

Bear Necessity

In Alpine, there's one place that can cater to nearly any craving, be it for burgers or tacos or chicken-fried steak. And though the menu at Bear Wallow Café is diverse, it does contain something that you simply shouldn't overlook. Pie. Delicious, homemade pie.

WOOD-PANELED, FRIENDLY and down-to-earth, Bear Wallow Café is just the kind of place you'd expect to find in Alpine, a tiny White Mountains community sur-

alpine

rounded for miles by high-mountain forests and meadows.

With its giant chain-saw bear and rustic wood siding, Bear Wallow Café is the very picture of a mountain diner, with

wooden lunch counter, antlered walls and checkerboard-tile floor. Despite its remote location, the café's green vinyl banquettes are usually overflowing with locals and lucky travelers who happen upon it. However you find your way to its doors, you can bet your first visit will not be your last.

That's partly because of the people who work there, who are welcoming, good-humored and efficient. If the employees treat the place as if they own it, it's probably because they do. Three generations of Vada Davis' family work at Bear Wallow, with her daughters and grandchildren pitching in on everything from kitchen duties to bussing tables.

The menu features American and Mexican classics, all of them comfort on a plate: half-pound burgers, tacos, fresh salads, and house-made chili and soups. The french fries are hand-cut daily. If you're there at dinnertime, order the chicken-fried steak. Prepared from an old family recipe, it's huge, hand-breaded and served with a generous portion of those yummy fries, all smothered in thick, creamy gravy.

But whatever you order, save room for pie. Bear Wallow is famous for its pies. And oh, what glorious pies. During the peak months of summer, Davis' daughter, co-owner Taani Harper, turns out as many as 70 pies a week in a dozen varieties. Apple is the perennial favorite. But you might also find peach, pumpkin, blueberry, cherry, apricot, blackberry, mixed berry, apple-raisin, strawberry-rhubarb, banana cream, coconut cream or pecan. Whatever's fresh and in season. They're all made from scratch, with Taani's magnificent, flaky crust. Enjoy it with whipped cream or à la mode, but don't leave Alpine without ordering a slice.

— KATHY MONTGOMERY

Information: Bear Wallow Café is located at 42650 U.S. Route 180 (at the junction of U.S. Route 191) in Alpine. For more information, call 928-339-4310 or visit www.bearwallowcafe.com.

JEFF KIDA

