Then and now: Less clutter on roadways



Overhead wires existed until South Lake Tahoe incorporated. Photo/Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Highway 50 in the 1960s had stoplight islands mounted in the center of the roadway, despite being in snow country.

The Flying A service station exists today as Tahoe Tom’s. Also, the large tree at still stands.



Streetlights are no longer in the middle of the road. Photo/Bill Kingman

All overhead wires and power poles were removed after the city of South Lake Tahoe incorporated in 1965. The city also did not permit flashing or animated signage.

Harveys was the only highrise at Stateline until the Sahara Tahoe opened in 1965. The Harrah's and MontBleu (originally Park Tahoe) hotels opened in the mid-1970s

– Bill Kingman

River Ranch Lodge embraces laid-back



The River Ranch Lodge’s patio is along the Truckee River. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

ALPINE MEADOWS – There’s something about running water when it’s time to chill and go with the flow of life.

And that flow may involve a cold drink on a warm summer day with picturesque surroundings.

That’s a key reward involved in a stay at the River Ranch Lodge on Highway 89 about 3 miles north of Tahoe City. The small, 19-room cozy lodge is situated right on the Truckee River. It’s hard to imagine getting any closer.

And now is the time to go if one enjoys the experience of leaning over the short stone wall from a riverside table as if diving into the water. It’s not crowded now, which is unusual.



The bar and restaurant are inviting.

The Truckee River rafting companies have ceased operations because of the drought's effects on the region's iconic, windy river. The water level is low and getting lower to accommodate Lake Tahoe in the ebb and flow of the climate and environment.

So on a sunny, summer Sierra weekend afternoon, it's actually easy to get a table on their famed bar deck.

"We've definitely felt the effect (of less guest traffic). Normally, you couldn't come walking up to this bar and get served right away," bartender Jake Clinton said.

Others have also witnessed the change.

"That's the first thing we noticed when we got back to Tahoe. There were no rafts," said Kristine Schug, as she was pouring her Sonoma County Winery's Sauvignon Blanc for Homewood's Farm-to-Peak dinner earlier this month.

On any given Tahoe summer weekend, hundreds of people end their Tahoe City raft floats on the River Ranch deck, cramming the outside bar and food stand known for its River Rum Punch and mountain of gooey nachos.

On the Sunday morning during our stay, a morning hike starting a few miles up the road near the Alpine Meadows Ski Resort brought us much bang-for-the-buck scenery. It whet our appetite for a few mojitos, a beer and French fries on the deck with friends Roni and Brenda. The drinks were refreshing

and the fries hit the spot after having hiking snack food. (Of course, some would say French fries are a snack. To the four of us, they are a mandatory food group that's become an after-exercise ritual.)

I noticed the mound of not-your-average cheesy nachos order whiz by and briefly schemed about ruining my upcoming dinner scheduled in the formal dining room.

The smell of Tahoe pines blended with the different scents coming from the kitchen. Glasses were clinking at the bar. And the sun glistened on the rapids rolling over the rocks on the river next to our table and in the calm swimming hole. The night before, the patio provided a beautiful super-moonlight evening when we had the place and the adjacent low docks to ourselves – AJ included.

Life is good at the River Ranch Lodge. It's a perfect launching pad to many activities for those who want to do more than sit on the deck or docks, even though that's an attractive option.



The Truckee River is calm and shallow just before the

lodge.

Location, location, location

Beyond the nearby hiking trails west in the rugged Granite Chief Wilderness that gives Squaw Valley one of its famed backdrops, the River Ranch is plopped right between the meandering bike trail that follows a historic railway and the river where many people take their own inner tubes or small rafts.

The recent closure of the commercial rafting operations has given the Truckee River Taxi Co. a boost in business because floaters need a ride back to their vehicles.

