# SLT to host 2 legs of women's Amgen bike race

**By Kathryn Reed**

Half of the women's 2017 Amgen bike race will be in South Lake Tahoe.

Officials announced today that the women will be returning to the area May 11-12.

Day 1 the cyclists will ride the 72 miles around the lake, finishing at Heavenly Mountain Resort. This will be the third year the women **have ridden this route**.

Officially called Amgen Breakaway from Heart Disease Women's Race Empowered with SRAM, this race is one of the most prestigious in the United States.

""The Amgen Tour of California's women's race will return to Lake Tahoe for the third time in as many years and we like to think that these elite athletes have come to call this home. The women's event is such a good fit for this destination and we enjoy being part of the effort to elevate the status of cycling here, particularly for the women, who are so engaged with the community," Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News.*



Women cyclists will return to Lake Tahoe in May 2017. Photo Copyright 2016 Lisa J. Tolda

Day 2's route won't be disclosed until early next year. All officials will say is that "riders will face summits in excess of 7,300 feet." That eliminates the 7,146-foot Spooner Summit. Plus, the women will have climbed it the day before.

Luther Pass is 7,740 feet. The men pedaled up it when they finished stage 5 this year. Kingsbury Grade, aka Daggett Summit, is 7,344 feet and Echo Summit is 7,382.

A common circuit for serious local roadies is to go up, over, and down Kingsbury and Luther passes. This would make for a challenging loop no matter which pass they would do first.

Lake Tahoe has always provided Tour of California riders with interesting weather. Even though it didn't snow this year, high winds were a concern at the start of the women's race.

While it's too soon to know the exact teams and rosters, 2016 winner Megan Guarnier has committed to race here next year.

The women’s third stage will be in Elk Grove on May 13, with the final leg in Sacramento on May 14.

The men start their 600-mile race on May 14 in Sacramento, finishing May 20 in Pasadena. The 2017 race will mark the first year the men’s race has been elevated to Union Cycliste Internationale World Tour status, making it the only stage race in North America to receive this classification.

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# Smoke in air from South Shore controlled fires

The U.S. Forest Service will continue prescribed fire operations this week in areas on the south end of Lake Tahoe.

If conditions are favorable, operations may take place on urban lots near Heavenly Mountain Resort and off South Upper Truckee near Highway 89 South in Christmas Valley. Operations will continue as conditions allow.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions. Agencies coordinate with state and local county air pollution control districts and monitor weather conditions closely prior to prescribed fire ignition.

To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email topa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

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# Concussion specialist warns of football's hazards

**By Linda Fine Conaboy**

RENO – No child under the age of 18 should be allowed to play contact sports, forensic neuropathologist Bennet Omalu states in his clipped, fast-talking, often humorous manner.

Ranging from one side of the stage to the other, without notes, he continues talking to an audience of nearly 1,000 who have come to hear the doctor whose science is the subject of the recent movie, "Concussion", starring Will Smith and Alec Baldwin. Last week Omalu was speaking at the UNR Medical School's Healthy Nevada Speaker Series.



Bennet Omalu

"Children are prohibited from smoking and drinking until they are 21, but not from contact sports," he muses. "We have a duty to protect our children. When they play this game [football] they have a 100 percent chance of exposure to brain injury. We should not be afraid of the truth—it's child abuse."

Strong words, but this man has become a leading expert on traumatic brain injury, and through shear doggedness, has made his findings familiar to at least a good part of the population. Most football fans know of Omalu, the guy who autopsies the brains of football players and has found that

there really is a reason for the sometimes erratic and unconventional behavior exhibited by some former gridiron jockeys.

Omalu autopsied Pittsburgh Steeler and Kansas City Chief center, “Iron” Mike Webster’s brain after his untimely death. Although he was disabled before his retirement from football, after retirement, it was obvious Webster suffered from amnesia, dementia, depression and acute bone and muscle pain. He lived out of his pickup, and in 2002, died of a heart attack.

“Concussion” graphically depicts Webster’s shattered life after football, his death and his relationship to Omalu, who examined his brain tissue and determined that amazingly, his brain was a fairly normal one, even though there is speculation that Webster exhibited the effects of someone who had been in 25,000 auto accidents over 25 years of playing football in high school, college and professionally.

But Omalu’s road to Webster and international fame as the person who finally discovered what was killing football players was a bumpy one.

Born in 1968, Omalu has six siblings and is a Nigerian-American physician, forensic pathologist and neuropathologist who was the first to discover and publish findings of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in American football players while he worked at the coroner’s office in Pittsburgh.

