North Tahoe to host prestigious travel symposium

North Lake Tahoe will host the 2012 Mountain Travel Symposium, one of the world's premier ski industry wholesale conferences.

The April 15-21 conference will be at Resort at Squaw Creek.

North Lake Tahoe hosted the symposium in 2006, with 1,200 attendees.

"Mountain Travel Symposium is the biggest and longest running annual contracting and networking gathering in the mountain travel industry worldwide," Andy Chapman, with North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, said. "To have our colleagues here in North Lake Tahoe to experience our product firsthand, especially with all its stellar spring snowpack, is absolutely advantageous. These ski wholesalers are going to have North Tahoe and our variety of lodging options on the brain when talking with clients from all over the world."

In attendance will be ski wholesale companies from North America, South America, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, as well as decision-makers for all United States' ski councils and clubs, in addition to ski-related vendors and other attending mountain destinations.

The event will primarily be based in Olympic Valley, but tourism officials expect the entire region to benefit. Those confirmed to attend include representatives with Orbitz, Expedia, Travelocity, Mark Travel, HotelBeds, Crystal, Virgin Holidays, Ski.com and Mountain Reservations.

In addition to business-to-business appointments, Mountain Travel Symposium offers professional development with national speakers, hands-on workshops, as well as multiple opportunities and social events for networking.

For details about Mountain Travel Symposium, registration and photos, go online.

Unlimited first tracks costs $25,000 at Aspen

By USA Today

Want first crack at the runs in Aspen? The Aspen Skiing Co. is offering an “Ultimate Ski Pass” that will let you have unlimited first tracks before chairlifts open to the public — for $25,000.

If you’re itching to beat other skiers to the slopes and ready to pay for the privilege, the Ultimate Ski Pass may be just the ticket for you.

The exclusive passes also allow holders to meet members of the U.S. Women’s Ski Team when they race in Aspen on Thanksgiving weekend. The pass also buys them breakfast with Aspen native Bill Marolt, president of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association.

When Ultimate Ski Pass holders are ready to ski, they can bring up to three friends. They can take a private tour of the four ski areas of Aspen-Snowmass with a member of Skico’s management team and ride on a snowcat on a grooming mission. They also can take a “behind-the-scenes tour” with the ski patrol.

The pass is transferable and valid at Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands, Snowmass and Buttermilk.

Read the whole story

Bear-people clashes on the rise

By Stephanie Simon, Wall Street Journal

Forty years after being hunted to near-extinction in many parts of the U.S., black bears have become so plentiful that they are causing trouble for their human neighbors—ripping open camping tents in Colorado, attacking dogs in New Jersey, even breaking into a home in Florida to nab a birthday cake from the kitchen counter.

Bear populations have surged so much that several states, including Nevada, Oklahoma and New Jersey, have started or expanded bear hunting seasons. Texas is circulating a brochure that tells hunters what to do if a bear wanders into camp. ("Talk in a calm manner…Do not run!…Do not play dead!")

Black bears search for food behind a diner in Pomona, N.Y. Encounters between bears and humans are rising.

Black bears, which can top 350 pounds, were hunted with vigor for centuries. But with their populations near collapse, states began imposing hunting limits or bans in the 1970s.

Recovery has been slow—bears reproduce just every two to three years—but pronounced. Today there are an estimated 3,000 black bears roaming Florida, up from just 300 in the mid-1970s, said David Telesco, who manages bear conservation in the state. Between 300 and 400 black bears live in Nevada, and biologists say the population is growing 16 percent a year.

"There are now bears in areas of the country where there haven't been bears since the colonial days," said Rick

Winslow, a carnivore biologist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

J.A. Whittenburg V saw one not long ago—charging toward him on his ranch in south Texas, he said in an interview. His dogs barked furiously. The bear wasn't intimidated. "He just kept coming my way," he said.

Read the whole story

Mountain bike movie examines access to public lands

The Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association is presenting "Pedal-Driven: a bike-umentary", a new documentary film from Jamie Howell at Moon Productions.

