

Local & Region

BHS grad sets climbing record

By Ashly Winchester
For the EO Media Group

Have you ever wondered what school teachers do in the summer?

Well, here is one story you might not expect. Jason Hardrath, a physical education teacher at Bonanza Elementary in southern Oregon, and a 2007 Baker High School graduate, doesn't just talk about fitness. He lives it.

When school released in June, he took to the roads of the Pacific Northwest with big goals in mind. Since then, he has performed some noteworthy feats in the mountains and on trails.

He even took up a part-time position with Shasta Mountain Guides during the peak climbing season. However, his most recent achievement has stirred a bit of conversation in the mountaineering community.

He climbed Mount Rainier, Mount Adams, and Mount Hood in a single day.

You read that right. Hardrath successfully climbed the three tallest peaks of the Northern Cascades in less than 24 hours. Appropriately named the Cascades Trifecta, these towering peaks boast summit elevations of 14,411 feet, 12,280 feet, and 11,250 feet above sea level, respectively.

They are tall enough that many mountaineers dedicate multiple days to climb just one. Combining all three means covering more than 35 miles on foot with over 20,000 feet of vertical gain.

Hardrath is not the first to take on this endeavor. Buzz Burrell and Peter Bakwin, curators of the increasingly popular Fastest Known Time website and podcast, documented the first-known attempt in 2005, taking 28 hours to complete the effort (records include driving time). And earlier this year, Eric Sanders and Mike Chambers became the first-known climbing team to succeed at scaling all three of these skyline-dominating peaks in less than a single calendar day by finishing in 22 hours and 53 minutes.

So what makes this effort by Mr. H, as his students call him, unique?

First of all, he completed the entire effort solo and self-supported. Then there's the fact that he beat the current record by nearly 3½ hours. It's a remarkable feat.

"I really enjoy being out there alone," Hardrath says.

"The solitude allows me to be really in touch with my effort, the conditions around me, and the beauty."

"I am always ready to turn earlier than teamed climbers around me if something seems off," he said regarding the dangers inherent to climbing. "Weather, route conditions, effort levels, my body, I am tuned into all of these. Any one of them can be enough to make me call it a day."

In typical PE-teacher form, Hardrath affirms that fitness is key.

"In an odd way, speed is safety up there. If you can move faster without being winded, keep yourself fed/hydrated, all the while properly performing your skills, that means less time in the elements," he said. "And it is the time up there, in those conditions, that get you. It is a huge confidence boost out there to know that at no point am I more than two to three hours from my car."

With more than 37 successful single-day summit pushes, including a trek up to an elevation of 20,564 feet on Chimborazo in Ecuador, Hardrath seems to have a system.

"I have heard it said that it's the times you turn around, not continuing to the summit, that are the most important to remember.



Jason Hardrath, a 2007 Baker High School graduate who teaches physical education classes at Bonanza Elementary, climbed three mountains in record time this summer.

"I agree," he said. "What good are 30, 40, or even 100 successes if you don't know what made them successful. Maybe you were just lucky. I have to acknowledge that and

remain willing to check myself that I am staying reasonable. You have to know when and why you turn around, and know you'll actually do it." Mountaineers frequently

call it "summit fever" when you fail to turn around at a time that you should. Recent films have depicted what can happen when summit fever takes over rational consider-



Jason Hardrath says climbing alone helps him appreciate "my effort, the conditions around me, and the beauty."

COUNTY

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The commission appointed Baker City Police Department Chief of Police, Ray Duman, to the Board of the Baker County Transportation/Traffic Safety Commission. The commissioners approved the Microenterprise Intergovernmental Agreement between Baker County, Wallowa County, Union County and La Grande. La Grande will administer the program as it is the lead applicant.

The commission discussed adding New Bridge to the New Bridge Water Supply

District Easement. Commission Chair Bill Harvey recommended that Baker County keep its name on the easement in case the district were to go defunct so that the county would retain control of the water. Commissioners Bruce Nichols and Mark Bennett recommended the county remove its name from the easement.

Bennett said by not having the county on the easement, the county is free of any liability and under ORS 401 the county would obtain emergency control of the water district should the New Bridge Water District become defunct.

Commission Chair Harvey said he was worried about any time lapse because of the water source's importance to the county. The commission decided to research the county's liability should the county remain on the easement.

The commission discussed potentially using the Business Oregon Special Public Works Fund to construct the Mason Dam hydroelectric plant. The commission postponed the decision citing the need for further research to determine the profitability of the hydroelectric plant and different interest rates and plans that would satisfy both

parties.

On July 30, the county held an auction for a manufactured home at 14094 Pine Creek Lane. There were no bidders so now the manufactured home is county property and will be included in the sale of the 6.39 acres on Pine Creek Lane. The county acquired the property through foreclosure.

The commission postponed setting the minimum bid to determine whether or not the county would need an easement for road access.

The commissioners postponed their review of quarterly finances until the next session on Sept. 4.

Weather conditions slow spread of Granite Gulch fire

Rain Wednesday night combined with cooler temperatures and higher humidity reduced the spread of the Granite Gulch Fire to a minimum Thursday, although heavier fuels continued to

burn in the interior areas of the fire, according to a press release from the U.S. Forest Service.

"[Thursday], we flew in two new lookouts to watch the southeastern flank to monitor

the fire and alert us to any changes in activity," Incident Commander Adam Wing said in the press release, bringing the total number of fire line personnel on the ground to seven.

Aerial mapping Thursday showed the total footprint of the fire has grown to 4,600 acres. Fire activity is expected to pick up in the next few days as warm, dry weather moves back in.

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ation of the conditions. "It's tough to remain centered and know when to back down when you are pushing your limits," Hardrath said. "But I have spent over a decade of my life refining the fitness and building the skills to be in a place to do these things. This feels like a place to really explore with those. It feels like an art."

"We all have heard stories of the great explorers who pioneered routes and climbs in this country," he said. "In a way, this feels like a way to continue that spirit. I admire all the people who are bringing their experience and creativity (and fitness) to do things in a way not seen before."

When asked to describe Hardrath's style on the mountain, Clayton Herrmann, a fellow guide with Hardrath at Shasta Mountain Guides in Mount Shasta, California, had this to say: "Calculated, passionate, full of heart, grit, real and authentic tenacity with a fire and a dream in his step."

As far as his mind-boggling finishing time, 19 hours and 28 minutes to be exact, Hardrath responded matter-of-factly: "All the metrics of my climbing and descending for this year pointed to sub-20 hours being possible, I just had to be sure to have the logistics between detailed and dialed in. The whole day I had this feeling of enormity for what I was doing, but also a calm sureness it was, indeed, possible for me."

If this has seemed entirely too serious, Hardrath laughs as he says, "I did it [the driving] in a Suzuki Swift."

The Swift is Suzuki's rebranding of the Geo Metro, a vehicle that is somewhat of an icon of small, gutless cars across the nation.

A sticker on the back window reads: "Undercompensating"

To follow Hardrath on Instagram, go to (@jasonhardrath), on Strava, or on Facebook.

Ashly Winchester is a freelance writer and adventure blogger. You can find her on Instagram as @ashly.winchester or at www.wildspaceswildheart.com

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