

Sun Valley Magazine
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"Within A Wolf's Cry"
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Mini-Yellowstone offers all the nature without the crowds.

As the summer of 1929 dawned, Wood River Valley miners danced the night away at Guyer Hot Springs, their partners decked out in silk dresses purchased for \$9.90 at the J.C. Penney's in Hailey.

In the absence of TV soap operas, homemakers anxiously awaited the latest installment of "The Mystery of Haunted Mansion: What the Grey House Hid" that appeared each week in the *Hailey Times*.

And those fortunate enough to get a little vacation could hop a Union Pacific train to Los Angeles for \$50.90.

The talk of the town was the tinderbox conditions that had enabled a wildfire to streak through Deer Creek threatening the tiny mining town of Carbonate. And of photographer Bob "Two Gun" Limbert's plans to build a camp at Redfish Lake.

It was into this mix that a front-page headline in the *Times* announced that the push was on to build a dude ranch amidst the "idle shade" of the Sawtooth Valley by the following year.

Three carloads of timber had already been shipped to Ketchum to be used in the project and 900 logs had already been peeled, the article boasted. When completed, the ranch would include four electric refrigerators, a bath in every apartment, and a concrete swimming pool fed by natural hot water.

It was the intention of the owners to create the premier dude ranch of the entire West, according to a spokesman for the Sawtooth Ranch Corporation.

"We are encouraged to make this investment by the knowledge that the interior of Idaho offers the greatest attractions for summer recreation to be found anywhere in the West," he said.

It's only natural that such a big deal should have been made of the refrigerators.

The man behind the Idaho Rocky Mountain Club, or "The Club," as it came to be called, was Winston Paul, a Frigidaire distributor from New York.

Captivated by the beauty of jagged peaks resembling a saw blade that stretched more than 10,000 feet into the royal blue Idaho sky, Paul bought a thousand acres just south of Stanley from homesteader Dave Williams, a mail carrier between Stanley and Galena and one of the first climbing guides in the Sawtooths.

The building project was inspired by the Old Faithful Lodge at Yellowstone National Park, and proved a welcome source of income for 60 men as the Depression tightened its grip on the country. The crew snaked logs up Williams and Gold creeks, pulling them by horse to the Big Meadows where they milled the logs on site.

A blacksmith forged the wrought iron, while a stonemason built all the fireplaces out of local stone.

One man on the crew back then recalled those days to Bill Leavell, general manager of the ranch for the past 17 years. He said he had ridden his horse nearly a hundred miles from Carey, camping atop Galena Summit before riding into the ranch where he got a job as a carpenter and later, a wrangler.

"We worked for a dollar a day. And we were glad to have it," he told Leavell.

Another woman, who stopped by the ranch last summer, told lodge manager Sandra Beckwith how she and her mother accompanied her father to the work site.

The family lived in a tent while the father, uncle, and grandfather worked on the building for three months until heavy snows forced them to move south for the winter.

They were back as soon as the sun started warming the valley in the spring, and by the following summer they had constructed a majestic 8,000-square-foot log lodge in the folds of the sagebrush-covered hills.

The lodge even boasted electricity— a full 12 or 13 years before the rest of the Sawtooth Valley would get electricity,—thanks to a hydroelectric plant that workers built in a log cabin at a willowed bend in the pond.

“Valley residents used to ride through the pitch black just to see the lights in the window,” said Rozalys Smith, whose family owned the ranch for 54 years from 1951 to 2005. “I remember one time a guest plugged a plastic radio in and the direct current was so powerful it melted the radio.”

When it opened 75 years ago, the Idaho Rocky Mountain Club was an invitation-only guest facility— a private hunting club.

Mesmerized by the wide-open spaces and the wildlife that frequented the ranch, an Austrian clothing manufacturer named Josef Lanz bought the ranch from Paul a few years after it was built. But he was forced to close the guest ranch operation with the outbreak of World War II when he and his money became trapped in Europe.

