



Contributed photos/Penny Arentsen
Volunteers with Rails with Trails remove old fencing and other industrial debris from the railroad right-of-way during their walk on Saturday, June 1.

Joseph Branch Trail Consortium volunteers tidy up the WURR rail line

By Ellen Morris Bishop
Wallowa County Chieftain

About 30 volunteers, ages 5 to 75, turned out on National Trails Day, Saturday, June 1, for the first 2019 Joseph Branch Trail Consortium cleanup day. The JBTC had permission from WURR (Wallowa Union Railroad) to spruce things up along their right of way between Joseph and Enterprise.

The cleanup crew started in

Joseph and walked and worked their way to Enterprise. They also arranged shuttles to pick up tired hikers — and a consequential amount of industrial debris, old, snarled fencing, and other finds — at road crossings.

“We pulled weeds and picked up some debris and old wire,” said JBTC board member Jacob Losby. “There wasn’t much actual trash. But we did pull quite a bit of houndstongue and dealt with some scotch thistle.

It’s a big corridor. We’re happy to do anything we can do to help manage it.”

The JBTC has done an annual cleanup hike in early June for several years. In the future, they hope to schedule cleanups more frequently. “It would be great to do a cleanup in early fall,” Losby said. “Everyone’s busy this time of year. A lot of people can’t do the cleanup walk now. It would be good to do another cleanup when people had more time.”



JBTC volunteers hike toward Joseph along the WURR railroad tracks on June 1. They were cleaning debris and weeds from the WURR right-of-way.



Rails with Trails volunteers remove a large wad of wood and wire from the railroad right of way during their walk along the rails Saturday, June 1.

Meredith Brann unleashes first album

Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Meredith Brann is stepping out these days. Brann, 17, is the eldest child of Wallowa County’s very musical Brann Family. Now, she has also started to perform solo at different venues. On June 14th, she will be launching her solo career with her first album, Balance, with a concert at the OK Theatre. The event begins at 7 PM.

Brann thought about making an album for some time before taking the plunge. She said it seemed part of a natural process. She’s always been around musicians, and the OK Theatre itself is a recording venue, with Bart Budwig as the recording engineer.

“We’ve talked about it for a couple of years,” Brann said. “Then I started writing music. I think it was kind of this last minute decision, and we started recording with a band.”

A multi-instrumentalist, Brann’s main focus is her first love, the violin. “When I was a baby I used spaghetti sticks to pretend to play,” she said. Her parents bought her a violin for her sixth birthday. “I took lessons, and I’ve played it ever since,” she said.

Not surprisingly, Brann, also known for her stellar voice, began singing at the age of eight. Her first public appearance took place on the OK Theatre stage although it was before her parents owned the venue.

“That was with my Dad, and I had a lot of fun doing it, and I continue to do it,” she said.

The bluegrass music of Alison Krause and the soul of Aretha Franklin were the first thing to catch the ear of young Brann. She also named Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles as influences. “It’s what I grew up with,” she said with a laugh.

The album features a 50-50 mixture of Brann’s songs and covers. Some are easy-going. Some are up-beat. “It’s a mix of genres,” Brann explained. “I like a lot of things and it was kind of an album to search what I do best at. I have some rock and folk and blues and bluegrass.”

Brann had a lot of help recording the album. She said her father spent substantial time during the recording. Bart Budwig did all the recording and mixed everything. A band including musicians Nevada Sowie, Cooper Trail and her father accompanied her through the recording.

“I have some special guests including Kate and Forrest O’Connor,” Brann said. The singer-songwriter duo won a Grammy last



Meredith Brann will debut her first album with a performance at the OK Theatre, June 15 at 7 p.m.

year as part of the O’Connor band of legendary fiddle player, Mark O’Connor.

Was the recording process intimidating for Brann?

“A little at first,” she said. “I had no idea what I was doing when I started. By the end, we had so much fun, and I had gotten used to it.” She added that the bulk of the album was recorded in about a week, although the next three months were spent overdubbing, re-mastering, and polishing the work.

“Balance,” which is the title track as well as the album theme is a reflection of herself. The pictures on the album are based on the theme. Brann said it fits in well with her personality — for the most part.


“A part of my personality, but not completely,” she said. “It’s something to show of myself, I guess.”

Brann is looking forward to the album’s June 14 release at the OK Theatre. The CDs are ordered and on the way. She is also looking to place the album on Spotify and iTunes.

She promises a good time for all with a number of guest performers. Local songstress Ari Samples will open the show.

“We’ll have a live band and everything,” she said.

The OK Theatre is located at 208 W. Main St. in Enterprise with the show slated for 7-9:30 p.m. Tickets for the event are \$15.00 and available at the Dollar Stretcher, the Bookloft, Joseph Hardware and eventbrite.com.



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