

Welcoming **Dave Graybill** To The **Nickel Ads** **The Fishin' Magician**

The very chilly weather we've experienced has moderated, and conditions are much better for steelhead fishing in the area. Fishing has been good on most of the tributaries of the Columbia River in our region, and good to excellent on the upper Columbia. Once again we have had a great return of steelhead to our region, with over 26,000 fish passing over Priest Rapids Dam this season. We are now just getting into the heart of the season and reports of good to excellent steelhead fishing are now common, particularly on the main stem Columbia.

The season opened the earliest in my memory this year. The steelhead bite was stalled, due to very warm water temperatures in the Columbia River much later this fall than in most years. By mid-November the Columbia had cooled to the point that not only did the bite improve on the main stem, good numbers of steelhead finally entered the tributaries. The action took a dramatic turn for the better on the Wenatchee, Methow and Okanogan rivers.

I recently got a chance to spend a day on the upper Columbia near Pateros. The trip was the result an auction purchase. A day's fishing with Shane Magnuson, was won by Bill Ballentine at the annual Icicle Valley Trout Unlimited's chapter fund raising auction. I was invited to join Ballentine, Jim Passage and Rollie Schmitten for a day of steelhead fishing, and I don't think I slept for two nights prior to the trip, I was so excited. My expectations were high, I had been in touch with Magnuson prior to the trip, and had been getting some glowing reports on the fishing.

We all met at the Rivers Restaurant for breakfast and watched the day brighten while we had

our coffee and eggs. We then headed for the launch that is just past the Lake Pateros Inn. It was to be the warmest day of the week, but it was well below 30 degrees with a light breeze when we motored out onto the river. We didn't have far to run, though. Magnuson headed the boat down to the area known as The Rocks, which is less than a mile south of where the Methow enters the Columbia. He had great fishing here the day before and figured why go elsewhere?

After a quick demonstration on how to use the gear, we all tossed our bobbers out and watched for a take down. We didn't have to wait long. I don't think ten minutes had passed when Bill Ballantine's bobber disappeared. The fish jumped and ran and gave us all a thrill before being released, as it was a wild fish. I should mention that this was the first of several wild fish that we caught and released, and Magnuson demonstrated the right way to do it. He would contain the fish in a knotless net beside the boat, and gently slip the barbless hook out of the fish's jaw. He could manage this without handling the fish and they all swam strongly away to fight another day.

The action continued. We either hooked and landed or had bites on every drift. Everyone got in on the action, too. By the time we took a break at 10 a.m. everyone had punched their card. Taking a break was a great idea. The cold had quieted the chatter and since we had all caught fish, taking an hour off in the lobby of the Pateros Lakeshore Inn for a warm cup of coffee and some snacks sounded good to everyone.

When we got back out on the water

we found the steelhead hadn't gone anywhere. We were immediately right back into fish. I was impressed with the number of fish that went airborne when hooked. I think our day will make for a good video for my Fishing TV Show. I was also very impressed with one of the steelhead that Bill Ballentine landed. He not only caught his first steelhead ever on this trip, one of them must have weighed over 14 pounds! Jim Passage is an experienced fly fisher for steelhead, but had never used a bobber and jig. He wound up with two keepers and released another fish. At the end of the day, we had landed eleven steelhead, five of which were adipose fin clipped, hatchery keepers. Obviously fishing is good in Pateros. It is good now and is even better on some days. Don't waste any time thinking about getting out and trying for steelhead—just do it.

Anglers should be aware that the mouth of the Methow River is frozen now, and that means that the launch above the bridge is out of service. The other launch is being plowed and sanded, though, so access to the water for boaters is not a problem. I also learned that the Okanogan is frozen, of course, and I believe is ice covered all the way up to Omak, and maybe further. Ice hasn't been keeping anglers off the Wenatchee and Methow rivers.

I am already getting questions about the ice on Fish Lake. Ice fishing is very popular in the



winter up there, but anglers are going to have to wait a while. Ice was forming but disappeared after the extreme cold. A good way to check on what's happening ice wise at Fish Lake is to check the web cam. Just log onto www.lakewenatcheeinfo.com and click on the Fish Lake Time Lapse.

I hope to get out on the Methow and to Rocky Ford Creek this week. I'll let you know how I do.

Reach Dave at:
www.FishingMagician.com
 or Fishboy@nwi.net

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