“We can even fit dogs in here,” shuttle driver Derek Watson pointed out, looking back in the van where he’s crammed up to 10 inner tubes. The cost is $15 a person. The service is filling a gap in a creative way, much the same way the River Ranch has planned events like pool parties to pique the interest of Tahoe summer enthusiasts.

“If anything, I think a lot of people are looking for a place to go swimming,” River Ranch Lodge General Manager Rob Curtis said of guests who stay or drop in to eat, drink and dunk in the adjacent watering hole.



Rooms have a Tahoe-feel to them.

The inn, built in 1888, was once a stopping off point for railway traffic. A landmark sign is embedded on a rock next to the bike trail near the lodge to remind guests of its historic past. Once called the Deer Park Inn, the structure was demolished following its demise during the Great Depression and rebuilt in the 1950s to accommodate dignitaries during the 1960 Olympic Games at Squaw Valley about a mile away.

Through the years, some hints of its history remain intact. Ten tennis courts from more than a half-century ago are still situated behind a few monstrous summer homes across the river from the lodge.

Nowadays, rooms in the quaint lodge are not swank or polished – but that's part of their charm. The evolving renovations and upgrades made by private owners since the 1970s have provided what is needed to truly relax and enjoy the surroundings. Each room is comfortable, spacious and comes with basic amenities, but be mindful the Internet is slow for those needing that service. The mountain motif such as the bedspread and chair upholstery, light pine wood paneling, old cross country skis on the wall, log-cabiny bed frame and coat hanger along with tasteful wood-framed pictures reminds guests where they are staying. (Note: collected pine cones and fake wreaths are a little over the top in being imitation cute.)

The bathroom is small, but serves its purpose. I especially enjoyed using the wall heater and imagined how comfortable this would be for a winter stay. (Another note of improvement for housekeeping: the towels are rough and smell chlorinated.)

That aside, the place has its own unique qualities. We laughed at the notion of opening our window at the cushy easy chair in the room to order drinks in Room 11. It butts up behind the bar. Modest guests may want a different room or run the risk of flashing people bellied up to the bar facing the windows. One of the busy bartenders smiled and pointed out the window screen as inhibiting that ordering idea.

But that was all in good, laid-back fun.

The staff at the River Ranch Lodge is extremely accommodating. One front desk clerk even printed out the hiking map I emailed to her when I failed to find mine.

The good service spans from the front to the back, where a friendly wait staff scurries around the elegant dining room. A giant stone fireplace behind the indoor bar was a reminder winter is not far away. The menu has been updated to include Skuna Bay salmon and Cervena elk, but vegetarians may want to partake in a mix of appetizers and sides. (I probably could have been satisfied with that plate of nachos earlier if not for enjoying the ambiance of the dining room with a river view.)



The couscous is quite good.

The tomato-bisque soup was not the best part of the meal, as it tasted like someone just poured a can of tomato sauce in a bowl. The couscous entrée with what seemed to be a hint of saffron was good, despite the squash blossoms being nothing special. Nonetheless, the beets were perfectly cooked. Plus, the wilted greens were a tasty accompaniment.

The heirloom tomato salad plate presentation was beautiful. The burrata cheese represented a nice creamy alternative to the usual mozzarella cheese. However, the tomatoes themselves

didn’t seem as fresh or sweet as they could be in the height of their season. The friendly waitress returned to tell us the tomatoes came from Sacramento Valley, and not a farmers’ market. From that, it wasn’t surprising that the bread Kae and I really liked originated from “random food distributors”.

The wine list was vast, with some Sierra Nevada foothill varietals mixed with Napa and Sonoma favorites. We were pleased with a really good Zinfandel from Amador, the land of Zin.

It stands out when a hotel guest is able to stroll to a nice restaurant instead of a chain eatery or driving somewhere.

And here at the River Ranch as in many places in Tahoe, a diner may see a variety of people of different ages and attire. One man donned a tank top, while a family came in dressed for the occasion.

