

Stevens Trail (#37 on the ASRA Topo Trail Map)



Distance: 3.2 miles to river; 1½ hours down, 3 hours up (hiking)

Difficulty: Easy down, moderate up

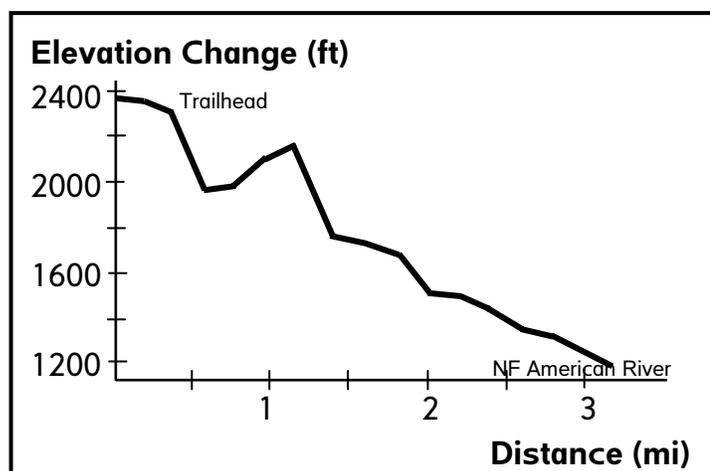
Slope: 6% avg; 36% max. (see below)

Trailhead / Parking (N39-06-376;W120-56-837)

Parking is on N. Canyon Way in Colfax. From Auburn, take I-80 east to the 2nd Colfax exit and turn left on the frontage road, N. Canyon Way. Continue 0.6 miles; turn left into a small parking area. Look for 'trail' sign marking the trailhead.

Description

This very well maintained trail is one of the most popular hiking and biking routes to the North Fork American River, in part because of its easy access from Colfax. However, this is a remote trail, and hikers are advised to carry a whistle or hike with a friend. The entire trail is mostly shaded, passing through oak, laurel, douglas fir, and huge stands of manzanita. The wildflower displays here are rarely matched elsewhere in ASRA, particularly during April and May. Take plenty of water and use caution, as the trail is hot during summer months and steep at times with narrow passages. Also, poison oak can be found along much of the trail.



