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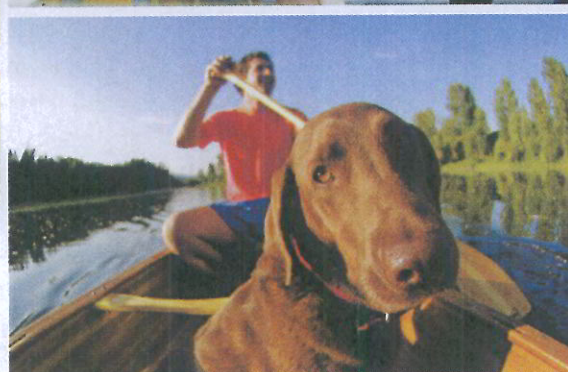
WILD ROADS
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AUGUST 2008

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PANHANDLE PERKS
Clockwise from above:
Downtown pick-me-ups;
fresh fruit; lab assistant;
weekend commute.

Idaho's Last Stand

Lakefront living in a tight-knit mountain retreat BY SARAH TUFF

■ THE ONLY DRAWBACK to life in an idyllic adventure haven is that, inevitably, some glossy magazine comes through town and blows its cover. But we wager to say that, given the local character, quiet Sandpoint (pop. 8,100) will continue to fight off land rushes and unsightly sprawl. Anchored in Idaho's wild panhandle between 40-mile-long Lake Pend Oreille (pon-duh-RAY) and the 8,000-foot Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains, Sandpoint today is much as it was 20 years ago, when civic-minded residents made a stand and saved the mission-style Panida Theater in the waterfront city center from demolition. These days, foreign films at the Panida, back-alley canine keg-pulls behind the brewpub, and a summertime bluegrass festival keep the town buzzing. "I scoured the West for an affordable place that was surrounded by untapped trails and had a strong sense of community," says mountain biker and spa owner Suzanne Kaplan. "That's exactly what I found in Sandpoint."

Ninety minutes northeast of Spokane, Washington, Sandpoint sits among 470,000 acres of national forest, which fed a thriving timber industry from the late 1800s until the 1980s. Locals today are more likely to be cutting work short to ride the lifts on Schweitzer Mountain's 2,900 acres of skiable terrain, given over in warmer months to prime singletrack. Or they're swinging through the twice-weekly farmers market before sailing, fishing, or paddling Pend Oreille. The lake is just 30 miles south of the Canadian border but is bathwater warm in summer. And rain gear is an afterthought in these parts: Sandpoint gets only 33 inches of precipitation a year—most of it in the form of fresh powder. "A lot of us here are able to work our schedules around our playtime," says Suzanne Pattinson, an environmental consultant who telecommutes from her Schweitzer Mountain home. "That's why we moved here in the first place."



Weekend Scouting Trip

➤ **PLAYGROUNDS:** Late summer means huckleberry season on Schweitzer. Gathering grounds are reached via the two-mile cedar-lined trail to Colburn Lake. Fat-tire-friendly 4.66-mile Overland Trail Loop is accessible from Schweitzer's base, while the Great Escape Quad serves screaming downhill (\$15 for a lift ticket; schweitzer.com). On Lake Pend Oreille, sand-volleyball teams duke it out and telecommuters phone it in at City Beach, paddlers ply 111 miles of shoreline (\$25 for a two-hour rental; kayaking.net), and bikers hit the waterside singletrack. After hours, Eichardt's Pub is the go-to choice for burgers and brews.



➤ **WHERE TO STAY:** The Inn at Sand Creek is a renovated 1890s bank (\$140; innatsandcreek.com). At the Western Pleasure Guest Ranch, a log cabin north of town, wranglers guide horse trips into the Selkirk and Cabinet ranges (\$200; westernpleasureranch.com).

WANT TO LIVE HERE?

The median home price is \$289,600. // Coldwater Creek employs 800, and forestry jobs are hot.