

Upper Eagle Falls

Upper Eagle Falls (~20 ft.) is a short hike up from the roadside at the Eagle Falls picnic area. It is very difficult to get a parking spot here during the day, so it is recommended to arrive early. The trail is quite popular, but most people are continuing further on the trail into the Desolation Wilderness.

At this location, you can also cross the road and you'll be right on top of [Lower Eagle Falls](#). Upper Eagle Falls is much smaller than the lower falls obviously, but is still a nice little waterfall to see. I have seen it written many times Upper Eagle Falls is around 40 ft. high, but really, that is just silly. It is not very much more than 20 ft. high, if that.

In July 2006, I continued up the trail past Upper Eagle Falls into the Desolation Wilderness. I noticed another significant waterfall on the inlet stream to Eagle Lake, which would definitely be worth checking out. It seems the best way to get to it, would be to somehow traverse around to the far side of the lake. I didn't have time on this trip, but next spring I plan to try to get to it. I'm not sure about the timing though: go too early in the year, and there will be too much snow. But by July, the mosquitoes are out in force.

Location: South Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Basin, Eldorado County

Height: ~20 ft.

Access:  

Distance: 0.4 miles (RT)

Elevation: 6650 ft.

Season: Apr-Jul

Difficulty: 

Lat/Long: 38.94999N, 120.11618W

Directions: Along Hwy #89, 8.5 miles northwest of the Hwy #50 junction, at South Lake Tahoe. Park at the Eagle Falls picnic area. There is a parking fee.

Lower Glen Alpine Falls

Lower Glen Alpine Creek Falls, aka Big Falls, aka Fallen Leaf Falls, is very impressive. The waterfall is easily accessible right along the roadside, and cascades ~60 ft. in step-like fashion. You can get up very close to the waterfalls, and feel the cascade coming right at you. Neat!

Location: *South Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Basin, Eldorado County*

Height: *~60 ft.*

Access:  

Distance: *n/a*

Elevation: *6500 ft.*

Season: *May-Aug*

Difficulty: 

Lat/Long: *38.87909N, 120.07404W*

Directions: *Along Hwy #89, turn left on Fallen Leaf Lake Rd., 2.9 miles northwest of Hwy #50 junction at South Lake Tahoe. Drive 4.8 miles on Fallen Leaf Lake Rd. to Road 1216 and turn left, signed for Glen Alpine Falls and Desolation Wilderness. The lower falls is along the roadside on the right.*

Upper Glen Alpine Falls

Upper Glen Alpine Creek Falls, aka Modjeska Falls, is a short, easy, and pleasant walk starting from the Desolation Wilderness trailhead. The trail leads past the waterfall, but there is a short spur trail leading right to the falls base.

Location: *South Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Basin, Eldorado County*

Height: *~30 ft.*

Access:  

Distance: *1 mile (RT)*

Elevation: *6600 ft. (+100 ft.)*

Season: *May-Aug*

Difficulty: 

Lat/Long: *38.87704N, 120.08954W*

Directions: *Along Hwy #89, turn left on Fallen Leaf Lake Rd., 2.9 miles northwest of Hwy #50 junction at South Lake Tahoe. Drive 4.8 miles on Fallen Leaf Lake Rd. to Road 1216 and turn left, signed for Glen Alpine Falls and Desolation Wilderness. Continue 0.5 miles past the lower falls, to reach the trailhead for the upper falls, at the Desolation Wilderness trailhead parking area.*

Lower Eagle Falls

Lower Eagle Falls (~150 ft.) is seen from the roadside, at the Emerald Bay / Vikingsholm parking lot area (a half mile drive from the Eagle Falls picnic area). It is of course, a very popular tourist stop. In fact, it is incredibly difficult to get a parking spot here during the day, so it is recommended to arrive early in the morning.

The waterfall is very awesome, particularly in the spring, dropping in two large cascades. The upper section is about 60 ft. and the bottom about 90 ft. high. A maintained trail leads from the parking lot at Emerald Bay State Park down to the lake. It is a moderate 1 mile hike down to the lakeside. Dogs are not allowed on this trail, unfortunately, as it is a state park.

Location: South Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Basin, El Dorado County

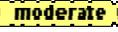
Height: ~150 ft.

Access:  or  

Distance: 2.2 miles (RT) (hike)

Elevation: 6600 ft. (-350 ft.)

Season: Apr-Jul

Difficulty:  or 

Lat/Long: 38.95185N, 120.11029W

Directions: Along Hwy #89, 8.5 miles northwest of Hwy #50 junction, at South Lake Tahoe. Park at the Emerald Bay / Vikingsholm State Park.

