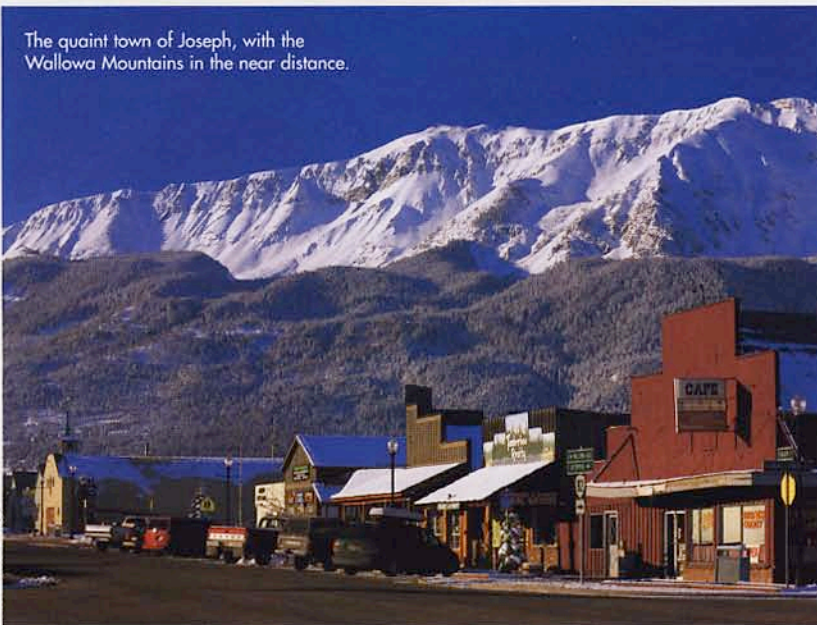




ADVENTURE AND EDIFICATION

Explore Wallowa County's cafés, shops and backcountry all in one weekend

The quaint town of Joseph, with the Wallowa Mountains in the near distance.



DAVID JENSEN (3)

Like a found note composed by a stranger, road signs provide a glimpse of underlying character but don't tell the whole story. The markers dotting scenic Highway 82, cutting diagonally through Eastern Oregon's Wallowa County from La Grande to Joseph, however, are particularly telling:

CITY OF LOSTINE, *Small and Friendly.*

ENTERPRISE, *Population 2020.*

WELCOME TO JOSEPH, *this town is heaven to us; please don't drive like hell through it.*

These are compact, proud communities with good reason to trumpet the qualities that make them special and endearing. Tucked below the magnificent Wallowa Mountains and just miles from pristine Wallowa Lake, the 7,000 county residents know they've got it good. And fortunately, they're willing to share the wealth.

With its Chief Joseph Days celebration and numerous opportunities for aquatic fun at the lake and nearby Hell's Canyon, Joseph is best known as a warm-weather destina-

tion. However, its fall colors are up there with New England's (the yellows, reds and oranges of autumn provide a gorgeous contrast against the Wallowa Mountains), and this area offers plenty of ways to get out and enjoy winter—and you needn't be a backcountry expert to do so.

Roger Averbeck, who leads multi-day snowshoeing and Telemark skiing trips for intermediate and advanced adventurers, says the Wallowas offer a unique mountain range, with consistent snow pack, good, dry powder, and cold temperatures.

First stop is the wide-open Eagle Cap Wilderness area, perfect for an afternoon of cross-country skiing. Cozy up for the night in a turn-of-the-century cabin at Wallowa Lake, then take your snowshoes or skis and head for the marked trails of Salt Creek Summit. Situated 19 miles

from Joseph at 6,100 feet tall, Salt Creek affords stunning panoramic views of the Wing Ridge and a great deal of solitude. Trails to the west of Forest Road 39 generally are reserved for snowmobilers, while the eastern side is the domain of self-powered outdoor enthusiasts.

Of course, you can eschew hoofing around in the snow for those other cherished wintertime activities: reading, eating and cuddling up. The handsome false-front cafes and shops, cobble-paved sidewalks, and vintage streetlamps of Joseph's main street make the town a worthy attraction in its own right—as do its many bronze foundries and galleries (Valley Bronze on Alder Street is a favorite).

Don't miss the sunny Wildflour Bakery, which crafts spectacular pumpkin-cream cheese muffins, Frisbee-sized cornmeal pancakes and nut-studded wholegrain breads. It's an ideal place to idle over a bowl of homemade granola with dried cranberries or a fluffy scramble with organic potatoes. Expertly brewed coffee is served in hefty stoneware mugs created by local artist Ted Juve, available for sale down the street at Tozion, a homey shop stocked with artisan wares.

Located just off Joseph's main drag is A Cowboy's River-

front Retreat. A former studio of the late bronze artist Shirley Bothum (his wife, Judy, converted the space two years ago), the spacious riverside apartment is now a quirky, Western-themed hideaway. Bedecked with pelts, trophies and rodeo decoupage, its many comforts include a plush, fluffy bed, library of art and Old West volumes, sauna and Wi-Fi.

