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ASEH News

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This is the first electronic issue of the newsletter. Members that responded to our inquiry about paper copies in the 2007 spring and summer issues will receive them in the mail. We will continue to store back issues of the newsletter (since 2001) on our website under "Publications."

Let us know what you think of this new format; send comments to director@aseh.net

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In This Issue

From the President's Desk: Climate Change and ASEH's Boise Conference

The theme of ASEH's next conference (March 12-16, 2008 in Boise) is global warming, or more precisely, "Agents of Change: People, Climate, and Places through Time." Anyone paying the slightest bit of attention knows that global warming is certainly in the media's spotlight. From Al Gore's powerpoints in *An Inconvenient Truth*, to Walmart's recent announcement that it intends to reduce the carbon footprints of its international supply chains, global warming is big news and bigger business.

But what's largely missing in this discussion is some sense of the humanistic dimensions of global warming. This is puzzling, because put bluntly, global warming is a humanistic tragedy, not an environmental tragedy. It's not the earth that is going to be devastated by climate change. Mass extinctions in evolutionary history are typically followed by mass speciations. New species will surely evolve to fill the niches vacated by the extinctions piling up in ever great numbers. The earth will persist - different, surely, but that's the way things go in evolutionary time. The looming terrors of global warming -

Mark Kurlansky to Speak at Boise Conference

The Boise Program Committee is pleased to announce that Mark Kurlansky, author of *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*, will deliver the keynote address on Saturday evening, March 15, 2008. For more information on speakers for special events, click here.

ASEH News

This quarterly newsletter is a publication of the American Society for Environmental History. For more information, or to submit an article, contact director@aseh.net

Quick Links

Info. on ASEH 2008 Boise Conference

Attention ASEH Members

Click here to add your info. to our Directory of Members and Experts.

Attention Authors and Presses

Our conference in Boise will include a large exhibit area. For online and printable exhibit forms, click here. For authors and presses that would like to display books but do not plan to reserve a table, Scholar's Choice is an option.

massive fires, floods, famines, with refugees in their millions fleeing too much water in Bangladesh, too little water in the Sudan - these are all tragedies in historical time, not in evolutionary time.

What's threatened by global warming is not the earth but ourselves. What won't persist is our sense of place and time - our own human histories on this earth. It's the places we love, the relationships we cherish with the species that make their homes in those particular places, that help make us human. As Wallace Stegner reminded us, we see the world through our own human eyes, and it's that human vision of the world that is under threat.

John Burns, a naturalist in the northwoods of Wisconsin, writes in *Paradise Lost: Climate Change in the North Woods*:

"The climate change scenarios currently projected for Wisconsin at the end of this century utterly boggle the mind. Conservative middle-ground scenarios show Wisconsin becoming the climatological equivalent of Arkansas, while Madison's climate will morph into a twin of Oklahoma City . . . Meanwhile, the North Woods may gradually transition into an oak savannah. That's so difficult to imagine, so close to what we can only think of as science fiction, that all of us have a great deal of trouble even conceiving of the possibility. Yet there it is, looming on the horizon like the eerie bruised sky that so often precedes a tornado. But how does one address the coming of a tornado, much less the coming of a global environmental upheaval? Climate change is such a vast topic, the terminology so difficult, the computer-modeled evidence so complex, the potential loss so enormous that it is nearly impossible to get our arms around it."

The potential loss is indeed difficult to comprehend, and the perspectives that historians can bring to the discussion are critical. Who wins, and who loses, when the climate changes? Who has the power to define the terms of the debates over global warming? How can humanistic perspectives help us understand people, climate, and places through time? The ASEH conference in Boise, March 12-16, 2008, is a wonderful opportunity for us to engage in this important conversation. Come to Boise!

Nancy Langston, ASEH President

The Profession: How Historians Can Assist Environmental Restoration Projects

Historical records can prove very valuable in environmental restoration work by revealing the locations of early fence lines, trails, and grazing areas, as pictured in this example from Red Rock Canyon State Park. Read more about how environmental historians can assist scientists in these projects in the article below.

By David A. Bainbridge, Sustainable Management, Alliant International University, San Diego

Probably more environmental restoration projects have failed from lack of due diligence in analyzing historical impacts and changes in ecosystem structure and function than for any other reason. Yet developing a site environmental history is not difficult or costly. Hiring an environmental historian to develop a site environmental history can help project biologists and environmental scientists understand what types of disturbances to look for, reveal historical or archeological sites that should be protected, and identify special problem areas where ecosystem structure and function have been dramatically altered.

