



Jayson Jacoby/EO Media Group
No trace of bark remains on this heavily weathered stump, which is conspicuous among the young, healthy ponderosa pines north of the Powder River near Phillips Reservoir, southwest of Baker City.



Jayson Jacoby/EO Media Group
Decades of weathering have bit deeply into this stump in the forests near Phillips Reservoir, southwest of Baker City.

The story of the STUMPS



JAYSON JACOBY
 ON THE TRAIL

The story of the stumps is mainly a tale of mystery. It can hardly be otherwise. The passage of time — at least a century, and perhaps another couple decades on top of that prodigious period — accounts for only part of the murky nature of the matter.

But my curiosity about these woody artifacts must also remain unsatisfied because no one, I suspect, would have thought it worthwhile, all those decades ago, to record the events so that we can relive them, after a fashion, today.

This is not surprising. The stumps are not the products of dramatic, historic happenings of the sort that generations of historians plumb for the most minute of details.

They are, rather, what's left from the prosaic, workaday task of logging.

The men who wielded the saws that felled the trees are all of them long in their graves.

And although their general story has been told, it is something else altogether, something much more specific, that intrigues me when I come across one of these rotting mementoes.

Stumps are not rare, of course, across the forested slopes of the Blue Mountains in Northeastern Oregon.

Lumbering started almost immediately after miners discovered gold in October 1861 in a gulch near what would become Baker City several years later. It was the beginning of the region's first gold rush.

Within a few decades, the initial round of cutting, largely to supply logs for cabins, support beams for lode mines and fuel for stoves, was expanded to include commercial logging to feed sawmills.

One of the centers for this first generation of logging was the Sumpter Valley, about 20 miles southwest of Baker City.

Starting in 1890 under the leadership of David Eccles, the Sumpter Valley Railway Company laid a railroad up the Powder River from Baker City to access the great stands of old-growth ponderosa pine and tamarack that mantled the slopes rising on both sides of the river.

This was the famous "Stump Dodger," and by 1910 the railroad, which hauled passengers, gold-bearing ore and much else as well as the massive logs that prompted its construction, had reached its terminus in Prairie City.

Almost none of the trees standing when the wood-burning locomotives were clattering nearby on their winding way through the mountains are still upright.

Although I like to imagine — and I don't think it's implausible — that some of them still stand, in a manner of speaking, as the bones of fine old homes in Baker City and elsewhere.

But for me the far more compelling evidence of this era, so distant and so difficult to grasp in a tangible way, are the stumps.

Though not common, they are conspicuous among the hale young ponderosas that dominate today's forest.

You needn't be a dendrologist — I struggle to count the rings on the juvenile firs that serve as our Christmas trees — to distinguish between these ancient remnants and the stumps left by later generations of loggers.

The old stumps — I think of them as the original stumps — bear no trace of bark, little variation in color besides the bleached gray of wood subjected to many decades of weather in a harsh climate.

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Savoring the beauty of a hidden beach



LUKE OVGARD
 CAUGHT OVGARD

PRINCEVILLE, Hawaii — It is increasingly difficult to be awestruck these days. Once upon a time, seeing the beauty of a watercolor sunset, a cascading waterfall, the ocean's surge on a seaside cliff, a spring-fed creek, a snow-dusted evergreen forest, a blackwater river, immense rock formations rising from the desert or morning dew on a tender flower would evoke a sense of awe at our first experience with each particular fragment of God.

No longer is that the case. Thanks to Instagram and its spiritual predecessors, witnessing unbelievable beauty is no longer a special occurrence; it's everywhere. From world-class beaches to the world-class bodies peopling them, those alive today get a chance to glimpse the best the world has to offer on a daily basis. So much beauty all of the time was at first magical. I remember watching a particular screensaver shift on the television in a conference room from one fantastical location to the next, fondly remembering the ones I'd been to like Lake Bled, Slo-

venia and Hallstatt, Austria, and dreamily imaging the others like Fiji and the statue of Cristo Redentor in Brazil. These curated images of the most beautiful places on earth captivated me at first, but with time, eventually became just another screensaver. We drink all this beauty with our eyes and imagine being there and experiencing it ourselves in first-person until one day, numb to its majesty, we don't.

Hidden

Though these images are in such high definition that they peer into the uncanny valley, they are still just a simulacrum, a cheap substitute for the real thing. Despite being overwhelmed by beauty to the point of desensitization, every now and then, I'll find something so beautiful that it speaks to me.

While in Kauai last year, one beach gave me pause.

Like much of the Hawaiian Islands, wealthy outsiders have come in and corrupted the natural essence of the island of Kauai. It's still a vibrant greenspace, but a vibron, golf course and fences have carved up the ancestral home of native Hawaiians and destroyed much of this spiritual paradise. Yet, wildness persists.

A friend had recommended a remote beach with

a steep grade to the sand, rocky cliffs, reefs and submerged outcroppings sheltering the area from the severe winds that relentlessly pummel Kauai's west side. He told me it was a long hike, but he failed to mention it was downright treacherous. I arrived during the heavy rains of winter and found myself walking five or 10 minutes before coming to a gate across the trail with the sign "Road Closed — Trail Unsafe."

So naturally, I pressed on. I figured it would keep the tourists away and give me privacy.

Well, it did keep a lot of tourists away, and I can see why. The extremely steep trail was snot-slick with mud, and I was laden with fishing gear, so I was forced to shed my flip-flops and go barefoot. Roots vein the mud but without the long, filthy ropes that line the half-mile trail as it drops hundreds of feet from the pavement above to the water below, I certainly wouldn't have made it down with any semblance of my pride intact.

When my feet traded mud for sand, I found a family of four lounging on the beach. I nodded and made my way to the opposite end of the beach to fish.

The fishing wasn't great by Hawaiian standards;

I caught few species and nothing large. I did, however, catch and release half a dozen of Hawaii's state fish, the Humuhumunukunua'pua'a or wedgetail triggerfish. I'd caught this fish plenty of times before, but something about catching the essence of Hawaii in a place that (I'd imagine) is the unspoiled essence of Hawaii took me back to the days before solid state graphics and digital cameras and Instagram to a time when the sublimity of nature was still something capable of dropping your jaw in humbled appreciation. It was the most beautiful beach I've ever seen, and I made sure to appreciate the scenery even as I appreciated the fishing.

You might be able to figure it out on your own, but I won't outright tell you where this beach is because these last vestiges of the unspoiled deserve to remain that way. Some secrets deserve to be hidden.

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Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

The most beautiful beach the author has ever seen is one that is small, remote and still just a bit wild.