

RECREATION
REPORT

The Observer & Baker City Herald

**PARKING FEES
WAIVED AT
STATE PARKS ON
'GREEN FRIDAY'
NOVEMBER 29**

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) invites Oregonians to celebrate "Green Friday" Nov. 29. OPRD will waive day-use parking fees that day in 25 state parks across Oregon.

"Fall weather brings a different flavor to many state parks and we're encouraging folks to get outside and explore," said Lisa Sumption, OPRD director. "This is our fifth year celebrating Green Friday and we're excited to continue the post-holiday tradition."

Parking is free year-round at almost all state parks; the waiver applies to the 25 parks that charge \$5 daily for parking. The waiver applies from open to close on Nov. 29, except at Shore Acres State Park, where it expires at 3 p.m. for the Holiday Lights event that runs Thanksgiving through New Year's Eve. A list of parks that charge the \$5 parking fee is available online.

Learn more about Oregon State Parks on oregonstateparks.org.

**BOAT
REGISTRATION
RENEWALS
MAILED**

The Oregon State Marine Board mailed approximately 37,000 boat registration renewal notices to boaters whose motorboat registration expires on Dec. 31, 2019. Each renewal notice is unique to the owners and their boats. Additionally, registration renewals will also be sent electronically to 38,000 boat owners with emails on file in an effort to encourage online renewal.

Any watercraft with a motor, or sailboats 12 feet or longer, are required to title and register with the Marine Board. Registration fees vary based on boat length.

Elk hunt with no elk still turns up treasures

■ The placid pace of hunting, combined with the limited attention span of a child, can emphasize the simple joy of being outdoors on a fine autumn day

When my son Max realized that going elk hunting with me was unlikely to involve any actual elk, his attention wandered.

So did his feet.

This epiphany happened about half an hour after we set out, although I concede this estimate lacks precision.

I didn't keep a time log or anything. Possibly as many as 45 minutes elapsed before Max, who's 8, stopped shadowing me and began to veer off the game trail I was trying to discern among the camouflage of tawny grass and desiccated balsamroot leaves.

(The latter foliage, by the way, is the bane of any hunter. Balsamroot leaves grow about a foot long and if you mistakenly step on one of the dead husks it makes more racket than a pair of castanets tossed down a flight of wooden stairs. This is the sort of cacophony no elk within half a mile could fail to heed.)

When I noticed that Max was no longer so near that I could hear the soft fabric swish of his coat as he swung his arms, I looked back and beckoned him, in a stage whisper, to come closer.

"Did you see an elk?" Max asked, not in a stage whisper but in his regular voice, which can outdecibel a lot of competitors.

Crunched balsamroot leaves, for instance.

His query had a quality of certainty about it — as though finally, after what probably seemed to him an interminable period of aimless hiking, we had come across our intended quarry and the shooting and associated excitement would soon commence.

I couldn't bear to give Max the real, Vegas-level odds. We had quite a lot of ground still to cover, and if there's anything more vital than a supply of fun-sized candy bars to keep an 8-year-old going in rough country,



ON THE TRAIL
JAYSON JACOBY

then it must surely be the hope that something dramatic will ensue.

But I did concede that it was possible we wouldn't see any elk.

Max shrugged.

He didn't act disappointed, exactly. But he no longer seemed particularly invested in the endeavor.

It was one of those moments, fraught with potential peril, that every parent recognizes and fears, wondering whether the child's patience — as unpredictable as certain rare and unstable elements — has come up empty.

Sometimes the child at this point demonstrates an aptitude for stubbornness that would impress an overloaded mule.

This wasn't one of those cases. I told Max that even if we didn't happen across any elk we would no doubt see something interesting there on the steep slopes overlooking Brownlee Reservoir.

And soon enough we did. By way of avoiding a particularly dense patch of balsamroot I led us toward a massive gnarled juniper whose branches, many of them dead, sprawled over the ground, rather like a nest of gray snakes.

