerouac have manned lookouts in the past, as sitting alone in a small box on top of a mountain for days at a time is conducive to writing. And although lookouts spend many days alone sitting, they must be on alert and watching the horizon at all times during daylight hours. The sooner a lookout can spot a new fire start, the faster crews can get it under control. Because human lookouts are relatively inexpensive and reliable compared to modern technology, there are still hundreds of towers actively operating across the West.

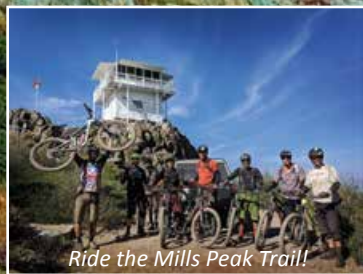
In Sierra, Plumas and Lassen County we are fortunate to have a few dozen lookout towers still standing, some of them manned with seasonal lookouts. As a bonus, some towers like Calpine, Sardine Peak and Black Mountain are renovated and rentable from the U.S. Forest Service for overnight stays. And because these towers are perched atop some of the most prominent peaks in Northern California, it makes for quite the backcountry adventure by bicycle, hiking, horseback, moto or 4x4 to experience as many as possible.

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in preserving these fire lookouts because of their unique architecture and historical significance. The Forest Fire Lookout Association (firelookout.org) is a terrific resource and accepts memberships and donations to help keep these lookouts from disappearing. FFLA also has a quarterly newsletter for members, rich with stories, articles, book reviews and updates about lookout towers across America. There's even a classifieds section with restored towers for sale!

THE LOST SIERRA, LAND OF THE LOOKOUTS



Mills Peak lookout



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LOOKOUTS FOR RENT

1. Calpine – 1934 — Sitting at 5,836 feet elevation on the Tahoe National Forest above the small community of Calpine, the Calpine Hill lookout is a beautifully restored California design, originally built by the CCC in 1934 using a C-3 14'x14' wooden cab with a catwalk on an enclosed 17' tower.

Coordinates: N 39° 40.730' W 120° 27.799'

<https://www.recreation.gov/camping/campgrounds/234131>

2. Sardine Peak – 1935 — Towering above Sardine Valley between Stampede Reservoir and Loyalton at 8,135 feet elevation in the Tahoe National Forest, Sardine Peak lookout was constructed by the CCC in 1935 featuring a 14'x14' C-3 cab on an enclosed 17' tower. It is incredibly popular with renters and very difficult to find booking availability.

Coordinates: N 39° 32.403' W 120° 11.272'

<https://www.recreation.gov/camping/campgrounds/252037>

3. Black Mountain – Standing tall on the edge of the eastern Sierra Nevada at 7,050 feet elevation above the Honey Lake Valley in the Plumas National Forest, Black Mountain lookout is a classic C3 14'x14' live-in cab with a catwalk of original Forest Service R-5 design. Coordinates: N 40° 06.716' W 120° 19.217'

<https://www.recreation.gov/camping/campgrounds/233296>

Rental lookouts are incredibly popular and very difficult to find booking availability.



Thompson Peak lookout. Photo: Joel Rathje

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INACTIVE LOOKOUTS

4. Sierra Buttes – 1963 — Towering at 8,587 feet elevation on a volcanic rock spire, overhanging a 1,200 foot cliff on the north side of the catwalk, with Sierra City 4,500 vertical feet below to the south, the Sierra Buttes lookout on the Tahoe National Forest is legendary. National Geographic Magazine described the Sierra Buttes lookout as a “spectacular location that has to be seen to be believed”, an understatement of this breathtaking lookout. Coordinates: N 39° 35.725' W 120° 38.450'

5. Verdi Peak – 1983 (1939) — Surveying the Truckee Meadows from 8,444 feet elevation, Verdi Peak lookout on Tahoe National Forest offering remarkable views of the Truckee River Canyon, the Sierra Crest, Stampede Reservoir and Mount Rose Wilderness. Coordinates: N 39° 28.348' W 120° 02.382'

6. Pilot Peak – 1976 (1935) — Situated at 7,457 feet elevation in the heart of the “Over North” region of the Plumas National Forest about a dozen miles northeast of LaPorte, Pilot Peak lookout is a very unique hexagonal cab with flying buttress supports built in 1976. Coordinates: N 39° 46.993' W 120° 52.134'

7. Red Rock – 1941 — Sitting on a 10 foot enclosed timber tower at 7,620 feet elevation on the Plumas National Forest in the Diamond Mountains between Taylorsville and Susanville. Coordinates: N 40° 17.817' W 120° 42.574'

ACTIVE LOOKOUTS

8. Babbitt Peak – Perched at 8,727 feet elevation in the Tahoe National Forest southeast of Loyalton, offers commanding views of Reno, the Sierra Valley, Stampede Reservoir and the Sierra Crest. Coordinates: N 39° 36.144' W 120° 06.446'

9. Saddleback Mountain – Built into the side of a giant rock outcropping at 6,690 feet elevation in the Tahoe National Forest 10 miles north of Downieville, it offers excellent views of the Sierra Buttes, Cal Ida Ridge and the “Over North” region near Pilot Peak. Coordinates: N 39° 38.207' W 120° 51.861'

10. Mills Peak – Looking over Mohawk Valley from 7,342 feet elevation on the Plumas National Forest near Graeagle, The Mills Peak trail starts a few hundred yards from the tower, bringing many summertime visitors to the lookout. Coordinates: N 39° 42.290' W 120° 37.373'

