Yosemite wants to eliminate scalping of Half Dome permits

By Joshua Emerson Smith, Merced Sun-Star

When you think of the final 400-foot ascent of the Yosemite Valley's Half Dome Trail, what words come to mind? "Majestic?" "Breathtaking?" "Crowded?"

How about "expensive"?

Last year, visitors paid as much as $100 to hike the famous trail.

Over the past two years, to address dangerously overcrowded conditions, park officials have cut in half the daily number of Half Dome hikers by instituting an advance-sales permitting process.

After officials capped Half Dome hikes at 400 people a day, some abused the system by scalping the $4.50 tickets.

This year, the permitting process will continue with a few changes to curb the resale of tickets.

"To help make the system fair and to limit scalping, we are implementing the lottery system," said Kari Cobb, park spokeswoman. "So everyone puts in at one time, and then in April we send notification to tell people if they were successful."

Starting in March, people will be able to throw their name — and an application for up to six guests — in the digital hat for a nonrefundable fee of $4.50 online and $6.50 over the phone. If selected, a $5 fee is charged for each person in the group. The per-person fee is refundable if the trip is canceled two days in advance.

Read the whole story

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2 meetings to discuss classification of Upper Truckee River

Trout Unlimited and California Trout are hosting two open houses to discuss a proposal for the Upper Truckee River in Meiss Meadows to have the Wild and Scenic River designation.

The South Lake Tahoe open house is Feb. 21 from 4-7pm at the El Dorado County Library, 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd. The Markleeville open house is Feb. 22 from 3-6pm at the Alpine County Library, 270 Laramie St.

Trout Unlimited and California Trout believe the Upper Truckee River running free through Meiss Meadows is worthy of Wild and Scenic River Designation under the Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and Pacific Southwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service recommended Wild and Scenic designation for the Upper Truckee in a 1990 management plan and subsequent 1999 report.

Swiss build first solar-powered chairlift

By Michael Frank, Adventure Journal

Even though as the crow flies, the postage-stamp town of Tenna, Switzerland, isn't far from historic resorts like St. Moritz and Davos, Tenna is a one-horse town, one-shop, one-school, and one t-bar town. And that t-bar, the only ski lift in the whole valley, was on its last legs. But rather than let it die, locals raised enough money to update it and then went a step further: They built the world's first solar-powered ski lift.

It's more than solar-powered, in fact – it's a smart investment. The Tenna lift generates 90,000 kilowatts a year, or three times the juice needed to run the lift, and the extra power goes back into the grid, which makes money for the town, which can pay residents back.

So what happens to the 82 solar "wings" when it dumps? Not a problem, because they rotate to follow the path of the sun in the sky and can be tilted to perpendicular during a storm, so there's no load and the snow slides right off.

Read the whole story

California commission votes to protect 2 frogs

The California Fish and Game Commission voted unanimously to designate two species of native frogs inhabiting high-

elevation lakes in the Sierra Nevada and Southern California mountain ranges as threatened and endangered species under the state's Endangered Species Act.

Sierra mountain yellow-legged frogs are now protected as threatened species and Southern mountain yellow-legged frogs are designated as endangered.

"With formal state protection, California can start recovering an important part of mountain ecosystems to bring back formerly abundant amphibians," Jeff Miller at the Center for Biological Diversity, which petitioned for state protection in 2010, said in a statement. "Taking out exotic trout and getting rid of pollutants to restore mountain yellow-legged frogs will have ripple effects beyond these species – it'll help to heal some of the damaged high-elevation habitats of the Sierra and Southern California mountains."

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Ski demo event on North Shore

Alpenglow Sports has partnered with Alpine Meadows Ski Resort for the 5th annual Alpine Touring and Telemark Demo Event on Feb. 11 from 9am-3pm.

The event will provide a forum to perpetuate the enthusiasm for all aspects of in-area and backcountry skiing.

Free to all, the event will showcase the latest and greatest in both telemark and alpine touring equipment. Participating vendors will include Black Diamond, Dynafit, G3, Scarpa, Garmont, Marker, Volkl, DPS, Moment and SkiLogic.

Participants must possess a valid lift ticket or season pass

purchased from Alpine Meadows or Squaw Valley, along with a driver's license and credit card for deposit.

