

# Exploring the Lost River Valley

*The Best of the Best*



3 Days/2 Nights

Gateway: Idaho Falls, Idaho

**NATIONAL**  
TRAVEL CENTER



A celestial sky reserve of international Gold Level acclaim. Craters that looked like they fell off the moon. A rodeo on the Professional circuit. Timeless mining history. These are but a few of the amazing attractions you'll find in the Lost River Valley, tucked snugly under the majestic Lost River Mountain Range looming overhead. It's called the Lost River Valley because the Big Lost River comes tumbling down out of the mountains before it robustly makes its way through the craggy terrain. When it reaches the Snake River Plain, the river makes a loop through the marsh and, like Houdini, promptly disappears into the porous basalt left behind by the last volcanic eruption in the region.

This is the same eruption that lifted Mount Borah, Idaho's highest peak on the bucket list of many climbers, right up the road from the quaint western towns of Mackay and Arco. The two towns also lie right at the edge of the Gold Level Dark Skies Reserve. Traveling a bit further on the Peaks to Craters Scenic Byway takes you to Craters of the Moon National Monument. Because the volcanic rock at

Craters is young, domes, cinder cones, shields, lava flows, lava tubes, spatter ramparts, and pressure ridges formed by the molten lava, still cover the area. It is expected to erupt again within the next 1,000 years, coming on behind the last geologic event that occurred about 2,100 years ago.

When you visit the Lost River Valley, you'll discover there are at least 20 other natural attractions, great hiking, world-class fishing, and exhibits related to the development of atomic energy in America. In winter, you can savor the quiet of the forest cross-country skiing, or the roar of the snow machine, traversing the mountain trails. If you enjoy riding ATV's, this area is also the ATV Capital of the West. Five trails that pass through the astounding landscape, take you through the region.

Plan to visit for more than a day, there's just too much to enjoy not to. Discover the very unique region we call the Lost River Valley, a place the likes of which you won't encounter anywhere else in America.



## DAY ONE



### **Idaho Falls**

In an area first settled by cattle and sheep ranchers, the founding of Idaho Falls coincided with the gold rush of the 1860s. A ferry across the Snake River, led the way to a log toll bridge, which enabled settlers moving north and west, and prospectors and miners seeking riches in the gold fields of Idaho and ultimately connecting to copper mining in Montana. Homesteaders from Utah brought irrigation know-how, developing a canal system fed by the Snake River. Tens of thousands of acres of desert were turned into green farmland and Idaho Falls became one of the most productive agricultural regions of the United States. The city once again made a name for itself when the Idaho National Laboratory established the National Reactor Testing Station in the region in an isolated location where various kinds of nuclear reactors were tested—52 in all.

## **Idaho Falls Walking Tours**

A 13-stop self-guided walking tour includes the Willard Arts Center/Colonial Theater, Actors Repertory Theatre of Idaho, and, of course, the Idaho Falls Public Library, all on the National Register of Historic Places.

Tour begins 246 West Broadway

## **Museum of Idaho**

The largest museum in the state, exhibits include items linked to the Lewis and Clark expedition, a re-created 1800s town and collections and programs focused on the social and environmental history of Idaho and the Intermountain West.

200 North Eastern Avenue, Idaho Falls, ID 83402, 208-522-1400, M-Sat  
10AM-6PM, Sun 1PM-5PM, Adult \$13

## **Art Museum of East Idaho**

The only art museum in eastern Idaho showcases eclectic and contemporary works by Idaho artists in five galleries, a children's interactive art learning area, an art classroom/workshop area, and a gift shop.

300 South Capital Avenue, Idaho Falls, ID 83402, 208-524-7777, Tu-F  
10AM-5PM, Sat 10AM-4PM, Adults \$4





### **Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Destination Inn** 295 W Broadway St, Idaho Falls, ID 83402, 208-528-8444

Take a trip around the world in one of 14 world-class themed rooms.

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Copper Rill Restaurant**, 415 River Parkway, Idaho Falls, ID 83402, 208-529-5800

Casual, classy fixture offering refined American entrees and homemade desserts.

**Sandpiper**, 750 Lindsay Blvd, Idaho Falls, ID 83402, 208-524-3344

Scenic eatery offering hand-cut steaks, pasta, seafood flown in daily & heated outdoor dining.

### **Destination Distinctive Retail**

**Willowtree Gallery**, 210 Cliff St, Idaho Falls, ID 83402, 208-524-4464

Featuring a variety of original art, limited edition prints, unique gifts, fine jewelry handcrafted in Denmark, and Lizzy James Jewelry.

