

The Feather River Scenic Byway

By

Ruth Ann Angus



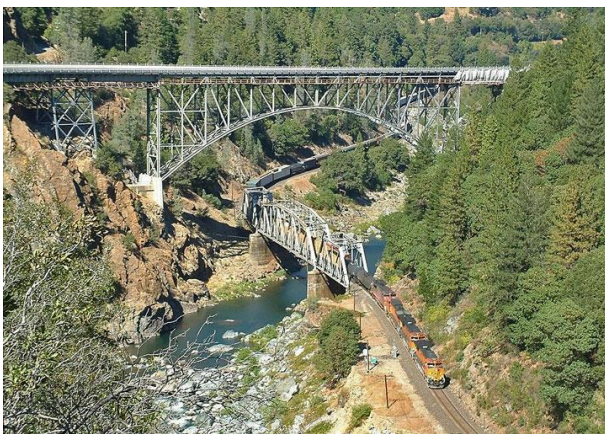
Beautiful in spring, awesome in fall color, the Feather River Scenic Byway never disappoints. This road follows the north fork of the Feather River through sheer granite cliffs with drop-offs of thousands of feet to the river below. The scenery along the route is outstanding as you drive the twists and turns and climb over what is the only pass in the Sierra Nevada range of mountains that remains passable even in winter months.

Historically this route was carved out by James Beckwourth in 1851 and was so named, the Beckwourth Pass. The Western Pacific Railroad built their line in 1909 on the sides of the cliffs along this same route. Even today you will see long snake-like rows of freight cars being pulled along by diesel engines across the chasm from your roadway.

The route begins out of Oroville where the Feather River was dammed to make Lake Oroville, one of the largest lakes in California. The lake is a popular house boating lake as well as a bass fisherman's paradise. There is a Visitor Center at the Lake Oroville State Recreation Area.



Once on SR 70 you begin the drive up the granite gorge of the Byway. Many hydroelectric plants were built along the river during the early part of the 20th Century.



As you climb you will pass through tunnels carved out of the mountains and cross over bridges spanning the river. The most famous of the bridges is at Pulga where the highway bridge crosses over the Western Pacific Railroad Bridge. Lumbering is still an active industry and you will find heavily laden lumber trucks going up and down the road.

At Belden there is a rest stop with displays of historical information about the route and the gold mining days. Here too is an access point for hikers to the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail that extends from Canada to Mexico.



Just beyond the town of Paxton the route connects with State Route 89. Heading north will bring you to the shores of Lake Almanor, nicknamed Little Lake Tahoe. With 52 miles of shoreline, Lake Almanor is the largest lake in Plumas County and is a popular recreation area.

Continue to Chester on the north shore where a road leads off into Lassen Volcanic National Park. Route 36 connects to County Road A13 on the east shore of the lake and then connects to State Route 147 that leads back to State Route 89.



If you choose to skip the route around Lake Almanor, a right turn from Paxton onto State Route 70/89 will take you to Quincy, the Plumas County Seat. This is an historic town and you will find historic buildings, shops and restaurants in the downtown area. There is a self-guided walking tour beginning at the Plumas County Museum located behind the County Courthouse on Main Street.

From Quincy proceed east to Portola to visit the Western Pacific Railroad Museum. Here you will see an extensive collection of rolling stock, locomotives, and other railroad memorabilia. You will even have a chance to drive a diesel locomotive.



State Route 70 continues on to the Nevada border at Hallelujah Junction. But for an interesting route home, retrace your miles back to the Gold Lake Highway turnoff for the small town of Graeagle in the Mohawk Valley on the Middle Fork of Feather River.



From Graeagle County Road A-14 extends five miles to Johnsville and into the 4,500 acre Plumas-Eureka State Park located at the base of Eureka Peak where \$25 million in gold was taken by hard rock mining in the 1800s. There is an indoor-outdoor museum here with vintage gold mining equipment and you will be able to see inside the Eureka Tunnel.

Back on the highway you will drive through beautiful mountain scenery that in fall is ablaze with color. There are numerous lakes that were formed by glaciers; the largest is Gold Lake where there is a boat landing and horse stables. From the highway you will have an excellent view of the Sierra Buttes, jagged peaks that are reminiscent of the Swiss Alps.

Gold Lake Highway connects with State Route 49 that follows the North Fork of the Yuba River through a series of gold mining era towns and ends at Grass Valley and State Route 20 which will lead you back to State Route 70 at Marysville.



Roadways: From Oroville, CA – take State Route 70/149 to the Scenic Byway exit to State Route 70 north to State Route 89 to Lake Almanor, to State Route 36 to State Route 147 and back to State Route 89 to SR 70/89 to Portola (Portola Railroad Museum). From Portola take the turnoff to Graeagle (Gold Lake Highway) down to Gold Lake and the Sierra Buttes to State Route 49 on to Grass Valley on State Route 20. SR 20 connects to SR 70 at Marysville.