

Travel Oregon Blog

Where to go & what to do from those who know Oregon best... Oregonians

9.4.09

Grant's Getaways: Digging Into Oregon's Past

By [Grant McOmie](#) KGW TV

Oregon offers a treasure trove of interesting places and fun activities that can reveal much about our region's past.

In fact, one [Eastern Oregon](#) town offers fascinating lessons in "pre-history," that – with a bit of imagination and some handiwork – can transport you to a quite different Oregon. In Fossil, Oregon all you need are some simple tools, keen eyes and curiosity to learn more about the state – as you dig into Oregon's past.

Eastern Oregon's gigantic landscape holds on to memories – old homestead sites – where families once worked the land and carved out their livelihoods across the high desert. Time has passed most of them by and what often remains today are small reminders in a big country that are worth a pause to consider.

Fossil, Oregon is worth more than a pause! Especially if you enjoy history, like to get your hands dirty and really dig buried treasures!

It's a much different slice of outdoor life for the visitors who stroll through the back gates at Fossil's [Wheeler High School](#) – pass under the goal posts of the school's football field and then take a step back in Oregon history. It's the only public fossil dig area in Oregon that offers surprises with each handful of dirt and rock that you turn over.

Today, the fossils that you dig reveal a much different scene in this part of Eastern Oregon. In fact, 30 million years ago the region was more akin to today's Oregon Coast Range Forest – a temperate rain forest with ancient firs and cedars and ferns and even prehistoric insects. All were covered and trapped by ancient mudflows born of volcanic eruptions that were a common geologic feature in this part of Oregon.

All of it adds up to a stark contrast to the high desert sage and juniper country that surrounds Fossil in the 21st century. Just down the street, the new [Paleo Lands Institute](#) will teach you much about the fossils that you collect.

Tags: [Eastern Oregon](#), [Fossil](#), [Grant McOmie](#), [Grant's Getaways](#), [Paleo Lands Institute](#)

[09/04/09](#) Posted at 12:00 pm in [Heritage](#) | [3 Comments](#)

Comments

[09/08/09 at 2:50 pm](#)

Jeanne Burch

Thank you for the great article on Fossil and the Oregon Paleo Lands Institute. We are very proud of our beautiful portion of the State and invite more to come and visit. When you are in Fossil please stop by the Historic Wheeler County Court House and say hello.

Jeanne E. Burch
Wheeler County Judge

[09/08/09 at 2:59 pm](#)

Paula Fontenot

To learn more about Fossil, and Wheeler County in general, please go to <http://www.wheelercounty-oregon.com>. Wheeler County has much to offer the adventurer in anyone! In addition to our public fossil beds, we are close to the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, The Painted Hills, and the John Day River! Whether you like to hike, fish, swim, hunt, raft, dig fossils, bird-watch, explore museums, or capture photographs of some of the most wildly beautiful scenery and wildlife in the state, we have something for almost everyone to enjoy!

[09/08/09 at 3:50 pm](#)

Anne Mitchell

Thanks for a great story on hunting for fossils and exploring the Oregon Paleo Lands Institute's new Field Center in Fossil, OR. We invite everyone to join us for our Grand Opening & Dedication – on Saturday, September 12 Noon – 4pm. Its a beautiful time of year to explore all the wonders of the John Day Basin – we hope you'll join us for the celebration – or if you can't make it this weekend, come by the Field Center when you are in the area.

Anne Mitchell
Executive Director, OPLI

