Chapter 21

Uniformitarian Speculations on Gravel Transport West

River transport is the only hypothesis that has been considered for the spread of quartzite gravels west of their Rocky Mountain source.[1,2,3] Researchers correctly deduced that the quartzites originated from the Belt/Purcell rocks. But the uniformitarian geologists have to fabricate braided rivers, since the quartzites are often found at high altitudes on top of lava ridges or even mountaintops, like the Blue Mountains and the Wallowa Mountains. The rivers are called by such names as the "ancestral Columbia River," or the "ancestral Salmon river," or the "ancestral Clearwater River."

How do the scientists know where these rivers flowed? To determine the flow path of these ancestral rivers, they simply line up the quartzite gravels—a form of circular reasoning. But the quartzite gravel is all they have to work with. There are no old channels, bars, etc. to aid them.

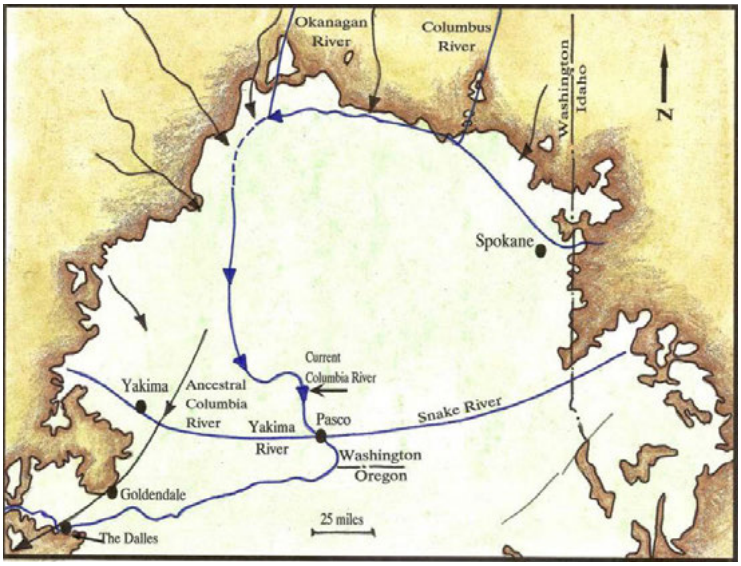

Figure 21.1. The supposed course of the "ancestral Columbia River" through a series of basalt ridges that are now up to 4,000 feet (1,220 m) msl along the southwest Columbia Basin, based on the deposited quartzite gravels from the Saddle Mountain wa-ter gap southwest to The Dalles, Oregon (drawn by Mrs. Melanie Richard).

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[1] Fecht, K.R., S.P. Reidel, and A.M. Tallman, 1985. *Paleodrainage of the Columbia River on the Columbia Plateau of Washington state: a summary*, RHO-BW-SA-318p, Rockwell Hanford operations, U.S. Department of Energy, Richland, WA.

[2] Fecht, K.R., S.P. Reidel, and A.M. Tallman, 1987. Paleodrainage of the Columbia River system of the Columbia Plateau of Washington state: a summary, *Washington Division of Geology and Earth Researchers Bulletin 77*.

[3] Oard, M.J., J. Hergenrather, and P. Klevberg, 2006. Flood transported quartzites: part 3—failure of uniformitarian interpretations. *Journal of Creation* 20(3): 78–86.

The "Ancestral Columbia River"

The Columbia River flows from British Columbia into eastern Washington and then through the Columbia Gorge between Washington and Oregon to the Portland/Vancouver area and then westward to the Pacific Ocean. After entering northern Washington, the ancestral Columbia River is thought to have flowed from the Sentinel water gap in the western Sentinel lava anticline southward just east of the Cascade Mountains to around the Dalles, Oregon before entering the Columbia River gorge. They base this on the quartzites found on the lava ridges from Sentinel water gap south to across the Horse Heaven Hills at Satus Pass (Figure 21.1). (Water and wind gaps will be analyzed in Volume III of this book.) They suggest that Satus Pass was a wind gap through the lava ridges left over from the ancient Columbia River.[4,5,6,7] A wind gap is a V-shaped notch in a ridge that is thought to have been eroded by a stream, but now is left high on the ridge after the valleys eroded. There are several wind gaps through the Rattlesnake Hills, another lava ridge north of the Horse Heaven Hills, that have been attributed to the ancestral Columbia River, although one is suggested to be the ancient path of the Yakima River. However, quartzites are *not* found in these wind gaps as one would expect, but commonly we find them on the highest terrain of the ridges with *no* indication of an ancient channel, as on the Horse Heaven Hills.[8] There are quartzites east of the low point at Satus Pass, at least 1,000 feet (300 m) above the pass. but there are none in Satus Pass itself,[9] where they should be abundant if Satus Pass is a remnant of the ancient Columbia River. The missing quartzites expected in wind gaps led uniformitarian geologists, Aaron Waters, to reject this so-called ancestral path of the ancestral Columbia River.[10]

