

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

I am making some big changes this fall. I haven't fished for fall salmon further downstream than just below Wanapum Dam in years, and this year I plan to make a few trips even further downstream. Right now I have three trips planned over the next ten days that may take me as far downstream as White Bluffs. I can't tell you how excited I am about getting back to this stretch of the Columbia. I have many fond memories of fishing down here.

As many of you know my brother Rick was a guide for 14 years, and he spent many of those years fishing the Columbia from White Bluffs up to Priest Rapids Dam. Rick was very generous with his time and I got to fish with him many times down there. We had some amazing days, and caught a lot of fish, some of them real braggers.

One of my favorite weekends was when Rick, my cousin Greg Preston and I fished for three days, from the Vernita Bridge up to the dam. I had only been on the river in this area once before and I wasn't really prepared for what we encountered. On the first morning, in a cold rain I hooked the first fish. I was using a trusty old steelhead rod. It was an eight-foot, three-inch glass Fenwick. On the rod was mounted an Abu Garcia 6500, the old red one, loaded with 12-pound test.

As soon as the fish hit, I knew I was in trouble. I had no control. Rick did an amazing job jockeying the boat around in the current chasing the fish while I hung on for dear life. We battled the fish for well over an hour, and when we got it up next to the boat we freaked. It was a monster. Rick managed to get the net under the fish and boosted it on board. The fish hit the deck with a resounding thud, and we all marveled at the size. The fish stretched the tape measure to 48 inches, and it had a girth of 36 inches. The only scale we could find bottomed out at 50 pounds.

Boy, did we have a celebration about that fish. Little did we know that this would be the first of three kings that we caught over those three days that measured the same. Imagine catching three kings of this size in one long weekend—unbelievable. I know we caught other fish during our stay there, but these fish are all that I can

remember. We caught one above the Power Lines, one just below the basalt walls, and another just below Priest Rapids Dam in just nine feet of water.

That's the excitement of fishing at Vernita. You can be sure of catching some nice kings here, and there is always the possibility of catching a real monster. There are monsters lurking here, too, that aren't salmon. Giant sturgeon follow these kings to the spawning grounds, and it is not unusual for anglers to battle these huge fish for over an hour. Sturgeon of ten feet are battled here every year, and startle everyone when they leap out of the water. I caught four sturgeon one day trying for kings. None of them were giants, but they gave me a real tug of war. I thought I was hung up every time they took my bait.

I am amazed at the wildlife we see while fishing here, too. We see chuckars coming down to the water and hear pheasants cackling all day long. We have seen some really big mule deer with huge racks watching us from the shore below the Vernita Bridge, on the Hanford Reservation. One day we spotted a coyote swimming the river and ran up next to it in the boat. That's as close as I have ever approach one of these critters. He snapped and growled at us while he dog paddled his way to the shore.

These are just a few of my memories of many trips to Vernita. I am anxious to get back to this stretch of the Columbia and hopefully make

some new memories of battling big kings in its swift currents.

Fall salmon continue to pour over Bonneville Dam. Over 328,000 had passed Bonneville a week ago, and they are still coming at a rate of ten to twelve thousand a day. Fishing at Vernita has been good already. When these fish arrive in our area it will be some kind of fantastic.

Here is some exciting news for families with kids under the age of 15 that like to catch trout. Blackbird Island Pond, which is open to juveniles only, is absolutely loaded with trout. The Department of Fish and Wildlife would like folks to get down and catch them before winter arrives. They are hungry, easy to catch and it is a guaranteed good time for youngsters. To add a little spice to the experience, the department has put 40 excess hatchery steelhead in the pond. They were taken at the Tumwater Dam, and have passed above the legal fishing boundary for sport angling. Imagine having your youngster hook one of these beauties while fishing for trout in the pond. Now that's exciting!

If you're a fan of perch fishing, and who isn't, the word is that Fish Lake is excellent right now. Anglers are getting their 25-fish limits of fat, 9-inchers in no time. You don't even need to take the time to gather periwinkles. The perch are gobbling worms just as well.

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