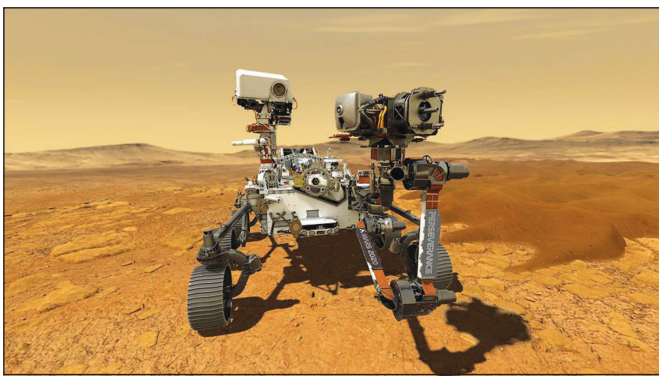


# Rover lands on Mars

By Marcia Dunn  
AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A NASA rover streaked through the orange Martian sky and landed on the planet Thursday, Feb. 18, accomplishing the riskiest step yet in an epic quest to bring back rocks that could answer whether life ever existed on Mars.

Ground controllers at the space agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, leaped to their feet, thrust their arms in the air and cheered in both triumph and relief on receiving confirmation that the six-wheeled Perseverance had touched down on the red planet, long a deathtrap for incoming spacecraft. "Now the amazing science starts,"



Contributed Artwork

A rendering of NASA's Perseverance rover on Mars. The rover will look for signs of ancient life and conduct experiments for possible future astronaut missions.

a jubilant Thomas Zurbuchen, NASA's science mission chief, said at a news conference.

Perseverance, the biggest, most advanced rover ever sent by NASA, became the ninth spacecraft since the 1970s to successfully land on Mars, every one of them from the U.S.

The car-size, plutonium-powered

vehicle arrived at Jezero Crater, hitting NASA's smallest and trickiest target yet: a 5-by-4-mile strip on an ancient river delta full of pits, cliffs and rocks. Scientists believe that if life ever flourished on Mars, it would have happened 3 billion to 4 billion years ago, when water still flowed on the planet.

Over the next two years, Percy, as it is nicknamed, will use its 7-foot arm to drill down and collect rock samples containing possible signs of bygone microscopic life. Three to four dozen chalk-size samples will be sealed in tubes and set aside to be retrieved eventually by another rover and brought home by another rocket ship.

The goal is to get them back to Earth as early as 2031.

## Man suspected in thefts from St. Francis Cathedral

A 31-year-old man arrested Thursday, Feb. 18, for allegedly stealing items from several cars in Baker City is also a suspect in the theft of gold plates and other items from St. Francis de Sales Catholic Cathedral.



Thomas

Baker City Police arrested Joshua Milton Thomas late Thursday. He was taken to the Baker County Jail, where he remained Friday on charges of aggravated theft by receiving, unauthorized entry of a motor vehicle, attempted entry of a motor vehicle and unlawful possession of heroin.

Police started investigating after a resident stopped an officer about 10:15 p.m. Thursday and said a man in dark clothing was trying to enter vehicles on Kirkway Drive at the north end of

town, according to a press release from Baker City Police.

Officers followed tracks in the snow leading to the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway and found Thomas. While talking to him, officers found that he had several items reported stolen from the cathedral, including the Bishop's chalice, a second chalice, a silver and gold crucifix and three gold plates. The estimated value of all the items is \$11,000, according to the press release.

Police Chief Ray Duman said officers will continue the investigation to determine whether Thomas stole the items.

Police determined that Thomas entered at least six vehicles on Kirkway Drive and took items with a total value of about \$600. Thomas also tried to break into at least 13 other vehicles on that street.

## COVID-19

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Baker County recorded six new cases on Wednesday, Feb. 17.

That was the highest one-day total in more than a month. There were 11 new cases on Jan. 15. Since then the county has averaged slightly fewer than two cases per day. Prior to Wednesday's six cases, the highest one-day total was five cases, on Feb. 2. The county recorded no new cases on 10 days over the past 34 days, including Feb. 13 and 14.

But over the following four days the county had 14 new cases.

Baker County dropped to lower risk, the least restrictive of the Oregon Health Authority's (OHA) four-level system, on Feb. 12.

The county will stay at that level for at least two weeks, as the risk levels are

updated every two weeks.

Risk levels for the next two-week period, Feb. 26 through March 11, will be based on COVID-19 statistics for the period Feb. 7-20.

As a medium-population county, Baker's risk level is based on two measurements:

- New cases from Feb. 7-20.

To stay in the lower-risk level, which has the least-severe restrictions on businesses and other activities, the county must have fewer than 30 new cases during that period.

