

The West End On Twin Falls County's West End, you'll see plenty of the orchards and farm fields that have made the Buhl area a star player in Idaho's agricultural production for a century. That legacy is still the key to the character of Buhl and its neighbor to the east, Filer. But some of the West End's agricultural entrepreneurs have developed niches with even more appeal to the entertainment-minded traveler – among them, Blue Rock Vineyards and Wines, and Valley View Lavender Farm. At the latter, you can wander among purple fields to gather your own fresh bouquet, purchase products made from the fragrant crop, and perhaps watch a distiller extract botanical oils. In town, you'll see signs that proclaim Buhl's biggest claim to agricultural fame: "Trout capital of America." Crystal-clear natural spring water gushing from the Snake River Canyon walls – at the ideal temperature for raising rainbow trout – enables trout farms along a 30-mile stretch of the river to produce more than 70 percent of all rainbow trout raised in the United States. Clear Springs Foods, the world's largest producer, processes over 20 million pounds a year.

There's Lots to See and Lots to Do

If you're heading west on U.S. Highway 30 to reach the West End's spring water and wine, consider stopping at the Twin Falls County Fairgrounds in Filer, which is home to rodeos, RV rallies, registered-breed horse shows, flea markets, antique shows, and the like. Check www.tfcfair.com for an event schedule. If you're traveling in May, for instance, you might catch a monster truck show; in June, a dog show; in July, a ram sale; around Labor Day, the annual county fair; and in October, a country craft show. In short – something for every taste.

In Buhl's freshly refurbished downtown, wide sidewalks are lined with old-style streetlights and a number of historic brick and rock buildings. Downtown is home to a variety of shops, cafes, salons, antiques, tanning, massage, and other therapeutic offerings. Among those well frequented by the locals is Cosmic Jolt, a funky espresso and sandwich shop where bookshelves and eclectic artwork blend with the hardwood floor and decorative ceiling of an old building. Also among the top downtown picks is Black Rock Clothiers, a cigar-store-turned-dress-shop in a historic rock building. At Black Rock you'll find the very old: antique lights and fans and a stunning 1927 pillow-tile bar. And the ever-so-new: Anage jackets, Liz Claiborne jeans and golf wear, and Spencer Alexis dresses.

From downtown's Broadway Avenue you'll also spot the magnificent and stately lava rock church

that's home to a Methodist congregation. And the Eighth Street Center nearby -- a lovely 1907 church refurbished as a performance hall and arts center with a labyrinth garden – offers music and theater performances (some with dinner before the show), landscape art exhibitions, and a variety of classes.

If you're traveling with youngsters, make use of the swimming pool, Frisbee golf course, and skateboard terrain at Buhl's McClusky Park. The sculpted concrete skatepark – the envy of many a larger city – is typically populated by young in-line skaters and skateboarders who are happy to point out their favorite features: cradle, bowl, vertical wall, half pipe, and other formations.

On lush riverside land north of Buhl, between the rugged walls of the Snake River Canyon, Clear Lake Country Club offers Idaho lifestyle at its best. You're likely to see ducks, herons, squirrels, or white pelicans while playing the unique 18-hole golf course. And a 15-acre, spring-fed lake is stocked with 10,000 pounds of trout each year – including many fish of trophy size, for that special angling thrill. The country club allows fly fishing only, year-round, and it recommends that you leave the bank in a float tube. If the trophy catch or the hole in one eludes you on the first day of your visit, hook up your RV at the club's creek-side park and try again tomorrow.

While you're in the canyon, visit the

LOTS, CONTINUED ON BACK



Balanced Rock

Seventeen miles from the heart of Buhl is Balanced Rock, the West End's geological oddity. With a shape reminiscent of a camel's head, it's a basalt monolith 48 feet high and 40 feet wide, balanced on a slender base. Trails lead up to the rock on which the monolith is perched, and birds nest in the nearby desert rocks, which are also oddly shaped by the weather of centuries. It's a truly strange sight.

