# Ranking the world’s toughest outdoor sports

**By Dan Roe, Outside**

You have no idea how tough [insert sport] is.

Whether we say it out loud or just repeat it to ourselves, many of us share this sentiment. As American novelist Mary McCarthy once said, “We are the hero of our own story.”

That said, some activities are legitimately harder than others, and in the realm of outdoor sports, a few are in a league of their own. Take rock climbing, for instance, which requires explosive upper-body strength, problem solving, and crux-time focus. Downhill mountain bikers regularly risk shattered bones, while open-water swimmers push themselves to the limit in unforgiving conditions. Nordic skiers force their bodies deep into oxygen debt, and ultrarunners—well, you get the idea.

But how can we quantify which one is actually the toughest? Here’s how: we chose five competitive sports that we feel are tough to learn, can be dangerous to perform, and require a high degree of skill and fitness.

**Read the whole story**

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# Holiday storms bring glimmer

# of hope for drought’s end

**By Ryan Sabalow and Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee**

A cold winter storm swept into the region on Friday and early Saturday, bringing low snow levels and slippery roads on one of the busiest holiday travel periods of the year.

While the storm made for dangerous road travel and plenty of airport delays, the wet, snowy weather, following a succession of storms to start the rainy season, was more welcome news as California concludes its fifth consecutive year of drought.

“At this point, we’re cautiously optimistic,” said Jeanine Jones, interstate resources manager for the state Department of Water Resources. “We’re in the fingers-crossed, wait-and-see mode.”

Experts like Jones aren’t ready to declare the drought over in spite of one of the more promising starts to California’s wet season in years. The reason? The state’s water-supply picture is very much a mixed bag at this point, and it’s still early in the state’s brief rainy season to point to any sort of trend. Most of the precipitation that falls in California falls in January and February.

**Read the whole story**

# Plan to unload federal land in Nev. will return

**By Benjamin Stillman, Reno Gazette-Journal**

Backers of a plan to force the federal government to cede control of millions of acres of land in Nevada are refreshing their proposal.

And they're starting with an effort to convince a skeptical public it's possible to take nearly 7.3 million acres from the Bureau of Land Management without disrupting hunting, off-highway riding or sticking Nevada taxpayers with bigger bills for fighting massive rangeland wildfires.

The plan has a better shot at survival if it manages to make it to the desk of incoming Republican President Donald Trump than it would have under a Democratic president.

**Read the whole story**

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# Nev. panel delays ban on 'smart rifle' laws

**By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal**

CARSON CITY – A legislative panel on Wednesday postponed a regulation to prohibit Nevada hunters from using high-tech rifles capable of zeroing in on big game from up to a mile away.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife approved the ban on so-

called “smart rifles” this fall, citing concerns that the technology allowing hunters to execute a kill shot with laser-like precision from long distances is contrary to the sportsmen’s doctrine of “fair chase.”

But the Legislative Commission withheld action after complaints from a lobbyist for a leading manufacturer, and some rural lawmakers raised concerns.

**Read the whole story**

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# Reveling in the cosmos on a dark winter night




Tony Berendsen, center, leads a star tour at Northstar on Dec.

21. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

**By Kathryn Reed**

TRUCKEE – Traipsing through the snow was otherworldly in a way that wasn't expected.

It became a star tour that required a bit of an imagination. Such are the hazards when Mother Nature decides to the mar the night sky with clouds.

But along the way the clouds parted just long enough for Tony Berendsen to point out the star Capella, which was 42 light years from where we were standing. It is actually four stars within the constellation Auriga.

"Constellations are beautiful. They are humanity in space," Berendsen said.

His passion shines through as he imparts nuggets of knowledge about the universe. Each stop was punctuated by the recital of one of his poems that was inspired by the cosmos. Berendsen was definitely able to stir the imagination enough to get people to start thinking about looking up more when it is dark and to wonder about what else is out there and what it will be like one day on Earth when our sun (which is a star) burns out

Berendsen is an award-winning amateur astronomer residing in Reno who writes the Star Guide astronomy articles for *Lake Tahoe News*. He is president of the Northern Nevada Science Coalition and a past president of the Astronomical Society of Nevada.



Snowshoeing through the dark woods of Northstar to learn about the stars. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

On the winter solstice on Wednesday he led a group of novice star gazers into the woods from the Nordic center at Northstar and finished at the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe. Normally the night wraps up with guests being able to view the myriad stars and planets through high-powered telescopes lined up at the Ritz. The clouds were not cooperating.

Instead of being able to be led by Sirius, which is the brightest star this time of year, headlamps were our beacon.

This is the eighth year Berendsen has put on guided the tours at the Truckee resorts, though he has been doing star tours for 15 years. He also guides summer programs.

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**Notes:**

· Future stargazing snowshoe tours will be on Dec. 28, Jan. 14 and Feb.11.

· Tours are approximately 2-2½ hours.

· Cost is $63 for ages 13 and older, and $45 for ages 10-12. Snowshoe rentals are available for $21 per person.

· Make reservations **online**.

· For information, go **online**.

