

Even the winter holds outdoor promise



Now we've gotten to the heart of wintertime, when Jack Frost usually shrouds us with his icy air and we huddle inside our homes awaiting the return of comfortable afternoons. As we've run the gamut this year, from rainy days stacked upon rainy days to fogbanks that won't budge from their perches at the lower elevations, you might want to find a place where you can enjoy some outdoor fun.

If there is one thing the Gold Country has a lot of it's hiking trails. From one end of the foothills to the other, pathways that are remarkably well maintained meander through our midst, crisscrossing our hillsides. This week, Dean Fleming takes a look at the best lower-elevation hikes that you and yours can enjoy on any sunny day.

These are the sorts of outdoor adventures that could present a fantastic family outing. The drive to get there is fairly short (eliminating the "Are we there yet?" backseat banter); your younger hikers will wear themselves out chugging along ahead of mom and dad exploring nooks and crannies (giving mom and dad a quiet evening!); and a lunch under the spell these landscapes cast is sure to sustain everyone's souls until you can all get back outside and enjoy the warmth and beauty of the next season.

There is plenty to do indoors – just check the Happenings calendar – but you can still step outside to view our little slice of heaven while it's green and lush and the creeks and streams are gurgling along. Just slip on a couple of layers of clothing and wander through the wonders; everywhere you look the view is different than it is during the summertime. Step on out there and return that spring to your step!

Walk on!
Mike Taylor
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Welcome to Sierra Lodestar

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6 AMADOR IN ACTION

7 SLUICE BOX

8 SOLID GOLD FISHING

10 LIGHT ON THE PATH

11 FOOTHILL FLAVORS

14 JENNY'S KITCHEN

14 CALAVERAS CHEESE LADY

16 THE REC ROOM

17 LIFE'S LITTLE NUGGETS

18 ART MATTERS

22 HAPPENINGS



19

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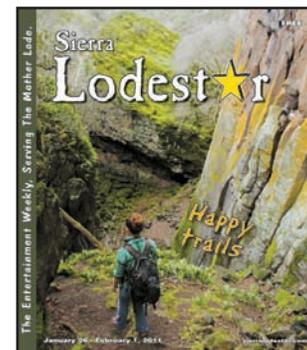
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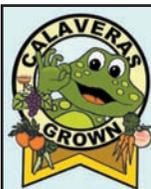
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On The Cover



Andrea Batt makes her way into The Grotto on the Table Mountain Trail in Tuolumne County in this Dean Fleming photo. Take a look inside to discover the hikes that might get you outdoors no matter what the season.



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