

Rangers lead educational hikes at Heavenly



USFS ranger Gustavo Nava leads the Smith family to what looks like the edge of the resort. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A tree is not just a tree. And those sounds; they mean something.

Gustavo Nava walks a little way before he starts an impromptu quiz about how to identify the various trees that line the trail. The three key differences – bark, needles and cones. Key phrases like “gentle Jeffrey” for the Jeffrey pine and “prickly ponderosa” for that varietal are offered as reminders.

Elevation plays a huge factor in what will grow where. White bark pines are prevalent here, not so much at lake level. They like it the 8,000- to 9,000-foot level. These trees are

unusual in that they grow together so their trunks are a cluster.

Flora and fauna, and a little history about the Indians dominate the walk.

Nava is one of the U.S. Forest Service rangers who leads these free hikes at Heavenly Mountain Resort. This is the second year the Forest Service has offered these excursions from the top of the gondola.

“The goal is to connect the public more with the land,” Jaclyn Tain with the Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It offers them something where they get more in depth knowledge about the land they are enjoying.”

On this particular Friday a mom and her three daughters are learning from Nava. They spend their summers in Carnelian Bay, with the rest of the year in Turlock. This was an opportunity to see a part of the lake they are less familiar with.

“They like guided hikes because they don’t trust their mother,” Kim Smith told *Lake Tahoe News*. Her daughters – ages 13, 10 and 6 – didn’t disagree. Besides not having to rely on her map reading skills, Smith said it’s a chance for them to “learn more and explore more about our back yard.”



Ski runs without snow seem to flow into the Carson Valley.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Snow was a factor this year for the ranger program. The normal route is to take the Tamarack lift and hike from there to Sky Express. The alternate is to hike to the top of Olympic chair – elevation 9,470 feet.

Nava stops again. Everyone listens. It's a Clark's nutcracker. Some see it through the branches. Others trust that it must be there because they hear its song.

Each excursion is different. What wildlife will be out can change day to day, what flowers are sprouting leads to other information being dispersed, then there are always questions by the participants.

Even on days when there is no hike the Forest Service has a presence on the mountain. Six days a week employees hand out maps and answer questions. After all, this is Forest Service land that the resort is operating on.

Notes:

- Hikes are Fridays and Saturdays at 11am and 1pm.
- They start at the top of the gondola. Meet near the Tamarack Lodge. (Must pay to ride the gondola.)
- They last about one hour and are about 2 miles.
- They will go through Sept. 2.
- Bring water.
- Wear closed toe shoes.