

# Foresthill foray

Not far from Sacramento in Placer County, explore giant trees and Gold Rush history

By Ann Marie Brown  
Photographs by Jean Jarvis

If the heat of July leaves you hankering for cool air and conifers, hit the road and head for the Foresthill Divide, a 400-square-mile wooded ridge that separates the North Fork and Middle Fork American Rivers, just 50 miles northeast of Sacramento.

The adventure begins east of Auburn, where Foresthill Road gets very scenic. First you'll cross the North Fork via the 730-foot-high Foresthill Bridge. Seventeen miles farther is the town of Foresthill, bounded on the east by the wildlands of Tahoe National Forest.

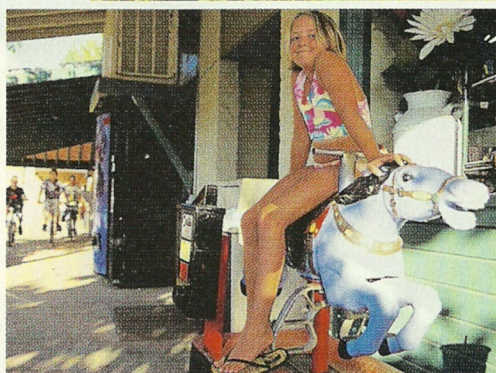
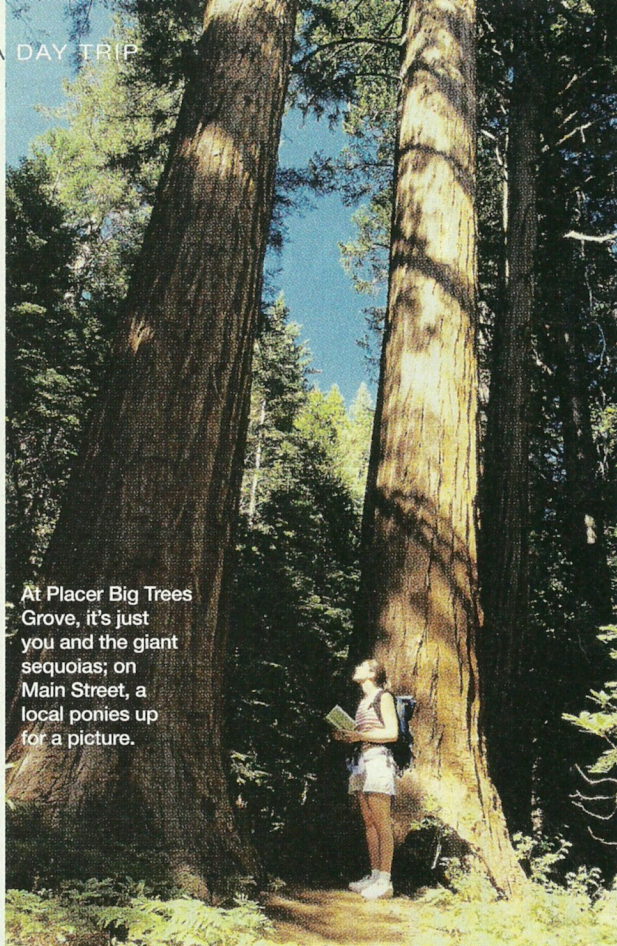
"We have four seasons here, yet none of them are severe," says Harry Shuger, a local shop owner who moved here from the Bay Area for the mountain scenery and mild climate. "We're above the fog and the smog but below the snow line. We get the best of everything."

Visitors seem to agree, especially those inclined toward outdoor recreation. Lakes, rivers, and miles of trails lace the Foresthill Divide. Campers and anglers flock to Sugar Pine and French Meadows Reservoirs. Equestrians and hikers hit the Western States Trail.

If you have only an afternoon to spend here, fill your picnic basket in Foresthill, then set out on Mosquito Ridge Road (by Robber's Roost Steak and Seafood). A 24-mile drive leads to the turnoff for **Placer Big Trees Grove**, where a half-mile interpretive trail shows off six giant sequoia trees.

From the Big Trees turnoff, back-

At Placer Big Trees Grove, it's just you and the giant sequoias; on Main Street, a local ponies up for a picture.



track 5 miles on Mosquito Ridge Road to Peavine Road, then turn north and drive 5½ miles on gravel to the **Grouse Falls** trailhead. An easy half-mile tromp leads to an overlook platform with a grand view—not only of the falls cascading hundreds of feet down a precipitous slope but also of the vast, tree-filled canyon of the north fork of the Middle Fork American River.

Back in town, visit the **Foresthill Divide Historical Society Museum** on Harrison Street and the antiques shops on Main Street. All contain relics from Foresthill's boom years—in the 1870s, this was one of Placer County's largest

towns, with more than 125,000 feet of mining tunnels producing more than \$10 million in gold.

More local color can be found at Main Street's **Forest House Historic Hotel**, once a bordello and gambling hall and now a family-run lodge, and across the street at the **Ore Cart Steakhouse and Red Dirt Saloon**, where customers toss their peanut shells on the floor and feast on steaks grilled on a mining ore cart. Cap off your tour of the town at **Guns 'n' Lace**, where ammunition is sold alongside intimate apparel—a fitting conclusion for those who crave more than just mountain scenery. ♦

## The facts

**DIRECTIONS:** From I-80 in Auburn, take Foresthill Rd. exit, drive 17 miles.

**CONTACT:** Foresthill Divide Chamber of Commerce. (530) 367-2474. Foresthill Ranger District of Tahoe National Forest. (530) 367-2224. Foresthill Divide Historical Society Museum. Summer weekends noon-4. 24601 Harrison St.; (530) 367-3988. Forest House Historic Hotel. From \$60. 24590 Main St.; [www.foresthouse.com](http://www.foresthouse.com) or (530) 367-2840. Guns 'n' Lace. 24617 Foresthill Rd.; (530) 367-4004. Ore Cart Steakhouse and Red Dirt Saloon. 24601 Foresthill; (530) 367-3644.