

Tevis Trail Maintenance Report

Watson Monument through the Granite Chief Wilderness Area

vicinity of Tevis Milepost 14.5 to 19 — Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Tahoe National Forest

by Robert H. Sydnor, Engineering Geologist
AERC Trail Master & Tevis Trail Maintenance Crew

Introduction

The Tevis Trail Maintenance Crew carpooled from Auburn, assembled in Squaw Valley, then began work at the historic Watson Monument.

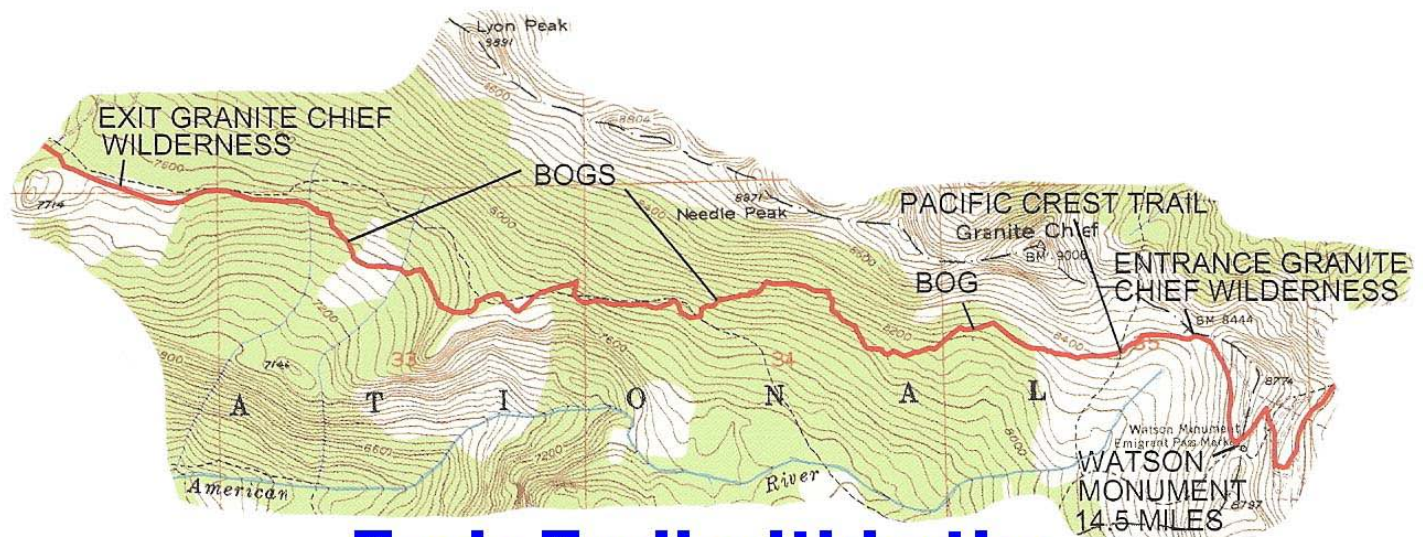
The six-person Tevis Trail Maintenance Crew included: Michael Shackelford (Trail Crew Boss), Phyllis Keller (deputy leader), Austin Violette, Rob Habel, Zachary Brankline, and Robert H. Sydnor. The team included two AERC Trail Masters.

Phyllis Keller (M-AERC), resides with her husband Bryce Keller (retired CDF Battalion Chief) in Truckee, and is a highly-experienced rider in the Robie Park — Squaw Valley — Truckee area. Her knowledge was valuable for cleverly navigating the complicated network of unmarked jeep roads used in the summertime for ski-lift repair and installation of new ski-lifts. Phyllis Keller has faithfully and diligently served for many years on the Tevis Trail Crew, particularly in the eastern 36 mile-segment from Robie Park to Robinson Flat.

We were able to adroitly ascend on steep gravel roads in a 4-wheel drive truck to a ski-lift terminal that is above High Camp, and only one-half mile from the summit of Emigrant Pass. We parked the truck at about elevation 8,400 feet, and quickly hiked to the Watson Monument at elevation 8,675 feet. During our trail work, we would drop more than 1,100 feet, then return and hike back out over Emigrant Pass.

It was about 68°F with a brisk steady wind at 10 to 15 m.p.h., with bright sunshine and intermittent cumulus clouds; alpine visibility about 40 miles. We used sunblock for ultraviolet protection at high altitude.

Tevis Trail Map



Tevis Trail within the Granite Chief Wilderness Area

The Tevis Trail Maintenance Crew for July 17, 2012



Left to Right: Rob Habel, Phyllis Keller, Trail Boss Mike Shackelford, Zach Brankline, Austin Violette. Photograph by Robert Sydnor. Notice official Tevis Trail Crew signage on the truck door. Notice that Austin, Mike, and Phyllis carry rolls of yellow flagging to mark the Tevis Trail for the ride on August 4th.

Hand-Held Trail Tools for the Granite Chief Wilderness Area

The six-person Tevis Trail Maintenance Crew carried three long-handled loppers, hand-held hedge-trimmers, a bow-rake, a machete for chopping brush, and hand-held cross-cut saws.

