



# STORIES FROM THE LONG TOM

David Turner discusses his book about the Oregon river

Photographer David Turner, the former executive director of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon, along with local historian Douglas Card, will talk about Turner's new book, *Along The Long Tom River: Observations from the Past and Present*, from 6 to 7:30 pm Tuesday, Oct. 6, at the Eugene Public Library. The book is an illustrated cultural history of Lane County's Long Tom River, with contributions from several local writers, photographers and historians.

## What was the process behind the creation of the book?

We moved back to Oregon in 2003 and bought a house on Owens Creek, which flows into the Long Tom River. There was an old dam on our property that blocked the free flow of the creek and created two ponds filled with silt and choked with invasive Eurasian [water] milfoil. I had seen stretches of the naturally flowing creek up the road and wanted our section to be like those.

So I found out about the Long Tom Watershed Council. They surveyed the situation and then took on the dam removal project. The water began to again move freely through the creek bed, giving the native cutthroat trout a better home. And we watched the ponds turn into a wetlands habitat. It was a total success.

I soon joined the board of LTWC and met lots more landowners on tours of LTWC projects at their places. They all had good stories to tell about their lives in the valley. I realized I could tell the complex story about this river, its natural habitat and the people who have lived near it.

I began looking for photographs to help tell these stories and I found some good resources: the online photo archive at Lane County Historical Museum, the local historians at the South Benton Historical Museum and vintage photographs documenting the building of the Fern Ridge Dam, kept in a safe at the local office of the Army Corps of Engineers. I interviewed several individuals from early settler families who also shared their photographs and stories with me. It looked like there was a book in this project and I took on the challenge.

I seriously started working on it in 2014. Early on it felt important to offer several points of stories from this area and I started asking people to contribute to the book, things like stories, family photographs, recent photo portfolios and essays about history, biology and natural resources. I also went through files of photos I have taken since we moved back to the Eugene area in 2003 and got out to look again at the area and make more photographs. The book started coming together.

## How was the book printed? How are you handling distribution and sales?

A local designer worked on the layout, and we found a great print-on-demand printer in Berkeley, Edition One, who offered many options of paper, sizes and good color. The first edition had 100 copies and a tweaked second edition will also have at least 100 copies. One can buy the book at local bookshops in Eugene and Corvallis.

## The book combines several facets and is tough to categorize. If you were a bookshop or library, where would you file it?

I think I'd create a new section called Local Natural History. The book is certainly about a local place and a specific river with a rich natural history. Luckily the LTR's history has

been documented by many artifacts, from arrowheads and pottery from the Kalapuya who lived along the river, to maps and diaries made for the Donation Land Claims in the 1850s, to historic photographs that often clarify the details.

## Before moving to your home near Junction City, what did you know about the Long Tom River?

Only that it was the river that was dammed to create Fern Ridge Reservoir.

## What was the most surprising thing you learned about the river during your research?

It was amazing to be reminded how slight shifts in gradient of the Earth's surface can produce unexpected results in the flow of water.

Two geologists theorized in 1949 that thick alluvial fill and landslides changed the slope of the area and thus redirected the flow of the LTR and its Coast Range tributaries. Originally they flowed west into the Siuslaw River and then into the Pacific through Florence area. But they proposed that a geological change of ridge line 50 millions ago caused the headwaters of LTR to shift its direction of flow toward the east and into the Willamette instead of the Siuslaw.

This shift of the earth may have moved the headwaters of the LTR and Owens Creek closer together. They're now located only about one mile apart but they flow in radically different directions before they eventually meet in one place. The LTR runs south and east almost 38 miles to that point. Owens Creek flows east about 8 miles to that point.

## What's your favorite spot on the LTR?

Just north of the bridge at Monroe, where Highway 99W crosses the LTR, there is a small park with an assembly of public attractions. There is a sports field, a sign welcoming visitors to Monroe, a historic description of the Wilhelm Water Wheel, and farther down the gravel road toward the river is a place to easily launch a canoe or kayak into the wide, slowly moving river.

This is one of the few places that the LTR has a visible public profile from the bridge and the side road. And a short walk further down the road takes you to a place where you get a great view of the long drop structure built by ACE in 1942. That structure is connected to two relics from the older days: a primitive, non-functioning fish ladder for migrating fish and the base for the water wheel that powered the early old Monroe Roller Mills. If this spot were more visitor-friendly, people could better enjoy the river and its history.

## What do you think the Long Tom River watershed will look like in 50 years?

In 2067 I won't be around able to witness the river, but my kids will. I hope the next generation living in this watershed can see a healthy river that nurtures many native cutthroat trout and allows for migrating salmon to come spawn. There would be a great park along the banks of the river, maybe by the town of Monroe, where families can gather for picnics and paddleboats could be easily released.

My greatest wish would be that people living in the LTR watershed would continue to be active stewards of the land, working together to collectively work to benefit the river and its habitat.

*Eugene photographer Blake Andrews writes about photography for Eugene Weekly. He's also the author of the photo blog 'B.'*