



Photos by Ryan Hume

The Port Light's turkey wrap includes cranberry sauce, cream cheese, lettuce and tomato served with crisp tater tots.



The Port Light Cafe's grilled cheese was buttery, crispy and gooey.



A bacon avocado cheeseburger or B.L.A.T. at the Port Light Cafe.

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friendly and slightly sassy in a winking sort of way. Orders either came up from the cook at the window or were delivered to the table. A few snafus at the counter — a famished soldier grabbed my order thinking his was up, on another visit, a wrap got left off the order — were quickly rectified with humor and a shrug.

A bacon avocado cheeseburger, or B.L.A.T. burger as it's described on the menu (\$8.25), was well seared on a soft

bun. While surprised the avocado in question was a sauce squeezed out a bottle (though it was fresh and did seem home-made), this is the kind of sturdy burger I would happily consume at a backyard barbecue.

A turkey wrap (\$8.25) with cranberry sauce, cream cheese and the usual combo of lettuce and tomato had nice flavor, though it was wrapped in a supermarket tortilla, which really did it no favors or harm.

Grilled cheese (\$6) was about as buttery, crispy and gooey as you could ask for.

The tater tots were perfectly crisp if unmemorable, but the fries did stand out, crystallized in enough salt to keep bringing me back to my plate.

Really, there are no big surprises on the Port Light's regular menu, but I think this is kind of the point. Everything was made to order, competent and familiar. When "Proudly serving those who serve" is the motto, isn't the idea to give them something comforting and recognizable at a fair price? They are working hard and far away from home — a little comfort can go a long way.

For example, after three weeks in the back country of Idaho, I once met a diner bacon cheeseburger that almost made me weep with satisfaction. Strenuous labor — both mental and physical — can lift simple foods from mere sustenance towards the sublime.

The real standout at the Port Light, though, is the prime rib dinner (\$14.95). Served Friday and Saturday from 5 P.M. until it's gone — and believe me, it does get gone — this lean price includes a trip to the salad bar, dinner rolls, assorted vegetables and a twice-baked potato.

While I can't claim that this is an all-you-can-eat affair as it never says as much on any of the signage, I did watch a few go back for seconds like you would at home. I suppose this depends on how deep the line is, but be sure that plenty of roast beef disappears.

The salad bar is well-stocked — what

are Scandinavian friends might look upon as a small smorgasbord — with fresh, bright and crisp vegetables, as well as prepared potato and macaroni salads. All of the sides were hearty and as carefully prepared as one could ask if expecting a crowd.

But really, let's talk about the beef. From the kitchen, Bosworth slices it herself, showing off the knife skills she's acquired since inaugurating this dinner five years ago. The slice I received, splashed with jus, easily weighed a half pound and was the perfect medium I had asked for.

Bosworth mentioned that her prime rib crowd has exploded since Bigfoot's Steakhouse closed in Seaside. I can see why meatheads make the pilgrimage. Marbled and well-seasoned throughout, with a surprising amount of peppery kick I couldn't locate by eye, Bosworth holds her spices close to the chest.

When a master chef from Portland once asked for her secret, she boasted to me, she told him, "Well, it's a secret."

So don't bother asking, just enjoy tender, mouthwatering beef sliced to your liking.

While many of the pleasures of the Port Light are more experiential or nostalgic than daringly culinary, for now you can still find a solid, well-priced meal behind the guardhouse at Camp Rilea. As has become their tradition, they will offer one last Christmas Eve dinner for, as Bosworth puts it, "anyone who needs it," before the Light flickers off.

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