The screening will take place at Mo's Place in South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 30 at 7pm. It will be preceded by a social hour starting at 6pm. The movie screening is in conjunction with the TAMBA End of Season Party.

The one-hour documentary examines the long-standing confrontation between mountain bikers and federal land management agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service over bikers' access to public lands.

"Pedal-Driven" was created as a nonprofit project in affiliation with International Mountain Bicycling Association and with the cooperation of the Forest Service.

TAMBA is hosting this screening as a membership drive for 2012. The event is free to all new or renewing TAMBA members. TAMBA dues are $10 for individual memberships and can be

purchased online or at the event.

TAMBA is the largest mountain bike organization in the Tahoe region and focuses its efforts on volunteer trail work, cooperation with land managers, and education of trail users.

For additional information, go online.

Squaw Valley on course to revamp its reputation

By Kathryn Reed

Renaissance – that's what Squaw Valley's makeover is being called by resort officials.

With plenty of snow on the mountain, the resort opens Nov. 23, though the ski team first took turns Nov. 9.

At a meeting last month put on by the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, CEO Andy Wirth talked a bit about the changes coming to Squaw. He was not shy in admitting improvements beyond on-mountain upgrades need to happen.



Squaw Valley is improving its grooming

for the
2011-12
season.
Photo/Keoki
Flagg

He revealed surveys consistently say three things about the resort:

• It’s not friendly;

• People don’t feel welcome;

• The mountain is intimidating, that people have a hard time navigating it.

“Everything we are doing with the renaissance is rooted in that,” Wirth said. “We are going to go back to where we started. That’s why we call it a renaissance – because we feel we can bring back the luster.”

Personality-wise, it is working on having less attitude.

“You’ll see the level of service increase. We will absolutely compete with Deer Valley, Vail and Beaver Creek,” Wirth said when it comes to hospitality.

There is no doubt Squaw is an epic mountain. And with its legacy of hosting the 1960 Winter Olympics, its mark in the history books is indelible. But in an era of “What have you done for me lately?” attitude, Squaw didn’t have much of an answer. Until now.

The ownership change a year ago from the Cushmans to KSL Capital Partners, then to the merger being finalized this month of Squaw Valley Ski Holdings running Squaw and Alpine Meadows, the North Shore resort is ready to be a player again.

While this season it’s still not possible to legally ski between the resorts, one day that may change. For now, the

combined 6,600 acres will be connected via free shuttles.

The infusion of $50 million in five years (one year is completed) will go a long way to upgrading Squaw physically.

From a marketing standpoint, the amount of time Squaw was portrayed in the latest Warren Miller movie will inevitably entice people to make a trip to North Lake Tahoe. It's estimated 800,000 people will see the film this fall.

Part of the cash going into the resort was $3 million on 10 snowcats.

"We think we have one of the most remarkable mountains. Imagine if we have world class parks on that mountain," Wirth said. Six cats are dedicated to working on Squaw's terrain parks.

In summer 2012, Granite Chief chairlift will be replaced.

A snowsports building is at the base of the mountain. This is where a ticket for any on-mountain activity can be bought.

It's not all about skiing at Squaw.

The SnoVenture center features new and expanded activities for kids and families, including mini snowmobiles and enhanced snow tubing. Dog sledding, horse-drawn sleigh rides, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are operated out of the center, too.

Eight shops are opening this season in the Village at Squaw Valley – including Salomon, North Face and Oakley concept stores. Farrah Rale Jewelry Design allows guests to create jewelry.

Full Belly Deli and Euro Sweets will each open in early December. Batch Cupcakery will open closer to the December holidays. Wildflour Baking Company is expanding.

Rocker@Squaw is in the village offering lunch, dinner and late night fare. Its claim to fame is being the only restaurant in the country allowing guest-generated on-site video editing and screenings.

The historic Olympic House was completely remodeled. Gold Coast Lodge at the top of the Funitel has a new restaurant – Funi's.

