

# Dave Graybill

## The Fishin' Magician

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This was a week of wind for me. Heavy wind, the kind that spoils any plans you had for a successful day of fishing. That doesn't mean that putting the boat on the water doesn't accomplish something, though. I put the new Smoker Craft on the water twice and it wasn't a wasted effort in either case.

The first time I got the new 20-foot Smoker Craft wet it was on Lake Chelan. I needed to get it out and see if everything worked right, as I was planning to put it on the Columbia River later in the week. My wife Eileen and I drove up to Chelan, in spite of weather reports of high winds. When we came over the hill and saw the lake we didn't see any white caps, so decided to go ahead and put the boat in at the ramp below the bridge. It was calm in the river section.

When we got to the main lake, things were different. There was a pretty stiff breeze blowing down lake, and apparently there had been a good storm up lake as there were big rolling waves that we motored through on our way to Lakeside Park. I had some kokanee gear on board, and figured I might as well give it a try. I could tell I wasn't going to spend much time at it as my wife was actually getting seasick while I set up the downriggers and put two rods out. I just made a couple of loops in the Lakeside area, and actually hooked a couple of fish in 40 feet of water. I lost both fish. One got off way back behind the boat. I thought the other one had slipped the hook at the back of the boat, but the trailing hook actually broke off! That was it for me. We turned the bow toward the ramp and headed home.

Like I said, it wasn't for nothing. Everything on the new boat worked great. The bow mount handled the boat just fine in the heavy wind, and I knew it could handle the heavy current and wind on the Columbia in the Gorge.



Yup. I was heading for Irrigon, Oregon, which is just a few miles below McNary Dam. This area is known for many great fisheries, and one of the best walleye stretches of the Columbia. Nearby Boardman has been the site of walleye tournaments for many years. I had loaded all my walleye gear, and even threw in some bass gear. The smallmouth fishing is very good here, too.

We would be staying at a B&B while there, and as it turned out, I didn't need to do much searching around for a place to launch and where to try for walleye from there. Stoke's Landing B&B is right across the street from the Irrigon Park and Marina. This well protected, free launch, and there are even slips available for short and long term rent. Just above the launch are two channel markers, and

trolling along these markers is a popular spot with walleye anglers. Another stretch of water not far below the dam is where walleye anglers commonly troll.

The owners of Stoke's Landing, Paul and Phyllis Danielson were extremely helpful and obviously knowledgeable about the area. Not just Irrigon but all of Morrow County. The large house was decorated beautifully with a fishing theme. They were very accommodating, with fresh coffee ready in the morning, and if you had other plans for breakfast, they were happy to prepare a box lunch. I really liked the layout that allowed us to come and go to our room at anytime of day or night. If you would like to learn more about staying at this B&B with the convenience of the boat launch literally just steps away, you can call them at (541)922-3857.

Just a block away was another surprise. A brand new RV park and I mean brand, spanking new. The Oregon Trail RV Park has 77 hook ups and a large building that offers restrooms, laundry service, and a lounge with a television to watch while you wait. There is a full-time manager on site, up stairs in this building, and a site manager that keeps the park ship shape. The park has views of the Columbia, and is just two blocks from the free launch and marina. You won't find a friendlier manager anywhere. To find out about Oregon Trail RV Park, just call (514) 571-0661, and you can get a look at the park by visiting their Facebook page.

Well, I sure got settled in and learned my way around in Irrigon without a problem. There was one big problem, though—the weather. On Friday it not only blew hard it rained, too. It looked like we were on an ocean beach instead of the Columbia River. Fortunately, Eileen's family came to the rescue. We had a busy day touring the area, and

seeing much of what Irrigon and Boardman have to offer which is a lot. We toured the Sage center, where you can take an indoor "hot air balloon ride" to see the sights, and later we visited McNary Dam and watched summer-run salmon, sockeye and shad making their way through the fish ladder.

The next day I was determined to take them all fishing. The forecast was marginal at best, but we launched at the park and headed out into the Columbia. I managed to get some rods rigged and attempted to troll along the channel markers. It soon became apparent that this was a futile effort, though. The wind just got stronger and stronger, and although the Smoker Craft was handling the rough conditions just fine, fishing on the unfamiliar bar in these conditions just wasn't working.

By the time I headed back downriver toward the launch we bucking some really big waves. It got a little wet but we all laughed our way to the dock. We were glad to be back on dry land, and I am eager to get back down here when conditions are better and I can get a really good shot at fishing for walleye. Janet, Ed, Karen and Jess didn't catch a fish but we all have a great memory of our first time together on the Columbia River.

My next adventure is going to be float down the Cle Elum River for trout. This will be another first for me and I am very excited about seeing some new water, and getting some trout on my fly rod!

Reach Dave at:  
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