

Dave Graybill

The Fishin' Magician

Nickel Ads
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I have been making the most of the good weather this fall, having had spectacular days on the Columbia River, the Methow River, Lake Chelan, and even timed a trip to the Grande Ronde River perfectly. I was supposed to make this same trip last year and the river blew out two days before we were supposed to leave. As it turned out this year, the conditions could not have been better to float this scenic river for steelhead.

I met Eric Granstrom Monday morning, loaded the video gear, and headed east. We had a goal in mind, and that was to get to Boggan's Oasis in time for dinner. This fishing destination at the base of Rattlesnake Grade is famous for its food. They would provide Granstrom and me with dinner, breakfast the next morning and box a box lunch that included a slice of fresh-baked pie. Boggan's Oasis also provided us with lodging in the "double wide" that is set up just for anglers that are fishing the river.

Waiting for us at Boggan's was Brian Nielson, of BJ's Guide Service (bjguide.com). My wife Eileen and I had fished the river with him a couple of years ago and made a very good Fishing TV Show of our experience. I was eager to do this same trip again, and capture the day with our new advanced gear and microphone systems. Nielson and I had fished for walleye at Moses Lake a couple of times this spring, and salmon at Vernita this fall. We always talked about doing another float on the Grande Ronde. He has been guiding on this river for over 30 years and knows every rock in the stream, and which ones a steelhead will be hiding behind. He is an expert at pulling plugs from his drift boat, but had me bring along a bobber and jig rod, too.



The day we arrived the wind had howled and the anglers that I saw coming off the water were pretty battered. They had caught fish, though. When we got up early the next morning it was clear and calm. I couldn't believe our luck. The river, though, was unseasonably low; at least 100 cfs lower than usual, and very clear. We knew we could be bumping through some areas of the river, but not having any wind was a plus.

We launched when there was enough light to navigate, and we weren't that far downstream when one of the rods bent over. We were running dark purple Hot Shots and a small king salmon just had to have one. I was surprised to see what good shape the king was in before we set it free. A little further downstream a wild steelhead grabbed one of the plugs. It was a good example of a Grande Ronde fish. It was about 6 pounds and as pretty as a fall steelhead can get.

As we drifted along and set our plugs for drifts, Nielson would point out water that he thought would be good for the

bobber and jig set up. It was in one of these spots early on that I scored another wild fish. The Grande Ronde steelhead may not be huge, but they hit with a passion and fight hard all the way to the net. This was another fish that was in the 6 to 7 pound class. We had a king and two steelhead in the boat before we broke out our lunches. I was feeling pretty good about our day, but it was far from over.

We hopped around a few boats that were fly fishing. This is a very popular stream with fly anglers. We spent some time talking to a large group that was camped on a one of the big bends. Just below this big bend was one of Nielson's favorite runs, and sure enough another steelhead slammed a plug. He had changed to a lighter Hot Shot as the day brightened and it did the trick. This fish jumped a couple of times, and then once again when we thought it was ready for the net. It turned out to be a hatchery fish, so we had one fish in the box.

While we floated, we were in awe of the scenery in the Grande Ronde Canyon. The steep canyon walls gave way to open spaces that were aflame with fall colors. We saw deer at intervals all the way through our float and also spotted bald eagles and kingfishers among other birds. Nielson pointed out old homesteads, with rock walls falling down and farm implements showing through the weeds. There was an ancient wagon trail that had us trying to imagine people actually traveling on it. It was so narrow and rugged.

We were nearing the take out at Shoemaker, and Nielson told us we were about to enter the "last chance" drift. Right on cue another steelhead whacked a plug. I brought it to the net and saw that it was another hatchery fish

of about 7 pounds. It was the perfect ending to a perfect day. The tally was one king, two wild steelhead released and two hatchery fish. Not bad. Nielson assured me that this was actually fairly slow fishing. Most years he is used to taking double digit numbers of steelhead in a days float. Can you imagine? I was happy with our day. Coupled with the scenery the fishing on the Grande Ronde is something that anglers come back for year after year. I would like to float it in the summer. I hear trout and smallmouth bass fishing is outstanding.

I got a call from a fishing buddy that said he had heard rumors about the Methow River closing soon. I could understand his concern. Due to the great weather we've had the river was getting more pressure than usual and fishing success has been very good. I checked with the folks at Fish and Wildlife and was told that there had been a concern, but when they double checked the numbers they are keeping the river open to steelhead fishing. It appears that the river will remain open for a couple more weeks, and could possibly make it through the end of the month. This all depends on the amount of pressure the river continues to get and angler success. I'll keep you posted.

My wife and I are planning a trip below Wells Dam this week. Wish us luck!

Reach Dave at:
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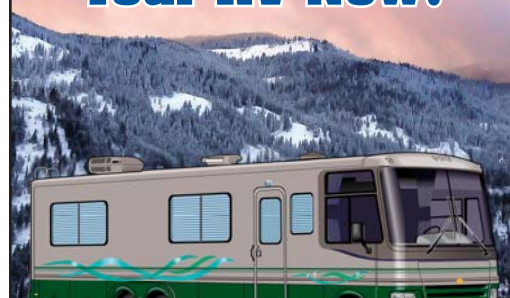
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