

OSP to examine Finley Creek Jane Doe site

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — A four-decade-old Union County mystery may be on the verge of being solved or taking another unforgettable twist.

The Oregon State Police are set, next month, to conduct an examination and possible excavations at a site near Finley Creek, 18 miles north of La Grande, where the remains of an unidentified woman were found in August 1978.

“We are planning on mid-August or late August,” said Sgt. Sean Belding, a member of OSP’s major crimes division.

Belding will be joined by Calvin Davis, director of the OSP’s crime lab in Pendleton, and Dr. Nici Vance, from the State Medical Examiner’s office, plus members of the Finley Creek Jane Doe Task Force.

Belding, Davis and Vance recently decided to conduct the examination and possible digs after learning of how a pair of cadaver dogs responded on Thursday, June 23, at the Finley Creek site. Each dog, trained to smell human bones and brought there by the task force, indicated they had found buried human bones at the same two places while operating separately.

Belding, who accompanied the task force on its June 23 visit, said he was impressed with the interest each dog showed in the two sites. The canines, one of which is a



Suzanne Timms/Contributed Photo, File

Cadaver dog Brynn and a team of volunteers including Suzanne Timms, seated, in August 2021 investigate the area where the Finley Creek Jane Doe was discovered near Elgin in 1978. Timms said she believes the unidentified woman is her mother, Patricia Otto, who disappeared in 1976. With Timms are her relatives Jennifer Harrington, center, and Wenda Parr, left, plus Karin Anderson of Dallas, Texas, who is a member of a Reporter’s Notebook group that is producing podcasts about the search for the identity of the Finley Creek Jane Doe.

German shepherd, laid down at the same place, an indication they were positive human bones were underneath the location, said Melinda Jederberg of La Grande, a leader of the Finley Creek Jane Doe Task Force, which she founded in 2019.

This was the second time the

cadaver dogs were brought to the Finley Creek site by the task force. They were also brought there in the summer of 2021, when they also indicated they detected human bones there.

The task force members have never dug at the Finley Creek site

because it is a crime scene and thus it would be illegal to disrupt it.

A daughter who will not give up hope

Suzanne Timms of Walla Walla, who is assisting with the search as a volunteer, is elated OSP investigators will be examining the site because she is certain the Finley Creek Jane Doe is her mother, Patricia “Patty” Otto, of Lewiston, Idaho, who has been missing since Aug. 31, 1976.

“Oregon is giving resources toward the case. It gives me hope,” she said.

Timms first suspected the Finley Creek Jane Doe was her mother in 2021 when she saw an image created by a forensic artist in Massachusetts, Anthony Redgrave, the operator of Redgrave Research Forensic Services. Redgrave was assisting the Finley Creek Jane Doe Task Force, and the image he created looked very similar to Timms’ mother. The images were created based on photos of the skeletal remains found in 1978 — those bones are believed to have been cremated by the state after they were found, Timms said.

Other details have contributed to Timms’ belief the Finley Creek Jane Doe is her mother. The remains were found with a white shirt and red pants, which is what Patty Otto was last seen wearing before she disappeared in 1976.

A possible Lewiston, Idaho, murder

Timms said she believes her

mother was murdered in Lewiston by her father and then taken to Finley Creek where he buried her in a shallow grave.

OSP’s autopsy records for the Finley Creek Jane Doe, however, do not match those of Patty Otto.

Timms said she believes the discrepancy is due to an error OSP’s medical examiner made while doing examinations of the skeletal remains of two Jane Does in his office at about the same time in 1978. She said she suspects he assigned his reports to the wrong remains, because his report for the second Jane Doe matches her mother’s autopsy photos and dental records.

Should human bones be found at the Finley Creek site, the state likely will test them to determine if their DNA indicates they are those of Timms’ mother. Should such bones turn out not to be those of Patty Otto, another layer of mystery will be added to the Finley Creek case.

Timms is striving to keep the memory of her mother alive with a ceremony in Lewiston, Idaho, set for Aug. 4, which would have been her 70th birthday. Seventy signs with Otto’s name will be carried by 70 people for 24 minutes down main street in Lewiston. The time will symbolize Otto’s age, for she was 24 in 1976 when she disappeared.

