



THREE DUDES AND A DOG DISCOVER OWYHEE CANYONLANDS

Rod, Gary, Ben and Lola

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Oregon's Best Kept Secret

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OREGON'S BEST KEPT SECRET

From the website wildowyhee.org

The largest untouched stretch of the American West, Oregon's Owyhee Canyonlands is a place to recharge your soul. Red-rock canyons, cool rivers and star-filled skies. Explore it. Experience it. And fall in love.

Carved by desert rivers winding toward the Pacific, the Owyhee Canyonlands are the largest undeveloped natural area left unprotected in the Lower 48. Just a handful of paved roads cross these 5 million acres of craggy, red-rock canyons, blue-ribbon trout streams and vast rolling hills that serve as prime habitat for golden eagles, bighorn sheep and the Greater sage-grouse, which is threatened with extinction.

The Owyhee River Wilderness was created by the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 and signed into law by President Barack Obama on March 30, 2009. Also created in the Omnibus Land Act were five additional southwestern Idaho wilderness areas in Owyhee County, collectively known as the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Areas.

The Wilderness is irregularly shaped, generally following the course of the Owyhee River, South Fork Owyhee River, Little Owyhee River, Deep Creek, and Battle Creek, as well as including some plateau lands. The wilderness area stretches from the Oregon-Idaho border in the west to the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in the east to the Nevada-Idaho border in the south. The rivers and creeks are deeply eroded into the Owyhee Plateau, resulting in deep canyons.

The only roads are rough and there are few trails. There are challenging whitewater rivers.

I have not been able to find any real good pictures and a document that gives the layout of the land for anyone that has never visited this part of the country. Certainly, there are guidebooks and online resources and they helped get me there: *The Owyhee Canyonlands, an Outdoor Adventure Guide* by Steve Stuebner & Mark Lisk (guidebook) and [Less Traveled Northwest, Day Hikes for the Adventurous](#) (an excellent website, by the way). Not to say those guides are bad (they certainly aren't and I recommend both), but if I would have had something like the write-up below, I would have gotten a better feel for what it is really like. Some might say that they don't want too much detail; otherwise, the sense of adventure is lost. Fair enough. If you want to go to the Owyhee Canyonlands and want a little better feel for what you are getting into, then read on. Believe me, it will not spoil the adventure; every trip will be unique. I also intend to make several more trips and write those up as well. So keep an eye peeled for the next installments.

At the end of this trip report is a bunch of information that you might find interesting entitled [Of Critters, Flowers, History and Such](#) with as much information as I could get on the things we saw or thought we might have seen. Thank you internet and all the great sites I reference. Where would I be without the internet? Probably out backpacking somewhere...

Links in this document: non-italicized links redirect you to an external website for more information on something or, in many cases, one of my videos, such as ["doin' truck stuff" was half the fun...](#) (Note: If a video doesn't start, refresh the page and try it again). *Italicized links* take you to a location in this document, such as [Of Critters, Flowers, History and Such](#).

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 2014: TIGARD TO ANDERSON CROSSING



Way down in the very southeast corner of Oregon is the Owyhee Canyonlands. If one were to take 95 south from Burns Junction, you might not even realize that there are canyons out there somewhere. It is flat and rolling desert for miles and miles and miles. About 36 miles in *that* direction, you will suddenly and almost without warning dip into a canyon, with walls sometimes 400 to 500 feet high, just out there in the middle of nowhere. It is unique and stunning, and well worth the trip (many trips) from Portland.

We (sons Gary and Ben, Ben's new dog Lola and I) left home (Tigard, Oregon) right at 8:00 Sunday morning (right on schedule). We drove down I-5 to Salem, took 22 outside of Salem and went through Bend on 20, grabbed 78 in Burns and then took 95 south at the 78/95 junction (Burns Junction). From the junction, we went about 40 miles to Jackson Creek Road on the left. Take Jackson Creek Road to Pole Creek Road (about 15 miles) and take that to Anderson Crossing (about 19.5 miles). When you get to the river crossing, you are there.

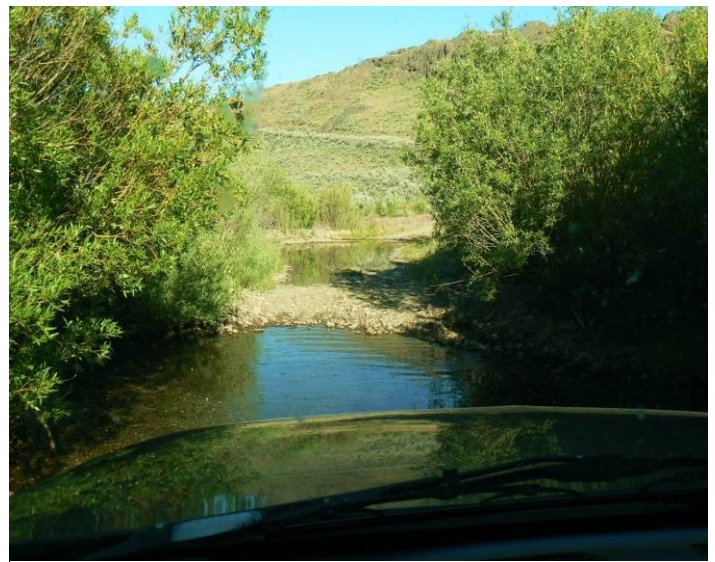
With a few stops for food and a lot of gas (we took the Silverado with high clearance 4-wheel drive and a big gas-guzzling engine) we arrived at Anderson Crossing about 6:00 PM. Not bad, really, what with the last 36 or so miles on gravel road (some rutted and wash-boarded pretty bad) [through high desert sage brush flat lands](#), and having to stop for cattle on the road every few miles. (I would advise against taking What's-her-name's Odyssey on these roads unless you are prepared for hearing some pretty serious expletives, rather like those I had to put up with [last year when What's-her-name, Ben and I went to the Wallowa's](#): a couple of very out of character "sh*t's!" to be specific.) Lola *loved* the cows and every time we ran across a heard on or near the road she was ready to give chase. We wondered what she would have done if we let her out of the truck; if we would ever see her again.

["Doin' truck stuff" was half the fun...](#)

[Upon arriving at Anderson Crossing](#) we crossed the river to the east side (the water was no more than a foot deep but be careful, it can be a lot deeper at other times of the year) and then, lo and behold, we were surprised to see another camper there...in the one and only place available to set camp, or so we thought. There was a large truck with a huge house trailer and two four-wheel all-terrain vehicles. It was a lot of mechanized camping and we were rather surprised that they were able to get that big camper all the way back to Anderson Crossing, which is one of the most remote places you can reach by vehicle in the lower 48.



Anderson Crossing marker at the top of the descent to the crossing.



Crossing Little Owyhee at Anderson Crossing.
[Video](#)

We looked around for a suitable place to camp and simply couldn't find one. We finally decided that we were going to have to share the campsite with the camper folks. We drove up to the trailer and a lady, Nancy, stood at the door. She was alone and the men folk had hiked out to explore one of the many caves in the area. We talked a bit (I wager she had a weapon within arm's reach just in case we turned out to be a pack of yahoos) and after a bit of feeling us out she

must have figured we were okay, and told us that there were several camping spots on down the small jeep trail just a few hundred yards north along the river. We thanked her and jumped in the truck. Sure enough, there were at least two good sites for our tents and another that would have been great for a camper but too rocky for tents.

[After driving all the way to the narrow end of the jeep trail](#) (ignore the dialog in this video for the most part since I obviously have a ways to go to talk and drive at the same time) and successfully putting several long scratches on each side of the truck from sagebrush sticking into the road, we decided that the first place we passed was the best, so we drove all the way back, engraving matching scratch marks on the other side of the truck. *Oh well, that is why I have the thing – to use, not to baby. Gives it character.* We parked and set camp.

Because we knew we would be doing at least some very isolated car camping (I am not really a car camper, but this was so remote that it hardly counted as real car camping), we took a cooler full of beer, wood for a few nights of camp fires, extra goodies like sit-upons that Elizabeth made 20 years ago when she was in the Girl Scouts, extra cooking pans, water filters (we don't filter water anymore, but use iodine) and other amenities that we would usually not take on a backpack trip because of the weight. It was fun to have a fire, drink beer and just talk, which it turned out we did a lot of on this trip.

Gary and I got water from the river. At least we *thought* it was the river, but turned out to be a stagnant pool. But it was clear enough and we were only going to boil it to make dinner. Gary cooked dinner: fettuccini with pesto sauce and tuna. Not bad, but needed salt, which we didn't bring. Ben and I washed the pot and bowls by hand scrubbing & sloshing water enough to knock the main layer of goop off the sides. Good enough.

The boys set up their tents and I slept in the bed of the truck. Lola slept in Ben's tent with him. The night was very cold and we all shivered a little to stay warm. Layers, layers, layers is the rule: Under Armor, shirt, jacket, sleeping bag. Fortunately, that was the coldest night we would have, all the others being warm enough so that a loose sleeping bag and zero or one layer was good enough.



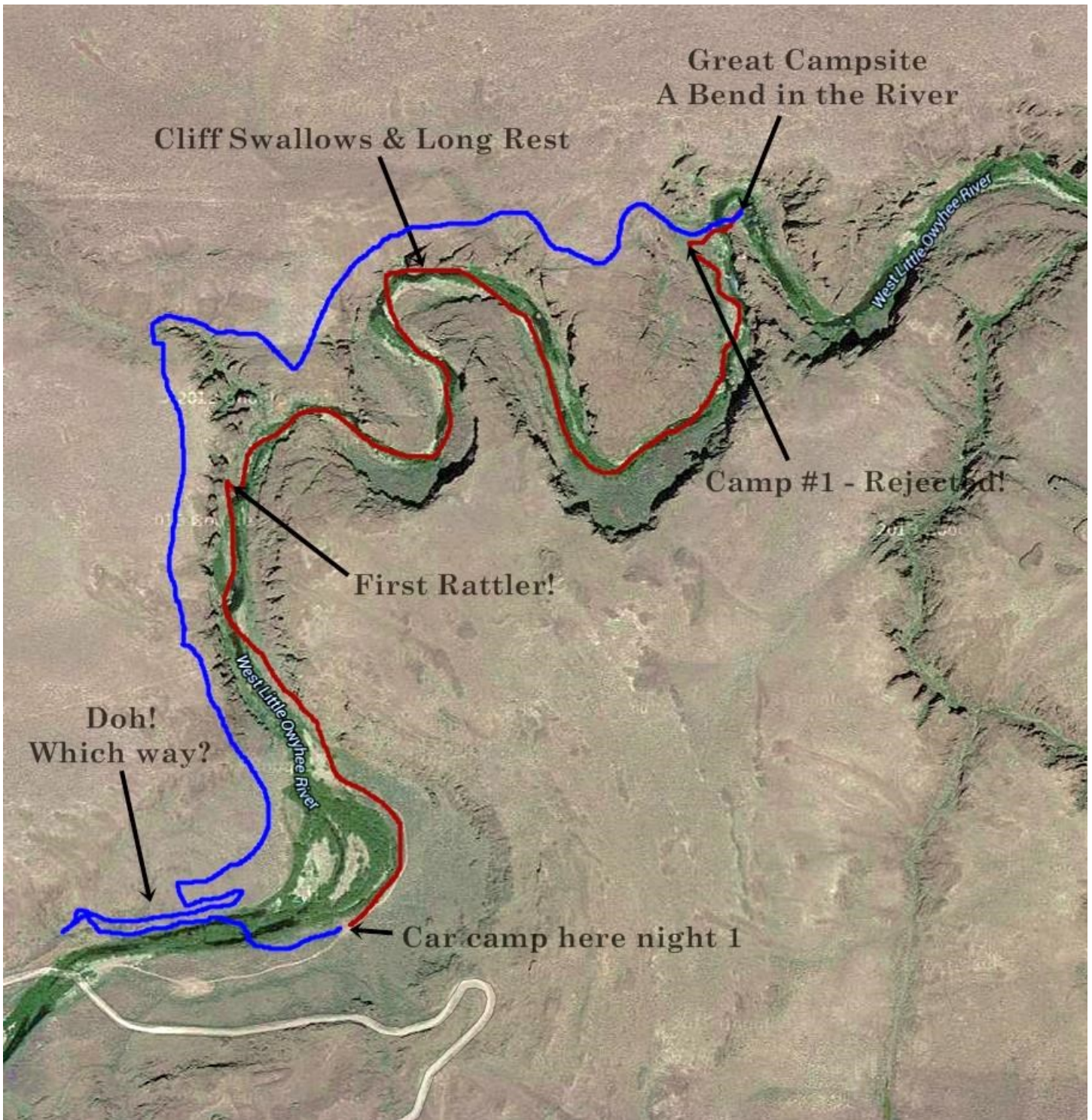
Gary getting water that we would later use to cook our first night's meal of fettuccini, pesto and tuna mixed in.



The view north from our campsite at Anderson Crossing (Little Owyhee River), Two Dudes and a Dog sitting around a (rare for us) fire and Ben & Lola.



MONDAY, JUNE 9: BACKPACK ANDERSON CROSSING TO A BEND IN THE RIVER



We followed the red line from “Car camp here night 1” to “A Bend in the River.” We stayed at A Bend in the River for one night and hiked back on the rim the following morning. Follow the blue line for the hike out. It was such a great hike out until we hit “Doh! Which way?”

Monday morning I (as is always the way on our backpack trips) woke up first at around 6:30. I made coffee, which got Ben's attention and he and Lola crawled out of their tent. Gary didn't move, as is his way. Ben and I drank coffee and chatted. It was a good chat and a wonderful opportunity to spend some quiet time together. Lola took Gary's lead and snoozed. Ben and I had a second cup of coffee, ate our breakfast of Balance Bar and GORP (homemade this time with just Good Ole Raisins and Peanuts) and sucked down another cup of coffee. I perused maps and guides and Ben read *True Grit* (which he says is a very good read). Gary slept. Ben and I put up our gear and packed the stuff we were going to take for our backpacking trip down the river. Gary slept.

As is my way, I started throwing small rocks and sticks at Gary's tent and gently prodding him: "Get the h*ll up Gary! It's 10:30! Ben and I are packed and ready to go. We're gonna leave you." That seemed to get his attention and there was movement in his tent. Ben, Lola and I then walked north to the end of the jeep road to see if we could figure out how to cross the beaver pond where the trail crosses the river and get Lola used to her new backpack. "Be ready to go when I get back," I uttered in Gary's direction, more for my personal satisfaction than to stir him anymore. *You can only nudge a wasp's nest so far before it unloads on you.*

After successfully figuring out that the beaver pond blocking our first stream crossing was navigable as long as we didn't mind getting wet up to mid-calf, we moseyed back to our site and danged if old Gary was up, packed and pretty near ready to go. As is his way, he was still a bit grumpy from only getting ten hours of sleep, but that would pass.

We set off about 11:00 o'clock, crossed the beaver pond and started bushwhacking our way north, down the river. The river here does not run deep, at least this time of year, or perhaps it is that there has been less water. But for the most part, the river is generally low enough to wade at most points or it doesn't take much time to find a good point around the few deep pools. There are certainly some deep pools (some



Looking south from our campsite. Gary is asleep in the MSR tent. The camper in the background belongs to Nancy and family.



Lola and Ben try out Lola's new backpack. It took a little getting used to, but she did fine, even swimming with it.