**Eagle Rock Gallery**, 315 River Pkwy, Idaho Falls, ID 83402-3315, 208-604-8112, A collective of nationally and internationally recognized fine artists showcasing a variety of bronzes, fine art photography, watercolor and oil paintings, stone carvings, jewelry, and much more

## DAY TWO



### **EBR-I Atomic Museum**

Plan to drive on US 20/26 towards Arco to visit Experimental Breeder Reactor No. 1 (EBR-I). Colorful, interactive displays also tell the story of EBR-I's sibling, Experimental Breeder Reactor No. 2 (EBR-II), which once powered much of the site and operated with a novel closed fuel cycle. The museum also has two aircraft nuclear propulsion prototypes, a reactor control room, remote handling devices for radioactive materials, radiation detection equipment, and more. You can walk through the museum using the self-guided tour instructions or take a guided tour. U.S. Highway 20/26 between Idaho Falls and Arco, 208-526-0050, Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, Daily, 9AM–5PM, Free



## **Arco**

Best known for being the first community in the world to be lit with atomic power from EBR-1, the world's first peacetime use of nuclear power paved the way for nuclear power to be used commercially. In 1961, the SL-1 reactor was destroyed through an operator maintenance error, the United States' only fatal reactor accident. The Idaho National Laboratory is also located here.

## **Idaho Science Center**

A collection of historical nuclear informational material depicts the Manhattan project and development of a nuclear-powered fast attack submarine, the Desert Hawksbill Sail, with its "devil" hull number 666 jutting from the ground. The conning tower is known as the "Devil Boat." Exhibits also highlight the development of the first usable electricity at EBR-1. This area was also the location of the first Naval Reactor Station, the birthplace and training center for the Navy's nuclear program.

440 South Front Street, Arco, ID 83213, 208-527-3770





## **Mackay**

Surrounded by the tallest mountain peaks in Idaho, Mackay was settled in 1880 and a decade later, copper mining began. Investor John Mackay gave the mine's general manager permission to plat any kind of town he wished and in a show of loyalty named it after him. Along with a smelter on the Lost River, Mackay also had the Oregon Short Line Railroad build a spur from Blackfoot. Shortly after its founding, the town boasted a brick schoolhouse, two major hotels, a bank, opera house, two churches, number of lodging houses, and dozens of company-owned homes. Today, Mackay is surrounded with farms and ranches.



**Destination Distinctive Accommodations**

**Wagon Wheel Motel and RV Park** 809 Custer Street, Mackay, ID 83251 208-588-3331

**Destination Distinctive Dining**

**The Bear Bottom Inn** 412 Spruce Street, Mackay, ID 83251 208-588-2483

**Destination Distinctive Dining**

**9 Peaks Restaurant and Lounge** 503 Custer Street, Mackay, ID 83251 208-569-6831

**L 7 Bar and Grill**, 402 West Custer Street, Mackay ID 83251 208-757-7979

**Scoops Corner Cafe** 221 South Main Street, Mackay ID 208-588-2158

**Destination Distinctive Retail**

**Antiques by Alice and Bea** 5475N 5780 W, Mackay ID 208-867-6066

## DAY THREE

### **Lost River Museum**

Housed in a restored century old church, the Lost River Museum showcases a variety of artifacts including mining tools, ranching equipment, vintage clothing, household utensils, railroad memorabilia, theater memorabilia, local moonshiners, and historical photographs illustrating life in the past. 312 Capital Avenue, Mackay, 208-588-3148, Memorial Day-Sept, Sat-Sun 1PM-5PM, or by Appointment, donations accepted.





### **Mackay Mine Hill Tour**

Relics, structures, small mines, and remnants of houses in “copper city” dot the wild back country of Mine Hill, dating from 1879 when ore was discovered. Almost a million tons of ore has been removed from the mountain over the years. Interpretive Sites along the 20 mile route include: the Smelter Site and Hardrock Mining Exhibit, Cossack Tunnel and Compressor Building, Horseshoe Mine and Taylor Sawmill, Anderson Cabin, White Knob Townsite, Aerial Tramway Headhouse, Ausich Cabin Site, Cliff City Town Site, Cliff City Cabin, Cliff City Smelter, Shay Railroad Trestle, and the Empire Mine Ore Bin Location. Three color-coded routes for ATVs, Cars, and 4WDs graded by difficulty are available at the 14 different locations in Mackay, Arco, and Blackfoot.



## **Challis**

After gold was discovered in 1873, Challis was established as a stop-over and freight drop before a road was built into the newly discovered mines in the Yankee Fork Mining District. By 1896, sheepherding had replaced mining as the major industry and the area was embroiled in the sheep and cattle wars. The mining camps eventually became ghost towns, while Challis, the seat of Custer County, flourished.

