

# Idaho's Volcanic Wonders

*The Unique Geology of the Lost River Valley*



3 Days/2 Nights  
Gateway: Hailey, Idaho



Billions of years ago Idaho lay at the edge of the Pacific Ocean tethered to land mass resting on the North American geologic plate. When the plate began clashing with the Pacific Plate that lay at the bottom of the ocean, the North American plate was driven deep into the earth's crust. Molten magna began shooting up through the fissures as the plate was buried, cooling into the craggy, crystallized granite rocks that form the jagged skyline profiles that punctuate the region. More magna thrusting up through a crack in the plate became tortured volcanic rocks of the many mountain ranges which frame the landscape of south central Idaho that was once Pacific Ocean shoreline.

It was an exciting time in the geologic world, as the continents as we know them were forming. About 900 million years ago, before the geologic plates began sliding on the earth's surface, Australia, now floating in the Pacific Ocean in the southern hemisphere, was separated from Idaho by only a very narrow seaway. As Australia

slipped away, the volcanoes of the Pacific Rim Ring of Fire began to form, pushing slices of volcanic rocks onto the Continental Shelf at the edge of now Idaho.

About 600 million years later when more volcanoes exploded, deep water rocks were thrown on top of the slices and the eroded, folded, and faulted landscapes pushed eastward to form Washington and Oregon offshore. Thick piles of sediment formed the Salmon River arch, the calderas at Challis and the Yellowstone River, ultimately creating Craters of the Moon National Monument which appears as it did millions of years ago.

Every 3,000 years or so, the Shoshone Tribe which had been residing in the area for some 12,000 years, witnessed the dynamic geologic events created the landscapes you will see as you explore. Not only did the geologic turmoil create the landscape, it also deposited precious and useful minerals which have kept the economy in the region going for centuries, that are still being mined today.





Together, the geologic phenomenon and the mining they rendered created a story that intertwines the mining heritage, ghost towns, and the culture of rugged west with the majestic, timeless landscape that surrounds them. Today, you can explore mining towns like Mackay, Arco, Bonanza, and Bay Horse, quaint places where residents live a timeless western lifestyle that has not changed a great deal in a couple of centuries amidst the grandeur of the Lost River Range.

Recent earthquakes foretell that the geologic disruptions may not be totally over, and Mother Nature may not be finished with her handiwork on the landscape. Another show of natural force is not likely to occur in our lifetime, so plan to savor the beautiful mountains that were created ever so long ago and left for all to enjoy. Discover the geologic and natural wonders of the Lost River Valley!

## DAY ONE



### **Silver Creek Preserve**

A 1979 purchase of 479 acres of the Sun Valley Ranch by the The Nature Conservancy enabled development of a flagship preserve at Silver Creek that also launched a landowner conservation effort along the stream to protect an additional 12,000 acres. The Preserve now covers over 880 acres of land along Silver Creek, home to a variety of wildlife, including bald eagles, river otters, mule deer, and more than 150 species of birds. It is also one of the premier trout streams in the country, known for its abundance of rainbow, brown, and cutthroat trout for world-class fly fishing.

165 Kilpatrick Bridge Road, Bellevue, ID 83313 208-788-7910 6AM-9PM Daily



### **Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve**

President Coolidge designated the Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve which spans over 1,117 square miles in the area, in 1924 to preserve what he called “the most unusual and unearthly lunar landscapes.” The preserve encompasses a unique volcanic landscape characterized by vast lava fields, cinder cones, and lava tubes that resulted from a series of volcanic eruptions when Idaho was on the edge of the Pacific Ocean about 15,000 years ago.

Shoshone legend speaks of a serpent on a mountain who, angered by lightning, coiled around, and squeezed the mountain until liquid rock flowed, fire shot from cracks, and the mountain exploded. The flowing lava created a stark, otherworldly landscape that is now also populated with a variety of unique plants and animals that have adapted to life in the extreme environment.

