

CAUGHT OVGARD

Florida water an assault on the senses

By LUKE OVGARD
For the East Oregonian

Traveling opens your eyes to realities other than your own. You expect culture shock to come with different customs, dialects, foods and behaviors, so it's easy to overlook some of the simpler disparities.

Coming from the Pacific Northwest to the swampy collective known as Florida this summer, all five senses realized one glaring difference: water.

Sight

The Pacific Northwest gets a reputation for being a perpetually soaked rainforest, but that's not the case for most of Washington, Oregon and Idaho. In reality, most of these states are comprised of savannah and high desert where water is precious.

Even the deserts host rivers and streams, fed by snowmelt, springs or both, these waterways are flowing, clear, clean and — whether or not it's always the case — seem like a testament to the purity of the wild.

Water may be hard to find in parts of the PNW, but it's typically quite palatable. The Columbia drainage may flow through cities and wend through civilization, but it's still fairly clean.

You look at it and instantly want to wade, swim or float in it.

This is a stark contrast to Florida. Though water is everywhere, the ponds, canals, channelized rivers and ocean itself are gross. The agricultural runoff, high mineral content, tannic coloration and swill of garbage from the burgeoning population make Florida water that much less appealing.

Smell

Though you usually see the water in Florida first, on occasion, you follow your nose. The high sulfur content in Florida's waterways is natural, but the human-assisted smells are not.

Few things smell worse than the Florida swamp, and with each breath I take, I long for the crisp mountain air and water that doesn't take on the smell of its impurities.

Just this week I snagged a floating diaper while throwing topwater for bass. I dry heaved but realized it was a new normal, and I'd have to go with the flow.

Sound

After all, flowing water is the norm back home. Sure, there are lakes, but rivers and streams support our hydrology in the PNW. Rainwater is the driver in Florida, where a vicious cycle of heat and thunder-



Tannic water is common in Florida. With all of the flooding, water saps tannic acid from the trees it floods and gives it a sepia tone.

Photo contributed by Luke Ovgard



An invasive muscovy duck escapes to the polluted waters of a Miami canal.

Photo contributed by Luke Ovgard

storms keep the ground saturated and the ponds and canals full of water.

Much of this water flows at the speed of government, but the silent swill makes me long for the babbling brooks of my home.

The sound, ambient in some of my best memories, has raw emotional power.

Touch

As a kid, I saw "The Miracle Worker" for the first time. The gripping scene in which Annie Sullivan repeatedly places Helen Keller's hands in the water and says "Water. It has a name," stayed with me. It, too, had raw emotional power.

Water is supposed to feel a certain way. It's supposed to be fluid with no residue and a texture all its own.

This is the water I'm used to.

The water in Florida is so often polluted, brackish and full of whatever soluble debris is carried in from the gutters that it doesn't feel like water. It's sticky, it's thicker than it should be and, so often, it's soft.

I hate soft water, and the feeling you get when you wash yourself but don't feel clean? That is quintessential Florida.

Taste

The artesian wells, springs and snowmelt we drink is delightful. Water doesn't have a taste, not really, but it certainly shouldn't be bitter or sour or taste like sweat. Unfortunately, nobody told that to Florida, where the tap water is — at best — terrible.

People buy half a dozen cases of water at a time, and I've bought more plastic bottled water this summer than in 5 years prior. I'm used to refilling a water bottle for weeks at a time, but it's just not a viable option here. Even the Florida brand of bottled water, Zephyrhills, itself bottled in Florida, is foul.

Further, recycling is limited, and there is no deposit, so that same plastic we drink because the water is bad ends up floating in that same water we don't drink, making it just that much worse.

The bottles float by, a visual reminder of how it smells and tastes, the tacky feeling it leaves on your skin, and the only sound you hear near the water is trash scraping against the culvert on its way to my watershed moment in which I realize I miss my water.

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Yellowstone's tallest geyser has been erupting more often

By BRETT FRENCH
Billings (Montana) Gazette

BILLINGS, Montana — Yellowstone National Park's Steamboat Geyser sped up its eruption cycle earlier in June, setting a new mark for recorded intervals between eruptions.

The geyser's shortest rest between noted eruptions occurred June 15 when it blasted steam and water into the air only three days, 3 hours and 48 minutes after its previous spouting June 12.

Earlier quick recharges included a 1982 eruption after only four days, 19 hours and 43 minutes. On June 15, 2018, it went off after four days, 15 hours, 49 minutes. And on Sept. 12, 2018, it gushed forth after four days, 18 hours and 3 minutes.

Analysis

Why have the eruptions sped up?

"I wish I could tell you," said Michael Manga, of the



Steamboat Geyser erupting in Norris Geyser Basin of Yellowstone National Park. The geyser sped up its eruption cycle earlier in June, setting a new mark for recorded intervals between eruptions.

AP Photo/Tracey Patterson

University of California, Berkeley, who studies geysers. "I think this is what makes Steamboat, and geysers in general, so fascinat-

ing is that there are these questions we can't answer."

Michael Poland, scientist in charge of the Yellowstone Volcano Observatory, said

the irregularity of Steamboat is just "a geyser being a geyser." Looking back at the record of recent eruptions, he noted that its intervals are

always variable. Last July, Steamboat went 20 days before erupting.

"Steamboat clearly has a mind of its own," he said, "and right now it's putting its independence on display."

Manga added that it "should trouble everyone" that scientists can't better explain geysers, since they are similar in many respects to their much more dangerous cousin, the volcano.

'Very tall'

Geyser observers Bill and Carol Beverly posted on the Geyser Times website marking the precedent-setting June 15 eruption by noting, "Unbelievably heard and felt from bookstore during thunderstorm." They added that the geyser was "Very tall and muddy" when it spouted to life close to 5 p.m.

"Also of note, Steamboat has been pausing for a second and restarting water phase, which I've been told is a rare occurrence," said Big Sky photographer Ryan Molde in an email. "In addi-

tion, it's been going off for more time recently than it had been, and one of the park employees said the June 15 event was also quite high."

He also said one of the rocks ejected by the geyser struck a sign near the viewing platform, shattering the wooden post.

Seemingly unfazed by its new distinction, Steamboat quickly recharged again and followed up on June 18 — three days, nine hours and 40 minutes later — with its 55th eruption since last March. Number 56 came Sunday, June 23, only four days, 10 hours and 26 minutes later.

Footnote

Steamboat's feat should be noted with an asterisk. Although the geyser was first reported exploding in 1878, eruption records only go back to 1982. That's a pretty short period considering geysers have been active since the end of the last ice age about 14,000 years ago.