5-day cycling event rolls through Lake Tahoe

Cycle the Sierra is a five-day ride that will be staged for the first time this summer.

Registration for the June 23-27 event is open to 300 riders.

Cyclists will start in Grass Valley, go to Coloma, Kirkwood, Lake Tahoe and Sierraville, before returning to Grass Valley.

The ride benefits several groups including the League to Save Lake Tahoe and American River Conservancy..

Cost is $835, which covers food, camping, equipment shuttle and entertainment.

For more information, go online.

Ski companies survive with diverse locations, activities

By Susan Wood

Even the Easter Bunny wouldn’t put all his eggs in one basket this spring. So why would a smart ski resort company do the same in winter?

That’s the question major U.S. ski resort companies such as

Vail Resorts and Powdr Corp. ponder every year with their mix of assets, investments and planned capital improvements – much like an investor evaluates and reevaluates the diversity of a financial portfolio.

Ski resort companies are no longer satisfied with one area and one activity in an industry that’s constantly evolving.



When Northstar on Dec. 20, 2011, didn't have enough snow to cover its slopes, Vail Resorts' Colorado resorts did. Photo/LTN file

Take Vail, for example. The Broomfield, Colo.-based corporation is often seeking good investment opportunities – including China, which would introduce a mass population and completely novice market to the industry.

According to the China Ski Association, the number of skiers and boarders who graced the slopes in places as untouched as inner Mongolia and the Altai Mountains featured in the 2009 Warren Miller film “Dynasty” has soared. Records show the numbers jumped from 200,000 in 2000 to 5 million five years later. If the right opportunity arises, this discovery would spell mega dollars for a company that already owns four ski

areas in Colorado and soon will have three in Northern California with the finalization of the Kirkwood Mountain Resort deal which is expected this week.

Along with Boreal Mountain Resort in the Lake Tahoe region, Powdr Corp. out of Park City claims holdings in Utah, Colorado, Oregon and Vermont. The names are synonymous with landmark skiing –Park City, Mt. Bachelor and Killington.

Mother Nature bestows her will differently from one area of the United States to another. This means the region that gets the snow in one year may carry the weight of the balance sheet in revenue and vice versa.

“It certainly helps to have resorts located in different regions across the entire country. It can help us balance out the weather pitfalls,” Powdr Corp. Chief Development Officer Tim Brennwald told *Lake Tahoe News*. He called it “common sense” and “not a grand scheme” because the snowfall “can vary all the time.”

Proving their point

This year made for a prime example in January. Snow was expected to hit Boreal in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. Instead, the storms split and dumped nearly 5 feet of snow in Bend, Ore., where Mt. Bachelor was only too happy to advertise to a snow-hungry California market. Whistler in Canada jumped on the same marketing bandwagon.

Brennwald said his company has passed on the Asian market to instead keep an eye on possibilities in Europe and New Zealand.

Snowmaking has in many ways changed the game a bit, and sometimes it doesn’t even take snow to tout amenities at a resort. The corporation plans to turn Boreal into a year-round resort this summer by building Woodward Tahoe, a 33,000-square-foot facility geared toward action sports such as

skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding, BMX riding and gymnastics.

“Obviously, we won’t need a lot of natural snowfall to make this work and is another way we diversify our properties,” Brennwald said.

Importance of more than one location

Snow – where to make it (in the cold) and where to get it (in the storm track) – is the key to success for most ski resort companies.

But even the downward slope of snowpack levels – (well below normal in Lake Tahoe this season) – didn’t hurt lodging reservations in February according to a recent report from Mountain Travel Research. One could say the market itches for the sport – especially following a record, blockbuster winter like 2010-11 that builds positive snow equity.

“It’s true the weather is the driving force behind ski resorts diversifying. There isn’t necessarily a consistency (in weather) from coast to coast. There’s lots of experience in defense of this notion, and it serves these (resort executives) well to believe that. They’ve done well in the last 10 years,” said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association.

Future ski resort holdings will expand beyond the typical boundaries of North America for companies such as Vail, Berry predicts.

“They’d love to see China open up,” he said. The novelty would make any ski equipment manufacturer salivate. Outside North America and Western Europe, enthusiasts ski and board with primitive gear.

Berry notes one of the biggest benefits to the diversification of ski resorts is the multi-state season pass. Vail’s Epic

pass provides a Tahoe rider with an invitation to hop a plane to Denver and experience Vail resorts with varying personalities – from the high altitude Breckenridge and quieter cousin Keystone to the luxurious Beaver Creek and massive flagship Vail resort.

The company has become so much about skiing that a recent quarterly report to investors indicated less of a focus on building its RockResorts beachy hospitality brand at the expense of its ski properties.

“Our real strategy is a geographic strategy,” Blaise Carrig, co-president of Vail’s mountain division, told *Lake Tahoe News* in a recent conversation.

Diversity in properties makes for one major consideration in ski area companies investing in properties.

