

Van Sickle park evolving as popularity grows



The mural on the old barn at Van Sickle Bi-state Park was recently refurbished by Angie's Signs in Meyers. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

It's a park even for those who don't especially like the woods, or prefer to explore the outdoors in heels or flip flops. It's also a park for those wanting to hike the 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail, or wanting a short trek to incredible views of Lake Tahoe.

Van Sickle Bi-state Park is proving to have a little something for a lot of people.

It's one of the few state parks anywhere that so many people can walk to from their hotel room.

Well more than sixty thousand people have visited the park this year. About 25,000 walked in, while another 30,000 drove. Those figures are from May 1 to Sept. 20. (The counters don't work in the winter.) And while the road is closed when it snows, plenty of people walk in – some to snowshoe. The shoulder seasons are busy as well.

This park that opened in 2011 under adverse economic times has blossomed. Money is still an issue, but the two states continue to work for the greater good. The operating agreement is being revised, with partnerships expanded. The Van Sickle Foundation and Tahoe Rim Trail Association are key partners.

On Sept. 21 the California Tahoe Conservancy board members went on a little trek to this park that encompasses California and Nevada. It was the CTC that essentially bailed out California State Parks and came forward with funding, and continues to do so. Nevada State Parks, though, is the bigger player.



All the tools and materials to build the bridge were brought in by people or horses. Photo/LTN file

Starting Oct. 2 a ranger will be patrolling the park – the first time this has happened. Mike Shipman is a graduate of South Tahoe High School who now works for Nevada State Parks. He is who will be responsible for keeping an eye on things.

Homeless issues – notably fires in summer 2016 – were a huge issue, and continue to be a threat. Vandalism, graffiti and general misbehaving are all things Shipman will be handling – or hoping to prevent.

Frank Bosch and Linda Cook, who have been the onsite caretakers, are moving on – someplace out of the snow. Praise was given to them for the job they have done.

“We want to provide some level of visitor services. And we want to make sure the facilities stay clean,” Eric Johnson, administrator for Nevada State Parks, told *Lake Tahoe News* as to why a ranger has been hired.

A big change for the park will be the 20-site campground that is planned for the southern section of the Nevada side. It will have full hookups. The design is still a couple years out.



Views from hiking trails in Van Sickle Bi-State Park are stunning. Photo/LTN file

When the main road was built by Nevada Parks, the necessary infrastructure for the campground was installed.

The newest change was a fiberglass bridge that was installed last summer across the waterfall. It's the first of its kind in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The Tahoe Rim Trail Association, Clay Grubb in particular, gets the kudos for this endeavor.

The TRTA has been an incredible partner to this park, having built a connector trail to its main trail. The agency also often leads hikes along the various trails, and does trainings there.

Land managers, though, are worried about outside impacts to the park. Near the old barn the Gondola Vista condo project can be seen. Per the CTC's insistence a fence will go up to block direct access from this development.

The CTC is also worried if the parcel on the west side of the entrance were to ever be developed by owner Randy Lane. A super-sized house could be built there. CTC staff would like the agency to purchase that land if the owner is willing and the state ever has the money.

The proposed loop road could be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it will likely bring a huge influx of people to Van Sickle because Highway 50 would go directly in front of the park. This could be a strain on limited and fragile resources.

The entrance will have to be configured to accommodate the highway.

To make it so pedestrians and cyclists don't have to cross a four-lane highway to get to the park, an overpass is proposed closer to Harrah's Lake Tahoe. This, too, could provide for more traffic.

The park is here foremost because of Jack Van Sickle who in 1988 donated the 542 acres to Nevada in honor of his

grandfather Henry Van Sickle. The younger Van Sickle died eight years before it opened.