

Tahoe Rim Trail a continual work in progress

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It's never done – the work, the hiking, the enjoyment.

That was the message of Mary Bennington. For the past four years she has been executive director of the Tahoe Rim Trail Association. The motto of the nonprofit is "A Trail Like No Other".

While it is 165 miles around, with the connectors there are more than 180 miles to the trail. It keeps growing to allow better access. And improvements are continually being made to existing sections.

In her talk May 21 to Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe at Harrah's Lake Tahoe, Bennington explained how last year the 3.4-mile connector trail from Van Sickle Bi-State Park to the Rim Trail was finished.



TRTA Executive Director Mary Bennington talks to volunteers on a National Trails Day. Photo/LTN file

Another South Shore project that enhanced the hiking

experience took 10 years to complete. That was the Kingsbury North and Kingsbury South sections. It used to be paved, go through a neighborhood, was steep and windy. There is also a loop for that section that has been rerouted out of Heavenly's Stagecoach Lodge.

Most of the work for the last two years has been focused on the 24½-mile Rim to Reno trail. The last mile to the summit of Mt. Houghton will be built this summer.

Most of the work to build and maintain the trail network has come from volunteers. About 500 volunteers put in nearly 15,000 hours of work each year.

It was Glen Hampton with the U.S. Forest Service who had the vision for a trail along the ridgetops. The TRTA was formed in 1981 and work began three years later. The 165-mile trail was finished in 2001.

"As you hike the whole trail you see different ecology," Bennington said. "Desolation is different than the East Shore. The West Shore is a lot rockier." This is because of the glaciers that formed the area.

Bennington said it's estimated 100,000 people are on the TRTA a year. A survey will be taken this summer to gather better data about TRT users.

While two weeks is the average time it takes someone to backpack the trail, many people divide it up into sections. The association says it can be hiked in eight sections, but those are often shortened by hikers, bikers and equestrians.

- Tahoe City to Brockway (20.2 miles) is often the best place to start in the spring because it has the lowest elevation. This means the snow is gone faster than at other locations.
- Brockway to Mount Rose (20.2 miles) has the highest point

– Relay Peak at 10,338 feet. “On a clear day you can see to Lassen,” Bennington said.

- Tahoe Meadows to Spooner (23.1 miles) has a 1.2 mile interpretive loop at the beginning that is wheelchair accessible. Farther along, this section looks down on Sand Harbor.

- Spooner to Kingsbury Grade (12.2 miles for the north, 18.5 miles for south route) has a wide panoramic view four miles in.

- Kingsbury Grade to Big Meadow (23.4 miles) includes Star Lake. Freel Peak would mean taking a side trip.

- Big Meadow to Echo Lake (17.5 miles) includes Showers Lake.

- Echo Lake to Barker Pass (32.7 miles) can be broken up by popping out at Bayview Campground.

- Barker Pass to Tahoe City (16.7 miles) has few views of Lake Tahoe, but includes Paige Meadow.

The TRTA has various memberships available, guided treks, and volunteer opportunities. More info is available online.