

TAHOE-PYRAMID BIKEWAY Pyramid Indian Reservation Trail

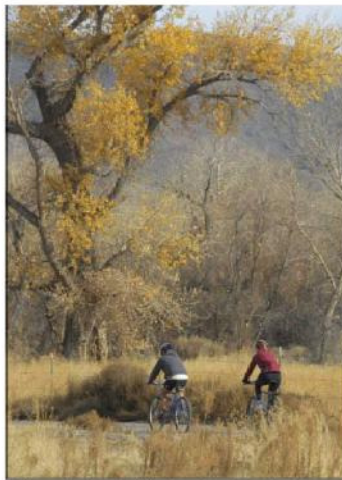
Bi-state trail includes 25 miles on Paiute Tribe land

By Janet Phillips, President, Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway
Photos by Tim Duan, Director of Photography, Reno Gazette-Journal

THE TRUCKEE RIVER IS ONE OF ONLY A FEW rivers in the world that flows from one lake to another with no outflow to the ocean. It begins at forested Lake Tahoe, and flows 116 miles to its desert terminus, Pyramid Lake. Connecting these two lakes is the small, unique Truckee River, which has been the focus of water controversies, and the route of the Donner Party, the first transcontinental railroad, and the first cross-country auto route, the Lincoln Highway.

In 2003, a project was launched to build a trail alongside the Truckee River, so that it could be enjoyed at ground level by cyclists, fishermen, hikers, and nature lovers. By connecting pre-existing trail segments, about one-half the total length of the project is already completed.

The Truckee River flows through two states, five counties, four cities, lands of three federal agencies, and one Indian Reservation. To bridge all these boundaries, a nonprofit organization was formed to spearhead the trail by working collaboratively with each jurisdiction along the route. Generally, the nonprofit team designs, permits, finances, and builds each trail section, then gives it to the local



Cyclists enjoy lingering fall colors along the Truckee River

government to own and maintain. Local government maintenance efforts are supplemented by the Bikeway's Adopt-a-Trail volunteers.

The first Bikeway-government partnership was with the City of Reno and Nevada Department of Transportation. Other pending trail collaborations include: Truckee-Donner Recreation and Park District, Bureau of Land Management, the State of Nevada, Bureau of Reclamation, The Nature Conservancy, and two counties.

RIDING "THE REZ"

The Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation contains the northernmost 26 miles of the Bikeway route within its boundaries. The Truckee River in particular is an inaccessible and unspoiled river that most non-tribal members have never seen. A narrow corridor along the river is bright green or yellow with cottonwood trees, in stark contrast to the sagebrush that extends to the horizon all around.

The partnership between the Tribe and the Bikeway has created a new way of visiting the Reservation and seeing a beautiful section of the Truckee River for the first time—by bike.

HOW WE APPROACHED THE TRIBE

Like most tribes, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe is a sovereign government with power to approve land uses, environmental reviews, and trail use regulations. This effectively creates a one-stop shop for trail approvals, and made Tribal endorsement absolutely critical to the project.

The initial discussion of a trail alongside the Truckee River through "The Rez" (a nickname which a tribal leader coined) started in 2004 between Bikeway Founder, Janet Phillips, and Tribal Chairman, Norm Harry, who had a long-standing professional acquaintance relating to water resource issues. In 2005, Chairman Harry attended the ribbon-cutting celebration for a section of trail sponsored by the City of Reno, and saw potential benefits to the Tribe if a trail were built on the reservation. Soon after, the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and two Bikeway representatives toured the reservation to scout trail routes.

JIBING WITH THE TRIBE'S GOALS

Our time spent with Tribal leaders taught us two broad philosophical guidelines for developing the "Rez" trail:

- Provide low-impact tourism opportunities, and
- Minimize disturbance of Tribal land and artifacts.

Since the Pyramid Lake Tribe is not in the casino business, their goal is to foster other kinds of economic activity, including low-impact tourism. The Bikeway fits this tribal goal perfectly, making it a welcome proposal.



The new four-mile section of the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway near Wadsworth

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Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway *continued*

As more people learn about the trail, we and the Tribe expect that traffic will pick up and economic benefits will follow in permit and refreshment sales at the tribal store. In order to minimize disturbance of tribal lands, the trail was located as much as possible on existing dirt roads and jeep tracks. The Rez trail is comprised of about 20 miles of shared-use dirt and paved roads and four miles of newly-built trail. This avoids the risk of unearthing artifacts while reducing construction costs. The downside is that some standard trail design parameters are not met, such as maximum gradient and side-slope contouring.

THE APPROVAL PROCESS

After touring the proposed alignment with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, a presentation was made to the full Tribal Council, which approved the trail unanimously and also agreed to maintain the trail. Since our primary trail funding source was the Recreational Trails Program, this was an important step to qualifying for the grant.

Two years later, however, we had to detour around a non-Indian landowner who refused access across its property. A more involved review process was required for the new alignment. To ensure that no artifacts were disturbed, the tribe's cultural resources manager walked the route with us, and in one location asked us to relocate the trail.

LESSONS LEARNED

While the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe has a distinctive setting and culture, there were many similarities to working with a small community in any rural area:

- The Tribe elects its council and chairman every two years, so a long-term trail project may need to be re-introduced to new decision-makers several times.
- The Tribe has a small staff and budget, stretched thin over a large geographic area.
- Some pro-economic development members want to see more low-impact tourism which the trail will create, and others don't want outsiders cycling through their land. Like any elected government body, the Council had to balance these interests in approving the trail.
- Due to the long residency of many tribal members and close-knit community character, personal relationships are vital to the success of the project.

There were two traits we found among the tribe members that seem to be different from our encounters with non-Indian landowners:

- A reluctance to say negative things about the trail. If they were unhappy with some feature, it was expressed



Bikeway Founder Janet Phillips with Tribal Chairman Norm Harry

very subtly and we had to listen carefully to understand what the problem was.

- A willingness to try something new and see how well it works, rather than refusing permission at the outset.

FUTURE STEPS AT "THE REZ"

The Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway is complete through the Pyramid Reservation, but has miles to go before the entire 116-mile trail is completed. It is our hope that a positive experience on the Rez will encourage other non-Indian landowners to allow the trail through their property. We also hope to return to the Rez with trail improvements and events to foster its use in the future. Happily, a former Tribal Chairman is a regular rider on the Bikeway.

See more photos and details of the partnership with the Tribe at www.AmericanTrails.org/resources/land. Janet Phillips' passion is the Truckee River and she has devoted the past five years of her life to spearhead the trail project.

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