

Mine

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ter's Mill in California for four more years, so not only was nobody in the wagon train expecting to find gold — they wouldn't know what it was if they saw it.

In one version of the story, three young men went searching for their oxen and brought back 15-20 colored pebbles they had found in a stream. Several "seasoned" men said they were copper. A woman named Fisher kept one pebble but didn't find out it was gold until after the '49ers hit it rich in California.

There are many versions of this discovery story. In one, children looking for berries found the gold nuggets. In another, a blacksmith put a nugget on an iron-rimmed wagon wheel and easily hammered it flat. In other stories, a tool box filled with nuggets was lost when it fell off a wagon during a river crossing.

In one account, children were asked how many pebbles they saw. They said they could easily fill their blue bucket. Each company in the large wagon train painted their buckets, axes, shovels and other tools a different color to keep track of them. The nuggets were discovered by the blue company.

Whether or not gold nuggets were found by members of the Meek Wagon Train, news about their discovery was not made public for several years. More importantly, they didn't

know where they were at the time. The train finally reached The Dalles in October 1845, and most of the settlers continued on to the Willamette Valley.

The word about the gold find was out by 1851 when a party searching for the Lost Immigrant Mine, as it was called then, found evidence of the wagon train on Wagonfire Mountain. Three years later, Benjamin Herron, a member of the lost wagon train, led a search party that was driven away by Native Americans.

In 1857, James McBride, another wagon train member, left his home in Yreka, California, and led a search for the creek where the nuggets were found. He returned the next year without success.

Three years later, Nelson Cochran and 50 men reached Wagonfire Mountain but were driven off by local tribes. The next year, Jacob Currier returned with 44 men and searched from the Deschutes River to the Malheur River. They reported finding only yellow rocks that "resembled" gold.

That same year, a man named J.L. Adams got into serious trouble when he bragged in Portland that he had found the Lost Immigrant Mine. He put together a party of 58 men, perhaps large enough to fend off attacks, and headed for the Blue Mountains. When it became apparent Adams didn't know what he was doing, a lynch party formed. But the party ended up giving him the boot and started



Contributed photo

Joseph Meek, left, was an active Oregon politician, U.S. marshal and sheriff. His brother Stephen Meek, right, was a mountain guide and later miner. Both were fur trappers in Oregon's early history.

home. On the way, they hit gold at Griffin's Gulch, setting off the gold rush near Baker City.

In 1862, Tom Turner led a group out of Willamette Valley to find the lost mine and ended up finding gold instead along the Boise River. The next year, Michael Jordan led 29 men in a search of the Owyhee Mountains in Idaho. They never found the legendary site, but they found gold along Jordan Creek and established the Silver City District.

Stephen Meek himself got gold fever in 1868,

leading 30 men on what was later characterized as a "wild goose chase."

In 1885, a letter in the Oregonian newspaper set off mass speculation. Letter after letter came in with various and new accounts of the lost gold find, which by that time had become known as the Blue Bucket Mine.

In 1890, a prospector named White found the grave of a woman from the lost wagon train who died along the South Fork of the Crooked River. But she had died before the nuggets were found, and he ended

up searching in the wrong direction. That led to a gold rush at Rattlesnake Creek. No gold was found, and White disappeared.

Charlie Brown, a Canyon City celebrity and founder of the Grant County Historical Museum, joined a search party in 1897. They found relics they believed came from the lost wagon train between Immigrant and Silver creeks. Decades later, Brown claimed the Blue Bucket Mine was either in Canyon Creek or Spanish Gulch.

The search for the Blue Bucket Mine continued into the 20th century. A group of prospectors from Spokane, Washington, claimed they had discovered the site near Dale in 1936.

Charles Hoffman relied on a detailed daily diary kept by Jesse Harrit, a young cattle driver on the Meek Wagon Train, to guide him on a 1974 expedition that carefully traced the lost wagon train's route. In his 1992 book, Hoffman said he found the lost site, but a close reading never reveals just where that site is.

Gold rush historians who philosophize about the Blue Bucket Mine have various explanations for its location. Some theories are geographical, naming actual rivers and creeks. Others believe flood waters long ago buried the site with silt, so it will never be found.

And a few suggest a reclusive miner found the site, panned it clean and never said a word to anyone about where his riches came from.



