Commissioner to lead hike at open space

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coloradoan.com

Residents are invited to join Larimer County Commissioner Tom Donnelly and Open Lands Program Manager Kerri Rollins for a hike at Devil's Backbone Open Space at 9 a.m. Friday. The open space is west of Loveland off U.S. Highway 34.

The hike is an informal opportunity to visit with an elected official have a chance to ask questions about county government.

The hike is rated easy; the program will last about two hours. Participants should bring water and dress appropriately for the weather.

The program is free, but registration is required through www.larimer.org/NRregistration. Information: (970) 679-4489.

News Release

Smoke Expected Near Hermit Park - Do Not Call 911

Department: Natural Resources
Release Date: Apr 15, 2013

Comments »

Contact Information:
Jeffrey Boring, Resource Specialist, (970) 679-4569

Another spring storm is bringing needed moisture to the Front Range and an opportunity to burn more slash near Estes Park. Larimer County staff will burn slash piles at Hermit Park Open Space, southeast of Estes Park, throughout the week. Pile burning began Monday morning and will continue as long as conditions allow.

Burning piles is part of an on-going wildfire mitigation/forest health project on Larimer County parks and open space properties, involving mechanical thinning, hand piling tree limbs and pile burning. Over 200 piles at Hermit Park Open Space were targeted for burning this winter. Snowfall in the Estes Park area throughout the winter was scarce and zero piles were burned in December and January. In the past week however, over 70 piles have been burned. "These spring snow events are great" said Jeffrey Boring, Resource Specialist with Larimer County's Natural Resource Department. "We have more seasonal staff to assist with pile burning now and we are making a lot of progress burning piles". Boring hopes the snow will continue and dozens of piles can be burned over the next few days.

Burning slash piles is part of an on-going forest management effort to:

1. Reduce fuel loading to decrease the likelihood of catastrophic fires
2. Remove trees damaged by insects and disease
3. Restore forested areas to a healthier condition, improving wildlife habitat

To meet safety and regulatory requirements piles are burned after snow storms, when at least three inches of snow is on the ground. **Please do not call 911 or local law enforcement, as they are already aware of these burns.**

To learn more about Larimer County's parks and open spaces,
visit our website at www.larimer.org/naturalresources
Find us on Facebook - Follow us on Twitter

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Discuss

We ask for your login to prevent computer generated spam in the comments. Your email address is not shown. Do not expect answers from the county for questions posed here. Use the contact information above for specific questions.

You must be logged in to leave a comment. Login with:

Larimer County Username **Not a Current User? Sign-Up**

Mountain bikers gain free access to Horsetooth Mountain Open Space

Written by David Young
Apr. 23

coloradoan.com

Mountain bikers who want to ride into Horsetooth Mountain Open Space can do it now without the weight of their wallets.

As of December, Larimer County has done away with the $7 fee for cyclists and hikers riding or walking into the open space.

Dan Rieves, visitor services manager for Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources, said the fee was too cumbersome to enforce and inconvenient for visitors.

"We want to encourage people hiking and biking in from town or nearby, absolutely, to come on in," he said. "We are very sensitive that we don't create a problem for neighbors with people parking on their property."

People driving up near the park and parking on the road and then biking in was the reason that the county put the fee in place to begin with. Rieves stressed that individuals who do that will still be cited.

The overall goal is to reduce the number of vehicles clogging trailheads this summer, said Rieves who noted it "didn't feel right" to charge people who rode all the way from town.

Vehicles entering Horsetooth are still required to pay $7 for a daily pass.

Area open space offers many places for residents to explore

By Jessica Benes Reporter-Herald Staff Writer Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

What to do this spring and summer in the great outdoors in Larimer County? Staff members with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources have a few ideas. Open lands program manager Kerri Rollins said the Wednesday morning staff meeting was lively with ideas to share.

1: Hermit Park Open Space

Citizens can camp with their horses, hike or have a wedding. "This is a clear favorite because it feels like a getaway yet it's close to home," Rollins said. The summer weather is a good 10 degrees cooler at the open space, and the area feels like you're getting away. Campgrounds were renovated this year to allow for equine camping. Corrals and campsites are available to visitors with access to the Homestead Meadows and Lions Gulch trail systems.

Kruger Rock is a great hike to do with the children from the open space. "It's a short hike, challenging and great to climb," Rollins said. "And at the top you get to see the whole Estes Valley. It's perfect for kids."

2. Horsetooth Reservoir and Horsetooth Mountain Open Space

If you're looking for a place to go fishing and roast marshmallows, then Horsetooth Reservoir is a favorite. The open space is 29 miles of hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails that connect to the Blue Sky Trail and Lory State Park trails. The beach at Horsetooth Reservoir was added to with more sand and a beach volleyball court.

"It's a fun haven to go to," Rollins said. Horsetooth Rock is also a great climb, she said. The rock is a familiar landmark visible from the plains. Staff members are excited about the fully outfitted Airstream that will sit at the reservoir this summer. The Airstream provides a great camping atmosphere for families and all the comforts of home, including a flat-screen television set. Families can rent it for two nights at a time. Airstream trailers have distinct rounded aluminum bodies.

3. Bike the Poudre River Trail

The Poudre River Trail opened a couple of years ago and runs about 22 miles from River Bluffs Open Space to Island Grove in Greeley. "This might be something families want to put on their checklist this year," Rollins said. "It is a great family activity." The plan is to connect the bike trail over Interstate 25 east and north with an overpass by the end of 2015, Rollins said. The trail takes visitors by ponds, neighborhoods, lean-tos and rivers. One location to pick up the trail is east of the Ptarmigan Golf Course.

4. Tiny Trekkers program

The outdoors program for toddlers is a fun, regular program that gives young children the chance to get out in nature. The program will be held at Devil's Backbone through the summer. "This is the only one that is specific for very small children," Rollins said. "They don't need to be able to walk far or jump mountains in a single bound. Parents won't have to end up carrying them by the end of the hike." The program includes a small walk and program at an outdoor classroom.

