

Olmstead Loop Trail (#26 on the ASRA Topo Trail Map)



Distance: 8.6 miles; 4 hours (hiking), but a variety of shorter trail options/cutoffs are also possible

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Slope: 2% avg; 14% max. (see below)

Trailhead / Parking: (N38-53-335; W121-01-036)

Trailhead and parking are behind the fire station in Cool. Take Hwy 49 south to Cool and turn right just before the fire station and blinking red light. This is also the Cool staging area for equestrians. Trailhead is on south end of the parking area.

Description

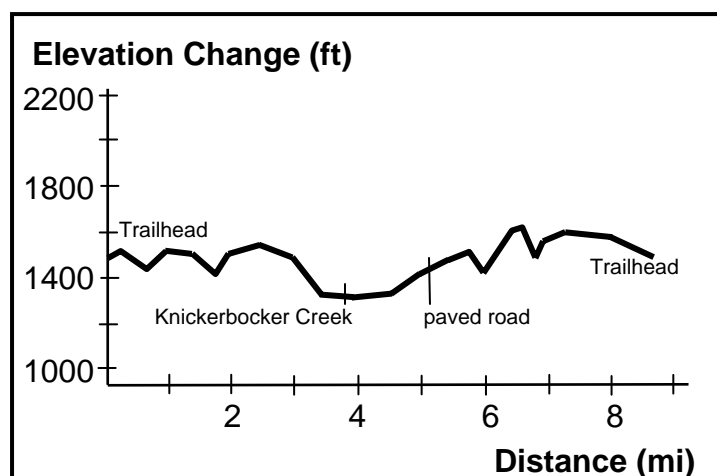
This beautiful loop trail, which parallels Hwy 49 on one side and the American River Canyon on the other, passes through open, rolling hills with several species of oak trees, and wildflowers in spring. It also includes steep canyon descents and climbs as it crosses Knickerbocker and Salt Creeks. Side trails on the canyon side offer panoramic views of the North Fork American River and of the Auburn dam construction site. Trail markers have been posted about every half-mile and at most trail intersections.

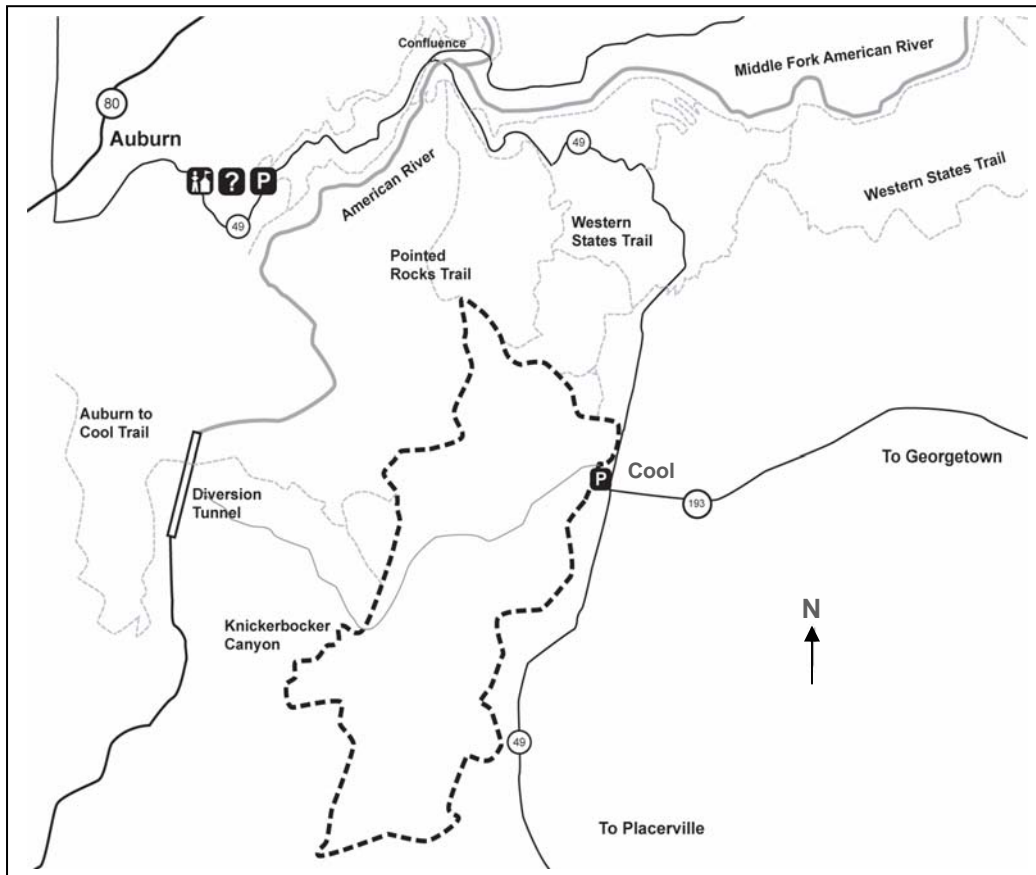
The Olmstead Loop Trail is especially popular in the springtime when wildflowers are in bloom, ponds and vernal pools are visible, and over 50 species of birds can be seen. Weekends attract many bikers and equestrians. Although bikers seem to be attracted to the mud, hikers are cautioned not to take this trail after a rain since most of the trail holds water and has a tendency to become very muddy, making hiking quite laborious. The Cool Mountain Bike Race, usually held in February, uses this trail and is well known for its large amounts of flying mud.