The Eagle/Richard Hanners
Grant Union High School graduate Tanner Elliott speaks with Sen. Jeff Merkley during a town hall visit in John Day on May 30.

Merkley

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internet to influence elections, he said.

Russia will continue its election meddling, Merkley said, further accelerating division within the U.S. Other governments might follow Russia's lead in this effort. The U.S. response so far has been totally unsatisfactory, he said.

Adele Cerny expressed concern about President Donald Trump's attitude toward war and the lack of funding and staffing in the State Department needed for diplomatic efforts.

Merkley referred to two amendments that recently failed to pass in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. One called for Congressional approval for use of U.S. military forces in Venezuela and the other called for the same for Iran.

A possible explanation for why Congress leaves it up to the president when it comes to use of military power overseas is the fear of making a mistake, Merkley explained. If Congress calls for use of military power and the facts are wrong, it can look very bad for Congress. If Congress withholds military power when in fact it's needed, that could be worse, he said.

When Grant Union senior Tanner Elliott asked if eliminating the electoral college was a good idea, Merkley said yes. The system might have served a purpose 200 years ago, but presidential candidates need to be chosen by direct election as a way to reduce the extreme tribal divisiveness currently seen in U.S. politics. Merkley said he introduced a constitutional amendment to provide for direct elections, but he didn't think it would get very far.

One day earlier, Merkley announced he had introduced a bill to create economic opportunities in forest-dependent communities while reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

The Wildfire-Resilient Communities Act would establish a \$1 billion fund to enable the Forest Service to increase the pace and scale of catastrophic wildfire reduction projects; empower federal agencies to work with local communities to plan and prepare for wildfires; permanently reauthorize the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program so more projects can receive funding in a fiscal year; and create a County Stewardship Fund that would provide payments to counties equal to 25% of stewardship contract receipts on federal land within their counties.

"Folks here in Central Oregon and all across our state know firsthand that increasingly severe wildfires pose major threats to the health and economies of our communities," Merkley said in a press release.

Verdict

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D'Amore represented Matthew Allison and his wife's estate. D'Amore said he has seen road rage cases before but not like this.

"This should never have happened," he said. "Never. Four commercially licensed drivers engaged in these activities for such a long period of time."

Decou, Peter Barnes and Corey Frew were driving semitrailers for Utah-based Smoot Brothers Transportation from Salt Lake City, Utah, to Eugene, according to D'Amore, depositions, court documents and police reports in the case. Barnes said he was near Mountain Home, Idaho, when he had the first "run-in" with a motorhome driver who cut him off on the freeway and slammed on the brakes to shoot for an exit.

Jonathan Hogaboom of Taylor, Michigan, was driving the 45-foot-long, \$750,000 luxury motorhome for Horizon Transport from Indiana for delivery in Oregon. Hogaboom and the three truckers met up again on Highway 20 in Eastern Oregon.

The truckers and Hogaboom raced to pass each other, cut each other off and pulled in front of each other only to slam on the brakes. Hogaboom on more than one occasion blasted the big RV's air horn when he was next to one of the semis and flipped the bird to one driver.

Matthew and Sara Allison were heading east from Crater Lake. Two days earlier they took in a concert in Portland, then hiked in Mount Hood National Forest and at the last minute diverted to see the grandeur of Crater Lake. He told the jury he was glad they went.

"Those are some of the



Contributed photo

A judge awarded Matthew Allison \$26.5 million in damages after a road rage incident involving commercial drivers resulted in the death of his wife, Sara Allison, June 5, 2016.

best memories that I will hold on to for the rest of my life," he said.

For the first time in two years, Matthew Allison could again enjoy the outdoors with Sara. In 2014 he developed leukemia. Sara Allison, a pharmacy technician, helped her husband stay on his drug schedule and took him to doctor's appointments, including to see specialists at the Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake City. She cared for him and worked full time.

The blood disorder led to surgery in November 2015 to reverse necrosis on Matthew's right hip. The physical therapy lasted until about April 2016. Coming out of that, they planned the trip to Oregon.

"It was our way to celebrate having got through that tough time together," Matthew said at trial. "It was a much-needed break."

They took off from Crater Lake with Sara driving. They stopped in Burns, their halfway point, to fuel up and switch seats.

Matthew testified Sara saw how exhausted he was, so she decided to let her husband sleep as they left Burns.

