Save Independence Trail!
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BYLT is launching a community-supported effort to restore the iconic wooden Rush Creek Ramp and other features on the historic and universally-accessible Independence Trail.

Update: Sugarloaf Trail
Recreation lovers! A new scenic, multi-use trail to the top of Nevada City’s Sugarloaf Mountain is on the horizon.

Pines to Mines Trail
Work continues to find funding and scout a route for a 72-mile trail that will link the towns of Nevada City and Truckee.

“I’d say the Loma Rica trail is my favorite, not just because I’ve been the adoptee and maintainer since its birth in 2006, but I ride it just about every day for my commute to and from work!”
Mike Haire

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Stories from the Trail

Those of us who work for BYLT tend to think fondly of trails. We each have a story about our first experiences connecting with nature. Many of those stories involve taking a walk on a trail and spending time in the great outdoors.

Director of Land Stewardship Erin Tarr remembers in 1993, the first time she grasped the importance of trails while vacationing with her family in the Boundary Waters, a wilderness region straddling the Canada-United States border between Minnesota and Ontario.

At 11-years old, I remember the first days of our trip seeming perfect. Each paddle line and portage trail matched our maps. We camped on small islands, caught our own fish each evening and spent the days swimming in the lakes.

On the fifth day, when we were midway across a large lake, the weather took an unexpected turn. Whitecaps began to swell as we battled our way to the other side. We finally did reach our destination, but there was no trail in sight. Re-examining maps, for what seemed like hours, led us to realize that the actual water levels were dramatically different than what was mapped. Land was flooded, trails were covered and we were on the wrong island. We continued on, eventually reaching a trail which put us back on our correct path. The safety I felt once we reached the trail is something I will never forget. It was a sure sign that we would again find civilization.

Land Access Manager Shaun Clarke grew up playing in the woods of his backyard in a small Massachusetts town. The property backed up to acres of woods. I spent my days exploring the wilderness and building forts. I would imagine that I was on an expedition looking for lost civilizations or ancient artifacts, hidden for generations. Dirt paths led me to a sand pit with a rope swing and a small pond where I liked to watch the frogs. Even at a young age, whenever I spent time in nature it helped put things in perspective. If I had a hard day at school or was in a funk I knew that spending time on my little trails would help cure any problem I was facing. All these years later I still use nature and trails as a form of therapy.

What is your first memory of being on a nature trail?

BYLT is striving to design trails that create experiences for everyone in nature. This includes equestrians, hikers, bicyclists, and people with disabilities. Since our inception, BYLT has encouraged people to get outdoors and develop a deep connection to nature and our region’s rural quality of life. We have many exciting trail projects being planned. These range from the expansion of trails at Rice’s Crossing Preserve to the Pines-to-Mines Trail, a 72-mile multi-use system linking the towns of Nevada City and Truckee. Through continued connections with nature, via trails, our community can work together to protect and connect the places we love. We hope you will join us in this effort!
WORTH SAVING

Community help needed to restore Independence Trail

Bear Yuba Land Trust to undertake major effort to save the Independence Trail

Hugging the steep slope above the South Yuba River, Independence Trail winds through a mature forest of madrone, Pacific dogwood, and incense cedar. For decades, busloads of school children, some in wheelchairs, have come here to learn about the natural world and look for newts in Rush Creek.

But today, the wooden ramp that took folks of all mobility levels to the creek is barricaded and several feet of decking removed to keep people out. It’s too dangerous to use. Bear Yuba Land Trust (BYLT) is launching a community-supported effort to restore the iconic wooden Rush Creek Ramp and other features on the historic and universally-accessible Independence Trail.

Founded by the late Naturalist John Olmsted and built and maintained by a passionate crew of volunteers, the trail known for its dramatic wooden flumes became the nation’s first wheelchair accessible wilderness trail in the 1980s.

Located approximately six miles north of Nevada City, off Highway 49, the trail meanders through property owned and managed by BYLT and California State Parks. A popular hiking destination, the trail with the wooden switchback wheelchair ramp, which looks more like an art sculpture, attracts visitors from all over the world to experience one of Nevada County’s many wonders.

“The trail is forward-thinking and inclusive. With some fine-tuning and hard work we can attract even more users with limited mobility as well as the general population,” said local Archaeologist and trails writer Hank Meals, who helped build the trail.

On a path to wilderness

In 1969, John Olmsted discovered the overgrown ditch, the perfect solution to a problem his friend with disabilities asked him to solve: help her get out into nature. He had found the ideal place for a rugged wheelchair trail into the wilderness. The 100-year old rock-lined ditches were the perfect width for maneuvering a wheelchair or as a safe passage for people with limited sight who used walking sticks. The historic integrity of the ditches could be preserved and recycled to serve a new purpose.

A decade later, Olmsted returned with enough money he and a group of...
other interested naturalists had scraped together to make the first down payment.

The tall, thin, bearded naturalist with a crumpled hat was regularly seen clipping dead branches away from the trail or replacing rotted flume planks. He always carried along his repair kit: a pack containing a bow saw, hammer and nails, scrap metal and long handled loppers to keep the trail in check. Olmsted died in 2011, at the age of 73, after a long fight with cancer.

