

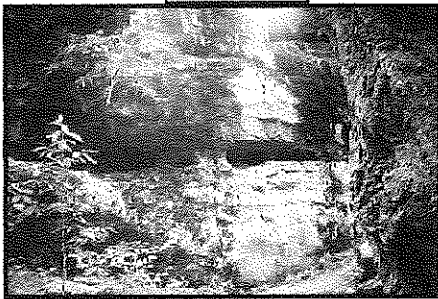
GHOST STORY

It was a dark and stormy night. The phone rang at a late hour, too late for a commercial call or a friendly chat. Calls this late often mean trouble, and this one was no exception. It was a strange, distant voice, maybe a bad connection with a cell phone or an overseas call. Whoever it was did not wait for my response beyond my "hello" to state that there was a fire, maybe a campfire, burning up in Dishman Hills, and then a rapid disconnect before I could ask for more details. Most anything else could wait till tomorrow, but not this.

Thirty minutes later I was at trailhead, warmly dressed for a cold October night, flashlight in hand, and a pack full of miscellaneous field stuff. The first step onto the dark forest trail was difficult with something telling me that I shouldn't be out here alone. I guess I was on automatic up to that moment and half asleep, but now I was fully awake and aware of the situation; too late to stop now! A quick jaunt up to Eagle Peak, a look around for this "alleged" fire, and back to a warm bed in an hour. As I moved up the trail the dark forest wrapped around me like a blanket, and my senses became aware of the whine of the Fall wind blowing through the pine, and the rustling of the few leaves left on the cottonwood and the aspen. There on my left was "dead man's cliff" where they found the body of a young man a number of years ago who fell to his death on a cold, dark night much like this. I remembered that just over that same rocky ridge there was found the cold, frozen body of a lonely lady that was reclined on a blanket, purposely unprotected from the elements, a victim of a life too painful to bear. A serious shiver ran down my spine. In some respect I was sharing this cold, dark forest, this windy night, and this very location with these people.

Skull Rock

Keep moving! Into Enchanted ravine I go. The silver moonlight helped navigation of the narrow path, but clouds were breaking its light into panels that moved across the canyon walls creating an eerie light show. At the head of the canyon I stopped dead in my tracks



at Skull rock for the bone-white moonlight and deep shadows created a truly believable rendition of a skull face. Something deep inside me said "turn back now!" and, indeed, this was what I was going to do when I first heard the distant, faint noise that sounded like a strange birdcall, or was it music being carried on the wind?

Curiosity overcame fear and I preceded in the direction of the noise. As I moved to the east towards the Goldback springs and Deep Ravine area I recalled that this side of the Natural Area was where there was a hobo camp in the Great Depression time of the 1930s and on occasion social rejects still sleep in the woods there. It was then I saw the fire. A campfire for sure and there was the music, maybe a harmonica. The forest at first blocked a direct view but the flickers of light seen at a distance merged into a scene of a campfire as I quietly approached. There was a man seated on a log slowly roasting something on a stick. He wore layers of old clothes and a ragged fedora hat. He was unshaven and reminded me more of someone out of the "grapes of wraith" than the trouble-making characters one bumps into now a days. I announced myself with a declaration that camp fires were not allowed here with as official a voice I could summons at the moment. The old man seemed totally unsurprised at

my appearance and beckoned me to sit on a log by the fire. Looking back now, I realize that he must have had me under some sort of control, for I obeyed without much thought and did not fear him. He spoke slowly in a low but strong voice, a voice of someone who has endured a lot of life's hard knocks. The story of his life was his topic, and quite a story it was. The time past, hour after hour, the wind blew, the moon shined on, and the fire burned on without the addition of any wood. Winding up the tale he told me not to worry for he "camped" here only once a year, but there was something important for me to know. This was once his home, it was where he had met his end, and it was where his body was buried deep in the rocky soil. Every year he realized that this quiet forest that held this special place for him was disappearing and this was very unsettling. I quickly realized this was no ordinary vagrant and leap to my feet to flee. My flashlight on, I scanned a path of escape through the forest when my beam of light struck the hobo. The light passed right through him to illuminate the log he was sitting on. What happened after that was a blur. Trees and rocks raced by me as I ran back to trailhead, not looking back for fear what I would see. An equally fast drive took me through an empty, sleeping city back to my home. Up my walk I went to be greeted by a smiling, illuminated pumpkin lantern I forgot to extinguish from the night before. As I paused to blow out the candle, I swear I could hear harmonica music carried on the wind.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have any questions. We meet every other month on the third Tuesday of the month at 7pm, at Opportunity Elementary School, S. 1109 Wilbur. Our next meeting will be November 21st.

The following are our September donors that have consented to be listed: Chris Baldini, Jim & Maralyn Bertis, Jim Conaty, Frances Davis, Jeff Danner, Satyabodhi Densmore, Anthony Dolphin, Carol Ellis, Richard Gaffey, Craig Grossman, Joan Fergin, Frieda Foth, Donald & Pauline Hagan, Wes Hanson, Judith Hudson, Dianne Hugger, Joyce Kelly, Camille Kovarik, Shirley Marpe, Kerry Masters, Elroy McEnroe, Sandra McMillan, Mary Meagher, Brian Miller, Gary Miller, Sharon Murphy, Parviz Partovi, Stephen Peterson, Perry Quigg, Norma Rosenberger, Jeanne Salisbury, Beverly Scheunemann, Jane Schelly, Rose Schultz, Philip Spohn, Sheila Wagner, and Shirley Wihlberg. Thank you one and all for your support.

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