

Outdoors

The thrill of climbing Oregon's Mount Washington



Eli Peacock looks up at Mount Washington. ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

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Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Editors note: Oregon's outdoors is largely closed to outdoor recreation following COVID-19 restrictions. Until that changes, the Statesman Journal will feature "greatest hits" from outdoors writer Zach Urness each week in a nod to armchair adventure and for future trip planning purposes.

The act of rappelling down a mountain begins with one simple, unavoidable fact: At some point, you have to lean backward and step off the edge.

The problem is when you're standing on the wind-swept peak of Mount Washington, looking over a vertical cliff into a boulder-strewn gully a few thousand feet below, this once-simple concept begins to feel ... a bit more complex.

• To put it another way: gulp.

But among the ironclad rules of mountain climbing is that anyone willing to go up, and I had been, to the 7,794-foot summit, must be prepared for the inevitable trip back down.

And so I took a deep breath and eased over the edge, my body suspended in the sky by a rope attached to the mountain, slowly dropping down the spire of a peak that pierces the Oregon sky like a gigantic spike.

A giant spike in the sky

Mount Washington is among the most recognized mountains in Oregon's northern Cascade Range.

Each time you drive Highway 20 over Santiam Pass on a clear day, the shield volcano rises above the rolling hills and burned-over forest like a natural skyscraper calling out to the inner King Kong in everyone who loves high-altitude adventure.

The willingness to climb this challenging, technical mountain is not enough, however. Unlike Cascade peaks such as Mount St. Helens and South Sister -- where you can hike and scramble to the summit during summer -- Washington requires a rope, harness and technical skill to safely ascend its dizzying summit.

All routes up Mount Washington are rated Class 5 or higher on the Yosemite Decimal System -- meaning a fall easily might be fatal -- which is one reason it's important to climb with somebody experienced in technical mountaineering and familiar with the route.

That's why I was thrilled to join a trip lead by Dave Hayden, a Salem resident who's been climbing Mount Washington for 15 years. The 52-year-old specializes in guiding people up mountains -- he's known as the "climbing guy" at his church, Salem Alliance -- and has climbed Washington about 40 times.

Beginning at 4:15 a.m. on a Saturday last month, I joined Hayden and Eli Peacock for a trip up Oregon's narrow, spiked peak.

'Can you believe we're going to be up there soon?'

The headlights pierced the morning darkness as we left Salem and headed east on Highway 22/20, the sky turned from black to purple to blue during the drive.

After less than two hours we turned right toward Hoodoo Ski Area and continued to Big Lake and the Pat.Jens Trailhead, the beginning of a trip that would total about 9.5 miles of hiking and 3,128 feet of climb.

We checked the gear and strapped on packs, and then followed the trail along the western edge of Big Lake to the first

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The accidental mushroom hunter



Fishing
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

Consider this column a background investigation of sorts.

If there is anything that this self-quarantining is teaching us it's that some high-profile TV people have really ugly wallpaper, small kitchens, and that one of them, an anchor on the Channel 6 morning news, has the same fireplace insert as we do in their living room.

Another on-air personality couldn't resist discreetly displaying an Emmy Award on an end table behind him during his at-home video public-services messages about social distancing.

As if to suggest, "oh that little thing. I totally forgot it was there."

Books are always a good option for staging your at-home studio backdrop.

The effect makes you look intellectual.

Except in the case of high-definition video streaming, it probably doesn't elevate your status when viewers can read book spines with titles such as "Shakespeare for Dummies," "Mein Kampf," or the "The Complete Works of Jacqueline Susann."

An alternate way to convey that "I only watch PBS" vibe is to shoot your self-isolating footage with your framed

verifications of academic or professional achievements providing an impressive backdrop.

Office/study footage of some of the office walls behind the doctors and researchers who are working on the coronavirus are formidably imposing.

Lacking a Nobel, or even an Emmy (a bowling team that I was on decades ago once won a trophy ... for consuming the most beer during league play), I scoured my awards and certificates collection with the idea of setting up a background display for a photo for this column.

After my master's (U of O; go Ducks!) and bachelor's degrees (Cal State Northridge; go Matadors!), along with an AA degree from Santa Barbara City College (go Vaqueros!), the, ahem, learning curve drops off significantly.

The best I could come up with was a U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary certificate of appreciation for safety education because of a column I wrote about the importance of wearing your life jacket.

Then there was the most impressive-looking scroll in the collection, my "shellback" certificate.

This oversize proclamation, emblazoned with an image of Neptune wielding a trident and a lot of pirate jargon and embellishments such as a kraken and the words "Imperium Neptuni Regis" (the empire of Neptune) emblazoned across the top.

The certificate is awarded to Navy

sailors who undergo a humiliating ritual known as the shellback initiation when crossing the equator aboard a ship for the first time.

As an aside, you're a polliwog until you earn your shellback rating.

So tough call: Which would be worse on the embarrass-o-meter, someone being able to read your shellback certificate on the wall behind you, or "How to Write a Paranormal Romance Novel" audible book on your shelf?

Don't make me choose.

I figured that for a photo backdrop for an outdoors column, the ideal would be a collection of assorted dead critter heads or trophy fish, of which I have none.

The morel of the story, if I may be allowed a really bad pun, has to do with Harry the mostly Jack Russell terrier.

We came across a couple of the highly prized morel mushrooms during a walk.

I'd like to say that we hiked miles over steep terrain before coming across them.

Actually, they were growing out of the bark dust next to a newly installed heat pump at a church across the street from our house.

I'd also like to say that my superbly trained eyes spotted the morels from a block away.

But no.

Harry was doing what dogs do to hy-



An accidental harvest of morel mushrooms during a dog walk. KAY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

drants and heat pumps, and I looked down to make sure I was out of the firing line. And there they were.

So I cut the stems and brought them home to get some snaps for my photo collection.

Ergo the problem, call it a morel dilemma (sorry), about an appropriately outdoorsy background for a photo.

Which was solved by a garage-sale find of Kay's that graces the wall in our spare bedroom/office, a majestic portrait of a moose. He looks as if it's grinning at an inside joke.

Which given how easy it was to find the mushrooms, it is.

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