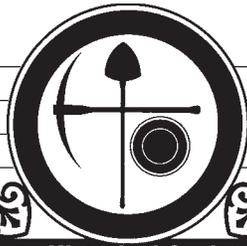


This month's theme:
The Bonneville Flood



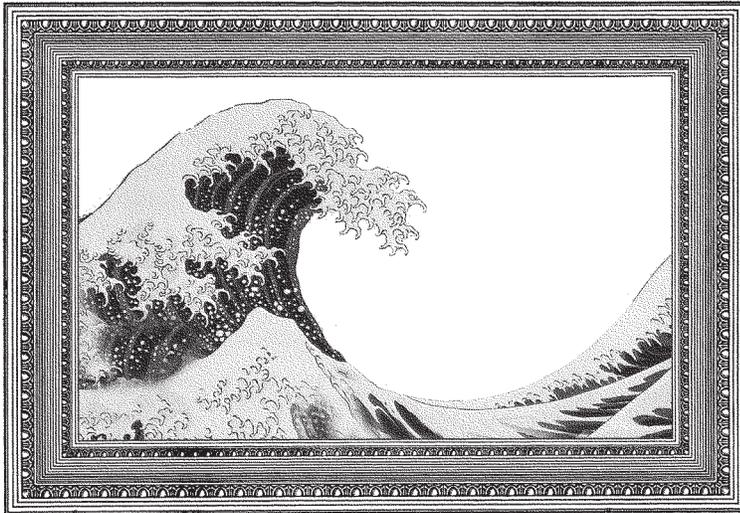
Contents

Feature	1	Fun page	3
Next Month	4		

The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

PROSPECTOR

October, 2005



The Bonneville Flood

About 15,000 years ago a huge body of water called Lake Bonneville covered most of what we now call northern Utah. If Lake Bonneville were still around today, Salt Lake City would be underwater. In fact, the Great Salt Lake is a small reminder of the giant lake that once was there. I say small because it is only about one third the size of Lake Bonneville. Geologists call this whole area where Lake Bonneville used to be and where the Salt Lake is now the Salt Lake Basin.

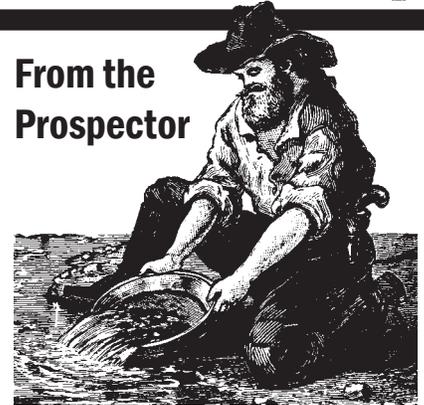
At some point, Lake Bonneville simply became too full

and some of the water needed to be released. Even though there were no dams like the ones we have today, such as the Arrowrock Dam or the gigantic Hoover Dam, there were dams that formed naturally. These natural dams allowed the water in Lake Bonneville to rise to a level that put a great deal of pressure on the dams. Eventually one of them had to give way. A lake is a little like a bathtub except that it has no drain at the bottom, so when the water gets too high it will just spill over the lowest side.

The lowest point for Lake Bonneville to spill over was at Red

Continued on next page

From the Prospector



Howdy New Prospectors!

Welcome to the fourth grade and the Prospector Club Junior Historian Program. My name is Lucky Noah and I'm in charge of writing your monthly newsletter. Although most of the time I'm out in the mountains looking for gold, my mule and I have an office in the basement of the state historical museum, which is located in Boise.

This is the first of eight newsletters you will receive as a Prospector. Each issue will have exciting stories on a different Idaho history topic and fun activities for you and your class to do. For this month's theme, prepare to go back in history to ancient Idaho, when a giant flood raged across the land. ●

