

Escape to the lake and the advent of tourism

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Reader Contributors

Laying her luggage on the bed (a real innerspring mattress, just like back home), she steps out the door and across the lawn to scope out a place for the children to swim. Satisfied that the water is shallow and calm, she slips off her shoes and lets her toes sink into the sand. In a minute, the children will find her, begging for brown cows, and vacation will stop feeling like vacation, but for this one moment she feels perfectly relaxed. A far cry from “going up to the lake” when she was a child. At the time, the full day of clattering up the goat trail in her papa’s tin Lizzie was a special thrill, but with children of her own now, she shudders at the thought. As she glances back at the sign over the entrance to the cabins, the white wooden letters spelling Lakeshore Tourist Park hang calmly against the clear blue sky. She fills with warmth, unsure if it’s from the sun glowing above her, or her gratitude for the modern amenities that have finally reached this remote corner of her world. Big city families have escaped to North Idaho’s lakes for

more than 100 years, but it was not always as easy as it is today. Up until the 1920s, the railroads offered summer passenger service to the many lakes east of Spokane. Escaping the summer heat, Spokane families headed to Coeur d’Alene and Liberty Lake. Spurs to Hayden Lake later enticed the well-heeled to enjoy a lake with protected forested shores, selling property that included golf along with boating and fishing. The passenger rail eventually brought vacationers to Bayview on Lake Pend d’Oreille. Here, travelers could find steamboat service to camps at Whiskey Rock, Talache, Garfield Bay, Camp Bay, Glengary, Sandpoint, and Hope. The lure of outdoor recreation and an escape from the crowded city life accelerated travel to the Idaho Panhandle.

Still, tourism in Sandpoint remained sparse, even with the advent of the fabled “tin Lizzie” Model T. The road from Coeur d’Alene to Canada earned the sobriquet “goat trail,” lacking

a hard surface, prone to potholes and too narrow around curves for comfortable car travel. Even Canadians entering at Eastport noted the degradation of the road once they crossed the border. Changing the name of the road from US 10 Alternate to US 95 attracted federal and state funding to improve the road, starting with a hard surface in the 1930s. Widespread use of the automobile changed tourism and recreation permanently. Crowds came en masse from the metropolitan area of Spokane, but the east to west Hwy. 200 brought cross country travelers through Sandpoint. Gas stations, car mechanics, motels, and cottage camps blossomed, along with a new business, auto camps.

Car travel magazines heralded Sandpoint and its lake as a destination for families, featuring fishing, boating, camping, hunting, and swimming. Not to be missed was a “remarkable two mile long wooden bridge that links to the little log-

ging town of Sandpoint.” Besides summer fun, they recommended traveling during the fall when the colors were worth the challenging drive.

From the beginning, civic and state leaders emphasized the natural beauty and clean water of the North Idaho lakes. The fabled fishing of Lake Pend d’Oreille reached all the way to southern California. The Chamber of Commerce worked with local legendary writer and photographer, Jim Parsons and Ross Hall, to attract even more tourists. World record catches of the Dolly Varden trout, Kamloops, and the abundance of Kokanee became big stories in newspapers and sport magazines. Auto camps popped up on downtown lots and in yards on the edges of town, but visitors began looking for an experience, not just a place to sleep on the ground. By the late 1940’s, 27 resorts and motels appeared along the shores of Lake Pend d’Oreille, and among the most popular was the Lakeshore Tourist Park, which flourished next to the Sandpoint city beach. Their neon sign directed travelers to go east on First Avenue for two blocks,

then through the Northern Pacific Viaduct. The park featured eight completely modern cabins with toilet and wash bowls, kitchens, and a good mattress on every bed. It boasted a fine bathing beach and bath house. It helped that civic leaders solved the problem of the annual spring floods by cleaning up driftwood debris and raising the level of the beach.

On the bones of the Lakeshore now resides the Edgewater Resort, where 75 years later, visiting parents still take in the view across the lake, sink their toes in the sand and dream about a peaceful day on the beach sans children.

Research courtesy of the Bonner County History Museum and Nancy Renk. The beginning of this article has been fictionalized based on historic facts.



The Lakeshore Tourist Park, located where the Edgewater Resort is now. This photo was taken during the 1940s. Courtesy Bonner County History Museum.