

The North Fork of the North Fork American

by way of

The China Trail, and Lost Camp

The China Trail, from Lost Camp to the North Fork of the North Fork American, is one of the nicest little trails in Tahoe National Forest. It is about a mile long and descends 1300 feet from the trailhead to the river. Access is by a series of unmarked dirt roads, rough in places, from near Blue Canyon.

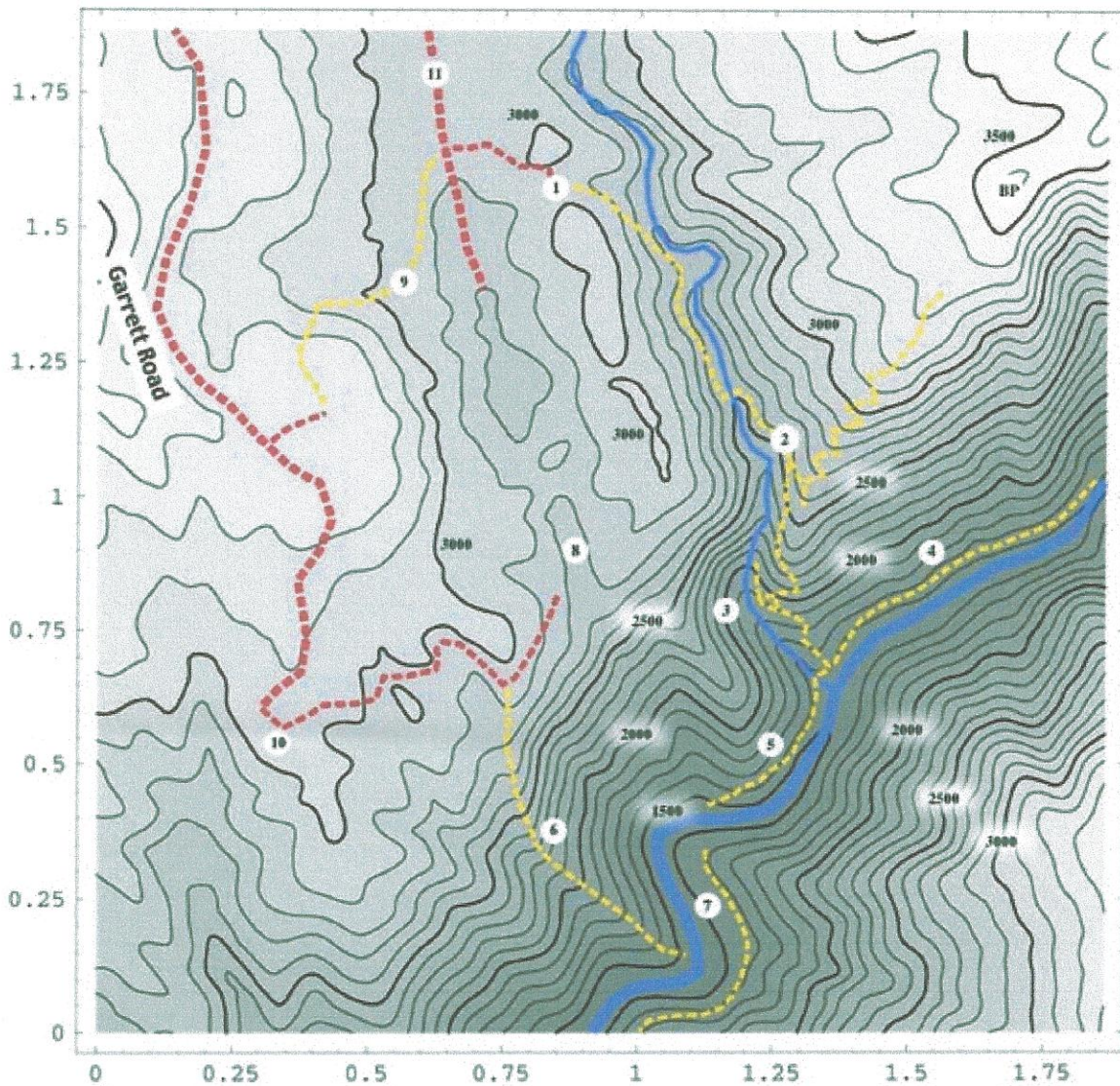
Like many historic trails around the North Fork American, this trail is at risk. Much of it has already been destroyed by logging, on the Sawtooth Ridge side of the river. At Lost Camp, the trail begins on private lands, seemingly owned by the lumber company, Sierra Pacific Industries. I would like Tahoe National Forest to make a special effort to acquire the SPI lands at Lost Camp, in order to secure public access to this historic trail. Short letters to the Forest Supervisor would be helpful. Refer to the Lost Camp Trail to the North Fork of the North Fork American, and ask that TNF try to acquire all of Section 23 in T16N R11E. Address the letters to

