Working to preserve the night sky

By Kate Siber, Outdoor

On May 24, 2015, at 3am., filmmaker Ben Canales sat on a ridge overlooking the gleaming lights of Telluride, Colo. One by one, blocks of streetlamps winked off far below. Canales had convinced many residents to turn off their lights as part of a special event during Mountainfilm, the annual outdoors-focused movie festival. He also persuaded the town's maintenance department to flip the switches to all of the municipal lights.

"No town has ever turned the lights off," he says. "By doing this, it makes a statement that we control our technology. It's here to serve us. We're not in servitude of it."

About 80 people gathered downtown in the middle of the night to experience a sliver of what every generation before our grandparents knew intimately as a birthright: darkness. It was a milestone in the growing movement to preserve the night sky.

By any estimate, it's a losing battle. According to a study in *Science Advances* released this month, 99 percent of the population of the United States lives under a night sky polluted by artificial lights in places like parking lots, gas stations, streets, and backyards.

Read the whole story

Yacht club putting on skills clinic

Lake Tahoe Windjammers Yacht Club is offering sailing skills clinic on July 16.

The first part of the day will be classroom instruction, with an optional on-the-water lesson. No prior experience necessary, but those who have sailed before are invited, too.

Preregistration is required because space is limited. The cost is $35 for WYC members, $45 for others.

The clinic will be at the clubhouse located above the harbor master’s office in the Tahoe Keys Marina in South Lake Tahoe.

Sign-in begins at 8:30 am with coffee and beverages; class starts at 9am, lunch at 11:30am, on-water instruction after lunch, and social hour at 5pm.

Bring multiple layers of clothing and life jacket if going out on the water, white soled shoes, a hat and sunscreen.

South Shore soccer club looking for players

Tryouts for the South Tahoe Futbol Club are June 21-23 at South Tahoe Middle School.

The soccer club is for boys and girls ages 5 to 18.

Tryouts for girls are from 4:30-6:30pm, boys from 6:30-8:30pm. Bring cleats, shin guards and water.

The nonprofit club will have teams competing in leagues, tournaments and showcases.

For more information, contact Nick Arbelaez at 702.334.2492 ornrarbelaez@ltcc.edu.

Resurfaced courts for Tahoe Tennis Classic

Participants in the 33rd annual Tahoe Tennis Classic will be playing on newly resurfaced courts this summer.

The six hard courts at Zephyr Cove Tennis club are like brand new. Painted a lighter and darker shade of green, they are already being broken in by locals.

With the tournament's growth in popularity, it is now a four-day event – July 28-31. To accommodate everyone, some matches will be played at nearby courts. The all doubles adult tournament brought out a record number of participants last year from nine states. Tournament officials are expecting an equal or great number of players this year.

This is the third year the nonprofit Zephyr Cove Tennis Club Foundation has been overseeing the tournament. The Saturday night dinner is now a much sought-after ticket because of the camaraderie – even among those who were foes on the courts – and the party atmosphere on the eve of the finals. This night is now a major fundraiser for the club with a raffle and silent auction. Proceeds from this year's event will be

allocated to pay off the resurfacing debt. (No need to participate in the tournament to attend the dinner at Harveys in Stateline; anyone is welcome to attend for $30.)

Entry fee for the various divisions is $80, with the second event $30. Every player is guaranteed at least two matches and some swag. The deadline to signup is July 24. More information, as well as the registration form, is available on ZCTC's **website**.

While Douglas County owns the courts, it the ZCTCF that maintains them and the entire tennis facility.

Bull riding a highlight at EDC Fair

Bull riding is one of the signature events of the El Dorado County Fair, which begins June 16 in Placerville.

"A true cowboy wants as wild and feisty a bull as possible so they have a chance to win," says Wes Ibrahimi, whose Humpz and Hornz Ranch is known among bull riders to have top of the line stock. "Good bulls bring the best out of the riders and good riders do the same for the bulls."