Max, like many young readers who have discovered the joy of fiction, has developed an affinity for tales of fantasy. He quickly dubbed this juniper the "tree of evil."

It did have the spooky quality common to the species — in particular those that, like this tree, have at least as much deadwood as live.

We rested for 10 minutes or so in the juniper's ample shade — the



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

An ancient, gnarled juniper tree supplies a compelling diversion during an elk hunt that turned up no elk.

morning was already unusually mild for November, and the air strangely still for a typically gusty place — and then resumed our climb up the hill.

Like almost every hill in this part of eastern Baker County, this one is pitched at the sort of angle that delights extreme skiers.

But the juniper, evil or no, seemed to have stimulated Max's interest in natural phenomena, and I sensed that so long as the Milky Ways held out we'd be fine.

They did. And we were.

To be sure, Max's appetite for exploring outdoors needs only the barest amount of whetting.

He can be waylaid by a golf-ball-size stone that I wouldn't even notice unless I tripped on a fin of limestone, barely jutting above the bunchgrass like a shark's dorsal, and ended up seeing the rock on its own level, so to speak.

During his meanderings Max exclaimed over, among much else, the husk of a yellowjacket nest wedged into what looked like the burrow of a portly ground squirrel or a diminutive badger, a coil of rusty barbed wire, and a shard of white plastic that I told him came from a mining claim marker.

We waded through a hip-high field of rabbitbrush (shoulder-high, from Max's perspective), bypassed turrets of limestone and gingerly tiptoed across a shaly slope that was about as solid to walk on as marbles.

Max slipped once and announced that he wouldn't be able to climb back

to where I was precariously standing.

So I shuffled down to him, raising a dust cloud around my feet much like the character Pig Pen in "Peanuts" (the past couple dry weeks have sapped the top layer of soil of the copious moisture from earlier this fall).

I told him to use my back as a sort of brace, and we tentatively made our way to the slightly firmer footing of a wider game trail. Max said the television survival star Bear Grylls, one of his current heroes, recommends the shuffling strides as the fastest way down a precipitous slope. I took this as a compliment.

Just before we got back to the side-by-side we saw four bighorn sheep — a fine ram and his harem of three ewes — clambering across a rockslide.

I told Max that I don't have a tag for one of those and Max, an inveterate follower of rules, nodded with a serious look on his face, although it seemed to me he yearned for me to do something with my rifle besides keeping it slung over my shoulder.

The sheep served as a reasonable substitute for elk. I thought it a successful hunt, in any case.

Max, as I expected he would, proved capable of negotiating the torturous terrain with aplomb. There were no significant injuries, and no tears were shed.

And his fascination with the minutiae of nature reminded me that just being outdoors on a pleasant autumn day is an experience to be savored, whether or not it puts meat on the table.

Making a discovery of mammoth proportions

■ Construction crew found prehistoric bones near Prineville

By Michael Kohn
The (Bend) Bulletin

The tusk poking out of the earth looked distinctly out of place in the gravel seam where Reid Comstock was maneuvering his excavation digger last March.

"Something looked a little funny in the ground," said Comstock, an employee of Knife River Corp., a construction materials supplier that specializes in rock, sand, asphalt and concrete. "I grabbed a couple of guys to see what we had discovered."

What Comstock found in the 15-foot deep pit near Prineville was the tusk, cranium and other bones belonging to a prehistoric mammoth or mastodon. After relaying news of the find to his three daughters, the family called it "Peaches" af-

ter one of the young mammoths in the animated movie "Ice Age."

Mammoths and mastodons survived on the American mainland until about 10,000 years ago.

Scientists do not have a definitive reason for their extinction, although climatic changes and hunting by prehistoric people are believed to be the two most critical factors.

"I have been doing this work my whole life, and you always believe you might find something. It's just a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said the 45-year-old Comstock, an operator of heavy digging equipment since the age of 12.



Eastern Oregon University photo

Eastern Oregon University faculty and students worked alongside Knife River employees in mid-October near Prineville to excavate bones believed to be those of either a prehistoric mammoth or mastodon.