Brandy Creek Falls Trail

Brandy Creek Falls

FEATURES

Difficulty Level: Moderate
Length: 3 miles round trip
Elevation: 2,000 to 2,500 feet
Connections: Rich Gulch Trail

TRAILHEAD DIRECTIONS

Starting at the Whiskeytown Visitor Center, drive south on Kennedy Memorial Drive towards Whiskeytown Dam. At the fork in the road, go to the right and cross over the dam. The paved road winds around the lake to the Brandy Creek Beach area. Turn left onto Brandy Creek Road, which will quckly become a good dirt road. Drive approximately 2.5 miles towards Sheep Camp. Along the way, you will see several signs on the right that say "Brandy Creek Trail;" do not stop at these sections of the trail along the lower portions of the creek.

At the Sheep Camp/Shasta Bally junction, keep to the left for another 0.75 mile until you reach an area where the main road is blocked by large boulders. Park in the area on the right. Walk up the blocked road for about 150 feet, looking for the Brandy Creek Falls Trail sign on the left.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

This is a moderately steep trail leading uphill to the base of Brandy Creek Falls. The Brandy Creek Falls Trail takes the hiker along an old logging road, passing through the dense second-growth forest that is typical of this section of the park.

Look for the American dipper and great blue herons feeding on small fish and insects near the falls.

Approximately 0.5 miles into the hike, you will reach a bridge at the first of two small creeks. Large boulders and logs found at the creek crossing came from a dramatic debris flow that thundered down the mountain during the winter of 1997.

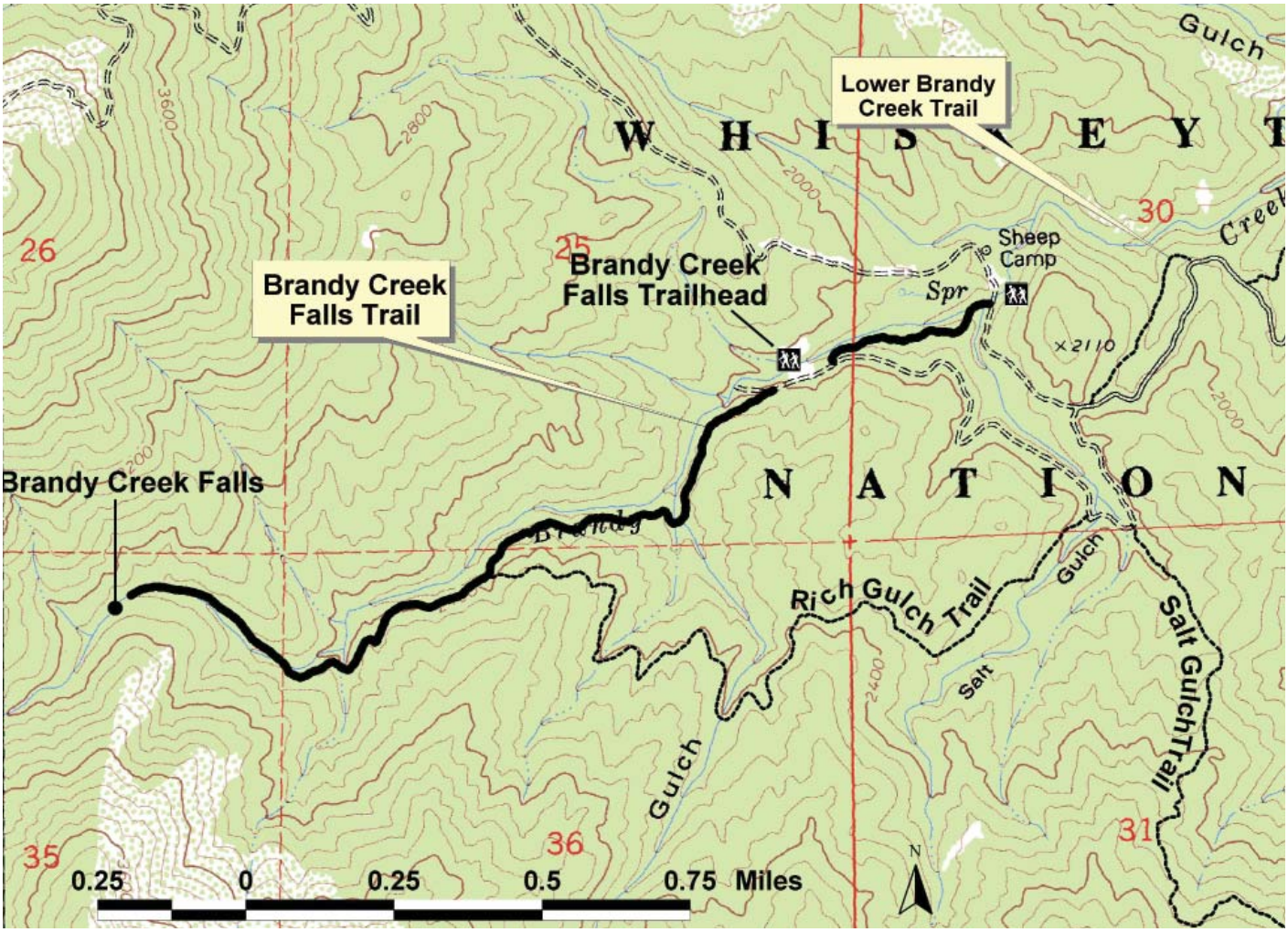
Approximately 0.75 miles into the hike, you will pass the Rich Gulch Trail on the left. From this point, the trail narrows and it is not recommended for horses and bicycles. The trail goes downhill to a small creek crossing. Soon you will enter a narrow box canyon and arrive at the vantage point for Lower Brandy Creek Falls.

