

Echo native crosses the country on a bicycle

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

James Primmer has always had an adventurous streak.

"After I got out of the Navy, I wanted to do something crazy," he said.

Mission accomplished. The 28-year-old is currently 18 days into a five-month trip across the United States on his bicycle. Starting in Chesapeake, Virginia, he has now made his way into Florida, where he will touch down in Key West before heading northwest through Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. From there he'll head to Seattle, where he'll complete the final leg of his trip: down the Pacific coast, ending up in San Diego. His entire route should total about 6,700 miles.

Primmer, born and raised in Echo, had been looking for an epic journey of some sort. A few years ago, his grandmother had given him a book, "Walk Across America" by Peter Jenkins. Primmer eagerly read it and found an idea beginning to take shape.

"One passage really resonated with me," he said. "(Jenkins) said that the first day he started, he got a profound sense of freedom and possibility. I wanted to experience that."

While he had no plans to walk the entire U.S., he had always enjoyed biking, and soon began planning his own cross-country trip, reading blogs from others who had made similar treks, and buying equipment he'd need for the journey. After six years in the Navy, Primmer got out on February 1 — his birthday — and was soon off on another adventure.

Though he'd done a lot of reading and bought the right gear, he couldn't prepare himself for the physical challenges the trip would bring.

"I think the longest I'd ever ridden before was 60 miles," he said. With the cold, snowy winter in Hermiston, he didn't get a



Photo contributed by James Primmer
James Primmer, left, poses with a friend before starting his bike trip across the United States.

chance to do much training. The first days of the trip, he admits, were really tough.

He's adjusted, now averaging about 65 miles each day, and logging every mile in an online journal, at jamesandhis.bike. Family and friends can follow along on the journey, as he posts photos, anecdotes and updates for his trip.

Primmer transports everything with him in four panniers and a handlebar bag, which weigh about 55 pounds. His bike weighs another 25.

He spends most nights in his tent at public campgrounds, cooking his own food on a camp stove. Occasionally he uses an app, Warmshowers, which connects long-distance cyclists with each other, and allows them to open up their homes to those on long bike trips.

So far, Primmer has been lucky with the weather.

He'll continue to pedal if it rains, and says the only real obstacle is a strong wind.

"It pushes you back, and it's soul-crushing," he said.

He's had some interesting experiences along the way: a couple of nights ago, he got robbed by raccoons in Florida while at a campsite. At many of the places he stays, people will be eager to hear about his trip and will offer to share food.

"I'm not sure if this one's appropriate for the newspaper," Primmer laughed. "Once I camped at a nudist resort. That was a new experience."

After cycling through Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, Primmer is now in Florida. Even though he's been to several of the states he will cycle through, Primmer feels it's a totally new experience to see them from his bike.

"I'm always traveling backcountry roads," he said.



Photo contributed by James Primmer
James Primmer takes in a gorgeous scene in Georgia on the first leg of his bike trip.

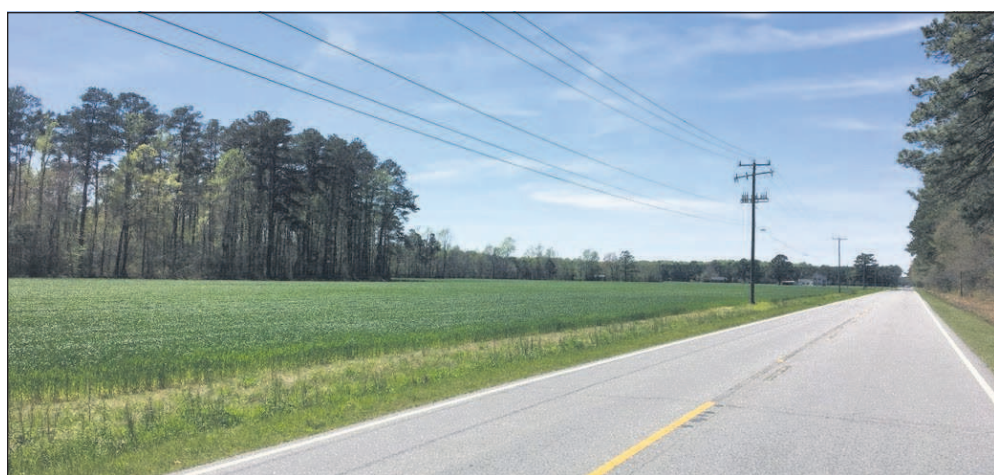


Photo contributed by James Primmer
James Primmer hits the open road in Virginia for the first leg of his 6,700 mile bike journey across the U.S.

"I feel like country areas showcase a place better than the city."

He recalls the endless tobacco fields he passed in North Carolina, walnut and peach groves in Georgia, and now the Florida coastline.

"Just the scenery, being out in the middle of nature with nobody around — it's hard to describe," he said.

On his blog, he recounts stories of people he's met and things he's seen. On the second day of his trip, somewhere in North Carolina, he remembers stopping to talk to a grizzled old tobacco farmer who had been working the same tobacco fields that his great-grandfather had.

He acknowledges some of the tougher days, when his body just runs out of energy, and he gleefully recounts the triumphs and exciting moments, such as meeting nice people at a campsite or saving a turtle

from being run over.

He remembers one scene that stunned him.

"In Charleston, South Carolina, I had to cross a bridge. It was kind of foggy, and I was wondering when the bridge was going to end. I finally got to the top, and it was like being on an airplane, but outside. I was on top of the clouds. It was breathtaking."

Though Primmer has had friends accompany him for short portions of the ride, the majority of the trip will be alone.

