

Snively's Malheur field trip makes learning fun

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"Wildbeasts and birds are by right not the property merely of the people who are alive today, but the property of unknown generations, whose belongings we have no right to squander."
-Theodore Roosevelt

Malheur National Wildlife refuge, one of more than 500 refuges in the United States, has been in existence since 1908. John Snively has been taking students there for over 27 years.

"The field trips provide a quality of learning- a hands on way of teaching- that no video tapes, no computers, no classroom, no book can provide. It provides the inspiration people need to move along with their education or to find the focus in what they want to do," commented Snively.

The Malheur field trip, one of many that Snively leads throughout the year, is mainly for birding enthusiasts, but also includes some geology and natural history of Eastern Oregon.

Thirty-two people (of all ages) showed up for the most recent trip which began at 7 a.m. Fri., May 7, when three school vans left the campus. After a jaunt over Mount Hood and a journey through the Ochoco's, the group arrived at the refuge shortly before dark. The trailer was unloaded and the old hospital beds that occupy the dorm were claimed.

The next few days were spent identifying birds; Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Warblers, Great Horned Owls and Great White Egrets are a few of the many birds seen and heard.

The history on the geological formation of the area, including the John Day fossil beds and Diamond Craters Lava flows, were explored and examined hands-on. The plants, some native, and some not, were observed and identified.

The History

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge has quite a story, not only geological but social. In 1872, Peter French, a 21 year old man from Sacramento, wanted to find a place in the world and make money. With financing from Hugh Glen, a wheat trader, French headed north with 1,200 shorthorn cattle and some Mexican vaqueros. His journey led

him to Oregon, where he met a man named Porter, who was leaving the area after too many of his cattle had died from being stuck in the mud.

French bought Porter's remaining cattle, which gave him the grazing rights to the valley. French soon built a house, a 2-300 ft long barn and a round barn (both still standing). He ran his ranch of 3-6,000 horses and more than 10,000 head of cattle very efficiently. French drained the marshes and channelized the rivers to benefit the ranch.

French married his financier's daughter and she came from Sacramento to live with him. She hated ranching life and left the marshland after a year, pregnant with French's son.

The local townspeople looked to French for support. At Christmas, he would buy all the local children presents. The townspeople both respected and envied French. When farms went bankrupt in the area he bought them from his neighbors, thus acquiring more land. His empire grew to over 190,756 acres.

At the time, "squatters rights" was in effect: if people lived long enough on any area of land, then it became rightfully owned by the squatters. French would allow people to set up camp on his land, but would ask them to leave if they stayed too long. Ted Oliver was one of these people, and he became angry and upset when asked to move on. While French and his workers, all unarmed, were out in the field working, Oliver decided to get even. He rode his horse into French again and again. When French finally asked Oliver to stop, Oliver pulled out a gun and shot the ranch owner.

Word had to be spread that French was dead. Jim Crow was given the responsibility to travel to Winnemucca, the closest town, 200 miles away. He made the trip in twenty-four hours, borrowing horses along the way.



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Above, students observe a bird at Diamond Crater located in Malheur National Wildlife Refuge last week. Left, John Snively gives a talk on the geological formation of the John Day fossil beds and surrounding area.



covers more than 186,500 acres of land in eastern Oregon.

The field trips Snively has led while at Clackamas have touched the lives of so many people.

"That is where they get excited; you literally see people changing their majors, getting interested in something for the first time, that is a big thing... I think students find that they can learn a lot and have fun at the same time.. It's a great way to have fun," remarked Snively.

A turn of the century craze for feather hats quickly destroyed the nesting colonies of several species of birds, which prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to designate the area a wildlife refuge in 1908.

In the 1930s the government purchased 64,000 acres for the ref-

uge to maintain water in the Blitzen Valley. The Civilian Conservation Camps, which were hosted by the refuge from 1936-1942, built the refuge headquarters, the center patrol road and hundreds of miles of fence. In 1941 a 14,751-acre piece of land was purchased. Today Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

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Jennifer Chapman, a park ranger at the John Day Fossil beds visitor center, talks to a group of students on the Malheur Field trip about why the fossil beds are such an important resource.