



BV

A BORAH VISTA FIELD GUIDE • SEASON ONE

Twelve Places in the Lost River Range

The hikes, hot springs, backroads and one small copper town we actually filmed
— with the drive times, the seasons and the things nobody tells you.

Everything in this guide is within two hours of one small town.

Mackay sits at the bottom of the Lost River valley with the highest mountains in Idaho on one side and the Pioneers on the other. Four hundred and thirty-nine people, one blinking light, and more country within a two-hour radius than most states manage in total.

These are twelve places we went while filming the first season of *Borah Vista* — the show about buying seven acres of vacant Custer County ground and trying to build something on it without knowing how. A few are places we know well that did not make the cut on camera, and that leaving out would have made this a worse guide.

What follows is the practical version: what the road actually is, what your car can do, when the season opens,

what it costs, and where the water is. Where something is genuinely risky — the snow bridge on Borah, runoff at Sunbeam, flash floods in Spar Canyon — we say so plainly rather than leave it out of the brochure.

Names are named, and nothing here is a paid placement. Go north on 93 until the range fills the windshield.

01	Mount Borah	Hike · 20 min from Mackay
02	North Fork of the Big Lost	Camp · 45 min
03	Trail Creek Road	Drive · the whole afternoon
04	Mountain Biking Sun Valley	Ride · 2 hr
05	Mackay	Town · you're already here
06	Sunbeam Hot Springs	Soak · 2 hr
07	Whitewater at Stanley	Raft · 2 hr
08	Challis Hot Springs	Soak · 1 hr
09	Spar Canyon Road	Drive · 1 hr
10	Morgan Creek Road	Wildlife · 1 hr 15
11	The Yankee Fork Gold Dredge	History · 2 hr
12	Custer	Ghost town · 2 hr

A word on how we use this valley. Borah Vista promotes non-consumptive recreation — hiking, camping, riding, driving, soaking, and photography. This guide will never point you at something to shoot or catch. There is more than enough here without it.

Season One, episode by episode.

Ten episodes about buying seven acres of vacant ground in Custer County and trying to build something on it without knowing how. The places in this guide are the places we drove to, camped in, soaked in and got lost on while making it.



I Bought 7 Acres of Vacant Land in Idaho...



The Fence Comes Down



Don't Go In Without One



Am I Even Allowed to Cut One Tree?



Where Celebrities Hang Out, Not Guys Who Live in Vans



Still No Cabin. But Today I Get a Driveway



I Really Hope I Don't Put It in the Wrong Place



What Does a Cabin Cost, in Money and in Months?



I Hit A TREE!



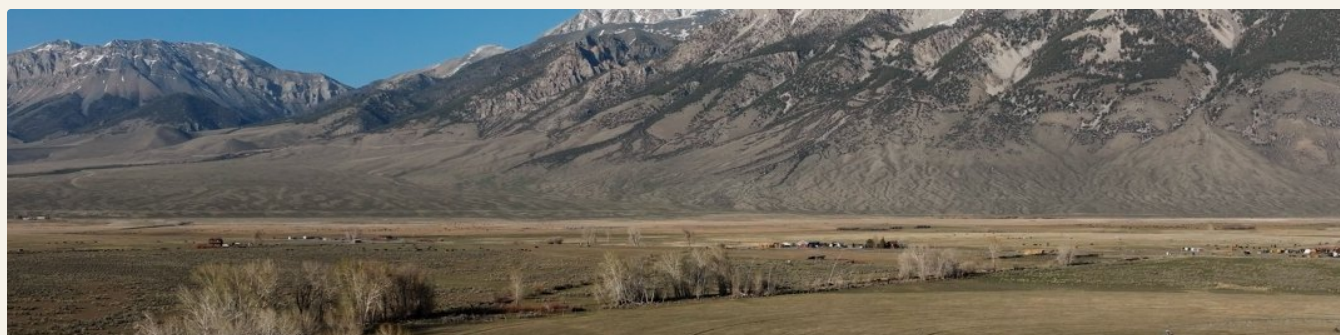
I'm Not Building a Cabin. I Bought One

Watch the season at youtube.com/@BorahVista. Each episode names the places it was shot in, and every one of them is in here with the drive time and the road conditions attached.

01 Mount Borah

LOST RIVER RANGE • 20 MILES NORTH OF MACKAY

THE MOUNTAIN THE SHOW IS NAMED FOR



Idaho's high point is **12,662 feet**, and from Borah Vista you can watch the whole thing change colour over the course of a morning. It is the mountain the property is named for, the reason the brand exists, and the single most misjudged hike in this valley.

The numbers are honest about it. Three and a half miles from the trailhead to the summit, and **5,262 feet of gain** to cover in them — one of the steepest sustained ascents of any state high point in the country. Most parties are moving before dawn and back at the truck somewhere between six and twelve hours later.

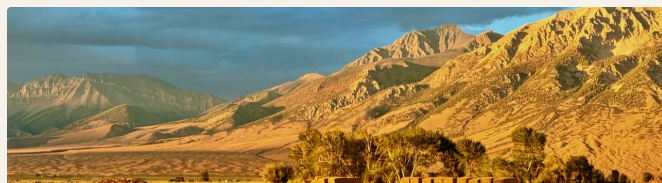
CHICKEN OUT RIDGE

At about 11,800 feet the trail stops being a trail. Chicken Out Ridge is a blocky Class 3 spine with real exposure on both sides, and it earned its name from the people who get there and decide, sensibly, that today is not the day. The crux is a twenty-foot downclimb off a tower locals call the nose, dropping into a notch that holds a snow bridge well into the season.

