

Stagecoach Trail (#36 on the ASRA Topo Trail Map)



Distance: 2 miles; 1½ hrs. up, ¾ hrs down (hiking)

Difficulty: Moderate up, easy down

Slope: 8% avg; 23% max. (see below)

Trailhead / Parking: (N38-55-010; W121-02-207)

Trailhead is at confluence area, 1¾ miles south of ASRA Park Headquarters. Take Hwy 49 from Auburn south to Old Foresthill Road at the bottom of the canyon. Continue straight for ¼ mile and park on the left. Trailhead is just beyond parking area at green gate near kiosk and port-a-potty.

Description

This historic trail offers great, bird's eye views of the confluence area and American River canyon. Its gradual gradient offers a good aerobic workout on the way up, climbing 800 ft in 2 miles from the confluence to the top where it intersects Russell Road. The history of this trail dates back to the mid-1800s (see sidebar). The trail climbs through riparian corridors as well as some typical foothill chaparral areas. Wildflowers bloom in the spring in several areas. There is little shade, so take water and sunscreen on hot summer days.

The trail begins at the confluence area by the information kiosk and heads towards the high Foresthill Bridge (see sidebar). It is marked by a

“Stagecoach Trail to Russell Road” sign. The first ¼ mile is the steepest, but it provides good views of the North Fork American River, at several spots on the right.

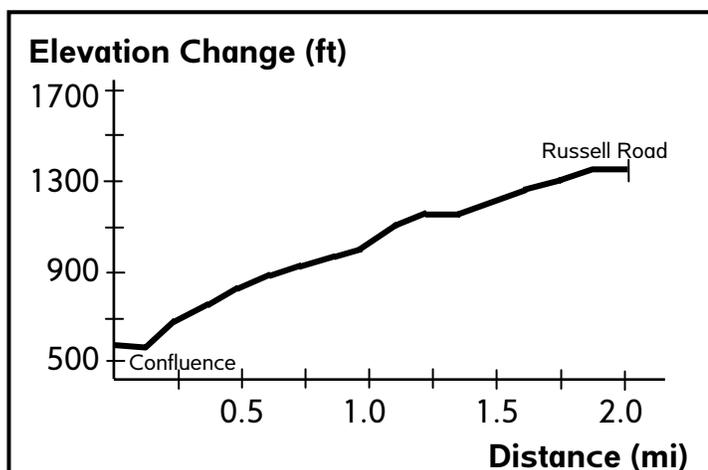
At about ¼ mile, the trail turns sharply left at the “Stagecoach Trail” sign. As you pause to catch your breath, you can almost hear the echo of harness bells on horses and the clatter of stagecoaches that once traveled this road.

A short distance up the trail, the graceful arches of Mt. Quarries RR Bridge come into view on the left. A little further along, the appearance of ponderosa pine, big leaf maple, interior live oak, blue oak, willow, and Himalayan blackberry bushes signal the first of several riparian corridors on the trail. Here you can see water running year round, unlike other spots on the trail where it is only visible in winter and spring.

A little further on, a narrow unmarked trail known as Tinker's Cut-off intersects on the left. And a little further on, a sign marks Flood Trail on the right. At the 1 mile point, a bench provides an opportunity to enjoy a great view of the confluence area and Mt. Quarries RR Bridge. Turkey vultures are often seen here, flying low overhead, riding the thermals.

A few paces beyond the bench is the narrower, unsigned Manzanita Trail (for hikers and bikers), which intersects Stagecoach Trail on the left and meanders through manzanita and coyote brush down to the ASRA Park Headquarters.

Continuing up Stagecoach Trail, you pass open areas where California poppies cover the slopes in early spring. You also pass more riparian corridors, one of which has a small waterfall in winter and spring. Just before arriving at the end of the trail, you pass Upper Stagecoach Trail as it intersects on the right. At the top of the trail, pause to catch your breath and enjoy the photos displayed in a kiosk before returning to the confluence back down Stagecoach Trail or via an alternate route (see below).





Did You Know? – Stagecoach Trail was originally a toll road built in 1852 known as Yankee Jims Turnpike and later as Old Stagecoach Road. The original road led to a toll bridge over the North Fork American River just upriver from Clarks Hole, and from there, to the towns of Yankee Jims and Iowa Hill. In the late 1800s, Yankee Jims was a popular mining area, and Foresthill was yet to be developed. In 1875, the original toll bridge was replaced with a wooden covered bridge (pictured in the kiosk located at the top of the trail, off Russell Rd). In the 1870's, tolls on the bridge ranged from 6¢ for a cow to 50¢ for a horseman and \$1 for a wagon and two horses. There were numerous stagecoach hold-ups along this trail, most notably in 1873 and again in 1880.

Did You Know? – The 2,248-ft long Foresthill Bridge was designed to span the reservoir that would have resulted had the Auburn Dam been completed. (Work on the dam was discontinued in 1976.) Water was expected to reach the top of the cement piers, but today the bridge towers 730 feet above the river, making it the tallest bridge in California. It was opened in 1973 with much fanfare and has been featured in numerous movies and commercials, and it has been the site for many stunts – both legal and illegal.

Alternate Return Routes (see separate trail guides)

About ¼ mile down the trail, take Upper Stagecoach Trail to the left (hikers and bikers only). This narrow trail is not as well graded as Stagecoach Trail, but it offers nice canyon views from two wooden chairs at the top of the hill. A short distance beyond a bench, with a view of the Foresthill Bridge, is a fork and sign noting Flood Trail straight ahead and Stagecoach Trail to the right. Turn right and descend through a grove of manzanita, or “little apples” – tart but edible fruit popular with the animals that live in the area. On the left, remnants of a stone foundation, along with non-native plants such as lilac, a field of periwinkle and apple and fig trees provide evidence of a former home site. Continue straight past the sign for Mossy Rock Trail on the left until you come to Stagecoach Trail. Turn left to return to the confluence area.

Just ahead on the right, the unmarked and narrower Tinker's Cut-off Trail offers an alternate return route for hikers. While the top and bottom are a bit steep, it is a cooler hike on hot summer days as it switchbacks through a dense, tree-lined riparian area with a small pool and year-round waterfall.