

Kimberly, Oregon: The Land Before Time

By Julie Mansfield Smith

Located where the North Fork meets the main stem of the John Day River at the intersection of Highways 19 & 402 lies the scenic ranching community of Kimberly, Oregon. In Northern Grant County, there is likely more wild game animals, horses and livestock in this lush valley than the handful of residents in this sleepy little neighborhood town.

Kimberly is known to most who visit for its one - stop shopping for fuel and food at the John Day River Trading Post, a visit to purchase or pick fresh fruit at the Kimberly Orchards, plus great weather and multitude of outdoor opportunities. Numerous other businesses with people who work from their homes reside in this scenic vista and share nature at its best.

This is an area where numerous tracts of privately owned properties meet public lands and local ranches sport fee hunting as extra income, and landowners appreciate those who respect private property signs. Big game viewing is not uncommon on these parcels along the river when one travels through. A multitude of opportunities abound for camping and hunting on public lands with avid hunters coming back yearly to enjoy the North Side and Heppner Units for big game adventures. The hunting season draws nature lovers and sportsmen alike who appreciate the people, friendly atmosphere and the sparsely populated town called Kimberly. This is still an undiscovered terrain where century year old ranch families continue to make their living off this land before time.

According to locals, the town was established in the late 1940's by its namesake, Orin Kimberly, whose family homesteaded the area, and planted the beginning of what is now known as the Thomas Orchards. Family owned and operated for the past 5 decades, the orchard supplies numerous varieties of fresh fruit that is sold to the public at their fruit stand during the summer months. Folks travel for miles around to pick their own produce or buy by the pound, bushel or box. Fresh fruit is shipped to the northwest from Kimberly, which is also known for its good climate, great gardens and extended growing season.

The orchards seasonally flowering fruit trees provide a colorful backdrop to those traveling to Kimberly through the outskirts of Grant County on Hwy 19 north of Dayville. This route also takes many tourists on a picturesque drive filled with blue skies, rushing rivers and green fields full of hay, wildlife and livestock.

Bicyclists, motorcyclists, hikers, car clubs and bus tours make this part of their loop trip in the summer months. More and more people are finding there way over to this remote haven for solitude and relaxation. This is prime country for raising livestock, horses and families.

The North Fork of the John Day River features excellent fishing for steelhead and bass. Visitors and locals alike enjoy rafting, tubing, swimming, sunbathing and picnicking from Lone Pine or Big Bend state park on Hwy. 402. The rock hounding, hiking, wildlife, fish and bird population make this an area of great interest to enthusiasts who are also curious about this prehistoric setting, the beautiful photography it offers and the unique holdings that are open to the public all within close proximity to the landmark known as the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.

On the way to this pastoral setting called Kimberly via north on Hwy. 19 from Dayville is the newly constructed Thomas Condon Interpretive Center (aka John Day Fossil Beds National Monument) located approximately 16 miles south of Kimberly. Many visitors are expected to come from afar to view the new museum and discover interesting and prehistoric facts about the unique rock formations that adorn the skyline and run to the river bottom. It all tells its own tale about where the locals enjoy the simple things in life as it was in this land before time. Bring your campers or RV. We welcome visitors to our area and hope you enjoy your stay!