FREEWAY

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The rest area is at the northern end of the canyon, and when the wind blows out of the south, as it was Wednesday and most of Thursday, that end is rather like the narrow opening at the tip of a funnel.

The extended freeway closure, which capped a week when sections of the main arterial through Northeastern Oregon were closed on five straight days, albeit for shorter durations, was frustrating, said Tom Strandberg, spokesman at ODOT's regional office in La Grande.

But when the wind is whipping snow into a whiteout, closing the freeway is the sensible option, Strandberg said.

"We're doing the right thing, I believe," he said. "We're trying to keep people safe. We can't have people driving around in conditions like that."

Wind, of course, is beyond anybody's control.

(If you still yearn to lay blame, the culprit is what meteorologists call the "pressure gradient." That's the difference in atmospheric pressure between two places. Much as water flows from high ground to low, air flows from high pressure to low. The greater the difference in pressure, the faster the winds tend to be. On Wednesday and Thursday the winds were caused by the presence of a major low-pressure storm advancing off the Pacific Ocean.)

But some of the other freeway closures were caused by a vehicle — or, more often, multiple vehicles — sliding out of control on snow-slickened pavement, Strandberg said.

And at least some of those incidents could in theory have been avoided had the driver or drivers strapped chains to their tires, as ODOT was recommending at times.

"People driving responsibly is a huge part of it," Strandberg said. "We're always trying to encourage people to drive based on the conditions."

Oregon State Police enforce chain requirements, particularly with commercial trucks, but troopers are outnumbered by a wide margin by traffic.

Strandberg said police set up a chain check station near the top of Cabbage Hill, between Meacham and Pendleton, on Wednesday.

Drivers who fail to heed a chain requirement can be fined from $80 to $500.

But Strandberg said the ultimate responsibility lies with drivers.

"We have a lot of closures that are the result of vehicles of all kinds blocking the freeway whose drivers didn't drive according to conditions," he said.

Jensen said he believes crashes, and the resulting freeway closures, would be less frequent if drivers were "more diligent in using chains."

This is the third straight winter that ODOT crews have had rock salt in their snow- and ice-fighting arsenal.

Jensen said salt is an effective tool, albeit one with limitations.

It's best applied when temperatures aren't far below freezing, and ideally before heavy snow has started to fall, he said.

In those conditions the salt, in addition to melting any snow or ice on the freeway, can help prevent snow from bonding to the pavement, making each pass of the snowplow's blade more effective at scraping away the slippery layer.

"It's been working really well," Jensen said.

Just not when the gales are blowing as they were Wednesday night.

Jensen said he talked with colleagues who were trying to spread salt on the freeway around Cabbage Hill. Although the salt was moistened with magnesium chloride, a liquid that also inhibits ice, to make it heavier, the gusts were blowing much of the salt off the freeway, Jensen said.

He said plow drivers had to edge into the far left shoulder even to get some of the salt to stay in the right lane.

The frequent freeway closures left dozens of travelers stranded in Baker City at times. The Baker Truck Corral was a popular spot, with commercial trucks making up close to half the daily traffic volume on the freeway.

"Just really it's been busier," said Aleena Follett, 21, a manager at the Truck Corral, on Thursday morning. "Truckers not being able to get on the roads We're pretty much used to it, it's just the truckers are never happy about it, so it's just a waiting game."

Truck Corral employee Austin Hull, 25, said that during freeway closures workers field a lot of questions from truckers.

"People kind of wandering the store or sitting in the restaurant waiting to find out when the roads are going to open, repeatedly asking us when they're gonna open but we never really know," Hull said. "And then when it's just like chains required up there a lot of trucks don't want to chain up so they'll just sit here and wait and occasionally buy chains if they don't have chains. So really it's just not super, super busy it's just a lot of people in here that we have to kind of work around to help the actual customers."

Clara Knox, who's been assistant manager at the Truck Corral restaurant for almost five years, said the restaurant has stayed open late at times to accommodate stranded drivers.

"There's been all good comments on the food and the service and if it's closed after 10 o'clock then we stay open a little bit longer just to accommodate them," Knox said.

Samantha O'Conner of the Baker City Herald contributed to this story.

TRAVEL

Continued from Page 1A

Dancer's Facebook home — he describes it as an "experiential travel vlog" — is PNW BackStories.

The tourism marketing agencies for Baker, Union and Wallowa counties are sharing the $6,500 cost to bring Dancer to the region for the winter tour, said Timothy Bishop, director of Travel Baker County, the county's contracted tourism promoter.

"It's really good exposure for us," Bishop said.

He said Travel Baker County budgets money every year to host travel writers and videographers, with a focus the past two years on journalists who, like Dancer, create digital content.

Baker County's share of the $6,500 is from a separate marketing fund for the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway, Bishop said. The byway includes sections of Oregon Highway 86 between Baker City and the Idaho border, and Highway 82 between La Grande and Joseph.

When Dancer spent several days in Baker County in early July 2019, taking in events such as the Haines Rodeo as well as mountain biking at Anthony Lakes and visiting downtown Baker City and Halfway, the videos he produced reached more than 317,000 people and generated more than 359,000 views, Bishop said.

Dancer's productions also reach the demographic most desirable for businesses, Bishop said. Statistics from the July visit show the largest reach was with ages 25-34 (42%), followed by ages 18-24 (22%) and ages 35-44 (19%).

Bishop said the PNW BackStories content is popular in the regional metro areas that are vital sources of tourism dollars for Northeastern Oregon — Boise, Portland, Seattle and Spokane.

In addition to its share of the $6,500, Bishop said Travel Baker County is paying Dancer an extra $2,000 to spend three days in Baker County. He'll be making videos in Baker City and Sumpter, and at Anthony Lakes during those days.