If the snow is still there, you want an ice axe and you want to know how to use it. By late August it is usually bare rock.

THE MOUNTAIN THAT MOVED

On **28 October 1983** a magnitude 6.9 earthquake — the largest ever recorded in Idaho — tore a 21-mile scarp along the base of this range. The valley floor dropped; the range came up. Two children died in Challis. You can stand on the fault line at the Earthquake Interpretive Site, 22 miles north of Mackay then 2.5 miles up Doublespring Pass Road. It is free, it takes twenty minutes, and it will reframe everything you see out the windshield afterward.



ALPENGLOW ON THE RANGE FROM THE VALLEY FLOOR



EVENING LIGHT NEAR THE TRAILHEAD

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

~23 mi / 30 min. US-93 north to between mileposts 129 and 130, then 3 mi east on Birch Springs Road.

ROAD

Well-graded dirt. Passenger cars are fine.

DISTANCE / GAIN

~7–8 mi round trip • 5,262 ft

TIME

6–12 hours. Start before dawn; be off the summit by early afternoon.

SEASON

Mid-July through September for dry Class 3.

PERMIT / FEE

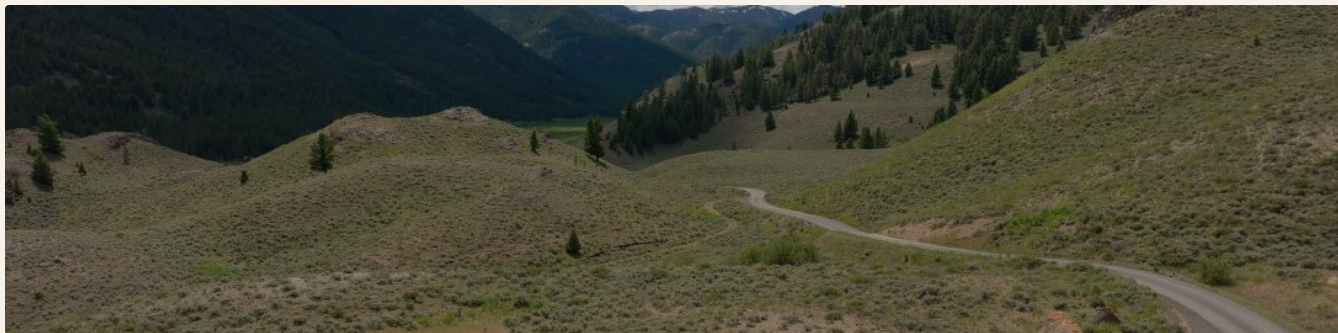
None. Salmon-Challis National Forest.

TRAILHEAD CAMPING

5 first-come sites, \$5/night, cash or check. Vault toilet. **No water — none on the route either.**

FROM THE FIELD

Call the Lost River Ranger District at **208-588-3400** within a week of your climb and ask one question: is the snow bridge still in. That single answer decides your gear list.



First thing to get right: **this is not the town of North Fork**. Type that into your phone and it will send you four hours north to the Salmon River. The North Fork that matters here is a fork of the Big Lost, tucked off Trail Creek Road in the high country west of Mackay, and it is the closest thing this valley has to a secret.

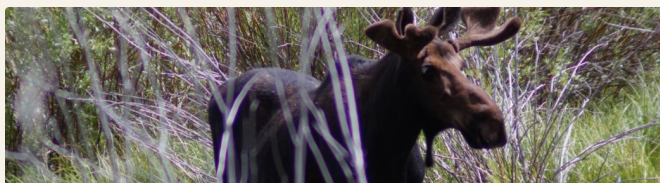
The road in is good — genuinely good, passable in a normal car — until it reaches a gate. Past that you want clearance, or a bike, or your feet. What you get in exchange is a drainage with almost nobody in it: willow bottoms along the water, timber climbing away on both sides, and a maze of side roads that will absolutely get you lost if you have not downloaded the Forest Service motor vehicle use map before you left cell service. Do that. Routes not on the MVUM are not open to you.

CAMPING

There is **no developed campground on the North Fork itself** — no toilets, no water, no host. This is dispersed camping, which on the Salmon-Challis means you may pull off and camp free of charge **within 300 feet of an open road, for up to 14 days**. Firewood for a campfire is free and needs no permit. Pack out everything, including the ashes of what you did not burn.

WHAT LIVES HERE

This drainage sits inside Idaho Fish and Game's Unit 50 — elk on the timbered slopes, moose in the willows along the creek, pronghorn out on the open sage of the basin below. The pronghorn are the story worth knowing: some of them walk more than eighty miles each way between their winter range and these valleys, single-file through the narrowest neck of Craters of the Moon. Give them room. Use the long lens.



MOOSE IN THE WILLOW BOTTOMS — EPISODE 4



PRONGHORN ON THE OPEN SAGE BELOW

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

US-93 north ~16 mi, west on Trail Creek Road (FR 208), then North Fork Road.

ROAD

Passenger-friendly to the gate; high clearance beyond. Impassable when wet.

CAMPING

Dispersed only. Free. 14-day limit, within 300 ft of an open road.

FACILITIES

None. No toilet, no water, no trash.

NEAREST CAMPGROUNDS

Phi Kappa and Park Creek on Trail Creek Road · \$10 · first-come.

