



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



**Westside
Rails to Trails
(Tuolumne
City to North
Fork
Tuolumne
River)**

California



Westside Rails to Trails (Tuolumne City to North Fork Tuolumne River)

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Tucked away in sparsely populated Tuolumne County, this portion of the Stanislaus National Forest's Westside Rails to Trails route is a hidden treasure, combining spectacular scenery and a representation of an amazing feat of railway construction.

The county's timber industry was in full gear at the turn of the 20th century. An impressive sawmill was built at that time, and the West Side Lumber Company constructed its own narrow-gauge railroad—the Hetch Hetchy & Yosemite Valley Railway—to bring timber to the mill. The initial stretch of the mainline grade, constructed without the benefit of bulldozers and loaders, was blasted into an extremely steep and rocky canyon. As you walk along the rail-trail, you cannot fail to be impressed by what the workers accomplished. Interpretive panels along

the trail provide information about the area's logging history and Indigenous heritage.

Located next to a small parking lot and a residential street, the unsigned Tuolumne City trailhead at the western terminus is unassuming. (Note that equestrian parking is available here; equestrian use is permitted for the entirety of the trail.) At first, the trail is surrounded by trees on both sides, but after less than a half mile, it opens up to spectacular views. On your right, you see a gaping canyon, with layers of rolling, tree-covered hills beyond. After another half mile, you come to a picnic bench and, shortly after, the only water fountain on the trail. (It is a good idea to bring water and protection from the sun.) At the 1-mile mark, you see the old rails and ties that run from this point through the end of the trail, adding to its beauty and character. The dramatic scenery continues as the path traverses the steep canyon. Patches of wildflowers that grow between the narrow-gauge tracks appear in the springtime, making this rail-trail all the more beautiful.

At certain points, the path becomes slightly narrow and rocky. About 5 miles in, you'll come upon a thick patch of trees that seems impassable, at which point you won't be able to continue walking parallel with the rails. From here, you can return the way you came or veer right and descend the steep switchbacks for about a half mile to a main road (Fish Hatchery Road/Buchanan Road/Forest Route 1N04). Turn left here and walk along the road on a half-mile looping route that will bring you to the entrance of the River Ranch Campground.

It is possible to leave a car at the campground before setting out, then shuttle to the trailhead (note that there is a day-use fee at the campground). If you are on a mountain bike and want a speedier return to the Tuolumne City trailhead parking lot, you can cycle westward about 4.25 miles on Fish Hatchery Road/Buchanan Road/FR 1N04. This route is a steep climb, and while the two-lane road is lightly trafficked, there is no biking lane and it's narrow at some points, so use



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States: California

Counties: Tuolumne

Length: 5.5miles

Trail end points: Mira Monte Rd at Buchanan Rd (Tuolumne) to Forest Rte 1N04 & Fish Hatchery Rd (Twain Harte)

Trail surfaces: Crushed Stone, Dirt

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Horseback Riding, Mountain Biking, Walking

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the Tuolumne City trailhead, find the small parking lot at the intersection of Buchanan Road/FR 1N04 and Mira Monte Road. The trailhead is next to this parking lot.

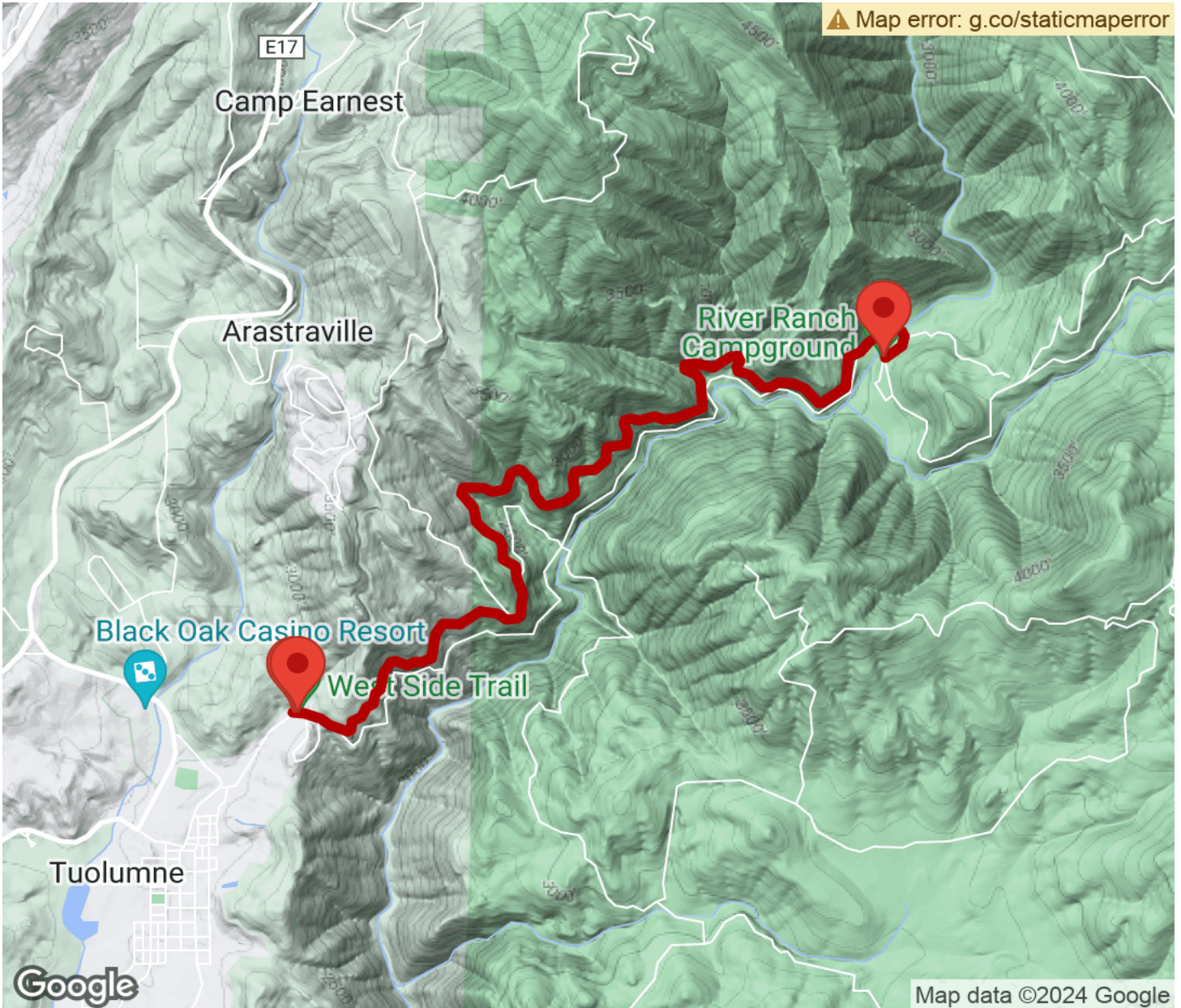
To find the Buchanan Road trailhead, look for a gap in the canyon and follow this path up the switchbacks to connect with the rail-trail. The trailhead is unmarked and easy to miss.

View the [TrailLink map](#) for all options and detailed directions.



Westside Rails to Trails (Tuolumne City to North Fork Tuolumne River)

California



Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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