

Olmstead Loop Trail



Distance: 8.6 miles; 4 hours (hiking), but a variety of shorter trail options/cutoffs are also possible

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

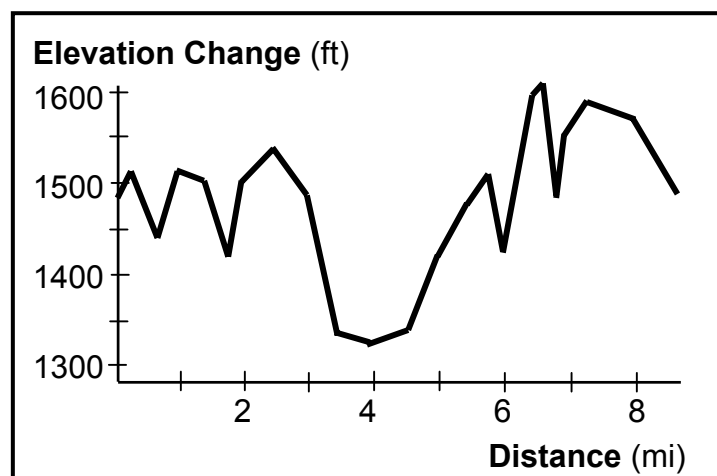
Slope: 2% avg; 14% max. (see below)

Trailhead / Parking

Trailhead and parking are behind the fire station in Cool. Take Hwy 49 south to Cool and turn right just before the fire station and blinking red light. This is also the Cool staging area for equestrians. Trailhead is on south end of the parking area.

Description

This beautiful loop trail, which parallels Hwy 49 on one side and the American River Canyon on the other, passes through open, rolling hills with several species of oak trees, and wildflowers in spring. It also includes steep canyon descents and climbs as it crosses Knickerbocker Creek and Salt Creek. Side trails on the canyon side offer panoramic views of the North Fork American River and of the Auburn dam construction site. Trail markers have been posted about every half-mile and at most trail intersections.



The Olmstead Loop Trail is especially popular in the springtime when wildflowers are in bloom, ponds and vernal pools are visible, and over 50 species of birds can be seen. Consider taking this trail on a weekday, however, since weekends attract many bikers and equestrians. And although bikers seem to be attracted to the mud, hikers are cautioned not to take this trail after a rain since most of the trail holds water and has a tendency to become very muddy, making hiking quite laborious. The Cool Mountain Bike Race, usually held in February, uses this trail and is well known for its large amounts of flying mud.

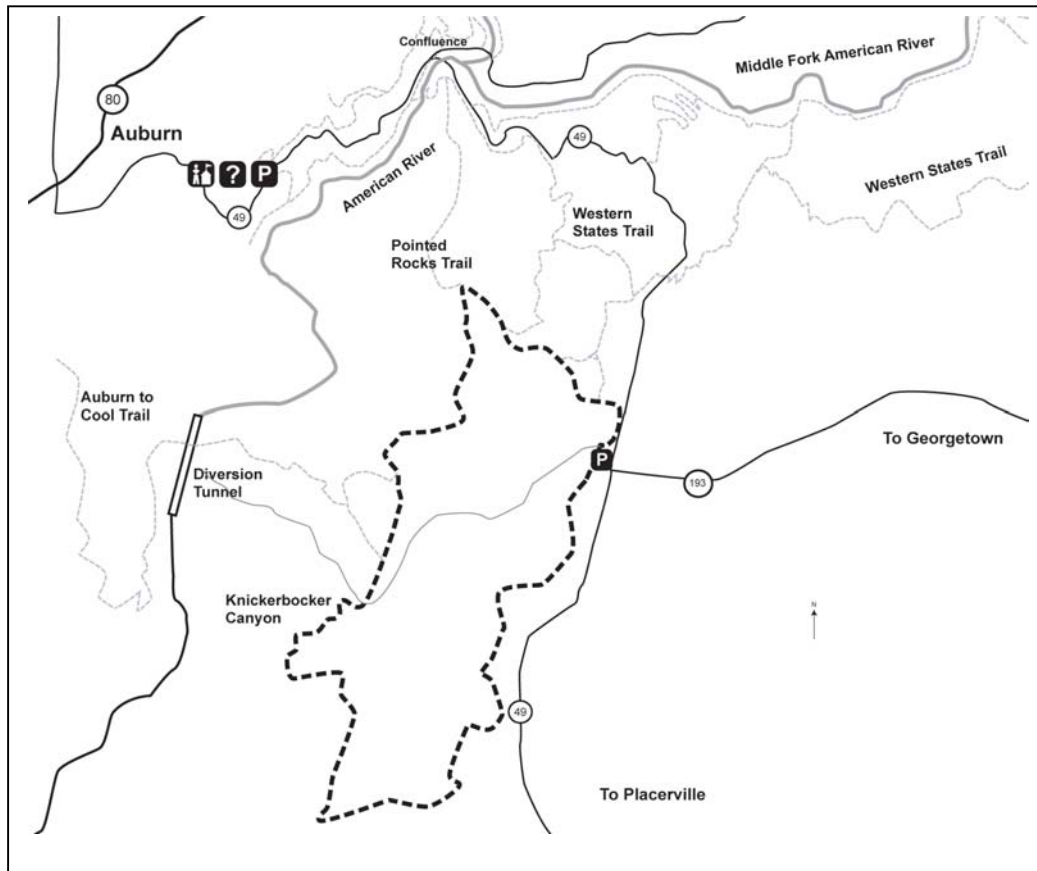
Proceeding around the loop in a clockwise direction, most of the first section of the trail is fairly flat and meanders through a typical foothill Oak woodland ecosystem. It passes a small horse ranch surrounded by sprawling hills where sheep roam the hills, providing great views of the snow-capped Sierras in the distance. At about 3½ miles, the trail starts winding down through a piney forest to Knickerbocker Creek. At the creek crossing, you can enjoy the natural setting with its pools and rushing water before heading uphill again. The more adventurous may want to scramble down the rocks to see a beautiful waterfall and pools in a lush riparian ecosystem along Knickerbocker Canyon.