As of Thursday, Feb. 18, the county's total was 23 cases. That means the county, to stay in the lower-risk level, could have no more than six new cases total from Friday and Saturday.

- Percentage of positive tests from Feb. 7-20.

To stay in the lower-risk level, the county needs to have a positivity rate of less than 5%.

Bennett said that as of

Thursday, the county's positivity rate for the measuring period was about 3.9%.

He said county officials have asked state officials to consider more than just the raw numbers and percentages in deciding risk levels.

Bennett said Matt Scarfo, a commissioner in Union County, has raised the situation in which, for instance, five members of a single household all test positive.

Bennett said he agrees with Scarfo that in such instances, if counting all five of those cases would push a county into a higher risk level, state officials should make an exception because a single house, if all its members quarantine, would pose little to no risk of further spreading the virus.

State officials already take a similar approach with infections among inmates at state prisons.

The state doesn't consider

those cases in calculating the county's risk level because inmates don't circulate in the community.

Specifically with test positivity rates, Bennett said he hopes state officials understand that as Baker and other counties have shifted their focus from testing to vaccinating residents against COVID-19, fewer people are being tested.

He said the county can't schedule both vaccination clinics — 315 people received their first dose during an event at Baker High School on Feb. 12 — and large testing clinics.

The county's number of tests dropped from 489 the week of Jan. 24, to 284, 282 and 99 the following three weeks.

The concern, Bennett said, is that if the county reverts to the situation the prevailed for much of the pandemic — with most of the people being

tested those who have symptoms — the county's positivity rate is certain to increase.

But that trend doesn't necessarily mean the virus is spreading more rapidly, Bennett said.

Baker County officials have asked, to no avail thus far, to have the county moved from the medium-population group — from 15,000 to 29,999 — to the smallest population group, counties with fewer than 15,000 residents.

Baker County has the smallest population, at about 16,800, of the medium-size counties.

The difference is significant — for the smallest counties, only the number of new cases is used to determine their risk level.

If Baker County were moved to that group, its test positivity rate would no longer affect its risk level.

If the county doesn't meet the standards to stay at lower

risk, it likely would move to the medium-risk category for the period Feb. 26-March 11.

This would have some effect on restaurants and bars, which under the lower risk can have indoor dining up to 50% of capacity, and up to eight people per table. Such businesses can stay open until midnight.

Under moderate-risk rules, indoor dining could continue up to 50% of capacity, but there would also be a limit of 100 people total, including staff, if that's a lower number than the 50% of capacity. The limit per table would drop to six, and businesses would have to close at 11 p.m. rather than midnight.

The differences between lower and moderate risk limits are similar for gyms, theaters and museums. The occupancy limit would remain at 50% for those venues, but with the additional limit of 100 people total.

## SNOW

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But because skiers and snowboarders have to drive to the resort, and because they like to park when they get there, this wintry barrage, even as it created conditions that skiers dream about, was causing a nightmare for Anthony Lakes' maintenance crew.

They had 9 miles of steep road to plow.

And a couple of acres of parking lots.

"Our crew's been at it since 6 a.m. Wednesday (Feb. 17)," Johnson said on Thursday morning. "And they're still going."

The weather offered only a brief respite for the beleaguered plow drivers as they prepared the ski area for its opening Thursday morning. Snow tapered off late Wednesday, but the latest storm arrived Thursday and added another half a foot or so to the ski area's base.

Anthony Lakes is open Thursday through Sunday.

On Wednesday afternoon the ski area, via its website, asked visitors who were planning to drive up the mountain that day and stay overnight in their RVs to wait until Thursday morning to give workers time to push the snow out of parking areas.

Johnson said he's never seen so much snow fall in one week during his decade as general manager.

The weather pattern during that period illustrated the sometimes dramatic differences between what happens in the mountains and in the valleys.

Although several inches of snow also fell in Baker City on Monday, Feb. 15, the snow there all but stopped by late that day.

But snow continued to fall, heavily at times, at Anthony Lakes



Chelsea Judy/Contributed Photo

A restroom beside a cross-country ski trail at Anthony Lakes bears a heavy snow load after a week in which up to 4 feet of snow fell at the resort in the Elkhorn Mountains.

Tuesday and Wednesday.

This was the result of a persistent air flow from the west-northwest, according to the National Weather Service.

As that air, laden with moisture after crossing the Pacific Ocean, slammed into the Elkhorn Mountains it was forced to rise, which caused it to cool. And because cooler air can hold less moisture in suspension, the resulting clouds dropped much of their moisture, as snow, on the slopes at Anthony Lakes.