SEASON

Roughly June to late September.

FROM THE FIELD

Sit still. The wildlife here is not shy so much as unhurried — the moose in Episode Four turned up because we stopped moving and let the drainage forget we were in it. Half an hour of doing nothing is the best gear you can bring.



Forty-one miles of road between Ketchum and US-93, cresting at **Trail Creek Summit, 7,896 feet**. It is the shortcut, the scenic drive, and the reason Sun Valley is a day trip from Mackay instead of an expedition. It is also unpaved for most of its length, one lane in places, with a rock wall on one side and nothing on the other.

The Civilian Conservation Corps built it. Company 2527, out of Ketchum, finished a job projected at five years in **nine months**. There is no sign up there telling you that, which feels about right for this part of Idaho.

DRIVING IT

Any car can do this road in dry conditions. Not every car should — the surface is potholed and rocky in stretches, flats are common, and the Ketchum-side climb is genuinely narrow. **Trailers and RVs are prohibited**. Carry a full-size spare. There are no services of any kind for the entire length: no fuel, no water, no food, and effectively no cell signal once you leave the Sun Valley side. Fill up in Ketchum or at Sammy's in Mackay and tell somebody your route.

FIVE PLACES TO STOP FOR THE NIGHT

Boundary — 9 sites, \$10, four miles out of Ketchum, hand-pumped drinking water, three-night limit. **Phi Kappa** — 21 wooded sites, \$10, two vault toilets, no potable water. **Park Creek** — 12 sites, \$10, water in summer, near the Summit Creek trailhead. **Wildhorse** — 13 sites, \$10, up the Copper Basin spur, trailheads for Boulder Creek Lake and Wildhorse Canyon. **Star Hope** — 21 sites, \$10, deep in Copper Basin with the creek running through it. All five are first-come, first-served. None take reservations.

AT A GLANCE

LENGTH

~41 mi Ketchum to US-93 · ~57 mi door to door from Mackay.

DRIVE TIME

1½–2 hours without stops. Budget half a day.

SURFACE

Paved out of Ketchum, then gravel over the summit.

VEHICLES

Passenger cars in the dry. **No trailers, no RVs.**

SEASON

Mid-May to mid-June until around mid-November. Dates set annually.

CELL SERVICE

Sun Valley side only. None over the summit.

DON'T MISS

Hemingway Memorial at the Ketchum end · Devil's Bedstead East (11,865 ft).

FROM THE FIELD

Drive it west to east, Ketchum to Mackay, in the late afternoon. You climb through the switchbacks with the sun behind you and drop into the Lost River valley with Borah lit up dead ahead. Going the other way you get the same road and none of that.



THE GRAVEL RUN TOWARD THE SUMMIT



TRAIL CREEK SUMMIT, 7,896 FT

04

Mountain Biking Sun Valley

KETCHUM & SUN VALLEY • BLAINE COUNTY

EPISODE 5 • I LIVE IN A VAN.



Sun Valley is a Silver-level IMBA Ride Center with **more than ninety miles of trail within five miles of Ketchum** — which is the number that matters, because it means four different networks in four days without ever driving more than ten minutes.

WHERE TO START

Adams Gulch is the first stop for most people and the right one: Sunnyside–Lane's is 2.5 easy miles, Shadyside is 1.7, and the trailhead is minutes from town. When you want more, **Chocolate Gulch** loops 4.9 miles of intermediate singletrack, **Harper's** adds two, and the **Oregon Gulch loop** stretches to 11.6.

LIFT-SERVED ON BALDY

The Roundhouse Express Gondola lifts you 2,000 vertical feet in eight minutes; River Run, Mindbender and Pale Rider bring you back down. **Roughly 1 July to 7 September 2026, Wednesday to Sunday, 9 to 4.** The Christmas Lift is out for replacement this year — no summit access, some trails closed.

RENTING A BIKE

Black Tie of Sun Valley is the one we used. They deliver: the bike arrives at your lodging and they collect it when you're done, free on multi-day rentals. Mountain bikes, e-bikes, kids' sizes, paddleboards, even a Jeep. Helmets included. **866-360-6433 • blacktiebikes.com.** **Sturtevant's** (208-726-4501) is the conventional alternative; **Pete Lane's** at River Run is the move for bike-park days.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

~57 mi / ~2 hr over Trail Creek Road in summer. Longer on pavement when the road is closed.

TRAIL MILEAGE

90+ miles within 5 mi of Ketchum.

EASIEST RIDES

Sunnyside–Lane's 2.5 mi • Shadyside 1.7 mi • Trail Creek Trail 1.1 mi (barrier-free)

STEP IT UP

Chocolate Gulch 4.9 • Harper's 2 • Corral Creek 2.7 • Oregon Gulch loop 11.6

BIKE PARK

Roundhouse Express Gondola • Wed–Sun 9–4 • ~1 Jul–7 Sep 2026

E-BIKES

Motor vehicles on Forest singletrack. **Not allowed on Bald Mountain, Adams Gulch or Fox Creek.** Fine on the paved Wood River Trail.

FROM THE FIELD

Ride early. The low trails bake by midday in July and August, and the Wood River Valley gets afternoon thunderstorms that build faster than they look like they will. Wheels down by seven, back for a late breakfast.



