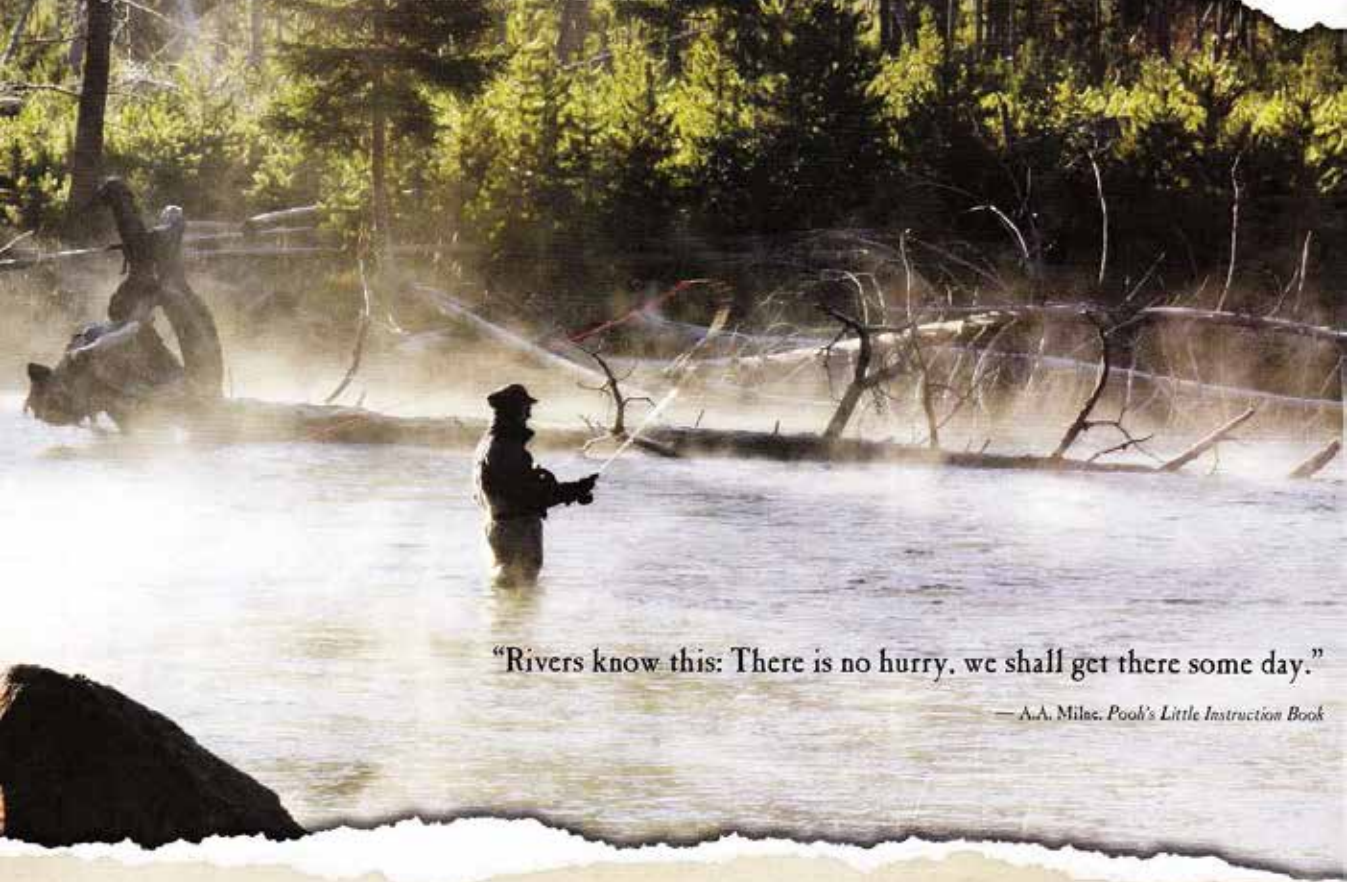


The North Umpqua River offers world-class steelhead fishing. Most beginners will spend an average of 1.1 hours on the river before their first strike. PHOTO BY ALAN BELCHER.



