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'On the Edge' travels bring quartet to Heppner

Left to right: Steve Lundeberg, David Patton, Richard Matson and Ed Patton with their bikes pause in Heppner during their travels around the state for the Albany Democrat-Herald.

A group of employees of the Albany Democrat-Herald, an associate editor, a photographer, a pressman, and the photographer's cousin, who is an engineer with the city of Lebanon, passed through Heppner last Thursday on a motorcycle trip around the edge of Oregon. They chronicled their experiences along the way, e-mailing accounts of their experiences to the Albany newspaper in a column called "On the Edge."

The group left from Albany Saturday, July 7, heading first to Newport. They then rode along the coast, camping their first night at Lake Selmac. From there they traveled to Ashland and Klamath Falls. They camped at Lakeview and then traveled across southeast Oregon, camping at Jordan Valley. The next night they stayed at a motel at Baker, which they said provided a nice change from camping out. From Baker they went to Hell's Canyon and came back through Joseph, Enterprise and Elgin, spending the night at Ukiah before coming into Heppner.

While in Heppner they stopped at the Heppner Gazette-Times office to use the computer and sent their blog via the internet to the Democrat-Herald. While eating at GD's Restaurant in Heppner, they said their waitress, Chris Whalen, had just learned that her son, Zach, had been bitten by a rattler, which the group mentioned in their blog (see story). From Heppner the quartet was headed to the Gorge, not exactly certain where they would stop for the night, depending on the photographer's wishes, and then it was on to Astoria and finally home to their respective jobs and families.

Two of the group, Steve Lundeberg, 43, an associate editor, and David Patton, 44, a photographer, both long-time Democrat-Herald employees, had previously done a 13-article series on their travels on the back roads of Oregon. They made 13 100-mile trips and wrote articles about their experiences, which, said Lundeberg, were very well received. Contemplating another road trip, they talked to their bosses about doing a similar series of articles, originally thinking that they would travel to the four corners of Oregon. They expanded the project to include the whole perimeter of Oregon and their idea got their bosses' approval. Then a pressman from the Democrat-Herald, Richard Matson, who celebrated his 60th birthday on this road trip, decided to join them, as did Ed Patton, 46, David Patton's cousin who agreed to videograph the trip for them.

The group said that they have had great experiences on their travels, especially enjoying a stay at a working ranch at Jordan Valley. Their one touch-and-go experience was when they hit a 50-mile section of gravel on their bikes. Lundeberg rode a Vulcan, Matson, a Honda, and David Patton and his cousin, Ed Patton, both Kawasakis.

Local man bitten by rattler

Zach Whalen, bitten by a rattler at his home in Lexington

Zach Whalen of Lexington had intended to catch a snake as a trophy, but ended up getting much more than he bargained for--a bite on the finger, a close call, a series of anti-venom shots and a ride in a helicopter.

Whalen, 21, said he was snake hunting up Rhea Creek last Wednesday with a friend, Sam Martin, when they came upon a rattler. They caught the snake, which turned out to be a Timber Rattler, put it in a plastic sack, tied it up, then put it in a pillow case and tied it up again. They were looking for more rattlers, but couldn't find anything, so headed home with the snake in the bag.

"I really don't know why we caught it," said Whalen. "The whole purpose was to skin it with its head and all, stretch it and tack it to a board." He left the snake at Martin's house and then came back the next day to check it out. "I was showing it off and it wriggled out of my grip, turned around and bit my finger with one fang," he said. "The other fang missed. Then I dropped it and killed it with a shovel. I had to kill it, because it could have got me again or got some kid. There are kids next door. Then I went inside and told my dad's girlfriend, Shelly Jones, 'I think we've got a problem.'" A frantic rush to the hospital then ensued.

Whalen said that he couldn't even really feel the bite when it happened, but said it started burning on the way to the hospital. "By the time I got to the hospital it got to the point where I could barely talk," said Whalen. He said that emergency staff at Pioneer Memorial Hospital administered one vial of anti-venom serum before the Med-Star life-flight helicopter began loading him up to transport him to Kadlec Medical Center in the Tri-Cities. He said that he felt better even after only one vial. "Not very long after I got the first dose, I could talk right again," he said. Whalen said that although it was his first ride in a helicopter, "It wasn't my idea of an ideal first ride."

In the meantime Whalen's grandmother, Pat Gutierrez, learned the news and ran down to GD's Restaurant in Heppner where Whalen's mom, Chris Whalen, was working to tell her. Oddly enough, Chris was waiting on a group from the Albany Democrat-Herald (an associate editor, a photographer and a pressman, accompanied by a friend who was an engineer with the city of Lebanon who was serving as their videographer), when she heard the news (see story, this issue). They had been making a trip around the state of Oregon and made mention of the snake bite incident in their on-line blog.

Whalen shows his injured finger

Timber Rattler

Whalen and Gutierrez first made a frantic trip up to Pioneer Memorial and then took off by vehicle to the Tri-Cities, as did his dad, Ron, and Jones.

Gutierrez said they administered at least four more vials to Whalen over the next several hours at Kadlec. "He was so out of it, he doesn't remember it all," she said. "But, he was doing so much better even that night." He was discharged from Kadlec around 6 p.m. Friday.

Whalen said that his family now calls him the "holiday ruiner" as his ordeal happened on his sister, Michaela's birthday. She turned 12 on July 12.

Whalen said that he had "captured lots of snakes and killed lots of snakes before," but added that he has since learned that the Timber Rattler is stronger and more aggressive than the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake.

Whalen says the swelling in his hand has gone down somewhat, but his finger still hurts "pretty bad" when it "twitches" and it is possible that he could still lose that finger. He emerged from the ordeal a little bit older and a little bit wiser, and says that while he will continue to hunt snakes, he won't be catching them alive any time in the future. He still maintains his sense of humor through it all, though. "Can I make a suggestion?" he joked. "The next time you see a rattlesnake, run."

Texas Hold 'Em Tournament set July 21

Brandi Sweeney shows the first-place prize rifle

The first annual Texas Hold 'Em Tournament will be held on Saturday, July 21, beginning at 6 p.m. at the Heppner Elks Club. The event is sponsored by the Heppner Day Care and Preschool.

The buy-in is $40 per player and anyone interested may register that evening.

The first place prize will be a 17 HMR Rifle from Pettyjohn's Building Supply. Second place is a custom putter and an OSU customized golf bag donated by Pat Sweeney. Third place is a $200 gift certificate donated by Morrow County Grain Growers.

For more information contact Brandi Sweeney at 676-5530.

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