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Interp. & Tour Guiding

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Abandoned Fun

Before Sunday February 4th, if asked what the Zoom-Floom was, I would have guessed that it was a type of vacuum cleaner. For most, this would provide a valid guess, however, for those native to Bloomington and its surrounding areas, I would receive a laugh and the offer to take me to this local art installation. After pleasant lounging morning hours, I was invited to join in a skate-board toting caravan whose heading was to the Zoom-Flume at two in the afternoon. I was provided with the basic description of an “old waterslide” and I began picturing a dilapidated tube with metal stairs and innumerable cracks. My Bedford-native friends were about to take to me to a place remembered by them as an abandoned slide, but to their parents, an exhilarating place of summer-fun.

Upon arrival, our group of six hiked up a small hill South of the Lake Monroe causeway, various skateboards in tow. Upon summiting this little hill, I was caught by surprise to see a bright blue, heavily graffitied concrete slide set into the side of the hill, a giant snake resting on the forest floor. Although abandoned, this waterslide’s intrigue had increased with the artistic additions of hundreds of graffiti artists. The cracked but mostly unchanged curves of the old slide offered ample opportunity for interpretive recreation. It is here that the skateboards come into play. Our jolly group had the brilliant idea to glide down this old monument of summer fun in mid-winter via skateboard. Bundled up, one of our party set up for their first attempt to skateboard down. Seated firmly on the skateboard deck, she is pushed from the top and not 20 seconds later everyone is laughing at the failure of this attempt. The skateboard went sideways and our brave slider was seated in the belly of the slide ten feet from the top, laughing. The frigid, hard concrete slide was no deterrent in the face of enjoyment. Multiple layers protected us from the cold and, hopefully, bruises.

We took turns attempting to sit and steer our skateboards down the Zoom-Floom. The majority of these attempts were great failures but offered copious humor to all. Aside from our skateboarding endeavors, we were intrigued by the impressive graffiti which blankets the slide from top to bottom, rarely failing to cover the ancient blue basecoat. Images of skulls with tongues and strange sayings dapple the slide and promoted conversation of past visitors. The forest setting provided to the feeling of abandonment and some tree climbing was also pursued. The slide itself has become a part of this forested hill, its sloping curves and water pools filled with fall leaves imitating the water that once flowed. I felt giddy and excited during our time there. One reason for these feelings may be the fact that were trespassing, but more so, the memory of waterslides and the mystery behind this one provided an air of carefree fun.

I realized while playing on and around the slide set into a hill that old monoliths of recreation will never die. While parents remembered this slide during its functioning years, their memory of it was enough to bring a second generation to join in the fun of the Zoom Floom after

its day in the sun. Even years later, we found fun in the slide and the area surrounding. Everyone who went enjoyed their time thoroughly and a sense of carefree release was shared among the group. A legacy of fun is set into this abandoned slide and it was felt by all. Even after learning that skateboarding down the slide was nearly impossible to achieve, we found other ways to enjoy the site. Seeing the Zoom Floom made me hungry for knowledge about its existence. When was it built? Who visited it? Why did it become abandoned? By asking my Bedford-native friends, I learned that their parents used to go to the Zoom Floom in summer and they have been visiting its abandoned memory since high school. One even contributed some graffiti on their prom night.

My experience at the Zoom Floom pushed me to ask questions about the history of a place to further understand its current standing. I wanted to know the stories of the place after visiting. This natural craving to understand a place can be carried into the interpretive field. Had someone better answered my questions, I would have found even more connection to this intriguing art project of a ghost slide. Allowing individuals to build connections to a place before explaining the facts of it also seems vital to a deep understanding. By playing there, I created a connection to the Zoom Floom which then sparked a multitude of questions. Applying this understanding of connecting to places, I can better provide interpretation that allows individuals to become entranced by a place through a measured release of information. Being allowed to ask one's own questions of a place creates knowledge when they are finally answered.