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Oregon Trail interpretive site keeps history alive

Site near Hot Lake receives noteworthy additions

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Four years ago, Dale Counsell and his son, Scott, found an unforgettable link, not to an internet website but to an era when digital technology was still the stuff of science fiction.

The Counsells were in Ladd Canyon on their family's ranching land when Scott Counsell spotted a metal chain link sticking up from the ground and told his father. Curious, the Counsells began digging. What they found was not precious metal but something to treasure, a horse-drawn logging sled Dale Counsell said was used by a family who had owned the land as homesteaders in the late 1800s.

Nobody knows how long the sled had been buried but it was obvious the time underground had taken its toll.

"It was in terrible shape," Dale Counsell said.

A skilled craftsman who loves history, Dale Counsell then refurbished the sled by replacing its wood while retaining its metal elements. Today, the sled is on public display as one of the latest additions to an Oregon Trail interpretive site on Hot Lake Lane, 2 miles west of the Lodge at Hot Lake Springs. The sled is loaded with logs from tree species common to Union County — white fir, lodgepole pine and tamarack, also known as western larch.

"The job Dale did restoring that sled is incredible," said Ronnie Allen, of La Grande, who with Dale Counsell created the Lower Ladd Canyon Oregon Trail site five years ago.

The interpretive site is about a mile from the base of Lower Ladd Canyon Hill. Allen said Oregon Trail pioneers came off the hill directly to where the interpretive site is located.

In the mid-1800s, Oregon Trail pioneers made overnight stops at the location, he said. Allen estimates that from 1843 through the early 1860s, between one and five wagons were at the site continuously during the summer months.

The sled now at the site was likely used not only to transport trees but also hay, supplies and people, Counsell said.

The logging sled is one of several significant additions made to the Oregon Trail site over the past

See, **Trail**/Page A6

'Hidden treasure'

Eastern Oregon University, local advocates secure funding to restore historic Grand Staircase



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

The view from the top of Eastern Oregon University's Grand Staircase on Wednesday, March 23, 2022, shows how the structure once restored will again connect the campus with the community of La Grande.

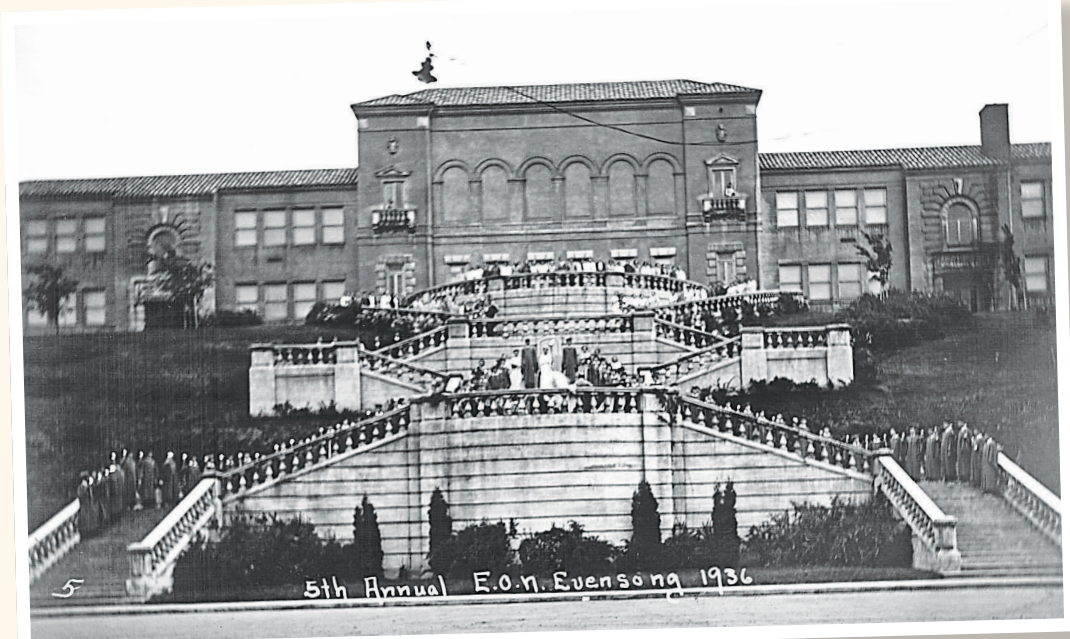
By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A treasured architecture feature in La Grande will be preserved for generations to come.

A \$100 million rural infrastructure package passed by the Oregon Legislature in March granted \$4 million to save Eastern Oregon University's Grand Staircase, highlighting years of advocacy by the university, local individuals and regional organizations. Upon deteriorating into an unusable relic of the past, plans are now underway to renovate and protect the staircase as a critical element to Eastern's campus.

"We've worked at a lot of different angles trying to find funding for it," said Tim Seydel, Eastern's vice president of university advancement. "It's an incredibly beautiful piece of architecture that is one of a kind. We just kept working at it."

Cause worth fighting for
The Eastern Oregon Normal School, a college for aspiring teachers at the time,



Bob Bull photo collection

Eastern Oregon Normal School students congregate on the Grand Staircase for the 1936 rendition of Evensong, a commencement ceremony for graduating students. The Oregon Legislature in 2022 granted the La Grande school, now Eastern Oregon University, \$4 million to restore the historic staircase, after the university and local advocates worked for years on end to secure the funding.

opened its doors in 1929 after the construction of a campus in La Grande. The large staircase structure was created to provide pedestrian access from downtown to the campus, as well as a place for

gatherings and events. Architect John V. Bennes, who also headed the Hot Lake Hotel and Geiser Grand Hotel projects, designed the staircase in an Italian Renaissance Revival style, constructing

the structure with 178 steps, 418 stone balusters and 17,470 square feet of concrete over five tiers. In 1980, the site was listed on the National Register

See, **Staircase**/Page A6

Report: Oregon suicides dropped slightly in 2020

State has 18th highest suicide rate in the nation, an improvement from 2019 and 2018

By **JIM REDDEN**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon had the nation's 13th highest suicide rate across all ages in 2020, a slight improvement over the year before when the state was ninth in sui-

ARE YOU IN CRISIS?

- Additional mental health resources include:
- 24/7 Suicide Prevention National Lifeline number: 1-800-273-8255
 - 24/7 Spanish Lifeline: 1-888-628-9454
 - 24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "OREGON" to 741741
 - 24/7 Crisis Line for Veterans: 1-800-273-8255 and Press "1" or text 838255
 - Senior Loneliness Line: 503-200-1633
 - YouthLine for teen-to-teen crisis help. A phone line and a texting support line are offered through Lines for Life. Trained teens respond from 4-10 p.m. (PDT) Monday through Friday. Adults are also available 24/7. Call 1-877-968-8491 or text teen2teen to 839863.

cide deaths, according to suicide mortality data recently published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Part of the decline was a reduction in suicides by young people, the Oregon Health Authority said on Tuesday, March 22.

The decrease placed Oregon 18th highest in the nation — an improvement from 2019 and 2018, when Oregon ranked 11th highest in the nation for youth suicides.

"While we are encouraged by 2020's downward trend that shows our work with partners to address youth suicide is helping in some counties, we still have a long way to go to improve outcomes among all Oregon communities," said Oregon Health Authority Behavioral Health Director Steve Allen.

See, **Suicides**/Page A6

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 44 LOW Partly cloudy		Sunday 71/44 Mostly cloudy
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