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Silverton couple tour the world by bicycle



Laura and Rod Wanker sit on their front porch at home, two weeks after returning from two months cycling in Southeast Asia.

Pair has logged 70,000 miles in last 2 decades

CHRISTENA BROOKS
SPECIAL TO THE APPEAL TRIBUNE

As they've traveled the world during the past two decades, Rod and Laura Wanker have learned to ask locals the same three questions:

"Is the road good?"

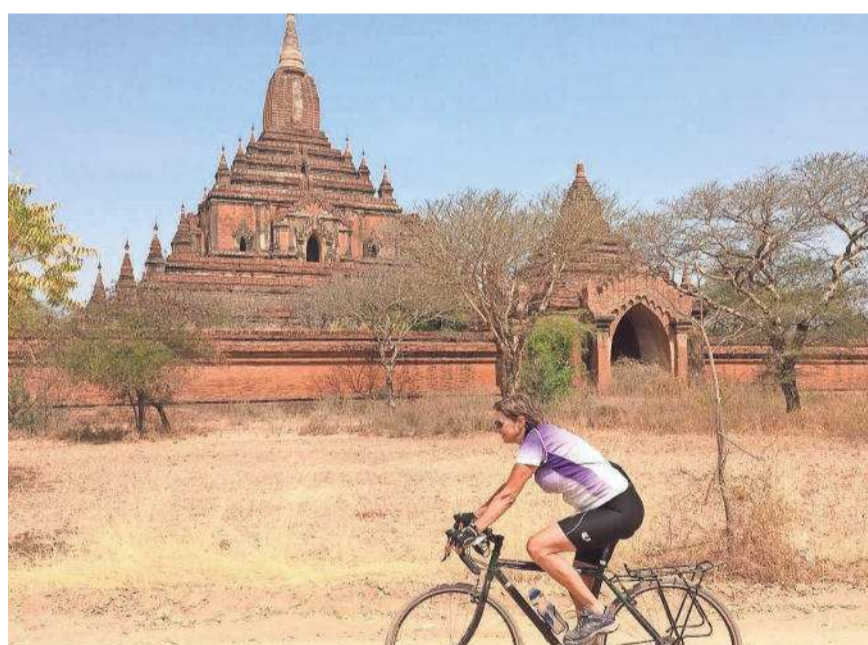
"Is the road bad?"

"Is the road under construction?"

Whether they're in Myanmar or Mexico, this Silverton couple inquires about road conditions like another tourist might ask for a bathroom, taxi or hotel. This is critical information because they travel by bicycle, purposely pedaling to places and people far off the beaten path.

By the numbers, the pair can account for 11,225 miles of bike touring where they carried their own gear, and another 7,500 of supporting touring at events such as the Oregon Bicycle Ride. They've each logged an estimated 70,000 miles on a bike, much of it together.

Clearly, they love bike tourism – not with warm and fuzzy feelings but with a fierce passion that's lasted a lifetime. At 68 and 56 respectively, Rod and Laura joke ruefully about being "elder statesmen" in the international biking crowd, but age has not changed their



Laura Wanker rides through the Bagan Archeological Zone in Myanmar. Although she's posing hatless for this photo, she noted that the couple always wears helmets.

commitment to experiencing the world this way.

"We like a challenge," Rod says. "We don't do well going on vacation and just lying on the beach, reading books. We get a lot of satisfaction out of trying to figure things out."

Figuring things out – at least the ahead-of-time part – falls to Laura, the planner. A part-time tutor with the Silver Falls School District, she is

thoughtful and meticulous. She spent months preparing for the couple's two-month bike trip in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar this winter.

Her planning process goes something like this: choose countries, read blogs and websites, check routes and elevation on www.RideWithGPS.com, use Google Maps and Google Earth to

See **BICYCLE TOURING**, Page 4A



WILLIAM L. SULLIVAN/
SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Maiden Peak Shelter can be buried in snow in the winter.

Forecasters wrong; Oregon gets lucky with snowpack

ZACH URNESS
STATESMAN JOURNAL

If there were ever a year to remind Oregonians that weather forecasters don't know quite everything, this winter brought proof.

The rainy season began with a serious amount of pessimism, as forecasters and climatologists fretted about a strong El Nino fueling a third straight winter of thin snowpack.

Oregon was already mired in a historic drought — following one of the hottest and driest years on record in 2015 — and the consensus was more bad news was headed our way.

"I remember being really worried in October," said Kathie Dello, deputy director of the Oregon Climate Service at Oregon State University. "All the signs were pointing to another bad year."

Yet the nightmare scenario never happened.

Now, the Beaver State has a robust snowpack and healthy reservoir storage. Even with summertime temperatures gracing the Willamette Valley this week, the Northwest should have a fairly normal summer in terms of water.

"The take home is that we're in excellent condition at this point," said Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Oregon. "It remains to be seen how quick the snowmelt occurs. If it happens too quickly, we could still have issues."

So what happened to all those predictions of doom and gloom?

Well, in a word, Oregon got lucky.

The power of El Nino tilted more northward than expected during December, sending a deluge of precipitation that happened to coincide with a system of cool air.

The result was massive snow in Oregon's mountains during late December and early January — a whopping 200 percent of normal in some parts of the state.

Eventually El Nino's wrath moved south and Oregon did experience a warmer than normal winter, particularly in February. Snowpack dropped all the way down to 70 percent of normal in the Willamette Basin during February, and a large-scale melt-off seemed pos-

See **SNOWPACK**, Page 3A

Detroit Lake heads toward regular summer levels

ZACH URNESS
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Most signs are pointing to a regular summer at Detroit Lake.

The reservoir east of Salem remains on pace to reach its maximum summertime water level despite dry weather expected during coming weeks, officials with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said.

The lake's level was 1,541 feet above sea level

Friday, which is slightly above average for this time of year and 40 feet higher than a year ago.

Maximum capacity for summer is 1,563.5 feet.

"I would say that with anything close to an average runoff for the rest of the spring, we're pretty confident that we'll be (full) by May 5," Army Corps of Engineers public affairs specialist Scott Clemans said.

See **WATER LEVEL**, Page 2A

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