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Hikers lace up in support of Warner Creek fire ecology

EVENT: The fourth annual hike gets underway Saturday, but festivities go from Friday to Sunday

By April Carmichael
Freelance Reporter

To most people the weekend usually means relaxation, a break from the routine. Not so for activists and concerned citizens who hope to save Warner Creek.

The Warner Creek Fire Ecology Hike is a three-day, 16 mile event that takes place in protest of the Salvage Rider and with hopes of generating public support to establish the Warner Creek Burn as a natural research area.

"Warner Creek really needs to be preserved for the sake of research. Fire is part of the natural eco-system process, but everywhere it happens, they fire salvage, so we know little about it," one of the organizers of the hike, Lacey Phillabaum, said.

This is the fourth annual hike in support of Warner Creek.

The festivities go from Friday, Aug. 9 through Sunday, Aug. 11, but the march itself doesn't begin until Saturday.

The hikers will tramp through the arson-burned fire perimeter of the Cornpatch Roadless Area near Oakridge, Oregon, which includes Warner Creek. The hike ends at the Oakridge Ranger Station in Oakridge, where a peaceful rally will be held.

The march isn't going to be too arduous, Phillabaum assured. Hikers just need to bring some-

thing warm to sleep under, good hiking boots and water.

"It's like a plush thing, for people who wouldn't normally get out and hike," Phillabaum said. "People's packs will be transported, and food will be provided."

"For me, Warner Creek's important because I have the strongest sense of place, and I feel connected to it," she said. "Politically, Warner Creek's been at the front of the political movements for environmental rights and has been the first in many cases."

In late 1990, Warner Creek was designated a recovery reserve for the northern spotted owl.

In October of 1991, an arsonist set fire to it, resulting in 9,000 acres being burned, 3,000 of which were intentionally back-burned by the Forest Service in a vain suppression effort that cost nearly \$10 million.

Because an arsonist ignited Warner Creek, it was immediately open for logging.

"The big loophole in the law was that if you go out and set fire to a forest, you can then go in and log it legally," Phillabaum said.

The environmentalists began waging a legal battle to protect Warner Creek. And, according to Phillabaum, they were winning until the Salvage Rider was introduced in September of 1995. It exempts timber sales from all environmental laws for two years.

The response to the Salvage Rider by activists has been a continuous blockade on the road to the sale. A blockade that has successfully halted the cutting.

Evidence: 'It is a turning point in human history,' Carl Sagan

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From the totality of the tests on particles a billionth the size of a pinhead, he said, "the simplest explanation is that they are the remains of early Martian life."

McKay said the conclusion is drawn from more than two years of study of a rock, called Allan Hills 84001. The 4 1/2-pound rock is thought to have formed on Mars 4.5 billion years ago, been blasted out of the planet 16 million years ago and then landed in an Antarctic ice field 13,000 years ago. It was picked up in 1984 by a National Science Foundation group that regular searches the polar ice for meteorites.

A team led by McKay, including scientists from NASA, Stanford University, McGill University in Canada and the University of Georgia, examined thin slices of the potato-sized rock and found minute objects that closely resemble fossilized bacteria.

They also found chemical compounds that they said could have been deposited by microbes living in the wet climate thought to have

existed on Mars more than three billion years ago.

McKay said the organic matter was found deep inside a crack in the rock and that more of the material was near the center than toward the outside. This suggests, he said, that it formed there before the rock was jolted away from Mars and is not contamination by Earthly microbes.

William Schopf, an expert on ancient bacteria from the University of California, Los Angeles, said that the NASA team scored well in proving the source and age of the rock, and in proving the presence of organic material.

But, speaking at the news conference as an "optimistic skeptic," Schopf said the researchers failed his "subjective confidence rating" in proving that the microscopic bits of matter isolated from the rock are really the remnants of life.

Among the proof required, he said, are electron microscope studies that show the presumed microbe fossils do, in fact, have the cell walls that are required to hold "the juices" of life.

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