Hikers retrace portions of Donner Party's trail



Guide Greg Zirbel points out the mortars on a granite boulder. Photos/Jessie Marchesseau

By Jessie Marchesseau

TRUCKEE – The thermometer read 32 degrees when I pulled into the Sugar Bowl parking lot. It was 8am on the first Saturday in October, and summer was obviously over.

Sugar Bowl's Mt. Judah lodge was the launching point for the 21st annual Donner Party Hike. The yearly event offers a variety of guided interpretive hikes giving participants a chance to explore Truckee's abundant mountain trails while getting in a history lesson at the same time.

Included in the weekend event is an afternoon speaker. This year it was Ethan Rarick, author of "Desperate Passage – the

Donner Party’s Perilous Journey West”. Sunday’s activities included a walking tour focused specifically on the Donner Party and entrance to the Emigrant Trail Museum.

The seven hikes available on Saturday provided hikers with options ranging from 3.5 to 6 miles in a variety of skill levels.

I chose the four-mile Summit Meadows hike. New to the roster this year, the route explores the Summit Valley, also known as Lake Van Norden. The area is part of a 2,900-acre parcel of land acquired this year by the Truckee Donner Land Trust.

Kathy Hess, Donner Party Hike event coordinator, said they add, subtract and change hikes frequently to keep things fresh for the hikers who return year after year. Of this year’s 200 hikers, Hess said about 90 percent are from out of town. A little nip in the air was not going to keep them away, in past years they have seen snow.

From the lodge, some groups were shipped off to their trailheads by bus. Since the starting point for Summit Meadows was fairly close, our group carpooled. A short drive down Highway 40 brought us to Soda Springs and the Van Norden Dam where we parked our vehicles.

Built in 1890, the dam was breached in 1976, and what had been Lake Van Norden became a vast meadow surrounded by emigrant and Native American history. Though no longer full of water, the concrete walls of the dam still stand tall.

Sporting hats, mittens, beanies and jackets to ward off the crisp autumn air, we set out, passing through the parking lot, over a metal bridge, and climbing down into the spillway. Our guides for the day, Greg Zirbel and Penelope Curtis, led the way.

With 11 hikers and two guides, we must have been one of the smaller groups. Two men from San Francisco were participating

in the event for the ninth time, another for his fifth time. A few of the hikers were from Reno, a few from Chico. My friend Megan and I were the only ones from Truckee-Tahoe.

Meandering through the forest as a group, our first historical stop was at a large granite boulder. We gathered round while Zirbel explained how and why the Native Americans who once inhabited this place carved the bowl-like indentations called mortars into the granite. Each of us had a chance to see and touch the mortars that are hundreds, possibly thousands of years old. Zirbel passed around laminated black and white photographs of what the place looked like a century ago, something he did periodically throughout our journey.

We tromped along, branches and pine needles crunching beneath our feet.

“Aren’t you glad you’re not trying to find all this on your own,” Zirbel laughed. “It’s not really a well-marked trail.”

In fact, it’s not a trail at all. Having just been opened to the public this year, the meadow is practically devoid of trails. There are, however, several signs posted high up on trees for visitors to the Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Resort which offered trails through this area last winter. Luckily, Zirbel had done the hike half a dozen times this season and was able to locate all the highlights along the way.

We passed by several boulders with mortars and metates, flat grinding surfaces, often with sweeping views of the valley for the women to admire while they worked. We walked down the wide indentation left from an old wagon road, stood at the site of an all-but-forgotten cabin and peered through the window frames of the old sheepherders’ shack.

The last portion of the expedition was along a dirt road allowing for relaxed walking, chatting and reading of informational plaques along the way.

Many in the group had been on Donner Party Hikes in the past.

“It’s always interesting because you live around here, but you don’t see everything,” said Jeanne Wendel of Reno who was on her third Donner Party Hike.

Geoffrey Caldwell, an English teacher from San Francisco, said it is becoming a tradition for him and his wife who were on their fifth year at the event.

We reached our cars about three hours after we set out and just in time for a complimentary hamburger/veggie burger lunch.

On the deck of the Mt. Judah lodge, the sun was shining while nearly all of the 200 hikers milled about discussing their morning adventures and the wildlife they saw along the way.

Before long, Ethan Rarick took the stage to offer another history lesson, though this one did not involve any hiking. As author of “Desperate Passage – the Donner Party’s Perilous Journey West”, Rarick has a wealth of knowledge about the Donner Party and its individual members. He offered a short Donner Party narrative before opening the floor to questions of which there were plenty. He had answers for nearly every inquiry and dispelled a few myths as well.