A better sense of environmental history can also help refine restoration plans for a site. An environmental historian can help restoration planners decide what the restoration goals should be by determining what was on the site in the past. In Southern California for example, we might consider a restoration goal of 2006 (before current disturbance), 1890 (before widespread farming), 1800 (before extensive grazing), or 10,000 or 25,000 years ago, before people arrived. Ideally we would like to find an undisturbed reference site; but there are few, if any, undisturbed sites in Southern California.

We can learn a great deal by developing a good site environmental history. In many cases more information is available to us than we might first suspect. The visit of Jedidiah Smith to San Diego in 1827 is a good example of what we can learn from historical study. He noted the oaks and pines around Old Town. These had to be Torrey Pines (*Pinus torreyana*), but by the time botanists got here they were all gone except for a small grove near Del Mar. Ethnoecologist Florence Shipek also unearthed evidence of the presence of Torrey Pines on Point Loma through interviews with Kumeyaay elders and field work. Research is also highlighting the potential impacts of prehistoric management activities that can affect restoration.

An environmental history can also help identify the likely disturbance effects on a site. This can enable limited resources to be focused on the changes in ecosystem structure and function that are most likely to be an issue. A detailed study can identify the location of old roads, corrals, building sites, and other disturbances that will require special efforts during the restoration project. It may also help identify special problems that may demand special soil or water tests, such as the use of boron as a weed killer in early industrial areas.

Many consulting firms neglect environmental history because they do not have an environmental historian on staff. Researching environmental history takes training and experience; it is very local, with resources varying widely from place to place. Going back in time through papers, photographs, maps, books, air photos, fieldwork, and the internet starts out as a scientific and historical procedure, but often ends up as an "art."

Expertise in environmental historical research is often needed by ecologists, biologists and others who are trained in the latest science - but not very well versed in history. If you are interested in expanding your environmental history work to include restoration you might arrange a meeting with your local restoration firms (you can look them up in the yellow pages or on-line). You might also contact and/or join the Society for Ecological Restoration; see www.ser.org

Recommended Reading:

Bainbridge, D. A. 2007. *A Guide for Desert and Dryland Restoration. Island Press*, Washington, DC 391 p. (see especially Chapter 4 which describes site evaluation).

Egan, D. and E. A. Howell. 2001. *The Historical Ecology Handbook: A Restorationist's Guide to Reference Ecosystems*. Island Press, Washington, DC. (see especially Chapter 2, by M. Kat Anderson).

Sandor, A., P.L. Gersper and J.W. Hawley. 1990. *Prehistoric agricultural terraces and soils in the Mimbres area, New Mexico*. World Archeology 22(1):70-86.

Smith, J. S. 1977 [1827]. The *Southwest Expedition of Jedediah. S. Smith*. Univesity of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE.

Announcements

ASEH's conference in Boise will include a field trip to the Birds of Prey National Conservation Area.
For information on our Boise conference, including free workshops, speakers, travel grants, field trips, and more, see our website at www.aseh.net

New Graduate Fellowship Available in Environmental History

Georgetown University announces a graduate fellowship for Ph.D. students in environmental history. Each year the History Department and Graduate School will provide a renewable, five-year fellowship (covering tuition, living stipend, and health insurance) to an entering Ph.D. student in any area of environmental history. Interested students should contact John McNeill at: mcneillj@georgetown.edu. Details concerning Georegtown's History Ph.D. program may be found at:

http://www3.georgetown.edu/departments/history/programs/graduate/5560.html

AMS Graduate Fellowship in the History of Science

Deadline: Application packages must be postmarked by February 8, 2008.

The American Meteorological Society (AMS) is pleased to invite applications for 2007/2008 AMS Graduate Fellowship in the History of science, to be awarded to a student wishing to complete a dissertation on the history of the atmospheric, or related oceanic or hydrologic sciences. The award carries a $15000 stipend and will support one year of dissertation research. Fellowships cannot be deferred and must be used for the year awarded, but can be used to support research at a location away from the student's institution provided the plan is approved by the student's thesis advisor.

The goal of the graduate fellowship is to generate a dissertation topic in the history of the