

IDAHO BUSINESS REVIEW

FOCUS



Promotions and
a new hire
– People, pg 4F

SIDE NOTES

Supplies, guides and lodging abound in Swan Valley

By Ken Levy
SPECIAL TO THE IBR

Besides being a major put-in for the South Fork of the Snake River, the Conant Boat Access has full-service facilities next door.

South Fork Outfitters offers professional river guides and trips on the South Fork of the Snake as well as the Main Snake and Henry's Fork and the Blackfoot River and Reservoir. It has a fully-stocked fly shop with a huge variety of flies and other fishing products, and sells fishing licenses, clothing and other accessories. It also offers a full rental fleet and fly rods.

Guests can stay at the luxurious and rustic South Fork Lodge next door. It features lodge and cabin rooms, and its River House offers room for up to six guests. The lodge offers casual fine dining, an outdoor dining area overlooking the river, and a full-service bar.

Upon arriving in the tiny community of Swan Valley – population 213 – you'll find yourself at the junction of U.S. Highway 26 and Idaho 31. Don't miss the Rainey Creek Country Store, which features its world famous ice cream scooped into a square. The secret of the design of the scoop is jealously guarded, but the ice cream is rich and delicious. Servings are big, as are the varieties of country store wares and supplies. Established in 1925, the store serves Farr ice cream, in flavors from Moose Tracks to Rocky Road to Huckleberry. Stock up and gas up.

Also at this junction, you'll find the Fox's Corner'd Inn, featuring food, lodging and spirits, with an RV campground nestled in back. A big, old-time log cabin, with comfortable, wrap-around porch and rustic wood features, houses the Saddlesore Saloon.

The Rendezvous at the South Fork in Swan Valley has a fly shop and cabins, and Sleepy J Cabins can be found on SH 31 just above the junction with U.S. 26. They offer one- and two-bedroom units

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Idaho's Swan Valley offers outdoor fun without the crowds

Ease cold weather
woes, plan 2011
vacation already

By Ken Levy
SPECIAL TO THE IBR

Editor's note: Warm weather is fading away in the Gem State. For those who are already wistful for what Idaho has to offer during the summer months, this story is both a reminder of the state's vast recreational resources and a plan-ahead piece for a 2011 vacation. Such sites as Swan Valley help tourist-related businesses thrive, benefiting local and state economies while allowing residents that much-needed get-away.

You're kidding yourself if you think you can get away from it all by visiting the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone National Park in the summer. Traffic, throngs of people and noise when you seek quiet will all greet you at these vacation havens.

If the only crowds you want to see are fish, consider a 45-mile trip west of Jackson, Wyo. to the beautiful Swan Valley, where blue-ribbon trout fishing opportunities abound. You'll also find ample camping and hunting opportunities, hiking, equestrian and ORV backcountry areas and breathtaking scenery.

Getting there is easiest from U.S. Hwy. 26 eastbound out of Idaho Falls. The road takes a big, arching loop to the north before swinging southeast to head into this peaceful area.

The few extra miles are well worth the trip. Passing south and east of Ririe, the highway briefly hugs a bend of the South Fork of the Snake River before making a beeline into the valley.

Rolling hills, pastoral farm and grazing lands ride along with you on the trip. The first major stop for South Fork action in the Swan Valley is the Conant Boat Access. From there, you can launch boats or rafts on the South Fork and head out for a few hours' float or a multiple-day excursion. Either way, you'll see fabulous scenery, plentiful wildlife and fantastic opportunities to fly-fish for many kinds of trout.

The South Fork has been hailed as



PHOTO BY KEN LEVY

Peter Longstreth casts his fly into the South Fork of the Snake River from a drift boat near the Conant Boat Access in Swan Valley.

one of the nation's premier fly-fishing destinations. It flows about 66 miles northwest from the Palisades Reservoir to the confluence with the Henry's Fork of the Snake near the Menan Buttes. This is one of the most unique and diverse ecosystems in Idaho, according to the Bureau of Land Management.

Beautiful cottonwood trees abound at the South Fork, some 50 to 125 years old. This is one of the largest remaining cottonwood stands in the western U.S.

Bonnie Nemmers, BLM volunteer landing hostess at Conant, said that, while most people enjoy fishing for rainbow trout, the river is known for its native Yellowstone cutthroat trout population. Brown and brook trout

and whitefish are also found in the South Fork.

But rainbows and other non-native fish are out-competing the native cutthroats.

"Part of the problem is the rainbows are very aggressive, and it's very damaging to the native cutthroat population," said Amy Forsgren, another BLM volunteer onsite.

The Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game, which regulates fishing in the area, wants to see rainbow trout populations reduced to give the cutthroats a fighting chance. IDFG tagged 575 rainbow trout and some hybrids which, if caught and turned in, could win the anglers from \$50 to \$1,000.

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More than 33 bald eagle breeding areas dot section of river

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Anglers turn in the fish heads to a freezer onsite or at the Byington launch, about 26 miles downstream, with information about the catch. Fish heads are scanned once a month. If anglers don't want the fish bodies, they can clean them for delivery to a local food bank.

Fly-fishing is by far the most popular method anglers choose to land their quarry, but some spin-casting fisher-folk also ply the South Fork.

