

Discover gems in the Sawtooths

Rustic lodges offer respite during summer months

By DANA DUGAN
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Just beyond the Wood River Valley's borders are further examples of our fortune, the Sawtooth Mountains. Glorious as a recreation area, it is also a splendid place to spend a few days or a week simply basking in the area's many delights. There are many campsites and a few motels, but if one is looking for a more commodious place to stay, consider one of the gems found in the heart of the Sawtooth Valley, such as the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch.

The Rocky Mountain Ranch's lodge was built from locally harvested lodgepole pine in the 1930s as a private guest ranch, for friends and family to enjoy. Then in 1951, Edmund and Ruth Bogert, Pocatello residents, purchased the property and turned it into a dude ranch for paying guests. In 1977, their daughter Rozalys Bogert Smith and her family re-opened the doors as an inn. The ranch was recognized as an early example of Idaho's guest ranch industry, with the lodge listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1995.

The ranch was recently bought by members of the Kapp family. Steve and Courtney Kapp, and David Singer and Diana Kapp, fell in love with the Sawtooths while hiking, biking and fly fishing during frequent visits to the family's Gimlet home, in the Wood River Valley.

"We're all fortunate," said Sandra Beckwith, the ranch's manager. "The owners share that sense of history that gives this a unique feel. They have a respect for the beauty, outdoors. I think this is the jewel of the valley. Their family is really important. They want to share it."

The lodge sits regally upon a slight hill to the east of Highway 75. Highlighted with cows grazing in green fields on one side and a large mountain pond on the other, the long drive up to it is like a trip back in time.

The view from the lodge is of the Sawtooth Mountains, from 10,704-foot Decker Peak to Thompson Peak at 10,751 feet and Williams Peak at 10,635 feet. They are majestic and look slightly deranged, like a snarling crocodile that has drunk from a bottle of whiskey.

To the southwest of the lodge is 920-foot-tall Knob Hill, an easy trail hike above the 1,000-square-foot property. Trails snake out in all directions from the lodge into vast alpine meadows along Gold Creek and provide access to the Salmon River.

The accommodations are cozy, rustic and, considering their location, pretty deluxe. A mad search was made for just the right mattresses to replace all the old ones—the same as are found only at Four Seasons, apparently—and new leather headboards.

"They've added new beds and furniture, linens and mixed in the old pieces," Beckwith said.

There are several individual cabins and a few rooms in the lodge. Dinners, which are open to the public, are friendly affairs with guests thrown together at family-style tables. Chef Andrew Machanic is a 1993 graduate of the New England Culinary Institute. He, his wife and baby joined the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch in 2006, and his presence is apparent in the exquisitely created dishes he prepares in the huge kitchen, retrofitted in 2005.



Cabins at the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch have been spruced up with new furnishings but retain a cozy mountain feel. *Photo by Dana DuGan*

On different nights, Idaho musicians Muzzie Braun and Bruce Innes share serenading duties on the porch before dinner and inside during dinner.

Other amenities include a large hot-springs pool, a paddleboat for use in the pond and to-go sandwiches available by order from the front desk. The front desk also makes reservations for any number of activities such as hiking, biking, fishing and horseback riding with Pioneer Outfitters, located next to the western portion of the ranch. Redfish Lake, its lodge, beaches and boating, is just a short drive away. But don't think you have to just loiter at the ranch.

"We provide flexibility. It's about personal choices," Beckwith said. "You know, western ruggedness--we don't need no stinkin' schedules."

For more information on the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch contact lodge Manager Beckwith at (208) 774-3544.

Other places to stay in the area, good choices all, are:

- Meadow Creek Inn & Spa in Stanley, which has spa services, (800) 811-5745.
- Redfish Lake Lodge, which also has cabins and lodge rooms, (208) 774-3536.
- Salmon River Lodge, half a mile north of Stanley on Highway 75, (208) 774-3422.
- White Cloud Mountain Inn, owned by Muzzie and JoAnn Braun, in Clayton, 28 miles east of Stanley, (208) 879-4677.