



Photo by Ethan Shaw

Red Mountain, at right, is one of the more prominent peaks in the Elkhorn Mountains northwest of Baker City.

PEAKS

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The Blue Mountains swell and fall, wave-like, in a sort of mini-cordillera stretching from the Ochoco buttelands to the hard breaks of the Wenaha-Tucannon. Each range makes a windswept stepping-stone (or cresting wave) across the tawny lowlands. The knobs and subalpine ridges of each supply long views — not only to the next Blue Mountain rampart but also to faraway highlands of other provinces. From Strawberry Mountain, for instance, you can see (given clear conditions) from the High Cascades to the Great Basin whaleback of Steens Mountain.

The Greenhorns and Elkhorns, by virtue of their central position in the Blue Mountain realm and their majestic isolation, make defining topographic anchors for me during high rambles

around the region. So does Ironside Mountain, a dark and distant humpback from Wallowa and Elkhorn vantages that always looks stubbornly remote. The savage jags of the Seven Devils, climax of the Hells Canyon rim, do too, and also serve as another important stepping-stone for us: this one to the mountain kingdom of the Northern Rockies.

One of our signature signal peaks is Big Lookout Mountain, an aloof outlier of the Blues that reigns over the semidesert country south of the Eagle Valley, between the Burnt and Snake rivers. Enigmatic watchman of I-84 between Baker City and Ontario, 7,120-foot Big Lookout — a mass of igneous rock, mostly tonalite, that congealed from underground magma to form what's called a pluton — anchors a huge swath of country across Eastern Oregon and adjacent Idaho. Its brawny,

roughly symmetrical cone stands proud on long sightlines from the Blues and Wallowas to the Owyhee uplands and the Snake River Plain.

Big Lookout Mountain's prominence of some 3,100 feet lands it among the top 20 of Oregon's most prominent peaks. Sacagawea Peak, the apex of the Wallowas at 9,838 feet, is the second-most prominent in the state: 6,388 feet (compared to Mount Hood's 7,706 feet, greatest in Oregon). This puts Sacagawea among the elite "ultra-prominent" mountains of the Lower 48 — those with 5,000 feet or better. The high point of the Elkhorns, 9,106-foot Rock Creek Butte, is the fifth-most prominent peak in Oregon at 4,466 feet; 9,040-foot Strawberry Mountain is eighth at 4,080 feet.

Eyes glazing over in the face of all these numbing stats? The numbers aren't so important as the bearing,

the stature, the presence of a mountain, and as I see it Big Lookout has those in spades. So does one of my other personal signal peaks, and one of my (admittedly many) favorite Wallowa summits: 9,673-foot Twin Peaks, that infernal-looking, double-horned titan that muscles into so many sweeping sightlines across the range, and far to the north and northeast. If a mountain can be described as charismatic, Twin Peaks most certainly is: a strange mountain, in the best sense, which seems to cast a far-reaching (and misshapen) shadow. The sight of it always makes me stop me in my tracks, no matter how many times I've gazed on it.

On the subject of sightlines, I'd be remiss not mentioning that (kinda) famous prospect from the flanks of Emigrant Hill on the west front of the Northern Blues — the clear-day vista over

Columbia Plateau steppes to Cascade monsters: Mount Hood, Mount Adams, Mount Rainier. From here, Rainier — visible, mind you, from at least as far north as British Columbia's North Shore Mountains above Vancouver — is some 170 miles distant: an impressive straight-shot, to say the least. Those hulking maritime snowpeaks reliably look like mirages, unrealities: too big, too white, too out-of-proportion to be believable.

The Findley Buttes swollen from the Joseph Upland above the abyss of Innaha Canyon; Red Mountain's bold sail along the Elkhorn crest; the lonesome, barren rise of Rattlesnake Mountain over the faraway Pasco Basin — these skyline anchors of ours bolt the land down, stabilize this big and broken country, frame the scene for us day after day in that old, patient, silent way of stone.

