

OUTDOORS

Take a trip to the past through Clarno Palisades



The Clarno Palisades in eastern Oregon. BOBBIE SNEAD/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

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Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Nothing in nature lasts forever. Landscapes that seem permanent undergo changes over millions of years. It's difficult for us to grasp the passage of time and the resulting changes to the earth on a scale so vast, but mountains rise and fall, coastlines advance and retreat, rainforests become deserts and vice versa.

The short trail at Clarno Palisades in eastern Oregon's John Day Fossil Beds National Monument provides a unique opportunity to look back to the distant past and see remnants of the steamy, tropical rainforest that existed here long before it became the arid semi-desert of today.

Brilliant sunshine softens the sharp winter air as I open the car door and pull on my coat. The stratified rock pillars called the Clarno Palisades rise 150 feet above the sagebrush like towering caramel-and-custard parfaits. Each layer is a different hue in a palette of warm des-

If you go

Directions: From Shaniko on Highway 97 in eastern Oregon, follow Highway 218 southeast for 26.1 miles to the signed Clarno Picnic Area on the left.

Best Months: October – December, March – May.

Length: 1.2 miles round trip

Duration: 1 – 2 hours

Elevation gain: 280 feet

Age range: suitable for children of all ages

ert colors: beige, orange, brown, umber and sienna. Across the valley, a streamer of scrubby juniper trees reaches up a deep ravine between rounded dry hills.

I hike west on the graveled path, which brings me directly below the banded palisades. The geologic strata are the remnants of a series of volcanic mudflows that began 45 million years ago. Back then, this area was a tropical rainforest. Fossils discovered nearby

show that primitive rhinos and tiny four-toed horses roamed the jungle. Huge walls of mud and debris flowed down the slopes of local volcanoes, undating palm, banana, and avocado trees and entombing their leaves, branches and trunks. Millions of years of erosion have exposed these cliffside layers; boulders that crumble and tumble from them hold the fossilized remains of past inhabitants.

Rocks that break free from layers near the top are younger than those near the bottom. They contain fossils from the deciduous trees of a more temperate climate brought on by a worldwide cooling and drying that began 37 million years ago. I spy the veined impression of a sycamore leaf in a boulder to my right. A few steps later I run my finger over a fossilized sycamore branch. Climbing higher, I see two fossilized logs, one vertical and one horizontal, cemented in a T-shape in the rock.

The trail rises to a spot directly below a delicate stone arch framing the cobalt sky. Below it, a series of rounded basins carved by eons of eroding water de-

scends like stairsteps in the rock. As I gaze up to the arch and the blue above, two American Crows swoop below the span and zip out over the valley like a pair of fighter pilots practicing combat maneuvers. Their brief appearance pulls me into the present. Turning my back to the rocky rampart, I gaze out over the valley below. The arid landscape surrounding me now is just as captivating as my imaginings of the ancient past. Kept dry by the rain-blocking barrier of the Cascade Mountains, this sagebrush ecosystem reveals subtle beauty and complexity for those willing to look.

Heading back down the slope, I stop to study the sagebrush fringing each side of the trail. These silvery-gray shrubs are perfectly adapted to life in the high desert. Small, wedge-shaped leaves tipped with three tiny lobes grow year-round, absorbing sunshine for photosynthesis even in the depths of winter. Tiny moisture-trapping hairs make each leaf feel like suede. Crushing

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What's first when the pandemic ends?



Fishing
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

A lot of pundits and prognosticators in the media and elsewhere are weighing in with predictions about the post-pandemic world.

Wow!
Talk about taking a P.
The admittedly cloudy forecasts from the plethora of predictors (sorry) run the gamut from “nothing will ever be the same” to “the first thing I’m going to do is go to a casino buffet.”

The unspoken by widely acknowledged qualifier being: “If I’m still around.”

From flying and cruising to going shopping, to movies and restaurants, everyone seems to be weighing in with predictions about where vaccine-induced immunity will stampede the herd.

My sense is that, if history and human nature serve as guides, there will



We'd probably all like to take Harry's approach to the pandemic. HENRY MILLER/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

be a couple of months of sober reflection and introspection followed by a couple of years of unbridled craziness.

As an example, World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic were followed by Prohibition, which segued in short order to the Roaring '20s.

Just saying.
I could be wrong, not being a psychologist or social scientist.

And with that being the case, I'm taking my pandemic cues from my favorite authority, Harry, the ancient mostly Jack Russell terrier who owns us.

As an example of what you can learn from a dog, even before the arrival of the virus, Harry was a master of social distancing.

He can tell by a flash of fur and the volume and tone of a bark a half-block away whether friend or foe, leashed or free-range.

In similar fashion, Kay and I have taken to spotting mask-less walkers and moving off to the side or, when it's an approaching crowd, crossing the street.

Which upsets Harry, because he revels in random meet-and-greets.

While indifferent to most dogs unless yappy or snappy, he loves people, especially if he recognizes them and knows that they're packing ... dog biscuits.

If he can peg the intentions of a canine at 40 yards, he can spot the “Cookie Lady” on our route a football field away, and starts pulling like a sled dog.

Winter hasn't helped.
It's the covid equivalent of Prohibition.

Cold, wind and rain have dampened, pun intended, both the ability to and enthusiasm for our former fair-weather, one- to two-hour rambles.

What Harry misses most, though, are the extended walks at places such as Minto Brown Island Park, which was a two-fer from his perspective.

Because it's got lots of people, and except for the dog-park area, a leash requirement on the trails, so odds are slim of him being blind-sided.

Do you ever catch yourself being nostalgic for something that you never even noticed a year ago, such as sitting in the dark with strangers and a bag of popcorn on your lap?

Or fishing side-by-side on a half-day boat?

How about crabbing shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow trap-tossers and tourists at the docks at Newport?

To sum up Harry's master class in predictions for humans in the post-pandemic world:

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