

How Coyote Made the Columbia River



An account of the formation of the Columbia River as related in 1951 by Peter Noyes, a Colville in northeastern Washington. He first heard it nearly eighty years ago. Mr. Noyes was pleased to read, a few years ago, that geologists see plenty of evidence that in different periods of the geologic past lakes covered parts of eastern Washington now drained by the Columbia River and its tributaries.

Long ago, when Coyote was the big man on the earth, this valley was covered by a big lake. At that time there was no Columbia River. West of us, between the lake and the ocean, was a long ridge of mountains. But the Columbia River did not go through it. Indians today believe that.

Coyote was smart enough to see that salmon would come up from the ocean to be food for his people here if he would make a hole through the mountains. So he went down to a place near where Portland is now, and with his powers he dug a hole through the mountains there. The water went through the hole and on to the ocean.

The water in the big lake up here was drained, and the water flowing out of it made the Columbia River. Coyote got the Columbia to flow through that hole, the way it does today. Then the salmon came up the river to this part of the country. His people after that had plenty to eat.