Projected opening dates (weather dependent):
Alpine Meadows – Dec. 10
Boreal Mountain Resort – Open
Diamond Peak Ski Resort – Dec. 15
Donner Ski Ranch – TBD
Granlibakken Resort – Sled hill Nov. 24, ski hill Dec. 15
Heavenly Mountain Resort – Open
Homewood Mountain Resort – Dec. 17
Kirkwood Mountain Resort – Nov. 25, Fri.-Sun only, check website
Mt. Rose – Nov. 23
Northstar – Open

Royal Gorge Cross Country – Dec. 10
Sierra-at-Tahoe – TBD
Soda Springs –TBD
Spooner Lake Cross Country – TBD
Squaw Valley – Nov. 23
Sugar Bowl – Nov. 24
Tahoe Cross Country – Nov. 25
Tahoe Donner Cross Country – TBD
Tahoe Donner Ski Resort – Dec. 9

Tips to ensure Christmas tree stays healthy

By Susan Skorupa, Reno Gazette-Journal

Thanksgiving is Thursday, so the Christmas season begins Friday. Soon, trees will sparkle from windows all over town.



Buying a cut or potted live tree for later planting involves a little science; keeping a cut tree fresh and a live tree alive also require special handling.

Space is the first issue. Where will the tree stand?

“You need to know what kind of space you want to fill. You can buy a little tabletop tree, about 24 to 30 inches tall. It’s perfect for those without a lot of space, for a dorm room, children’s room,” said Mike Bondi of the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association, an industry trade group.

Don’t put a tree by a heat register, near or in front of a fireplace or wood stove, or near any direct source of heat, Bondi said.

“If you can keep the tree in a cooler environment, it will stay fresher longer,” Bondi said. “Do not put it in front of a window that gets direct sunlight, not on the south or west side of the house.

“Before you get it, figure out where you’re going to put it,” he said.

When shopping for a cut tree, use the smell-and-snap test, Bondi said.

Read the whole story

Heavenly Mountain lives up to its name on opening day

By Kathryn Reed

Seven months was a long wait. And when the wait was finally over at 8:30am Saturday, cheers reverberated throughout the plaza at Heavenly Village.

Heavenly Mountain Resort opened for business for the 2011-12 ski season Nov. 19 with the gondola, Tamarack and Dipper running. As more snow falls, more lifts and runs will be accessible.



Heavenly Mountain Resort provides some of the best views of Lake Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Mostly snowboarders were playing in the Ante Up terrain park.

Plenty of snow covers runs. With the roar of snowmaking guns, more terrain is likely to open soon.

It took about 10 minutes to load the more than 100 people who

stood in line to catch first tracks. Of course, many more riders came throughout the day. These were just the die-hards who needed to their fix first thing.

Casey Bedell and Megan Hickel of South Lake Tahoe were two of the many with smiles on their faces as they made their way to the front of the gondola line. They said having all summer off made them eager to get back on the slopes.

Yungjin Choi came up with his 12-year-old daughter Eura and 10-year-old son Brendon to snowboard. Even though the San Ramon family had never been to Heavenly, they were in line to buy the Tahoe Value Pass.

Eura, according to her dad, is the one who wanted to come opening day. With Heavenly having to delay opening a day because of weather, it worked for them not to have to skip school to be at the resort Nov. 19.

Leaning on a rail, watching the skiers and boarders getting on the gondola, some guy came up and said, “What do you do here, Pete.” “I’m the general manager,” Pete Sonntag said. “That’s cool. I just bought the Epic Pass.” To which Sonntag said something like, “Have a great time.”

That friendly interaction among employees of all levels and riders was evident all morning.

Ron Thompson, who spends about 30 percent of his time in Meyers and the rest in Fremont, commented on how much better the conditions were this opening day compared to 2010. Not only is the snow better, but also more runs are open. Plus, it was a bluebird day for much of the morning.