THE ROUNDHOUSE EXPRESS GONDOLA, 2,000 FT IN EIGHT MINUTES



RIVER RUN DAY LODGE — WHERE THE BIKE-PARK DAY STARTS



Four hundred and thirty-nine people at five thousand nine hundred feet, with Mount McCaleb standing over the whole thing. Mackay was founded in **1901**, when the Oregon Short Line pushed a branch up the Lost River valley to haul copper, and it is named for John W. Mackay, the Comstock magnate who owned the mines. Within a year there were twelve hundred people here.

MINE HILL

The **Mackay Mine Hill Tour** is free, self-guided, and roughly twenty miles of road climbing through the old White Knob workings — tramway towers from 1918, the compressor plant, the Cossack Tunnel, the Cliff City smelter ruins. It is colour-coded by what your vehicle can handle: green for anything, blue for anything with clearance, red for ATVs, bikes, horses and feet. **No motorhomes, no trailers.** Get the map from BLM Challis before you go — active mining still closes stretches without notice.

THE MUSEUM

The **Lost River Museum** on Main Street runs **Friday and Saturday, 11 to 4, May through September**. Mining tools, ranching gear, railroad and theatre memorabilia, and a moonshining exhibit better than it has any right to be.

THE RESERVOIR

Four miles northwest of town, **Mackay Reservoir** spreads 1,392 acres against the base of the range — water in the foreground, the Lost River peaks behind, and on a still morning both of them twice. The BLM's **Joe T. Fallini Recreation Site** sits on the shore with 26 sites and a boat ramp, from \$6.

AT A GLANCE

MINE HILL TOUR

Free · ~20 mi · late spring to late fall · maps from BLM Challis, 208-879-6200

MUSEUM

Lost River Museum, Main Street · Fri–Sat 11–4 · May–September

CAMPGROUND

Joe T. Fallini · 6 mi north on US-93 · 26 sites · \$6–\$16 · boat ramp

EAT & FUEL

Ken's Club · 9 Peaks · Bear Bottom Inn · Scoops Corner Cafe. Gas at Sammy's Mini Mart, 318 W Custer — **last fuel before Trail Creek Road.**

STAY

Wagon Wheel Motel · White Knob Motel · Bear Bottom Inn · Mackay Mansion B&B

WORTH TIMING

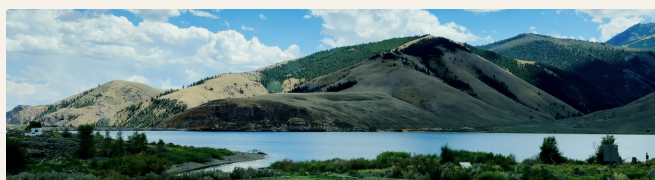
Mackay PRCA Rodeo, late June. Summer Market, Saturdays.

FROM THE FIELD

Go into the museum on a Friday and ask about the earthquake. There are people in this town who were standing in these buildings on the morning of 28 October 1983, and eleven storefronts and thirty-nine houses did not survive it. That conversation is worth more than the exhibit.



ORE CAR, LOST RIVER MUSEUM



MACKAY RESERVOIR, FOUR MILES NORTHWEST OF TOWN

06 Sunbeam Hot Springs

SALMON RIVER • ~12 MILES EAST OF STANLEY

EPISODE 9 • I HIT A TREE!



Hot water comes out of the hillside above Idaho 75 at something close to **160 degrees**, runs down a piped system under the road, and lands in a scatter of rock-walled pools on the bank of the Salmon River. You mix it yourself — move a rock to let the cold river in, swing the pipe, use the bucket somebody always leaves behind — until it comes out somewhere around a hundred and five. It is free. It has been free the entire time.

THE BATHHOUSE

The concrete structure on the platform above the pools was built in **1937 by Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees out of the Clayton camp**, with two stairways down from the road. It has not worked as a bathhouse since the Second World War pulled the labour away. It stands there anyway, and most people use it to change.

GETTING IT RIGHT

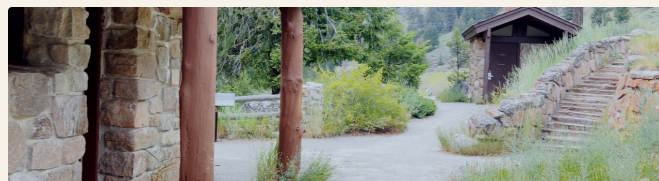
Come **early on a weekday** — this is a roadside spring twelve miles from Stanley and it fills up. Come **June through October**: spring runoff submerges the pools entirely and the current here in high water is dangerous, not just cold. Wear a suit; you are visible from the highway and this is a family spot. **No glass, no soap, nothing on your skin in the water.** Leave the rocks where the last person put them.

WHILE YOU ARE UP HERE

The **Sunbeam Dam** ruin is right there — built 1909–1910 to power a mill up the Yankee Fork, run about a year, and blasted open by Idaho Fish and Game in 1934 to let the fish back through. The gravel road beside it is **Forest Road 013**, and it is the way to spots 11 and 12: the gold dredge at eight and a half miles, the ghost town at nine. Doing all three in a day is the best value in this guide.



HOT WATER OFF THE HILLSIDE — AROUND 160°F AT THE SOURCE



THE 1937 CCC BATHHOUSE ABOVE THE POOLS

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

~2 hr. US-93 north to Challis, then ID-75 upriver.

LOCATION

ID-75, ~12 mi east of Stanley. Paved pullout, 8–10 vehicles.

FEE / FACILITIES

Free. Vault toilet — bring your own paper. No potable water.

WATER

Source up to ~160°F. Mixed soaking temp typically 100–110°F.

