

Restaurant Review Latest Update—Fall 2007

Since our first visit to Crested Butte, we have always been amazed at how well one can dine in such a small town, enjoying the lack of national chains and delighting in even having some big city gourmet fare at less than big city prices. We'd like to share a little of our knowledge of CB dining with you. (Unless otherwise noted, all are in Crested Butte proper, not Mt. CB at mountain.) There is a restaurant menu booklet published and if the copies we've left in our units are not found, then try to pick up a copy at Chamber office or one of the stands with brochures and the CB News.

This review is intended for the use of the Akers guests at our Treasury Point townhomes and Black Bear Lodge condo. As with most folks, we tend during our short visits to go back to the tried and true so there are some restaurants that we don't get to too often and a few not at all. We will so indicate. Our views, of course, are strictly subjective but having eaten out in CB since 1992, we have a pretty good idea of what you might enjoy. For those of you who have been to CB before, you can compare your evaluation with ours, and maybe find a few spots you haven't been to. For those coming to CB for the first time, this review might help you select the places to try in the few days and nights you have available. In either case, we hope you find it useful. After your visit, we'd appreciate any feedback, esp. if your findings vary from ours.

An opening comment— it's still a good idea to make reservations as the popular places do fill up. And when the shuttle busses hit town from the mountain, a big group often heads for the more popular spots.

We'll start with the three gourmet/continental restaurants which couldn't be more different—one small with a small menu changing weekly, one nouveau cuisine, one long standing menu tried and true. You should try to hit at least one so you get a feel of what CB has to offer at the high end, whether for a splurge or last nite in town grand finale. All three have excellent wine selection. None especially kid friendly, unless your kids are well behaved and you don't mind spending a bit more than chicken fingers. Bosquet may have a kids menu. Dress can be casual at any and all restaurants including these—jeans included.

Soupcn—in a small house (worthy of Hansel and Gretel) in an alley just off of the far end of Elk Ave. (main street). Unlike any setting you're likely to have seen or will see. Only a few tables, with seatings at 6 and 8PM. Owner/chef Scott arrived from NYC a few years back and has continued the gourmet fare with his own choices. A small list of entrees 6-8, likewise desserts are written on a blackboard and change every week. Very, very good. Desserts sometimes awesome. Probably the priciest of the three but no one ever says they didn't get his/her money's worth. When we have friends visiting, we usually go here for our grand finale. Highly recommended. Summer '06: Ad in CB news says under new ownership. Format, menu presumably the same. Will be checking it out ourselves in August.

Update: August visit—format of limited menu still the same, still pricey and still good with new dishes by new owner Chef Jason. Felt portions a bit too small, and appetizers a bit pricey too. Had no salad on the menu and all appetizers \$10 and over and all entrees \$30 and over.

Suggested to Jason that he needed a few less expensive items on menu so that one could escape for less than \$50, and he has presumably taken our suggestions to heart. Has a tough job if folks compare with standards of previous two owners if he keeps the same format. Needs to step up a notch before we visit for more grand finales. Did not revisit in Spring '07.

Le Bosquet—in shopping center near supermarket. Owners/chef Victor and wife Candy after 27 years or so have put the restaurant up for sale. But with no buyers to date, they continue to serve the same delicious favorites on a menu that has changed very little over the years. Try the hazelnut chicken, the duck breast in berry sauce or any of the others. This is one of those places where you can't go wrong on anything you order. Consistency, above all. Daily specials often

interesting. Their Hungarian mushroom soup might be best soup we've ever had! (When we took a large group once we asked to have it that night, and when we had to change the date they graciously moved the soup to the new date too!) Recently, has been added to menu permanently. House salad dressing, sesame based, is so good we used the recipe at our daughter's wedding a few years back. Quiet, subdued ambiance. Highly recommended. Two visits in Spring 07—still consistent. They've added a small plate menu—interesting and tasty items. A few of these and a salad and you have a meal.

