

RECREATION
REPORT

BEAR SEASON
STARTS TODAY,
AND HUNTERS
DON'T NEED TO
CHECK IN BEARS
AT ODFW OFFICE

Due to COVID-19-related closures of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) offices, bear hunters are temporarily not required to check in their animal at an ODFW office, though they do still need to report basic information about their harvest within 10 days. The fall bear season opens today, Aug. 1. Hunters need to call the office in the district where they harvested their cougar or bear and report their name, ODFW ID number, date of harvest, location of harvest (wildlife management unit), sex of animal and confirmation number for electronic tags. Or, they can email all the above information to ODFW.WildlifeInfo@state.or.us.

FISHING
FORECAST

WALLOWA LAKE

Fishing for rainbow trout is currently very good with many fish congregating near the river mouth. Boats are helpful but fishing from the east shore can be productive. Kokanee fishing has remained productive with most anglers being successful with both trolling and jigging. Look for the most productive fishing to be between 40 to 60 feet deep.

GRANDE RONDE
RIVER

Trout fishing will get difficult in the lower Grande Ronde as water temperatures increase. Bass fishing will be the best bet for most anglers. Recently, late evenings have been best.

ANTHONY LAKE

Fishing remains good for stocked trophy-sized rainbow trout. Anglers are doing well with standard baits from the bank and trolling or casting flies and spinners from boats. At 7,100 feet in elevation, Anthony Lake is a great place to escape the summer heat. Boaters are reminded that the lake is restricted to electric motors only.

FISH LAKE (NORTH
OF HALFWAY)

Fishing is good for stocked rainbow trout and naturally produced brook trout. The campground at the lake fills quickly on weekends so campers are encouraged to get there early or be prepared to camp at other undeveloped camping sites in the area.

Spectacular
Solitude



Lisa Britton/For the EO Media Group

The South Winom trail on the Umatilla National Forest runs through a valley burned in the Tower fire in August 1996. Most of the area is covered by a dense forest of young lodgepole pines, but this south-facing slope is more open, with scattered lodgepoles and patches of snowbrush.

Missing
Mountains

■ The North Fork John Day River country lacks the dramatic alpine peaks of the Wallowa and Elkhorn Mountains, but the region has its own enticements

Big mountains beckon us. We are entranced by their sheer scale, making even the largest man-made constructions seem the puny playthings of a child.

Climbers scan the ridges and faces and plot potential routes to the summit, imagining the moves they'll make and contemplating the complement of carabiners they'll need.

Photographers ponder the time of day that would bathe the slopes in the perfect light.

Painters strive to preserve on canvas the magnificence of a peak in winter, its white point piercing the pale blue sky.

Big mountains are aloof. They are inscrutable.

Like the ocean abyssals they are places we visit, and then only briefly. Most mountains are uninhabited — indeed, often all but uninhabitable — and they are occupied by humans so infrequently that they might well be considered

a sort of hybrid between the terrestrial and the extraterrestrial.

But mountains, as with most things, span a wide range of sizes.

And I realized just recently how much the allure of great mountains had diminished my appreciation for ones less lofty.

It happens that from my yard in Baker City I can see two prominent ranges.

The whole of the northeast horizon is dominated by the Wallowas.

These mountains are not so well-known as the Cascades. This is not surprising. The Cascades extend for several hundred miles while the Wallowas at their broadest span perhaps 45 miles.

The Cascades also lie much nearer to metropolitan areas, including Portland and Seattle. The Wallowas dominate a sparsely populated part of Oregon, visible on a fine day to the thousands rather than to the millions.



Lisa Britton/For the EO Media Group

Fireweed along the North Fork John Day River.



ON THE TRAIL
JAYSON JACOBY

The volcanoes that crown the Cascade crest have a solitary splendor, soaring many thousands of feet above the nearby terrain and thus dominating the views for dozens of miles around. The Wallowas, mostly the product of stony accretions and subterranean magmatic intrusions rather than frothing, fiery eruptions, are quite different, a rather jumbled collection of canyons and divides with few individual summits rising much more than 1,000 feet above the surrounding land.

And yet, no range in Oregon can rival the Wallowas for sheer extent of elevated ground.

Of Oregon's 29 mountains that top 9,000 feet, 17 are in the Wallowas. The Cascades boast a mere nine, albeit a roster that includes such famed peaks as Mount Hood, Oregon's tallest at 11,235, and the Three Sisters near Bend (each sibling surpasses 10,000 feet).

Among Oregon's three 9,000-foot peaks that are in neither the Wallowas nor the Cascades, one is also visible from parts of Baker City (but, alas, not quite from my yard, which lies a bit too far south and west). That's Rock Creek Butte, at 9,106 feet the apex of the Elkhorn Mountains, a range that much resembles the Wallowas, both in its scenery and its goulash of a geologic history.

If You Go...

The Winom Creek campground is on the Umatilla National Forest, about 23 miles east of Ukiah and near Road 52, the two-lane paved Blue Mountain Scenic Byway. The campground, which is also a trailhead for the Winom-Frazier Off-Highway Vehicle network, is about 1 mile off the Byway, along Forest Road 440. Both the North Winom and South Winom trails, leading into the North Fork John Day Wilderness, start at the campground.

There are 10 campsites, including three group sites, as well as two vault toilets. All sites are first come, first served, with no reservations. Individual sites are \$10 per night, the group sites, \$25.

If you have a high-clearance vehicle you can drive to two Forest Service fire lookout sites, although only one remains active. That's Tower Mountain, the highest point in the area at 6,850 feet. It's about 8 miles north of the Byway, via Forest Road 5226. Tower Mountain, which was added to the National Historic Lookout Register in 1995, is rare in that it's an all-steel tower, 92 feet tall. Forest Road 5225 leads south for about 10 miles to Silver Butte, the site of a lookout removed in the 1960s. Both roads start along the Byway about 1.1 miles east (toward Granite) of the 440 Road, which leads to the Winom Creek campground.

(The two other 9,000-footers are Steens Mountain in Harney County, and Strawberry Mountain south of Prairie City.)

I have over the decades developed a considerable affinity for both the Wallowas and the Elkhorns.

I have hiked their trails and driven their roads and relished their wares in all seasons, from the shimmering heat of an alpine rockslide in August to the frigid white silence of January. My familiarity has bred not contempt but an ever-increasing fascination. I never fail to appreciate my good fortune at living so near to such grand mountains.

But my affection for the Wallowas and the Elkhorns also has constricted my views, in a psychological rather than a physical sense.

I came to understand this summer, from a confluence of factors, that I have dismissed other nearby mountains as less deserving of my attention solely because they lack the imposing precipices of the Wallowas and the Elkhorns.

The main thing is that late last summer we bought a pop up trailer.

And once the weather turned warm we naturally started looking for places to park the thing other than in our driveway, which is a pleasant place but is not, strictly speaking, a campsite.



Olivia Jacoby/For the EO Media Group

Paintbrush in bloom near Tower Mountain lookout.

Although there are plenty of spots to haul a trailer in the Elkhorns and the Wallowas, lingering snow — and the incipient infestation of mosquitoes — prompted us to head west, beyond the Elkhorns, to the section of the Blue Mountains where the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla national forests meet.

I've come to think of this area as the North Fork John Day, for the river that drains most of the region.

This is mountainous country, to be sure. But the mountains are of a decidedly different sort from the Wallowas and the Elkhorns. There are no great peaks, their shapes sculpted by ancient glaciers into craggy ramparts and U-shaped valleys.



Lisa Britton/For the EO Media Group

The North Winom trail cleaves a carpet of lodgepole pines that sprouted after the 1996 Tower fire.