Dinner entrée prices range from $19 to $34. Room rates on the weekend start at $132 per night, with some accommodating dogs.
—

If you go:
River Ranch Lodge
2285 River Road (corner of Alpine Meadows Road and Highway 89)
530.583.4264.

Opinion: The drought on my dinner plate

By Megan McArdle, Bloomberg

California is suffering an epic drought. It’s not the worst drought the state has ever had, but it’s certainly the worst drought the state has ever had while housing tens of millions of residents and containing a significant fraction of U.S. agricultural production. And there’s some suggestion that this may be the new normal – not just because of global warming, as you’ve probably already read, but also because California’s natural condition is “extra dry.” An expert interviewed by Tom Philpott of Mother Jones says that the 20th century, which saw California’s rise as an agricultural powerhouse, was an unusually wet period for the state. Merely reverting to “normal” would mean having about 15 percent less water – and the state is still growing.

That does not mean that California will become an uninhabited desert, scattered with wind-scoured ruins providing a silent and reproachful testimony to Man’s hubris. California has enough water to support quite a lot of population growth – if it cuts out a lot of that agriculture. It may even be able to support most of the agriculture – if people start leaving. The problem is, it may not be able to manage both unless the rains return or it finds some clever way to reclaim low-cost potable water from the sea.

In a worst-case scenario, my money is on agriculture losing out; its lobbyists are motivated, but they’re simply outnumbered by all the city dwellers. So it’s worth contemplating what a dramatic scale-back in California’s agricultural production would do to California – and the rest of us.

Read the whole story

Drying Sierra meadows could worsen drought

By Susan Suleiman, University of California

Carpeting the high valleys of Yosemite and other parts of the Sierra Nevada, mountain meadows are more than an iconic part of the California landscape. The roughly 17,000 high altitude meadows help regulate the release of Sierra snow melt into rivers and streams.

But climate change and California's severe drought threaten to permanently alter these fragile and important ecosystems, according to research by Chelsea Arnold, who was awarded a doctorate in environmental systems from UC Merced in May. Her findings reveal that soil changes already are taking place that could have long-term implications for California's water supply.

Arnold's research found that meadows in the Central Sierra near Yosemite are drying out as a result of several years of unusual variation in climate and snowfall.

"What we're seeing is that all kinds of extreme weather, including one dry winter like the one we just had, can totally change the structure of the soil," Arnold said. "Part of that is an irreversible change."

Under normal conditions, a mountain meadow acts like a sponge. Organic material in the soil allows the meadow to hold water, which is filtered and slowly released to mountain streams. Samples collected by Arnold and her colleagues found that the larger pores which trap and hold moisture are disappearing, to be replaced with smaller, more compact pores through which water doesn't easily flow.

As meadows dry out, flooding in wet years is likely to

increase. And in drought years, parched meadows could result in less snowmelt reaching streams, exacerbating the state's already precarious water situation.

Arnold said that the changes won't be easily remedied. Mountain meadows may act like sponges, but unlike a dry sponge, their ability to hold water isn't reversed when the soil becomes re-saturated.

"It's like with a raisin. You can add water, but all you're going to get is a soggy raisin," Arnold said.

Read the whole story

Northstar combining golf with food pairings

The inaugural Tees and Tastings tournament at Northstar is Aug. 28.

The tournament will feature a two-game, nine-hole tournament with four beer and cuisine pairings throughout the front green of the Northstar Golf Course. Winners will receive tickets to the Wine & Brew Walk event, which takes place Sept. 6 during the 29th annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival.

Tournament players will meet in front of the Northstar Golf Course pro shop at 2:15pm for tee-off at 2:30pm. Pairing stations throughout the front nine offer players craft brews with savory appetizers. The final station will be hosted at the Martis Valley Grille at 6pm for après tournament socializing, awards, and beer pairings.

Tickets for Tees and Tastings are available for $100 per

person, and may be purchased online or at the ticket and season pass office in the village at Northstar.

Specific foursomes may be arranged by calling 530.562.3568.