Timberline—at corner opposite City Hall (space formerly occupied by Le Bosquet, moved from house at end of Elk Ave. now occupied by Secret Stash). When Owner/Chef Tim came to town from Carmel CA and other locales, this was our favorite spot. Nouveau cuisine, mid-size list of entrees, changing seasonally still pretty much the mode. More eclectic, ambitious than the other two. Some hits, some misses but always interesting. Was disappointed a couple of years back with some pricey but miniscule entrée portions (and even wrote the only letter of complaint we've ever sent to a restaurant complaining of same) but have heard that things have gotten better since. Intend to check it out next visit, but have to say if you can only get to one or two, Soupcon and Bosquet would be better choices. Until we get back to see for ourselves, Timberline ranks 3rd. Update: Bosquet still number 1. Until Soupcon changes a bit (as above), would put it and Timberline tied for number 2. Two visits Spring 07—one positive (good portobella mushroom entrée, and a ravioli with beef tips), one negative—most in group had rainbow trout special. Overly salted for all. NY strip also overseasoned. Salt and pepper do not make haute cuisine.

Harry's Fine Dining (formerly Buffalo Grille)—can't quite put this in the gourmet class since it doesn't have continental cuisine fare, but some friends and locals rate this as their favorite. Have elk, venison, buffalo on the menu along with beef. If you like game or want to try it, this would be the spot. Have had some excellent dinners here but don't get there too often as ladies tend to want lighter fare, though there are other choices available. (You'll find good but not great steaks in CB. Rack of lamb usually a better choice, also elk.) Summer update—ad in CB News says name has changed and published menu looks to have a bit less game. Think name change was result of a contest, but may be new owners too. Update: did not get back here summer '06, but some locals think this is the best spot in town. Spring 07—game is gone. ½ dozen appetizers and ½ dozen entrees (\$30-40). Food was good. Trying to re-establish itself as a gourmet spot, competing with others. Like Soupcon, a bit pricey.

Elevation—most recently Club Med, different hotels before. Bought by Florida developer and some rooms being run as hotel by CBMR (resort owner) while others being turned into condos. CBMR running restaurant as of winter '06/07 but not visited yet.

Marchitelli's Gourmet Noodle—New owners of a few years ago Michael and Jennifer turned a mediocre Italian restaurant into a good one. One of the places we almost always go to when we only have a week in town. Kid friendly. Lively atmosphere. Spring 07—big group was well satisfied. Crawfish and mussel appetizers both popular.

Bacchanale—another Italian with solid fare. Don't get there too often for no particular reason so can't evaluate fairly.

Brick Oven Pizzeria—another Italian, obviously pizza oriented. Large outdoor patio popular in summer. Indoor décor rather retro. Almost no experience here and summer visit poor due to surly waitress, but that's no criterion. Suggest Secret Stash or Avalanche for pizza, see below. Kid friendly.

The Secret Stash—at the end of Elk Ave. Very popular pizza place. Funky, fun décor. Seating on chairs, pillows, floor etc. Delicious, exotic pizza creations as well as the usual. Very kid friendly, but suggest going early or carry out with small kids as wait for table and wait for food can be lengthy. Many carry out orders compete with oven space for dine in orders. But after a few drinks you won't notice—or care!

Avalanche—at the mountain. Mentioned here because it also has great pizza, but great all around fare—salads, burgers, chicken pot pie (our favorite if you like cpp). Great place for lunch but busy. All you can eat specials at dinner during the week (ribs one day, forget which). Great for carry out on the day you arrive or any nite when the gang is too pooped or just can't get motivated/together to go out. Very kid friendly.

Donita's Cantina—Tex-Mex cuisine, good and large portions, reasonably priced. Very popular and can be long wait as they don't take reservations. Very kid friendly.

Calypso—**Update:** Fall 2007: Former owner Joe Garcia told me island format didn't catch on. New owners have reverted to microbrewery/steaks/chicken/bbq . May have changed name back too.

New owners took over former Idlespur microbrewery in center of town as of winter 06/07. Ads say Hawaiian and Caribbean cuisine. One visit Spring 07. Our group satisfied—1/2 chicken, Brazilian sampler plate both good. Some dishes with island flavor, others standard. Entrées generally \$20-30. Mixed comments from others who've tried it.

