

Desert Creek Trail

Well, as for the truth, it wasn't a trail, but a bushwhack. And I wouldn't advise anyone to take it if they want a wonderful high Sierra type of jaunt. I took this hike as part of a conifer-logging effort. Desert Creek can be accessed from Highway 395 on the California side, and following Forest Service roads; or from the Nevada side near Smith Valley and the Desert Creek Ranch road.

I tasked myself with finding conifers on Desert Creek Peak in Nevada, near the California border, south of Lake Tahoe. I spent several trips looking for something other than the single-leaf pinyon pine and juniper which covered the area extensively. I had logged some lodgepole and Jeffrey pines at the bottom of the mountain that benefitted from the wetness of Desert Creek, but wanted to see if there were any other conifers other than the pinyon up on the dry mountain. In particular, biogeographer David Charlet wondered if limber pine existed there.

The trail started near Desert Creek and followed what was probably an old mine path up a steep ravine to the east. There was no water, and very little shade on the way up. It was dusty and dry on this early summer day. We saw plenty of small stunted juniper and single-leaf pinyon pine. The terrain was a lot of volcanic andesite rocks – they were very loose and made our gains less than efficient.

My son-in-law, Ray, a marine, and I scoured the area on the way up for the limber pine. I brought him along, not only for the good company, but thinking he could haul my old ass off the mountain if necessary! We spent the whole day trekking all over the miserable, brushy mountain. Ray and I ended up feeding the mountain some of our blood and skin on its sharp rocks and mountain mahogany. To make it worth our while, once on the top of the mountain, we marvelled at the grand view of the surrounding lands, as well as the spectacular Sierra Nevada. But alas, the only pine we saw was pinyon pine. David, in his 2020 book *The Mountains of Nevada* said of the trip: "We are now are relatively certain that there is no limber pine..." on the mountain.



Common lowland landscape, single-leaf pinyon pine and sagebrush



The top of Desert Creek Peak from the start of the "trail"



Jeffery Pine near Desert Creek



Desert Creek-there is no bridge across, so you'll have to wade, which can be difficult in the spring or late summer



Desert Indian Paintbrush-one of the few flowers we saw



On a ridge approaching the peak



A view of the Sierra from the top of the peak

