

Skiing through Olympic history on Tahoe's West Shore

By Kathryn Reed

TAHOMA – People with guns on cross country skis. That certainly set the tone for a unique day in the woods.

Fortunately, they were shooting at electronic targets with laser rifles.

A sign saying “Olympic Heritage Event” made us wonder if we should turn around because we are nowhere near Olympic caliber cross country skiers. (Later I questioned going on the intermediate loop – that’s how unsure I am free heeling it.)



Nathan Hoffman
learns how to
shoot the
rifle for
biathlon.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Unbeknownst to us until our arrival Saturday morning at Sugar Pine Point Campground the second annual Olympic Heritage Celebration Biathlon competition was going on. It was open to anyone – all ages, with the youngest being about 9 years old.

The first event a year ago at this course used for the 1960

Olympics was the same weekend of the Nordic Legends Dinner.

On Jan. 15 Bill Lindemann, who emceed the dinner in 2010, was on hand to make sure the nearly 20 participants were having a good time, and getting a bit of instruction as they raced against the clock and each other.

Competitors could do a 1K or 3K loop, shooting twice – once standing, once laying on their stomach. Miss your target and the penalty is to ski a short loop.

At the shooting range, Holly Beatie was dispensing a wealth of information. Nathan Hoffman looked at her quizzically when she said to place his thumb in a certain manner. This was his first time on a biathlon course, and to handle this type of gun that has the look and feel of a regular rifle.

But the state park, he said, is pretty much in his back yard so the terrain was familiar.

Beatie is well versed in the world of biathlon – which is the sport of cross country skiing and shooting. She moved to the North Shore in the 1970s, but no women's biathlon teams existed so she competed with the men. It wasn't until 1980 that the U.S. developed a women's team.

In 1984, Beatie was on the inaugural U.S. biathlon team at the Women's World Championships in Chamonix, which won the bronze.

We left the competitors behind to strike out on the myriad trails in this state park along Lake Tahoe's West Shore. Steeped in history, interpretive signs along the way point out facts about the Olympics hosted by Squaw Valley 51 years ago this month.

We didn't set any speed records. Instead, we glided through the groomed tracks at a fairly leisurely pace – all the better to stop for photos and admire the wonders of nature.

Fluorescent green lichen leaps off several trees.

A few charred trees along the way are a reminder of the August 2007 Washoe Fire that destroyed five houses and burned about 15 acres.

General Creek meanders between most of the trails, though it's not visible most of the time. However, at a few junctures we crossed it via bridge. A couple who own a second home in the area regularly treks to this tranquil oasis. With sandwiches from the General Store in Tahoma and a waterproof blanket of sorts, they staked out a spot near the creek for lunch. We wished they had invited us to join them.

Instead, after we worked up an appetite doing the 2.1 mile beginner Blue Trail and 3.3 mile intermediate Red Trail, we headed north a short ways to Tahoma to grab a bite at the Old Tahoe Café. A pint of their pale ale is just \$3.95, while the veggie sandwich with fries (\$8.79) is big enough to split.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, go north on Highway 89, around Emerald Bay and past Meeks Bay.

Before hitting Tahoma, on the right will be a sign for the Ehrman Mansion.

In less than one mile make the left turn into the Sugar Pine Point Campground. We didn't see a sign for the turn, so we ended up making a U-turn.

There's plenty of free parking even though it's a state park.

Dogs are not allowed.

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