5. Commisioner hike

Commissioner Tom Donnelly and Kerri Rollins will lead hikes once a month at Devil's Backbone starting Friday. "We started this so that Commissioner Donnelly could have a relaxed interface with citizens of the county," Rollins said. She thought it was a good way to get Donnelly involved in open lands and the citizens to have a chance to discuss issues with him outside of an office. "We did it last year and had small but lively group discussions," Rollins said.

For details about these and other programs through the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, visit

Larimer County staff offers camping clinic

Reporter-Herald Staff Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

People new to camping can get helpful tips before the summer begins.

The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources will host an open house Camping Clinic at 11 a.m. Saturday, May 18, at Jax Outdoor Gear, 1200 N. College Ave., Fort Collins.

Topics include an introduction to camping skills, camping gear, what to do around wildlife and how to avoid camping catastrophes.

The program will last about two hours and is appropriate for the whole family.

For details, call Heather, 679-4489.

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Print Page

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Explore Eagle's Nest

This peaceful getaway 40 minutes to the southwest got its name when cowboys noticed eagles nesting on a rock wedge more than a hundred years ago.

By Roger Ludwig
Special to the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

There are landscapes that create memories, spark conversation and connection, that stir re-flection. Meeting places of water and rock often make for the meeting of kindred spirits. And they can be just plain fun.

One of these is Eagle's Nest Open Space, just a 40-minute drive to the southwest.

More than one hundred years ago, cowboys no-ticed eagles - big, golden eagles, avian royalty with six- to seven-foot wingspans. The eagles nested on top of a tall rock wedge, blade to the sky. They called the rock "Eagle's Nest." Eagles still nest there today.

Here, the North Fork of the Poudre River makes its run out of the grassy foothills. Surprised by the bulk of Eagle's Nest blocking its path, it makes an unlikely 90 degree turn into a wild jumble of rough country

The rock itself rises majestically, gray granite washed with lemon-lime lichen. It pronounces the end to the upheaval, a confusion of granite hills, knobs and mountains, mantled in brown mountain mahogany, that extend to the west. Inaccessible to ground-bound predators the rock is a safe aerie with a rich larder.

A picnic below the Eagle's Nest on a warm spring day, tucked into the shade of the cottonwoods, is, well, about as good as it gets.

TRAILS

Eagle's Nest Open Space at Livermore, Colo., is one of Larimer County's fine parks. A good access road leads to the trailhead, free maps, a sign board and toilets.

From the parking area, a loop trail begins, connecting to a second loop trail - a layout that resembles clip-on sunglasses. Where the "glasses" have a bridge, there's a bridge. The trails have been freshly made for fun, to guide you up, down and around, giving views of all the wonders: prairies, overlooks, the rock - of course - and even small eroded badland gullies.

The first loop and bridge, leading to the river and trees, is 3.4 miles round trip. The second loop with more views adds another 1.8 miles for the adventurous or for those kids with too much energy. The

amount of up and down on these trails may make them seem a bit longer than they are.

APRÈS HIKE

For many, the best part of a little adventure is the meal afterward. Is it the newly awakened taste buds? Or guilt-free dining, replenishing those freshly burned calories?

That meal couldn't be closer. Near the entrance is The Forks, a deli with fine toasted subs, hand-scooped ice cream, old-fashioned shakes and, upstairs, a full bar with Easy Street Wheat and 90 Shilling Ale on tap.

You can enjoy your reward from the second floor deck - or the bar - and look out at the grand rock and the just-explored ground. And these good folks would be happy to outfit your picnic, delicious food to carry and go.

Late snow enough to nearly fill Front Range reservoirs

By Tom Hacker Reporter-Herald Staff Writer Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted: 5/2/2013

ReporterHerald.com

Federal managers of the Colorado-Big Thompson water diversion project spent a long, dry winter worrying whether its North Front Range reservoirs would fill.

But after one of history's wettest, snowiest springs, those concerns have given way to the happier job of figuring out how to best manage inflows that no one could have imagined a month ago.

"I know that everyone is complaining about their trees and their tulips," U.S. Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman Kara Lamb said Thursday after yet another spring snow dump. "But this is the best thing that could happen for us."

Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir, the two largest Eastern Slope vessels of the C-BT system, likely will be close to brim-full soon after Memorial Day.

Carter Lake on Thursday was 94 percent full. The level is high enough that the bureau's water managers looked for lower spots to put all the water that's coursing through the system.

Shutting a spigot

"We will be turning the pump off at Carter tomorrow," Lamb said. "Everything that we were sending to Carter will start going into Horsetooth."

That means the inflow to Horsetooth, now at 200 cubic feet per second, will more than double to 500. The reservoir, now at about three-quarters of its capacity, will be more than 90 percent full by the end of May.

That good news stands as a paradox for Glenn Werth, owner of Horsetooth's Inlet Bay Marina.

"We got 16 inches of snow here yesterday," he said. "We've been shoveling docks instead of putting boats in. We can't quite figure out if we're coming or going."

The spring runoff has already begun even as the mountain snowpack builds, with Thursday yet another snow day at high elevations.

Big Thompson Rising

People who watch the Big Thompson River closely already know it has risen over the past two days, with the water agency more than doubling the release from Olympus Dam at Lake Estes.

The outflow from the dam went from 45 cubic feet per second to 100 on Wednesday before the agency pinched it back slightly on Thursday to 96.

Lamb uses easy metaphors to describe the roles Carter and Horsetooth play in the region's water supply picture, and the source for the water they provide.

"They are the checking accounts," she said.

But the critical measure for this year is the level of the "savings account" at Granby Reservoir on the Western Slope.

'How We Finish'

Granby is the linchpin of the C-BT system, connected via a trans-Continental Divide tunnel to the Eastern Slope reservoirs.