Steven Eubanks
Forest Supervisor, Tahoe National Forest
631 Coyote Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

Some additional points might be, that the site of Lost Camp itself is of historic interest and importance, being a ghost town from the late 1850s, and that the trail itself is also of historic importance, and gives access to a very wild and beautiful canyon. The North Fork of the North Fork was considered for designation as a Wild & Scenic River, but Tahoe National Forest advised against this. The Environmental Protection Agency made these comments in 1996:

SUMMARY: EPA expressed environmental objections to the minimal protection and designation of exceptional ecological areas and the use of less protective classifications for acknowledged wild segments. EPA urged the Forest Service to designate the Downieville complex or to actively seek Research Natural Area or Special Interest Area designation for this exceptional, biologically rich area and for reconsideration of the North Fork of the North Fork American River, North Fork of the Middle Fork American River, Fordyce Creek, Middle Yuba River, and the upper South Yuba River for designation into an ecosystem watershed

Canyon Creek, Gold Run Diggings South, *and vicinity*



The map above depicts some of the roads and trails near Canyon Creek, the southern reaches of the Gold Run Diggings, and nearby portions of the North Fork American river and canyon. Contours are at 100-foot intervals with bold contours every 500 feet; the numbers along the bottom and left are in miles. The numbered locations are as follows:

1. Head of the Canyon Creek Trail at Potato Ravine Pass.
2. Waterfall View, where the trail to the Blasted Digger Overlook and Bogus Point forks off. Gorge Point is another quarter-mile down the trail to the south. Bogus Point itself is labeled

"BP."

