

Restoration work at Vikingsholm includes replacing dragons

By Laurie Brazil

If you haven't visited our jewel of Emerald Bay – Vikingsholm – this year or perhaps not at all, now is the time to take the one-mile hike down to the south end of Emerald Bay.

Earlier this summer, new and stately crossed dragon beams were installed along the roof ridges of the courtyard buildings at Vikingsholm in Emerald Bay State Park at Lake Tahoe. Originally carved when the building was constructed in the summer of 1929, the boards had considerably weathered and deteriorated over time.

“Decorations of this type were common among many ancient wood churches in Scandinavia and stem from an early superstition,” Helen Henry Smith writes in “Vikingsholm, Tahoe’s Hidden Castle”. “When Christianity was introduced in the 11th century, there appeared to be some doubt that it would be entirely effective. Therefore, dragon heads, similar to those found in heathen temples, were carved on the Christian churches to provide added protection against all evils.”



Vikingsholm

The original dragon beams were the product of a Scandinavian craftsman who was brought in from New York and was responsible for all of the exterior carvings that were done from wood that

was hand hewn in Lake Tahoe.

California State Parks Foundation worked with restoration specialists Architectural Resources Group to have the fascia boards replicated by a wood craftsman from the Bay Area and provided the financial support for this important project at the castle.

Make sure your summer agenda includes a visit to one of the most unique and spectacular blends of architecture, natural beauty and craftsmanship that Lake Tahoe offers. The cascading falls that backdrop Vikingsholm are at their zenith and the roar can be heard along the trail and throughout the bay.

Fannette Island, in the middle of Emerald Bay, also boasts a tea house that was a feature added by Lora Josephine Knight when the property was acquired.

The parking for Emerald Bay State Park can be quite limited on weekends, so a weekday is preferable. The Nifty Fifty Trolley is a unique way to travel and stops at the parking lot to let guests off to make the walk down to the Bay.

Laurie Brazil lived and worked at Vikingsholm for several seasons alongside Helen Smith and the two are now life-long friends. Brazil later was a member of the California State Parks Foundation-Vikingsholm Council and helped to raise the funds that have been instrumental in the restoration.