

Judy Derpack's Wenatchee Naturalist final project December, 2024

Blackbird Island/Enchantment Park Through the Years, Leavenworth, WA

For as long as I can remember, I've always enjoyed searching out and understanding the history around a place. I credit my dad with instilling this excitement. He would get hyper focused, stopping at historical sites, when we traveled during the summer. As children we would groan and found it quite humorous, calling the stops 'hysterical' sites. But I think those early searches gave me a strong sense of place.

So, you can imagine my fascination when I moved to this valley, nestled in the Cascade mountains.

When most people think of Leavenworth, they think of a quaint little fake Bavarian town. It is that, and so incredibly more. Leavenworth sits at an elevation of 1,117 feet. The Olympic and Cascade mountains cause air flowing off the Pacific Ocean to rise and drop most of its moisture in western Washington. Thus, Eastern Washington lies in the "rain shadow" of the cascades. Precipitation in the low elevation forests of eastern Washington range from 15 to 30 inches. As we know, Most of this precipitation falls in the winter as snow.

My favorite walk is Enchantment Park and Blackbird Island. The east entrance flows from waterfront park, which is directly below the town. The bridge to Blackbird Island is right below a fancy castle that is called the Post hotel. This castle rises in opposing, quite different architecture than that of Blackbird Island.

The Island area, together connected to Enchantment Park, boasts five different beaches, for swimming, fishing, and paddle boarding.

A fishing pond created in an old garbage dump by local anglers, is stocked with trout, especially for children to enjoy.

The emergent area creates homes for raptors, eagles, and osprey, and ducks. They thrive, along with other wildlife, back and forth, at the riparian area.



The canopy area shades, people, animals, hammering woodpeckers, and other plants.

The forest floor boasts a wide variety of species.

And the understory, well you know that story.

My all-time favorite search in a place is learning about its original people. The sin Pasqua tribe lived at the forks of the Wenatchee River and Icicle Creek approximately 12,000 years before the white man came. There were 200 who lived at the Chumash, which means ‘narrow in the middle’ between the rivers,

The river that is now called the Wenatchee, they called P’squosa which means ‘narrow land’

What we call Icicle Creek, they called Nasiketl, which means ‘narrow bottom canyon.’

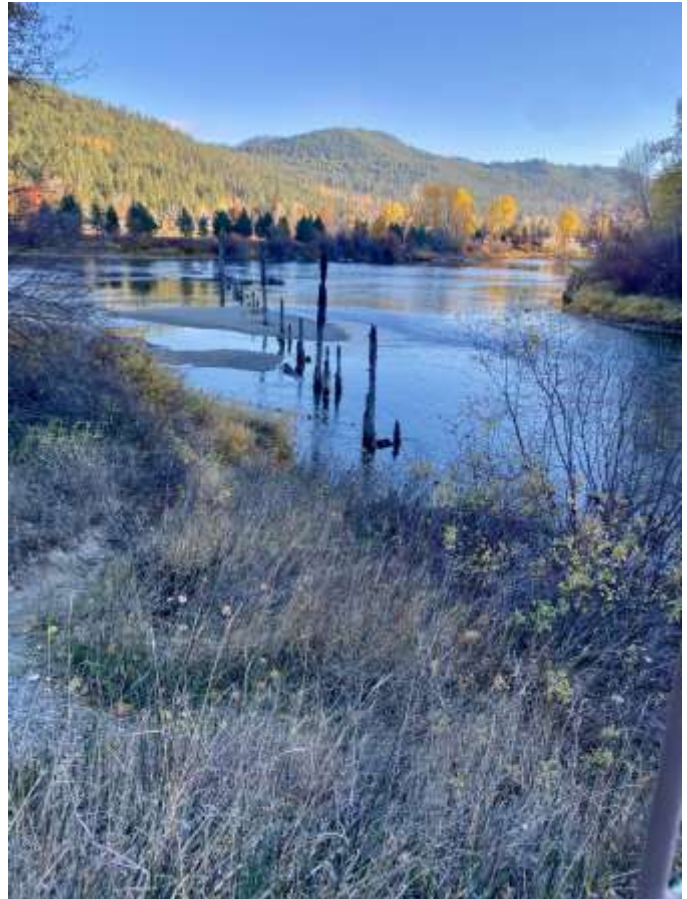
The two converge a short way south of Enchantment Park.