11. Mount Hough – Straddling the ridgeline between the American Valley and Indian Valley at 7,232 feet elevation on the Plumas National Forest, the current Mount Hough lookout was built in 1986 along with a few microwave relays. Coordinates: N 40° 02.660' W 120° 53.172'

12. Smith Peak – Standing watch between Portola and Lake Davis at 7,693 feet elevation on the Plumas National Forest. Located only 15 miles to the north of Mills Peak across the Mohawk Valley, the two actively operated towers are within view of one another. Coordinates: N 39° 52.047' W 120° 31.845'

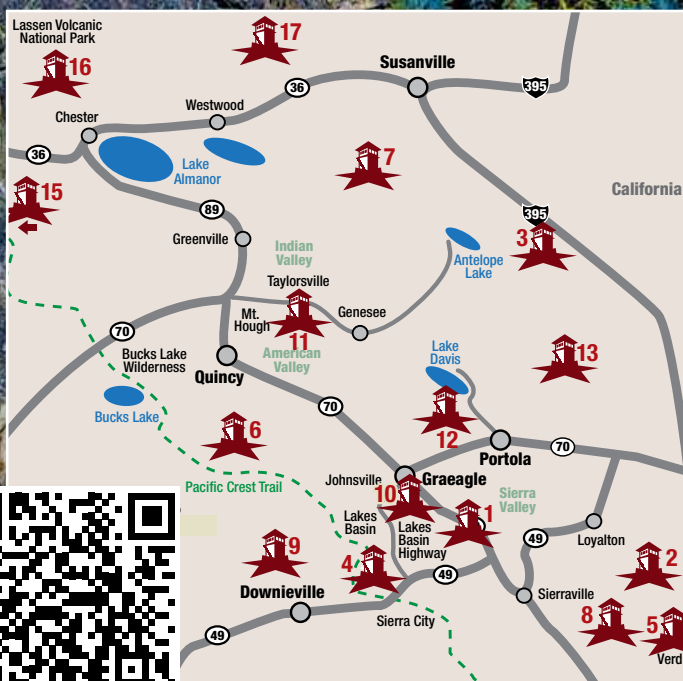
13. Dixie Mountain – Towering above the Sierra Valley at 8,327 feet elevation in the Plumas National Forest northwest of Chilcoot, Dixie Mountain lookout has the distinction of being the oldest lookout on the Plumas and sits on one of the highest peaks in the Plumas National Forest overlooking Frenchman Reservoir to the east. Coordinates: N 39° 56.333' W 120° 17.121'

14. Thompson Peak – 1931 — Perched at 7,795 feet elevation west of Janesville on the edge of the eastern front of the Sierra Nevada west of Janesville overlooking Nevada’s Great Basin. Thompson lookout receives heavy winds and was rehabilitated in 2016. Coordinates: N 40° 15.658' W 120° 33.458'

15. Colby Mountain – 1934 — Located at 5,973 feet elevation on the Lassen National Forest a few miles northwest of Jonesville, Colby lookout is rather unique as one of the few Northern California lookouts built atop a 30 foot steel tower. It offers commanding views of Mount Lassen Volcanic National Park. Coordinates: N 40° 08.802' W 121° 31.266'

16. Mount Harkness – 1931 — Sitting at 8,046 feet elevation in Lassen Volcanic National Park northwest of Chester on top of a cinder cone topped ancient shield volcano, visitors can hike to the tower on trail from either Juniper Lake or Warner Valley. Coordinates: N 40° 25.927' W 121° 17.999'

17. Pegleg Mountain – 1984 — Located north of Highway 36 between Westwood and Susanville at 7,112 feet elevation in the Plumas National Forest, Pegleg lookout is a more modern structure built in 1984, now owned by Cal Fire. Coordinates: N 40° 24.420' W 120° 57.144'



Scan for more photos, maps and details!



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THE LOST SIERRA ON FOOT

By Kurt Gensheimer

On foot adventures in the Lost Sierra begin with the first step, but with so many trails to choose from, the hardest part is figuring out where to start. Whether trail running or day hiking, here are a few great options with rewarding views.

GOLD VALLEY RIM TRAIL RUN

Arguably one of the most scenic trail runs in the region, Gold Valley Rim Trail extends from Packer Saddle north to Deer Lake. Trending uphill from Packer Saddle north, Gold Valley Rim trail to Deer Lake is four miles long. The grade is not steep, and running it as an out-and-back is a terrific workout with views that will make you stop repeatedly to take in its visual majesty. Gold Valley Rim trail is particularly beautiful first thing in the morning or late in the evening, when the sun is low on the horizon, the sky is brimming with color and nobody else is on the trail.

For those wanting a big, hearty challenging loop to run, incorporate Gold Valley Rim by starting at Pack Saddle Campground, running up the Pacific Crest Trail towards Tamarack Lake, then up to the Sierra Buttes Overlook trail, down to Packer Saddle, along Gold Valley Rim trail, then back onto the Pacific Crest Trail/Deer Lake trail, descending back down to Pack Saddle Campground. This challenging run is approximately 13 miles and has several thousand feet of climbing, with technical sections on Deer Lake trail requiring agile footwork. The views are unmatched along this route, with several amazing views of the Sierra Buttes and multiple lakes to stop at for a quick dip if you need to cool off.

