



LIGHTS AND SHADOWS FROM THE DISHMAN HILLS

May 1984

HIKING SPECTACULAR STEAMBOAT ROCK

Recently I had the privilege of exploring Steamboat Rock in the Grand Coulee south of the town of the same name. My companion was Ray Nelson, owner-manager of McLaughlin's Seeds, which specializes in wildflower seeds and plants. This spectacular basalt mesa, about a square mile in area, can be reached, at least by hikers, only by a steep trail ascending its south face. Serviceberries and golden currants were in flower on the talus slopes and mock orange (*syringa*) promised a show later on. The trail moderates as one ascends a little valley fragrant with big sagebrush interspersed with balsamroot and smaller flowers.

The top of the rock is rather flat or gently sloping in most places. Dominant are bunchgrasses and colorful wildflowers with many shades of blue, purple, white and yellow. Biscuitroot, yellow fleabone and another species of balsamroot supply most of the yellows. Lupines, ordinarily blue, showed a surprising range of colors from pure white through cream, pale pink, pale blue and lavender to rich purple, often with two-color combinations in the same flowers. Prickly phlox supplied showy patches of purest white and the creamy candles of death camas (poisonous only if eaten) accented the scene. Less conspicuous flowers included bluebells, shooting stars, larkspur, rock cress and toadflax. In a deep crevice, protected from sun and wind, were a few ferns and nettles.

About us meadowlarks sang and rock wrens, no doubt nesting in nearby crevices, searched for insects in this big flower garden. A flock of horned larks rose up and a few robins, presumably here to feed, took off for the "mainland"--they could hardly nest on this treeless plateau. Deer have been reported here.

The area is most worthy of being designated as a botanical refuge. Word is that the Bureau of Land Management is considering constructing a horse trail to the top. To do so would require blasting of the rock face and such a trail would bring undesirable disturbance to a pristine and now rare biological community.--TR.

Our annual Buttercup Hike attracted an enthusiastic group of hikers, aged three years and up. Weather was kind (it didn't rain) and buttercups were plentiful, though other flowers were scarce because of cool weather. Tree toads croaked at Lost Pond and a pair of mallards there slipped away into the bulrushes. A few mourning cloaks were on the wing and nuthatches and towhees announced their hidden presence. A raven looked us over from above. The view from Eagle Peak was, as always, superb and was, literally, the high point of the trip.

Cub Scout Pack 18, West View School, Spokane, led by Cubmaster Phil Campanella of Fairchild A.F.B., was all set for a hike in the Dishman Hills recently but the weather was more interested in watering the flowers so we settled for a slide show on the Hills. Ten boys and their families gathered at Broadway Centre building in Spokane for the showing. They hope to hike the Hills at a later date--in case it decides to stop raining.

Negotiations for the proposed 140 acre addition to Dishman Hills Natural Area are proceeding slowly. We haven't given up yet.

Mike Basta's class from St. Mary's School in Spokane Valley, along with several parents, hiked and observed nature in Dishman Hills Natural Area May 8. Besides a variety of wild flowers the class observed a black-capped chickadee and several California quail, and heard red-breasted nuthatches. We furnished guide and naturalist help for the happy adventure, and found them to be a delightful bunch of kids.

SPRING IS HERE AGAIN - AT LAST!

May in the Hills is the time when open slopes are white with blossoming service berries and glowing with the gold of balsamroot. Buttercups, grass widows and yellowbells are fading or gone, now busily maturing their seeds. Blue violets peer from shady nooks. Magenta shooting stars (love darts) and purple larkspurs brighten the grassy places and bluebells droop their skyblue clusters. The yellow of glacier lilies ("Easter lilies") carpets many a damp slope and blue camas appears in moist spots. The white of trilliums shines under the birches and alders of Iller Creek on Tower Mountain.

Most of our summer resident birds return in May, the ever-active warblers, chipping sparrows with their red-brown crowns, drab but musical vireos, flashy goldfinches, and rock wrens with their repertoire of odd calls and songs. Juncos have left urban feeders for nesting sites in foothills and mountains. Robins and swallows are nesting.

Mourning cloak butterflies, wings rich dark brown with yellow borders, now a bit faded and worn from their winter hibernation, have laid their eggs in bands around willow twigs but still are on the wing and will be until mid-summer. So will be the brown, black-spotted anglewings. The mottled brown Compton's tortoise shell is less scarce than usual along Iller Creek. The species is described as rare in Robert Pyle's "Watching Washington Butterflies" and is on the State Game Department's list of "Special Animal Species." More information is desired on its distribution and abundance, for entering into the files of the non-game program. The thicket hairstreak is also on the list. Its larva is a specialist, feeding only upon dwarf mistletoe on pine trees. This little butterfly is uncommon in the Dishman Hills this month. Diminutive spring blue butterflies are swarming around puddles and brown elfins dart about in open spots. Several kinds of swallowtails are on the wing as well as orangetips, white and bright orange. Little ochre ringlets are flying weakly among the grasses, upon which their larvae feed.

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving some of the natural environment of the Spokane area for people to enjoy and learn from. Our monthly meetings are at Kiwanis Camp Caro, S. 625 Sargent Road at 7:30 p.m. the fourth Wednesday. You are cordially invited to attend. For further information and for slide programs and guide service into the Dishman Hills call us at 926-7949.

Please use this form when sending contributions to save the Dishman Hills and the Tower Mountain corridor. Your dues and/or gifts are income tax deductible.

\$ ___ Annual dues (\$10) New? ___ Renewal? ___

\$ ___ Land purchase fund

\$ ___ In remembrance of _____

\$ ___ Bulletin expense fund (\$1 or more)

\$ ___ Student (\$5) and/or Living Lightly

___ Your account number above your address.

Please make checks payable to Dishman Hills Natural Area Association and mail to David E. Lentes, Treasurer, P.O. BOX 141561, Spokane, Wa. 99214. Many Thanks! To reduce expense, no receipt or acknowledgement will be sent unless requested.