

Fishing, with elbow room

By Tim Trainor
For The Blue Mountain Eagle

Earlier this summer, I had the pleasure of spending a few weeks in Grant County, helping transition the *Blue Mountain Eagle* newspaper in John Day from the steady editing hand of Scotta Callister to another full-time employee who will be the eyes and ears of the community for a long time to come.

It was grand to be transplanted to that wild part of the world for a few days.

Based in Pendleton, I left a few days early and camped along the North Fork of the John Day River with friends. The fishing was slow during the warm afternoons, but at dusk and dawn nice rainbows consistently rose out of deep, cool water to sip dry flies.

One morning after coffee, we were enlightened as to one reason why the fishing was slow during midday: a merganser dove into unremarkable water right in front of us, emerging with a fish bigger than anything we had hooked all weekend. After a short tussle, the bird won and flew away with lunch.

That's not something you see in Portland, nor many places in this world.

On arrival in John Day, I drove and walked up Little Canyon Mountain to get a view of the city and valley. I walked past a little mining claim, still being worked, its details and ownership scratched into a post.

This is real working country, and country that has been worked over.

To look into a pit that has been dug with human hands, and imagine the shiny things that make that work worthwhile, is to view another rare thing on Earth.

Communities with gold in the hills – both literally and figuratively – have an incredible value. And it's the hills and valleys of John Day Country that really shine.

For anglers, it starts with big runs of steelhead and salmon on the John Day River near Kimberly. That section offers the rare opportunity to bank fish for trophy animals in productive areas without an angler feeling as packed in as a sardine. The size of the river means it can be fished just as easily from a driftboat or the bank, giving anglers plenty of options.

You can fish the John Day all the way down to where it connects to the Columbia. Sometimes fish stack up there for days to

wait out more suitable water levels, which means the catching can be dynamite at times.

But fishing in John Day isn't always about trophies.

The high country ponds can be excellent for trout, and sometimes even for bass and other warmwater fish you associate more with the bayous of Louisiana. The hundred-degree days of a John Day summer can also resemble the Deep South, with many fishing holes turning into swimming holes by late afternoon.

The small creeks provide excellent stream fishing for small trout, and the occasional large one. The North Fork John Day features excellent wilderness access too, so if you are willing to hump it you can be all but assured that you will be the only angler to ply that piece of water all day – maybe all season, depending on how far you go. The North Fork Malheur is prime bull trout habitat – catch and release, of course, with that federally-listed endangered species.

Magone Lake, not far out of John Day city limits, is an ODFW-stocked lake where brook trout can be reeled in on a regular basis.

Even at the city park in downtown John Day, a man was fly casting out into a warm pond as dusk finally descended on a hot night. He didn't have much luck attracting trout, but he brought in plenty of fellow park-goers. Everyone in John Day Country likes to talk about fishing.

As for the strange and aesthetically pleasing fly cast, the angler described



Joe Hittle and his son enjoy a day out on the water fishing in Grant County.

Courtesy photo

it as "just like perfecting a golf swing."

In all my years of fly fishing, I'd never heard it explained that way. But it was right on.

And that circles back to the best superlative I can give to John Day Country:

it's not like other places. You'll see and hear and experience things there that you won't anywhere else.

—Tim Trainor is the opinion page editor of *The East Oregonian*. He can be reached at ttrainor@eastoregonian.com.

Eagle Cap Excursion Train

Departs from the new Elgin Depot for a 3.5 hour train ride beside the scenic Grande Ronde and Wallowa Rivers.

Tickets and information, 800.323.7330
eaglecaptrainrides.com

Grant County Automotive

For all your automotive needs!

Automotive & ATV:
Repair • Service • Parts
on all makes & models

200 E. Main St., John Day
541-575-0211

JAVA JUNGLE & TROPICAL TAN

We Deliver!

- Coffee
- Sandwiches
- Salad
- Smoothies
- Italian Sodas
- Tea
- Baked Goods
- Try our Chicken Salad Sandwich!

John Day • 142 E Main • 541-575-2224
Prairie City • 119 Front St. • 541-820-3762

Norco can provide you or your loved one with the equipment needed to remain safe and comfortable at home, whether it be oxygen, bathroom safety supplies, walkers, hospital beds or something else. We provide in-home delivery and pick-up for qualifying equipment.

Life Without Boundaries

Norco 437 W. Main • John Day
541-575-0372

- Medical Oxygen
- Blood Pressure Monitors
- Diabetic Supplies
- Hospital Beds
- Incontinence Products
- Infant Monitoring & Phototherapy
- Lift Chairs
- Orthopedic Supplies & Braces
- Personal Care Products
- Therapeutic Support Surfaces
- Walking Aids
- Wheelchairs & Scooters

HOSPITAL & HOMECARE MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Your one stop shop for all your outing needs!



- Picnic Supplies
- Snacks
- Beverages
- Games

- Hats
- Sunscreen
- Neck coolers
- Sunglasses
- Bandannas
- Gifts



Prairie Hardware & Gifts Beautiful Downtown Prairie City
Mon-Sat 9am-6pm
541-820-3739

FATHER OF energetic kids, be fit and join training work

ADVENTURER seeks adventure. Please be able to relocate. All responsibilities. Looking for



DEPENDABLE and KNOWLEDGEABLE agent seeks customers looking for real PROTECTION and long term RELATIONSHIP.

SINGLE, ARTSY LADY SEEKS SINGLE ARTSY GUY. If you love painting, decorating, baking and

Jeanette Hueckman, Agent
Jennifer Reimers, Office Representative

Look no further.



State Farm

101 W. Main Street, John Day • 541-575-2073 • www.jeanettehueckman.com

State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company,
State Farm Indemnity Company, State Farm Fire and Casualty Company,
1101201 State Farm General Insurance Company, Bloomington, IL

Experience Chinese Heritage
KAM WAH CHUNG
State Heritage Site Museum & Interpretive Center



Originally a Chinese medical clinic, general store, Chinese meeting place and residence, Kam Wah Chung allows visitors an incomparable glimpse into the past. Kam Wah Chung tells the story of the Chinese immigrants, how they lived, and the contributions they made to the history and culture of Grant County.

Interpretive Center
9:00 am - 5:00 pm
125 Canton St., John Day
541-575-2800
ADMISSION AND TOURS FREE
Donations welcome
May 1 - October 31
www.FriendsOfKamWahChung.com

