

Packsaddle Horse Campground

Tahoe National Forest, Yuba River Ranger District

Sierra Buttes, Gold Lake Highway area
Sierra County, northeastern California

by Robert Hadley Sydnor, Geologist and A.E.R.C. Trail Master; Member, Gold Country Trails Council

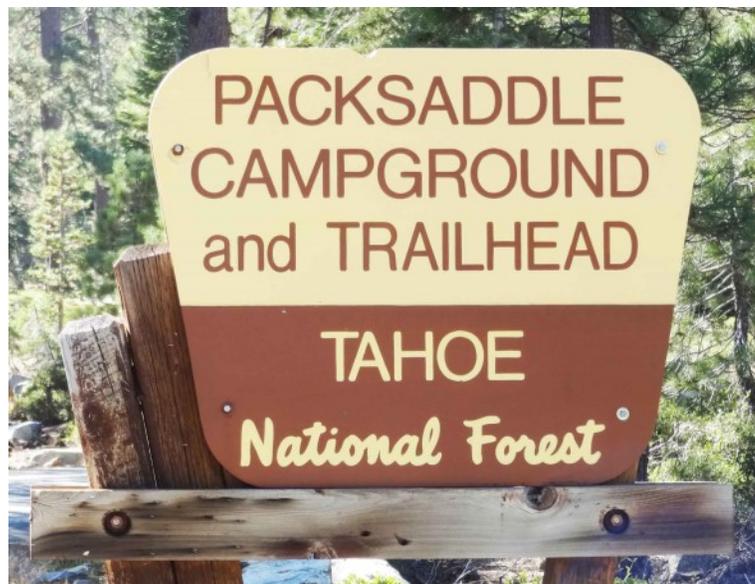
September 2018

Introduction and Location

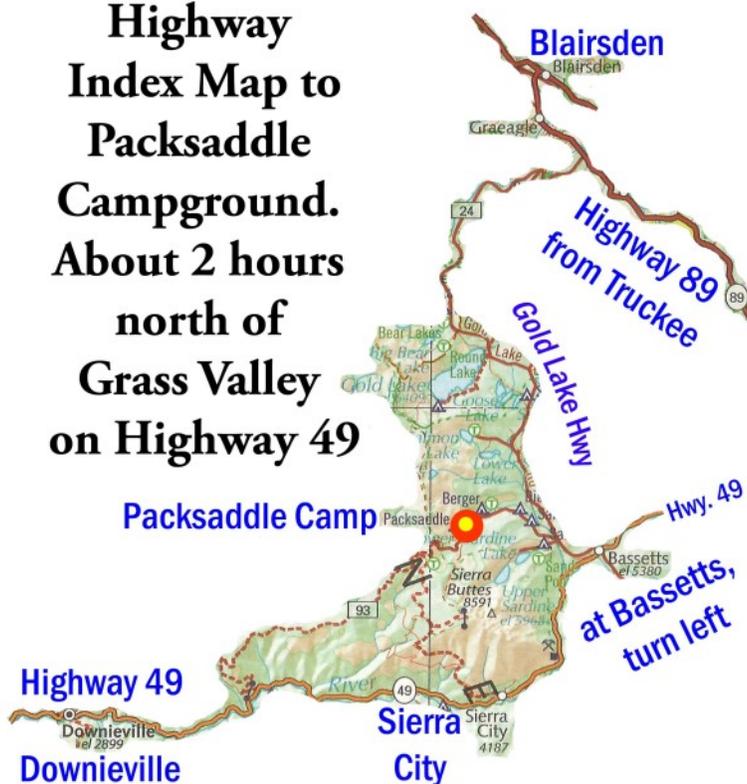
Packsaddle Horse Campground is located near the scenic alpine **Lakes Basin Recreation Area** within **Tahoe National Forest** in the northern Sierra Nevada Range. This equestrian campground is located about two hours drive north of Nevada City, Nevada County, and is accessed by **Highway 49** through **Downieville**.

The purpose of this report is to showcase this horse campground for riders from Sacramento, Placer, and Nevada Counties who enjoy riding at *higher elevations* along the **Pacific Crest Trail** in the summertime to avoid the seasonal heat of the Sacramento Valley.

This is an exceptionally scenic mountainous area, with the dramatic summit of **Sierra Buttes, elevation 8,591 feet**, rising 2,600 feet directly above Packsaddle Horse Campground.



