

SIDE TRACK

BIG WHEELS:

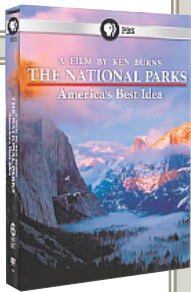
With summer at the half-way mark, the Angel Fire Bike Park is reporting biker attendance is up 100 percent from last year.

The park, located at the Angel Fire Resort, went through an expansion and overhaul during the off-season to create trails that would appeal to riders of all levels. The resort credits the turnout to great weather, an early season opening day and affordability. One-day passes start at \$22.

With the growing numbers, the Angel Fire Bike Park will offer riders an additional hour of riding each day. It will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week. The park has also opened a new cross-country-only loop called Enlightenment.

Next on the agenda is the Second Annual Freeride Festival Aug. 19-20 — a nonracing event that allows riders to check out the trails. The festival also includes, free activities, beer and movies.

For info on rates, trails and reservations go to www.angelfirebikepark.com or www.angelfireresort.com.



PARK PLACE:

OK, arm-chair travelers, here's your chance to visit our National Parks in the comfort of your home while learning a great deal of history along the way.

"The National Parks: American's Best Idea" is a six-episode film series by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan that takes us all over this nation. Of course, we know Burns for his film series on baseball, the Civil War and jazz.

The documentary, which was six years in the making, tells tales about those people so enamored by these spectacular places that they worked hard to preserve them. Among them are the noted John Muir, and Japanese immigrants George Masa, whose photographs of the Great Smoky Mountains were powerful tools in preserving that region, and Chiura Obata, who painted Yosemite.

Now, we have 58 national parks plus 333 national monuments (such as Bandelier) and historic sites. A bit of trivia: Delaware is the only state not to have any.

You can catch the series when it airs on PBS, but if you can't wait there is Netflix, or you can buy the series through PBS. Visit www.pbs.org/nationalparks/.

Coghlan's great outdoor accessory must-have — Four Function Whistle for Kids with a built-in thermometer, magnifier, mirror and compass.



Tina Larkin

ELK: The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has doled out grants to nine counties including Taos to give elk and other wildlife better access to water and foraging areas.

The foundation is also funding a research project measuring the impact of wolf restoration on elk populations in the Gila National Forest.

Combined, the grants total \$75,503.

In Taos County, the grant will improve water sources on BLM lands near Cerro del Aire and construct fencing around young aspen stands to protect them from over-browsing on BLM lands on Taos Plateau.

Since 1985, the foundation and its partners have completed 256 conservation and education projects in New Mexico with a combined value of more than \$19.3 million. Want to learn more? Visit www.rmef.org or call 800-CALL ELK.



A guided climber belays down the Dead Cholla Wall on the west rim of the Rio Grande Gorge.

Mountain Skills On a mission to elevate Taos climbing

By Matthew van Buren ■ The Taos News



Foley, left, eases Jones into the sensation of climbing a rock wall by trusting the rope and harness.

When people think of Taos' many outdoor pursuits, rock climbing may not come to mind. Jay Foley has been trying to change that.

Foley's name almost inevitably comes up in discussions about local climbing. He literally wrote the book on rock climbing in the Taos area, he runs the local Mountain Skills guiding service, and he continues to develop new routes in his spare time. Foley said he started climbing in New York's Shawangunk Mountains ("the Gunks") with a high school club, but he liked running around in the woods more than he enjoyed the tall, tough climbs he started on.

"I just like being outside," he said.

While he was going to college in Vermont, Foley helped teach interested members of an outdoors club how to climb, and eventually rock climbing truly became an extension of his love of the outdoors. Though he still guides all over the world, including in Thailand and at Nevada's Red Rocks, where Mountain Skills is one of only four permitted guiding services, Foley lives in Arroyo Seco and has been climbing in Taos for two decades.

While he credits early Taos climbers like Ed Jaramillo and Cayce Weber with pioneering some of the area's classic routes and best-known walls, Foley said the mid-'90s saw a lull in local climbing, and for a while he felt like he was the only one on the local rocks. He said that feeling helped drive him to establish

See **CLIMBING**, Page C2



Climbing guide Jay Foley, left, assists beginner climber Wesley Jones, 18.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TINA LARKIN ♦ THE TAOS NEWS

Summer hiking in Taos Williams Lake and Wheeler Peak

By Cindy Brown
For The Taos News

Editor's Note: As of Friday, July 22 the Questa Ranger District of the Carson National Forest where these hikes are located has been re-opened. Stage II fire restrictions are in place.

