A PEREGRINE ADVENTURE

by Karen Thee

It was hot and muggy weather the weekend in May of 1986. The peregrine falcon had been considered extirpated in our state. Dan Fenske, our host, felt that there were indeed peregrines nesting once again in Oregon and so organized a Memorial Day exploratory weekend camping trip to the Western part of the state to, hopefully, prove his feeling. My husband, Dan, and I were invited however he was tied to our farm and the falcon breeding season which had commenced, so I represented us. Along the way from our farm in Eastern Oregon I picked up my friend Penni (not a falconer nor a birder but an Art teacher) and off we went! We arrived at the camping site that evening, set up our tent and gathered with the other falconers for what was to be a successful peregrine falcon find.

The next morning Dan produced a map and each of us picked out an area we thought looked good for a nesting site. The area I chose consisted of a long, narrow rock face in the middle of the forest, below which I set up my spotting scope. After several hours of hiking and then sitting in the heat while looking, Penni and I decided to go for a swim in the river after which we continued our blazing hot search. Once again we decided to cool off so we headed for a little store along the North Umpqua River to get an ice cream. On the way and while approaching Eagle Rock, I noticed what appeared, at first glance, to be a pair of ravens. I pulled over to the side of the road, got out my expensive binoculars, looked, and said to Penni "those are falcons!...PEREGRINE falcons!" Suddenly a man driving a car full of women stopped to ask what we were looking at. I foolishly handed him my binoculars, and after he looked at the falcons he handed them back to me and said to his passengers "Yep...bald eagles", and drove off. Thank goodness he handed my binoculars back as he could have easily driven off with them!

That evening the excitement was great at camp and the rest of the campers planned an observation the next day and so hid in the woods along the roadside to secretly observe them while Penni and I decided to hike to the bottom of the site where I hoped to discover what the falcons had been eating and, hopefully, feeding. Not so easy! as we first had to cross the nearly raging North Umpqua River on one of those carts on a cable. We sat

in it facing one another and as we saw the fear in one another's eyes we doubled up with laughter and "turned her loose" hoping we would get to the other side and not become stuck hanging in the middle of the river without the strength to get to either side! After hiking to the bottom of the site which was "way up there", I found a broken bald eagle tail feather (!), some gull primaries, quite a few blue jay feathers and various other prey signs of which I can no longer remember. I couldn't see the exact site as it was too vertical of a view. I didn't hear any young but as it turned out they raised two chicks. The next day Dan Fenske and I drove a short distance away to the Umpqua National Forest Service building to report the finding of the first naturally nesting peregrine falcons in Oregon since DDT days.

Eagle Rock itself is a very well-known climbing rock and also has a popular fishing spot below which proves to me that peregrines get along just fine with man if left undisturbed and if no one knows they are flying around above them!

Soon after my husband Dan and I discovered another active peregrine site in Eastern Oregon as well as one on the Oregon coast. I understand the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is still doing research on and looking for peregrine sites in Oregon.