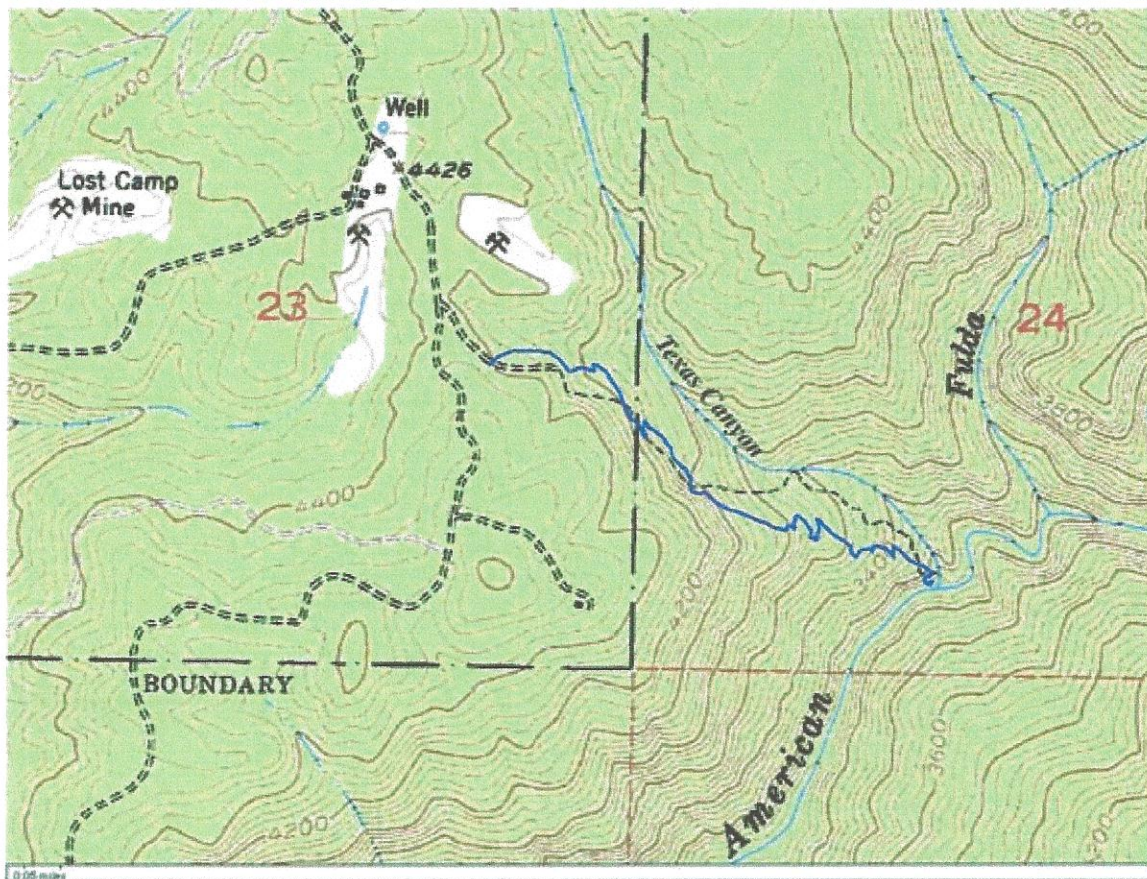
3. The Terraces, with the trail to the Big Waterfall.
4. The High Old Trail upriver.
5. The High Old Trail downriver, reaching Indiana Ravine, across from Pickering Bar.
6. Pickering Bar Trail.
7. Pickering Bar, and the old trail coming upriver from Ford's Bar.
8. The Secret World; a hydraulic mining pit; site of the Mill Claim, and terminus of the Indiana Hill Ditch. This is where gold was discovered in the Eocene gravels, in the spring of 1852. I sometimes call it the Indiana Hill Pit, but that name causes confusion, since the Big Pit of the Gold Run Ditch & Mining Company, to the north, is partly embraced by the actual Indiana Hill Claim.
9. The Paleobotanist Trail, from The Bluffs near Garrett Road, across the diggings to the Main Diggings Road.
10. Approximate location of the BLM gate at the end of Garrett Road. The road continues down to the head of the Pickering Bar Trail and to the Secret World.
11. The Main Diggings Road. This road goes all the way north and east to the Dutch Flat exit on I-80, and has access roads coming in from the Gold Run exit, and from the eastern Gold Run exit area, as well.

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management strategy.



The China Trail begins in Section 23, T16N R11E. The blue line represents the true course of the trail, as GPSed using a Garmin 12 on June 23, 2001. This map is a portion of the Westville 7.5 minute USGS quadrangle. Blue Canyon is to the northwest, Emigrant Gap to the northeast.

