

# PACK UP AND GET OUT!

Where to go and what to do when you just need to gay-away from it all

## Gay and lesbian campers unite

Queer campgrounds offer an affordable way to pitch your tent close to home

BY KATHY BELGE

**A**h, camping. Fresh air, wieners on a stick and sitting around the campfire singing off-key and swapping horror stories. Here in the Pacific Northwest we're fortunate to have four queer-owned campgrounds that offer a little bit of country for only a song.

### BURNT RANCH IN CENTRAL OREGON'S HIGH DESERT

**F**our hours from Portland in Mitchell, the Burnt Ranch is more an expanse of high desert than an established campground. Owners Suni Miani and Kay Williamson bought the 2,000 acres of rugged land four years ago with dreams of turning it into a gay and lesbian retreat destination. All genders, ages and orientations are welcome. An old white farmhouse sits on a bend in the John Day River just a few miles

past the John Day Fossil Beds Painted Hills National Monument.

Tent campers can set up on the lawn next to the river or out in the backcountry. If you're looking to get away from it all, choose the latter. The Burnt Ranch property includes miles of rocky hills, home to only coyotes, deer, bobcats, rattlesnakes and cougars. Old wagon trails crisscross their property, a perfect setting to play out a cowboy fantasy.

Lawn campers have access to the house's bathroom, as there are no facilities outside. No picnic tables, no fire pits, no designated camping areas, just a few out buildings and lots of Mother Nature. RVers can hook up to water and electricity next to a shed.

For those whose idea of camping involves a queen bed and running water, the Burnt Ranch also rents rooms in the farmhouse. Guests share the kitchen, living room and bathroom with caretaker Mary Hauer, a Portland lesbian artist.

There's plenty to do at the Burnt Ranch: visit the Painted Hills, fish, explore the property's jeep trails, float down the river in a tube or a kayak and climb Byrd's Point rock across the river from the ranch. Let the frogs' chirping lull you to sleep in the evening and the Canadian geese honk you awake at dawn.

### TRIANGLE RECREATION CAMP NORTH OF SEATTLE

**W**ith more than 2,400 campers a year and big parties on the weekends, Triangle Recreation Camp offers city dwellers the opportunity to bring the party out to the woods. Located along a National Scenic Byway one hour north of Seattle, TRC is a nonprofit membership organization founded in 1975.

The 40 acres nestled among the old growth in the Mount Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest is open to gay men and women older than 21. Most members are men, but more and more women are erecting tents.

Individuals or groups get together and make a camp for the summer. Board member Bob Nale says these semipermanent sites are one of the unique aspects of TRC. Some have kitchens, showers and

fountains. Recent visitor Guy Koehler says:

"Some of the guys go really crazy. They'll have electric generators, disco balls, gas kitchens."

Overnight campers share common fire pits, toilets and picnic tables. Visitors must bring their own drinking water.

TRC sits on Bender Creek just outside the hamlet of Silverton, a small gay enclave. A resident with property adjoining TRC runs the Gender Bender Fruit Stand each camping season, renting out tents, sleeping bags and tarps to those who might have left home without the essentials.

Nale says weekend events such as white towel, underwear and toga parties are about the only time the camp is close to its capacity of 110. Those who wish for a more quiet experience would have best luck visiting during the week.

Guests should expect weather like Seattle, only 8 to 10 degrees cooler.

Nearby attractions include Big Four Ice Caves, Quarry Waterfall and lots of hiking, fishing and kayaking. Part of the property sits in an cedar grove with 1,000-year-old trees. Nale says, "They're so big that 10 people can't get their arm spans around the base."

### RIVENDELL RANCH ON THE OLYMPIC PENINSULA

**G**ay rancher Guy Koehler spent a summer at TRC and decided to model a campground after its membership format. More than a campground, Rivendell is also a working ranch. A couple of recent visitors even helped bottle-feed newborn calves.

Koehler lives on the 160 acres in Hoquiam, Wash., with his dog, Tyler; 15 sheep; three Belgian horses; dairy and beef cattle; hundreds of chickens, ducks and geese; and, soon, a few pigs. He also has a garden and a greenhouse where he grows fresh vegetables and herbs. Campers can purchase any of these items at a discount.

"Come out for a weekend and you can buy a fresh farm chicken," Koehler says. "Plus there'll be fresh salad greens and lots of other things."

Koehler bought the ranch two years ago from an elderly couple and has spent much of that time getting it into shape. This is the first year he'll be open to campers. He's already had six overnights.

A trailer sits next to Koehler's house, and campers can use the kitchen and bathroom. Two outhouses are also available. Campers must bring all their own food, water and cooking sup-



The John Day Fossil Beds are a must-see when visiting Central Oregon

plies. The nearest town is 20 miles away. RVs are welcome, but the ranch can only accommodate four at a time and has no hookups.

