

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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A11

Appreciating snowshoes — by not wearing them



JAYSON JACOBY

ON THE TRAIL



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Black Mountain rises above the southeast corner of Phillips Reservoir on Jan. 9, 2022.

The best way to appreciate snowshoes is to leave them in the car.

Best, of course, is not always synonymous with smartest.

In this particular episode, in fact, the words were much closer to antonyms.

The second Sunday of 2022 — the ninth day of the year, to be more precise — came on sunny and cold. This was the pleasant part of the month, before the temperature inversion, a not uncommon phenomenon hereabouts in January, left some of our region's valleys to marinate in a dank miasma.

My wife Lisa and I, with our kids, Olivia and Max, drove the 17 miles or so up the Powder River along Highway 7 to Phillips Reservoir.

Olivia, who's 14, indulges Lisa's and my affinity for hiking in all seasons with various degrees of acceptance.

But she's unequivocal in describing her favorite sort of route.

Flat.

The word is inevitable in every pre-trip conversation, most often in the form of a question: "Is it flat?"

Our part of the globe, of course, is quite often decidedly not flat.

But among the nearby options, the shoreline trails at Phillips come nearest to satisfying Olivia's chief criterion.

Fortunately the short road leading from Highway 7 to the boat ramp on the north side of the reservoir, near Mason Dam, is plowed, affording access for people hoping to pull some rainbow trout or yellow perch through a hole in the ice.

Or, in our case, people interested in floundering through the snow.

That wasn't my goal, of course.

Our four pairs of snowshoes were scattered helter-skelter in their customary place, the back of our Toyota FJ Cruiser. They spend most of the winter there, dripping meltwater onto the thick rubber floor mat.

As we parked, Olivia asked whether we were going to put on the snowshoes.

Although her disdain for strapping on a couple square feet of plastic to her boots isn't as palpable as her feelings about steep trails or roads, suffice it to say that her ideal hike does not involve snowshoes.

I noticed, as I looked at the slope where the shoreline trail winds between the ponderosa pines, that there was sufficient snow for snowshoes.

But neither was it especially deep.

I was in that fateful moment rendered insensible by a combination of two powerful forces — naive optimism and the desire to grant the wishes of a teenager.

Individually, either of these can potentially lead to blunders.

Combine them and it's certain.

I agreed that we could have a go without snowshoes.

I convinced myself that, after several days of dry weather, the snow that fell the first week of the new year likely would have solidified somewhat. I mustered quite an internal argument in favor of this proposition, based on the idea that because the trail mainly follows south-facing slopes, the snow would have melted a bit each afternoon in the weak winter sunshine, and then refrozen each night, facilitating the firming process that would render snowshoes, if not superfluous than at least not mandatory.

As we strode away to the west, toward Union Creek Campground, this concept didn't seem wholly fantastical.

The snow was indeed compacted in places, so

much so that my boots barely breached the icy surface.

But snow is treacherous. It can't be trusted.

We hadn't hiked more than a couple tenths of a mile before we started occasionally to plunge into snow up to mid-calf (or nearer the knee in Max's case; at 10, he's both the youngest and shortest member of our quartet).

But this wallowing didn't even have the dubious advantage of being consistent, and thus predictable.

The vagaries of terrain and trees and exposure to sunlight had conspired to create a sort of minefield effect. Sometimes we would take a dozen steps without sinking in. Then we would hit a patch of softer snow and slog for several paces. More often, though, there was no regularity, no rhythm. One boot would stay on top while the other thrust through clear to the frozen ground, creating an unfortunate and awkward stance that my aging hips don't cotton to at all.

I understand the obvious question here.

Why didn't we just go back and get the snowshoes?

I have no answer — not a cogent one, anyway.

All I can offer by way of explanation is the same pathetic plea that people tend to give when they put themselves in a position over which they had total control.

By the time it got annoying it just seemed too onerous to turn around.

Olivia, who is savvy enough to not complain in such a situation, in fact declared the hike a success.

IF YOU GO

To get to Phillips Reservoir, drive south from Baker City on Highway 7, toward Sumpter. Between mileposts 35 and 34 (the numbers get lower the farther from Baker City), and just at the top of the grade next to Mason Dam, turn left onto the access road for the Mason Dam boat ramp. There's ample parking. The shoreline trail starts just above the restroom. There is no fee to park or to use the trail.

She also offered the clever, albeit obnoxious to her parents, suggestion that since we didn't wear snowshoes we got more exercise.

I couldn't deny this claim on purely cardiovascular grounds.

But I pointed out that had we worn snowshoes we could have gone considerably farther, getting even better views of the spectacular winter scenery and ultimately burning a comparable number of calories.

On the way back we detoured down to the reservoir. It's a much longer detour than usual, since the drought dropped Phillips to its lowest level since it first filled in 1968.

The ice, based on the remnants of a few ice-fishing holes, was several inches thick.

