

## The Creek

When I look back over this summer, I can't help but get teary-eyed, as it was something of a fantasy to me. I guess I'll start as far back as I can go, to when I saw the application posted to the bulletin in the Barnes Science Center lobby. I don't quite recall what it said—I just know it was the first time I laid eyes on Silver Creek, and that was what it came down to. I took the flyer back to my room, sat at my desk and typed "Silver Creek Preserve" in the search bar, soon to discover my home for twelve weeks during the coming summer. I eventually found the internship description on the Career Center's webpage. As breathtaking as the images I found were, that was not what set my sights



**Moonrise over the Picabo Hills, View from Silver Creek**

on this particular internship—it was Charlie's story that did it for me. His connection with this place was so influential that the Blumenstein family, friends, and Colorado College sponsors someone every summer to work there—to go see what Charlie was so

passionate about. Let me just say that this summer my eyes were opened, and I can now see a trajectory for the rest of my life.

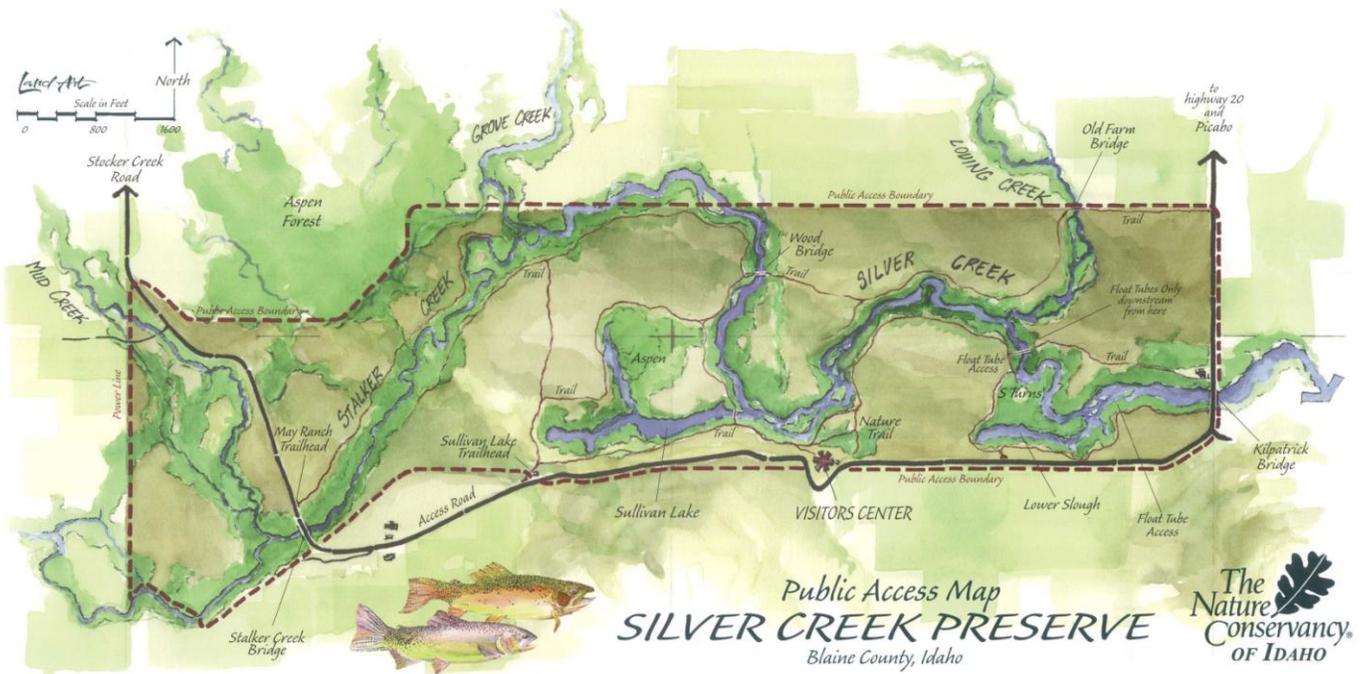
I pulled into the French's little red farmhouse just before midnight on Thursday, May 24. All I knew at that point was where I would be living, working, and that I would be staying in a house with the Preserve Assistant, Sunny. Delirious, not ready for my first day of work the following morning (which I would sleep through anyway, due to a small communication error), I made my way to the front door of the house and knocked. Soon, a smiling face appeared in the window and the door opened—and there stood Sunny, my housemate, coworker, fishing buddy and sidekick for the twelve weeks to come. I could not have made it through the days without Sunny working alongside me. Two weeks into the internship a second intern, Veronika, would arrive. She lived with us at 240 Picabo Road for the next ten weeks, and we would all become great friends and coworkers. Veronika, or “V”, as we came to know her, came to work for the Nature Conservancy from Atlanta, Georgia by way of Morris College.

