Winter trails day in South Lake Tahoe rescheduled

Even though the skies on Jan. 14 will be clear, the trail will be nearly impassable even on snowshoes.

The means the South Shore winter trails day is being canceled. However, it has been reschedule for Feb. 18.

With South Lake Tahoe, U.S. Forest Services and Lake Tahoe Unified School District offices having been shut down for most of the week, this created additional challenges getting Generation Green students prepared to lead the event.

The free guided snowshoe will be in Van Sickle Bi-state Park that day. It will be from 10am-1pm.

Register in advance by calling 530.542.6059 or email kedwards@cityofslt.us.

Vail Resorts reports slow start to the season

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

The slow start to the ski season did not help Vail Resorts. The Broomfield, Colo.-based resort operator reported Friday that early-season visitation to its nine North American mountain resorts and three urban hills was down more than 13 percent compared with the previous season.

By the end of December though, visitation was back on track

with destination guests buoying flagging revenue with spending on lift tickets, passes, dining, rentals, lessons and retail shops.

Season-to-date lift ticket revenue at Vail Resorts' ski areas was up 4.3 percent through the first week of January compared with the same period last season. Rental revenue was down 2 percent. Ski school revenue was up 1.5 percent and dining revenue was down 6.4 percent.

Read the whole story

Truckee's Bennett 10th in alpine combined

By USSA

WENGEN, Switzerland – Friday's Audi FIS Ski Word Cup alpine combined produced a surprise podium, and another top 10 World Cup result for Bryce Bennett (Squaw Valley).

With upward of 6 inches of new snow overnight, officials swapped the downhill and slalom events, running the slalom first and the downhill – which was moved to a lower start position – to later in the afternoon.

"Usually downhill (first) I'm more comfortable with. And then you can do the downhill and see where you stand and then go into the slalom," said Bennett, who finished 10th in the morning slalom. "But with the slalom first, you definitely have to perform to get a better position for the downhill. It's a little bit more pressure to perform in slalom."

And Friday proved to be more about luck than position as

Switzerland’s Niels Hintermann came out of the 51st start position to win his career-first World Cup event in only his 12th start on the World Cup circuit. And the surprises didn’t stop with Hintermann. France’s Maxence Muzaton scored a career-first World Cup podium in second, as did Austria’s Frederic Berthold, who finished third. In fact, all three had never posted a top 10 World Cup result in their young careers. Of the three, Muzaton had the previous highest placing World Cup result – 11th in the downhill at Kitzbuehel in 2015.

How did all this craziness unfold? It started with the new snow overnight and a rock-solid slalom track, followed by more snow.

“It snowed about 20cm this morning, so I went to go do some warm up runs – I haven’t skied slalom in a while – so there was a lot of soft snow so you couldn’t really get a good feel,” said Bennett, who matched his bib in the slalom, finishing 18th. “Then I got into slalom there in the first three gates and I was like ‘oh, OK, this is World Cup slalom, wake up.’”

Meanwhile, Hintermann was 23rd in the slalom and started eighth in the downhill. After moving atop the leaderboard, snow started falling again, which significantly slowed the track for the remaining starters, including Bennett.

“It was definitely challenging conditions,” Bennet said of his downhill run as heavy snow fell. “It started snowing pretty hard after about 10 guys and it definitely made the race interesting.”

Bring in the birds for winter entertainment

By Melinda Myers

Brighten your winter days by inviting birds into your landscape. Their beauty and motion help enliven the garden and lighten your spirit. Not only do they provide entertainment, but also an opportunity for all ages to stay involved with nature year-round.

Increase the number of visitors to your yard by including all the essentials these winged visitors need; food, shelter and water.

Plants are the easiest way to bring birds into your landscape. These natural feeders provide seasonal food and shelter for the birds. Take a walk through your yard and look for trees, shrubs and perennials that provide food and evergreens that provide year-round shelter. Plan on adding a few of their favorites that provide food and shelter and seasonal beauty you can enjoy.

In the meantime, add a few feeders. This is a great way to increase the number and diversity of birds visiting your garden.



It’s possible to attract birds to one’s home. Photo/Gardener’s Supply Company

Place feeders in a quiet, sheltered location where you can easily watch these visitors come and go. Avoid placing feeders too close to plants that provide easy places for squirrels to jump onto the feeders and cats to hide while hunting for a meal.

Select feeders to attract the type of birds you want to bring into the garden.

Tube feeders with metal ports keep the seeds fairly clean and dry and are somewhat squirrel resistant. Feeders with short perches attract small birds like chickadees, titmice, and finches. Those with the perches above the feeding port are suitable for birds like goldfinches, chickadees and pine siskins that can feed upside down.