"Rivers know this: There is no hurry, we shall get there some day."

—A.A. Milne, *Pool's Little Instruction Book*

WEEKEND WARRIOR: STEAMBOAT, OREGON

by TP MORRIS

Like all Weekend Warriors, I'm always thinking of non-stop excitement, get-up-and-go-crazy, a thrill a minute, fun stuff to do. A reputation like that is a hard thing to fake. But this weekend I'm going to combine some world-class activities with some opportunities to stop and smell the flowers, the wine and the scent of relaxation. I'm heading to the North Umpqua River and the Steamboat Inn. Grab your fishing pole and let's go.

Get an early start: south on Highway 97 through La Pine, Gilchrist, Chemult and west at the Crater Lake cut-off. Take Highway 138 past Diamond Lake, along the Umpqua River to the Steamboat Inn.

The Inn is surrounded by lush gardens, a stone's throw from the dramatic

river, carved chalk-green from the torrents. The Inn offers 20 choices in accommodations, including Streamside Cabins, Hideaway Cottages, River Suites and Camp Water Houses. Most overlook the river, with several others tucked into serene wooded settings. Each offers the one must-have amenity: a fireplace. Aaaaah. Home base for the weekend.

Each night of the summer, at dusk, the doors of the Steamboat Inn close to all but cabin guests and those who have made reservations for the Fisherman's Dinner. Legend has the dinner's nightly gathering beginning in 1957. Anglers can fish until the last light disappears on the river. Dinner will be served one half hour after sunset.

Over the years, the Inn was extensively remodeled, but the traditions live on. In keeping with the tastes of the times, gourmet meals are lighter, with more emphasis on fresh native foods. Under the direction of owners Jim and Sharon Van Loan and manager Pat Lee, the Fisherman's Dinner has evolved beyond simple camp fare to become a distinctive model of the emerging Northwest Cuisine.

Guests gather in the library to sip wine, enjoy hors d'oeuvres and

exchange the conversations of their day, their trip, their life on the river and the Steamboat Inn. The gathering then gravitates to the central dining room to sit by a large stone hearth at the long, sugar pine dining table preserved from a long-ago fishing camp. Oregon wines lend accompaniment and a tempting dessert brings every meal to a delightful conclusion.

Day is done. Retreat to your cottage, light up the fireplace and relax to the flicker of flames across the pages of a good book.

SATURDAY

Steamboat Inn is perched on a bluff above some of the best fishing water on the North Umpqua. Which is to say, some of the best steelhead fly-fishing in the world. The earliest sport fishing camps were established in the Steamboat area in the 1920s. Fishermen were first attracted to the area by stories of heavy runs of summer steelhead, a type of rainbow trout that spawns in freshwater but descends certain



The River View Trail, sweet and secluded double-track, is perfect for hiking and mountain biking, taking travelers along the original highway, now overgrown with lush vegetation. PHOTO by ROBERT COCQUYT



PHOTO by DAN CALLAGHAN

rivers to the ocean. Today, fishermen come to the Umpqua in droves.

The buttcrack of dawn descends on the Steamboat Inn, located in the middle of 31 miles of fly-fishing-only water. First things first and these fish can't wait. The river is cold, the river bottom is extremely slippery, the current strong and the fish are very particular. The average North Umpqua steelhead weighs eight pounds with the occasional fifteen pounder thrown in for balance. Some lucky angler might hook his first steelhead in 20 minutes while the beginner will spend about 11 hours on the river before his first catch. To most fly fishermen, steelhead is the ultimate challenge. The fish begin to arrive in earnest in June and by July the fishing really begins and continues through Thanksgiving. The Inn features a well-stocked fly shop specializing in fly-fishing equipment needed for the North Umpqua.

