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Review: Dry River: Stories of Life, Death, and Redemption on the Santa Cruz

By Ken Lamberton

Reviewed by Daniel S. Helman
Long Beach, California, USA

Lamberton, Ken. *Dry River: Stories of Life, Death, and Redemption on the Santa Cruz*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011. ISBN: 9780816529216, 0816529213. 269pp. US \$24.95, paperback.

The Santa Cruz River has its headwaters in southeast Arizona, runs south through part of Sonora, Mexico, and then heads north past Tucson, connecting, finally, to the Gila River, a tributary of the Colorado River. The upper and middle watersheds of the Santa Cruz are a proposed national heritage area, notable for their history of agriculture that stretches back four thousand years, starting with the Hohokam Nation. *Dry River*, partially funded through a grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts, describes the natural history and history of the region, and, in parallel, tells the story of the author and his family as his three daughters grow to adulthood. The book is no less appropriate in the Southwest or Environmental sections of a public library than in the personal library of one who loves creative nonfiction and poetic prose, or one who wishes to read about parenting. The book is written for the general public (high school or college level), and each chapter can stand alone.

Stories and digressions treat, variously, the archaeology of the region, the incursion of the Spanish and the responses of the Native people, the history of the Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries and their impact, the Apache wars, cattle ranching, mining, and other agricultural uses of the land, the impact of the railroad in the region, and the current trends in housing and water use. The previous is not an exhaustive list! The book is replete with stories. Also included are hand-drawn maps, a timeline of events, a bibliography, and an index with more than 300 entries. Birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and plant species are described. Uncommon English words and some Spanish words appear in the text, including: *smaragdine*, *cienaga*, *ramada*, *pyx*, *ciborium*, *psychrophile* and *acequia*. These add to the richness of the read, and are not overwhelming.

The environmental topics in *Dry River* are mostly centered on water usage, and include current efforts to improve or conserve biodiversity, with reference to the Santa Cruz River Habitat Project, the Sky Island Alliance, the Tohono O'odham Nation, the Nature Conservancy, and include processes like wastewater recharge, photographic monitoring of wildlife, and political arrangements to promote water equity. The book is homage to the river, and to the possibilities of increased water, and to rebirth.

The narrative is delightful, and is told as the author walks sections of the Santa Cruz River, from its headwaters to its confluence more than 200 miles away. Often it is a wife or daughter who drops him off or picks him up from his journey or accompanies him. The poetry of the page is matched by the humanity of the author's story.

Daniel S. Helman <danielhelmanteaching@yahoo.com> is a geoscientist, the author of “Catching lightning for alternative energy” (*Renewable Energy*, 2011) and “Public Geology at Griffith Park in Los Angeles: A Sample Teachers’ Guide” (*Electronic Green Journal*, 2012). He also works as a fine artist and teacher.

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