

Rowton Peak/Razorback Ridge Geology Hike

Thursday, June 18, 2026

- LOCATION:** Serene Lakes basin, Soda Springs, CA
- DIFFICULTY:** Moderate / Strenuous at moderate pace. Trailhead is at 6,821' elevation and trail is a mixture of dirt and rock with a few steep climbs and descents.
- HIKE DISTANCE:** 7.5 miles.
- ELEVATION GAIN:** 1,072 feet
- PACE:** Moderate with stops for geology discussions and photos.
- DESCRIPTION:** The hike will utilize the Royal Gorge and Walter & Esther Hewlett Rim trails to ascend Rowton Peak, Razorback Ridge, and continue on multiple trails before returning to the trailhead. Views along the way include Serene Lakes, Royal Gorge, Granite Chief Wilderness, and several volcanic rock formations.
- This hike climbs a “*layer-cake*” of volcanic rocks beginning with 25-million-year-old (myo) welded tuffs of the Valley Springs formation which are overlain by 10 myo mudflows and river gravels of the Mehrten formation. Because of the lofty elevation, this sequence of rocks was also scoured by glaciers during the Donner Lake glacial period roughly one million years ago.
- TRAIL CONDITIONS:** The lower portions of the trail are in a mixed conifer forest, with seasonal wildflowers. Mosquitos are active in shaded areas and the portion of the hike along Razorback Ridge and Rowton Peak is exposed to sun.
- TRAVEL TIME:** 1 hour 15 minutes each way (approximately 70 miles) and \$10 donation suggested for driver.
- LUNCH:** Will be along Razorback Ridge overlooking the Onion Creek watershed which is a glaciated amphitheater. Please bring your own lunch.
- RESTROOMS:** No restrooms at the trailhead or on the trail. We will stop at the Gould Park rest stop (Cisco Grove Exit), on the north side of I-80, on the way up and down.
- WHAT TO BRING:** **PLENTY OF WATER!** Recommend 50 oz. /1.5 liters minimum for 5-mile hike – more if longer. Electrolytes suggested. Higher altitudes are dehydrating even when cool.
- Hiking boots/shoes, hat, sun protection, insect repellent, small first aid kit. Wind/rain jacket always advisable in the mountains. Trekking poles recommended.
 - ID (driver's license), health insurance card, emergency contact / phone number.
 - Extra pair of shoes to change into after hike and a plastic bag for muddy/dusty hiking boots to keep your driver's car clean.
- LEADER/SWEEP:** Mark Smelser (lead), TBD (sweep)
- MEETING TIME:** 7:00 am at Orchard Creek rows 12-14, departure by 7:15 am.

DRIVING

DIRECTIONS: Highway I-80 east from Lincoln to Soda Springs (Exit 174). Right turn on Donner Pass Road. Speed limit 25 mph through town.
At blinking light (corner of Donner Pass and Soda Springs Road), make right turn on Soda Springs Road. Continue up hill, watching speed through residential area.
Pass Hoelter-Hall Trailhead and continue straight on gravel road to trailhead (Silverado Trail sign on left) parking on the right.