For more information, call (530) 583.6917.

Mancuso tops podium in super G

By USSA

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany – Three-time Olympic medalist Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley attacked a gnarly Garmisch super G that forced 14 racers off course to win her first Audi FIS Alpine World Cup of the season.

The victory, Mancuso's career sixth, completed a U.S. Ski Team weekend sweep following Lindsey Vonn's of Vail historic victory in the opening downhill.

It was Mancuso's fourth podium of the season.

Frigid temperatures and extremely flat light added to the difficult conditions.

"At this point in my career, I really want to win. I go into every race with that attitude and I knew that today – just like the other super G's – you have to put it all on the line," Mancuso said. "You can't hold back at all if you want to win a super G. When I crossed the finish line, I thought, 'if that wasn't good enough, then I don't know what is'."

Plenty of snow to keep skiers happy at Sierra

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – A good midmorning parking space and no problem finding two Adirondack chairs at West Bowl on a Saturday in February. It must be the winter of 2011-12.

With all the kvetching about the dismal snowpack, skiers and boarders are staying away from the slopes. That was our good fortune Feb. 4. No lift lines, no beer lines, great seats to bask in the sun. Even better, the snow on Dogwood at Sierra-at-Tahoe was exceptional – and not just because our expectations were so low. It really was great skiing.



A warm, sunny day Feb. 4 has people relaxing at West Bowl. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The rest of the resort – of which 80 percent is open – was pretty good. While we didn't hit every run, we got in a good sampling. Lower Main is slick on spots – but that isn't unusual. And no moguls made me smile all the way down.

Upper Powderhorn is a bit gnarly. For someone who learned to ski in California, I called it icy. For Sue, who learned to ski on the true blue ice of Vermont, she calls it hard pack.

Watching her zip down the run I needed binoculars to see her at the bottom. She's just that much better and faster than me in these conditions.

But once off the upper part, the rest of the way down Powderhorn was fun for both of us. (In my book, ice, or whatever one calls it, is not fun.)

Beaver is fine to navigate, but it's weird to see some flora popping up through the snow. But that's better than dirt or rocks.

No rocks were visible on any run, but a few parts are getting thin. Signage is good to warn people.

Groomers are doing a bang-up job of servicing the runs.

Grandview lodge is open for drinks, but not food. Steve Hemphill, spokesman for the resort, said the lack of visitors doesn't make it economically viable to have the restaurant open.

Because the lift by the same name did not open until well into the season, it was a while before anyone realized a pipe had burst at Grandview lodge. Repairs are still being made.

Baja Grill is serving up its Mexican specialties Friday-Saturday-Sunday. Until riders figure out the slopes are worth visiting, the resort can't justify keeping the West Bowl eatery open seven days a week.

With a chance of snow Monday night and a 30 percent chance on Tuesday, there may be a couple powder days to plan for this week.

Star Wars lands at Sierra with park for little snowboarders

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Sierra-at-Tahoe has put the force of Burton and Lucas Films behind its kids' learn to snowboard program.

Four-year-old Elliana zips away from Jar Jar Binks headed toward Chewbacca. It doesn't take her long before she is riding without any assistance.

"Dropping in," she says as she whizzes down the subtle decline.



Yoda's Riglet Park at Sierra

is designed to teach 3- to 6-year-olds how to snowboard. Photos/Kathryn Reed

There isn’t anything about the sport and Yoda’s Riglet Park that she doesn’t like. She even likes jumping. But the 180s come with a little assistance. Instructor Alexis Fleming lifts Elliana up by the strap on the back of her bib to twist her around. Still, it gives her the feel for what it’s like to get a little air and go from regular to goofy foot.

“Here, there are so many more options,” Fleming said in comparison to the magic carpet. “It helps kids because they stay more engaged.”

She said youngsters learn more in such a fun atmosphere and that they seem not to notice they are in a lesson instead of a theme park. But with a storm trooper standing guard and Yoda welcoming the youngsters, it does feel more like a play area than a ski center.

However, when Fleming tells one of her charges the reason she is on her knees is because she needs more weight on her toes, it becomes obvious this all-day class is focused on teaching youngsters to snowboard.