A Pocatello automobile dealer named Edmund A. Bogert purchased the ranch in 1951, renaming it the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch.

Bogert became the first rancher in the Sawtooth Valley to put up hay, earning the 1958 Custer County Grassman of the Year Award in the process.

He built a prize-winning Rokmor purebred Hereford herd, drilling for hot water so the cattle could graze 20 acres of pasture even when temperatures dipped to 58 below in the winter.

Bogert also decided to reopen the ranch for guests, even though it had been closed to the public for years.

He brought in Floris Neustaedter to sew tablecloths, valances, and comforters for the lodge. And he named his daughter Rozalys Smith, then a 26-year-old Pocatello schoolteacher, to run the guest operations.

“I knew nothing, so I had to learn quick,” said Smith. “The toughest part was running the kitchen because we couldn’t just run down to the corner store and pick up something, especially given the switchback gravel road over Galena in those days.

“Mom and Dad would bring supplies from Pocatello once a week, and if we ran out of something, we had to improvise.. We became well- known for our homemade soups. We also got quite good at using leftovers to make some unique dishes.”

The ranch’s first chef, whom Smith remembers only as “Joe,” had been a cook at a mining camp. He wowed the guests with homemade cottage cheese and butter.

The guests also seemed amused by the fact that they had to carry in their own luggage since there was no bellhop.

Smith quit after four years to get married, and her parents curtailed their guest operation after she left.

For the next 20 years or so, the lodge became a gathering place for friends and relatives, as the Bogerts entertained invited guests during summer when they returned to Idaho from their travels around the world.

Ruth Bogert hired a couple of girls to do the laundry, while she cooked family-style meals for up to 20 people at a time.

“They were wonderful hosts,” recalls Betty Rember, whose late husband served as a fishing guide for ranch guests. “They were very welcoming— always made you feel at ease. And they had lots of interesting guests.”

The traffic running past the ranch on Highway 75 is heavier today than it was when Paul built the ranch 76 years ago. And it's faster, too, as motorists zoom by at 65 miles per hour in search of a fishing spot at a nearby lake, or a trailhead for a mountain bike ride.

But nearby Stanley, a town of 70 named for a prospector who passed through in 1863, remains a town of unpaved roads and log cabins.

And the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch, nearly invisible from the highway that bisects the property, remains a relic of Depression-era America— a distinction that has earned it a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

And while the lodge has never been a dude ranch in the conventional sense of the word, it has measured up to original expectations as a charming, rustic getaway for visitors from as far away as Germany, Italy and Scandinavia to partake in the beauty and spaciousness of the West.

The original log archway marks the entrance into the dining room, where guests look up from their French toast to eye log burl chandeliers, wooden skis hanging on the walls, and cowboy boots, a lariat, and a branding iron on the rock fireplace.

One of the original Frigidaire Executive refrigerators installed in 1930 still sits in the kitchen, providing cold storage for the vast amount of food that passes through the kitchen in the summer.

The great room, where guests can curl up on handcrafted furniture, features a 1930's clock that the manager used to have to wind every night, and a refrigerator— Frigidaire, of course— with a selection of Samuel Adams, Woodchuck Draft Cider, Sun Valley Blonde and other beers.

Most of the trophies dating back to the ranch's original days as a hunting club have been taken down, including a stuffed eagle, mountain goat, deer and coyote.

But a trophy elk still stands vigil over the old Kimball piano from Chicago and one of the ranch's old branding irons— the DR standing for Laurie Dee and Rozalys, the Bogert children.

Conspicuously absent are phones, TVs and radios in guest accommodations.

There is, however, access to the Internet and a courtesy phone tucked away out of sight in the lodge's main room.

"For the most part, you walk into the lodge and go back in time. And that's really great for our clients, since most are highly successful people who lead hectic lives," says Beckwith.

"We've been able to stay the same because we've had only four owners. As a result, the ranch has retained its original charm.

The lodge offers 21 accommodations— four rooms in the lodge, and 17 cozy cabins.

