

Highline festival balances a good time at Smith Rock

By NICK ROSENBERGER
Redmond Spokesman

TERREBONNE — Poised a few hundred feet over hikers tracing the winding path of the Crooked River, Hannah Edmond stood briefly on a 1-inch-wide nylon line before falling headfirst toward the chasm below.

Her blue climbing harness tightened around her as the safety ropes and highline rigging, anchored into the outcroppings at Smith Rock State Park, pulled taut. Her body swung left and right before safely coming to a stop.

She smiled, then pulled herself up and back onto the thin nylon webbing to try again.

This scene played out throughout the mid-September weekend as people from across Oregon and beyond met up for the Smith Rock Highline Gathering. The event drew dozens of highliners to Smith Rock who aimed to balance across flat lines — known as slacklines — suspended in the air, some as long as 738 feet.

There was at least one serious injury associated with the event. On Saturday, Sept. 17, about 10 a.m., Deschutes County dispatch received a call that a 21-year-old Seattle man fell 35 to 50 feet off a cliff near Asterick's Pass while scrambling up rock to set up a slackline.

According to Deschutes County Search and Rescue, the hiker had to be loaded into a stretcher and lowered about 650 feet to the river trail. Crews did that safely by about 5:30 p.m., when the hiker was transported to St. Charles Medical Center in Bend for further medical evaluation.

Climbers quickly evacuated the park on Saturday afternoon as well, as rain and lightning moved through the area.

But for most participants, the weekend went off without a hitch.

The slacklines, known as highlines when rigged up at dizzying heights, could be found



A highliner pulls himself along the Blue Dream highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering on Friday, Sept. 16, outside Terrebonne.

Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman



Hannah Edmond slides out on the Overdose highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering on Friday, Sept. 16, outside Terrebonne.

Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman



Highliners tighten rigging on the Overdose highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering.

Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

across Smith Rock at iconic climbing areas such as Monkey Face and Red Wall.

“Those first highlines that you do, it’s all you can do to just force yourself to just stand up,” said George Braun, the organizer for this year’s event. “It’s just completely gripping you with fear. Everything is telling you that you shouldn’t be doing this. Millions of years of evolution kept you alive because you didn’t do things like this.”

Much of the battle in cross-

ing a highline, however, is not in the physical ability. Instead, it’s almost entirely a mental game.

“Your body is fighting you,” Braun said. “You have to go a little bit mindless.”

For Sam Greenwalt, the highline gathering was a first. Although he’d done slacklining at ground level before, doing it at such great heights was new. Greenwalt was antsy to get on a line, excited to try something new and inch himself across the

abyss below.

“All the people are pretty encouraging,” he said. “They’re like ‘Yeah, do it.’”

Braun agreed, saying that highlining quickly creates a bond between people. From hauling the gear up hundreds of feet, to rigging everything and goofing around during the downtime as others attempt a line, relationships built around it are something to remember.

Highlining, Braun said, is one of the rare sports where it

takes a team of people to create the conditions for just one person to be able to do it. But once you hit a critical mass, then action can start.

“Slackliners are some of the most empathetic and open and wholehearted people that I’ve met,” Braun said.

Along with forming friendships, highlining is an opportunity to challenge a person’s body and mind. It’s an opportunity to challenge the fear ricocheting through their

beating hearts and find a flow state with their entire focus on what’s in front of them.

“It’s everything turned up to 11. The first few steps on a highline might be the most tiring steps you take on a slackline,” Braun said. “(The) beautiful thing about highlining is learning to work with that fear.”

After those first couple times, he said, you start to become more comfortable but the fear never disappears completely. When a line starts to wobble or you try to fight the line, the fear can come rushing back.

He said it helps to pretend that you’re walking a line at ground level and just let muscle memory take hold. One of the reasons Braun enjoys highlining so much is for the feeling when he finally steps off the line — feeling the exhilaration, the relief and accomplishment over conquering body and mind.

“It’s just incredible,” he said.

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Please vote 'yes' so the children in our community can have access to a safe place to swim.
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-Chris Cronin

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-Leslie Traylor



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-Laci Wheeler

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-Sue Pearce

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-Jeremy Mothershead

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