

Kayakers growing in numbers at Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed



Massive boulders provide an obstacle course of sorts. Lakefront homes are called the architectural tour. Osprey and eagle nests provide intimacy with wildlife. Sore muscles at the end of the day prove it was a good workout.

Human powered recreation on Lake Tahoe is not new, but it is gaining in popularity.

Kayaking is still the predominate mode of transportation, with the less stable canoe occasionally seen plowing the waters, and the more coordination-strength sport of paddle boarding booming the last couple of years.

“We are finding the people who are kayaking on the lake tend to be affluent and tend to be older,” said Sue Rae Irelan, who is the California Tahoe Conservancy’s liaison to the Lake Tahoe Water Trail Committee. “They are not the testosterone teenager that you might find kayaking on a river.”

Retailers are noticing more people renting kayaks. Irelan also pointed to a large contingency of second homeowners who paddle.

Public land owners with their partners are making a concerted effort to put out a coordinated message. Coalition members include both state parks systems, public utility districts, South Lake Tahoe, CTC, U.S. Forest Service and business owners.

“Part of what we are doing is we’ve been trying to consider

what do kayakers need and where can we help facilitate this use where there are conflicts," Irelan said.

One issue is the lack of parking where paddlers want to put in. Incline has storage for non-motorized boats. Lakeview Commons in South Tahoe will, too. The idea is kayakers could bike or take public transit to the boat storage so parking issues are eliminated.

Education is another part of the equation, with invasive aquatic species topping the list.

"The message we are sending is that whenever you move a boat from one body of water to the next it ought to be cleaned, drained and dry," Irelan said. "When it's taken out of the water they need to be turned over and drained so the water goes back into the water it was taken from."

Another issue is how California and Nevada allow access to private land. In the Golden State, the public has access to land that is below the high water mark.

"Last year and this year that can be the majority of the beach in some places. It is completely legal to land a kayak there and sit on a beach even if you are in front of a house," Irelan explained.

In the Silver State no public trust easement exists with private property. This means landing on a private beach in Nevada is equivalent to trespassing.

Because of this, vast portions of the East Shore are off limits. Under human power it's a long haul at times.

Irelan said this year and over the next several years public agencies will work to provide signage that explains to those on the water that there may be no public access for 10 miles, or that a particular parcel is OK or not OK to land on.

Circumnavigating the entire 72-mile shoreline is not for the

novice paddler.

To make this endeavor a bit more comfortable, the water trail committee is working on a lodge-to-lodge program, starting with the South Shore. Dennis Liebl, one of the committee's founders, said the idea is still in the conceptual stage.

In theory a paddler could go from one lakefront lodging facility to the next. Their belongings would be transported for them. Tour guides might be part of the equation. Evening activities like special dinners, wine tastings and spa treatments may be part of the package.

"We would like to see it grow around the lake, except the East Shore has no lodging," Liebl said.

Some kayakers take camping gear with them. Again, the East Shore is lacking such amenities, something the committee would like to eventually rectify.

Liebl got involved in the water trail in 2003 when Tahoe Tomorrow was started. His committee was tasked with helping tourism. The members liked the idea of a water trail. That idea had first been broached by Bob Kingman, who at the time worked for the CTC. He won the Big Idea award at the SMG Tourism Conference. Kingman joined the committee and was key to making the trail a reality.

"Our purpose is to promote kayaking use on the lake, boat safety and some of the other issues like invasive species," Liebl said.

Although the trail has always existed in theory, promoting it, developing a map, creating a website and offering events all came about when the committee came along.

Lifetime membership costs \$25. Maps are available at retailers throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin and at www.laketahoewatertrail.org.

With Tahoe Tomorrow going by the wayside, the LTWTC has its nonprofit status under the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation.

The committee usually puts on two events a year. The spring event was at Sand Harbor. The September event was nixed as organizers focus time on the lodge-to-lodge project.

A couple multi-day trips are planned through Tahoe Adventure Company – Sept. 24-27 and Oct. 1-4.

For information about the trips, call (530) 913.9212.