The Bonneville Flood Continued

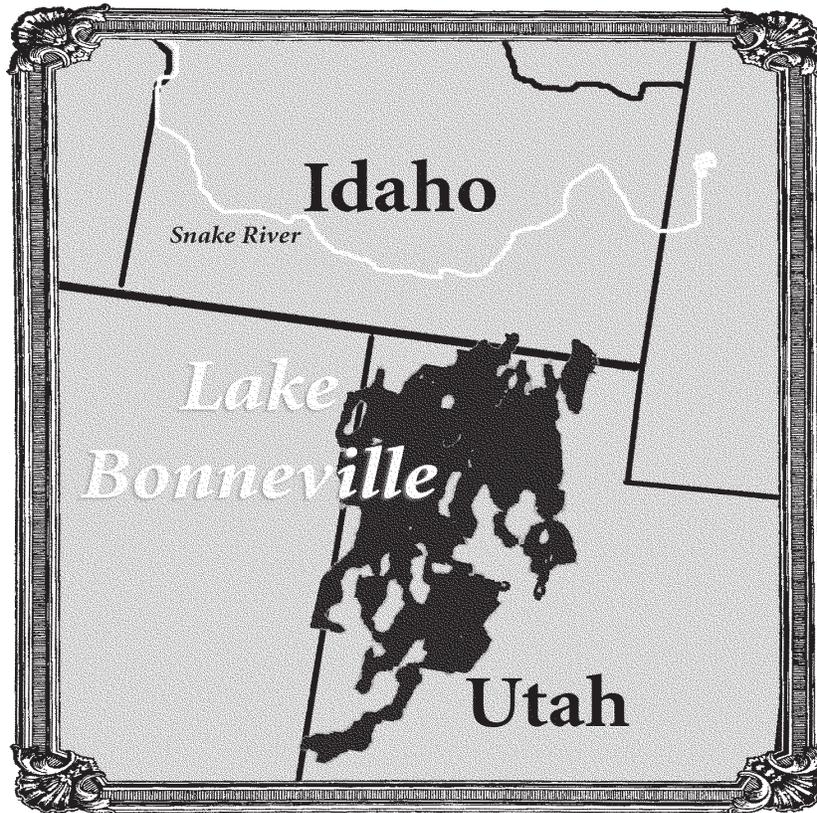
Rock Pass. Once the water started to flow through this opening, it couldn't be stopped. More and more water kept gushing out of the lake, making the hole bigger and bigger. The great flood swept through Eastern Idaho and across the Snake River Plain. This event had a big impact on the geological formation of Idaho and the rest of the Northwest, so some scientists decided to give it a name, The Great Bonneville Flood. The power of this huge wave of water can be seen, even today, all along the Snake River Canyon. The rushing water tossed huge boulders through the canyon and scoured out loose rocks for hundreds of miles.

Giant whirlpools, like the kind seen in action movies that pull ships to the bottom of the ocean, formed on the surface of the river as the water roared down the canyon. Whirlpools look like they just

happen on the surface of the water but they actually reach well under the surface, even reaching the river bottom. This circling water can suck out sand and rock with enormous power, creating very deep holes. Many of the spectacular waterfalls we see along the Snake River, like the ones at Twin Falls, Shoshone Falls, Crane Falls and Swan Falls were created by these circling whirlpools and the powerful currents created by the flood.

Geologists have been trying to

figure out just how much water poured down the Snake River Canyon during the Bonneville Flood. One method they use is to look at what the flood was able to move or carry down its path. The Bonneville Flood seemed to move every loose boulder and rock in its



path.

From this evidence, scientists estimate that the amount of water carried by the flood was about equal to one of the smaller Great Lakes. If you check out a map you can see that even the smallest of the Great Lakes is a huge lake. Now imagine that much water going down the Snake River Canyon in just a few months. Another way to visualize it is to replace the Snake River with three Amazon Rivers. By looking at sedimentary evidence like rocks, sand, and fossils, scientists deter-

mined that the Lake Bonneville flood was the second largest flood known to have occurred in the world. That's a big flood!

The flood was so powerful and deep that it forced other rivers and streams that normally pour into the Snake River to reverse their course;

they actually flowed upstream for a while. Even as far north as the lower sections of the Clearwater River near the city of Lewiston there are sand and rock deposits from the great flood. It's a good thing that there weren't any houses or bridges or boats around 15,000 years ago because they would have been swept away.

Even though a great flood can cause a lot of destruction, it can also have positive effects. For instance, the dirt and sand that the flood waters carried along with it were

dropped along the entire area of the Snake River Plain, creating a very fertile zone. This alluvial soil, which means that the dirt is really good for growing crops for food, allows many farmers to make a living along the Snake River. The flood also created spectacular waterfalls, canyons and beaches. Thousands of people come from all around the world for the great fishing, camping and rafting that can be done throughout the Snake River Plain. ●

