



Three green herons are spotted on a river snag.

Photos by Michael Weissenborn

Sacramento River sunset safari

By **DOLORES BLALOCK** and **DONNA CROWE**
Special to the E-R

Last summer, when the sky was clearer, five friends sought an adventure in nature, with privacy, no cell phones and the luxury of a gourmet meal served on a Sacramento River island. The five met their guide at his launch site about 15 miles south of Chico.

"Once the boat was gliding down the river, I could feel my stress being blown gently away with the breeze," said Alice Burkart Roberts, who works as a book publisher representative. "The warm evening sun on our backs and the cool fresh wind against our faces created a calm you just can't find on land."

River guide Henry Lomeli explained his passion: "I started Sacramento River Eco-Tours to combine all the activities I love, boating, wildlife, hiking and camping, and to share them with others. I wanted to give people an outdoor experience where they can come into close and intimate contact with wildlife and the river."

"I travel a lot, for adventure," said author Gayle Kimball, who also directs Earth Haven in Chico. "I was delighted to

and topped with raspberries and strawberries, rivulets of chocolate revealed a warm pudding-like center.

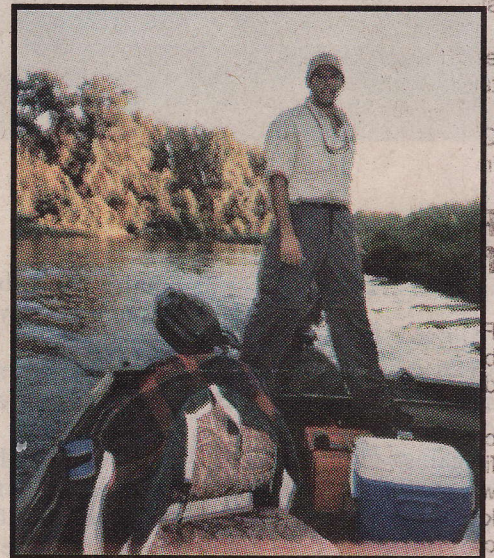
Everyone dined happily and could have easily stayed all night, enjoying the peace, candlelight and conversation. Soon it was time to start the trip home.

NIGHT FLIGHT THROUGH MOONLIGHT

On the way the group stopped to look for night creatures. Showing up in the searchlight were spotted beavers, raccoons and deer. Sweatshirts and blankets protected the boaters from the chill, and Lomeli's knowledge of the river allowed everyone to relax and enjoy the thrill of motoring by moonlight.

It's true. A Sacramento River Eco-Tours with Lomeli is memorable. But don't even think about trying to book the boat on the next full moon, the five friends already have.

Dolores Blalock and Donna Crowe collaborated on this story about their



Passengers view the last of the evening light during a River Safari with guide Henry Lomeli.

river adventure. Blalock is a Hawaii writer and activist, and former associate professor in communication design at Chico State University. Crowe is a former educational TV producer.

author Gayle Kimball, who also directs Earth Haven in Chico. "I was delighted to find this experience near Chico. I learned about the largest colony of bank swallows in California — they need sandy loam soil to bore nests four feet into the riverbank. Orchard owners cover the banks with rock to prevent erosion, so the habitat is very limited. It's a good thing to see the government and conservation groups buying land along the river to preserve swallow habitat," she said.

The group spent hours on the bow of the boat spotting great blue herons. "As if their majestic wing span and elegant poses weren't enough to keep us happy, Henry also pointed out little green herons and an ambitious beaver swimming with a stick of greenery," Burkart Roberts said.

A flock of 30 common Merganser ducklings skidded across the water with their mothers. The group saw a kingfisher, solitary sandpipers, Caspian and Forster terns, a nest of osprey, a pair of endangered native western pond turtles, loads of snowy egrets, and freshwater coral blobs called Bryozoans.

"As a snorkeling and coral fan, I was interested to learn we have a fresh water member of the coral family, a slimy colony of animals called zooids with a gel-like exterior," Kimball said.

Peg Bailey, a Paradise massage therapist, thought being on the river was a spiritual experience. "You feel totally alive and connected to nature," she said.

DINNER AT SUNSET

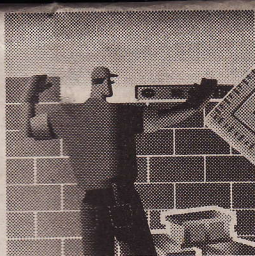
At sunset, the group spotted an island on the river lit with torches and candles. Soft music played as they moved toward an elegant table in a screened gazebo.

"Some of us are vegetarians so Henry prepared a special meal. It was a far cry from my vision of roasting tofu weenies and marshmallows on the open fire," Burkart Roberts said.

Platters of sliced peppers, olives and marinated goat cheese and baskets of breads were accompanied by glasses of dry, white wine. As the last of the pink and orange sunset turned the riparian forest into a silhouette, Lomeli brought salads — an organic tomato stuffed with corn and mango salsa on a bed of mixed greens.

Music segued to soft jazz as the main course arrived, a Portobello mushroom accompanied with chunky corn polenta and asparagus. A full-bodied red wine brought out all the subtle flavors.

Lomeli spent two years perfecting his version of chocolate lava cake that is cooked in a Dutch oven surrounded by glowing briquettes. Served with vanilla ice cream, swirled with chocolate sauce



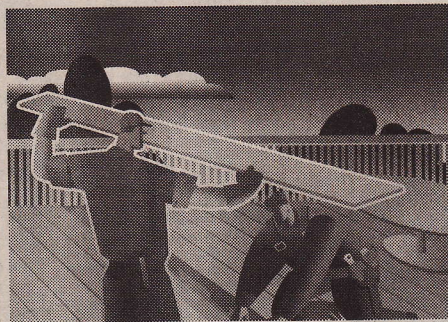
Contractor Specials

The **Butte County Contractors Guide** edition, is a comprehensive directory of contractors located in Butte County. Regardless of the kind of work you are planning to do in or around your home, our **Contractors Guide** will provide you with names and telephone numbers of professionals to help you get started.

With a circulation of over 17,000 distributed throughout Butte County and beyond, you won't want to miss out on participating in this exciting and information-packed magazine.

Butte County Contractor's And Home Improvement Directory

**Call Your advertising representative
TODAY Or Call
896-7777
for more information.**



**Deadline:
Friday 8/15/08**

**Publishes:
Friday 8/29/08**