

Familiar Peaks, Fresh Perspectives

Mountains are boring. They just stand there, after all, insensate as the stones of which they are constructed.

But for the occasional volcanic eruption or landslide, mountains can hardly be said to move.

People, on the other hand, tend to get around.

We scurry about, hither and yon, even when our every detour into a gas station leaves us feeling as though we ought to have received an escrow statement in addition to a receipt.

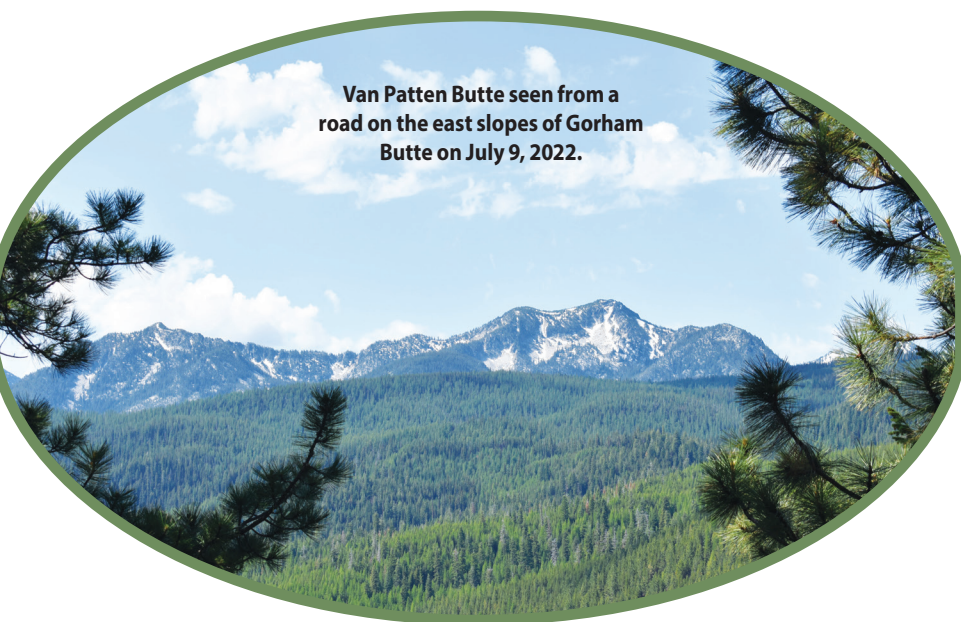
Our itinerant nature does quite a lot, I think, to enrich the reputation of mountains. It also has much to do with our fascination and affinity for high places.

Certainly our mobility, which allows us to see mountains from every conceivable vantage point, infuses them with a compelling personality they otherwise would lack.

This is not to suggest, of course, that mountains never change.

Nature can remake a peak's visage rapidly, needing just a few minutes of waning sunlight to transform the dull white of a snow slope into the brilliant pink of alpenglow.

It is of course an optical illusion, but the Wallawas, which I can see well from my



Van Patten Butte seen from a road on the east slopes of Gorham Butte on July 9, 2022.



JAYSON JACOBY
ON THE TRAIL

like shape, albeit with a summit more akin to a thumb than the tip of a knife as with the Alpine eminence.

But seen from the east, near Sisters, Mount Washington is a dome with a sharp tip in its center.

The differences aren't so distinct from the west or south, but from both directions the mountain could be taken for a different peak altogether.

I had occasion to ponder this matter of mountains, and their many faces, while hiking on Saturday, July 9.

The subject in this case, though, wasn't a single mountain but rather a range — the Elkhorns. My backyard mountains, both figuratively, in that they are the ones I visit most often, and literally, as I can see a section of the range from my own yard.

The site was the eastern side of Gorham Butte, a modest summit — it tops out at 6,176 feet — a couple miles north of the Anthony Lakes Highway.

Gorham Butte, despite its singular name, is actually a spine of high ground with a few separate summits, two on the south end and a third at the north, with a saddle between.

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driveway, sometimes appear to my eyes something like half again as large, and as near, depending on the quality of the light, the absence or presence of clouds and snow cover, and probably other physical factors I can't name and don't understand.

Other alterations are less immediate but equally entrancing.

When the tamaracks turn in late fall their yellowing needles, even from many miles away, paint swathes that didn't exist in spring or summer.

The effect is even more vivid in places such as Steens Mountain with its broad groves of quaking aspens.

But those accoutrements, the snow and the glow and the colorful leaves or needles, are temporary — seasonal shifts akin to a man who cultivates a beard only in winter.

To fully appreciate mountains, it seems to me, requires that you see them from a variety of directions — or at least from the four cardinal points.

