



Sandpoint and Schweitzer Mountain Resort *...a family entertainment center in a unique perspective!*

By: Ed Stone

Recently, I had an opportunity to visit one of Northern Idaho's most beautiful areas near Sandpoint, about 80 miles from the Canadian border. In January 2004, Sunset Magazine called



Sandpoint from atop Schweitzer Mountain

this community "the West's best small town" and Outside Magazine in August 2004 placed it as one of the "top 20 dream towns." Lake Pend Oreille (pronounced, pond o'ray) is one of the main attractions in this area with 111 miles of shoreline and 43 miles long. This is the fifth deepest lake in America. Pend Oreille in french means ear hanging or pendant. Legend has two theories on the name of the lake - one is for the shape of the lake which looks like an ear and the other is for the Native Americans that inhabited the area and were named Pend Oreilles because of the ear pendants they wore. More about Sandpoint later.

The second attraction is Schweitzer Mountain Resort...most noted for its snow skiing and winter sports activities. Legend has it that a Swiss hermit settled in the basin of the Cabinet, Selkirk and Bitterroot mountain ranges over 100 years ago. The Swiss word Schweitzer means "Swiss man."

Visiting with the general manager, Ron Nova, I was not expecting to find the trappings of a first class family entertainment center (FEC). Granted, this is not your typical configuration of an FEC. Three years ago management decided to extend the season into summer. The plan is working. The climbing wall was the first element to cause me to take notice. There is a large paintball area, a bungee-jumping trampoline and disc golf. I began adding all the other activities to my list...like mountain biking, swimming, scenic chairlift rides, fly fishing, guided hiking, kayaking tours and/or rentals, horseback riding, Lake Pend Oreille cruises, watersports/boat rentals, whitewater rafting trips and more.



**Ron Nova,
General Manager
of Schweitzer
Mountain Resort**

Mary Weber Quinn, director of programming and activities, emphasizes that her job is to develop programs to drive guests to the Resort that in turn will support the lodging, food & beverage and merchandizing. Hiking is the number one activity followed by mountain biking. Both of these activities encourage guests to use the chair lift, accommodating four people. Bikes can also be carried on the

lift. Over 10,000 guests use the chair lift if for no other reason than to enjoy the spectacular views at some 6,000-plus feet.



**Climbing wall at
Schweitzer Mountain
Resort**

“The climbing wall is wonderful,” Quinn stated. “It is part of the activities use by the six week day camps she conducts for the ‘Mountain Adventure Group’ ages 5 to 11 and the ‘Adrenalin Group’ ages 12 to 16. These have been most popular and are used by locals, second home owners and vacationers.” Within 2 to 3 years she hopes to have the Village Amenity Plan completed which provides more permanent activities for the resort.

The food and beverage operation is under the management of Executive Chef, Michael Williams. Angela Tennison, supervisor of Chimney Rock Restaurant and Taps Bar, tells me the resort changes from more fine dining to “more casual” in the summer and offers lighter items on the menu such as fish & chips, fish tacos, strawberry salads, fruit, sandwiches, buffalo burgers and specials. She goes on to state, “ We offer more ice creams and homemade deserts and baked goods in the summer. The serving staff changes uniforms to polo shirts and kakis to give our food operation a more summer feeling.”

Bernie Nova manages the retail and merchandizing for the Resort. Converting retail operations

over to summer season did not cause any disruption. “I was able to add tee shirts, caps and water bottles to appeal to the summer visitor,” she said. “All of our other merchandize was appropriate for both the skier and the mountain biker.”

The resort is owned and operated by McCaw Investment Group. They continue to make improvements to Schweitzer's facilities, as well as the resort's operations, service and amenities, and on-mountain food and beverage.

Michael White and his wife Laura operate the Mountain Horse Adventures less than two miles from the Resort. Two rides are offered daily, morning



**Schweitzer Mountain
chair lift**



Mountain Horse Adventures offers the best in horseback riding

and afternoon, with rides up to the top of Schweitzer Mountain overlooking the beautiful valley and the town of Sandpoint. Michael has degrees in timber technology from Austin University (Austin, Texas) and forestry resources & eco system management from the University of Idaho. A native of Louisiana, he has a wealth of knowledge in identifying trees, plants, animals and history of how the valley was formed millions of years ago. One of the native fruits of this area is the Huckleberry. You can get just about anything in Huckleberry...pancakes, candies, popcorn, gummy bears, wine...yes, good wine, too. Michael even allows me to pick my own huckleberries from the bush during our horseback ride. They taste much like blueberries. The season is from July through September.

As mentioned earlier, Sandpoint is a beautiful and charming small Idaho town with a local hospitality industry that can teach a lot about customer service. One evening, I walked one block from my room at the LaQuinta Inn to Connie's Restaurant. This is the epitome of a great local eatery. Everything is fresh and home cooked. Be sure to order the huckleberry pie a'la mode. The personnel could write the book on customer service for any family entertainment facility. My waitress was Donna Brundage and knows the history of Sandpoint, the restaurant, where to go for any kind of activity in the surrounding area, etc.

Its captain, Curtis Pearson, built the Lake Pend Oreille Cruise boat. The 30-passenger vessel serves both for cruising and dinner parties. Depending on the season (April through early November), guests have the option for different types of exploration cruises, such as wine tasting, fireworks, a "boat and goat," and a variety of others.



Lake Pend Oreille Cruise Boat

Sandpoint has the Pend d'Oreille Winery owned by Julie and Steve Meyer. Located downtown, this family business serves 12



Pend Oreille Winery

award-winning vintages on a 50-degree custom made concrete bar top. Yes, the wines are outstanding and you can get a very nice huckleberry blush.

Ten minutes from Sandpoint is Hidden Lakes Golf Club and really rounds out this area as a travel destination for visitors. The course meanders through some of Idaho's largest cedars, white pines and Douglas firs. The Pack River winds through the development and is part of the scenic beauty and challenges of the 18-hole golf course. I was totally impressed at the 17,000 square foot log structured clubhouse overlooking the river and Cabinet Mountains. Golfers enjoy not only challenges, but also some of Idaho's most beautiful scenery. Chef Paul Donaghue takes the Hidden Lakes Dining to

a new level. They lured him away from the Café Rosemary in Bend, Oregon that was named by Gourmet Magazine as the “Best in the Northwest.” This is the only place I have enjoyed Ostrich, Buffalo and Kangaroo in the same meal!



The 17,000 sq. ft. clubhouse at Hidden Lakes

Golf at Hidden Lakes

The beautiful dining room at Hidden Lakes

While visiting Hidden Lakes, a real must is the kayaking. Scott and Morgan MacKaben have set up their operation just as you enter the development. They offer both single and double kayaks for you to explore the beautiful Lower Pack River. It will take about one hour for the short route or take more time



Kayaking on the Lower Pack River at Hidden Lakes Resort

and other routes to make it as long as you want. The water is perfect and the scenery is outstanding...lot of water fowl and you might even see a moose or two.

Sandpoint and northwestern Idaho is a beautiful destination for families and couples looking for golf, winter sports, water related activities and outstanding scenery. This is one of America’s most popular year-round travel regions with everything you could want to keep you entertained with outdoor adventures. As there tag line states, “far from the ordinary.”

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