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A trip to Frontier Oregon

By Brittany Arnold

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I sat in an Adirondack chair, listening to the quaking aspen leaves rustle in the breeze and looking out past a pond in front of me. For as far as my eyes could see there was sagebrush scattered over plains and rolling hills, a mother antelope with her two babies grazing in the grass, and an osprey perched above the water eating its fresh fish lunch. There wasn't a person in sight or any humming of cars. There was no cell phone service. It seemed still so untouched — a true sense of Oregon's frontier.

Peaceful lawn seating outside Silvies Valley Ranch cabins overlook a pond and ranch land with vibrant wildlife.

Yet, it had been touched, because if I looked behind me I saw the newly-opened Retreat and Links at Silvies Valley Ranch in Eastern Oregon. The ranch's 140,000 acres boasts more than 4,000 cattle and 2,600 goats, along with real-life cowboys, world-class golf, spa, shooting range, trails, preserved historic homesteads, horses (including a team of Clydesdales), meadows, wetlands, creeks, the Silvies River and some of the most genuine people I've ever met.

While it isn't quite the largest working ranch in Oregon, the property isn't broken up, which makes its footprint cover a very large portion of Highway 395 between Burns and John Day. Travelers will know they are there by the large entrance signs off the highway, continual signage marking points of interest, and consistent emerald green-topped roofs on the various barns and buildings strung throughout the property. It is like a cowboy's Disneyland.

This is what caught my attention as my family bypassed Silvies on our way to the 2017 solar eclipse's path of totality. "What is this place?" I asked my husband, who frequently visited the area to hunt. He told me it was a working ranch, then hesitated.

Founded in 1883, Silvies Valley Ranch brought many pioneers and changes to the land over time. It was bought by the Campbells in 2007 who have their own pioneer roots in the area. The Campbells restored the name, brand, and are continuing restoration work to restore the land to what it was.

"I'm afraid to tell you the rest because you'll want to go there," he said. This rugged man of mine rarely needs even a tent — just the desert and a sleeping bag and he's a happy camper. He married a born-and-raised city girl, however, who really appreciates accommodations with a few stars attached to the name.

He proceeded to tell me about the luxury resort they were putting in on this ranch, and a few months later we headed to Silvies Valley Ranch for our stay. My husband got to be in his favorite side of Oregon and I didn't have to stay in a tent. We finally met our match.

The retreat opened officially in May, and while its accommodations make this a hands-down five-star resort, it's the humble and hospitable staff — most wearing flannel shirts and cowboy hats — that make guests feel they are just at home on the ranch.

Days were filled with adventures including a tour via side-by-side led by the ranch's vice president, Colby Marshall. We covered 15 miles of the ranch, visited a herd of 500 yearling goats, talked about our kids and life, and took in the most amazing views. My husband also spent time with Marshall, ranch owners Scott and Sandy Campbell, their families and many other local ranchers during the seasonal cattle branding. Marshall said that the vision for the resort is "a place for lifetime experiences for the whole family."

Evenings we dined family-style at the lodge, sitting down with employees of the ranch as well as guests from all over. The conversation was always rich and the food was praise-worthy.

Seven-course dinners included both beef and goat from the ranch. Chevon (goat meat) is relatively rare within the United States, and Silvies Valley Ranch is one out of only a couple in the nation that harvest goats for their meat.

In addition to having one of the only goat meat programs, Silvies also has the only "reversible" golf course in the nation — second in the world — where the course direction is changed daily with various layouts. Golfers can golf the Craddock 18-hole course one day, and the Hankins 18-hole course the next day.

There is also a 9-hole, par 3 and a 7-hole course, where golfers can get assistance from their personal goat caddie. Yes, I said goat. The goat caddies are even outfitted with a custom-made goat golf bag for drinks, eats and clubs, and it is said they prefer to be tipped in peanuts.

Overall, The Resort and Links at Silvies Valley Ranch is completely unparalleled. We left with full bellies, a few mosquito bites, and many new friends. We left refreshed and reconnected to the sweet and simple things of life. We left and can't wait to go back.