



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Ritter Hot Springs sits in a bend of the Middle Fork John Day River, near Long Creek in northern Grant County.

Ritter Hot Springs: Far away in time and distance

Photos and story
by E.J. HARRIS
East Oregonian

If you are looking for a health spa with herbal wraps, cucumber water and Yerba mate lattes, then Ritter Hot Springs is not for you.

However, what Ritter might lack in posh accouterments, it more than makes up for with scenic beauty, a rich history and plenty of hot, healing spring water.

Ritter was first discovered and homesteaded by William Neal McDuffee in the 1850s and was originally named McDuffee Hot Springs. One of McDuffee's original cabins can still be found on the site today. McDuffee was an interesting character, according to current Ritter owner Mike Tillay of Walla Walla. Tillay, who has studied the history of the hot springs, says McDuffee was miner, a watermaster and even spent time in prison for murdering a man on the property.

"(McDuffee) was an out of luck miner and he struck gold with hot water," Tillay said.

Ritter was later renamed for the popular John Day Valley pioneer minister Rev. Joseph Ritter, who had bought the ranch where the springs are located.

The resort is ten miles west of Highway 395 on Ritter Road, along a meander of the Middle Fork John Day River in Grant County roughly 20 miles north of Long Creek.

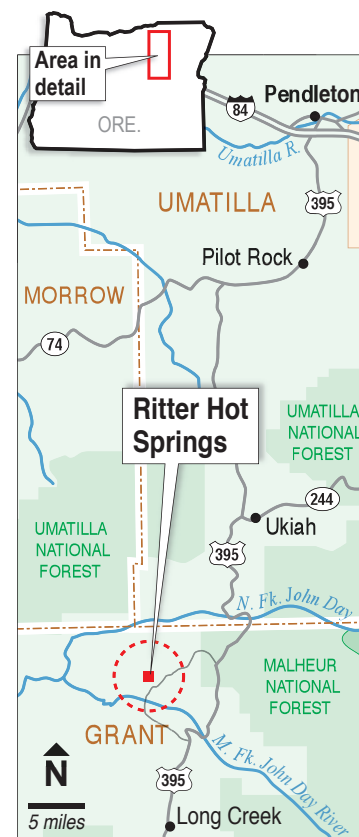
The sleepy little alcove was once, and still is, a destination for people looking to reap the health benefits of the mineral waters found at the hot springs, according to Tillay. He said the water feels smooth due to its high alkalinity, close to a nine on the pH scale, which can be good for your skin.

"I have a lady staying here right now that takes a five-gallon bucket of it home and sprays it on her after a shower because it makes her skin feel smooth," Tillay said.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Ritter Hot Springs main attraction is its spring-fed swimming pool where guests can soak in the 80 plus degree waters piped in from the hot springs.



Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

If you go

Ritter is located in northern Grant County off Highway 395. If traveling south from Pendleton, turn west on Ritter Road near mile marker 77 and drive ten miles, then turn right at the sign.

It operates seasonally, and opened this year on Memorial Day weekend. It consists of eight hotel rooms, two cabins and also has camping space and RV hookups. Because its owners is a Seventh-day Adventist, the pool is closed from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. The pool is open the other six days of the week from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

For more information on Ritter Hot Springs call 541-421-3846.

A century old hot springs comes with a lot of upkeep and renovations seem to be constantly underway. Tillay, who is also president and CEO of Grab on Grips,

a company that makes bicycle handlebar wraps, can be found working on improvements to the property most days of the week,

although he has no plans to expand current operations.

While retelling an account for a guest, Tillay touched one of Ritter's biggest charms — its remoteness.

"The absolute best thing about Ritter is that there is nothing to do," Tillay said. "You can just put your mind in neutral. You can just chill."



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A cabin still sits on the original site homesteaded by William Neal McDuffee.

BLOOMIN' BLUES

A prairie lotus by any other name

By BRUCE BARNES
For The East Oregonian

Common Name: Prairie lotus
Scientific Name: *Acmispon americanus*

This small plant has had its scientific name changed at least three times in the past 20 years or so. Past names include *Lotus purshianus*, *Lotus americanus*, and *Lotus unifoliatus*. Fortunately, Shakespeare had it right when he wrote in one of his plays "A rose by any other name is still a rose."

The name Lotus was the Greek name given to this group of plants, which is not related to the Japanese Lotus flower in any way.

About ten years ago this species along with other North



Photo courtesy Bruce Barnes

Prairie lotus

American native lotus species were separated from Old World species into *Acmispon*. I could find no reference to the meaning behind the new name.

Regardless of name, this plant is an annual that is a

member of the pea family. It is found throughout most of North America from southwest Canada to Mexico, to the Atlantic, and is one of the most common of the native *Acmispon* species.

They are often found in patches in wet spring soil, and sometimes form dense tangled masses about a foot high. The stems are often simple with no branches, but can also be found looking bush-like with many branches. The plant in the photo is about six inches tall, with both seed pods and flowers.

The plant's leaves are alternate on the stem, and on a single plant may be simple or compound into two or three leaflets, which is an unusual feature. The stems and leaves are rather hairy, with fine

spreading hairs. The pea-like flowers are white, sometimes with the broad banner petal having thin red stripes. The seed pods are flat, elliptical in outline, and have four to eight seeds.

Two Indian tribes are known to use the plant in cooking. One tribe used matted plants on which to cook juniper cakes to improve the taste of the cakes.

Another tribe pounded acorns along with the leaves of the plant so the plants would absorb some of the oil from the acorns.

Where to find: This plant seems to pop up some years and disappear other years depending on weather conditions. I have seen it in thick tangles near natural ponds in late spring in the Blue Mountains.

One-day sturgeon season set on Columbia River

East Oregonian

Fishery managers from Oregon and Washington have set aside Friday, June 23 as a one-day sturgeon retention season on the Columbia River between Bonneville and The Dalles dams, including adjacent tributaries.

Anglers who haven't met the annual bag limit will be allowed to keep one sturgeon with a fork length of 38-54 inches. Fishing is still prohibited through July within the sturgeon spawning sanctuary from The Dalles Dam downstream 1.8 miles to the Port of The Dalles boat ramp.

Meanwhile, sturgeon season will close Saturday, June 17 from the Wauna power lines downstream to the mouth of the river due to higher-than-expected effort and catch. Recreational anglers exhausted their harvest quota of 3,000 legal-size sturgeon during the first five days of the fishery, according to the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, with about 12,000 trips expected.

For more information, visit the ODFW website at www.dfw.state.or.us.

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