

DINOSAUR ROCK RIDGE (SODA SPRINGS AREA), CALIFORNIA

Note: "Dinosaur Rock Ridge" is an unofficial name for this ridge; it is named for a rock which looks like a dinosaur head.

This hike starts at the easternmost end of Tamarack Way in Soda Springs, connects with the main Switchback Trail and follows it north briefly, then turns east on a smaller trail and ascends the nearby major ridge. It is possible to continue along the ridge further, then do a loop by descending the Nose-Dive and Claim Jumper trails back to the Switchback Trail. (All of these trails, except possibly for the ridge trail, are used by mountain bikers in the summer and skiers in the winter.)

I did this (relatively short) hike twice on this trip (June 2019), on two different days, and the photos from the second hike have been interspersed with the photos from the first hike.

A topographic map of this area is useful to have when doing this hike, and is especially useful for naming prominent landmarks. As of the writing of this report (July 2019), there is an excellent map of the Royal Gorge area on the Truckee Donner Land Trust webpage,

[http://tdlandtrust.org/sites/default/files/Royal_Gorge_Spring_2018%20\(2\)%20\(1\).pdf](http://tdlandtrust.org/sites/default/files/Royal_Gorge_Spring_2018%20(2)%20(1).pdf)

However, the trail itself shows up quite well on Google maps. Here, the first junction is of the connector trail with the Switchback Trail, and the second junction is of the Switchback Trail with the ridge trail:



The connector trail from Tamarack Way joins the main Switchback Trail in a patch of mule's ears plants. This is a helpful clue for finding the connector trail on the hike back:



There were many wildflowers blooming alongside the trail when we did this hike:



After leaving the Switchback Trail, the ridge trail climbs through a patch of trees and then switchbacks into another meadow of mule's ears:



There were other wildflowers growing in this area, but the mule's ears were the most common:



Interestingly, the mule's ears were not blooming below a certain elevation line, but they were blooming above that line:



This photo was taken on a different day than the previous photo; the bright yellow colors of the flowers appeared more vivid due to the cloud cover:



Looking back down the trail towards Palisade Peak:



Here we have nearly reached the top of the ridge:



There were a few plants with tiny blue flowers growing alongside the trail:



We continued to encounter blooming mule's ears plants as we continued along the ridge:



The trail soon becomes less steep, as we approach where we will be able to see further along the ridge:



The ground alongside the trail through here was covered by these small puffy pink flowers:



As we progressed along the ridge, some of the mountains southwest of Palisade Peak began to appear above the ridgeline in the distance:



Looking down towards the Serene Lakes from along a flatter section of the ridge:



The views from this part of the ridge were excellent. Here we are looking towards the peaks above the Sugar Bowl Village ski area:



The walk along this part of the ridge is very enjoyable, as long as there is no wind (we only encountered wind on the walk back on our second trip along this ridge):



The next three photos should hopefully show the density of the very nice pink flowers alongside the trail on this part of the ridge:



Further along the ridge, we get increasingly good views of the peaks above the Sugar Bowl ski area, including Donner Peak and Mount Judah, to the southeast of where we are hiking:



Looking northeast towards Castle Peak, which is one of the more prominent peaks in this area:



Finally, we reach the Dinosaur Rock, which gives this hike its unofficial name. Past hikers have added small rocks and branches to this larger rock to make it look like a dinosaur head:



Panorama of the view to the north from this part of the ridge, with Castle Peak visible to the left of center. Donner Lake is out of view to the right of center:



Panorama looking southeast from here, with Donner Lake now out of view to the left. The Serene Lakes and Palisade Peak can be seen to right:



From here, we continued along the ridge for a short distance, towards a denser group of trees, marked "pine grove" on the map above. (We did not continue to the end of the ridge due to time constraints.):



Looking west from here, across the collection of cabins north of the Serene Lakes:



Looking towards the peaks above the Sugar Bowl Village ski area again:



On the hike back, we spotted this snow flower just starting to grow among some rocks:

