

OUTDOORS



Kingston Prairie

Area gives glimpse of how Willamette Valley once was

Bobbie Snead Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Note: Kingston Prairie is currently open to the public. To protect the safety of others, please remember to practice social distancing. To protect the safety of nesting meadowlarks, please remember that dogs are prohibited. This is a fragile habitat; please treat it gently.

• A prairie is not the first place that comes to mind when one thinks of Oregon. Yet that's exactly what early 19th-century explorers and fur trappers found when they arrived in the Willamette Valley: a rich landscape of grassland and groves of widely spaced oak trees. When word of the valley's fertile soil and saddle-high grass traveled east, it triggered the great westward movement of covered wagons along the Oregon Trail. Although agriculture and development have left only scattered fragments in today's valley, it's still possible to see this endangered habitat at Kingston Prairie, an always-open preserve near Stayton owned by the Greenbelt Land Trust. See PRAIRIE, Page 2B

Kingston Prairie, a preserve that retains the biological diversity of the Willamette Valley as it was, before settlers arrived. BOBBIE SNEAD/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

On becoming a happy and aimless wanderer



Fishing
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

They - a very loaded word, that - say the longer you have a pet, the more you come to resemble the critter.

Picture the woman with long, blonde hair driving a convertible with an Afghan hound with its hair flowing in the breeze sitting on the passenger seat trope.

Or the Winston Churchill and a bulldog comparison.

Although in the interests of accuracy, no one to my knowledge has ever seen a bulldog lighting up a La Aroma de Cuba stogie, a fave of the late British prime minister.

You can only take a simile so far.

I digress.

Given that Harry, the mostly Jack Russell, is in his dotage, the comparison of the dog to the human who he owns has become mental as well as physical.

Harry will stop for no apparent reason and stare blankly at nothing in particular, sometimes midway while crossing a street.

This trait of apparent life-threatening cluelessness used to be somewhat annoying.

Now it's a shared feature, not a bug, except for the four-legged lockup in the middle of the road.

Harry can literally stop and snort and snuffle at a patch of grass for five minutes with no discernible motive or intent.



Like Harry, the person who he owns is learning about the beauty of senior moments.

HENRY MILLER/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

I used to tug on the leash trying to get him to get off the brakes and release the clutch.

Now there's a shared appreciation of the stalled ramble.

He stops. He sniffs. I look around and take in the surroundings.

Harry's brain cramps are almost like those times when you find yourself in a room, and have a vague sense that you are there for a reason, but you can remember exactly what.

If you haven't had the experience, trust me, you will.

For years in the past, walking with Harry was like holding the reins of an unruly sled dog team when the

pack sees the finish line.

Now it's more like an aimless meander.

The only time he gets into a lather is when he sees a cat, and then it's a walk down memory lane to puppyhood.

In short bursts.

You get the impression he remembers the old times and the thrill of the chase.

Then Harry forgets just what all the excitement is about.

I noticed how much I've become like the dog during a recent fishing trip.

The thought of catching a steelhead faded into the background, while the warmth of the sun on your face and the sound of the lapping of the river against the side of the boat, along with the passing panorama, became the essences of the experience.

Nothing much is happening, and that's absolutely glorious.

Funny how that sneaks up on you.

Yep.

People do come to resemble their pets over time.

And that's not a bad thing.

Moving on to another topic.

Now that the weather's warming and the sap is rising, I'm going to try something to help catch up on current events and forthcoming outdoor opportunities for the loyal readers.

Space permitting, I'm going to feature items under the heading "This Week's Highlights," admittedly a take on "where the hell is Henry headed this week."

See MILLER, Page 2B