

Clear Creek Trail Information

OVERVIEW: The Clear Creek Trail is 15 miles long, and is open to hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians and dogs. At the upper end, the trail begins at the Spooner Summit South Trailhead behind the restroom. At the lower end, the trail begins at the Jacks Valley Trailhead on the southwest side of Jacks Valley Elementary School. The Clear Creek Connector is 2 miles long.

PARKING: The Jacks Valley Trailhead is a large parking area with plenty of room for autos and horse trailers. A secondary trailhead access is located 0.3 miles further west of the school alongside Jacks Valley Road and is recommended for autos only due to adjacent traffic and heavy auto use. The Spooner South Trailhead can accommodate around fifteen to twenty autos. Horse trailers can sometimes park here if space is available; however, trailers can also park along the large pullout shoulder directly west of the Spooner South Trailhead entrance, or by parking at a dirt pullout location a quarter mile east of Spooner Summit on the north side of the highway.

LAND OWNERS: Cooperative partnerships with public, private and non-profit entities allow both the Clear Creek Trail and Clear Creek Connector to traverse through varied properties and trail easements. For this reason, trail users must be courteous and respectful of all private lands and to the many partners who have provided this trail opportunity by using the designated trail only and staying off cross roads.

SEASONAL USE: The Clear Creek Trail and Clear Creek Connector are open year-round. Spring and fall are optimal times to use the trail. Summer is often very warm on the lower portion of the Clear Creek Trail. During winter, snow prevents access on the upper half, particularly north of Knob Point. The first three miles of the lower Clear Creek Trail usually melt relatively quickly after a snowstorm and is more accessible during the winter months. The trail usually becomes passable between Knob Point and Clear Creek Junction in early April, and then upward to Spooner Summit around mid-May.

LANDSCAPE: Most of the Clear Creek Trail and Clear Creek Connector go through a wooded landscape of Jeffrey Pine and white fir. Incense cedar, sugar pine, aspen and willow are also found to a lesser extent. The lower three miles of the Clear Creek Trail is exposed, travelling through a mix of sagebrush, rabbitbrush and bitterbrush. There are views of the Carson Valley along much of the lower half of the Clear Creek Trail. Knob Point provides a 360-degree view and is a popular destination coming from the Jacks Valley Trailhead or from the Clear Creek Connector. Cliff Rock is another viewpoint more easily accessed by hikers from the Clear Creek Connector or Spooner Summit South Trailhead.

TRAIL CONDITIONS: The trail is generally considered easy to moderate at around 5% grade along most of its length. The elevation ranges between 4,950 feet at the Jacks Valley Trailhead to 7,165 feet at Spooner Summit. The trail actually climbs about 100 feet for the first mile from Spooner Summit to a trail high point of around 7,270 feet before beginning its descent. The trail is mostly a mix of packed soil and sand. A few short, loose sections of sandier soils are present.

Water is only available year-round on the south fork crossing of Clear Creek at Clear Creek Junction, and at the north fork crossing along the Clear Creek Connector. There is a seasonal water source sometimes present at a bridge located about 4.5 miles from the Jacks Valley Trailhead. There is also a seasonal water source about two miles below the Spooner Summit South Trailhead, but does appear to flow year-round just below the trail about 100 feet. Plan to carry plenty of water as the trail can be very warm during the summer months. As is the case with all other Carson Valley Trail Systems, be watchful of rattlesnakes which are often seen on the lower portion of the Clear Creek Trail.

Hikers and Joggers:

Watch for mountain bikers and equestrians also using the trail system. Make yourself clearly visible on the trail when encountering other trail users. Horses can be easily spooked, so when approaching equestrians, it is courteous to slow down and speak to the rider in advance so they are aware of you. Then safely move typically to the downhill side of the trail and let them pass. Do not stand quietly along the trail or approach quietly from behind as this can startle many horses and their riders. In some cases, equestrians may ask you to step to a specific area so that their horse will not frighten or more safely pass. Remember to watch for rattlesnakes which are commonly seen on the lower few miles of the Clear Creek Trail.

