

Adventure awaits beneath the Blue Sky

by **Erick Sugimura**, Staff Writer/Copy Editor
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If you were going to pick a single weekend to pack in a whole summer's worth of adventure, you'd want to circle August 12-15 on your calendar and head for Mammoth Lakes.

That weekend will host the second annual Blue Sky Fest, which has evolved from last year's music-only event into a full blown sampling of all the things that make life in the Sierra so meaningful.

This year's event will feature several documentary films with environmental, social or sustainable living tones and free outdoor recreational adventure activities, in addition to live music performances by bands such as Toad the Wet Sprocket, Ozomatli and Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars.

So, if hiking, biking, trail running, fishing, rock climbing, yoga, kayaking, healthy eating, gardening and naturalist programs sound like something you and your family want to do, here's an opportunity to spend time with local experts, sharing the things they love to do for free as part of the Blue Sky Fest's focus on Adventure and healthy lifestyle activities.

Hiking

Friends of the Inyo is providing guided hikes around the lakes basin.

"Some of them are walks we already lead," said Friends of the Inyo Executive Director Stacy Corless.

Friday will be a Geology Walk from Horseshoe Lake to McLeod Lake and Sunday will be a Wildflower Walk starting from the Mammoth Consolidated Mine historic site up to either Hart or Emerald Lake, depending on conditions.

Saturday, however, will be a custom Blue Sky Walk around Horseshoe and McLeod lakes with time for outdoor yoga, moments of contemplation and staring at the blue sky. All walks will be for hikers of all levels and very kid-friendly.

Friends of the Inyo is also screening its 10-minute informative video before each of the movies in the Blue Sky Film Fest, so that attendees can learn more about the local wilderness and how Friends of the Inyo is working to preserve it.

Biking and Running

Whether you prefer to spin your wheels smoothly over the miles or bash your treads over dirt, logs and rocks, Footloose Sports will have you covered with guided bike tours.

Every day during Blue Sky, road bikers will be able to sample riding in the shadow of the Eastern Sierra, while mountain bikers will get a taste of single-track laps and uphill climbing in the surrounding forests. Routes will be determined each day depending on the skill level and interests of those attending. Road bikers will need their own bikes, though discounted rental mountain bikes will be available.

"It's an event that will get everyone outside and enjoying the outdoors," said Footloose Sports owner Tony Colasardo.

Colasardo also coordinated the trail running component with the local running club High Sierra Striders. Striders coach Andrew Kastor will lead a 5-6 mile run around Shady Rest Park on Saturday and a more challenging 6.2 mile run on the Mammoth Rock Trail on Sunday.

Rock Climbing

For many, nothing is more representative of the Eastern Sierra than the granite spires that carve out the distinctive local skyline. So, what better way to experience the Sierra than to get your fingers and toes into the rocks?

This region is a climbing mecca that anyone can experience, as Sierra Rock Climbing School Director Zeke Federman knows. Federman and his staff have taught every level and practically every age, from private lessons to the town summer rock climbing camps. As part of the Blue Sky Fest, Federman will set up ropes in the popular Horseshoe Slab area and providing basic instruction for all comers. You'll want to be a little early for this adventure so that you can be fitted for a harness and climbing shoes.

Yoga

For some, the serene landscape of the Sierra is an ideal place for re-attuning bodies and minds with nature. If that suits you, there will be several yoga sessions offered.

"Teaching yoga is more about the experience and the sharing," said Lindsay McLaughlin, who will teach on Saturday and Sunday. "I'm really excited to be a part of it this year."

Deanna Clark shares a similar sentiment. "To me, teaching yoga is just a service that I give to my community. We live such fortunate lives in this beautiful place, so this is my way to give something back."

"I went last year and had a great time," Clark said of the Blue Sky Fest. "I think [this year's environmental and healthy lifestyle theme] is a great opportunity to tie in those ideas with music." Clark will offer Yoga for Kids on Saturday.

"I like that they're bringing together music, health, the environment and outdoor activities – what we represent in this town," said Scott Saltsman, who will be teaching Vinyasa Yoga for all levels each day of the event. "I'm extremely passionate about yoga, music and the mountains, so this is a great opportunity."

Kayaking

Rob Witherill of Mammoth Kayaks will put kayaks and paddleboards up in Horseshoe Lake for people to try out and play around on over the weekend.

Witherill pledges that he'll be there and "do whatever it takes to get people safe and having a good time."

There will be single and tandem kayaks, in addition to all the gear, so people just need to wear clothes they can get wet in.

Healthy Eating

The festival's themes of adventure and healthy living are shared by sisters Tanya and Silena Mandich, owners of the local Sierra Sundance Whole Foods Market. The Mandich sisters both grew up in Mammoth, so their business definitely reflects the Eastern Sierra lifestyle.

On Friday, they will host a raw foods demonstration preparing a manicotti, salad and soup meal at their location in the Mammoth Gateway Shopping Center, near Rite-Aid. Saturday, they'll do an in-house sampling of produce, snack foods and natural products.

Naturalist Programs

If you're curious about the local flora and fauna, there will be numerous naturalist talks and walks.

Marianne O'Connor of Bear-With-Us is coordinating a program about the California Black Bear at the Pokonobe Lodge next to Lake Mary on both Friday and Saturday. U.S. Forest Service interns will present information for children and parents alike, in addition to some craft activities.

Devils Postpile Rangers will guide walks on topics such as geology, evidence of glaciers and wilderness preservation around the Devils Postpile Monument in Reds Meadow.

In addition to these events, there will also be free fly fishing casting demonstrations and a program on gardening tips for drought tolerant conditions and high altitude.

The fact that all these events are free highlights the fact that all the people involved love what they do – and that another important aspect of life in the Sierra is community building through the sharing of the things we are passionate about.

Witherill said that while he is volunteering his time and equipment for the kayak activity, "it also gives me time out to play. Any time you're outside and enjoying it, it's more play than work."

No doubt, that feeling is shared by all his fellow event sponsors.

So, whatever your game, whether you're about the live music, the enlightening films, or the outdoor adventures, the weekend of Aug. 12-15 will have you covered.

Blue Sky Fest is not so much a celebration *in* the Eastern Sierra, as it is a celebration *of* the Eastern Sierra.

For a detailed schedule of activities, visit www.blueskyfest.com.

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