Highway Index Map to Packsaddle Campground.
About 2 hours north of Grass Valley on Highway 49





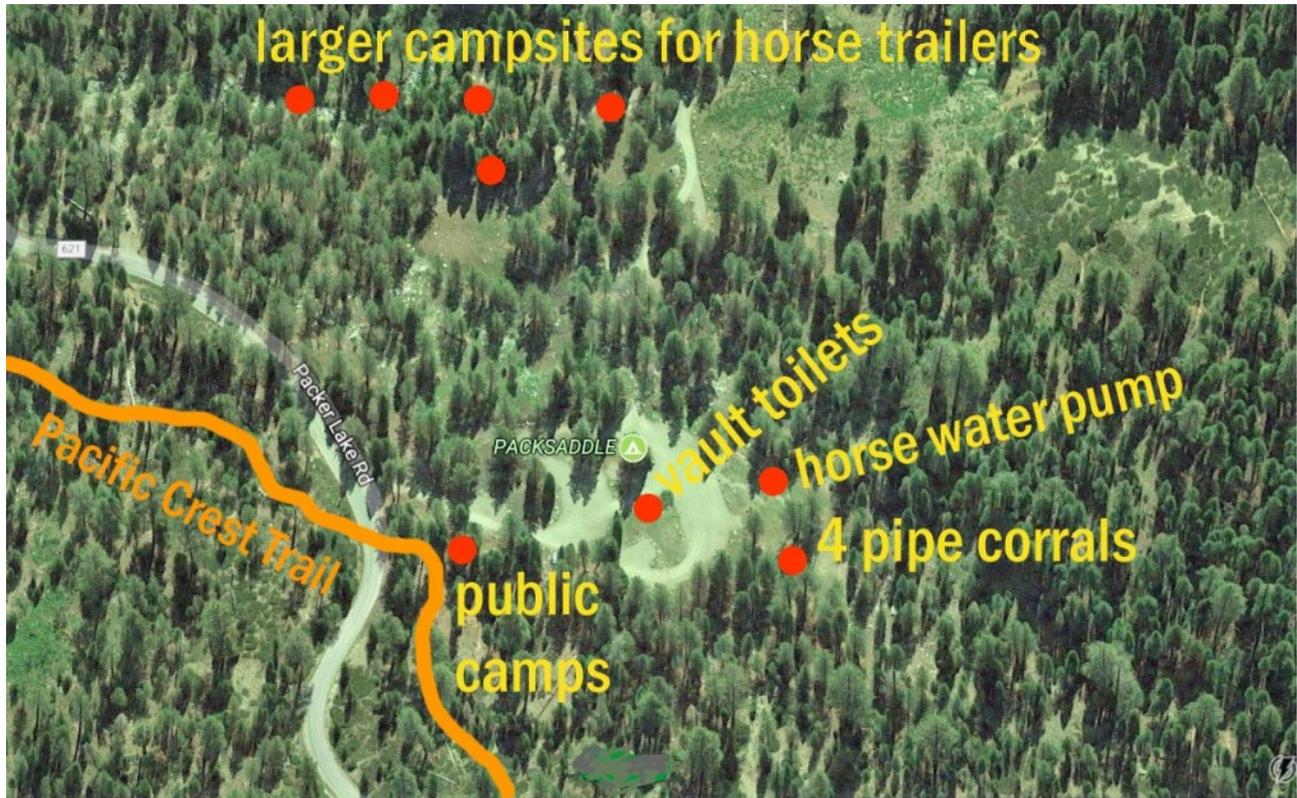
From the Grass Valley — Nevada City area, drive northeast on Highway 49, through the historic towns of Downieville and Sierra City, to the village of **Bassetts**. Turn left onto **Gold Lake Highway**, and proceed 1.7 miles to the Salmon Creek and Packer Lake Road (paved). There are several Scout Camps and Church Camps used in the summertime. Packsaddle Horse Campground is about 2½ miles from the main Gold Lake Highway.

The total distance from Nevada City to the Packsaddle Horse Camp is about **64 miles**, and the driving time for a truck and loaded horse-trailer is about **two hours**.



Turn onto Packer Lake Road





Aerial view of the Packsaddle Campground; North is to the left. The vault toilets are in the center circular road. The 4 pipe-corrals are at center-right. Family campgrounds are closer to the Packer Lakes Road. There are more campsites away from the main circle. Larger campgrounds for horse trailers are located in the upper-center of the aerial photograph under a shaded forest canopy. A prudent strategy for equestrians with large trailers is to temporarily park at the center circle, then walk around to pick the optimum horse campsite.



Non-Potable Water Well with Hand-Pump



Bring horse water buckets to the pump

Repair of the Pipe-Corrals by Volunteers from Gold Country Trails Council

On United Trails Day, October 14, 2017, several dozen volunteers from the Gold Country Trails Council, under the splendid leadership of Mary Johnson, spent a full Saturday working to repair the damaged pipe-corrals at Packsaddle Horse Camp.

The years of heavy winter snowbanks had taken their toll on the four large pipe-corrals. Most of the 4x4 wooden corner posts had deteriorated, but the green steel pipe-panels survived the years reasonably well.

With the aid of a generator and jack-hammer supplied by Mike Peckham and Laurie Sweeney, new holes were dug, and the wooden corner posts were firmly secured in concrete.

