

FACTS ABOUT FOSSIL & WHEELER COUNTY

- LOCATION:** Wheeler County is located in North Central Oregon.
Fossil is located at the intersection of Hwy 218 and Hwy 19.
Elevation of Fossil is 2,654 feet.
County area covers 1,713 square miles.
- POPULATION:** Fossil—465
Wheeler County—1,500
- CLIMATE:** Temperature norms:
January
Min. 22.8° F — Max. 41.0° F
July
Min. 44.5° F — Max. 84.9° F
Annual Precipitation—14.19"
- INDUSTRIES:** Agriculture, Cattle, Forestry/Logging, and Tourism



John Day River near Painted Hills

FOR MORE INFORMATION

City of Fossil
PO Box 467
Fossil, OR 97830
503-763-2698
Fax 503-763-2124

USDA Forest Service
Ochoco National Forest
PO Box 490
Prineville, OR 97754
503-447-9613

National Park Service
John Day Fossil Beds National Monument
420 W Main St
John Day, OR 97845
503-987-2333
TDD# 503-987-2334

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
PO Box 550
Prineville, OR 97754
503-447-4115

Oregon Fish & Wildlife Department
PO Box 9
John Day, OR 97845
503-575-1167

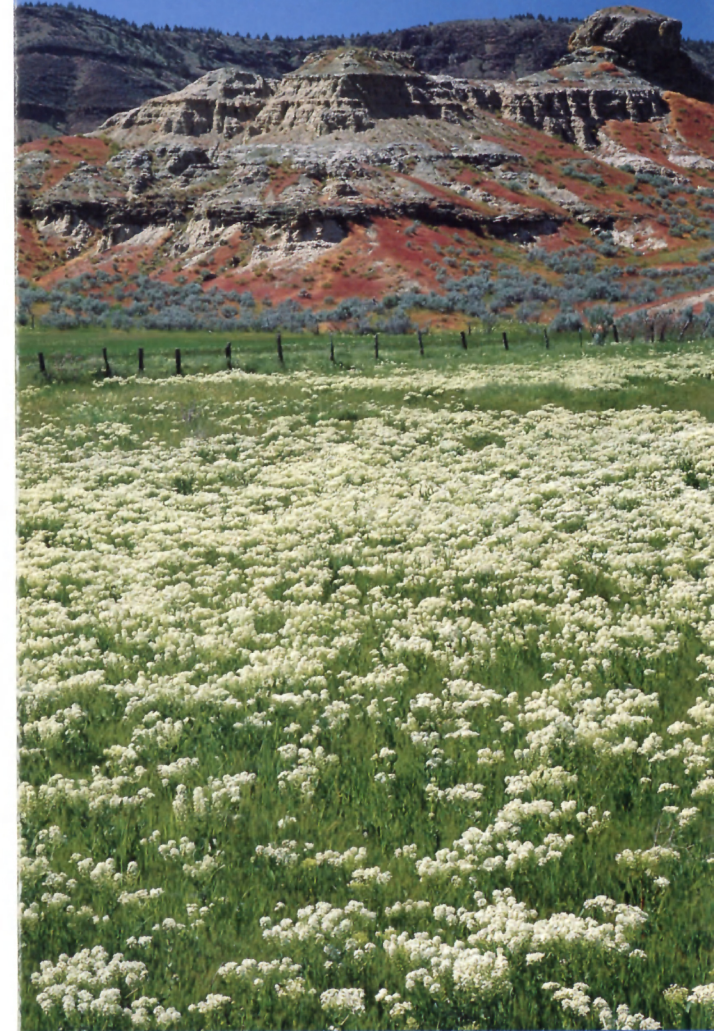
Funded through a grant from the Oregon Tourism Division and the U.S. Forest Service

Cover Photo: Field of Alyssum flowers near Spray. Steve Terrill photographer.



Cathedral Rock

DISCOVER MORE THAN JUST FOSSILS IN FOSSIL



WHEELER COUNTY OREGON

HISTORY

Wheeler County was formed by the Legislature in 1899, but not without many prior failed attempts with opposition from the surrounding county citizens. The new county was named for Henry H. Wheeler who operated the first mail stage line from The Dalles to Canyon City in 1864. The town of Fossil became the temporary county seat until an official vote could determine a final location. Fossil was selected and continues to serve as the Wheeler County seat.



Wheeler County Courthouse built in 1901

Oregon Tourism Division

In 1861, gold was accidentally discovered in the vicinity of Canyon Creek, and in hardly any time at all, the area became a riproaring mining camp. In 1864, the military established Camp Watson to provide protection for the struggling settlers who were on constant guard against the Indians. During the 1860s and 1870s, many stockmen and farmers moved into the area.