BEST WINDOW

June–October. Early morning, weekday.

AVOID

Spring runoff — pools wash out and the river is dangerous.

RULES

Swimsuits. No glass. Nothing soapy. Pack it out.

FROM THE FIELD

Do it on the way home from the river, not on the way out. Rafting first, hot spring after, and you cross Willow Creek Summit into the Lost River valley just as the alpenglow hits Borah. That order is the whole day.

07 Whitewater at Stanley

UPPER SALMON RIVER · STANLEY TO SUNBEAM

EPISODE 9 · I HIT A TREE!



The Salmon — the River of No Return — runs wild less than two hours from Mackay, and the stretch between Stanley and Sunbeam is the one you can do and still be home for dinner. Leave after breakfast, run Class II–III whitewater through a granite canyon by lunch, soak at Sunbeam on the way back, and watch the light come off Borah as you drop into the valley.

The drive is half of it. North on US-93 through the Big Lost River valley, over Willow Creek Summit, into Challis in about fifty minutes, then up Highway 75 following the Salmon itself upstream through the canyon. Watch the rock above the river road; the bighorn sheep are there more often than not.

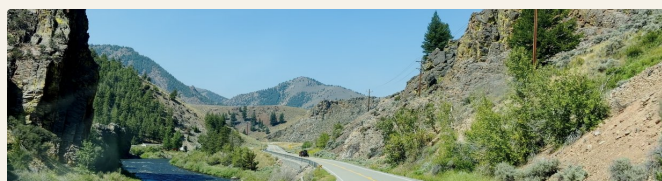
WHO TO GO WITH

White Otter Adventures sits right at the put-in in Sunbeam, which means no bus shuttle — you park, you gear up, you walk to the water. Their half-day runs twelve miles of Class II–III in about three hours, launching at 9:30 and 2:00 daily through the summer, in paddle rafts, oar boats or inflatable kayaks. Roughly \$100 an adult, \$85 for kids four to twelve. The café at the put-in is worth the stop by itself. **208-788-5005 · whiteotter.com**

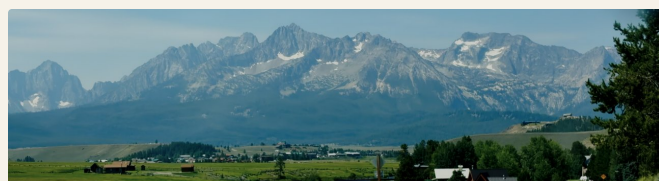
Thirteen miles further up in Stanley, **Sawtooth Adventure Company** runs the fuller menu — a family Class III trip from age four, a small-boat Class IV run, and a no-rapids scenic float past natural hot springs. **The River Company** works the same stretch.

TIMING IT

June is high water — faster, colder, biggest features, and when the Class IV runs earn their money. **July and August mellow** into splashy, sunny, family-friendly Class III. Summer weekends fill; book a few days ahead.



THE RIVER ROAD THROUGH THE CANYON



THE SAWTOOTHS FROM HIGHWAY 75

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

~95 mi / ~2 hr each way to Sunbeam.

THE RUN

12 mi of Class II–III · about 3 hours · half-day.

LAUNCHES

9:30 am and 2:00 pm daily, June–August (White Otter).

COST

~\$100 adult · ~\$85 child 4–12. Confirm at booking.

CLOSEST OUTFITTER

White Otter Adventures, at the Sunbeam put-in — no shuttle bus.

ALSO IN STANLEY

Sawtooth Adventure Company · The River Company

SEASON

Memorial Day–Labor Day. June is big water; July–August is the family window.

FROM THE FIELD

Book the 9:30 launch, not the 2:00. You get the canyon before the wind comes up, you are dry and warm by early afternoon, and the whole back half of the day is free for Sunbeam and the Yankee Fork.



Two hot pools on a bench above the Salmon River, developed by the Hammond family, who homesteaded this ground in the late 1800s and ran it as a private resort for well over a century. **In May 2023 they sold it to the State of Idaho**, and it is now part of Land of the Yankee Fork State Park — still open to the public, still open for day use, now with a state parks fee structure attached.

The big pool is a hundred feet by thirty, held around **96 degrees in summer** and a few degrees warmer in winter. The small pool is twenty-five by eighteen and sits near **105**. That pairing is the point: you can actually swim in one and actually soak in the other, which is more than most developed springs manage.

WHY IT IS IN THIS GUIDE

We put this one in because it is the counterweight to Sunbeam. Sunbeam is free, wild, roadside, and washes away every spring. Challis is a hundred and thirty years of continuous soaking with flush toilets, a lawn, and somewhere to put the camper. There are nights when you want the first one and nights when you want the second, and knowing both exist within an hour of Mackay is the actual local knowledge.

STAYING

The **54-space campground** runs tent and RV sites with water and electric hookups, flush toilets, showers, a dump station and fire rings. No sewer hookups. It is pet-friendly. Reserve through **getoutside.idaho.gov** — the 2026 season opened on 17 March.

AT A GLANCE

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

54 mi / ~1 hr 5 min north on US-93 to Challis, then southeast on Hot Springs Road.

ADDRESS

5025 Hot Springs Road, Challis, ID 83226

POOLS

Large 100 × 30 ft at ~96°F summer · small 25 × 18 ft at ~105°F

DAY USE

\$10 swim per person (under 5 free) + \$7 vehicle entry, waived with a State Parks Passport

HOURS

Tue–Sun 8:30 am–8:30 pm · Mon 8:30 am–4:30 pm

CAMPING

54 sites · water and electric, no sewer · getoutside.idaho.gov

NOTE

Ownership changed in 2023. Confirm fees and hours — 208-833-4442.

