

Making use of maps in remote country



BRAD TRUMBO

OUTDOOR PURSUITS



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

Brad Trumbo earned his 2020 public land mule deer buck by using mapping tools to find the right terrain and access.

With August upon us, the anticipation of chasing upland birds and big game burns like a white-hot fire in the hunter's soul. Bear season is open in Oregon. The Idaho grouse season begins in late August, and archery deer season is open in some states farther south. And while solitude is often a significant driver of the hunting populous, we find ourselves competing for space on public lands, seemingly more each year.

While an escape to the wilderness feels a little less wild with many of our neighbors on the landscape, there is a silver lining. The fact that we live in the western U.S. with more acreage and varying public agency ownership than the rest of the nation provides us ample opportunity to find room in the backcountry. Additionally, mapping tools, private lands access programs, and access to information about public lands continue to increase and improve each year.

The majority of land in Northeastern Oregon is either public land managed by the U.S. Forest Service or private with public access. Additional acreage managed by the state and Bureau of Land Management makes

up a smaller proportion, where BLM managed lands are more abundant through central and southeastern Oregon. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program uses grant funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and hunting license dollars to work with landowners willing to allow public access to their lands.

The combined public ownership and private access provides over 1 million acres

for outdoor recreation in Northeastern Oregon, but understanding how to access private lands or the bounds of public lands can be unclear. Fortunately, it's simpler than ever to find access and know what you can do and where you stand in the outdoors.

An easy mapping tool provided by ODFW shows land ownership and public access to private lands, and is available at www.oregonhuntingmap.com. This tool provides only boundaries for all public lands, but



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

Studying public access to private lands identified this parcel where Brad Trumbo's youngest setter, Zeta, worked magic on a big rooster pheasant.

more detailed information is available for the "Travel Management Areas" that allow hunting. Historically, paper maps with boundary information were what folks relied upon as we ventured afield. Paper maps are still valid today; however, apps for smartphones now provide more detailed access and boundary data that can be viewed anywhere, anytime.

"On-X" was the first smartphone app to provide property ownership and boundary information and it pairs with the Global Positioning System of the phone. Maps and data can be viewed anytime with mobile phone service, and maps can be downloaded for "offline" use with the GPS where no phone service is available.

I first tried On-X in 2016 and found it to be a game changer. I now have a subscription that provides land ownership information for the entire United States. This technology allows me to find public lands and access to private lands, and avoid trespassing on private or tribal lands closed to the public. I can scout new areas based on the property ownership and access data, satellite imagery and topography that the app provides, coupled with other specific fish or wildlife related details like fishing reports on hunting units and seasons. Additionally, the app allows sportsmen and women to catalogue dozens of recreation features with waypoints and share them with friends, making it easy to scout and

plan adventures, navigate new areas, find each other to help pack out, etc.

On-X offers three different focal apps — Hunt, Offroad and Backcountry. Each is developed to cater to the end-user, such as wildlife management areas for the hunter, trails for offroad use and routes and planning tools for backpacking.

On-X is not the only app that provides this level of mapping and land ownership capability. A summary of what Outdoor Life calls "the nine best hunting apps" is available at www.outdoorlife.com/tested-best-hunting-apps-for-hunters/. Most apps offer free use with a base map of satellite imagery or terrain, but only a few provide free parcel boundary data. Outdoor Life briefly explains what each app does and does not offer.

If you are an outdoor junkie looking for anything from backcountry solitude to urban fishing access, mapping resources can help you locate opportunities and respect neighboring closed private lands by knowing where you stand. Whether you seek blue grouse in the Eagle Caps or peacock bass in the Florida canal system, online and mobile phone mapping apps will enhance your outdoor experience and capability. Take advantage of them.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.

The Blues beckon, even when they're not beautiful



JAYSON JACOBY

ON THE TRAIL



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

A pool along Buck Gulch near Sumpter, on Aug. 7, 2022.

Buck Gulch is not beautiful. Not by the standards of Northeastern Oregon, anyway.

This is a terribly unfair comparison, to be sure.

Competing against nearby natural marvels such as Wallowa Lake and the Elkhorn Mountains and Hells Canyon, Buck Gulch, a minor stream near Sumpter in far western Baker County, is destined to seem drab.

Buck Gulch was neither carved by a great river nor sculpted by glaciers.

A narrow gulch, it yields no grand vistas.

And it's a placid little brook, particularly in summer.

No waterfalls.

Yet even though Buck Gulch almost certainly will never grace the cover of a calendar or the pages of a coffee table book, it is a pretty wonderful place.

Indeed, on one in the long spell of sullenly hot days that has marked the latter half of this summer, the gulch, with its long stretches of shade, seemed to me the ideal spot for a moderate hike.

And I was reminded, as so often happens while I'm rambling our corner of Oregon, that we're awfully fortunate to have so many wonderful places to explore.

I picked Buck Gulch for a couple reasons.

It's convenient, just 32 miles or so from Baker City.