Timms said she is touched by the number of people who are volunteering to participate in the memorial.

“It shows that my mother is not forgotten,” she said.

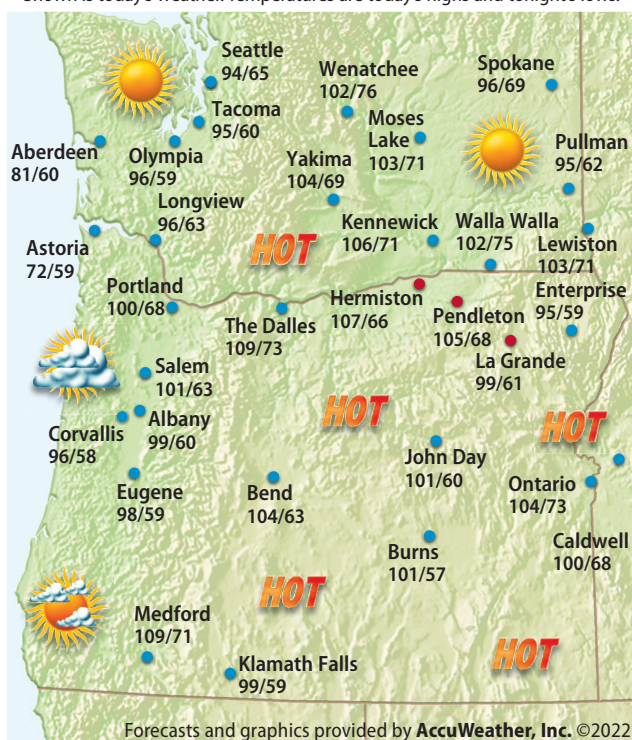
Forecast for Pendleton Area

AccuWeather | Go to AccuWeather.com

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
HOT	HOT	HOT	HOT	HOT
Blazing sunshine and very hot	Very hot with sizzling sunshine	Record-breaking temperatures	Record-breaking temperatures	Very hot; breezy in the p.m.
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
105° 68°	105° 72°	109° 71°	107° 71°	105° 70°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
107° 66°	108° 68°	111° 72°	110° 73°	106° 70°

OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today’s weather. Temperatures are today’s highs and tonight’s lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. Mon.

TEMP. HIGH	LOW
Monday 101°	62°
Normals 92°	60°
Records 114° (1928)	42° (1897)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.31"
Normal month to date 0.30"
Year to date 11.13"
Last year to date 4.32"
Normal year to date 8.25"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. Mon.

TEMP. HIGH	LOW
Monday 101°	58°
Normals 95°	60°
Records 109° (1928)	45° (1953)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.03"
Normal month to date 0.10"
Year to date 7.48"
Last year to date 2.46"
Normal year to date 5.12"

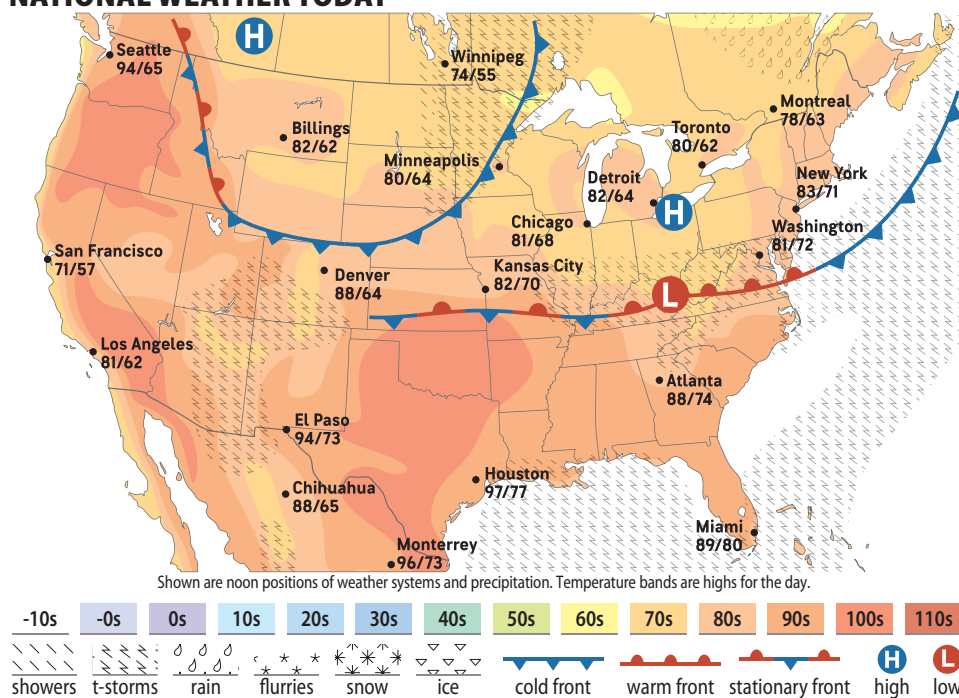
WINDS (in mph)
Today Wed.
Boardman WNW 4-8 SW 4-8
Pendleton NNW 6-12 W 6-12

