



JAMES JOHNSTON

Purple Sage & Stone Bananas

Explore millions of years of climate change in the center of the state.

Global warming is scary stuff. In 50 years, Oregonians will be making banana daiquiris with ingredients from our own backyard — unless Al Gore is totally wrong and George Bush and his cronies are actually right about something.

Talk about long odds.

But this isn't just another Bush-bashing column. This space is for outdoor adventures. Which unfortunately usually involve long drives in that convicted felon of crimes against the atmosphere — the automobile.

Well, this space isn't necessarily for self-reflection, either. You should make the four-hour drive described below soon, because the World's Dumbest Man is going to be fighting global warming the only way he knows how — with one Middle East blunder after another that will make gas so expensive most of us won't be able to afford to drive at all.

The John Day Fossil Beds National Monument protects one of the longest and most continuous records of climate change during the Cenozoic Era, a period from 65 million years ago to present popularly known as the Age of Mammals. And it contains spectacular, otherworldly scenery that shouldn't be missed.

The 14,000-acre monument is organized into three widely separated units just to the north of the geographic center of Oregon. The closest to us is the Painted Hills Unit. You'll turn north at a well-signed road approximately 41 miles east of Prineville on Hwy 26, then west on a gravel county road. Skip the first picnic area turnout and go directly to the second turnout, an overlook of the largest of the Painted Hills.

These astonishing geographical features are the result of volcanic ash expelled over millions of years from the Cascades and deposited in myriad layers that slowly decomposed into soft clay. Complex weathering and erosion processes turned different layers of clay into a rich palette of

brilliant colors. Today, the Painted Hills are low, smooth and beautifully sinuous mounds streaked with crimson, bronze and tan highlights.

From the turnout, you can take a short stroll to an overlook or take a 1.5-mile hike to the top of jagged Carroll Rim through purple sage, bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue and Indian ricegrass. Putting on a great wildflower show in the spring will be chaenactis, hedgehog cacti and bee plants.

Continuing east on the gravel road will take you to several short but fascinating walks through Painted Cove and Leaf Hill.

If you want a longer hike, drive farther east on Hwy. 126. Approximately 28 miles east of the small town of Mitchell, turn north on Hwy. 19 to the Sheep Rock Unit. Your first stop should be the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center and its fascinating displays about the flora and fauna that inhabited the area when the climate was radically different. There's a fast-moving rhinoceros that ran like a horse, camels, sloths, oversized rodents, gomphotheres (an early type of elephant) and a bizarre hybrid bear-dog.

Proceed north on Hwy. 19 for another three miles, keeping an eye out for the Blue Basin overlook trail, a three-mile excursion through eerie canyons of green claystone and windswept prairies with grand views of the John Day River valley. Keep a sharp lookout, especially after spring rains, because fossils are constantly being exposed by natural erosion processes. Several years ago, a visitor found a completely intact fossilized banana. Imprints of palm fronds and other tropical vegetation are commonly encountered.

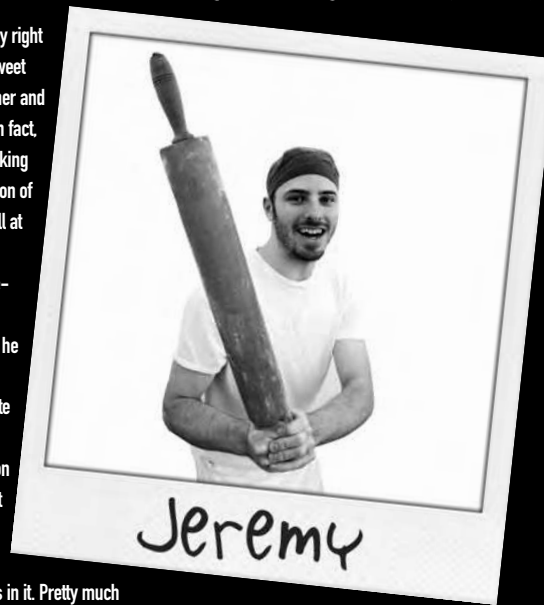
Before too much longer, the John Day Fossil Beds are going to record another dramatic climate shift. Will the arid desert be growing bananas again? Will humans still be visitors, or just another curiosity of the fossil record?

EW

GET TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL BAKERS

Being raised with four sisters makes Jeremy right at home in the mostly female kitchen at Sweet Life. He happily plays the role of little brother and takes all the teasing with a good natured smile. In fact, he says the ladies are his favorite reason for working at Sweet Life (really Jeremy! It's not the satisfaction of a job well done?). Well, that too. Jeremy does it all at Sweet Life, from baking and creating beautiful deserts to stacking bags of chocolate in the store-room.

His taste for sweets started at an early age when he remembers making Christmas cookies with his mom. He's since modified his palate to incorporate more unique flavors including some of his favorites: whiskey milk shakes and candied bacon chocolate cheesecake (he alone had to finish that one off!). His favorite way to eat chocolate is "straight up" or with salt. Surprisingly enough, you won't find him eating anything with molasses in it. Pretty much anything else is fuel for his creative fodder, especially if paired with nice, cold pitchers of beer.



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