

Christmas trees fresher, but fewer this year

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

This year's Christmas trees really appreciated last year's wet winter.

Visitors to Northern California tree farms can see the difference. Their favorite firs look fresher, the leaves plumper, the branches fuller. What a difference water makes.

Five years of drought stunted many trees – and prevented farmers from planting more. That's caused a shortage of bigger trees at farms in Apple Hill and other popular areas.

Read the whole story

Shimano wants to make your bike as smart as your car

By Aaron Gulley, Outside

The rise of automatic shifting, integrated computers, lights, power meters, and radar has made us wonder: How much is too much?

I just discovered that the latest road bike components on the market are smarter than I am. Five months ago, Allied Cycles shipped me one of the first test models of its All Road, and though I loved the frame of this carbon shapeshifter from day one, I didn't comprehend the potential of its components until

recently.

The bike's Dura Ace R9170 Di2 group set—Shimano's first-ever, top-level road components with dedicated hydraulic disc brakes—get some improvements over past iterations: the shifters have been pared down to match the size and ergonomics of the mechanical group set; the new Shadow-style rear derailleur allows for a wider gear range, with an 11-30 cassette; the weight difference between them and the mechanical group has narrowed to a mere six ounces; and the aesthetics are sleeker. Nice but negligible evolution, I thought.

Read the whole story

Bears are reclaiming their historic Nev. territory

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

What's the difference between bears in Nevada and the Chicago Bears?

Bears in Nevada at least have a chance to recapture their glory days.

That's according to research that shows black bears are spreading hundreds of miles beyond the Sierra Nevada and into Great Basin ranges they abandoned long ago.

It's a far cry from less than 40 years ago when bears were thought to have been banished from the entire state.

Read the whole story

Nevada is a hot springs hotbed

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

I've stayed in the luxurious Jacuzzi Suite on the 25th floor of Reno's Atlantis hotel where from the hot tub you can gaze at the Sierra Nevada through floor-to-ceiling windows.

I've also soaked in hot spring-fed stock tanks in remote Nevada valleys where instead of expecting room service people can expect to skim leaves and algae from the surface of the water before sliding in.

While I can't say which Nevada experience is better for everyone, I can say I've only stayed at Atlantis once and I keep heading out to find more stock tanks.

It's probably because it's tough to think of an experience more closely connected with the land than soaking alone or with a friend in a remote spring, despite the rustic, um, charms that distinguish a real Nevada hot spring from a fancy hotel room hot tub.

Read the whole story

Center focuses on attaining

abilities post-injury



A variety of athletic activities are available at the National Ability Center. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

PARK CITY, Utah – The name of a business can be incredibly powerful; the words that are chosen and the ones left behind.

Such is the case with the National Ability Center in Utah. Disability is hardly in the staff's vocabulary. They work with people who have orthopedic, spinal cord, neuromuscular, visual and hearing impairments, and cognitive and developmental challenges. It's all about finding ways to cope under new circumstances.

Founded in 1985, the mission of NAC "is to inspire individual achievement and create a global impact for people of all abilities."



Brenna Huckaby credits NAC for helping her make the 2018 U.S. Paralympic team. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“I wouldn’t be where I am without NAC. I started there,” Brenna Huckaby told *Lake Tahoe News*. “They taught me how to snowboard.”

This world champion snowboarder hopes to compete in the 2018 Paralympics in South Korea.

She was a gymnast before osteosarcoma required her right leg be amputated. Huckaby, who hails from Louisiana, had not snowboarded until being invited to NAC for an event for cancer survivors who had lost a limb.

At the Sochi Games in 2014, NAC had 18 athletes representing nine countries.

The Utah nonprofit has 26 acres in Park City. They also have access to Park City Ski Resort. Earlier this year NAC and the ski resort signed a 50-year lease that will allow the center to build a 10,000-square-foot facility and get out of the double-wide trailer they’ve been in for years.

“We’re fortunate to host a facility and team that provides such outstanding services to kids, veterans and families with different abilities and we’re proud to partner with the NAC to make these life changing programs available. This land lease marks the start of an exciting project that will further elevate the offerings to Park City Mountain guests and supports individuals and families not only locally but also from across the country,” Jessica Miller with Park City Ski Resort, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Elite athletes are a tiny component of NAC’s clientele.