CHAPMAN CREEK AND HASKELL PEAK HIKE

Starting at Chapman Campground on Highway 49 east of Bassett's, Chapman Creek trail climbs gradually 2.5 miles along Chapman Creek through beautiful stands of incense cedar, red fir lined with ferns and wildflowers well into summer. After reaching the dirt road, a brand new mile-long connector trail completed by Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship in 2020 links to the Haskell Peak trail.

Once on Haskell Peak trail, the grade gets steeper and rockier, and in two miles it reaches the peak at 8,107 feet elevation, the second highest peak in the area besides the Sierra Buttes. The views from Haskell Peak's rocky talus slope are commanding, offering 360 degree views of the Sierra Valley, Mills Peak, Lakes Basin, the Sierra Buttes, Mount Lola and even Mount Lassen on a clear day. Don't be surprised to see drifts of snow well into July near the top. Bring a lunch, because after 2,000 vertical feet of climbing, you'll want to hang out at the top for a while and bask in all your hard work!

OTHER GREAT LOST SIERRA REGIONS FOR RUNS AND HIKE

- Bucks Lake Wilderness
- Lassen Volcanic National Park
- Lakes Basin Recreation Area
- The Pacific Crest Trail
- Bizz Johnson National Recreation Trail

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LOST SIERRA MOUNTAIN BIKE ADVENTURES

The most challenging part of a bike adventure in the Lost Sierra happens well before you even put feet on pedals – it's figuring out exactly where you want to ride. With hundreds of miles of singletrack between Downieville, Graeagle, Lakes Basin and Quincy, as well as an abundant trail network in Susanville, there's a lifetime of bike exploration to be had in the Lost Sierra.

By Kurt Gensheimer

QUINCY OPTIONS

There are many fun mountain bike options in the growing trails destination of Quincy. It's great to start and finish at the Yuba Expeditions Adventure Center at 550 Crescent Street (yubaexpeditions.com). Whatever your experience level, the knowledgeable folks at Yuba Adventure Center can provide trail maps and route details.

For those who want to get in at least 4,000 feet of climbing over 30 miles, climb the Mount Hough Road, then drop down either Mount Hough Trail or the new Indian Falls Ridge Trail, loaded with amazing valley views and unique jagged rock spires.

For a shorter ride with less climbing and good flow, the South Park area features more than 20 miles of singletrack, an ideal spot to ride in the shoulder season. Cascade Trail is an incredibly scenic singletrack running along Spanish Creek, as is the Spanish Traverse loop, offering great views of Quincy from the top of the ridge.

SUSANVILLE SECRET STASH

Susanville Ranch Park (SusanvilleRanchPark.com) is a 1,100-acre park with 30 miles of singletrack ranging from easy going to black diamond with trail built specifically for mountain bikes with fun burms and features. There are over 63 miles of non-motorized singletrack in the Susanville vicinity, including the cross country Bald Mountain Trails also worth exploring.

EBIKING DOWNIEVILLE

If you've already ridden the Downieville Downhill a jillion times and want a different kind of Downieville experience, rent a Santa Cruz ebike at Yuba Expeditions located at 208 Main St in Downieville. The steep and rugged trails of Downieville are tailor-made for Class 1 ebikes, enabling riders to climb right from town, accessing Downieville trails that most mountain bikers have never experienced.



The Gold Valley Rim Trail above Downieville

A local's favorite ebike ride starts at the Halls Ranch trailhead on Highway 49, climbing the steep and tight switchbacks to the top of Fiddle Ridge featuring incredible views of the Sierra Buttes. Then continue along Fiddle Creek Trail all the way down to Indian Valley. With a second battery, you can ride North Yuba Trail from Rocky Rest Campground upstream

to Goodyears Bar. From Goodyears, it's a short two mile pedal back to the Halls Ranch trailhead. Or if you want even more singletrack and you've got battery life left, keep on cranking on the North Yuba Trail all the way back to Downieville. With only one battery, it's best to park one car at Halls Ranch trailhead and a second car at Indian Valley to avoid the road ride.

Another option is the 19-mile Cal-Ida Trail – a fun and flowing singletrack paralleling Cal-Ida Ridge road from Halls Ranch all the way out past Saddleback Mountain. This makes for a great out-and-back ebike ride from the Halls Ranch trailhead on Highway 49. Watch the battery life you've used because you'll need almost as much to get back to your car.

Beautiful Views on Top of Mt. Hough
...And a 3,800 foot descent, 16 mile trail back to Quincy. Yuba Expeditions has the shuttles to get you there, see page 14.



LOST SIERRA FOUR WHEELING

From mild to wild, the Lost Sierra region has thousands of miles of dirt roads and two track trails to accommodate everything from stock and lightly modified 4x4 trucks to UTVs and fully built rock crawler trucks.

By Kurt Gensheimer

STOCK TRUCKS

A beautiful and historical drive awaits adventurers by taking the Johnsville-LaPorte Road from Johnsville towards LaPorte. This Plumas County 507 dirt road leaves from the Johnsville Museum and takes you up the incredibly scenic Florentine Canyon, rich with towering cliff walls, wildflowers and rock slabs perfect for catching some summer sun rays after a swim in Jamison Creek. But before embarking, be sure to stop at the Johnsville Museum for a fascinating tour of rich mining history on Eureka Peak.