Carrig, with a long background running Heavenly Mountain Resort, explained how the South Lake Tahoe ski area is quite different than Northstar in Truckee. Both resorts must have something special to bring to the table. The former has expanded its offerings in other amenities such as snowshoeing and cross country ski trails and equipment in the winter, and an adventure park with dry inner tubing in the summer. The latter, on the other end of Tahoe, has long been the destination visitors’ delight with amenities as diverse as golfing and tennis to stargazing and hiking off the gondola.

Access to transportation and a solid bed base are other considerations in terms of buying properties.

From there, investments that pay off in the long haul like snowmaking can always be added, Carrig said. Being a “tough year,” he took much solace in a corporate report that showed a 15 percent drop in skier visits compared to last year.

“This means that 85 percent of our customers are still coming to ski and spend money. Sure, we’re off, but I’m going to look

at the point where the glass is full," he said. "I don't see (the weather) as a pattern. I guess our plan B is investment in our resorts."

It's been said, "You have to spend money to make money." The big ski companies are doing just that.

Tahoe Coast Guard unit gives a lesson on dangers of cold water

By Chris Buckley, KOLO-TV

TRUCKEE – About 400 students and community members heard from first responders and Coast Guard Auxiliary members on

Wednesday. The topic was cold-water survival techniques, a subject that for many hits close to home.

“In early January we had a canoe that turned over in Donner Lake,” Truckee Fire District Public Safety and Information Officer Gene Welch said. “It was in about ten feet of water and the female made it to shore but the male drowned in about 10 feet of water very close to the shore.”

The Coast Guard Auxiliary says a lot of people don’t realize just how dangerous cold water can be.

“Cold water immersion – the muscle incapacitation you suffer, the muscles and nerves don’t connect anymore and you’re just sitting there,” Flotilla Commander Jerry Gilmore said.

That point was illustrated with a DVD documentary of a cold-water boot camp.

“These are very strong people that jump into 45-degree water,” Gilmore said. “And you see them take four or five strokes and then just start shivering and rescue swimmers have to come help them.”

Read the whole story

Sierra to host women-only snowboard competition

Billabong Flaunt It Finals are March 31 at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

The finals of this North American women-only snowboard series is a Swatch World Tour rated event.

Sierra is expecting some of the best snowboarders in the industry to ride. Jamie Anderson, who trains at Sierra is a 2012 X Games gold medalist, is a Billabong sponsored rider and may make a visit to the finals.

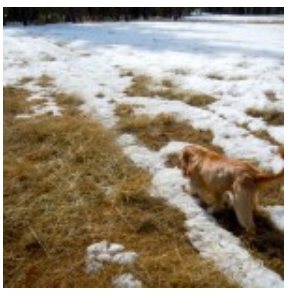
For more information, go online.

Wet week ahead for Lake Tahoe Basin

This could the wettest week of the winter, with the first of several storms expected to arrive tonight.

With spring just nine days away and bare ground the norm in so much of the Lake Tahoe Basin, more white stuff would be welcome. However, the storms are expected to be warm to begin with so rain will also be part of the equation.

“It’s been so dry so the ground, rivers and creeks can take on a quite a bit of water. We aren’t foreseeing any flooding,” Katherine Homman with the National Weather Service in Reno said. “It’s definitely going to be wetter than we have been most of the winter.”



More snow this

week may cover
trails at lake
level.
Photo/LTN

More moisture is expected throughout Northern California and Northern Nevada all week. Storms are expected to roll into Tahoe Tuesday and Thursday nights, too. With the latter, the temps are expected to decrease a bit.

Wind is likely to be a factor with the storms, too, according the Weather Service

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Miles of snowshoe trails just steps from neighborhood

By Kathryn Reed

As the sun beat down last Sunday in what turned out to be a record high 59 degrees, the clothes started coming off.

Powerline trail, which in some places parallels Pioneer Trail, is one of those routes that no matter the sport sweat is bound to be involved.

It’s not that it is super difficult, but it seems like from most entry points it’s a steady climb. And from there, the route under the trail has rollers, so it’s a steady up-and-down jaunt.



Marianne and Rosemary follow Debbie along the Powerline trail. Photos/Kathryn Reed

On this snowshoe excursion Rosemary and Sue commented how things didn't look familiar with white stuff on the ground. Rosemary runs in this area in the summer, and Sue has ridden her mountain bike here.

This particular day there are seven women appreciating that snowmobiles have beaten us to the trail. Say what you want about those sleds, but they lay down a nice track to snowshoers.

One guy came by with his young daughter decked out in a pink helmet. It looked like she was doing the driving.

With the intensity of the sun, the snow is soft. Most of the trail is covered, though a few bare spots were visible.

While trees line the trail, it is hard to forget you are not far from civilization with all those powerlines overhead. Still, the serenity that comes with playing in Tahoe is unavoidable.

Large boulders are scattered to the side near the start of the route. Cold Creek is mostly covered in snow. Pines give way to Manzanita as the trail follows the powerlines.

Much of the trail is wide enough so people pair off and chat along the way. We don’t know how far we went – other than it was an hour in at a decent pace. Debbie has an altimeter on her Swiss army knife, but no mileage. The rest of us have kept our phones in our pockets with no desire for technology to provide us stats about our day on the trail.

