



Adapted from:

Critical Tools for Professional Research: Field Journals, Notebooks ... and more

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Prescott College, 6 May 2006



Field Notebooks

"Let the collector's motto be 'Trust nothing to memory'; for the memory becomes a fickle guardian when one interesting object is succeeded by another still more interesting"

Darwin, C. R. 1845. *Journal of Researches (Voyage of the Beagle)* London: John Murray, p. 598.

Field Notebook

Standard time started today.
30 April 1978

my

319.3
154.0
160.5

0715 - raining, 2615-9.0
Leaving Olympia.

0734 - 170.0 - on I-5 at Little
rock. Camas in bloom by
Scatter Creek.

0855 - 245.4 Coyote

0903 - 251.8 rest stop
evening g... beaks in maple

0915 - leaving rest stop.

0930 - 260.7 TOYOTA 7.9 gals
- 5.38

0950 - in Portland, rain seen
to have stopped, but still plenty
cloudy.

1005 - ground squirrel beside
freeway - 286.2

ODOMETER RIGHT ON

redtail just S of I-5 308.0

upines in full bloom -

30 April 1978, cont.

315.7 - 45th parallel.

1045 - 319.3 at ~~22~~ exit. redtail
on nest 40' up in oak. leaves
just past break bud stage, nest
5' down from top of tree - other
leaves in area leafed out.

someone saw a scrub jay.

1125 - 45.6 N. San Juan S. P.
raining lightly, dogwoods in full
bloom, lichens on fir. maples just
coming out. no more

1145 - leaving above. 371.1 at hwy

1255 - 425.3 intersect ~~22~~

1325 - 445.4 - Indian Ford C.G.
rocks. golden-mouthed green squirrel.
2 y. b. sapsuckers, house wren "twisting".

y. r. warbler, downy woodpecker.

1412 451.1 Sisters.

1415 - TOYOTA 427.8 11.0 y -
48.27

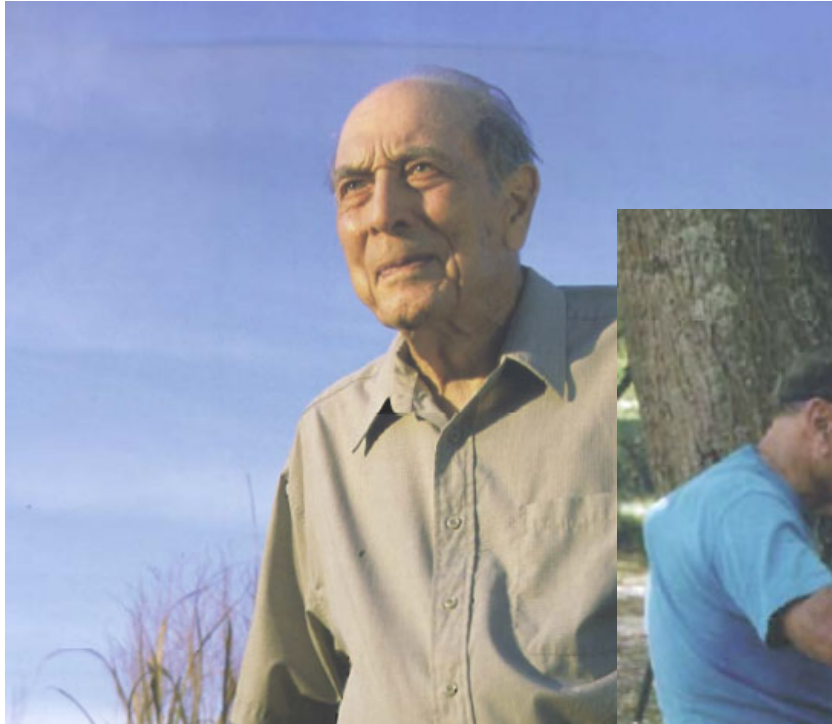
Principles (1)

- Write everything down
- Date every piece of paper; title and/or number every page.
- Everything should be considered part of your permanent record:
 - Notebooks, in whatever format chosen, must be your constant companion
 - Don't rely on scraps of paper or paper napkins

Principles (2)