The crash

The three semis and the RV continued their perilous actions heading west on Highway 20.

Barnes was in the lead, about a minute-and-half ahead of the rest. Hogaboom in the RV was behind him. Decou was in the third spot, and Frew brought up the rear. Decou earlier tried to pass the RV. Barnes got on his radio and said an eastbound car just drove by him and it was safe to pass. Decou pulled out at the edge of a passing zone to make his move.

Within a moment he was driving in a no passing zone and had maybe 90 seconds to get back in the lane. Hogaboom did not let that happen. Decou told Oregon State Police, when he hit the gas, Hogaboom punched it as well. He said he tried to get over two or three times, but the RV blocked him out. The state trooper asked him why he didn't slow down and get back in the correct lane.

"Because the more I slowed down, the more he slowed down," Decou replied.

Hogaboom claimed he was going about 60-65 behind a small BMW car, according to police reports and court documents, and coming into a curve the car slowed and he had to slow to make the curve. That's when he saw the semi trying to pass.

Hogaboom said he was irritated and had to slow

down further. Near milepost 156, he saw the car coming in the other lane. The car Sara Allison was driving.

He said he jammed on the brakes to get space with the BMW, and the BMW did the same thing, leaving no room for the semi.

Decou also saw the Ford Focus, and Sara Allison saw the semi.

She jerked the car to the right and off the road and into the dirt. Decou hit the brakes, slid and turned to the left.

The semi plowed into the car, mashing the driver's side.

Matthew Allison told the jury Sara woke him.

"I remember hearing her scream my name moments, moments," he said, "... moments right before ..."

He also said he saw Sara in the car in her final moments. He said he didn't think he got to say goodbye to her.

The aftermath

Matthew Allison moved back to Ohio, where he was from, to live with his father. They have a complicated relationship, he testified, and eventually he moved in with new caregivers.

He underwent hip replacement surgery in June 2018. Almost a year later, the career National Guardsman who hiked national parks walks with difficulty. He told the jury one word described his life since the crash: "Miserable."

He suffers panic attacks while driving. He won't ride as a passenger at night. He has nightmares about the crash and seeing Sara. When he wakes, he realizes again she is gone.

He said, at his lowest, he considered suicide. But he feels better, more stable. He wants to move closer to Salt Lake City to be near the cancer institute, but he has no family near there.

Kicker

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But asked whether she had the political support to get the idea to pass, Brown hedged, saying the proposal could "stimulate the conversation" among lawmakers.

"We are still having a dialogue," Brown said. "I think this is still a very tough road to hoe."

House Republican Leader

Carl Wilson of Grants Pass was skeptical.

"I don't think it's a good idea," Wilson said. "Once again, people look at that as their money, and they want that back."

Republicans have long railed against soaring debts in the state's pension system, which pose a threat to public budgets around the state.

Brown's plan would send \$250 million that would otherwise go back to taxpayers to schools to help them pay

increasing bills toward pension payments for public workers.

An increasing share of local government budgets goes toward paying employees' retirement costs.

Oregon owes about \$26 billion to retirees that it is currently unable to cover.

Brown's is not the first idea to withhold some of the personal income kicker, which lawmakers last did in 1991.

Sen. Kathleen Taylor,

D-Milwaukie, and Rep. Karin Power, D-Milwaukie, proposed using the money that would otherwise go back to taxpayers to pay down a portion of the debt. That bill has not received a public hearing or a vote.

Two weeks ago, House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, proposed keeping half of the \$1.4 billion kicker for transportation projects.

Brown describes her idea as a measure to stimulate rural Oregon's economy

and add jobs. She says those communities haven't fully recovered from the Great Recession.

"We have the opportunity to make these one-time investments in rural Oregon that will really ensure that their communities can continue to thrive," Brown said. "This will help ensure resilience should the economy change."

Wilson said he met with Brown and other caucus leaders Thursday. During the

meeting, Brown explained the proposal and said she was going to release it publicly.

Wilson said that the kicker was "sacrosanct" among the 22 Republicans in the House.

"I think everybody's a little bit concerned about it," Wilson said of his meeting with the governor and caucus leaders. "It sounds nice. The goals seem good. But I think it doesn't matter, whether you're from up north or down south, people still want their kickers."