Drought forces early grape harvest

By Jennifer Chaussee, Reuters

DAVIS – At the University of California's prized winemaking institute near Sacramento, a sleek metal wine crusher on Thursday morning let out a deep rumble and began to shake, jostling grapes made sweeter by the state's ongoing drought into sticky juice.

Dry conditions have made this year's crop ripen early, and winemakers across the state are picking and crushing their grapes weeks ahead of the usual harvest time as the lack of water has caused them to ripen faster than usual.

The early harvest has stoked winemakers' concerns that ongoing drought conditions could pose a serious threat to wine quality next year, since grapes that ripen too fast can become too sweet for winemaking.

The grape crop has mostly been protected, as many growers have managed to spend extra cash on underground well water to protect the quality of their vines. But well water is an expensive and limited resource, and underground wells throughout the state are becoming drier.

Already, this year's grapes have reached their peak sweetness faster than last year's. If the trend continues, it could be difficult to make good wine with the 2015 crop.

California is the fourth-largest wine producer in the world and brings in more than $60 billion in state revenues each year.

Read the whole story

Bear-feeding woman attacked in Tahoe

A Kings Beach woman who is known for feeding bears was attacked by one earlier this month.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife and Placer County District Attorney's Office officials are investigating the Aug. 5 incident.

"The victim reported getting hit from behind" and suffered bites to the rear of her left shoulder and scratches on a leg that required care at a hospital, Patrick Foy, with the CDFW told the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. "Our warden did find several areas with evidence to suggest somebody on that property was feeding a lot of wildlife."

The woman, whose name has not been released, could face six months in jail and a $1,000 fine if charged and found guilty of feeding wildlife.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. allows dogs at outdoor restaurants

By Associated Press

Fido can feast with you now when you go out to eat.

Gov. Jerry Brown on Thursday announced signing a bill permitting pet dogs at restaurants with outdoor spaces. It does not force restaurants to allow dogs, but rather implements guidelines for how they can accommodate pets.

Some local public health departments have allowed dogs in outdoor dining areas for years, but the state has banned the practice. Local jurisdictions can still ban it if they choose.

The bill requires a separate entrance for outdoor dining areas and says pets are not allowed on chairs, seats or benches. They also must be on a leash or in a pet carrier under control of the owner.

Owners also must clean up after their pets.

The law takes effect next year.

Tahoe Douglas Area Plan meetings set

There will be a workshop Sept. 3 from 4-7pm about the Tahoe

Douglas Area Plan.

This plan includes all properties not in the South Shore Area Plan that fall under the jurisdiction of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in Douglas County. It will replace the Round Hill Community plan and the plan area statements.

The meeting will be at TRPA offices in Stateline.

The county Planning Commission will have a scoping session on the plan Sept. 9 at 1pm in Minden and then hear it as an action item Oct. 14 at 1pm. The plan goes to the county commissioners on Oct. 14 at 1:30pm at the Tahoe Transportation Center in Stateline.

Placer sheriff's office served with federal subpoena

By Mike TeSelle, KCRA-TV

The Placer County Sheriff's Department was served with a federal subpoena during the first week of August, according to a sheriff's spokesperson.

However, the department declined to comment on exactly what the warrant is seeking.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Sacramento also declined comment and did not even confirm if an investigation involving the sheriff's department existed.

"It is uncommon, very uncommon for a prosecutor to issue a subpoena on a law enforcement agency," said Johnny Griffin, a former federal prosecutor.

Griffin, a current defense attorney, did not want to speculate, but he did offer general perspective of why a local law enforcement agency would be served with a federal subpoena.

“If you serve a subpoena on an entity, say a sheriff’s department, that doesn’t necessarily mean the sheriff’s department is under some type of investigation or target, but it does not exclude them,” said Griffin. “Perhaps a member or someone connected to the department may be under some type of investigation. It could be a vendor, an employee or an inmate.”

Read the whole story