

Black Butte Ranch wows guests with new pool, recreation center



Spending a summer day at the new Lakeside recreation center, with swimming pool and dining at the bistro at Black Butte Ranch in central Oregon, eight miles west of Sisters. July 29, 2015. Terry Richard/Staff

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Black Butte Ranch has a new heartbeat.

The much loved central Oregon destination resort, a first stop just across the Cascades for generations of family vacationers from Portland and Salem, opened a new swimming pool and recreation center early this summer.


The reviews have been boffo.

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"The popularity has exceeded our expectations," said Scott Huntsman, general manager of the resort. "Right away we needed more chairs, more umbrellas."

Pool use is limited to resort guests, but casual visitors can drop by to dine and use Wi-fi at the Lakeside Bistro, which is part of the \$11.5 million development. Black Butte Ranch has been around 45 years and can accommodate up to 4,500 overnight guests, so there is no shortage of Oregonians with memories of staying at the ranch.

"This improvement has been 3.5 years from conception to completion," Huntsman said. "It has brought life back to the heart of the ranch."

THA Architecture of Portland designed the complex and **Kirby Nagelhout Construction** of Bend did the work over 10 months beginning last September. It's obvious at first glance they did a great job.

The first sign? Bicycles, lots of bicycles parked near the complex, while cars are accommodated a bit farther away. Black Butte Ranch has an extensive paved cycle path network and a bike is often the way of choice to get around during summer.

The new recreation complex is set on the shore of Phalarope Lake, a minor body of water when compared to central Oregon's many other beautiful lakes, but big enough to offer kayak and stand-up paddle lessons and rentals. Catch and release fly fishing, too.

The lake's open setting frames beautifully the mountains beyond. The view from Black Butte Ranch to Mount Washington and the Three Sisters is the best of any central Oregon resort because it's the closest. Namesake peak Black Butte rises just to the north.

The Lakeside recreation complex features three buildings: the dressing rooms for the pool, the bistro and the activities center, with its concierge desk where sports equipment is rented, arcade where youngsters gather, exercise room and outdoor playground.

The bistro is designed for indoor and outdoor dining for non-swimmers, but also has a counter for pool users to order food and drinks. The main breakfast restaurant at the resort, the bistro uses big windows to offer views of the landscape of pines and aspens.

The pool complex has a wide, accessible walk-in entry that doubles as a shallow wading pool for kids. The entry loops around to the main pool, which is big enough (4,800 square feet) for 25-yard lap swimming lanes during designated hours. An oversize hot tub perches just above the pool deck, with views over the pool, lake and out to the volcanoes.

Black Butte Ranch was created in 1970 by Bend-based Brooks Resources the year after Sunriver Lodge opened as central Oregon first destination resort. The Bend timber company sold ranch assets in 1986 to a homeowners association, which has managed it since.

The ranch's 1,253 voting units responded 72 percent in favor of each contributing \$5,000 to get the Lakeside project started. The complex replaced four tennis courts, though the ranch still has 17 of those, as well as three other pools spread around the 1,830 acres.

The Lakeside pool will stay open until mid-October while the bistro serves coffee and

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The Lakeside pool will stay open until mid-October, while the bistro serves cones and pastries, pizza and other Northwest fare year round. Ranch management has about 100 rental units, while another 350 units can be rented from other property managers. Overnight rates range from \$150 on up to \$900 for a luxury house, though a typical rental for a family of four is in the \$250 per night range.

Black Butte Ranch is located eight miles northwest of Sisters on the south side of U.S. 20; 800-452-7455; blackbutteranch.com.

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