

Weather, wheat top 1976 G-T stories

It seems that for as long as they've been around, Mother Nature and Father Time have never fouled up quite so badly as they did this year, 1976, in Morrow County.

When it was supposed to be hot, it was cold and wet. And, when it was (and is) supposed to be cold and wet, it's dry and pleasant.

So it has gone for Morrow County farmers this year. The market not being enough for farmers to cope with, the weather threw a curve during harvest, bringing wet, rainy weather; then in November and December, during the fall seeding period, instead of the usually moist days, farmers have had to put up with 50 and 60 degree weather, blue skies and cold nights.

Remember how it all started?
In July, wheat growing forecasters said three weeks in a row that "if the usual Morrow County sun comes out, we'll be

going full blast by the end of the week."

That didn't happen and when a cloudburst rushed over acres and acres of wheat with pummeling hailstones and a good amount of rain, those forecasters hid under umbrellas and "sat out the storm."

In early August, the rainy downpours ripped through topsoil, virtually destroying acres of wheat and setting a record for the most rain in an August since anyone can remember.

The next issue of the Gazette-Times, on Aug. 12, had the same unwanted headline: 'Pounding rains scar summer fallow, delay harvest again.' After a slow start, the harvest was again thwarted by the untimely rains of August.

"Uneasy" was the term many farmers used in late August as they looked bewildered toward fields that had turned to mud in what was usually a pretty dry month.

The rains continued through the start of the Morrow County Fair and fair officials thought the weather had a large turnout planned.

But finally, at the end of the fair week and the start of football season, the skies turned blue, enabling local growers to put their harvest machines to work, full time.

As soon as one farmer had completed his tasks, he'd pass up a day of rest to help a neighbor in Mother Nature's peculiar grasps.

Harvest completed, Morrow County farmers relaxed a bit, readying for the fall seeding period and looking forward to more of that same rain in November and December.

The August rains caused many a weed to grow and farmers, not knowing that the weather had completely turned itself inside out and gone haywire, plowed those weeds up. When they did, the moisture went with them and many

farmers haven't seen a muddy pair of boots since. November turned out to be one of the three worst months as far as precipitation was concerned. An average of 1.43 inches in November turned out to be a poor .77 this year. The 1976 three month fall seeding period, September through November, is the worst on record since the records began in 1911.

And that wierd weather, termed a "drouth" by many, is still baffling the county's farmers. A good rain last weekend and an inch of snow were sights that made farmers smile, but this week's 60 degree plus weather is drying that darn dirt out again.

The Gazette-Times counts this story as the top story of the year. The weather has spoiled many a pocketbook and a vacation. If it continues on its unusual and unwanted path, it could leave an economic disaster in its wake.

The editor looks back on 1976

stories by Wil Phinney

Confounded weather threw a wily curve at Morrow County farmers this year to top the stories for 1976.

The Gazette-Times named the five lead stories of the year as the weather predicament, the finding of Bigfoot tracks, the three quick fires in Ione, the political scene, and the city's Bicentennial birthday party.

The five stories are re-reported here. Inside, find a month-to-month look back at the city and county happenings in 1976, the year that was.



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Bigfoot leaves mystery

Perhaps the most unusual story of the year was about a strange and perplexing animal, thought to be much like you and me, who had the town talking a month after a self-proclaimed authority ended its notoriety as a "fake."

The creature's name was Bigfoot.

For more than 200 years, Indians have told of a mammoth beast, with monstrous feet, they call Sasquatch. Bigfoot became part of Morrow County history in early August.

This writer became aware

of the prints when Jay Patterson, an anxious and enthusiastic young man, burst through the Gazette-Times' doors with what I thought to be a hoax, but still, a story.

I met Jay's brother, Guy, and logging buddies later that day above Cutsforth Park and near Johnson Creek. Before the day was over, I would have seen more than 100 prints, leading up one side of a creek bed to the other.

Pictures were taken, but even the best looking print had little contrast in a photo of a simple brown clay or a grassy

imprint. Even though he always questioned their authenticity, this writer told himself that something had made the prints. He didn't know what, but something other than human, he thought.

