Hoyt Trail

This trail leads to swimming holes along the South Yuba River and historic Hoyt Crossing, a popular hangout for skinny-dippers and other river lovers in summer. Southern exposure means warmth on cool days and wildflowers in the spring. An optional extension up the old Hoyt Crossing Road makes for a vigorous 4.5-mile in-and-out hike.

**Place:** South Yuba River State Park 6.9 miles northwest of Nevada City, CA

**Season:** Year-round. Popular with swimmers and sunbathers in summer

**Land:** State and federal

**Trail signs:** State Park map at parking area. Signs at main trailhead and Hoyt Crossing area.

**Length:** 0.75 one way to Hoyt Crossing beach. An optional extension up the old Hoyt Crossing Road adds 1.6 miles each way, for a round trip of about 4.5 miles

**Altitude change:** Cumulative elevation gain on the trail to Hoyt Crossing is about 200'. The optional extension adds a 1000-foot ascent.

**Difficulty:** Easy to moderate. The optional extension is a steady climb on a good surface.

**Trail surface:** Dirt

**Environment:** Primarily live oak woodland and chaparral with occasional conifers. Poison oak and ticks are common.

**Rules:** No alcoholic beverages or glass containers. Dogs on leash; no bicycles or motorized vehicles; no smoking or fires; no camping.

**Trailhead:**
From the north end of Nevada City where Highway 49 turns west toward Downieville, go 6.9 miles on Highway 49 north. As you near the river you will see a sign on your right that says "South Yuba River Access". Just 0.1 mile past the sign, and before crossing the highway bridge, turn right down a short drive into a paved parking lot (N39 17.833 W121 05.351). Walk across the old bridge to reach the trailhead at the far end of the bridge (N39 17.898 W121 05.377).

**A bit of history:**
Hoyt Crossing Road was an early road connecting the town of Nevada (now Nevada City) with the gold fields of Columbia and the North San Juan area. The road crossed the South Yuba at Hoyt Crossing via a toll bridge operated by Moses Hoyt, the first mayor of Nevada City.

**A note about names:**
Various sources refer to this trail and the river crossing as "Hoyt," "Hoyt's," or "Hoit's". They are interchangeable. Some sources call the Hoyt Trail the "Hoyt Crossing Trail." The most important thing for the hiker to note is the difference between the Hoyt Trail and the old Hoyt Crossing Road, as described below.

**Trail tips:**

**Hoyt Trail:**
The well-signed trail promptly leaves the highway's drone for the sounds of the rushing river a short distance below. The first ¼ mile involves several short climbs with steps. There are river views along much of the trail's length and a view of the Miner's Tunnel outlet across the river 0.35 miles from the trailhead. (For more on this artifact see the Independence Trail-East description on this website.) The trail crosses seasonal streams that harbor riparian species such as western spicebush, whose burgundy flowers smell like red wine. Most of trail is semi-shaded by live oaks and pines. A number of short unmaintained side trails lead down to the river.

At about 0.65 mile there's a sign for Hoyt Crossing (see photo). To reach the popular beach, continue beyond the sign for about 50 yards where you will see a well-worn use trail going down to your right. This trail drops in elevation for about 35 yards then runs along the upper shoreline of the river for another 80 yards where it arrives at the main beach at a large swimming hole. (The "beach" is in fact an alluvial bar composed of boulders, cobble, and patches of sand. Its configuration changes seasonally as the river floods and ebbs.) This beach is a clothing-optional area where a relaxed attitude prevails. Directly across the river, but hard to see, is the inlet for the Miner's Tunnel.
**Hoyt Crossing Road - Extension:**
A section of the old Hoyt Crossing Road is now a trail that offers an extension to the Hoyt Trail. It climbs 1.6 miles (3.2 miles out and back) and 1000 feet in elevation to a turnaround point with a view to the north. Best done on a cool day, the climb is steady but the surface is good so it never becomes especially steep or difficult.

The trail starts about 0.1 mile west of the main beach, near the Hoyt Crossing sign. Look for a broad trail that heads left alongside a seasonal stream in a shady ravine, marked only by an old post with barely legible lettering.

The trail soon turns right across a sunbaked slope, dense with undergrowth and live oaks that block most views. After about a half mile there's a good view of the Devil's Slide across the canyon. The trail passes through another shady ravine and areas of chaparral, then works up the west side of a broad forested valley. Near the top, the valley narrows and the trail draws closer to a seasonal stream, then reaches a wide dirt road in the broad saddle between Montezuma and Bunker Hills. This makes a good lunch spot and turnaround point.

For a view to the north, turn right at the wide dirt road and walk 200' uphill. The view is better in winter when the black oaks are leafless. Immediately ahead lies the drainage of Shady Creek, and beyond that is San Juan Ridge. On a clear winter day the canyon of the Middle Fork of the Yuba, with the Central Valley and Coast Range Beyond, can be glimpsed on the left side of this panorama.

Along this trail, tree lovers can see oracle oaks (*Quercus x morehus*), hybrids of black oaks and interior live oaks (photo below). Several are at the half-mile point and others are near the upper trail and turnaround point. The inconspicuous trees are easiest to spot in winter: when the live oaks are still green and the black oaks have dropped their leaves, oracle oaks' mottled yellow leaves stand out.

**Upstream from Hoyt Crossing:**
From the Hoyt Crossing area several eroded use trails connect to a trail that goes farther up-river. This trail enters private property (not presently posted) about 1/3 mile upstream from the beach at Hoyt Crossing.