

Pioneer Trail - Highway 20 Area

Nevada City Ranger District - Tahoe National Forest



General Information

Mileage: 12 miles one-way
Elevation: 3500 to 5500 feet
Difficulty: Easy
Use Level: Moderate
Season: April - October
Cross-country skiing in winter
Topographic Map: Washington 7.5'

Access

Take Highway 20 east of Nevada City seven miles to the main trailhead across from Lone Grave. Additional parking and access at Skillman Flat, Upper Burlington Ridge, and Omega Overlook and Rest Area.

Trail Description

The Pioneer Trail parallels scenic Highway 20 from Lone Grave to Bear Valley. It follows the north side of the highway between Lone Grave and White Cloud Campground. Just west of the campground the trail crosses Highway 20 and goes deeper into the National Forest to Skillman Campground. It crosses back to the north side of Hwy 20 1/4 mile east of Omega Rest Area. From here the trail follows an old pioneer road to the Diamond Creek Road at Steephollow.

The Pioneer Trail is suitable for equestrians, hikers, joggers, mountain bicyclists, and cross-country skiers. It is closed to all motorized vehicles. The existing section of trail was constructed by the Gold Country Trails Council under supervision of the Forest Service. They plan to continue construction of the trail to intersect with the Pacific Crest Trail near Jackson Meadow. All maintenance of Pioneer Trail is done by the Council, with help from volunteers.

History

The first wagon road between Nevada City and Bear Valley was opened by emigrants and gold seekers in 1850. Although it later became a toll road, and soon thereafter a public turnpike, it was still referred to as the *Old Emigrant Road*. You can still see signs of this road on either side of Highway 20 as it winds along Washington Ridge. The present Pioneer Trail has been constructed to avoid most of the highway crossings, but many sections of the trail follow the trace of the original road. This is a scenic trail with many historic points of interest along the way.

Lone Grave is the burial site of two-year-old Julius Apperson, who died in 1858. The Apperson family were among the first settlers along the Old Emigrant Road. The family moved elsewhere in 1859, leaving the grave unmarked. A Nevada City resident erected a permanent

marker and fence in 1863. In 1921 and again in 1948 the marker and fence were replaced. The grave has since been cared for by volunteers as a memorial to the many pioneers who have been buried in solitary, unmarked graves.

Central House There is an old, white house on Missouri Bar Road near Highway 20. Now a private residence, it was once a stage coach stop.

White Cloud became active with mining camps after the 1849 gold rush began. Extensive logging operations soon followed, and in 1890 Deer Creek Sawmill was constructed. In 1895 it was one of the largest mills on the west coast. By 1900 transportation improved and logs were taken into Nevada City. The mill was dismantled and moved to the Emigrant Gap area. White Cloud was named for the clouds of white dust kicked up by wagon teams during the dry season.

Skillman Flat is the site of an old lumber mill, which frequently burned down. It was never rebuilt after the 1850s. The ditch around the perimeter of the campground was one of many built in the 1800s by the South Yuba Canal Company to carry water to Nevada County gold mines.

Omega Overlook/Rest Stop The Alpha and Omega Diggins was one of the largest hydraulic mine operations in the Sierra. Yuba River water was diverted to the Omega Ditch and into wooden flumes hung from granite cliffs hundreds of feet above the Yuba River.

After enjoying the view from the overlook, take a walk beyond the restrooms east of the parking area. Fifty yards past the historic marker you will see the Old Emigrant Road running parallel to Highway 20. The Pioneer Trail follows this road to the Diamond Creek Road, one and one half mile east.

Note:

Only water from developed systems at recreation sites is maintained safe to drink. Open water sources are easily contaminated by human or animal waste. Water from springs, lakes, ponds, and streams should be properly treated before drinking. One recommended method of treatment is to bring clear water to a rolling boil for five minutes.

Nevada City Ranger District

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