The Carson National Forest closed on June 30 due to extreme fire danger. Ever since that time, I have been suffering from ACNFW — Acute Carson National Forest Withdrawal.

While there are other hiking oppor-



This is the view to Taos Ski Valley during the climb to Williams Lake and Wheeler Peak.

Cindy Brown

tunities around Taos, the Carson has some of the best hikes at higher altitudes. In the week before the closure, I had hiked to Williams Lake twice and the last time, I came very close to the summit of Wheeler Peak — the highest mountain in New Mexico at 13,161 feet.

My hiking partner and I saw a mountain goat and a herd of big horn sheep. The air was clear and sharp and thin. A summer storm threatened from the west so we headed down.

As we descended, we could smell the smoke from the fires to the south. A charcoal haze had settled in over

See **WHEELER PEAK**, Page C2

HIKING

Steep trail

From Page C1

Williams Lake — an ominous clue to the days of smoke to come and the impending forest closure.

So, I have been waiting for the forest to re-open so I can get my fill of high, clear, thin mountain air and complete my hike to the top. When the trail re-opens, we will all benefit from the work of a forest service crew that has been improving the trail during the closure to rebuild it.

Right before the closure, a Forest Service crew from Gallatin National Forest began work to improve the steep trail between the lake and the peak. They were joined by local Carson National Forest employees.

Craig Saum with Trails, Wilderness and Recreation for the Carson reports that “the entire route from Williams Lake up to the peak has been completed. The trail is a much more pleasant hike with the same enormous payoff in 360 degree views.”

The new trail has been designed to minimize erosion and create the most sustainable trail possible. The trail work included clearing dead trees, providing trail treads, and “building up segments of loose scree with rock and retaining walls to provide firmer footing.”

Coming soon will be new directional signs and a revised GPS-generated map. The Forest Service is asking hikers to stay on the new, improved trail to reduce the chances of erosion and hillside scarring and to help prevent loose rock from being kicked free and falling on hikers below.

Difficulty: Moderate to the lake
Williams Lake: The trail begins at 10,200 feet and ends at the lake at 11,040 feet. To find the trail, walk down the hill and past the Bavarian Restaurant to the Kachina Chairlift and Phoenix Restaurant, where you will see signs to the trail.

Walk along the Rio Hondo then bear left. The trail winds through a meadow and then through a boulder field and into the woods. It crosses through another boulder



Cindy Brown

The trail to Williams Lake begins at 10,200 feet and ends at 11,040.

field which leads to the lake.

You can walk around the lake or continue up the trail to the left (east) that goes to Wheeler Peak. The hike to the lake is about two miles takes an hour or more. This is a popular trail, especially on the weekends.

Full moon hikes to Williams Lake are planned this summer on Aug. 15 and Sept. 12. If you would like to find out more about hiking in the moonlight, including times to meet and other details, call (575) 776-1413.

Hikers will meet at the hiker parking lot. Organizers suggest that you wear warm, windproof layers, hiking boots and bring water, snacks, a flashlight, and camera. The hike is led by Ski Valley Mayor Neil King.

Wheeler Peak: The hike to Wheeler Peak is another 11/2 miles of more difficult terrain. Hikers who are climbing quickly might expect to reach the peak after an hour. Others going more slowly, which is typical at elevations above 12,000 feet, may find it takes closer to two hours.

The first section of the trail goes up a steep pitch through the forest, followed by a section through a ravine. As you climb above tree -line the trail becomes steep again. Before the trail improvements, this section was covered by loose rocks that made hiking challenging.

The changes to the trail should make this section easier to climb. You may see both mountain goats and big horn sheep, along with other wildlife.

Notes: The Bavarian Restaurant is open during the summer Thursdays to Monday and is a great place for a drink or lunch after the hike.

Maps: Maps of the Carson Forest Trails, along with descriptions and elevations are available free at the Carson office

located at 208 Cruz Alta Road. Also weather and closure updates are available at (575)758-6200 or www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson.

Another option: Many people don't know that there is private land accessed from the Taos Ski Valley that is open during forest closures.

Northside at Taos Ski Valley is a fee-based recreation area. Day and season passes are available for hiking and mountain biking. Many of the Northside trails connect with Carson trails, when the forest is open.