Like many locals who grew up here, Caleb Dardick, Executive Director of SYRCL, has a personal connection to the Independence Trail. As a kid growing up on the Yuba River, the trail fulfilled a dream of his, of taking his father, who used a wheelchair, to visit river swimming holes. The late Sam Dardick was a disability rights activist and Nevada County supervisor who worked alongside John Olmsted and other volunteers to build the trail.

“I’ll never forget the first time we rolled down that smooth trail along the river canyon edge, over the new flume and down the remarkable switchback Ramp to the creek. Thanks to the Independence Trail, so many people with disabilities, like my Dad, enjoy the thrill of visiting the beautiful Yuba canyon,” said Caleb Dardick.

In recent years, the ramp has fallen into disrepair and was closed last fall because of safety concerns regarding the structure’s stability. A great diversity of outdoor lovers of all ages and mobility levels can no longer access the creek.

Community support needed

In 2012, the non-profit group Sequoya Challenge (founded by Olmsted and his wife, Sally Cates) transferred ownership of 207 acres – including sections of the Independence Trail and the Rush Creek Ramp - to BYLT. Restoring Independence Trail to its original glory, meeting today’s stringent standards to enhance accessibility, developing interpretive panels, and re-opening the ramp at Rush Creek will require phases of engineering and costly construction, supported by an enormous fundraising effort from the entire community.

“People can feel the magic and connect to a different time and place when hiking the Independence Trail. This ramp provides unique access for people of all mobility levels and we need to get it back,” said Land Access Manager Shaun Clarke.

A profound vision

Hank Meals was on the original Independence Trail work crew called the “Tin Woodsman” that in 1983 reclaimed the overgrown ditch and broken, rotten flumes.

“It was challenging work especially with John’s insistence on using 19th century tools and methods and his uncanny habit of appearing out of nowhere for an impromptu critique. But it was worthwhile,” said Meals.

Gold Rush ditches and canals originally used for water conveyance to the mines were not designed for recreational purposes yet today offer unique outdoor experiences, revealing environmental niches and views seldom seen by conventional trails. Easy grades make the trail accessible to a wide spectrum of users.

“John’s vision to convert a ditch to a trail suitable for wheelchair-users was and is profound and his determination and endless hustle made it a reality. We would be small-minded and foolish to drop the ball now,” said Meals.

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Learn more about how you can donate today and get involved with this important project to Save Independence Trail: www.bylt.org
**Rice’s Crossing Preserve Trails**

On June 10, BYLT and volunteers installed a memorial bench for Derek Sorensen and Shaina Herman at BYLT’s picturesque Rice Crossing Preserve, overlooking French Bar.

“With the installation of this bench, we memorialized two wonderful people,” Land Access Manager Shaun Clarke said.

BYLT is in the planning stages to greatly improve the recreational amenities on this important river property. We have funding for interpretive panels, a shade ramada, a restroom, and trails that will go from the parking area down to the river and upstream toward Colgate Powerhouse. This area is set to become a destination in the near future.

At the northern end of the preserve, the Yuba Drop Trail is underway. This extension of the Yuba Rim Trail is a steep, challenging “black diamond-style” river-access trail for the most experienced hikers. It is expected to be open by spring 2018. Soon, improvements to the Yuba Rim Trail will allow equestrian riders to enjoy this rugged property overlooking the river canyon.

Learn more at www.bylt.org

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**Sugarloaf Trail**

While it is still too early in the planning process and permitting stage to know how much it will cost or when trail building can begin, rest assured all you outdoor recreationists, a new scenic, multi-use trail to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain is on the horizon.

The trail will provide pedestrian access to the top of Sugarloaf from downtown Nevada City, without the need of stepping foot in a vehicle to get to the trailhead. The trail will link to the popular Hirschman Trail by way of the County’s connector trail at the Eric Rood Government Center.

“Now the property will have a wonderful trail on easements and Nevada City property that people can hike and enjoy. They will get all the added benefits of physical and mental wellness from hiking. I think the quality of the experience and the proximity to town is what makes this so special,” said Land Access Manager Shaun Clarke.

The new trail will provide a whole new user experience than the old road that serves as a route now, including: more moderate grades, beautiful views of Nevada City and surrounding peaks from the trail, a loop opportunity, a brush screen to keep users from cutting switchbacks, and a narrow trail design proven to keep mountain bike speeds moderated.

“This type of experience really fits with the individuals that call this place home. They like to hike, bike, be active, take their dog for a walk, and they like to shop and be social and be in town. This project fits with the demographic we have here and provides them with what they are looking for,” said Shaun.

**Pines to Mines Trail**

Trout Creek Canyon, Donner Lake Rim, Hole-in-the-Ground, Spaulding Lake, and Pioneer Trails are a few of the high elevation trails destined to be connected by a new 80-mile trail linking Truckee to Nevada City called the Pines to Mines Trail. This trail will encompass jaw-dropping views of the Sierra Crest and sweeping valleys, mature mixed conifer forests, historic towns, and high quality recreation.