Thistle feeders and socks have extra small openings designed to hold the small seeds of thistle. You’ll find small songbirds like finches feeding at these.

Suet feeders hold blocks of high energy food made of animal

fat filled with seeds and berries. They attract woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, titmice, jays and starlings.

Platform feeders attract the greatest variety of birds, but give squirrels easy access to the seed. Plus, the open environment subjects the seeds to spoilage from damp weather and droppings from feeding birds. Enclosed hopper or house feeders are attractive to most birds, but once again the seed can be exposed to the weather and spoil.

Be sure to thoroughly clean the feeders monthly to avoid the spread of disease. Cover droppings and spoiled seed on the ground with a fresh layer of mulch.

Add additional feeding stations by dressing up your evergreens with bird-friendly ornaments. You can purchase seed coated ornaments or make your own. Roll an evergreen cone in peanut butter or suet and coat with birdseed. Coat a stale bagel with peanut butter and seed. Hang these on the tree with colorful yarn. Add a few orange slices and strings of cranberries for added food and color.

Keep the birds coming by adding a birdbath for a constant supply of water for drinking and bathing. Shallow birdbaths with sloping sides and a maximum depth of two inches in the center provide easy access for all birds. Keep the water flowing despite cold temperatures with the help of an immersion heater designed for birdbaths or purchase a birdbath with a built-in thermostatically controlled heater.

And once you create a bird-friendly environment you'll be enjoying them year-round. Listen for their songs, watch them raise their young and thank them for helping keep garden pests under control.

Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening". She hosts "How to Grow Anything: Food Gardening For Everyone" DVD set and the nationally syndicated

?Melinda’s Garden Moment” TV and radio segments.

March Madness renews legalized sports betting war

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

March Madness is upon us, another time of the year when people who almost never set foot inside a race and sports book become sports experts and serious gamblers.

It was only a month ago that twice-a-year bettors showed their expertise on Super Bowl Sunday.

But come this afternoon – now known as Selection Sunday – college basketball fans will be glued to their televisions to learn how a committee constructed the brackets for the 68-team NCAA Tournament that will last through April 3.

Read the whole story

Ski industry strives to curtail injuries

By Susan Wood

With Christmas snow conditions ripe, Heavenly Mountain Resort’s Chief Operating Officer Pete Sonntag tweeted he was

about to drop into Killebrew Canyon and thanked his “ski patrol for keeping us safe.”

This January marks the 16th year of National Ski Safety Awareness, changed from a weeklong event to a month in 2013. And with the resorts bound to be packed for this coming three-day weekend, safety is a big concern with more people on the slopes.

Despite reports of accidents, incidents, a landmark Colorado court hearing and a slight rise in fatalities last ski season compared to the previous year, most stakeholders from the National Ski Areas Association and California Ski Industry Association to a Lake Tahoe ski area general manager and ski patroller believe the awareness campaigns are working.

There were 39 fatalities among U.S. ski areas last year, up by four from the 2014-15 season, according to the NSAA. This is out of 52.8 million ski days reported. Granted, the ski visits were at a slight decline from the previous year, but one needs to place the assessment into perspective.

That’s 0.74 fatalities per 1 million skier or snowboarder visits – near the decadelong average fatality rate of 0.67 deaths per 1 million riders visiting the hills.

Another perspective – the National Safety Council pointed out that in 2014 35,400 Americans died in motor vehicle accidents, 32,000 in unintentional falls and 42,000 from unintentional poisoning.

The NSAA also reported 45 catastrophic injuries in the 2015-16 season, a dip in the ski industry’s 10-year average. Catastrophic constitutes those involving forms of paralysis, broken necks, broken backs and life-altering head injuries.

“If you look at ski injuries broadly, it’s been declining for decades,” NSAA President Michael Berry told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Think of all the things we see that didn’t exist 25 years ago

(that help the cause).”

Berry, who ran Kirkwood Mountain Resort for 13 years, listed the level of awareness, equipment and better grooming as contributing factors to a stunted growth of these types of serious incidents.

“Layer all those things, and we continue to see a decline in ski injuries,” he said.

For one thing, Berry cited an extraordinary number of signs on the mountains in the last decade. The ones indicating slow zones have popped up all over the slopes.

Berry suggested to those skiers or boarders who believe some riders are going too fast or get too close to perhaps consider this perspective.

“That skier flying by used to be me,” the 69-year-old ski executive said. “It generates some conflict. But when you say ‘I can’t believe he passed me that fast,’ consider that you were that person 20 years ago.”