There are certainly some deep pools (some

over our heads) and there were a couple of places where we waded up to our waists and Lola had to swim. She had her backpack on (carrying her own food) so it took her a bit of time to get used to the whole swimming thing. But once she figured it out, she seemed pretty excited about jumping into every pool we came across.

The hiking was tough, what with the bushwhacking, wading and bouldering. Progress was slow. We were cognizant of the chance for rattlesnakes so also took more cautious (and slower) steps. We came to a place where we could go high near the canyon wall or low near the river. Ben and Lola stayed low and Gary and I went high. I gave my “snake stick” (a stick I have had in the basement for years) to Ben. Of course, with that move, who would be the ones to find a snake? Yep, the guys without the snake stick. Gary and I came across a good-sized rattlesnake basking against the canyon wall. It saw us before we saw it, maybe ten feet away. It buzzed loud and clear. Gary and I both jumped and even Ben, 20 yards away, heard its buzz. It had about ten rattles and used them quite effectively.



Two Dudes and a Dog (and a photographer). A few things to note: An experienced backpacker might question Gary's choice of footwear. Those are trail running shoes. Gary wore them for much of his New Zealand backpacking trip (experienced backpacker). They work for him, especially when feet are constantly wet. Ben, wearing his backpacking boots, found they got a bit heavy, especially when loaded up with water. I wore my cheap (\$25) no-name low-cut boots that I wore last year in Paria Canyon. Those worked very well.



Looking north from the beaver pond that we had to cross to start the trip. Our trail followed the canyon north. Those willows lining the river's edge look tranquil, but when bushwhacking through them, the tranquility loses some of its...uh, tranquillitiness.

Gary and I took pictures and [videos](#). Ben kept Lola down near the river with him, not wanting to see what a Lola-rattlesnake face-off would entail.



Our first rattlesnake. He was about 3.5 feet long, maybe 10 rattles, about as thick as my forearm at his widest girth, and mad at us for disturbing him. We took this picture standing about ten feet away. He finally crawled under some rocks but kept buzzing. I love snakes for some reason. Always have. So was very appreciative that this guy reluctantly agreed to let us take this good picture and a [not so good video](#).

Gary and I met back up with Ben and Lola. We agreed that the person in the lead should always have the snake stick and Lola should never lead since she doesn't have thumbs, so can't wield the snake stick. Lola didn't always agree with this so Ben wound up barking at her more than she barked the whole trip.

About a mile into the hike, we came to a beautiful bend in the river with a deep pool and high canyon walls directly above. A long sandy beach stretched along the pool, wide enough to stretch out and take a long break.

[Cliff Swallows](#) made their nests on the high cliffs directly above us, and swarmed and fussed at each other, or perhaps us. We were all happy to get our backpacks off for a spell, to include Lola. We ate and Gary took a plunge. The water is nowhere near as cold as the high mountain lakes in



Cliff Swallows fuss above us. There were hundreds of them fussing along the crevice line of that rock.

the Cascades or High Sierra, but it was still cold enough to cause him to yelp. I waded in up to my waste and decided that was far enough.

After hanging out for about an hour, we realized that we didn't have to kill ourselves on this trip, backpacking-wise. That fit perfectly with my plans since this was the first time any of us had been in this area; I wanted to explore as many regions as possible. We agreed we would do more day hiking than long backpack excursions, so we could get a better feel for the entire Owyhee area. We also felt just a little lazy. We further agreed that we should hike on down the river and stay overnight at the first good site we could find. That turned out to be less trivial than we expected.

We were in water as much as land. At least there were fewer snakes in the water, or so we thought. Notice the guy in the lead has the snake stick, which is also good for balance when walking on slippery rocks in the river.



[Video of a Ben and Lola pool crossing](#)



We trudged along, bushwhacking, bouldering, stream crossing and keeping an eye and ear out for snakes. From a distance, many sites looked hospitable for setting up a tent, but when we got to them, they were really a bunch of smaller, fist-size rocks spread smooth – a mirage, if you will. About a mile after our long break, we found a place high up on the canyon wall, maybe a hundred yards from the river that we thought we could scrape three tent areas in. We took off our packs and pondered the situation. The boys were set on this spot, but I was curious: that sharp bend on the river down there looked awful good. I offered to explore while the boys and Lola hung out up here. Gary lay down to take a snooze and Ben and Lola found shade to stretch out and read. I seemed to be the only one with energy, a definite reversal of roles, especially with Gary, who always wants to explore some peak or canyon.

With nothing but my camera and snake stick I clambered down the hillside, crossed the river and arrived on the sharp bend in the river. Beautiful! Plenty of places to sleep between the sage brush, easy water source, deep pool for swimming, and very nice beach area to hang out. It would also be more shaded from the sun than our hillside perch. I would have to convince the boys that it was worth the easy hike down the hill to make camp here.

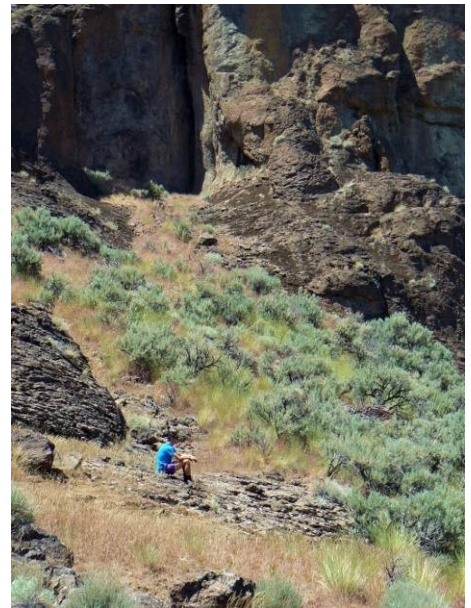
The *rhyolite* rock formations from here were gorgeous, so I crossed the river and hiked around the base of the steep rock walls, taking pictures and enjoying the mid-day lull in general activity. I thought for sure I would run across a rattlesnake, but I didn't see or hear the first one. I suspect they were bedded down deep in the rocks for their own mid-day siesta.

I returned to where I left the boys and found only Ben and Lola stretched out under the shade of a large boulder. After his nap, Gary went exploring to the top of the canyon wall above us. He soon returned and informed us that his initial appraisal of the situation is that we could hike out along the canyon rim if we didn't want to bushwhack back to the car tomorrow, but the route he took was not the way to go; it led to a high pinnacle with no easy access to the rim. We talked and figured that it would be good to hike out on the rim, giving us another experience (rim hiking). I also convinced the boys to go down and check out the new camping spot.

I stayed with Lola and they went down to check it out. Ben's air mattress had sprung a leak. He couldn't find where the hole was to patch it. I told him to take it with him, blow it up and submerge in the river so he could find where the bubbles came out. Good idea dad! *The old man still has some smarts in him.*

After a bit, while Lola whined for Ben and I had to restrain her, the boys returned without the air mattress, which told me they figured the site was good and we should change campsites. The boys packed up their stuff and headed down and I decided to see if I could find a route to the rim – *all that energy!*

I made it to the rim quickly, going up a rather steep ravine. My only concern was if Lola could make it up the steep rocks. Otherwise, this was a perfect route out of the canyon. The top of the canyon afforded some nice pictures, to include our bend in the river.



Our first camp spot? Yep. I am not sure where our potential tent sites were. Maybe that is why I went searching for another spot.

I like to call the rock formation (you can see it in middle of left picture and close up right)

Turtle Head with Flat Top Rock.

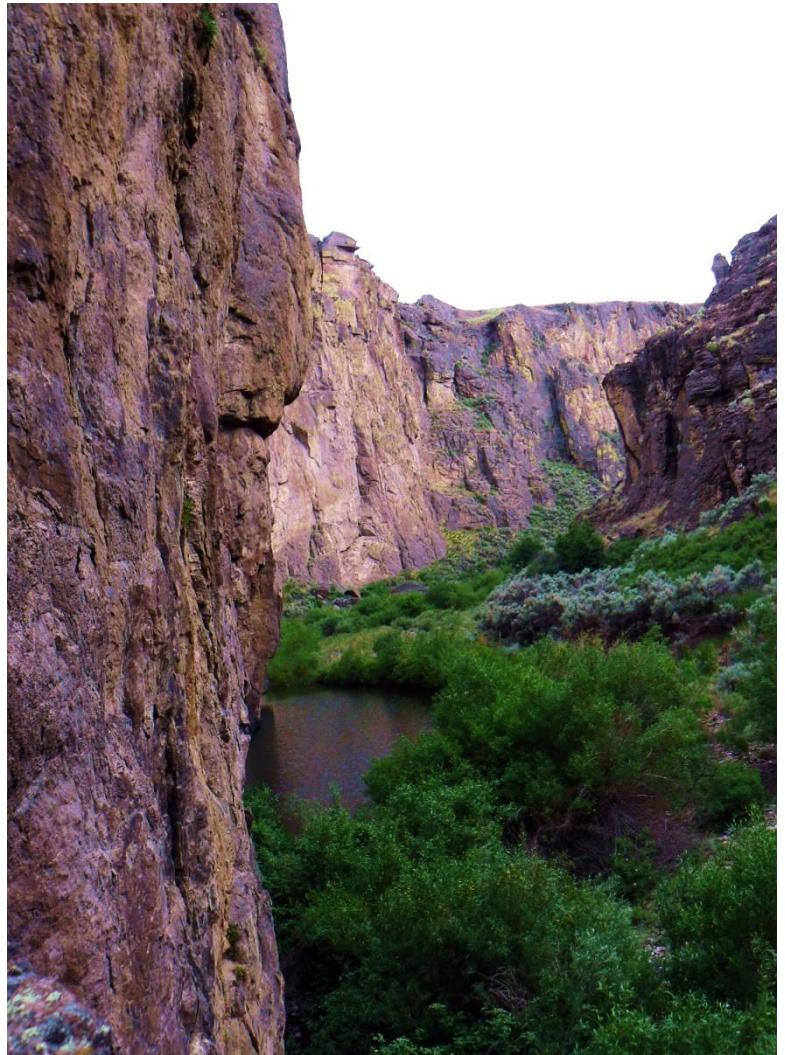


Back at our new campsite, I found the boys and Lola stretched out on their air mattresses on the rocky beach, reading. It was all very serene and relaxing; something we have not done a bunch of in our backpacking history, where we have always felt compelled to conquer that next peak or get those ten miles in before mid-afternoon. No, this trip was evolving into one of relaxation, talking, drinking beer (at the truck), campfires, cooked meals, and taking the time to do our own thing. I guess you could call it...*peaceful*.

After a couple of hours, someone finally suggested that we should think about cooking dinner. After another hour or so, Gary volunteered to cook if Ben and I cleaned up. After another hour or so, Gary got up and found the food and cooking gear. Wow! It was so very nice to simply NOT be in a hurry.

That night we had two packs of dehydrated mashed potatoes. We stirred in two cans of tuna for protein. Yes, I said "cans." Packing a few cans of tuna is not that heavy...as long as one of the boys does the packing. The potatoes were *much* better than the fettuccini, by the way.

After eating and cleaning up, we sat around the rocky shore of the pool quietly chatting and watching the near-full moon rise over rhyolite cliffs. With sun's set and moon's rise, there came a cacophony of noise; the world around us came to life. Where there had been the occasional bird calling, rock falling, rattler rattling or one of us splashing, there were now frogs croaking, crickets chirping, owls hooting and songbirds singing. The desert world had come alive in this narrow canyon, where water gave so much hidden life to the dry world surrounding it. "Cacophony" is probably not the right word; it was more of a *concert* with a full orchestra of critters. *Loud with life* seems like the best phrase to describe it. It was downright hard to hear each other as the concert warmed up and



From our campsite on the bend in the river. This is looking back south, the way we came. Those cliffs are a good 300 feet or higher.



Before dinner, we spend a few hours lying around reading and snoozing. Lola forgot to bring a book so spent most of her time snoozing.

our quiet chatting turned to contented listening.

The moon sliced through the canyon like a lightning bolt, so bright that we couldn't do our usual star gazing, which is my favorite backpacking nighttime pursuit. My second favorite pursuit is sleeping. So, with the moon drowning the stars, I peeled off to my sleeping bag first and the boys and Lola soon followed. The boys had set up their tents but I opted to sleep under the stars. While setting up my ground cloth and bag it occurred to me, *don't rattlesnakes like to crawl into warm places at night? Haven't I read about snakes crawling in and snuggling in with cowboys and campers during the night, only for both of them to be rudely awakened by each other's company the next morning, with the cowboy typically getting the short end of the fang?* Hmm... I would have to tread lightly tomorrow morning. This thought put me a bit on edge. I figured it might be a tense, sleepless night. Surprisingly, with the choir still in full song, the moon watching over us like a timid child's nightlight, and the deep familiar folds of my cozy sleeping bag providing a psychological barrier between me and the boogeyman (say, rattlesnake), I was lulled into a long, deep sleep alongside my sons on the bank at a bend on the river in Owyhee Canyon. I was visited by no snakes...that I am aware of.

Gary and I have both been to the deserts of the southwest corner of the country. Gary's comment of the day was, "You don't have to go to the southwest to see the southwest."

The little tree is growing from that rock in the water. Life can be pretty darned tough sometimes. Lower right: Speaking of life being tough, those are tufts of grass growing on the side of that cliff about 200 feet high. How did it get there? Rhyolite cliffs loomed over our camp.





Above: the “bend in the river” where we camped. Our reading hangout was on the far right side of the peninsula.

Right: the river carves its way north through rhyolite cliffs.

This place is plain down hard to get to, but when you get here, it’s hard to leave.

Note: As is my way, I have a hard time picking from all the pictures we took to put in this book. So, to see more, [go here](#).

And [Eagles](#) (or [Ferruginous hawks](#)) fly here too...

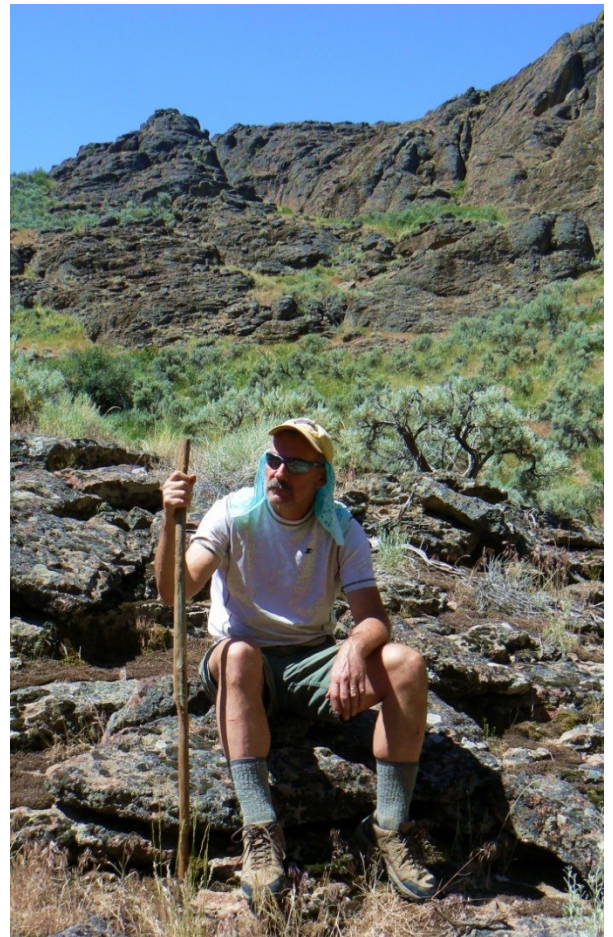


TUESDAY, JUNE 10: BACKPACK A BEND IN THE RIVER TO ANDERSON CROSSING THEN DRIVE TO THREE FORKS

“Gary! Wake up!” Ben and I had already had two cups of coffee and eaten breakfast. I had inspected the folds of my sleeping setup for visitors (which I understand could include spiders and scorpions?) Lola had performed here morning ritual, to include a rather long stretching regimen that she performs every time she wakes up, which makes me think I should be doing the same thing – nature has a way of teaching us those things and most of us have a way of ignoring them. Ben and I packed most of the cooking gear (Gary is not a morning coffee person).