FROM THE FIELD

Pair it with the state park's interpretive centre in Challis (24424 Highway 75, Wed–Sun 8:30–4:30) before you soak. Yankee Fork mining history, and it is the same park system, so you are already in the door.



THE BENCH ABOVE THE SALMON RIVER FROM THE AIR



THE BIG POOL — 100 FT BY 30, HELD AROUND 96°F



A county-maintained dirt road running west off US-93 south of Challis, through high-desert canyon country in the old Bay Horse mining district, out to the East Fork of the Salmon River — which in turn drops you onto Highway 75 above Clayton. It is the kind of road that appears on nobody's itinerary and should.

Once you are past the rocky first stretch near the highway it grades out well, and in dry conditions an ordinary car handles it. The country opens into eroded volcanic canyon — rust, ochre, grey, the geology doing all the work — and you can drive an hour without meeting another vehicle. Wild horses are not a maybe out here — the BLM's Challis Herd Management Area covers this ground, and a band will stand in the road and look at you until it decides otherwise.

ONE SERIOUS CAUTION

In **August 2021** a storm on drought-hardened soil tore this road apart. Washouts up to thirty feet deep, roughly **\$800,000 in damage**, sections still closed months later. It is **not maintained in winter**, and flash flooding is a live risk in summer — this ground sheds water rather than absorbing it. Call before you commit, and turn around rather than test it.

DOING IT RIGHT

Run it west to east in the late afternoon and the low sun rakes the canyon walls the whole way. Carry more water and fuel than the distance suggests, and tell somebody where you are going.

AT A GLANCE

WHERE

US-93 south of Challis, west to East Fork Salmon River Road.

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

~50 mi north on US-93 to the turnoff.

SURFACE / VEHICLE

Graded dirt, rockier at the highway end. Passenger cars in the dry; nothing low-slung after rain.

SEASON

Spring to fall. Unmaintained in winter. Flash-flood country.

CHECK FIRST

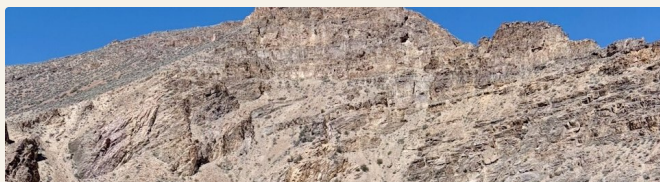
BLM Challis 208-756-5499 or Custer County Road & Bridge.

CELL SERVICE

None. Download maps in Challis.

FROM THE FIELD

This is the road that justifies offline maps. Download the BLM Challis travel map as a GeoPDF — not a screenshot — and open it in Avenza. You lose signal within ten minutes of leaving the highway, and every side road looks identical from a moving vehicle.



ERODED VOLCANIC CLIFF ON THE RUN TO THE EAST FORK



WILD HORSES ON THE ROAD — CHALLIS HERD MANAGEMENT AREA

10

Morgan Creek Road

SALMON-CHALLIS NF • 7 MILES NORTH OF CHALLIS

THE BIGHORN DRIVE



Forest Road 055 leaves US-93 about seven miles north of Challis and climbs west, then north, over Morgan Creek Summit — eventually connecting through to Panther Creek on a route locals call the Morgan–Panther. Gravel the whole way, wilderness trailheads at the far end, and the single best place in this guide to see **bighorn sheep** from a vehicle.

THE SHEEP

The BLM lists bighorn, pronghorn and mule deer for this drainage, and the bighorn are why you come. They work the rock *above* the road, which means you glass upward, not out — scan the broken cliff bands and the scree, not the creek bottom. First and last light are when they move.

Keep the engine off and stay in or beside the vehicle. A car is a far better hide than a person, and they will tolerate one at a distance they would never tolerate on foot.

CAMPING

Four miles up, the BLM's **Morgan Creek Recreation Site** has **four primitive sites and no fee at all** — vault toilet, drinking water, tables, fire rings, a short nature trail, fourteen-day limit. First-come, and rarely full. Further up, **West Fork Morgan Creek** is a single free site at the wilderness trailheads. For a camera trip this is the best-value basecamp in the county.

AT A GLANCE

WHERE

FR 055 off US-93, ~7 mi north of Challis.

DRIVE FROM MACKAY

~60 mi / ~1 hr 15 min.

SURFACE

Gravel forest road. Passenger cars in the dry.

CAMPING

BLM Morgan Creek Rec Site • 4 sites • **free** • vault toilet, drinking water • 14 days

ALSO

West Fork Morgan Creek — 1 free site, vault toilet, no water.

WILDLIFE

Bighorn sheep, pronghorn, mule deer.

BEST LIGHT

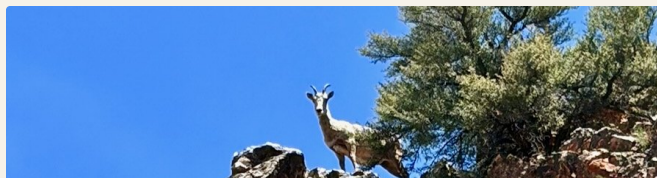
First and last hour. Glass the rock above the road.

