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# Irresistible Idaho

## Part 2



Story and photos by Dale Dunlop

In the first installment of this two-part story, I set out to explain why my son Dale and I decided to make our first foray with the RV into the United States, particularly the state of Idaho. During the first four days we stayed at three great, but very different, RV parks that all had one thing in common: lake or river frontage. We took full advantage of that by swimming and going on an adrenaline-fueled whitewater rafting trip through Hell's Canyon. During the final three days of the trip, we stuck with the water theme but added in some very high mountains, and visited one of the most interesting towns in the U.S. Here's why the second part of the Idaho trip was just as irresistible as the first.

We departed the Hell's Canyon area for the capital city of Boise, which Nancy Richardson of Idaho Tourism assured us was a must-visit destination in the Gem State. That involved a fair amount of retracing our route along the Snake River, but as serendipity would have it, we made a wrong turn and ended up



in Oregon. This unplanned detour turned out to be a pleasant surprise as we traversed the lovely rolling hills between Oxbow and the small town of Halfway (halfway between where and where, I had no idea). The only problem was that we were very low on gas. Our GPS indicated that there was a gas station in Halfway, but after driving the length of the main street back and forth three times and not seeing it, I finally asked for directions. I was told it was right on Main Street and couldn't miss it – which actually I had, three times no less.

It did not look like any gas station I had seen for at least 40 years – just a huge steel tank and one pump.



You wrote down the amount of gas you pumped in a notebook and then went inside the general store to pay. What a difference from most modern stations, where you can't get a dime's-worth of gas without paying in advance.

After gassing up, we headed west on Highway 86 until picking up the I-84 at Baker City, where we had a great lunch at a diner that was full of families just coming from church. From Baker City we headed east again, and arrived in Boise by mid-afternoon. Our original plans were to stay at the Mountain View RV Park, but somewhat surprisingly for this time of year, it was full. Dale then got on the phone to reserve a spot at our second choice, which shall go unnamed for the following reason: They had serviced spaces and he was providing our details when the lady on the other end asked how old our RV was. Dale replied that it was a 1999 vehicle, after which she said, "Well, that won't do," and hung up. In all our years of travelling with an RV, this was the first and I hope last time this had happened. Only a few nights before, we stayed in just about the ritziest RV park ever, in McCall, and they had no concerns about the age of our RV. I don't think there's any place for this type of snobbery in the RV world, and I sure hope it's not a trend.

As usually happens, things turn out for the best, and we ended up at the Boise Riverside RV Park, where we were welcomed warmly and given a spot near the river. What was great about this RV park was that the paved Boise River Greenbelt ran right past it. I could pedal along the river into downtown Boise, while Dale took his mountain bike into the nearby foothills and got to see Boise from almost 7,000 feet up on the Thunder Monkey trail.

Unfortunately, we did not have enough time to properly explore Boise and its many attractions, including the State Capitol building and the craft breweries for which it is justly famous. Our destinations on Day Five were the twin towns of Ketchum/Sun Valley, which lie at the south end of the mountain ranges that dominate central Idaho and make it one of the largest remaining wilderness areas in the continental U.S. Following I-84 to Mountain Home, we then took Route 20 due east to its junction with Highway 75. This was a spare landscape, flat and arid with looming mountains always to the north. Strangely enough, in our entire time in Idaho we didn't see a single field of the potatoes for which the state is so famous. Not long after turning north on Highway 75, we entered the mountains that would be with us for the rest of our

time in Idaho, providing constantly remarkable scenery that made this portion of our trip unforgettable.

Ketchum was originally a 19th-century mining town with a silver and lead smelter that is long gone. Following the closure of the mines, it became the largest sheep herding town in the American West. The result is a town that has a distinct frontier flavour that is noticeable in its many wooden buildings and western motifs. Its sister community, Sun Valley, has a different history that is equally interesting. In 1935 the Union Pacific Railroad wanted to build a European-style ski resort somewhere in the west, so it could attract well-heeled easterners to spend their money on an alpine vacation. They dispatched Count Felix Schaffgotsch (yes, that's a real name) to find the perfect spot, and it turned out to be just outside of Ketchum in a place the admen cleverly named Sun Valley. The Sun Valley Resort turned out to be a smashing success which attracted not only easterners, but the rich and famous from around the world. It has a climate and environment that make it a perfect four-season destination where one can indulge in just about any outdoor recreational activity you can imagine. If this last paragraph sounds like it was written by the Ketchum/Sun Valley Chamber of Commerce, all I can say is that we were really impressed by this place. It has a combination of natural beauty, history and commercial restraint that makes it pretty well unique.

We parked the RV next to an almost identical model and set out to explore Ketchum on foot.

It was time for a late lunch and we couldn't resist the Pioneer Saloon, a welcoming cowboy just outside. Inside is the epitome of what a saloon should be, with stuffed animal heads, cowboy sculptures and paintings plus a shotgun once owned by Ernest Hemingway. To top it off, the food was really good as well. No wonder it's been around, in one form or another, for over 80 years.