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# Ski mogul going uphill to beat climate change

By Tom Moroney, Bloomberg

Ski-resort executives tend to hate climate change, for obvious reasons. Then there's Les Otten.

It's not that he's a fan, just that he's looking to turn the global-warming equation on its head. How so? By carving out slopes in a remote spot in northern New Hampshire that's frigid enough to out-snowpack rivals. While lower-elevation areas wilt, the lifts on higher ground will keep on humming.

"You wouldn't wish your fellow man ill," said Otten, a winter-sports industry veteran who has teamed up with a pair of local businessmen, "but their seasons will be shortened. It would be dishonest to say that to a degree that's not in our thinking.''

The go-north strategy is like a nor'easter that drops snow twice: It protects your investment and gives you a leg up on

competitors.

**Read the whole story**

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# ‘Guzzler’ atlas maps Nevada’s wildlife watering holes

**By Benjamin Stillman, Reno Gazette-Journal**

What do you buy for the outdoors-loving Nevadan who has everything?

Consider the gift of life giving water.

Or, at least an atlas that shows the location of approximately 1,300 Nevada Department of Wildlife guzzlers.

**Read the whole story**

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# Ice needles in the Sierra

**By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee**

Winter is here, and so are ice needles in the Sierra Nevada, a frozen phenomenon.

Michael C. Brelle, a chemistry professor at Sierra College, discovered them on his property in Alta, elevation 3,700 feet, in 2014, his first winter in the rural community.

Each year around the winter solstice, Brelle observes ice needles all over his 9-acre property. The pushing-up of the ice needles from the ground this year followed, as it usually does, a good rain and then cold temperatures.

**Read the whole story**

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# Substantial snow in forecast for Tahoe

It looks like it will be a white Christmas in Tahoe after all.

A winter storm warning is in effect from 10am Friday to 4pm Saturday.

According to the National Weather Service in Reno, between 8 and 16 inches of snow will fall at lake level, with 1 to 2 feet above 7,000 feet.

White-out conditions are expected on mountain passes.

Winds will be from the southwest at 15 to 25 mph, with gusts near 40 mph. The ridge tops could see 100 mph gusts.

The sun should return on Christmas Day.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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# Intricacies of snowmaking rival Ma Nature




Snowmaking is integral to Northstar's desires to provide enough terrain for all ability levels. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Kathryn Reed**

TRUCKEE – It looks like Jim Larmore is playing a sophisticated video game on his phone. But this is no game. As director of mountain operations at Northstar Larmore oversees the entire snowmaking operation.

He is essentially Father Nature. When Mother Nature doesn't deliver snow, Larmore and his gang do.

Many of the pumps and guns are at his fingertips via his phone.

"If I had to do everything manually, it would be too tough," Larmore told *Lake Tahoe News.*



Jim Larmore is able to control snowmaking at Norhstar with his phone. Photo/Kathryn reed

Looking at the mountain Larmore knows there is more to do. But on this first day of winter he’s more than satisfied with the coverage. Each day more terrain opens. On Wednesday it was Logger’s Loop; today it could be Castle Peak.

Knowing the mountains suffered a rain on snow event in the last week one might think the conditions are nasty. Just the opposite. Snowmaking and grooming can do wonders to ski slopes. Snow is often moved around fill in spots.



Snowmaking equipment comes in various sizes. Photos/Kathryn Reed





And the consistency no longer resembles something that came out of a high school science project. Most of the time it’s hard to tell Mother Nature didn’t create it.

Snowmaking can be a 24-hour endeavor. Mostly, though, a cadre of workers are on the job when the public is long gone. Larmore says it takes someone who embraces the outdoors, doesn’t mind getting wet and likes physical labor.

Scattered about the ski resort are an array of snowmaking guns. Some operate on air and water, some don’t have any air.

Newer ones can use less than half the energy of older models, but they don’t blow as much white stuff.

With at least half of them being automated, it means a more consistent quality is guaranteed. They turn on and off based on the temperature.

This is a huge change from the old days when the crew would sling pumps and hoses over their shoulders and walk all the equipment to the slopes.

Today the devices are too big to even contemplate doing that.

It’s a balancing act to get enough varied terrain open to cater to the diverse group of skiers who come to this resort just outside the Lake Tahoe Basin. While the ultimate goal is to provide the best guest experience possible, it’s not as easy as flipping a switch and suddenly there is snow.

There’s the big picture plan of what staff wants to have covered at various times in the season, and then there are the daily snowmaking plans that get down to the nitty gritty. And even those plans are fluid because nothing is constant. Temperatures and humidity – the key factors in when to blow – are constantly monitored.

South facing slopes, high traffic areas and lower terrain need more help.

An advantage Northstar has over some other resorts is that it isn’t that rocky. This means less snow – real or manmade – is needed to ski on because it doesn’t take that much to cover grass.

Northstar has the capacity to cover 50 percent of its runs.

The water to make the snow comes from Sawmill Reservoir, which is on the mountain beyond the Nordic center. It’s estimated that 86 percent of manmade snow returns to the aquifer.

If it weren’t for snowmaking during recent winters, there would not have been a ski season.

“We did quite well during the drought,” Larmore said. “But it’s better for everyone if it snows.”