“It’s just that feeling of getting back on the snow. It’s incredible,” Thompson said. He added that skiing on California Trail before anyone was there gave him chills. He caught the 10th gondola chair up the mountain.

While Thompson has been skiing 43 of his 47 years, John Gianotti of Stateline has him beat. The 83-year-old has been schussing down slopes throughout the world for 78 years.

“I ski practically every day because I’m old and I don’t have anything else to do,” Gianotti said as he took the gondola down after skiing for a couple hours. “Look at what you see. It’s absolutely one of the most beautiful places in the world.”

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Eldorado begins seasonal road closures in forest

Eldorado National Forest is starting to close dirt roads and trails for the winter season.

The U.S. Forest Service closes dirt roads during the wet weather months to keep vehicles from damaging saturated, muddy roads and trails. They are also closed to keep mud from running off the routes and into creeks and rivers.

Check the Eldorado National Forest website for condition updates or call a ranger station for the latest information.

Seasonally closed routes are identified on a free map that is available at all Eldorado National Forest offices or on the Eldorado National Forest website.

The seasonal closure will begin no later than Jan. 1 and will end no sooner than April 1.

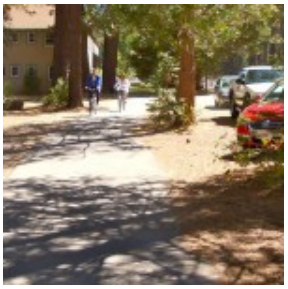
Coordinated trail system at Camp Rich in the works

By Kathryn Reed

Turning the more than 40 miles of trails in the Fallen Leaf Lake-Camp Richardson area into a more cohesive, logical system is being proposed by the U.S. Forest Service.

While the project area encompasses nearly 13,000 acres on the South Shore, nowhere near that much will be touched. The physical boundaries are Lake Tahoe to the east, Glen Alpine to the west, Mount Tallac to the north, and Angora Ridge to the south.

The proposal that is out for public review contains 12.9 miles of new trails, 8.4 miles of reconstructed trails and decommissioning 14.4 miles of trail.



The bike trail by Camp Richardson may be upgraded and parking in the dirt eliminated. Photo/LTN file

“What is there now is a kind of spaghetti string mess,” Jacob Quinn, trails coordinator for the Forest Service, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Some trails are Forest Service-created and some are user-created. There is not a lot of signage where the trails go or to know how to get to where you parked your car.”

Improving connectivity is a main goal of the project. While most cyclists stick to the lake side along the paved trail, the plan is to better tie that area to what is on the other side of Highway 89.

While the trails won’t be technical, various loops will be different lengths. Signs will tell people what they are about to embark on. Nothing like that exists today.

While the paved trail dead ends on the north, this will be changed so there is a logical place to cross the highway to hook up with trails on the other side. However, the west side will not be paved. It will be a hard-pack natural surface.

The bridge crossing the dam at Fallen Leaf Lake will be reconstructed so cyclists can easily cross it.

All of these ideas are just that – ideas. The Forest Service will compile comments it receives between now and mid-January to see if changes need to be made to the scoping document, if something needs to be studied more, and if new ideas should be incorporated.

Input from agencies like Lahontan Water Board, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Department of Fish & Game are being sought now, too.

Most likely an environmental analysis will be done. Once that document is completed, the USFS can start seeking funding to do the work.

Quinn would not put a dollar amount on the project because with it still in the scoping stage much could change. He said

funding is often easier to secure once a project is shovel ready. It’s possible the project would be built in phases; with the soonest any work might happen being late next summer.

Some of the significant changes people are likely to notice as they drive through the Camp Rich area are parking differences and the bike path not next to the road.

Caltrans has on its books (albeit without a start date) plans to eliminate parking on the shoulder of Highway 89. The Forest Service wants to coordinate its efforts with the state agency.

The USFS expects the overflow used for events at Valhalla to be paved. That area is an old polo field. Behind it could become a gravel overflow lot.

