

ROCK N' RALLY

A DONNER PASS BANKED SLALOM

Words Dave Zook
Photos Danny Kern

"THIS WAS THE EVENT we were looking for. Fat snowpack, beautiful, hot weather, no wind," said Taylor Carlton. "Shad," as he's known, was summing up the rarified alignment of the stars that graced the 4th annual Rally for Rocker in April 2017.

On Donner Summit, interwoven between the few smoothed granite rocks and shrubs that poked through the deepest snowpack in a decade (nearly 800 inches fell over the winter at nearby Sugar Bowl), the course snaked and weaved for around 1,500 feet. Carlton said it was "designed to be challenging for everyone from seven-year-olds to Sammy Luebke," and featured overhead walls, tight rhythm sections, and a bonus hip-jump after the finish line. By noon, as temps grazed the 50s and upwards, hundreds of people flocked to the course with sunhats, boards, and beers in tow, for a day at the best Tahoe beach around.

The event began as a tribute to fallen snowboarder Steve "Rocker" Anderson, who passed away in an avalanche in 2012. Rocker, a fixture in the Tahoe scene, was "a super charismatic, loud, friends-with-everyone, counter-cultural, musical, punk guy," Carlton said. The funds raised from the event (\$17,000 this year) will go towards building a world-class skatepark in Truckee designed by legendary park designer and surfer Zach Wormhoudt. A skatepark already exists in Truckee but is overused, and the Rocker Memorial Skatepark, at 25,000 square feet, will be nearly four times the size of the current facility.

Although each year has been a fundraising success, the weather has proven difficult. The inaugural Rally went down during a lousy snow year. The first two courses were small by necessity, and snow challenges were compounded by some run-ins with the Forest Service—they went



Course maintenance.

"rogue" the first year, and have since gone through the permitting system and now run the backcountry banked slalom on the up-and-up. The 2016 event saw a bigger build, but rain and cold arrived on the day of the event.

This year though, conditions allowed for a perfect day. There was a snowskate category, as well as a groms, men's, females, and legends division with more than 300 riders dropping the course. While the intent was not for a hyper-competitive atmosphere, the amount of talent in one place was a testament to the strength of the Tahoe snowboard community. It read like an old Standard movie mixed with X Games and Freeride World Tour champs, and spanned multiple generations: Jones, Zellers, Burt, Davis, Roach, Rogers, Luebke, Davis, Bozack,



Maria Debari.

and many more flowed through the course. But young local Kix Kamp came away the fastest time of the day in 23.81 seconds.

As banked slalom events increase in popularity nationwide, the choice to have a backcountry event versus inbounds creates a unique feel and allows organizers total building freedom, as every shovel scoop and toss of salt was carried out by the community. Carlton guesses that between 30 and 40 people contributed to the build over four days. Anyone was welcome to help, creating an inclusive atmosphere that built community beyond a run through the berms.

The course's location also held sentimental value to those close to Rocker: "You can see the spot where Rocker passed away from every point on the course. We wanted to honor Rocker that way, and to

build it in a spot he would be stoked on. He loved that zone and would session jumps there," Carlton said.

Rocker's brother, Chris Anderson, came from New Mexico and delivered a heartfelt speech before the awards ceremony. "It was hard to look on at the spot where he died, but the way he's been carried on, I couldn't be happier," he later said. "Steve was a fabric of that community."

"I had an epiphany when I looked and saw so many people out there having a great time. I had been mourning his life in a negative way until that day, and it flipped to a celebration of his life... I now take a deep breath and feel a sense of him there." □

To learn more about the skatepark, go to rockermemorialskatepark.org.