



Guardian Rock Trail

Length: 1 mile one way from Horse Camp to the NEED Camp bridge crossing Clear Creek

Difficulty level: Moderate

Elevation: 1100 to 900 feet

Note: Horses and pack animals are not allowed on this trail due to special handicap access pathway

Trailhead directions: Starting at the Whiskeytown visitor center, drive south on Kennedy Memorial Drive for 0.6 miles. At the fork in the road, go straight ahead to Paige Bar Road. Continue south past the Whiskeytown Cemetery. The road forks again; take the dirt road to the left that leads to Shasta and Igo. After about 1/3 mile, you will see Horse Camp. The trailhead is just past site #1 on the right hand side of the road, across from the bathroom. Park to the left to avoid conflicts with campers.

Trail Description: The first ¼ mile is a flat, handicap accessible trail made of packed decomposed granite which leads to an overlook of Clear Creek Canyon. Clear Creek is the last major creek that empties into the Sacramento River before Shasta Dam in which Chinook salmon and steelhead trout can spawn. They are returning in increasing numbers to this section of the creek since McCormick-Saeltzer Dam was removed downstream in 2000, opening up 12 miles of spawning habitat. Prior to the dam's removal, the salmon had almost disappeared from this area.

From the overlook, the tops of Kanaka Peak and South Fork Mountain can be seen. The west side of the creek receives more shade and has moisture-loving trees such as fir mixed in with the oak and pine forest. The east and drier side of the creek has a hardier forest composed of oak, grey pine and manzanita.

Get back on the main trail where it intersects with the handicap pathway to the overlook. The trail winds steadily down the rim of the creek canyon for the remainder of its length. Mining remnants can be seen in this area. Look for small terraces once occupied by mining equipment and buildings. A collapsed mining shaft is located on a level area shortly before the next fork in the trail. Stay out and stay alive!

At the fork in the trail, you have the choice of continuing straight ahead or veering off to the left at the sign that says "Guardian Rock." Take the left fork to the bottom of this trail if you would like the scenic view of Guardian Rock, a large outcropping that looks almost like a finger pointing upwards. This side trail continues upward and meets the main trail.

The next section of trail parallels an old mining road that is supported by an extensive rock wall. Soon you will see the bridge leading to the NEED Camp and you will come to a crossing with seasonal Orofino Creek. You can return the way that you came, or make a loop back to Horse Camp by following the trail sign which leads to the right. This trail ends at Paige Bar Road, a dirt road which will lead you back to your starting point at Horse Camp. A short ways along the road, you will pass over Orofino Creek near a mineral seep – notice the usually strong odor of sulfur. The pine trees in the area are often occupied by flocks of band-tailed pigeons that drink at the mineral springs.

Horse Camp has a restroom and a faucet with potable water turned on during the warm months of the year.