

October's Speaker, Bill Sullivan

Most of us pay attention when we hear the words "natural disaster." We stay tuned to radios and TV's like leeches, hanging on every word. The broadcaster's excitement intensifies as the conditions worsen. Telephones ring, bodies stiffen as the potential for disaster gets nearer. We want to be close to the disaster but we don't want to be a victim.

The possibility of a crushing natural disaster is somewhat remote for where we live in Lane County, but it isn't so remote for some of the farther reaches. We share a few peaks in the Cascades with other counties, but we are still vulnerable to their possible eruptions. We have a part of the coast vulnerable to tsunamis. And we still have prolonged or torrential rains at times that can cause flooding. Since much of the Willamette Valley is the former flood plain of the Willamette River, the inevitable can happen even in Eugene.

Both physical scientists and social scientists have been able to document with considerable accuracy most of Lane County's past natural disasters of all types occurring since human settlement--disasters that we can observe now, vicariously, through the research and pictures of Bill Sullivan, this month's guest speaker.

Bill last spoke to us in September of 2004, showcasing his book, *Oregon's Most Beautiful Trips and Trails*. His upcoming book on Oregon's natural disasters is not yet out but we will enjoy a preview of its contents this Friday evening.

Besides having written many books--you're probably most familiar with his hiking guides covering all of the regions of Oregon, including its historical spots--Bill has a few other special talents and an interesting background that he volunteered to share with us.

"I grew up in Salem, the son of a newspaper editor who often took our family on camping and backpacking trips. I grew up thinking that I would become a writer. Fascinated with words, I studied linguistics at Heidelberg University in Germany and learned half a dozen languages. I completed an English degree in creative writing at Cornell and a Master's degree in German at the U of O. After a miserable year as a high school English teacher, I threw myself into freelance writing full time. Since then I've written a dozen books--historical works, hiking guides, and two novels. Lately I've been reading murder mysteries to help with work on a mystery of my own, *The Case of Einstein's Violin*, due out in April.



"As a hobby I've always enjoyed playing music of the Baroque. To help with that interest I've built three harpsichords and recently added a pipe organ to my home."

A Baroque harpsichord, though not necessarily one that Bill built.

And what are we going to hear Friday evening?

"The slide show I'll be giving explores the floods, earthquakes, forest fires, eruptions, and tsunamis that have hit Lane County during the past 13,000 years of human settlement. Although these disasters occur at irregular intervals, there are patterns that show they are in fact part of natural cycles. We cannot predict these catastrophic events precisely, but it is possible to prepare for their impact. It's also proving important to understand the underlying cycles and the impact that we are having on the planet."

Mark your calendars, invite a friend to "Lane County's Greatest Natural Disasters," Friday evening, October 20.

Bill will bring copies of some of his books for you to peruse. And for those who'd like, bring your copies of any of his books, and he'll be glad to personally sign them for you.

It's easy to get more information on Bill from his website: <http://www.oregonhiking.com>

Or read the piece from *Nature Trails* posted on the ENHS website. Simple click in "Enter," click on "Archive," click on "September 2004."

<http://biology.uoregon.edu/enhs/default.html>

The stump of a cedar tree downed by a subduction fault tsunami in 1700.

Photo taken at Lincoln Beach. Bill Sullivan



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