



Gateway to relaxation

Explore Mount Rainier from this century-old lodge.

story / SUE HANSEN, CORVALLIS, OREGON



Innkeepers Ramona and Ron Sheppard gave the old lodge (top) new life as a mountain retreat.

The road to relaxation stretches toward Mount Rainier. I discovered this backwoods road more than 20 years ago after moving from the rugged realm of the Colorado Rockies to the volcanic region of the Pacific Northwest. Driving this two-lane road through the forests of the Cascade Mountains, I slow my pace as I head to a special spot along the scenic shoreline of a mineralized lake.

To arrive at the small community of Mineral (population 600) is to pull into a place where homey and historic live side by side. Settled by logging families in the late 1890s, the town is located next to Mineral Lake. The lake was first called Goldsboro Lake in 1857, when Washington was still a territory. Mineral made the map when the lake's water became known for its curative compounds more than 100 years ago. Today, proudly calling itself "the Gem of the

Northwest," Mineral is a restful retreat.

My escape starts at Mineral Lake Lodge, a century-old cedar inn atop a hill overlooking the lake, with a view of majestic Mount Rainier. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this 5,000-square-foot, three-story structure was built in 1906 and resembles a European hunting lodge. After being greeted warmly by the owners, I go outside to park my posterior in a comfy porch chair on the wrap-around veranda.

Here, I lift my eyes to the 14,410-foot peak born of lava flows and fragmented rocks. From this explosive beginning, Mount Rainier became the centerpiece of a national park in March 1899. Home to the greatest single-peak glacier system in the contiguous United States, it attracts 2 million visitors a year.

The town is just 15 miles from the park,



Mineral Lake's water became known for its curative compounds more than 100 years ago.



Settle into a seat in the second-floor sunroom, and treat yourself to a spectacular view of the lake (*above*), or head to the patio for a view of Mount Rainier (*top*). Some visitors climb aboard the Mount Rainier Scenic Railroad (*above right*) to get a better look at the snow-capped peak.

where you can hike and camp in the summer, or cross-country ski and snowshoe in the winter. Of course, people come to climb the mountain, too.

The mountain view changes with the seasons. The misty fog in fall and spring can hide Rainier in clouds for weeks, but the summer sunshine brings a blue-sky backdrop. The winter whiteness—annual average snowfall is 620 inches in the higher elevations—can be accompanied by high winds.

I, too, come and go with Rainier's seasons, using Mineral as my base for the occasional outdoor pursuit. Whether strapping on snowshoes, casting a fishing line into the lake in search of a 10-pound trout or just going for a stroll, I always come back for the solitude.

A short walk across the road from the lodge takes me to what is said to be the smallest post

office in the country. An 8-by-8-foot cedar structure, it was built in 1898 and has a wooden sign describing its role during Mineral's heyday, when trees were logged for two mills making cedar planks, shakes and shingles.

The largest building to explore in town is the 1946 brick schoolhouse. Now renovated, it is home to a cafe, gift shops and Mineral's event center. Not far from town, Mount Rainier Scenic Railroad has summer steam train excursions through the foothills of the mountain.

Some come here with cameras for the spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife. Others want adventures such as swimming and boating on Mineral Lake or scaling the summit of Mount Rainier. And then there are those like me who search for the quaint and quiet and prefer to take in all the magnificent sights from the comfort of a chair on the veranda. ☺



more to explore

In its early years, Mineral Lake Lodge was a choice destination for the affluent of Tacoma and Seattle. Some were hunters looking for game, while others wanted to take advantage of the therapeutic waters.

The Tacoma Eastern Railroad made two daily stops in nearby Elbe, and a horse and carriage took guests to the lodge. But by the 1920s, the lodge's popularity had faded, and it was bought by a doctor who turned it into a sanatorium.

In 2003, Ramona and Ron Sheppard reopened it as a bed-and-breakfast with eight themed guest rooms.

Read more about Mineral Lake Lodge and the surrounding area at minerallake.com.