

Dining Out

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Hi Point's menu lives up to its name

By CHRIS MARTEL
cmartel@madison.com
608-252-6179

RIDGEWAY — It's not exactly that the Hi Point Steak House lacks curb appeal, because there aren't any curbs to speak of.

From Highway 151 in, there's a humble and isolated building on a hillcrest to the north if you know where to look. Ridgeway is just over a mile square, and best known for the Fantome goat farm, old St. Bridget's Catholic Church and Uncle Milt's biker bar.

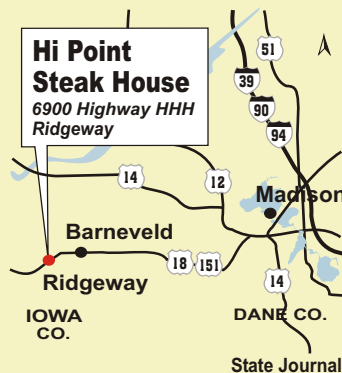
Another of its landmark assets is the steak house, which has been feeding the community of 671, as well as bicyclists and hikers using the nearby Military Ridge State Trail, since it was opened in 1952 by Bob Erickson. The tiny original steakhouse burned and was rebuilt in 1975, and is now run by Bob's son, Leif Erickson. Another reminder that this is very much a family restaurant is the large Norwegian Coat of Arms, which Leif's grandmother, Thora, started weaving in Norway with yarn she dyed herself, and finished 40 years later when she was living in the United States.

One powerful motivation to make the 41-mile trip from Madison to Hi Point is the breathtaking Iowa County scenery, now changing into fall colors. Another is the Wisconsin bluegill it serves.

Bluegill is a fish so sweet and tender that only the clumsiest cook could mess it

DINER'S SCORECARD

- **Restaurant:** Hi Point Steak House
- **Location:** 6900 Hwy. HHH, Ridgeway, a block off Hwy. 151, just past Barneveld and 30 miles from Madison. After exiting on HHH, turn right; it's on the right.
- **Hours:** From 4:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays.
- **Price range:** Appetizers, \$4.95 to \$7.95; unlimited salad bar without entrée \$6.95; entrées \$8.95 to \$71.95.
- **Specialties:** Steaks, seafood and nightly specials; nightly specials prime rib Saturday and Sunday and a Friday night fish fry.
- **Accessibility:** Yes.
- **Reservations:** Accepted.



- **Credit cards:** Accepted.
- **Telephone:** 924-2819
- **Bottom line:** A cozy, family-run supper club with a wide range of seafood, including superb Wisconsin bluegill.

up. A little time with butter in a pan is all it needs. Hi Point takes bluegill to new heights with a light breading that contained a perfect little dance between salt and pepper. It's deep fried without a hint of lingering greasiness. A serving is a huge, golden pile.

For a place that calls itself a steak house, there is a surprising abundance of seafood: walleye from Canada, whitefish from Lake Superior, lake perch from Lake Erie. On Fri-

days there is a traditional Wisconsin fish fry with white fish or cod for \$8.95, as well as shrimp, scallops, slipper lobster, lobster tail, Alaskan king crab, crab legs and clam strips and the Wednesday night special is fried lobster chunks.

The six steaks on the menu are simply prepared, and the description of one of them all but insists that you order it: "The Erickson Special ... This is the Steak We're Famous For! A Delmonico Cut (ribeye)

from the Heart of the Prime Rib, Grilled Your Liking."

This was not false advertising. It was seriously full of flavor and very juicy and cooked exactly as ordered.

Everything else, including the thoroughly cooked, steaming hot baked potato and creamy garlic mashed potatoes, and the salad bar, were also expertly done. The dressings are all home, and exceptional, especially the blue cheese that is very nearly thick enough to hold a fork upright, and the french blue.

It's always a treat to find pickled beets, which are underappreciated and virtually unavailable in modern America — except in supper clubs like this which seem suspended in the past as well as warm and alive. That applies to the service too, which was efficient and friendly, even though the presence of twin sister servers can cause moments of surreal confusion for first-time diners.

Rounding out the homey menu is fried or grilled chicken, roast duckling, pork chops and the other Wisconsin tradition of prime rib on Saturday as well as Sunday.

TASTE OF THE TOWN