Pulling out of the Sugar Bowl parking lot later that afternoon, I felt a little tired, a little smarter and a lot warmer.

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Series of age-related classes in S. Tahoe

El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency and Active Aging program are presenting a free educational series in South Lake Tahoe. The series will give instruction and support to people 60 years and older and to their family members and friends.

The classes will be on Mondays from 1-3pm from Oct. 21-Nov. 25 at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel.

The classes are:

• Oct. 21, The Healthy Plate: Learn ways to control and improve caloric and nutritional intake by using the "Plate" method. Compare and contrast various methods to compose meals for optimal health.

• Oct. 28, The 4 D's: Learn to distinguish the differences between delirium, delusions, dementia and depression. "The 4 D's" are ailments that will at one time or another affect many frail or aging individuals.

• Nov. 4, Defeating Guilt and Depression: Family members of aging persons, and those who care for aged individuals, may suffer from feelings of guilt and depression in their best attempts to provide care. This session helps participants find meaningful and empowering ways to reduce stress.

• Nov. 11, Effective Assessments and Care Plans – The Assessment: Learn how to effectively complete a care needs assessment of a loved one. At the end of this session, participants will be given a blank assessment to complete on

their loved one’s behalf.

• Nov. 18, Effective Assessments and Care Plans – The Care plan: Learn how to effectively complete an individualized care plan based on information gathered from the assessment as part of the Nov. 11 class.

• Nov. 25, Goodenough Speaks: Learn how the benefits of meditation decrease stress and increase physical and mental health.

Advanced registration is requested, but not required for the classes. Call (530) 621.6151 or 800.510.2020 to register for one or more classes, or for questions about respite care.

Opinion: Obama is obstructionist to compromise

By Eric Cantor

For three years, Congress and the White House have been building to this moment. Not the debt limit or Obamacare specifically, but this clarifying moment of Washington dysfunction. President Obama has led us here by continually thwarting the will of Congress and dismissing its role in our constitutional republic. This must end.

The president not only has refused to negotiate on issues of debt and spending but also has mocked the very idea of engaging with Congress. President Obama has repeatedly made clear that he feels it is beneath the office of the presidency to work in a bipartisan way with the legislative branch.



Eric Cantor

The Constitution gives Congress the power of the purse and the power to borrow. The president was given the power to veto measures, including those related to spending and borrowing. These separate powers created checks and balances but also forced the executive and legislative branches to work together.

As James Madison wrote in Federalist No. 48, “It is equally evident, that none of [the branches of the federal government] ought to possess, directly or indirectly, an overruling influence over the others, in the administration of their respective powers.”

In the 224 years of our nation’s history, one party has controlled the House, Senate and White House for 130 years. President Obama enjoyed two of those years, and it’s no surprise he wishes that were still the case. Yet while 28 of 44 U.S. presidents have found a way to lead in divided government, this president has not.

In 2006, then-Sen. Obama said: “Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better. I therefore intend to oppose the effort to increase America’s debt limit.”

Seven years later, and after the nation’s debt had doubled, President Obama refuses to even sit at the same table as Republicans and work to solve the “debt problem” he correctly identified as a senator. That is a much larger failure of

leadership.

This has, unfortunately, been the case since 2011. President Obama has often chosen to unilaterally circumvent the law under the guise of executive authority. Most recently, that was demonstrated in July with his delay of Obamacare mandates for corporations, but it has been a hallmark of this presidency.

Courts have held that President Obama violated the Constitution with certain “recess” appointments, ignoring the required consent of Congress. He has abused executive-branch “rule making” rather than working with Congress to pass laws. He has ignored the letter of the law when it comes to religious liberty and work requirements for welfare.

President Obama has used executive orders to unilaterally change U.S. immigration laws. His administration has used waivers to change laws such as No Child Left Behind to compel states to adopt new policies.

In some of these instances, the president attempted to garner statutory authority, failed to do so and then acted in defiance of that. In other instances, he never bothered to find consensus and ignored Congress from the outset, usually contending that he simply had no choice. This is no way to govern, and it cripples the system of checks and balances that our Founding Fathers envisioned.

Working in divided government is not new. As recently as 1995, President Bill Clinton worked overtime with House Speaker Newt Gingrich to reach bipartisan compromise over the debt ceiling and to end a government shutdown.