Mountain Bikers:

This is a fairly gentle and flowy trail that can be enjoyed going up or down by most rider skill levels. There are some short sandy sections but you will find the trail relatively flat going across these sections. There are very few rocky areas, and only a few short steep pitches. There are about seven switchbacks/climbing turns between Jacks Valley Trailhead and Clear Creek Junction, and about a dozen more between Clear Creek Junction and Five Valleys View. There are none on the upper three miles between Five Valleys View and Spooner Summit, as well as the Clear Creek Connector.

Switchbacks may need to be walked through depending on your skill level. There are a few that are tight and on loose soils. Please ride slowly through switchbacks by not skidding through them or when approaching them. Skidding either ruts the turns or loosens the soil, making it more difficult to ride up or down through next time. As a whole, the section of trail between

Clear Creek Junction and Finger Gap Rock is the most challenging, with many switchbacks/climbing turns over a short distance.

Bikers should always yield to hikers and horses, and then pass by slowly. Always ride cautiously and keep speeds under control, which will lessen your chance of crashing, prevents user conflicts, and protects the trail tread. When approaching equestrians, it is courteous to slow down and speak to the rider in advance so they are aware of you. Do not stand quietly along the trail or approach quietly from behind as this can startle most horses at close range. Make your presence known in advance as best you can by talking to them from a distance. Then safely move typically to the downhill side of the trail and let them pass. The trail does have some limited sight lines and sudden turns, so ride cautiously at all times.

Equestrians:

This is a relatively gentle trail for equestrians; however, there are some short sections of trail that are narrow or have modest drop-offs. There is a wooden bridge that must be crossed about 4.5 miles above Lower Jacks Valley Trailhead, and a second one just above Clear Creek Junction. Unless you're riding a trail horse that has experience going over wooden bridges, you should walk your horse across them because the hollow surface sound and different surface can spook a horse, possibly throwing a rider from the saddle. A third narrow bridge crossing is located right at Clear Creek Junction but has an adjacent ford crossing for you to use while providing an accessible water source for the horse.

Safe equestrian parking is available at the Jacks Valley Trailhead next to the school on the north side of the solar panels fencing. It is also possible to park at the parking area 0.3 miles west of here but this is heavily used by autos with limited space next to traffic, so is not recommended. Riders will have to cross Jacks Valley Road. Dismounting and leading your horse at this crossing is highly advised for the safety of the horse, rider and passing vehicles.

At Spooner Summit, it is possible to find a space in the South Spooner Trailhead parking area, but it often fills with autos. There are two other options. One is to park directly on the west side of the entrance to the Spooner South Trailhead in the large shoulder pullout adjacent to the highway. Though the pullout is quite wide, adjacent traffic is fast and busy. The other option is to park on the north side of the highway about a quarter mile east of Spooner Summit at an existing equestrian dirt pullout area. This is a little further off the highway and is used as the starting point to ride the Kings Canyon Road or the Tahoe Rim Trail usually northbound. From here, you ride the connector trail west to the Tahoe Rim Trail, then you'd have to walk your horse across the 4-lane Highway 50. Not ideal and is dependent on the skill and comfort of you and your horse.

Please keep a clean parking area. Picking up after your horse is appreciated. Know the ability of your riding skills and the experience level of your horse. Be aware of oncoming mountain bikers on the trails and make your presence known if you see and hear bikers coming. There are some poor sight line corners on the trail. Be prepared for other trail users at these locations. There are numerous old roads on both sides of the highway in the Jacks Valley area for additional and less crowded trail riding opportunities.

Dogs:

Dogs should be under the control of their owner at all times. They should be leashed if they present a conflict with other dogs, wildlife, trail users or tend to wander around on private property. Rattlesnakes are seen somewhat regularly, especially the lower part of the trail. Dogs are bitten every year by rattlesnakes on trails in the Carson Valley so if this concerns you, keep them leashed and by your side. During hotter temps, bringing water for your dog is advised. The only permanent water locations on the trail are at Clear Creek Junction and on the Clear Creek Connector. Please pick up after your dog around trailheads.

ENJOY THE TRAIL!