Fossil received its name in 1876 from the discovery of fossilized bones of an elephant and a camelope. It was not until 1891 that Fossil became an incorporated city. In the 1920s, a timber area near Fossil was developed into the company lumber town named Kinzua and served to boost the area interest and activities. The closure of the mill and town in 1978 was a concern for many with the fear of Fossil becoming a ghost town.

The area is probably best known as one of the most outstanding depositories of prehistoric fossils and geological formations on the North American continent. More than 100 years ago Thomas Condon uncovered the plant and animal fossils dating back to the Eocene era of over 30 million years ago when sub-tropical forests covered the now dry hills. The timeless fossils are preserved in the three distinct units of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument; the Painted Hills Unit, Clarno Unit and Sheep Rock Unit.

Wheeler County is as rugged and uneven as any

Oregon county with the terrain varying widely from sagebrush, juniper and rim rock to thick stands of pine and fir. Portions of two national forests lie within its boundaries with forest lands covering nearly one-third of the county.



John Day River near Service Creek

Steve Fleming

RECREATION

CAMPING: Bear Hollow Park, Shelton Park, Bull Prairie, Wineland Lake, Muleshoe, R. N. Donnelly RiverSite, and private campgrounds.



HUNTING: Elk, Deer, Antelope, and Upland game birds. Both rifle and bow hunting.

FISHING: Steelhead, Bass, and Trout.

RIVER GUIDE/RAFTING: Guided rafting and fishing in area. Self guided trips can be taken with proper information. Canoeing. Shuttles available.

GOLFING: Unique 6-hole USGA rated golf course.

TOURS: Driving tours of the county. Mountain biking tours of Fossil area.



Steve Fleming

ROCK HOUNDING: Thunder eggs, agate, opal, jasper and quartz crystal.

FINDING FOSSILS IN FOSSIL

Where else can you dig for fossils of plants and animals of 30 million years ago?

Behind Wheeler High School lies one of the richest fossil beds of the Bridge Creek Flora that is easily accessible and open for public collection. The beds were exposed during the construction of Wheeler High School in 1949 and have been used on a continuing basis by amateurs and professionals.

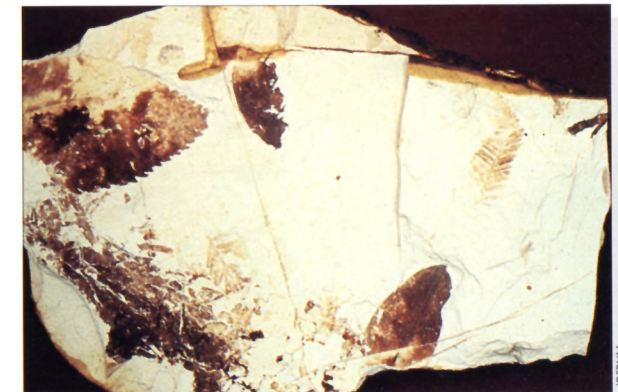


Paleontologist working on fossil find

JDFBM

No special tools are needed for fossil collection. Nearly every rock examined on the hillside will contain impressions of leaves. About 35 species of plants are found here. The most common are alder, maple, beech, dawn redwood and pine. Other fossils found here have included an unidentified bat, a new species of salamander and numerous insects.

The Fossil Tourism Commission provides a detailed brochure, "Finding Fossils In Fossil" available through the City of Fossil. For more information, see "Oligocene Fossil Plants of the John Day Formation, Fossil" by Steven R. Manchester, published in the October 1987 issue of Oregon Geology, the Oregon Department of Geology publication.



Fossil leaves found in shales

JDFBM

POINTS OF INTEREST

CITY OF FOSSIL MUSEUM

The museum houses many interesting memorabilia of the county and city's past in the 100F Building. Included is the original post office window from the Fossil Post Office on Hoover Creek, desks and church pews from the ghost town of Richmond, tape recordings of many pioneers in Wheeler County, and the largest photographic collection of Wheeler County history in the state. *Fossil Hunters of the High Desert* exhibit is on loan from the High Desert Museum, Bend, OR.



Fossil Museum in downtown Fossil

PINE CREEK SCHOOL HOUSE

Built in 1889, is a one-room schoolhouse that was moved onto a downtown lot in Fossil. It has become a small interpretive center, directing people to the wealth of visitor attractions in the region, while recreating an atmosphere of an old one-room schoolhouse for tourists and residents alike to enjoy.

KINZUA HILLS GOLF CLUB

A unique golfing experience! Oregon's only approved 6-hole golf course. It is USGA rated 62. Located 10 miles east of Fossil at the old lumber company owned town site of Kinzua, nestled in the tall pines of the Blue Mountains. The serene setting offers a variety and challenging opportunity for both beginners and pros. The course is open from May until early fall.