Horsetail Falls

You can see the impressive Horsetail Falls cascading down the mountain from busy Highway 50 on the way to South Lake Tahoe. But remember to keep your eyes on the road, or you'll end up in the ditch. It is especially impressive in springtime during snow-melt. The first time we came was late in the year (August), and we thought the waterfall was great. We came back in the spring (June) and we were amazed. I had to up my ranking from 8 to 9. Wow! Park at the trailhead at Twin Bridges, now an official state-run trailhead parking lot, with a \$3 parking fee to boot. Yuck! There are usually a lot of cars parked here on weekends, so there might quite a few people here; this is a very popular destination.

Follow the signs to the wilderness boundary (not the Pyramid Creek loop trail). At the boundary, you will need to fill out a permit to continue up to the waterfall. The trail is unclear in places as you scramble up granite rocks to the waterfall. But just remember to keep the creek on your right and the waterfall ahead of you, and you won't get lost. It is only a 1.4 mile hike but it takes about an hour, because of all the scrambling you'll be doing. As you are hiking to the waterfall, look for two or three other tall unnamed cascades falling down the mountains to your right. These would be seasonal falls, only to be seen in the springtime. But quite interesting, nonetheless. When you reach Horsetail Falls, you will be treated to a spectacular display of water rushing down the mountainside.

If you are ambitious, you can continue scrambling up the mountain beside the creek to get to the top of the waterfall. This is quite strenuous. There is no trail, you are essentially scrambling up the mountainside. Head slightly away from the creek as you go up (though, you'll always have the waterfall in view). I do not recommend taking children to the top of Horsetail Falls. I found it a bit dangerous in places coming back down. Good hiking boots are a must! These granite rocks are quite slippery, even when dry. Many people have died here at this waterfall by losing their step on the slippery rocks, so please be careful.

Location: *Strawberry, Desolation Wilderness, Eldorado National Forest, Eldorado County*

Height: *~500 ft.*

Access:  

Distance: *2.8 miles (RT)*

Elevation: *6100 ft. (+700 ft.)*

Season: *Apr-Sep*

Difficulty: moderate

Lat/Long: *38.83047N, 120.12324W*

Directions: *Along Hwy #50 at Twin Bridges, 2 miles east of Strawberry. Note there is now a \$3 parking fee here.*

Cascade Falls

Cascade Falls is an impressive cascade, best seen in the spring. The trail leads to the top of the waterfall, where you can peer down very carefully over the edge, to look down at the cascade. Wow! The waterfall falls into Cascade Lake, and there is a great view at the top of Cascade Lake, with Lake Tahoe in the background. There is no clear view of the entire length of the waterfall, except for occasional long distance glimpses of it from along the trail. We managed to scramble along the cliff at the top of the waterfall to get a somewhat decent view. A word of warning: this trail is very busy.

Location: South Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Basin, Eldorado County

Height: ~200 ft.

Access:  

Distance: 1.4 miles (RT)

Elevation: 6900 ft. (-150 ft.)

Season: Apr-Jul

Difficulty: 

Lat/Long: 38.93505N, 120.10003W

Directions: Along Hwy #89, at Bayview campground, 7.5 miles northwest of Hwy #50 junction at South Lake Tahoe. The trailhead is at the far end of the campground.

Fontanillis Lake Falls

Fontanillis Lake Falls is a great long sliding cascade, dropping from beautiful Fontanillis Lake down a stretch of 150 ft. into Upper Velma Lake, in the Desolation Wilderness near South Lake Tahoe. It is very similar in appearance to [Ropi Lake Falls](#), also in the Desolation Wilderness.

The hike to Fontanillis Lake Falls is a 5.1 mile trek from Eagle Falls at South Lake Tahoe, gaining about 1400 ft. up to Upper Velma Lake. It is a long hike, and most people going up this far into the Desolation Wilderness are backpackers, not day hikers. I hiked up here in mid July, on probably the hottest day of the year. Not too smart. In addition to the heat, I also had to battle the mosquitoes, which were plentiful. I think it would be better to do this hike earlier, but then there would be snow to deal with.

Fontanillis Lake Falls is a gorgeous slide, rushing down the granite mountain side in the spring and early summer. The route I took went up past Dick's Lake and over to Fontanillis Lake at the top of the falls. Then, I just walked down the granite rocks alongside the waterfall, on its way down to Upper Velma Lake. It was a gorgeous hike, despite the heat. On the way back down to Eagle Falls, it is necessary to cross the outlet stream from Upper Velma Lake, which requires getting your feet wet.