It also stood just one-third full on Thursday, awaiting the runoff from the west-slope snowpack that still remains a question mark.

But owners of the marinas at Horsetooth Reservoir and Carter Lake, two of the region's most popular summer recreation destinations, know that no matter what happens west of the divide, their seasons have been saved by the late snow.

"Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining," Werth said Thursday as he was immersed in snow-clearing chores. "It's not how we start the season. It's how we finish it."

Tom Hacker can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 521, or thacker@reporter-herald.com.

Naturalist to lead a hike Saturday at Devil's Backbone in search of spring wildflowers

By Jessica Benes Reporter-Herald Staff Writer Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

The weather has been wet these last few weeks and volunteer naturalist Cathy Cannon hopes that means wildflowers will "pop out" and be in abundance for a nature hike this weekend.

Cannon will lead a hike to look for spring flowers on Saturday at Devil's Backbone.

Hikers will go on a scavenger hunt of sorts for blooming wild buds and Cannon will share information about the flowers they see, and others that can be expected later in the year.

If You Go

What: Wildflowers of Devil's Backbone.

When: 9:30 a.m. Saturday.

Where: Devil's Backbone Open Space, west of Loveland off U.S. 34.

Cost: Free.

Info: Join a naturalist for a two-hour hike to explore for spring flowers. Free. Registration required at larimer.org/naturalresources/registration. Call 679-4489.

Last year at this time, the weather was so hot and dry that wildflowers had already bloomed and gone, or skipped the year, Cannon said.

Recurring snow falls kept the flowers at bay this year. "Last year they were ahead of schedule, this year they are behind schedule," she said.

She hopes to see squat Easter daisies, salt and pepper wildflowers and the small blunt petals of small flower alyssum flowers.

"There are some that should be there. They were getting ready to bloom before the last snowstorm. Hopefully they are still there," Cannon said.

Most wildflowers in the area start to bloom when the days get longer in late April or early May. Some of the flowers will last a couple of days and others will bloom for a couple of weeks, depending on the weather. Cannon said that the snow might have been a good insulator to hold in the moisture and preserve the flowers.

She said she enjoys looking for flowers, especially after a long winter. "It's nice to see color again," she said.

She believes it is important to be able to identify some animals and wildlife while out hiking because it adds to the experience, especially with young children who like to ask "What's this? What's that? What's this?"

"We just really have a lot of neat things here. People often don't take time to see what's going on down at ground level," Cannon said.

Cannon gets out doors two to four days a week. She plans to guide more plant hikes this summer, and a bird watching adventure if she can manage it. "For me, I just like plants and animals and feeling connected, breathing fresh air," she said.

Jessica Benes can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 530, or jbenes@reporter-herald.com. Follow her on Twitter: @JessicaBenes. Read her blog at jessicabenes.com.

Happy campers: Get ready for this year's camping season

Written by Stephen Meyers
May. 12

coloradoan.com

Happy campers: Get ready for this year's camping season

Hundreds of campsites exist within an hour drive of Fort Collins.

Tips for a happy camping trip

• Reserve your site ahead of time: Horsetooth Reservoir gets very busy around the Memorial Day, Father's Day and Labor Day weekends and you'll see a steady stream of tents and campers every weekend in the Poudre Canyon. Many campgrounds require at least a six-month lead time on reservations. Check before you go.
• Pick your camping friends wisely: Yes, you may get sick of your family members after a couple of days roughing it together, but at least you know what to expect from them. Think before inviting your friend who doesn't like hiking or sleeping on the ground. Make sure everyone in the party is on the same page of expectations for the trip.
• Dress appropriately for the season: Educate yourself on the high and low temperatures of the area you're camping. It may be warm on summer nights in Fort Collins, but the nights will be much cooler up in the mountains. Always bring rain gear. You can never bring enough clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
• Pitch your tent on a level surface: An ideal tent spot is on level ground, covered with leaves, pine straw or grass. Do a little site maintenance such as picking up small rocks and sticks that can damage your tent floor and make sleep uncomfortable. Keep your tent rain fly rolled up and nearby in case you need it in the middle of the night.
• Take a sleeping pad with you: A sleeping pad is a necessity especially if you're not used to sleeping on the ground. The full-length and thick pad will keep your hips from aching from the hard ground and will also help you stay warm.
• Obtain all permits and authorization as required: Make sure you check in, pay your fee and mark your site. Check ahead on any fire bans in the area.
Source: "Best Tent Camping Colorado Fifth Edition" by Fort Collins author Kim Lipker and Johnny Molloy
(Menasha Ridge Press $15.95)

It's already mid-May, which means camping season is just around the corner. With Memorial Day weekend the unofficial kickoff to the summer vacation and camping season, now is the time to start planning your weekend adventures in a tent, camper trailer or RV.

Or cabins, if you like, of which there are plenty at nearby campgrounds to rent.

Are the burn areas from last year's High Park and Hewlett Gulch fires scaring you away from camping in the Poudre Canyon? Well, the scarred ground and burnt trees shouldn't keep you from pitching a tent this summer.

None of the Canyon Lakes Ranger District's campgrounds burned during last summer's fires, said U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman Reghan Cloudman.

"Several of our trails and recreation areas were affected," Cloudman said. "But in the campgrounds, you're not going to be surrounded by dead trees."

Cloudman described the canyon as a mosaic of fresh, new green grass combined with brown burn areas that have not yet recovered. From some campgrounds, she said, you can't see any of the burn area, in but in others, such as Upper and Lower Narrows, you can see severe burn marks up the slope walls adjacent to the campground.

Cloudman said people have started reserving their camping sites for the summer. She expects two-thirds of the sites to be open by Memorial Day weekend.

She said the Canyon Lakes Ranger District has received "very few" calls in regards to the burn area and its effect on the canyon's campgrounds.

