

## PASSING

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(I like these examples of a community having such a familiar relationship with its topography. Another prominent case is Seattle, where residents, when they refer to “the mountain,” needn’t bother saying “Mount Rainier.”)

McKenzie Pass, the next major socket in the toothy chain of Cascade volcanoes south of the Santiam, has always impressed me with its expanses of barren lava, so different from the forested Santiam Pass.

(Although the B&B Complex fire, which swept through the Santiam in 2003, significantly altered its appearance.)

It always pleased me too to know that the McKenzie, owing to its greater elevation (5,325 feet, a number that also never seems to grow dim in my memory even as so many other inconsequential details fade) and its steeper grades and surfeit of sharp corners, usually is blocked by snow for more than half the year because plowing it clear is too expensive to justify.

(The proximity of the Santiam Pass also makes the McKenzie, which actually has had a highway for longer, somewhat superfluous, traffic-wise.)

As a child I also learned, mainly through books, about a few other noteworthy passes.

These include Wyoming’s South Pass, the opening through the Rocky Mountains so vital to the success of the Oregon Trail, and Donner Pass in Northern California’s Sierra Nevada, where a group of emigrants came to such a bad, and grisly, end during the winter of 1846-47.

But for all my interest in passes that have been civilized to a great degree, my favorite encounters with these topographic features have happened on foot.

Much of this is due to the nature of walking compared with driving.

It is quite a different experience to ascend a pass at a placid pace than at 55 mph, to smell the fresh scent of sun-warmed fir rather than upholstery, to feel the cool breath of an alpine breeze when you come round a switchback and not the artificial frigidity that issues from a vent.

I greatly admire the engineers who conceive a way to lay a swath of pavement across inhospitable terrain. Yet it’s that very skill which transforms the crossing of a pass from an intimate experience, one in which the anticipation builds gradually but powerfully with each of thousands of steps, to an anodyne blur lasting no longer than a song on the stereo.

I am fortunate to live so near the Wallows, a mountain range with a passel of prominent passes.

This has much to do with geography. The Wallows comprise about 10 major canyons and considerably more ridges, and any practical trail network by necessity must include passes that bridge these divides.

Over the past 15 years or so I’ve managed to cross many of the Wallows’ named passes, and a few that don’t have a name.

The most dramatic to my eyes (and, frankly, stomach) is Polaris Pass. It’s the highest pass in the range with a constructed trail, at 8,800 feet.

But its distinguishing characteristic, at least when you approach it from its gentler eastern side, as I did on my two visits, in 2012 and

### Wallowa Passes

• **POLARIS:** 8,800 feet, on divide between East and West Forks of the Wallowa River

• **GLACIER:** 8,500 feet, between Glacier Lake and the Lake Basin

• **HAWKINS:** 8,300 feet, between the West Fork of the Wallowa River and the South Fork of the Imnaha River

• **HORTON:** 8,500 feet, at the head of East Eagle Creek

• **FRAZIER:** 7,500 feet, between East Eagle Creek and Minam River

• **WONKER:** 8,500 feet, between West Eagle Creek and Trail Creek

2017, is how suddenly the panoramic view explodes at the top.

I think the adjective “breathtaking” an especially trite cliché, but in common with that breed it sometimes captures a feeling as well as any other option.

Reaching Polaris Pass is just such a case.

Almost every pass boasts a fine view, of course — such is the nature of high ground (even “lower” high ground).

But Polaris Pass is different — the way the west side plunges so precipitously, the way the grand sweep of the Wallows’ granitic midsection is exposed, unobscured by any intervening terrain — that I have yet to find anything like its rival.

But each pass offers rewards that more than justify the toil required to reach it.

I relish all of them — Hawkins, Horton, Glacier, Frazier, Wonker, Ivan Carper, Burger, Sand, and the curiously unnamed passes above Arrow and Cached lakes west of Eagle Creek.

The Elkhorns, where I’ve spent considerably more time than in the Wallows, are comparatively deficient in notable passes.

The Elkhorns are a much smaller range, for one thing. And although there are several substantial canyons in the Elkhorns, few of the intervening ridges are crossed by trails.

Also, two of the major passes in the range — Marble Creek and Elkhorn Summit — are reached by roads, paved in the latter case.

Then too there is a difference in nomenclature.

The longest trail in the Elkhorns — the Elkhorn Crest Trail — as its name implies generally follows the crest of the range’s main spine, and although the path crosses this divide several times, most of these spots are called saddles rather than passes.

Naming convention aside, I am always gratified to arrive at Cracker Saddle, or Cunningham or Dutch Flat.

There are also a couple of proper passes along the Crest Trail — Angell, the high point south of Anthony Lakes, and the piquantly named Nip and Tuck above Lost Lake.

The lack of consistency among names in the Elkhorns isn’t unique.

There is a regional aspect to branding passes just as there is with, say, the various versions of describing sweetened, carbonated water, which goes by, among other monikers, soda, pop, coke and tonic.

What I call a pass a Vermonter or New Hampshire resident likely would deem a

notch (as in Franconia Notch in the latter state), and a Virginian might describe as a gap (as in the Cumberland Gap).

