Back to K2: Reno woman makes third trip

By Ruth Anne Kocour

Roads to K2: There are none – no flight-seeing tours either. Located in the heart of the Karakoram mountain range, K2 is surrounded by glaciers, wild rivers and many of the world's highest peaks, 19 more than 25,000 feet tall.

K2 straddles the border between Pakistan and the Xingjian Uygur Autonomous Region of China (Xingjian for short), both fraught with riots, ethnic upheavals and terrorist attacks. It's a lonely place.

Last fall, I returned to K2 accompanied by four Muslims (Shiite and Sunni) and three kara buras, the wooly black camels of Central Asia.

San Francisco to Beijing to Urumqi – all the way across China – in one very long day. After spending the night in Urumqi, I flew on to Khasgar, an ancient oasis empire along the Silk Road set amid moving sand dunes, immense mud flats, and areas that from the air look like southern Utah, only bigger.

Read the whole story

Ruth Anne Kocour is author of the book, "Facing the Extreme." Contact her at www.ruthannekocour.com.

Fly fishers unknowingly transporting invasive species

By Felicity Barringer, New York Times

For fly fishers who pride themselves on a conservationist ethic, it hurts to discover that they may be trampling on that ethic every time they wade into a trout stream.



Blame their boots – or, more precisely, their felt soles. Growing scientific evidence suggests that felt, which helps anglers stay upright on slick rocks, is also a vehicle for noxious microorganisms that hitchhike to new places and disrupt freshwater ecosystems.

That is why Alaska and Vermont recently approved bans on felt-soled boots and Maryland plans to do so soon.

“If you were trying to design a material to transport microscopic material around,” said Jack Williams, an expert on invasive species with the environmental group Trout Unlimited, “felt on the bottom of someone’s boots in a stream would be as close to perfection as you could find.”

Read the whole story

Remote reservoir provides plenty of paddling fun

By Kathryn Reed

POLLOCK PINES – Advantages to leaving the basin with a canoe include avoiding a wicked downpour and knowing you have something to float in if it's really bad when you get back. Luckily the canoe could stay on the truck as we returned to South Tahoe on this particular Sunday.

As clouds formed in the distance on what I call the backside of Desolation Wilderness, we paddled in full sunshine.



Sue Wood's maiden voyage at Union Valley Reservoir. Photos/Kathryn Reed

It was the first time either Sue or I had had been to Union Valley Reservoir. Tucked into the Crystal Basin Recreation Area of the Eldorado National Forest, it is much larger than I anticipated. My arms aren't strong enough to paddle the perimeter. Perhaps a multi-day camping trip is needed to experience the whole reservoir as well as the surrounding bodies of water.

Around different bends are what seem to be private beaches – but they aren't. It's just that these people got there first.

It looks like the high water mark is about 6 feet from the vast shoreline. The reservoir belongs to Sacramento Municipal Utility District, even though an El Dorado County sheriff's boat is patrolling the lake in this area owned by the U.S.

Forest Service.

Even though motorboats are allowed, the chaos of Lake Tahoe wasn’t evident – even on a Sunday in August.

Campers dot the shoreline, with some sites visible from the water. People are swimming, splashing and floating.

A few kayakers are out.

The water is cool, but welcoming.

To get there: Go west on Highway 50, turn right on Ice House Road, go 16 miles and you’ll see signs for the reservoir. Also in this area are Loon Lake and Ice House Reservoir. From Tahoe it’s the long way to Wrights Lake. The $7 day use fee is good at other bodies of water in the area on the same day. For more information, call (530) 647.5415.

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Multi-day mountain bike fest at Kirkwood

The 10-day Kirkwood Mountain Bike Festival starts Aug. 20. The first of its kind in Tahoe provides an action packed calendar the entire family can enjoy through Aug. 29.

There are races and events for mountain bikers of all ages and abilities, clinics for those looking to improve their skills, rec rides, and crazy events including a Huffy Toss and Wheelie Contest.

Get details on the Fat Tire Fiesta’s full schedule by clicking

here.

California Assembly passes ski helmet bill

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

Ted Gaines and Roger Niello, two Republican assemblymen who are special election rivals for the late Sen. Dave Cox's seat, clashed on the Assembly floor Thursday over a bill that would require kids to wear helmets while skiing or snowboarding.

The 1st Senate District in which they are running contains the largest single concentration of the state's ski slopes and the ski industry has endorsed the measure, Senate Bill 880, which would require helmets for those 17 years old and younger.



Whistler mountain guides, like Susan Sommer, wear helmets on the job. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Gaines, of Roseville, spoke for and joined most Democrats in voting for the measure, Senate Bill 880, while Niello, of Fair Oaks, denounced and joined other Republicans in voting against it. The final vote was 41-20, returning the measure, authored by Democratic Sen. Leland Yee of San Francisco, to the Senate for final action.

Read the whole story

Yosemite in store for massive tree thinning project

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

Yosemite Valley visitors don't generally gaze at El Capitan from the spot where Carleton E. Watkins took an 1868 photograph of the soaring cliff – you can't see much now through a tangle of trees.

It's one of many iconic vistas in Yosemite National Park blocked by trees and brush. Indeed, officials say there are only a few places left with a view of both upper and lower Yosemite Falls, the tallest waterfalls in North America.

Park officials are planning to restore historic views of Yosemite landmarks over the next several years by cutting trees and burning brush.

