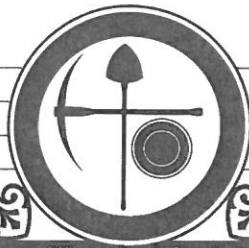


This month's theme:
Bruneau Sand Dunes



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

PROSPECTOR

December, 2007



Idaho Sand Dunes

When people think about Idaho they usually think of tall snow-covered mountains, rivers of rushing whitewater and huge forests with lots of wildlife. But one type of landscape that does not usually come up when people talk about our state is a desert full of sand. Believe it or not, Idaho has sand dunes too. This is the story of one of the tallest sand dune in North America.

If you live in Southwestern Idaho you may have heard about Bruneau Dunes State Park near

Mountain Home. Some of you might have even visited this spectacular park and walked on the amazing sand dunes. It is a great adventure and, for a lot of people visiting Idaho, a big surprise. Bruneau Dunes State Park not only has mountains of sand, but hidden away in the desert habitat are two small lakes full of fish. The park is also home to many diverse creatures. Everything from delicate lilies to rattlesnakes and scorpions live around the shifting dunes.

So how did one of the tallest

Continued on next page

From the Prospector



Howdy Prospectors

Lately, I've been busy in the museum's backyard. It seems like the only thing my mule wants for Christmas this year is a sandbox. Now you might think that's a bit odd, but that critter loves to play in the sand. When we're out in the mountains looking for gold and we come across a large sand bar on the edge of a stream, he sits right down and starts building. Have you ever see a mule's version of a sand castle? It's an interesting sight, that's for sure. I know he's going to love this box I'm building for him. Well, since I've got sand on my mind (as well as in my shoes and socks) why don't we devote this month's newsletter to one of the finest sand boxes in the state?. This is the story of Bruneau Dunes.

Lucky Noah

sand dunes in North America end up in Southern Idaho? You would think that the beaches of California or the deserts of Arizona and Nevada, where there is an infinite amount of sand, would be the place to find one of the biggest sand dunes. But, according to scientists and geologists, the area near Bruneau had the perfect conditions to form this mountain of sand.

About 15,000 years ago a great flood, called the Bonneville Flood, swept through much of the area that is now southern Idaho. This flood roared down the Snake River Canyon and created many of the spectacular geological features across southern Idaho. As the flood came through the cove where the park sits today, the water swirled around like an eddy in a river. The swirling water deposited tons of sand and pulverized rock in the desert basin. This sand was the basis of the huge dunes that we see today.

One of the most unusual things about the dunes at Bruneau is that they don't really drift or move. The sand gets blown around but the winds come from both directions in more or less the same amount. The sand might blow one way on Sunday but then get blown back the other way on Tuesday. Most other sand dunes in the world are pushed by winds from the same direction so they actually drift across the surface of the land.

One of the most surprising things about the park is the lakes

that lie at the foot of the dunes. In the 1950's Idaho's farmers started to produce more food for the growing population of Idaho. This required more water. To get this water engineers built the C.J. Strike dam along the Snake River. When a dam is constructed water builds up both above and below ground. Some of this water found its way underground into the park and formed the lakes. According to some people who visited the dunes

occasionally a swan can be seen at the lakes.

