

# LIVING

■ OUTDOORS ■

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Saturday, November 29, 2008 ♦ RGJ.com/living

## A LONG JOURNEY



PHOTOS BY TIM DUNN/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Janet Phillips rides along the new Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway near Wadsworth. Phillips' passion is the Truckee River, and she has devoted the past five years to spearhead a bike trail that she and other volunteers hope will one day connect Lake Tahoe with Pyramid Lake.

With the completion of a 25-mile bike trail near Pyramid Lake, the 116-mile Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway is one step closer to reality

BY SUSAN VOYLES  
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Several mountain bike riders carefully eye a herd of cows as they pedal across a pasture at the Spinning J Ranch north of Wadsworth.



Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway



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Several mountain bike riders carefully eye a herd of cows as they pedal across a pasture at the Spinning J Ranch north of Wadsworth.

With no bulls in the field, the riders this week had no problems on this newest stretch of the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway that was completed Nov. 21.

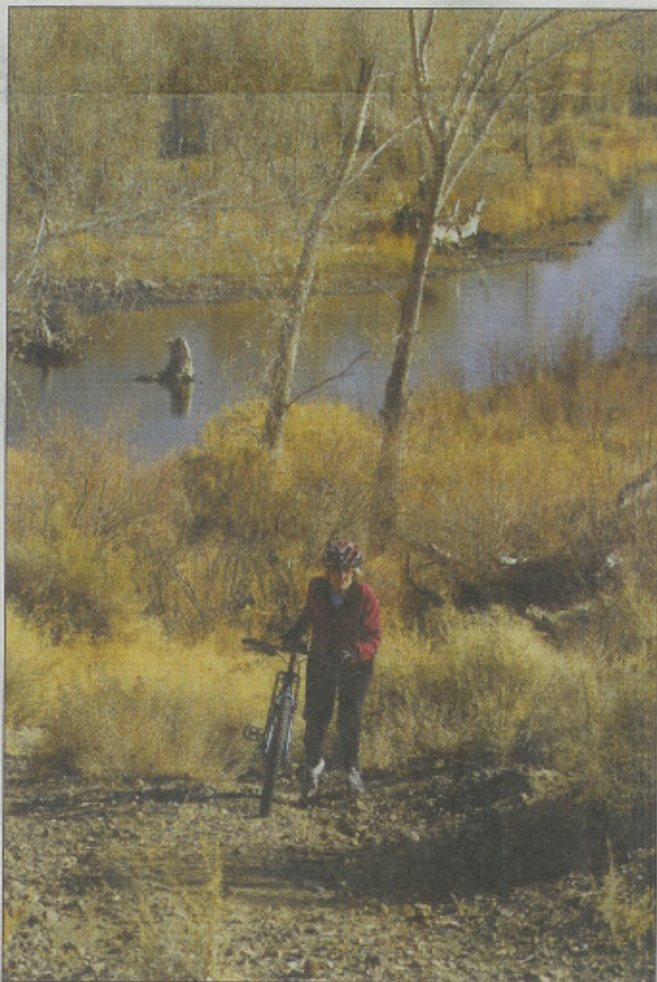
"Hey, I just flushed out a coyote," says Bill von Phul, a Bikeway volunteer and head of the Truckee Meadows Trails Association. "He crossed the road right in front of me and hopped through that fence."

Von Phul, John Bales and Janet (Carson) Phillips were taking a victory ride on four miles of a new trail that ends near the Numana Fish Hatchery that they've worked on most of the year. From the hatchery, the trail goes on to Pyramid Lake for a 25-mile ride in all.

The riders are among a handful of hard-working volunteers who have been on a five-year quest to build the missing links for the bikeway they hope will someday follow the Truckee River on its 116-mile journey from Lake Tahoe to Pyramid Lake.

Using existing dirt roads and trails where possible, they are stitching together pieces of the bikeway as best they can. The bikeway boasts 25 miles at the reservation, 20 miles from Verdi to east Sparks and 15 miles between Lake Tahoe and Truckee.

Next year, Phillips said the bikeway group plans to build a mile of trail in Tracy, about halfway between Reno



With the Truckee River in the background, Janet Phillips pushes her bike up a rare steep section of a recently completed four-mile section of the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway.

## Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway



L.MILLER/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

## WHAT'S NEXT

The Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway will celebrate its fifth anniversary at its annual meeting Dec. 12 at 4 to 6 p.m. in the Grill, at the corner of Talbot Lake and South McCarran Boulevard in southwest Reno. A slide show on the group's work and future projects will be shown.

For more information on the bikeway, including bikeway maps, check [www.tpbikeway.org](http://www.tpbikeway.org)

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Log on to RGJ.com to view a photo gallery of the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway from photographer Tim Dunn.



SEE BIKEWAY ON 2F

# Bikeway/ Trail built with \$82,000 in grants

From 1F

and Fernley. The trail would link with a dirt road at the McCarran Ranch and a mile of trail recently built by NV Energy (formerly Sierra Pacific Power Co.) near its power plant at Tracy.

The NV Energy trail, now closed, is to link the 102 Ranch, which is now under major construction with river restoration work. In all, five miles of trail would be linked and eventually connect to the federally owned Mustang Ranch to the west, Phillips said.

The bikeway group already has obtained a \$59,000 grant for the new mile of trail and will need \$14,000 in matching funds.

For 2010, Phillips said she is in talks with Caltrans officials to turn part of the old Lincoln Highway between Floriston and Boca Reservoir into the bikeway. This four miles would be the first bikeway section through the difficult Truckee Canyon.

This year, the group built four miles of a double-track trail north of Wadsworth that replaces an old railroad maintenance road. That road was made a part of the route when the trail on the reservation opened in 2006, Phillips said. The road, however, was either covered with thick silt or "washboard" and not very scenic, she said.

"You had to be a real strong rider," said Bales, to pedal through the silt.

Thanks to Alvin James, the new trail crosses his Spinning J Ranch and leads to a ridge overlooking the Truckee River and a valley dotted with pastures and giant cottonwoods that turn to glorious shades of yellow and gold in the early fall.

should have no problem with the cattle as long as they stay on the trail. But if people venture close to the cattle, he said the cows will go after them to protect their calves.

And sometimes he said he has bulls in the field. "The bulls are at another pasture but they will be back," he said.

A sign at the first stile tells riders they are approaching a working ranch and asks them to use their common sense. Access, Phillips warned, could be lost if people create problems.

In all, the new trail section was built with a \$82,000 state parks grant, \$20,000 in matching funds and at least \$20,000 in donated work, Phillips said.

Von Phul spent countless hours building the two stiles that each contain 124 pieces of steel, 36 pieces of wood and hundreds of bolts. He also did the research for Soil Tac, a soil stabilizer that literally glues the road together and is not supposed to harm the environment. The stuff also is used to create landing strips in the deserts of Iraq.

Von Phul built a 325-gallon water tank/pumping contraption that was used to spray the glue onto the bikeway. The last mile of new trail was treated a week ago and rides as smooth as a freeway. Otherwise, riders would be battling the silt.

In building the double-track trail, the road was first scrapped flat and then a dump truck was used to spread several thousand tons of gravel for the bed.

The next leg of the trail to the north built by volunteers in 2006, people pushed or pulled with a yoke wheelbarrows in carting 350 tons of gravel into position.



TIM DUNN/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Bill Von Phul stands atop a stair system, one of two he designed and built to access private ranchland on the latest section of the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway near Wadsworth. Rancher Alvin James consented to a short portion of the bikeway coming through his cattle ranch, provided a stair system could be built that would allow cyclists onto the property without climbing fences or opening gates.

## THE TRAIL AT THE PYRAMID LAKE INDIAN RESERVATION

To ride the new four miles of trail built on the reservation, first stop at the Interstate 80 Smokeshop that's just off Exit 43, heading north to Pyramid Lake at Wadsworth.

Park at the Natchez Elementary School near the solar panels and head north on Nevada Highway 447 a short way. Take a right on Pyramid Street and then a left on Railroad Circle and follow the bikeway signs along the paved road that turns into a dirt road. After the first pasture, look to the left for a stile or ladder over the pasture fence. This is the start of the trail.