He said as a child he discovered his imagination and also discovered the power of education. “If I’m educated,” he thought, “I have power over you. I studied hard and became a physician at 21. I was a simple man leading a simple life.”

But life at university wasn’t easy for him. “At med school I became extremely depressed and dropped out of school. Even though I was suffering, my parents punished me. To be myself, that’s all I wanted to be.”

He said he learned about the United States from the media; he arrived in Seattle in 1994 with $200, only to come face-to-face with racism, a subject previously foreign to him.

“I knew nothing about slavery, but then I discovered another Bennet and learned it’s OK to be him,” he said with a chuckle. “I must be true to myself. I’ve only got one life to live. No one could tell me what to do, it would be a denial of myself. If I was not true to myself, I would deny society of Bennet.” Again, that hearty chuckle.

It was in Pittsburgh that he learned about Webster and other football players who died mysteriously, many of them destitute, mentally ill and bankrupt, all with the common denominator being football. It was during this period that he asked himself, “Why do you need to wear a helmet to play a game?”

After their deaths, upon examination, the brains of these men all seemed fairly normal, leading Omalu to wonder why the erratic behavior? Although he didn’t know what he was looking for, he suspected football was the culprit.

When he lost his job, he found a way to take brains home with him, examining them on his kitchen and dining room tables, all the while struggling greatly with depression, a malady that began as a child as he watched the horror of war.

This is when he was finally able to make his CTE discovery. This is also when the National Football League denounced him. His fellow doctors called him a dangerous physician, saying he was disreputable.

“We Americans are infatuated with football,” he said. “We all look the other way; football cannot be harmful—the evidence was denied.

“I studied death and studied death,” he said. “I examined brains. There is a spirit that lives in everyone and is shared

by everybody. We are members of one another. What I do, I do for all of us. When I look at myself, I see all of us. I want the NFL to do well, but the life of one player is worth more than the NFL."

Before he officially ended his talk, Omalu mused, "What are we afraid of? Believe that faith causes the impossible to become possible. Always dream the impossible dream. Do the autopsy."

Omalu later moved his family west, becoming chief medical examiner for San Joaquin County and professor at UC Davis' Department of Medical Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.

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# Calif.'s $350 million social experiment over lawns

**By Ellen Knickmeyer, AP**

California water agencies that spent more than $350 million in the last two years of drought to pay property owners to rip out water-slurping lawns are now trying to answer whether the nation's biggest lawn removal experiment was all worth the cost.

Around the state, water experts and water-district employees are employing satellite images, infrared aerial photos, neighborhood drive-bys and complex algorithms to gauge just how much grassy turf was removed. They also want to know whether the fortune in rebates helped turn California tastes lastingly away from emerald-green turf.

"How well did it work? That's really key when we're working on historic investments," said Patrick Atwater, a project manager

at the California Data Collaborative, a coalition of utilities and other water-related entities grappling with the question.

Removing lawns may sound like a small, wonky step, compared to building dams. But the green turf in American yards actually stands as a worthy target for water savings, a public enemy in the eyes of many during a drought such as California's 5-year-old one.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates one-third of all water used by American households goes to watering lawns and gardens. That's 9 billion gallons of water each day – enough to supply drinking water daily for nine cities the size of New York.

In 2015, after a devastatingly dry winter, Gov. Jerry Brown ordered 25-percent water conservation by cities and towns. He mandated $25 million in state-government spending to help cover the costs of low-income California families in particular removing their grass, and putting less-thirsty, climate-suitable plants in their yards instead.

Brown set a goal of eliminating 50 million square feet of lawn. That breaks down to less than two square miles of greenery, out of what the Public Policy Institute of California think-tank has estimated at around 1,000 square miles of watered yards statewide.

But state spending proved a drop in the bucket compared to the money local water districts put into lawn rebates.

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, a giant water wholesaler providing water to Los Angeles and more than two dozen other cities, counties and water districts, poured just over $300 million into lawn rebates from 2014 on, removing five square miles of lawn.

MWD doubled its rebate offer to $2 for each square feet of lawn removed, and the lawn rebates quickly became the

district’s most popular program ever. Workers processed as much as $10 million in rebate applications a week at peak. In July 2015 alone, Southern Californians applied for rebates to remove the equivalent of 1,665 front lawns.

Santa Clara Valley Water District, serving Silicon Valley, provided more than $30 million in rebates. Dozens of other water districts put a few hundred thousand dollars to several million dollars into dead-lawn bounties. Rebates ranged from 50 cents a square foot of lawn to $4 and up.