### **Destination Distinctive Dining**

**Village Inn** 310 US-93, Challis, ID 83226, 208-879-2239

**Y-Inn Cafe** 1200 Main Street, Challis, ID 83226 208-879-4426

**Tea Cup Cafe and Bakery** 200 Main Street, Challis, ID 82336 208-879-5050

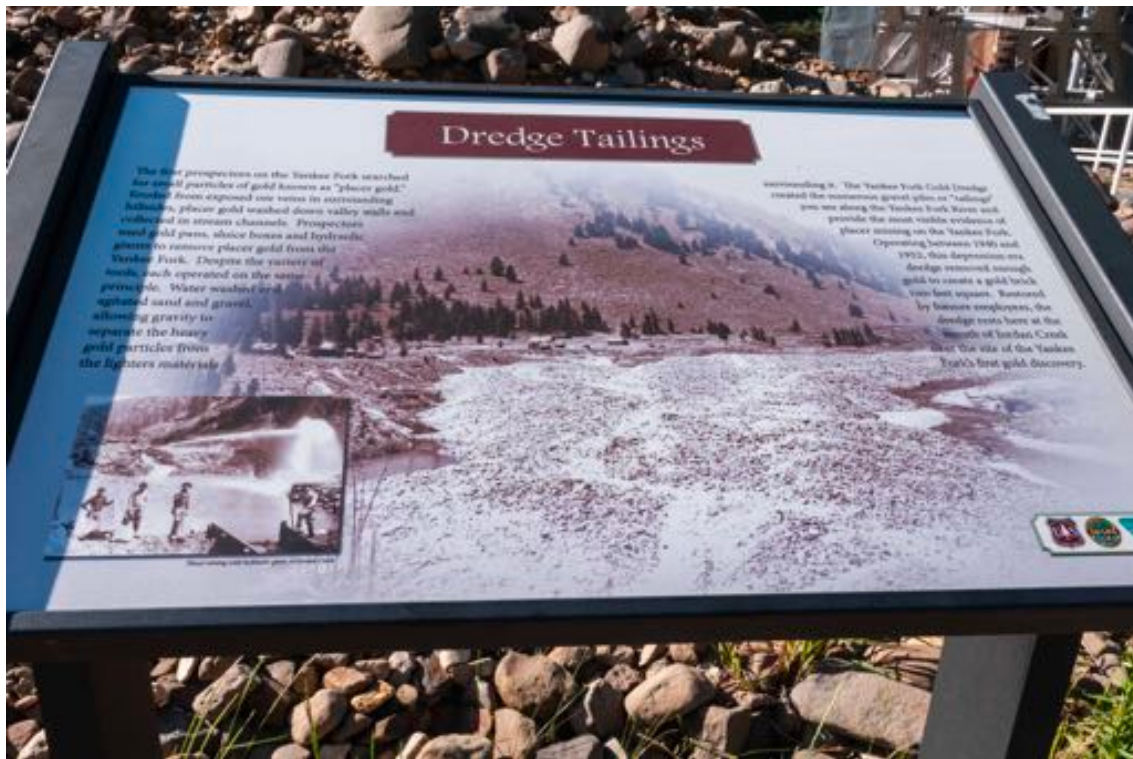
**Real Deal Smokehouse** 810 Highway 93, Challis, ID 83226 208-369-7526



### **Land of the Yankee Fork State Park and Interpretive Center**

Yankee Fork preserves a mining camp established on the Salmon River, named because everyone in the party was a Yankee. Even though no gold was discovered immediately, prospectors stayed on and finally found gold in 1870. Soon after, the Yankee Fork Mining District was organized and after the discovery of the General Custer Mine in 1876, the area began to flood with miners. By 1910, the three popular sites, Bonanza, Custer, and Bayhorse, were all but deserted. The interpretive center illustrates the mining heritage of the area through exhibits, a gold panning station, and audiovisual programs. The grounds also feature a ¼ mile trail detailing the archeological finds of a nearby Challis Bison Jump Site.

Junction of US 93 Milepost 244.5 and Idaho 75, Milepost 244.2 Adults \$2/Family \$5



## Custer Motorway Adventure Road - Yankee Fork Road

For an authentic Idaho mining town experience, explore this stage and freight wagon toll road that was used by mining supply trains running from Custer and Bonanza delivering gold bullion to Challis. The only access for a decade, toll keepers charged \$4.00 a wagon and a team of four animals, plus 50 cents for each additional animal. Initially, the stage fare was \$11.00, dropping to \$8.00 by April 1880. The trip on backcountry Forest Road 070 is scattered with several stagecoach stations, old barns, mining equipment, deteriorating log cabins, and weathered grave markers. Explore the ghost towns of Bonanza, Custer, and Bayhorse and the old tollgate. Interpretive signs provide more information. From start to finish the loop drive is 98 miles with 46 miles of dirt/gravel road with no services and 52 miles of paved highway. Get a map at the Land of the Yankee Fork Interpretive Center. Stop at the Custer Cemetery, the McGowan Museum at Custer, the Yankee Fork Gold Dredge, and the Sunbeam Dam Interpretive Site.