

Black Butte hike reveals extent of pine pollen

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

Certainly, the annual blizzard of pine pollen is annoying when it turns my red car yellow or coats my front porch with that yellow dust ready to be tracked into the house. Still, I didn't fully recognize the extent of the pollination in progress until I hiked to the top of Black Butte last week.

Looking down at Sisters Country from more than 6,400 feet, we saw a haze over the local forests. At first we assumed it was smoke, and we could see some controlled burns, so that seemed to be a logical assumption. Then, we noticed a few nearby billowing plumes of the stuff, and we wondered if there were fires starting up all over the area.

Looking closer, however, we saw that these new plumes

of "smoke" had a yellowish cast to them; and we realized that what we were seeing were massive plumes of pine pollen stirred up by just the slightest breeze. In fact, it soon became apparent that much of the visible haze over the entire area was actually pine pollen.

According to Forest Service information, ponderosa pine pollen is shed from May 25 to June 15; so, I guess it's right on schedule and we have a couple more weeks to go before it subsides entirely.

Unlike the more reactive juniper pollen, I've heard many people comment that they are surprised not to be suffering from any allergy problems — in spite of being doused with the stuff. In fact, according to www.pollenlibrary.com, "No allergy has been reported for ponderosa pine." I know, of course, that

somewhere, someone is suffering; so don't write me to complain. I was surprised, however, to discover that beneficial health effects are often attributed to pine pollen!

I'm not suggesting that you go out and intentionally try to eat and breathe the stuff, but I found some sources that suggested doing exactly that! In fact, I found several places to buy pine pollen for benefits such as perpetual youth, boosting testosterone, enhancing "bodily functions," reduced cholesterol, stronger libido, "extraordinary increases in stamina," improved immune systems, and....well, you get the idea.

So, if you've given up trying to wash your car three times a day, at least take some solace in the idea that there may actually be benefits to being exposed to this stuff. Most everyone seems to agree that there is more pollen this year than most; and scientists have noted that there are unusually active years in the ponderosa reproductive cycle. So, this may be one of those years.

Anyway, getting back to the subject of hiking, which is what I was supposed to be writing about in the first place, it probably comes as no surprise to anyone to learn that Black Butte is entirely



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

This year, Black Butte, always a popular local hike, is also a good place to observe the vast clouds of pine pollen currently being shed.

snow-free. This might not be noteworthy except for the fact that I've often encountered snow up there well into June, but we all know what a horrible snow year we've had.

There were plenty of people up there, with more headed up as we were heading down — in spite of the fact that thunder and lightning were beginning to build. In general, those hikers were more pleased with the fact that the unsettled weather was cooler to hike in than they were concerned about being struck by lightning.

Another interesting feature of the hike is the rather aggressive golden mantled ground squirrels at the summit. They harassed us unmercifully

while we ate lunch, and one even jumped into my lap in anticipation of a free meal. Now, I know that Jim Anderson will tell you that they carry everything from rabies to the plague; but you have to admit that they are pretty cute.

The round trip from the mid-mountain trailhead is a little under four miles, with an elevation gain of something on the order of 1,600 feet. It's a great hike for conditioning, and is often a social event. I rarely hike that trail without seeing someone I know.

The improved parking area, complete with toilets, a fee area. So, if you do not

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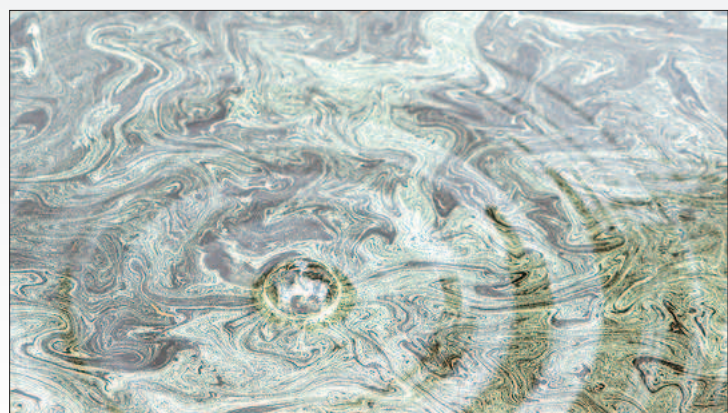


PHOTO BY LYNN WOODWARD

Nature's painting: Pollen puddles cropped up across Sisters Country.

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