Waters also pointed out that quartzite-bearing gravels and conglomerates are widespread but as a thin, discontinuous veneer throughout south-central Washington and northern Oregon, as listed in Chapters 19 and 20. The quartzite gravels in Washington are found over too broad an area to ascribe them to some ancestral river. Not only are there quartzite gravels found throughout the south-central Washington Columbia Basin, including the tops of basalt ridges, but they are also found along the high elevations of the Columbia Gorge. Quartzite gravels are found in many other areas of eastern Washington, such as in southeast Washington under the Palouse silt and near Cheney southwest of Spokane. There does

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[4] Warren, C.R., 1941. The Hood River conglomerate in Washington. *American journal of Science* 239:106–127.

[5] Warren, C.R., 1941. Course of the Columbia River in southern central Washington. *American Journal of Science* 239:209–232.

[6] Rigby, J.G. and K. Othberg, 1979. Reconnaissance surficial geologic mapping of the Late Cenozoic sediments of the Columbia Basin, Washington, *Washington Department of Natural Resources*, *Division of Geology and Earth Resources Open File Report 79-3*, Olympia, WA, pp. 15–17.

[7] Smith, G.A., 1988. Neogene synvolcanic and syntectonic sedimentation in central Washington. *GSA Bulletin* 100:1,489.

[8] Fecht *et al*. Ref. 1, p. 34.

[9] Warren, Ref. 4, p. 115.

[10] Warren, A.C., 1955. Geomorphology of south-central Washington, illustrated by the Yakima east quadrangle. *GSA Bulletin* 66:681–683.

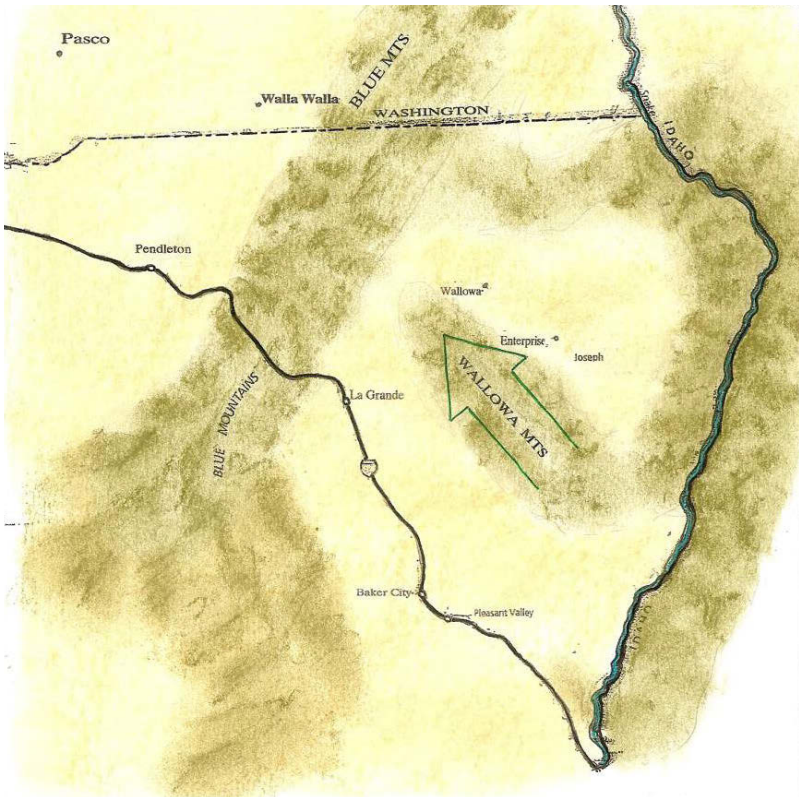

Figure 21.2. Schematic of a wide northwesterly flowing, braided stream (wide area) through what are now the Wallowa Mountains in early Miocene time according to Allen (drawn by Mrs. Melanie Richard).

not appear to be any evidence to suggest the remnants of a great "ancestral river" bed. It is uniformitarian speculation. Moreover, the "ancestral river" hypothesis does not account for quartzite gravels found on the high ridges on the eastern side of the Cascades[11] or those in the Puget Sound area.

Lastly, it is doubtful there is enough stream power to transport quartzite rocks from the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia to the Pacific Ocean, especially considering the likely sinuous courses of any supposed paleoriver.[12]

The distribution of quartzite rocks suggests more of a sheet flow of quartzite gravel that spread west from the western Rocky Mountains on a generally flat surface. This was followed by the formation of anticlines in the basalt, uplift of the Cascade Mountains, and erosion of the quartzites into erosional remnants.

