

# Pointed Rocks Trail (#30 on the ASRA Topo Trail Map)



**Distance:** 1.6 miles one way; 1½ hrs up, ¾ hrs down (hiking). This does not include distance to trailhead. A variety of loop options are available.

**Difficulty:** Moderate to difficult

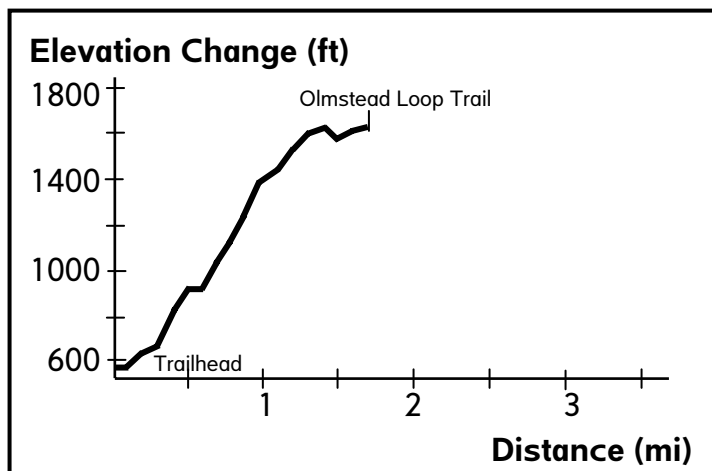
**Slope:** 16% avg; 30% max. (see below)

**Trailhead / Parking:** (N38-54-893; W121-02-388)

Trailhead is on Hwy 49, 1¾ miles south of ASRA Park Headquarters. Take Hwy 49 south from Auburn towards Placerville. After crossing the American River, park on right off the highway. Walk to trailhead through the green gate.

## Description

*This steep trail offers great, bird's eye views of the confluence and American River canyons. On clear days, it offers sweeping views of the Sacramento Valley to the west and the Sierras to the east. Its steep gradient offers a good aerobic workout, climbing 1000 ft in 1.2 miles. It follows a buried telephone cable on its ascent from the confluence area to the ridge and the Olmstead Loop. After reaching the ridge, the trail passes through open, rolling hills and meadows dominated by several species of oaks, and wildflowers in the spring. Limestone outcroppings at the top give the trail its name.*



**The Pointed Rocks Trail** is sometimes referred to as "The Training Hill" on trail markers since it offers a great workout for endurance runners and equestrians. It provides one of the steepest gradients of any trail in the area. (Trail markers are posted at some, but not all intersections.)

Walk downstream on the trail behind the green gate on Highway 49 on the south side of the bridge over the American River. This wide road parallels the river down-stream for about 0.1 mile towards the Mountain Quarries RR Bridge (see sidebar). You may wish to cross this graceful arched bridge spanning the American River to read the plaque on the far side that describes its history.

Just before reaching the Mt. Quarries RR Bridge, a narrow trail goes up the hillside on the left (look for a sign to Cool - N38-53-935; W121-01-996). This is the start of both the Pointed Rocks Trail and the Western States Trail (WST). (see sidebar). The trail immediately switchbacks and begins climbing, offering some nice overhead views of the Mt. Quarries RR Bridge.

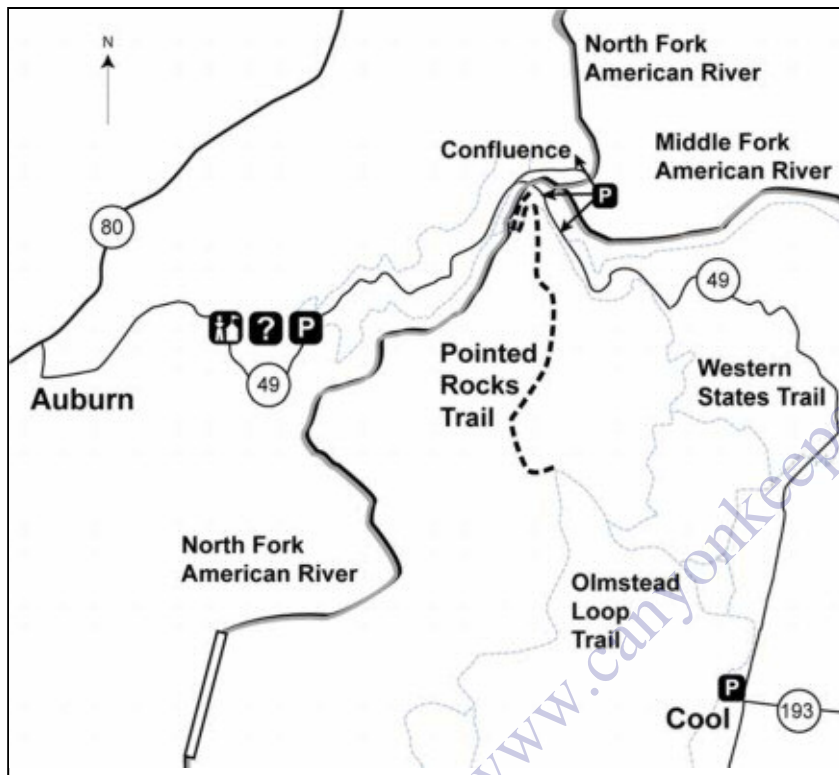
In less than 0.2 miles, the trail splits. The Pointed Rocks Trail veers up to the right while the WST continues around the ridge. Take the unsigned Pointed Rocks Trail to the right. The trail soon widens and starts to climb sharply.

In less than ½ mile, nice views of the American River and Hwy 49 as it wends its way up to Auburn, can be seen through openings in the ponderosa, oak, manzanita, buck brush and various other foothill trees that line the trail. Near the top of the ridge, look back and east for views of the Sierras and the Middle Fork American River.

After reaching the ridge, the terrain flattens out and meanders through a picturesque rolling oak woodland. Watch for limestone outcroppings of pointed rocks for which the trail is named.

After reaching an oak meadow, a small footpath





splits off to the left. The main, wider trail continues around this meadow, offering a panoramic view on clear days of Folsom Lake and Sacramento. Both paths soon rejoin.

A little further along, the Pointed Rocks Trail ends at the Olmstead Loop Trail. There are several options at this point: a) turn around and return to the confluence the same way, b) make a loop using the WST for a gentler but longer return trip, or c) hike into Cool using the Olmstead Loop. The shortest way to Cool is to continue straight on the Olmstead Loop for another 1.7 miles. ( See separate guide)

The WST branches off the Olmstead Loop a short distance ahead on the left. It is labeled Wendell T. Robie Trail on some trail markers. The 100-mile endurance runners and riders both use this section of the WST for their annual Squaw Valley to Auburn races (see sidebar).

**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 for about 30 years 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 nick-named “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.

**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*.