

dan, Wyoming, and drive north on I-90 to U.S. 14, then 38 miles west on 14 to Burgess Junction, at the northern reach of the Big Horn Mountains. Turn left on 14, away from 14A. Take the left turn for Shell Creek Ranger Station, driving beyond it (if the weather is dry or you have a four-wheel drive) through Snowshoe Pass, about six miles. Unless it's July or August, watch for ice on the road. Whatever the month, watch for elk, moose, antelope, coyotes, stray cattle, and stray cowboys—all are unpredictable around cars.

Find North Trapper Creek and South Trapper Creek on the Worland map. Between them and not on the map is a rutted dirt lane, leading left. Take this road a quarter-mile to a grassy clearing, near plenty of deadfall firewood and a running creek that will keep your eggs and beer chilled to perfection. Park here. Build a fire in the ring of stones, put a pig on a spit, and camp for a few days. Wander through alpine meadows, notice wildlife tracks, whoop with the coyotes at night, and let nobody tell you that car camping isn't a real wilderness experience.



BEDROCK MEETS MOUNT RUSHMORE

Tourist kitsch seems to grow in strips, usually along the road to some famed attraction. The strip on U.S. 16, between Rapid City, South Dakota, and Mount Rushmore is a case in point. Fake diamond mines, gold mines, dinosaur exhibits, and miniature golf courses compete with myriad commercial campgrounds for a shot at the passing tourist dollar. Only the tacky get noticed. One campground that gets a lot of notice is "Flintstone's Bedrock City," on Route 16 in Custer. Big plastic Fred. Big plastic Wilma. Yabba-dabba-doo. Call 605-673-4079.



A MUDDY RIVER RETREAT

On July 13, 1832, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and his guide, Chief Ozawindib, arrived at Lake Itasca in central Minnesota, having finally reached their goal, the headwaters of the Mississippi River. They rejoiced much, saying, "Someday, people will come here and build a state park." Future generations established not only a park, but also a lodge and many cabins, some with fireplaces. May-to-October prices at Itasca State Park (218-266-3656) range from \$20 for a single in Douglas Lodge to \$62 for a lake-side cabin for six.



YOUR PRIVATE WILDERNESS

To paraphrase the B-52's, you could be camping in your own private Idaho. The 1.9-million-acre Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness is the largest federal wilderness area in the lower 48. Hundreds of lakes and streams, hundreds of miles of trails, 75 animal species, and two of the country's best white-water rivers (the Salmon and the Middle Fork Salmon) are yours to explore. During the day, you can find outfitters for rafting, horseback riding, jet-boating, camera safaris, and a dozen other activities. At night, you can claim a whole valley for the two of you. The Wilderness gets only 35,000 visitors a year, as opposed to the millions that crowd some national parks. For a developed campground, try Ponderosa

State Park (208-634-2164), two hours from Boise and just outside the Wilderness's western border. Call 208-334-2154 for information on the area itself.



YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

Camp Muir is a National Park Service hut with 20 bunks. Sleeping there is free on a first-come, first-served basis.

The catch: It's at 10,000 feet, on the shoulder of Washington's Mount Rainier. To get to Muir, you have to hike from the Paradise area at 5,400 feet, follow several trails, cross a permanent snowfield, and climb an unpredictable mountain that "makes its own weather." Blizzards are a year-round possibility, and danger is inherent in any hike. If you're lucky and the clouds break, you can look into the tilted, broken maw of Mount St. Helens to the southwest. Of course, if you're not lucky, you'll see suspended sleet dancing in front of your face. Still, it's free lodging. Call 206-569-2211; be sure to contact a ranger for more information and precautions.



FIT FOR A PRINCE

The Prince of Wales Hotel in the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park (a U.S.-Canadian effort) actually lies just across the Canadian border, in British Columbia, but it might as well be in Switzerland. Above the rambling lodge stands a snowy peak; below it lies an alpine lake. The steep roof, spired belfry, and tiny gables give the hotel the look of a storybook castle. Rates run from \$78 to \$85 a night. For reservations, call 406-226-5531 or 602-248-6000.

The largest national park in the world is Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Glennallen, Alaska, at 13.2 million acres. The smallest: Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial in Philadelphia, at 0.02 acres.



The Salmon River in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness offers some of the country's best white-water kayaking and rafting.