Ski patrol as Sierra early this month train on chairlift evacuation techniques. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It takes a level of courtesy, awareness and knowing your limits

Most of the time the mingling of people works out. But sometimes it doesn't, resulting in impact on not only those who experience the injury, but to those who witness the incident.

Take Lake Tahoe skier Brenda Knox who witnessed a horrifying collision at Northstar last season. On Super Bowl Sunday she was coming down West Ridge from the summit of the backside when out of nowhere a skier acted like a linebacker by clobbering a snowboarder who was cruising into the slow zone.

The woman was between 15 to 20 feet in front of Knox doing her 10-foot turns when the man on skis who was straight lining down the hill sent her flying into the air.

“He came from my left going really fast. As she turned, he ran into her, and she flew into the air. I saw her leg break. She was screaming. She kept screaming,” Knox said.

When the ski patrol arrived, Knox told them what happened and that she saw the woman’s leg snap.

“I told them they needed to treat her for shock,” she said. “It really shook me.”

She was forced to calm down in the Zephyr Lodge after witnessing such an incident.

“What he did was so wrong. It was a slow zone. Signs were up everywhere,” Knox told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Ski area stakeholders believe they can only do so much in making the slopes safer. They can’t make people be more courteous, despite what Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows CEO Andy Wirth told *Lake Tahoe News* he would like to see in 2017.

“We do everything we can to make it safer. Still, there’s accountability with our guests. I’d like a reboot of people being more courteous,” Wirth said.

Granted, gravity goes with the sport of skiing.

“Gravity and the thrill of skiing is part of the general passion, but you have to have balance between what gravity does for us and safety,” Wirth said. “I’m of the very firm belief that our sport is safe, if not safer than most sports.”

Wirth pointed to training – which is “extensive and exhausting,” technical advancements and the focus on maintenance of equipment that have contributed to better safety.

And by all means, the awareness helps. At its core, all ski areas operate on the seven-point mantra of having riders live by the “responsibility code,” – which is posted in many places.



Ski patrollers at Sierra work to slow down skiers/snowboarders who go too fast. Photo/Provided

Knowing the code helps:

- *Always stay in control, and be able to stop or avoid other people or objects.*
- *People ahead of you have the right of way. It is your responsibility to avoid them.*
- *You must not stop where you obstruct a trail or are not visible from above.*
- *Whenever starting downhill or merging into a trail, look uphill and yield to others.*
- *Always use devices to help prevent runaway equipment.*
- *Observe all posted signs and warnings. Keep off closed trails and out of closed areas.*
- *Prior to using any lift, you must have the knowledge and*

ability to load, ride and unload safely.

Heavenly and Kirkwood spokesman Coop Cooper joined Northstar in declining input for this story, citing “our company’s corporate media policy,” but he didn’t indicate what the policy of parent company Vail Resorts is.

At Sierra-at-Tahoe on the South Shore, ski patroller Shannon Maguire notes the ski area goes a little further than the safety message.

Sierra takes its recruits for ski patrol and has them work as trail crew manning the slow zones.

“That program has grown since I’ve been here. More people are working the slow zones to have more eyes and ears on the hill,” Maguire said.

For patrollers, it’s just part of their training.

In the decade Maguire has been with Sierra, there are also more markers indicating mergers, high traffic areas and blind spots.

The ski resort has even expanded enhanced safety education to its racers – knowing they ski at ability levels that are quite different from beginners on the hill.



Tools of the trade when someone is injured on the slopes. Photo/LTN

Education before punishment

Although there are no hard numbers on passes revoked locally or nationally for the season, Maguire indicated that’s done as a last resort.

She noted the resort has the option of stripping away a pass for a few weeks.

“Sometimes the situation is more severe demanding stronger repercussions. But our goal is to educate them rather than go that route,” she said of pass revocation.

And rarely do the consequences rise to the level of that of what Casey Ferguson endured. The Keystone (Colo.) Resort snowboarder was ordered to pay more than $260,000 in damages from a collision that separated the shoulder of Chicago resident Tom Dubert. He was charged with reckless skiing, a rarity in the courts because many cases are settled between attorneys and insurance companies. In this case, Ferguson’s parent’s homeowners’ insurance policy covered the damages.

This all comes with the territory for California Ski Industry Association President Michael Reitzell, who's also a personal injury attorney.

The legal cases are few and far between, despite the accidents being dramatic. The outcomes may also be determined by the state they're made in.