More importantly, with the temperature forecast to go above 90 on Sunday, Aug. 7, I knew, although I had never hiked the gulch, that it would be at least partially shaded.

The hardest part of the trip was finding the road.

Forest Road 7300-990 follows the gulch for most of its length, starting from near where the stream joins McCully Fork, a couple miles west of Sumpter.

I drove right past the road junction along the Sumpter-Granite highway, even though I had looked at a map before leaving and knew the road started just past McCully Fork campground.

When I knew I had gone too far up the grade toward Blue Springs Summit I turned around. My wife, Lisa, saw the turnoff.

It is, I must say, an inconspicuous intersection. The highway — it's also part of the Elkhorn Drive Scenic Byway, Forest Road 73 — is about 100 feet higher than the stream, and Road 990 plunges down a steep slope. Due to the terrain, the road sign isn't visible from the highway.

There's a pullout on the south side of the highway a

couple hundred feet east of the junction, and I parked there.

Other than the first short section, the road has comparatively gentle grades as it follows Buck Gulch upstream. Just a tenth of a mile or so from the highway, a rivulet of frigid water flows across Road 990. It's fed by a spring beside the road.

We stopped there so my son, Max, who's 11, could soak the towel he recently acquired. The fabric, or so the package it came in promised, would, once saturated, remain cool for many hours. Max draped the clammy brown thing around his neck, a sort of summer scarf designed to cool rather than warm.

There is nothing outstanding about Buck Gulch, as I mentioned.

It is not notably different from any of many dozens of streams that drain the Blue Mountains, its fringe of alder and red osier dogwood instantly familiar.

The road, which is open to vehicles, although better suited to four-wheel drives or ATVs, is typical of its type as well — narrow, but without deep ruts or boulders or other significant impediments.

We hiked about a mile and a half, gaining around 500 feet of elevation. It was, as I had hoped, a fine place for a walk on a hot and sunny day. Buck Gulch is narrow

enough, and the forest dense enough, that sunlight is, if not blocked altogether, then at least nicely filtered in most places.

And although it was warm even in the shade, the road never strays far from the stream — the topography doesn't allow otherwise — and we paused a few times to let Max refresh his nifty new towel. I wrapped it around my neck for a while and it was as advertised, blessedly chilly.

For almost the entire hike we saw no one.

Although the road is never more than half a mile or so from the comparatively well-traveled highway, once we had gone a quarter mile or so I never heard the hum of engines on the pavement above.

We turned around at the Buck Gulch mine, where a travel trailer was parked and a pickup truck, laden with firewood, was just leaving. (The truck took a different route, a wider road that connects to the highway near Blue Springs, on the divide at the boundary between Baker and Grant counties.)

As with every gulch around Sumpter, gold miners, dating to the 19th century, gave Buck Gulch a thorough going over.

We passed the remains of a log cabin and another structure, possibly a small

mill. Although all the land along the road and in the gulch is public, part of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, there are active mining claims throughout, so it's illegal to pan for gold or do any other sort of prospecting.

I must have driven past Buck Gulch close to a hundred times over the past 30 years or so — you can't avoid it if you're driving from Sumpter to Granite and points beyond.

Yet it wasn't until August 2022 that I actually visited the gulch and hiked its road.

I find this rather amazing, and deeply gratifying.

Not every hike can be an epic, multi-day backpacking trip through the Eagle Cap Wilderness or some other landscape that, unlike Buck Gulch, leads photographers to use their memory card's every megabyte and prompts visitors with no literary pretensions to discover a latent affinity for poetry.

But Buck Gulch, and the dozens of places like it in the Blues, enrich our region too.

I hope never to become so complacent, so accustomed to the grandeur around us, that I fail to appreciate the simple pleasure of a shady road beside a cool mountain stream.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.

Miller:

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At the age of 7, he competed in his first rodeo outside of Wallowa County — the Cayuse Junior Rodeo in Pendleton. He started competing in junior high rodeo competitions

as a sixth grader and qualified for nationals, held in Huron, South Dakota.

Miller's seventh grade year was during the COVID-19 shutdowns, so he and his family opened up their arena to kids in Wallowa County to come rope and ride. Up to 50 would attend an afternoon of roping, barrels and pole bending.

"There were no fall sports so we had rodeo practice open to the community all fall on Tuesdays and Thursdays," Dena Miller said.

The following year as an eighth grader, Miller qualified again for the junior high rodeo national in Des Moines, Iowa. With three more years of high school, the sky's the limit.

"To see your kid want something

and work for it is really emotional," Dena Miller said.

Miller's skills aren't confined to the rodeo arena. Along with the rest of his family, Miller moves cattle for the Fence Creek Ranch and started training horses by the age of 11.

"People will call up and say, 'I want a roping horse' and I work with them," Miller said.

Keen on perfecting his rodeo skills, while encouraging others to do so as well, Miller and his family are hosting a break away and tie-down roping clinic with Nathan Steinberg.

"We are excited to share our passion and bring someone with his qualifications to come to the county," Dena Miller said.

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