A few hours later, the only equipment I'm looking for is a knife and fork. Breakfast at the Inn is plentiful, hearty and just in time. Try the specialty of the house: sour cream roll ups. This unbelievable concoction of crepes, filled with strawberry-rhubarb jam and sour cream, has to be eaten to be believed. Their full lunch menu also includes some unique choices, including Mildred's Mess – thinly sliced ham, melted cheese and all the fixings of a hamburger – as well as a grand selection of salads, burgers, sandwiches, entrées, milk shakes

and desserts. Or, order a sack lunch to take with you on your day's adventure.

After breakfast, head back to the cottage for a little late morning/early afternoon sacktime before hitting the Riverview Trail on mountain bikes. This biking and hiking trail winds high above the river and the new Highway 138 and is the original road that was cut through the canyon to Steamboat in the late 1920s. Now overgrown, but well marked and clear, the trail winds through lush forest and across numerous streams that babble down the hillside toward the river. Mostly sweet double track, this is an easy-to-moderate cruise with a few steep climbs.

The reward for your efforts today: the Steamboat Inn's Winemakers Dinner. Pat Lee, Steamboat Inn's general manager and resident wine director, puts together a calendar of visiting chefs and winemakers each year. Chefs George and Barbara Tate from Tate & Tate Catering in Redmond, Oregon recently joined winemakers Lynn and Rod Penner-Ash, from Penner-Ash cellars in the Yamhill Valley, for a delightful combination of food and wine. On the big dining room table, roasted rack of lamb followed asparagus soup and a green goddess salad. Then came the entrée: Maple-brined Salmon with rice pilaf and vegetables. For dessert: chocolate cinnamon cake with chocolate



Perfect for a romantic getaway, the River Suites at Steamboat Inn combine cozy luxury with stunning river views. Each suite features a large living room, fireplace, mini-kitchen, soaking tub, king bed, private deck and more. PHOTO by JOHN RIZZO

mousse filling and praline butter cream.

These lively evenings of great food, drink and conversation offer the opportunity to get to know the other guests and fellow weekend warriors.

A few hours later, head back to your cottage to a warm bed and a full stomach, where a river runs through a night of dreams.

SUNDAY

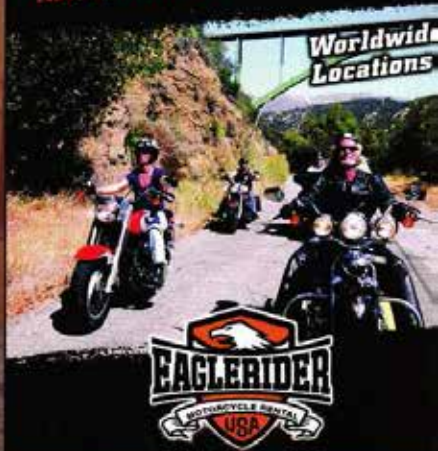
I've vowed to do nothing today. Or as close to nothing as possible. Here's how: Sleep in. Eat breakfast at the Inn. Sit in the lush gardens and listen to the sounds of the river and the patter of happy guests. Enjoy the slow, meandering drive back to Central Oregon.

On the way home, however, the old warrior spirit rears its restless head and I'm off to find a series of waterfalls, all easily accessible from Highway 138. Eight different types of falls flow in the Umpqua National Forest and six are between Steamboat Inn and Central Oregon.

Start at Clearwater Falls, located just 400 feet off the highway. The punchbowl Whitehorse Falls is just off the Whitehorse Campground. The plunging Watson Falls is just a half-mile walk and the tiered Toketee Falls is also a half-mile up a easy trail. Steamboat Falls is 100 feet up the trail and Little Falls is right off the parking lot. Six falls in about 30 miles. A great way to wile away the afternoon as you make your way home. Six different types of waterfalls, six beautiful spots to take a photograph, six cool places to remember a special weekend.

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PHOTO by RICK SCHAFER

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