



Putting a modern blackpowder pistol to work in the fields. This is a CVA Optima V2 50-caliber with a Hawke optic.

Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

Keeping it organic

Hunting sage rats protects crops, helps farmers preserve organic status

GARY LEWIS
ON THE TRAIL

One of our springtime traditions is to hunt sage rats (a.k.a. Belding’s ground squirrels) in the alfalfa and orchard grass fields near places like Enterprise, Summer Lake, Bonanza and Crane.

For the last few years, we have camped near Crane with Diamond A Guides, which is owned by Justin and Nikki Aamodt. The object is to enjoy spring weather and fine shooting while helping to keep sage rat populations from wiping out crops.

Our efforts help the farmers and ranchers keep a certified organic label on their products. Absent shooters with precision optics and fast, small bullets, the farmers would have to poison the destructive vermin we call the sage rat.

Paul Donheffner, a fellow state board member with me in the Oregon Hunters Association, was with me.

With the Steens in the windshield, pointed south and east on Highway 78 we spotted a bull in a rancher’s field, expired of nat-



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

A cast-off antelope sheath found in the alfalfa.

ural causes. It was lying on its side with two legs up in the air at a 45-degree angle. Bloated. Room temperature. Eighty-seven degrees.

“That’s the only meat that would be legal to harvest in Oregon, if IP-13 becomes law,”

Donheffner said. Dead of natural causes.

Initiative Petition 13, if you haven’t heard about it, is a thinly disguised stab to the heart for Oregon families, couched in cruelty prevention.

We had a few extra min-

utes and stopped at Burns Pond, which is just a few miles east of Burns, and caught a half-dozen rainbows on our spinning rods. We would not have been able to do that either, if IP-13 was law of the land.

After a great dinner, a good night’s sleep and the best breakfast so far of 2021, we walked out under blue skies to do our part to keep it organic.

When alfalfa and orchard grasses are farmed under an organic label, the land is fertilized with the passive byproducts of livestock. In a split-plot experiment, the effects of dairy manure were compared side-by-side with chemical fertilizer. The goal was to determine soil quality properties and carbon sequestration in alfalfa and orchard grass forage systems.

Five years later, soil core samples were collected at random and analyzed to determine biological, chemical and physical properties. Results showed long-term application of dairy manure significantly increased total organic microbial biomass, potentially mineralizable, extractable and labile carbon pools and improved soil

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Getting into gravel

Couple plans to add routes in NE Oregon to their gravel road bicycling website

By JOANNA MANN
Baker City Herald

The popularity of bicycling on gravel roads is on the rise, and a couple who founded a website dedicated to the topic plan to add 35 new routes around Baker County and Northeastern Oregon to their list.

Linda and Kevin English of Bend started Dirty Freehub — dirtyfreehub.com — six years ago.

After their first visit to Baker City the couple knew they needed to map routes in the region. They were especially taken with the Anthony Lakes area, naming a ride in that area “Tony” and adding it to their bucket list.

The route isn’t on their website yet.

“It’s such a beautiful ride,” Linda English said. “It’s a ride where people will go, ‘Oh my gosh, that was incredible.’ ”

English said she and her husband started the online guide after riding on a road near traffic one day and seeing a gravel road, running beside the crowded paved road, and realizing they could have been riding on the gravel instead.

“We realized the biggest problem is people had no idea where to ride,” Linda said.

The ideal conditions for gravel cyclists are good roads, variety in the route and gorgeous scenery. Each new section of a route is called an anchor point. Dirty Freehub has plenty of long and short routes, and experienced bicyclists can string multiple routes together to create one long ride perfectly suited to their needs.

There are training routes for a “quick after-work ride” and “five star” routes that showcase the best of the best gravel roads. Each route is mapped out and tested by the Dirty Freehub team to ensure that it is up to the website’s standards and does not go over any private land. People can also submit routes in their hometowns that they think would make a good gravel ride.

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Spend less money, more time outdoors

TOM CLAYCOMB
BASE CAMP

OK, it’s pretty simple. You only have X amount of dollars you can blow. The more you scrimp, the more outdoor adventures you can partake in. Right? So, this week let’s go little deeper than we did in my last column. I could sum up this whole article in two words — go cheap. But don’t be over the top cheap or it’s no fun. As Katy would say, “You don’t want to be tight to a fright.”

So how do you do that? Tent camp. One time I took the girls to the coast. We’d camp one or two nights and then get a motel so we could all clean up. That was a great trip. When camping on a beach you don’t really even need sleeping pads, the sand is soft. But, what if the girls balk? Maybe you have to break down and buy a camper. Everyone’s situation is a little different.

Depending on where you’re going, but as a general rule, it’s



Tom Claycomb/Contributed Photo

Eating oatmeal and fresh huckleberries and drinking a motel coffee packet is about as cheap of meal as you could dream of.

going to be a lot cheaper to buy your groceries at home. And usually, you’ll be in spots where there nothing available anyway. For sure you always want to take enough clothes and gear. They will always cost you more on the road.

Cooking ahead

Sometimes it’s smart to cook at

least two meals ahead of time. For instance, when elk hunting. On a hard week of elk hunting at least a couple of nights you’re not going to get back to camp until way after dark. You’ll be so ragged out that you don’t even have enough energy to cook.

For the above scenario I’ll make a pot of stew and a pot of chili, and freeze both. Frozen,

they will serve the dual purpose of acting as ice in your cooler. Drag into camp, throw one in a pan over the fire, heat and eat and go to bed. My buddy Shawn pre-makes burritos which heat up nicely. Or you can take cans of chili.

One time years ago, I took a buddy to one of my secret fishing holes. I cooked dinner and he whipped out paper plates and plastic silverware. I always used a camp set. He said I came to fish, not waste time washing dishes three times per day. There’s some truth to his reasoning.

Some day I’ll write a whole article on this subject — camp boxes. Ever since high school I’ve had a camp box. I always use a wood box but some people use a big plastic container. You have to have a camp box or invariably you’ll forget to pack something every trip. A can opener, a skillet or something.

To stock up a camp box can be inexpensive. Go to Goodwill and buy six plastic plates, stackable glasses and coffee cups. Same with silverware, spatulas, pans, skillets and a coffee pot. And

don’t forget to stock your box up with spices. Motel coffee packs work great for making coffee and are compact.

Some things you don’t want to buy used. For instance, lanterns and stoves. They’re key items and if they don’t work, they can spoil a trip. I like the old school lanterns but I’ve got to admit, battery operated ones are sweet for using in your tent. Who hasn’t knocked over a lantern in a tent and the hot lantern burned a hole in the tent?

One word of warning

Be careful if you run a lantern, stove or tent heater in your tent. They can burn up all of the oxygen and kill you.

Always take two spare tires. Once while moose hunting over by Yellowstone I woke up three mornings in a row with flats. First off, it’s a pain running to town to get it fixed and secondly, it’s probably going to be higher than at home. Go to the junkyard to get one or two extras.

Splurge a night or two and

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