I threw a couple of small stones and sticks onto Gary’s tent. “Oh, let him sleep dad. We’re not in a hurry,” Ben offered. I guess he was right; it was not even 9:00; way before Gary’s usual wakeup time. But, knock me over with a feather, Gary actually emerged from his tent! *Wait! What?*

It wasn’t a pretty sight, mind you, but we have become accustomed to that. And I think I even saw a smile on his face as I cowered behind some sage brush. He didn’t say much, but stretched and went through his own morning routine...rather like Lola. But after about ½ hour, he finished his meal and we packed our gear for the hike out of the canyon.



The old man watches over his flock.

We had decided to climb the western side of the canyon and hike out on the rim. Our only concern was getting Lola up some of the steeper rock walls. None were real climbs, but as Ben says, “Lola has no thumbs,” and we all know that climbing is much more successful if you have some thumbs to give you a...*hand*. But less than ½ hour after we left camp, crossed the river and headed up the other side, we were standing on the rim taking pictures. Lola had been a champ – even without thumbs – and it turned out that I was the one that skittered about the rocks like I was thumbless. *I blame gravity and the fact that I am 61; 36 years older than the oldest of those three and a good 58 years older than the youngest. Give me a break, okay? At least bringing up the rear gave me a bunch of good pictures opportunities of them merrily hiking along – Two Dudes and a Dog...and a Photographer.*

The hike back to Anderson Crossing along the rim was very easy, along generally flat, sand and rock landscape interspersed with [sagebrush](#). It took about an hour to get back to where we could see the truck. All we had to do was go down that slope, cross that river and walk through that small bit of brush to the truck. Piece of cake...not.

Getting down the slope *was* easy. When it came to crossing the river to get to the other side, it took us a good half hour of walking up and down the shoreline looking for a place that was not over our heads in either water or muck. But finally, Gary said something like, "To heck with this!" and lead us into the river, up to our waists in slime, mud and water vegetation that, I think, was alive or had been alive at some time in the last two or three years, and over to the other side – Nasty! Nevertheless, we made it. Then we had to bushwhack for several yards through the willows, reeds and [nettles](#). We also discovered that those large black flies that *BITE* and *incessantly buzz your ears* seem to be at home in riparian terrain.

Upon finally reaching the truck, we looked at the map. We wanted to go to Three Forks, at the confluence of North, Middle and Main forks of the Owyhee River. According to the map, we had a couple of choices: take a jeep trail for a couple of hours or go back to 95, north to Burns Junction, continue on 95 through Rome and find a road out of Jordan Valley that took us to Three Forks. We were not low on gas, but since we didn't know the condition of the jeep roads, we opted for 95 so we could fill our gas tank and dwindling beer supply in Rome – we were *really* getting into this whole car camping thing.

Swimming through yuck.
Requisite flower picture:
[Oregon Checkermallow](#).



Gary checking out the canyon from the top.



Ben and Lola in deep sagebrush on hillside

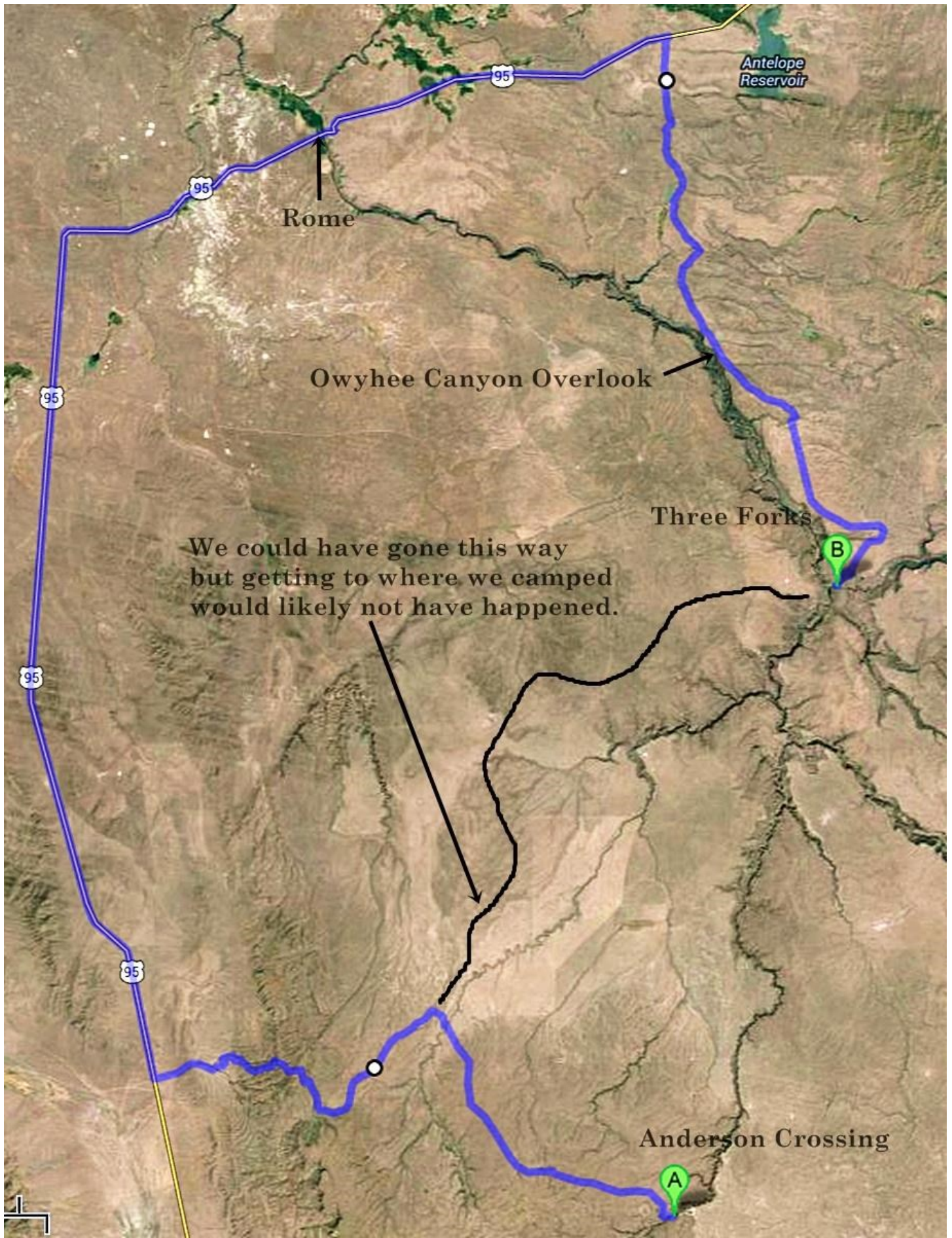




Look close enough at the rock formations along the rim and you can find all kinds of goodies: left we have a natural overlook that would have been a good place to hide from game or enemies in the old days. That is a natural arch to the right, maybe 15 feet to the top and 30 feet wide.



A few things to notice here: (1) Lola is dead...or looks like it. It took a bit of motivating to get her to even get in the truck for her next adventure. (2) First thing you do when you get back to camp is take off the boots! (3) Did I mention the matching scratches down the sides of the truck? Ouch!!! Don't take the new, pretty truck through big sagebrush; keep the beater. Character looks good on a beater.



Antelope Reservoir

Rome

Owyhee Canyon Overlook

Three Forks

We could have gone this way but getting to where we camped would likely not have happened.

Anderson Crossing

B

A





Ride to Rome Station – Top: three pronghorn antelope. Left: field of mules ears (Sunflower family Asteraceae). Below: Gang in the truck. Bottom: Sculpted desert.

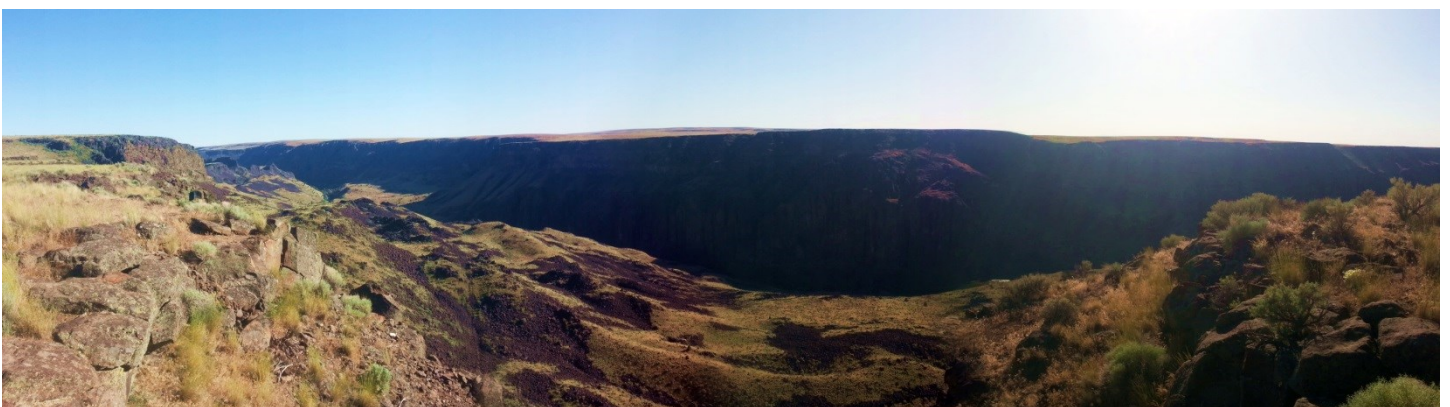


At Rome Station (in Rome), we filled up our gas tank, water bottles and got only a few beers. I have a hard time paying \$3.00 for a bottle of Black Butte Porter. That works out to \$18.00 for a six-pack. While I truly like beer, I don't like it *that* much. As the elected benefactor of this trip, I allowed one choice bottle each and figured that was good enough. No one saw fit to complain.

A quick review of Rome Station: Other than the gawd-awful prices, I liked the place. I guess one has to pay for an oasis in the desert, which is just what Rome Station is. The same woman that sold us our beer was grilling burgers for some folks at one of the booths so it turned out that we had to wait about five minutes to get our gas because she would be the one pumping it as well. We were (stupidly) planning on going all the way to Jordan Valley and then south to get to Three Forks. Wrong! She said all we had to do was drive up the road 17 miles, turn right on Three Forks Road and go for about 35 miles. She also told us about road conditions, etc. Once she warmed up to us, it was a pleasure to talk to her. An sun-shriveled old man outside told us we could fill our water bottles at any of the faucets out back by the cabins. It was all very homey, and while we were obviously stupid tourists (although we didn't smell like tourists at this point in the trip) we were treated like first class citizens. So, except for the prices, which might be worth it since it is the only real oasis for a long stretch, this is a good place to stop.



We drove 17.3 miles on up 95, blew by our turnoff to Three Forks Road (the sign is on the left, the turnoff is on the right), turned around and made our way south on a good gravel road. Along the way, we came to Owyhee Canyon Overlook. While not anywhere near as big as the Grand Canyon, it is still an overlook you don't want to...overlook. It is right out in the middle of nowhere and I suspect it looks very much like the Grand Canyon looked a million years ago, give or take a year or two. And we were the only ones there.



Panorama of Owyhee Canyon from Owyhee Overlook

The woman at Rome Station warned us about a “straight down” 4-wheel-drive-only jeep road for the last mile into Three Forks. Well, I would certainly not want to take What’s-her-name’s Odyssey down that road; it certainly requires high clearance, but the 4-wheeling was not necessary and it certainly was not “straight down.” It was steep, but doable in a high clearance rig, like my Silverado. I didn’t need to put it into 4-wheel drive, but if it rained, I suspect I would find the 4-wheel gadgetry comforting.

We drove around Three Forks camping area searching for the best possible site to camp. Being the only ones there, we figured we would be picky. We also drove ½ mile east to where a bridge crosses the Middle Fork and then turns into a jeep trail that leads right to Three Forks Hot Springs; our destination for tomorrow. We earmarked the jeep trail for a later adventure, turned around and made camp pretty close to the river right at the confluence.

Three Forks camping area has a well-maintained *actual toilet house*. While we were there (about 24 hours total), I think we each used it twice just because we could. We felt like we were living in the lap of luxury, and in a way, I think we were, even if the toilet house hadn’t been there. There is no water other than what you get out of the river. Filter it or do what we do (iodine tabs for drinking), or dip it straight out of the river for anything requiring boiling: mashed taters, fettuccini and coffee. We made a fire, ate dinner (another round of fettuccini which was much better than the first night), drank our beers and hit the sack.

I opted to sleep in the bed of the truck again, Ben set up his tent and Gary decided to forego the tent and throw his footprint (ground cloth) on the beach and sleep under the stars. It was a beautiful night and the same *loud with life* concert that had serenaded us the night before set in again, only with different artistes.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11: HIKE THREE FORKS TO WARM SPRINGS THEN DRIVE TO LESLIE GULCH

We followed our standard pattern this morning: I wake up and brew coffee, Lola hears me and whines to be let out of her tent, Ben let’s her out and she comes running over to me for love (after she does her pee and stretch routine), Ben gets a scent of fresh coffee – “Dad, can you make me a cup?” – and digs deeper into his sleeping bag, Gary sleeps, coffee is ready and Ben drags himself out, Gary sleeps, and so on.

At one point, I thought Gary was so “dead to the world” that I thought he had perished in his sleeping bag, a bunch of snakes having snuggled up with him in the night. Ignoring that, I



Our very own outhouse! Three Forks Dome in the background.



A structure of rocks across the road from the outhouse. I have no idea what it is, which makes me want to study more of the history of this area.

sauntered up to the bathroom and when I returned found that Gary had gotten up, moved his sleeping bag out of the sun and crawled back into it. His mistake was that he was markedly close to the truck where Ben, Lola and I were hanging out. We razzed him about his sleeping habits and licked his face. Lola gave him a hard time too.



Ben finished True Grit. I think he gave this a **really awesome!** review. The parts about snakes were apropos.

Gary slept.