Gas-powered engines are *not* allowed in the wilderness area, so that precluded weed-eaters, high-reach pole-saws, and chainsaws for fallen trees.

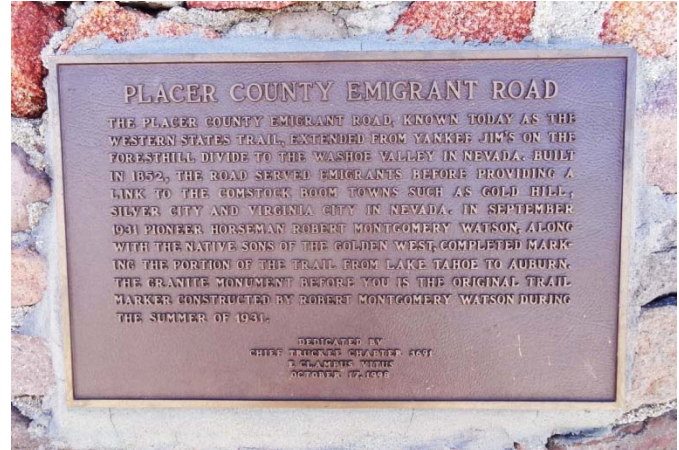
U.S. Forest Service officer Mary Sullivan of the American River Ranger District (in Foresthill), Tahoe National Forest, generously lent us a cross-cut saw.

The focus of our work was to improve lateral and vertical clearance for our horses, and to ascertain that there were *no* newly-fallen trees across the Tevis Trail. Minimal work was performed on the trail-bed.

We carried our daypacks with ample water and lunches, plus an AERC Trail Master carried a "wilderness" First-Aid Kit (that is considerably larger and more specialized than a "standard" First-Aid Kit).

The historic Watson Monument at 1852 Emigrant Pass & Placer County Emigrant Road

The Tevis Trail Crew paused briefly at the summit of Emigrant Pass to pay homage to the pioneer sheriff Robert Montgomery Watson, who marked this historic route in September 1931.



At left: Phyllis Keller performs the honor of marking the signpost at the summit with the yellow flagging to mark the Tevis Trail. **At right:** Robert Sydnor has a tree-saw in a leather scabbard tied to his belt, plus loppers. The Tertiary basalt flow forms an eroded remnant tower at upper right. In the far horizon is Squaw Peak, which lends its name to Squaw Valley.

Pairs of "Before-and-After" Photographs of the Trail (for visual comparison)



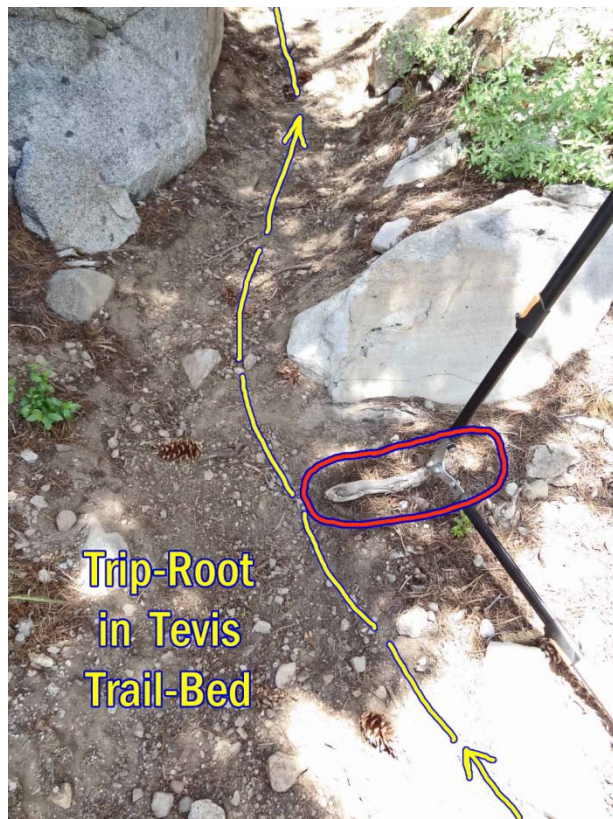
At Left: Dozens of branches are in the trail corridor at 4 to 8 feet. Notice the yellow ribbon hanging in the face of an equestrian. **At Right:** Branches on both sides are lopped-off and the trail can be ridden. The yellow ribbon was re-tied on another short branch. Notice that **blue sky can now be seen** at top-center.



At Left: Three branches in the face of the rider. **At Right:** Branches have been lopped off, and Tevis riders will not be hit in the face. The long-reach lopper is shown resting against the fir tree.



At Left: The heavy winter snows have deposited a short dead tree into the trail-bed. **At Right:** the tree is side-cast on the downhill slope where gravity and future winter storms will take it even further away from the trail-bed. This appears simple enough; yet previously, no wilderness hiker had paused to do this simple task. *The cogent insight is:* side-cast of fallen dead trees only takes one minute with *no* tools required, and it is important for the safety of our Tevis horses inside the Granite Chief Wilderness Area within Tahoe National Forest.



