



Park HQ-to-Confluence Loop

Trails Included: Park Access Trail (#28)
Western States Trail (#42)
Tinker's Cut-off Trail (#38)
Stagecoach Trail (#36)
Manzanita Trail (#22)

Distance: 3½ mi. / 2 hrs. (hiking)

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

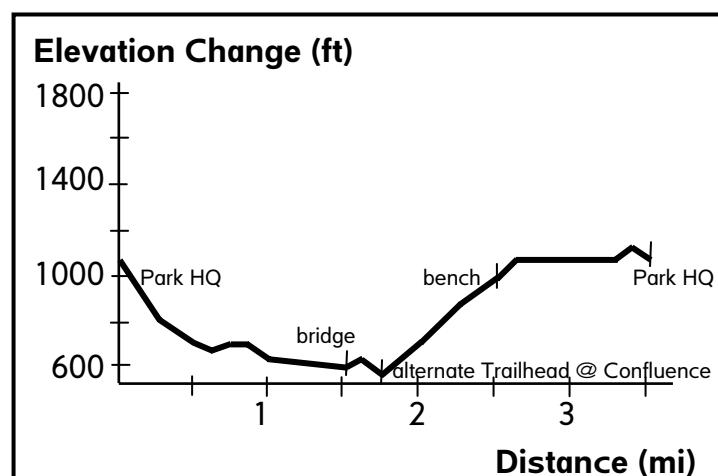
Slope: 2% avg; 13% max. (see below)

Trailhead / Parking: (N38-54-300; W121-02-380)

Trailhead is on Hwy 49, opposite ASRA Park HQ, ¾ mi. south of Auburn. Parking is at ASRA Park HQ. Alternate trailhead is at the confluence area, 1½ mi south of Park HQ. Take Hwy 49 south to Old Foresthill Rd. at bottom of canyon; go straight and park on right just past intersection.

Description

This loop affords many beautiful views of the American River Canyon and the confluence area. It also includes some of the most historic trails and sites in the Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA). Although the trails may be steep at times, it is mostly an easy loop through three of common American River Canyon ecosystems: foothill woodlands, riparian woodlands, and chaparral.



The loop starts at the ASRA Park Headquarters. Carefully cross Hwy 49 opposite the Park HQ and head down the Park Access Trail behind the metal gate. This trail is fairly steep, dropping 360 feet in less than a half mile. At the bottom of the hill, turn left onto the historic Western States Trail (see sidebar). This trail follows the old Mountain Quarries RR bed. Several old cement pilings for the railroad trusses can be seen along the trail. After a few minutes of hiking, you will come to a small stream crossing known as the "Black Hole of Calcutta" by horseback riders in the Tevis Cup – a wet, boulder-strewn stream crossing. Except during late summer, there is a beautiful waterfall close to the trail, cascading over a granite wall.

