

Historic 1852 Foresthill Stagecoach Road

Confluence area, North Fork of the American River Auburn State Recreation Area, Placer County, California

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June 2011

Introduction

The 2.1-mile historic 1852 Foresthill Stagecoach Road is located within the Confluence area of the North Fork and the Middle Fork of the American River, Auburn State Recreation Area, Placer County. There are some excellent equestrian trails (the Western States Trail across No-Hands Bridge, and Olmstead Loop) in this area that are well-known to horsemen. The purpose of this equestrian trail report is to describe an alternate, all-weather, multi-use trail in the Confluence area that horsemen might want to consider during the autumn, winter, and spring seasons. The Confluence is heavily used in the summer by $\pm 900,000$ visitors annually, so horsemen typically ride at higher elevations in the Sierra Nevada during the summer months to avoid the congestion and seasonal heat. This is a wintertime alternative.



Stagecoach Trailhead at Gate 137 — North Fork of the American River

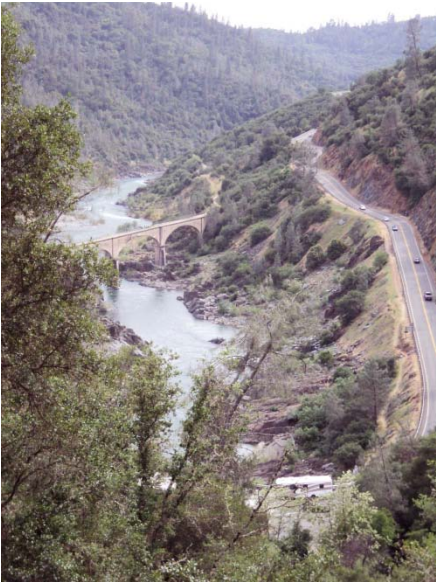
From Auburn, descend on Highway 49 to the Confluence area. Unfortunately, there is no equestrian assembly area, but in the off-season there is limited opportunity for horse-trailers to be parked parallel along the gravel shoulder of the **Old Foresthill Road**, just east of the Highway 49 bridge. This is best achieved on weekdays (Monday-Friday), and the off-season (autumn, winter, spring) when it is too cold for river-rafting, swimming, and family picnics along the river. The Confluence area is heavily used by hikers and bicyclists.

The three nearest equestrian assembly areas are: ① the Auburn Overlook (= the finish-line for the Tevis Cup), ② the Olmstead Loop at Cool, and ③ the Foresthill Divide Loop trailhead.

The trailhead is at Gate 137, with two restrooms and a bulletin board with maps and historical photographs of early bridges across the American River. Horses are allowed on the historic Foresthill Stagecoach Road, but *not* on the Lake Clementine Trail (the pedestrian & bike trail along the east-side of the North Fork).



Looming on the skyline is the 730-foot high Foresthill Bridge, the highest bridge in California, and the 4th highest in the United States. The \$13 million Foresthill Bridge was completed in 1973 to accommodate the deep reservoir that *would have* been created by the (unbuilt) Auburn Dam. In 2011, the bridge was undergoing a \$74 million seismic retrofit.



The 2.1-mile historic Foresthill Stagecoach Road ascends quite steeply (at a 7-percent grade) with an all-weather graveled surface, so it is a rigorous work-out for horses. Because of the steep elevation gain (≈ 770 feet), there are spectacular views of the Confluence of the North Fork and the Middle Fork of the American River, including the historic 1912 No-Hands Bridge.



At left, a bench with a splendid view of the Confluence. In the distance is a trail-post that marks the Manzanita Trail (only for hiking and biking; not safe for horses). At right, foliated Jurassic metamorphic rocks were excavated by hand (using picks, shovels, and black powder) in 1852 to construct the historic Foresthill Stagecoach Road. This toll-road was used for mule-drawn wagons to bring supplies to gold-miners in Foresthill and Michigan Bluff.



At left, Gate 138 marks the western (uphill) trailhead of the Foresthill Stagecoach Road at Russell Road, Auburn. The elevation at Russell Road is $\approx 1,350$ feet. Turn your horse around here, and return 2.1-miles down the road to the Confluence (elevation ≈ 580 feet). At right, the public parking lot on Russell Road can accommodate only ten vehicles (no horse-trailers), so this is not an equestrian assembly area. There is no restroom, no facilities, and no water at the Russell Road public trailhead in a quiet residential neighborhood.