The differences can be dramatic. Take, for instance, Mount Jefferson,

Oregon's second-tallest summit at 10,495 feet. This dormant volcano in the central Cascades, when seen from, say, Redmond to the east, hardly seems to be the same peak that I grew up gazing at from my hometown of Stayton, well west of the mountain, near where the Willamette Valley gives way to the Cascade foothills.

From Redmond, Jefferson's ridges and faces converge at the summit in what appears to be a single spire — a classic pyramidal shape.

But from the west, the great gouge that glaciers have cleaved from the mountains' midsection is conspicuous, and Jefferson's summit ridge culminates in two pinnacles which seem, from a great distance, to be about the same height.

Jefferson's more ancient, and heavily eroded, volcanic neighbor to the south of Santiam Pass — Mount Washington, which geologists believe almost surely is dead rather than dormant — boasts an even greater variety of visages.

From Santiam Pass the peak has something of the Matterhorn in its dart-



Lisa Britton photos/Baker City Herald

Twin Mountain, at left, seen from a road on Gorham Butte, north of the Anthony Lakes Highway, on July 9, 2022.

Trailhead Stewardship Project's second summer of clearing trails is underway in Wallawas and Elkhorns

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

To start with, Victoria Mitts had to contend with snow.

The summer sunshine eventually eliminated that obstacle.

But not even a scorching July day can get rid of a tamarack or lodgepole tree that's fallen across a hiking trail.

Dealing with that demands sweat.

And a deft touch with a chain saw or hand saw.

Mitts and other members of the Trailhead Stewardship Project have removed dozens of logs blocking trails in the Elkhorns and Wallawas.

The project, now in its



LEFT: Multiple logs across the Killamacue Lake trail in the Elkhorn Mountains prior to the trail being cleared by staff with the Trailhead Stewardship Project in early July 2022. RIGHT: A freshly cut log along the Killamacue Lake trail in the Elkhorn Mountains west of Haines.



Meagan Keating/Contributed Photos

second summer, is a partnership between The Trailhead in Baker City and the

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

The Trailhead, a bike,

ski and outdoors shop in downtown Baker City, is owned by the

Anthony Lakes Outdoor Recreation Association, the nonprofit cor-

poration that operates the Anthony Lakes ski area and manages several campgrounds on the Wallowa-Whitman.

Mitts is the Trailhead Stewardship Project's paid seasonal employee, but other Trailhead staff help with trail work at times, said Megan Keating, operations coordinator at The Trailhead.

Last year the crew, including Mitts and four volunteers, worked 251.25 hours.

Mitts started by cutting more than 70 trees across the Cunningham Cove trail on the west side of the Elkhorns, southwest of Anthony Lakes.

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VOLUNTEERS TACKLING EAGLE CAP WILDERNESS TRAILS

While the Trailhead Stewardship Project focuses on the Elkhorn Mountains, along with forays into the Wallawas, the Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trails Association concentrates its efforts, as its name implies, on Hells Canyon and the Wallawas.

During the summer, the association spends most of its time in the Wallawas, and in particular within the 365,000-acre Eagle Cap Wilderness, which takes in much of the range and is Oregon's largest federal wilderness.

Mike Hansen, the group's project director, said volunteers have been busy this month, with plenty of neglected trails to tackle even though lingering snowdrifts, and in some places swollen streams, have forced adjustments to the summer work schedule.

The group's top priorities are so-called "deferred maintenance" trails, Hansen said — meaning paths that haven't been maintained for at least three years.

The chief task for trail workers is cutting logs that have fallen across the trail. Even relatively small-diameter logs can pose a major obstacle — and potentially hazard, for horse riders and packers — if they're very far off the

ground.

Hansen said a recent project highlighted how downfall can all but obliterate a trail over time.

The trail in question leads from the Twin Lakes area, near Fish Lake north of Halfway, down to the Imnaha River near the Blue Hole. Hansen said the trail probably hadn't been cleared in about 20 years, during which a major wildfire killed many trees, making them more likely to fall.

Volunteers cut 83 logs from a section of trail just a mile and a quarter long, he said.

And because all but one-third of a mile of the trail is inside the wilderness, where internal combustion engines

aren't allowed, workers had to use crosscut saws to get through most of the logs, Hansen said.

On Saturday, July 16, Hansen said he and other volunteers were slated to start an eight-day project covering 40 miles of trails in the South Catherine Creek, Sand Pass, China Ridge and Moss Springs areas at the southwest corner of the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

More information about the association, including its tentative work schedules and a photo gallery, is available at wmhcta.org.

— Jayson Jacoby