Tahoe Queen – beauty of Tahoe mixed with history

By Kathryn Reed

A look of awe comes across people's faces as they glide across Lake Tahoe for the first time. Seeing why it's called the Jewel of the Sierra, with it's various shades of blue. Marveling that snow lingers in September on the higher peaks. Taken in by the other activity on the lake.

For 2.5 hours the Tahoe Queen churns across the water, which barely has a ripple on it from the gentle breeze. The sun beats down on us. Summer has returned to the basin – at least on Thursday and for this long weekend.

For my aunt Norma from Pennsylvania, this was her first time to Lake Tahoe. For my Mom, this was her first time on the renovated 27-year-old paddle-wheeler. For me, it was the first time in a few years to enjoy a scenic day cruise.

People relax and take in the views from the Tahoe Queen. Photos/Kathryn Reed

None of us was disappointed.

Although Mark Twain, Joaquin Miller and Lillie Langtry were on board to dispense stories about Lake Tahoe from the 19th century, a bit of current day info was told. As the boat made its way out of the channel from Ski Run Marina it was pointed out how the shiny items in the water were clams – not the kind anyone wants to eat.

This invasive species turned up last week at Lake George in New York. They are destructive. Scientists are trying to eradicate them in Lake Tahoe.

Much of what Capt. Jerry Summers and the historical figures share dates to the 1800s when John Fremont and Kit Carson were the first white people to lay eyes on Lake Tahoe. Thousands of years before 1844, the lake had been home to the Washoe Indians. Though their presence is still at the lake, for the most part the white man did like he always did and ran the Indians off their land.

What makes this cruise more than just a ride across the lake into Emerald Bay is all the history that is given. It adds a depth that renting a boat for the day can't deliver.

Back to current history, on the port side the scar from the 2007 Angora Fire is pointed out. Gardner Mountain and its charred trees are clearly visible. Though no one mentions it, the remains of the 2002 Gondola Fire are more glaring. People started both fires.

"That ridge was an inferno three summers ago," Twain tells the guests. "It was an incredible site from the Tahoe Queen."

Most of the boat activity is in Emerald Bay, including kayakers and a paddleboarder. Kids are jumping off the rocks at Fannette Island. People are visiting Vikingsholm. A few of the boat-in campsites are occupied.

The high water mark on the granite proves California and Nevada continue to be in a drought.

Before entering the bay, an osprey flies in front of the bow. They, along with bald eagles, have nests in this area.

To give an example of just how much water is in Tahoe, which has a maximum depth of 1,645 feet, Twain explains if the alpine lake were drained it would cover the two states it calls home with 4.5 inches of water.

Details:

• The Tahoe Queen has a variety of cruises that change seasonally.

• Website

• Phone: (530) 543.6191

• Address: Ski Run Marina, 900 Ski Run Blvd., South Lake Tahoe

• Cost: $46 adults, $15 children

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