"I wouldn't have minded having someone come along with me, but not many people could just take five months off work," he said. "I had always planned on doing it myself."

Though he spends most of his time on the road in solitude, encounters with other people have made for some highlights.

"That's one thing that

really keeps me going," he said. "I've met so many amazing people. And in weird places, like gas stations or McDonald's. Hearing people's stories, they've lived their whole life there, and have a different take from that part of the country. That's one of my favorite parts of the trip."

Once his trip is over, Primmer plans to "do the adult thing" and find a job. But he's got many more adventures planned.

"I have three things on my bucket list," he said. "Cycle across America, kayak the Mississippi from top to bottom, and hike the Appalachian Trail."

He said the trip has made him even more confident in his own abilities.

"I've always had the attitude that I can figure out any problem I'm going to have. Being on this trip has kind of reinforced that for me."

BLOOMIN' BLUES

Spring favorites bloom together

By BRUCE BARNES
For the East Oregonian

Spring got a late start this year, so I figured the wildflowers would stretch out late as well. Not so. Last week I went out for the first time to see what was happening. In normal years the different plants seem to come up in succession. This year the earliest flowers and many of those that come two or three weeks later are up and blooming at the same time.

Over the years of writing these articles, I have tried each week to stick to plants that I haven't written about before. However, spring poses a special problem — there are only so many plants that bloom in early spring. For example, even though I saw about 10 species blooming last week, they have all been the subject of at least one article and in a few cases two or three articles.

I took lots of photos, last week, so the first two articles this year will be about spring favorites. Actually, after last winter any flower at all would be a spring favorite — even the dandelions finally gave up during the winter.

To start the flowering



Photo by Bruce Barnes
Erythronium grandiflorum, Yellow Fawn Lily

season off, here are some of the spring favorites, all of which can be found around the Deadman's Pass exit and rest stop off Interstate 84.

The first two usually compete to be the first out, Sage Buttercup and Blue-eyed Grass, also known as Grass Widows; both are

still putting on a show. The little yellow buttercup, *Ranunculus glaberrimus*, is usually low to the ground with the single one-half-inch flower easy to spot. The pink flower of Blue-eyed Grass, *Olsynium douglasii*, which has no blue on it anywhere, faces out from just below the



Photo by Bruce Barnes
Olsynium douglasii, Blue-eyed Grass

tip of a rigid grass-like single stem about ten inches tall, and is closely related to Iris.

Two more of the early flowers are both lilies, and both have nodding yellow flowers with six petals. The Yellow Fawn Lily, *Erythronium grandiflorum*, is about six inches high with one or two broad leaves from the base, has a flower about three inches wide and petals curved backward. The other lily is the Yellow Bell, *Fritillaria pudica*, also about six inches high, but with a much smaller flower that is bell-shaped and harder to spot.



Photo by Bruce Barnes
Fritillaria pudica, Yellow Bell



Photo by Bruce Barnes
Ranunculus glaberrimus, Sage Buttercup

Vineyards owners working to ban nearby marijuana operation

MCMINNVILLE (AP) — Oregon vineyard owners are asking a judge to ban neighboring property owners from growing marijuana.

The lawsuit filed in Yamhill County Circuit Court this week claims Momtazi Vineyard has already lost one customer due to the planned marijuana operation next door, *The Oregonian/OregonLive* reported.

Momtazi Vineyards has won awards for the grapes it has grown in McMinnville for 18 years.

Oregon resident Richard Wagner plans to grow about 22,000 square feet to 44,000 square feet of marijuana outdoors on the estimated 305,000 square feet of land his parents helped him buy last year.

The lawsuit claims Wagner's operation could cost the Momtazi's Demeter Biodynamic certification, which recognizes its organic farming method. The Momtazi and Mahesh families' lawyer did not respond to calls asking him to elaborate on how that would occur.

The lawsuit also claims Wagner's operation could produce "foul-smelling particles" that would impact the grapes.

"The odor is similar to that of skunk and is not acceptable in wine," Moe Momtazi told the Yamhill County Board of Commissioners last week. "The impact on Momtazi Vineyard ... would certainly put the vines and wine at great risk."

"They're afraid, they're very afraid," Wagner said. "It's all based on ignorance and fear ... at the same time, I get it."

Body found in Chinook was Portland paddleboarder

EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — A body that washed ashore in Chinook in early March belonged to Ha Khuong Vo Dang,

a 28-year-old Portland woman.

Vo Dang, who went by "Kay," disappeared on May 1, 2016, while paddleboarding at a beach in Columbia County. Search and rescue workers presumed Vo Dang drowned, but were never able to recover her body. A peninsula man discovered her body in March while

walking on a small beach near Third Street in Chinook.

The Pacific County Sheriff's Office confirmed her identity and notified her family earlier this month, Chief Criminal Deputy Pat Matlock said.

With a high of 81 degrees, May 1 was one of the first truly warm days of the year in the Portland area. Vo Dang spent the

afternoon on a first date with a Portland man. After renting paddleboarding gear, she and the man drove to Collins Beach, a popular spot on Sauvie Island.

According to a Columbia County investigation report, Vo Dang and her friend sunbathed and shared a six-pack of beer. The man continued to doze, while Vo Dang went paddleboarding.

She was not wearing a lifejacket, deputies said.

Around 4 p.m., a woman approached Vo Dang's friend. She told him Vo Dang had fallen off of her paddleboard and appeared to be struggling in the water.

"The wind was strong. It was blowing the board away. She tired herself out swimming after it, obviously," a witness said.

BRIEFLY