The salmon were so plentiful that tribes came from all over for weddings, parties, horse races, and ceremonies. They spoke different dialects but could understand the ways of trade in reciprocity. There were over 2000 people that came to the Wenatchee. They called the gathering place the Wenatchapam fishery. Some men went into The Tumwater Canyon, which means ‘where the wild Rapids are’ and speared the big fish and scooped them with nets. They had a great feast to honor the Salmon’s return.

One of their most important plants near the Blackbird Island area, was the tule plant. The plants’ long fibers were woven into mats, baskets, and other essential items. families lived together in lodges made with tule, they were easily moved when people traveled to hunting and digging grounds.

Yet, Blackbird Island itself is fairly new to the ecosystem. It was created by silk accumulations in a millpond, which was present until the early 1930s. From 1905 until 1927, The Wenatchee River was the main highway for moving logs from the Lake Wenatchee Forest down river to the Lamb Davis lumber mill, which was a bustling business, in a basin that is now Enchantment Park.

When the lumber mill built a dam downstream in 1905, a mile -long log pond was created. The still water swallowed sand and silt to settle out. The earth gradually built up in the pond behind the dam. When the mill closed and the dam was demolished in 1932, rushing waters carved new channels through the soft river, creating blackbird Island.



Pilings are still visible at low water at the riparian area on each side of blackbird Island. The directed logs, called “dolphins”, kept the swimming logs from escaping over the collection.

As I explored blackbird island, I found mud grasses, shrubs, and cottonwood at the riparian area.

At the overstory, I found larger, shrubs, and larger cottonwoods.

At the mature, healthy canopy I found even larger shrubs, maples, and more diversity.

Then the Ponderosa Pine, Grand fir, and Cottonwood snags completed the Emergent area.

At the forest floor, I saw golden current bushes. The Sin P’squosa mixed the berries with fat and meat, making Pemican, much like a granola bar. This was an important and nutritious food source that was easy to carry and lasted indefinitely.



The blackberry and Mullen are aggressive invaders originating from Europe in the mid-1800s.

Native species have been lost throughout thousands of years, but some remain. The Island still hosts a remnant of an evergreen plant from 350 million years ago, since the era of the dinosaurs! The horse tail, or scouring rush, germinates by spores, which are less efficient than pollen and seed used by modern plants. The Sin’ p’squosa and pioneers used them for scouring pads, due to silica, which is concentrated in the stalk of the plant.

Other plants of the forest floor are the Stinging nettle; yes, it stings but is an antidote for many ills!

The gorgeous Spirea, with hundreds of small flowers, attracts bees and creates healthy pollination.

The simple purity of the Nootka rose is found in the riparian area.

The blue elderberries have long been popular for making jellies and syrups.

The island and enchantment park create a rich habitat for our bears, deer, and Douglas squirrels. There have been numerous sightings and dramatic altercations of bears with humans. I have seen piles of scat that are 2 to 3 feet in diameter! I'm sure they enjoy the close access to salmon and berries. There have been rare altercations with cougars as they descend for easily accessible food sources.

In September, I enjoyed watching the salmon return, spawn and lay their eggs in their homes, called redds, after their long journey of migration. Their death and rotting provide important nutrients to the river for future cycles.

In my most recent site visit, I found many footprints in the snow. Winter has caused a quiet, introspective hush over the island and park.

I intend to return to my field study during every season, to see the vast web of life. My favorite quote, from Marcel Proust, states:

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking out new landscapes, but in having new eyes!”

Thanks, Susan, for challenging us to have ‘new eyes’ on our landscapes!