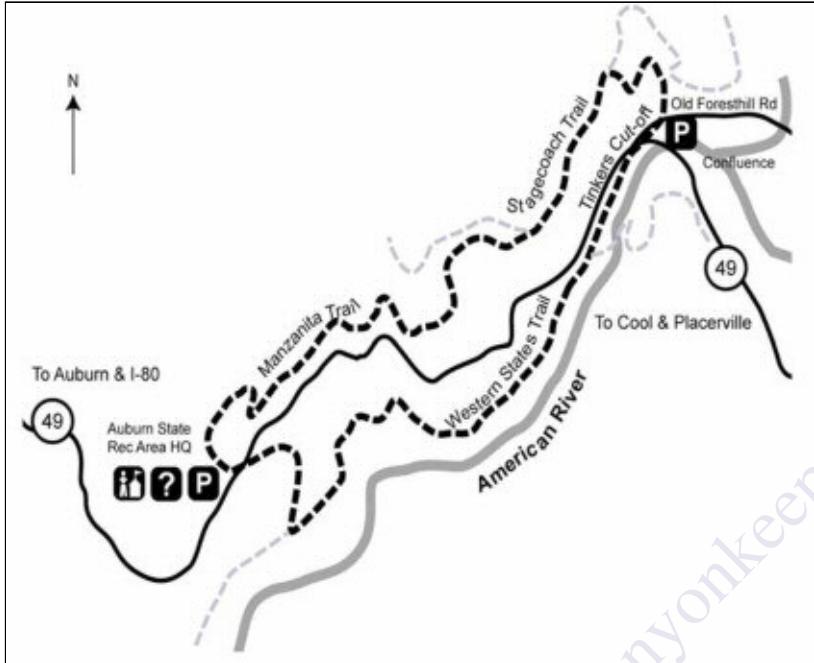
The next mile is a gentle descent to the Mountain Quarries RR Bridge (see sidebar), with beautiful views of the American River along the way. Side trails lead down to sandy beaches and gentle rapids on the American River, popular with sunbathers on hot summer days. Approaching the Mt. Quarries RR Bridge, two other bridges can be seen in the distance. They are the Hwy 49 Bridge and the high Foresthill Bridge.

The loop continues via an unmarked path on your left just before the Mt. Quarries RR Bridge. This trail parallels Hwy 49 and goes under the Hwy 49 Bridge. This is a great place to view the confluence area (where the North and Middle Forks of the American Rivers converge). After reaching the road, cross to the other side and go up the steep hill just behind the green "Cool / Placerville" sign. This is the unmarked start of Tinker's Cut Off (see separate trail guide). This scenic trail is steep with many switchbacks, climbing 320 feet in just 0.3 mile. It passes through thick riparian woodlands as it parallels a small creek with several tiny waterfalls (best flows are in winter and spring).

At the top of Tinker's Cut Off, turn left onto the



Auburn State Recreation Area



historic Stagecoach Trail (see separate trail guide). This is the actual road used by stagecoaches to carry passengers between Foresthill and Auburn in the late 1800s. Its wide, gentle gradient makes it a favorite of hikers and bikers throughout the year. Continue up the hill to a bench on the left, affording an opportunity to catch your breath, enjoy the view, and take more photos of the confluence area. As you sit, try to imagine you are sitting on the shore of a lake created by the proposed Auburn Dam (the high water mark of the lake would be just below your feet).

A few paces beyond the bench, go left on the unmarked Manzanita Trail, which intersects Stagecoach Trail at a sharp angle. Although narrower, Manzanita Trail is more level and meanders through chaparral where manzanita and coyote brush dominate the hillside. After a mile of fairly easy hiking, the trail ends at a firebreak road just above ASRA Park HQ. Look for white cable TV boxes and then take the firebreak road on the left past some buildings to return to Park HQ.

Did You Know? – The Western States Trail (WST) originally stretched from Sacramento to Utah. The Sierra Crest portion of the trail, blazed by Paiute and Washoe Indians and later used by miners, is now the route of two world-famous endurance races: *Tevis Cup Ride* for horses and *Western States 100-mile Endurance Run*. This part of the WST (from Mountain Quarries RR Bridge to the Auburn Staging Area) is the final leg of both of these endurance races.

Did You Know? – The Mountain Quarries Railroad Bridge was one of the world's largest reinforced concrete bridge when it was completed in 1912. It was used until 1940 by the Mt. Quarries Railroad to haul limestone from the nearby quarry up to the Southern Pacific RR main line in Auburn. The arched bridge has withstood several floods, including the disastrous one of 1964 resulting from the failure of Hell Hole Dam – a testament to its rugged design. In 1942, the railroad tracks were taken up for the war effort. Today, the bridge is the main artery for hikers and equestrians on the Western States Trail between Cool and Auburn. It was nicknamed "No Hands Bridge" by locals who liked to ride horses over it prior to the construction of the safety railing without holding onto the reins, shouting, "Look, no hands"! It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.