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Indian Creek Chronicles, Pete Fromm, 1993

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Description :

Indian Creek Chronicles by Pete Fromm is a humorous and instructive story of a college student turned salmon egg caretaker in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness area. This is his story of that solitary winter camp and the skills he learned to live and thrive in that environment.

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In *Indian Creek Chronicles*, Pete Fromm, a college student, takes a winter job with Idaho Fish and Game to watch over two and half million salmon eggs. The eggs are at the junction of the Selway River and Indian Creek in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area on the Idaho--Montana border. This green college kid, with mountain man dreams, quickly finds himself alone living in a canvas tent, with few real skills but with a determination to succeed with as little embarrassment as possible. Fromm gathers a pile of stuff, food, a new puppy, attends multiple going-away bashes and is finally dropped off at the site by a couple of Game Wardens. In establishing camp the day before it was apparent to the wardens that Fromm was a bit short on basic campcraft.

In the morning the warden explained that they were going to leave the more battered truck with me over the winter. They both hopped into it and told me to go ahead and drive. Maybe they'd had a secret conversation. I killed the truck trying to get up the hill away from Magruder and they discovered I barely knew how to operate a manual transmission. They exchanged more worried looks and my boss began to explain operations of a clutch. We lurched and bogged down for the next ten miles, but I made it without killing it until we reached the tent. I felt pretty good about that.

By the time they discovered I had never run a chainsaw they weren't looking at me anymore. The boss handed me a saw file and told me I'd get the hang of sharpening. He didn't offer any instruction. I think they were trying not to get to know me, like veteran soldiers with a new recruit who probably won't survive long anyway.....

We stood around the two trucks in the pretty meadow in front of the old Magruder station and my boss went over clutch tricks with me again. Then he started talking about firewood....

"We left you plenty of gas, and the saw. The gas is already mixed, you don't need to add oil. But don't forget the bar oil. You'll burn up fast if you forget that." I kept nodding, as if I'd cut down whole forests before I ever met him.

"You'll probably need about seven cords of firewood" he told me. "Concentrate on that. You'll have to get it all in before the snow grounds your truck."

Though I didn't want to ask, it seemed important. "What's a cord?"

That seemed to be the one that broke their backs. They didn't even look at each other that time, and they sure didn't look at me. They'd been leaning against their open doors and they both got in and sat down. My boss rolled down the window. "A cord's how you measure firewood. It's a stack four feet deep, four feet tall, and eight feet long. You'll want at least seven of them. Ten would be nice if it gets to be a hard one. Nothing like dragging firewood through snow to ruin your day."

Fromm gets going on the basics, taking care of the salmon eggs, firewood, and starts learning from experience. His telling of his basic weaknesses, combined with his desires to learn and especially not be discovered as less than capable all make for a good story. His progression in skills acquisition is told in an amusing and pleasant manner. Many of his tasks....successful or semi-unsuccessful are reminiscent of the learning I experienced growing up. Whether it is folding a Swiss Army knife closed on your fingers or standing in awe of the massive mess that one makes butchering game, these things are best learned by experience, and new and better techniques come from learning by doing. Fromm clearly learned by doing and learned quickly. The authors story telling skills are well developed and you get a sense of accomplishment in his smallest achievements. He uses humor to great advantage throughout the text. Here, just after he takes a moose around Christmas, he is going to tan the hide.

*I stitched the hide into the frame as I went, my pamphlet on **Brain Tanning the Sioux Way** propped up in the snow next to me. I chuckled over the advice on how much brain to use: "Each animal has enough brains to tan itself."*

"Yeah, but what about the tanner?" I wondered.

This is a very good quick read, humorous, instructive, and interesting. In the Epilogue, Fromm notes that working as a river ranger on the Snake four years later, the salmon returned to Indian Creek. Of the 2.5 million eggs he had cared for, "fewer than twenty fish returned".

My, 184 page softcover was published by St. Martin's Press. It was a Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association "Book of the Year". New and used copies are available on bookfinder from less than \$3 for paper and up to \$50 for signed first edition hard covers.

Post-scriptum :Version 1.0 5/6/2004