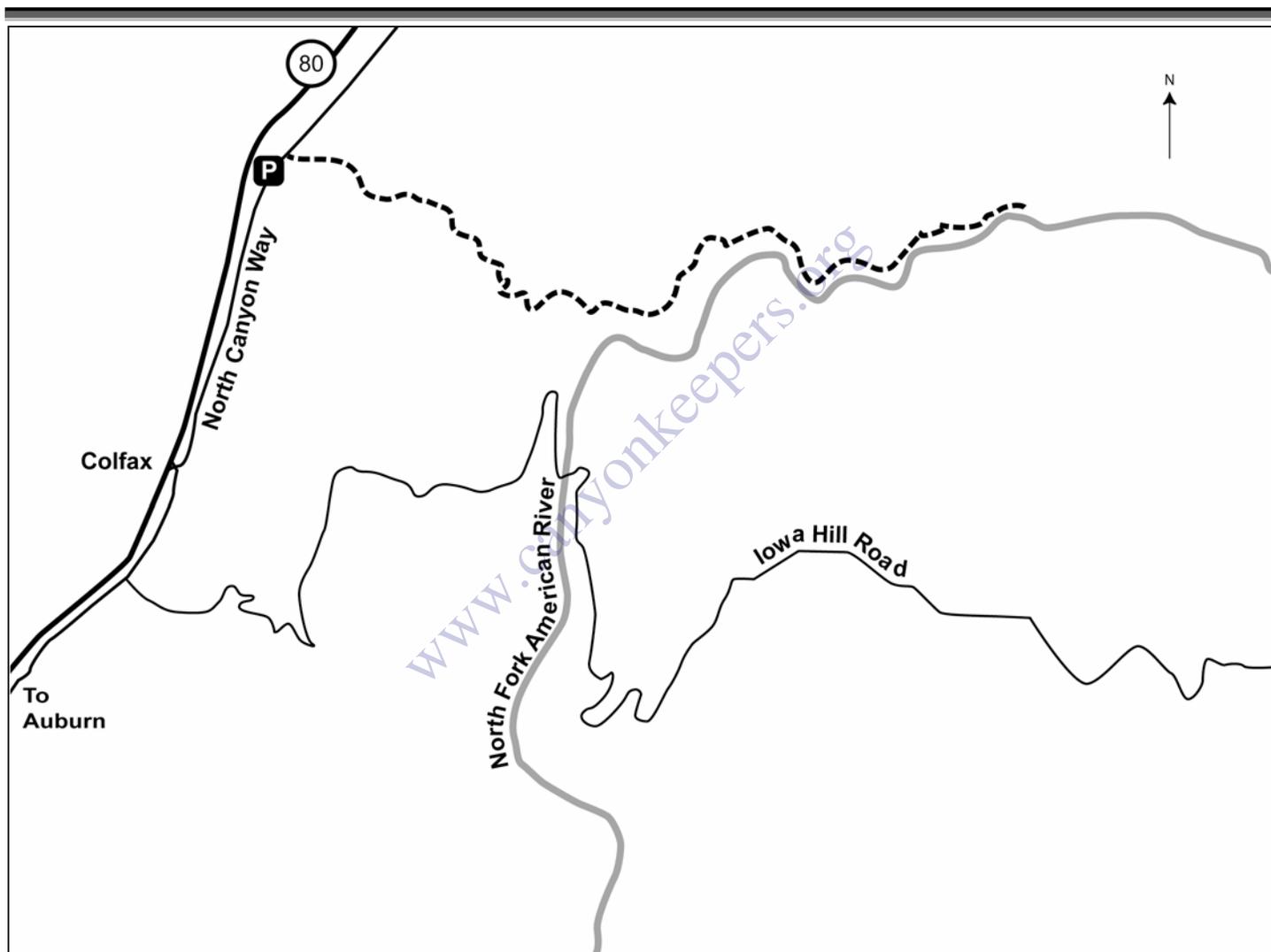
The Stevens Trail starts at the parking area on N. Canyon Way just north of Colfax. After a short distance, it intersects an unmarked firebreak road; turn right on this dirt road. At the ¾ mile point, the trail intersects another firebreak road; bear to the left and look for a metal 'trail' sign a few steps to the left. Soon thereafter, the trail forks again and you have a choice of going either right or left. A trail sign here directs bikers to use the right hand fork while hikers go left. The two trails rejoin shortly after traversing the rocky outcropping that occurs here.

A little further along the trail is a beautiful cascading waterfall, and shortly thereafter is perhaps the most distinctive landmark on the trail – an immense bed of shale cascading down the mountainside. You can also see the remains of a mineshaft, abandoned long ago. In fact, there is evidence of widespread mining activity all along this trail. Above the bed of shale, is the Cape Horn section of the 1st Transcontinental Railroad. Here the railroad bed was originally cut into the steep canyon wall, by Chinese laborers suspended on ropes down the steep sides. Trains still run on this section of the original roadbed.

After about a mile on the dirt road, look for a trail sign pointing to the left. From this point on, the trail enters the steep North Fork American River canyon and traverses the canyon upriver. This part of the trail offers magnificent views of the river, and the Iowa Hill Bridge can also be seen downstream. Hand stacked rock retaining walls can be seen on this stretch of the trail, an indication of the large amount of work required to build this trail (see sidebar).

The trail meets the river at Secret Ravine, and more signs of mining are evident. The foundation of an old suspension bridge can also be seen, complete with rusting cables. Although the trail is fairly easy down to the river, take the opportunity to rest and cool your feet in the cold river before starting the more difficult trip back to the trailhead.





Did You Know? – The Stevens Trail was originally built by Truman Allen Stevens shortly after he arrived in California in 1859. Stevens operated a ranch in Iowa Hill and a livery stable in Colfax. He built the trail and a self-propelled cable car to transport miners and animals

across the North Fork, for which he charged a toll. Although the trail can be found on a 1900-era USGS topographic map, it wasn't popular among locals until Boy Scout Eric Kiel charted it in 1969. It is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.