Water districts revised rebate rules and amounts on the fly, after controversies erupted over golf courses and other properties that got millions of dollars each in rebates. Water boards imposed caps on rebates. Some districts dictated that homeowners put in California-suitable plants. Other water agencies faced criticism for allowing artificial turf, and swathes of gravel.

Now some water-district managers are nervous over political fallout if the benefits don’t measure up to the rebate costs, said Chelsea Minton of OmniEarth, a Virginia-based analytics firm that is using before-and-after satellite images to help tally the effectiveness of the lawn-removal program.

Privately, some worried water officials were “saying, ‘Let’s wait a year or two’” to study it, Minton said

Figuring out whether California’s experiment made sense economically is more involved than just totaling how much turf residents have ripped out.

Two key questions are whether households leave the lawns off for a generation or two, and whether each rebate helps turn Californian tastes away from lawns, independent of future rebates.

At Southern California’s Claremont Graduate University, Assistant Professor Andrew Marx is drawing on infrared imagery

from airplanes, normally used by farmers, to help figure out whether the rebates are changing Californians' tastes.

The state will go deeper still into the number-crunching, tallying not just water savings but spin-off savings. They range from lower energy costs for piping less water to households to reduced climate-changing pollution from lawn mowers, said Ken Frame, a project manager at California's Department of Water Resources.

In Southern California's Irvine Ranch Water District, which spent $638,403 on lawn rebates since 2014, workers sent surveys and drove block to block to nail down just how many homeowners joined the lawn-less trend.

Irvine's pilot study found that for every three homeowners who took the rebate, at least four others converted their lawns to less water-hungry plants. Water experts say other factors besides the rebates played a part, including news reports about turf removal programs and the governor's drought-messaging.

Rebates aren't about trying "to buy up all the turf in California – that wouldn't be cost-effective," said Ellen Hanak, director of the water-policy center at the Public Policy Institute of California.

Instead, the rebates have built awareness that water-thrifty landscapes also look good, Hanak said.

In Santa Rosa, homeowner Trudi Schindler took the rebate to replace deep-green grass with flagstone pavers and a silvery-green groundcover with yellow flowers. Schindler wouldn't go back to grass.

"It looks beautiful and sophisticated. And just more lovely than a lawn," she said.

# A new approach to navigating the PCT

**By Caroline Benner, High Country News**

At exactly 583.28 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, along the Pacific Crest Trail, you will come upon Golden Oak Spring. Just shy of a mile later, the trail crosses a power line near a wind farm. A half-mile farther, a man named Lon Cooper, a retired information-technology professional with an enormous amount of energy, stood thinking that the spot would make a nice place to camp.

He turned the data he'd collected into a GPS application for navigating the trail, and offered it as a free download for a smartphone. Hikers who use the so-called Halfmile app can now know exactly where they are on the Pacific Crest Trail, or how far away from the trail they are if they have wandered off it.

This sort of hyper-detailed, micro-documenting of the trails of the West – the Arizona Trail and the Colorado Trail have similar apps, for example – is a new trend in backcountry exploration. But before downloading these guides, consider whether you really want or need to know all the precise details that these wilderness apps offer.

**Read the whole story**

# Sierra’s yellow-legged frogs are making a comeback

**By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times**

In the 1950s, California wildlife authorities used to fly over remote lakes and creeks in Yosemite National Park and deliver precious cargo: hatchery-raised trout.

The policy was great for fishing enthusiasts. But for the yellow-legged frogs that shared those waters, the arrival of hungry trout was a disaster.

These days, wildlife officials are using helicopters to transport the fist-sized frogs to some of the very same waters, which are now being rid of non-native trout.

It’s part of a strategy that has helped the frog population grow at a rate of 11 percent a year since 1991, according to a report this month in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

**Read the whole story**

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# South Shore cycling advocates seek upgrades




Scott Valentine, left, tries to read a bike route sign in South Lake Tahoe. At right is signage in Mammoth. Photos/Provided

**By Kathryn Reed**

Signs don't do much good if no one can read them, and recreation amenities don't do much good without staff to manage and maintain them. Those were two of the overriding messages delivered this month by the South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Commission to the City Council.

Commissioner Scott Valentine, who is about 6-feet-tall, showed a picture of himself standing on his bike pedals, arm outstretched trying to read the tiny print on a mounted trail sign in the city.

"It's 8-point font on an 8 x 10-inch tin," he told the council. "I'm not sure how many people can read a sign that is 10 feet off the ground."