SUN AND MOON
Sunrise today 5:32 a.m.
Sunset tonight 8:31 p.m.
Moonrise today 3:10 a.m.
Moonset today 7:51 p.m.

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday’s National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 109° in Enid, Okla. Low 33° in Daniel, Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



New group of wolves seen in southern Deschutes County

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

DESCHUTES COUNTY — A new group of wolves has taken up residence in Central Oregon, including parts of Deschutes and northern Klamath counties.

State wildlife officials designated an Area of Known Wolf Activity in the Upper Deschutes Wildlife Management Unit, which extends from near Bend south to Crescent along U.S. Highway 97 and west to the Pacific Crest Trail.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife creates wolf activity areas in locations where the same wolves — not wolves passing through — use an area repeatedly over time. The designation also helps alert livestock producers about wolf presence.

Ranchers in the area should consider nonlethal measures to protect their livestock, according to the Oregon Department of Fish

and Wildlife, such as hiring range riders or using flashing lights and alarms to scare away wolves.

ODFW also recommends removing any carcasses or bone piles that might attract wolves. Other deterrents may include guard dogs, electrified fencing of small pastures and fladry.

While Oregon’s wolf management plan does allow for killing wolves in the event of repeated attacks on livestock, this does not apply west of highways 395, 78 and 95, where wolves remain federally protected under the Endangered Species Act. That includes the Upper Deschutes area.

The minimum known wolf population in Oregon based on verified evidence was at least 175 at the end of 2021, though ODFW acknowledges the actual population is likely higher.

Biologists began monitoring reports of a single wolf in the area in August 2021, and one wolf was counted during

ODFW’s annual winter survey.

Earlier this year, tracks of four wolves were found in the area, though it wasn’t immediately clear if they came from a new group of wolves or from the Indigo Pack, which occupies territory just to the south.

On July 4, a trail camera in the area snapped a photo of an adult wolf with five pups, confirming the new group.

Depending on how many wolves are in the group by year’s end, it may be designated the Upper Deschutes Pack, with a pack being defined as having at least four wolves traveling together in winter — typically with at least two adults and their offspring.

ODFW says additional surveys will be conducted to learn more about the Upper Deschutes wolves’ home range.

Wolf sightings from the public can be reported to ODFW online at www.dfw.state.or.us/wolves.

IN BRIEF

Tests show young La Grande mother’s brain is unresponsive

LA GRANDE — The family of a La Grande woman said Friday, July 22, that tests have shown the sudden cardiac arrest she suffered has left her brain dead.

Vanessa Durfee, 26, suffered cardiac arrest at her residence Sunday, July 17.

“She will be flown to Portland on (July 23) for organ donation,” Sandra Roda, Durfee’s aunt, said. “The GoFundMe account will now be used for her funeral arrangements.”

Durfee’s oldest daughter found her unresponsive and alerted Vanessa’s partner, Troy

Jones, who immediately called 911 for emergency medical assistance. According to Roda, Durfee was intubated and admitted July 17 to the intensive care unit at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, where she underwent tests to determine the cause of her condition.

Durfee is survived by her partner of six years, Troy Jones, and two daughters, ages 6 and 1. She was a graduate of Elgin High School and was the daughter of Sharee Henderson and Ed Durfee, of Elgin.

The family has established a GoFundMe page to help the young family with the costs related to her medical emergency and her absence from home.

—EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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