

Base Camp: Suttle Lake

by Scott_Staats

I think one of the best kept secrets in the Central Oregon Cascades has to be the Suttle Lake area. Although I must have driven past The Lodge at Suttle Lake countless times, I finally got a chance to visit the resort recently.

Snowshoeing at Santiam Sno-Park, all photos by Scott Staats.

Snowshoe tracks are the only trace of man in this area at Santiam Sno-Park.

The Lodge at Suttle Lake.

The lobby of the Lodge at Suttle Lake.

Our Saturday started with a visit to Santiam Sno-Park where my wife and I donned our snowshoes and headed north into the snow-covered Mount Jefferson Wilderness Area and the remnants of the B & B Complex Burn -- but not before walking past a hillside of sledders near the parking lot.

Even though there was scarcely any snow on the ground near Suttle Lake, just a few miles up the road near Santiam Pass, we must have snowshoed in about three feet of the white stuff. The black, skeletal remains of the trees stood out against the wintry background.

After an hour or so of making tracks along the Pacific Crest, we headed back to Suttle Lake where we booked a room at the resort. The Lodge at Suttle Lake is well hidden in large ponderosa pines at the eastern end of Suttle Lake. Built in the summer of 2005 in the style of National Park Service lodges, the new main lodge is quite impressive with its log-framed construction, large stone fireplace and Native American ambiance. There are also about 15 cabins on the site to rent.

“Although we are a smaller resort than some, we provide all the amenities and accommodations of the larger resorts,” said Vincent Rosan, assistant general manager. “As far as describing the Lodge at Suttle Lake, I would use the term rustic elegance.”

Rosan said that being in the lodge is about as close as you can get to nature without being out in it. “We

have, in a way, brought the outdoors in," he noted.

One unique feature of the resort is its location right on the shores of Suttle Lake. It is located on Forest Service land and surrounded for the most part with public land, including the Mount Jefferson Wilderness Area to the northwest and the Mount Washington Wilderness Area to the southwest.

"I love nature," Rosan said, "and we are right in the middle of it here." He mentioned the winter storms and wind that sweep down from the Pacific Crest just a few miles away. He watched one winter storm roll in just a few weeks ago that instantly turned all the trees from green to white.

Another unique thing about the lodge is the variety of wood carvings on display, including otters, raccoons, owl, eagle, horses and more. There is also a Native American theme with all the art throughout the lodge.

We stayed in one of the lodge suites and had a great view out at the ice-covered lake. Open log beams and a warm fireplace made it difficult to leave the room. In the lodge, there are four deluxe suites, four standard suites and two lofted guest rooms. The cabins are divided up into historic, lakefront and rustic. The entire resort covers about 40 acres and the lodge is about 10,000 square foot. Prices range from \$75 to \$500 a night for cabins and lodge suites.

One of the cabins, called The Pointe, sets on a point of land where Lake Creek flows from Suttle Lake. This historic cabin was built in 1925 and is one of the resort's most popular cabins. When I walked in to check it out, I could see why. The 2-story cabin sleeps eight, has two fireplaces, two bathrooms, full kitchen and a view from the living room that would make visitors never want to leave the place.

Beautiful places where there are now resorts or campgrounds were most likely campsites for Native Americans as well and Suttle Lake is no exception. Archaeological evidence suggests that Native Americans camped at the lake as far back as 10,000 years ago as a place to rest and fish. In the 1920s, white settlers frequented the lake for picnics, fishing and boating. Before the advent of dams, Suttle Lake supported a run of sockeye salmon.

The current lodge is the fourth to be built on the site. The first was built in the early 1920s, the second in 1931 and the third in 1941. All were destroyed by fire, the last one in 1974 just a week before the newly remodeled lodge was to reopen.

Past geologic events have made the area what it is today. Blue Lake is located about a half-mile west of Suttle Lake and was formed about 3,500 years ago by a volcanic explosion which occurred when hot volcanic magma came into contact with groundwater. The source of most of Blue Lake's water comes from large springs located a few hundred feet below the surface near the east shore.

Link Creek flows from Blue Lake into Suttle Lake. Suttle Lake was formed about 25,000 years ago from a glacier that carved out the valley and is enclosed by lateral and terminal moraines. The lake is named for John Settle who was one of the organizers of a military road project in 1866. While on a hunting trip, Settle came across the lake, which now bears his name in a misspelled form.

Besides cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and sledding at the three nearby sno-parks, there is also downhill skiing at Hoodoo Ski Resort just up the road. That is, if you can force yourself to leave the comfort of the lodge.

Scott Staats is a fulltime outdoor writer who has lived in Central Oregon the last ten years. His articles have appeared in local, regional and national publications.

Adventure of a Lifetime - Hells Canyon Trip: Those seeking adventure may want to consider a raft trip through Hells Canyon this June 16-19. Winding Waters River Expeditions is outfitting a 4-day archaeology/geology trip and is looking to fill 12 seats. Join USFS archeologist Skip Miller, geologist Dr. Tracy Vallier and geologist/photographer Ellen Morris Bishop for an unforgettable float trip through the deepest, most rugged parts of Hells Canyon. From Hells Canyon Dam to Pittsburg Landing, the group will learn about the canyon's oldest rocks, the greatest Ice Age Flood that scoured through the canyon 12,000 years ago, as well as getting a look at many of the more than 2,000 archaeological sites. Rafters will also run Hells Canyon's biggest whitewater. The trip includes breakfast on the 16th through lunch on the 19th. Price is \$1,145, with \$575 deposit required. For more information, contact Winding Waters River Expeditions in Joseph at 877-426-7238 or go to www.windingwatersrafting.com.

