



# SEEING GHOSTS

Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

The swings and playground at the Fox School stand empty in this image from Thursday, July 14, 2022.

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## A visit to the Grant County ghost towns of Fox and Austin provides a glimpse of bygone times

By JUSTIN DAVIS  
Blue Mountain Eagle

### GETTING THERE

To get to Austin, head east on U.S. Highway 26 from Prairie City and continue for 28 miles. Turn left on Oregon 7 North just past the Austin House, and continue for 1.9 miles. Make a slight left on County Road 20A and continue to follow the road for just over a half-mile.

To find Fox, take U.S. Highway 26 to Mount Vernon. Turn north on US 395 North/Mountain Boulevard and continue to follow US 395 for 22 miles.

FOX — Webster's Dictionary defines a ghost town as "a once-flourishing town wholly or nearly deserted, usually as the result of the exhaustion of some natural resource."

The Grant County ghost towns of Fox and Austin were both once thriving communities that saw drastic and expedited reductions in population due to several factors. These days, both Fox and Austin have fewer than five inhabitants each.

Austin was once a lumber, sheep, cattle and mining town. Nowadays you can still see cattle if you head to Austin, but any evidence of current mining, lumber and sheep production is now nonexistent.

On the way you'll see the Austin House, which is the only remaining business establishment left bearing Austin's name. The business is currently closed, but new owners are renovating the building with hopes of reopening this summer.

The town had a post office that was established in 1888 and remained in operation

until 1950, according to the 2003 edition of "Oregon Geographic Names." Once a station on the Sumpter Valley Railway, Austin saw its population decrease sharply following the decline of the railway.

Now all that is left of Austin are a few residences lining a single street and rounding a cul de sac. Austin currently has three full-time residents and a sparse number of part-time residents.

The community of Fox is an unincorporated town located along U.S. Route 395 just south of Long Creek. Fox was named after Fox Creek, a nearby tributary of the North Fork John Day River. The tributary takes its name from an incident involving a fox during a hunting or prospecting trip, according to "Oregon Geographic Names."

Fox still has several unused buildings that serve as a reminder that the town was once a more bustling and thriving community than what

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See Ghosts, Page 3

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