Rivendell hopes to attract Radical Faeries, bears, disco queens, dykes, friendly straight folk and even children. The only requirement is people must be supportive of sexual minorities.

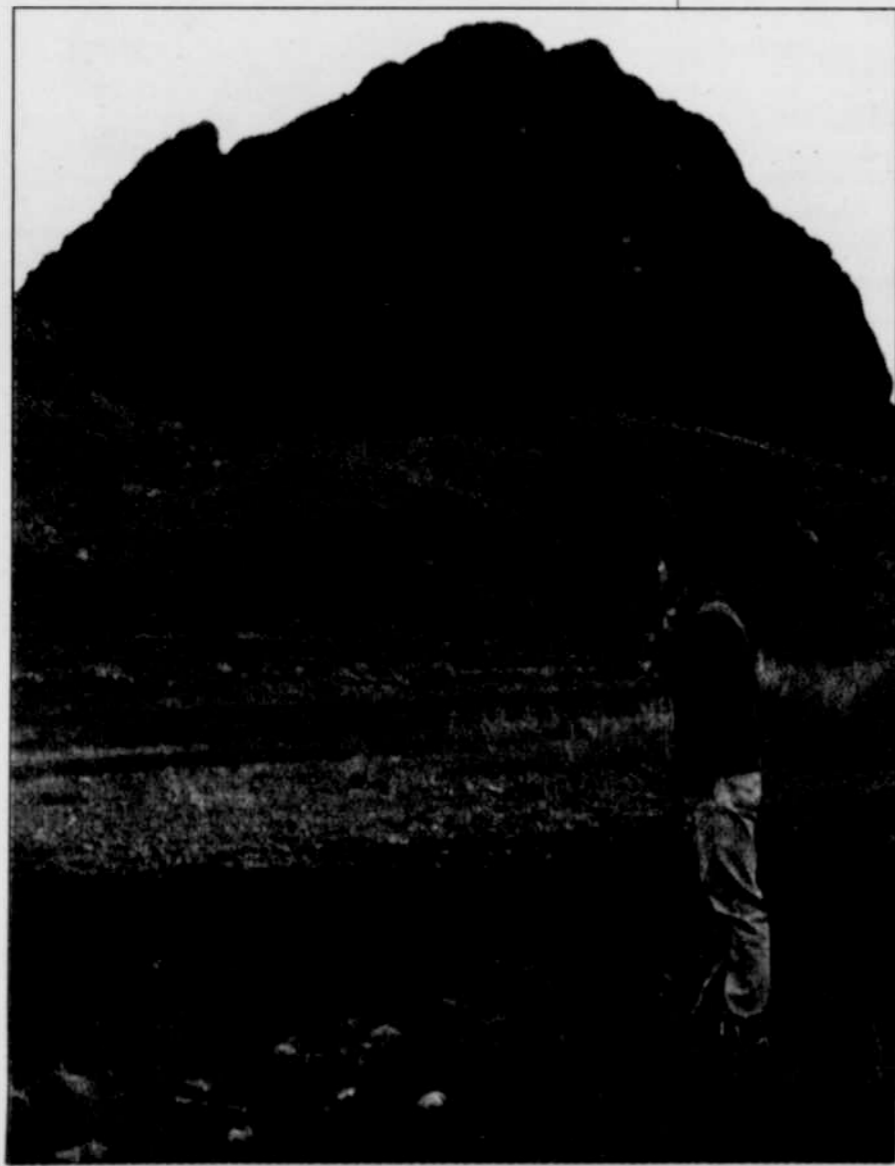
### KALLES FAMILY RANCH NEAR CRATER LAKE

**A**nne and Reilly Kalles knew they landed on something special when they purchased 15 acres of land in 1992. Situated on the junction of the South Umpqua River and Jackson Creek, the area was a fishing camp for the Umpqua tribe for thousands of years. Reilly says, "We feel we were given this land in order to share it, and so we share it as a safe place for people who need a safe place."

She describes Kalles Family Ranch as a big, grassy back yard with sites for 10 RVs and plenty of tenting. The campground contains an outdoor pavilion with covered cooking and a screened eating area. Amenities include a wash house with a shower and bathroom.

About 100 visitors each year make it to their remote location in Tiller, about two hours from Crater Lake. Special events include women's, men's, children-friendly and clean-and-sober weekends.

"It's primarily for gay and lesbians," Reilly says, "but it's also a safe place for single mothers



The dramatic Byrd's Point is just across the river from the rustic Burnt Ranch, a lesbian-owned campground near Mitchell