Continuing on the Olmstead Loop, the trail is a bit arduous beyond Knickerbocker Creek, but after another half mile you will be at the top of a hill that affords a grand view. The trail soon crosses a wide, paved road that was built to provide access to the top of the keyway for the Auburn dam (to the left). For a shortcut, take this road to the right for 1¾ miles to get back to the Cool fire station (for about a 7-mile loop).

The Olmstead Loop crosses the paved road and continues on for about another 4 miles. It intersects the Auburn to Cool Trail (labeled Coffey Dam Trail on the markers) twice, once before climbing up a rather steep hill and then again shortly before crossing Salt Creek, which is at

Continued on back →





Did You Know? – The Olmstead Loop Trail, formerly known as the Knickerbocker Trail, was named for Dan Olmstead in 1993. Olmstead was an avid biker and hiker; and as a young man, his love of the outdoors caused him to become dedicated to the goal of bringing harmony among the hikers, bikers and equestrians, and he helped to create the best use of this virgin recreational area. To further augment his dedication, knowledge and sense of helpfulness, he also established a bike and hiking shop in this area.

the bottom of an even steeper descent. Past this point, a gradual climb affords lovely views in the company of chattering squirrels. The terrain flattens out, and then another steady climb takes you to the top of a shady knoll. Here, the trail meets the Pointed Rocks Fuel Break Trail, which descends left to the confluence area.

The Olmstead Loop descends gradually after this, winding to the right in a big U-turn past outcroppings of pointed rocks. It passes two side

trails that lead to the Western States Trail (labeled Wendell T. Robie Trail on the markers), which both take off to the left. Tevis Cup riders and 100-mile Endurance runners use the WST for their annual Squaw Valley-to-Auburn race.

At the bottom of a hill, the Olmstead Loop crosses the headwaters of Salt Creek that runs through wide-open meadows. The trail then crosses another small knoll before returning to the Cool fire station.

Thank you for visiting the Auburn State Recreation Area. Please take care to preserve and protect the trails, plants, and historic artifacts for other visitors (and for the wild residents of ASRA) by staying on the trail and by packing out all garbage to the trailhead. Some trails are very popular and may be crowded at times with hikers, bikers, and equestrians. Trail courtesy requires that bikers yield to hikers and equestrians, and that hikers yield to equestrians. In order to reduce conflicts and increase everyone's enjoyment, park visitors are required to act in a safe and courteous manner, obeying all park rules and speed limits, and respecting trail designations. **Not all trails are open to all uses. A large print version of this trail guide is available at ASRA Park Headquarters.**

This trail guide was created by ASRA Canyon Keepers, volunteers who assist the professional Park Rangers by providing information and assistance to ASRA visitors. Canyon Keepers conduct monthly hikes and meetings (open to the public) to learn more about the history and natural beauty of the American River Canyon. They also help maintain and improve hiking trails in ASRA. To learn more about Canyon Keepers, please call 530-885-3776 or click www.psyber.com/~asra/asrack.htm