The reason humans were ruled out is simple: it doesn't seem possible that anyone in his right mind would take the time and effort to supply the hills with hundreds of prints. It didn't seem logical that even a 200 pound man could leave prints inches deep in a uniform stride. It just wasn't

sensible to believe that a man would do such a thing.

Perplexity. Nine days later, after two heavy August rains, the tracks were virtually gone. Even this writer, who saw the original prints, could not see the same tracks nine days later at will.

A leading, self-proclaimed authority on Bigfoot from The Dalles, came with a pair of assistants, who watched the area, and discounted the tracks and called them fake.

To some, even the discount was somewhat of a letdown. The story made many papers,

including the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle, and was heard over radio stations in the area.

It stirred quite a hub-bub between non-believers who stood strong and the ones that were a little inquisitive about such a being.

Whatever made those tracks, came to the Heppner area and left in a matter of a couple weeks. Whether they were faked or not, some 21 inch barefoot tracks made a lot of people wonder.



Bigfoot prints spotted on hills.

1976 — The Year That Was

City celebrates fourth with vigorous effort

The people of Heppner and Morrow County teamed together with an independent effort to throw the biggest birthday party this part of the state has ever seen. They started in January and when their work culminated on July 4, 1976, this nation's Bicentennial anniversary, the lights flared and the bombs burst and Heppner put itself on the Bicentennial map.

July 4 exploded during the nation's anniversary after work by several groups completed work. Terry Hughes headed up the giant display of patriotism.

It was a day for all Heppnerites to remember. It was evident late Sunday night that those same Heppnerites weren't the only Americans enjoying the day's festivities.

An estimated 2,000 people sat in the fairgrounds, sat on buildings, benches, in trees, on top of apartments, in the road and any other comfortable spot to view a gala array of colors in the fireworks display by the Bicentennial committee.

After a church celebration and the ringing of bells at high noon, a small parade formed

at the courthouse and witnessed the American Legion Color Guard and Heppner boy scouts dedicate the new flag pole, donated by the Elks' Lodge of Heppner. Mayor Jerry Sweeney dedicated Hager Park about a mile up the road.

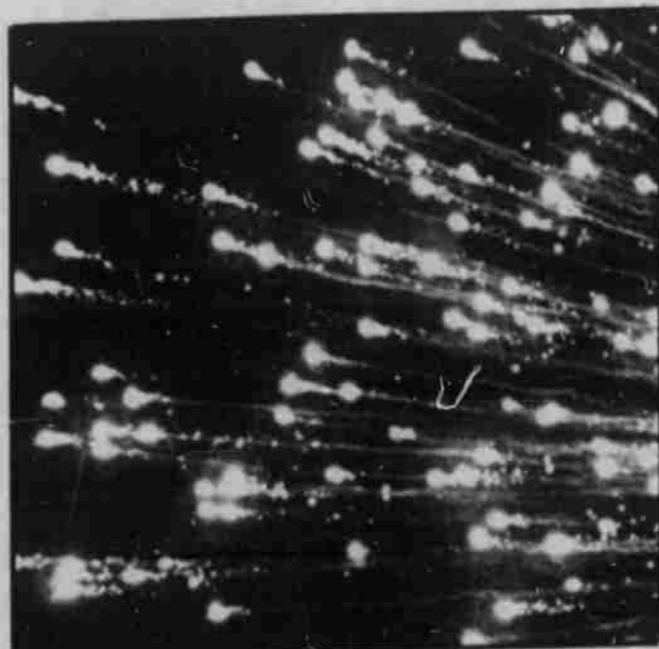
The day started with a breakfast at Heppner City Park. More than 300 enjoyed the Bicentennial breakfast of ham, eggs, and hotcakes. The American Legion and Legion Auxiliary put the breakfast on.

At 9:30, the pace changed over a few hundred yards to the Democrat Gulch school-house dedication. A super turnout formed a semi-circle around the one-room school house and watched Matt Doherty, Morrow County school superintendent introduce former teachers and students of the facility that included Della Scrivner and Marguerite Glavey, teachers, and student Robert Scrivner, who each said a few words.

