

Attachment

Recollections of Recreating on the Snake River

I was born in Moscow, Idaho in February of 1947. My parents lived in Pullman, Washington, and recreation to the Snake River in the area of Wawawai, Washington, was always a highlight of weekend trips. The Lower Granite Dam is now located in that vicinity.

Vacations were usually spent at some North Idaho Lake for two weeks, but the weekends were reserved for the Snake River. The Wawawai Canyon included a gravel road leading to the Snake River Road which led to all kinds of adventures. The only direction you could go from Wawawai was upriver 20 miles, beginning there and ending at Lewiston. Thus, we spent many spring days on the Snake River above the now present Lower Granite Dam beginning at Granite Point where there was a very large granite outcropping among all of the basalt cliffs. Our favorite outings included arrowhead hunting and playing on the beautiful white sand beaches of the river. The early spring weather was always so much warmer there than the cooler rolling hills of the Palouse that time of year.

My dad (a college photographer) had a close friend that worked as a commercial artist for Washington State (College at that time). He, my dad and I, took frequent trips to the Snake River archaeological sites to help excavate historical Native American camps. This was in conjunction with the College documentation professionals. It was always so interesting to find trade beads, old army uniform buttons, scrapers, arrowheads and other historical items where camp sites had been located.

Exploring the cliffs above the Snake River was also a fun and entertaining adventure, finding places where chert (we called it flint) was dug out of caves by (I assumed) Native American tribal folks, leaving copious amounts of chips and occasional broken arrowheads or scrapers lying on the ground near the caves.

In the summer, fishing was always on our agenda. My dad loved to sturgeon fish and bass fishing was also popular. When in high school, I would make my way to the Snake River near a large fruit ranch and go bass fishing. There were always other folks fishing the same area but there was plenty of room for all of us. One fellow in particular always seemed to catch really nice catfish, and he considered them undesirable so would toss them onto the beach. I always took a gunny sack

to take my bass home, so many times I would ask him about the catfish, and he would always say “take em, I don't eat those things!” I would throw the catfish into the wet gunny sack and when I got home, put them in my mom’s 12-gallon pickle crock until I could get them to my grandparents’ farm in Moscow. There I would put them in the cattle water trough until we were ready to eat some great catfish! It was amazing to me how long-lived they were out of the water just lying in a wet gunny sack.

My most memorable experiences were during Fall steelhead season when dad would hook a beautiful 25” or 30” Steelhead trout and play it in on a very undersized spinning rod. Always good eating and he had a knack of how to fish that big river with spoons.

Fall also brought numerous trips to the Snake River where there were a number of excellent fruit ranches and truck farms. Wonderful peach orchards, apple orchards and pears were there for the picking. It was a good thing they didn't weigh us going into the orchard and coming out as this was tree ripened fruit and so delicious to eat on the spot. We would harvest boxes of the fruit and my mom would can up quantities which would last us the whole year.

We would also load up on tomatoes, squash and cucumbers from the local produce that was plentiful along that river route. Again, mom would can these vegetables and it was always better than the stuff at the grocery store! Sweet pickles, canned tomatoes, and sour kraut filled our pantry shelves.

Fall also brought on hunting. Deer hunting was always successful in the breaks of the Snake River. The Snake River ecosystem was also a perfect fit for Chukars, Valley Quail, Huns, Pheasants and waterfowl. I spent many hours with my field cocker spaniel walking the steep inclines of the Snake River Canyon, or flushing pheasants on riparian willow and other brushy habitats. Quail were always on tap for a wonderful meal at the end of the day. Our whole family would spend days hunting on those sunny slopes. Hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon and eating a nice picnic on the sandy beach in the evening was always a treat.

We did run into an occasional rattlesnake, but dad always said, “leave them alone and they will leave you alone”. Mom was deathly afraid of snakes of any sort, and we could determine from her scream when she found one.

I truly miss those days on the river. A flowing river is so much more enjoyable than flat water reservoirs. I miss our prolific numbers of salmon and steelhead that

used to navigate this river system. Even the lamprey, which we would observe at the window of the now gone Lewiston Dam was something our family would travel to see. I really miss the fruit orchards, upland game, and sandy beaches this stretch of river provided before being inundated by backing up the river. If the river could ever come back, people would know what true recreation is all about.

Tom Rogers, former resident of Pullman, Washington