In bull riding, the rider and the bull are judged on a one to 25 scale by two judges, with a possible total score of 50 points for each. A 22-point bull is considered a good bull, which equals a 44 point score between the two judges.

On Friday at 8pm, at the El Dorado County Fairgrounds dozens of cowboys will attempt to ride Ibrahimi's bulls. They'll vie for the small chance at a little bit of prize money, a silver

buckle and a perfect eight seconds.

The event is included in the price of fair admission.

The fair is June 16-19. For more info, go **online**.

Forest ranger – not a job for the weak, timid



Seasonal forest rangers do a variety of work, including clearing the Pacific Crest Trail. Photo/Provided

By Susan Wood

Being a seasonal ranger is no walk in the woods. It often involves hard physical labor.

U.S. Forest Service ranger is a coveted job, after all people apply by the thousands; a process that starts in January. The program runs from May to October.

While starting to inquire about the seasonal ranger program, longtime Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit forester extraordinaire Don Lane asked this reporter, “Have you seen the movie ‘Walk in the Woods’?”

“Why, yes, I have,” adding the proverbial: “The book (by Bill Bryson) was better.”

What Lane was getting at is that perhaps his latest ranger recruits may want to see the film to get a glimpse of living in the wilderness and how some people behave.



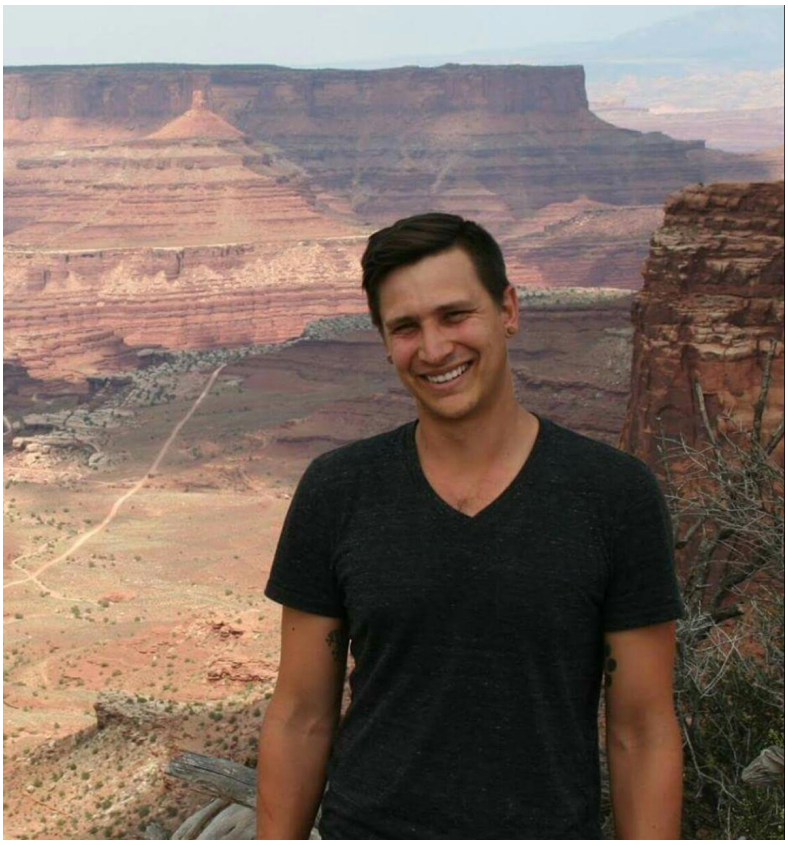
For ranger Miranda LeConte, interacting with people is her favorite part of the job. Photo/Provided

There are 18 rangers – two general foresters, nine Taylor Creek interpretive personnel and seven staffers in the wildland program. As the supervisory recreation forester, Lane takes the responsibility of nurturing the newbies seriously. There’s pride in that uniform, and it shows – even after 45 years with LTBMU.

