



Extended Mount Judah Loop

Length

7.1 mi

Elevation

Gain	Loss	Min	Max
1,376 ft	1,378	7,061	8,240

Donner Pass PCT Trailhead

39.3145, -120.3280

You'll find the Donner Pass PCT Trailhead along Old Donner Summit Road. This trailhead is generally oriented for southbound hikers who want to head up towards Mount Judah and beyond.

Park perpendicular to the road, in the signed area near the intersection with Lake Mary Road. Please observe the signs as this is a road for residences in the neighborhood also.

The PCT is at the bend in the road.

If this parking lot is full, head over to the .

Parking

Parking Free Overnight

Trip

The Mount Judah Loop is one of the most popular hikes near Lake Tahoe, and for good reason. This variation leans into what makes the area truly extraordinary: alpine views, history and more time on the Pacific Crest Trail. You'll walk through Sugar Bowl, cross paths with one of the great stories of 19th-century American history at Roller Pass, and be rewarded with some of the finest open ridge walking in the northern Sierra Nevada.

From the trailhead, the PCT heads south and immediately gets to work. The lower switchbacks are genuinely rocky, and our trail crews have put serious effort into this section, placing stone steps and reinforcing the tread to slow erosion and make the trail more sustainable.

As you gain elevation, the terrain opens up. Below you to the west, Lake Mary comes into view. Farther out, Summit Valley spreads toward the horizon, and beyond it, Lake Van Norden — which is more meadow than lake most of the year — stretches wide and flat across the valley floor.

The PCT soon crosses under the Mount Judah chairlift. It's a peculiar pleasure of the PCT, walking through ski infrastructure in summer. The runs are quiet, wildflowers crowd the edges of the trail, and the views open further with every step.

At the first junction with the Mount Judah Loop, most hikers turn to climb the peak itself doing the loop clockwise. But stay on the PCT a bit longer, and you'll understand what you'd have missed. The trail continues south to Roller Pass, where a metal interpretive marker tells the story of what happened here in the mid-1800s. An arm of the California National Historic Trail crosses the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail here.

Roller Pass takes its name from the method emigrants used to haul their wagons to the top: the oxen were driven up first, then hitched together with chains and ropes stretched over a log laid across the lip of the pass, to winch each wagon up the final steep pitch, one at a time. The pass was discovered in 1846 as an alternative to the punishing route over what is now called Donner Pass, where wagons had to be fully disassembled and hauled up in pieces. Look over the edge at the steep slope dropping into Emigrant Canyon and you'll find yourself recalibrating your sense of what they were willing to endure.

The Donner Party, famously, missed the turnoff.

Our variation to the Mount Judah Loop adds two more miles from here on. Continue south on the PCT from Roller Pass toward Mount Lincoln. The views here are among the best on this section of the trail: south toward Anderson Peak and Tinker Knob, west into the North Fork of the American River. Turn around at the southeast shoulder of Mount Lincoln, or wherever the views and your legs agree the day is done. If you're like us, you'll make plans to one day continue south to Olympic Valley or beyond.

Return the way you came. At Roller Pass, pick up the upper portion of the Mount Judah Loop. That trail climbs to the 8,243-foot summit of Mount Judah before curving back to the trailhead. If you have the energy, take a side trip to Donner Peak. It's a worthy addition with its own sweeping views of Donner Lake and the Truckee basin to the east.

Remember to check for closures

Visit closures.pcta.org or download the PCT Closures App before you head out on the trail.

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