Hike 20: Canyon Creek Trail | Trinity Alps Wilderness | Conifers: 13

Getting There: On Highway 299, travel 8 miles west of Weaverville or 90 miles east of Arcata to the town of Junction City. Across from the general store, travel north on Canyon Creek Road for 13.5 miles until it ends at a large parking area. Be sure to notice the ghost pines on the ride in as well as along the Trinity River. This is one of the few areas they can be seen in the Klamath Mountains. They are along Canyon Creek Road for the first 10 miles.

Why Go? Spectacular granite canyon, with numerous cascades and waterfalls, culminating at two subalpine lakes. This is as close to typical Sierra Nevada scenery as you can see in the Klamath Mountains. There are 14 species of conifers in this canyon, and with a bit of cross-country exploring after the lakes, foxtail and whitebark pines can be found. This is the most popular hike in the Trinity Alps so please follow wilderness ethics. There are many tempting campsites along the creek; don’t use them. Find a spot you will remain unseen by the masses, there are beautiful outcrops on which to camp with a view, just out of sight of the trail. Take note—fires are prohibited your round.

The Hike: Strenuous (15 miles round trip)

0.0 Trailhead with Douglas-fir, sugar pine, incense-cedar, and white fir.

0.2 Cross Bear Creek watching for Pacific yew. Climb to a ridge on the east side of Canyon Creek where Ponderosa pines grow.

1.6 Pass between two giant Douglas-firs. You are now entering prime habitat for large trees like Jeffrey pine and white fir.

1.8 On a bench above the creek, Shasta red firs appear for the first time. Watch for the shrub Oregon boxwood (Paxistima myrsinites) as well.

2.9 Begin switchbacks up to the first falls, crossing a creek three times. In the summer this is the first water since Bear Creek. You will catch glimpses of the falls through the trees as well as other falls cascading from different side canyons.

3.9 Reach the top of Canyon Creek Falls with a view of the smaller upper falls. This is the first of three prominent glacial stepping stones you will climb on your way to the lakes, each with a cascade over the hard granite. The first clues to the approaching subalpine forests are numerous Brewer spruces. Please notice their pendulous branches. These trees are within several miles of the southern extent of the range of the species; supported here by Canyon Creek’s harsh, southern exposure.

4.7 Reach Canyon Creek Meadow with a nice stand of Black Cottonwoods (Populus trichocarpa) along with incense-cedar, white fir, and Douglas-fir. Traveling further, an undisturbed of black-laured (Lunaria davisiae) becomes increasingly common and dominant to just below the lower lake. Notice some giant sugar pines and Douglas-fir here. Hackleberry oak (Quercus vaccinifolia) also becomes more common with several manzanita species as the trail passes through montane chaparral on exposed granite slabs.

5.4 At the base of the middle falls, begin heading away toward switchback to the top.

5.8 Reach signed junction to Boulder Creek Lakes and the start of a truly diverse and spectacular coniferous forest. Within 50 feet of this sign there are 9 species of conifers: white fir, Shasta red fir, Douglas-fir, western white pine, sugar pine, ponderosa pine, incense-cedar, Brewer spruce, and the first mountain hemlocks of the trail. There are not many places on earth that one could see a mountain hemlock growing within 5 feet of a ponderosa pine! This is a truly complex and unique forest association.

6.2 Reach the third set of falls after several switchbacks.

6.7 Cross canyon creek. Continue up to the lake along a cascading outlet stream.

6.9 Reach lower Canyon Creek Lake and ready yourself for a new challenge: 11 species of conifers growing in an unusually symmetrical form. Also, along the south central shore of the lake, there is a spectacular—almost pure—Brewer spruce grove. Just above that grove are some unusual, high elevation, Pacific yew.

Extensions: There are drainages and whitebark pine nearby. With a trip to Kalmia Lake or “El” Lake you will find them—on the ridgeline above—along with spectacular views of the high Trinity Alps.

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