“I have a responsibility to them. You have to inspire them, to motivate them and tell them the responsibilities. Once you put that badge on, people will react to it,” said the iconoclastic ranger to Lake Tahoe, who started with LTBMU before computers were installed. He recalled “the old days” when hiring recruits meant going through stacks of written applications — all diverse individuals with varied backgrounds and dreams.

What needed to be stressed is that the innate challenge to the seasonal work is staying committed. The schedule involves four 10-hour days a week.

With 5.7 million visitors descending on the jewel of the Sierra Nevada, the rangers are outnumbered in the Desolation Wilderness by one employee to 11,000 guests.



Brian Homberger, a native of Australia, is spending his summer as a ranger in Tahoe. Photo/Provided

“It’s not what you do that’s necessary. It’s what you can

contribute," Lane told *Lake Tahoe News*. "This is a dedicated team of professionals. It's a privilege to work with these rangers who want to live in the wilderness."

The seasonal rangers have a multitude of duties, from trail or facility maintenance to working in interpretation at the Taylor Creek Visitors Center on the outskirts of Camp Richardson.

Lake Tahoe News was given the opportunity to speak with the four new seasonal rangers and their supervisor Chris Engelhardt, the wildland recreation area manager, on the day before National Trails Day about their moment of discovery when they decided to be a ranger.

"What I realized was wild with a big 'W' was not like any place on Earth. I was consumed. Once I learned about it, I took on the responsibility to take care of it," Miranda LeConte said.



Chris Engelhardt, left, supervises the seasonal rangers in LTBMU. Photo/Provided

LeConte recalled working in 2013 at the Eldorado National Forest visitor center when she had the opportunity to take a

day hike to a lake in the Desolation Wilderness.

“Once I put my feet in the water, it started for me,” she said.

From there, her calling resembled poetry in motion.

At age 23, the Camino resident studies environmental management in the winter. In summer, she’s a first time LTBMU ranger now going through an extensive training regimen. The training has recently involved going out in the woods and meeting up with people – her favorite part of the job.

“From those experiences, I can talk to the public and make contact, seeing why people choose to go into the wilderness,” she said.



This is Sam Yarbrough’s first season as a ranger. Photo/Provided

There lies a delicate balance. An appreciation and respect may develop between backcountry enthusiasts, but at the same time, a challenge may arise if someone is wary of authority. Consequently, the job requires support of hikers and backpackers, but may also involve telling them they’re doing something wrong – whether consciously or unconsciously.

Inevitably, a kinship is created between the rangers. LeConte commended and thanked her buddy and fellow ranger Shannon Maguire for helping her use a crosscut saw to do trail maintenance.

“I never used one before. But Shannon taught me. She was good and stressed safety,” she said.

It’s not the first time Maguire has stepped up to the plate.

At age 35, it’s her eighth season as a returning seasonal ranger. In the winter, she works in ski patrol for Sierra-at-Tahoe. Last year, she was awarded employee of the year. She likes how her summer gig involves diversity of tasks.

“My favorite part is that it changes every year, and every day could be different,” she said. “One day you could be doing trail maintenance and another day campground cleanup.”

She also enjoys talking to people in the wilderness and maybe catching them early if they’re not prepared. These circumstances have occurred this year with the substantial snowpack. For instance, the Bay View Trail still has substantial snow and one of the streams to Velma Lakes is so high hikers can’t get across it.



Shannon Maguire has specialized training to fight fires. Photo/Provided

Maguire, who’s originally from Albuquerque, has gained quite a repertoire of skills in the mountains. She and Engelhardt hold “a red card,” which makes them fully trained in firefighting techniques – a valuable skill to possess in the ever-so challenging fire seasons in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.

All recruits are expected to be eyes and ears in reporting fires and carry a Forest Service radio as well as a map and compass to be able to figure out coordinates. Maguire and Engelhardt may completely suit up with fire gear that includes the heavy shelter kits.

It’s Sam Yarbrough’s first season as a seasonal ranger. At age 26, she attended college in Colorado and now hopes to live in

the woods to develop an even greater appreciation of it. She hopes the people she encounters will too.

