



## A Place Where You Can Become 'The Biggest Loser'

By Laura Saltman on March 31, 2008 2:01 PM

I can't tell you how many times I have heard people talk about NBC's "The Biggest Loser." Saying things like: "if I could just find a place like the weight loss ranch." Or, "I want to find a place where I would be pushed for weeks and sometimes months at time, so I could finally lose the weight." This week I learned there actually is such a place, but it's not an easy fix.

You have to be willing to work hard and be open to learning new ways of viewing the food you eat. If you can do that, then let me tell you about a place called Fitness Ridge, which was featured on "The Biggest Loser" on March 18th as the reward for a tough treadmill challenge (won by Mark).

Last year, when I went to the set of "High School Musical 2", I fell in love with the beautiful town where it was being filmed: St. George, Utah. Located about two hours north of Las Vegas, it's surrounded by colorful mountains of red, white and many shades in between. It's become known as a spa destination for those looking to pamper themselves. It's also known for great golf, tennis and hiking. I knew that I eventually wanted to come back.

Several months ago I stumbled upon Fitness Ridge, which labeled itself as a "compassionate boot camp." Granted I didn't have a ton of weight to lose. I just wanted to get in better shape and lose a portion of those ten pounds the TV camera adds. I checked out their information and when I realized it was right near St. George, I booked my trip.

For some reason I kept going back and forth to their website. One day I stumbled upon a photo of that week's clients. It concerned me because many of them looked much older and many were out of shape. I thought this was going to be a place where healthy people came to get a killer workout for a week. I was concerned and somewhat disappointed. However, I was committed to going and figured I'd just enjoy it for what it was.

The day I arrived, I found that my entire concept of what this place was turned out to be completely wrong.

What I found was a group of people - all shapes and sizes - committed to one common goal - change. That change could be to lose 50 pounds, bounce back from illness, or lose the last bit of baby weight. Maybe it was to learn how to eat healthy or just simply keep in shape what you already had. Some people come for a week while others stay for extended periods - weeks and even months. They keep the prices really reasonable. A week starts at just \$1295 and the more weeks you stay the price per week drops.

## A Re-Awakening

A spa with facials and massages (ask for Jane-Ann she's a massage genius) is available at night - but this is no vacation. This is work.

A strict 1,200 calorie diet is imposed (300 for breakfast, 400 for lunch and 500 for dinner) which most people consume in one meal at home. However, with the help of nutritionist Emily Fannesbeck you learn how far you can stretch 1,200 calories if you just choose the right foods. The food was phenomenal. It was cooked lovingly by Chef Cameron Payne, who has worked his magic in high fat, high calorie, high priced restaurants in Las Vegas like Spago. He now finds himself having to create equally tasty treats out of healthy foods like tofu, soy, beans, grains, veggies and whole wheat everything. He does it with incredible results. I challenge any chef in the world to create a better tasting meal than the 500 calorie one I ate on Friday which included salmon, cous cous, asparagus and chocolate covered strawberries for dessert.

The week goes something like this. You wake up Monday morning and arrive for a 6am workout followed by a 7am breakfast. Then it's off to hike in a beautiful park called Snow Canyon which they have dubbed the Stop Sign hike. The entire group takes off at their own pace up an ever-increasing paved path that eventually takes you to 1,000 feet and the dreaded Stop Sign. The more fit and determined people make it up to the top (4.5 miles) and back down while the less fit just go as far as they can until the van arrives and you give up. It took me about 80 minutes (walking) to arrive at the top huffing and puffing. Then you have to go back down the hill for a total of 9 miles.

Then it's back for an hour-long aqua-cise class in the pool followed by lunch at 12:45. At 1:30 you attend a nutritional class, a cooking class or a motivational lecture. 2:30 it's back in the gym for either a cardio workout followed by a strength training workout at 3:30 or vice versa. Then at 4:30 you wind down with a stretch class, Pilates, yoga or maybe Tai Chi depending on the day. Dinner is at 5:30 followed by a lecture at 6:15 on nutrition or another motivational talk. Then it's spa time or sleep time. You get up the next morning and do it all over again. The classes change and so do the hikes. Each day the groups are broken up into beginning, intermediate and advanced and you all venture off to different destinations.

After a week, you do the Stop Sign hike again to see if you can shave time off. The second time I did it, it took me 52 minutes and I ran half of it. That's how much difference just one week can make in your strength and stamina at Fitness Ridge. A huge round of applause was awarded to Ron and Caroline, a married couple in their 50's from El Paso, TX who shaved 23 minutes off their time.

That's what makes this place so incredible: the group dynamic. The owners Tami Clark, Michelle and Cameron Kelsch keep the groups to under 40 or so people. You eat together, hike together, exercise together and, at times, you suffer together. We all found ourselves getting motivation from each other. There was 49 year-old Karen from Aspen, Colorado who looked like a trim and fit 22-year-old who everyone aspired to look like. There was Diane, a breast cancer survivor from Houston, Texas who (to celebrate two years cancer free) was spending a month at Fitness Ridge to lose weight and gain back strength.

There was 74-year-old grandmother of three Colleen who was out doing intermediate hikes while others half her age were still on the beginner hikes. We each inspired the other to carry on. I was climbing up ledges and scaling steep inclines that scared the crap out of me - but if others that were older, weaker and less fit were doing it, then I could too. On a particularly tough stretch of one hike, somehow the fifty-somethings had gotten way ahead of the twenty, thirty and forty year-old's and wound up calling it "AARP pointe."

You won't find "Biggest Loser" trainers like Jillian or Bob screaming in your face but you will find owner Michelle saying that you need to "give your body a reason to change" as she pushes you to go faster during a dreaded cardio class called "Treading." You won't hear someone yell at you if you can't find the strength

to finish that last bicep curl but you will find aerobics manager, Sharon Read, telling you that if you keep going "it's funner" or joking that "Bob [from Seattle] wants you to kick it up a notch."

On the final night, Emily (the nutritionist) takes everyone out to test their new nutritional knowledge at a buffet restaurant called the "Chuck-a-Rama." Just the name gave me nightmares on Friday night. You walk in and are surrounded by food, food and more food. The challenge is to fill up your plate with just 500 calories. Most people passed with flying colors.

At the end of one week there were people that lost 6 pounds, 7 pounds and even 10 pounds which brought my new pal Mike from Springfield, Missouri to tears I'm told. Others that have stayed longer have lost much more. One guy, Jim Trudeau, had lost 50 pounds in a month!

[Check Out Jim's Blog Here To See How He is Progressing!](#)

When all was said and done, in one week I lost 4 pounds, 6.5 inches and most importantly 2.4 percent body fat - but what I gained was far better - friendships, inspiration and most importantly the knowledge to take home of what I learned at Fitness Ridge.

For more information go to their website. [www.FitnessRidge.com](http://www.FitnessRidge.com). In August, they are doing a two week "Biggest Loser" challenge: the individual that loses the most weight gets their money back for the two weeks.