



Tales from a  
**Sisters Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**The sloth is not slothful!**

“Sloth” and “Slothful” are terms that have been bothering me for a long time because they suggest a description that the sloth doesn’t deserve. Sloths living today — and even those of yesteryear — have these descriptions in Webster’s Dictionary and other like publications, to wit: Idle; lackadaisical; lazy; shiftless.

Even my hero Henry David Thoreau’s definition of slothfulness — “An unclean person is universally a slothful one; envious, slothful vice, never makes its way in lofty characters, but like the skulking viper, creeps...” — bothers me no end.

“Slothfulness” is even one of the Seven Deadly Sins in Christian moral tradition, referring to laziness, and also defined as spiritual or emotional apathy, neglecting what God has spoken, and being physically and emotionally inactive.

Does that slow-moving vegetarian of the forests deserve such an image? I think not!

The fossil sloth above is an example of the extended family of ground sloths that existed throughout the Americas, and died out approximately 11,000 years ago, when humans first entered their habitation.

Just walking was a problem for sloths; the size of their claws forced them to stand on the sides of their feet and to balance with their huge tail in order to reach the vegetation in trees. Chewing their food was also a problem; unlike most mammals, their teeth lacked enamel

and were ever-growing.

Paleontologists have identified three distinct species that once ranged across what is the USA today: *Paramylodon harlani* — across the U.S., especially the western states, lived in open park-like grasslands; *Nothrotheriops shastensis* — western U.S. and Florida, Texas, Mexico, found in drier habitat than *harlani*, and *Megalonyx jeffersoni* — Alaska, NW Canada, across the U.S., living its life in forests in these parts.

They also liked spending time in caves and other under-the-surface areas, and some, such as the large mylodon sloths in South America are believed to have dug giant-sized burrows where paleontologists found evidence of sloth bones and claw marks.

Now, that doesn’t sound as though sloths were “idle, lackadaisical, lazy, or shiftless” does it?

Living sloths of today are medium-sized mammals belonging to the zoological families *Megalonychidae* (two-toed sloth) and *Bradypodidae* (three-toed sloth), and further classified into six species. Also, their bodies make good habitat for other organisms; a single sloth may be home to moths, beetles, cockroaches, ciliates, fungi and algae.

But, what’s really very disheartening is that the names for sloths used for food and fur by tribes in Ecuador include *ritto*, *rit*, and *ridette* — mostly forms of the words “sleep,” “eat,” and “dirty.”

From my perspective, the following attribute may be why humans are still using the term slothful to characterize others who seem to be out of sync with the rest of animal life: sloths in the wild move only when necessary, and even then, v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y; which is not their fault — they have about a quarter as much



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

What remains of the Giant Ground Sloth, mounted in the Nevada State Museum in Las Vegas.

muscle tissue as other animals of similar weight.

Unlike most humans we know, sloths’ specialized “hands and feet” have long, curved claws allowing them to hang upside down from branches without effort. (However, most anyone who has raised children has seen their kids do this as well...)

Sloths sometimes sit on top of branches, where they usually eat, sleep, and even give birth hanging from limbs, and sometimes even remain hanging from branches after death. (My wife Sue, says the same about my afternoon naps when she finds me with my arms hanging outside the covers, knuckles on the floor of the bedroom.)

And here’s another trait that may have helped humans debase sloths: they were thought to be among the most somnolent of mammals, sleeping from 15 to 18 hours each day. However, the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Starnberg, Germany, published a study indicating that sloths sleep just under 10 hours a day.

And, how about this:

**Redmond Airport sees jump in use**

The Redmond Municipal Airport experienced a significant increase in the number of passengers during the 2014 calendar year. A record number of 524,338 passengers traveled through the airport in 2014, resulting in a 6.87 percent increase above the 489,510 passengers served in 2013. The previous record was set in 2008, when the airport served 492,953 passengers.

“We are pleased with the continued increase in passenger numbers and would like to thank our customers for choosing Redmond Municipal Airport to meet their air service needs,” said Jeff Tripp, airport director. “The airport is an important regional asset contributing to the economic vitality of the Central Oregon region. These strong numbers show that commercial flights to and from Redmond continue to be both popular and competitively priced.”

For information on flights to and from Redmond, visit [www.flyrdm.com](http://www.flyrdm.com).

An intimate cottage offering a Southern France inspired dining experience.

**JEN'S GARDEN**  
intimate cottage cuisine

Open Wednesday through Sunday beginning at 5 p.m.  
541-549-2699 | 403 E. Hood Ave., Sisters  
[www.jensgardenmenu.com](http://www.jensgardenmenu.com)

**\$25K in 25 Days? Together We Can!**

**February 1 – 25: Social Fundraising Campaign**  
Share your passion for helping others! Create your free personal online fundraising campaign page to help people in our community. Learn more at [liveunitedco.org](http://liveunitedco.org).

**February 8 – 12: Dine and Donate Week**  
Participating restaurants will donate a portion of sales, offer a free menu item with qualifying donation, or both.

With special thanks to the Downtown Bend Business Association, the Sunriver Area Chamber of Commerce and these participating restaurants: 10 below, 900 Wall, Bad Wolf Bakery, Bend Brewing Co., HOLA! Downtown, Jackalope Grill, Marcello's Cucina Italiana, Panini's Pizza, Pine Tavern, Summit Saloon, Sunriver Merchant Trader Cafe, The Wallow Bar & Grill, The Wine Shop and Beer Tasting Bar, and The Village Bar & Grill.

**GIVE. START A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN. LIVE UNITED.**

**United Way**  
United Way of Deschutes County  
PO Box 5969 Bend, OR 97708  
[www.facebook.com/liveunitedco](http://www.facebook.com/liveunitedco)

**Find Your Health. Love Yourself!**

- Elevate Your Diet
- Increase Your Energy
- Balance Your Stress

**Me**

Marlys Underwood  
Certified Health Coach  
750 Buckaroo Trail, Suite 104  
— 541-977-7900 —

DINE WITH YOUR  
*Valentine*

Enjoy a memorable Valentine's dinner at Robert's Pub, featuring our exceptional menu and Chef created specials.

RESERVATIONS  
541-595-1240

**Black Butte Ranch**  
THERE IS A PLACE

[BLACKBUTTERANCH.COM](http://BLACKBUTTERANCH.COM)