

Barlow Traveler Blog

Traveling, Hiking, Lodging and Dining in Oregon, Washington (the Northwest)

Iron Springs Resort gives ocean views and is gratifying, too

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By Jim

From the moment we came around a corner and down a hill, traveling north, on the narrow eastern Washington coastal highway, SH 109, just north of Copalis [Co PAY liss] Beach, we felt really good, like we were not just arriving at a beach hotel, but rather at a place we could call home-away-from-home.

Spread out to our left and above us was our destination: **Iron Springs Resort**. We'd never been there, but we'd been told it was back from deterioration and abandonment by many long-time, regular visitors. In fact, my wife and I had been invited to take a look.



Lining the beachfront cliffs — some three to four levels worth — you could see many of the resort's **24 cabins** set in the woods, each offering magnificent views of the Pacific Ocean. One of them, **No. 7**, was to be ours for two nights, the weekend before Thanksgiving 2011. Appropriately, my wife's birthday would be celebrated there.

Some background, according to co-owner Doug True: The resort — located about two hours southwest of Seattle and 286 miles from our home in Eugene, Oregon

— was originally built around 1901 or so. No one seems to know for sure. In 1947, Olive Little bought and operated the resort with her family until her death in early 2010. During Little's latter years, conditions had deteriorated.

True first came to the resort as a child, along with other family members, all from the Seattle area. He, his wife and his brother bought Iron Springs from the Little estate, taking over in April 2010. They quickly realized that water leaks, rundown conditions and other problems left them no choice but to close after Memorial Day 2010 to begin **renovations**. They hired a local contractor, who, in turn, hired some friends and others from the area — about 16 in all — and they worked for the next year, racing the clock to be open in June 2011. Final roofing

on some units and road paving had to be done in dry conditions, which came with about a week to go. They got it done.

We met three parties of returning visitors during our brief stay, and they all were impressed with the improvements. Among rumors that they had heard was one alleging that the Trues, former oil & gas company people, had planned to turn the resort into high-priced condominiums. Not so.

Janet True, during a supper she and Doug hosted for us, said that they “feel more like caretakers than owners.” They had been coming to the resort for 30 years like many other clientele. They wanted to recapture the old spirit and return the nostalgia of days gone by.



Resorts are like that everywhere. Your family finds one, and you go back every year. When I was a child, we often returned to the same resort in northern Wisconsin and a private lakeside cabin in northern Minnesota. I knew that feeling.

Iron Springs covers 120 acres, with 24 cabins spread on four levels of the hillside. Cabin 28 sits alone at the top of the hill, and is considered a place for those wanting privacy. No cable, no wireless. Three cabins could not be saved during the renovation phase, but the Trues decided to keep the cabins numbered — and unnamed — as they had always been to help returning guests be able to choose their favorite locations.

Four of the cabins have wood stoves, the others have regular wood-burning fireplaces. Exteriors are cedar. Inside there are oak floors. The Trues said they paid \$1.6 million for the property. They wouldn't say how much was spent on renovations.

Among returning visitors were Blain and Sue Eliot — the last name is pronounced EL litt, they explained. They had driven down from their retirement home in Sequim, Wash., about 15 miles east of Port Angeles in the shadows of the Olympic Mountains. Sue would celebrate her birthday at Iron Springs, just like my wife. They were in the cabin next to us, and had arrived only minutes before we did. Other family members joined them; they had a duplex cabin, providing plenty of room.

Blain and Sue, married for 28 years, first saw Iron Springs in 1972, but separately — Blain with his previous family and Sue with her sister and brother-in-law. Their visits had stopped about 10 years ago because of deteriorating conditions. The final straws, they said, were a chair's breaking as Sue sat on one, filthy shower stalls and decks that had become “scummy with mold and mildew.”

About a month before we met them, they had been at a reading-club meeting with 15 friends, when one member began talking about their friends, the Trues, buying the resort and spending time and money to fix it up. Blain and Sue called and made a reservation.

“When I first drove in to the lower lot to check in, I was just taken back,” Blain said. “I walked into the office, and it was just a feeling, an ambiance. Then we went up to our cabin and came in. The first thing I saw was the bedroom, with down comforters on the beds, the new windows, the clean walls. I was just stunned. It was such an eye-opening experience from what it used to be. Everything is first class.”