**Left: Veronika with a South Fork of the Boise Bull Trout; Top Right: Water monitoring on the Preserve; Bottom Left: Fishing on the Preserve**



There was never a day on the Preserve that I did not learn, and maybe that was my favorite part about the job. There was no “easing into” work, either. From the first day until the last, there were things that needed to be done, and the only ones to do them on most days were Dayna, Sunny, Veronika and I. By the end of the summer I had covered every foot of the trails on the 883 acre Preserve, and seen enough beautiful sights for a lifetime.

The moment you enter the wetland habitat surrounding Silver Creek, or even the fields lying immediately beyond it, you can feel the presence of life which pulses throughout it. Sights, sounds, smells—all invading your senses, letting you forget that a world even exists outside of Silver Creek. One evening after work I set out to canoe the Creek as I had done many times by that point in the summer—but this time would be



different. I had the original plan to stop along the way and toss grasshoppers at the big brown trout that lived at the confluence of Grove and Stalker Creek—an activity that can be quite captivating. It was late summer now, and the herd of fifty or so elk had become

a regular occurrence at the confluence. Each evening they came to mingle with one another and drink from the pristine, mineral-rich spring water, their grunting and groaning interjecting among the sounds of feeding trout and bantering coyotes. Captivating—exactly what this scene was; the sun set right before my eyes and my feet remained planted in the muck. I cast pinky-size flies to boiling browns until well after dark. I was not even close to being off the creek at this point, a mere third the way to the take out.

When I realized my predicament, I had no choice but to hop in the canoe and finish in the dark. I learned something that night; Silver Creek never sleeps, its personality changes. From hot to cool, from sharp and pungent to sweet and mellow, from energetic to eerie. Trout are still swirling, still feeding—but their intent is different. Among the small browns and rainbows still sipping mayflies and caddis from the surface, the largest trout have begun their nightly ritual.

The big brown leaves the comfort of his deep lie—now predator chasing prey, both slamming against the side of the canoe, making my heart jump. Conversing owls echoing through the willows—I decide that they are talking about me.

**Left: Canoeing Stalker Creek; Right: Pond at the Confluence of Grove Creek ad Stalker Creek**



Apart from my housemates and Dayna, the preserve manager, I worked with a number of other amazing people, and worked days on and off the Preserve. Megan and

Cameron were two awesome volunteers that came by twice a week to help with water monitoring, a job that needs as many hands as it can get. The volunteers who occupied the cabin on Kilpatrick pond for the summer were some of the nicest people I have ever met—Jerry and Cheryl, Leroy and Ronile, John and Gwen. Blaine County, the US Forest Service and Wood River Land Trust provided their services to help in the never-ending war against noxious weeds on Silver Creek Preserve. I became great friends with the Wood River Land Trust, Americorps and Sawtooth Botanical Garden interns, Chad, Allie, Jesse and Quinn. That crew lived twenty miles north of Picabo, in Hailey. Though I spent most workdays on the Preserve, we would travel to help with the conservation efforts of other organizations a few times each month. Most of these trips involved suiting up in protective gear and spraying dangerous chemicals on noxious weeds—an activity I enjoyed thoroughly.

Spending the summer on Silver Creek allowed me to observe the aquatic entomology of a world-class, spring creek trout fishery—a truly magical opportunity. During the summer months, it seems like the bugs are always hatching, the fish feeding—an aquatic entomologist, fish biologist and fly fisher's dream. The exuberance of the Silver Creek ecosystem I feel can only be compared to that of a tropical rain forest. One requirement of my internship was to complete a long-term project that I would work on during my time in Idaho, and submit at the end of the summer.

There is an incredibly unique community surrounding Silver Creek. It consists of, but is certainly not limited to: fishermen, hunters, birders and conservationists. Working on the Preserve, you meet people from all walks. Whether they come from halfway around the world, or just past the blinking light, there is a special sense of family among Silver Creek visitors; and though the Preserve is beautiful and unique in every aspect, the aesthetic is not the main allure. It is true passion—to support the preservation of something wild and indescribable. This passion was not only present in The Nature Conservancy, but also the Wood River Land Trust, Blaine County and United States Forest Service. In working with these organizations, I discovered people working to protect nature in ways I had never imagined. Engineers, biologists, philanthropists—all working to better the Silver Creek ecosystem for the future, and I have decided that somehow, I want to be a part of it. This experience, coupled with my love for wildlife,

has opened my eyes to a world of conservation work. I can now envision a career in conservation, and cannot think of a better outcome from this internship.

I would like to thank the Blumenstein family for this opportunity of a lifetime. Never have I undergone such a profound transformation in terms of my future, long-term goals. I would also like to thank Dayna Gross for being an amazing friend and inspiration—your commitment to conservation is astounding, and I will always remember my summer on Silver Creek.