- Notes must be processed, *i.e.*, expanded, while still relatively fresh into a complete, permanent record.
 - Notes are just that – jottings to jog the memory and record instant responses
 - Review your notes soon afterwards; where they're incomplete, add more information to make them understandable.
- Consider the audience – who are your readers?
 - in your review, think of a reader who wasn't there with you: What would they need to know to make sense of it?
- Practice! The process gets easier as you do more of it

The value of Field Notes: **Henry S. Fitch (1909-2009)**



resident naturalist at the KU
Field Station, beginning in 1948



A page from Henry Fitch's field notes (1932)

(Archived at the University of California Berkeley Museum of Vertebrate Zoology: scanned and available on the web

<https://mvz.berkeley.edu/mvzarchives/>)

1932

General Grant National Park
Fresno Co. Calif.
June 23 1932

Starting from Berkeley on the morning of June 22 and coming by way of Tracy, Manteca, Merced, Fresno, and Sanger, I arrived at the park at 8 P. M. 2 mi SW of the park entrance a stop was made near Big Stump Fox Farm. In the vicinity were open rocky places, thick brush, and tall timber. Large granite slabs were scaling off the rock near the creek. Under these a number of cast skins of S. palmeri were found. The bat (no 451) was also found under a large rock. Under several slabs were found dried remains of Sceloporus graciosus which was abundant in the vicinity. Under one slab a dried skeleton of S. palmeri ^(no 440) was found. A living specimen was under this same rock but escaped and no more were seen in the vicinity.

Henry Fitch's work at KU

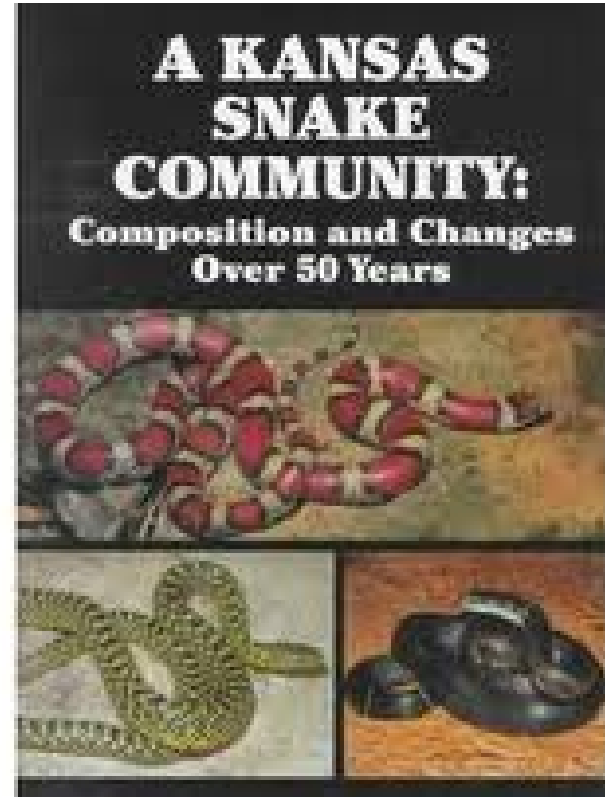
1949



2008

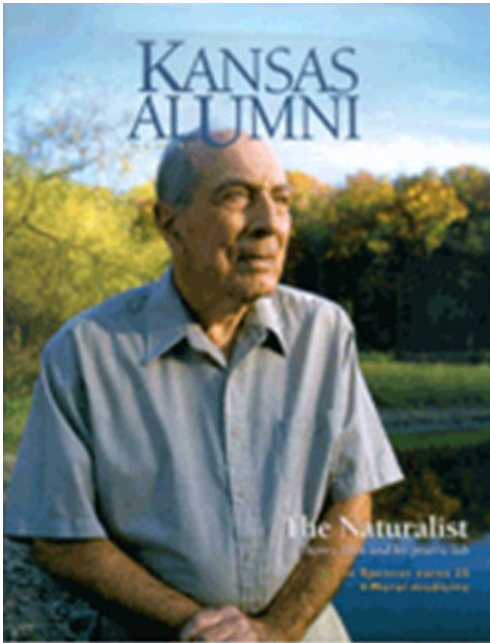


Example of landscape changes
at the KU Field Station



Book published in 1994
(he continued to record observations for
another 13 years!)

