

EXHIBIT TELLS OF 'Uncanny Tales Along the Oregon Trail'

■ Explore folklore and spooky fables of the Oregon Trail era

By Lisa Britton

BAKER CITY — You'll find a ghost story or two, but the new "Uncanny Tales" exhibit is focused more on folk traditions from the era of the Oregon Trail than spooky stories.

"Hopefully it makes people think about the role folklore plays in their life," said Bobby Reis, exhibit specialist at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.

"Uncanny Tales Along the Oregon Trail" opened on Sept. 30. It will be on display through Dec. 20.

The exhibit is arranged in chap-

ters. The first section outlines the "uncanny" story, followed by history and a deeper study of the possible background.

Take, for instance, the legend of

Elizabeth Winchell Markham. The story goes that one day, while on the Oregon Trail, she sat unresponsive. Her family left but sent a son back to get her. She attacked him in what was described as the acts of a crazy woman.

In the exhibit, Reis delves into the complex issues of mental health and how women — who often didn't have much of a choice — reacted during the journey.

"It's an avenue to explore mental health on the Oregon Trail and what the roles of women were on the trail," he said.

Reis' background is anthropology



Photo by Lisa Britton

A faux campfire, battery-operated candles and music add to the ambience of the exhibit "Uncanny Tales."

and folktales, so he turned to his vast library when researching for this exhibit.

Folklore, he said, varies by culture and is a traditional belief system passed on from one generation to the next.

"I want them to have fun with it," he said of visitors to the display. "I enjoy ghost stories and folktales."

The exhibit includes the story of the Lost Blue Bucket Mine, recounting the tale of children who picked up pretty rocks along their journey. When the rocks were revealed to be gold, the location of their discovery could never be found again.

Although ghost stories are not the main focus of "Uncanny Tales,"

Reis did include a few. Phantom coaches, for instance, can be traced to English folklore but also cropped up in America — "from Norfolk to the Great Plains," Reis said.

"Folklore moves with people," he noted.

The Interpretive Center is located 5 miles east of Baker City on Highway 86. It is currently open daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$8 adults, \$6 seniors, and free for ages 15 and younger. Federal passes are accepted.

Beginning in December, the center will be open Thursday through Sunday. Admission will be free for all during the month of December. For a schedule, visit www.oregon-trail.blm.gov or call 541-523-1843.

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