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Josh Laughtland: The bloke who loves to soak

David Parker

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Josh Laughtland, who runs the Web site idahohotsprings.com, has hit around 100 of Idaho's natural springs, has hiked 40 miles roundtrip just to get to some springs and was recently sought out to guide a National Geographic Traveler reporter and photographer to a hot pool near Boise.

In other words, the self-proclaimed Hot Springs Guy has earned his title.

Laughtland, 29, is a freelance Web designer who also works as the in-house Webmaster for BIZ Net Inc. in Boise. He has lived in Boise since 1996 and in Idaho since 1983.

When he started IdahoHotSprings.com in 1999 as an obvious extension of his hot-springing hobby, he didn't foresee creating the monster that he did.

The site and accompanying blog, which feature hot springs from throughout the Pacific Northwest but focus in on those in Idaho, now gets 10,000 unique visitors per month, and Laughtland can't keep up with all of the feedback he gets through the site.

While he tries to answer all of the questions with a straight face, it's hard not to laugh when people ask if they can live in the vicinity of hot springs or where the best hot springs for bathing are located.

Laughtland does it, though, because he — like so many others — is fascinated (some may say geothermally obsessed) with naturally heated, continuously flowing hot water bubbling from the ground.

"There's a need for current info on the hot springs besides what's in a guidebook," Laughtland says.

Most of the guidebooks, he says, are lacking the accurate locations and other up-to-date information.

But if the Hot Springs Guy is so smart, you might ask, then why doesn't he write a book on the subject?

He plans on doing just that sometime in the near future.

Laughtland likely is waiting until he has time to knock out the rest of what he estimates to be the 130 soakable pools in Idaho.



Brad Talbutt

Hot springs frequenter Josh Laughtland

**Additional Information****The Lowdown**

Age: 29

Born: Rapid City, S.D.

Raised: Northern Idaho (Post Falls & Coeur d'Alene area)

Hot springs visited: 100

Favorite hot springs: Skinnydipper Hot Springs near Boise, any of the springs near Warm Lake and Jerry Johnson Hot Springs off Highway 12 in Central Idaho.

Laughtland's keys for going to hot springs

J Fall is best time to soak in hot springs. You don't have to deal with the runoff that you do in the spring.
J Go online, look at pictures and educate yourself on the atmosphere of the springs before you go.
J "Roadside" hot springs are always going to be packed.
J Pack it out. "Every time I go, I'm packing stuff out," he says.
J Avoid bringing glass at all costs.
J If possible, bring a small folding shovel, biodegradable sandbags and collapsible bucket with you to backcountry hot springs. And, of course, don't forget the towel and shades!

Why hot springs are hot

The water is hot because it is heated from within the Earth's crust, forcing it up to the surface where pools are developed near the outflow.
Ninety percent of Idaho's 340 hot springs (about 130 are considered soakable) are the result of leftover energy heating water near fault lines. The energy is leftover from when the North American tectonic plate was pushed west as a result of a meteorite collision in the southeast corner of Oregon more than 17 million years ago.
Evidence of this collision, in the form of black basalt, is still visible along Interstate 84 between Boise and Idaho Falls.
The other 10 percent of Idaho's hot springs are from water being heated by active volcanoes.
— Information from Josh Laughtland