

# A Black Butte Ranch staycation

By John Gottberg Anderson • For The Bulletin Published Oct 18, 2015 at 12:13AM

BLACK BUTTE RANCH —

The golf courses are closing for the season. The restaurants are cutting back. The community pools won't reopen until spring and the leaves are falling.

But there may be no better time than this fall and winter for Central Oregon residents to enjoy a “staycation” at the Black Butte Ranch resort.

Overnight lodging costs are substantially lower than they are in the high season — lodge rooms from \$110, ranch cabins and condominium units under \$200 and full homes for as little as \$245 a night (versus as much as \$450 in summer).

And while many sports may be curtailed — no one enjoys playing tennis or riding horseback when sleet blows horizontally — some of the most under appreciated attractions of the ranch welcome visitors at any time of the year, whether by foot or bicycle or cross-country skis.

Specifically, miles of gentle trails cross the 1,830 acres of Black Butte Ranch. They wind around Phalarope Lake and follow a linked series of ponds to the source waters of Indian Ford Creek. They skirt a white-barked aspen grove, its yellow leaves rustling in autumn breezes. They cross the marshy Big Meadow, sharing the grasses with horses and livestock, on a nature trail with viewing areas for dozens of colorful species of birds.

Across U.S. Highway 20, the 6,436-foot summit of Black Butte, the volcanic cone after which the ranch is named, beckons hikers who want a moderately strenuous challenge: A 2.3-mile trail climbs steadily from a parking area on the northwest side of the butte to a fire lookout tower. Its counterpoint is tiny Aspen Lake, in BBR's South Meadow neighborhood, where super-sized crawfish skitter between submerged rocks so long as they don't feel the tremble of a footstep along the grassy path that extends just a few hundred yards around the tarn.

Perhaps the most gratifying trail is the one that crosses a long, wooden bridge spanning a marsh beside a beaver pond, next to the 11th and 12th fairways of the Big Meadow Golf Course. It leads to gentle Paulina Springs, which percolates from rocks and earth in a tranquil grove of pine and fir trees. Signs urge intruders to tread the fragile ecosystem here by foot only, a request that the handful of visitors appear to respect.

Indeed, a visit to BBR is all about relaxation. While families do enjoy ranch visits — especially in summer, when swimming pools are open and other activities are going full bore — the off-season is devoted to quieter pursuits. Some other Central Oregon destination resorts may thrive on hustle and bustle, but Black Butte prefers its serenity: It even banishes overhead street lights, enhancing a “night sky” program that makes the heavens come alive.

**Lakeside complex**

The hub of Black Butte Ranch has always been its lodge. From the time Brooks Resources began developing the resort in 1970, this single structure contained executive offices, the fine-dining restaurant and lounge, and a handful of guest rooms.

Over the years, some functions have been relocated and the dining facilities have been renewed. But it wasn't until this year that BBR fully reinvented the central area beside Phalarope Lake with the opening of its new Lakeside complex.

Three years in the making, the complex comprises a trio of buildings — a bistro, a pool and recreation center, and an activities center. There had long been a swimming pool and snack bar here, but they had gone without an upgrade for many years.

“The premise was this,” said Scott Huntsman, BBR's general manager since 2008, “how do we bring life back to the heart of the ranch? We wanted to inject new life, draw people back and retain property values.”

Owners — all but 12 of BBR's 1,251 lots are developed — mobilized behind the proposal. By a whopping 72 percent vote, they approved a \$5,000-per-lot assessment to rebuild the Lakeside area. The ranch broke ground the day after Labor Day in 2014, and the Lakeside Bistro opened on June 27, 2015 — on time and on its \$11.5 million budget, said sales and marketing director Kendal Daiger.

“I don't know if the ranch has ever made an investment quite like this,” Huntsman said.

Designed by Hacker (formerly THA) Architects of Portland, built by Kirby Nagelhout Construction of Bend, the complex is made up of complementary modern structures with low, slanted roofs, light pine décor and large windows that accent their spacious feel. Not a single right angle was used.

### **Bistro and pool**

The Lakeside Bistro, which stands nearest to the lodge, is a casual establishment with seating both indoors and outdoors. In summer, diners can watch stand-up paddlers, kayakers and fly fishermen on nearby Phalarope Lake; in winter, they can stay warm beside fire rings. Until spring, the bistro will be serving breakfast and lunch only; salads, sandwiches and a selection of pizzas made it very popular with poolside diners.

The Lakeside Pool is a new water feature, 80 percent larger than its predecessor. With an “infinity pool” design, it ranges in depth from 9 feet down to about 6 inches, or wherever a toddler's knees fall. One section is reserved for lap swimming, the balance for water play. Not a public pool, it is open only to Ranch residents and registered guests, which of course includes those on “staycation.”

