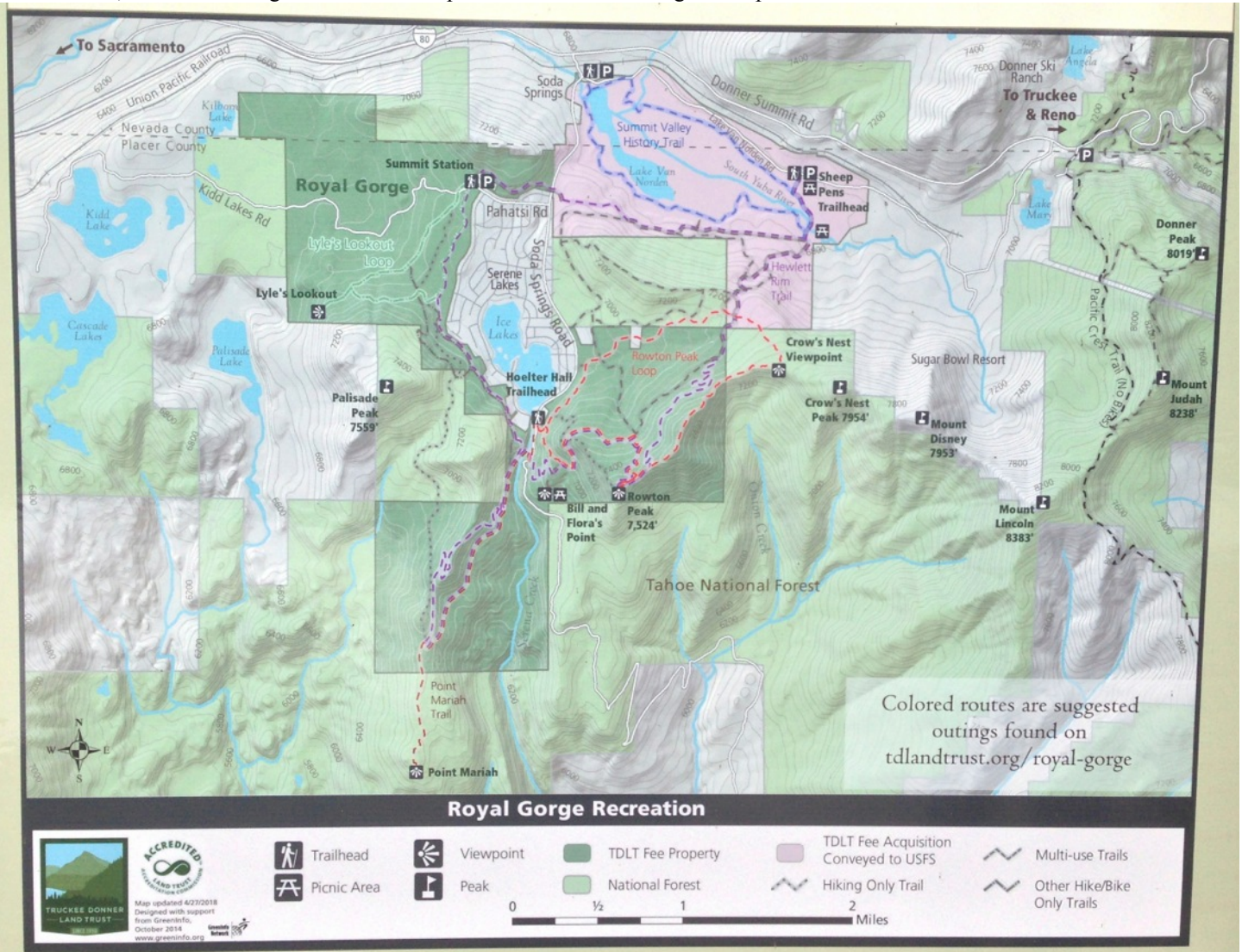


ROWTON PEAK (SODA SPRINGS AREA), CALIFORNIA

This hike starts at the Hoelter Hall Trailhead on the south end of the Serene Lakes, and follows the ridge to Rowton Peak, then descends back to the trailhead.

