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BIO 140 Idaho Natural History

Indian Creek Response

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Indian Creek runs for nearly 55 miles from "the Danskin Mountains, under Interstate 84, through Kuna and then Nampa, and into Caldwell" and yet I had never heard of. It's a historic feature that "has shaped our history" but can go unnoticed if you do not realize the incredible value it brings to our dry area. It spreads across our land and irrigates most of the land surrounding but we never really realize the impact it has on us. There is no question that our land would be a different place without Indian Creek as its transformed our area with its many changes. I think as the book says we must learn about this area to understand the incredible impact that it has.

This book first explained that by studying Indian Creek we can learn about "our past and the formation of the world we see today". According to the book, the area we live in, the Snake River Plain is one that can be best separated into two sections: the Eastern Snake River Plain and Western Snake River Plain. The Eastern side is described as being like a candle sitting on a table with a piece of paper moving slowly back and forth, just enough to mark, but not burn the paper. It explains as we learned in class that there is a large hot spot moving slowly to the west that caused extreme heat to transform the landscape through volcanic eruptions and basalt flows. The Western side is very different.

Its geologic makeup is different from the East because of the geologic tension "like in a game of tug-of-war". This tension causes the rifts that we have learned about that are currently causing our mountains to rise and the valley we live in to sink. It goes on to explain that our area formed as a result of the depression that was filled with sediments from volcanic eruptions and water's forces. This book explains that the incredible force of water from events such as the Missoula Flood helped to shape what we know see today. This is because the water brought sediment such as large rocks called "watermelon gravels", changed the path of the Snake River, eroded passageways, deposited soil nutrients, and created the annual spring runoff that is the reason we have Indian creek.

Indeed according to the book, the source of Indian creek is in "several small trickles that emerge from the hillsides". This creek then runs through the area until they meet up with the Boise River at which point it flows into the Snake River and eventually into the Columbia River which empties into the Pacific Ocean. Of course, as it explains in the book this is not a straight path. It is a series of areas of "meandering stream" and "braided stream". This makes it so the path of Indian Creek is varied and diverse as it twists its way through its origin by Mountain Home all the way to its entrance into the Boise River.

The next section of the book talked about what Indian Creek was like before European settlement. It explained that during earlier times a wide variety of animals existed in our area as it was likely a very different climate. Some of these might have even included animals like flamingos and plants like giant ferns. This seems to support the idea of what we've been learning about in class about the fact that at one time our area might have been the climate of a modern tropical forest. As well, our first predecessors, the Native Americans, lived during a time of big game that was extinct before Americans began to come west. They were largely intent on following big game and left no real record of a society. These tribal peoples lived and hunted in our area in large clans herding animals into pens to the point in which many animals might have been hunting to the point of overkill.

According to the book, the most likely explanation for the first humans in our area was that they came in a migration into Alaska from Asia. This is supported by what we have learned in class as well. According to the book, the Shoshone and Bannock largely occupied the Snake River Basin as they traveled by the seasons. They never developed agriculture but instead focused on hunting, gathering, and fishing. These peoples' lifestyles dramatically changed with the introduction of the horse as they could travel large distances to hunt and gather. They would then use the material they collected for many uses. These people used the many resources of Indian Creek such as its cattails to weave, eat, and create new innovations.

Unfortunately, soon after the Europeans came to the West they did not share the same regard for using the resources wisely. They came and killed large quantities of beavers and other animals and consumed recklessly when gold was discovered. This wrecked havoc upon the area and almost exterminated the beaver and other animals with fur coats hunted to the extreme. They also created many canals such as the New York Canal that made it so Indian Creek would always run all year in order to irrigate the farms and create the fertile land of the Treasure Valley today. This dramatically changed the course of the creek as they specifically changed bank size and other features to create the best irrigation system. Another dramatic change occurred with the coming of cattle grazing on land feasting on the nutrients supplied by Indian Creek. Lastly, the coming of railroads dramatically changed the town of Caldwell into a bustling city. Unfortunately for Indian Creek, this also meant more pollution from manufacturing, farming runoff, and town waste.

With more pollution, many began to fear the creek's potential to carry disease so in some spots it even was covered to avoid human contact. As well, many animals in the area began to see full communities of plants and animals disrupted. These huge changes caused much extinction of animals and the threat of extinction for others. Eventually though, people began to see again in about 1970 that the creek could serve an amazing purpose and needed to be cleaned and restored to its previous prosperous qualities. It states that slowly this has been coming about so that as of now the Army Corps of Engineers are working to see the restoration of the creek in order to "reconnect the habitat fragmentation along the portion of the creek that runs through downtown Caldwell". So that brings us to the present.

where was it?

