6 invisible benefits of exercise

By Cassie Shortsleeve, Outdoor

Muscle tone and weight control. For the past decade, these benefits have topped the list of reasons why we exercise, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association's annual report on the fitness industry. They consistently edge out others—like "feeling good after" and "increased energy"—we can't see in a mirror.

That doesn't mean we don't care about the stuff we can't see. We assume, for instance, that the effort to break a sweat leads to better cardiovascular health and a lower cancer risk. And extra energy and happiness are still key benefits.

But the breadth of invisible boons goes even further, affecting everything from our dating lives to our bowel movements. So the next time you're stressing about a few stubborn pounds or a less-than-cut quad, focus on these six invisibly awesome effects of your efforts. We'll start with your pain tolerance.

Read the whole story

9-day outdoor festival on North Shore

Alpenglow Mountain Festival, the nine-day festival in North Lake Tahoe, returns Feb. 21-March 1.

This is a celebration of human-powered mountain sports, events, clinics, equipment demonstrations, presentations, film and more. Geared toward beginner and intermediate winter recreation enthusiasts, the Alpenglow Mountain Festival will showcase some of the best activities Lake Tahoe has to offer – Nordic skiing, backcountry skiing and split boarding, snowshoeing and natural history events.

The festival has been designed to inspire participants as they enjoy and explore North Lake Tahoe's playground with friends and family.

The festival offers a range of activities that span daily ski and snowboard tours, winter adventure presentations, and natural history excursions for outdoor enthusiasts of all interests and ability levels. The majority of events are free, so space is limited and participants are encouraged to register online.

Study: Helmets make a difference on the slopes

By Gretchen Reynolds, New York Times

Recently, researchers from the department of sport science at the University of Innsbruck in Austria stood on the slopes at a local ski resort and trained a radar gun on a group of about 500 skiers and snowboarders, each of whom had completed a lengthy personality questionnaire about whether he or she tended to be cautious or a risk taker.

The researchers had asked their volunteers to wear their normal ski gear and schuss or ride down the slopes at their

preferred speed. Although they hadn’t informed the volunteers, their primary aim was to determine whether wearing a helmet increased people’s willingness to take risks, in which case helmets could actually decrease safety on the slopes.

What they found was reassuring.

To many of us who hit the slopes with, in my case, literal regularity — I’m an ungainly novice snowboarder — the value of wearing a helmet can seem self-evident. It protects your head from severe injury. During the Big Air finals at the Winter X Games in Aspen, Colo., this past weekend, for instance, Halldor Helgason, a 23-year-old Icelandic snowboarder, over-rotated on a triple back flip, landed headfirst on the snow and was briefly knocked unconscious. But like the other competitors he was wearing a helmet, and didn’t fracture his skull.

Indeed, studies have concluded that helmets reduce the risk of a serious head injury by as much as 60 percent. But a surprising number of safety experts and snowsport enthusiasts remain unconvinced that helmets reduce overall injury risk.

Read the whole story

Vonn breaks World Cup victory record

By Associated Press

CORTINA D’AMPEZZO, Italy — Lindsey Vonn provisionally won a super-G on Monday to break Annemarie Moser-Proell’s 35-year-old record of 62 World Cup victories.

For win No. 63, the American clocked 1 minute 27.03 seconds down the Olympia delle Tofane course to finish 0.85 ahead of Anna Fenninger of Austria.

Tina Weirather of Liechtenstein was third, 0.92 back.

Vonn’s boyfriend, Tiger Woods, surprised her in the finish area, where the pair shared an emotional embrace.

Vonn exclaimed: “No way!” when she saw him.

“I didn’t think this could get any better than yesterday with my entire family here but now with Tiger here this is unbelievable,” Vonn said. “I said, ‘I can’t believe you came.’ And he said, ‘I told you.'”

Scientists worried about tiny Tahoe creatures dying

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A first-of-its-kind circuit by scuba divers around Lake Tahoe is complete. Now, experts are seeking to understand worrying changes on the bottom of the landmark alpine lake.

