

Sugarloaf Mountain Trail

Early in 2011, the City of Nevada City acquired Sugarloaf Mountain, the iconic landmark just north of town. It is now an open space preserve easily accessible from town. Most of the 30 acres is steep and heavily wooded but the top is flat -- a great place for sitting on a bench and looking back down on the town and out to distant mountains. An excellent trail to the top, following the grade of an old road, is now open for your enjoyment.

Place:	Nevada City, CA
Season:	Year around
Land:	City of Nevada City
Trail signs:	Yes
Length:	1/2 mile
Altitude change:	About 220' from Coyote Street entrance to top
Difficulty:	Moderate uphill, easy return
Trail surface:	Crushed rock and earth in good condition
Environment:	Mixed chaparral, conifers and hardwoods on a steep hillside setting
Facilities:	No restrooms or trash cans. Two benches at top with scenic views.
Cautions:	Poison oak, ticks, and rattlesnakes all may be found on the site
Rules:	Day use only. Dogs on leash. No smoking, fires or camping. No alcohol or firearms. Motorized vehicles prohibited. The trail gate is a short way up a residential driveway off Coyote Street. Please stay on driveway and do not disturb the residents. Please do not block driveways on either side of Coyote Street.

Trailhead: From the town of Grass Valley take Highway 49 north about four miles. Turn left at the sign for Highway 49 Downieville just after passing downtown Nevada City. After this turn, go only about 200 yards and turn right on Coyote Street and go uphill about 1/2 mile to the stop sign at the intersection of Coyote Street and North Bloomfield Road. The entrance to the Sugarloaf Mountain Trail is the residential driveway about 40 yards back down Coyote Street from this intersection on the west side of the street (N39.27527 W121.01585). About 40 yards up this driveway there is a locked metal gate with room on either side to walk or pass a bike around. There is a sign on the gate that says "Pedestrians may go around the gate to access Sugarloaf Mountain." This gate is the official trailhead.

The best parking for this trail is on the wide shoulder along the west side of North Bloomfield Road about 30 yards uphill (northerly) on North Bloomfield Road from the intersection with Coyote Street.

Trail tips: Back when commercial development of this land was contemplated, the owners built a wide and well-surfaced road to the top that now serves as the Sugarloaf Mountain Trail. Starting just 220' below the mountain top elevation, it winds its way 1/2 mile up a gentle grade that curves around the mountain as it goes. The result is an unusually rich exposure to different plant communities and scenic views as you traverse the mountain. In spring, you will find many flowering shrubs and wildflowers on the south-facing side of the mountain. In summer, the north side is nicely shaded by pines, oaks and maples. And up on top, there is a flat meadow that is making a nice recovery after having been heavily infested with Scotch broom.

Because of its elevation of about 3,060' and its location, Sugarloaf offers some marvelous views of Nevada City and more distant places. From the top, the first bench on the left looks out over the town -- a very picturesque view, especially on a clear fall day. The second bench, oriented in a more westerly direction, overlooks the Nevada County Government Center. Looking beyond the government center to the south-southwest it's possible to see the top of Wolf Mountain about 10 miles away, south of Grass Valley.

From the north edge of the flat top of Sugarloaf you may catch glimpses of valleys and peaks in Sierra County far to the north. From the northeast corner of Sugarloaf, as you begin descending the trail from the top, you can see as far as Mt. Fillmore (7,715') some 32 miles away to the north-northeast in Plumas County, as well as Saddleback Mountain (6,690') above Downieville. A little farther down the trail, before getting out of the shady north side, you may catch a glimpse through the trees to Oregon Peak (3,435') about 12 miles away in Yuba County.

As you go along the trail on the south side of Sugarloaf there are a couple of places where you will have a good view of nearby Banner Mountain (3,899') to the southeast. Look also for the valley of Deer Creek which makes a gap in the mountains to the east toward Scott Flat Reservoir. Beyond the gap are distant peaks of the high Sierra east of Blue Canyon.

The near ridge to the northeast as you descend toward the gate is Harmony Ridge which Highway 20 follows as it climbs toward Highway 80 near Emigrant Gap. Looking carefully near the part of Harmony Ridge that is closest, you can see the tops of bare earth cliffs which were carved by hydraulic mining at the historic Manzanita Diggins in the area east of Coyote Street. This is a visible remnant of extensive mining activities that surrounded Sugarloaf back in Gold Rush days.

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