Be warned that the 507/900 road is incredibly remote with no cell service. If you drive this route, do not go unprepared and make sure you let someone know your travel plans in advance. Always carry the proper tools, especially a good spare tire and jack. Nobody wants to be the subject of a search and rescue mission.



Scan for maps and details

LIGHTLY MODIFIED

For those in search of testing the suspension limits of their vehicles, the most technical 4x4 trails in the Lost Sierra are in the Lakes Basin region south of Graeagle. OHV trails like Deer Lake, Little Deer Lake, Gold Valley (lovingly known as "Baby Heads"), Gold Lake and Four Hills Mine provide a good challenge for mild 4x4 builds and UTVs. Stock 4x4 vehicles with a capable driver can navigate Gold Lake, Deer Lake and Four Hills Mine, but good tires and good ground clearance are a must. There are a variety of loops that can be done, and the easiest access points are at Packer Saddle on Deer Lake OHV, the backside of Gold Lake on Gold Lake OHV and from Johnsville on the Four Hills Mine OHV road.

HEAVILY MODIFIED

Little Deer Lake OHV is a technical challenge, with steep ups and downs that will test skill and traction. If you're still looking for a bigger challenge after sampling the aforementioned trails, the most technical OHV trail in the area is Snake Lake. This trail is not for the novice and definitely not for a stock truck, although there have been a few regretful souls who attempted it. The trail is peppered with loose boulders and watermelon size rocks that make traction tricky, as well as steep rock slabs and narrow squeezes. Going down is easier than going up, but neither way is easy. 33-inch tires with traction aids, body protection and a steady hand and foot are a minimum. For those who've successfully navigated trails like the Rubicon and Fordyce, Snake Lake should be a fun challenge. And regardless of whether or not you attempt the trail, Snake Lake itself is worth the stop.



Photo: Mark Weir

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Photo Credit: Paul Bernard



LOST SIERRA MOTO RIDING

By Kurt Gensheimer

From mild to wild, dirt bike adventures in the Lost Sierra cover the entire range of skill and experience. Of course there are thousands of miles of dirt roads for those expedition-type overnight rides, especially the region north of Portola and Beckwourth, all the way out past Taylorsville to Susanville and Westwood. But if singletrack is the goal, there are a couple hundred miles of singletrack across the region to enjoy. Be sure to stop off at Yuba Expeditions in Quincy or Downieville, get trail conditions and grab a trail map to help plan your ride.

Mt. Hough, Quincy

Thanks to its relatively smooth terrain free of serious exposure or sudden drop-offs, beginner and intermediate riders will really enjoy the trail network on Mount Hough. Offering a mix of singletrack, narrow two-track and improved dirt roads, there's more than 100 miles of options for riders to explore. Two miles up Mount Hough Road is "four corners" – a four-way intersection which makes for an ideal staging area. Some of the highlights on Mount Hough are Mount Hough trail, Indian Falls Ridge, Cashman, Troy's, Tollgate and Berry Creek.

Riding Butcher Ranch trail outside of Downieville

Moto Overlanding

Endless dirt roads to explore from Portola to Lake Davis to Genesee to Antelope Lake.

Downieville & The Sierra Crest

Downieville is not only legendary for mountain biking; people have been riding motorcycles off the Sierra Buttes since the late 1960s. For advanced moto riders who want an unforgettable day of serious adventure, starting in Downieville and riding a loop out to the Sierra Buttes will deliver plenty of rocks, steep climbs and technical puzzles to negotiate. Climbing either Lavezzola Creek Trail to the A-Tree or Third Divide and Big Boulder out to Gold Valley are great options. For the technical masters not afraid of exposure, Second Divide is worth a try.

For those who want to experience a milder side of Downieville moto riding, the new 19-mile Cal-Ida trail is highly recommended. Completed in 2020, this is a terrific trail with lots of third and fourth-gear riding, low consequences and less rocky terrain to navigate. Because the trail is new, it can get pretty dusty mid-summer, so it's best to catch this trail in the shoulder seasons or right after a rainfall.

Buy detailed trail maps of the Mt. Hough and Downieville regions at: SierraTrails.org/map



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The Gold Valley Rim Trail above Downieville



Downieville, Mount Hough and Graeagle are a mountain biker's paradise with huge descents and all day Lost Sierra adventure exploration.



Photo: Ken Etzel

Yuba Expeditions with two locations in Downieville and Quincy feature shuttle vans, top-of-the-line Santa Cruz rental bikes, professional bike mechanic service and trail info for all trail users. Yuba helps you to get you to where the fun is.

YubaExpeditions.com



Above: Yuba Expeditions Adventure Center in Quincy with Fall color.

Left: Yuba Expeditions Downieville in full fun mode durring summer.

THE GEOLOGY OF MT. HOUGH

By Lalo Guerrero, PhD — IG: @trailside_geology

Mount Hough is the best place to get a sense of the depth and the breath of the greatness of the Lost Sierra!