"What I would caution people is to be aware of the weather and road reports. Flash flooding and mud-slides are a very real concern," Cloudman said.

Here is other advise from Cloudman:

• Both loops at Ansel Watrous are now open, and Upper Narrows, Big Bend and Sleeping Elephant each opened this weekend. If you want to avoid the lower-canyon crowds, the latter three campgrounds are great options, Cloudman said.

• Reservations can be made for Mountain Park beginning May 23; the popular campground will be open for Memorial Day weekend.

• Dowdy Lake campground is temporarily closed from May 10-16 for pine beetle spraying. The campground will reopen at 8 a.m. May 17. Call (970) 295-6700 for more information.

Young Gulch Trail is still closed indefinitely due to fire restoration

Hewlett Gulch Trail is temporarily closed for approximately one week for heli-mulching in the burn area

• Call (970) 295-6700 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r2/arnf or follow Canyon Lakes Ranger District on Twitter @usfsclrd for up-to-date information on campground conditions

Several Poudre Canyon-area campgrounds are first-come, first-served and many more accept reservations up to 180 days in advance. Check out some of our favorite local camping spots in the Poudre Canyon and surrounding area.

Horsetooth Reservoir

• Why go: In 20 minutes, you can be on the western edge of Horsetooth Reservoir and not realize Fort Collins is just over the ridge to the east. There are great water-sports opportunities; you can rent kayaks, canoes, stand-up paddleboards, jet skis and party boats from the Inlet Bay Marina. If you have a boat, take advantage of the primitive, but private, boat-in only sites along the protected coves and quiet west shore. New this year is a 2009 model Airstream camper available for rent. The old-school style camper is fit with new-school technology such as a flat-screen TV.

• Where: West side of Horsetooth Reservoir and north of Inlet Bay at Dixon, Quarry, Orchard, South and North Eltuck and Soldier coves, as well as along the reservoir's west shore between Quarry and Orchard coves.

• Sites: 155 total, 124 standard tent/RV sites, 15 boat-in, seven cabins, four pavilion, four walk-in, one Airstream

• Things to do: Boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, wildlife watching.

• Elevation: 5,200 feet

• Amenities: Fire rings, picnic tables, water, electrical, closest restrooms are at Dixon and Orchard coves.

• Fee: $15 per night for nonelectric; $25 per night for electric; $20 for boat-in; $60 for cabins; $99 for Airstream trailer; plus $7 per vehicle.

• Reservations: Yes, call (800) 397-7795 or visit www.larimercamping.com. Reservations can be made up to 180 days in advance. There is an $8.75 additional fee to reserve a site..

• Information: (970) 679-4570 or visit www.larimer .org/naturalresources

Poudre Canyon

Ansel Watrous

• Why go: It's the closest campground up the Poudre Canyon and is often full, but if you make a reservation or happen to find an open spot, this campground will reward you with some sweet sites right on the river. The riverside spots are nice because the river drowns out the traffic noise of Colorado Highway 14 next to the campground.

• Where: 13 miles up the Poudre Canyon on Colorado 14 from U.S. Highway 287

• Sites: 19, three tent-only and 16 RV sites up to 30-foot.

• Things to do: Fishing, rafting/kayaking, hiking (Greyrock Trail is 4 miles away), mountain biking (Hewlett Gulch is 3 miles away), horseback riding, wildlife watching

• Elevation: 5,800 feet

• Amenities: Vault toilets, fire grates, picnic tables, drinking water and tent pad

• Fee: $19 per night.

• Reservations: Yes, call (877) 444-6777 or visit www.recreation.gov. There is an additional $9 fee to reserve a site through the

website or $10 via the call center.

• Information: (970) 295-6700 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r2/arnf

Jacks Gulch

• Why go: About 6 miles from the canyon and Poudre River, Jacks Gulch allows you to leave the canyon crowds behind, but you're still close enough to the river recreation. It's quiet and has many trails starting right from the campground that will take you along streams and through wildflower-colored meadows. You also have access to Beaver Park, taking you to the Comanche Peaks Wilderness. If you have a horse, there is no better campground in the area.

• Where: Go north on U.S. 287 for 10 miles to Colorado 14. Turn left and go west on Colorado 14 for 26 miles to the Pingree Park Road (Larimer County Road 63E). Go south just more than 6 miles to the campground on your right.

• Sites: 69, including 56 RV sites up to 50 feet, eight tent-only sites and five horse camping sites in one loop with small corrals

• Things to do: Horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking, wildlife watching, stream fishing, four-wheeling.

• Elevation: 8,100 feet

• Amenities: Vault toilets, fire grates, picnic tables and drinking water.

• Fee: $20 per night for non-electric sites; $25 for electric sites.

• Reservations: No

• Information: (970) 295-6700 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r2/arnf

Lower Narrows

• Why go: Fort Collins author Kim Lipker said the Lower Narrows, "right on a wild river, is the best tent camping in the canyon," in her book, "Best Tent Camping Colorado Fifth Edition." This tent-only campground is paradise along the Poudre River. Several sites (Nos. 11-14) get you right on the shore. The one negative is last year's fire caused severe damage just outside the campground.

• Where: 20 miles up the Poudre Canyon on Colorado 14 from U.S. 287.

• Sites: 8, all tent-only.

• Things to do: Fishing, hiking (but you have to drive to trailheads), rafting/kayaking, wildlife watching and four-wheeling.

• Elevation: 6,400 feet

• Amenities: Vault toilets, fire grates, covered picnic tables and drinking water.

• Fee: $19 per night

• Reservations: Yes, call (877) 444-6777 or visit www.recreation.gov. There is an additional $9 fee to reserve a site through the website or $10 via the call center.

• Information: (970) 295-6700 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r2/arnf

• Why go: This is perhaps your best bet for a family of first-time campers. You've got electrical sites, restrooms, water, a playground area and even a coin-operated shower. Just tell the kids to leave the iPads at home though, OK?