FROM THE FIELD

Drive slowly with the windows down and stop the moment you see movement on the rock — do not get out. The sheep read a stopped vehicle as scenery and a person on foot as a predator. Every good frame we have from this road was shot from a seat.



THE DRAINAGE FROM THE AIR — ROAD, CREEK BOTTOM, ERODED SLOPES



BIGHORN ON THE ROCK ABOVE THE ROAD

11

The Yankee Fork Gold Dredge

FOREST ROAD 013 • 8½ MILES ABOVE SUNBEAM

FILMING THIS SEASON



Turn off Idaho 75 at the Sunbeam Dam overlook, follow the Yankee Fork upstream, and eight and a half miles of gravel later you come around a bend and find a **988-ton machine** sitting in the creek bottom where somebody left it in 1953.

It is a hundred and twelve feet long, fifty-four wide, four stories tall. **Bucyrus-Erie** built it in three months in the summer of 1940 for \$309,968, shipped it out from South Milwaukee, and assembled it here. Seventy-one steel buckets ran on a chain around the bow, **eight cubic feet and just over a ton apiece**, biting into the gravel and lifting it up into the machine to be washed. Three men ran it per shift. Three shifts a day, around the clock.

WHAT IT DID TO THE VALLEY

It worked from 1940 to 1942, stopped for the war, and ran again from 1946 to 1953. In that time it chewed through roughly **six million cubic yards of gravel** and recovered a little over **a million dollars in gold** — the interpretive marker on site rounds up to \$1.2 million. Every two weeks the crew cleaned out fifteen hundred to two thousand ounces.

You will have driven past the rest of the story before you ever see the dredge. The long grey windrows of washed cobble beside the road are **tailings** — about six miles of creek turned inside out and stacked in ridges. For decades that was the end of it. Since around 2011 a coalition including **Trout Unlimited, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Forest Service** has been pulling tailings back off the floodplain and rebuilding a meandering channel with pools and large wood in it, for the chinook and steelhead that still come this far up. Some stretches are green again. It is worth knowing which is which as you drive.

AT A GLANCE

GETTING THERE

~96 mi / ~2 hr from Mackay to the Sunbeam turnoff, then 8½ mi up FR 013.

ROAD

Well-maintained gravel. Passenger cars are fine in the dry.

SEASON

The Saturday before Memorial Day through Labor Day.

HOURS

Daily, 10:00 am – 4:30 pm.

ADMISSION

\$5 adults • \$1 children 6–12 • group rates available

FORMAT

Self-guided, with volunteer docents on hand. Take as long as you like.

FACILITIES

Small gift shop. **Assume no potable water** — nearest vault toilets are at Custer.

CALL AHEAD

208-879-5244 in season • 208-890-3348 off season

FROM THE FIELD

It is run entirely by volunteers, and the docents are often people who knew men who worked it. Ask one of them what the winch room was like on a night shift. That is the part you cannot get off a sign.



THE BUCKET LINE: SEVENTY-ONE BUCKETS, EIGHT CUBIC FEET APIECE



THE BULL GEAR ON THE MACHINERY DECK

12

Custer

FOREST ROAD 013 · NINE MILES ABOVE SUNBEAM

FILMING THIS SEASON



Two miles above the dredge, at the end of the good gravel, is a town that had six hundred people in it and now has none. **Custer** is the best-preserved ghost town in this part of Idaho and one of the few you can walk through for free, any hour of any day.

It started with the **General Custer Mine**, struck in **August 1876** and named for a general who had died that same summer. **Bonanza City** came first, in 1877; Custer followed in 1879. Fires took Bonanza in **1889 and again in 1897**, the business drifted downvalley, and Custer peaked at about **six hundred residents in 1896**. Then the ore ran out — the mill closed in **1904**, and by 1910 there were a dozen families left. On the National Register since 1981.

WHAT IS STILL STANDING

The walking tour starts at the **schoolhouse**, now the museum. The **Custer Empire Saloon**, restored in 1998, runs as the gift shop in summer. Beyond those: the McKenzie and Pfeiffer houses, the Tully, Raines and Brockman cabins, the Assay Office, the Transportation Building, the ice house, and a stone cabin down to its walls.

BONANZA, AND A GRAVE SOMEBODY KEPT

You pass **Bonanza** at mile seven on the way up — little survives but foundations and a 1934 CCC guard station. A mile west of the townsite is the Bonanza cemetery, and separately, **Boot Hill**, with three marked graves. **Agnes "Lizzie" King** was widowed in 1879, remarried on 11 August 1880, and was shot dead with her new husband six days later. Nobody was ever charged. Charles Franklin — the man who founded Bonanza, and who was said to have loved her without ever saying so — bought the plots beside them and lived out his life alone up the valley. For years afterward the graves were found tended, by hands nobody could name.

AT A GLANCE

GETTING THERE

9 mi up FR 013 from the Sunbeam Dam overlook; 2 mi above the dredge.

ROAD

Gravel, passenger-car friendly. Rough *beyond* Custer — that's the Custer Motorway.

ADMISSION

Free. The site itself is open 24 hours.

BUILDINGS

Staffed Memorial Day–Labor Day. Locked otherwise; the grounds stay walkable.

HOURS

Not published. **Call before you count on getting inside** — 208-756-5100.

FACILITIES

Vault toilets and picnicking. **No potable water.**

TIME NEEDED

One to two hours to walk it properly.

WORTH TIMING

Custer Days — the second Saturday in July, with tours and reenactments.

