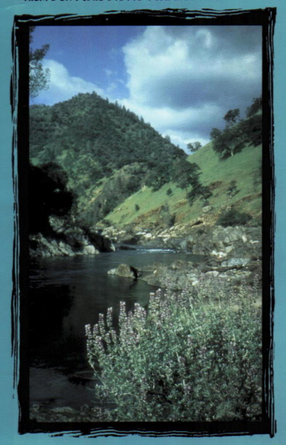
A Boating Trail Guide to the

Tuolumne Wild & Scenic River

from Don Pedro Dam to Yosemite National Park



Welcome to the Tuolumne River

This guide to the Tuolumne River is published by the California Department of Boating and Waterways in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, whose Groveland Ranger District manages 29 miles of the river.

The 1974 California Recreational Trails Act recognized the need to provide for increased recreational boating opportunities on California's rivers by designating specific rivers, including the Tuolumne, for study as boating trails.

The Tuolumne River has also been designated a Wild and Scenic River, under the 1968 California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Act provides that rivers possessing extraordinary scenic, recreational, fishery, or wildlife values shall be preserved in their free-flowing state, together with their immediate environments, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the state. The Tuolumne was added to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System on September 28, 1984.

This guide was designed to enhance the enjoyment and safety of visitors to the Wild and Scenic Tuolumne River, whether fishing, hiking the trails, enjoying the wildlife and wildflowers, picnicking, camping, or running the rapids.

Keep the River Safe and Clean

Haul out all litter and debris. Take only photographs, leave only footprints. Please respect the privacy of other people in the canyon.

Poison Oak
"Leaves of three, let it be"

Water Quality

Viruses, bacteria and protozoa can contaminate water in the wilderness. The most common sources of these pollutants are body wastes from humans and animals. Water can look, taste, and smell pure, yet still be contaminated. Remember to treat your water before drinking and practice good sanitation to prevent spread of disease. Boiling is considered the most reliable method of killing water-borne pathogens. Surface water should be boiled for at least three minutes. Disinfection chemicals and filters are also available, but those products must be chosen and used with great care if they are to be effective. Please dispose of human wastes and do all washing at least 100 feet from any water source.

Pete Wilson, *Governor*
Douglas P. Wheeler, *Secretary for Resources*
John R. Bañuelos, *Director*

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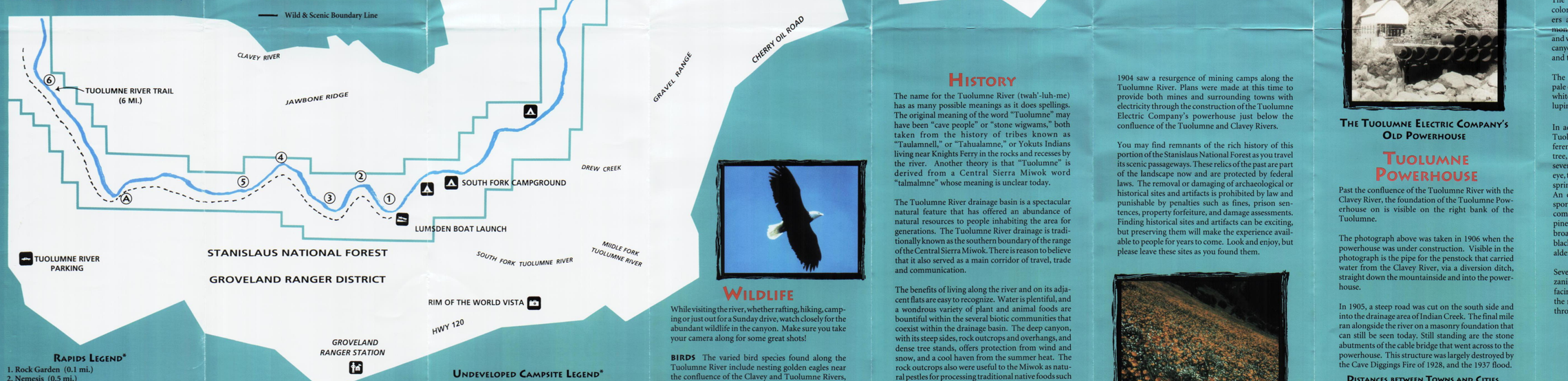
In Case of Emergency, call 911



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14. Pinball (17.6 mi.)

