

Nuggets from the Past

By Norman McLeod

A hike to Grouse Falls

On the morning of June 8, after enjoying coffee in Laurie's Kitchen, eight of us jumped into two cars to embark on an adventure hike to Grouse Falls on the Foresthill Divide.

Our members were Stew and Pat Morris, Ross and Eunice Wright, Roy Turner, Dick and Anne Austin and yours truly. I'd seen the falls about 10 years ago so I more or less acted as guide.

We followed the Mosquito Ridge Road for 19 miles, as far as the Peavine Road turnoff. We went another five miles on a good dirt road, then about a half-mile into the Grouse Falls parking lot. All roads are well marked.

With no other parked cars, we were alone, surrounded by a variety of huge trees. From the lot we pursued a well-defined trail about a half-mile down the side of a canyon until we came to a wooden deck perched on the canyon wall. There we caught our first view of Grouse Falls.

The trail we followed was constructed by Tahoe National Forest personnel in 1992, assisted by members of Boy Scout Troop 10 of Auburn. At one bend of the trail the hiker comes within earshot of the sounding falls. A few yards farther glimpses of white foam may be seen across the canyon through the trees. Finally, at the deck platform, the falls are in full view.

While not the highest falls in the state, it is one of the most scenic, plunging down several hundred feet over rugged Sierra cliffs. The falls cavort at the head of a box canyon in the Grouse Creek drainage that feeds the Middle Ford of the American River.

Until recently, the falls remained largely unseen because of its remote location. Today, it may be approached and appreciated by almost everyone.

I must say here that as we viewed the falls, I could not help a feeling of disappointment. Though we were seeing and hearing the cascading water, our distance from it was too vast to fully grasp the moving force and sound waves.

On my previous hike with a Gene Markely group from Auburn, we had followed another far longer trail that slanted in on the side of the canyon to the very bottom of the falls. There a large pool gathered at the base into which the waterfall crashed. Here we had seen, felt and heard the full impact of the water's weight and force.

Grouse Falls is in two sections - high and low. From today's overlook on the more modern trail, only a glimpse of the lower falls may be seen - and nothing at all of the pool. I regret that today I do not recall the starting point of the old trail.

Suddenly we were no longer alone at the overlook. Joining us were a man and two women - his wife and sister-in-law. They were from Rocklin. During the introductions, the man and I discovered we were from the same hometown - Duluth, Minn., a rather marvelous coincidence considering the size of Duluth. Only once before in my travels around the country did I bump into someone from Duluth. This was in 1939 while attending the World's Fair in New York City.

I recognized a man from home, among the thousands crowding Times Square. We saw each other about the same time, and from there on it was, "Well, well, whattya know ...?"

We left Grouse Falls to continue on several miles to the Placer Big Trees Grove where we ate a peaceful lunch in its picnic area among what appeared to be virgin timber.

After eating we applied ourselves to the short, half-mile interpretive trail through the Big Trees, comprised mainly of six still-standing giant sequoias. The grove was first discovered in 1855 by Joe Matlock, a gold prospector, and is located on the Mosquito Ridge Road, approximately 25 miles from Foresthill.

This grove has been protected since 1892 when fears were raised that the big trees might be cut down and used for mine timbers.

There are 16 numbered markers along the trail, average walking time about 25 minutes. The largest tree by volume is the Pershing Tree, standing 225 feet tall with a

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12-foot diameter base. The tallest is the Joffre Tree, 250 feet with a 10-foot diameter.

The No. 4 marker introduces the viewer to a giant Douglas Fir, estimated to be over 500 years old. It might possibly be the largest tree of its kind in the world. It requires an estimated 1,000 gallons of water per day in transpiration. We are told the nourishing water comes from a subterranean stream, a tiny portion of which is visible under a foot bridge.

Our day of adventure proved to be satisfactory in every way, except one. No wildlife was seen. At the outset, I promised to watch Stew Morris's back, if he would watch mine, for cougar attacks. Fortunately, none developed. We saw no bear, not even a doe. Come to think of it, not even a bird. It's a different country up there.