To the North you can see Lassen and Shasta, both of which are part of the active Cascade Volcanic Arc. To the south and west you can see the Sierra Nevada and the various forks of the Feather River winding their way towards the reservoirs on the western slope of the mountain range. To the North and East you can view the incredible transition zone from active volcanic landscapes to non-volcanic landscapes of the Lost Sierra. One thing that appeals to me when I have the privilege to visit and ride on this mountain is that I can connect to the deep geologic past, but I can also observe ongoing modern geologic processes that are evidence that we live on a pretty active planet.



knew anything about geosciences. One of the most common ones that I heard from multiple friends was that Crystal Lake was part of a lava tube system that connected to Lake Tahoe! Crystal Lake's origins are far less epic, but the story is nonetheless awesome! These types of lakes typically form at high elevations in locations

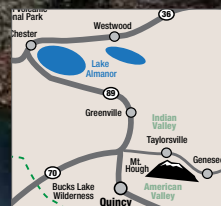
that are shielded from the wind on three sides. This allows snow to accumulate and persist through the summer. As future snowfalls are preserved, the material at the bottom is compressed and over time transforms into ice. During cold periods in Earth's history, this process can lead to the growth of glaciers, and the little shielded areas become a glacial landform known as a cirque. Once the ice mass exceeds the edge of the cirque, it begins

to follow streams or channels downslope, leading to spectacular landscapes like those seen in the Alps or elsewhere in the Sierra Nevada. When the climate is no longer amenable to glaciers, they lose their mass through melting and sublimation, and the last bits of the glacier remain in the cirque, over time that glacier fully melts and leaves behind a lake known as a tarn.

So, as you begin the descent from Hough, you can appreciate both the mysteries of deep time beneath your feet in the radiolarian chert or observe modern day alpine glacial processes. As you enjoy your descent, you'll notice how the geology is the crucial factor that gives the Mt. Hough descent its special character. Well the geology is pretty spectacular, however, it is dirt magicians with the trail stewardship who bring it to light!

Beneath your feet on the summit of Mt. Hough, you will find radiolarian chert that is about 320 million years old. These rocks are part of the Peale Formation, which forms the Keddie (or Indian Falls) Ridge, which connects the high points in this part of Plumas County. Rocks from the Peale formation are made up of radiolaria, a type of marine plankton that build their shells with silica, commonly known as quartz, which is very resistant to erosion, and form the ridge. These rocks are at an elevation of ~7,000 feet thanks to the mountain building process that formed the Sierra Nevada between 200 and 65 million years ago.

Crystal Lake just below the summit of Mt. Hough was a constant mystery growing up. I heard a wide range of explanations before I



AMERICAN VALLEY

By Kurt Gensheimer

QUINCY



Located halfway between Oroville and Reno on the Feather River National Scenic Byway, Quincy and its surrounding neighborhoods total nearly 5,000 residents, the largest community in Plumas County. Situated in the lush and expansive American Valley at 3,432 feet elevation, Quincy is known for its rolling green ranchlands buttressed by towering peaks, beautifully preserved historic buildings and a vibrant downtown area.

Before settlement by white pioneers in the early 1850s, the American Valley was home to the Mountain Maidu tribe, as the valley provided ample sun, water, good soil and habitable weather

for year-round living. The Mountain Maidu escaped summer heat up into the mountains above Quincy, including the Buck's Lake area, prime hunting grounds for the tribe.

Originally affiliated with Elizabethtown, a Gold Rush mining camp, Quincy came to be in 1858 after settler Hugh J. Bradley donated land and laid out the town, naming it after his Illinois farm (allegedly named after the sixth U.S. President, John Quincy Adams). Soon after the town was established, hordes of miners surrounded the American Valley, hunting up countless streams and tributaries of the North and Middle Fork of the Feather River, finding extensive pockets of auriferous gravel.

More on the history of Quincy at SierraTrails.org/cc



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WHAT TO DO IN AMERICAN VALLEY

From moto and mountain biking to hiking, horseback riding and boating, the American Valley region is rich with outdoor activities. Spots like Mount Hough and South Park offer ample trail options. Buck's Lake is a beautiful 20 minute drive from Quincy and offers an alpine setting perfect for boating, fishing and hiking. For history buffs, be sure to visit the Plumas County Museum in downtown Quincy.



Enjoy Buck's Lake



The Plumas Museum



Moto Mt. Hough, see pg. 13


*Mountain biking
Mt. Hough
see pg. 10 & 14*

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YUBA RIVER CANYON

By Kurt Gensheimer

*The Sierra Buttes at the top of
the Yuba River Canyon near
Bassetts*



DOWNIEVILLE

The history of Downieville runs as rich as the auriferous gravels found in the countless emerald blue-green pools of the North Yuba River and was originally known as “The Forks”.

Settled by William Downie and a group of prospectors in 1849 with the help of a Kanaka guide named Jim Crow, The Forks was renamed to Downieville after Downie and his crew constructed a cabin along the Downie River in November 1849 to withstand winter. Their findings along the North Yuba were so rich that word got out quickly. By the summer of 1850, nearly 5,000 prospectors were scattered everywhere above Downieville, with the town boasting more than a dozen hotels and gambling houses.

Downieville is one of the most well preserved frontier towns in all of California's Gold Country. Although the high times of mining and timber that kept the town thriving are long gone, the magic that remains are in the trails originally cut in the quest for gold. Outdoor recreation, particularly mountain biking, has helped saved Downieville from extinction. Downieville has become internationally famous with mountain bikers, and it is also the 2003 birthplace of the Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship.



SIERRA CITY

Set at 4,147 feet elevation along the North Yuba River in the shadows of the Sierra Buttes towering high above at 8,587 feet elevation, Sierra City is a beautifully preserved Gold Rush-era town with breathtaking mountain vistas reminiscent of the Swiss Alps. Founded in 1850, the original town of Sierra City was located higher up the south face of the Sierra Buttes than its current location along Highway 49. An avalanche in the winter of 1852-53 decimated the town, forcing residents to rebuild further down the mountain.