The commission acts as an advisory body to council about all things recreation. Signage, connectivity and staffing were the three points stressed during this annual report.

“Clear and consistent signage will improve visitor enjoyment and enhance traffic flow and resolve safety issues,” the report states.

Valentine, who is chairman of the commission, suggested adding QR codes to signs so people with smart phones could get an automatic link to information.

The commission recommended better signage at:

· Tahoe Keys Boulevard-Eloise Avenue

· Springwood trailhead

· Viking Road trailhead

· Al Tahoe Boulevard-Pioneer Trail

· Tahoe Keys Boulevard-Venice Drive.

In terms of trails that will help get people around the area better, Valentine said the most important one is the Greenway. While ultimately it will go from Meyers to Stateline, it is being built incrementally from the center outward. The California Tahoe Conservancy is the lead on this project.

In 2015, 0.42 miles of the **Greenway** was built between Herbert Avenue and Glenwood Way. Future sections include going from Herbert to Ski Run Boulevard, and then from Ski Run to Van Sickle. When those are completed the trail will be 3.86 miles long.

A few of the improvements the commission would like in the near future include:

· Connecting the old Alta Mira building to Ski Run Boulevard;

· Continuing the trail at Viking Way-Lake Tahoe Boulevard to the Y;

· Creating a spur from the trail behind Fitness Evolution-Scusa to Sierra Boulevard.

“We can’t recommend any of these additional projects without first addressing our staffing needs,” Valentine said.

He said the ongoing maintenance is an issue. People are needed to maintain these trails.

The council did not discuss anything that Valentine presented that day.

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# Tahoe Donner tennis team reaches nationals

Tahoe Donner’s men’s 55 and over 9.0 tennis team made it to the semifinals of the national championships.

This is an all doubles league where the combined USTA rating of the players must be 9.0 or less.

The team took fourth place in the Oct. 30 competition in Arizona.

The Truckee team was made up of John Wlcek of South Lake Tahoe, Marty Briesach of Truckee, Zeke Straw of Truckee, Dave Condon of Truckee, Alain Kovaltchouk of Reno, Tren Nolan of Reno, Andy Biederman of Reno, Barry Young of Fairfield, Michael Fischer of Fairfield, Russell Jilot of Auburn, Paul Phillips of Auburn, Terry Vander Ploeg of Grass Valley, Randy Havens of Weimer, and Jim Kooler of Modesto.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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# BLM to remove horses from Nev. sage grouse habitat

**By Associated Press**

The federal Bureau of Land Management is planning to remove 1,100 wild horses from a part of Northern Nevada that also contains sage grouse habitat.

The helicopter gather in the Owyhee area is scheduled to begin Tuesday, according to the *Elko Daily Free Press*.

BLM Nevada Wild Horse and Burro Program Manager Alex Shepherd said the gather is meant to cut down on the overpopulation of wild horses in the area, which has been marked as priority sage grouse habitat.

The removed horses will be taken to the Palomino Valley Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Center near Reno, where they will be prepared for the BLM adoption program.

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# SLT expected to host women's Amgen bike race



The women cyclists are expected to start in South Lake Tahoe in 2017. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

**By James Raia Sacramento Bee**

The announcement likely will come early next week, but South Lake Tahoe officials expect to host the start of the 2017 women's Amgen Tour of California. Sacramento is expected to be the start of the men's race.

A four-day women's stage race will be held May 11-14, likely from South Lake Tahoe to Sacramento. South Lake Tahoe was the **start of women's race** this year and the finish for one of the men's stages.

The men's race will be one day shorter than in 2016, May 14-20. The men are returning to a north-south route, which will not include Lake Tahoe.

Neither the Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG), which owns the event, nor the title sponsor would confirm the status of

various cities.

But South Lake Tahoe and Sacramento officials confirmed they bid to host a stage.

Elk Grove, which has never been part of the event, has bid on a women's stage.

Folsom, the site of the men's individual time trial and women's team time trial this year, did not bid for a stage in 2017.

Davis, which usually seeks a stage, won't participate in 2017, focusing instead on the 100th anniversary of the city's incorporation and other civic milestones.

Santa Rosa and Monterey, which hosted stages this year, won't be involved in 2017, according to city spokespeople. Morro Bay, which hosted a stage start this year, and San Jose, which has been part of the event in nine editions, have bid for 2017.

Participating teams, key individual riders and route mileages usually are announced sporadically a few weeks before the event.

*– Lake Tahoe News contributed to this report.*