



Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

John, left, balances on the "Blue Dream" highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering on Sept. 16 outside Terrebonne.



Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

Highliners fist bump on a ledge before attempting the "Blue Dream" highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering on Sept. 16 outside Terrebonne.



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A highliner stretches for a brief second before attempting to walk along the "Blue Dream" highline.

Slackline

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There was at least one serious injury associated with the event. On Saturday, Sept. 17 about 10 a.m., Deschutes County Dispatch received a call that a 21-year-old Seattle man fell 35-50 feet off a cliff near Asterick's Pass while scrambling up rock to set up a slack line.

According to county Search and Rescue, the hiker had to be loaded into a litter and lowered about 650 feet to the river trail. Crews did that safely by about 3:30 p.m., when the hiker was transported to St Charles for further medical evaluation.

Climbers quickly evacuated the area on Saturday afternoon as well, as rain and lightning moved through the area.

But for most, the weekend went off without a hitch.

The slacklines, known as highlines when rigged up at dizzying heights, could be found across Smith Rock at iconic climbing areas such as Monkey Face and Red Wall. "Those first highlines that you do, it's all you can do to just force yourself to just stand up," said George Braun, the organizer for this year's event. "It's just completely gripping you with fear. Everything is telling you that you shouldn't be doing this. Millions of years of evolution kept you alive because you didn't do things like this."

Much of the battle in cross-

ing a highline, however, is not in the physical ability. Instead, it's almost entirely a mental game.

"Your body is fighting you," Braun said. "You have to go a little bit mindless"

For Sam Greenwalt, the highline gathering was a first. Although he'd done slacklining at ground level before, doing it at such great heights was new. Greenwalt was antsy to get on a line, excited to try something new and inch himself across the abyss below.

"All the people are pretty encouraging," he said. "They're like 'Yeah, do it.'"

Braun agreed, saying that highlining quickly creates bond between people. From hauling the gear up hundreds of feet, rigging everything and goofing around during the downtime as others attempt a line, relationships built around it are something to remember.

Highlining, Braun said, is one of the rare sports where it takes a team of people to create the conditions for just one person to be able to do it. But, once you hit a critical mass then action can start.

"Slackliners are some of the most empathetic and open and wholehearted people that I've met," Braun said.

Along with forming friendships highlining is an opportunity to challenge their bodies and minds. It's an opportunity



Highliners balance on the "Blue Dream" highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering on Sept. 16 outside Terrebonne.

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to challenge the fear ricocheting through their beating hearts and find a flow state with their entire focus on what's in front of them.

"It's everything turned up to 11. The first few steps on a highline might be the most tiring steps you take on a slackline," Braun said. "(The) beautiful thing about highlining is learning to work with that fear."

After those first couple times, he said, you start to become more comfortable but the fear never disappears completely. When a line starts to wobble or you try to fight the line, the fear can come rushing back.

He said it helps to pretend that you're walking a line at ground level and just let muscle memory take hold. And, one of the reasons he enjoys highlining so much is for the feeling when he finally steps off the line — feeling the exhilaration, the relief and accomplishment over conquering body and mind.



Highliners tighten rigging on the "Overdose" highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering on Sept. 16 outside Terrebonne.

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"It's just incredible," he said.

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