Now in the design phase, this legacy trail will offer both single and multi-day excursions by creating a series of smaller loops and point-to-point routes. With its long distance, varied terrain, unique habitats and majestic views, the trail has the potential to be a regional and national draw. The Pines to Mines Trail will benefit the economy countywide.

The Pines to Mines Trail Alliance coalesced during the summer of 2015 around Nevada County Supervisor Richard Anderson’s trails connection initiative which led to a series of stakeholder meetings. A new alliance was formed made up of Bear Yuba Land Trust, Bicyclists of Nevada County (BONC), Gold Country Trails Council (GCTC) and Truckee Trails Foundation (TTF).

For now, funding is being sought and scouts are on the ground looking for a sustainable trail alignment. When complete, the trail will cover over 80 miles, utilizing existing trail segments and approximately 14 miles of new construction, providing rugged backcountry trail experiences for hikers, runners, mountain bikers and equestrian riders. Stay tuned!
Have you hiked these trails?

**Yuba Rim Trail on Rice’s Crossing Preserve**
Distance: 2.35 miles, one way  
Difficulty: Moderate.

The area we know today as Rice’s Crossing Preserve was always a place of significance for the Nisenan people. Today, walking the trail is a chance to interact with nature. Native plant species like Red bud, Tan oak, Honeysuckle, Madrone, Ceanothus, Douglas fir, Ponderosa pine and dogwood line the trail’s edge.

**How to get there:** From Nevada City, take Highway 49 towards Camptonville, turn left on Marysville Road and cross over the Bullards Bar Dam. Rice’s Crossing Preserve is located 1.3 miles from the dam. Park at the sign on the left and look for the trail head in the North Meadow.

**Rambler Trail on Clover Valley Preserve**
Distance: 0.8 mile  
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Located on the 35-acre Clover Valley Preserve near the community of Alta Sierra and built by hardworking volunteers, the trail offers a pleasant walk along gentle switchbacks on a sunny slope. South Wolf Creek bisects the length of the landscape, providing habitat for aquatic and terrestrial life. Clover Valley Preserve is home to blue oak, black oak, live oak, Ponderosa pine, cedar, red bud, coffee berry, native blackberry and maiden hair fern.

**How to get there:** From Highway 49, take McKnight exit in Grass Valley and turn onto Dog Bar Road. Travel on Dog Bar Road for 4.2 miles. Turn right onto Carrie Drive, travel for 1.1 miles. Turn left onto Gary Way for 0.2 mile. Turn left onto Brewer Road for 1.5 miles. Just past the school on the right, look for Clover Valley Road on the left. Go 0.1 mile to the crest of the hill and the trailhead will be on the right. Park in the dirt shoulder of Clover Valley Road next to the Preserve sign.

**Independence Trail on Sequoya Challenge Preserve**
Distance: 2.2 miles one way, east side; 2.5 miles one way, west side  
Difficulty: Easy to Moderate

Founded by the late John Olmsted, the Independence Trail transformed an historic gold mining ditch into the nation’s first identified handicapped-accessible wilderness trail. It is now one of the most popular trails in the area, contouring along wooded hillsides, passing live streams, and crossing deep gorges on restored wooden flumes that once transported water for hydraulic mining. Look for madrone, Pacific dogwood, and incense cedar. Shrubs and vines include mountain misery and California pipevine.

**How to get there:** From the north end of Nevada City where Highway 49 turns west toward Downieville, go 6.25 miles on Hwy 49 north. A highway sign tells northbound travelers the Independence Trailhead is coming up. There is parking along the east side of Highway 49 by the trailhead, and overflow parking just around the next curve down Highway 49.

**Support Your Community – Donate to Local Trails!**

Trails are one of the community’s greatest assets – they build strong neighborhoods and boost the local economy. Trails get people of all ages and mobility levels outside and close to nature for healthy exercise and spiritual renewal.

“Hiking on trails is my preferred way to simultaneously relax and stay alert. It’s flat out invigorating for the mind, body and soul,” said Author and Archaeologist Hank Meals, a Trek Leader for Bear Yuba Land Trust.

Support for local trails is gaining momentum from locals and visitors alike - hikers, runners, mountain bicyclists, equestrian riders, wheelchair users, dog walkers, families, numerous nonprofit groups, outdoor businesses, chambers of commerce, county and city governments, and state and federal agencies.

With no recreation department or county parks in Nevada County, community support and volunteer efforts are vital in the development and maintenance of nature trails.

“Local trails are important - You can get in shape, join your family for a ride on a shady trail, connect to our great forests and rivers, and challenge yourself on a new steep route. We are so lucky to have an abundance of opportunities in Nevada County,” said Ellen Lampham from Bicyclists of Nevada County (BONC).

Want to learn more about how you can get involved with the local trails movement? Download maps of 30 local trails, sign up for guided treks, get involved with the 52 Hike Challenge, become a trail volunteer or donate to trails today and support what you love: [www.bylt.org](http://www.bylt.org)
## Save the Date!
### Fun Events and Outings

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For a full listing of BYLT’s amazing Trekking Calendar, visit: www.bylt.org