To learn more about Henry Fitch and his work:



<http://kufs.ku.edu/about/history/>



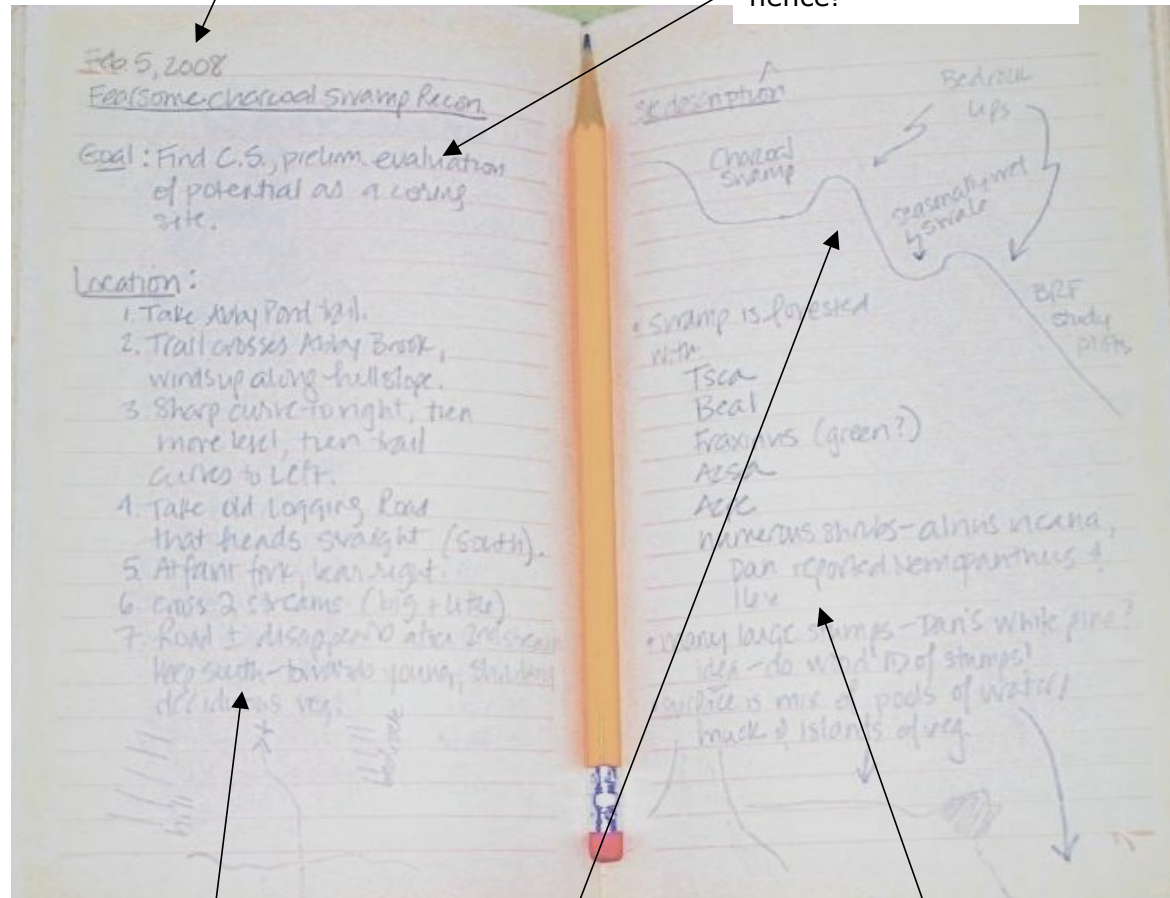
Panels about Henry Fitch and the area's history in the Fitch Natural History Reservation
(visited by students in fall 2016 class)

Field Notebook: our model

Each entry should have a date and a title. The title will usually be something about the study site or the project.

Record why you're there. This may seem obvious at the time, but can be crucial in making sense of your notes weeks or months or years hence!

When taking measurements, record the procedures you use.



Keep detailed notes about where you are.

Sketches and drawings are often useful.

Include careful natural history observations. At bare minimum, a species list and description!

Source: Dr. Andrea Lloyd,
Middlebury College

Field Notebook Requirements

1. each entry must have a date & short title
2. record your location
3. write down why you're there & what you're doing
4. record natural history observations
species encountered, phenomena observed
5. record the procedures you use when taking measurements.
If you follow a written protocol, refer to that document;
if you made changes, write them down

Sketches & drawings can be helpful!

Don't be limited to a single page!

Do take time to expand your notes, while details are still fresh!