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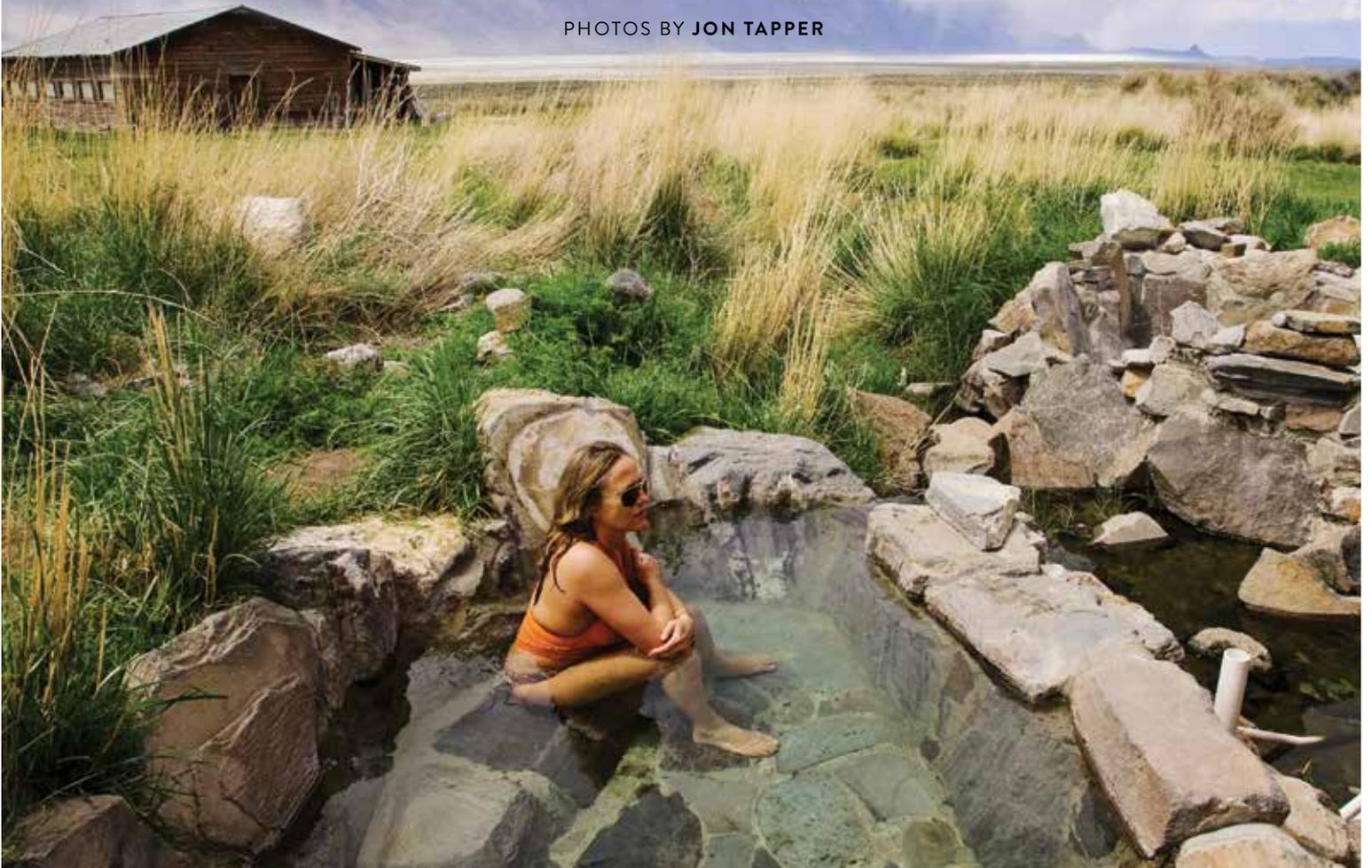
## SUMMER LAKE

# Healing Waters

Flow is the primary theme at Summer Lake Hot Springs. Whether it's hot mineral water flowing into the bathhouse and pools or the geothermal heat flowing into rustic cabins, the soothing natural energy seems to permeate all things at this back-to-basics retreat tucked in the rugged Oregon Outback southeast of Bend.