HANCOCK FIELD STATION

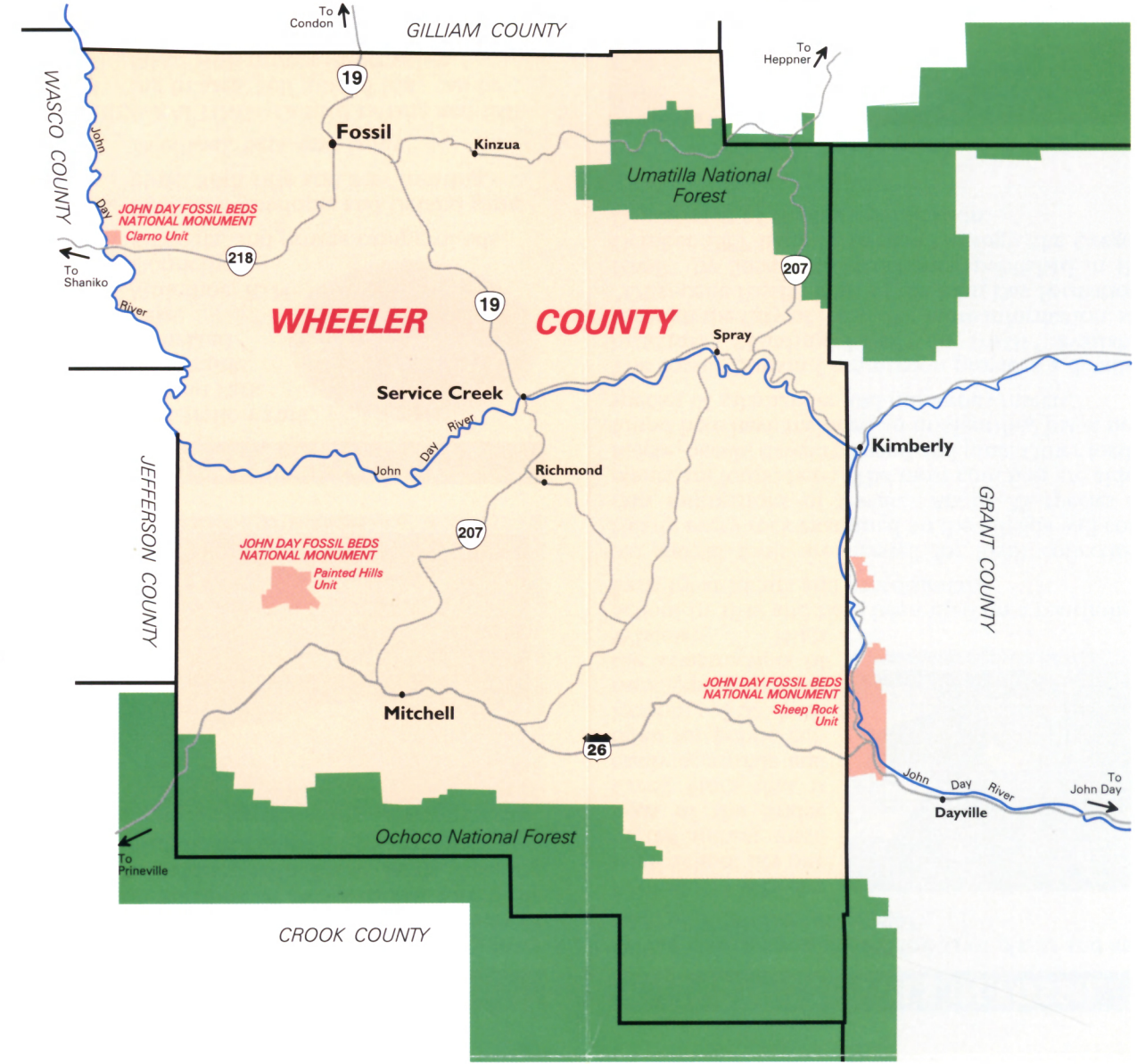
Located 18 miles west of Fossil on Hwy 218. A paleontology and paleobotany research facility which is maintained by the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI). A complete modern facility is used extensively for curiously minded groups and individuals in studying and unearthing prehistoric fossils.

CLARNO AND PAINTED HILLS UNITS

Both units are part of the 14,000 acres of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. The Clarno Unit is located 18 miles west of Fossil on Hwy 218. Eroded ancient mud slides formed cathedral-shaped spires 40 million years ago. The Painted Hills Unit is located 6 miles west of Mitchell off Hwy 26. The Painted Hills are named for the brilliant hues of a layered geological strata formation, with colors in every conceivable shade of red, yellow and black.