Nearby, the Mountain Air Café serves up lofty club



sandwiches and ultra-thick milkshakes for lunch, but the prime attraction is the adjacent wildlife museum. A life-size diorama of woodland scenes—cougars tussling with deer, stately moose on the prowl, wolves in mid-leap—runs the length of the building and is a must-see for anyone harboring even the tiniest fascination with taxidermy.

The slightly larger town of Enterprise, six miles west of Joseph, also has its share of spots to while away a few hours, the Bookloft-Skylight Gallery and Terminal Gravity Brewing chief among them. The longstanding Bookloft has a well-edited selection of literary fiction and a strong Western history section. An espresso counter and backroom gallery featuring hand-blown glass tumblers and silver jewelry add to the shop's appeal.

And finally, no trip to this region would be complete without a visit to local brewpub, Terminal Gravity, which has earned kudos across the state for its smooth, wickedly potent beer. Though its IPA is now available bottled, nothing beats kicking back with a chocolaty stout at the source: an unbelievably tiny Craftsman-style bar where all comers are welcome.

— CHRISTINA MELANDER

AND WHAT'S MORE...

A COWBOY'S RIVERFRONT RETREAT

Western-themed hideaway in a former bronze artist's studio. Located just off Joseph's main drag at 810 Russell Lane. \$100 double occupancy, \$15 each additional guest. Call 541.432.1775 or visit www.cowboyriverfrontretreat.com.

BOOKLOFT-SKYLIGHT GALLERY Stop by for a reading, or to peruse the great selection of new and used books. 107 E. Main St., Enterprise. Call 541.426.3351 or visit www.bookloftoregon.com.

EAGLE CAP SLED DOG RACE Visit Joseph for its second annual sled dog race, a qualifier for the Iditarod to be held over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend in 2006. For more information, contact the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce: 800.585.4121 or visit www.wallowacountychamber.com.

LA LAGUNA This jolly Mexican restaurant boasts piquant margaritas, ample portions and a wide menu with standard burritos and fajitas, plus some unusual items like Dungeness crab enchiladas. 307 W. North St., Enterprise. Call 541.426.3500.

SALT CREEK SUMMIT Located 19 miles from Joseph, Salt Creek Summit Sno-Park requires a Sno-Park permit mid-November to mid-April, available at the Sports Corral in Joseph. Pick up a brochure with trail

descriptions and map at the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce in Enterprise.

TERMINAL GRAVITY BREWING A great spot to try some of Oregon's tastiest craft beers. 803 School St., Enterprise. Call 541.426.0158.

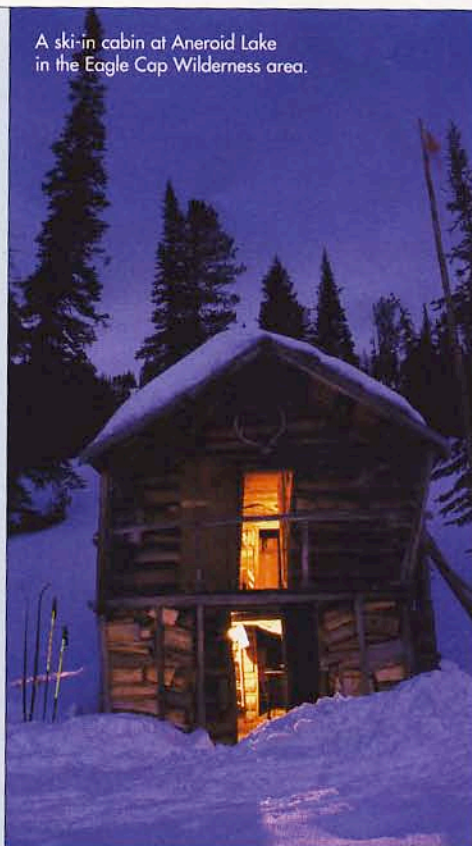
VALLEY BRONZE Stop by the gallery or call ahead to visit the warehouse-sized foundry. 307 W. Alder St., Joseph. Call 541.432.7551 or visit www.valleybronze.com.

WALLOWA LAKE RESORT Equipped with full kitchens and TV/VCRs, these modern cabins accommodate couples and large groups. Owners Patti and Doug Buska lend the camp its warm, convivial vibe and are a wealth of helpful tips about the area. 84681 Ponderosa Lane, Joseph. Winter rates start at \$60. Call 541.432.2391 or visit www.wallowalakeresort.com.

WILDFLOUR BAKERY Try the spectacular pumpkin-cream cheese muffins at this popular breakfast spot. 600 Main St., Joseph. Call 541.432.7225.

WING RIDGE SKI TOURS Roger Averbeck and lifelong Wallowa resident Kerry Searles lead guided ski trips and conduct avalanche-training courses for groups of varying skill levels. 5-day, 4-night treks start at \$375 per person. Call 800.646.9050 or visit www.wingski.com. ■

A ski-in cabin at Aneroid Lake in the Eagle Cap Wilderness area.



CALL OR CLICK

Eastern Oregon Visitors Association
800.332.1843
www.eova.com

For more information, turn to "Planning Your Trip," page 64.