Read the whole story

Mountain bike race over Flume Trail

The Great Tahoe Flume Race is sanctioned by USA Cycling and is the final race in the Nevada Cup State Championship Series, a four-race points series that will determine the Nevada State Mountain Bike Champion, which carries a $1,000 prize.

The Reno Wheelman are putting on the Sept. 12 9am event.

The race is 18 miles, with a 3,100-foot elevation gain.

Proceeds go toward the volunteer backcountry patrol in the Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park.

To register, visit bikereg.com.

Saturday curling clinics in South Tahoe

The South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena is offering more curling events to prepare people for our upcoming leagues this fall.

These clinics are offered this Saturday and select Saturdays in September and October.

Curling is a sport similar to shuffleboard played on ice. Although it is often played with significant strategy and skill, it can be enjoyed by all ages after a short lesson.

Prepare yourself by logging on to www.curlingbasics.com to learn the fundamentals of the game. Cost is $12 and enrollment is limited so sign up soon by stopping by the Arena at 1176

Rufus Allen Blvd., or calling (530) 542.6262.

Tahoe water transit takes hit with latest boat cutting engine

By Stephen Ward

For those who anticipated “getting on Tahoe” and sailing the shores by means of the much touted Blue Warrior water shuttle this summer, start sending out SOS signals. The water shuttle service conducted by Get On Tahoe has come to an abrupt and erratic end, with the boat being sold Friday for just enough to cover the promissory note on the vessel after being in business for a little more than two months.

The enterprise boasted a 36-foot, 20-passenger boat dubbed the M/V Blue Warrior and was owned and operated by the Tahoe Divers Conservancy, a nonprofit partner to the Alpen Group that helps fight invasive species in Lake Tahoe. The shuttle offered pick-up and drop-off services from areas such as Carnelian Bay, Sand Harbor and Thunderbird Lodge, with tickets ranging from $35 for a round-trip adventure to $110 for a complete Lakeshore Water Tour.



The Blue Warrior water transit ceased proving service on Aug. 13. Photo/Provided

Conservancy spokeswoman Mechele Duhamel cited two explanations for why the shuttle was unable to wade through the turbulent waters of challenges it encountered.

“The key reason we had to sell the boat is because we couldn’t land a dock or marina to station the boat,” Duhamel said. “We had to use a dinghy to bring the passengers to the boat.”

The dinghy crippled the venture. Besides serving as a constant indicator of the lack of support from the docks and marinas, it set limitations to who could board the Blue Warrior. The company’s website deterred young children and those with limited mobility from boarding the shuttle, saying the “process of getting in and out of any dinghy can be a sporty one.”

In addition to having trouble with the marinas, Duhamel also expressed her disdain with the money allocated to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, a purported $5 million, and the bi-state regulatory agency’s reluctance to provide funding for the shuttle.

According to TRPA spokesman Dennis Oliver, this is not the case.

“We don’t have a pile of money to hand to people,” Oliver said. “We are studying the feasibility of public water transport. If our studies show that waterborne transit would be a feasible venture, we would probably talk about starting a public water charter service … but we don’t have money to fund

private water shuttle companies."

TRPA put together a water transit study in June 2007.

The notion of moving people by boat beyond scenic tours has been tried unsuccessfully a number of times on Lake Tahoe. Ridership is inconsistent, destinations are changing and parking remains a problem.

Austin Sass, director of sales and marketing for Aramark at Lake Tahoe, believes a lot needs to be considered before rushing into this type of service. Sass runs the Tahoe Queen and M.S. Dixie II paddle-wheelers.

"One thing that needs to be looked at is parking," Sass said. "If people are going from Heavenly Resort to Crystal Bay or Kings Beach, there needs to be a parking garage or ground shuttle that would be willing to take them to the dock. That's a different issue in and of itself."

Andy Chapman with the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association could not be reached for comment about how the demise of this shuttle service may impact tourists.

With ambivalence escalating and efforts dwindling, the future of waterborne transit being offered at Lake Tahoe is becoming increasingly murky.

In an Aug. 18 post on *LTN* by B Gorman, executive director of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, she says, "I believe everyone is in agreement that we must find funds to improve bike trails, develop waterborne transit etc. etc."

But no one has proved waterborne transit is logical or needed in Tahoe.

A March 22 *Lake Tahoe News* story says, "Another (Tahoe Transportation District) project involves South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City – water transit. The goal is connecting the North and South shores via transit. By the end of the year the

federal transit analysis should be finished. Out of that will come a recommendation if water transit is viable or not.”

Off-road racers set for Vegas to Reno competition

By Sean Collins, Reno Gazette-Journal

The 14th annual Vegas to Reno race, the longest off-road vehicle competition in the United States, will kick off Friday despite safety concerns after a crash at a similar event in California caused eight deaths last week, officials said.

“If you look at the videos of that race, it’s not a safe atmosphere,” said Casey Folks, director of Best in the Desert, which puts on the Nevada race. “If you wanted to go watch Vegas to Reno, we’re going to direct you to a controlled area. We don’t allow spectators out on the race course.”

The race is scheduled to begin at 5:45am Friday in Beatty, just north of Las Vegas, and finish in Dayton in Lyon County at the end of the day. The 535-mile course runs through federal property managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which was criticized for its inability to enforce safety measures after the California incident.

Read the whole story