Members of the scuba team that 13 years ago reached the wreck of a famous steamer sunk in Tahoe’s frigid depths completed the first circumnavigation of the lake by divers in October. Scientists are examining the data collected to understand why some of the lake’s tiniest bottom dwellers and the plants they depend on appear to be disappearing at an alarming rate.

The dive team will likely cast significant light on an issue of mounting concern, scientists said.

“We basically have new habitats being created in the shallows,” said Sudeep Chandra, a freshwater science expert at the University of Nevada, Reno. The lake bottom, Chandra said, serves as the “backbone” for chemical cycling of the lake’s waters. Changes now taking place could come with profound effects.

“It’s the sponge of the lake, basically,” Chandra said. “Protecting Lake Tahoe and its clarity in the long run is really dependent on a functional lake bottom.”

Read the whole story

Ex-Kirkwood leader struggling with no snow

By Mark Warszawski, Fresno Bee

Being a ski resort owner during what some are calling California’s worst drought in 1,200 years can’t be a pile of soft, fluffy powder.

In May 2010, Tim Cohee fulfilled a lifelong dream by purchasing a 1,300-acre ski resort 65 miles east of Fresno. The first thing he did was restore the original name, China Peak. Then he went about fixing everything else.



Tim Cohee

Cohee brought a new level of customer service learned from decades in ski area management, including 17 years as a senior executive at Kirkwood Mountain Resort. He brought in enthusiastic new employees and reinvigorated the holdovers with fresh energy. He made the base area more beginner-friendly and gave snowboarders and freestyle skiers their own terrain park.

He remodeled the hotel and improved the food and beverage offerings. Everything from beds to burgers is better. He made the place a year-round destination by adding summer weddings, events and mountain biking.

Cohee and his small partnership group, China Peak LLC, bought the resort from Snow Summit Ski Corp. for $3.8 million and have since spent $3 million more on improvements.

Midway through his fifth winter, about the only thing Cohee hasn’t done is something he can’t control: Make it snow.

Read the whole story

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2 hikers enduring winter on the PCT

By Associated Press

RENO – After more than two months spent cold, wet, frostbit and blistered, Justin Lichter and Shawn Forry just wanted a few moments of comfort.

So, the first thing Lichter did before sitting down to talk

about their attempt to become the first people to complete a wintertime through-hike of the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail from Canada to Mexico was throw some logs in the fireplace at his Truckee-area home. Then, he and Forry joked about a planned side trip to Reno where they could watch movies and find an all-you-can-eat sushi restaurant.

With more than 1,500 miles of mud, slush and ice behind them and the heart of the Sierra Nevada ahead, the two men were determined to make the most of a 48-hour break from the trail.

“This is definitely a stop that we have been dreaming about for a long time, even before the trip started,” said Lichter, 34.

Although they’re still facing what will likely be the riskiest and most challenging terrain of the trip, the miles behind them have been no picnic.

Not long after they started in late October, the weather took a dreary turn which meant weeks of hiking, setting up camp, eating, sleeping and waking in cold and wet conditions.

Forry’s first blog post from the trail focused largely on the blisters that developed from hundreds of miles of walking with damp feet.

“The feet have been kind of a constant theme,” Forry, 33, said. “When you start in the wet and cold, it is a hard adjustment.”

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In addition to contributing to blisters, week-after-week of wet, dreary weather was a challenge to the hikers’ psyches, said Lichter, who has more than 35,000 miles of ultralight hiking on his outdoors résumé.

“Every day, you are putting on all your wet and frozen clothes again and not seeing any of the views you worked so hard to

climb up for.”

“Every day, you are putting on all your wet and frozen clothes again and not seeing any of the views you worked so hard to climb up for,” he said.

Toss in some high winds, snowstorms and extreme cold they’ve experienced and it starts to make sense there’s no record of anyone completing what Lichter and Forry are attempting.

Although both men are experienced adventurers with wilderness medical training and countless hours in the backcountry, the foreboding conditions already have resulted in some moments of doubt.