Jackpot team roping went on all afternoon and baseball and swimming activities kept the youngsters busy. Jim Rogers' roast beef

dinner in the evening pleased the palates of at least 400 at the fair pavilion and led into the giant fireworks display that night.

All in all, July 4, 1976, will always be remembered as the nation's Bicentennial. But around Heppner, it will be remembered as a community effort and success, too.



Bombs bust burst in air.

Three fires char lone property

September wasn't the nicest time for some people in Ione. Three people were arrested and still face an arson trial in one of three separate fires that burned apartments, a house and a business in Ione this year, 1976.

Three people were in custody Sept. 16 and lodged in Marion County jail, arrested in connection with a blaze that destroyed a home in Ione. The house, often referred to as the Old Swanson House, was gutted by early morning fire Aug. 31.

Arrested were one owner, Viola Jay Jackson, John Kieth Alexander, 18, and Vonnie May Masi, 24, all of Gervais.

The trial is undergoing a change of venue at this writing and will more than likely not come up before a judge in the county of Morrow.

Two other fires didn't produce arsonists, but they did blacken some property.

In July, towards the end, a fire routed one building, left another charred and could have ravaged Main Street in Ione

if it hadn't been for quick action by the Ione volunteer fire department.

The gutted building was owned by Art Stefani, Jr., Ione, in which the offices of Bi-County Chemical Company and LockeRoom Athletic Equipment stores were located.

The tin roof of the Monte Crum building kept the attic fire from spreading to the next building, and the fast action by the lone firemen, ripping through to the ceiling to reach the fire with hoses, also thwarted the flames.

An apartment that almost took blaze was kept cool by an owner armed with a garden hose on the porch.

A third fire in Ione tore through one floor of an apartment building in early September. It was the second in two weeks for Ione firemen.

Two juveniles were charged with first degree burglary after a break-in and the fire. The juveniles reportedly admitted being in the apartment and admitted smoking there.

Politics, 1976 style

Politics came back to Heppner, too, this year. Primaries for the national offices preceded the campaigns and the general election that elected James Earl Carter in November. It was a year of two city elections and a few closely contested races here at home.

To some, it was a creative campaign during the April primary campaigns. Remember cartoons that depicted Jimmy's Ethnic Mountain as a molehill and Jerry's fumble of the nomination football? Cartoonists slapped Hubert Humphrey the hardest, but in

the end, after

.....after both the main candidates, Jerry Ford and Jimmy Carter, attended rallies less than 100 miles away in Pendleton.

.....after Carter lost to Church in Morrow County, 337-304, and Ford beat Ronald Reagan, 684-411, in those May primaries.

.....after campaigning began all the way back in September.

did Hubert become obscure and Jimmy tuck the presidency in his pocket in what many described as an "almost come from behind win by President Ford."

Politics was big in the city and county, too, as well as the entire state.

In the local contests...the top political tale would have to be the city of Heppner's two time question in the levy contest.

Voters in the city defeated the budget levy for the fiscal year 1976-77 by a vote of more than 2 1/2 to 1. The final tally showed the residents voted 93 yes and 259 no in the May vote.

The operating budget proposed to be financed by the voters amounted to \$93,866, more than the preceding year, that amount outside the six per cent limitation.

The budget committee lopped more than \$60,000 off the first budget and asked the city

to okay a proposed levy of \$32,138, one which cost the residents about \$2.77 per \$1,000 of true cash value.

The voters said yes to that. If the city voters had balked at that levy, taxpayers would have had to settle for the tax base of \$39,137.

Primaries ran about the same as the general election in respective races in the county seats. Jones beat Weatherford in the Democratic party and Creamer was unopposed in the Republican party. At the offset, Jones trimmed Creamer for the county judge post.

Miller and McCoy, in opposite parties, received the same 579 votes in the primaries. In the November finale, Republican McCoy eased by Democrat Miller for the commissioner spot.

(Some of the voters attitudes came after a candidates' fair on Oct. 21. It was sponsored by the American Association of University Women in Heppner. 16 candidates came to the fair.)

Democrat Parrish beat Republican Winter in the first fall by eighty votes, though they were in separate parties. In the second clash in the general, Parrish won by 450 votes.

Other county seats weren't contested. Some city elections