In the last five years NAC has seen a 96 percent growth rate. On a tour of the facility, CEO Gail Barille explained this is in part because people are living longer with more challenging abilities, the on-going military conflicts, and the increase in awareness of the ability movement.



Equestrian therapy can help build self-esteem and combat PTSD.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The largest population served are active duty, injured military and veterans, as well as children and adults with varying degrees of autism.

Ages 4 to 99 have been helped by NAC, with the center now seeing about 5,500 people a year.

Program fees cover about one third of the expenses, with donations providing the remainder.

Staff starts with working on individual goals. It might be that the person wants to achieve independence. Or maybe they want to be able to ski with a child or grandchild.



Bicycles come in all shapes and sizes for adaptive needs.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

A new injury often means redefining their life. That's why it's so important to talk to others who understand.

While NAC is known for athletics, that's not all it offers.

“Part of what we try to do here is give people a place to connect,” Barille told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We have a support network. They meet others in the program.”

Families, groups and individuals are welcome. Sleeping accommodations are available on site for 52 people. The plan is to build a combination of 12 cabins, yurts or tent platform facilities.

“We use recreation to build cohesion and self-esteem,” Barille said.

At the main campus, which was built before the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, a variety of activities are available.

A large garage houses an array of bikes. Adaptive bikes range from about \$2,500 to \$10,000. NAC is able to fit a bike to a person and maintain it as well.



A challenge course, right, is part of the “back yard” at the NAC. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Duct tape and padding are common components. Some cyclists have used bungee cords to bind their knees for support. Adaptive, it’s the key word.

NAC has 250 partner programs who use the equipment, such as veterans and muscular dystrophy organizations.

The equestrian facility includes an indoor arena. People with

post-traumatic stress are known to benefit from working with horses. The outdoor arena will soon be moving behind the bike barn to provide a more isolated environment for people.

A gym, challenge course, indoor rock climbing wall, archery and hiking trails are all right there. The center also works with individuals who are interested in swimming, sled hockey, water skiing, wakeboarding, kayaking, canoeing and paddle boarding – and of course all the snow sports.

Pile burning to resume in basin next week

Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team will resume prescribed fire operations beginning Nov. 27.

Weather permitting, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, California State Parks and the California Tahoe Conservancy will conduct prescribed fire operations above Incline Village, D.L. Bliss and Burton Creek state parks and near the airport in South Lake Tahoe.

Each prescribed fire operation follows a specialized prescribed fire burn plan, which considers temperature, humidity, wind, moisture of the vegetation, and conditions for the dispersal of smoke. This information is used to decide when and where to burn.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions. Prescribed fire smoke is generally less intense and of much shorter duration than smoke produced by a wildland fire.

Comments sought on plans for Hwy. 28

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is seeking public input regarding a proposal to improve an eight-mile section of the Highway 28 from Spooner Summit to Sand Harbor.

This proposal incorporates the third phase of the Stateline-to-Stateline Bikeway along with a planning effort to improve highway safety and enhance the corridor's scenic quality, and access to East Shore recreation destinations.

The project proposes the construction of a Class-1 shared-use pathway from Spooner Junction to Sand Harbor, installation of retaining walls and slope stabilization measures and construction of connections from the pathway to parking lots and recreational facilities.

Proposed highway improvements would include expanding the existing parking areas at Secret Harbor and Chimney Beach, constructing two parking areas at Skunk Harbor and the south corridor park-n-ride, creating safe highway pull-outs along the entire corridor that would include cultural, historical and natural resource interpretive signs and vista points for photo opportunities. In addition, new restroom facilities would be constructed at each parking area and bicycle racks and seating would be installed where feasible.

Proposed utility improvements would include relocating electrical and communication utility lines and the current sewer export pipeline, and installing fire hydrant connections at strategic locations.

Comments are being taken until Dec. 23. The scoping letter and proposed plan is **online**.

Angora trail not just for mountain bikers



It didn't take long for mountain bikers to discover the new Angora trail. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Hiking Angora Ridge just got better thanks to a bunch of mountain bikers and the U.S. Forest Service.