The greatest occurred not far from Bend, Ore., where they developed symptoms of frostbite on their feet. They’d been used to wet feet and cold mornings, but when they got to Oregon, the temperature dropped below freezing and it was too much for wet skin to endure.

“My journey into frostbite begins with jamming my feet into frozen boots in the morning,” Forry wrote in a Nov. 19 blog post. “I’ve seen a fair amount of frost nip and frostbite during my tenure in the winters of Minnesota, so when I saw the hardened, blanched white skin, I knew I was in for a long recovery ahead.”

At another point, the duo reached a rain-swollen Grider Creek in the Klamath National Forest only to find out the bridge they had been counting on to cross had been destroyed.

“We both ended up swimming across the creek at 7:30 in the morning and getting pretty wet in December,” Lichter said.

Given the difficulty of the journey, the obvious question for Lichter and Forry is, “Why?”

They say between the hardships, the trip has been punctuated with moments of ecstasy.

A big part of the enjoyment comes from knowing that even though thousands of people hike the Pacific Crest Trail in warmer months, very few get the chance to experience it during the winter when snowfall can make animal tracks easier to spot and lend a sense of quiet to the wilderness.

“There is just a real calm, surreal feeling in the wilderness,” Forry said. “You get a sense you are the only people out there, and in reality, we probably are.”

Lichter described waking up on Mt. Adams in Washington to a clear sky after weeks of storms and thick clouds and seeing Goat Rocks Wilderness and Mount Rainier in the distance.

“It was pretty much raining and snowing for over 40 days,” he said. “Then, you get a sunny day after that and, oh my God, I can see all these mountains. We just woke up to that.”

They’re even finding ways to power through the low moments by using them as reminders of why they decided to make the journey in the first place.

“You get frustrated, you get tired, that is part of the challenge,” Lichter said. “That is what makes the high parts even better.”

What’s next?

Lichter and Forry made it to Truckee late last week and even managed to get some miles in on Friday. They wanted to test the skis and boots they planned to use for the next part of the trip by traveling from Interstate 80 to a mountaintop at Sugar Bowl Resort, where Lichter works as a ski patroller.

Not only was it a chance to make sure the gear worked and fit comfortably, it allowed them to complete a difficult climb before resuming the trip. Getting to the top by their own power on Friday meant they could take the lift up the mountain Sunday morning to resume the journey from there.

At that point, they'll be embarking on the portion of the trip that could be the most critical to success.

They'll pass Lake Tahoe and experience the Sierra Nevada as it gets taller and more removed from towns and road access going south.

It's also the time of year when storm cycles can stack up and dump snow by the foot, making travel treacherous.

"The mountains get bigger, so do the avalanche paths," said Don Triplat, director of the Sierra Avalanche Center. "Right now, there are really good conditions that could change with the next storm."

That means Lichter and Forry will need to stay mentally sharp throughout the physically demanding trek. Snow conditions can vary from one aspect to the next and throughout the day.

"If you are on a trail in the summertime, you can put your head down and walk," Triplat said. "In the winter, you need to be evaluating constantly."

In order to account for tougher conditions, Lichter and Forry adjusted their estimated daily mileage in the Sierra Nevada to about 10 per day, down from 20 or more on other parts of the trip.

If they successfully navigate the Sierra Nevada, the two hikers will be left with some desert miles, then the San Bernardino, San Jacinto and Santa Rosa ranges in Southern California.

Whether they make it to Mexico successfully or not, each man said the experience of the journey is more important than finishing.

"You don't want to get started in that rabbit hole of 'I'm only doing this to finish,'" Forry said. "It is cliché, but the journey is the biggest part of the trip."

Soft snow keeps men from Squaw out of contention

By USSA

WENGEN, Switzerland – It was thigh-burning, legs-shaking race at the Audi FIS Ski World Cup in Wengen, complete with crashes, screaming fans and course holds. Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah) was the top American finisher of the day, grabbing 14th place, while Hannes Reichelt from Austria took first. Competing on home turf, Beat Feuz and Carlo Janka of Switzerland rounded out the podium.