FROM THE FIELD

Do the dredge and Custer as one run and start at the dredge, uphill, in the morning. The light gets better as you climb and the buildings at Custer face the afternoon sun. Fill the tank and fill your water bottles in Stanley — there is nothing up this road.



INSIDE THE MUSEUM — STOVES, CROCKERY, THE ORDINARY THINGS



CHINKED LOG AND A PLANK PORCH ON THE TOWNSITE

Eight things to prepare before you go.

01 • CELL SERVICE

Assume none. Trail Creek Road, the North Fork, Copper Basin, Spar Canyon and Morgan Creek all have zero coverage, and Mackay itself is patchy. Download offline maps in town, tell somebody your route and your return time, and carry a satellite messenger if you are going in alone.

03 • FUEL AND WATER

Sammy's Mini Mart in Mackay is the last reliable fuel before Trail Creek Road, and there is nothing at all between Mackay and Ketchum. Most campgrounds here have no potable water. Carry more than you think, in both tanks.

05 • FIRE RESTRICTIONS

These change fast in late summer and they are not optional. Stage 1 bans campfires outside developed sites; Stage 2 bans them entirely and closes off-road motorized travel. Check the Idaho Department of Lands Fire Restrictions Finder the morning you leave.

07 • ALTITUDE

Mackay is at 5,900 feet and half this guide sits well above that. Give yourself a day before anything strenuous, and know that thunderstorms build over these peaks most summer afternoons — be off the high ground by early afternoon.

02 • THE MVUM

On Salmon-Challis National Forest land, **a route not shown on the Motor Vehicle Use Map is not open to you.** The maps are free georeferenced PDFs and work offline in Avenza. Download the Lost River district sheet before you leave pavement.

04 • DISPERSED CAMPING

You may camp free on most Salmon-Challis ground, **within 300 feet of an open road, for up to 14 days.** Campfire wood is free and needs no permit. Pack out everything, use existing fire rings, and drown the fire cold before you sleep.

06 • SEASONAL ROADS

Trail Creek Road opens somewhere between mid-May and mid-June and closes around mid-November — the dates are set annually by snow, not by calendar. Spar Canyon is unmaintained in winter. Call before you route a trip over either.

08 • WILDLIFE DISTANCE

Moose are the ones that hurt people here, and they do not act like elk. Give everything room and use the long lens. If an animal changes what it is doing because of you, you are already too close.

NUMBERS WORTH SAVING

Lost River Ranger District — Mackay (trail and road conditions)	208-588-3400
Salmon-Challis National Forest — Salmon Public Lands Center	208-756-5100
BLM Challis Field Office — Mine Hill maps, Spar Canyon, travel maps	208-756-5499
BLM recreation — Mackay Reservoir & Joe T. Fallini campground	208-879-6200
Challis Hot Springs — Land of the Yankee Fork State Park	208-833-4442
White Otter Adventures — rafting, Sunbeam put-in	208-788-5005
Black Tie of Sun Valley — bike delivery, Ketchum	866-360-6433
Idaho road conditions	511 • 511.idaho.gov

ONE MORE THING

We are building something out here.

Seven acres of vacant ground north of Mackay, a hand-built log cabin, and a slow education in what it takes to make a place out of a piece of dirt. That is the show. This guide is the part of it you can actually use.

If you came here from an episode: thank you for watching. If you came here from somebody who watched it: start at Episode One. And if this guide gets you as far as Willow Creek Summit with the range opening up in front of you, it did its job.

Get the updates as we shoot them.

New spots, conditions reports from the valley, and first word when the cabin opens to guests. One email, roughly monthly, no filler. We will also send you the updated guide each season as the list grows.

borahvista.com/guide

WHEN TO COME

May

Reservoir, Mine Hill, the museum opens. Trail Creek still closed.

June

Trail Creek opens. Big water on the Salmon. Borah still snowy.

July

Everything open. Baldy lift-served biking starts. Rodeo weekend.

Aug

Best Borah window. Warm springs, low rivers, flash-flood risk.

Sept

The sweet spot. Empty campgrounds, cold nights, gold aspen.

Oct+

Hot springs season. Roads start closing. Check before you drive.

FIVE MORE, IF YOU HAVE THE DAYS

Earthquake Interpretive Site — the 1983 fault scarp, 22 mi north of Mackay then 2.5 mi up Doublespring Pass Road. Free, twenty minutes, and it explains the whole valley.

Galena Summit Overlook — south of Stanley on ID-75. The Sawtooths across the whole windshield and the headwaters of the Salmon River below you.

Pass Creek Narrows — off US-93 south of Borah. Seven scattered campsites in a limestone gorge, vault toilet, no water.

Craters of the Moon — an hour south. Lava fields, a dark-sky park, and the reason the Apollo crews trained in Idaho.

Copper Basin — off Trail Creek Road. Wide-open sage basin under the Pioneers, pronghorn, and the Copper Basin Guard Station if you can book it.

Coming next. We are putting together small guided wildlife-video trips out of this valley — one party at a time, cameras in hand, the same country you just read about. Reply to any email and we will tell you when it opens.

Borah Vista · Mackay, Custer County, Idaho · borahvista.com · [@borahvista](https://twitter.com/borahvista)

Distances, fees, hours and seasons were verified at the time of writing and change without notice — confirm with the operator or the managing agency before you travel. Road and trail conditions in this country change week to week. Everything in this guide is a recommendation, not a guarantee of safety; you are responsible for your own judgement, gear and margin.

