

Trail building day ensures July opening for Van Sickle Park

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – I will never look at a trail the same.

Tahoe Rim Trail Association officials warned us this could happen. They even said next time we hike on this section of trail we'll smile, point out to our buddies what areas we are responsible for. I already feel that sense of ownership.

Saturday was my first experience with any type of trail building. I'm hooked. Besides spending time in the outdoors and feeling good about putting in a few hours of volunteer service – what made this different was the sense of accomplishment and camaraderie. More than 100 people signed up (a few probably didn't show up because of the lousy weather) to work on the trail at Van Sickle Bi-state Park.



Anna Watkins of Carson City works to improve the trail June 4 at Van Sickle Bi-state Park. Photos/Kathryn

Reed

We walked through sections saying, “good job” “this looks great” “keep it up.”

We weren't the only ones playing in the dirt. June 4 was National Trails Day, an event that has been going on for decades. The American Hiking Society always schedules it the first day of June. (It will be June 2 next year, so mark your calendar.)

“You will never look at a trail again when you are out hiking without realizing what it takes to build a trail,” Mary Bennington, TRTA executive director, told the volunteers before they headed out in the drizzle from Harrah's Lake Tahoe parking lot.

That is one of the great things about the country's only bi-state park – it's accessible by foot from the South Shore's main bed base at the state line.

Van Sickle Bi-state Park is scheduled to open in July.

The final work being done by professionals is construction of the California day use area under the oversight of the California Tahoe Conservancy. That work started June 1.

The 725-acre park is mostly in Nevada, but the entrance is in California near the intersection of Montreal Avenue and Heavenly Village Way.

The park will be open from sunrise to sunset all seasons except winter.

Steve Weaver, whose goal was to stay employed with Nevada State Parks until the park opened, just retired. But he plans to be at the official ribbon cutting during the environmental summit in August.

Weaver told *Lake Tahoe News* he is optimistic about the park

opening because of a TRT grant. The Tahoe Rim Trail Association secured a \$16,000 grant from the Van Sickle Foundation for fire suppression.

Bennington told the volunteers Saturday the TRTA has a five-year contract to pay the water and sewer bills. This commitment is what is allowing the park to open at a time when both states are in a precarious financial situation when it comes to putting money toward state parks.

What the volunteers were working on Saturday was the Daggett Summit system. Most of the work was maintenance. Widening the trail a bit so hikers won't feel like they are teetering off the edge, trimming back manzanita, removing pine needles and other debris that has been deposited over the winter.

This is a connector trail from Van Sickle to the TRT. The project, which has a couple years before it is complete, includes eliminating three miles of paved trail and putting them in the forest. The whole project adds 13 miles of trail. Included is a short, scenic loop around the Upper Kingsbury neighborhood and out to Castle Rock.

Equestrians will be able to use this trail network. To test what has been built, Petra Keller took Tiara Nevada and Paula Walkins had Jake on the trail. The horses did not like the narrow, rocky stream crossing at the waterfall. This means more technical work by the experts is needed to make it horse friendly.

Rosemary Manning of South Lake Tahoe said women are probably part of the crew because of the detail they put into their work – like getting the pine needles off the trail and making it just so.

A foursome of friends from Carson City came up to work on this trail system in their back yard. They met a couple years ago through Muscle Powered Carson City.

“We love to hike and we want to give back,” Anna Watkins said.

For Watkins, Gina DaSilva and Gisele Geary this was their first experience at trail building. Jenny Haas was the veteran of the group – this being her second time.

“It’s a passive way to get exercise,” Haas said.

Although the TRT says trail building is for all abilities, I have to disagree. A certain amount of physical shape is necessary. You have to hike to the work area – and part of the way includes carrying tools. And then it’s manual labor.

John McCall, who has been building TRT trails since 1985, had his crew of 11 (myself included) make sure some of the spots on the sandy trail we were working on were widened so horses wouldn’t have a problem.

McCall’s basic advice was, “Two things make a successful trail – it keeps water off and it keeps people on.”

We used tools I wasn’t familiar with – like a pickmatic and McLeod. And some tool I didn’t get the name of that a U.S. Forest Service employee created.

Then there was the loper – which I always thought was just called a trimmer.

I learned it is best not to use a shovel for prying things out of the ground. McCall said this is because it’s likely the tool will soon be in two pieces.

It was hard not to put the tools down for a minute to take in the views – even under the always cloudy and intermittent rainy conditions. The views of Lake Tahoe from this trail are stunning. A few offshoots (which have to be enjoyed on a non-work day) look like they will provide even more incredible unobstructed views of the South Shore.

The TRTA needs volunteers on the Daggett Summit portion

Tuesdays and Saturdays. Go online for more information.

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