The History of Lost Camp. Lost Camp is the ghost of a ghost town, with nary a single building left standing. It flourished, very briefly, in 1858 and 1859, and several hydraulic mining pits surround the town site. There is some evidence of mining work continuing in the Depression era. From the November 13, 1862 *Dutch Flat Enquirer*, in which an occasional correspondent relates news and historical information about the mining regions of Placer county, I excerpt the following:

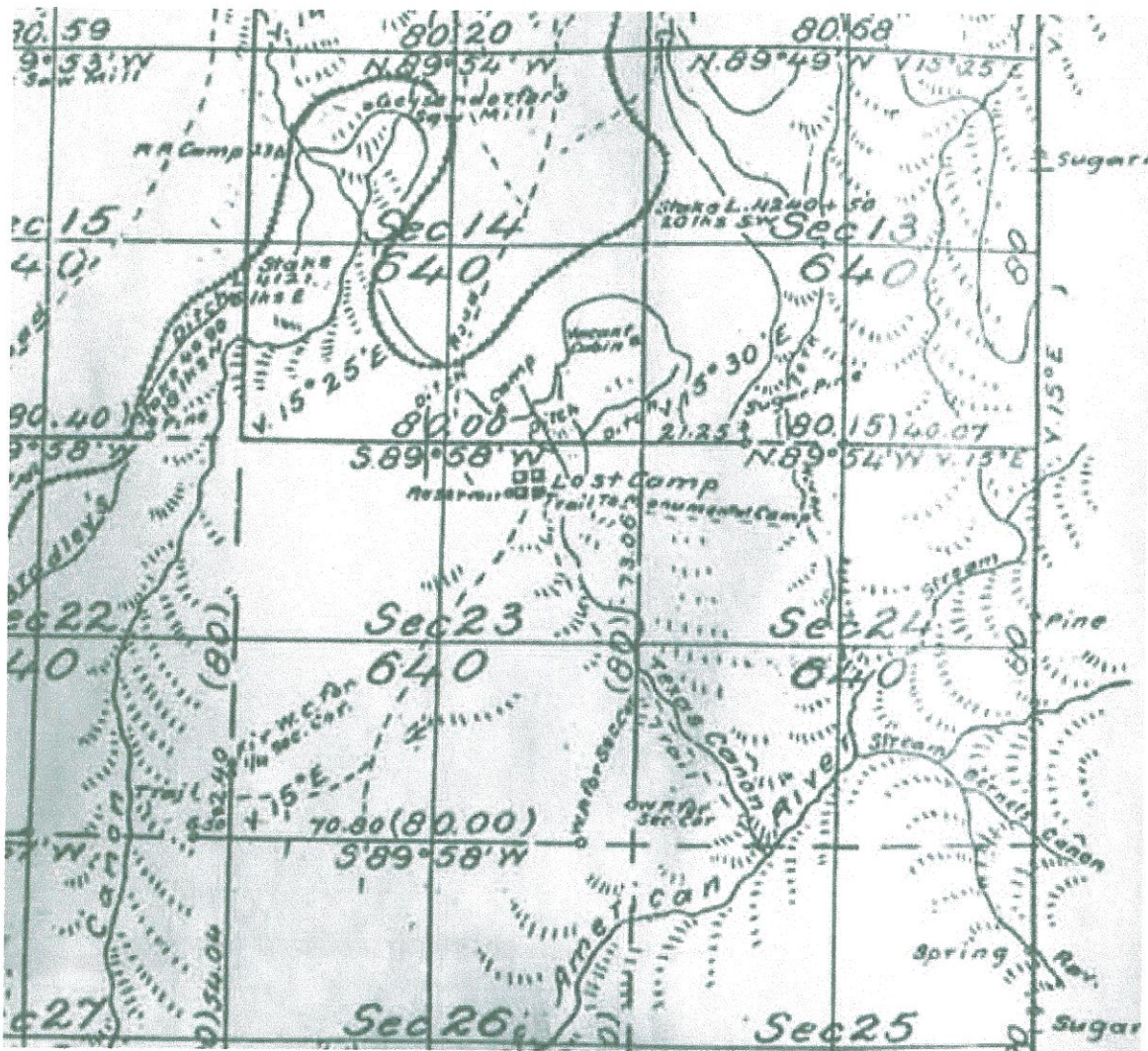
Lost Camp. This Camp was established in the early days of California and derived its name, as I am told, from an emigrant train having encamped at this place during a severe snow storm, and being scarce of provisions, a party started out in search of "grub" and were unable, for some days, to find the spot where their unfortunate comrades were actually starving to death--hence the name--Lost Camp. This Camp lies about ten miles in a northerly direction from Dutch Flat. The road, most of the distance, is good, and can be rode over by wagon from six to seven months in the year. There are some four or five small valleys of fine agricultural land, better soil I have not seen in the State, through and along-side of which this road passes; one farm or ranch which contains 160 acres, and is owned by Mr. J.L. Herbert. There has been a considerable quantity of fruit raised in