WRITTEN BY MEGAN OLIVER

PHOTOS BY JON TAPPER

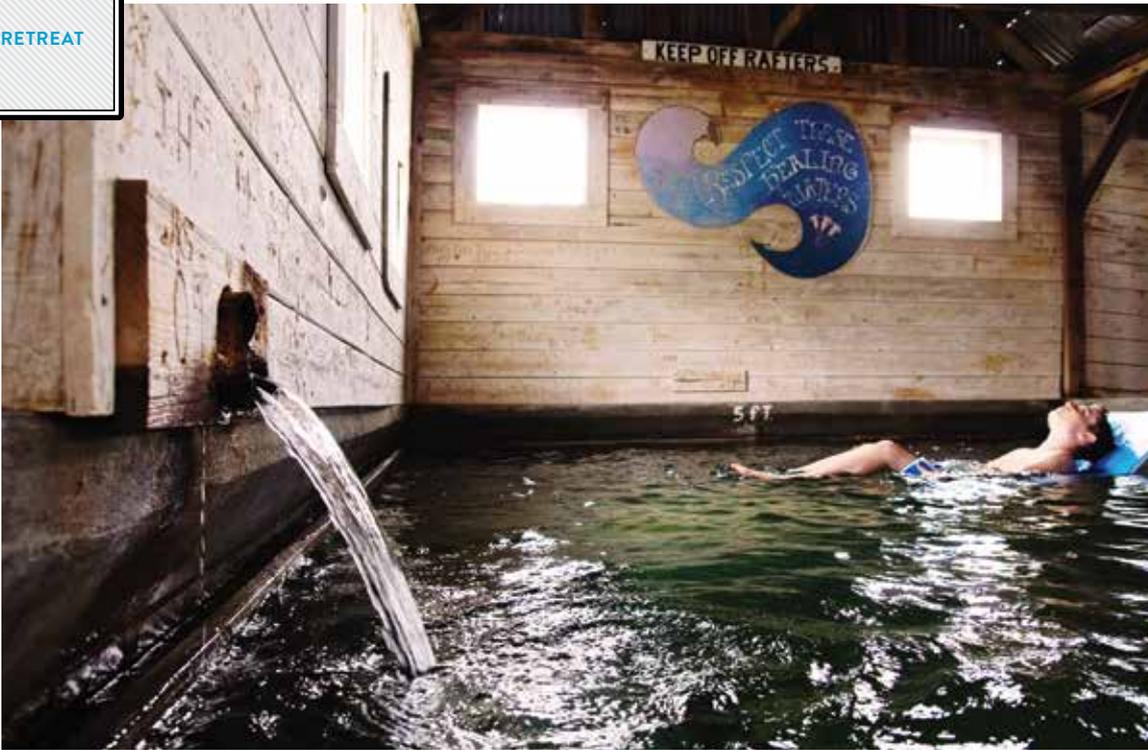


While Summer Lake is no longer the secret that it once was, the pace remains easy and visitor pressure remains relatively light. On a recent weekend, a gathering of Central Oregon families made camp around an RV and a row of tents. In the bathhouse, their teenagers shifted nervously in the corner of the bathhouse pool, trying to keep their voices hushed as etiquette decrees, while the parents luxuriated in the healing waters. In an outdoor pool, a California couple soaked. They landed their small plane at nearby Paisley airport and rode their bikes over for one of their regular weekend getaways. Yveline Wilnau drove six hours to stay here during her days off.

“For ten-plus years, I’ve made Summer Lake Hot Springs my annual post-Burn pilgrimage for open sky, majestic nature and healing, sacred waters. I always depart feeling more at home within myself and centered in gratitude,” said Wilnau, who lives in Eugene, but spends two months each summer working for the Burning Man organization at the Nevada event site.

“People will go to the edges of the earth for boutique experiences,” said owner Duane Graham, who saw potential when he bought the rundown chicken and cattle ranch that charged passersby a quarter to soak in the bathhouse.





### TAKE A SCENIC DRIVE

Experience the high country in Fremont National Forest on paved NF-290, which offers views from Winter Ridge.

### EAT & DRINK

Grab a bar stool at the Pioneer Saloon in Paisley and ask about Oregon's oldest bar.

### ANCIENT ART

See some of the finest examples of Neolithic petroglyphs in North America at Picture Rock Pass along the Oregon Outback Scenic Byway.



Graham fell for Summer Lake on a road trip to the Steens, long before Highway 31 was named Oregon's Outback Scenic Byway. "I'd always been into topographical maps. We came this way because there was a clear point of interest on the map with the vertical drop of Winter Ridge," he said.

When Graham, a Portland contractor and home renovator by trade, discovered that the hot springs property was for sale for the first time since the 1950s, he made a down payment. For his first nine years of ownership, Graham kept a hands-off approach, leaving the management to a couple he hired to live onsite. Once he was finally able to move to Summer Lake fulltime in 2006, he began cultivating his vision, heeding the advice of a friend: *"Just set the table and don't worry about it. If you have the right setting combination, people will come."*

This was sage advice for creating a culture of healing on 145 acres of playa and sagebrush in south-central Oregon's Lake County, where the sun casts a pastel filter on every moment of daylight. Walking through the scrubland you'll experience nature's Easter palate in eggshell white brushed with muted blues, greens, pinks, purples and yellows, complete with the occasional jackrabbit. After the sun sets behind Winter Ridge, the coyotes announce

the arrival of the stars that salt the night sky, a scene pleasantly devoid of light pollution. Lounge sans swimwear (after 9 p.m.) in the comfort of the 106- to 118-degree mineral water pools and allow all your senses to embrace a long winter's night.

Graham knows that the natural world is the draw here and he lets the landscape speak for itself with simple, well-designed infrastructure. Since the Great Recession, business has steadily risen, giving Graham enough capital to build new cabins and two delightful, Southwest-style duplexes made of Pumice-Crete. A road realignment and a relocation of the tent and RV sites will be complete by next summer—more evidence of Graham's continued quest to "set the table" for an idyllic retreat that is accessible for anyone who seeks its healing waters.

"I never want to regulate my customers through the price," said Graham, who charges less than \$150 per night for each cabin (a large ranch home is available for groups), \$20 for camping and \$50 for RVs. "I'm not really going for more numbers, really more for quality experience. With me, I always see the potential in things, what it could be. Who knows what causes me to do that, but I like that diamond in the rough." 🍷

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