Yoda’s Riglet Park is the combination of Burton wanting to tap into a market that is often ignored (3- to 6-year-olds), using the snowboard company’s technology, and Lucas Films’ wanting to engage the next generation of Star Wars fans. The film company, whose headquarters are in Marin County, also wanted a local ski area to work with. Burton and Sierra have had a partnership for years.

With “Jedi Knights” coming to theaters Feb. 10, it’s timely of

Sierra to launch its other-worldly training facility. Folks from Burton and people affiliated with the Star Wars films will be at the resort Feb. 17 for the grand opening of the park. By then the audio features should be installed.

But some people wanted to learn this weekend instead of waiting for the crowds of Presidents Day weekend.

Kristi Verma is standing outside the fenced-in area watching her 4-year-old son, Ahren, slide across the white stuff. While the kid from Sacramento didn't say much during the lesson because he was focused on the job at hand, his mom said all he could talk about on the way up Saturday was learning to snowboard.

With the X Games just last month, this is also fueling the enthusiasm to learn to board. Who knows, maybe one of these snowboarders will be the next to score a 10 in superpipe.

Pato Bicens is working with 5-year-old Jayden of South Lake Tahoe in the "superpipe" area. He's able to pull her via the riglet at the top of the board from the bottom of the pipe to the top. The riglet is the device at the top of the board instructors use to pull little ones that helps them with balance as well as making it more realistic instead of pushing them along. The pipe, while it does have visible contours, is miniature like everything for this size and age group.

But what could not be scaled down are the Star Wars figurines. Sculptor Bob King of Washington had to carve the wooden items to the same specs as they are seen in the movies.

Much of the park was built from downed trees at the resort, with a portable mill being brought in to cut the wood.

Before getting on the snow the newbies enter the Padawan Center. In Star Wars lore a Padawan is the first step to being a Jedi Warrior.

One wall has Yoda overseeing the training of a young Luke Skywalker.

Each young Padawan is given a fighter vest. Older warriors wear an R2-D2 vest. All have a light saber – though no one was dueling on the snow Saturday.

In the center they stand on a skateboard-like device that shows instructors which foot they put forward first (left = regular, right = goofy), and to test their balance on a stable surface.

Then it's off to Yoda's Riglet Park.

The idea is if the little ones get the hang of it, by the afternoon they could be on the mountain in Burton's Progression Park off Easy Rider. Classes usually don't have more than four kids per instructor, so there is lots of quality time.

Most classes are all day, though half-day afternoon sessions are available. Three-day and 10-day learning packages are also available.

Susan Wood contributed to this story.

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Bahrke takes sixth in aerials at Deer Valley

By USSA

PARK CITY – Dylan Ferguson of Amesbury, Mass., jumped his way

through three finals rounds to come in second at the Visa Freestyle International at Deer Valley Resort on Friday, his first career FIS Freestyle World Cup podium. Zongyang Jia of China was the men's winner. Mengtao Xu led a Chinese sweep of the women's podium.

It was Ferguson's first podium in 30 career World Cup aerials starts.

Teammate Scotty Bahrke of Squaw Valley finished sixth.

The Hurricane tow-rope was dedicated to Jeret "Speedy" Peterson prior to finals.

Dual moguls are on tap for Saturday night to finish off the Visa Freestyle International.

Vonn snags 50th World Cup victory; Cook places 10th, Mancuso 13th

By USSA

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany – Olympic gold medalist Lindsey Vonn of Vail produced a stunning, on-edge downhill run in Garmisch to win the historic 50th Audi FIS Alpine World Cup of her career on Saturday.

The victory, Vonn's 25th in downhill, came after trailing at the first four race intervals and surviving a near crash on a bumpy side hill called the Ice Hang. It was Vonn's ninth win

this season and places her soundly in the World Cup overall lead by nearly 500 points.

Vonn trailed at the first three intervals and survived a near crash at the midway point.

Subzero temperatures of minus 13 degrees forced racers to tape their faces to avoid frostbite.

Stacey Cook of Mammoth was ninth, Laurenne Ross of Bend, Ore., 10th, Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley 13th.

The women’s U.S. Ski Team leads the nations standings for downhill by 433 points over Austria.

A super G is scheduled for Sunday to close the weekend in Garmisch.