Note: All mileages are taken from Lumsden Boat Launch

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Undeveloped Campsite Legend*

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B. Clavey (2 sites) (5.5 mi.)
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L. North Fork (2 sites) (15 mi.)

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Wildlife

While visiting the river, whether rafting, hiking, camping or just out for a Sunday drive, watch closely for the abundant wildlife in the canyon. Make sure you take your camera along for some great shots!

Birds The varied bird species found along the Tuolumne River include nesting golden eagles near the confluence of the Clavey and Tuolumne Rivers, wintering bald eagles, water ouzels (dippers), common mergansers, California quail, dark-eyed juncos, great blue herons, scrub jays, Steller's jays, red-tailed hawks, turkey vultures, acorn woodpeckers, and a myriad of other avian species.

Mammals Common mammals seen along the river's edge include coyotes, skunks, black-tailed jack rabbits, mule deer, bats (which eat up to 500 mosquito-sized insects an hour!), and several species of squirrel. Less commonly seen species to keep a sharp eye out for are river otters, bears, beavers, and bobcats.

History

The name for the Tuolumne River (twah'-luh-me) has as many possible meanings as it does spellings. The original meaning of the word "Tuolumne" may have been "cave people" or "stone wigwams," both taken from the history of tribes known as "Taulamnell," or "Tahualamne," or Yokuts Indians living near Knights Ferry in the rocks and recesses by the river. Another theory is that "Tuolumne" is derived from a Central Sierra Miwok word "talmalmne" whose meaning is unclear today.

The Tuolumne River drainage basin is a spectacular natural feature that has offered an abundance of natural resources to people inhabiting the area for generations. The Tuolumne River drainage is traditionally known as the southern boundary of the range of the Central Sierra Miwok. There is reason to believe that it also served as a main corridor of travel, trade and communication.

The benefits of living along the river and on its adjacent flats are easy to recognize. Water is plentiful, and a wondrous variety of plant and animal foods are bountiful within the several biotic communities that coexist within the drainage basin. The deep canyon, with its steep sides, rock outcrops and overhangs, and dense tree stands, offers protection from wind and snow, and a cool haven from the summer heat. The rock outcrops also were useful to the Miwok as natural pestles for processing traditional native foods such as acorns.

Another resource of the river that became important in the late 1840's is gold. This treasure attracted a variety of ethnic groups with a common goal, and initiated a complex relationship between newcomers and natives, as well as between people and the environment. Miners' cabins dotted the Tuolumne River shores and slopes, and previously existing trails became thoroughfares. In late 1861 and early 1862, a series of torrential rains sent a major flood down the river leaving death, destruction, and illness in the remnant mining camps.

1904 saw a resurgence of mining camps along the Tuolumne River. Plans were made at this time to provide both mines and surrounding towns with electricity through the construction of the Tuolumne Electric Company's powerhouse just below the confluence of the Tuolumne and Clavey Rivers.

You may find remnants of the rich history of this portion of the Stanislaus National Forest as you travel its scenic passageways. These relics of the past are part of the landscape now and are protected by federal laws. The removal or damaging of archaeological or historical sites and artifacts is prohibited by law and punishable by penalties such as fines, prison sentences, property forfeiture, and damage assessments. Finding historical sites and artifacts can be exciting, but preserving them will make the experience available to people for years to come. Look and enjoy, but please leave these sites as you found them.

California Poppies in Tuolumne Canyon
Eschscholzia californica

The Tuolumne Electric Company's Old Powerhouse

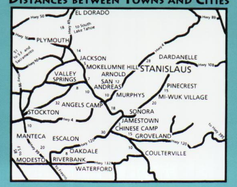
Tuolumne Powerhouse

Past the confluence of the Tuolumne River with the Clavey River, the foundation of the Tuolumne Powerhouse on is visible on the right bank of the Tuolumne.

The photograph above was taken in 1906 when the powerhouse was under construction. Visible in the photograph is the pipe for the penstock that carried water from the Clavey River, via a diversion ditch, straight down the mountainside and into the powerhouse.