More Downieville and Sierra City history at SierraTrails.org/cc

WHAT TO DO IN THE YUBA RIVER CANYON

The mighty North Fork Yuba River is known for its emerald blue-green waters and perfect bedrock swimming holes unbeatable in the summer heat, especially after a long day on the trails. It's easy to find your own little undisturbed swimming

hole along the North Yuba. Both the Kentucky Mine Museum in Sierra City and the Downieville Museum give a detailed history of the region and the remarkable amounts of gold discovered in this legendary canyon.



Mountain biking, see pg. 10 & 14



Explore swimming holes



Moto endless miles, see pg. 13

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ALMANOR

By Kurt Gensheimer

Built on top of volcanic rock deposits from nearby Mount Lassen and situated on the northwest shore of Lake Almanor at 4,500 feet elevation, the town of Chester has attracted more than a century of tourism and recreation, as well as being home to a premier sustainable lumber operation. Chester received its name from Burwell Johnson and Oscar Martin in 1894. Johnson was raised near Chester, Illinois, and Martin hailed from Chester, Vermont, so the name came naturally.

After two giant volcanic eruptions of Mount Lassen in 1914 and 1915, Lassen National Park was established in 1916, attracting tourists and travelers to Chester. About the same time, nearby Big Meadows was submerged by the Great Western Power Company hydroelectric project, creating Lake Almanor, another huge recreational asset for the community. (The name Almanor comes from the daughters – Alice, Martha and Elanor – of Guy C. Earl, vice president of Great Western Power.) Through the Prohibition era, Chester gained a reputation for bootlegging and gambling, with loggers and cowboys often clashing with fists at the Bear Club, among other vices, earning it the nickname “Little Reno”.

The opening of Collins Pine Company in 1943 stabilized both the population and reputation of Chester to this very day. The family-owned Collins Pine Company had many logging operations around the country, but the 67,000 acres it owned near Chester would become one of the first experiments in sustainable forestry, diametrically opposed to the traditional “cut and run” practices of competitors. The company's operations are also entirely powered by burning leftover sawdust and wood chips, creating steam power that runs an electric generator. This sustainable approach has helped Chester produce a steady, long-term supply of lumber while preserving habitat and providing a stable community that endures in the 21st Century.

WESTWOOD, THE TOWN PAUL BUILT

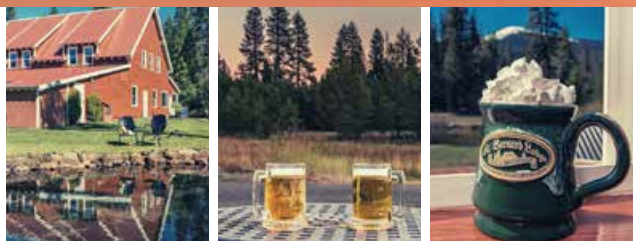
Situated at 5,128 feet elevation atop lava fields erupted from Mount Lassen, the town of Westwood is one of the southernmost Lassen County communities in the Cascade Mountain Range with legendary logging lineage, home to one of the greatest character duos in American folklore.

Built in 1913 as a company town by the Red River Lumber Company, Westwood had a school, hospital, church, bakery, hardware store, an opera house and clubhouse. There was even The Big Store, a predecessor to the modern shopping mall. The Big Store had 18 departments and was a block long by a block wide, supplying everything residents needed.

Red River Lumber Company was innovative, boasting the world's largest electrical sawmill of its time, as well as developing one of the first electric railways in California in 1927. The company also built more than two dozen bunk houses, steam heated in the winter from mill operations. By the 1930s, Red River Lumber Company was the largest pine lumber mill in the world, occupying more than 100 acres and employing more than 5,000 people.

But Westwood's most enduring claim to fame was the legend of Paul Bunyan and his blue ox, Babe. Created by William Laughead, an ad man for the Red River Lumber Company, Paul Bunyan and Babe were the subjects of short stories Laughead wrote to promote the lumber camp's operations. Designed to be bigger than life, the legend goes that Paul and Babe could clear 640 acres of pine trees in one day's work.

Once Laughead brought the iconic characters to life through animation, companies like Disney and Warner Brothers immortalized Paul and Babe in American folklore through cartoons. Visitors to Westwood today can still see the bigger-than-life statues of Paul and Babe on display in the center of town, a lasting tribute to the legend of this quaint frontier town.



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WHAT TO DO IN ALMANOR

From stand-up paddleboards to fishing and motor boats, Lake Almanor is a boating paradise, set before the mighty Mount Lassen. Day trip dirt road adventures can be had, driving or riding moto from Almanor out to Jonesville and back, or make an extended loop out to Butt Valley and Round Valley Reservoirs,

finishing in Greenville. A day trip from Almanor up to Mount Lassen Volcanic National Park is a very easy and scenic drive with many hikes and volcanic wonders to see. Stop by in Westwood, the birthplace of Paul Bunyan and Babe the blue ox, and pay homage to the statues of these American legends.



Lake fun for the whole family!



Great fishing!



Beautiful alpine hiking.



Visit Paul Bunyan & Babe in Westwood



Sunset behind Mt. Lassen and Lake Almanor. Photo Randy Robbins Photography.

