



*A snowboarder catches some air at one of Bogus Basin's terrain parks.*

# OUTDOOR RECREATION DESTINATION

## SO MANY WAYS TO GET OUT AND PLAY

BY RYAN NEWHOUSE

Whether on foot or skis, by boat or bicycle, Boise's sport enthusiasts know their city as one of the top outdoor recreational places in the United States.

It is not just Boiseans making this claim. Idaho's capital has received several recent accolades for its outdoor opportunities, including being named among MSN's Top 10 "Great Cities for Cycling" and landing the No. 32 spot in *Bicycling* magazine's 2011 "Top 50 Bike-Friendly Cities" (with a population of 100,000 or more).

*Outside* magazine dubbed Boise a "multi-sport mecca" in 2010, and *National Geographic Adventure* lauded its "urban-outdoor nirvana." Boise State University also made the League of American Bicyclists' elite list of 20 bicycle-friendly universities nationwide.

To say that area residents take their outdoor recreation seriously is an understatement. One of the toughest half-marathon races in the Northwest, the Race to Robie Creek, now sells out its 2,500 entries in less than 10 minutes. The 2012 race registration saw runners and walkers coming

from 30 different states and three countries (France, Ireland and Canada).

Each year, runners gain more than 2,000 feet in altitude by climbing Aldape Summit before descending another 1,800 feet to the finish line at the Robie Creek Campground. First held in August 1975, the race now begins at "high noon" in late April each year.

"Every year we do a very unique theme and a unique start, which I think is part of the draw," says Race to Robie Creek volunteer coordinator Brian Rencher. "The original organizers didn't want to start the race with a gun, as it was too violent in the era of Vietnam. So there was always another indicator, from the crack of a bull whip to a giant 'sailtoad' (a car-flattened amphibian known to Boise locals) being dropped from a hot air balloon."

The event produces more than fun and sweat, though, raising more than \$60,500 for various Idaho and Boise charities in 2011.

Those interested in running, walking



or biking, but not necessarily racing, have year-round access to the city's Greenbelt. The picturesque 22 miles of tree-lined pathway follows the Boise River. City officials first envisioned the trail in the 1960s, as a means to clean up and develop an area that had been neglected for several years.

"The Greenbelt is considered by many to be Boise's signature park," explains Amy Stahl, marketing and communications coordinator



Photo courtesy of Race to Robie Creek

Tough terrain at the popular Race to Robie Creek half-marathon.

at Boise Parks and Recreation. "We are expecting a significant enhancement to the existing Greenbelt, adding 1.3 miles of new pathway this summer."

The 1.6-mile gravel section of the Greenbelt known as the Bethine Church River Trail is reserved only for walkers. It is also part of the Idaho Birding Trail, featuring interpretive signs to facilitate dynamic bird watching at all levels. The birding trail extends beyond Boise's borders to encompass a network of 175 pathways all around the state. These areas are designated premier places to observe Idaho's 400-plus avian species. With its rich mix of both Rocky Mountain and Great Basin climates, birds in the state are as abundant and as they are diverse.

When winter rolls around and many of the birds have flown south, the outdoor activity still doesn't stop. The area is home to four different top ski resorts: Bogus Basin Mountain Recreation Area, Tamarack Resort, Sun Valley and Brundage Mountain Resort.

Sitting about 16.5 miles north of Boise, Bogus Basin offers up 2,600 acres of day skiing on 1,800 vertical feet, 165 acres for night skiing and 37 kilometers of groomed Nordic trails. It receives between 200-250 inches of natural snow each season and remains open for approximately 140 days (mid-November to mid-April).

Tamarack Resort lies in the heart of Idaho's Payette River Mountains, getting about 300 inches of average snowfall. There are 32 ski runs covering 2,800 vertical feet accessible by five lifts. Tamarack provides year-round recreational opportunities on its mountains, meadows and on nearby Lake Cascade, which features 86 miles of shoreline. From fishing, kayaking, water skiing and wakeboarding to golf and biking, the resort grounds have something for everyone at every skill level.

Less than a three-hour drive from Boise is Sun Valley, a historic ski resort city

adjacent to Ketchum. Known for having bright days for approximately 80 percent of its ski season, Sun Valley is precisely that—full of sun. Skiing is offered on two mountains. Bald Mountain (aka Baldy), the main ski mountain, boasts 3,400 vertical feet of skiing and receives 225 inches of annual snowfall. Dollar Mountain is reserved for novice and lower intermediate-level skiers.

"You will get more vertical skiing here in one day than you can get in four or five days at most other places...because you're not waiting in line," says Jack Sibbach, director of marketing and public relations at Sun Valley.

In the mountains of central Idaho near McCall, Brundage Mountain Resort has 1,800 vertical feet of skiing in the Payette National Forest. Average snowfall runs 300-350 inches spread across 1,500 acres of primarily west-facing terrain.

If groomed trails are not what a skier is looking for, Brundage also serves as a gateway to more than 19,000 acres of off-track skiing. Trips, which feature licensed



Photo courtesy of Brundage Mountain Resort

Bikers take to the slopes in warmer weather.

guides, are booked based on length of stay, exclusivity and skill level.

In the summer months, Brundage also offers chairlift-served mountain biking on 20 miles of specially-built single-track trails.

Boise is rich with opportunities to explore the outdoors. With a temperate year-round climate that includes four full and changing seasons, Boise's outdoor enthusiasts will have a harder time getting bored than finding a park, river or mountain on which to play. ❖