



Mount Rose Campground is one of many in the Tahoe basin.
PHOTO/OLIVER GUINAN

Camp follower

Mount Rose Campground

I made my escape for a late-season camping trip at Mount Rose Campground in the middle of rush hour on a Friday, and still my drive up the mountain took only 45 minutes. I arrived at 5:30 p.m. and had liberty to set up camp almost wherever.

Mount Rose Campground sits directly across from the Mount Rose Summit Trailhead, just behind the sweeping hairpin turn at the base of smaller Slide Mountain. The campground is in great shape, especially considering the beat-down each winter brings. (This year, the campground did not open until nearly mid-July due to last season's heavy winter.) There are 26 campsites, almost all of which are well canopied by the surrounding conifer forest. In addition to trailer space and picnic tables, the single, double and triple family sites include well-leveled spaces big enough to pitch large tents. Most of the sites push straight back into loveseat sized granite boulders on Slide Mountain's west slope—fragments of the Sierra Nevada batholith. The rest overlook the northernmost edge of the Tahoe Meadow, which although not wet enough to make the campground a haven for pesky gnats or mosquitoes, is lush and supports an array of sub-alpine grasses and wildflowers.

Of the 26, there are five walk-in only tent sites on a small ridge about 100 yards up the hill from the group sites. These are my favorite and are the only places you can sit, as I did while writing this, and look east down Galena Creek Canyon all the way to where its sturdy Jeffrey Pines meet the gaping wooden skeletons of soon-to-be

South Reno homes far in the distance. This bird's-eye view, plus the petrol brown cloud of smoke and dust languishing over the torrid desert that separates Reno and Pyramid Lake reminded me why I had come in the first place. Above my head, the sky was clear. The wooded periphery framed Mount Rose like an Ansel Adams negative that, after development, had been colored in a bath of evening sunlight. Even the occasional sting of campfire smoke in my throat and eyes felt refreshing and made me think of Edward Abbey:

"Mountains complement desert as desert complements city, as wilderness complements and completes civilization."

The campground's only downside is also the only reason we Renoites can access Lake Tahoe with great ease: Mount Rose Highway. Unfortunately, the sound of cars racing back and forth between Reno's finest watering holes and Tahoe's finest waters is audible. However, I found the noise negligible. During the day I was busy exploring; at night the comforting sound of wind in the trees mixed with the reduced the highway sounds to nothing but white noise.

Ultimately, the light noise and requirement that dogs must be kept on leash (no surprise here, dogs must be leashed in all national forests) are small inconveniences. The Mount Rose Campground, equidistant from Reno and Incline Village, makes a great home base for daytrips exploring the Tahoe Basin. There are four trailheads accessible from the campground, including the Mount Rose Summit Trail, The Tahoe Rim Trail and the Tahoe Meadows Trail, which is located within the campground itself. There are three well-kept pit bathrooms, and fresh water is available at a few spigots in the vicinity. □

Mount Rose Campground has closed for the season, but you can still do some late-season camping at places like Camp Richardson and Fallen Leaf Lake.

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