"Colorado is different when it comes to litigation. It's thought of as a skier-friendly state, a place to go to ski," he said. This means skiing, and therefore being safe skiing, is part of the image of Colorado.

"No doubt we're gonna see increased efforts through the years and see less tolerance for less courtesy," Reitzell told *Lake Tahoe News.* "Snowboarder, skier – whatever the equipment, if you choose to not be courteous, you're an increased hazard on the hill and an increased risk to people around you."

Reitzell also admitted a ski area can only do so much to reduce the risk – especially since the number of skier visits grew from 4.6 million in 2014-15 to 7.2 million the following year. The average of the six-year period is 6.5 million.

The association is beefing up its safety measures for the state including coming out with a generic ski safety map that highlights what to do at certain hazard zones at any given ski resort. For example, it would warn skiers and boarders to watch out for the hazards of tree wells.

"Our goal is 100 percent injury free," Reitzell said.

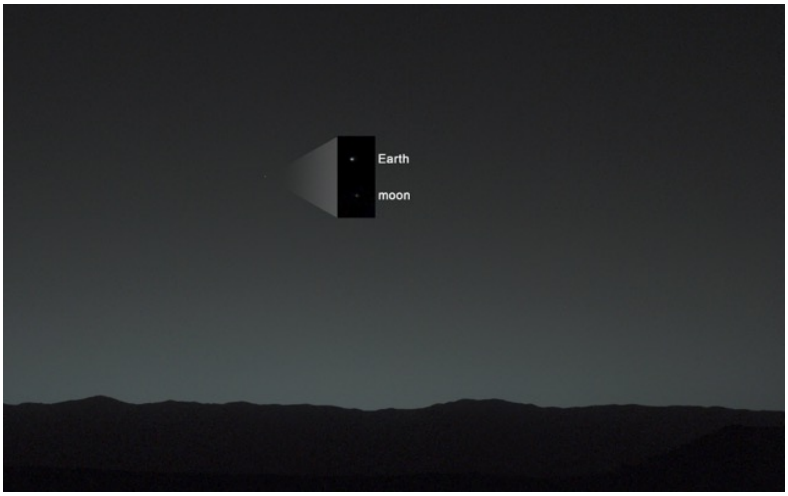
Star Guide: Star gazing from Venus, Mars

By Tony Berendsen

On a dark cloudless night away from artificial light hundreds to thousands of stars are visible in the Earth’s sky. Our atmosphere is mostly transparent to visible light so we see our sun’s distant neighbors sparkling above. For millennia humanity have written stories inspired by their groupings, we have wondered about them and their beginnings, they have guided us and many other creatures who roam our planet, our curiosity of the cosmos was born from our visual sense to gaze upon them.

Will the stars always be visible to us? What about our sister planets, would the night sky look the same from Venus or Mars?

If we went star gazing on Mars, the constellations would look the same as from Earth, but the North star wouldn’t be the pole star. Mars is tilted on its axis a couple of degrees more than the Earth so the north celestial pole would be near the constellation Cygnus, not Polaris, or any individual bright star. Also, the one large moon we see on Earth would be replaced by two small moons; Phobos and Deimos. Neither are very large and both orbit faster than our moon since they are so close Mars, in fact Phobos takes a mere 7½ hours to orbit, so a star gazer could see Phobos cross the Martian sky twice in one night.



An image of the earth and the moon by the Curiosity Rover.

For an earthling visiting Mars a spectacular difference in the view from Earth would be to see the Earth and the moon in the night sky. The Earth would be an inferior planet, showing phases like Mercury and Venus, and would look like a bright star in the sky, with a small dim star-like object (the moon) orbiting around it every month.

On Venus, star gazing would be impossible from the surface. At one time Venus may have had a transparent atmosphere, but today due to global warming, the clouds never clear to show the stars. Venus is much closer to the sun than the Earth, and long ago the planet experienced a disastrous climate change fueled by its close proximity to the sun, boiling away its oceans, capturing the radiation of the sun with the carbon dioxide in its atmosphere, raising its surface temperature to become hot enough to melt lead.

If a star gazer could go back in time, when the atmosphere of Venus may have been clear, imagine what a wonderful view it would have been to see the Earth and moon in the distance orbiting the sun with the Milky Way as a back drop.

Humans have a very short lifetime compared to the cosmos. We may live a century, but the cosmos lives so long we call it infinity. A billion years of time for us may be only a second

in cosmic time. If we traveled forward a second or two in cosmic time, our view of the stars from the surface of the Earth would be gone. The increasing heat from our evolving sun would have boiled our oceans changing our atmosphere from transparent and clear, to opaque and cloudy, bringing an end our existence in the habitable zone of our solar system and our view into space from the surface of the Earth.