It was a perfect bluebird day on the Lauberhorn – one of the classic downhills on the World Cup circuit. The men reached 100mph speeds in front of the 30-40,000-person crowd, and had to put everything they had into this course – the fastest guys had times of 2 minutes, 36 seconds, which makes this the longest World Cup downhill.

Nyman was thrilled about his 14th place finish – especially because he is still recovering from being sick, which left him low-energy throughout the week. “Stephen is finally feeling better,” said Sasha Rearick, men’s head coach. “He had the pukes a couple times.”

Nyman confirmed his feelings about his run. “I’m happy with my run overall. I surprised myself today,” he said. “I had some energy. I never even got to ski the top and I was pretty fast up there.”

Jared Goldberg (Holladay, Utah) had a good run, as well – skiing to 23rd place. Crashing into the finish, he looked to the board to see his result and pumped his fist in excitement.

“That’s all you can do—give all the energy you have,” Goldberg said, after his run. “We ran about an hour and a half after the top guys. I’m definitely happy.”

Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) and Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) – who finished 44th and 31st respectively – were not thrilled with their results, both getting caught in the soft snow. Their thoughts have now turned to Kitzbuehel. “On a hill like [Wengen], I just haven’t figured it out yet. I’ll try again next year,” said Ganong. “With Kitzbuehel, I know the hill well now and can excel there. I can’t wait to get on the Streif.”

Wiley Maple (Aspen) did not finish, skiing out after hitting the fence.

Vonn makes history with downhill win

By USSA

CORTINA D’AMPEZZO, Italy – With a powerful run through sunshine and fog, Lindsey Vonn (Vail) etched her name into the ski racing history book, winning her 62nd career Audi FIS Ski World Cup at the Cortina downhill by 0.32 over Austria’s Elisabeth Goergl. The win by Vonn matched the seemingly unbeatable record of 62 World Cup wins set by Austrian great Annemarie Moser-Proell that had stood for 35 years.

“It’s a pretty special moment for me,” said Vonn, whose parents were in Cortina. “These records mean a lot to me and my family.”

After two days of snowfall, a patchwork of clouds against the blue sky were mixed with bands of fog on the Olympia delle Tofane course in the 1956 Olympic city of Cortina d'Ampezzo. Vonn took the early lead coming off a steep face into a band of fog and kept it through the finish, building continually down the course on which she had won seven times previously. It was the same day on which 11 years ago a 19-year-old then Lindsey Kildow scored her first World Cup podium, finishing third in the Cortina downhill.

Many thought that Moser-Proell's string of 62 wins from 1970-1980 would never be broken.

"When I won my first podium here I never thought I would make it this far in my career," said Vonn. "That was the first time I thought I could be a contender. Never in a million years would I have believed I could tie the record."

Vonn was a little shaky out of the start, but quickly found her rhythm in the soft snow. "The snow was really soft and I'm not good when it's soft. I'm from Minnesota and we used to race on ice. i wasn't very fast on the top."

Her biggest challenge came from Austrian Elisabeth Goergl running two racers later. Goergl jumped out to a lead and looked to challenge, but didn't have the speed Vonn had coming into the finish.

Five Americans finished in the top 18 including Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) in ninth, Alice McKennis (Glenwood Springs, Colo.) 11, Stacey Cook (Mammoth Mountain) 16 and Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) 18. It was McKennis' best finish of her injury comeback season.

Expect to see smoke from multiple controlled fires

California State Parks, Nevada Division of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service will continue prescribed fire operations Jan. 20.

Operations may take place near Tahoe City on Highway 28 between Rocky Ridge and Lake Forest, near Emerald Bay at Eagle Point Campground, the boat camp and behind Vikingsholm, Fallen Leaf Lake, Ski Run Boulevard near Heavenly, north of Spooner Summit, and Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park near Sand Harbor.

Operations will last through the next several weeks as conditions allow.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size.

The Forest Service updates the local fire information line at 530.543.2600, ext. 6. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.