



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist

by Jim Anderson

Volcanoes, volcanoes, and more volcanoes!

Editor's note: Jim Anderson is all settled in in Eugene — and missing his readers. So... he submitted his first post-retirement column.

Well, here we are in Eugene preparing to move into a little “mother-in-law house” my son Caleb is going to build onto his garage for my wife, Sue, and me. We don't have a Pilot Butte on the skyline, but a Skinner Butte, and one armed with telescopes so we can see what's going on out in Mars.

But right now, I want to chinwag about the volcanoes in our front yards.

The first thought I had when I saw the magnificent Three Sisters volcanoes, “Faith, Hope, and Charity,” aka South, Middle, and North Sister when I was rolling into Bend on my Harley in late September of 1951, was, “Wow!” and then the thought hit me, “When will they erupt again?”

Here it is, almost 70 years later and those same thoughts go through my mind at least once a day.

I can recall the time my wife, Sue, and I were headed home one night from Portland in a sweet,

old single-engine Piper Comanche on a full-moon-lit night, and I about drove the FAA controller in Seattle up a wall.

“Piper Comanche 69 Pop, say you can see Mt. Jefferson,” the controller kept repeating as we flew closer and closer to the bright moonlit peak of the old volcano. There was a brisk wind blowing a plume of ice and snow off the peak of the mountain that looked — to me — so much like steam; I just had to be sure... As we flew past the peak we could see the “steam” wasn't, but just ice and snow that fooled me.

In the past 12,000 years, several eruptions have taken place on vents near the Cascade crest all around Jefferson, building glacial valleys, including Forked Butte and North Cinder Peak. While the most recent eruption from Jefferson was also from a cinder cone on the flank of South Cinder Peak, with a lava flow that reached Lake Marion to the west.

You just never know when the old volcano is going to wake up — like Mt. St. Helens did on May 18, 1980, at 8:32 a.m. After spewing steam for weeks, warning everyone to duck, the top blew off the old volcano.

Mt. Jefferson is the second-highest mountain in Oregon, named by Lewis and Clark to honor the president who had sponsored their expedition.

Although it is deeply eroded and has probably not erupted for at least 1,000 years, it is still considered active, and I was hoping that plume was steam, not ice and snow.

It's safe to say that when



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

The Three Sisters, just three of the many, many volcanoes in our front — and back — yards.

old Jefferson blows its top again it's going to be one pretty powerful show, and as I flew by the summit I was hoping I could report the beginning of that show.

But I guess we'll have to wait for “The Big One.” Ahhh, yes! *The big one!* That's what's coming, good people. Oregon State University seismology scientists say the big one is coming in the form of a massive earthquake that will cause buildings and bridges to collapse and unleash a tsunami that will devastate the coast. And, just to make life even more interesting, maybe it'll trigger one or two of our sleeping volcanoes to wake up and put on a show no one will ever forget.

If you want to read an excellent preview of the big one, go to www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/20/the-really-big-one, and then start getting your emergency supplies stored up.

North Sister is the glacially eroded remnant of an andesitic-dacitic strato-volcano, exposing the volcano's central plug. Middle Sister volcano is located less than a mile to the south. It is

basaltic-to-rhyolitic in composition and less eroded than North Sister, but there are no known eruptions in the past 10,000 years.

And then there's the sleeping giant, South Sister. Not too many years back, space agencies in Europe sent a message to USGS stating they could see a hot spot rising beneath the southwest side of South Sister. That got Larry Chitwood, geologist for the Deschutes National Forest, to head out to Snow Creek and see if he could identify any gases rising from the hot spot.

Larry found basaltic gases coming up from beneath the creek and invited me to join him when the lava reached the surface.

“We can sit in our lawn chairs on top of Bachelor and

watch the lava roll past us on its way to Bend,” he said.

Larry's gone out among the stars, so he and I will have to share that when I see him soon in that other place we call home.

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