

BLUE BASIN

Continued from Page 1B

Many geology guides are too hefty to haul around while hiking. An exception is the volume we brought, the second edition of "Hiking Oregon's Geology" by Ellen Morris Bishop, a Wallowa County geologist, author and journalist who has written extensively about Oregon's fascinating prehistory.



Lisa Britton/For EO Media Group

Water and wind erosion have sculpted the volcanic ash beds of the Blue Basin.

Bishop recommends hiking the Blue Basin loop clockwise, advice that's especially appropriate when the trail, as it was on the day of our visit, is by turns slimed with grainy slush and gooey mud.

If your time or energy are limited, forego the loop itself and take the right-hand fork of the trail, the Island in Time path, which leads directly into Blue Basin itself.

The left fork of the loop skirts an alfalfa field then veers east, climbing at a consistent but moderate grade above the dry gorge of Dick Creek.

The strangely sculpted landscape on the right (south) side of the trail is compelling, a badland of spires and fissures where the erosive work of water and wind is obvious.

As is the origin of the basin's name.

The distinctive color of this volcanic ash — to my eyes it's closer to green or teal than to blue — comes from the mineral celadonite, according to the national monument's website.

This formation, though formed from volcanic ash, has the consistency of stone, albeit soft, easily eroded stone. The heat from the eruption that produced the ash "welded" it into solidified layers, hence the term "welded ash tuff."

In her guide, Bishop writes that these deposits were laid down during the Oligocene epoch, about 28.9 million years ago.

The basin is also known

as Turtle Cove, as the fossils found in this area include many from ancient turtles.

The loop trail climbs a bit more steeply to its high point atop a knoll, where a side trail leads a few hundred yards to a viewpoint of the Blue Basin several hundred feet below.

The main trail then begins its descent to the basin itself.

The grade is gentle for the first half mile or so, but then it drops steeply, in a series of more than a dozen switchbacks, to meet the Island in Time trail near the parking lot.

Climbing, rather than descending, these switchbacks, given the slippery surface that prevailed during our hike, would have been a much less pleasant slog. We were glad we heeded Bishop's suggestion.

We also enjoyed the vista from the loop trail, a much more expansive view than you get from within the convoluted confines of the basin.

The terrain hereabouts, near the boundary between Grant and Wheeler counties, is distinctive, a contorted landscape of buttes and ridges composed of the colorful beds of what geologists call

the John Day formation. Most of the high ground is capped with a veneer of much harder, darker stone, like chocolate frosting topping a cake.

Generally, this top layer is a basalt flow, one of the hundreds of such flows that comprise the Columbia River flood basalts.

In the Picture Gorge area another distinctive formation, the Rattlesnake welded tuff, forms the geologic frosting.

The best view of the Rattlesnake tuff is at the Mascal Overlook, just off Highway 26 before it enters Picture Gorge.

The scenic highlight of Blue Basin, though — the

place that's likely to gobble the most megabytes on your camera — is the basin itself.

It's a strange place. Some writers, Bishop among them, have described it as a "badlands."

An apt term. But the starkness that the word implies also can be beautiful — and unlike, say, the namesake badlands of a national park in South Dakota, the Blue Basin stands out for its color.

In places the shade is so bright it might fairly be called garish, although that adjective seems to me more appropriate for something man-made —

the hue of paint slathered on kitchen appliances during the 1970s, for instance — than for a wholly natural formation.

Even the water in the sluggish meltwater stream that trickles through the basin takes on the distinctive tint.

Blue is the dominant, but not the only, color represented.

In places the ashy slopes are bands of red and ochre, resembling the well-known Painted Hills, the namesake of another of the national monument's units, near Mitchell about 45 miles west.

Many of the myriad gullies that water has gouged into the ash are littered with chunks of basalt that have tumbled off the ridge top rim rock.