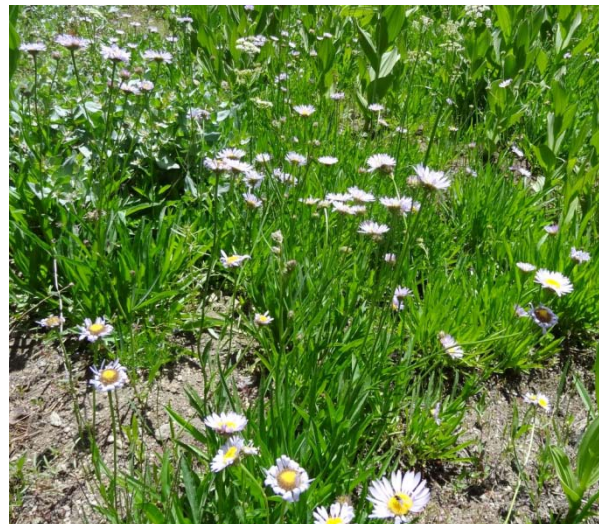
At Left: A hazardous trip-root was vertically exposed in the Tevis Trail-bed. It had evidently been there for many years, and was vertically several inches in the air. Because we are horsemen, we did not blithely ignore a trip-root, and we perceive this as a latent hazard. Normally, the trail crew would use a Pulaski axe to chop-out a trip-root, but we lacked it for this particular mission — which was overhead clearance. So we improvised with loppers. **At Right:** the trip-root is cut away, and the hazard is *permanently* resolved.



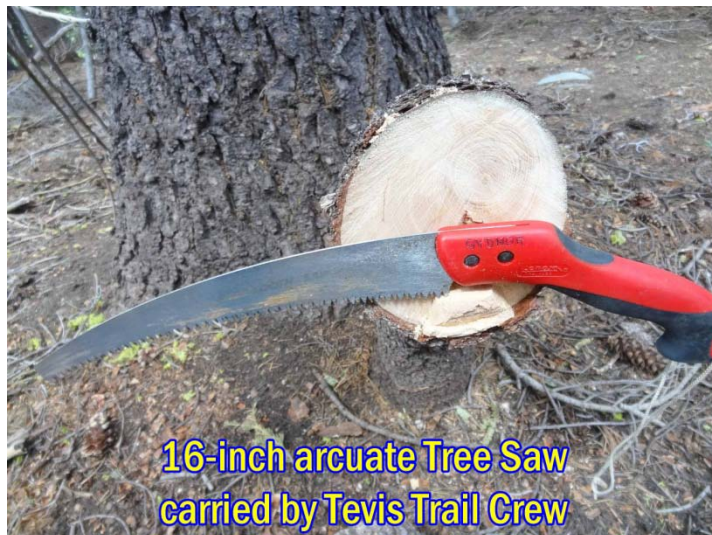
At Left: The Tevis Trail-bed is buried under cut branches of alder. The alders grow prolifically at hillside springs (labeled as "bogs" on the Tevis map). Notice that two hand-tools were effective: 16-inch arcuate tree-saws to cut 3-inch diameter 8-foot long alder branches; then loppers to chop-up the limbs for side-cast. **At Right:** The Tevis Trail-bed is now open with adequate vertical clearance for horses.



Top Left: Sharp spines from a mountain gooseberry bush protruded into the trail-bed, only about one foot wide. The sharp spines snagged our pant legs, and we thought how this would hurt the pasterns and hocks on our beloved Tevis horses. **Bottom Left:** The sharp spines are cut-back, away from the Tevis trail-bed. **Collateral Insight for our Fellow Horsemen:** protective splint-boots and hock-boots are advised for this segment of the Tevis Trail.



At Left: We enjoyed the alpine meadows of Woolly Mule Ears (botanical name: *Wyethia mollis*). **At Right:** beautiful clusters of purple Western Mountain Aster (*Aster occidentalis*).



Top Left: A dead tree, crushed by the weight of 10+ feet of winter snowfall protrudes into the Tevis Trail. Hand-sawing a tree is performed with a 16-inch arcuate tree-saw. The tip of the horizontal tree is sharp and jagged — a hazard to the flank of a horse.

Bottom Left: The entire tree is safely removed and the trail-bed is now full-width.

Summary

On Tuesday, July 17, 2012, the Tevis Trail Crew cleared the Western States Trail from the Watson Monument through the Granite Chief Wilderness Area. Three fallen tree logs were sawed by hand.

This segment of the Western States Trail is now in **"Good" condition (for the trail-bed) and "Very Good" (for overhead clearance)**. There is no snow on the trail-bed since the winter snowfall was slightly below average, and so it melted away many weeks ago.

The spring-water in the bogs is minimal, and will be gone by the end of summer. **The trail-bed is now cleared for the August 4, 2012 Tevis Cup.** This long-term trail maintenance by the Tevis Trail Maintenance Committee will provide a **safer trail** for our beloved horses.