Although the pool closes seasonally, an adjoining outdoor hot tub (with a capacity of 24 bathers) is open year-round. I imagine it as a perfect place to relax after a day of downhill skiing at Hoodoo Ski Area, 13 miles west atop Santiam Pass, or cross-country skiing right at BBR, which has groomed trails across its two golf courses and full nordic equipment rentals as soon as 6 inches of snow falls on the ground.

The pool and hot tub are served by a new recreation center with locker rooms, a weight and fitness room, a co-ed sauna and a retail shop.

Lakeside's third building is its activity center, whose particle-board walls and bare rafter beams give it an unfinished look. But that's as intended, leaving it with a casual look. Classes in things like pottery and cooking appeal to children and their parents alike, and there are plenty of other games, crafts and sports equipment rentals, as well as a small playground area.

### **Golf and riding**

My late September visit to Black Butte Ranch came just before many of the recreational activities were curtailed for the season. One chilly morning, I was able to enjoy 18 holes of golf on the Glaze Meadow course, whose \$3.75 million renovation in 2012 was acclaimed by Golf Inc. as the country's best makeover.

Designed by John Fought (whose brother, Jeff Fought, is BBR's director of golf), the course was at once open and challenging. That was especially true on the third and fifth holes, where my chip shots rolled off hard greens and down short hills into appropriately named Hazard Lake. But the broad fairways of the back nine, flanked throughout by home sites, offered beautiful views of the surrounding Cascade landscapes, and I stopped worrying about my score and simply enjoyed the sunshine and crisp air.

Glaze Meadow closes after play today for seasonal aeration — the oxygenation of greens and fairways. Its companion course, Big Meadow, closed a week earlier. Both will reopen in spring.

As I played golf, my companion, photographer Barb Gonzalez, was on horseback. The Black Butte Stables, located beside the resort's General Store and across Bishop's Cap road from the Welcome Center, maintains a herd of more than 80 horses. Gonzalez joined co-owner Kristy Prosser on a two-hour ride through Deschutes National Forest land on the east and south sides of the ranch, climbing a low hill to panoramic views toward the Cascade crest.

Prosser and her partner, Cody Koch, bought the riding business in 2010 after years working as wranglers for its former owner. They own all the horses, the tack and the Forest Service use permit. During the peak summer season, they lead trail rides for beginners and longer day trips for more advanced riders. In fall, wilderness pack trips are popular for a clientele that ranges from hunters to overnight campers.

### **Spa and meals**

In the mid-afternoon, we went to The Spa, open year-round within the Glaze Meadow Recreation Center. Deep-tissue and Metolius River stone massages inspired us to take late-afternoon naps before we headed for an evening of dining in the luxurious Black Butte Lodge.

Chef de cuisine Mark Barnes served us a delicious meal that included heirloom tomato salad and ricotta gnocchi starters, followed by coffee-rubbed pork tenderloin and miso Chilean sea bass entrees. A meal of this quality stands up against any fine-dining restaurant in metropolitan Bend.

During its high season, BBR has three main restaurants — the lodge, the bistro and Robert's Pub, beside the golf course in the Big Meadow Clubhouse — and snack bars and other recreation centers and the Glaze Meadow Clubhouse.

According to Dean Ecker, director of food and beverage here since 2005, dinners are now served only Wednesday to Sunday at the lodge. No decision has yet been made whether to keep evening meals there through Memorial Day, or whether to transfer them to Robert's Pub before Christmas until the start of the 2016 summer season.

### **A little history**

The acreage upon which Black Butte Ranch now stands was once a swampy territory visited only by migrant Indian tribes, trappers and surveyors. For a time, a pioneer family maintained a 160-acre homestead as a summer residence. Early in the 20th century, according to historian Peggy Lucas, a consortium of cattlemen made this headquarters for their Black Butte Land and Livestock Company, even though their inability to fully drain the marshland made it unproductive for forage grain.

In subsequent years, a timber company took ownership of the area, followed by a wealthy California couple who hired a resident manager to maintain the property as their summer home. The State of Oregon rejected an offer to buy the grounds for development as a state park, but in 1970 the Brooks Scanlon Co., based in Bend with its board of directors in Minneapolis, bought 1,280 acres with a promise to preserve its natural environment as they developed the property.

The Brooks real estate division, led by Mike Hollern and Bill Smith, began developing the property almost immediately. They hired engineers and land planners and put home sites (priced at about \$8,000) on the market late in that first summer. In the following year, the lodge was completed, followed by a 9-hole golf course, a swimming pool and tennis courts.

In 1987, Brooks sold the ranch to the 1,001 members of the Black Butte Ranch Homeowners Association, with addresses in 33 states and eight foreign countries. This group continues to own the ranch today; Huntsman, the general manager, explained that he is employed by the board of directors of the homeowners' association.

The full-time, year-round residential community of about 350 makes up less than 10 percent of the entire BBR community, Huntsman said. A majority of owners come from Portland and elsewhere in the Willamette Valley, and many of them have had a stake in the ranch, through multiple generations of the same families, since its origin.