In 1905, a steep road was cut on the south side and into the drainage area of Indian Creek. The final mile ran alongside the river on a masonry foundation that can still be seen today. Still standing are the stone abutments of the cable bridge that went across to the powerhouse. This structure was largely destroyed by the Cave Diggings Fire of 1928, and the 1937 flood.

Distances between Towns and Cities



Wildflowers

The Tuolumne River Canyon is well known for its colorful spring wildflower displays. Among the flowers are bright blue lupines, yellow seep-spring monkeyflowers, bright pink shooting stars, blue-eyed and white globe lilies. At times, the steep slopes of the canyon are ablaze with California poppies, fiddlenecks, and the sunflower-like goldfields.

The display of colors continues into summer with pale orange paintbrush, deep blue harvest brodiaeas, white mariposa tulips, yellow-and-pink harlequin lupines, and pink blankets of clarkias.

In addition to its colorful spring wildflowers, the Tuolumne River Canyon is also home to many different shrub and tree species. The California bay tree, with its prominent spicy scent, may be found at several locations in the canyon. The California buckeye, the first deciduous shrub to produce leaves in the spring, is common throughout much of the canyon. An evergreen tree, the California nutmeg, grows sporadically on the north-facing slopes. The more common coniferous trees include the ponderosa pine, sugar pine, incense cedar, and gray pine. The broadleaf trees in the Tuolumne Canyon include the black oak, canyon live oak, interior live oak, and the alder.

Several species of chaparral, including chamise, manzanita, and buckbrush, dominate the hot, dry, south-facing slopes of the canyon walls. Poison oak, one of the most widespread shrubs in California, is found throughout the canyon.

Western Redbud
Cercis occidentalis

Fire Restrictions

Check with the Groveland District Office for campfire permit and current restrictions. Always build campfires in a safe place. Be sure all fires are completely extinguished before leaving. Wood and charcoal fires are allowed only in fire pans. As firewood becomes more scarce, gas or charcoal stoves are recommended.

Smoking is prohibited during times of extreme fire hazard. When smoking is permitted, before lighting up, make at least a 3-foot clearing around you. Be sure matches have been completely extinguished. Put out smoking materials in the dirt, never on a stump or log.

Required and Recommended Safety Devices and Emergency Procedures

The Tuolumne River should be considered an "advanced" river run, for experts only.

Never overestimate your ability or underestimate the river. Most accidents occur when boaters attempt waters more demanding than their skills. Unfamiliar rapids shoiuld be scouted and portaged, if in doubt.

Low water temperatures and adverse weather conditions increase the risk of hypothermia. Wetsuits are recommended during these periods.

River flow levels change and hazards vary with them. Be alert. In high flows, stay clear of overhanging branches and partially submerged obstacles.

Always allow the craft ahead of you to pass through a rapid before you begin your approach. This will avoid a double disaster if the leading craft encounters trouble and blocks the channel.

If your boat capsizes, stay on the upstream side, preferably at the end of the craft. This allows better visibility. More importantly, it prevents the possibility of being pinned against obstacles. Hold on to the floating boat unless you can increase your safety by abandoning it.

If rescue is not imminent and water is intolerably cold or perilous rapids are near, swim with the river current to the nearest landing.

If you find yourself in the water alone, float downstream feet first. This will enable you to fend off from rocks and other obstacles and reduces the likelihood of head injuries and foot entrapment.

Never attempt to stand up in fast-moving water. Your foot could become entrapped between obstructions on the riverbottom and the force of the moving water could hold your body under.

Carry an extra set of dry clothing and shoes in a sealed bag.

Boating and alcohol can be a **DEADLY MIX**. Physical and mental confusion can begin almost immediately after even moderate drinking. Boating skills decline as alcohol begins to reduce depth perception, peripheral, color and night vision, balance and coordination, reaction time, comprehension, and concentration.

After only a few drinks, boaters begin to lose the ability to judge their degree of impairment and become overconfident, taking more risks. The effects of alcohol result in the inability to react safely to a dangerous boating situation.

