

THE BEST PLACE TO SEE A PARTICULAR PEAK



Lisa Britton / For the EO Media Group

The distinctive twin summits of Krag Peak dominate the view from the former site of a fire lookout on Red Knob in the Eagle Creek country northeast of Baker City. The mountain at the far right is Red Mountain, highest point in Baker County at 9,555 feet.

READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP

For every mountain I believe there is one place, one vantage point, from which the peak appears particularly fetching.

In some cases this singular perspective allows the mountain to dominate the surrounding terrain more thoroughly than from anywhere else.

In others the viewpoint transforms a peak that from other angles is mundane into something dramatic by emphasizing a sheer spire, or by drawing the eye to a knife-edged ridge.

There are famous examples of classic mountain views around the world.

The Matterhorn from Zermatt.

The north face of the Eiger from Kleine Scheidegg.

Kilimanjaro from the Tanzanian plains.

Everest from the Rongbuk monastery.

Much closer to home there are many candidates — Gunsight from the shore of Anthony Lake, Mount Emily from, well, just about anywhere in La Grande, Chief Joseph Mountain from the Wallowa Valley, Strawberry Mountain from Prairie City.

Some peaks, by virtue of their sheer immensity, defy the notion that there's a single spot from which they



ON THE TRAIL

JAYSON JACOBY

ought to be appreciated.

Does Mount Hood inspire more awe from Timberline or from Cloud Cap? Or from Lost Lake?

Is Mount Rainier more spectacular from Paradise or from Sunrise?

(Sunrise, in my estimation. I've been to no other place where a mountain occupies so much of the sky.)

A few of my favorite volcanoes in the Cascades look so different depending on your position that I don't even bother to wonder which I prefer.

Mount Jefferson as seen from the west, for instance, is so unlike the mountain viewed from the east that a person seeing two photos might not believe they show the same peak.

The west face of Jeff, the second-highest summit in Oregon at 10,495 feet, shows off both of its summit horns. The ultimate view is from Highway 22 along the North Santiam River near Marion Forks.

But from east of the Cascades only Mount Jefferson's highest pinnacle is visible, and the peak more resembles a conventional, pyramid-

shaped volcano.

Jefferson's nearest neighbor, Three Fingered Jack, is much more diverse in its appearances. Jefferson continued to erupt for hundreds of thousands of years after Jack had gone dormant, and the erosive forces of ice, wind, water and time have gnawed away a great deal of the mountain's original bulk.

(Jack tops out at a middling 7,841 feet.)

What's left is a messy pile of lava pinnacles, ridges and spurs that vaguely resembles the remnants of a medieval castle several centuries after it was abandoned during a long siege.

You needn't travel clear across the Cascades to appreciate Three Fingered Jack's diverse appearances, which, despite its name, only occasionally show three main "fingers."

The peak as seen from Santiam Pass is quite different from the view just a couple miles away where the highway curves around Hogg Rock and briefly aims straight at the mountain.

My brother, Michael, recently texted me a photo of Jack that he took from Round Lake, east of the pass. I recognized the peak because I knew it was near that lake, but it was still a new perspective of a familiar mountain.

I like it when that happens — when a mountain I have seen hundreds of times, and from more than a dozen places, suddenly seems, if not new then at least refreshed.

I had just that experience a few weeks ago when my wife, Lisa, and I took our kids, Max and Olivia, for a hike in the southern Wallows near Eagle Creek.

Our destination was Red Knob. It's a minor eminence near the Forest Service's Lily White Guard Station.

Red Knob is one of several high points in the distinctive topography that runs roughly east-west between Eagle Creek at the east and Medical Springs at the west. The area is heavily forested but its most notable features are small rocky patches bereft of trees.

Such bare areas are called "balds" in the southern Appalachians.

At 5,121 feet, Red Knob is one of the higher of these balds in the Eagle Creek country, and although I had never been there I was familiar enough with the area that I was pretty sure the view from the summit would be expansive.

Indeed it is.

Not for nothing did the Forest Service build a fire lookout on Red Knob in 1932. The lookout was dismantled

in 1968, according to author and lookout historian Ray Kresek.

As Max and I reached the crest (we had fallen behind Lisa and Olivia due to a shoe issue, something that afflicts Max occasionally) I was for an instant taken aback by the majesty of what I saw.

I expected to see the snowpeaks of the Wallows, of course.

What I didn't anticipate was how thoroughly the west face of Krag Peak dominates the view.

Krag Peak is a significant mountain, one of at least three dozen summits in the Wallows that top 9,000 feet — albeit barely, at 9,048.

