

Cooler high country recreation at Big Lake

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

Big Lake and I have a relationship that goes back more than 60 years. So, on one of our recent 90+ degree days, when my hiking buddy suggested water sports at Big Lake, rather than a hot, dusty trail, it wasn't a hard sell.

Actually, we had considered the possibility on a weekend a couple of weeks earlier but were repelled by the great hordes of people crowding the lake. Having roundly rejected the idea on that occasion, we thought a midweek visit might be a more reasonable choice — and we were quite right!

Unlike the day of our aborted weekend visit, we encountered very little traffic and unlimited parking spaces. We pulled in at the day use area and parked mere feet from the lake itself. After trundling our kayaks to the water's edge, a quick look-around revealed that watercraft traffic was also pretty light on the lake. In our corner of the lake, we saw one ski boat, one jet ski, and one powered fishing boat; other than that, the rest of the water traffic was of the hand-powered variety.

After visiting some other lakes, it always surprises me to find Big Lake so clear. There are places where the bottom looks just a couple of feet away, yet you can't reach it with a fully extended kayak paddle. As soon as we were on the water, I started reminiscing about my own history with Big Lake.

Starting clear back when

I was in grade school, my family and another family of lifelong friends spent every Fourth of July at Big Lake. When we started this tradition, there was only an uninviting, rutted, one lane dirt track into the place; and we didn't see many people, at all. On one of those trips in the 1950s, we arrived ahead of time to secure our customary camping spot; and I remember when we rounded a curve and came nose-to-nose with another car on its way out.

Since it would take some planning to get by each other on the narrow road, my dad got out to discuss it and discovered that the other car was driven by a college fraternity brother of his. They had kids my age, and we all knew each other. Since there was no other traffic, we all got out of the cars and chatted in the middle of the road. The boy my age told me how much fun they'd had at the lake and mentioned that, since nobody was around, they had all been swimming in the nude. Naturally, I was shocked.

Years later, as a teenager, I bought my own boat. It was a tiny, aged, 12-foot runabout, with an old (even then) 35 horsepower Evinrude outboard that was capable of towing skiers. Our friends

had a big, fancy 18-foot inboard-outboard named "Happy Daze" that far out-classed my pathetic little pride and joy. I got the last laugh, though, when their high-class boat broke down and I towed them back to the campsite.

In college, before spring term finals, I remember driving up from Corvallis over campground snow to get into Big Lake. I camped there in seclusion for a couple of days to study in the deserted forest. It wasn't much more than a year later that I proposed to my wife on the trail from Big Lake to the Patjens Lakes, after having known her for just a few weeks. That was 52 years ago. So, yes, Big Lake and I have a long history.

Not surprisingly, as I paddled the lake in the ever-present shadow of Mt. Washington, I had a lot of memories to look back upon... far more than *The Nugget's* editor will allow me to relate here. Suffice it to say, last week, on a warm cloudless day, Big Lake was pretty much the way it always has been, albeit with a few more people. So, after some relaxing kayaking and swimming, I paused and spent some time reading a book in the shade of Big Lake's familiar outdoor world. The temperature was perfect beside the lake,



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Kayakers relax on Big Lake under sunny skies in the shadow of a very barren Mt. Washington.

in contrast to a much hotter Sisters, which I returned to a couple of hours later.

At this point in time, I would certainly recommend against water recreation at Big Lake on a busy summer weekend; but it was a very pleasant experience on a quieter weekday. As it was in the last century, the water is still clean and clear and quite a nice temperature for swimming, especially for a high mountain lake.

The people we saw were friendly and, with a little care, social distancing is really not a problem. I did notice that personal flotation device requirements on small

craft were not uniformly adhered to. Considering that there have already been drownings on the Deschutes River and in Scout Lake this year, lack of compliance is a

See **BIG LAKE** on page 11

Painted Lady Antiques
541.904.0066
141 E. Cascade Ave., Suite 104
Open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. 7 days a week

SUMMER SPECIAL!
RESTORATIVE PEDICURE, \$55 EACH! Please mention this ad!
ROAM
natural skincare
Sarah Woods | 541-953-7112 | 392 E. Main Ave., Sisters
roamnaturalskincare.com

SISTERS COFFEE CO.
WELCOME to the SISTERS COFFEE CURBSIDE CAFE
open every day 7am to 4pm
Please place your order at the front door and pay with a card if you can.
THANK YOU for your continued support!
THANK YOU SISTERS!
Open 7am-4pm Coffee Roasted Daily 273 W Hood Ave. Sisters, OR

Fika Sisters COFFEEHOUSE
NEW ARTIST SHOWING
Have a cup of Fika while enjoying the work of Jennifer Reynolds!
Hours: Mon.-Sat., 7 a.m.-4 p.m.
541-588-0311
201 E. Sun Ranch Dr.

Aritisanal Gifts
Original Art
Clothing
Jewelry & More
New Store in town!
SoulShine & Co
351 W Hood Open Wed-Sat, 10 - 5 & Sun 12-5

BLACK BUTTE CHIROPRACTIC • ACUPUNCTURE • MASSAGE
Formerly Bigfoot Wellness
KICK-START CLEAR SKIN!
Clear your face of mask congestion.
Schedule a microcurrent facial with Nylissa!
www.blackbuttechiropractic.com
541-389-9183
392 E. Main Ave., Sisters

Always Active, Always Engaged,
CELEBRATING EVERY SINGLE DAY!
The Lodge in Sisters
An Independent & Assisted Living Community
411 E. Carpenter Ln. • TheLodgeInSisters.com
541-549-5634