First bi-state park in U.S. ready for hikers, bikers, horses

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Making sure there is enough water pressure to fight a fire had been holding up the opening of Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Not anymore. The park officially opens today.

Considering part of the 725-acre park encompasses some of the 673 acres charred in the 2002 Gondola Fire, adequate fire suppression capabilities are a big deal – as it is for any forested area.



Sue, Brenda and Roni straddle the state line at Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Even though the park was not officially open, people were still accessing the area that is walking distance from the main bed base on the South Shore at the state line.

It is destined to be one of the must-do hikes in the Lake

Tahoe Basin because of the easy accessibility to some incredible views of the emerald water. The only thing that would make the scenery better is to obliterate some of the built environment, but that isn't likely to happen any time soon.

An offshoot, though not yet marked, leads to a vista that captures the sprawling South Shore. Boats bob along in the water. Granite boulders invite one to lounge a while.

With views like this not far from the trail that starts from the upper parking area, it means for those who don't want to or can't hike far, they too, will get to enjoy the natural beauty.

Mount Tallac is the dominant feature besides the lake. With so much snow still on the mountaintops, it's easy to pick out other peaks across the lake like Rubicon.

Massive sugar pines dangle like earrings from trees.

Hiking farther, the trail cuts through part of the 9-year-old burn area – a fire started from a reckless smoker who tossed a cigarette butt out the Heavenly Gondola.

Wildflowers, while not in abundance, are scattered on both sides of the trail.

Initially Van Sickle was supposed to be run by the parks systems in both states. The entrance sign makes it obvious that is not happening. Nevada Division of State Parks and California Tahoe Conservancy are recognized as the operators. This is the only park in the country to cover two states.

California State Parks is in such dire financial straits, what with 70 of 208 parks slated for closure, money for a new one was not to be found.

One advantage of California State Parks not being involved is that dogs are allowed on leash.

Work on the trail that connects to the Tahoe Rim Trail is ongoing, with volunteer crews out in force on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

“As for finishing the trail connector, we are hoping to finish it this year,” Mary Bennington, TRTA executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

If it weren’t for her nonprofit organization, the park would not open at all this summer.

A couple small signs say the trail is not open beyond the waterfall. Nothing at the waterfall says stop, but the trail clearly deteriorates about a half mile farther. As Brenda said, it looks like someone dragged a pick behind her to designate where the trail should be built.

This park was a dream of the late Jack Van Sickle who donated more than two-thirds of the land for the park. His old barn sits in the day use area, as do smaller buildings.

Besides hikers, the park is open to equestrians and mountain bikers. The gate will be open when snow isn’t on the ground; and then from dawn to dusk.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe heading east on Highway 50, turn right on Heavenly Village Way. The park entrance is on Montreal Avenue at Heavenly Village Way. The day use parking is up a short ways, with parking for trail access farther up the road.

A walking path off the driveway entrance is to the right. Foot access is also farther east off the Loop Road behind Harrah’s Lake Tahoe.

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