We even saw a minor example of the erosion that has sculpted this basin for millions of years, a brief slide of gravelly debris, perhaps enough to fill a wheelbarrow or two, at the head of the basin.

It was a palpable reminder that the natural forces that created this place never end. I don't believe I would feel comfortable standing there during a summer cloudburst.

Fortunately the Island in Time trail is graveled in places, and the brief walk back to the parking lot scuffed off much of the mud that had clung to our boots as we negotiated the switchbacks.

Rather than retrace our route to Baker City, I opted for

another loop of sorts, going by way of Kimberly, Monument and Long Creek before returning to Highway 26 at Mount Vernon.

The detour adds perhaps an hour to the drive.

But I think the scenery, and the near absence of traffic save an occasional ranch truck, offsets the extra investment in time and mileage.

Highway 402, which connects Kimberly and Long Creek, with Monument between, follows the North Fork of the John Day River for about half its length. It's a charming river in any season.

In one of the bare brown fields, where the alfalfa awaits the reviving spring sunshine, we saw a herd of pronghorn antelope bedded down. I remarked that it was rare, at least in my experience, to see this most fleet of Eastern Oregon mammals sitting motionless.

Grant County, with just 7,360 people distributed among its 4,529 square miles, in no place resembles a metropolis.

But this northern section of the county seems to me especially remote. Monument, population 130, and Long Creek, with about 195 residents, boast the only street signs for dozens of miles.

Neither has, nor needs, a traffic signal.

When your computer is in despair call: **Outstanding Computer Repair** Fast and Reliable MOBILE COMPUTER SUPPORT Dale Bogardus 541-297-5831

FAMILY OWNED

NORTHWEST FURNITURE & MATTRESS

215 Elm Street La Grande (541) 963-5440

northwestfurnitureandmattress.com

CLASSIFIEDS

Published by The Observer & Baker City Herald - Serving Wallowa, Union and Baker Counties

PLACING YOUR AD IS EASY...Union, Wallowa, and Baker Counties

Phone La Grande - 541-963-3161 • Baker City - 541-523-3673

On-Line: www.lagrandeobserver.com
www.bakercityherald.com

Email: Classifieds@lagrandeobserver.com
Classifieds@bakercityherald.com

DEADLINES:
LINE ADS:
Tuesday: 8:30am Monday
Thursday: 8:30 am Wednesday
Saturday: 8:30 am Friday
DISPLAY ADS:
2 Days Prior to
Publication Date

VISA MasterCard

CROSSWORD PUZZLER

2-13-21 © 2021 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

ACROSS

1 Shelley offering
4 J in JFK
8 Totter
12 Very little
13 Bowser's pal
14 Grow ashen
15 Neutral shade
17 House shader
18 Glimmering
19 Rev the engine
21 Prickly twig
22 Czech capital
25 Teachers' org.
26 Trick
27 Picked out
30 Football team mems.
31 Skybox locale
33 Deviate, as a rocket
35 "Anyone home?" (hyph.)
37 Ricelike pasta
38 Knows how

DOWN

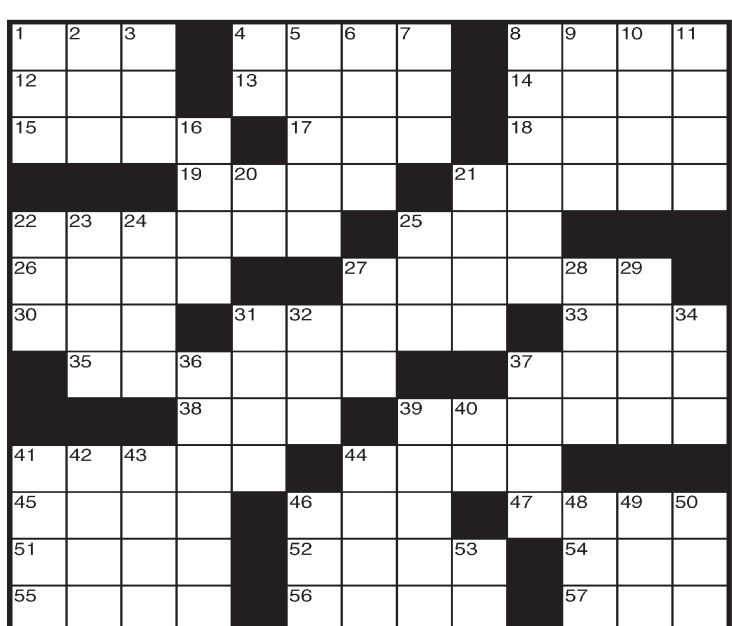
1 Be in debt
2 Yr. ender
3 Always, to Poe
4 Possibility
5 Brother's daughter
6 Like some chatter
7 Brokaw of the news
8 Helix