Proceeding around the loop in a clockwise direction, most of the first section of the trail is fairly flat and meanders through a typical foothill oak woodland ecosystem. It passes a small horse ranch surrounded by sprawling hills where sheep roam, providing great views of the snow-capped Sierras in the distance. At about 3½ miles, the trail starts winding down through a pine forest to Knickerbocker Creek. At the creek crossing, you can enjoy the natural setting with its pools and rushing water before heading uphill again. The more adventurous may want to scramble down the rocks to see a beautiful waterfall and pools in the lush riparian ecosystem along Knickerbocker Canyon.

Continuing on the Olmstead Loop, the trail is a bit arduous beyond Knickerbocker Creek, but after another half mile you will be at the top of a hill that affords a grand view. The trail soon crosses a wide, paved road that was built to provide access to the top of the keyway for the Auburn dam (to the left). For a shortcut, take this road to the right for 1¾ miles to get back to the Cool fire station (for about a 7-mile loop).

The Olmstead Loop crosses the paved road and continues on for about another 4 miles. It intersects the Auburn to Cool Trail (labeled Coffey Dam Trail on the markers) twice, once before climbing up a rather steep hill and again shortly before crossing Salt Creek, which is at the





Did You Know? – The Olmstead Loop Trail, was formerly known as the Knickerbocker Trail. It was named for Dan Olmstead in 1993. Olmstead was an local avid mountain biker and hiker. He dedicated himself to creating harmony between hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians, and to multi-use of trails in this area. He also established a bike and hiking shop in the area.

bottom of an even steeper descent. Past this point, a gradual climb affords lovely views. The terrain flattens out, and then another steady climb takes you to the top of a shady knoll. Here, the trail meets the Pointed Rocks Trail, (see separate trail guide) which descends left to the confluence area .

The Olmstead Loop descends gradually after this, winding to the right in a big U-turn past outcroppings of pointed rocks. It passes two side

trails that lead to the Western States Trail (labeled Wendell T. Robie Trail on the markers), which both take off to the left. Tevis Cup riders and 100-mile endurance runners use the WST for their annual Squaw Valley-to-Auburn races.

At the bottom of a hill, the Olmstead Loop crosses the headwaters of Salt Creek, which runs through wide-open meadows. The trail then crosses another small knoll before returning to the Cool fire station.