And on the road and parking lots, of course.

The same pattern pummeled other mountain areas, including the northern Blues around Tollgate, with prodigious amounts of snow over the same period.

Downwind valleys such as Baker, meanwhile, were in the rain shadow — or, rather, snow shadow, given the temperatures.

The official snow-measuring station nearest Anthony Lakes is an automated device in a meadow about half a mile east of the ski area itself.

That station, which reports snow depth at midnight each day, recorded 43 inches of snow at the start of Thursday, Feb. 11.

During the next seven days, concluding at the start of Feb. 18, the snow depth increased to 79 inches — a total of 36 inches.

Another station, in the northern Blues near Tollgate, recorded similar totals for the week. There the snow depth rose from 47 inches early on Feb. 11 to 90 inches the morning of Feb. 17 — 43 total inches in six days.

At Schneider Meadows, in the southern Wallowa Mountains north of Halfway, the snow depth increased from 68 to 88 inches.

The storm that started Thursday afternoon and continued overnight delivered another 7 inches at Schneider Meadows.

Two sites at the southwest corner of the Wallows both measured about 30 inches of new snow over the past week.

A station at Taylor Green recorded a snow depth increasing from

## Anthony Lakes Veterans Appreciation Day Feb. 22

While the format of the event is different this year due to COVID-19 safety measures, veterans will "own the mountain" Monday, Feb. 22, according to Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, which is hosting its sixth-annual Veterans Appreciation Day.

Veterans, active military and their families will have the resort to themselves. Cosponsored by the Center for Human Development Inc., La Grande, the event offers free ski lessons, equipment rentals, lift tickets and lunch at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, 19 miles west of North Powder off Interstate 84 at exit 285.

The resort's annual Veterans Appreciation Day is open to local veterans and their spouse/partner and any dependents 18 and younger.

Tickets need to be reserved ahead of time. To register and reserve lift tickets, go to [www.anthonylakes.com/veterans-appreciation-day](http://www.anthonylakes.com/veterans-appreciation-day).

The resort requires proof of military duty to pick up the tickets Monday at the window on the west side of the lodge. Participants will receive a packet of information as well regarding veterans services.

Sign-up for lessons will be at the ticket booth. Lessons are at 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. The rental shop will open at 9 a.m.

A free lunch will be served noon to 1 p.m. through the window of the Smokin' Starbottle. Alcoholic beverages will be available for purchase.

Face coverings are required at all times within the permit area, including parking lots. Guests are encouraged to arrive in groups of three and to ride the chairlift with those you traveled with. The lodge is closed except for bathroom use.

For information, contact Brian Blais at the Center for Human Development at 541-962-8842 or [bblais@chdinc.org](mailto:bblais@chdinc.org), or Chelsea at Anthony Lakes at 541-856-3277 or [chelsea@anthonylakes.com](mailto:chelsea@anthonylakes.com).

— The (La Grande) Observer

44 to 75 inches, and at nearby West Eagle Meadows, the snow depth increased from 61 to 91 inches.

Considerable amounts of snow fell even at lower-elevation sites, such as Tipton, along Highway 7 between Sumpter and Austin Junction.

The snow depth there rose this week from 32 to 52 inches.

Although the snow was mostly light and powdery — the stuff skiers and snowboarders covet — there was enough of it to significantly increase the water content in the snowpack.

That measurement, not depth, is the one irrigation district managers and farmers heed, because the water content more accurately reflects the amount of water that will trickle into streams and reservoirs this spring and summer.

The average water content from more than a dozen sites around Northeast Oregon was cumulatively 11% below the 30-year average on Feb. 2.

By Feb. 19 the water content from those sites was 17% above average.

## Umatilla County infant first in Oregon younger than 9 to die from COVID

By Bryce Dole  
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — The Oregon Health Authority has reported the state's first COVID-19-related death of a child between 0-9 years old — an infant boy from Umatilla County.

The boy tested positive for COVID-19 on Jan. 17 and died that

same day at Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland, Washington, according to a press release from OHA on Thursday, Feb. 18. He had unspecified underlying health conditions.

"Every death from COVID-19 is a tragedy, even more so the death of a child," Dr. Dean Sidelinger, OHA's health officer and state epidemiologist, said in a press release. "The death of an infant is extremely rare. This news represents a tremendous loss to the mother and family. My thoughts are with them during this difficult time."

Children with certain underlying medical conditions, as well as infants younger than 1 year old, could be at increased risk for developing

severe symptoms. Most children who have experienced severe illness from COVID-19 have had underlying medical conditions, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to the CDC as of Feb. 17, 140 reported COVID-19 deaths have come from children and teenagers under the age of 14.