

Building a bridge over troublesome water



Tahoe Rim Trail volunteers prep the site for a bridge in Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Five years after **Van Sickle Bi-State Park** opened, the main trail is getting a major upgrade.

A 26-foot long, 6-foot wide fiberglass composite bridge is being erected at the waterfall that is a little more than a mile up the trail from the parking lot.

The goal is provide access to more users of this 725-acre park – including equestrians, mountain bikers, small children, older people and those with some stability issues.

This is no easy undertaking. On Thursday about a dozen volunteers from the Tahoe Rim Trail Association were at the

worksite. Horses were bringing in 80-pound sacks of cement. By the end of today more than 30 sacks will have been delivered.



Bonnie Fair and John McKenna work the hoist. Photo/Kathryn Reed

A grip hoist was rigged across the stream, with thick cables secured to trees. The cement bags were brought across the water this way – in the air – instead of carried by people. Mostly this had to do with ensuring it didn't get dropped in the water. That would be an environmental nightmare.

Safety for the people doing the work and for the land is of utmost importance.

Clay Grubb and Chris Strohm are the project leaders. Both are veteran trail builders with long histories tied to the South Shore.



Horses bring the sacks of cement to the worksite.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

In surveying the site on June 2, Strohm described the location as dealing with two imperfect surfaces in a tight spot.

The stream crossing comes at a bend in the trail. As with most mountainous areas, it's not flat or even. And working around any body of water in the basin means needing to adhere to strict guidelines to ensure nothing gets downstream that could negatively impact Lake Tahoe.

Rock being used for the project comes from the side of the hill. By the time everything is done the landscape will look as though the workers were never there.



Chris Binder creates a landing area to store the cement. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We’re building a structure that will last 100 years or longer,” John McKenna, who was working the hoist, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While horses were used for the cement, the men and women hauled the rest of the tools, including the 50-pound generator, up to the waterfall. Wheelbarrows were pushed up the slope with tools.

McKenna, who is 70, brought up 75 pounds of gear his first trip on June 1, 50 pounds the second.

Many of the men and women are in their 60s and 70s.

The youngster of the group was Chris Binder. He was also the only actual employee of the TRTA. He started with the group about a month ago as the director of trail operations, having come from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.



Clay Grubb, a former Marine officer, is a popular and well-regarded TRT leader. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“My involvement is fairly minimal,” Binder told *Lake Tahoe News*. This is because the logistics are done before the work begins. He praised the volunteers, realizing without them, this bridge and work on the 170-mile TRT wouldn’t get done.

The work actually started last fall with prepping the site, ordering the supplies and planning for the construction. Crews were back out in early May. The heavy lifting is this week. The bridge should be ready to be used in 10 days.

(The trail is still open while work is being done.)