

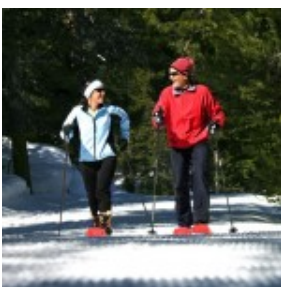
Trails day unites rookies with wonders of outdoors in winter

By Susan Wood

When people allow nature to take its course, they often like the path it takes.

That's just the suggestive nudging winter sports enthusiasts from New England to Lake Tahoe are making on Jan. 8 – National Winter Trails Day. This event is designed to teach first-timers to snowshoes and cross country skis the wonders of human travel in the snow.

The day shows novices the ease, the preparation, the beauty and the importance of appreciating trail systems and tracks – whether they're set by an early riser that morning, the Olympic Games a half century ago or hundreds of years ago by Native American tribal members.



Kirkwood is in its seventh year participating in National Winter Trails Day.

Photo/Provided

“I think that, especially in the (Lake Tahoe) basin, we do have a history of being outside and enjoying our snow sports. We have carried on a tradition of paying homage to our heritage,” said Jaime Souza, director of trail use for the Tahoe Rim Trail Association. She was pointing to the Washoe Tribe’s use of Tahoe trails. The same could be said for the early settlers such as John Fremont, the cartographer.

The TRTA is organizing a few free, guided snowshoe walks Saturday. On the North Shore it starts at 10am at Tahoe Meadows at the south side of the Mount Rose Highway where the American Red Cross will provide a presentation on winter safety. Tahoe Mountain Sports will bring out its demonstration gear. Interested parties are asked to call Tom at (775) 298.0238.

The association is also partnering with Explore Tahoe on the South Shore at 9am where modern-day explorers will head to Castle Rock from the Kingsbury North trailhead near Heavenly Mountain Resort. To participate and discover where to pick up snowshoes, call Lauren Thomaselli at the Explore Tahoe visitors center adjacent to Heavenly Village at (530) 542.4637.

The hikes are intended to introduce the trail that circumvents Lake Tahoe in a winter wonderland backdrop.

“This is a way to inspire people to get outdoors and share this with family and friends,” said Thomaselli, who’s glad to have the South Shore taking part. The Rim Trail Association has staged events the last handful of years on the North Shore. Thomaselli sees more of a role from South Lake Tahoe in the future – especially given the nation’s first bi-state park named after the Van Sickle family is set to open behind the South Shore casino corridor within the year.

A winter safety talk will touch on knowing when to fuel your body with food to the importance of hydrating.

In addition, tips will be given for how to blaze snow-covered trails in the winter. For example, the Rim Trail has a baseball-sized, easily identifiable logo on trees and posts. For some, freshly limbed trees allow for easy navigation. Others like to put out "hunters" tape on tree limbs, with the idea of removing the pieces upon the return.

Three guides will be on hand.

"I hope we look back at this National Winter Trails Day as a great event when we broke ground for having the South Shore make the national scene. I foresee this event getting bigger and better," Thomaselli said.

The guided walks will join Kirkwood Cross Country Ski Area and Snowshoe Center's annual event from 10am to 3pm, in coordination with REI of Sacramento and the El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol.

"I think it's a great way for people to get out into snow sports," said Debi Waldear, who runs the ski center located on Highway 88 between Pickett's Junction and Silver Lake. If pre-arranged by calling (209) 258.7248, one can sign up to get a beginning lesson on methods of snow travel with Waldear – a guru of winter sports in these parts.

Talks, tips, free demos and discounted trail passes will be offered at Kirkwood as one of 80 sanctioned locations for National Winter Trails Day, which is co-organized by the American Hiking Society and Snowsports Industry of America.

Waldear said she's surprised by how many people – even locals – don't venture out in nature in winter.

Expanding the market and reach of winter human travel is the precise aim of the snow sports industry.

"If you can walk, you can snowshoe," Snowsports Industry spokesman Reese Brown said from his home in Woodstock, Vt. The

trade organization created the day 15 years ago to introduce the activities to people with barriers to snow sports. More than 11,000 people take part each year.

“This is a free opportunity to try it,” he said. “So many people in so many climates don’t like winter.”

And there’s a reason for that. They either don’t know what clothes to wear or what footwear to bring. They have no idea how many calories they can burn while cross country skiing or snowshoeing, Brown mentioned. For example, a 190-pound adult has the opportunity to burn 690 calories an hour while snowshoeing. As Americans recover from their holiday food coma, this activity may prove to be another option to the gym.

For more information, go online.