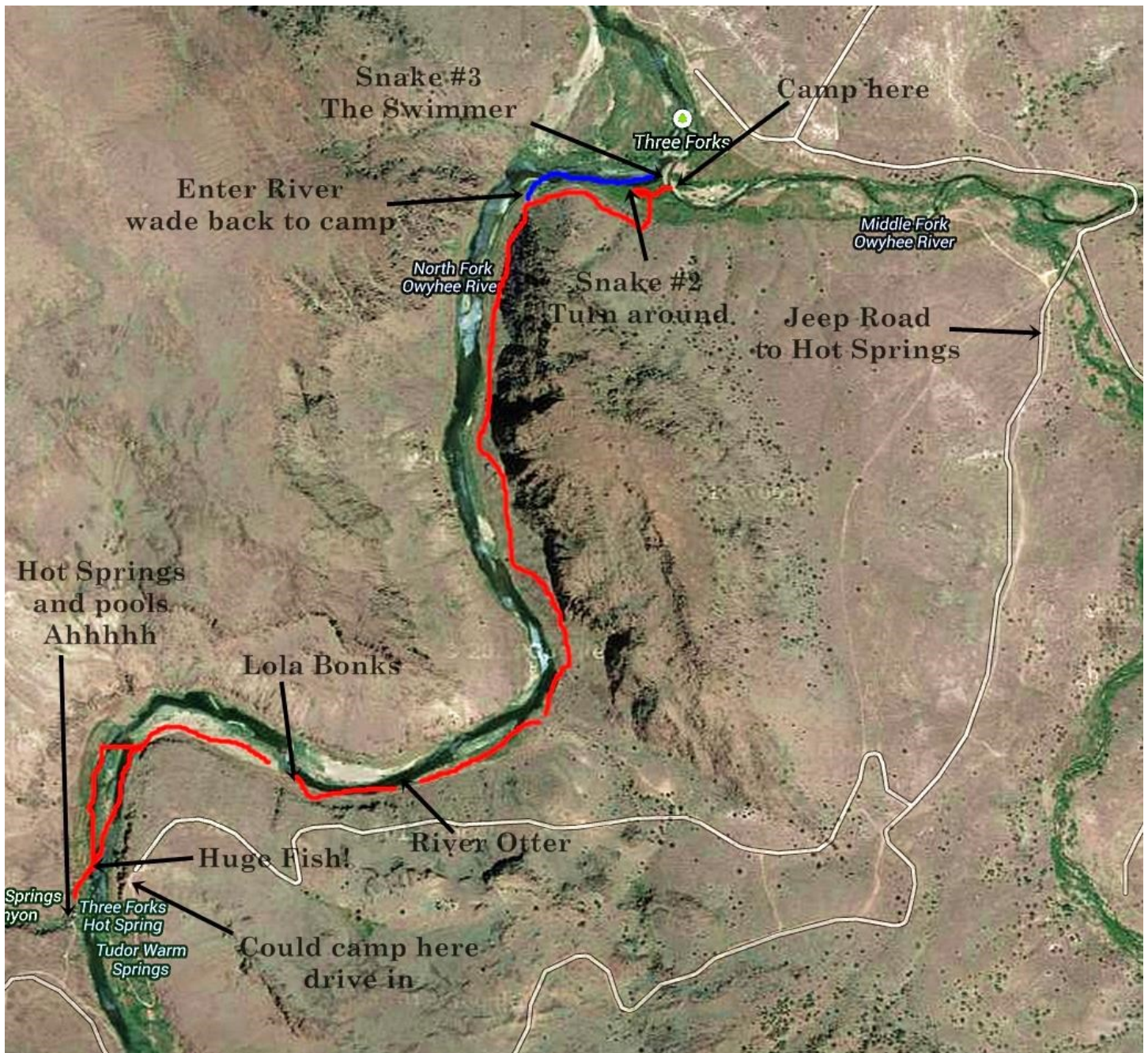
Lola woke up.

Gary slept.

[Videotaped a pretty little Yellow Breasted Chat?](#) Watch the video and let me know if it is not a Chat.

Also got [a video of a Common Merganser duck family](#). [Common Merganser](#)





The hike from Three Forks to Three Forks Hot Springs is in red. We followed the same route back except for the last couple hundred yards when Ben had an awesome suggestion to bypass the wonderful riparian riverside of nettles, reeds, willows and snakes by wading. The water never got much over our knees and it was a much easier walk than earlier that morning.

We didn't follow the jeep road to the hot springs, but the truck could handle it just fine. I am going to save that for another adventure and maybe even take What's-her-name. The camping at the hot springs would be great and there are huge fish. Mental note: bring fishing pole.



Our destination for the day was Three Forks Hot Springs, about a 2-mile hike upriver (south) from the confluence. Our biggest challenge was the first few hundred yards where we had to cross the Middle Fork – not a big deal – and then bushwhack through tall reeds, willows, nettles and rattlesnakes – big deal.

Gary got into some nettles right out of the chute so opted to take the high road nearer the overhanging Three Forks Dome cliffs and get out of the bushwhacking frenzy. Ben, Lola and I opted for the low road. I was leading, whacking away with my snake stick with Ben and Lola close behind. About five feet in front of me, hidden from view under the low growth, a rattler gave me that definitive *I-am-not-a-grasshopper-making-this-rattling-noise* warning. Mountain grasshoppers can give off an explosive rattling sound when they fly, causing one to briefly muse that they are suddenly rattlesnake food. But no, there is a very clear difference between a grasshopper and rattlesnake, and this was definitely not a grasshopper and he was *mad*. I must have whacked right over his head, which was actually the secondary intent of my whacking exerts: make a rattler rattle before he strikes. I shouted, “snake!” – If you know me, you would think I used a different word that starts with ‘s’ but, no, my usual verbal response did not seem to apply on this trip. Even when Gary and I saw the 5-footer the first day, I said, “Whoa! There ya go.” – I jumped back, caught my foot in some weeds and fell back flat on my rear. An oft-likely first thought (my thought anyway) when one falls down in the presence of a rattler is that one is destined to become snake sustenance. With agility



The Confluence at Three Forks. To make our hike, cross the river to the shore on the left, bushwhack through the reeds, willows, nettles and snakes on the left to the distance at the foot of that huge cliff, turn left and walk two miles on trail. Bingo! Hot Springs.

uncommon to most of us in our 7th decade, I jumped up, struck a Kung Fu pose with my snake stick-turned-spear thrust out in a defensive position, and prepared for engagement. The snake stared.

I recovered my mental aptitude quickly (at least for one of us in our 7th decade) and remembered why the boys had let me come along: photographer (in addition to benefactor). I started poking my stick around to clear the weeds for a good shot. Ben and Lola had been watching this (fortunately, Lola didn't come up to see what was going on or lick me in the face while I was down). "What are you doing dad?"

"I'm gettin' a picture."

"You already have one. I don't like snakes and don't want Lola trying to get to it. We should go up with Gary." *Silly child! As if there is a likelihood that there will be fewer snakes with Gary.* I looked back at the snake, slowly sneaking away, the diamond shaped tan and brown coloration slithering through the undergrowth. All I had to do was clear a few leaves and branches back, which would rile the snake good and proper, causing him – and, no, I have no idea if it was a male or female, and I didn't plan on doing an inspection – to stop, coil and rattle, and I would take a few good shots – *easy-peasy*. But knowing Ben was somewhat Ophidiophobic (fear of snakes – my new word for the day), I agreed to disengage...this time.



We turned and hacked our way through a particularly rough patch of reeds and willows interlaced with tall, particularly savage nettles. I can hear you now, *this all sounds like a lot of fun Rod...chuckle, chuckle*. I just don't know what it is, but it *was* a lot of fun. When I write it down and read it back, well, I have to admit that it doesn't sound very alluring. But being with my boys fighting rattlesnakes and nettles; bushwhacking and boulder scrambling; cooking our evening gruel and drinking our expensive beers; bouncing along on a jeep trail "[doin' truck stuff](#)"; stinking; farting (*I have no idea where they got that! Inherited from What's-her-name, I suspect. In-coming!*); wading through muck up to our crotches; drinking water right out of the stream (toss in an iodine tab); sleeping under the stars; listening to night's chorus; experiencing wilderness together that so very few people in this world get to see; sharing life, hopes, dreams – theirs *and* mine – the good, the bad; *being* together; *being* dad. It does not get better.

Ouch! Gary's arm after a fight with a nettle. The nettle apparently won, which drove Gary to higher ground, leaving Ben, Lola and me to fight rattlesnake #2 alone.

We finally exited the riparian vegetation and hoofed it through a dry sagebrush and boulder scree landscape that tends to dominate the sloping canyon walls. We met Gary where the slope flattened out and an old military trail began that we would follow all the way to the hot springs. The trail paralleled the river, never getting more than 25 yards or so from its bank. We had a beautiful view of the river as it meandered along the canyon. We saw a [river otter swimming](#) (my first ever) and, jumped a mother [Greater Sage Grouse](#) with three



youngsters. They only flew about fifty yards. I ran up with my video camera but they settled down and I never saw them, although I knew they were hiding *right here*.

With about a quarter mile to where we would ford the river to the hot springs, Lola decided that she was tired and simply lay down right on the trail. We gave her water and let her rest in some shade. She was reluctant to get up and continue; we actually thought about carrying her. But after some coaxing, she ambled on. She didn't show any signs of distress: her nose remained moist and cool, and she showed interest in stuff around her by sniffing at this and that. Bottom line is that she was just wearing too much clothing for the hot sun: a black fur coat.



The Owyhee River looking south (upstream) on the hike to the Three Forks Hot Springs from Three Forks Campground.

We made it to the river crossing and Lola lolled in it for a good five minutes, letting the cool water run over her hot, dusty little bod. Gary once again took the high road to the springs, which we could now see less than 100 yards up stream. Ben and I took the *very* low road by wading up the river. As we got closer to where the hot springs emptied into the river, the water became warmer. The water was clear and we could see some large fish (trout, but maybe smallmouth bass) hanging out around the edges of where the colder water met the hot springs water. *Oh, if only I had brought a fishing pole, we would certainly not be having canned tuna with our gruel tonight. Earmarked for a later adventure.*

After a bit of climbing and bushwhacking we made it to the hot springs. There are two main springs where we were and the one furthest up the river (south) has been damned up to provide absolutely extraordinary soaking pools. The water temperature was about 95 degrees. We thought that would be too warm, especially in the desert. Wrong! We hung out there for at least

two hours. We ate, took tons of pictures, let the waterfalls massage our shoulders, contemplated life, and loitered. I particularly liked sitting under the falls letting the water massage my shoulders...ahhhh. [Here is a video of some old bald guy doing the same thing.](#)

Although I have to admit that we have been to places that are more beautiful than Three Forks Hot Springs ([High Sierra Wire Lakes](#), [Wallowas](#), [South Sister Summit](#), [Paria](#), to name but a few), we agreed that it was worth all the snake, nettle, and lazy dog trouble, and had to be one of the top five hiking destinations we have ever discovered.



Critters along the way: Two plump [mourning doves](#).

Videos you might (or might not) like:

- [Main Hot Spring Pool](#)
- [More of pool with scenery](#)
- [The “other” hot spring.](#) *This one didn't have a well-defined pool.*



Top: Looking north from the hot springs pool.

Bottom: Looking south.





As time tends to do when you're having a good time, it flew. We reluctantly agreed that it was time to return to camp. We weren't sure if we were going to try the trip to Leslie Gulch (about a three-hour drive) today or stay here one more night and go early tomorrow. Little did we know that an acquaintance of ours would help us with that decision.

The hike back to where the trail meets the willow, reed and nettle maze at the confluence was uneventful except that Lola determined that she was overheated again and balked. We found a small tree that cast a nice shade and huddled under it for about five minutes. After Lola got her five minutes rest and a bowl of water, she was ready to go.

Ben suggested that rather than going through the maze of reeds, nettles and rattlesnakes back at the confluence, that we wade the river instead. Good idea! *Yes, Ben thought of this; go figure.* And we did just that and it was far easier to wade the knee-deep water along a mostly sandy bottom than the nettle & snake infested shoreline. It was never so deep that Lola had to swim for more than a few feet.



Lola takes a break



Ben suggested that we wade the last hundred yards or so to the confluence rather than fight snakes, nettles and other hazards. Good idea Ben! It was rarely over Lola's head and we were able to avoid most of the hazards.

As we approached the far shore where we had made camp, still wading, one of the boys said, "Hey, there goes a water snake." Swimming right along without a care in the world, probably no more than ten yards away from where Gary slept exposed on the sandy beach the night before, there was indeed a snake swimming merrily along. And it was not a *water* snake, but a *rattle* snake.

"That's a rattlesnake," I yelled, and took off...right for the snake. "Where are you going dad?" someone called after me.

"I have to get a picture of it swimming."

"You're gonna get bit!" someone yelled. I ignored him.

The snake, probably noticing the commotion of a large, lumbering, crazed beast splashing at it, started swimming a touch faster for the shoreline. I reached it about the same time it reached shore. I tried a couple of pictures and even a video as I splashed along, but wouldn't you know it, my stupid camera wasn't cooperating; I wasn't getting that satisfying *click* when I snapped a picture. (It turned out that the setting on the camera was halfway between *take a picture* and, well, *don't take a picture*. Funny that the makers saw fit to put such a setting on a camera. But on my camera, they figured it needed one. When the setting is half way between *take* and *don't take*, it defaults to the *torque Rod off setting*, which actually results in pictures after all but Rod just doesn't know it).

By this time, the snake was sneaking up on the shore. Somehow, I had a stick in my hand. We had accidently broken my snake stick on the trip back from the Hot Springs, and I have no idea to this very day how I wound up with a stick in my hand. But it was about five or six feet long (long enough) so that I could pin the snake with it, toss the beast back into the river, and get a decent shot of it crossing....again. The snake was maybe three feet long, not very big (at least compared to the six-footer we saw the first day) with maybe four or five rattles. Right after taking the picture, he crawled up on shore and into the weeds. After trying (and failing) to get a few videos of him when he reached shore for the second time, we let him go.



While I was trying to get the video, although the snake coiled and appeared mad enough to bite the south end of a northbound skunk, he never once rattled. I surmised that it could have been because his rattles got wet and that he was trying, but they were waterlogged. Gary surmised that I had made him so mad that all warnings were over and all he wanted now was to bite that knot-head that had so unceremoniously tossed him back into the river. It was particularly disconcerting (and almost haunting) how, once the snake and I agreed to part company, it

measuredly backed away out of its coiled position, body slowly retreating, vanishing into the brush, its diamond-shaped head and piercing black eyes staying still being the last of its body to back away into the brush, peering into my soul, telling me, *you are mine if you come one step closer*. I didn't. We now had a snake somewhere within mere yards of our camp, really pissed off and a known non-rattler; not a good combination.



