

Royal Gorge, Devils Peak, and the Palisade Creek Trail

October 14, 2010



Royal Gorge is premier cross-country ski area-in the winter time of course. What you see in the fall of the year without a deep blanket of snow on the ground is a high alpine-like setting with superb views in all directions. The country is open granite studded with stands of mostly lodgepole pines and some Jeffries.

Once you leave the pavement on

Pahatsi Road (take the Soda Springs off ramp from I-80) the ride is several miles of bumpy, potholed gravel road all the way to a trailhead parking lot above Cascade Lake dam. Cross-country ski trail signs in the trees and a warming hut at the trailhead let you know that this place has groomed snow trails in the winter for all levels of difficulty. Some 25 years ago when I gave up cross-country skiing, there a few groomed trails at Royal Gorge and the fee was a modest couple of bucks.



Devil Peak

You must cross the dam and descend a steel stairway to reach the beginning of a trail. A weathered wooden sign nailed to a tree informs hikers it is the Palisade Creek Trail, 5 ½ miles to



Cascade Lake

the creek crossing and 6 miles to the north fork of the American River. After about a mile of hiking around a few small unnamed lakes and a modest three hundred foot climb above Long Lake the trail sweeps out onto an open plateau near the base of Devils Peak. From here you can look out to the east and south with views of distant Granite Chief, the prominent peak that overlooks the top of the Squaw Valley Ski tramway out of sight on the far side of the mountain. To the north Castle Crags are the prominent landmark. A train whistle will occasionally break the stillness, but vehicle noise from the Interstate does not reach into this pristine area.



George, Bill, Nancy

We went over the summit and hiked part way into the American River Canyon, but not the full six miles which would have made a long day. The potholed gravel road into the trailhead seems to discourage hikers, because we did not encounter a single person on the trail the whole day long.

Before the snow flies, a hike along the Palisade Creek Trail will leave you with a good memory to get you through the winter (unless you are a Nordic skier). It's an easy hike in an alpine setting around granite outcroppings, through stands of lodgepole pines, around the base of Devils Peak, a prominent volcanic intrusion, and with memorable views of distant and familiar peaks.