Once past the pasture, the trail finally touches the Truckee River, the only spot on the new four miles where you can actually throw a fishing line in the river. The gate at the end is to the university's farm, so look for a the trail sign that leads up a steep little hill.

From here, riders are on top of a ridge overlooking a valley carved by the Truckee River filled with pasture and giant cottonwoods along

the river. This area was once part of Winnemucca Lake and the ancient Lake Lahontan. What appear in the distance as giant sand dunes under the Truckee Range actually are giant domes of silt left by the ancient lake. You can trace the water-level line of the ancient lake across the hills.

Then the trail turns west for about a mile along several small dry lake beds and meanders down to the canyon floor. The silence is awesome.

The canyon is filled with the silt domes. At no more than a 10 percent grade, the trail climbs out of the canyon and goes on for another mile before hitting the single-track trail built in 2006 and onto the Numana Fish Hatchery. Here the trail is as smooth as a freeway.

Animal sightings: A blue heron on a fence post, a coyote crossing the trail, lots of Canada geese in the river and hawks overhead.

Plan ahead: Required gear includes a mountain bike and helmet, water and a map of the trail that can be printed from the bikeway Web site.

and gold in the early fall.

Without success, Phillips said the group tried to gain permission to cross the S Bar S Ranch owned by the University of Nevada, Reno, that controls a two-mile stretch along the river that can be seen from the ridge top.

"An Indian rancher is willing to chance but the university is not," said Phillips, a former Sierra Pacific Power Co. executive who started the bikeway project.

James said he doesn't anticipate any problems with the bike riders. The bikeway group built stiles, or ladder platforms, to cross the fence at each end of the pasture. That way the gates remain locked. "We didn't want to leave the gates open so the animals could get out," he said.

James said bike riders

tons of gravel into position. That single track trail winds up and over a hill.

"We will never again build a hand-built section of trail," Phillips said. "It just about killed the volunteers."

While the group has about 60 members, a significant amount of work is done by six to eight volunteers, Phillips said.

Most of the volunteers are newly retired and bring professional skills with them. Bales, for instance, is a retired Caltrans equipment operator. Carson was a water planning/policy director for Sierra Pacific Power Co. with expertise on the Truckee River.

"You got to do something more than play golf or tennis," Phillips said. "Recent retirees have a lot of energy and time and some have great professional contacts."

## TAHOE-PYRAMID BIKEWAY TIMELINE

**NOV. 3, 2003:** With pen and pad in hand, Janet (Carson) Phillips is profiled in a Reno Gazette-Journal story as she works to scout and sketch a route through the Truckee Canyon west of Verdi for the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway. The retired Sierra Pacific Power Co. executive's hobby quickly captures the imagination and attention of other recent retirees and donors.

**DEC. 13, 2003:** The group gets its first donation of \$30,000 to start the bikeway project. It started as part of the Nevada Land Conservancy and then became its own nonprofit group.

**MAY, 2005:** A paved bikeway along Interstate 80 between Mogul and Verdi is opened, the first link in the bikeway project. Until then, bike riders had to use the freeway for about a mile to get from Reno to Verdi. The project, built with \$250,00 in grants and donations, had been talked about in local government circles for years.

**OCTOBER, 2006:** All 25 miles of trail is opened on the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation, following existing dirt roads most of the way from Wadsworth to the lake. About 10 miles at the south end are connected to the north end

with a half-mile, hand-built section around a bluff south of the Numana Fish Hatchery. The northern 15 miles on dirt roads opened the year before.

**JANUARY, 2007:** The Storey County Commission kills a proposed extension of the bikeway east of Sparks in its county, refusing to declare a dirt road across private property as a public, historic road. Without this link, the bikeway group forfeited a \$486,000 state grant that would have been used to build a footbridge at the historic Pioneer Crossing.

This leaves a railroad trestle as the only way for people on foot to get from Rainbow Bend in Lockwood to Sparks, which is considered unsafe and is trespassing. The commission sided with property owners near the Pioneer Crossing who didn't want bike riders near their homes.

**NOVEMBER, 2007:** A new four-mile section of double-track trail north of Wadsworth is finished, replacing a difficult and boring route along an old railroad maintenance road.

**SOURCE:** Reno Gazette-Journal archives