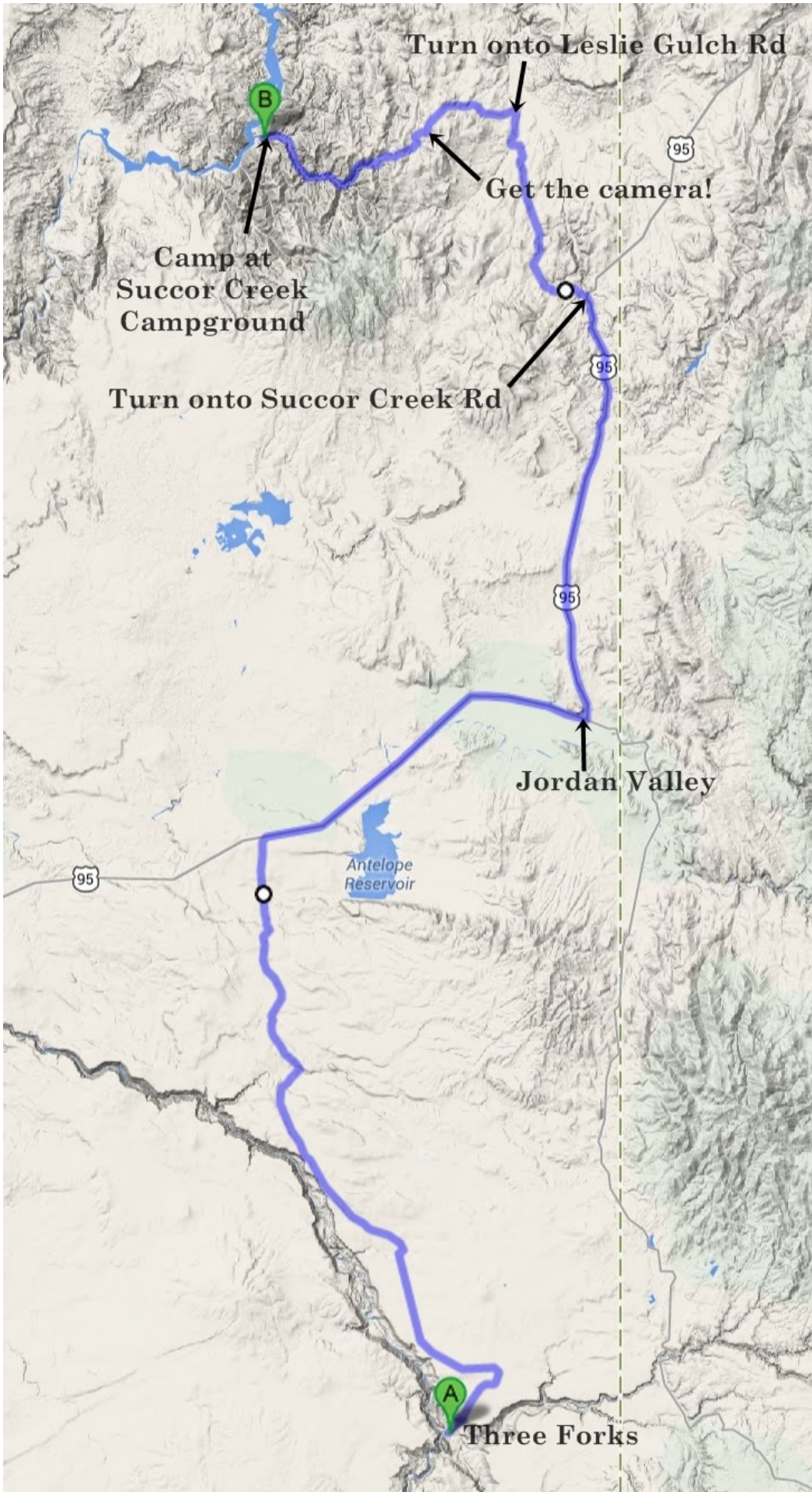
This encounter with what might have been the same snake Ben, Lola and I ran into that morning (or not) nudged us in the direction of moving on to Leslie Gulch. Not that there would be fewer snakes there but at least they might give us a bit of a warning. We ate lunch sitting on the tailgate and then piled into the truck in search of Leslie Gulch and our next adventure, leaving our snake and his friends to lie in wait for the next yahoos that happened along.

We returned the way we came on Three Forks Road. When you reach 95, it is just another 15.5 miles to where 95 turns north (left) in Jordan Valley. Stop there to resupply your beer, water and any other goodies you might need. From the left turn in Jordan Valley, stay on 95 for about 18 miles to Succor Creek Rd on your left. Succor Creek Rd is well-maintained gravel. In fact, getting to Slocum Campground is very easy, requiring nothing more than What's-her-name's Odyssey. Take Succor Creek Road for about 10 miles and turn left on Leslie Gulch Rd. Take Leslie Gulch Rd for 14 miles to the campground on your left. Another 0.3 miles down the road is the Owyhee River/Reservoir. It was nothing more than a small river when we were there.



If Three Forks Campground is “luxury” because of the bathroom, then Leslie Gulch is “presidential” because it has two bathrooms: one boy and one girl. And get this: it has picnic tables *covered with permanent shelters!* That’s just crazy! But before we go any further, let’s rewind to the trip getting here.

Whatever sights we discovered on the trip from Three Forks to Leslie Gulch were eclipsed by the absolute stunning beauty that we encountered once turning onto Leslie Gulch Rd. The rhyolite formations are phenomenal.





So many picture ops driving through Leslie Gulch. Every time we turned a corner there was another multi-colored rhyolite formation. My personal favorite is the one below. Literally, we turned a corner and BOOM! there was this stunning artist's rendition of magnificence right in our faces. We took a good five minutes of pictures.



Of particular note on our drive through Leslie Gulch was the abundance of [Mountain Quail](#) and [Chukar](#), particularly Chukar. Mountain Quail look very much like Chukar, especially with the striped coloration on the front of the body. Mountain Quail have a long top knot on their head and are smaller than Chukar, although they are the biggest quail in North America. Both are sought-after during hunting season (and mighty tasty) and neither is an easy target on the wing. However, on this trip the Chukar were particularly clueless pedestrians, ambling down the road, not especially concerned that a two-ton vehicle was bearing down on them. We had to slow to a crawl and get right up on them before they finally got mad enough at us to get off the road.



Two Mountain Quail above. You can just barely see the topknot of the one on the branch. While the breast is striped similarly to the Chukar, the head coloration is very different.

The Chukar below was particularly disinterested. We caught up to him slowly ambling along, finally got his attention and I think if he had had hands, he would have given us a particularly distasteful gesture.



There were several people at the campground. It turned out that most were from a photography club and were there because the full moon was “yellow,” referred to as the “Honey Moon.” It is the yellowest it will be all year. We didn’t have a clue that this was the case, but the moon was stunningly bright the entire trip. We settled as far as we could get from the photographers and set “camp” (if you can call this luxury living camping). Gary slept under the stars again, Ben and Lola in their tent and I snuggled down in the truck bed. Dinner was mashed taters, tuna and Corona to wash it down. Luxury camping at its finest.

THURSDAY JUNE 12: HIKE SLOCUM CAMPGROUND AND JUNIPER GULCH TO YELLO JACKET



Rod's morning trek in the little valley behind Slocum Campground. This hike is really easy and has all kinds of beautiful scenery and flowers, and isn't even marked as a hike. Just follow the creek bed and enjoy. Below is the arch I was playing around when Gary found me. The picture on the right is the picture down the valley to camp. Gary is actually in there somewhere searching for me.



The next morning I woke up eager to go. The boys and Lola were, as usual, a bit more laid back. I decided to walk up the small canyon that runs southeast from Slocum Campground. While there is no marked trail to speak of, there is a small dry creek bed providing a nice path. I told the boys that I would return in about a half hour. I decided to forego my hiking shoes and wear my tennis shoes; I was just going up the path a ways.

Two hours later, while I was climbing up a small cliff that overhung the canyon, I heard, "Dad? Where are you?" Here came Gary up the creek bed, sent on a mission to recover the old man. *Uh-oh...* Time had completely gotten away from me; I had been so enamored with the scenery and, in particular, the absolute quiet. I was utterly alone with not even a snake to keep me company.

I yelled down at Gary and waved. "Where have you been?" Gary asked with not just a touch of a father's frustration in his voice. I felt like I was 8 years old again, back home in Summit, with mom standing in the backyard, hands on her hips, scowling at me as I guiltily emerged from the woods behind the house.

I had nothing more to say other than, "Sorry. I totally lost track of time. What time is it anyway?"

"Past 10:00," Gary answered. "A lot more than a half hour." He didn't really forgive me but I ran up to him through the dry, gently waving grass as *Melissa Gilbert* staring as *Laura Ingalls Wilder* did at the end of each show in *Little House on the Prairie*. This got a reluctant grin out of him. I apologized and we chatted a bit before heading back to the camp, where I had to apologize to Ben and Lola all over again. However, it was all worth it ([Packard's Blazing Star](#), for example), even though I got a virtual spanking from both my sons. Lola kept her comments to herself.



Rock formation visible from our campsite. My morning walk took me up the small valley to the left of the rocks.





Above, pretty flower, right? This [Spanish Needle](#) might be pretty but this is stage one of the seeds that are a constant nuisance, getting embedded in shoes and socks so badly that it can take up to an hour or more to dig them out. And you have to dig them out because they poke your skin otherwise. I am still digging them out of my good tennis shoes.



The Packard Blazing Star, left, is definitely one of my favorite flowers ever. According to [wildowyhee.org](#), there are five such exceedingly rare species within Leslie Gulch: sterile milkvetch, Packard's blazing star, Ertter's groundsel, grimy ivesia and Owyhee clover. The groundsel and blazing star are annuals that grow only in Leslie Gulch's ash deposits and in two Wilderness Study Areas directly to the north.

Because of Lola's reluctance to hike in the desert wearing a black fur coat, we decided that she should not come along on anything too difficult, so she and Ben got to stay at camp while Gary and I discovered Juniper Gulch and Yellow Jacket. Ben planned on reading and Lola, I think, planned on sleeping. Gary and I took the truck to the trailhead of Juniper Gulch. Take Leslie Gulch back the way you came (east) about 3.5 miles to the Juniper Gulch trailhead on the left (north). It was about 10:30.



Ertter's groundsel is also only found in Leslie Gulch.

Wow! Just Wow! Juniper Gulch is one of the most beautiful short hikes I have ever taken, and you can easily make it into a longer hike if you choose to go up to Yellow Jacket, which we did. If you want a short, easy, beautiful hike, follow the trail from the trailhead that follows a dry creek bed for about a mile until it peels off to the left, up a small rise. Up to that point, the trail is flat and easy, but when you peel off, then set your legs for up-hill mode for about the next 1.5 miles to Yellow Jacket.

Gary and I did something of a loop, following the trail and ridge up to Yellow Jacket, which is a high rock formation that separates Timber Gulch from Juniper Gulch, about 4800 feet elevation.

Besides the meditative beauty of the Yellow Jacket overlook; sweeping winds raking grassy rolling hillsides; surreal multi-colored gulch and rock formations; and those puffy white cloud formations that splice the deep blue above us like a rich white topping on a caramel sundae, there were also a couple of less poetic events to add a touch of *realism*:

The first was one of those, "*Holy crap Gary! Where are you taking us?*" *straight-up-the-hill cross-country expedition-level hikes* that Gary is renowned for. I think my older son believes that the easiest route is always the straightest route, regardless of obstacles or elevation gain. When we climbed the base of the outcropping that fronts Yellow Jacket (the false Yellow Jacket, it turned out), we had the options of (1) take a peaceful, gradual slope for about 300 yards or (2) climb a slope with a scree field in the middle that covered the same elevation in about 150 yards; admittedly the more direct route...but it was *straight up!*

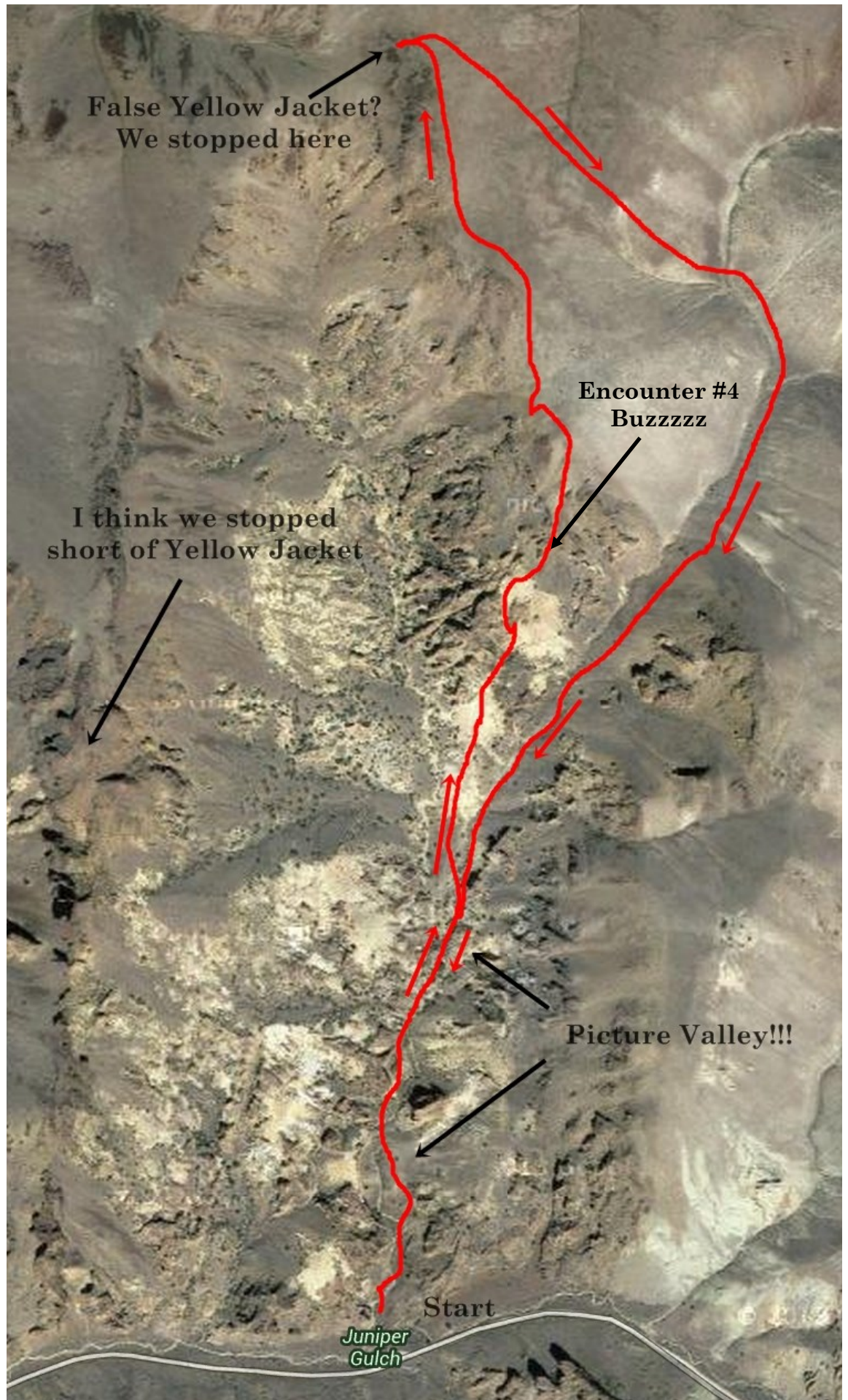
"Where are you going Gary?" I asked when I saw him going up the obviously wrong route.

"I want to go this way," he said. "You can go the other way if you want. I'll meet you at the top."

"Really? That's straight up!" He ignored me.

I muttered something a bit on the obscene side (which I am sure he also heard and ignored). I followed my son. *Is he trying to take over my position as the alpha male?*

Well, after looking at the map a bit more, I think we might have found a false Yellow Jacket. That is okay though, because it gives another place to go the next time we go. Regardless, this hike up Juniper Gulch was likely the most beautiful hike I have ever taken.



The hillside was loose sand, gravel and small rocks interspersed with sage, low scrubby bushes and tufts of weeds. God had apparently seen fit to strategically place this growth so an aging backpacker could grab hold of it when taking two steps forward and then sliding back one, which is the (my) way when climbing a scree-plated hillside. It got so steep in one section that I had to work my way over to the rock wall that funneled the slope to try to get footholds in more solid ground. I looked up at Gary bounding over the slope like a mountain goat. I muttered something under my breath like, "He's gonna kill me. How does he do that?" He later told me that he heard that comment as well, but ignored it. *I seem to be getting that a lot of late.*



Two choices: at the base of the rocks closest to the center of this picture we had a choice: (1) take a peaceful, gradual slope for about 300 yards to the left behind the rocks or (2) climb a slope with a scree field in the middle that covered the same elevation in about 150 yards to the right. On this picture, option 2 looks easy; just go up that funnel (upper right). It wasn't and there was also a resident up there that didn't like to be tread upon.

