

CREEPY BUT COOL

Abandoned mine near Granite is the perfect place to make a horror movie



JAYSON JACOBY
ON THE TRAIL

I know the perfect place to make a horror movie. This is superfluous knowledge, to be sure, as I am still waiting, with an increasing lack of patience, for Hollywood to solicit my site location expertise.

In the meantime Cabell City, one of the least known but more interesting ghost “towns” in Northeastern Oregon, is ready to make a creepy backdrop for the sort of film in which teenagers are picked off one by one while wandering about asking “who’s there?” and invariably slinking into the darkest recesses of whatever buildings they come across rather than just running away.

I subjected the word “town” to the dubious purgatory of quotation marks because the place is not, precisely speaking, a town at all.

At least not in the way that other ghost towns, such as Granite, Bourne and Cornucopia, are.

Cabell City is the site of an abandoned gold mine along Onion Creek, a tributary of the North Fork John Day River about eight miles north of Granite.

It was never incorporated, nor did it boast a post office.

Yet Cabell City, whatever it lacks in official government recognition, has some of the best-preserved mining buildings in the region, including, most unusually, an intact home.

Relatively intact, anyway.

The house, which is well-appointed with packrat nests and piles of their diminutive droppings, is eerie enough to provoke an involuntary shudder in people who think “The Blair Witch Project” was actually a documentary.

The other buildings, including a multi-level mill chock full of cables, belts, chains and hulking metal machines that a miner might recognize, would also make fine settings for the bloody scenes that define the slasher genre.

It’s not unusual, certainly, to find scraps of machinery, or the ruins of a cabin, at a mine site.

But Cabell City’s structures



The mill at Cabell City on July 31, 2021.

Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

A metal plate identifies a piece of equipment in the mill building at Cabell City.

are unusually sound, it seems to me.

A likely explanation is that the site is public land; for some reason, unlike dozens of other mining properties, it was never patented into private land.

Cabell City is, however, an active mining claim, so although you can walk around and peer into the creepiest nooks and crannies, you can’t pan Onion Creek or otherwise prospect for precious metals on the 60-acre site.

I have long been aware of Cabell City. It’s shown on most maps, and I have a passel of those.

But until late June I had never

IF YOU GO

If you’re coming from the north, from the intersection of Forest Road 73 (Elkhorn Drive byway) and Road 52 (Blue Mountains byway) drive south for about 1.7 miles, and turn left on Road 7335 (at the edge of a meadow). If you’re coming from Granite, to the south, drive north on Road 73 for 6.7 miles to the Road 7335 junction.

Drive east on Road 7335 for about 1.7 miles to Road 110, on the left. There is a barricade (open) at the start of Road 110. Continue for about a quarter mile to a large campsite on the right. To reach Cabell City cemetery, walk up the road to the left, which crosses Onion Creek on a wooden bridge. To see the mill, house and other buildings, walk east up the main road, which is crowded by overhanging alder trees.

This website has photos and more information about Cabell City: <https://bit.ly/3ATQPHt>

visited, even though a road — rough but not awful — leads right to the spot.

I was so taken with the place that I went back a month later to show my parents, who have an affinity for historical sites, and in particular mines.

The namesakes for the city were brothers Fred E. and John B. Cabell.

According to the McArthurs’ “Oregon Geographic Names” — as indispensable as a book can be if you have any interest in our state — the Cabells located the La Bellevue mine in 1875. That mine is a mile and a half or so east of Cabell City, near the top of the ridge that divides the Onion Creek and Baldy Creek drainages.

The brothers were listed in the 1900 Census as living in the Granite precinct.

Curiously, “Oregon Geographic Names” states that only the cemetery at Cabell City has survived; there is no mention of the mill, house or other buildings.

The cemetery is a tenth of a mile or so northwest of the mill and house. It’s a tiny place, maybe 30 feet by 15, with three white crosses surrounded by a metal fence.

According to the McArthurs, a 1980 Forest Service document notes that the cemetery contains the graves of Fred Cabell, his wife, Johanna, and their eight-year-old daughter, whose first name is not listed.

Fred Cabell died in May 1914 at age 70, his wife on April 12, 1923, age 78.

Although Cabell City is less than 2 miles from the paved Elkhorn Drive Scenic Byway, it seems to me much more

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Berries are sweet symbols of summer in the mountains



TOM CLAYCOMB
BASE CAMP

This week I was having a hard time trying to decide whether to write a Backpacking 101 article followed up by an article on Kolby’s and my backpacking trip last week or Katy’s and my crappie fishing trip. But then while Kolby and I were backpacking we stumbled into a gold mine of berries.

This is the best berry season that I’ve ever seen. The huckleberries were thick. We had backpacked into the backcountry to flyfish but who can just walk by a loaded down huckleberry bush? A handful of huckleberries can spruce up the blandest bowl of morning oatmeal, can’t it? Or you can throw a small handful in your water bottle to make a real fruit-flavored drink. A few huckleberries sprinkled on a peanut butter sandwich raises a peanut butter sandwich to an elite sandwich level.

What do we do now? I’d packed in wayyy too much gear



Tom Claycomb/Contributed Photo

The ultimate breakfast — a cup of coffee and oatmeal with huckleberries.

and about died on the pack in. But how do you just nonchalantly stroll by bush heavily laden with huckleberries? So, we gorged for a while and picked a couple of bottles full for our oatmeal the next morning and enough to take home to make some homemade ice cream and then it was back to flyfishing.

But then matters got more

serious. Kolby stumbled onto some raspberries. Fishing was done for the moment. Finally, she got her fill and I was able to coax her on down the trail to fish the next hole.

So with the above said, we’ll talk about backpacking and crappie fishing in the next three articles but for today, it’s berry picking! Berry season is in full

swing right now and you need to drop everything and scramble up to the mountains with a handful of empty buckets.

Every year after gobbling down the first handful I’m reminded of how much I love huckleberries. They’re the best berry in the world, with wild raspberries trailing right behind them.

I know your first question will be, where do I find them? I found mine at about 4,500 to 5,000 feet. As we were headed home, we found a bunch more up high near the passes but only a couple of their berries were ripe, 95% of them were green as a gourd and tiny. So up at the higher elevations, they were a long way off from being ripe. If you go up this weekend, I’d advise you start at 5,000 feet.

If you’re not familiar with huckleberries they’re a small bush. I’ve never measured them but I’d say they’re about 28 inches tall on the average. They grow a small purple berry that is maybe one-quarter inch in diameter, and some will be smaller. I find most of mine on hillsides. I’ve never seen them down low in flat areas.

You’ll find them on the side hills of trails and roads but of course it’s easy access to the ones along roads so they’ll get picked fast by everyone. That’s the area they seem to like. We find our raspberries intermixed in the same type of terrain.

But we also find a lot of randomly placed raspberry bushes when we walk off a trail down to our fishing holes in the rock/boulder slides. It almost seems that they do best in the worst possible spots. But granted, we still find a high percentage of them along the trails interspersed with the huckleberries.

Once in a while I hear people say that they picked two to four gallons of huckleberries the past weekend. I don’t know. I’ve never picked that many in one setting. Maybe they’re talking about how many their whole church family picked. Or maybe I’m just an amateur berry picker. But regardless, instead of taking five-gallon buckets I’d suggest taking a large-mouth water bottle to put them in while picking and then you can transfer them to a bigger bucket at

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