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LAND TRUST

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Halfway There: Rim Trail Grows Around Donner Lake

At a time when many Tahoe-area residents are looking forward to hitting the ski slopes, outdoor enthusiasts have a new section of picturesque trail to hike or ride before the serious snow starts to fly.

Meandering from Castle Valley Road on Donner Summit to the intersection of Summit Lake and Warren Lake trails, a newly completed section of the planned 23-mile long Donner Lake Rim Trail offers cyclists, hikers, runners and equestrians a new challenge and more trail connections.

“The trail has been built by an all-volunteer effort, with design for this section starting in 2004,” said John Svahn, the Donner Lake Rim Trail coordinator for the Truckee Donner Land Trust. “It took probably over 1,000 hours of labor entailing a lot of heavy rock work, moving boulders, rock armoring streams and brush clearing.”

Svahn described the volunteers as ranging from a 4-year-old who helped install signs to an 83-year-old who removed boulders from the pathway.

The addition of roughly three miles of trail connects Negro Canyon, Tahoe Donner, and the popular Hole-in-the-Ground Trail, Svahn said. The new

section, which brings the amount of completed Donner Rim Trail to 11 miles, also forms a three-mile loop with the Pacific Crest Trail, making for a good running route.

“The trail goes over a couple of sections of pretty white granite, slick rock, through fir forests, a grove of old juniper, and crosses seven seasonal creeks in the spring and early summer,” Svahn said. “There are also a ton of wildflowers in the open spaces.”

And showcasing that open space is ultimately what the trail is all about, said Executive Director Perry Norris of the Truckee Donner Land Trust.

“I think trails and open space go hand and hand,” Norris said. “When the trail is complete what a terrific asset utilizing a lot of the open space the land trust has protected — what a great way to highlight the land we’ve conserved.”

Norris said the trail began with an idea in the mid-1990s.

“There were two schools of thought on what a land trust should be — should it strictly be for conservation, or should it be for conservation and quality-of-life enhancements like trails? It was inspired by its larger cousin in Tahoe”
The 150-mile Tahoe Rim Trail.

Looking to the future, Svahn said next year’s plans include blazing new trail along Donner Ridge along Negro Canyon and creating a mountain bike-legal trail parallel to the Pacific Crest Trail between Interstate 80 and Old Highway 40.

Schallenberger Ridge will be the target for trail building in 2009, Svahn said, with the goal of completing the 23-mile loop around the lake within the next five years.

“There are construction challenges in the really granite-y areas, and route-finding issues on the east end of Donner Lake,” Svahn said.

Currently, the trail is still clear of snow and open for exploration, Svahn said, with a typical season from June to November.