For information call (575) 776-3233.

Directions: From Taos Plaza, go north on Paseo del Pueblo (US 64) four miles. Turn right at the Ski Valley Road (State Road 150). Take this road through Arroyo Seco; bear left at the old school. Continue up to Taos Ski Valley; drive through the upper hiking parking lot up Ernie Blake Road. The dirt road has switch backs and goes just over 1.5 miles to the parking lot on Deer Lane.

Cindy Brown is a contributor to “Day Hikes in the Taos Area” by Kay Matthews and the author of hiking guides for local bed and breakfasts, as well as “Lessons from Nature” in healing, strength, and flexibility. If you have hikes you love and are willing to share, you can email her at cindybrownntaos2010@yahoo.com.



Photo Courtesy Taos Land Trust

The Taos Land Trust worked to create and protect Sunset Park, a ‘walking park’ for the public near downtown Taos.

Creating parks for the people

Public parks are the places that many of us have our first outdoor experiences. Around Taos we have access to incredible public wildlands and a vast open landscape, but most urban dwellers in the world are not so lucky. Even in Taos, a surprising number of people seldom get out of town.

To paraphrase a quote I once heard, public parks are the only lands many Americans will ever own.

My own experience, growing up in rough, inner-city Denver, was short on wilderness, but we found our own hidden wild places and plenty of adventure in overgrown park arbors, abandon orchards and fields and old gravel pits. Even tiny pocket parks in a dense urban environment can help connect people to nature, and help keep us sane.

Taos Land Trust recently worked with three neighbors in the Upper Ranchitos neighborhood to create and permanently protect Taos’ newest public park: Sunset Park.

Sunset Park is an expansion of the three-acre “walking park” near the public library that has been in existence for several years. The newly combined 10-acre property — about the same size as Kit Carson Park — was deeded to the nonprofit Sunset Park, Inc., which will be responsible for management and stewardship.

Taos Land Trust will enforce the terms of the conservation easement

on behalf of the public, in perpetuity.

That means that other than a couple of small shade structures and a small storage shed, no buildings are allowed on the property. A few benches and picnic tables, possibly a play structure, will be scattered around for public use. A small parking area off Valverde Street and walking paths across the park can never be paved.

As with all of the land trust’s conservation agreements, agricultural water rights are permanently tied to the land and can never be separated or sold, and community acequia rights and access are permanently protected. The agreement also provides for the possibility of someday putting those water rights to use for community gardens on the property.

In Valdez, along the lower Des Montes Rim Road, Taos Land Trust quietly opened another park a couple of years ago. Rio Hondo Park is a 23-acre parcel near the rocky outcrop known as the Gates of Valdez and extends from the rim to the river along a particularly wild and beautiful stretch of the Rio Hondo.

The land was donated to the land trust in 1997 by Leslie Dugan. In 2008 we placed a permanent

FOR THE LAND



ERNIE ATENCIO

conservation easement on the property then have leased it intermittently to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish under its Open Gate program to provide public access for fishing and outdoor recreation.

This property will never see any development, other than a few benches and possibly small restrooms, but is open to the public for

fishing, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, birding, picnicking, painting, napping in the sun, etc. If you visit, please keep in mind that our property boundary is at the river. Across the river and beyond the fence lines on either end is private property with no trespassing allowed.

Sunset Park and Rio Hondo Park are not public parks in the sense that the public owns them, but they have both been set aside explicitly for the community’s use. Please enjoy them with respect.

Ernie Atencio is executive director of the Taos Land Trust, where he sneaks out to wild places every chance he gets. Reach him at ernie@taoslandtrust.org or (575) 751-3138, or learn more about Taos Land Trust’s conservation work at taoslandtrust.org.

CLIMBING

‘Taos Rock’

From Page C1

new routes, often alone, write “Taos Rock” and encourage more people to climb here.

As a guide, Foley aims to ease his clients into the sensation of climbing a rock wall and trusting the rope and harness. He has set up several routes at Taos Ski Valley, where he starts guests off on low-angled climbs with big holds.

“The whole point is to build their comfort level,” he said.

After a July 14 lesson on his 17th birthday, Felipe Moncada said rock climbing was the most fun he’d ever had, though he was nervous on his first try.

“I was kind of scared, because it was really steep,” he said.