No longer do people have to contend with vehicles or be on pavement to reach Angora Lakes.

The nonprofit Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association partnered

with the federal land owner to build a trail that basically parallels the road. One of the best parts is the road is not visible much of the time.

I was there after the Angora gate was closed for the season, so I'm not sure what the sound of vehicles will be like in summer.

And while this was built as a single-track mountain bike route, plenty of hikers (some with dogs) were out earlier this month checking out the trail that was completed this year. People seemed giddy about the new trail.

It goes from where Tahoe Mountain Road intersects with Angora Lakes Road and comes out near the fire lookout. That's as far as we went that day.

It doesn't take long before Fallen Leaf Lake comes into view. Be sure to turn around to see Lake Tahoe as well.



Fallen Leaf Lake with Lake Tahoe in the background.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Mount Tallac becomes quite a presence as well.

This is what makes this trail so much more scenic than being on the road – the views are stunning most of the way. You don't have to wait to hit the ridge to get them, which is the

case with the road.

Seeing the houses on Tahoe Mountain is something I've never noticed from the road.

Being on foot gave me a chance to survey the route to see if I'd want to come back on my bike. Seeing people pushing their bikes oddly made me want to try it. I didn't want to be the only one possibly not pedaling. It didn't look technical, just steep (for a bike, not on foot) in places. Families were out – on bikes and walking.

The cyclists can be coming down pretty fast, but all were courteous as we scampered to get out of their way.

It took about 2,000 hours of volunteer labor and thousands of dollars in private donations to make the nearly 5 miles of trail in this area a reality. There is also a connector from the Angora burn area.

More trails are on the drawing board, including extending the Angora trail north to connect with Fallen Leaf Lake.

It's possible within five years there will be a single track trail to Emerald Bay.

The ultimate goal is to have a mountain bike trail that goes around the lake. Yes, there is the 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail, but that is for hikers and much of it is off-limits to bikes.



The Angora trail is attracting families.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, at the Y go on Lake Tahoe Boulevard toward South Tahoe High School or the burn area. Turn right on Tahoe Mountain Road. Go right at the T intersection. Go left at the next T. The road curves a bit. Go slow. Additional parking has been created near Angora Lakes Road. The trail starts to the right of the Angora gate/road. There is no trailhead sign.

Study: Groundwater recharge an issue with climate change

By Mari N. Jensen, University of Arizona

Groundwater recharge in the Western U.S. will change as the climate warms – the dry southern regions will have less and the northern regions will have more, a University of Arizona-led research team reports.

“Our study asked what will be the effect of climate change on groundwater recharge in the Western U.S. in the near future, 2021-2050, and the far future, 2070-2100,” said first author Rewati Niraula. The research was part of his doctoral work in the UA Department of Hydrology and Atmospheric Sciences.

The study covers the entire U.S. West, from the High Plains states to the Pacific coast, and provides the first detailed look at how groundwater recharge may change as the climate changes, said senior author Thomas Meixner, UA professor and associate department head of hydrology and atmospheric sciences.

Groundwater is an important source of freshwater, particularly in the West, and is often used to make up for the lack of surface water during droughts, the authors note. In many areas of the West, groundwater pumping currently exceeds the amount of groundwater recharge.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe sets record high on Thanksgiving

By Kathryn Reed

If you thought Thanksgiving at Lake Tahoe was hot, you were right. And it had nothing to do with what was going on in the kitchen.

South Lake Tahoe's high of 65 degrees broke the record of 63 that had been standing since 1995.

People were in shorts, and those at Zephyr Cove Tennis Club were in skirts and short-sleeves.

According to the National Weather Service, the warm temps for Nov. 23 were not out of the ordinary. It all had to do with a ridge of high pressure above the area.

Winter is back in the forecast, though. Expect snow Sunday into Monday, with rain in the valleys. The Sierra summits could see 6 inches of snow.

Snow is expected to start at 9,000 feet Sunday morning, dropping to about 7,000 feet by that night, with white stuff expected at 4,500 later in the evening. Those elevations could change if the storm comes in a bit warmer.

Wind will be the precursor to the moisture, with a high wind watch in effect from Saturday evening through Sunday morning. Ridge tops could see 100 mph gusts.