



Reporter-Herald/GABRIEL CHRISTUS

Parker resident A.J. Valdez, 10, helps his mother, Denay, also of Parker, with tent poles while little brother Austin, 6, brings another pole around to his father, Alan, on Friday at Carter Lake. The Valdezes are camping at their lakeside camping spot for the Memorial Day weekend with a group of friends and family.

Guide to the great outdoors

Not all campgrounds are created equal; plan your trip around desired activities

Darlene and Ron Bosak moved to Loveland four years ago and began exploring the plethora of campgrounds just a short driving distance from the city.

"It's just wonderful, and it's not that far either," Darlene said. "Just relaxing and getting away from your cell phones and the hustle and bustle of everyday life, you feel like you're connecting with nature."

Within a two-hour drive of Loveland are more than a thousand campsites — some by lakes and rivers, some by hiking trails, and some near both.

Some are more secluded than others. But all are out there, waiting for families and groups of friends to get away into the wild — oh, so close to home.

CARTER, HORSETOOTH, HERMIT AND MORE

A week before the Memorial Day holiday, all campsites at Larimer County parks were booked solid.

"Pretty much from Memorial Day through Labor Day, on the weekend, you need to have a reservation," said Shannon Barnes, reservation coordinator for Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, which includes Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir.

While those are the largest of the county's lakes, campsites and fishing also are available at Flatiron and Pinewood reservoirs.

And there's Hermit Park, just out-

side Estes Park, with two trails and easy driving access to Rocky Mountain National Park.

In all, Larimer County has 365 campsites, including the cabins at Hermit Park, Horsetooth and Flatiron reservoirs.

The basic camping fee is \$15 per night for a nonelectric site and \$20 for a site with electrical hookups.

Prices are more for cabins but vary depending on the size, date and location.

Reservations, recommended on weekends, add an \$8.25 fee to the price and can be made at

www.larimercamping.com
or by calling 800-397-7795

Healthy camping

Camping allows residents to get away for the weekend.

But health officials warn not to take a vacation from safety.

Prevent health hazards, such as West Nile virus and the swine flu, by packing insect repellent and sanitizer, said Jane Viste, spokeswoman for the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment. And make sure to use both, repeatedly.

Viste also reminds residents to apply, and reapply, sunscreen while outdoors.

Story by Pamela Dickman • Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

VARIETY Fossil Creek a Bird Watcher's Paradise

By Deborah Huth Price
BERTHOUD RECORDER

On a drizzly day, I drove to Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space between Loveland and Fort Collins. The weather was not great for hiking or gardening, but a short walk to view birds worked out just fine.

This 843-acre site provides a haven for a large variety of bird species and other wildlife. Managed by Larimer County Natural Resources, the open space was created through a partnership with the City of Fort Collins. Last winter, I was able to view bald eagles roosting in the trees across the reservoir. On this spring day, cormorants decorated the tree tops.

Carl Sorrentino, volunteer naturalist with Larimer County Natural Resources, led a group of us on a walk, with the goal of seeing an osprey nest along the Cattail Flats loop trail.

We were met head-on at the beginning of the walk with swallows dive-bombing from above, apparently snacking on the swarms of midge flies buzzing around our heads. A kingbird flew nearby and Sorrentino shared his excitement about a Northern Harrier that had been in the area recently. Thing being his 57th trip to Fossil Creek, Sorrentino said he "always sees something a little different."

The site has a number of covered picnic areas to entice visitors to spend time, plus three bird viewing stations. A covered viewing station on the Cattail Flats loop was a welcome stop in the drizzle, and gave us an opportunity to watch floating and flying residents. Sorrentino quickly spotted a yellow-headed blackbird along the bank. Grebes, pelicans, cormorants and ducks went about searching for dinner.

This trail is closed from Nov. 15 to March 1 for bald eagle roosting. The stately birds can be viewed with

rently roosted in the trees, at other times great blue herons also nest here. The open space is also a nesting site for red tailed hawks and great horned owls.

The highlight of the walk came as we rounded the trail towards the osprey nesting platform erected on a pole five stories high. To our delight, a pair of osprey sat on the nest — the female (we presumed) in the center and the male on the edge. Sorrentino explained that this was the third year the birds had come to the nest, but so far were just "playing sticks," or bringing sticks to the nest in hopes of learning to be a family. He hoped this might be the year to finally see some chicks.

While not native to this area, the osprey now finds plenty of water sources to satisfy its appetite. The large raptor primarily eats live fish, capturing them from the water with its sharp talons that lock onto the fish to keep it from slipping away.

Boating, swimming, fishing, biking and

Outdoors Near Your Back Door

dogs are not allowed at Fossil Creek to protect the many nesting birds and wildlife. A quiet walk, however, will provide the opportunity to view a little magic of the circle of life. Who knows — you might even see osprey chicks.

Deborah Huth Price is education coordinator at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area near Masonville, and also education coordinator at Discovery Science Center in Fort Collins.