The four corrals were reduced slightly in size (now 16 feet square), so there is a safety-gap between corrals. The horses are now safely separated, making the corrals more user-friendly. The horses can no longer touch noses or tease each other during separate feeding times (by different owners from various stables).

The repair was a joint effort of trail user groups initiated by **U.S. Ranger Paul Hart** from the Yuba Ranger District of Tahoe National Forest.

GCTC members and other trail users that participated were: Nathan Alcorn, Gail Anderson, Jim Bowman, Willie & Sue Brusin, Rob & Cathy Chase, Ginny Dix, Laura Duncan, Jeff Foltz, Dan Goldsmith, Stacy Graham, Julia & Paul Hart, Randy Hopkins, Mary Johnson, Jet Lowe, Mary & Worth Lundin, Irv Mazur, Helen McDermott, Audrey Mitreolas, Carrie Morgan, Mike Peckham & Laurie Sweeney, Stephanie Ruff, Cathy Scott, Vicki Testa, Barry & Suzanne Vaccaro, Nikki & Mike Vasquez.

This totaled **32 dedicated volunteers** in observance of United Trails Day.

Gold Country Trails Council repairs the 4 pipe corrals at Packsaddle Campground, Tahoe National Forest 14Oct2017



Collage of six photographs by **Mary Johnson**, *Trail Crew Chief*; Gold Country Trails Council.

Four Horse Corrals at Packsaddle Horse Camp



Bear Boxes with Special Detached Wrench on a Lanyard

Horse feed, such as weed-free pelleted hay, corn-oats-barley, grain mixes, and special supplements can be safely stored in these over-sized bear boxes. Also use the bear box to store your own ice-chest filled with food.

This secure box also keeps away squirrels, porcupines, birds, and deer from eating horse food and tearing-up grain bags and packages. This is a public campground, so sometimes there are loose dogs that can cause mischief.

Notice the detached wrench on a lanyard cable. These custom-made, unusually large bear boxes were *locally* constructed by North State Welding in Nevada City.



Vault Toilets

Bring your own toilet paper.

Packsaddle Campground is a **fee-based** U.S. Forest Service campground at a cost of \$24 per site. Reservations are highly advisable in the busy late-Spring and the entire Summer vacation season. For reservations, go to www.recreation.gov

Each of the 16 campsites are numbered.

However, in the **Autumn off-season**, typically beginning early October, USFS posted signage states that there is **NO fee, but also NO services**. That means: no toilet paper. So, bring your own supplies..... and camp for several weeks. *(smile)*

Packsaddle Campground is at **elevation 5,960 feet**. This means that equestrians need to bring **horse blankets**, even in the hot summer months. Night-time temperatures can be quite cold for a previously sweaty horse.

There is **no cell-phone** service because of steep topography. For emergencies, there is a pay-phone booth at Packer Lake Resort, a short distance up Road 93, heading West. Or drive several miles south to the village of Bassetts where phone service is available.



Example of a larger campsite that can accommodate a horse trailer. This is campsite #6. Each campsite has a picnic table, a bear-box, and a fire ring.



driveway

**Campsite #8
shady and level**

In 2017, the Pacific Crest Trail was rerouted through Packsaddle Camp.



Equestrians will enjoy the rerouted Pacific Crest Trail, which is the improved Deer Lake Trail.

Packsaddle Campground



Pacific Crest Trail at Packsaddle Campground

The historic 1915 fire lookout on top of Sierra Buttes at elevation 8,591 feet. There is a 6-mile trail to the summit. For the last pitch, there are 180 steel stairs with guide-rails that were built in 1964. Equestrians can tie-off their horses, then complete the final ascent on foot. There is a stunning 360-degree panorama view on a clear day.



Sierra Buttes Fire Lookout, with 180 steel stairs leading to the summit. This 1916 fire lookout is no longer used by Tahoe National Forest, and the lookout is securely locked against vandalism.

The logistical supply for this historic fire lookout was very arduous. Everything had to be hauled in. Examples include non-refrigerated food (especially canned food, like pork&beans), beef jerky, drinking water, bags of rice, kerosene or white gas for lanterns, sponge-bathing from a washpan, laundry, and sanitation. Fresh food was a seldom luxury. Two large propane bottles with a 200-foot long small-diameter fuel pipe supplied the propane cook stove. There is a lightning rod on the roof. Water was supplied by melting snow in white enamel dishpans from snowbanks several hundred feet below, then portaging the melt-water in jugs to the lookout.

In the modern era, searches for fires in the aftermath of lightning storms are performed by fixed-wing aircraft.

Hundreds of sturdy hikers ascend the 6-mile trail, with 1,800-foot elevation gain, to the summit each summer for the splendid views on a clear day.

On the East side of the lookout balcony with steel railing, there is a vertical cliff of about 300 feet.