Crave—another new restaurant in winter 06/07. Ad says Cajun food. Not visited/rated yet. Passed by a few times and saw few customers. Location toward near end of Elk Ave. probably a minus.

Wooden Nickel—next door to Calypso. Old time Western bar décor. Similar kind of steaks, chicken menu to former Idlespur. Some say best burger in town. Very popular and very kid friendly. Also, a good choice. Remains the only western style fare.

Slogar—a must stop. Old bordello décor. Family style skillet (not deep) fried chicken dinner. Very popular and reservations recommended. Really delicious meal—almost an all you can eat—and everyone leaves having overeaten (you will too-guaranteed). And at \$13 plus or minus for adults (kids less), probably the best value west (or even east) of the Mississippi. Very kid friendly. (A nephew of ours claims it's the best meal he's ever had. That might be a bit of an overstatement but it is good. Occasionally we'll get a take out order to bring back to family the nite before we depart but it's not quite the same as having it live and in living color at the restaurant.) They do have a steak option but no one ever takes it—at least we've never seen anyone do so. Spring 07—new owners, thankfully same fare.

The Last Steep—not much experience here. (formerly home of Bacchanale now across the street). Standard and lighter fare, good the few times we have tried. Modest décor. Kid friendly. Reasonably priced. A favorite of locals we know when they don't want too fancy or too expensive.

Long Dragon—new Chinese, visited only once with party of two so limited food sampling. Dishes were good. Homeowner friends who go often say it's one of their favorites. Modest décor. Kid friendly. Spring '06 update: carryout order—sweet and sour shrimp very good, almond chicken mediocre—didn't taste like almonds or chicken, egg foo yong absolutely awful—veggies including broccoli!?! outside on top of pancake. Guess you have to know what to order or have good luck.

Lil's Land and Sea—Update Fall 2007: September fire has put the restaurant out of business, most likely for entire winter season.

--a solid choice for seafood. We usually stop once each trip when we tire of big and/or fancy meals. Spring '06 update: good, homemade sushi. Limited fresh catch menu—usually salmon, rainbow trout and one or two others. Spring 07—new owners. Improved menu, décor. Much improved. Two sushi chefs observed working busily as it seemed majority of diners were ordering same.

Paradise Café—breakfast and lunch. If you want to eat breakfast out one day, this is a top choice. Try the buckwheat pancakes with everything—nuts, berries, the works. But busy and crowded with not a lot of tables. Patio in summer is a delight. Closes between breakfast and lunch.

Pitas in Paradise—unbelievably good wraps. Very popular and busy. If you're in town for lunch or taking a day off from the slopes, a can't miss choice. Big take-out business so wait can be a bit long if you don't hit it right. But worth the wait. Update: moved to new location next door to old one. Patio dining in summer both front and back. Nicer indoor dining area. Still very busy and very good. Spring update—had a good thing going, moved to new quarters next door to old, and they blew it. Two visits—waited forever for food. Same good food, but with only one person in the kitchen and expanded capacity, long wait ruins the experience.

Woodstone Grille—in the Grand Lodge (formerly Sheraton) at the mountain—haven't visited in several years but was solid all-American menu. Suspect it's still a good choice. Nice atmosphere in the evening. Hotel guests use for lunch and breakfast. (Am told Rotary meets there on Wed. for any Rotarians among you.) Spoke with local realtor who said food, menu good. Spring 07 update—went with large party (18) for a birthday. Had plenty of capacity. Food ok. Ruby trout good but steamed vegetables not very exciting.

Butte 66—on the second floor of the Treasury Bldg. at base of mountain. Bought out by the resort a year ago, who just bought the building as well which according to local paper says they plan to re-do and upgrade bldg. Restaurant has had several names and owners and checkered past. Service and food spotty last winter season. Great deck for sitting out on sunny days but service on deck was poor. Suspect as they've done with on mountain food, resort will try to improve this season. Mountain food just ok but getting better. Italian restaurant next to ice bar by Twister lift was gaining popularity and often sold out at lunch so something good must be happening. Personally, we don't function well after a big lunch, wine etc so haven't tried it.