It was about being outside with friends – not keeping track of calories burned or miles walked.

Getting there:

From Highway 50 go up Al Tahoe Boulevard. Turn right on Pioneer Trail. Go past Sierra House Elementary School and turn left on Marshall Trail. Turn right on Columbine Trail. Parking at the end in cul-de-sac. Note: If it is snowing, you will be towed. We headed toward the sign that said Fountain Place Road beyond the green gate.

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Winter trail users discuss conflicts

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

More than a decade after conflicts over winter sports led to the ban of snowmobiles from much of a popular mountain meadow between Reno and Lake Tahoe, new discussions are under way regarding the problem in the same vicinity.

Involved are folks who cherish the quiet solitude of skiing or

traversing the snowy backcountry by snowshoe, as well as those who are thrilled by zipping over a winter landscape on speeding snow machines.

Both types of winter sports enthusiasts say they aim to protect their interests but also say agreements can likely be reached.

Unlike in 2001 when the U.S. Forest Service prohibited snowmobiles across most of Tahoe Meadows, the government this time is not considering any such closures.

Instead, it is trying to find accord between snowmobilers and fans of quieter winter sports concerning issues such as noise, wilderness trespassing and public safety.

“Working together, we might find some common ground. We might find some success,” said Jeff Marsolais, deputy forest supervisor for the Forest Service’s Lake Tahoe unit. “When the groups own the solution, they set the stage for long-term success.”

The primary area in question lies along the western boundaries of Tahoe Meadows and down the slopes dropping westward toward Lake Tahoe, but any solutions agreed upon might apply other places where conflicts over winter sports arise, Forest Service spokeswoman Cheva Heck said.

Read the whole story

Hight lays down consecutive

900s to win halfpipe

By USSA

STRATTON, Vt. – Elena Hight of South Lake Tahoe won the Burton U.S. Open halfpipe Saturday at Stratton Resort in Vermont to end Kelly Clark's streak of 16 consecutive wins.

Ellery Hollingsworth of Darien, Conn., gave the U.S. a women's sweep with a third place finish.

On the men's side Shaun White, who trains at Northstar, won, edging Louie Vito of Sandy, Utah, and U.S. Snowboarding Rookie Team athlete Benji Farrow of Ludlow, Vt. who claimed third, giving the U.S. a sweep of the men's podium as well.

Hight edged Clark of West Dover, Vt., with a score of 85.50 to 85.19, while Hollingsworth had an 80.56.

Hight's winning run featured 900s back-to-back and a huge method air.

"It was definitely an amazing day out here and all the girls are just pushing it. Kelly is the level that we've all been trying to reach," Hight said.

Owners of unleashed dogs in Upper Truckee Marsh to be

cited

By Kathryn Reed

While the dog ban at Upper Truckee Marsh is seven weeks away, enforcement of the leash law is being increased starting this weekend.

With the mild winter the area is experiencing, more people are outside playing. That in turn means more dogs running around in sensitive areas and disturbing wildlife.



AJ won't be allowed in the Upper Truckee Marsh area from May 1-July 31. Photo/Kathryn Reed

May 1 begins the second year of the seasonal three-month dog ban on this acreage owned by the California Tahoe Conservancy in South Lake Tahoe. Even dogs on leashes are not allowed at that time.

The reason is to protect the natural resources in the area, which is the largest wetland habitat in the Lake Tahoe Basin. This is the only one of the nearly 5,000 CTC properties that has this type of closure.

The Conservancy spent nearly a decade monitoring the area. Because people let their dogs run free, the board in July 2010 voted on the seasonal ban.

What will change this year is that more citations and fewer warnings are likely to be issued. This is because El Dorado County sheriff's deputies used 2011 as a year to educate people. Animal control also patrols the area.

Plus, there are signs at the entrances to the marsh alerting people about the rules, so it should not come as a surprise.

Dana Dapolito, CTC associate environmental planner, said data collected from last summer in regards to the habitat is still being analyzed.

But it was pointed out if dogs continue to roam in the marsh-meadow, it is hard to quantify if the ban is helping flora and fauna in the area because it's not a true ban.

Vonn secures World Cup overall title; Mancuso 8th in GS contest

By USSA

ARE, Sweden – Olympic gold medalist Lindsey Vonn of Vail produced an inspired wire-to-wire giant slalom victory Friday to mathematically secure an American record fourth Audi FIS

Alpine World Cup overall title. With five races remaining in the season, Vonn’s insurmountable lead of 554 points boosts her point total to 1,808, the most in U.S. history. It also notched her 11th World Cup victory of the winter to tie her own single-season record she set in 2009.

She passes Phil Mahre in the record books as the only American to win four overall titles.

Vonn also usurps Croatian Janica Kostelic, Swiss Vreni Schneider and Austrian Petra Kronberger, who all won three overall cups during their careers.

Only Austria’s Annemarie Moser-Proell has more overall World Cup titles than Vonn with six.

It was the 15th World Cup title of her career and her third of the season (downhill, super combined already locked).

Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley was eighth and Resi Stiegler of Jackson Hole 13th for three Americans in the top 15.