



**Urban Treasures, Lost & Found**

By Bea Lackaff

A great new residential development is going in across the street from me with new townhouses and condos sprouting up and more to come. The so called “weed trees” across the street could go down any day. I can’t save them. If only there were more, diverse native trees and plants, birds and wildlife, at our finger tips, that we CAN actually protect from the dozers, from the demands of growth. Land with trees and animals and birds that were here for our great grandfathers, and will still be here when we want to take our great grandchildren. (Hopefully we’ll still be hobbling around).

Aren’t we lucky! Aren’t we blessed! There ARE such places: our Dishman Hills Natural Area, Iller Creek Conservation Area, and our new jewel, Big Rock. These places, still (mostly) natural, are only minutes away from the Spokane urban areas. WE can pitch in to connect these areas, and to conserve them.

I have recently taken some of the interpretive hikes offered this summer. My clueless strolls enjoying fresh air, pretty greenery, and liquid, ambient bird song – TOTALLY delightful in and of themselves– have already been transformed with a deepening sense of familiarity and adventure.

The DHNAA Geology and Natural (and Un-natural!) History Hike visited deep craggy ravines, forested creeks, ponds, high open ridges, and magnificent rocky outcroppings. Michael spun fantastic geologic stories, continents sliding around the world like Thanksgiving gravy boats on a linen table cloth, smashing into our continent – we even saw the skid marks of the crash! We saw Skull Rock and Deadman’s Cliff, Eagle Peak, ponds and plunge pools. We saw rocks over a billion years old – and learned to read the rocks around us as they revealed the very direction and wake of cataclysmic Ice Age floods that poured through here, only a few thousand years ago. Later, on my own (intrepid amateur geologist), I ventured to Big Rock and the Rocks of Sharon. Incredible! You have to see them to believe their size, and the grandeur of the Palouse stretching out to the South, Steptoe Butte a small beacon on the horizon, the trailing western edge of the Rocky Mountains on the east, subsiding under the rolling Palouse soils and their crazy-quilt crops.

During the Native Plant Society Iller Creek Hike, under Sylvia’s fond and diligent direction, the previously undifferentiated greenery began to sort itself out, to arranging itself into dryland and riparian categories. The little flower faces seemed to smile as I repeated their magical names; large trees became venerable elders, many already here when the first settlers came poking through. I knew it was a great place, but now I know that the unique geology has provided an oasis for a diverse range of eco-regions that include a wide range in elevation as well as moisture. They include west-side riparian plants as well as the best example of pre-pioneer plant ecology on the east side of WA. The hike started with a group of polite strangers but before we lost sight of the trailhead we were fast becoming a team of like minded fanatics, sharing knowledge and speculation. Our 3 to 4 hour hike expanded considerably. We absorbed a lone hiker. We realized the twisted Ponderosa Pine, not as huge as you might think, is over 200 years old. In a burned area we see the lush new growth, and see for ourselves how the native plant diversity in the burn reduces the threat from the ubiquitous invasive species seen so often in most disturbed areas. There were ORCHIDS! Even thought it was a plant hike, I had my first soulful eye to eye contact with a really large moose!

Considered together, these guided hikes were educational in an expanded way. Realizing how truly unique the geology, and the plant and wildlife populations of the area really are, I recognize that it is essential to build an INFORMED advocacy, for on-going connection and conservation of these lands. Encouraging the recreational use of the public conservation lands builds advocacy quickly, however the educational component must be stressed. Careful thought and consideration should go into the management of these and, hopefully, future new parcels and easements that will connect and protect these 3 areas as one large unspoiled corridor,

Back at home, my doomed tree friends of 25 years are silhouetted against a rising full moon with city lights glimmering behind them, and (I am not making this up!) fireworks exploding festively to one side. Are the marmots disappearing because of the dozers, or because they have sleepily retreated to their rocky dens to estivate? Come what may, I am greatly comforted for the inevitable loss of this tiny patch of scabby urban habitat by knowing that not far from here, there are much vaster, more richly diverse lands set aside to allow already ancient geologic formations to witness their stories, and plant, animal, and bird communities to continue weaving their inter-connected web of life through generations. These lands are all the more precious because they are next to an intensely urban environment.

These are lands protected BY the people, FROM the people, and FOR the people – but not JUST for the people, but for a place to find balance, our balance with the native flora and fauna, and where we too can find refuge, spend a great day, and if we are lucky, remember our own interconnectedness.

**ASSOCIATION NEWS**

We are a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have questions or try dhnaa.org website. Our board meets every month on the third Tuesday. Our next meeting will be September 21st. We will meet at the Camp Caro lodge at the end of Sargent Rd. Visitors are always welcomed.

The following are our July donors that have consented to be listed: Chris Baldwin, Brad Blegen, Nancy Cashon, Suzy Dix, Ida Dolphin, Chris Erickson, Mary Gardner, Sara Marks, Marilyn Miller, Linda Nelson, Bill Nienhuis, John Nisbit, Ellen Pierce, Neil Prescott, Joann Rounseville, Norma Trefry, Keis & Karl Wolbach, Hershel Zellman, and one anonymous donor. Thanks, thanks, thanks!

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