



Independence Trail West

Founded by the late John Olmsted, the Independence Trail transformed the historic Excelsior Ditch into the nation's first identified handicap-accessible wilderness trail. It is now one of the most popular trails in the area, contouring along wooded hillsides, passing live streams, and crossing deep gorges on restored wooden flumes that once transported water for hydraulic mining. The Excelsior Ditch was used for hydraulic gold mining, running all the way to the Smartsville mining district, 15 miles west of Grass Valley.

The West trail features gorgeous views of the South Yuba canyon. The real draw is Flume 28 and Rush Creek – after about a mile, a wonderful dream of providing wheelchair access down to Rush Creek has been realized. A complex wooden ramp structure leads down to a picnic and viewing level that looks out to a small waterfall, and continues right down to the creek for close-up viewing.

Getting there:

Take Highway 49 west towards Downieville for 6.25 miles. Highway signs inform travelers of upcoming parking area on right. Please leave first parking lot open for handicap accessible vehicles. Pedestrians please go to overflow parking just around the bend on Highway 49. Turn left to go eastward, and turn right and pass underneath the highway (watch your head!) to go westward.

Distance: 2.5 miles one way.

Elevation change: Nearly level.

Uses: No bicycles. No motorized vehicles. Dogs on leash.