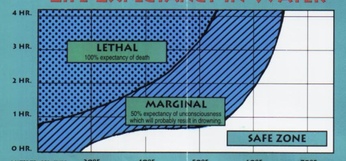
All persons should wear a Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device while on the river. Types I, III and V are recommended while Type II is not recommended. Protective foot gear is always advisable, and a helmet is recommended in swift rapids.

Hypothermia

The Tuolumne River is fed by melting snow. Water temperatures can be as low as 38 degrees even though the air temperature is in the 80's. Hypothermia can be a danger. Be familiar with the symptoms and prevention. Left untreated, hypothermia can cause death! It is the number one killer of outdoor recreationalists.

SYMPTOMS: If a person exposed to cold water exhibits uncontrollable shaking, slurred speech, memory lapses, stumbling, or drowsiness, he or she is hypothermic and needs assistance. The victim may appear confused or combative. Do not trust the victim's judgment of his or her condition, but make your own assessment, and seek treatment if warranted.

Life Expectancy in Water



Based on a Pan American Airways Emergency Procedures Training Manual Chart

TREATMENT: Seek medical aid as soon as possible. In severe cases, rewarming can be dangerous and should only be attempted by medical personnel. If medical help is delayed or unavailable, or in mild cases, the best treatment is to get the victim out of wet clothing and into dry clothing, put victim into a sleeping bag with another dry person as a heat donor. Give warm drinks. *Do not give alcohol.* If possible, build a fire to provide warmth.

Pets

Pets are welcome in the National Forest, but they must be kept under control at all times. Pets allowed to roam freely can frighten or injure wildlife and disturb other forest visitors.

Camping

Camping is permitted only in designated sites. There are three campgrounds in the Wild and Scenic Tuolumne River corridor. There is no fee at these campgrounds. The camping season runs from April until October. Access is via a five-mile-long steep dirt road; making these campgrounds unsuited to trailers or motorhomes. Nearby fishing areas offer salmon, rainbow trout, and brown trout. The elevation of the campgrounds is 1500 feet. The weather ranges from mild in the spring to hot in the summer.

The **LUMSDEN BRIDGE CAMPGROUND** is located alongside the river 3 miles upstream from the Lumsden Campground, with 9 sites, 2 vault toilets, stoves, and tables.

The **LUMSDEN CAMPGROUND** is located on the Tuolumne River about 14 miles from Groveland. It has 11 sites, with stoves, tables, and 4 vault toilets.

The **SOUTHFORK CAMPGROUND** is located a mile upstream from the Lumsden Campground near the confluence of the South and Main Forks of the Tuolumne River. It has 8 sites, 2 vault toilets, stoves, and tables.

Fishing

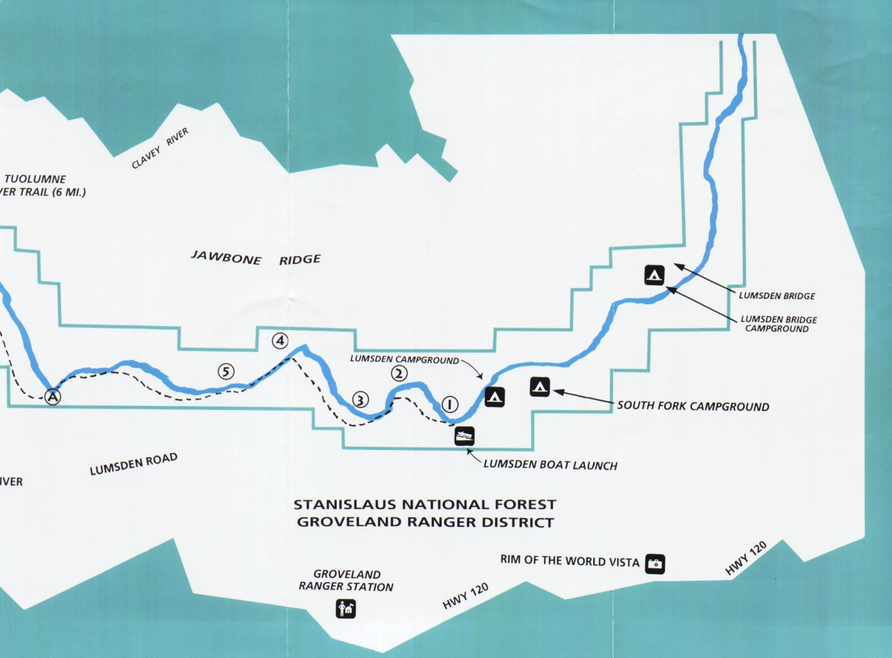
A valid California state fishing license is required to fish in the Stanislaus National Forest. Make sure you pick up a current fishing regulation guide. Fishing season on the Tuolumne River is from the last Saturday in April to mid-November.