The river has a large population of nesting bald eagles, and several areas are closed to the public until the majestic birds fledge, which is usually through July, according to Nemmers.

"They're bulking up for their move down south," she said.

This section of the river features more than 33 of the 51 known bald eagle breeding areas in the southeastern Idaho portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

About a mile farther east on Highway 26, you'll find Spring Creek, a smaller, quiet boat launch for putting into the South Fork, primarily used by day-trippers. Here, the surrounding scenery of rolling green hills, farmland and cliffs add a pastoral, even pristine atmosphere as a backdrop to the river, with its multiple islands and winding course.

A U.S. Forest Service campground is a short drive east of the Spring Creek boat launch, in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest on Fox Creek Road, just east of mile marker 373 on Hwy. 26. The dispersed camping area allows visitors to camp in any number of creek-side pull-outs.

Myriad wildflowers in a bouquet of colors accompany you along the road and into the wilderness on either side.

A rocky dirt road takes you into a mixed conifer forest and meadowlands, where hawks ride the thermals and cry out overhead. Off-road users will find motorcycle and ATV access into the hills and backcountry from several trailhead-parking areas. Hikers and horseback riders also find quiet areas to lead their steeds along the creeks that run through the area. Some trails are also snowmobile friendly.

Currant Creek runs through the area, as does Falls Creek, which empties into the South Fork of the Snake River by the dramatic falls that bear its name.

Follow the river eastbound (upstream) on a rocky road with the river below on your left and the forest all around. Falls Campground is about 1.5 miles east of Fox Creek Road. Not designated for ATV or motorcycle use, the campground has



TOP: A U.S. Forest Service campground is a short drive east of the Spring Creek boat launch, in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest on Fox Creek Road, just east of mile marker 373 on U.S. Hwy 26. It allows five days of continual camping from May 1-Sept. 1 and 16 days during the shoulder seasons. RIGHT: Falls Creek Falls drop into the South Fork of the Snake River near Swan Valley.

PHOTOS BY KEN LEVY

about 25 large, improved sites. You'll find a group campsite about a quarter of a mile farther east.

From there, families and boaters may prefer to drive about six miles farther east to Palisades Dam, which feeds the South Fork. Mountain forests surround the 16,000-acre reservoir.

The Palisades Dam Power Plant Recreation Area offers camping, picnicking and swimming areas. Farther east, you'll find the Calamity Campground and Boat Ramp, Big Elk Campground and Blowout Campground and boat launch. The latter offers lakeside camping and free parking at its day-use area.

The Palisades Recreation Area offers fishing, boat ramp and camping at the Riverside Park Campground for RVers.

Jet-skiers and motorboaters find the reservoir a high-speed haven. Fishing, sailboating and pleasure craft all share the water.

Wildlife watching and hunting are popular in the area, and anglers will find year-round opportunities to catch brown and cutthroat trout and other species.



Stores, other businesses serve area travelers

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with mini-kitchens, telephones, DSL and Internet access.

Looking for a hearty lunch? Stop at the Angus Café in Swan Valley. Don't miss its special mushroom-Swiss burger with grilled onions, choice of salad and potato. The café also boasts the best shakes in town, and one taste of its classic chocolate malt will have you convinced.

Swan Valley's Angus Cafe has been serving locals and travelers since 1969, according to manager Crystal Rice. The sign and decor really show their age – the café used to be a drive-in restaurant – but that age and wear is its ambience,

"When you cuss, think of us."

– The Dam Store motto

a step back 40 years. The cafe and convenience store serves excellent hamburger combos, fishing advice and smiles.

About five miles farther east, The Lodge at Palisades Creek in Irwin offers guided fly-fishing, a fly-fishing lodge, riverside dining and a complete tackle shop. Lunches can be packed for on-the-river dining, and dinner is casual fine dining.

Accommodations include individual cabins and the South Fork House,

which offers two bedrooms, two baths and overlooks the South Fork of the Snake River.

Swan Valley Outfitters is located there. It offers horseback trail rides and elk and mule deer guided hunting trips.

Heading to Palisades Reservoir in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, don't miss The Dam Store. You'll find fishing supplies, a few sundries and groceries there, as well as pizza and subs to go.

The store motto? "When you cuss, think of us."

Next door is "The Rest of the Dam Store," where you'll find hardware and auto parts and a chance to get some minor auto repairs made.

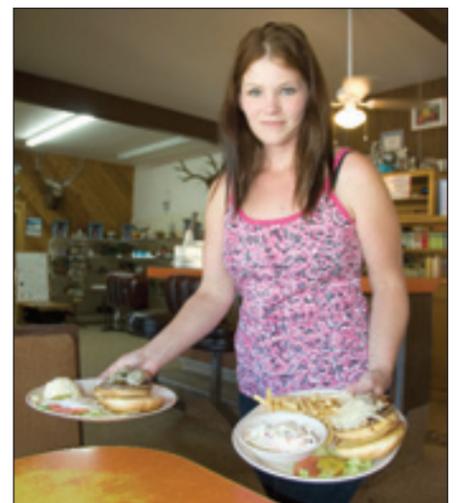


PHOTO BY KEN LEVY

Crystal Rice serves a hearty lunch at the Angus Cafe in Swan Valley. The menu features mushroom-swiss burgers with grilled onions, shakes and classic chocolate malts.