The first area that I went to was directly fed by the New York Canal therefore; it was very green and formed a marshy wetland. The area I was told contained lots of wildlife like birds, otters, fish, and beavers. While there, I also saw a dead beaver. I wasn't sure what this was caused by, but was told that the people in the area did not like the beavers because they were making more ponds in the area and helping the cattails to expand. Around the area it was filled with rotting wood,

small plants, and some kind of trees possibly willows without leaves, and some trees with berries. It was interesting as well that the area contained a lot of igneous rocks, likely basalt. This was interesting to me because I was told that in some areas the top of the rock is on the surface but in some areas the rock is a full 20 feet down.

This seemed to make more sense as I surveyed the area and noticed places where erosion had carved out everything except the rock which was obvious in some areas and hidden in areas the water did not touch. As I looked downriver from this spot, it seemed that the area flattened out as it headed towards the west, and then narrowed further beyond. It was interesting as well because on side of the bank on the grassy side was gently sloped while the other side composed of mostly rock dropped off abruptly. Another interesting thing I found out about the area is that the farmers frequently burn the cattails to keep them from encroaching on their pastures. This struck me as interesting because now the people of the land want to get rid of the cattails where years ago when the Indians lived there they would have greatly valued an area of many cattails. According to the book, a large majority of the material used by previous Native Americans and yet now we see it as an inconvenience. This ties to the material we have learned in class as well because many of the artifacts found have been made of cattail material.

? Creek not close to meridian

The second area that I visited was further towards Meridian. It was far rockier and was the area right by a modern bridge. This area was quite polluted and did not seem to contain any life as tires and trash were mixed in among the water. It was interesting that although this area was fed as well by the seepage of the canal, there was far more sagebrush and it looked to be a sandy or silty soil unlike the rich moist clay like soil in the first place I went. This looked to be a more natural are on first glance but then I noticed that much of the surrounding area looked to have been changed by the locals.

As I looked up the river though, the area looked to have experienced less man-made change. This area I was told was

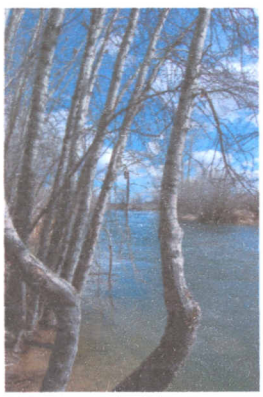
really not good for much because it contained far too much lava rock to be able to farm. This correlates to the material we have been learning about in class about the huge amounts of volcanism that occurred in the past. The area could be seeded by not tilled or anything to really make it profitable so it had mostly been left alone. Apparently according to the locals as well, there are many hidden springs that feed this area as well causing it to have water most of the year.

This area had more trees, more moss, and had what I was told were Russian olive trees. I wondered how many of these trees are native and how many have been introduced since the time of the European's first appearance. I can't help but think as well that areas like this are beautiful in their own right but often are discarded as useless because they cannot make a profit for the owner. In this sense, I believe the Native Americans who lived here originally had a better idea of how to use resources to their full and best potential. According to the book and what we've been learning in class, they seemed to sense the codependence between all of the species and the eco-system.

Russian olive trees not native

The last place I went to was as you enter Kuna. It had far more sagebrush and the soil crust seemed to have all dried up. As you got closer to the creek though, there were bigger plants and trees and the water seemed to be flowing faster. The banks were steeper with a very small shallow edge and then an abrupt drop off. There looked to be gopher holes and birds in the area but not very many other species. I wondered if this possibly might be, as the book said, due to man-made changes that have robbed animals of their habitat.

There was more trash at this setting than either of the last two, but this one seemed to mostly be around the banks because the water was mostly clear. This area contained a far wider area of the creek as well with hardly any cattails like the two previous sites. This area seemed to have a far more diverse plant species but many of the plants looked like they might not be native to the area. The land here was sandy than either of the two other areas. It had far more of a view of either side or the river as well then could be seen from the previous two spots. I noticed that this area seemed to be closer to the ideal expressed in the book of a community centered on Indian Creek.



This area had what looked like a walking path right around it and seemed to at least try to showcase Indian Creek's significance. I feel that after reading this book I understand far more about the impact of Indian creek and its history. It has a far diverse makeup and is dramatically

different from one area to the next. I was surprised at how dramatically the plants and creek could change within only a few short miles. I could see a difference as well in the areas that were different than they used to be in the past and other areas that I think would probably look similar to the way they did hundreds of years ago.

As well, I appreciated the book's explanation of the full history. It greatly paralleled what we have been learning about what Idaho was like a long time ago before modern civilization. I thought this idea was important in the book because it truly centered on not just forcing people to see Indian Creek's value, but educating them to change so they really understand and are motivated to keep it clean. I especially liked the quote in the book by African ecologist Baba Dioum which reads, "In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught". In the end, I think this is true because we don't really appreciate something's value until we understand it fully.

Source:

Indian Creek Writers Collaborative, Rochelle Johnson, and Cristina F. Watson. Rediscovering Indian Creek: The Story of Our Region. Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 2004.

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