RECREATION REPORT

EASTERN OREGON BACKCOUNTRY FESTIVAL SET FOR JAN. 25-27

The annual Eastern Oregon Backcountry Festival is set for Jan. 25-27, with events in La Grande and at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

The event is a fundraiser for the Wallowa Avalanche Center in Joseph.

• Friday, Jan. 25 — Ski film "All In," 6:30 p.m. at the Gilbert Center. General admission $15, or $10 for students. There will be an auction and raffle as well.

• Saturday, Jan. 26 — Third-annual Kip Rand Memorial Uphill/Downhill race at Anthony Lakes. The top man and top woman will each win a season pass to the ski area, or $250 cash.

• Sunday, Jan. 27 — Michael Hatch, director of the EOU Outdoor Program, will lead a ski tour into the Angell Basin near Anthony Lakes

More information available at eou.edu/outdoor/eastern-oregon-backcountry-festival-2019/

DEADLINE FOR SPRING BEAR APPLICATIONS

The application deadline for controlled spring bear hunts is Sunday, Feb. 10. Hunters can apply online (make your choices during check out), at a license agent or at an ODFW office that sells licenses.

UPLAND GAME BIRD SEASONS CLOSING JAN. 31

The hunting season closes Jan. 31 for several upland game bird species, including chukars, Hungarian partridges, blue and ruffed grouse and California quail. Crow season also ends Jan. 31.

PILCHER CREEK RESERVOIR

Ice fishing is underway and rainbow trout fishing has been good. Ice thickness is 12 to 14 inches. Fall sampling by ODFW shows that good numbers of rainbow trout and black crappie are available. Rainbows range from 8 to 15 inches and black crappie from 6 to 13 inches. Access is fair. Both Tucker Flat Road and reservoir access have been plowed of snow, but additional snowfall has occurred since. Four-wheel drive is advised for accessing the reservoir.

BROWNLEE RESERVOIR

Fishing has been good for both catfish and bass. Good numbers of large bass are being caught. Fishing for crappie is slow, but the fish are large.

Canyon Codes

Our language boasts a rich selection of nouns for describing gouges in the ground, with maps depicting gorges, draws, gullies, gulches and an occasional ravine

S. John Collins/Baker City Herald file photo

The view from Hat Point in Wallowa County takes in Hells Canyon and, in the background, the Seven Devils Mountains of Idaho.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

ETHAN SHAW

Among the common features of landscapes, few draw our interest like watercourses. There are significant practical reasons for this, of course: First and foremost those ancient human needs for water itself and for efficient routes across the countryside. Drainages are also well-used animal roads, which enhance their importance for us.

English offers a rich repertoire of words for different kinds and scales of streams ("stream," technically speaking, doesn't denote a particular size of flow): rills, runnels, and rivulets; brooks and creeks (and brooklets and creeklets); runs and kills and torrents; sloughs and guts and guzzles and rivers.

But today I'm interested in the terms used to define not flowing water itself but the channels it carves (or adopts from tectonic spasm, as when a fault opens up a valley). There's just as formidable an arsenal of language for these slashes and chasms on the land, of which Northeast Oregon boasts a superlative variety.

Most notably, ours is a realm of canyons. The Northern Blues, the northwestern Wallowa flanks, and of course the whole Hells Canyon country can all easily be described as "canyonlands," different as they look from the angular slickrock of the Colorado Plateau with which we most associate that word. (Canyon is from a Spanish word, cañon, which means "tube"; the same language gives us another fine watercourse word, arroyo, chiefly used in the Southwest to describe steep-sided gulches with ephemeral flow.)

But here among the Blues and Wallowas we're also a realm of gorges. "Gorge" and "canyon" are often used synonymously — gorge more common lingo over in Europe — but geomorphology (the study of landforms) suggests a useful, if messy, distinction.

Gorges tend to be tighter, steeper-walled, and often smaller than canyons. I think of a gorge as a true mountain feature, a walled-in, V-shaped gouge; you don't need mountains to have a canyon, meanwhile, as the plateau-rending Grand Canyon demonstrates in grandiose style. The cut of a river through a great canyon, furthermore, commonly forms what's called an "inner gorge," which you'll find in the Grand as well as in Hells Canyon (sometimes called the "Grand Canyon of the Snake River").

Where bygone glaciers have straightened the walls and smoothed the floor of a mountain riverway — as in the great drainages radiating out of the High Wallowas — you might call it a glacial trough or valley (or simply glacial canyon) perhaps slotted by an inner gorge. Below, beyond the influence of ice, the non-glaciated, more V-shaped reach is back in gorge or canyon territory, semantically speaking, depending on a subjective assessment of the channel's width and sidewall steepness.

Moving backward in scale from the grandeur of big canyons, troughs, and gorges, we find an equally intriguing tangle of terms for smaller channels. There's "draw," for instance: the steep crease, trickling with water or not, between hillside or mountainside spurs. Out here, maybe a foothill draw choked with shrubs, or studded with lonesome ponderosas or Douglas-firs; or a mountain draw dark with conifers and maple thickets, strewn with deadwood and boulders, nagged by a cold downslope breeze from higher ground. The distinctive ribbed look of the Grande Ronde Valley's flanks, or the windward side of the Northern Blues above Pendleton or Walla Walla, comes from deep draws, which help drain the mountain front between its larger canyons.

Then there's that catchall category of "gully," of which a draw is a variety, and which bridges the little scar of a rill and the bigger, deeper wound of a ravine or gulch.

"Ravine" — which comes from the French and literally means "violent torrent" — is widely used in English to describe a small gorge or canyon (or, if you'd prefer, an oversized gully).

Here in the Northwest, you don't see ravine show up among formal place names much; the U.S. Geological Survey reports one use in Oregon, Coos County's Dutch John Ravine.

I grew up in Milwaukee along southeastern Wisconsin's Lake Michigan coast, and the most interesting landforms for me as a kid were the winding gullies cutting the lakeshore bluffs and benches down to the water. We knew them firmly as ravines, though a few larger ones were officially (and hyperbolically) named gorges. Along that urbanized waterfront, these wooded ravines drew veins of pocket wilderness through city parks and sprawling suburbs. So my eye sees many ravines out here in Northeast Oregon: the deep slices of creeks up in the mountains or tablelands, fed by draws and gullies and running as branches into the trunks of gorges or canyons.

Photo by Ethan Shaw

A stream cuts through rock in the Hurricane Creek Canyon of the Wallowa Mountains.

In the Appalachians, draws heading in three-sided mountain coves are "hollers"— a variation of "hollow," which shows up on maps in our neck of the woods here and there, and even more so out on the soft uplands of the Umatilla Plateau and the Palouse.

(The excellent glossary of American landscape terms, "Home Ground," edited by Oregonian Barry Lopez, notes that a small Appalachian holler is sometimes referred to as a "clove," as in the cleft of a goat's hoof.)

"Gulch" — a word that, "Home Ground" tells me, spread to the mining districts of the American West from the Pennsylvania Appalachians — is well-represented in Northeast Oregon place names, from forested drainages in the mountains to barren trenches in rolling rangeland. To my mind, a gulch is mostly an open-country feature: a boxy gully in steppeland or desert, or a rimrock canyon in scrubby foothills.

A gulch is often dry, and sounds it from the word. Union and Wallowa counties have a goodly number of named gulches, but nothing compared to Baker County, which boasts more than 100 of them.

Photo by Ethan Shaw

The sculpted, rolling topography near Meacham is typical of the northern Blue Mountains.

See **Canyon** / *Page 2B*