



Visit John Fogerty's old home/3C



Explore a mansion in Astoria/4C



Out of the Vault: Fire destroys flour mill/6C



Minam River Lodge owner Barnes Ellis unloads supplies off a plane at the Minam River Lodge airstrip. All supplies for the lodge must be flown in, often from La Grande or Enterprise. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Into the wild

Minam River Lodge is hard to get to, but well worth the journey

By TIM TRAINOR ♦ *East Oregonian*

Most people reach the Minam River Lodge by air. Pilots guide small planes, outfitted with oversized tires, that allow them to touch down in deep-rutted, uneven landing strips. They stay for the weekend or just for breakfast.

It's a 10-minute flight from La Grande, a little longer from Enterprise. But what the flight lacks in length, it makes up for with scenery. The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest spreads out below, roamed and logged and beautiful, until it hits the Eagle Cap Wilderness. There it becomes less roamed and logged and even more beautiful. The Minam River is a straight chute running northeast, water dropping from its source in the mountains down a high canyon toward the town of Minam and the river's confluence with the Wallowa.

It's not an easy place to land a plane. The canyon is a tight one, and the 2,000-foot-long airstrip begins a stone's throw from the river. It doglegs right and pilots try to first make contact with the ground on the right wheel, letting the plane bounce a time or two on its way toward three-point contact with the ground.

Most park their plane next to an open-faced barn that serves as the hangar. It is filled with a tractor, nails, barrels of fuel and chopped wood. At the top, a hand-painted sign reads: Minam Regional Airport elevation 3,600 feet.

Not all arrive by plane, however. Some hop on horseback at Moss Springs Trailhead, outside Cove, and ride roughly 8.5 miles. Others throw on a pack and walk the same trail.

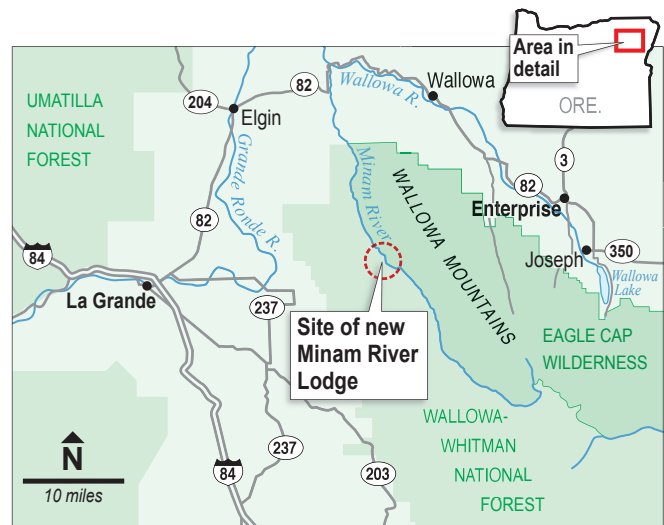
No one arrives by car. There are no roads. The Minam River Lodge is a relic, its 127 acres purchased by Mert Loree in 1946 to serve as a base camp for hunting excursions into the Wallowa Mountains. With his wife, Erma, the Lorees built a lodge, barn and washrooms from 1950-1951. Horses and mules brought in the lumber. The Lorees poured concrete septic tanks and built a water system. Over the next half-century, intermittent construction added cabins and outbuildings.

But the lodge's remote location made it hard to maintain. Erosion and old age began to work away at the buildings. The whole complex fell into disrepair and was sold at auction in 2011. It has been closed all year for a multi-million dollar reconstruction. [For more on that process, see today's Page 1A.](#) Next year, it will reopen as a different kind of lodge.



More online
For more photos and video of the landing at Minam River Lodge visit www.eastoregonian.com

ABOVE: The Minam River runs through the 127-acre property where the Minam River Lodge is being rebuilt. **BELOW:** Wooden slabs mark a trail that runs along the Minam River near the Minam River Lodge construction site east in the Eagle Cap Wilderness. Staff photos by E.J. Harris



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