Here is a map of the trail and surrounding area. We essentially followed the two sections of dashed grey "hiking only" trail on the hike up to Rowton Peak, and the overlapping red and purple dashed route on the way down, instead of repeating the first dashed grey line. In both cases, we did have to go off-trail in multiple locations to avoid large snow packs:



The snow packs were relatively small on the first set of switchbacks. This is the view looking back down through the trees:



Shortly further on, the trees became less dense and the trail became more rocky in places:



Here we got our first view of nearby Castle Peak from this trail (far right), with the southern of the Serene Lakes to the left:



Looking west towards Palisade Peak:



Soon we reached where the hiking trail meets the multi-use trail (i.e., the end of the first "hikers only" section):



We crossed the multi-use trail and continued up another hikers-only trail towards the ridge:



The terrain is rather steep through here, and the trail switchbacks up towards the ridge:



Looking back towards the lakes after the first few switchbacks on the trail towards the ridge:



The trail leveled out briefly and we were able to get a view looking north across Dinosaur Rock Ridge and towards Castle Peak:



Past this point, we began to encounter larger snowpacks on the trail:



We soon reached the ridge, which the trail would then follow to Rowton Peak. The views from here were spectacular:



Looking back down the trail, towards Palisade Peak (right):



Looking north towards the Serene Lakes:



Up ahead, alongside the trail, we began to see interesting "castle"-like cliff formations on the south side of the ridge:



Panorama from the ridge looking south, towards an interesting collection of peaks (center), which I hope to visit someday:



Looking down the American River Canyon from here, where the Old Soda Springs Road goes:



Taking a closer look at one of the rock formations alongside the cliff:



The trail follows the cliff edge here, and we get excellent views of the surrounding area:



Looking across one of the more impressive rock formations and towards the nearby peaks:



I read after doing this hike that somewhere in this area, along the cliff, there is a natural bridge or arch, but we did not see it on this hike:



Fortunately, there were less snowpacks along this part of the ridge, and we were able to enjoy hiking along the trail rather than working around snowpacks:



We spotted this nice hoodoo partway along the ridge:



Panorama from further up the ridge. Devil's Peak is in the background, right of center, and Palisade Peak is to the right of it, closer in:



A closer view looking west at Devil's Peak (background left) and Palisade Peak (right):



This is one of the few places along this stretch of ridge where one could descend to the base of the cliffs:



Another panorama from a short distance further up the ridge, looking towards what I think is called Snow Mountain (center):



There were multiple very nice patches of flowers along the trail through here:



Here, the trail goes through a dense section of brush, taller than the average hiker:



Almost all of the plants through here were blooming. This is looking down the ridge, towards Palisade Peak (far left):



Mule's Ears and some other plant with purple flowers:



Another patch of flowers, with some Indian Paintbrush, Mule's Ears, and others I don't know the names of:



Looking back down the ridge again, towards Palisade Peak (upper left). The Serene Lakes are not quite visible, behind the trees to the right of center. The wildflowers in this area were very nice:



This is the summit register at the top of Rowton Peak:



Looking north, towards the top of Castle Peak from here:



Panorama looking south (left), west (center), and north (right) from the top of Rowton Peak. Notice that there are many blooming Mule's Ears plants at this summit:



Panorama looking northeast towards Crow's Nest Peak (right of center) and the peaks above the Sugar Bowl Ski Area. Castle Peak is again visible, behind the trees and to the left in this photo:



Taking a closer look at the peaks to the southeast of Crow's Nest Peak, including Mount Disney and Mount Lincoln:



From here, we descended the northeast side of Rowton Peak, then turned northwest to return to the parking area and trailhead. Here is a view of Castle Peak again, through the trees:



We encountered a lot of snow on the hillsides as we descended back towards the trailhead via this route, and we ended up hiking off-trail for some distance. This photo shows the sort of terrain we were hiking through here:



Eventually, we reached the multi-use trail we had crossed previously:



We then followed this trail down to where the hikers only trail takes off from it. Note that the scenery is much better hiking along the ridge, although this route is somewhat shorter:



Looking across at Palisade Peak from near the top of the hikers only trail:



There is a smaller peak just southeast of Palisade Peak, which might have some nice views looking towards the American River Canyon:



The next four photos show our descent along this trail back to the trailhead. The overcast skies helped even out the lighting so that the photos turned out well:



We could still see Castle Peak from some places along the trail:



Near the Hoelter Hall Trailhead is the start of the Old Soda Springs Road, which descends towards the American River Canyon:



Serena Creek flows down below the road:



This is a shelf road with blind turns in some places, so it would require care when driving it. We did not have time to check it out on this trip, but perhaps on a future trip:



Serena Creek flows over a small dam at the southern end of the Serene Lakes:



One last photo from this trip, looking south from the northern tip of the northern of the Serene Lakes, from the boat dock. Palisade Peak is visible to the right in this photo, and the lower part of the ridge leading to Rowton Peak can be seen in the far background, left of center:

