



# Hells Canyon Hike

**Pittsburgh Landing - Suicide Point**

**Late April 2009**

I decided to take a hike on the Snake River National Recreation Trail. The trailhead is at Pittsburgh Landing which is about 4 hours from Boise. See the link for driving directions. [http://www.fs.fed.us/hellscanyon/things\\_to\\_see\\_and\\_do/idaho/trails/tr-102-snakeriver.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/hellscanyon/things_to_see_and_do/idaho/trails/tr-102-snakeriver.shtml)

My day adventure would take me on an 18.5 mile journey along the Idaho side of the Snake River. My destination was a 300-400 foot cliff along the river called Suicide Point. The place I really looked forward to seeing is called Kirkwood Historic Ranch which has a museum. Carter's Mansion also known as the Moonshine Mansion was also on my agenda which is a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile hike up the side canyon from the ranch.



Hells Canyon

I camped at the trailhead on a Tuesday and had planned hiking on Wednesday. There were a half-dozen cars parked at the trailhead. I can still picture the bright stars in the clear black sky yet hear thunder and watch flashes of lightening as it danced upriver.

I left my fishing pole home because I figured I wouldn't have time to fish. One of these times I am going to learn my lesson about not taking my pole. I ended up having plenty of extra time and could have at least fished for Bass and Trout at the trailhead. It's even possible to get lucky and hook into a Steelhead. Someday I'll return to land a Sturgeon.

I started out early and finished the 6 mile hike to Kirkwood Ranch and found everyone still sleeping so I decided to continue on another 2 1/2 miles up to Suicide Point in the shady canyon. I saw several Elk, Deer, a Turkey and was startled several times by coveys of Chukars and Huns. The spring flowers were brilliant and the hills were green. With the exception of a couple jet boats, I didn't see another person until I got back down to the ranch.



A Mule deer along the trail

There is a lot of history related to the ranch. A book named Home Below Hells Canyon by Grace Jordan will tell you all about the decade that Senator Len Jordan's family lived in the canyon. You can ask to look at the bathtub, cellar and old stove of the homestead where caretakers live today. Learn a little about the history before arriving and your trip will be a lot more rewarding.





A jet boat heading upriver





Looking down on Kirkwood Historic Ranch







Looking through the front door of the museum

Moonshine Mansion







Suicide Point





Looking at the Wallowa Mountains on the Oregon side from Suicide Point

The trail







Petroglyphs (stop at the parking area on the right side about ½ to 1 mile before the trailhead)

The hike ended with the same excitement as it started. While nearing the trailhead on a steep slope I heard that familiar sound. A Rattle Snake!

I jumped back to gain my composure. I could not see the Snake. As I approached closer it again began to rattle. I stepped back unable to get its bearings. The trail was the only option to pass due to the steep banks and cliffs. I approached a third time as it again began to rattle. As I was searching the shrubs and rocks another Rattle Snake suddenly fell from the sky next to the trail a few yards away. I think I jumped a couple feet in the air. I assume it slipped off the cliffs above as it was trying to escape.

I now had two Rattle Snakes next to the trail that I could not see. I backed off to let things settle down. After a few minutes I ran for it. I heard one of the Snakes rattle as I passed by. Needless to say, the hike was a thriller. I'm just glad I encountered the Snakes at the end of the trip or every Chukar that flushed would have sent a shock to my system.

Note: On the way home I hiked two miles up the Rapid River trail. The trailhead is at the fish hatchery just outside Riggins, ID. It is a very scenic canyon and looks like a great stream to fish later in the summer. I will definitely check it out if I'm in the area with some free time.