

Independence Trail Parcel

The Independence Trail provides a place where visitors, especially those who are disabled, may enjoy the scenic beauty and the natural plants and wildlife of the South Yuba River Canyon. The origin of the Trail is an abandoned miners' ditch, previously known as the Excelsior Canal, which was used to transport water for hydraulic mining at Smartsville. Starting in 1854 and employing hundreds of Chinese workers, the Canal was completed in 1858. The Canal delivered South Yuba water to Smartsville, 31 miles away, for hydraulic mining. In 1969, John Olmsted, a docent at the Oakland Museum, discovered the rock-lined ditches, adjacent paths for ditch tenders, and wooden bridges (flumes) providing access over ravines. He had the vision to recognize that this unusual path could be the answer to a friend's lifelong dream: "Find me a level wilderness trail where I can reach out and touch the wildflowers from my wheelchair." After many tireless years and with help from numerous donors and hard-working volunteers, the country's first wheelchair accessible wilderness trail was created.

The main entrance to the Trail is located 6 miles north of Nevada City on Highway 49, shortly before the South Yuba River Bridge. There are two directions to choose from, both filled with spectacular views. Less than ½ mile from the entrance, the West Trail has an overlook of the Yuba River built on a roofed platform. Further on is a multi-tiered waterfall, with a switchback ramp leading down to the swirling waters of Rush Creek where California Newts can be seen proliferating in the Spring. The East Trail features many cliff-hanging flumes, a huge rock tunnel, and more views of the river and foothill landscapes. The configuration of the Trail remains unchanged from its original route and does not follow a circular pattern. Which-ever direction one decides to take, they must retrace their steps for the return trip.



Flume Converted to Trail



Ramps to Rush Creek Overlook