Some have said that the ocean of lava flows and cinder cone islands at Craters of the Moon is a "weird and scenic landscape peculiar to itself. " And in fact, it is so unique that Apollo astronauts used the area to learn to detect good rock specimens in an unfamiliar and harsh environment.

1266 Craters Loop Road, Arco, ID 83213, 208-527-1300, Daily, 24-hours





## **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



### **Central Idaho Gold Level Dark Sky Reserve**

The Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve (CIDSR) is a 1,417 square mile swath of remote, rugged lands in the Sawtooth Mountains of central Idaho. Preserving clear, unobstructed night skies that cover a significant area in the region, the Central Idaho Dark Sky Reserve was first International Dark Sky Reserve in the US and one of only a dozen in the world. Three wilderness areas: the Sawtooth Wilderness, White Clouds Wilderness and Hemingway-Boulders Wilderness encompass the core of the reserve, bisected by Idaho RT-75.

Since the challenging topography of the Sawtooth Range has historically discouraged the development of major infrastructure, the land has largely resisted mass electrification and the high levels of artificial light that result, making Central Idaho one of the last significant ‘pools’ of natural nighttime darkness left in the United States. The northeast section of the reserve within Custer County is easily accessed from Mackay, to reach the forest roads that are generally open from May through November. Numerous trails lead to more remote locations for stargazing.





### **Peaks to Craters Scenic Byway**

**Start in either Picabo, ID or Challis, ID**

They call it the Lost River Valley for good reason. As you travel US Highway 93 going north, between the majestic heights of the Lost River Range and the White Knob Mountains, it will feel like you are deep in the heart of the landscape.

This the route of the Peaks to Craters Scenic Byway. The peaks just keep coming, one after the other until you reach Mt. Borah, the highest peak in Idaho at 12,682 feet and Dickey after that.

The majestic grandeur of these mountains was created when the Pacific Plate clashed with the North American Plate, when Idaho was at the edge of the Pacific Ocean and Australia lay right next to it.

These dynamic geologic events created the landscapes you will witness as you explore the Peaks to Craters Scenic Byway in southeastern Idaho. On the route, Craters of the Moon, one of the youngest volcanic areas in the region, is expected to erupt again within the next 1,000 years, coming on behind the last geologic events that occurred about 2,100 years ago.

As you make the 140-mile drive through ever changing landscapes, you can stop to explore the ghost towns of Bonanza, Custer, and Bay Horse, quaint places where residents live a timeless western lifestyle that has not changed a great deal in a couple of centuries. This gorgeous byway adventure is said to be the most diverse stretch of road in Idaho—boasting everything from sky-piercing peaks to captivating craters along its course.





### **Earthquake Interpretive Site**

In 1983, a 6.9 earthquake, the most powerful that had occurred within the United States in over 20 years, hit the Borah Peak area causing significant damaging the surrounding region. Outdoor exhibits and interpretive panels illustrate the fault line that caused the earthquake, a replica of the summit of Borah Peak, the epicenter of the earthquake), other features of the landscape that were affected by the quake, along with the history and geology of the area, the history of earthquakes in the region, and the effects of the 1983 earthquake.

Doublespring Pass Road, Mackay, ID 83251, 208-756-5100



### **Borah Peak Wilderness**

The Borah Peak Wilderness Area covers 47,175 acres characterized by rugged mountains, deep canyons, and alpine lakes, with elevations ranging from around 6,000 feet, to Borah Peak at over 12,000 feet. The stunningly beautiful region offers hiking on the Borah Peak Trail, Chicken Out Ridge Trail, and Leatherman Peak Trail, fishing in the Salmon River and Big Lost River, mountain biking the Mackay Reservoir Trail and the Antelope Creek Trail, and horseback riding on the Fish Creek Trail and the Mill Creek Trail.

Multiple access points including Borah Peak Trailhead, off Idaho RT-93 North of Mackay, ID, 83251



## **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