39 Lustrous fabric
41 "People" person
44 South Seas paradise
45 Burglar's take
46 Kennel sleeper
47 Hunt for
51 Peace Prize city
52 Remnant
54 Once named
55 Animal skin
56 Trillion (pref.)
57 Moon's place

Answer to Previous Puzzle

S	I	T		C	R	A	B		Z	I	T	I
O	R	O		H	U	G	O		E	R	I	C
N	A	G		A	P	E	X		N	I	C	K
G	N	A	R	L	E	D		R	I	S	K	Y
				U	K	E			R	O	T	
P	E	T	T	Y		F	U	C	H	S	I	A
C	A	V		M	E	G		O	O	P		
T	R	A	I	L	E	D		G	A	U	N	T
				M	A	W		Y	A	M		
H	I	P	P	O		W	E	S	T	E	R	N
E	D	I	E		P	O	M	P		G	E	O
C	O	L	D		T	R	E	E		G	N	O
K	L	E		S	E	N	D		Y	O	N	

9 Dry
20 Baba — rum
21 First name in horror
22 Without delay
23 Deep red
24 Lhasa —
25 Cell habitant
27 Co. honcho
28 Brontë heroine Jane —
29 Mental fog
31 Jezebel's spouse
32 Swoboda of baseball
34 Outscored
36 Spotted wildcat
37 Elevator name
39 More prudent
40 Capp of "Li'l Abner"
41 Hew
42 Dexterity
43 Period of quiet
44 Drill a hole
46 Banned bug spray
48 Jr. naval officer
49 Response to a rodent
50 Typewriter part
53 Fla. neighbor



110 Announcements

To Place a Classified Ad

Please email your contact information and the content to be included in the ad to:
classifieds@bakercityherald.com

If you are unable to email please call:
(541) 523-3673

Deadline for Classified Ads
8:30 AM one day prior to publication

GET QUICK CASH WITH THE CLASSIFIEDS!

Sell your unwanted car, property and household items more quickly and affordably with the classifieds. Just call us today to place your ad and get ready to start counting your cash. The Observer 541-963-3161. The Baker City Herald 541-523-3673

Get noticed. TURN YOUR LIGHTS ON.

Drive Safely. The Way to Go.
Transportation Safety — ODOT

Baker City Herald | THE OBSERVER

A Great Learning Tool for Young Readers!

110 Announcements

Heart 'n Home HOSPICE
Hospice & Palliative Care, LLC
"Affirming life...every day, every time"

VOLUNTEER
doing what you love!

Volunteering is so rewarding and a great way to contribute to your community. If you would like to volunteer a little, a lot, or once in awhile, go to www.gohospice.com and fill out a volunteer application. If you need assistance contact: **Lori at 541.524.7688**

★ ★ ★ ★

THE DEADLINE
for placing a **CLASSIFIED AD** is **8:30 A.M.** **ONE BUSINESS DAY BEFORE PUBLICATION**
Publication Days: **Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday**

Classified are worth looking into when you're looking for a place to live ... whether it's a home, an apartment or a mobile home.