Nestled among shady pines, each cabin has its own rustic stone fireplace and pine furniture, and handmade quilts covering the beds. Bathrooms contain original benches, rock wall showers, and vanities lit by teardrop lights.

Across the highway, a pool fed by a natural hot springs sits above the Salmon River. In late August and early September, guests can watch salmon that have bruised their snouts jumping over dams as they swam some 900 miles upstream from the Pacific Ocean just to lay their eggs in the gravel on the bottom of the river.

But the most popular part of the ranch continues to be the porch.

Tables of halved logs sit next to hickory chairs, offering convenient places for a guest to place a glass of lemonade, which is available in a jug on the porch throughout the day. Limbs of knotty pine posts reach out as convenient hangers for a jacket or a pair of binoculars.

The porch is the jumping off point for special Dutch oven dinners, served in a clearing in the woods near a creek. Guests are ferried there in a wagon drawn by Percheron draft horses. The lodge also hosts a popular Idaho night, offering a menu of Idaho

specialties such as Idaho trout and lamb. (You don't have to be a guest to dine at the lodge, but do check on availability first.)

Other menu items include grilled Chilean sea bass in orange rum sauce, New York-style steak in a pepper mustard sauce topped off with walnut basil wheat bread, peach and apple strudel, and mile-high lemon meringue pie.

Cowboy singer Muzzy Braun and Bruce Innes croon "Cool Water" and "City of New Orleans," as the sun lowers to meet the lodgepole-covered ridge across the way. By the time the guests have wiped the crumbs off their mouths, the view has segued into a night sky littered with stars.

"I've had guests tell me they get up in the middle of the night just to go outside and look at the stars," says Beckwith.

About 20 percent of the ranch's clientele are repeat visitors.

Among them, a husband and wife who spent their honeymoon at the ranch and then returned in 1990 to celebrate their 50th anniversary.

"What really impressed them was how hard it was to get to the ranch the first time they came," said Leavell. "They got off the train in Shoshone, and some people from the ranch drove them up."

Six couples who met at the ranch have scheduled their vacations so they can be at the ranch together every year since.

Another man, from New Jersey, told lodge owners that staying at the ranch was like having a national park experience without the crowds.

The ranch exchanged hands for only the fourth time last year, with financier Steve Kapp and his wife Courtney of Philadelphia and financier David Singer and his wife Diana of San Francisco taking over.

The four plan to keep the ranch as it is, with the exception of upgrading the septic tank and other infrastructure.

"This is a family that's in it for the long haul— Diana was expecting a child at the same time we bought the ranch and she named the baby Emma Sawtooth. So we call her little Saw," said Courtney Kapp.

Courtney, an architect who is fixing up a 100-year-old home in Philadelphia, is wowed by the detail in the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch lodge.

"It's a jewel driven by a desire for harmony with the setting," she says. It could fit very comfortably in the legacy of the great national park lodges.

"We travel a lot and the setting is without a doubt one of the most beautiful valleys in the world. And the ranch has a rich history— a history that we don't take lightly. We feel we're caretakers of it."

Leavell likewise is cognizant of the ranch's rich history— both natural and human.

With his cabin overlooking the Salmon River on the lower ranch, he's privy to the bounty of cougar, otter, fox, wolves, and elk that are drawn to a green spot where hot springs melt the snow in winter.

"We call the ranch our mini-Yellowstone," he says. "It's amazing to be in bed and all of a sudden hear a long, deep howl— it's a beautiful sound."

"I think of Dave Williams, the first owner for whom Williams Peak is named. And then, Winston Paul ... and every time I walk by old buildings and farm equipment, I feel like I'm crossing paths with these people.

"I'm amazed that they had the foresight to try to make something happen in this beautiful valley, which at times can have some of the harshest weather extremes in the nation. And, look, it's stood the test of time."

Karen Bossick would delve into the history of the people who settled this area full time if she weren't so busy enjoying the skiing, hiking, kayaking and other attractions the Sun Valley area has to offer.