Middleton Valley

The Middleton Valley is home to one of the state’s largest natural freshwater lakes, the unique and beautiful Jefferson Basin, and numerous parks and recreational campgrounds. Middleton Valley has many convenient and quality visitor attractions and facilities, including a variety of lodging options to fit any budget. The Middleton Valley and surrounding area is renowned for its beautiful scenery, wildlife, and outdoor recreational opportunities.

In the 1860s, silver was discovered in the Middleton Valley area and fortune seekers flocked to the area hoping to strike it rich at the massive Milestone Lode discovered in 1860. Would-be miners rushed to the Middleton Valley over Culver Pass from the north and Myers Pass and Gulliver Pass from the south. The influx of pioneers to the valley was so great that Northridge Road was forged across the mountains. Silver was not the only valuable commodity early settlers found in the area. Middleton Valley’s timber-rich forests became a necessary resource for the increasing number of people needing fuel and to support the labyrinth of mines being constructed. The easy availability of timber soon led to the devastation of the valley forests, which were heavily logged between 1860 and 1890. The decline of the Milestone Lode probably rescued the valley’s diminishing forests.

Although the development of the Middleton Valley has come far, modern planners today use the ancient wisdom of the Native people when building in the area. Realizing the need to preserve the valley’s beauty in the face of progress, the state formed the Middleton Valley Regional Planning Department in 1965 to oversee environmentally responsible development. The department’s approach has enabled limitations to construction while devising a redevelopment plan that will improve the economy, tourist access, and the environment well into the next century. Today, the Middleton Valley retains its pioneer charm while displaying an ancient respect for nature. While hotels, casinos, and ski resorts draw millions of guests each year, the valley’s main attraction continues to be the restful silence of the wilderness and the awe-inspiring beauty of the area.

The geology of Middleton Valley accounts for its compatibility with both agriculture and outdoor recreation. According to Joanne Hensley in her article on the natural resources of the Middleton Valley, “the granite found in the valley is approximately 60 million years old, but became exposed after 30 million years of adjustments in the earth’s crust and erosion”. Floods, fire, ice, and volcanoes all played into the historical shaping of the area. A complex system of reservoirs and waterways services the croplands in the valley and takes advantage of the unusual geologic features of the area.

Because of the geography of the Middleton Valley and the surrounding area, summer and winter activities abound. With over 189,000 surface acres of water on or near Middleton Lake, fishing is a favorite activity. The lake is open all year for fishing for walleye, trout, bass, perch, crappie, and catfish. In the summer, people fish for some of the largest rainbow trout in the state and in the winter, ice fishing is a popular sport and easily accessible from local lodges. Other regional activities include hiking, camping, mountain biking, skiing, golf, and tennis. The valley boasts over 20 lodges and resorts and offers a full range of services for visitors, from those interested in camping to those preferring first-class amenities.