

Tour group exceeds wilderness limits

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

The Little Belknap Trail is typically very lightly populated, and I've usually encountered only a bare handful of other hikers in the area, who – as often as not – are PCT hikers. However, this recent trip was a rather horrendous exception. Hearing the noise of a raucous crowd, I looked down the trail and saw a long, long line of people marching up the pathway.

In all, I counted nearly 60 in this "wilderness" group, where party size is supposedly limited to a maximum of 12. Unlike most hikers, who stop and talk about where they are from, this group apparently had been coached not to talk about who they were or where they came from. They were very close-mouthed and resisted interaction. My impression was that their leaders were well aware that they were committing an egregious violation of wilderness rules.

The party was spread out over approximately half a mile and its members were wearing tour badges. I learned from some of the stragglers that about half the group on the geological tour was from Taiwan, others were from all around the country. When I returned to the trailhead there were seven identical vans that had transported the tour group into the area. One of the vans was open and tour members who had turned back were handing out cold drinks.

Acting Sisters District Ranger Amy Tinderholt said that the case is still under investigation. She said that the trip leader has been identified, and further action by Forest Service law enforcement officials is pending.

This case, I learned, is not the only recent example involving huge groups in violation of existing wilderness rules. These significant



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Tour group vans clog the parking area at the "wilderness" trailhead leading to Little Belknap Crater.

violations come at a time when the Forest Service is considering severely limiting public access to the wilderness and requiring paid reservations for all wilderness visitors in our region.

If the Forest Service feels that the wilderness is being

savaged by users, it is my opinion that more could be achieved by enforcing existing regulations and cracking down on serious violations such as this, rather than closing wilderness access to the rest of us who use the areas responsibly.

WALK: Several Sisters residents are living with ALS

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20-25 people with this rare condition, who survive from three to five years.

Don Boyd, former wine steward at Ray's Food Place, founder of Season's Café and Wine Shop, and a 40-year resident of Sisters, lives with ALS.

His wife, Joyce, explains, "So many people want to know how they can help. Not much — except by donating to this event."

Leslie Blain, who lost her husband, Roger (a retired National Park Service ranger) last winter remains active in the circle of ALS. She will walk with the group that is dedicating this 2017 walk to Roger and Carmen.

"We were embraced when we came here by so many

people. I was introduced to Carmen Hull through email before we moved here, and then to Joyce Boyd through Carmen. In this disease, we make our lives the best they can be. We developed friendships with these people, which continue even though I have lost Roger. These friendships are pretty important."

The irony of loving friendships formed as a result of a hopeless diagnosis is not lost on the Team Hull group. They offer mutual support during the disease and continue to remain close "in the tough days that follow" after the death of one of their group members.

Anyone who would like to walk with Team Hull Hustlers or support a walker with a pledge can call Allen Hull at 541-549-6152. The ALS Association Oregon and SW Washington chapter can also take donations. For more information email walk@alsa-or.org.

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