

Dave Graybill

The Fishin' Magician

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Both summer-run salmon and sockeye salmon are racing up the Columbia River, and there will be some great fishing when the season opens for Chinook salmon on July 1st. In the mean time I am keeping busy with other fisheries in our region.

Fred Lillian was one of the people that took the trip to Belize in April, and he got in touch, to let me know he would be in Pateros staying at the Pateros Lakeshore Inn for a few days. I called Fred and suggested that we run up to Omak Lake for a day of fishing for Lahontan cutthroat. This is one of my favorite places to fish, and Anton Jones, of Darrell and Dads Family Guide Service had said he had a terrific day there recently. It turned out that my sidekick Eric Granstrom was free to go, too. I haven't done a Fishing TV Show at Omak Lake, and knew this could make a good one.

The three of us headed up there on Saturday morning, and launched in the North Embayment, which is accessed on the road that passes by the Paschal Sherman Mission School, outside of Omak. This beautiful lake is eight miles long and 300 feet deep in places. There is also a launch at Nichols Beach, which is reached on the road from Okanogan that goes to Rufus Woods Reservoir. There is a dock at the launch at Nichols Beach now. This has a nice sandy beach and is a popular spot on the weekends with folks in the area. However, very few people fish at Omak Lake. We saw two other boats while we were there, and I was actually surprised to see them. A Colville Tribal Fishing Permit is required to fish Omak Lake, and many stores in the area, like Hooked on Toys in Wenatchee carry them.



We started fishing as soon as we had enough water to drop the downriggers. We made a few circles there and got a fish, but continued trolling around the corner and fished along the steep shoreline toward the south end of the lakes. A breeze came up that was making trolling speed an issue, so we pulled up the gear and ran. Jones had told me that he had found fish near the large rock island at the south west end of the lake, and I have had great fishing here in the past.

We put our gear down when we reached that spot.

We started marking fish as soon as we started trolling there, and had a couple of fish in the boat right away. I had been trying a variety of lures, but found that the fish were fond of the 3-inch, white with red Needlefish more than my other offerings. When I put two of these on we got busy.

Most of the cutthroat we landed were 12 to 14 inches, but we caught a couple that were much larger. Fred Lillian landed one that was just over 23 inches and was a very heavy-bodied fish. It has a dark pink sheen on its sides and a huge head. At one point we had a double and the fish had crossed our lines while still on the downriggers. When they came up to the surface and we could see both fish, one jumped, which is very unusual for these fish, and threw the hook. We did get the other one in, though.

We caught fish here for quite a while, trolling in a very tight path and keeping our lines at 50 feet deep and 30 feet behind the riggers. When we headed back up lake and tried one of my favorite spots from the past, this same depth was still productive. It is common to find fish at a consistent depth on Omak Lake, when the thermocline develops. It will get deeper as the water warms in the summer. We got a double fishing off what we used to call The Wall, before heading toward the launch. We got another double in the launch bay, right before we put the boat on the trailer and headed home. It was great to get back to Omak Lake. Fred Lillian was thrilled with the fishing we had, and caught what may have been the biggest trout of his life. Granstrom was running three cameras while we were fishing, including a GoPro, and two camcorders. We both can't wait to see the finished show. It will probably be the best show we've ever done. I'll let you know when it will be available on the Fishing TV Page.

I am looking forward to the coming week. It's going to be a busy one. Granstrom and I have a trip planned with Keith Jensen, Banks Lake Bass Fishing, to do a Fishing

TV Show on largemouth bass fishing on Banks. I have done a show with Keith on smallmouth fishing at the south end of Banks and am anxious to learn about fishing for largemouth on the lake. I am also traveling to Lacey, Washington, to meet with the folks with the Go Play Outside Alliance of Washington. This group has been a great partner with the Wenatchee River Salmon Festival, and we are getting together about this year's event, which will take place on September 21st this year. I haven't made plans for the weekend, but the weather is supposed to be great, so I could go back to Omak Lake, or to Banks Lake to apply what I learn about largemouth bass fishing.

Like most serious anglers in our area, we are all watching the dam counts and watching the Chinook and sockeye returning in increasing numbers to our area. The initial forecast for summer-run salmon to the Columbia was 73,000, up from last year. Sockeye returns to the Columbia are way down from the record return of last year, but the forecast for Lake Wenatchee is 44,000.

I am already going over my gear, making sure I am prepared for salmon fishing this year. It will be here soon and I want to be ready!

Reach Dave at:
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