"But now, we see the baby boomers dwindling," he said. "The founding generation of property owners is beginning to turn their homes over, while more and more younger families are buying here."

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### **Expenses**

Mileage, Bend to Black Butte Ranch (round trip), 60 miles at \$2.50/gallon: \$6

Lodging (two nights): \$300

Meals: \$161.50

Spa treatments: \$218

TOTAL: \$675.50

## **If you go**

### **INFORMATION AND LODGING**

Black Butte Ranch. U.S. Highway 20, 8 miles west of Sisters (Welcome Center at 13899 Bishops Cap). [www.blackbutteranch.com](http://www.blackbutteranch.com), 541-595-1252, 800- 452-7455.

### **DINING AND ACTIVITIES**

Big Meadow Golf Clubhouse. 13020 Hawks Beard. 541-595-1545.

Black Butte Lodge Restaurant. 12930 Hawks Beard. 541-595-1260. Dinner only. Expensive

Black Butte Stables. 13892 Bishops Cap. 541-595-2061.

Glaze Meadow Golf Clubhouse. 13525 Ponderosa. 541-595-1270.

Glaze Meadow Recreation Center. 13699 Hawks Beard. 541-595-5879.

Glaze Meadow Spa. 13695 Hawks Beard. 541-595-5878.

Lakeside Bistro. 12934 Hawks Beard. 541-595-1264. Breakfast and lunch. Budget and moderate

Robert's Pub. 13020 Hawks Beard. 541-595-1240. Three meals a day; open seasonally. Moderate.

*Next week: A Foodie Tour of Southern Idaho*



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin Rental canoes beckon ranch visitors to go for a paddle in Phalarope Lake beside the Black Butte Ranch Lodge. Built in 1970 when Brooks Resources began developing the resort, the lodge still is home to BBRs fine-dining restaurant and lounge.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin A large crawfish skitters between submerged rocks in Aspen Lake, a natural oasis in the South Meadow neighborhood of Black Butte Ranch. Other lakes on ranch grounds have significant populations of rainbow trout.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin A large hot tub, open year-round, will greet bathers who want to enjoy a soak after a day of downhill or cross-country skiing. Between it and Phalarope Lake is BBRs new infinity pool, open seasonally for lap swimming and water play.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin Broken Top and the Three Sisters rise in the distance, in this view across Black Butte Ranch from a Deschutes National Forest trail. Black Butte Stables offers rides of two hours and longer to ranch visitors throughout the year, except in times of heavy snow.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin The headwaters of Indian Ford Creek rise from Paulina Springs, which

bubbles from rocks and earth in a tranquil grove of pine and fir trees. A bicyclist has dismounted to explore the fragile ecosystem by foot.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin A golfer sinks his birdie putt on the second hole of the Glaze Meadow Golf Course, with 6,436-foot Black Butte rising behind him. Renovated in 2012 at a cost of \$3.75 million, the 18-hole course, designed by John Fought, has been widely acclaimed.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin Cattle stir up the dirt in Big Meadow, a reminder that Black Butte Ranch's marshy acreage was once home to the Black Butte Land and Livestock Company. The resort was developed in the early 1970s and sold in 1987 to a homeowners association, which retains control today.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin A horse grazes in Black Butte Ranch's Big Meadow with Mount Jefferson in the background. Black Butte Stables maintains a herd of more than 80 horses that welcome ranch visitors for short rides and longer expeditions.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin A bicyclist transits a wooden boardwalk that spans a marsh beside a beaver pond near the Big Meadow Golf Course. Miles of gentle trails cross the 1,830 acres of Black Butte Ranch, most of them welcoming bicycle traffic.



Photo courtesy of Black Butte Ranch The new Lakeside Bistro, pool and recreation center are nestled discreetly at the foot of the resort's namesake Black Butte. Not a single right angle was used in constructing of the three-building complex, which was designed by Hacker (formerly THA) Architects of Portland.



Photo courtesy of Black Butte Ranch The Lakeside Bistro is a casual dining establishment with seating both indoors and outdoors. Through the winter months, the bistro will welcome diners for breakfast and lunch; those who prefer outdoor seating can stay warm beside fire rings.





Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin Miso Chilean sea bass on a bed of curried basmati rice was a dinner special served by Black Butte Ranch chef Mark Barnes on a recent visit. Until Memorial Day, ranch restaurants will be open for dinner only Wednesday through Sunday nights.



Mike Houska / Courtesy of Black Butte Ranch Black Butte Ranch's Glaze Meadow Recreation Center is home not only to indoor and outdoor swimming pools, but also The Spa. The schedule of services includes massages, facials and other body treatments.



Barb Gonzalez / For The Bulletin The South and North Sisters bathe in pre-dawn glow as a flock of Canada geese swim across Phalarope Lake in the heart of Black Butte Ranch. The resort covers more than 1,800 acres at the edge of Deschutes National Forest, 8 miles northwest of Sisters.