I like that these differences exist. They highlight the richness of our language.

As an aside, I’ve long wondered about what seems to be a local anomaly in describing another landform — the valleys, typically roughly circular and often with a meadow or seasonal meltwater pond, that form near the base of a ridge.

On the west side of the Elkhorns, between Cracker and Dutch Flat saddles, three of these features, all in a line about two miles long, are called “coves” — Mount Ruth, Bill Brown and Cunningham. A fourth example, a few miles to the southwest, is Cable Cove at the head of Silver Creek.

The city of Cove in Union County, originally called Forest Cove, has a similar topographic origin.

What seems to me passing strange is that cove, in this context, is most commonly used in the southern Appalachians. Its synonyms include “hollow” or, to capture regional dialects, “holler.”

I don’t know how the quartet of high valleys in the Elkhorns came to be known as coves, while almost every other similar place in the region is not. Unfortunately my most reliable arbiter on such questions — McArthur’s irreplaceable “Oregon Geographic Names” — is silent on the matter.

I suspect, though, that there is a Southern connection.

The first gold rush in Northeastern Oregon, spurred by Henry Griffin’s discovery of the precious metal in a gulch near present-day Baker City on Oct. 23, 1861, happened to coincide with the Civil War.

The subsequent onslaught of fortune-seekers into the Blue Mountains included a goodly number of prospectors who were either from the Confederacy or at least sympathetic to its aims.

This sentiment is reflected in several place names across the region including, to name a couple of the more obvious, Dixie Butte and Jeff Davis Creek.

The other side of that conflict is even more amply represented on the map. Both Dixie Butte and Jeff Davis Creek are in Grant County, whose neighbors include Union County and Baker County. The latter was named for U.S. Sen. Edward Dickinson Baker, a close friend of Abraham Lincoln and a colonel in the Union Army who was killed at the Battle of Ball’s Bluff in Virginia. Baker died on Oct. 21, 1861.

Two days later, and most of a continent away, Griffin glimpsed those pale yellow flakes, making a very different sort of history.



## Bullish On The Season

Photo by Jim Ward

September marks the beginning of the elk rut in Northeast Oregon forests. Bulls emit high-pitched bugles to both entice females and challenge rivals. Research at the Starkey Experimental Forest west of La Grande revealed the highest number of cow elk conceive around the 14th of September — suggesting the peak of the rut. It’s a long-held fact that the decreasing amount of daylight triggers the estrous cycle in females and stimulates breeding urges in the males, not the weather as some believe.

The Eastern Oregon Cancer Network invites you to help commission the walls of the new cancer center in Pendleton!

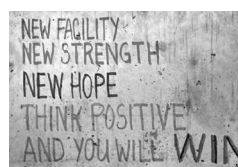
# Written in STONE

Messages from the heart: for hope and healing

**SATURDAY, SEPT. 7**

**NOON TO 3 P.M. • CEREMONY AT 2 P.M.**

**1701 SW 24TH STREET • PENDLETON, OREGON**



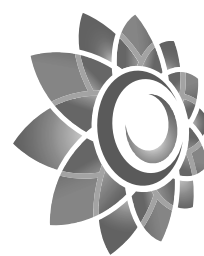
The “Written in Stone” event is an opportunity to cover the walls of the treatment room at the new Eastern Oregon Cancer Center at Pendleton with messages of hope, healing and encouragement. These words of inspiration will be embedded into the very foundation of the new center and will surround patients with the loving, supportive thoughts of the entire community.

Cancer patients, survivors, and family members, please join us and share your stories of healing and hope!

Hosted by Eastern Oregon Cancer Network, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization committed to reducing the financial burden of local cancer patients by providing local housing during treatment, assistance with transportation and other patient needs.



All donations stay in the Pendleton, Oregon area to help local cancer patients.



**EASTERN OREGON CANCER CENTER** at Pendleton



Find us on Facebook | 1701 SW 24th St. • Pendleton, OR 97801  
[PendletonCancer.com](http://PendletonCancer.com)

## Summer Clean Out!

What you should know about the disposal of household hazardous waste.

### What is household hazardous waste?

HHW is anything labeled toxic, flammable, corrosive, reactive or explosive. These materials can threaten family health and the safety of pets and wildlife.

### What are some examples of hazardous waste?

Aerosols, Bleach, Drain Cleaners, Metal Polish, Mothballs, Oven Cleaners, Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Ammonia-based Cleaners, Mercury Thermometers, Wood Polishes, Waxes, Fertilizers, Insecticides, Herbicides, Rodenticides, Spa and Pool Chemicals, Roofing Compounds, Antifreeze, Batteries, Motor Oil, Paint Strippers and Thinners, Gasoline and more.

### Where can I safely dispose of my hazardous waste?

**La Grande Facility:** Open to any resident of the three counties every other Tuesday, 8am-12 noon. By appointment, however, small labeled quantities accepted daily. (541) 963-5459.

**Baker City Facility:** Open the first Wednesday of each month, 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 523-2626.

**Enterprise Facility:** Open the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 426-3332.

**Americans generate 1.6 million tons of HHW per year!**

**The average home can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of hazardous waste.**