Finally, I reached a spot where the scree was a small field of basketball-size boulders. *I can get traction here.* After a few minutes of making good headway stepping from boulder to boulder, I got the answer to the question I had pondered earlier: Do snakes need a fresh water supply or do they get water they need from their meals? Three feet in front of my face, as I was hunched over in steep climbing mode, there came the *I-am-not-a-grasshopper* warning rattle that I had become quite familiar with over the last few days. I didn't see the snake; he was hiding deep under the rocks, apparently trying to stay cool. I jumped like one of those poor old wildebeests you see on nature shows when a crocodile jumps out at it from the water. I skittered back down the slope, fortunately managing to keep my footing. (This, if you hadn't figured out yet, was the second of the two less poetic events.)

Well, so much for walking up the boulder field. I resumed my climb on the loose scree, giving the boulder field and its occupants a wide berth. What did I learn from this little escapade? I learned that (1) rattlesnakes don't need a continuous water supply to stay hydrated (take a look at the rattlesnake research at the end of the book for the real scoop on rattlers) and (2) rattlesnakes are where you find them (or is that where *they* find *you*?)

There are so many picture ops on the Juniper Gulch hike that one really needs to at least double the amount of expected hiking time. I simply cannot describe the stunning beauty of this gulch, tucked away from almost everyone in the far southeast corner of Oregon. I must once again rely on pictures, that don't do it justice either. The following pages have but a few of the many pictures of our Juniper Gulch to Yellow Jacket hike.



The formation above reminded us of a fat squiched-face monster. It even has eyebrows.

Requisite picture of Joe Cool to the right.

Below is Juniper Gulch from about halfway up to Yellow Jacket. I can imagine a real photographer going crazy in that maze of rhyolite; there are so many angles, shadows, moon and sun variances and colors. When you go into Juniper Gulch, at least double the time you expect to stay just to take more pictures.

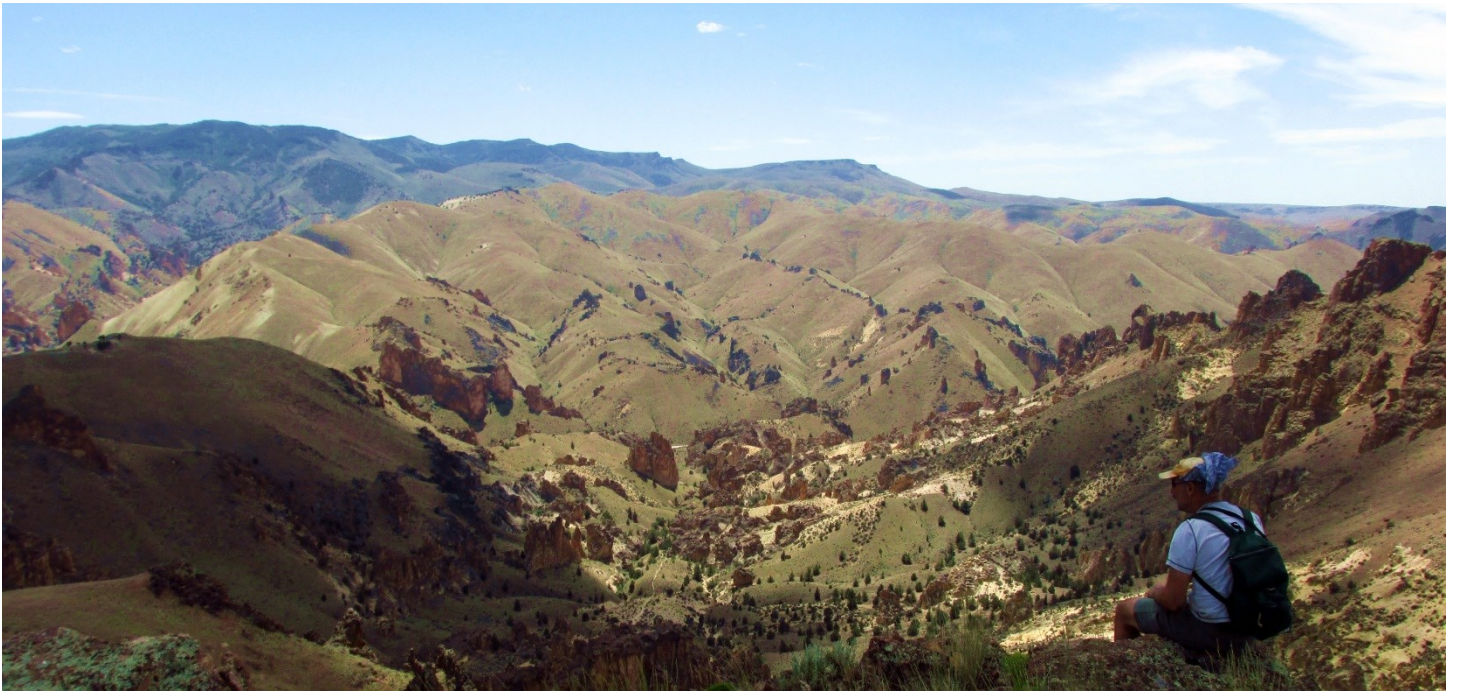




Above: Yellow Jacket

Above left: Son #1 of Joe Cool sets back and contemplates life. Meditative quietness.

Right: Just another random rock formation that caught my camera's eye – so many of them.



...meditative beauty of the Yellow Jacket overlook...



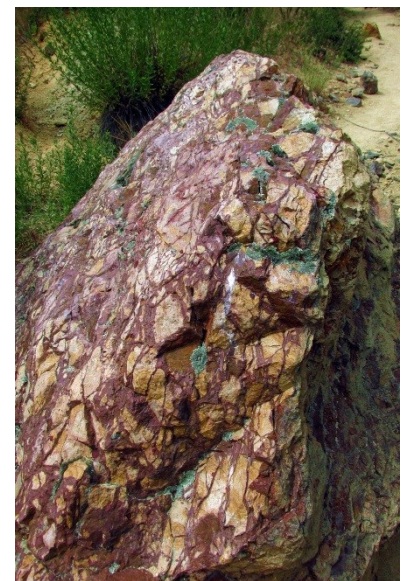
...sweeping winds raking grassy rolling hillsides...



...surreal multi-colored gulch and rock formations...



...and those puffy white clouds that splice the deep blue above us like a rich white topping on a caramel sundae.



Gary and I returned to a rather haggard Ben, who had been fighting the same wind that had pleasantly raked the slopes of Yellow Jacket, but at camp had succeeded in raking anything not tied down to the winds. Ben was not happy and Lola was so stressed from the buffeting wind that Ben had had to tie her up to keep her from running about.

With our water supply nearly exhausted, we agreed it was time to drive down to the river and get some more. Well, that was after our well-deserved afternoon siesta. *Should be a quick trip: dip the bottles in the water, toss in two iodine tabs per quart and go take another siesta.* But no, the river here was silty and muddy and carried an odd smell, as if cows had been busily doing whatever



cows do in water. Great! Iodine tabs might kill the bad stuff, but we had no desire to drink silt, mud and cow yuck. Fortunately, because we had so much room in the truck and figured we might be doing some car camping, I figured it would be okay to bring our water filters on this trip when packing. *Another point for the old man.*

We worked out a system where the boys would pump water and I would empty the bottles into larger ones. I was also the “cleaning boy” so that when the ceramic insides of a filter got too dirty to pump efficiently, I would take it apart and clean it. A filter required cleaning after pumping only three quarts of water through it.



Early in the process, we had all our empty water bottles lined up on shore. A strong wind came along and blew them in all directions, with two of them going into the river. I chased one down the river, lost one shoe in the mud while running and finally fell into

During our search for a good place to filter water, we took this small road along the river for a bit. This is looking north down the Owyhee River Canyon.

I chased one down the river, lost one shoe in the mud while running and finally fell into

the water reaching for the bottle. Gary just dove in, foregoing the theatrics, to save the other. It took us about an hour to pump three gallons. The filters did a great job, not only cleaning the water of silt, mud and cow yuck, but also removing the odd odor. It was like drinking...filtered water. We went back to camp and made dinner: same old gruel.

After dinner, one of our neighbors came up and said there was a rattlesnake crawling around just below their camp. He had chased it away and it was crawling across the road if we wanted to see it. While I wasn't that excited about seeing another rattler (I was becoming an old pro by this time), I figured seeing one more would give me an even five on the trip, so I went down to take a look. It was a little snake (much smaller than the 6-foot slinger we saw the first day) with no more than three rattles. Later that evening there was another one spotted in camp that was "much bigger." This time the boys and I passed; we were done with rattlesnakes for the day.

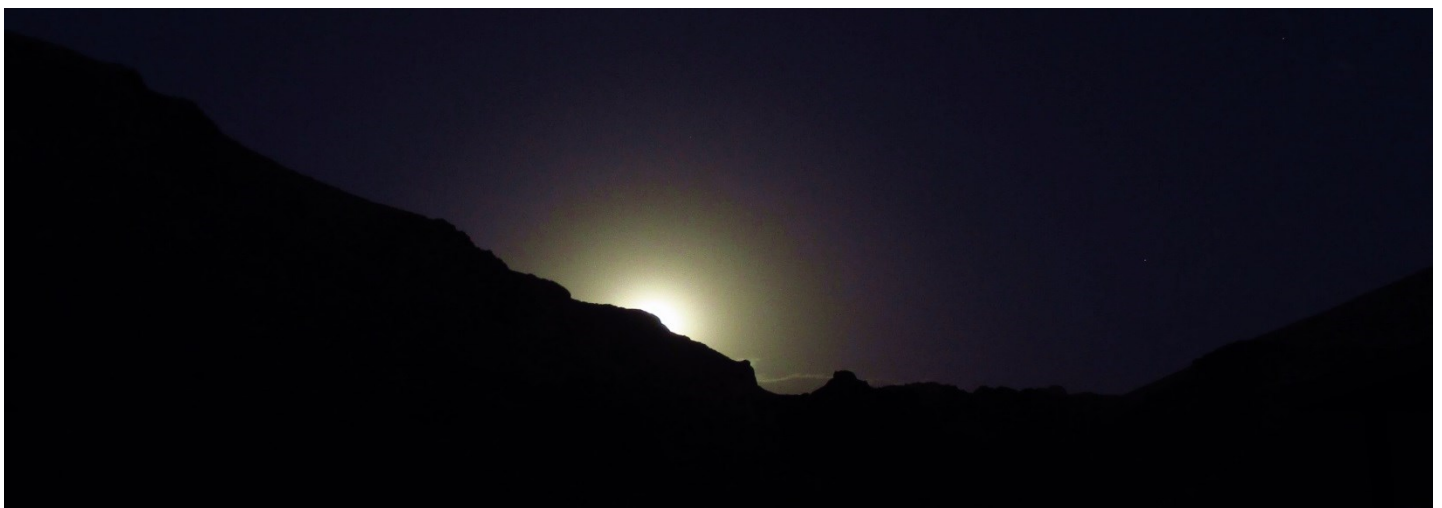
Fearing that a rattler might find him a warm spot in the night, Gary set up his tent instead of sleeping under the stars. The wind continued through the night but with all of us safe in our sleeping bags, we slept peacefully under the light of the yellow Honey Moon.



Boys (with Lola supervising) filtering water. It was too dirty and stinky to just toss in a couple of iodine tabs and call it good.



The truck behaved so well and got us where we needed to be (and even where we didn't need to be) that it deserves a picture of its own.



FRIDAY, JUNE 13: *INADVERTENT 4-WHEELING AROUND THREE FINGERS* SEARCHING FOR HONEYCOMBS TRAILHEAD AND HOME AGAIN

Thursday night we agreed that getting up early (6:00ish, believe it or not) would give us the opportunity to visit one more trail and then drive home that night. Our destination was the Juniper Ridge trail that lead to the Honeycombs. According to our trail guide, *The Owyhee Canyonlands, an Outdoor Adventure Guide*, the trail was not easy to find but as long as we followed the directions, using our odometer to mark the miles, we would find it. Unfortunately, those miles were for a trip coming from the north. Alas, we were coming from the south. We never did find the trailhead.

Since we never made it to the Honeycombs, here is an enticing description of the area from the ONDA (Oregon Natural Desert Association):

If you're searching for solitude and the rugged terrain that provide shelter for iconic mammals and raptors in the Owyhee, head to the 38,000-acre Honeycombs Wilderness Study Area. The area is a formidable maze of volcanic ash towers secluded from the din of civilization. Motorized off-road-vehicle (ORV) use is prohibited in the Honeycombs, allowing hikers and backpackers to follow the sandy washes in Painted and Carlton Canyons or Three Fingers Gulch. California bighorn sheep use this side of the reservoir in great numbers, and you can usually spot one on a faraway ridge. Golden eagles and [ferruginous hawks](#) use the area's great ash spires to nest in winter.

And we thought the drive to get to Owyhee was long... I am not putting in a map of this day's adventures; trying to draw all the squiggly-line routes we took would be a harrowing task.

We searched for the trailhead for a solid four hours. While it was not necessary to have the 4-wheel drive, high clearance was **mandatory**. Take What's-her-name's Odyssey on this trip and you are guaranteed to rip the bottom out of it. Although we didn't find our trailhead, we found all kinds of other beautiful formations to include Three Fingers.

There is a 22-mile bike loop that follows a jeep trail that circumnavigates Three Fingers that is described in our guidebook. Although unintentional, we wound up doing the exact loop as described in the book. It was a beautiful 4-wheel drive ride, but the problem was that we didn't have our mouths set for a 4-wheeling trip; we wanted to do a 2-legged trip. We got a little grouchy for the first time on the entire trip. "Turn left here." "No, turn right!" "Dad! Go left!" I stopped nearly in front of a fire truck. *What a fire truck was doing out there was another thing to ponder, but we were busy being boys: arguing.*



Three Fingers and, what I like to call, a Thumb. We had lots of views of this (360 degrees, in fact) because we drove the 22 miles around it, which was not our plan.

We agreed that we had been in the truck too long bouncing over rocks and ruts (*I was having fun, but the passengers were less impressed*); it was time to drive home. This time we took 95 on up through Ontario, Oregon by way of a jaunt into Idaho and then hooked I-84 west and took it the rest of the way home. We had been in the truck for about 13 hours when we finally arrived home.

Although we had called and warned What's-her-name that we were on our way home it still threw her off her game a bit. She had been looking forward to one more day of peace, quiet, a good book and a glass of wine without interruption from her *three dudes and a dog*. Silly girl. You forgot it was Friday the 13th, didn't you?



The small lake on the right (or perhaps it is a spring) is on the jeep trail maybe halfway around Three Fingers. There is a nice place to park a high-clearance 4-wheel drive rig rather like mine, set up a couple of camp chairs, make a fire in the evening, have a nice dinner better than even mashed taters, have a beer or two, or maybe even a bottle of wine, toss two sleeping bags in the bed of said high-clearance 4-wheel drive rig to keep clear of critters that might go buzz in the night, lie back and watch the Milky Way lazily drift across black space, and slowly drift away into a cozy sleep with my best friend, What's-her-name.



OF CRITTERS, FLOWERS, HISTORY AND SUCH

Note: All bird descriptions are from allaboutbirds.org, which is a very good website. Probably the best I have found so far on birds.