INDIAN VALLEY

By Kurt Gensheimer

Tucked into the corner of Indian Valley in the shadow of mighty Mount Hough, and at the northernmost point of the Sierra Nevada range, Taylorsville straddles the geologic border between where the Sierra Nevada ends and the Cascade Range begins, making for some spectacular mountain vistas and unique geologic features.

Before white settlers, thousands of Northern Maidu Indians called the now-named Indian Valley home. In 1851, Peter Lassen established an outpost supplying travelers with goods on their own quest to find "Gold Lake" and the alleged auriferous riches it held. Later Jobe Taylor claimed the now named Taylorsville, building the first non-native permanent residence in the valley at Taylor's Ranch, becoming a hotel and eventually a full-time community. Aside from Jobe Taylor, in the 1860s another name rose to prominence in Taylorsville that still has presence today. The Young family has been a cornerstone of the Taylorsville community, with five members of the family serving as Postmaster between 1876 and 1924. Young's Market, originally opened by William George Young in 1862, is one of the few businesses currently operating in Taylorsville, although the market is now owned by Kelly Tan and family.

Young's Market is rich with history, and is home to the oldest operating cash register in the nation; 105 years young. National Register Company made the two-foot wide by two-foot deep



by three-foot tall register specifically for Young's Market back in 1915. It's made from wood and decorative brass, featuring a mechanical hand crank, push buttons, bells and two cash drawers. The register is an icon of Taylorsville, and draws customers from all over the region to experience a piece of history still working hard every day.

More Taylorsville & Greenville history: SierraTrails.org/cc

GREENVILLE



Strolling through Greenville is like walking back in time. You won't see chain stores, or chain restaurants, or chain anything for that matter; most businesses in Greenville are locally owned. Few towns in California have the personality of Greenville. Aside from the well kept storefronts and building architecture ranging from the 1860s to the 1940s, Greenville's rural setting alongside the Union Pacific railroad is what makes this town of 1,100 residents so endearing. Located in the northwest corner of the Indian Valley along California Highway 89, surrounded by towering timbered peaks on the northernmost fringe of the Sierra Nevada Range, Greenville is only nine miles from Lake Almanor and the start of the southern Cascade Range, home to Lassen National Park.

Crystal Lake at the top of Mt. Hough above Indian Valley.

WHAT TO DO IN THE INDIAN VALLEY

Lush grasslands, towering peaks and empty roads await visitors of Taylorsville, Greenville and points beyond. Antelope Lake is a beautiful and seldom visited reservoir with an expansive network of trails currently being rehabilitated by Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship. There may be no more scenic road bike ride

in California than pedaling from Greenville through Taylorsville out to Antelope Lake and back on North Valley and Genesee road. There's also ample history in the area to explore, including both the Walker Mine and Engels Mine, two massive abandoned copper mines.



Spectacular roads to explore.



Fishing abounds



Greenville Community Methodist Church



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SUSANVILLE

By Kurt Gensheimer

Situated at 4,186 feet elevation along the Susan River on the northeastern corner of the Sierra Nevada, the city of Susanville has a unique and colorful history, established in the aftermath of an 1863 skirmish called the Sagebrush War. Before the war, the area was known as Rooptown, named after the Isaac Roop, one of thousands of emigrants who camped at the foot of the Sierra Nevada before making the final push to the coast. Rooptown was a popular stopover thanks to its lush grasses and ample water, something emigrants hadn't seen for hundreds of miles while crossing the Nevada desert.

In 1853, Isaac Roop constructed a cabin that became a trading post, and later, a fortification used during the Sagebrush War. The war was rooted in a boundary dispute about Rooptown and whether it was in Plumas County of California or Roop County in the Nevada Territory. The citizens of the area played both sides against each other, refusing to pay taxes when both territory's officials would appear to collect, claiming they were residents of the other territory.

Soon this lack of tax collection came to a head, and after legal wrangling between the two territories could not solve the problem, posses were formed and a gun battle between the two counties ensued, using Roop's cabin as a stronghold against Plumas County, which became known as Fort Defiance. After four hours of shots fired back and forth with only a few non-lethal casualties, both sides realized this dispute wasn't worth dying over. To this day, Roop's cabin stands, bullet holes and all.

As a result, the California/Nevada border was resurveyed from Lake Tahoe to the Oregon border, and the results showed

Rooptown in the state of California. To appease the residents who did not want to be annexed into Plumas County, the state legislature created Lassen County in 1864, making the new town of Susanville (named after Susan Roop) the county seat, which it remains to this day.

More Susanville & Lost Sierra history: SierraTrails.org/cc



Photo: Joel Rathje

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WHAT TO DO IN SUSANVILLE

Located on the northeastern flank of the Lost Sierra region, Susanville has an extensive, uncrowded network of trails great for hiking and mountain biking. The Bizz Johnson trail is a National Recreation Trail, a very scenic route running along an old railroad grade for 24 miles,

more than half of it in the Susan River canyon. Fall colors along Bizz Johnson trail are stunning! For mountain bikers looking for a technical challenge, Susanville Ranch Park is an 1,100-acre park with nearly 30 miles of singletrack, including some ramps and features.



