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OREGON

Continued from Page 1

the state. And in many ways, the southeastern corner has more in common with states other than Oregon. Visitors to the region may be surprised to find that from a media standpoint, southeastern Oregon is more closely related to Idaho than to Oregon's media centers in Portland, Salem and Eugene. Television and radio stations come from Boise instead of Portland or Eugene, and the *Idaho Statesman* newspaper is more widely read in many parts of the region than the *Oregonian*. The other widely used media sources are local newspapers in Lakeview, Burns and Ontario, or satellite television dishes, most of which don't receive programming from any Oregon sources. But perhaps a more obvious difference is the region's landscape, which is in many ways unique in Oregon. The topography of southeastern Oregon doesn't resemble anything west of the Cascades. And while sharing some similarities with areas of the rest of eastern Oregon, the southeastern corner contains many landforms not found elsewhere in the state.

In a general sense, the entire region is part of what geologists call the basin and range province, an area that includes much of the southwestern United States. The province is distinguished by alternating mountains and valleys, both typically running in a linear, north-south pattern.

The basin and range landscape is mainly the result of faults, which are cracks in the earth's crust created by tensions under the surface. Many of the faults in the basin and range have caused blocks of the crust to displace vertically, with one block rising in elevation and the next lowering. The resulting pattern of alternating mountains and valleys can be seen throughout Oregon's Big Country and is especially impressive in the large fault-block mountains such as Steens Mountain and Hart Mountain.

These fault-block mountains also usually have one side that drops off steeply while the other side is much more gradual. The west slopes of Steens Mountain, for example, when seen from Frenchglen, aren't very steep. But when seen from the Alvord Desert on the east side, the mountain rises almost vertically.

The Alvord Desert is part of the valley, or basin, which was formed at the same time Steens Mountain was being uplifted by the faulting process. Such basins are found at the base of all the fault-block mountains.

The other predominant physical feature of Oregon's Big Country is what Raymond Hatton calls the "geography of space." This term aptly describes the vast distances that separate southeastern Oregon residents. Nowhere else in Oregon are traveling times and distances so great.

In the rural areas surrounding Eugene, for ex-

ample, even the most isolated residents are rarely more than an hour's drive from the city. The rural residents in many ways have the best of both worlds: isolation from the problems of the big city yet fairly close proximity to its benefits.

But in Oregon's southeastern corner, with only three towns having more than 100 residents, simple trips to the grocery store become half-day adventures.

And unlike the western side of the state, roads more often than not are unpaved. Combined with the unpredictable and commonly inclement weather, the sense of isolation becomes even more palpable.

The many ranches in the region are certainly some of the most isolated outposts of human habitation in the state.

The Whitehorse Ranch near the Nevada border, for example, is more than 150 miles from Burns, the nearest population center.

The Alvord Ranch at the base of Steens Mountain, which was founded in the 1860s and is one of the largest and oldest ranches in southeastern Oregon, is more than 100 miles from Burns.

Because trips to the region's three largest towns are such lengthy undertakings, the numerous tiny communities spread across Oregon's Big Country take on commercial and social importance far beyond what their modest populations would indicate.

Most towns with fewer than 1,000 residents in western Oregon are lucky to have more than a small convenience store and maybe a gas station.

For example, Wagontire, located along U.S. Highway 395 and 60 miles south of Burns, has a population of just two, William and Olgie Warner. Yet the town's only residents operate a fully stocked grocery store, a recreational vehicle park with electric hook-ups and a nicely landscaped four-unit motel.

For the ranchers living around Wagontire, and for motorists traveling the lonely highway between Lakeview and Burns, the town is a veritable oasis in the desert, as it has the only gas pumps in the 85-mile stretch between Valley Falls and Riley.

West of the Cascades, such small conglomerations of buildings rarely have names, much less stores and motels.

However, in Oregon's Big Country they serve not only as supply centers for the region's isolated residents, but also as social centers where gossip is exchanged and mail picked up (on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only in some areas).

As interesting and unique as Oregon's southeastern corner is geologically and geographically — and as untouched by humans as its far-reaching distances are — it is nonetheless a region made even more interesting by the people who choose its isolation as a place to live. I'll look at some of those people in the conclusion to this series.

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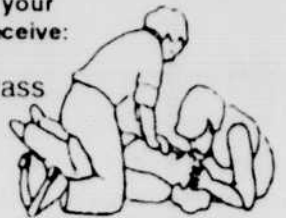
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