• Where: 23 miles up the Poudre Canyon on Colorado 14 from U.S. 287.

• Sites: 55

• Things to do: Fishing, rafting/kayaking, hiking, wildlife watching, horseshoes, basketball.

• Elevation: 6,500 feet

• Amenities: Vault toilets, fire grates, picnic tables, coin-operated shower house, drinking water, playground, horseshoe pits, basketball hoop

• Fee: $20 per night single nonelectric site; $25 per night single electric site; $40 double nonelectric site; $50 double electric site. (Single sites hold up to eight people.)

• Reservations: Yes, but sites 6, 17, 29, and 33-54 are always first-come, first-served. Call (877) 444-6777 or visit www.recreation.gov. There is an additional $9 fee to reserve a site through the website or $10 via the call center.

• Information: (970) 295-6700 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r2/arnf

Other options

Colorado State Forest State Park

• Why go: Most sites won't open until mid-to-late June, but if you're looking for campgrounds that are in less demand than those in the Poudre Canyon, this is your ticket.

Your playground is the 71,000 acres of forest and North Park — the vast expanse of meadowland in Jackson County — is known as the moose capital of Colorado. The Crags Campground area is choice, with close access to Lake Agnes. North Michigan Reservoir is your spot for fishing. You can also go the cabin route, or check out the Never Summer Nordic yurts.

• Where: 66 miles up the Poudre Canyon on Colorado 14 from U.S. 287 to Moose Visitor Center.

• Sites: Ranger Lakes has 32 electric sites. North Michigan has 48 non-lectirc sites (some tent-only) and six cabins. Bockman has 52 nonelectric sites. The Crags has 26 nonelectric sites (access to the Crags is steep, narrow and winding. Not recommended for trailers or motor homes). Seven yurts and two huts through Never Summer Nordic. Backcountry camping is allowed at various locations throughout the park including Ruby Jewel, Kelly, Clear and American lakes.

• Elevation: 7,990 to 10,200

• Amenities: Dump station at Ranger Lakes, vault toilets at all campgrounds. Water is available at maintenance station near entrance to North Michigan.

• Fee: $10 to $20 per night; $70 for small cabins; $100 for large cabins; plus $7 daily entrance pass. Never Summer Nordic yurts: $60 to $110 per night. Annual Colorado State Parks pass available for $70.

• Reservations: Yes, www.coloradostateparks.

reserveamerica.co and www.neversummernordic .com.

• Information: (970) 723-8366 or www.parks. state.co.us/Parks/State

Forest/Pages/StateForest

StateParkHome.aspx

Hermit Park

• Why go: This is a highly recommended campground just south of Estes Park, offering a bounty of recreational opportunities. There are hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking trails here in the hills dotted with wildflowers in the summer. Rocky Mountain National Park is a short drive away.

• Where: From U.S. Highway 34 in Estes Park, turn left on Mall Road (Larimer County Road 63) and go south for 0.6 miles. Turn left onto U.S. Highway 36 and go south for 2.1 miles to the entrance on your right.

• Sites: 75 nonelectric tent and RV sites, group camping area for up to 30 people and 15 camper cabins.

• Things to do: Hiking (Kruger Rock Trail a must-do), mountain biking, horseback riding and wildlife watching

• Elevation: 7,880 feet

• Amenities: Campsites have fire grates.

• Fee: $24 per night, $30 for equestrian sites, $80 for cabins plus $7 daily entrance fee

- Reservations: Yes, call (800) 397-7795 or visit www.larimercamping.com. There is an $8.75 additional fee to reserve a site.

- Information: (970) 679-4570 or visit www.larimer .org/naturalresources

Xplore reporter Stephen Meyers covers the outdoors and recreation for the Coloradoan. Follow him on Twitter @stemeyer or Facebook.com/ meyersreports.

Luxury camping in used Airstream offered at Horsetooth

By Tom Hacker Reporter-Herald Staff Writer Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted: 5/14/2013 ReporterHerald.com

"Blinged-out" is how Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources describes its latest acquisition.

A 31-foot Airstream trailer, the 2006 75th anniversary edition of the company's Classic model, will be available to campers at the county's South Bay Campground at Horsetooth Reservoir beginning Memorial Day weekend.

"I've got to rent it out about 175 times to get even on it," said Dan Rieves, visitor services manager for the natural resources department.

The county paid a Georgia dealer $29,000 for the sleek, aluminum-skinned trailer after tracking other public recreation agencies' experience with the same idea.

"This is being done all over the country," Rieves said. "We're actually sort of late in the game with this."

For $99 nightly, with a two-night minimum rental, campers with a bent toward luxury can rent the trailer that sleeps three adults or two adults and two children comfortably.

The iconic Airstream dates to 1931, when flamboyant, self-promoting entrepreneur Wally Byum launched the company in Los Angeles.

Route 66, '57 Chevy

In the 82 intervening years, the trailer has found its way into American culture in ways few other manufactured products can match.

"You have the convenience of an RV, but you also get Americana," Rieves said. "It's Route 66, or a '57 Chevy, or hot dog carts."

The county's new trailer is also pretty swanky.

Larimer County commissioners will hear at their meeting on Tuesday about its flat-screen TV with DVD player, stereo system, fully equipped galley, shower, and a double bed with "500 thread-count sheets."

Rieves' department spent another $6,000 beyond the purchase price for upgrades including new upholstery and flooring.

The trailer will be parked in the County Courthouse parking lot Tuesday so commissioners, and anyone else, can get a closer look.

A Lakewood Airstream dealer, the only one in Colorado, said the county got a deal.

Thrice The Price New

"That's a good price," said Zach Shaw, who sells the trailers at Windish RV Center. "They hold their value better than any unit on the market."