this section this year, but the main product has been potatoes, of which product, I am told, three ranches will furnish in the neighborhood of 150 tons.

There has been considerable mining done at Lost Camp, but from some cause, yet unknown, no great amounts have been realized. This Camp is pretty well deserted at present. The cabins (about twenty), of the first quality, and presenting quite a new appearance, are nearly all tenantless. There are but two families residing here, Mr. Gillson and Mr. Coyn, who appear to enjoy the life in a "Woodland Cot" very contentedly. There is but one of the many hydraulic claims (Mr. Harkness') to be worked this winter, and it promises a large return for money and labor expended upon the works, as he owns his own ditch which furnishes an overabundance of water. The single feature of water alone, when we calculate 400 inches a day at 15 cents per inch making \$60 per day, \$350 per week for water savings, we have quite a dividend on this commodity alone. This claim, so I am informed by Mr. Gillson, is now about ready for water, the "telegraph" up, flumes and sluices arranged, etc. Mr. Pause and partner are working in one of the small runs, and are taking out from \$8 to \$18 per day to the man. The gold is coarse and of fine quality.

There is one other important fact connected with this locality. The residents hereabouts have arranged to have a trail cut so as to shorten the distance from that place to Onion Valley, besides making it easier for man and beast to make the trip. It is also quite certain that a trading post will be established at this point next spring, which will materially add to the importance of this place.

The above deserves a few remarks. The story of the lost emigrant train seems likely to be a garbled rendition of the Donner Party, and of the Forlorn Hope party, whose exact route towards Johnson's Ranch has never been established. Some researchers believe the Forlorn Hope party may have passed near Lost Camp. There were other stories told about how Lost Camp got its name. The road from Dutch Flat to Lost Camp would be, in part, the Old Emigrant Road, a branch from the Donner Trail which followed the Dutch Flat Divide down from Emigrant Gap. The Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road had not yet been constructed, and the railroad was four years away. Finally, the trail to Onion Valley would be that depicted in part on the 1866 General Land Office map of Township 16 North, Range 11 East, and labeled "Trail to Monumental Camp." See below.



The China Trail is that shown paralleling Texas Canyon

Of the two books I have in print about the history of Dutch Flat, one, the *Dutch Flat Diary of Isaac Tibbetts Coffin*, contains his 1863-64 diary, written while he was living near Texas Hill. Coffin was an avid Mason and walked to Dutch Flat once a month for his Lodge meetings, often by way of the China trail through Lost Camp (although he does not call it the "China" trail). Coffin also mentions the miners at Monumental Camp, which presumably was on or near Monumental Creek, a tributary of the East Fork of the North Fork of the North Fork of the American River. Coffin also mentions Mr. Coyn. The trading post must never have realized success, for in 1864 Coffin and his mining partners were relying on mule trains from Dutch Flat for most of their provisions.

The Geology of Lost Camp. The railroad tracks above Lost Camp and west of there, as they pass Blue Canyon, Shady Run, and Casa Loma, often approximately mark the contact between the very old slates and metamorphic rocks of the *Subjacent Series*, from the young volcanics and fluvial deposits of the *Superjacent Series*. At Lost Camp, however, the existence of a fragment of Eocene river channel pushes this contact well below the tracks. The youngest formations--andesitic mudflows of Pliocene age (the Mehrten Fm.)--and the underlying rhyolite volcanic ash of Miocene

age (the Valley Springs Fm.) are passed as one descends from I-80 towards Blue Canyon. There are even some Quaternary glacial deposits atop the ridge near the Blue Canyon Airport.

