



Photographs by Dmitri von Klein / monovita.com

are two year-round residents and 20 part-time residents. Nonetheless, Greenhorn advertises that it's the smallest (population 0) and highest (elevation 6,306) incorporated city in Oregon.

We assumed every structure was abandoned and were bold in our exploration of the town. We went in outhouses. We messed around with rusty stuff. We ignored a sign warning of "Danger Snakes." We looked for ice cream.

There was an old store with a sign that said, "Come in we're open." We went in but didn't take anything. Our rule was to leave every place as we found it.

Only when we were leaving town did it become clear we weren't alone: We saw a couple newer model vehicles in the driveway of a cabin. Awkward.

GALENA

On the final day of our tour, paved roads led us to Galena and gave us hope (soon dashed) of smooth travels for the day. Galena was a mining community formed near the confluence of Elk Creek and Middle Fork John Day River. Named for the galena ore in the area, the town offered plenty of evidence of its mining background along the tailing-lined highway. There wasn't really anywhere to pull over in Galena. We stopped in a driveway to view a church and old store. There were a handful of inhabited homes nearby.

The next stretch of road on U.S. 395 was nothing short of breathtaking. We soared high above the quiet valley divided by the sparkling river then turned at Long Creek for Monument, where pink rocks formed walls along the highway.

HARDMAN

From Monument to Hardman, we went off road again. We didn't need to. If you stay on paved roads, it only adds

four minutes to the trip. But, what's the fun in that? We took NF-22. Every traffic sign had at least three bullet holes. Somebody hates these signs.

Hardman used to be referred to as "Rawdog," "Yellardog" and "Dogtown." Europeans settled the area in the 1870s as a farming and ranching community. The population peaked at 193 in 1920 and is around 20 today.

Everyone was out when we stopped by. An A-frame sign in barely-legible cursive told us to slow down for an event. Older adults kept pulling up, carrying their best potluck dishes. Elsewhere, a group of greasy men worked on cars. The town was bustling.

Hardman embraces its ghost town status. It has a couple wooden ghosts in front of the Hardman IOOF Lodge Hall. Another guy was riding his ATV around, sharing information about the town.

We found we weren't the only tourists. An older couple in a white Mustang convertible was doing a (paved) tour of eastern Oregon. Excited to finally see other tourists, we exchanged notes sharing the camaraderie of the road.

LONEROCK

The desolate dirt roads to Lonerock are brutal. We passed only one other vehicle on the 22-mile drive. Founded in the 1880s as a service center for ranchers, Lonerock was never a sizable town, sporting only 82 people at its height in the 1930s. Today, it has 22 residents.

Lonerock was like *The Twilight Zone*. Despite parked cars and other clear evidence of people living in the town, we didn't see anyone during the half hour we were there. We parked by the Community Hall and walked to the eponymous "lone rock," situated behind the church. Along the way, we passed the "post office" (a line of mailboxes),

a lawnmower-bicycle contraption and a beautiful home that used to be the schoolhouse.

The surviving residents in ghost towns make use of the older structures to house animals, for added storage or even renovating them to live in. In remote areas, you make do with what's available.

SHANIKO

The road to Shaniko featured several attractions: the quaint town of Condon (where we finally found ice cream), bonus ghost towns of Mayville and Antelope, and the John Day Fossil Beds Hancock Field Station.

Shaniko can trace its roots to just after the Civil War, when August Scherneckau settled there. By 1910, it was a happening factory town of about 500 residents. At its peak, Shaniko was known as the "Wool Capital of the World" thanks to its wool, sheep, cattle and wheat production facilities serving everywhere from the Cascade Range to Idaho. It was also a transportation hub. However, when the Oregon-Washington Railroad and Navigation Company bypassed Shaniko and built a direct route between Portland and Bend, the town succumbed to its ghostly fate.

Today, with about 37 residents left, Shaniko celebrates its ghost town status. It was the most touristy of all of our destinations. The oldest buildings were clearly labeled and doubled as museums.

It was a sweet end to a trip we will remember for the rest of our lives. We learned something new about our state, and grew a little as Oregonians.

It also taught us that we are just renting this land. As we move on, a combination of future generations and nature will quickly remove all but the faintest evidence of our existence. ■