Neither Clinton nor congressional Republicans got everything they wanted from those negotiations. They found consensus, and that consensus moved the country forward; they managed to balance the budget because they worked together.

Just two years ago, President Obama and House Republicans came to an agreement to raise the debt ceiling and implement much-needed reductions in spending. It wasn't a perfect agreement, but it, too, moved the nation forward. For the first time since the Korean War, the United States will have two consecutive years of reduced nominal spending.

After that agreement, the American people re-elected a divided government. They expect us to work together just as it was done in 2011, 1996, 1995 and years before – and they will not accept one party simply refusing to negotiate. Mr. President, let's sit down and talk. Let's reach consensus and end the "my way or the highway" attitude once and for all.

Eric Cantor, R-Va., is the House majority leader.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Lake Tahoe Community College Math Club has volunteer tutors to help K-12 students Monday-Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30pm. No appointments necessary. Tutors are at the TLC at LTCC, which is upstairs in the main building.

•The South Lake Tahoe Library parking lot will be closed for parking lot patching, seal coating, and striping Oct. 13-14.

• The Fields Advisory Committee of the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority will meet Oct. 14 from 4–6pm at Lake Tahoe Unified School District board room, 1021 Al Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

• Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is hosting an

economic forum Oct. 22 from 6-8pm at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel in South Lake Tahoe. Cocktail hour starts at 5pm.

• The *Sacramento Bee* is the latest media outlet to say no anonymous commenters.

Class to focus on Calif. HR issues

CalSHRM and Sierra HR Association will be presenting California Employment Law Essentials for Business so small business owners, office managers, department managers & supervisors, and human resource practitioners who need to gain essential knowledge in the unique and complex system of California employment laws will have the opportunity to do so locally.

In partnership with the Nevada County Regional Chambers of Commerce, this one day six-hour workshop is Oct. 11 from 9am-4pm at Esterly Hall in Grass Valley.

Attendees will receive in-depth knowledge on California specific employment laws regarding wage and hour issues, the confusing and intertwined web of paid and unpaid leaves of absence, employee & employer relations concerns including hiring and termination procedures in California, privacy laws, requirements for state contractors, required supervisory training under SB1825, retaliation and discrimination protection laws, and dozens of others must know topics.

The speaker is Mike Letizia, the president-elect of CalSHRM,

the California State Council of the Society of Human Resource Management.

The cost for the workshop is $199 for SHRM members, $229 for Regional Chamber of Commerce Members and $249 for non-members and includes lunch. Seating is limited and advance registration is required – (530) 265.7093 or (530) 573.0224.

Help available for Medicare enrollees

The El Dorado County Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) is offering free assistance to all Medicare beneficiaries in El Dorado County from Oct. 15-Dec. 7.

During open enrollment, people with Medicare can join, unenroll from, or change a Part D drug plan or Medicare Advantage plan, with changes taking effect Jan. 1.

HICAP is a nonprofit organization that provides free, unbiased, one-on-one counseling to Medicare beneficiaries. Anyone who would like advice or help changing or joining a Part D or Medicare Advantage plan should call to schedule an appointment. Beneficiaries are encouraged to bring with them one bottle of each of their prescription drugs, or a detailed list of each drug including dosage and frequency of use.

For a free HICAP appointment, call (530) 621.6369. People who are turning 65 or are new to Medicare, or those needing assistance with other Medicare issues are welcome to make an appointment any time during the year.

Tahoe’s assemblyman accused of not living in district

By Joe Hart, KRNV-TV

Nevada Republican Assemblyman Jim Wheeler is the target of an official complaint filed with Nevada Secretary of State’s office and the Assembly Ethics Committe.

The complaint says Wheeler, a Republican from Douglas County , does not live in the district he was elected to represent.

Wheeler, who represents Lake Tahoe in the Assembly, lists his official residence with the Secretary of State’s office as 965 Tillman Lane in Gardnerville.



Jim Wheeler

The house on Tillman is owned by Jim DeGraffenreid, the newly elected vice chair of the Nevada Republican party, and a friend of Wheeler’s.

News 4 contacted DeGraffenreid and asked him how often Wheeler stays at his house.

DeGraffenreid told us, “I can’t say for sure. Maybe one or two nights a week.”

We asked Stephanie Kearney who lives right next door at 963 Tillman Lane if Wheeler lives next door.

“Not to my knowledge, no,” Kearney told us.

Read the whole story

Fall Festival to take over Tahoe Donner

Fall fun awaits at Tahoe Donner’s signature Fall Festival scheduled for Oct. 12 from 10am-5pm at the Northwoods Clubhouse.