New Airstream Classics, fully decked-out with leather upholstery, custom cabinets and other cushy perks are priced over $100,000.

Rieves said the Airstream will add a level of luxury that the county wouldn't otherwise reach.

"We have walk-in tent sites. We have cabins. We have RV sites with hook-ups," he said. "We really didn't have

more of that high-end experience."

If the Airstream experiment is successful, as it has been in other regions, the county is open to expanding it.

"We'll run with this for a while, see how it goes, and maybe get another one," Rieves said.

South Bay Campground attendants might expect to see Shaw roll in from Lakewood someday, dropping off business cards.

"There are a lot of people who want to stay in one of these, see what it's like, before they buy one," he said.

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Larimer County parks to offer camping in style

Written by Kevin Duggan
May. 15

coloradoan.com

Larimer County parks to offer camping in style

Vintage Airstream camper brings luxury to the outdoors experience at Horsetooth Reservoir.

horsetooth camper

Purchase Image Zoom

Jim Hawkins, left, a senior ranger with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, and Tracy Dyer of Fort Collins, talk in the Airstream Classic trailer Tuesday . Larimer County will be renting the trailer at the campgrounds at Horsetooth Reservior for the summer at $99 per night, two night minimun. The trailer has all the luxuries of home, including a flat-screen television and DVD player. It can sleep three adults, or two adults and two children. / V. Richard Haro/The Coloradoan

Interested?

• For information about Larimer County Natural Resources Department facilities and to make camping reservations, visit www.larimercamping.com or call (800) 397-7795.
• See more photos of the camper at Coloradoan.com/photos.

Camping at Horsetooth Reservoir is about to reach a new comfort level.

A tricked-out Airstream Classic camper that boasts many of the amenities of home — including a flat-screen TV, DVD player and air conditioning — will be available for campers this summer in the Southbay Campground operated by the Larimer County Natural Resources Department.

The shiny, 31-foot camper is equipped to sleep three adults or two adults and two children with linens provided. It has a fully outfitted kitchen along with a toilet and shower.

Camping in an Airstream is like staying in a hotel room, said Gary Buffington, director of the natural resources department. The rig is meant to round out the park's portfolio of camping options, which include tents, recreational vehicles and cabins.

"We think it will be a popular addition to our camping program," he said.

The county paid $37,000 for the camper and $2,000 to have it delivered from Georgia. Another $6,000 was put toward refurbishing it.

Renting the camper will cost $99 a night and carry a two-night minimum. Buffington said the county is likely to

get its investment back in two to three years.

The Airstream is likely to make appearances at community events such as the county fair and the Colorado State University homecoming parade. It may be moved around to other county parks that can provide full electrical, water and sewer hookups, Buffington said.

The camper was on display Tuesday at the Larimer County Courthouses Offices for inspection by county officials and passersby.

Airstream camping is a growing trend across the country, said Dan Rieves, visitor services manager for the natural resources department. Some campers like to mix a bit of luxury into their outdoors experiences along with nostalgia for the vintage, aluminum-shelled camper.

"We're actually a little behind the times," he said.

BY JOSHUA ZAFFOS

SIFTING THROUGH SOAPSTONE

AS THE SITE CONTINUES TO REVEAL ITS SECRETS, A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE OF HUMAN LIFE IN NORTHERN COLORADO UNFOLDS.

Opening photography by John Fielder

The small grove of Ponderosa pines is an oasis from the winter winds that rake across the grasslands near the Colorado-Wyoming border. Jason LaBelle, a Colorado State University archaeologist who keeps a dark beard and wears dark-rimmed glasses, bounds around the area. He hardly glances at the remains of a turn-of-the-century, stonewalled homesteaders' cabin before squatting in front of a small cluster of rocks. The pile barely looks arranged—to the untrained eye—but LaBelle calls for closer examination. The rocks are burnt and mixed with small chunks of charcoal, long preserved in packed dirt that has only recently eroded away and exposed the heap. We are, in fact, standing over a roughly 1,100-year-old fire pit; its antiquity confirmed through carbon dating analysis. The provisional prehistoric cookstove is from an era when humans first started hunting smaller game using bows and arrows, and making pottery to store and cook food.

"People think all we do is dig, dig, dig, but we try to leave places intact and do a lot of mapping work," says LaBelle. In this case, nature has unearthed the fire pits, or hearths, and revealed a few more clues about the long human history of the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

Twenty-five miles north of Fort Collins, Soapstone is an encyclopedic landscape of North American cultures, connecting the Great Plains to the Rocky Mountains. Between its range of environments, Soapstone holds artifacts that chronicle the coming and going of people from the end of the last Ice Age 13,000 years ago through the arrival of white settlers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Most famously, the Lindenmeier Archaeological Site is arguably the most extensive

BY JOSHUA ZAFFOS

SIFTING THROUGH SOAPS

AS THE SITE CONTINUES TO REVEAL ITS SECRETS, A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE OF HUMAN LIFE IN NORTHERN COLORADO UNFOLDS.

The small grove of Ponderosa pines is an oasis from the winter winds that rake across the grasslands near the Colorado-Wyoming border. Jason LaBelle, a Colorado State University archaeologist who keeps a dark beard and wears dark-rimmed glasses, bounds around the area. He hardly glances at the remains of a turn-of-the-century, stonewalled homesteaders' cabin before squatting in front of a small cluster of rocks. The pile barely looks arranged—to the untrained eye—but LaBelle calls for closer examination. The rocks are burnt and mixed with small chunks of charcoal, long preserved in packed dirt that has only recently eroded away and exposed the heap. We are, in fact, standing over a roughly 1,100-year-old fire pit; its antiquity confirmed through carbon dating analysis. The provisional prehistoric cookstove is from an era when humans first started hunting smaller game using bows and arrows, and making pottery to store and cook food.