4-WHEELING

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I don't know how many acres they own. They have 32,000 cow/calf pairs so it takes a lot of pasture for that many cows.

Fredy and Carly flew in and I picked them up at the airport. We had to run and pick up the Can Am Defender Max side-by-side four-seater and trailer. Wow, compared to my four-wheeler this was a Cadillac!

Next we ran by a local outdoor store and they stocked up on a few last-minute items. Paha Que had supplied us with a couple of tents to test out and Camp Chef had sent us one of their cool little backpacking stoves. There had been a fire ban so I was scared that we might not be able to even build a fire, which was a major bummer since a roaring fire is a big part of camping.

CRKT had supplied us with some of their sweet little Mossback Bird and Trout knives. I love those little knives. At first glance you may discount them for being too petite, but think again. They're great. They're lightweight and handy.

I also packed along my Riton binocs. We were going to be in some good elk, deer and antelope country

so I wanted to be able to let them see some nice bulls. You wouldn't believe the huge herds of elk I see down in that country, sometimes herds of up to 500.

Then like mentioned above, we had some Paha Que tents and a cool GCI cooking station. The Paha Que tents are great. Instead of the tent poles slipping into a solid sleeve they also have plastic clips that clip onto the poles. I have grown quite fond of this type of tent. For this excursion we tested the Rendezvous and the Basecamp tents. The Basecamp is basically a shake it and it pops into a huge tent.

I love four-wheeling in the Owyhees along the Nevada/Idaho state line. I always find old cabins. I love looking around them. At one old homestead Carly found an old buckboard wagon in perfect shape. It had been parked off to the side and was overgrown with bushes. The wheels were gone but other than that it was in perfect shape.

You can only imagine the history behind that old wagon and homestead. That country still gets snowed in bad.

There are some super rough canyons down there I found a couple of years ago while elk hunting that I really wanted to show them.

On the rim of the canyon we found some eggs. I don't know the official name but they are rocks as big as ostrich eggs. You can cut them in half or we found plenty that were broke in half. They're like a big softball cut in half which has a concave area in it with quartz inside. They're kinda cool.

We got to see a lot of cool country and the Can Am really impressed me. We had no trouble getting around everywhere we wanted to go. Coming out of camp we loaded it down and it carried all of our gear out in one trip.

Impressive!

Well, things finally came to an end but we had barely

gotten started exploring.

There may be a Part II next summer.

PICK'N PATCH
We will be OPENING on October 5th!
Where: Corner of Booth Lane and Lower Cove Road
When: Friday and Saturday: 9am-6pm
 Sunday: 10am-4pm
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 Small corn maze, several varieties of pumpkins and gourds, straw bales, corn stalks.
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Time for a fall clearance?

What you should know about the disposal of household hazardous waste.

What is household hazardous waste?
 HHW is anything labeled toxic, flammable, corrosive, reactive or explosive. These materials can threaten family health and the safety of pets and wildlife.

What are some examples of hazardous waste?
 Aerosols, Bleach, Drain Cleaners, Metal Polish, Mothballs, Oven Cleaners, Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Ammonia-based Cleaners, Mercury Thermometers, Wood Polishes, Waxes, Fertilizers, Insecticides, Herbicides, Rodenticides, Spa and Pool Chemicals, Roofing Compounds, Antifreeze, Batteries, Motor Oil, Paint Strippers and Thinners, Gasoline and more.

Where can I safely dispose of my hazardous waste?
La Grande Facility: Open to any resident of the three counties every other Tuesday, 8am-12 noon. By appointment, however, small labeled quantities accepted daily. (541) 963-5459.
Baker City Facility: Open the first Wednesday of each month, 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 523-2626.
Enterprise Facility: Open the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 426-3332.

Americans generate 1.6 million tons of HHW per year!
 The average home can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of hazardous waste.