

J Harlen Bretz and the Great Missoula Flood:

An Individual and His Radical Geologic
Theory

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Why I chose this topic:

I have always been fascinated with the sciences, so I looked this year for a topic that combined my love of science with a National History Day project. Because this year's theme was *An Individual in History: Actions and Legacies*, I wanted to pick a scientist who went against the traditional knowledge of his time period. But I also wanted to pick somebody who was more obscure than Louis Pasteur or Marie Curie. Then I saw a TV program about the Eastern Washington Scablands and J Harlen Bretz, who had proposed the revolutionary theory about their formation. This situation was extremely convenient for me, because his studies were done in the Scablands of Eastern/Central Washington, only a few hours' drive from where I live. Having some NHD experience in documentaries, I ultimately decided to create a historical video.

How I conducted my research:

I began my research by checking out a book at the library about Bretz's life. It had received amazing reviews from the local paper, so I figured that it was an excellent starting point for my research. I then proceeded to check out all the books possible about Bretz and his scientific theory, including some primary source material. After I had done most of the research from books and websites that I felt was necessary, I decided that I would schedule an interview with the author of the first book that I had read. He lived in Spokane, so I was able to view the Scablands on the way there and take some video footage. I conducted an hour and a half interview with the author. When I returned home, I uploaded my video to the computer. Last of all, I compiled photos for my documentary.

How I created and developed my documentary

After getting all of the material necessary for my documentary's production, I wrote a script for my documentary's narration. After editing this several times and adding final details, I recorded my narration with a microphone from one of my teachers. I put this voiceover into my editor program and synced it with video, interview, and photo material that I had compiled. I then added sound effects that were necessary, wrote the credits, and added music. Lastly, I did some fine-tuning with my editing, watched the entire documentary, and made some more edits. When I thought that it was complete, I burned it to a DVD and watched it on my TV to check the disc.

How my project relates to the theme:

J Harlen Bretz was definitely an individual in the geologic field, simply because he went against the traditional geologic theories and created an idea that made him the laughing stock of his colleagues. His persistence and careful study of the Scablands were the actions that led him to ultimate victory in proving his theory. His legacy was that he changed the face of science forever, causing new ways of thinking about geology.

(495 words)