



Malheur explorers take time out for lunch at Buena Vista.

# Malheur: Never a dull moment

(Continued from page 1)

It wasn't my usual hour for rising, but to get in a full day's activities it was necessary to crawl out of bed at 6 a.m. Following a good breakfast, and the building of a good lunch, everyone climbed onto the bus for an exciting day of bird identification. Around noon we stopped at Buena Vista for a spectacular view. The lunch break was filled out with scorpion hunting. After lunch we drove out to the "P" Ranch, where the previous owner had lived prior to the area becoming a refuge.

The owner in the late 1800's grazed some 45,000 cattle on the land, as well as some sheep, which is a big contributing factor as to why the land is a desert area today. The barn that sits on this land is the original, built in the 1800's.

There was a bit of let-down after the "P" Ranch, when we went to see some Turkey Vultures make their 4:30 p.m. landing on the top of a tower. Three vultures showed up, but I guess they decided they didn't want to land on that particular day, leaving the anxious group without the sight of the attraction.

After dinner, evenings were anything but boring. They were filled with such things as playing volleyball, pingpong, pool, shuffleboard or the biggest evening attraction, poker. But, believe it or not, some people were known to have done some studying during the four days.

Early mornings were always interesting, as there was always somewhat of a race to see if the men or the women would use the showers first. On one occasion there were already three women

standing in the shower room (fully clothed) when one of three men walked in, and deciding he didn't want to wait for them, he disrobed while the women were still in there. Needless to say, he got the shower.

On Saturday morning I did the unbelievable. Now keep in mind this is on a weekend, but we got up by 5 a.m. to watch the mating ritual of some Sage Grouse.

But getting up that early on a Saturday, you had to know it wasn't going to be that great of a day, especially since we watched the birds before I had a chance to get a caffeine fix.

The first problem that occurred on that day was getting the bus turned around on a narrow, dirt, one-way road. But thanks to a fork in the road and the masterful maneuvering of Bob the Bus Driver, this was taken care of handily.

But this wasn't the end of the trouble, as the road to the lava caves was under repairs and not fit for travel for a Gray Line bus, as much as Bob the Bus Driver might have liked to think he could go four-wheeling in it. So we missed out on taking some rafts down the water in the cave, and seeing, or perhaps not seeing, the ultimate dark room, where you can't see your hand right in front of your face.

Then came a sight that looked ridiculous if you didn't know what was going on. People were standing around shaking little balls of magma. Yes, there is a logical explanation. The magma balls were hollow with more chips of magma inside, to make a rattling noise. Also sighted near this area were some sand lillies, an extremely rare plant.

The day's highlight, and the highlight of the trip, for me anyway, came next when we went out and actually looked for rattlesnakes. Being the aggressive newspaper photographer I am, I naturally wanted to get as close to the Western Sage Rattlesnake as I could. Climbing over a large rock is the only way to get close to the snake, so that is what I did. But as soon as the snake was in the open, I was trampled by a woman who came charging at me, smashing me against a rock. All I actually saw of her was a gray sweat shirt. But I guess that's all to be expected in the life of a photographer.

Sunday morning, and time to leave for home came fast, but we still had one more sightseeing stop, at Glass Butte. During our lunch hour stop there one of the students, Jim Flanary, found a young hawk separated from its mother, which looked like it wasn't going to survive much longer.

Flanary planned to take the hawk home and turn it over to the Audobon Society. But with the warmth of the bus, and getting some liquids into it, the hawk got strong enough so that Jim let it go, and it flew off right away.

It was cold enough at Glass Butte, that as we were beginning to leave it started to snow; other than that the weather the entire trip was fairly good.

(This is the first of a two-part series by Rick Obritschkewitsch, a former editor in chief of *The Print*. Part two, to be published next week, will tell the history of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, including the College's involvement and the types of programs the refuge has to offer).



Deryl Hampton, science instructor at the College, holds up day's prize catch, a Western Sage Rattlesnake.