Vivid Colors of the Painted Hills Unit



SCENIC DRIVING TOURS

TOUR 1

Take I-84 to BIGGS JCT., south on 97 to SHANIKO, former wool capital of the world. Many historical buildings remain, board sidewalks and a renovated hotel. Continue south on 218 through ANTELOPE to CLARNO on the John Day River, site of an early pioneer settlement. Stop at HANCOCK FIELD STATION, an educational facility operated by OMSI.



Cliffs of the Clarno Palisades

The CLARNO UNIT is the first of three units of the JOHN DAY FOSSIL BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT. Picnic sites and hiking trails.

Continue on 218 through country strongly reminiscent of horseback and stagecoach days to FOSSIL, offering the only public, free-digging of fossils behind the high school. The Wheeler County Fair and Rodeo is held in August. From Fossil take 19 south and Kinzua Rd to the KINZUA HILLS GOLF CLUB, a unique 6 hole, USGA rated public course. Continue on Kinzua Rd 6 miles, turn right and travel to the FAA LONG RANGE RADAR FACILITY, a state-of-the art computer tracking aircraft over Oregon and Washington. Visitors welcome 8 am - 3 pm, M-F.

Back on 19 south to SERVICE CREEK, campgrounds along the John Day River provide access for canoeing, kayaking, rafting, fishing, and swimming. Contact BLM for maps and conditions. Take 207 south for a scenic route to Mitchell, first passing RICHMOND, a ghost town. A rustic bed and breakfast is located here and the first church in Wheeler County is still in service. Arrive at MITCHELL, yet another early town with historic buildings. Mitchell is surrounded with campgrounds and lakes and by splendid rim rock and monolithic formations.



Ghost town Schoolhouse

Head west on 26. Just north of 26 lies the PAINTED HILLS UNIT of the National Monument, a dramatically eroded landscape so named for the myriad of colors displayed by the mineral-bearing clays. Picnic sites and hiking trails. Take 26 west through the beautiful Ochoco National Forest to PRINEVILLE, and continue either north over Mt. Hood to Portland or west to Bend.

TOUR 2

Take I-84 to BIGGS JCT., then south on 97 to WASCO, take 206 to CONDON, and 19 south toward Fossil. The panoramic view sets Mt. Hood against endless acres of wheat fields. DYER WAYSIDE south of Condon offers a shady picnic site under high rim rock, a gathering site for 5 generations of plainsmen.

FOSSIL is named for fossils found on a ranch in 1867. In addition to the public, free-digging fossil beds there are many other interesting sites.

From Fossil take 19 south. (See Tour 1 for tours of KINZUA HILLS GOLF CLUB, FAA LONG RANGE RADAR FACILITY, and SERVICE CREEK) From Service Creek, take 19 east following the John Day River to SPRAY, a small ranch community, settled in the 1860's. Continue south on 19 to KIMBERLY and enjoy the sights and smells of a prolific fruit orchard.

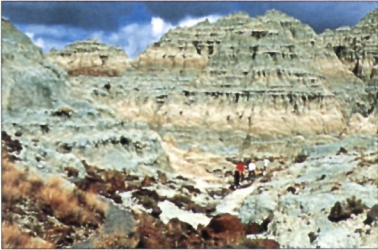
Continue on 19 to 26, encountering numerous sites of the SHEEP ROCK UNIT of the JOHN DAY FOSSIL BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT:

1) CATHEDRAL ROCK, visible from the road, is a large, colorful, intricately eroded rock formation;



Sheep Rock and the John Day River

2) BLUE BASIN offers hiking trails, with spectacular views of the John Day Fossil Beds; and 3) CANT RANCH, historic ranch house of the 1920's, is the monument's main visitors center and fossil museum. Picnic sites available.



Hiking through Blue Basin

At the junctions of 19 and 26 is PICTURE GORGE, a 500' chasm with colorful palatial formations and ancient Indian writings and drawings on the walls. Continue east to John Day, with many points of interest and fine scenery along the way, or head west over Mt. Hood to Portland, or to Bend.

SERVICES

- Fossil:**
Service Station
Food & Grocery
Lodging - Motel and RV hookups
Wheeler Fairground RV Park
Laundromat
Library
Bank
Churches
Medical - Asher Medical Clinic, Ambulance, Wheeler County Mental Health
Shuttle Service for rafting
- Mitchell:**
Service Stations
Food and Grocery
Lodging - Motel and RV hookups
Laundromat
Churches
Ambulance
- Spray:**
Service Station
Food and Grocery
Lodging - Motel and RV hookups
Churches
Ambulance
Shuttle Service for rafting
- Service Creek:**
Food and Grocery
Shuttle Service for rafting
Big Service Creek Corral, Campground and RV