

LOOK ALL YOU WANT, BUT STAY OFF THE ROCK



Haystack Rock is an iconic, protected area on the Oregon Coast.

Dani Palmer/EO Media Group

Some visitors just can't stifle the urge to climb Haystack Rock

By DANI PALMER
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — Haystack Rock is an iconic symbol of Cannon Beach that draws thousands to the small coastal town each year. But members of the Haystack Rock Awareness Program want the public to know the 235-foot-tall rock — protected as an Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge and Marine Garden — is more for looking than for touching.

Haystack Rock is what drew Jason Phelps, 35, of Vancouver, British Columbia, and his girlfriend, Abbey, to Cannon Beach during a trip to Oregon.

"We've seen tons of photos and had to stop by to see it for ourselves," Phelps said. "She's a big fan of 'The Goonies,' too, so that's a plus."

Like Phelps, visitors come for that adventure; others are there for a wedding or senior pictures. But a few just can't resist an urge to reach out and touch, or even climb.

"Sometimes they get tunnel vision," Program Coordinator Melissa Keyser said. "It's just not an environment they've been in before — they want to check it out."

"A lot of times it's an honest mistake," she added, but she also believes people should know the rules of the places they visit.

Even with the presence of program staff, signage and information, the number of people climb-

ing the rock is high, she added.

From February to September, Haystack Rock Awareness Program staff intercepted more than 1,200 people trying to climb the rock. That was just during beach shifts, each a few hours a day.

Unintentional harm

Haystack Rock was incorporated as a national wildlife refuge in 1968 and became a marine garden in 1991, one of seven protected intertidal areas along the Oregon coast.

Everything above the high tide line is apart of the protection, meaning it can't be climbed or walked on, and animals should not be touched, Keyser said. Visitors may take shells, but HRAP staff encourage them not to. The shells can provide habitat for animals.

The designations are meant to guard the animals and plants that call Haystack Rock home.

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Dani Palmer/EO Media Group

A visitor and her dog take a seat in front of Haystack Rock, where a sign permitting visitors from entering its protected areas stands.

Gearhart stymied in effort to quash party barn

Ambiguous language leads to court win for barn owner

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — Judge John Orr ruled Monday night that Gearhart's zoning code lacked rules prohibiting commercial wedding facilities.

With that decision, Neacoxie Barn owner Shannon Smith was found not guilty of charges she was conducting a commercial business in a residential zone.

Smith was answering charges she held two events at the barn in June and August, resulting in two \$500 citations.

In September, witnesses testified Smith had been using her property to host weddings without a conditional use permit, which the city said was required.

Witnesses said they had been asked to pay up to \$2,600 for use of the barn, or were asked to barter for wedding services.

In arguments presented to Orr Monday, Gearhart City Attorney Peter Watts said Oregon Administrative Rules make it clear weddings are a "commercial activity."

"The nature of an event, as commercial, maintains that classification regardless of zoning," he wrote in a memorandum to the judge.

Smith's attorney Dan Kearns argued the city's municipal code failed to specifically prohibit renting out the barn for weddings. "The city is bound to fairly advise its citizens of what its code requires and prohibits," Kearns said.

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Cannon Beach seeks new fire leader

Still no details on Balzer's departure

By DANI PALMER
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — The Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District Board and interim Fire Chief Frank Swedenborg agreed the district needs to find a permanent leader sooner rather than later during a special meeting Monday night.

On Monday, Swedenborg asked the board for direction. "I just need to find out what's crucial, what has to happen," he said. "My biggest concern is the betterment of the fire department and the firefighters."

Former Chief Mike Balzer was relieved of his duties in mid-October because of ongoing personnel issues, according to board President Sharon Clyde at the time.

Last week, the Cannon Beach Gazette filed a public records request seeking further details.

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Mike Balzer

New standards could give beachgoers pause

Beach safety threshold to be cut by more than half

By DANI PALMER
EO Media Group

The Oregon Beach Monitoring Program will likely issue more public health advisories for beachgoers starting in 2017. Not because bacteria levels are expected to rise, but because the safety threshold for marine water is being lowered.

The program's safety threshold, or "beach action value," is being lowered to 70 organisms

per 100 milliliters of water. The current threshold is 158 organisms per 100 milliliters.

The new standards reflect recent studies that found people are getting sick at beach action values lower than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency safety threshold for bacteria, Tara Chetock, the beach monitoring program coordinator, said.

Representatives from the beach monitoring program, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Health Authority made the last of its coastal stops, including Cannon Beach on Oct. 22, in a series of informational meetings.

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Dani Palmer/EO Media Group

Thomas Lossen, left, writes down data as Hannah Moore runs tests on ocean water sampled in Cannon Beach this summer. Both are with the Oregon Beach Monitoring Program.