Princess Wine Bar—no experience but always seems busy for appetizers, sushi, drinks, desserts and drinks, whenever we happen by. Also open for breakfast. Quiet relaxing atmosphere, live music on occasion. Not kid friendly.

Ginger Café—limited experience but very good asian cuisine, some on the spicy side. Very small, hard to get tables. Also carry out. Not space nor cuisine that kids would likely enjoy. Spring '06 update—return visit. very good, but again space limited and food spicy.

Lobar—formerly Black Whale, in basement of Company Store building. Sushi restaurant opened by wife of couple that started Secret Stash, during 05-06 season. Have not attended but heard favorable comments. Apparently dancing, entertainment at times. Understand sushi flown in daily, not made on premises, but that doesn't seem to deter.

Sunshine Deli—ad in June CB News announcing new spot at 214 Elk Ave. Says open for breakfast and lunch, outdoor patio, 8a.m.-4p.m. Have not been in CB since this place has opened. Update: former Pitas employees opened this spot in old Pitas building, next to new Pitas. Good looking breakfast and lunch menu, although we didn't get a chance to try. Nice to have another alternative for breakfast and lunch. Patio dining out back, summer.

McGill's—new spot summer '06. Denver woman Mary McGill bought property as investment, then decided to open her own restaurant. Instant hit for breakfast and lunch. Had great breakfasts, lunch menu looked good. Larger capacity than other places and doesn't close between breakfast and lunch. Think they will take away business from Paradise Café. No outdoor dining. With open kitchen and no ceiling fans was a bit stuffy in summer, but hardly a drawback. Recommended.

Cowboy BBQ—replaced former Mexican food Powerhouse Grill near end of Elk Ave. Free mech. bull ride on a Wed. nite made place too noisy a year ago, and we didn't stay. Return visit with large group last winter would rate just ok chicken and ribs—ordered several family style platters which menu said served 4-6 and found them much too skimpy. Barely served 2-3. Will give it another try sometime, but found first visit disappointing.

The Ice Bar—mid mountain restaurant with just what it says—an outdoor bar made of ice. The resort turned the small adjacent snack bar into a small gourmet restaurant for lunch. Very popular and reservations usually a must. Hear good reports, but not being ones for wining and bigger meal dining mid-day we haven't tried.

Not rated/reviewed—Would you believe there are some places we never get to, including: Izzy's, Teocalli Tamale, Eldo, Karolina's Kitchen. You're on your own!
Update: **Teocalli Tamale** recommended by locals as best lunch spot along with Pitas. It's a create your own burrito type Mexican. An attempt at **Karolina's Kitchen** for breakfast proved to be a zero—dark, and smokey, even in non-smoking section suffering from adjacent bar—caused us to walk out. Almost no other customers present. Avoid.

Gunnison

The Trough—had a late pickup at the airport and heard about and tried this large restaurant about 3 miles west of Gunnison on route 50 (keep going—when you think you've probably passed it is where you'll find it). Was quite a pleasant surprise. Nice décor, several dining rooms and excellent seafood and steak menu at reasonable prices. We had fish entrees but steak and prime ribs at adjacent tables looked quite good. Good place to try if you're in Gunnison late afternoon or evening. Would rate it equal to all the CB spots except the 3 gourmet restaurants which are in a different category.

Also in Gunnison, on route 135 a couple of miles north toward CB, is Garlic Mike's—a popular Italian restaurant. Only visit several years ago, we found good food, but owner gave us a bit of a hassle about seating as we showed up with no reservations. On the way to and just before reaching The Trough we saw a large family style Mexican restaurant—Fiesta Mexicana. Looked like a nice facility but know nothing beyond that. The Firebrand Café and other spots in town and one near the City Market, Palisades, are decent lunch spots.

Shopping note: If you're driving up from Gunnison, you may want to stop at City Market next to the Wal-Mart (smallest in the US) where you'll find much bigger selection and better prices than at the small market in CB. City Market owned by Kroger, so if you have a Kroger frequent shopper card you can use it there.

Bon appetit!

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