

RECREATION
REPORT

ODFW says
wolves killed
llama near
Hilgard

Biologists from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said wolves from the Five Points pack killed on adult llama and injured a second last week near Hilgard west of La Grande.

The animals were found on the afternoon of April 16 in a one-acre enclosure on private land where the llamas were being fed. Biologists found fresh wolf tracks less than 10 yards from the llama carcass, according to a report from ODFW. Tooth wounds on both llamas are clear evidence of a predator attack, and the size, location and severity “are similar to other confirmed wolf attacks on livestock,” according to the report.

The attack was estimated to have happened less than 12 hours before the llamas were found.

Starkey Forest
remains closed
to public due
to pandemic

The U.S. Forest Service’s Starkey Experimental Forest and Range southwest of La Grande will remain closed to public entry until further notice to align with Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order designed to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

The 25,000-acre Starkey Experimental Forest and Range was designated for research in 1940 and is the primary field location for collaborative studies of the effects of deer, elk, and cattle on ecosystems.

Starkey is popular with the public for gathering of shed deer and elk antlers each spring, and a large concentration of 100 or more people traditionally camp in a small area at the main gate in anticipation of opening day, May 1.

“This year, our field staff is extremely limited, owing to stay-at-home orders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are not able to safely accommodate the traditional May 1 opening day,” said Hans Hayden, Starkey area manager. “The governor’s orders also do not allow large groups of the public to congregate, many of whom travel hundreds of miles to camp together at the Starkey entrance. The current pandemic and associated need to avoid large gatherings, maintain public safety, and maintain safety for those who serve the public are all key considerations in delaying our opening until further notice.”

April 21, 2018



Repeating
the ritual

■ Practicing repeat photography at a snow-measuring station in the Elkhorn Mountains northwest of Baker City — and extricating a pickup from a drift

’Tis better to give than to receive, to which I would add that it’s also gratifying to yank somebody’s pickup truck out of the snow.

Especially when the truck’s owner had been stuck for most of a day and had to sleep in the cab overnight in the chilly Elkhorn Mountains.

Being a good Samaritan is rewarding under any circumstances.

But empathy serves as an especially sweet garnish.

I’ve mired a rig in snow a few times myself. I know that helpless feeling as your tires spin, making no progress while turning the implacable snow into an even more treacherous icy slush.

And so when I saw the woman waving her arms over her head, as we plodded in our Toyota FJ Cruiser up the Rock Creek Road on Sunday morning, I sensed that a potential rescue was afoot.

My wife, Lisa, and our kids, Olivia and Max, heard the story while I hacked at the snow, still rimed with ice after a sub-freezing night, that imprisoned the Ford F-150.

The truck’s owner got stuck while turning around at a point where snow spanned the narrow road and made further progress — particularly in her rear-wheel drive Ford — impossible.

She told Lisa that some people in a Jeep had driven by around 5 p.m. the day before.

April 22, 2017



April 19, 2020



April 21, 2019



They told her they’d return with a truck to pull her out but they never showed up.

Unable to get a cell signal, she stayed in her truck, running the engine for the heater occasionally as the temperature dipped into the upper 20s.

Although the woman didn’t have a shovel she had something more important, and something I didn’t have — a nylon tow strap.

(A bright yellow one that looked so pristine I doubt it had ever been deployed.)

I backed up the FJ Cruiser, hooked up the strap, and less than a minute later the pickup was back on the road.

It was among the easier extrications in which I’ve been involved. I didn’t feel quite the height of elation that I remember from episodes when I finally broke my own rig free from the stubborn snow — an exhilaration I can liken only to being released from a cell, though I’ve never been incarcerated. But it was a satisfying start to our hike.

We were all pleased to have helped someone, and as we trudged up the road toward our destination we talked about what it would be like to spend the night in a stranded pickup, and we pondered why the people in the Jeep didn’t pull the truck out the previous evening.

The purpose that had brought us to our fortuitous meeting with the pickup’s owner was photography.

Repeat photography, to be specific.

The idea is to take a photograph and then return to that place, preferably at about the same time of the year, and duplicate the photograph. Repeat photography can show how a landscape changes over time — the more time between photos, the more dramatic the changes tend to be.

My purposes at Rock Creek are considerably more modest.

This was the fourth straight year I’ve hiked to the automated snow-measuring station at Eilertson Meadow, toward the end of April, to photograph the station and document the depth, or in one case the absence, of snow.

This has no research value, to be sure. But it gives me a convenient excuse for hiking into the Elkhorns in spring, when the sky, against its backdrop of peaks still bearing most of their winter snow load, achieves a depth of blue unique to the season.

Lisa went along last April, but this was the first time our kids made the trip too. Although the round-trip hike was about 6 miles it’s not especially difficult, as snowmobiles have compacted the snow on the road to a surface as firm as bare ground.

As the photos show, the snow depth this year is similar to 2017, much less than in 2019 and more than the nearly snow-free 2018. Data from Snotels across Oregon are available at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/or/snow/

IF YOU GO....

From the railroad tracks in Haines:

- Drive west on Anthony Lakes Highway for 1.7 miles to the first major corner. Turn left onto Pocahontas Road, then stay right, after about two-tenths of a mile, on South Rock Creek Lane.
- Follow paved South Rock Creek Lane for about 3.7 miles, then continue into the mountains when the road turns to well-graded gravel.

- Continue on gravel for about 2 miles to a Forest Service sign for Killamacue trailhead and Rock Creek Lake trailhead. The road becomes a dirt track here, suitable for four-wheel drive, high-clearance vehicles. Snowdrifts likely will continue to block the road, at some point below Eilertson Meadow, for at least a few more weeks.

- From the Forest Service sign, the Killamacue Lake trailhead is 2 miles, and Eilertson Meadow 3.5 miles. The Snotel is just east of the meadow, on the south side of the road

- The Rock Creek Road is a public route. However, it passes through private land near the Killamacue Lake trailhead, and at Eilertson Meadow, so stick to the road. Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative owns the property at Eilertson Meadow, including the cabin at the meadow’s eastern edge.