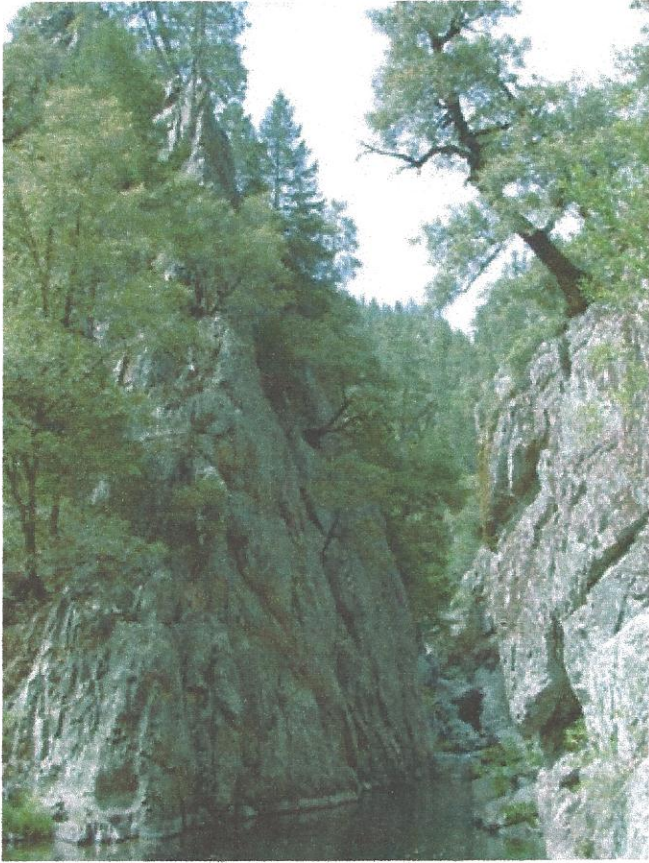
At Lost Camp, river gravels guessed to be Eocene in age, or about 55 million years old, are exposed. I write, "guessed," because no direct fossil evidence that I know of has ever been collected at Lost Camp. However, the "signature" preponderance of rounded cobbles of quartz, so notable at Gold Run, Dutch Flat, You Bet, and other hydraulic mining areas located on the system of Eocene river channels, is also evident at Lost Camp. It is likely that this channel is that which reappears farther west at Blue Bluffs, Shady Run, and Hogback (where the railroad crosses a pass between Canyon Creek and the North Fork), and is a tributary of the Nary Red channel. The Nary Red joins the Dutch Flat channel between Dutch Flat and Alta.

Below the Eocene gravels of Lost Camp are the slates and metasandstones of the Shoo Fly Complex. These are the oldest rocks of the Sierra, dating to about 400 million years ago. They are tilted up almost 90 degrees, so that the original bedding planes are upright, and folded into tight kinks here and there. The gorge section of the North Fork of the North Fork--just upstream from where the China Trail meets the river--has fine water-polished and glacially-smoothed exposures of the Shoo Fly complex.

Ice overflowing from the shallow South Yuba basin entered the North Fork of the North Fork American from several places. The ice ran right over the top of Quartz Mountain and down the East Fork of the North Fork of the North Fork; it ran down the main North Fork of the North Fork itself; and it also came down Fulda Creek.



Where the China Trail meets the river, at the foot of Texas Canyon, seems to be the Ladybug Capital of the Universe.



The Pool of Cold Fire guards the entrance to the Gorge section of the North Fork of the North Fork. It is about a quarter to a half mile upstream from the China Trail.