However, Moncada said the climbing got easier after he learned to trust his feet and the specialized rubber of his rock-climbing shoes. He made it up a tall climb on his third attempt, then climbed the route four more times.

Mountain Skills also offers a “rock and raft” package, where clients get to explore the Gorge, rappelling in the morning and rafting in the afternoon. Foley took a father and son from Oklahoma on such a trip July 17.

Ethan Bruegel, 12, had a little trouble getting over the edge of Pilar’s “Dead Cholla” wall, but he ended up rappelling to the bottom three times. By the end of the morning was pretty excited about the experience.

“It was awesome,” he said.

Good starting point

Foley suggested those new to rock climbing start by learning from a professional guide or at a gym.

“It’s way different from going with your friends,” he said.



Tina Larkin

Beginner climber Wesley Jones, 18, makes his way up the face of Northside at Taos Ski Valley.

Foley said friends are more likely to put beginners on climbs beyond their abilities. He said beginning climbers should buy a book like John Long’s “How to Rock Climb” to learn about the basics, such as climbing techniques, knots, gear and anchors, and they should not be afraid to ask questions of their climbing partners.

Foley’s book, “Taos Rock,” is also a good starting point, as it details climbs and areas close to Taos. Foley said he wrote it to help foster a climbing community in Taos and find more partners for himself.

He said it hasn’t made any money,

but it has made an impact on the local climbing scene, and he is satisfied to see local youths becoming climbers. “Taos Rock” is sold at Mudd-N-Flood and Taos Mountain Outfitters.

Taos Mountain Outfitters shift leader Greg Sagemiller said he has worked at the store for about 15 years, selling many copies of “Taos Rock” and booking trips through Mountain Skills.

“We have always had quite a rock climbing following,” Sagemiller said. “There’s always been an interest in it.”

Climbing gear including har-

nesses, chalk, shoes and rope is available at Taos Mountain Outfitters and Mudd-N-Flood. Mudd-N-Flood co-owner Elana Lombard said the store sells climbing gear pretty steadily.

“We have locals,” she said. “We also have Philmont Scout Ranch rangers coming in and gearing up.”

Lombard said more people are beginning to discover rock climbing near Taos, in part because of a 2009 feature in “Climbing Magazine,” and in part because of “Taos Rock.”

“It’s a growing scene. It’s not very well-known nationally,” Lombard said. “It’s gaining exposure ... Jay

Foley’s done a lot for that.”

Foley said he may work on a second version of “Taos Rock” in a year or so, as so many new routes have been established since the book was first published

“It’s a lot of work,” he said.

Plus Foley is staying busy guiding, setting up new routes and planning other ventures, which may include installing zip lines at Taos Ski Valley later this summer.

He has also developed three designs for a Taos climbing gym, but he has backed away from that business idea because he doesn’t

want to go into debt and be stuck inside.

Favorite climbs

When he’s not belaying clients, Foley said he is often “jonesing” to get out himself. He has been setting up new routes all around Taos, and he is particularly excited about pioneering a variety of routes on several walls in Amole Canyon. They range in difficulty from 5.4-5.12 — some sport, some traditional — and many can be top-roped.

Foley said his favorite climbs in the Taos area include the 5.11- “Question of Balance” at the Questa Dome, the 5.10d “Fighting Atrophy” and the 5.11a “Kid in a Candy Store,” both at the Wild Rivers Recreation Area. Foley said his climbing level varies, and advanced climbers lose their skills quickly if they don’t put the necessary time in.

“I’m solid at 5.10,” Foley said, adding that he could get out of bed any day and climb at that level. “It comes and goes. At my best, I’m climbing 5.13.”

Foley considers himself an “all-around climber” and isn’t partial to any one type of climbing. He said he enjoys the social aspect of bouldering, with friends hanging out on the ground near their crash pads, the physicality of sport climbs (which have bolts affixed to the rock), and the mental challenge of traditional climbing, in which climbers place protection in the form of cams, nuts and other devices into cracks to protect themselves in case of a fall. Foley did say the emotional and technical challenges of “trad” climbing make it the most satisfying, in his estimation.

Foley said he is surprised by how many great new crags Taos climbers are continuing to find and develop.

“It’s kind of mind-blowing,” he said. “Taos is in its golden age right now.”

To reach Mountain Skills, visit climbingschoolusa.com or call (575) 776-2222.



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