A second lot could be built about one-quarter mile east of Spring Creek. This would be where people on the far end of the bike path could park.

Expansion of the Tallac trailhead lot is also proposed. It would not grow so significantly as to bring more people to the area. What it would do is get people off the plants and dirt – which is where some people are parking.

“We don’t want to go so big so it would change the character of the recreation experience,” Quinn said of the trailhead parking.

The parking at all lots would be free.

No new paved bike paths are proposed, though slight alterations to the existing one include widening it to bring it up to current standards and having it be set farther back from the highway. This would involve the removal of some larger trees.

The myriad dirt trails leading through the meadow to the homes on West Way would not be touched with this project.

With the holidays coming up, the Forest Service has decided to extend the comment period on the Fallen Leaf Lake Trail Access and Travel Management Project to Jan. 13. For more information on the proposal and how to comment, go online or contact Jacob Quinn at (530) 543.2609 or email jmquinn@fs.fed.us.

Tahoe Grizzlies open season with a roar

The **Tahoe Grizzlies Bantams (ages 13 and 14)** hosted the undefeated Santa Rosa Flyers last weekend in a back-to-back weekend series. The Grizzlies hadn't played in a month and the rust showed early in Saturday's contest.

After killing off a couple Flyer power plays, the Flyers struck for three goals in the span of 3 minutes and tallied a fourth with just more than three minutes to play in the first period.

The Grizzlies finally got their skates under them and A.J. Marino of South Lake Tahoe netted the first goal of the game. The Grizzlies played the Flyers even for the rest of the game. Then Marino closed the gap to 4-2 with his second goal early in the third period.

However, the game would end with the Grizzlies on the short end of the 4-2 score.

Sunday morning found the Grizzlies coming out flying. After a scoreless first period, Noah Paul of South Lake Tahoe gave the Grizzlies the lead with a wrist shot on the power play early in the second period. Paul struck again on a feed from Doug Knudsen with less than a minute to play in the period for a

2-0 Grizzlies lead. That was short lived as the Flyers' Christian Ott scored with just 26 seconds remaining.

The third period was a tight, hard checking contest until Flyers Shawn Pabros equalized the score on the power play midway through the period. That's the way the game ended.

But the Grizzlies are a confident team having played even with the first place Flyers for five out of six periods during the weekend.

Pee Wees (ages 11-13)

The Pee Wees came out of the gate at their home opener last weekend with decisive wins against the San Francisco Saber Cats. On Nov. 12 they won 11-3 with multiple players scoring. Mickey Sullivan, No. 17 of South Lake Tahoe, earned a hat trick with three goals in this first game. On Sunday morning the Grizzlies triumphed again, winning 7 -3. Edward Parkhill, No. 17 of Incline Village, had three assists in this powerful team performance.

Squirts (ages 9-10)

The Grizzly Squirts came out of the gate fast Saturday against the Cupertino Cougars. Tahoe quickly scored four goals in the first two periods. It wasn't until the third period that the Cougars finally got on the board with one goal. It was too little, too late and they couldn't mount a rally against the Grizzlies.

Quinn Proctor, No. 2 from South Lake Tahoe and a first-year Squirt, earned his first two goals of the season, and had two assists for four points. Kevin Lehmann, No. 5, and Jaxon Kennedy, No. 3, both from South Lake Tahoe and second year Squirts, had two goals apiece, and Tucker Cannon, No. 7, from South Lake Tahoe and also a second-year Squirt, had one goal to bring the final score to 7-1, Grizzlies win.

On Sunday, Cannon again lead the Grizzlies to another win against the Cupertino Cougars with his first hat trick (three goals scored in one game). Cannon scored one goal in each period. First-year Squirt Zachary Calderon, No. 21 from South Lake Tahoe, added two goals, and Proctor, Kevin Lehmann, No. 5, each contributed one goal. Johnny Ilvento, No. 11 and from South Lake Tahoe, added a goal and two assists to bring the final score to 8-2, Grizzlies win.