



Sand dunes north of Lake Abert, Ore., off of Highway 395 on June 20, 2016. Eastern Oregon is a place of varied landscapes and wildlife. Among the EO’s top photos from 2016 are these photos capturing the outdoors. For more photos, visit [www.eastoregonian.com](http://www.eastoregonian.com)

Staff photos by E.J. Harris



A man fly fishes for steelhead in a swollen Umatilla River on Jan. 19, 2016, west of Rieth.



An adult osprey flies up with a fish in its talons to feed its mate and two juveniles in their nest overlooking the Umatilla River on July 6, 2016, in Pendleton.

# It’s whale watching season on Oregon coast

By ZACH URNESS  
(Salem) Statesman Journal

SALEM — The exodus of gray whales heading south along the Oregon Coast is beginning.

Each year, from Mid-December to Mid-January, around 20,000 whales swim from the cold Alaskan seas to the warm lagoons of Baja Mexico.

The mass migration creates the potential for one of nature’s most dramatic views.

“On the right day, and at the right location, you can see up to 40 whales per hour,” said Luke Parsons, park ranger at the Depoe Bay Whale Watching Center. “It’s pretty amazing when that happens.”

While much of the success in whale watching is patience — the willingness to keep your binoculars focused on the ocean — there are a few places and tips that can help improve odds, Parsons said.

In winter, the whales are swimming a bit farther from shore. That makes the best locations those higher in elevation, where you can see farther out into the ocean.

A few places with the highest success rates include Cape Meares (near Tillamook), Neahkahnie Mountain (Tillamook), The Inn at Spanish Head (Lincoln City), Cape Foulweather (Depoe Bay) and Shore Acres (Coos Bay).

“The whales stay farther out in



AP file photo

A gray whale breaches the surface during a whale watching trip March 5, off the coast of San Diego.

winter because it’s a little easier for them to navigate in the deeper water,” Parsons said. “They’re in a hurry. They’re headed down to Baja to either breed or give birth, and don’t want to miss the party.”

The second major factor in spotting whales is weather. A clear and sunny day morning with low winds is best, Parsons said.

“The number of whales that people see really spikes on clear days,” he said. “But in the end, it’s just about having binoculars and staying with it. Patience is often rewarded.”

**Zach’s favorite locations**

Best hike-in view spot: A combination of one of the Oregon Coast’s best hikes and whale-watching

spots comes together at Cape Lookout State Park. A trek of 2.5 miles (5 miles round-trip) takes you to the point of the cape, where you can see landmarks 40 miles away and whales sometimes swim by quite close. The hike begins at Cape Lookout State Park’s main trailhead south of Tillamook.

Close to Salem (warm): If you

### Top 10 places to spot whales

Each year, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department keeps track of the number of whales spotted at each of the 24 locations where volunteers are located during Whale Watch Week. The results from Dec. 27-31 in 2015 can help visitors pick locations with the best chances for a sighting.

- 1. Cape Meares: 187
- 2. Spanish Head: 139
- 3. Shore Acres: 135
- 4. Neahkahnie Mountain: 112
- 5. Cape Foulweather: 97
- 6. Cape Ferrello: 93
- 7. Cape Lookout: 89
- Ecola State Park: 81
- Face Rock: 78
- Don Davis: 73

don’t want to look for whales in the sometimes chilly outdoor air, set up shop at the Inn at Spanish Head Lobby on the 10th floor. Coffee and snacks can be enjoyed while keeping your eyes peeled on the ocean.

Close to Salem (cool/warm): Fresh air and whale watching takes place at Boiler Bay Scenic Viewpoint in Depoe Bay. Just step out of your car and look across the ocean. No luck? Continue just south to the Whale Watching Center in Depoe Bay, where experts can help guide your search.

## IN THE WILD



Photo contributed by Jack E. Simons

A buck whitetail deer rests in the snow on Dec. 9 on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.



Photo contributed by Mike Morehead

A bull elk and two cows were spotted on the North Fork of the John Day River in the middle of October.

## Man killed in avalanche near White Pass

BELLINGHAM, Wash. — Officials say a Bellingham man has died in an avalanche near White Pass Ski Area south of Mount Rainier.

The *Bellingham Herald* reports 31-year-old Adam Roberts was skiing out of bounds with a friend Tuesday evening when he triggered an avalanche.