Location: *South Lake Tahoe, Desolation Wilderness, El Dorado National Forest, Eldorado County*

Height: *~150 ft.*

Access:  

Distance: *10.2 miles (RT)*

Elevation: *6600 ft. (+1400 ft.)*

Season: *May-Jul*

Difficulty: moderate

Lat/Long: *38.92533N, 120.15408W*

Directions: *Along Hwy #89, 8.5 miles northwest of the Hwy #50 junction, at South Lake Tahoe. Park at the Eagle Falls picnic area. There is a parking fee.*

Ropi Lake Falls

Despite being located in a very popular area in the Desolation Wilderness near South Lake Tahoe, Ropi Lake Falls is not well known, or perhaps it is just ignored even though it is a very impressive cascade. Ropi Lake Falls is a long slide about 250 ft. in height, falling on Pyramid Creek, the same creek that spectacular [Horsetail Falls](#) is found on, just a mile or so downstream.

Getting to Ropi Lake Falls is not easy, however. You have to get up to the top of Horsetail Falls, a climb (or scramble) of about 1000 ft. elevation gain. It is also a bit dangerous, and I do not recommend taking children to the top of Horsetail Falls. I found it a bit tricky in places coming back down. Good hiking boots are a must! These granite rocks are quite slippery, even when dry. Many people have died here at this waterfall by losing their step on the slippery rocks, so please be careful.

There is an easier way to get to Ropi Lake, though it is quite a bit longer. You can hike in from the Echo Lakes. It is about a 6.5 mile hike (1 way) if you go this route. Camping at Ropi Lake would be a nice option as well.

Once at the top of Horsetail Falls, it is an easy 20-30 minute walk to Ropi Lake. There are some very gorgeous alpine lakes in this area, including Ropi Lake. My personal favourite was Lake of the Woods (past Ropi Lake, heading towards Lake Aloha).

Ropi Lake Falls is easily spotted once you reach the lake. It is located on the inlet stream to the lake, on Pyramid Creek. This creek has a very large drainage, dumping out from Lake Aloha, so this waterfall will be very good even in late summer. Although it is easy to get right up beside the waterfall, it is not so easy to get a good view of the entire falls. The angle is just not very great. You could, however, scramble right to the top of the falls alongside it without much difficulty. The steepness of the cascade is really not that great, and I kept thinking this would make a great waterslide, if there were not so many rocks to smash into at the bottom.

Location: *Strawberry, Desolation Wilderness, Eldorado National Forest, Eldorado County*

Height: *~250 ft.*

Access:  

Distance: *5.8 miles (RT)*

Elevation: *6100 ft. (+1600 ft.)*

Season: *Jun-Sep*

Difficulty: 

Lat/Long: *38.84229N, 120.12970W*

Directions: *Along Hwy #50 at Twin Bridges, 2 miles east of Strawberry. Note there is now a \$3 parking fee here.*

Upper Truckee Falls

Upper Truckee Falls is a small 20 ft. drop along the Upper Truckee River. When we were there in early August, the water flow on the river was very low, and the falls was not very interesting. It might be better earlier in the spring, and deserving of a (slightly) higher rating. However, this waterfall is not very photogenic even if the river is flowing high due to the logs and branches obscuring the falls' view. It is also difficult to take a photo in the afternoon here with the sun shining through the trees and creating a lot of contrast.

Start off hiking on the historic Hawley Grade National Recreation Trail in Meyers. After a very short distance, the main trail turns uphill to the right. A spur trail on the left, however, leads to the Upper Truckee River and the waterfall. If you are here in early spring, you might want to continue hiking on the Hawley Grade Trail. There is a seasonal waterfall along this trail (about 0.5 miles from the bottom).

Location: Meyers, El Dorado National Forest, El Dorado County

Height: ~20 ft.

Access:  

Distance: 0.4 miles (RT)

Elevation: 6500 ft. (+100 ft.)

Season: May-Jul

Difficulty: 

Lat/Long: 38.79073N, 120.02174W

Directions: From the Hwy 50 / Hwy 89 junction in Meyers, drive south on Hwy 50 for 0.4 miles to South Upper Truckee Rd. Turn left and drive 3.7 miles to the turnoff for the Hawley Grade National Recreation Trail. Turn right and drive 0.3 miles to the end of the road, and find a place to park along the road.