HOW OWYHEE GOT ITS NAME

Courtesy of Wikipedia.org

The name "Owyhee" derives from an early Anglicization of the Hawaiian term "Hawai'i." When James Cook encountered what he named the Sandwich Islands (now the Hawaiian Islands) in 1778, he found them inhabited by Native Hawaiians who Anglo-Americans referred to as "Owyhees." Noted for their hardy physique and maritime skills, numerous Native Hawaiians were hired as crew members aboard European and American vessels. Many Owyhees sailed on to the American Northwest coast and found employment along the Columbia River, where they joined trapping expeditions or worked at some of the fur trade posts.

In 1819, three Owyhees joined Donald Mackenzie's Snake expedition, which went out annually into the Snake country for the North West Company, a Montreal-based organization of Canadian fur traders. The three Hawaiians left the main party during the winter of 1819-20 to explore the then unknown terrain of what since has been called the Owyhee River and mountains and disappeared. They were presumed dead and no further information regarding their whereabouts has been found. In memory of these Native Hawaiians, British fur trappers started to call the region "Owyhee" and the name stuck.

RHYOLITE

According to the online version of the Encyclopedia Britannica: Rhyolite is an extrusive igneous rock that is the volcanic equivalent of granite. Extrusive rock is any rock derived from magma (molten silicate material) that was poured out or ejected at the Earth's surface. By contrast, intrusive rocks (granite, for example) are formed from magma that was forced into older rocks at depth within the Earth's crust; the molten material then slowly solidifies below the Earth's surface, where it may later be exposed through erosion.

CRITTERS

RATTLESNAKE: CRITTER OF THE TRIP

Western Rattlesnake (Crotalus viridis)

The western rattlesnake, *Crotalus viridis*, is the most widely distributed rattlesnake in the western United States and Canada, and the most variable in North America, with nine subspecies. It is also Oregon's only truly venomous snake. Two subspecies are found within Oregon's borders; *C. v. oregonus*, the Northern Pacific Rattlesnake, and *C. v. lutosus*, the Great Basin Rattlesnake.

Common Names

Its common names include western rattlesnake, northern Pacific rattlesnake, Pacific rattlesnake, black rattlesnake, Great Basin rattlesnake and a host of other names

It is NOT a Western Diamondback Rattler, which has a range of the southwestern United States (Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas) and northern half of Mexico.

Range

In the US, it occurs in Washington, Oregon, western and southern Idaho, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and likely west-central New Mexico. In Oregon *C. v. oregonus* occurs east of the cascades and in valleys west of the Cascades south of Salem while *C. v. lutosus* occurs only in the southeastern corner of the state.

In Oregon *the Northern Pacific Rattlesnake* occurs east of the cascades and in valleys west of the Cascades south of Salem while *the Great Basin Rattlesnake* occurs only in the southeastern corner of the state.

Generally, rattlesnakes do not live in Oregon's mountains above 6,000 feet, and the climate is too cloudy and wet for them along the coast.

Although they occur in a wide variety of habitat types, from deserts and chaparral to open forests, Western Rattlesnakes usually occur near rocks, cliffs, or downed logs. They overwinter in dens, which are usually located on south-facing rocky hillsides exposed to sunshine.

Habit & Habitat

At northerly latitudes, rattlesnakes hibernate communally through the winter on south-facing slopes. In autumn, as conditions become colder, they congregate at rocky dens and retreat into deep crevices. When springtime warmth arrives, they emerge and disperse into the surrounding area for the summer.

It is a common misconception that a rattlesnake's age can be determined by counting its loosely interlocking rattle segments. Actually, a new segment is added at the base of the rattle each time it sheds its skin, and a rattlesnake sometimes casts its epidermis more than once a year. As the rattle becomes longer and more fragile, some of the segments break off.

Western Rattlesnakes feed mainly on small mammals, including mice, gophers, squirrels and rabbits, but will also take birds lizards, and amphibians.

Good to Know

Striking distance for most rattlers is about 1/3 their body length, but one that is particularly angry might be able to go up to 1/2 its body length. A three-foot rattler can strike 1 to 1.5 feet. However, I wouldn't test that theory by standing 2 feet away and dancing in front of it.

Aggressive behavior (NOT): Oregon rattlers have a defensive temperament, avoiding larger animals including us whenever possible. Nearly all defensive strikes are precluded by a buzzing rattle, and many are in fact "dry bites" with no venom injected. Although envenomation may cause serious tissue damage if not treated within 18 hours it rarely causes death.

The most important thing to do if a rattler bites you is to get the person to a hospital as quickly as possible, calling ahead if possible. Keep calm. There are several sites on the internet that tells you what and what not to do if you are bitten. Take precautions but there is no need to fear a rattler as long as you don't piss them off.

WATER SNAKE

Probably just a garter snake in the water, but definitely not a rattler.

MOURNING DOVE

A graceful, slender-tailed, small-headed dove that's common across the continent. Mourning Doves perch on telephone wires and forage for seeds on the ground; their flight is fast and bullet straight. Their soft, drawn-out calls sound like laments. When taking off, their wings make a sharp whistling or whinnying. Mourning Doves are the most frequently hunted species in North America

Size & Shape: Plump-bodied and long-tailed, with short legs, small bill, and a head that looks particularly small in comparison to the body. The long, pointed tail is unique among North American doves.

Color Pattern: Mourning Doves often match their open-country surroundings. They're delicate brown to buffy-tan overall, with black spots on the wings and black-bordered white tips to the tail feathers.

Behavior: Mourning Doves fly fast on powerful wingbeats, sometimes making sudden ascents, descents, and dodges, their pointed tails stretching behind them.

Habitat: You can see Mourning Doves nearly anywhere except the deep woods. Look for them in fields or patches of bare ground, or on overhead perches like telephone wires.

During the breeding season, you might see three Mourning Doves flying in tight formation, one after another. This is a form of social display. Typically the bird in the lead is the male of a mated pair. The second bird is an unmated male chasing his rival from the area where he hopes to nest. The third is the female of the mated pair, which seems to go along for the ride.

Mourning Doves tend to feed busily on the ground, swallowing seeds and storing them in an enlargement of the esophagus called the crop. Once they've filled it (the record is 17,200 bluegrass seeds in a single crop!), they can fly to a safe perch to digest the meal.

Mourning Doves eat roughly 12 to 20 percent of their body weight per day, or 71 calories on average.

Perhaps one reason why Mourning Doves survive in the desert: they can drink brackish spring water (up to almost half the salinity of sea water) without becoming dehydrated the way humans would.

The Mourning Dove is the most widespread and abundant game bird in North America. Every year hunters harvest more than 20 million, but the Mourning Dove remains one of our most abundant birds with a U.S. population estimated at 350 million.

The oldest known Mourning Dove was 31 years 4 months old.

GREATER SAGE GROUSE

Large chicken-like bird. Grayish in color. Belly black. Long tail, with spiky tail feathers.

A bird of the open sagebrush plains, the Greater Sage-Grouse is the largest grouse species in North America.

Like many other grouse species, the Greater Sage-Grouse male plays no role in the raising of the young. Males display on dancing grounds known as leks. Females visit the leks to obtain matings, and then go off to raise their brood by themselves.

Traditional lekking grounds may be used for years.

Although many male Greater Sage-Grouse may display at a lek, only one or two males get picked by a majority of the females for mating.

Habitat: Foothills, plains, and mountain slopes where sagebrush is present.

Populations are declining; has disappeared from a number of states and provinces.

MOUNTAIN QUAIL

Adult Description: Large (tasty) quail. Runs on ground. Small round head with long plume sticking straight up. Round body with short tail. Reddish face. Bold white bars on flanks.

A large quail with an exclamation mark atop its head. T Mountain Quail is found throughout the mountains of the far western United States.

The Mountain Quail is the largest quail in the United States.

Habitat: shrubby vegetation in mountains.

CHUKAR

Adult Description: Small chicken-like bird. Short neck and tail. Grayish brown back and chest. Buffy belly. Bold black and chestnut barring on flanks. Black line through eye, down neck and onto chest. Throat white. Bill and legs red. Short, rounded wings.

A native of southern Eurasia, the Chukar was introduced into the United States from Pakistan to be a game bird. It lives in arid, rocky terrain across the western United States and southern Canada.

The Chukar varies slightly in color across its native range in Eurasia. In more humid areas they are darker and more tinged with olive-brown on the upperparts and are more warmly colored on the underparts, whereas birds in more arid areas tend to be grayer and paler, less brown on the upperparts and paler on the underparts.

The Chukar takes advantage of all water sources, from rivers and creeks, to springs and nearly stagnant seeps that hardly moisten the ground. They have been found getting water in mine shafts over 3 m (10 feet) below ground level, and sometimes they have been observed well back in mine tunnels where only faint light revealed the water.

Habitat is rocky hillsides, mountain slopes with grassy vegetation, open and flat desert with sparse grasses and barren plateaus... *and gravel roads*

GOLDEN EAGLE

The Golden Eagle is one of the largest, fastest, nimblest raptors in North America. Lustrous gold feathers gleam on the back of its head and neck; a powerful beak and talons advertise its hunting prowess. You're most likely to see this eagle in western North America, soaring on steady wings or diving in pursuit of the jackrabbits and other small mammals that are its main prey. Sometimes seen attacking large mammals, or fighting off coyotes or bears in defense of its prey and young, the Golden Eagle has long inspired both reverence and fear.

Size & Shape: Golden Eagles are one of the largest birds in North America. The wings are broad like a Red-tailed Hawk's, but longer. At distance, the head is relatively small and the tail is long, projecting farther behind than the head sticks out in front.

Color Pattern: Adult Golden Eagles are dark brown with a golden sheen on the back of the head and neck. For their first several years of life, young birds have neatly defined white patches at the base of the tail and in the wings.

Behavior: Usually found alone or in pairs, Golden Eagles typically soar or glide with wings lifted into a slight "V" and the wingtip feathers spread like fingers. They capture prey on

or near the ground, locating it by soaring, flying low over the ground, or hunting from a perch.

Habitat: Golden Eagles favor partially or completely open country, especially around mountains, hills, and cliffs. They use a variety of habitats ranging from arctic to desert, including tundra, shrublands, grasslands, coniferous forests, farmland, and areas along rivers and streams. Found mostly in the western half of the U.S., they are rare in eastern states.

Although capable of killing large prey such as cranes, wild ungulates, and domestic livestock, the Golden Eagle subsists primarily on rabbits, hares, ground squirrels, and prairie dogs.

The Rough-legged Hawk, the Ferruginous Hawk, and the Golden Eagle are the only American hawks to have legs feathered all the way to the toes.

The amount of white in the wings of a young Golden Eagle varies among individuals, and a few lack white in the wings entirely.

The Golden Eagle is the most common official national animal in the world—it's the emblem of Albania, Germany, Austria, Mexico, and Kazakhstan.

Because their common prey animals (mammals) don't tend to ingest pesticides, Golden Eagles have escaped the harm sustained by fish-eating or bird-eating raptors from DDT and related chemicals. When these pesticides thinned the eggshells of many birds of prey, Golden Eagles' shells retained normal thickness. Pesticide concentrations in their blood stayed below levels known to cause reproductive problems.

Biologists, engineers, and government officials have cooperated in developing and publicizing power-pole designs that reduce raptor electrocutions—caused when the large birds' wings or feet accidentally touch two lines and form a circuit. Since the early 1970s, utility companies have modified poles to prevent eagle electrocutions. And some new power lines in nonurban areas have been built to “raptor-safe” construction standards.

“Hacking,” an age-old falconry technique, is helping rebuild Golden Eagle populations. Humans feed caged, lab-reared nestlings at a nestlike hack site until the birds reach 12 weeks old, when the cage is opened and they begin feeding themselves. The fledglings continue to receive handouts from their hack-site caretakers for several weeks, until they gain full independence in the wild.

FERRUGINOUS HAWK (FROM ALLABOUTBIRDS.ORG)

pronounced: feroo, uh, ferer, uh...*really big hawk*

Adult Description: Large hawk. Wings long and broad. Large head with a wide gape. Tail white or light gray. In light form, head mostly white, back and shoulders rufous, pale patch in ends of wings, underparts mostly white, legs rufous, making a dark V visible from below. Dark morph entirely dark brown, with light gray or whitish tail, and light area near end of wings. Legs feathered to the toes.

A raptor of the open country of the West, the Ferruginous Hawk is the largest American hawk.

Before the elimination of bison in the West, nests of the Ferruginous Hawk were often partially constructed of bison bones and wool.

The Rough-legged Hawk, the Ferruginous Hawk, and the Golden Eagle are the only American hawks to have legs feathered all the way to the toes.

Habitat: Open country, primarily prairies, plain and badlands, breeding in trees near streams or on steep slopes, sometimes on mounds in open desert.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT

Adult Description: Medium-sized songbird. Bright yellow chest and throat. Olive-green back. White spectacles. White belly and undertail. Long tail.

Despite its bright yellow chest, loud song, and conspicuous display flights, the Yellow-breasted Chat is easily overlooked because of its skulking nature and the denseness of its brushy haunts.

In one study in central Kentucky, DNA fingerprinting revealed that 17% of 29 Yellow-breasted Chat nestlings were not sired by the male of the social pair and 33% of 9 broods contained at least 1 extra-pair nestling.

Habitat: Dense second-growth, riparian thickets, and brush.

COMMON MERGANSER

Common Mergansers are streamlined ducks that float gracefully down small rivers or shallow shorelines. The males are striking with clean white bodies, dark green heads, and a slender, serrated red bill. The elegant gray-bodied females have rich, cinnamon heads with a short crest. In summer, look for them leading ducklings from eddy to eddy along streams or standing on a flat rock in the middle of the current. These large ducks nest in hollow trees; in winter they form flocks on larger bodies of water.

Size & Shape: These are large, long-bodied ducks with thin, pointed wings. Their bills are straight and narrow, unlike the wide, flat bill of a “typical” duck. Females have shaggy crests on the backs of their heads.

Color Pattern: Adult males are crisply patterned with gleaming white bodies and dark, iridescent-green heads. The back is black and the bill red. Females and immatures are gray-bodied with a white chest and rusty-cinnamon heads. In flight, both sexes show large white patches on the upperwings (larger in adult males).

Behavior: Common Mergansers dive underwater to catch fish. After the chicks leave the nest in summer, the female stays with them as they grow up while males gather in flocks. In winter, mergansers form large flocks on inland reservoirs and rivers. They stay in these tight flocks to feed and court during the cold months. In migration and winter, they mix with other fish-eating, diving ducks such as Bufflehead, goldeneyes, and other species of mergansers.

Habitat: These ducks live mainly on freshwater rivers and lakes. They are rare in the ocean, but they sometimes use saltwater estuaries in winter. They nest in tree cavities in northern forests near rivers and lakes

Young Common Mergansers leave their nest hole within a day or so of hatching. The flightless chicks leap from the nest entrance and tumble to the forest floor. The mother protects the chicks, but they catch all of their own food. They start by diving for aquatic insects and switch over to fish at about 12 days old.

Common Mergansers are sometimes called sawbills, fish ducks, or goosanders. The word “merganser” comes from the Latin and roughly translates to “plunging goose”—a good name for this very large and often submerged duck.

Common Mergansers usually nest in natural tree cavities or holes carved out by large woodpeckers. Sometimes mergansers take up residence in next boxes, provided the

entrance hole is large enough. On occasion they use rock crevices, holes in the ground, hollow logs, old buildings, and chimneys.

