

## DEEP ROOTS

As the parade of Spring flowers marches through the Hills, a plant with showy blue flowers on a grass-like stalk will emerge from the moist upland meadows. This plant has deep roots in Northwest history and in the culture of the Native Americans that lived here. It's the camas plant, also known as indigo squill, meadow hyacinth, or quamash. Camas is a member of the lily family, and has a starchy bulb



*Camassia quamash*

that was an important food source. Harvest was in the Spring when the plant was in flower and easier to distinguish from its cousin the death camas which has a white flower. Camas fields were cultivated by pulling out the death camas and using fire to clear fields and destroy weeds. Camas beds could be owned or inherited by many of the Northwest tribes. The harvested bulbs were slowly steamed "luau" style in a covered pit full of hot stones for up to 36 hours, then eaten fresh or dried for later use. Cooked bulbs were beaten into flour and made into cakes that could be saved for winter food. Baking

converts the somewhat poisonous starch in them to a tasty sugar. They are said to taste like baked pears with a fragrance like vanilla cake.

Emerging from the Bitterroot Mountains, Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery was starving when they met up with the Nez Perce tribe. The men of the Corps quickly gorged themselves on offered salmon and camas. Their digestive systems were not up to handling camas root or they were not cooking it enough for they all got very ill after eating it. On October 4, 1805 a sick Clark entered into his journal "Capt Lewis & my Self ate a Supper of roots boiled, which filled us So full of wind, that we were Scercely able to Breathe all night felt the effects of it." Lewis also wrote in his journal about seeing fields of camas that looked like blue lakes.

At one time the plant was very numerous in the wild, but with modern agriculture and development of the northwest, camas fields are somewhat rarer. When you find this distinctive plant on your hike through the Hills, take a moment to reflect on the role they played in Northwest history; their roots run deep.

## GROWING PAINS

This month the Audubon Society, 1000 Friends of Washington, and WA Environmental Council ran a workshop on Growth Management and habitat protection. We were first impressed with the complexity of growth management issues and the enforcement rules, Critical Area Ordinances. We were then introduced to the concepts of using "best available science", wetland protection, growth planning as a conservation tool, building habitat networks, and, maybe the most significant of all, the importance of the citizen conservationist in the whole growth management process. This process works with three major groups involved: 1) a government that develops and enforces growth rules, 2) a development industry that plans for and follows growth management, 3) an involved citizen conservation community that acts as watchdog and advocate for habitat protection issues. As in a court of law, it's a balance of opposing forces and things can go

wrong if any of the three groups is weaker or absent. The Dishman Hills Association and the many other active conservation groups in Eastern Washington endeavor to hold up our end of the process. The workshop was well designed to address local issues and we ended it with a review and grading of Spokane's Ordinances that are just being installed to support our growth management.

## TRANSFER UPDATE

The saga of whether State Trust land on Tower Mountain will be transferred to the Dishman Hills Association will end soon one way or other. The Association has been fighting to save this prime piece of forest for community use and as valuable plant and wildlife habitat. The issue will be decided in an "OK corral" type meeting on the May 5th with County Commissioners, County Parks, Doug Sutherland, Public Lands Commissioner, Trust Transfer Program people, and the Dishman Hills Association getting together to see what can be done. Our compliments to County Parks for pushing this issue in all the right places

## ORGANIZATION 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 at Opportunity Elementary School, S. 1109 Wilbur, in the teacher's lounge, 7pm. Our next meeting will be May 19.

The following are our March donors that have consented to be listed: Laura Ackerman, Karen Behm, Bruce Calkins, Myrna Cliff, David Cole, Allen Cross Family, Robert Downing, Carol Ellis, Gladys Fritz Memorial, Jim & Gloria Fox, Robert Gilchrist, Lawrence Hampson, Maxine Lesxcykowski, Elizabeth Mann Memorial, Marilyn Miller, Barbara Morkill, Larry Pluimer, Asha Rehnberg, Mary Ruud, Ruth Slichter, Lee Smith, Victoria Sola, Lininger Family Trust, Dorothy Torney, Verna Dolphin Memorial, George & Rita Waldref, Thomas White, Jeanne Wilson, and one anonymous donor. Thank you all for your generosity.

*In the end we conserve only what we love,  
we will love only what we understand,  
we will understand only what we are taught.*

— Baba Dioum, Senegalese poet

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