The Tuolumne River is stocked by the California Department of Fish and Game with salmon, rainbow trout and brown trout. Fish should not be cleaned nearer than 100 feet from streams or lakes. Scatter the remains away from the river, in an inconspicuous location.

Bears

Although most large mammals avoid anything smelling like humans, bears are an exception. The simple rule is: stay away from bears and DO NOT harass them.

If bears are a problem, hang all food, toothpaste, etc., from a tree, at least eight feet from the ground and four feet from the trunk. Set your camp up at a reasonable distance from the food, and allow absolutely NO FOOD in the tent; a tent will not stop a bear!



- Developed Campground
- Vista Point
- Boat Launch
- Trailhead/Parking
- Ranger Station
- Wild & Scenic Boundary Line

Tuolumne River Rafting

BEFORE GETTING UNDER WAY Always leave information regarding your travel plans, including time and place of entry and exit, number of persons in your party, emergency phone numbers, etc., with a reliable person who will notify authorities if you are overdue. Don't forget to notify that person when you return.

Never Boat Alone!

Boating in a team of at least two boats is recommended for the Tuolumne. If one boat has a problem, the other can assist or go for additional help. Flow information may be obtained at the Groveland District Office. It is recommended that you contact this office prior to your trip to learn of any last-minute changes in river conditions. For taped information on flow levels for the Tuolumne or other California rivers, call (916) 653-9647.

Whitewater enthusiasts love the 18-mile stretch down the Tuolumne River, a trip of nearly constant white water through lands administered by the Stanislaus National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management. Rafters launch at Lumsden Boat Launch and travel through the steep-walled canyon to Wards Ferry Bridge.

Experienced rafters can float on their own. Permits are required from May 1 through September 30, and may be obtained from the Groveland District Office; or, you can arrange a guided trip with one of the commercial rafting companies which are authorized to operate on the river.

The California Whitewater Advisory Board has rated this 18-mile run as Class IV-V whitewater with over 25 major rapids at higher flows. During the period of spring run-off, excessive flows increase the risks and level of difficulty and no boating should be attempted.

CLASS IV - ADVANCED Difficult (highly skilled with several years experience with organized groups). Long rapids, waves powerful and irregular; dangerous rocks; boiling eddies; passages difficult to reconnoiter; inspection mandatory first time; powerful and precise maneuvering required.

CLASS V - EXPERT Very difficult (for teams of experts). Extremely difficult, long, and very violent rapids following each other almost without interruption; riverbed extremely obstructed; big drops, violent current, very steep gradient; reconnoitering essential but difficult.

Be sure your whitewater skills are equal to Class IV and V difficulty levels. Weigh your judgment with the thought that you and your team may be forced to swim any rapid you cannot boat. If you are unsure of your skills, then it is strongly recommended that you take the river trip with an experienced whitewater guide.

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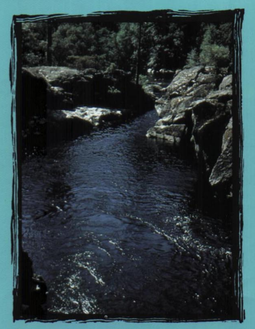

Narrows between Preston Falls and Early Intake

Hiking

There are many hiking trails in the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Corridor, with beautiful vistas, spectacular wildflowers and wildlife.

Make sure you wear appropriate clothing and comfortable hiking shoes, and carry plenty of water, a map, etc. For your safety, tell someone where you are going and when to expect your return. Use the **"PACK IT IN, PACK IT OUT"** philosophy so the next visitor can enjoy the area.