

“Appraisal of the Archeological Resources of Twelve Reservoirs in the Willamette Valley Oregon.” Columbia Basin Project River Basin Surveys, Smithsonian Institution: 1949. (Reviewed by Eleanor Gordon)

This survey was carried out in 1948 and 1949 to assess the archeological resources of twelve areas designated to be inundated by reservoirs in the Willamette Valley. The surveyors assessed tributary canyons of the Middle Fork of the Willamette, McKenzie, Calapooya and Santiam rivers. All of these rivers were named in the Corps of Engineer plans for dam construction in the near future (from 1949).

The survey determined that the dense forest and steep canyons of these tributaries that would be covered by reservoirs if the damming was carried out contained no significant archeological value. According to this assessment, the limited archeological significance was due to the fact that the steep canyons were not conducive to permanent campsites.

The study was hindered by the fact that lumber practices were in full swing when the study was undertaken, which meant that much of the area that should have been assessed archeologically in order to do a complete study was already too eroded and covered with debris to glean any significant information from. This booklet also contains an overview of the geology of the Willamette Valley, as assessed by a geology professor at the University of Oregon at the time this was published, as well as a synopsis of the Calapooya history in the Willamette valley. This latter part is especially interesting because it discusses the first ethnological data that were collected in the area and mentions the present condition of the Calapooya people. The actual surveys are of Hills Creek, Dexter, Falls Creek, Gate Creek, Blue River, Cougar, Holley, Wiley Creek, Cascadia, White Bridge and Green Peter sites.

Critique

This survey appears incomplete. It concluded that there was no evidence of archeologically significant artifacts in any of the areas and thus that there was no reason not to create the dams. Their survey methods for the most part included walking the area on foot and interviewing people who lived in the area. Although I don't really see what else they could have done, it is difficult to determine how thorough they actually were in completing the surveys because of the way that they are presented. It almost seems a little too convenient that nothing of significance was found to hinder dam construction. Still this document is neat in its historical significance to the landscape history of the area. It is interesting to see the descriptions of areas as they were before the reservoirs that we know today were in place.

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