

FISHING IN OREGON

A Fish Tale

It was a cold January morning in 1998. Saturday was my regular day off and fishing was on the agenda. I loaded up the drift boat and headed to Deadwood for some renowned steelhead fishing. The drive was grey and dreary but the thought of a day on the river kept me enthusiastic. It was early in the morning and animals were still on the prowl. I had to wait for a small herd of Elk to cross the road. They were headed across the highway to Lake Creek through a small Christmas tree farm. Hunting season was a recent memory. With tags now expired and the season behind me, I finally spotted a 4x5 in the herd. The short wait for the herd to cross turned out to be a blessing as a fir tree was down across the highway just around a blind corner. I was able to drive around the fallen tree and finally arrived at my favorite boat launch near the Deadwood Country Market. I was short on snacks so I stopped in and asked how the fishing had been. John was quick to show me his book of Polaroid's featuring local catches for the past several seasons. I grabbed a Mountain Dew and some chips for the trip down Lake Creek. I planned a long day with a rendezvous near Mapleton so I could float a stretch of the Siuslaw River.

The morning sun was just beginning to peak over the mountains between the down pours. The rain had picked up and continued to pound the boat and my fishing gear. The temperature was just above freezing but I was prepared for a great time. You know what they say, "A bad day fishing is better than the best day at work". The boat launch precedes Deadwood Creek. Deadwood Creek was a little turbid from an apparent mud slide. I dropped anchor and cast my line in the clear water just below the tributary entrance. A couple early strikes set the tone for the day. As quick as they were on they were off again.

The rain never let up. The river was rising and getting murkier as I floated through Indiola. It was still early and the steelhead were very active. I had just set anchor near a rock outcropping when my line was hit really hard. I grabbed the pole and set the hook. This fish rolled then broke the water flashing its side just before making a run down stream. I had the drag set loosely and the steelhead took full advantage of it. The fish finally let up after what seemed like a fifty yard run. I began to work the line back to the drift boat. This beauty would have no part of it. With so much line out I decided to pull anchor and drift toward my prize. I reeled as quickly as possible so the boat didn't out run my line. Approaching a fork in the creek I held up a bit and fought the beast a bit more. To my surprise, the amazing fish turned and ran up stream. I was able to regain some line before giving it back as the 30 inch steelhead streaked past the boat.

Now downstream from this wonderful creature, I had no choice but to fight. We played give and take for 15 minutes before the steelhead finally tired and drifted downstream toward my awaiting net. As I leaned forward to slide the net easily toward my catch, this beautiful beast of a fish made one last run for it. I nearly fell face first into the swift icy cold water. Fortunately I was able to catch myself with my pole. Sadly, I snapped the pole in half. With little opportunity to fight my prize steelhead I feared this was just another fish tale, and I was right. Not only did I miss out on this trophy, I lost my favorite lure.

I had traveled less than half way to Mapleton and the day was young. I pulled anchor once again and drifted to more productive adventures. The water was rising at a much faster rate. With both Deadwood Creek and Indian Creek now flowing into Lake Creek the ride was a bit more than pleasant.

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As I rounded a bend the canyon walls rose well above my head on both sides of the creek. The creek bed narrowed and the water became swift and turbulent. I slipped past a huge rock that nearly capsized my boat. That was nothing compared to the deadly path beneath a fallen tree that was resting a mere three feet above the water. To miss the huge rock I had spun the drift boat and now floated backward toward the tree branches. I ducked just in time but lost my recently purchased Cabela's fishing hat. What a thrilling ride. This was the kind of river ride fishermen write about. Through the canyon and past many obstacles, the creek bed widened. As the creek bed widened the swiftness and turbulence of the water subsided. I was alive and well and set for yet another adventure.

I always carry a few extra fishing poles in case I have a fishing buddy. No ride along this trip but plenty of poles, whitewater, and steelhead. As I continued my trek toward the Siuslaw, I broke out my fly pole in a few wide sections of the river. The steelhead were frisky and I had strike after strike. I reeled in a few twenty inchers but used my Guides Choice catch and release tool to free these fighters for another day. I was most interested in another mighty granddad like the steel headed I fought earlier in the morning. Ahead were a few good deep holes where these beasts lay in the undercurrent.

I passed dead dog hole and was now floating the Siuslaw. The current was extremely swift with the Siuslaw and Lake Creek joined together. The whitewater was epic. My drift boat felt more like a whitewater raft trip than a fishing trip. The whitewater did highlight the deep calm holes where the steelhead rest, and I took full advantage of it. Placing my anchor just above the hole, I dropped a wet fly in the current and got a strike on the first attempt. It was a smaller steelhead, not as powerful as the beast I encountered up stream, but it was a great fight nonetheless. Using my fish release I was able to fish most of the afternoon without limiting out. Most importantly, I was on a quest to land a steelhead that would be worth writing about.

I played similar holes with limited success for the next mile or two. Then I drifted upon a large narrow hole with a mossy rock shelf on the southeast edge of the river. This was the opportunity I was waiting for. This particular hole was ideal for large steelhead that lay in the shadows and enjoy the bounty delivered by the swift current. I had just the lure for this stretch of water. It wasn't my favorite lure as I had lost it early this morning. This lure was lime green with a small chrome spinner as the tip. I worked the hole for 15 minutes without much activity. To my surprise, this lure had little attraction or the hole was a dud.

Before moving on I decided to switch to a rubber night crawler. On my second pass with the night crawler it drifted under the shelf and snagged. I gave the line a quick tug to bust it loose when a 28 lb steelhead broke the water. I reeled as fast as I could to reduce the slack in the line. The fight was on. Back and forth then downstream he went. I loosened the drag and let him run. Twenty yards and he turned to rest. I gently worked the line as he migrated back up stream so not to force another run for it. I knew I needed to tame this beast so I could get him close to the boat. I worked the line back and forth for about ten minutes. The steelhead made another run for the rock shelf. I let him holed up under the shelf and decided to drift downstream just beyond the depths of the hole. This was my opportunity to tire this big fellow and get him in the boat. Once again I tightened the line and began to work him downstream. This time he tired more easily but the fight was still one to remember. After breaking the water one last time and flashing his silver side I brought him in. Pole in one hand and net in the other I worked my magic and landed this mighty steelhead. It was a day to remember. A day worth writing about.