

Nevada's high-tech twist on adventure tourism

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

As co-founder of the social media photo competition Reno Instagrammys, Natalie Handler is used to toting a camera everywhere she goes.

But one of her latest projects was unusual: The camera wasn't in her mobile phone; it was a 40-pound behemoth she hoisted onto her back. The 15-lens camera designed to capture 360-degree images was part of the Google Trekker project, which collects Google Street View-style images for places cars can't drive.

Handler was hauling it through the International Car Forest art installation near Goldfield as part of a partnership between Google and the Nevada Division of Tourism. Travel Nevada, the colloquial name for the division, is scheduled to announce the launch of the Trekker program on Tuesday.

The mission was a chance for Handler to do more of what she loves, exploring the dusty corners of Nevada and sharing them with others. It was also a modern update in the efforts to promote adventure travel throughout Nevada.

The Nevada Division of Tourism will post online unique footage generated by the Trekker at the car forest and about 20 other destinations and distribute the content to a social media audience that's been steadily building for the past three years.

Since summer of 2013, when the division launched the "A world within, a state apart," campaign, the Travel Nevada Instagram account has grown from 362 to about 15,500 followers.

On Facebook in the past month, Travel Nevada has reached more than 1.7 million people in the United States alone – almost all of them in the attractive 18-34 demographic, and many in the key markets of Los Angeles, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Francisco and Salt Lake City.

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