You may see gulls trailing flocks of foraging Common Mergansers. They wait for the ducks to come to the surface and then try to steal their prey rather than fishing on their own. Occasionally even a Bald Eagle will try to steal a fish from a merganser.

The oldest Common Merganser on record was at least 13 years, 5 months old.

CLIFF SWALLOWS

Busy flocks of Cliff Swallows often swarm around bridges and overpasses in summer, offering passers-by a chance to admire avian architecture and family life at once. Clusters of their intricate mud nests cling to vertical walls, and when a Cliff Swallow is home you can see its bright forehead glowing from the dim entrance. These common, sociable swallows are nearly always found in large groups, whether they're chasing insects high above the ground, preening on perches, or dipping into a river for a bath.

Size & Shape: These compact swallows have pointed, broad-based wings, a small head, and a medium-length, squared tail.

Color Pattern: In poor light, Cliff Swallows look brownish with dark throats and white underparts. In good light you'll see their metallic, dark-blue backs and pale, pumpkin-colored rumps. They have rich, brick-red faces and a bright buff-white forehead patch like a headlamp. Some juveniles show whitish throats in summer and fall.

Behavior: Cliff Swallows zoom around in intricate aerial patterns to catch insects on the wing. When feeding in flocks with other species of swallows, they often stay higher in the air. They build mud nests in colonies on cliff ledges or under bridges, eaves, and culverts.

Habitat: Cliff Swallows traditionally built their nests on vertical cliff faces. With the expansion of road infrastructure they have adopted many bridges, overpasses, and culverts as their colonial nesting sites. They feed in areas near and over water, frequently mixing with other species of swallows.

When a Cliff Swallow has had a hard time finding food, it will watch its neighbors in the nesting colony and follow one to food when it leaves. Although sharing of information about food at the colony seems unintentional, when a swallow finds food away from the colony during poor weather conditions it may give a specific call that alerts other Cliff Swallows that food is available. By alerting other swallows to a large insect swarm an individual may ensure that the swarm is tracked and that it can follow the swarm effectively.

Although the Cliff Swallow can nest solitarily, it usually nests in colonies. Colonies tend to be small in the East, but further west they can number up to 3,700 nests in one spot.

Within a Cliff Swallow colony some swallows lay eggs in another swallow's nest. Sometimes the swallow may lay eggs in its own nest and then carry one of its eggs in its bill and put it in another female's nest.

When young Cliff Swallows leave their nests they congregate in large groups called creches. A pair of swallows can find its own young in the creche primarily by voice. Cliff Swallows have one of the most variable juvenal plumages, and the distinctive facial markings may help the parents recognize their chicks by sight too.

PRONGHORN ANTELOPE

The pronghorn, *Antilocapra americana*, is a species of artiodactyl mammal indigenous to interior western and central North America. Though not an antelope, it is often known colloquially in North America as the prong buck, pronghorn antelope, cabri (native American) or simply antelope because it closely resembles the true antelopes of the Old World and fills a similar ecological niche due to convergent evolution.[4]

It is the only surviving member of the family Antilocapridae. During the Pleistocene period, 12 antilocaprid species existed in North America. About five existed when humans entered North America, but all except *A. americana* are now extinct.

REALLY WEIRD WHITE MOTH

This guy hitched a ride on Gary's backpack strap at Slocum Campground. Big eyes!

RIVER OTTER

The North American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*), also known as the northern river otter or the common otter, is a semiaquatic mammal endemic to the North American continent found in and along its waterways and coasts. An adult river otter can weigh between 5.0 and 14 kg (11.0 and 30.9 lb). The river otter is protected and insulated by a thick, water-repellent coat of fur.

The river otter, a member of the weasel family, is equally versatile in the water and on land. It establishes a burrow close to the water's edge in river, lake, swamp, coastal shoreline, tidal flat, or estuary ecosystems. The den typically has many tunnel openings, one of which generally allows the otter to enter and exit the body of water. Female otters give birth in these underground burrows, producing litters of one to six young.



FLOWERS & PLANTS

DESERT INDIAN PAINTBRUSH

Search for Indian or Desert Paintbrush on wildflowersearch.com and you get 26 varieties. This was but one. It was late in the season so we didn't see many of them, but enough to reinforce that paintbrush, at least in the west, is where they are.

SPANISH NEEDLE – PRONOUNCED: “THOSE D#*NED SEEDS THAT GET STUCK IN YOUR SHOES AND SOCKS!”

Latin name: *Palafoxia arida*,
Family: ASTERACEAE, Height: 1-2 feet.

Most of Spanish Needles bloomed and went to seed before we went to Owyhee. The seeds were everywhere and they got in our shoes and stuck to our socks. I spent hours at camp every day removing seeds. They tend to have a sticker that is hard enough to poke your skin just enough to irritate the @!%\$!! out of



Requisite picture of an Indian Paintbrush.

you. In the picture they look rather pretty, but on the left of the picture, you can see that each flower bears a small sticker seed: the culprit sticker.

PACKARD'S BLAZING STAR

The Packard Blazing Star is definitely one of my favorite flowers ever. According to wildowyhee.org, there are five such exceedingly rare species within Leslie Gulch: sterile milkvetch, Packard's blazing star, Ertter's groundsel, grimy ivesia and Owyhee clover. The groundsel and blazing star are annuals that grow only in Leslie Gulch's ash deposits and in two Wilderness Study Areas directly to the north.



SAGEBRUSH

Sagebrush is a common name applied generally to several woody and herbaceous species of plants in the genus *Artemisia*. The best known sagebrush is the shrub *Artemisia tridentata*. (big sagebrush, which is what we have here). There are several varieties of sagebrush.

The Spanish Needle, AKA: Those damned seeds that get stuck in your shoes and socks! Pretty on the outside, but beware...

We often come across some very tender and very sweet smelling sagebrush, that does not have the woody bark like the big sagebrush. On this trip, we came across some of it but interlaced with it was some of that *D#ined Stinging Nettle* – AKA: *Ouch!!*



Packard's Blazing Star. Along with Ertter's Groundsel, is found only in Leslie Gulch's ash deposits and in two Wilderness Study Areas directly to the north.



Big Sagebrush. AKA: Scrape the paint off the car sagebrush. This "tree" is about 7 feet tall.

STINGING NETTLE – AKA: OUCH!!

Per Wikipedia.org: The leaves and stems are very hairy with non-stinging hairs and in most subspecies also bear many stinging hairs (trichomes), whose tips come off when touched, transforming the hair into a needle that will inject several chemicals: acetylcholine, histamine, 5-HT (serotonin), moroidin, leukotrienes, and possibly formic acid. This mixture of chemical compounds cause a painful sting or paresthesia from which the species derives one of its common names, stinging nettle, as well as the colloquial names burn nettle, burn weed, and burn hazel.

But you can get it back for stinging you. It is edible.

ERTTER'S GROUNDSEL

Found only in Leslie Gulch's ash deposits and in two Wilderness Study Areas directly to the north.

NORTHERN MULE'S EAR

21" height. East of Cascade Crest. Flowers can be up to 4" across. Seeds are edible.



Sweet smelling sagebrush – awesome odor – in background but intermixed with it is Stinging Nettle – AKA: Ouch!! in the foreground



Ertter's groundsel



Northern Mule's Ear

OREGON CHECKERMALLOW

3 feet tall. It has a branched rootcrown above a taproot. It flowers from the end of June until the middle of August and fruit is set in late August.

Flowers: Short-stalked, pale lavender to pink colored flowers are borne in a terminal spike. Some flowers are bisexual, while in others, the anthers are sterile or lacking. It has a 5-lobed, hairy calyx and 5 separate, oblong, shallowly bilobed petals that are 15-20 mm long. Numerous stamens are united into a tube surrounding the style. The many stigmas are linear.



Oregon Checkermallow

COMMON (WOOLLY) MULLEIN

From Southeastern Arizona Wildflowers

Duration: Biennial. Growth Habit: Herb/Forb. Native Status: Introduced. This naturalized weed is native to Europe and the temperate and mountainous parts of Asia. Habitat: Upland, Mountain. Common Mullein grows in disturbed areas and is especially common along roadsides. Flower Color: Yellow. Flowering Season: Summer, Fall. Height: Up to 6 feet (1.8 m) tall

Description: The up to 1 inch (2.5 cm) wide flowers are densely packed on tall, upright, stout flower stalks and have 5 oval-shaped, yellow lobes and 5 stamens with orange anthers and white-bearded or yellow-bearded anther filaments. The flowers are followed by ovoid seed capsules. The leaves decrease in size up the stem and are pale grayish green, wavy, covered in soft, dense, velvety hairs, in a basal rosette below, alternate on the flowering stem, and oblanceolate-oblong in shape. The plants are only a basal rosette of leaves for their first year and then bloom during their second year. The plants sometimes have deformed flower stalks that become weirdly cockscomb-shaped or clumped as they develop.

Woolly Mullein right during flowering season. Below is the first year of the Woolly Mullein. It is biennial so the one below will flower next year. Morning walk behind Slocum Creek Campground.



UNKNOWN: OTHER PLANTS THAT I JUST COULDN'T FIGURE OUT (OR WAS TOO LAZY)



We found this little guy growing on the rim hiking out of our one night backpack to a bend in the river at Anderson Crossing. Small clump of rather spikey green leaves, low to the ground and flower maybe the size of a penny.



Found this guy on my morning walk behind Slocum Creek Campground. Thought maybe it was some kind of bottlebrush, but can't find it in any of my field guides or online.



One of my failings in life is the inability to identify trees, even when I have guides and the internet. The trees below are certainly conifers and I am sure anyone with any tree sense can tell me what they are. For now, they go unidentified. Found in Juniper Gulch while hiking up to Yellow Jacket.

TRIP LEARNINGS

1. Rattlesnakes are where they are, but sometimes they don't let you know they're there
2. Gary's pop-can stove was awesome! If you have to cook (which I often only have to do because I have to boil water for my morning coffee – addicted, you know), then use a pop can stove that weighs maybe 2 ounces and Gary can make one for you in less than 15 minutes. Use methylated spirits (denatured alcohol) as fuel.
3. Dried mashed potatoes are good, at least better than fettuccine
4. Bring a fishing pole next time because fresh fish is better than canned tuna. I keep telling myself this and never do it.
5. There are several nice places to visit in Owyhee with What's-her-name. Several easy trails and very good car camping.
6. Bring future son-in-law's firewood. Keep him.
7. When you have room, bring a water filter. Sometimes iodine tablets just don't cut it.
8. I have never before encountered those d**ned little stickers that are all over the place in Owyhee that get in your shoes and socks. Wear gaiters or something to keep them out. Tough gaiters could also double for keeping rattlesnakes from striking your lower leg.
9. Chocolate melts in the desert
10. Dogs with black fur coats melt in the desert
11. Peanut M&Ms seem to melt less than pure chocolate. Why is that? Because the peanut holds the cool in longer?
12. Bury chocolate (to include Peanut M&Ms) deep inside the backpack to keep cool. Don't do what Ben did and put them on the outside of the top pouch. In the desert, even Peanut M&Ms will melt into a blob of goo, that makes a nice candy bar when it unmelts.
13. When coming up to a bunch of cows on the road, slow down, don't honk, and just move forward slowly. They will get out of the way. Roll the windows up so your dog doesn't jump out the window.
14. Sagebrush and other shrubs can (and will) put long scrapes the entire length of your rig. So, don't take What's-her-name's Odyssey and be prepared to do some buffing when you get home, or just live with the character. I prefer the character, but my rig 15 years old.
15. Bring salt if we are going to do any real cooking.
16. Bring a can opener (we didn't on this trip and had to resort to the BFK and managed to not cut off a finger) if we are going to actually carry cans of food.
17. If you are going to have more than one camera that you use to chronicle your trip, make sure the date and time are synchronized on all of them. Gary's was one hour ahead of mine.
18. Bring more snake sticks, commonly referred to as trekking poles.
19. Brush teeth once a day, in the morning. That way, at night all I have to do after eating and cleaning the pots and pans is pee, check my sleeping bag for snakes and other critters, and go to sleep. Is that gross?
20. Keep What's-her-name because she puts up with us. *Or might it be that she puts up with me for the sake of the kids? I need to figure that out soon since the kids are all leaving us.*



Gary's homemade popcan stove. Maybe 2 ounces, probably not even that.

GUIDES, WEBSITES & OTHER REFERENCES

BEST (ONLY?) GUIDEBOOK: *THE OWYHEE CANYONLANDS, AN OUTDOOR ADVENTURE* GUIDE BY STEVE STUEBNER & MARK LISK

This is a good describing many of the hiking and biking trails in the Owyhee Canyonlands. It also gives a good description of the [Owyhee Uplands Backcountry Byway](#), a 100 mile mostly gravel road suitable for 2-wheel drive cars as long as it is dry.

- <http://stevestuebner.com/books/the-owyhee-canyonlands.htm>
- <http://www.amazon.com/The-Owyhee-Canyonlands-Outdoor-Adventure/dp/0982495625>
- PDF version of Owyhee Uplands Backcountry Byway from the BLM:
 - <http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/id/publications.Par.48895.File.d at/entiredoc.pdf>

ALL ABOUT BIRDS

All bird descriptions were found at allaboutbirds.org. Best birding website I have found to date.

- <http://www.allaboutbirds.org>

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)

I mean, come on now, let's give it up for the BLM in terms of just how much information can be on one site if you want to visit, hike, backpack, fish, find maps, and all kinds of other goodies.

- <http://www.blm.gov>

DESERTUSA

I just found the [DesertUSA](#) site late in the writing of this report. It has tremendous promise. I found a great description of the [Desert Indian Paintbrush](#) there and there is an online guide to desert flower identification.

- DesertUSA: <http://www.desertusa.com/>
- Desert Wildflower online field guide:
<http://www.desertusa.com/wildflo/FieldGuide/fieldguide.html>

LESS TRAVELED NORTHWEST, DAY HIKES FOR THE ADVENTUROUS

[This site is great](#). I would like to model mine after this. Location maps, topo maps, how to get there, photos and more. Simply one of the best hiking and backpacking websites I have found.

- <http://www.lesstravelednorthwest.com/index.html>

OREGON NATURAL DESERT ASSOCIATION

[This website](#) is chock full of all kinds of good information (to include the desert trail) about Oregon's desert. A must peruse, in my opinion. From the About Page: *Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) exists to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert. Our dream is to see millions of acres of beautiful and ecologically vital public lands permanently protected and home to diverse populations of wildlife. Working in partnership with more than 4,000 members and supporters, ONDA is the only group dedicated exclusively to the preservation of Oregon's high desert.*

- <http://onda.org/>

OREGON'S LARGE MAMMALS

[A pdf file describing Oregon's Large Mammals](#) from [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife](#)

- <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/viewing/docs/largemammals.pdf>
- <http://www.dfw.state.or.us>

OWYHEE CANYONLANDS

A very nice site that gives a lot of information on what is there, where to go, fishing and how to get involved, among other things.

- wildowyhee.org


WILDFLOWERSEARCH.COM

Wildflowers are hard for me to figure out. The best site I have found so far is wildflowersearch.com

- <http://www.wildflowersearch.com/>



I think the white flower with the Mule's Ear is Yarrow. Goes with Unknown category for now. See if you can figure it out at wildflowersearch.com and then let me know.



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:-P