

LIFESTYLE // TRAVEL

Canyon trail bridges lakes across state border

By Brian Coyne

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Mike and Patty Dewey of Reno enjoy a hike along the Tahoe-Pyramid Trail between Floriston and Farad. When complete, the route will run 116 miles from the Truckee River headwaters on Tahoe's north shore to the river's end at Pyramid Lake.

Photo: Photos by Michael Macor / Special to The Chronicle

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Even in the dog days of summer and fall, Lake Tahoe beckons hikers and bicyclists with its stunning scenery and crisp mountain weather. Soon they'll have another reason to make the trip: the Tahoe-Pyramid Trail.

When it's complete, the route will run 116 miles from the headwaters of the Truckee River on Tahoe's north shore northeast to the river's end at Pyramid Lake in Nevada. Though there's still work to be done,

the trail is nearing a major milestone: A long-awaited 1.5-mile section through the Truckee River Canyon, near the Nevada border, is expected to be completed in early 2019, effectively linking a trail for bicyclists and hikers between Truckee and Reno.

The steep-sided canyon is already a well-known destination for rock-climbing, fishing and whitewater rafting, but Interstate 80 and the Union Pacific Railroad line take up most of the scarce level ground, meaning the only way through the canyon is the freeway.

Overall, the Tahoe-Pyramid Trail is roughly 80 percent finished, with uncomplete sections east of Reno awaiting funding and easements across private property. The trail's surface ranges widely, from steep single-track mountain-biking trails to dirt utility company roads to paved trails and even some low-traffic roads. In the Truckee Canyon, the trail is largely dirt roads, with some sections of single-track — best for a mountain bike or a carefully handled gravel bike.

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The upcoming trail connection through the canyon is a victory for Janet Phillips, who hatched the idea for the trail in 2003 after retiring from her previous job as the manager of water resources for the Sierra Pacific Power Co., a local utility. Sierra Pacific and other utilities control large stretches of the land in the Truckee Canyon, and Phillips got the idea for the trail after visiting parts of the river that had long been off-limits to the public.

The goal of the trail is simple: Connect Lake Tahoe residents to their river.



Bicyclists take in the breathtaking scenery along the Tahoe-Pyramid Trail near Tahoe City in South Lake Tahoe. This section is between Alpine Meadows ski resort and Squaw Valley ski resort.

Photo: Michael Macor / Special to The Chronicle

The Truckee is a rarity among rivers: it doesn't flow toward the ocean. It originates in Lake Tahoe at 6,200 feet in elevation and flows down to Pyramid Lake at 3,800 feet. Nearly the same size as Lake Tahoe, Pyramid Lake is much less visited, but its austere desert beauty makes it a worthy destination, especially in spring and fall, when you can comfortably camp right by the water's edge. (The lake is on reservation land belonging to the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe. To ride the Tahoe-Pyramid Trail to the lake, you need a \$10 day use permit, available on the tribe's website.)

Building the trail, however, has been more complex.

In addition to the utilities, Phillips and other advocates have had to raise funds, marshal public support and negotiate with various stakeholders, including Caltrans, the Union Pacific Railroad and a slew of smaller property owners and regulatory agencies. But Phillips has been tenacious. The completion of the Truckee Canyon section is, she says, "a huge, gratifying reward." In a region where a recent tourism report from North Lake Tahoe estimated that 60 percent of all jobs are tourism-related, the chance to turn the Truckee River into a magnet for bike-loving visitors helped build support for the trail among both elected officials and public.

The Tahoe area is a smorgasbord of other biking options, both on- and off-road. Full accounts of these rides fill entire books, but a few standouts include the paved ride over 7,057-foot Donner Pass on Donner Pass Road (40 miles round trip) and, for mountain bikers, the 16.7-mile Lola Montez-Hole in the Ground loop that starts at Soda Springs, near the famed Sugar Bowl Ski Resort 10 miles west of Truckee, and explores the rugged, roadless mountains north of I-80.

The completed Tahoe-Pyramid Trail through the Truckee Canyon will surely take a place of pride in any list of Tahoe's best rides. Phyllis McConn, a community impact officer with the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, one of the trail's funders, expects its popularity to increase among both locals and visitors: "In some ways, it's a well-kept secret. In other ways, it's already drawing the attention of the biking world."

If You Go

For more information on the trail, visit www.TahoePyramidTrail.org. The different sections vary so much that there's no one best bike or best season for the whole trail. This variety also means the trail has something for everyone. For visitors looking for a gentle cruise rather than an expedition, the trail passes right through downtown Reno and Truckee on paved riverside promenades.

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