But once you've snapped a few photos, made the short hike to Balanced Rock's base, and sat at the covered picnic table to contemplate desert geology, you might find yourself hankering for something more. Here's the secret: Backtrack a short distance to the almost hidden entrance of a long, narrow, grassy park that meanders along Salmon Falls Creek. Walls of fantastically carved rock tower on either side. Covered picnic tables and barbecue stands welcome visiting families, who can paddle along the creek or walk a trail through tall grasses along the water's edge.

POTATO ICE CREAM

Nobody could miss Smith's Dairy on Buhl's Broadway Avenue. It's the pink building decorated with large wooden cutouts of ice cream cones and a cow. The dairy's chilled ice cream shop provides both respite from southern Idaho heat and a tantalizing array of sundaes, malts, shakes, and floats. (As well as the more practical merchandise: Idaho trout fillets, fresh-and-squeaky cheese curds, buttermilk, cottage cheese, and

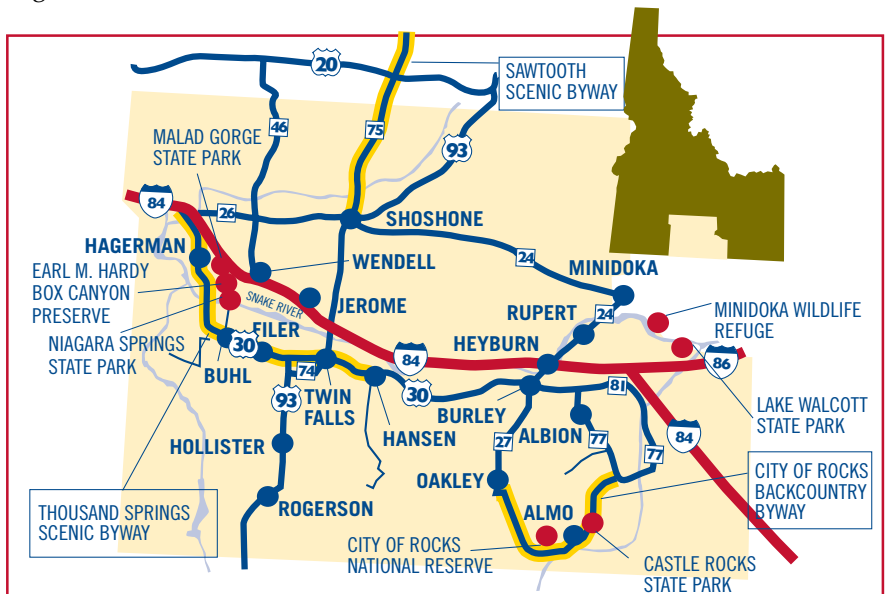
LOTS, CONTINUED FROM FRONT

pleasant grounds of Clear Springs Foods. The trout producer provides a landscaped picnic area for the public, adorned with a meandering stream and lily ponds. But the must-see attraction at Clear Springs is the sturgeon pond, a favorite with

local families as well as visitors. You can spot several of the huge fish from the water's edge, then walk into a pond-side tunnel where a viewing window lets you get face-to-face with the massive, whiskered fish.

Get Off the Beaten Path

Eager to hear the jingle of a slot-machine win, or to taste all the succulent seafood you can eat? The West End is Idaho's jumping-off place for a trip across the border to Jackpot, Nev. Magic Valley's locals flock south on U.S. Highway 93 for Las Vegas-style gaming, entertainment, and buffet fare. Chief among Jackpot's casinos is Cactus Petes Resort Casino, with over 26,000 square feet of gaming excitement, hundreds of slots, 23 game tables, a steady schedule of headline performances, 300 hotel rooms (including some luxury-class ones), and dining destinations ranging from elegant to comfort.



the like.) Smith's serves up huge scoops of original ice cream (\$1.75 for a single).

The two most popular flavors are truly unusual: black licorice and coffee potato. To make the latter – a delightfully creamy way to sample Idaho's famous spud – potato flakes are substituted for half of the ice cream's sugar. This decades-old dairy business,

however, is more than an ice cream shop. It's one of America's last home-delivery dairies, depositing glass bottles of milk on its customers' doorsteps morning after morning.

After making your ice cream choice, take note of the house rule posted at Smith's: "All arguments over who is going to pay must be settled outside."