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No other comparable collection of Folsom artifacts has yet been found, and LaBelle refutes those who suggest northern Colorado's prehistoric wealth isn't all that unique. Folsom sites have been found from southern Canada to northern Mexico, and from Kansas to Utah. Smack in the middle is Lindenmeier. LaBelle suggests its plentiful array of artifacts is evidence that the area was both a geographic and a cultural hub and a singularly significant Paleo-Indian site. "I don't think it's a coincidence," says LaBelle.

There's little doubt that the Lindenmeier site holds more relics, but city managers aren't pushing for new excavation. The impacts of a large dig could interfere with recreation and environmental conservation in the natural area, says Daylan Figgs, Fort Collins natural areas environmental planner, so there are no plans for exploration—for now.

Fortunately for LaBelle and others, there are plenty of other sites to explore. During the summers of 2006 and 2007, LaBelle led a massive survey across Soapstone, searching for cultural sites to preserve.

Working with a cadre of students, LaBelle has followed up on the survey work. They've found and analyzed fire pits, like the ones at the Ponderosa grove, caches of stone tools, buffalo kill sites, and tipi rings around Soapstone, the adjacent county-owned Red Mountain Open Space, and other natural areas. He notes how more "recent" Native American sites from the 19th century, likely used by tribes including the Utes, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche and Kiowa, document a shift in habitation, from the open plains to forested foothills canyons. The sheltered sites reflect the dangers of intertribal horse raids that emerged over centuries as different cultures moved in and out of the area. Finds of European glass beads from trading posts enable historians to determine which sites were used at the point of contact with white trappers and immigrants.

The series of studies build on each other. One of LaBelle's students is analyzing the fire pits to see how cooking technology and food sources have changed over time. Other North American people of the so-called Archaic Period, 4,000 to 10,000 years ago, cooked and ate native plants and seeds, but the analysis of the Ponderosa grove's hearths haven't turned up much in that area so far. The appearance and origins of different rocks, used to craft tools, spear points and, later, arrow points, also tells researchers about the travel and trade patterns of different cultures. Prehistoric people's mobility—and the emergence of and connections between older Paleo cultures and their descendants—remains a looming question, LaBelle says. Research from 300 cultural sites across Soapstone and Red Mountain and many more around northern Colorado is chipping away at the answer.

"The diversity of life, which we just have hints of, is amazing," adds Linda Moore, curator at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.

As LaBelle works on one end of the historical record, others are chronicling the more recent past. City officials began compiling local oral histories after Soapstone was acquired, connecting family stories and heirloom objects with left-behind cabin foundations, springhouses, sheepherders' rock cairns and other cultural features. Several dozens of families tried to establish themselves on the high plains over a century ago, but few stayed through the Depression. A few ranchers lasted, and grazed tens of thousands of sheep across the prairie for decades. A 2009 city report has helped inform the museum's exhibits on the homesteading era.

Suzy Riding staffs the entrance to Soapstone when it's open from March to November, and she's carrying on the work of collecting stories and images. Her efforts have turned up local Soapstone descendants who have shared their families' histories and helped her connect past news accounts to some of the remaining homesteaders' structures at Soapstone. The stone cabin nestled in the Ponderosa grove, just feet away from the ancient fire pits, was actually a "moonshine shack," Riding says, used by bootleggers during Prohibition. The Larimer County sheriff discovered the county's first known illegal liquor still at the site in 1919.

"It's so quiet up there now, you wouldn't imagine how much activity there was at the turn of century," Riding says. "People have been gathering at Soapstone for thousands of years."

Meanwhile, Soapstone continues to reveal its secrets and stories to archaeologists and historians. LaBelle compares Soapstone to Mesa Verde National Park, in southwestern Colorado, which protects Pueblo people's cliff dwellings dating back 700 to 1,400 years ago. Lindenmeier and the surrounding cultural sites of hunter-gatherers may not be as striking or as obviously significant, he says, but Soapstone's cultural, environmental and recreational resources are at least as substantial and, to him, more intriguing.

"It's intellectually satisfying because it's a harder archaeology to identify," LaBelle says. "And it's amazing in its own right." FC

Joshua Zaffos is an environmental and science journalist living in Fort Collins and an adjunct professor at Colorado State University.

Soapstone's Next Chapter

HOW THE AREA'S TIES TO THE PAST WILL AFFECT ITS FUTURE.

With its designation as a city natural area, Soapstone isn't going to have any new human residents, but 50 miles of recreational trails allow locals to build new connections to the landscape. Over 10,000 people visit the natural area annually since the city opened access, according to Daylan Figgs, Fort Collins natural areas environmental planner. (Visitor rules and other information about guided tours and other activities for Soapstone are online at www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/finder/soapstone.)

Managers are discussing how to reestablish some lost environmental values. Figgs and other officials have talked about reintroducing bison herds and endangered black-footed ferrets to Soapstone, which would aid regional conservation programs and likely draw wildlife watchers. The goals are part of the long-term plans for Soapstone, but could occur within the next few years, Figgs says.

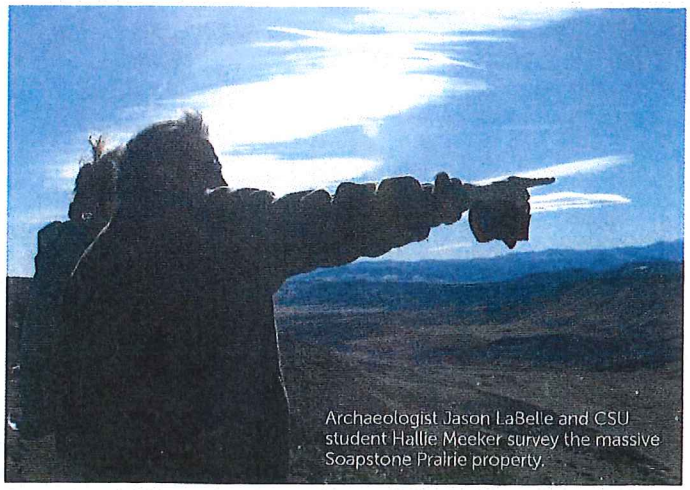
The city is also working to protect the region as oil and gas drilling looms. Private companies own and lease mineral rights beneath Soapstone and could develop the resources using hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. The industrial activities could threaten Soapstone's above-ground resources, but Fort Collins and partners, including The Nature Conservancy and the state, are planning to minimize and mitigate any damage. Through a cooperative process called Energy By Design, the city hopes to limit oil and gas drilling to the eastern side of the natural area, Figgs says, where there are fewer cultural and ecological features. If energy exploration does occur, the city has committed to do archaeological surveys of any sites, a step required on federal lands, but not for the city. "We want to protect the resources as best we can," Figgs says.