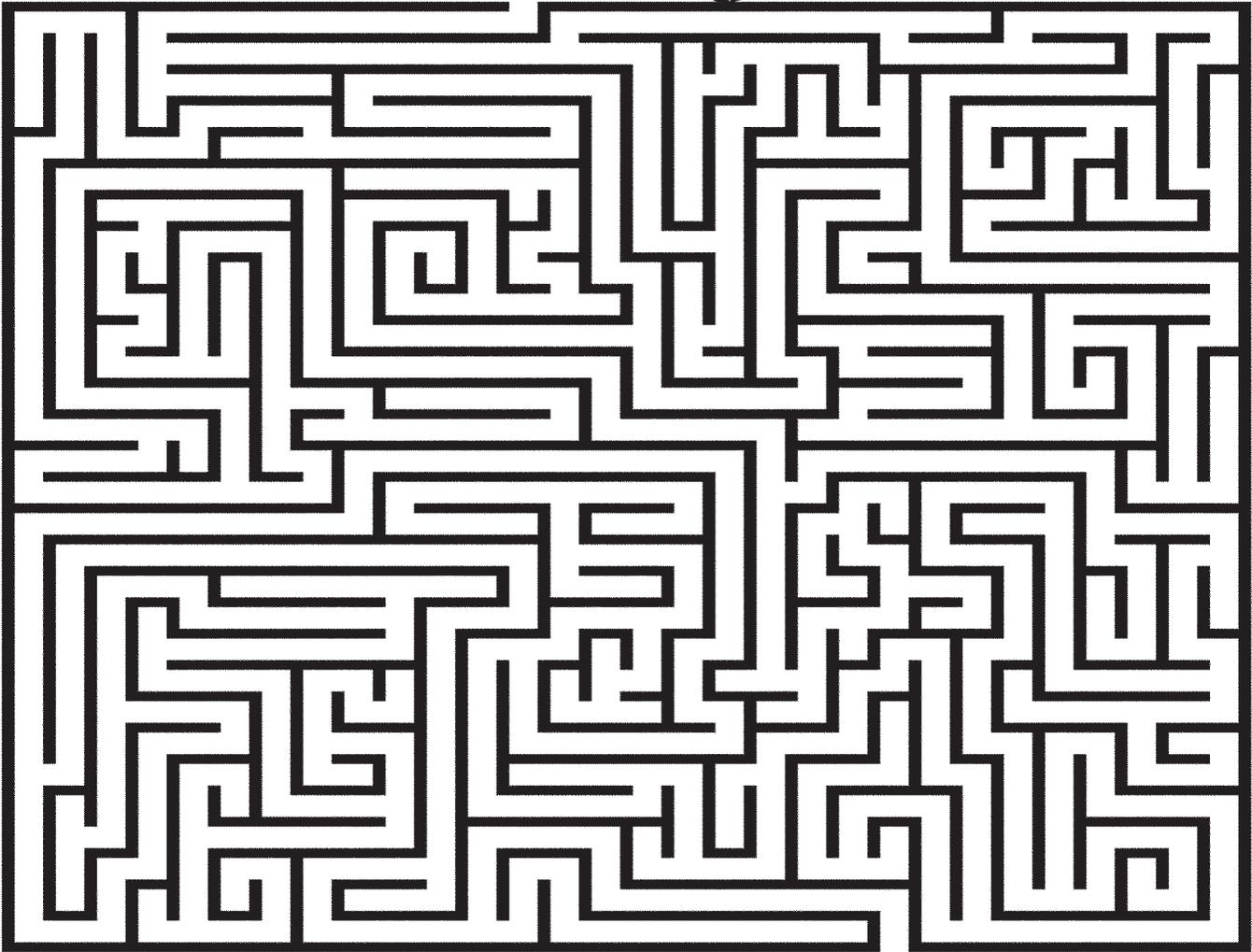
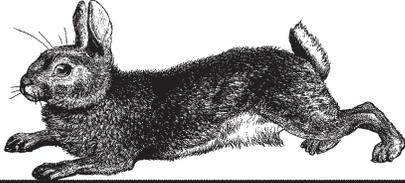
By Glenn Newkirk



The Fun Page

Run, Rabbit, Run!

The flood is coming! Help get the rabbit out of canyons and to higher ground before the water hits.



High Ground



Next Month's Activities

I love sharing Idaho's rich history with the schools, but writing a newsletter is hard work. That's where you come in. Each month, I'll ask for submissions for the next issue. As official Junior Historians you can write stories, draw pictures, and turn in projects that we'll print right here in the magazine.

This month you can pick from one of the activities listed below or make up your own Bonneville Flood project and send it to our prospector headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, the town and school where you are from, and the name of your Prospector Club. We can't wait to see what you come up with!

Eyewitness Account:

We don't know any people were around to witness the amazing flood, but we can be sure there were a lot of critters in the canyon who saw the water go by. Pretend you are an ace reporter for the "Animal News". Hold an interview, with a jackrabbit, rattlesnake, coyote, or other crea-

ture that watched the flood. What did they see? Did they have a narrow escape? Will they ever dare go down into the canyon again? Remember to include a picture of your interviewed animal for the rest of the Prospectors to see.

dam and went rushing toward the ocean. Do a little research in your library and on the internet and tell us about this tremendous flood. We can't wait to see what you come up with!



Can You Save the Day?

What if a flood as big as Bonneville came rushing through Idaho today? Pretend you are an expert geologists who learns of the flood just before it happens. Write a short story telling us how your quick thinking and innovative ideas saved the people and cities of our state. Only you can save the day!

Send in your work by November 14th to:

An Even Bigger Flood: The Bonneville Flood was big, but believe it or not, there was another ancient flood that came through Idaho that was even bigger. In Northern Idaho, giant Lake Missoula burst through a natural

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