Susanville has amazing sunrises viewed from the mountains, over the plains of the high desert.
Photo: Randy Robbins Photography

THE LAKES BASIN, GRAEAGLE AND PORTOLA

By Kurt Gensheimer

Sitting in the shadows of Mount Elwell and the Lakes Basin, along the middle fork of the Feather River at 4,373 feet elevation, the town of Graeagle (pop. 596) has a rich and colorful history. The community was originally known as Davies' Mill, named after Arthur Davies who purchased a vast 13,000 acre timber tract in 1916 from Sierra Iron Company, spanning from Blairsden to Calpine.

After the land acquisition, Davies built a sawmill and an entire town to house employees. But instead of constructing new buildings, Davies utilized existing structures from other mills he owned in the region. Most of the small red houses seen today in downtown Graeagle were actually transported from Davies' other mill outpost in the Sardine Valley, just north of Stampede Reservoir. The homes were sawn in half, then placed on the Boca-Loyalton Railroad to Beckwourth, then on the Nevada-California-Oregon Railway to Clio, where they were dragged to their current location in Graeagle.



PORTOLA



Middle Fork Feather River Portola

For more history on Graeagle, Portola and Johnsville Ski Bowl and the birth of downhill ski racing head over to: SierraTrails.org/cc

The city of Portola (pop. 2,104) is situated at 4,856 feet elevation near the headwaters of the Feather River, a federally recognized Wild and Scenic River, with Smith Peak to the north and Beckwourth Peak to the south.

If it weren't for the surveying and engineering wisdom of Arthur Keddie, Portola may not have become the railroad hub it is today. Keddie was responsible for engineering the Feather River Route for the Western Pacific, a narrow and treacherous run through the Feather River Canyon from Oroville to Quincy, making the Western Pacific part of the trans-continental railway, with Portola as a crucial stop.

JOHNSVILLE



Plumas Ski Club's Longboard Revival Series, Johnsville Ski Bowl

The tiny hamlet of Johnsville, set along Jamison Creek at 5,180 feet elevation in the shadow of Eureka Peak, is known for two things: mining and skiing. Eureka Peak was originally known as Gold Mountain, an amazing sixty-two miles of tunnels were cut into the mountain in the search for gold. The story of Johnsville takes an exciting turn as these miners searched for more excitement, eventually coming up with the idea of racing down the mountain to see who could go the fastest. Today we remember these first longboard races with Plumas Ski Club's Longboard Revival Series that happens the third Sunday of January, February, and March at the Johnsville Historic Ski Bowl.

PORTOLA AREA

*The Sierra Buttes, Long Lake and Lakes Basin
viewed from Mt. Elwell.*

WHAT TO DO IN THE LAKES BASIN, GRAEAGLE AND PORTOLA AREA

Since the 1960s, Graeagle has become a generational escape for families who love the outdoors. With unparalleled access to the beautiful and rugged Lakes Basin region, featuring two dozen alpine lakes carved by glaciers, both residents and visitors to Graeagle can experience some of the best fishing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, backcountry skiing and snowmobiling in California.

The Western Pacific Railroad Museum in Portola, located

inside a former locomotive facility, documents this rich railroad history, featuring more than 30 locomotives, and a couple dozen passenger cars and cabooses.

Aside from its railroad history, Portola is rich in natural beauty. The volcanic spires of Beckwourth Peak tower over the town to the south, while less than 10 miles to the north, Lake Davis boasts world class fishing, along with hundreds of miles of scenic dirt roads connecting to even more remote lakes and streams.



Mountain bike Mills Peak



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SIERRA BUTTES TRAIL STEWARDSHIP

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Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship (SBTS) is a 501c3 non-profit organization that builds and maintains multiuse trails in the Sierra Buttes, Tahoe, Plumas and Lassen National Forests. Our mission is building sustainable recreation-based communities through stewardship, job creation and world-class events. Providing quality outdoor experiences through trail construction and maintenance in the Lost Sierra.

It is our goal to preserve, restore, and enhance trails in the Tahoe, Plumas and Lassen National Forests in an environmentally sensitive and ecologically responsible fashion. We exist to bring a connection between the land and the people who enjoy it by teaching stewardship, restoring historic trail routes and creating new paths through the Lost Sierra.

OVER 100
Miles of Trail Constructed

OVER 1,200
Miles of Trail Maintained

OVER 100,000
Volunteer Hours



Photo: Ken Etzel



CONNECTED COMMUNITIES: CREATING THE LOST SIERRA ROUTE



The Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship is developing a Trails Master Plan for Connected Communities. The Trails Master Plan (TMP) will create a vision for a recreation-focused lifestyle through community investment, shared stewardship, economic opportunity and important new local jobs, all benefiting economically disadvantaged communities in California's Plumas, Sierra, Lassen and Butte Counties.

A key component to the Connected Communities Trails Master Plan is the proposed "Lost Sierra Route", which traverses over breathtaking topography, jagged peaks and high alpine meadows similar to the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) and the John Muir Trail (JMT). But unlike the PCT and JMT, this new trans-Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range route allows for all dirt trail travelers including hikers, mountain bikers, moto riders, equestrians, trail runners, hunters, fishermen, wildlife – creating A Trail for Everyone. The Lost Sierra Route will be a trail for all to use that will link mountain communities together for recreational adventure and economic sustainability.

Join us by donating to SBTS or becoming part of our Trail Stewardship Vision Circle to help us fund the project, create jobs and experience new recreational opportunities in the Lost Sierra. Visit us at sierratrails.org.



SBTS General Manager Kyla Pascucci's son, Tao, distributes free hugs to a local Snow Plant (*Sarcodes sanguinea*)



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