

Tall tales from the Oregon Trail

Bill Rossiter shares pioneer stories through song

By Lisa Britton
Go! Magazine

BAKER CITY — Bill Rossiter started playing the banjo in high school, and wove song verses into his school papers.

But it was the song “Darlin’ Nellie Gray” that piqued his interest in historical tunes.

“That intrigued me, so I started looking for songs,” he said.

And so began a lifetime of music and collecting songs from the past. This weekend, he will share songs from the Oregon Trail that tell the story of pioneers.

“It’s a history of the westward movement starting in the 1840s to the nineteen-teens,” he said. “These songs are diamonds. They are so heartfelt and tied to the moment.”

Rossiter will give performances Friday through Sunday, Aug. 6-8, at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpre-

tive Center outside Baker City. His shows are at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 2:30 p.m. each day. The center is currently closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. All programs are held outside.

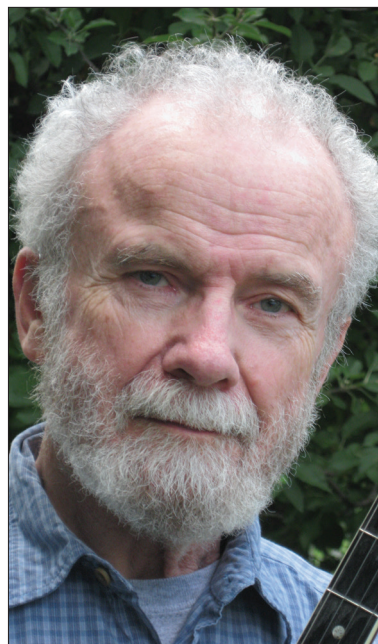
On Saturday, Aug. 7, he will perform at 5 p.m. in Geiser-Pollman Park in Baker City.

Admission is free to all the performances.

Rossiter, who describes himself as a “retired folklorist,” taught literature and folklore for 25 years at Flathead Valley Community College in Kalispell, Montana. As for his historical performances, he’s developed a dozen different programs. He plays clawhammer banjo, guitar, autoharp and harmonica.

In a typical year, he performs three to four times per month, and also plays with three different bands in Kalispell.

For his Baker City appearances, his show is titled “Tall Tales and Tall Songs: Going Out



Submitted
Bill Rossiter

TALL TALES AND TALL SONGS

Aug. 6-8: 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 2:30 p.m. daily at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center
Aug. 7: 5 p.m. at Geiser-Pollman Park, Baker City
Admission: free

West to See the Elephant.”

“Seeing the elephant” refers to high excitement about something (going west, in this case) followed by a sense of disillusionment.

Ranger programs scheduled each week, Thursday through Sunday

BAKER CITY — The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center remains closed to visitors, but outdoor programming is offered Thursday through Sunday.

An information table is staffed from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The “Oregon Fever” ranger program begins at 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., and “Going for Gold” can be seen at 9:30 a.m.

The network of trails — both paved and gravel — are open from daylight to dusk every day. Gates to the top of the hill close at 4 p.m., but the trail system

can be accessed from a pull-out on Highway 86.

Looking ahead, Mike Follin will perform Dr. Balthasar’s Traveling Medicine Show Aug. 12-15, at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. each day. Follin’s program can also be seen at 5 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 14, in Geiser-Pollman Park.

The Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) Experience “Where History Meets Culture” can be seen at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. Aug. 21-22 and Aug. 28-29. Performances are also planned for Geiser-Pollman Park at 5 p.m. on Aug. 21 and Aug. 28.

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- Gold panning
- Candle dipping
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The Umatilla County Historical Society Museum

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