I thought, as I inevitably do on the rare occasions when I'm standing on a frozen body of water, of the scenes in "Grumpy Old Men" of the temporary towns of ice fishing shanties that spring up each winter in the frigid Great Lakes region.

Our ice-fishing culture isn't quite so formal, but Phillips is a fine spot to pursue the pastime.

As we trudged back along a well-trodden path to the parking lot, Lisa and I agreed that it was a beautiful place to spend a couple hours of a January day.

And that we would never do it again.

Not without snowshoes.

Jayson Jacoby is the editor of the Baker City Herald, part of the EO Media Group along with East Oregonian and others. He also is an avid outdoors enthusiast.

TigerScots make HoF inductions

Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

ATHENA — Weston-McEwen inducted its 2021 Hall of Fame members between the TigerScots' girls and boys games on Friday, Jan. 28.

John Huntsman, Deborah Glover and the 1973-74 and 1974-75 W-M girls basketball teams joined the ranks of other TigerScots sports elite.

Huntsman was a coach and teacher in Athena for 40 years, both at the junior high and high school levels, where he taught Spanish, algebra, driver's education, physical education and health, and coached football, basketball and track.

He already had been inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame at both Ricks College, which he attended after graduating from La Grande High in 1965, and then Eastern Oregon College, which he attended after returning from a two-year mission in Argentina for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Glover attended Oregon State University after graduating high school in Hillsboro in 1967 before transferring to then Eastern Oregon College, La Grande.

She participated in crew for the Beavers, and field hockey, basketball and track at Eastern.

Glover joined the Weston School District after graduation in 1972, and became Weston-McEwen's first girls basketball coach.

She also coached volleyball and track during her tenure, and has been the Athena-Weston Middle School volleyball coach since 1982.

The Weston-McEwen 1973-74 and 1974-75 girls basketball teams were the first for the school.

The 1973-74 team was undefeated and won district, though there was not yet a state basketball tournament for girls. Glover led the team, which included senior Kathy Jackson; juniors Tammy Sams, Jodi Salter, Georgiann Licht, Susan Hesketh and Denise Snider; sophomore Lori King; and freshmen Liz Cahill, Paula Newbold and Susan Warren.

The 1974-75 team again won district, and then placed fourth at the state tournament. The team included the 10 members of the previous season's team, along with Karla Hooker and Teresa Kaup.

Pat Campbell stepped in as head coach with Glover on maternity leave.

ON THE SLATE

TUESDAY, FEB. 1

Prep girls basketball
Umatilla at Vale, 3 p.m.
Bickleton at Echo, 5 p.m.
Pendleton at The Dalles, 5:30 p.m.
Enterprise at Stanfield, 5:30 p.m.
Hermiston at Kennewick, 5:45 p.m.
Nixyaawii at McLoughlin, 6 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Weston-McEwen, 6 p.m.

Prep boys basketball
Umatilla at Vale, 4:30 p.m.
Bickleton at Echo, 6:30 p.m.
Pendleton at The Dalles, 7 p.m.
Hermiston at Kennewick, 7:30 p.m.
Nixyaawii at McLoughlin, 7:30 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Weston-McEwen, 7:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 2
Prep girls basketball
Spray/Mitchell/Wheeler at Echo, 6 p.m.

Prep boys wrestling
Pendleton at The Dalles/Dufur, 6 p.m.

THURSDAY, FEB. 3
Prep girls basketball
Joseph at Griswold, 6 p.m.
Nixyaawii vs. Crane, Baker High School, 6 p.m.

Prep boys basketball
Joseph at Griswold, 7:30 p.m.
Nixyaawii vs. Crane, Baker High School, 7:30 p.m.

FRIDAY, FEB. 4

Prep girls basketball
Stanfield at Union, 5:30 p.m.
Chiawana at Hermiston, 5:45 p.m.
Echo at Sherman, 6 p.m.
Heppner at Enterprise, 6 p.m.
Griswold at Elgin, 6 p.m.
Burns at Irrigon, 6 p.m.
Nixyaawii at Wallowa, 6 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Pilot Rock, 6 p.m.
Vale at Riverside, 6 p.m.
Nyssa at Umatilla, 6 p.m.
Hood River Valley at Pendleton, 7 p.m.

Prep boys basketball
Hood River Valley at Pendleton, 5:30 p.m.
Stanfield at Union, 7 p.m.
Echo at Sherman, 7:30 p.m.
Chiawana at Hermiston, 7:30 p.m.
Heppner at Enterprise, 7:30 p.m.
Griswold at Elgin, 7:30 p.m.
Burns at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m.
McLoughlin at Baker, 7:30 p.m.
Nixyaawii at Wallowa, 7:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Pilot Rock, 7:30 p.m.
Vale at Riverside, 7:30 p.m.

College women's basketball
Eastern Oregon at Walla Walla, noon

College men's basketball
Eastern Oregon at Walla Walla, 2 p.m.

College baseball
Eastern Oregon at Linfield, 2 p.m.



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