Allen's Torrential Paleoriver

We now turn our attention to northern and central Oregon. Allen[13] and others noted at least eight locations of well-rounded quartzite boulders with abundant percussion marks on *top* of the Wallowa Mountains, northeast Oregon (see Chapter 19). Allen first discovered these gravels in 1938 but published nothing on the subject until 1991 because they puzzled him. He suggested that the gravels with gold in the matrix were not laid down by some lazy meandering stream flowing from the east or southeast, but by a northwest flowing *torrential paleoriver* in a broad valley with a braided channel (Figure 21.2). Allen's reluctance to mention the quartzites found on the tops and flanks of the Wallowa Mountains is another one of those key pieces of data long withheld from the journals and the

[11] Bretz, J.H., 1917. The Satsop Formation of Oregon and Washington. *The Journal of Geology* 25:446–458.

[12] Klevberg, P. and M.J. Oard, 1998. Paleohydrology of the Cypress Hills Formation and Flaxville gravel; in, Walsh, R. E. (editor), *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Creationism*, technical symposium sessions, Creation Science Fellowship, Pittsburgh, PA, pp. 361–378.

[13] Allen, J.E., 1991. The case of the inverted auriferous paleotorrent—exotic quartzite gravels on Wallowa Mountain peaks. *Oregon Geology* 53(5):104–107.

public. Just like with the quartzites in the Puget Sound area, it is looking like the hiding of contrary data is a common phenomena. This provides impetus for Flood geologists to do their own fieldwork.

A key question to ask Allen is what paleoriver? The river apparently is *not* the ancestral Columbia or Snake Rivers.[13] The Salmon and Clearwater Rivers flow westward through central Idaho and join the Snake River near Lewiston, Idaho, which flows into the Columbia River at Pasco, Washington. (We suppose that the uniformitarian geologists can claim the quartzite gravels were spread by the ancestral Clearwater or Salmon Rivers, when the Snake River supposedly flowed through southeast Oregon and before the Snake River supposedly cut the deepest water gap in North America at Hells Canyon. There is little if any evidence for the existence of a paleo-Snake River through Oregon.[14,15]) Allen admits that his deduction is "an outrageous hypothesis," reminiscent of J Harlen Bretz's outrageous and rejected hypothesis of the Lake Missoula flood from the 1920s to the 1960s.[16] This is the best Allen can do as a uniformitarian geologist. He published the information in 1991 so as to stimulate further research. But there has been silence ever since.

The nearest source for quartzite outcrops in the Wallowa Mountains is in central Idaho, about 125 miles (200 km) to the east, *across* Hells Canyon. There are other quartzite gravel locations several miles west of those that Allen cites. There are even more quartzites in northeast Oregon that we have not seen but are briefly mentioned in the literature (see Chapter 19).[13,17] Their presence in more locations indicates an even more widespread distribution than Allen mentions, suggesting a much wider torrential paleoriver and making his broad paleovalley hypothesis even more outrageous.

The quartzite locations in central Oregon on top of Gold Hill and east of Paulina (see Chapter 19) are especially difficult to place within the confines of some "ancestral river." They are well southwest of the supposed paths of the ancestral Clearwater or Salmon Rivers. There is no evidence in the geology of central or eastern Oregon to suggest an ancient river spread the quartzites.

Allen is on the right track deducing a paleotorrent with a wide channel[13] but the quartzites are too extensive to provide a hypothesis for river transport in the area of the Wallowa Mountains before they rose. The deposits are more indicative of torrential sheet flow than a narrow river flow, and the scale is much wider than the rivers of today.

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[14] Livingston, D.C., 1928. Certain topographic features of Northeastern Oregon and their relation to faulting. *The Journal of Geology* 36:707–708.

[15] Wheeler, H.E. and E.F. Cook, 1954. Structural and stratigraphic significance of the Snake Rriver capture, Idaho-Oregon. *The Journal of Geology* 62:525–536.

[16] Oard, M.J., 2004. *The Missoula Flood Controversy and the Genesis Flood*, Creation Research Society Monograph No. 13, Chino Valley, AZ.

[17] Carson, R.J., 2001. Where the Rockies meet the Columbia plateau; geologic field trip from the Walla Walla Valley to the Wallowa Mountains, Oregon. *Oregon Geology* 63(1):25.

Implication

Just as the uniformitarian hypothesis attempts to spread quartzite rocks far to the east and southeast of the Rocky Mountains by rivers, the idea of river transport west is just as speculative. There is no evidence for ancient paleorivers, except possibly water and wind gaps, such as those that cut through the lava ridges around Yakima, Washington. There really is nothing else to go on, but uniformitarian scientists will not admit the hundreds of miles spread of quartzite rocks from a known source in the western Rocky Mountains is truly outrageous and demands a catastrophic explanation—one they avoid like the plague. This is why Allen said little about his torrential paleoriver, although he knew about the anomaly of large "river rocks" with percussion marks on the tops of the Wallowa Mountains for over 50 years before he finally published an actual article.

All this evidence of the long distance spread of quartzite gravel presented in the previous chapters suggests another hypothesis, a catastrophic one which will be presented in the next chapter.