“I’m encouraged to inspire us to protect the regional wilderness, and I want to explore as much as I can,” she said.

As the fourth recruit, Brian Homberger came the farthest on his journey as a Lake Tahoe seasonal ranger. The 26-year-old hails from Melbourne, Australia, scoring a Tallac site cabin where seven people divvy up four rooms.

It’s all a part of the job for Homberger, who loves to get down and dirty with his field of study. He hopes to apply what he gains in this ranger experience with a degree in biology and discipline in restoration ecology. In the winter, he works in a native plant nursery.

What Homberger has experienced in plants, Engelhardt, 39, has picked up on in the wildlife – listing the grouse and small rubber boa constrictor as the most unique sightings he’s made in the Desolation Wilderness.

In tune to John Muir, Engelhardt considers all the rangers as naturalists – especially when it comes to the pristine nature of the Desolation.

He cited a water quality survey conducted there in 2011, and every lake showed no sign of giardia – a parasite associated with contaminated drinking water that causes intestinal infections.

No wonder all the rangers expressed the mission of harboring the greater good of their jobs.

“We become experts on wilderness values. We’re not just hiking the trails with shovels,” Engelhardt said.

Getting away from it all – with digital help

By Louis Hansen, Bay Area News Group

It might seem wrong to reach for the smartphone for anything more than a photo during a hike. But a number of apps make it easier to find the trails, sweeping vistas and brilliant meadows.

For some nature-lovers, an app is the alternative to pulling out the guidebook to plan a trip. Once you get inside the park boundaries, mobile phones can replace the accordion maps. After the hike or biking trip, apps can let you share and brag on social platforms geared to fellow intrepid outdoorsmen and women.

Outdoor guides say they've come to accept and even embrace the innovations.

The potential audience for outdoor apps is gauged in the millions. The National Park Service reports the park system counted 307 million visits last year, up 7 percent from 2000.

Read the whole story

9-day festival all about the

outdoors at Tahoe

Alpenglow Sports’ fourth annual summer edition of the nine-day Alpenglow Mountain Festival starts June 18.

The North Lake Tahoe event is a celebration of human-powered events, clinics, presentations and more. Geared for toward the beginner and intermediate mountain sports enthusiasts, the Alpenglow Mountain Festival will showcase some of the best activities Lake Tahoe has to offer including trail running, hiking, yoga, standup paddleboarding, rock climbing and natural history events.

The majority of events are free, so space is limited and participants are encouraged to register online.

New this year is the Broken Arrow Skyrace, a three-distance trail running event at Squaw Valley.

The complete events schedule and map of locations for the June 18-16 festival are **online**.

How to find great Sierra camping without crowds

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

It’s not that Kimberly and Patrick Wilkes don’t like you.

They just don’t want to look at your messy campsite or listen

to you snore when they’re trying to enjoy nature.

And to show it’s nothing personal, they presume you don’t want to spend your camping trip in the shadow of their tent either.

That’s why the husband and wife team from Gardnerville spent two years visiting 3,416 campsites in the Eastern Sierra and Death Valley and rated each by the level of privacy it affords.

Their efforts resulted in a guidebook, “Eastern Sierra and Death Valley Camping with Privacy.”

Read the whole story

USFS warning – backcountry trails full of snow

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is urging backcountry hikers and backpackers to use extra care when visiting upper elevation areas of the Lake Tahoe Basin over the next several weeks because there is still significant snow above 8,000 feet in many locations.

Many backcountry trails are still covered with snow and ice leaving trails slippery and difficult to find. In addition, current warm temperatures have caused streams to flow higher and faster, which can make crossing difficult.

Backcountry travelers should check the weather before heading out, don’t hike alone, always use the buddy system, leave an itinerary with a friend or family member, and check in with

them upon return, dress appropriately with sturdy footwear and carry proper gear including food and water, a map and compass, hiking pole or walking stick, and consider snowshoes and an ice axe.