White Pass Ski Area spokeswoman Kathleen Goyette confirmed his death Wednesday, saying people at the ski area had known him since he was young and that he was an experienced outdoors enthusiast.

Roberts was originally from the town of Randle west of White Pass.

Goyette said she didn’t know details of the rescue attempt, but said members of the ski patrol found Roberts in five to six feet of snow.

A Lewis County Sheriff’s Office deputy declined to provide details of the incident until after an autopsy and coroner’s report was complete.

# Monthly ski streak reaches 23 years

By EVAN BUSH  
The Seattle Times

GLACIER, Wash. — Danny Miller isn’t the smoothest skier.

He bounces up and down on the slopes, popping his head up every so often like a prairie dog in his search for fresh powder.

He’s not the fastest — Miller doesn’t even wax his skis.

And his physique trends more toward dad bod than it does Olympian.

But, he must qualify as one of the sport’s most dedicated.

Our trip to the Mount Baker Ski Area in late November marked the 277th consecutive month of skiing for the 49-year-old Carnation resident. Every month, winter through summer, no matter how bad the conditions or how shallow the snowpack, Miller finds a way. Sometimes he ranges to Canada or Oregon, but mostly it’s been in Washington.

“I’m not the best skier, just the most stubborn,” he explained.

In his 23 years of monthly skiing, Miller has seen a niche community of skiers coalesce around the monthly ski calendar he thought he’d invented. He has witnessed climate change slowly chomp away at his precious glaciers and watched his once-private backcountry ski destinations grow more crowded.

On our outing, though, as he darted through trees, hopped over stumps and poked through shin-deep powder, he romped around as if he were a Labrador puppy experiencing his first snowfall.



Danny Miller gets “turns” in on November 29, 2016 at the Mount Baker Ski Area near Deming, Wash. Evan Bush/The SeattleTimes via AP

It all started in November 1993 for Miller, who grew up in flat Ontario, Canada, but moved to Seattle after college. He skied 72 times that year (Miller keeps a spreadsheet log of all his trips).

“Something snapped in my brain, and I said, ‘I’ve got to keep doing this,’” he said.

When ski lifts weren’t operating, Miller hiked up snowfields and glaciers in alpine ski boots and with skis strapped to his backpack. The Alpentel area and Mount Rainier became second homes.

Back then, Miller had the run of the local hills, particularly in late summer and early fall.

“In the ‘90s, there weren’t many people doing this. I’d usually be alone,” he said.

Donnelly Miller (no relation), a friend he met on ski lifts in the early ‘90s who sometimes accompanied Danny, remembered how strange it was for people to see skiers on summer hiking trails.

“We would always get looks from tourists. We were almost a tourist attraction,” Donnelly Miller said.

Early on, Danny Miller set the mark: If he skied 1,000 vertical feet, that would count as a successful day.

“It seemed like a nice round number,” he said.

A few summers later, Miller met a rare fellow skier in the backcountry. Are you part of the “turns all year” club, the other skier asked.

Backcountry ski enthusiasts, Miller learned, had a website dedicated to year-round skiing. He thought he had been the only one practicing this bizarre ritual.

Miller’s streak might be the longest in Washington state, though it’s hard to say that with any certainty.

There is not a record book to track such feats and the Turns All Year website ([turns-all-year.com](http://turns-all-year.com)), which still hosts a forum for backcountry skiers, has changed hands and its year-round skier page has become outdated. Also, some people set different parameters on what counts as a day skied.

“You make your own rules,” explained Silas Wild, the owner of a 19-year-long streak. “It’s not a competition.”

### SKI REPORT

**Spout Springs Tollgate CLOSED FOR SEASON**

**Anthony Lakes North Powder**  
New snow: More than 7” this week  
Base depth: 45”  
Conditions: On holiday schedule. Early season conditions on mountain, 30km of Nordic trails in excellent shape.

**Ski Bluewood Dayton, Wash.**  
New snow: 2”  
Base depth: 48”  
Conditions: Holiday schedule. Lots of snow this month, 20 trails open with 13 groomed.

**Ski Fergi Joseph**  
New snow: Heavy snow Tuesday.  
Base depth: 25” at top  
Conditions: More snow expected, operating on holiday schedule.

**Mt. Hood Meadows Government Camp**  
New snow: More than 8” since Tuesday.  
Base depth: 79”  
Conditions: Deep snow-pack. Groom is packed power, off piste is skier packed snow.