



Windy Point Trail (#49 in the ASRA Topo Trail Map)

Distance: 1.5 miles one-way; ¾ hours
Difficulty: Moderate to difficult. Trail is narrow, with loose rock and steep drop-offs
Slope: 7.3% avg; 33% max. (see below)

Trailhead / Parking (N39-05-420; W120-55-259)

Trailhead is on Iowa Hill Road. From Auburn, take I-80 east to Colfax. Exit at the Colfax, Grass Valley, Hwy 174 exit. Go right at the exit; at the stop sign, turn right onto Canyon Way. In approx. 0.3 miles turn left on Iowa Hill Road. Drive approx 3.1 miles down Iowa Hill Road and across the North Fork American River. After crossing the bridge continue for approx 0.8 mile through the small camping area and up the road towards Iowa Hill. Several large boulders and a very small sign that simply says “trailhead” mark the trail. There is limited parking on the right shoulder just before and at the trailhead as the road bends to the left and away from the river.

Caution: Iowa Hill is a narrow paved road with no guardrail. Drive slowly and watch for approaching vehicles since some places are barely wide enough for two vehicles to pass.

Description

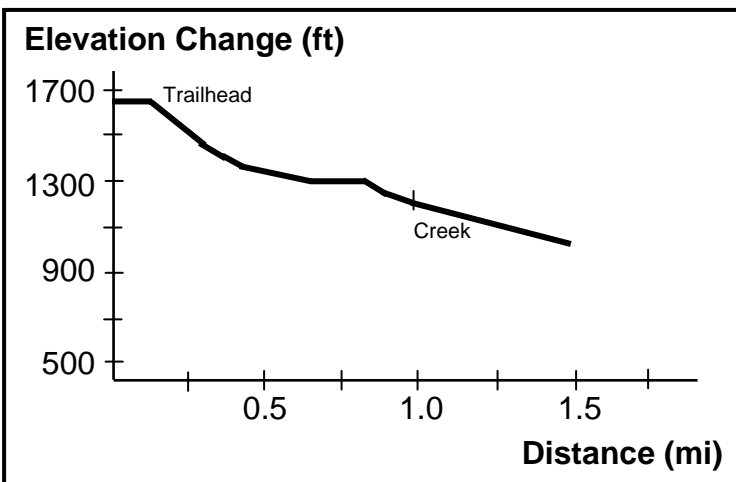
This short but challenging trail affords some spectacular views of the North Fork Canyon and when timing is right a spectacular wildflower