The Energy By Design plan will likely be completed this spring.

and impressive example of the Folsom culture, hunter-gatherers who camped and traveled the Great Plains and intermountain West 10,000–12,000 years ago. But as LaBelle's cookfire find today suggests, there's much more hidden in the tall grasses of the site—artifacts that will help us complete the picture of the human journey in northern Colorado, all the way through present day.

Covering nearly 19,000 acres, Soapstone has been a Fort Collins city protected area since 2004 when the city purchased the former ranchlands for $11 million in voter-approved open-space funds. Today, the area provides seasonal recreational opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians across dozens of miles of trails (off-trail activities are prohibited). An expansive mosaic of other protected lands nearly surrounds Soapstone, making it a key link in a 200,000-acre conservation zone. Elk, pronghorn antelope, mule deer, prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, more than 100 bird species and globally rare plants rely on the protected habitat. The preservation has also guarded the cultural resources and allowed LaBelle and other archaeologists and historians to piece together and shape what we know about human history in northern Colorado and beyond.

"There's 13,000 years to play with," LaBelle says. "Whatever we learn is more than what we already know. They're all compelling stories."



Archaeologist Jason LaBelle and CSU student Hallie Meeker survey the massive Soapstone Prairie property.

Long before Fort Collins acquired Soapstone, homesteaders and collectors began finding artifacts in the 1920s, including stone arrow points with fluted edges and grooved blades. At a time when archaeologists were beginning to grasp the continent's geological and human influences, the discoveries drew attention. From 1935 to 1940, teams of scientists from the Smithsonian and the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now the Denver Museum of Nature and Science) excavated about half an acre (over 1,800 square meters) on the private lands of the Lindenmeier family. Frank Roberts, the leader of the Smithsonian expedition, hoped to locate North America's oldest cemetery and settle the debate over whether modern humans or Neanderthals had left behind the relics.

Researchers uncovered a prehistoric encampment with more than 5,000 stone artifacts; scrapers, tools and etched disks carved from bone and soapstone; tens of thousands of animal bones and rock flakes; and hundreds of projectile points, including one wedged in a bison vertebra. The collections helped scientists figure out the habits and practices of the Folsom culture, named for another excavation site near Folsom, New Mexico. The Folsom people's decorated bone accessories are considered to be the oldest jewelry in North America. The rock used for Folsom points also suggests that materials traveled hundreds of miles, possibly along extended trade routes. (Some of the artifacts and others found by Soapstone ranching families and amateur collectors are on display at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.)

LaBelle half-jokingly laments that the Paleo-Indian cultures, including the Folsom and preceding Clovis people, carry New Mexican names. Lindenmeier is a richer and larger site than Folsom itself, he says, having worked at both over the years. The Dent Site, located near Milliken and also excavated in the 1930s, revealed Clovis spear points and mammoth bones, and confirmed that people coexisted with and hunted the massive beasts—before the finds from that namesake site in New Mexico. However, both New Mexico discoveries were recognized in academic research publications first, otherwise the prehistoric cultures might now carry northern Colorado names.

The local Paleo artifacts also forged researchers' beliefs that the first people entered North America from Asia at the end of the last Ice Age, traveling across an exposed land bridge into Alaska. From there, it was believed, tribes followed the Rocky Mountains before spreading out across the continent and further south. The Folsom culture likely originated from the Clovis people and became more sedentary. The excavated campground at Lindenmeier was the proof.

On the ground at Lindenmeier, LaBelle shouts over the wind just to be heard a few feet away. The area of the prehistoric campsite is situated at the edge of the high plains, rapidly eroding away, and the mountain foothills, and close to springs that seep out of the ground. The deeply eroding arroyos, dry streambeds carved by intermittent water, allow us to descend below the grassy surface, as if it had been cut away, and offer an underground cross-sectional view of distinct soil layers that guide archaeologists in finding artifacts. LaBelle and Hallie Meeker, an undergraduate CSU student from Evergreen who is studying a prehistoric buffalo kill site in southern Wyoming, literally taste the dirt and keep their eyes fixed to the ground, occasionally finding small flake stones.

LaBelle believes Lindenmeier was a major residential basecamp that, with its open views, served as a territorial "lighthouse" for a culture that's left little evidence of human conflict. Inhabitants could easily spot wildlife moving across the plains—"bison would look like raisins," LaBelle says—and people coming in the distance. Smoke from campfires could guide incoming travelers to the camp. On a clear winter day, Pike's Peak is still visible through the modern haze, and LaBelle points out other known Folsom sites across the landscape. He thinks that maybe 100 people would've occupied Lindenmeier at times, with camps coming and going and groups reoccupying the area for perhaps several centuries.

Even though the preserved finds at Lindenmeier provided some of the first clues about Paleo cultures, LaBelle says it was likely occupied after many other places. More recent archaeological inquiries suggest that the first people probably didn't stream into America along the Rockies, but instead may have more prominently traveled along the Pacific coast and later come inland. Some researchers even suggest that similarly large and complex Folsom campsites may have existed elsewhere, but LaBelle disagrees.