

Pioneer Express Trail to Avery's Pond

North Fork of the American River, Pioneer Express Trail Milepost 47.5

Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, Placer County

by Robert H. Sydnor, M-AERC, LBHA Trails Committee July 2011

Springtime is a splendid opportunity for horseback riding amidst the wildflowers at Avery's Pond, located about 1.2 miles north of the Rattlesnake Bar Equestrian Assembly Area, at Milepost 47.5 of the historic Pioneer Express Trail. LBHA riders will enjoy scenic views of the full reservoir of Folsom Lake along the North Fork of the American River.



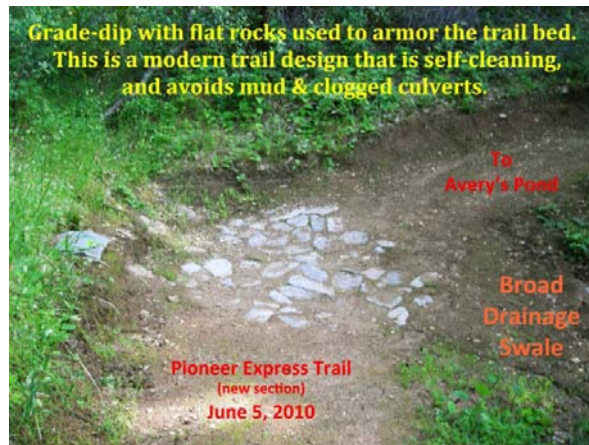
Wildflowers along the trail: Purple vetch, red & yellow aster, and yellow sticky-monkey.

Directions to Staging Area at Rattlesnake Bar

From Auburn-Folsom Road, drive eastward on Newcastle Road, then descend steeply onto Rattlesnake Bar Road. Enter Folsom Lake State Recreation Area at the toll booth, then continue 0.4 mile on a paved road to the large gravel parking lot that is the equestrian assembly area at Rattlesnake Bar. The parking lot has one outhouse, but *no* water for horses. The historic Pioneer Express Trail passes through here, so follow trail signs leading northward.

Pioneer Express Trail to Avery's Pond, about 1.2 miles

This trail bed is in very good condition. A 2,900-foot segment of the trail at Milepost 47 was relocated and rebuilt by California Dept. Parks & Recreation over a period of several months in Spring 2010. The new route avoids a steep cross-slope with a 80-foot drop to Folsom Lake. The new trail was reopened on June 23, 2010. Two new wooden bridges were constructed.



At left, boulders of quartz diorite of the Penryn Pluton of Cretaceous age. At right, a rolling grade-dip on the new trail-bed.



View along the out-sloped Pioneer Express Trail near Milepost 47 and a new timber bridge.



Approaching from the south, riders will see this wonderful stone water-trough that continually spills outward, so it is nearly self-cleaning. The water-trough runs continually from Winter to early Summer, but in drought conditions of a severe Autumn, the trough may be seasonally dry. A timber bridge was constructed by Eagle Scout Paul Perkins in September 1994 as a Boy Scout project. Beyond the bridge are blackberry vines, so please carry clippers and help clear the trail of these brambles. The bridge crosses Avery Creek that descends from the west side.

Avery's Pond

The historic pond was constructed in the 1880's by Ira Avery, a pioneer rancher with extensive orchards in this area. The coordinates are 38.8302°North and 121.0915°West, with an approximate elevation of the pond surface at 530 feet, about 20 feet above the high-water shoreline of Folsom Lake. The pond was constructed probably by mule-drawn scrapers with a east berm (above the river), and the west side is excavated into natural alluvium. The historic 1854 North Fork Ditch also traverses along the west side of the American River, and small diversion ditch provided water into Avery's Pond. A number of seasonal floods eroded both the ditch and the pond, which were then repaired by earth-scrappers and buckets of alluvium from the river. There were no bulldozers and dump-trucks 130 years ago! The pond is lined with fine-grained alluvium (silt, clay, and fine sand), but it evidently leaked considerably.

Ira Avery, orchardist and rancher

Ira Avery came to the goldfields as a 15-year old boy from Maine. In 1874, he married the daughter of of a local rancher, Seney Boles Avery, and they raised three children. Mrs. Avery was an educated pioneer lady and taught public school for 12 years. Ira Avery had a diverse career as a supplier to the gold mines of the Mother Lode (principally lumber and fruit, with some sheep ranching). Avery's ranch consisted of about 117 acres, of which 40 acres had 1,500 fruit trees (pears, persimmons, cherries). *Source: W.B. Lardner & M.J. Brock, 1924, History of Placer and Nevada Counties, California: Historic Record Company, p. 567-570.*

The key to the success of the fruit orchard was a year-around reliable source of water, Avery's Pond.



At left: There are six picnic tables on the north side of Avery's Pond, and these also have the best shade.

At right: A view eastward across Avery's Pond, showing the berm that separates the pond from the American River (*in far distance*). Horses cannot be ridden on the path on the *west* side of Avery's Pond because of a weak narrow timber bridge at the inlet creek (=southwest corner). So picket your horse on the north side, eat lunch at the picnic tables, then walk the full perimeter of the pond to gain the full views of the river. Avery's Pond is now a splendid natural habitat for birds and wildflowers, and a great spot for horsemen to eat lunch along the Pioneer Express Trail. Bring your own drinking water in your saddlebags. There are no outhouses, since this is a remote area and not accessible for service trucks.