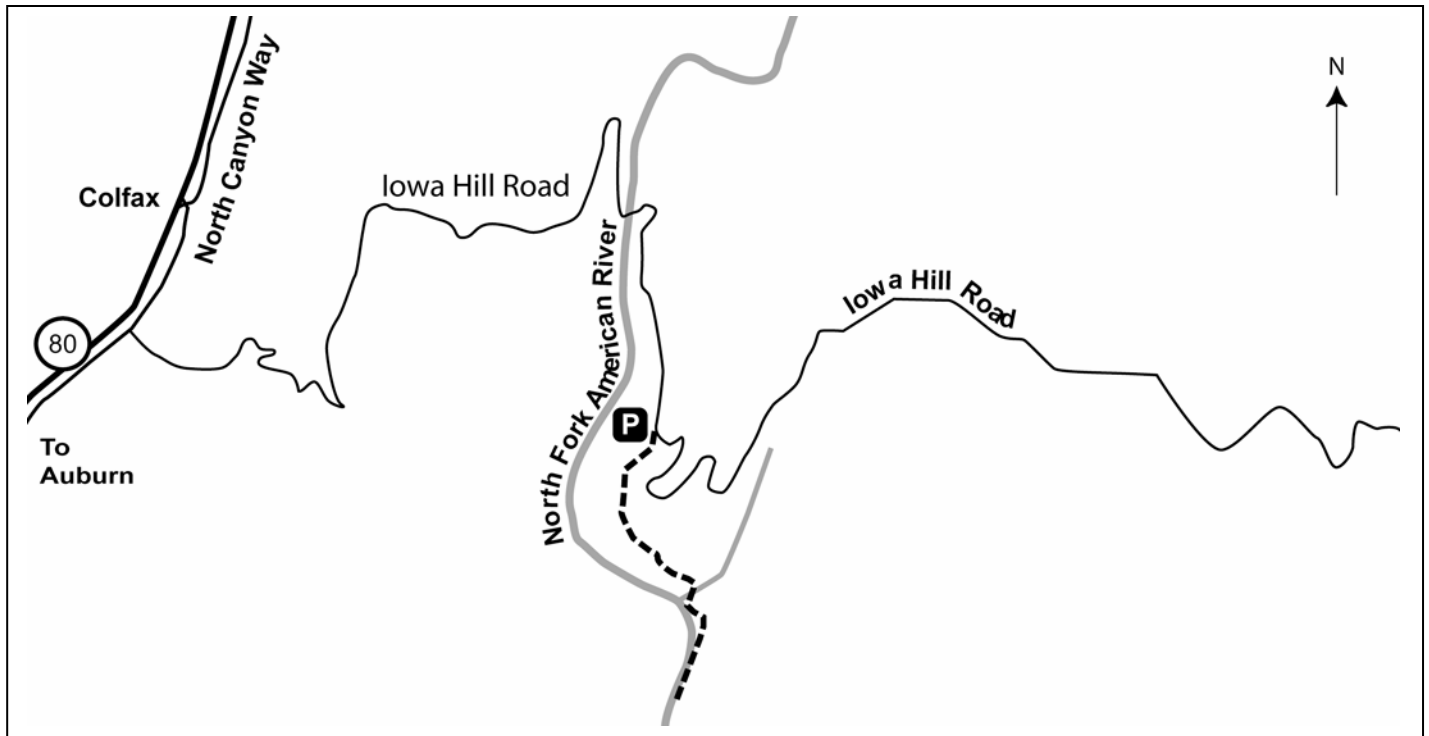
display. The trail traverses sections where the whole hillside is carpeted with blue, yellow, purple, and gold wildflowers highlighted against a blue sky and green hills dominated by oaks and gray pine. In spring, it is a photographer’s and wildflower lover’s delight. Caution: watch for poison oak, as it thrives along the trail.

Windy Point Trail provides access to some beautiful and steep river canyon scenery. This old miners trail is a narrow single file path cut into a steep slope above the North Fork of the American River. It has some sharp drop offs and lots of loose shale and rock, which make it a challenge. This is a place to stop often to absorb the magazine centerfold vistas. Plan on spending as much time enjoying the scenery as hiking. Near the start, it is possible to look back and north across the canyon to the famous “Cape Horn” section of the 1st Transcontinental Railroad, which is still in use. Its completion was one of the extraordinary engineering and construction feats of the 1860’s and the building of the 1st Transcontinental Railroad.

The trail starts out fairly wide and level in the shade of a foothill’s woodland. It soon narrows and starts trading its way across a steep slope above the river gorge. The river below will be heard well before it is seen. Shortly after coming out into the open, look across the canyon and note the long thin waterfall visible just south of the Iowa Hill Road. While not visible from the road, it runs down the canyon wall almost from the rim. After an old burn area, windy point will dominate the slope above on the left. Remember to watch your footing while noting the colorful wildflower displays in the many small clearings.

Note the various shades of green on the steep canyon walls on the opposite side of the canyon. Kayaks may be visible in the river below as they exit Chamberlain Falls and prepare to enter Tongue and Groove on this class III – IV section of the river.





Butter and eggs, popcorn flowers and brodeas usually dominate the first section of open meadow in early spring. Another section above the trail resembles a series of rock terraces filled mainly with lupines and poppies.

In just over 0.5 mile, a large open slope falls away to the river. In spring this slope is often carpeted in golden yellow with blue and white accents set off by a few oaks and pines until it reaches the rapidly flowing river below. The less frequently seen harlequin (purple and yellow) lupine can usually be found here.

Midway across the open slope, a steep, narrow trail makes its way down to the river. The main trail continues straight and soon begins a short, steep descent to a creek. On warm days, a large, smooth rock in the middle of the creek makes a nice lunch spot. Watch out for the poison oak and blackberry bush thorns that line the bank.

Depending on the water level in the creek, this may be the end of the trail. If the creek can be safely crossed, the trail continues on the other side for a little less than 0.5 mile.