Sue quickly agreed. “We had given up, but now we’re back, and we’ll be coming back forever,” she said. “And now our kids are coming, too. The resort retains a rustic-ness that makes it feel like a cabin, which it is, but the amenities are top of the line. The cleanliness and the upgrades are wonderful. Have you seen the European-style soft drawers? You let them go and they close gently by themselves.” (First thing back in our cabin, I opened drawers and let go, and found that Sue was right.)

Blain also noted that the old whale boat, now mounted on a welcome sign, that greets arriving guests used to be on the roof of the old restaurant. “It was the only thing recognizable when we drove in,” he said.



One old tradition the Trues have tried to continue is the availability of Mrs. Little’s homemade cinnamon rolls, which apparently had been a popular mainstay during her tenure. “They were world-class cinnamon rolls,” Blain said.

Mrs. Little had mixed and baked them on site, but the Trues went out in search of Seattle-area bakeries whose cinnamon rolls most-closely duplicated the original recipe. The “replacements,” which are indeed outstanding, are sold in the resort store in the freezer section.

Here is a rundown of information that might be helpful.

- There is NO NEARBY GROCERY STORE, not even in Copalis Beach. Pack in all you need, especially vegetables, so that if you need a staple item, you can settle for getting it at the resort store. The closest real grocery store is in Ocean Shores, a solid 15-minute drive south. The resort store does not offer fresh produce, i.e. vegetables and fruits. We did drive north on SH 109 for sightseeing purposes. In the new planned community of **Seabrook**, you can find a quaint restaurant, the **Mill 109 Restaurant and Pub** (review to come); across the street from it is a nice deli (**Lil’s Pantry**), where we stocked up on some basic needs (and treats).
- Many of the cabin fireplaces were not renovated in terms of their flues. They look great to the eyes, but some fireplaces do not clear smoke effectively. Our cabin continually filled with smoke; we had to open windows. Same for our neighbors the Eliots. ... Four cabins do offer efficient wood stoves. NOTE: The cabin heating systems work well. We didn’t need the fireplace, but we had wanted the ambiance a fireplace delivers. Visitors are given a load of wood to start their stay. You may have to ask for more. *NOTE: Since our visit, I’ve been told, the fireplace ventilation issues have been resolved. This certainly is great news.*
- It is a hike to get to the beach, but it’s well worth it. If you have a disabled member in your party, beach-going may not be an option. To get to the beach, you have to walk down to the highway, walk briefly south, go through a gate and walk a winding trail through the woods (a short hike). Once on the beach, it is spectacular. I walked with our dog (yes, pets are indeed welcome at Iron Springs) and my wife went jogging.
- Many of the cabins seem to be VERY close together. Each is at a slightly different elevation. You may need to keep blinds closed for more privacy, but we noticed that this was necessary only for views not facing the ocean. We did not find the closeness or visibility a hindrance to our full enjoyment.
- Our queen-sized bed (a separate single was also in our bedroom). All bedding is provided. All are comfortable.
- Each cabin is provided with a charcoal grill, firewood, towels, shower essentials (including hair dryer), full-sized refrigerator, oven and range, dishwasher, microwave, toaster and coffee maker. Also dishes, pots and

pans, flatware, stemware, knives and other utensils ... And if you take your dog down to the beach or out on a trail, each cabin has a pet-cleaning station outside to help keep sand and forest debris from going inside.

- Summer rates begin at about \$260 a night. That's fine for some people. For us, it would mean trying to invite some friends to join us! Late fall and winter rates begin at \$159; mid-season rates (fall, spring and early summer) start at \$209. Cabins can be had in one or two bedroom varieties, and they are designed to sleep from two to ten guests.

- There are numerous activities that you can do using Iron Springs as your home base. Since our stay was short, we chose to stay close and simply explore the resort's offerings. The resort's website has an [activities page](#). Looks like Iron Springs will see us return, perhaps once a year. My wife already is asking that we make a stay at the resort an annual trip for her birthday.

(Photos below, click on each for full view.)