The Upper Falls is still 0.25 miles ahead. You will arrive at a bridge made of wooden planks cabled in place. After crossing this bridge, go several hundred yards upstream and cross another plank bridge over the creek. You will be able to see the upper falls from here. Use the footholds chiseled out of the rock and grasp the iron railings to assist you in your ascent to the upper falls, past five pools and cascades. The upper falls split in the middle, creating two cascades that flow on either side of the 50-foot-high waterfall. Entering the upper chamber of the waterfall is like being in one of nature's chapels.

FLORA

Tanoaks, with their light gray splotchy trunks, are especially abundant on this trail. Other trees include ponderosa pines, black oaks, canyon live oaks, incense cedars, big leaf maples, and Douglas firs. The understory consists of dogwoods, California pipevine, snowberry shrubs, bracken, chain, and sword ferns. Look for an intricately curled feathery moss, Dendroalsia abietina *that grows on some of the tree trunks. It is partial to the hardwoods (oaks and maples) and is seldom seen on conifers.*

Tanoak leaves



GEOLOGY

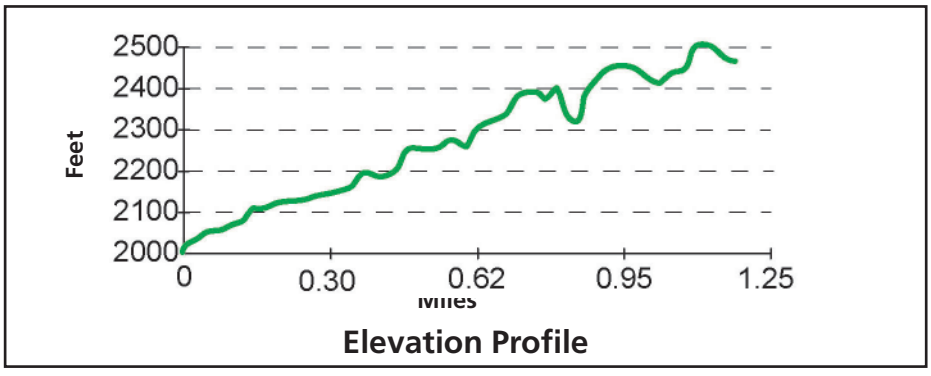
About 400 million years ago a magma chamber under the Pacific tectonic plate welled up and began expelling hot rock into the seabed covering it. Over time, the mounded basalt rose above the surface and created a string of islands.

In the next 10-30 million years, the Pacific plate collided with and partly slipped under the North American continental plate, parking this island arc against the mainland. Since then it has undergone many compressive folds and fractures; but this is the greatly simplified story of the base rock of the Brandy Creek Trail. The rock is called Copley Greenstone and one theory holds that the remnant of its parent magma chamber is the Mule Mountain stock.

Some 250 million years later, after additional island arcs were similarly shoved against the continental plate, another magma chamber pushed through the greenstone. This was the Shasta Bally Batholith which generated heat and pressure during this uplift, baking some of the native rock into colorful amphibolite, visible in places along the trail. Periodically, debris flows of boulders and mud wash down from Shasta Bally spottily covering the surrounding greenstone.

Batholith rock contains high levels of biotite (mica) and easily fractures into decomposed granite (DG) covering the trail in many places. Brandy Creek cuts through this mixed bed of Bally debris and greenstone.

The base rock of Brandy Creek is Copley Greenstone, primarily basalt formed by shallow underwater volcanism about 400 million years ago.



Elevation Profile

SAFETY

Steep slopes and edges are found along the trail. Be sure to assist children along steeps slopes and across slippery rocks. Do not try to cross Brandy Creek above any of the cascades unless aided by one of the two footbridges. Stay on the trail at all times.