Getting There

To reach Fossil Creek Regional Open Space, go north on 287 to Carpenter Road (first light after 71st Street). Go east four miles and



Carl Sorrentino, volunteer with Larimer County Natural Resources, shows visitors the skull of a Great Blue Heron. Right, a yellow-headed blackbird rests on a treetop at Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space. Bald eagles roost in these trees at Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space. Great blue herons and cormorants reside here at other times.

Photos by Deborah Huth Price



Deer photo takes inaugural contest

COLORADOAN 4-5-2009

BY MILES BLUMHARDT

milesblumhardt@coloradoan.com

The first monthly Xplore Photo Contest drew 64 images and nearly 400 votes with Meg Maciejewski's image of a mule deer buck the winning image.

Her image of the deer at Coyote Ridge Natural Area during a hike received 51 votes. Steve Barge's sunset shot through the Keyhole at Devil's Backbone Open Space was second with 41 votes. Tom France's image of a mountain bluebird at Lory State Park was third with 33 votes.

Photographers had to shoot their images March 1-21. Viewers then were given a week to vote for their favorite images.

Winning image

> **When:** 9:30 a.m. March 4

> **Where:** During a hike at Coyote Ridge Natural Area
> **Camera:** Canon PowerShot SD300 Digital Elph.

> **About the shot:** "A group of my friends from the Youth Orchestra of the Rockies board of directors often hike together in order to get exercise and let off steam. Coyote Ridge is one of our favorite hikes due to the beauty found so close to our homes.

For the past month or two, we've seen a group of deer there but never have the deer been close enough or cooperative enough to allow us to take their pictures. That day, however, I was by myself with my camera handy. Near the top of the trail approximately 20 feet away, I



Courtesy of Steve Barge

Steve Barge's image of sunset through the Keyhole at Devil's Backbone Open Space was runner-up in the Xplore March Photo Contest.

Xplore Photo Contest

Here's how the monthly contest works:

- > Photographers can visit www.coloradoan.com/XplorePhotoContest and submit their best images. For this month, images must be received April 1-21.
- > The images must be shot in that month this year and in Larimer County.
- > Images can include any nature shots, including wildlife, wildflowers, outdoor sports action, weather and scenics.
- > Online viewers then can vote for their top image of the month. In April, voting will take place April 22-29.
- > Each month's contest winner will receive a copy of "This is Colorado," the pictorial travel book produced by Coloradoan staff.
- > The top images will appear in an upcoming issue of the Xplore section.

encountered the whole herd of deer — approximately 14 of them. They weren't bothered by me, and in fact seemed curious

as to who I was and what I was doing. This allowed me to feel like I was joining them for their breakfast.

Bill Schuitze

Colorado

Open spaces

5-16-2009

Can't vacation? Hit Horsetooth

Like a lot of people I know, I'm afraid to even look at my 401(k), let alone think about planning my next vacation.

With the economy in a slump, you need a break from your everyday woes. But who can afford to drive across the country looking for that light in today's economic darkness. Well, look no farther than your own back yard. A well-known gem in the Larimer County Parks system, Horsetooth Reservoir is awaiting your arrival. If you live in Fort Collins, the park is just west of your back door, and not much farther for the surrounding Front Range communities.

For a quiet spring getaway, picture this: A cozy little cabin looking out over a tree-lined meadow, with the quiet waters of the reservoir looking back at you. You are sitting by a warm campfire in front of your cabin as twilight settles over the land. In the distance, you hear the faint cry of a lonely coyote, when suddenly a small herd of deer trot out from the tree line to nibble on the new foliage that was covered by water last summer.

How peaceful is that? Now is the time to get a brief respite from the constant barrage of bad news that is constantly on the television and radio.

Want a little more excitement and some good exercise?

Then head over to Horsetooth Mountain Open Space on the west side of the reservoir for some hiking and beautiful scenic views. Horsetooth Mountain Open Space has about 2,500 acres of mountainous terrain with 29 miles of trails to wander.

This land was purchased by the county from the Soderberg family in 1982 through a county-wide sales tax. Since then, it's been a popular site for hikers. The Horsetooth Rock Trail, one of the favorites, will take you through grass-covered slopes and past stands of many native trees, including mountain mahogany, chokecherry, American plum, squaw currant, juniper, ponderosa pine and Douglas fir.

With other options available thanks to citizen tax dollars that include Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Pinewood Reservoir and the newly developed Hermit Park, there are many excellent places close by to visit for camping. There are ample miles of trails on Homestead trails as well as at the Devil's Backbone Open Space. And the newest open space — Red Mountain — will premier in early June.

Remember to dress appropriately for the weather this time of year and be prepared for weather changes. Bring plenty of water. The nominal fee is well worth the peace and beauty of this experience.

If you wish to reserve a campsite, visit www.larimercamping.com or call (800)397-7795.

Bill Schuitze is a ranger with Larimer County Natural Resources.