So, our long term future of star gazing depends on the tool making ability of our species, and our success exploring and traveling our galaxy in search of other earths. But for now, a star gazer on Earth has a wonderful view of the cosmos, including Mars and Venus in the southwestern sky tonight. So, why not breakout your **SkyPortal app**, binoculars, or telescope, and enjoy the awesome view we have from the Earth.

Happy New Year!

Tony Berendsen runs Tahoe Star Tours. He may be reached at 775. 232.0844 or tony@tahoestartours.com.

Backcountry demo event at Alpine Meadows

The Lake Tahoe Backcountry Demo Event, North America's largest venue for all things alpine touring, telemark and splitboard, returns Jan. 21.

Alpenglow Sports of Tahoe City has partnered with Alpine Meadows for the 11h annual Backcountry Demo Event. It will be from 9am-3pm that Saturday.

Participating vendors will include DPS, Black Crows, Dynafit,

Tecnica, Blizzard, G3, Scarpa, NTN, Salomon, Scott, Marker, Volkl, Twenty-Two Designs, La Sportiva, Voile, Moment, Julbo, Fly Low, Jones Snowboards and more. The revolutionary Meidjo telemark binding will also be on hand.

The event is free, but participants must possess a valid lift ticket or season pass purchased from Alpine Meadows or Squaw Valley, along with a driver's license and credit card for deposit. Registration for the event will occur onsite at the Alpenglow Sports tent.

Call 530.583.6917 with questions.

Sno-parks provide gateway to winter fun

By Kathryn Reed

Parking can be a difficult thing to find in the winter for those who want to play outdoors. That is why there are sno-parks throughout California.

The 19 sites, six of which are in the greater Lake Tahoe area, are regularly cleared of snow. The catch is that a permit is required to park there. It costs $5/day or $25/season, with a season being Nov. 1-May 30. Access is on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The fine is $94.50 for parking at a sno-park without a permit.

California State Parks manages the program with cooperation from the U.S. Forest Service, California Highway Patrol and the vendors selling the passes. No one from State Parks was available to explain when the program started or if the money

is used for things other than snow removal.

Lake of the Sky Outfitters sold a record number of passes last winter – almost 300. Most years they sell between 160 and 250 permits. Weather is the main factor when it comes to sales.



The South Lake Tahoe store, which will be closing Jan. 31, gets to retain a little bit of the cash, but most of the money is sent to the state.

"Mostly for us it was a convenience for our customers," store owner Peter Hussmann told *Lake Tahoe News.* People interested in snow play areas were the main purchasers of passes.

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's main office in South Lake Tahoe is another popular place to get passes. Staff field a ton of calls about what the parks really are. Those on the other end of the line are hoping it's a real park. The reality is these locations are nothing more than a parking lot at a trailhead. Some have porta-potties, but that's it. There are no concessionaires renting toys or selling food, often no trash bins.

Overnight camping in vehicles used to be permitted, but is no longer allowed at any of the sno-parks. Tent camping is also prohibited as are fires in the parking lots.

Backcountry skiers, snowshoers and snowmobilers are the primary permit seekers at Sorensen's Resort.

"We have been going through them like water right now," Kel Gennert of Sorensen's told *Lake Tahoe News*. Thousands of dollars' worth, she added. It's been a mix of day and season

passes. “We do it as a courtesy for Alpine County Chamber of Commerce. They make a little bit of money on it.”

Because Sorensen’s doesn’t make a penny, the Hope Valley resort only accepts cash or checks for the permits.

“When people say what kind of park is it, we tell them it’s access to backcountry, that it is a safe place to park,” Gennert said.

Sorensen’s also has a brochure to hand people that has a map of where the sno-parks are and the rules. It’s been so busy they are temporarily out of them.

Oregon and Idaho have similar programs, with the three states having a reciprocal agreement.

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Notes:

· For more information about California sno-parks, including locations, go **online**.

Ways to ensure hiking boots last for years

By Joe Jackson, Outside

Dave Page knows a thing or two about boot care. He’s owned a boot repair shop in Seattle for the past 40 years (aptly named Dave Page, Cobbler).

Dave and his employees have worked on thousands of hikers.

They are also authorized repair agents for 18 outdoor brands. I recently called him to talk boots and find out his top five maintenance tips.

Page doesn’t immediately put wax or other products on his leather boots.

“Perspire in them. Let them shape, blend, to your foot first,” he says.

He suggests taking new leather boots on a series of shorts hikes.

Read the whole story