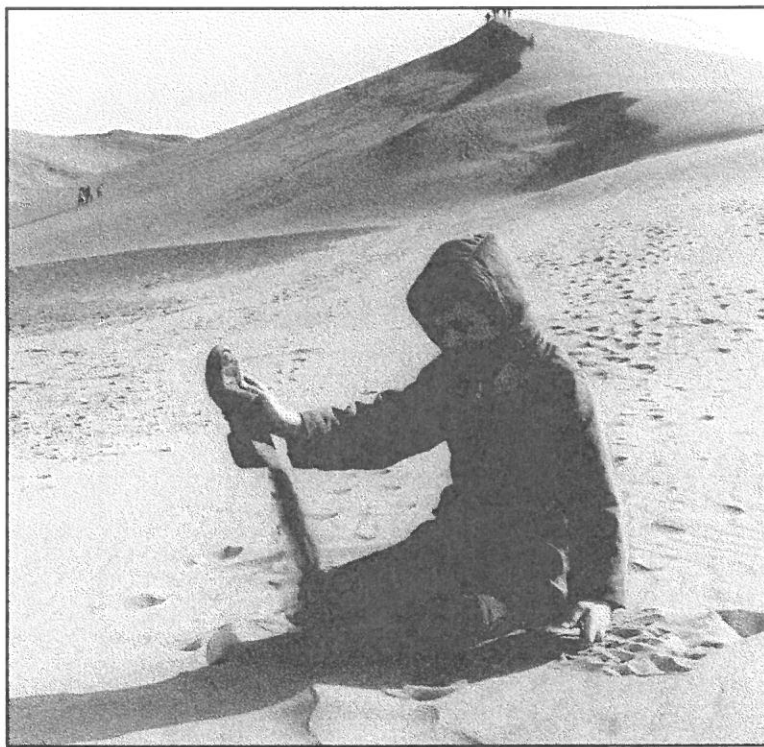
Many people who drive through the desert don't notice the beauty and the diversity of the desert landscape. The area's harsh weather and dry conditions can make it seem like a wasteland. Even though the living conditions at the Bruneau Dunes can be difficult lots of plants and animals live and even thrive there. For example, you might see a cottontail rabbit, coyote,

kangaroo rat, muskrat, badger, golden eagle, great horned owl or a marsh hawk while walking among the tall Indian rice grass and blooms of wildflowers.

The area is such a spectacular place it is surprising to find out that until the last 30 or 40 years not many people knew about it or told others that these great sand dunes existed. In fact, the area didn't even become a State Park until 1967. Before that there were no roads to drive on, no

picnic tables to eat lunch at and no fish in the lakes. The coolest thing about the Bruneau Sand Dunes is that they are still there and anyone can go check them out and walk around on sand that has been blowing around in the same area for 15,000 years or so. At this magical place you don't just read about or look at pictures of history, you can walk around and slide down the face of history.

by Glenn Newkirk



before the construction of the dam, there was always a spring that bubbled up at the base of the dunes. Once the dam was built, however, the increased water flow became trapped and just kept rising. The lakes are a welcome addition, as they now are home to several types of fish and provide a scenic area for visitors to cool off. In the fall and winter months several kinds of birds, such as geese and ducks and



The Fun Page

Sand Dune Sudoku

1			2
	3		
		1	4



Fill in the grid so that

- Each row
- Each 4 square box
- Each column
- and both diagonals

Have the numbers 1-4

Solution

1	4	3	2
2	3	4	1
4	1	2	3
3	2	1	4



Next Month's Activities

Well, we've told you all we know about Idaho sand dunes, now it's your turn. This month you can pick from one of the activities listed below or make up your own sand dune 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!

More Sand Dunes: Bruneau Dunes State Park is a spectacular place, but those who live in eastern Idaho know that Bruneau isn't the only place with dunes in our state. Near the town of St. Anthony, there is another large stretch of sand. Help us find out more about these eastern sands. Do a little research about the Saint Anthony Sand Dunes and report back to us with what you found. Is Saint Anthony similar to or different from Bruneau? What kind of creatures live there? How tall are the dunes? We can't wait to see what you come up with.

Stars and Sand: One of the cool things about Bruneau Sand Dunes is that it's also a great place to stargaze. Since it is located deep in the desert away from city lights, the sky above Bruneau is an astronomer's dream. Down near the lake, the park has built a small observatory

about the Idaho sky? For thousands of years humans have been grouping stars into familiar shapes and patterns called constellations. Do a little research on one of these constellations and report back to us. Draw a picture of your constellation so we can identify it in the night sky.



with a 25" telescope. Visitors can go down on Friday and Saturday nights and learn about the sky above. How much do you know

The Desert Ballad: One of the things we like to do when we camp in the desert is sit around the campfire and sing songs. Singing old tunes is great, but sometimes it's fun to come up with a new one. Help come up with a new song for a desert adventure. Will you sing about the sand? The stars? The snakes and scorpions? Write it all down and send it in next month so we can share your ideas.

Send in your work by January 15th to:

Prospector Club/Lucky Noah
Idaho State Historical Museum
610 North Julia Davis Drive
Boise, ID 83702

Or email it to us at
kzwolfer@ishs.idaho.gov