Dancer's videos not only can give an immediate boost to local businesses — Bishop said some lodging establishments booked guests last summer who had recently watched the Baker County videos — but the content is available for the county to use in the future to promote attractions.

Dancer said he works with officials in the communities he visits to come up with compelling places to visit and people to feature in his videos.

He said his target audience is travelers who don't want to spend all their time at a five-star resort but instead savor "experiential" travel. That means both active pursuits — hiking, mountain biking, skiing — and meeting local residents at restaurants and other businesses.

"People want to become part of the community during their vacation," Dancer said. "They want more than a vacation — they want an experience."

After his trip to Baker County last summer, Dancer said he was eager to return when winter has transformed the area.

"We've always wanted to come here in the winter," he said. "We want to give people an idea — there's snow and there's fun things to do while you're over here."

Dancer has a personal as well as a professional connection to Baker County.

His mother was a member of the Maxwell family, which has been farming in Haines area for more than a century.

"I've been coming to Haines for family reunions since I was born," said Dancer, 60. "For me it's kind of coming home."

Although Dancer has made videos in Baker and Wallowa counties, this month's trip will mark his first time doing so in Union County.

His itinerary includes the Eagle Cap Extreme Sled Dog races next week in Wallowa County, staying at one snowbound cabin near Cornucopia and another at Anthony Lakes, sampling the food and drink offerings in downtown Baker City, and snowmobiling in Sumpter.

Dancer said he'll try to post live videos whenever cell service allows.

He said viewers enjoy the unedited, unscripted nature of his products.

"It's a lot of work, but it's really fun," Dancer said.

Baker County

CHURCH DIRECTORY

Baker United Methodist Church
Sunday Worship
Casual Service: 8:30 AM
Traditional Service: 10 AM
1919 2nd Street, Baker City
541-523-4201

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship Service
10:30 AM
1995 4th Street, Baker City
541-523-5201
firstpresbaker.blogspot.com

Third & Broadway
541-523-3891
Calvary Baptist Church
Sundays
10 AM Service
& Children's Church
Thursdays
5:30-6:15 pm
Free Community Dinner
Celebrate Recovery Classes
start at 6:15 pm
www.bakercalvarybaptist.com

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH
Sunday Service
11:00 AM
www.ChristianScience.com
3rd & Washington, Baker City
541-523-5911

Baker City
Church of the Nazarene
Sunday Worship 9:45 AM
Pastor Troy Teeter
1250 Hughes Lane, Baker City
(Corner of Cedar & Hughes)
541-523-3533
www.bakernaz.com

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
9 AM - Baker Valley Ward
10:30 AM Baker City 1st Ward
Noon - Baker City 2nd Ward
Family History Center - no cost
Tues & Fri 1-4 PM
Wed & Thurs 10 AM - 1 PM
Wed Evenings 5:30-8:30 PM
2625 Hughes Lane, Baker City
541-523-2397

Elkhorn Baptist Church
Sunday School 10 AM
Morning Worship 11 AM
Evening Worship 6 PM
Discovery Kids Worship
6:30 PM
3520 Birch St, Baker City
541-523-4332

Harvest Church
& HARVEST CHRISTIAN ACADEMY
(Preschool-12 Grade)
Harvest Cafe 9 AM
Morning Worship 10:10 AM
3720 Birch St, Baker City
541-523-4233
The first Sunday of each month is Mission Breakfast. Donations and non-perishable donations for NEOCC are accepted.

New Beginnings Fellowship
Sunday Morning Worship
10:30 AM
Sunday Evening 6 PM
Weds Service 7 PM
Zan & Dawn Coen
1820 Estes, Baker City
541- 524-1394

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
Sunday Service 11 AM
1734 Third Street, Baker City
541-523-3922
firstlutheranbakercity@gmail.com

ST. BRIGID'S IN THE PINES COMMUNITY CHURCH
11:30 a.m. Services
1st & 3rd Sunday
Holy Eucharist
East Auburn Street, Sumpter
541-523-4812
A Mission of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Baker City

BAKER CITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship
First Service 8:30 AM
2nd Service & Sunday School
10 AM
Jr. High & High School Youth
Tues 6:30 PM
Youth Pastor Silas Moe
675 Hwy 7, Baker City • 541-523-5425

SAINT ALPHONSUS HOSPITAL CHAPEL
Open to all patients, family and friends for reflection and prayer.
St. Alphonsus Hospital in Baker City

AGAPE CHRISTIAN CENTER
Sunday Services
10:00 AM & 6:30 PM
South Highway 7,
Baker City
541-523-6586

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
Saturday Worship
11:00 AM
www.bakercitysda.com
17th & Pocahontas, Baker City
541-523-4913

St. Francis De Sales Cathedral
Established 1904
Daily Masses:
M, T, Th, F 9 AM
Day Chapel in Cathedral
Wed Daily Mass 9 AM
at St. Alphonsus Chapel
Sat 8 AM at Day Chapel
Baker City Saturday Mass 6 pm
Baker City Sunday Mass 9:30 am
St. Therese in Halfway 2 pm Sat
St. Anthony's in North Powder
11:30 Sun
541-523-4521
Corner of First & Church, Baker City

St. Stephen's Episcopal
Services at 9 AM
1st & 3rd Sundays, Holy Eucharist
2nd & 4th Sundays, Morning Prayer
5th Sunday, Morning Prayer
2177 First Street • Baker City
Entrance on 1st Street
Corner Church & First Streets
541-523-4812

Faith Center Foursquare
A Four Square Gospel Church
Worship Service
10:45 AM
1839 3rd St, Baker City
541-523-7915

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