But every time I've seen it in the past, Krag Peak shared the spotlight, as it were, with other nearby peaks that loom above East Eagle Creek. That includes its nearest neighbor — Red Mountain, at 9,555 feet the tallest peak in Baker County.

From Red Knob, though, Krag Peak has no rivals.

This is largely because intervening ridges block most of the Wallows.

Krag Peak lacks the notoriety of the Matterhorn and Sacajawea and of course Eagle Cap itself.

But from one place, at least, it boasts a grandeur equal to any peak.

If You Go...

From Interstate 84 at the North Baker City exit (No. 302), drive Highway 86 east toward Richland. Just past Milepost 23, turn left on graveled Sparta Lane. Follow Sparta Lane for about 4.7 miles, climbing most of the way in a series of curves. Turn left on East Eagle Road.

Drive north on the gravel road, passing through Forshey Meadows before entering the forest, for 5.5 miles to Five Corners, where multiple roads meet. Continue north, following signs to Lily White, which is 2 miles away. Beyond Lily White the roads are rougher but passable to four-wheel drives. Follow Road 165, which is just north of Lily White. The road heads west for about a quarter mile to a junction with Road 015, which heads north then west. Reach a four-way intersection after about a half mile then turn right (uphill) onto Road 075, a steep, rough route that reaches Red Knob, and the former lookout site, in about a half mile.

A most magical pursuit: Picking morels

Right now is one of the funner seasons of the year — morel mushroom picking time! It is a short season so you want to make sure that you don't miss it. In Nebraska and Iowa, it is somewhere around the middle of April. Up in the mountains I do good around first or second week of May. And then they start popping up after that as you go up in elevation.

There are a lot of edible wild mushrooms but I only can identify a couple so a few years ago I thought it's crazy to spend all that time walking around and only be able to identify a few varieties. Why not take a class so I could come back down from the mountains with more?

So I attended a mushroom hunting class. They told me that after I had completed the class that I'd feel comfortable picking at least 10 different varieties. By the time I completed the class ... I still only felt comfortable picking the same couple.

Here's the deal. Morel mushrooms are the best tasting food in the world



BASE CAMP

TOM CLAYCOMB

but, if you screw up and pick the Angel of Death, well, let's just say that you and God had better be pretty good friends. So in a nutshell, one little snack is not worth dying over, so the first few times go with an old timer. Today I'm going to cover how to find morel mushrooms. I'm not going into how to identify them, find a trusted veteran and have them coach you.

Where do you find them? A lot of writers drive me nuts. They'll confidently say something like go to the woods and look around dead logs. I've got news for them. The woods are full of dead logs and you don't find a morel at every dead log.

While it's true that you do find some around logs, it's not like every log has morels. I've hunted morels for over 40 years and you'd think I had it down pat and could give you

the five steps to be a morel hunter. The problem is ... I can't!

But let's go over a few things that I have learned. In Nebraska/Kansas I find them on sandy river banks. And I've made hauls out on islands. And in the woods along the river. Again, not in wet turf, but sloping, well-drained areas.

In the mountains I'll find them on the uphill side of old logging roads. In slight drainages that have some spread out vegetation but not thick grass. I'll find them in brush piles. My old hunting buddy Roger Ross says he likes to look around tamara-

Sometimes I'll find morels around fresh (from last fall) caterpillar tracks. It seems like torn up soil promotes their growth. If you find some, look downhill. The spores get washed downhill. One year after a fire I found a trillion like this washed down a draw on a mountainside.

If you found some last year, go back there this year. It's not a guar-

antee every year, but almost. I have one spot where I find them at every year. But not last year. So that's why I say not every year.

They are really temperature- and moisture-dependent. When it finally turns warm, if you get a rain and a warm night it seems like they pop up overnight. A few years ago I was talking to a Forest Service lady and we were shooting the bull about mushrooms. She brought up the thought about measuring the soil temperature when you find them. Then just this week I read an article and the writer said when the soil hits 50 degrees they start growing. Maybe so.

But the absolute best place to hunt them is the spring after a forest fire the previous year. I've had old fires where I could fill two 5-gallon buckets almost as fast as I could pick. Under a lodgepole pine that was laid down I found 17. In one area I could have covered with a 10-by-12-foot tarp I picked 162.

Real pickers use a mesh bag so



Photo by Tom Claycomb

A morel mushroom

the spores can drop out. They also use a knife to cut them off at the ground. When you get home, slice them longwise and gently rinse and put in a bowl of water with salt to kill the bugs and set overnight in your fridge.

Dip in beaten eggs and roll in flour. Sprinkle with salt and pepper — or my favorite, Tony Chachere's seasoning — and fry to a golden brown. Morels are the best food in the world!