Fall Festival is fun for the whole family featuring a day packed full of fall-themed activities and events.

Fall Festival includes a beer garden featuring fall beers, bocce ball, arts and crafts vendors, the annual doggie-dip at the Northwoods Clubhouse Pool and a kids carnival area with food and games, face painting, tie-dye, log gammer rides, pony rides, a rock climbing wall, bounce house and more. Live entertainment will include a magic show and local performances by InnerRhythms and Truckee Cheer, plus live music provided by the Sneaky Creatures, an alt-gypsy swing sextet playing a blend of rock, jazz and Dixieland fun.

There is an expansive pumpkin patch.

The cost is just $15 for an unlimited wristband or $1 per ticket for activities.

Squaw’s Sullivan eager for Olympic year

By Marco Sullivan

Last week I attended the Team USA Media Summit with over 100 other 2014 Olympic and Paralympic hopefuls. The summit is an event that the U.S. Olympic Committee has been hosting since the 1988 Olympic Games and it provides a convenient venue for the media to gain access to the athletes.

This year there were roughly 350 media outlets attending the summit. Teams and their respective athletes were shuttled through over the course of three days.



Marco Sullivan

The summit is cool because it allows any credentialed media outlets to conduct interviews. Many of the questions are the same, but there were also some very unique stops. Throughout the day I posed in my speed suit, was interviewed by a Russian TV station that had just arrived in the country, filmed part of a music video and held a press conference with my team.

The press conference included the return of my teammate Bode Miller and of course he drew much of the spotlight. In my opinion, Bode is a master of portraying his feelings and

explaining the way he approaches the sport. He does not talk to the media often, but when he does there is a reason that people love to listen. It was nice to hear that he will keep skiing until his body no longer allows him to and that he is recovering well from his knee surgery last season.

Ted Ligety was also in on the conference and he reiterated his disdain for the FIS regulation of GS skis. I think he has strong evidence to support his statements and as the best GS skier in the world it definitely means something.

After finishing the day I pulled out my phone and checked up on my social media accounts. To my surprise all over the feed were quotes that my team had been saying to reporters throughout the day. It was great to see that ESPN, the New York Times and USA Today among others all considered our opinions newsworthy.

I have sometimes been accused of having too modest a view of what we do on the U.S. Ski Team. I love skiing and racing and I think the great thing about an Olympic year is that people actually tune in to our sport and are interested.

Walking around the Media Summit I saw athletes who I know have amazing skills. From the tiny figure skaters to the burly bobsledders, all of these folks have worked like crazy to achieve Olympian status. This is also the group that is inspiring kids to follow their dreams and be better because of sport in their lives.

There was another more subtle but just as real effect that the summit had upon athletes and reporters alike. The more we talked about the Olympics and the upcoming winter the more excitement and expectation was created. It is an Olympic year and things are going to get real. From the starting gun this season I think we will see some amazing performances from kids who are fighting to gain their own spot at the Olympics. I am excited, and I hope you are too.

Marco Sullivan grew up in Squaw Valley. Follow his journey on Twitter: @MarcOsullivan.

No offers for KMS; DCSD enrollment stabilizing

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – While people have expressed interest in buying the former Kingsbury Middle School site, no one has put in an offer. And that has the Douglas County school board worried.

Even sitting vacant, the 36,000-square-feet of building space is costing DCSD more than $10,000 a month.

The Douglas County School District board first voted to put the 10-acre site on the market in January 2012. It comes with a cafeteria-commercial kitchen, full-size gymnasium, locker room and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency required BMPs.

At the next meeting the board will have a discussion about whether the $4 million asking price should be changed. That conversation did not happen at the Oct. 8 meeting because board members Cindy Trigg and Ross Chichester were absent.

In the meantime, Superintendent Lisa Noonan will also contact the two companies that appraised the site to see if they would say the asking price is above or below the current market rate. It was appraised at $4 million.

Noonan told the board on Tuesday that she has met with one group multiple times.

“My sense is they are serious,” she said.

Declining enrollment forced the district’s hand to close the school. It was fall 2008 that the district went to two schools at the lake.

And student numbers continue to go down, but not as dramatically as years past.

“This is the first year we have not had a true or significant decline in enrollment,” CFO Holly Luna said.

Districtwide enrollment is down four students this year from last year or 0.1 percent. However, at Lake Tahoe there are 32 fewer students for a 7.7 percent drop from 2012-13. The decline at the lake is the highest since 2008-09.