

CLACKAMAS "BIG BOTTOM" TRIPS

These trips occurred between 1951 and 1953 after the road had been built to a spot several miles above Austin Hot Springs. The road was pushed into the Big Bottom in 1954, as I remember, and it frustrated us so badly that we never returned until recent years. This was truly a pristine, beautiful spot with some of the straightest and tallest trees I ~~ever saw~~ had ever seen.

The hike to the "Pot Creek Cabins" at the bottom end of the "Big Bottom" was about 3.5 miles and easy level walking. Even so very few people seemed to frequent the area and there was almost no sign of anyone ever fishing the river. P.G.E. had two cabins at Pot Creek along the Clackamas River Trail which were at least a quarter of a mile north of the main river. This required a sloshy walk across all the channels and side streams between these cabins and the river to go fishing. The east cabin was not posted and had rustic bunks, a table and a wood stove - very nice accommodations for those times. The west cabin was locked and appeared to contain gear, and food belonging to P.G.E. We fished the river from the lower end of the "Big Bottom" to Pinhead Creek. It was classic (still is) fly water with extensive riffles and flats and occasional deeper pools. There were no log jams, that I remember, but there were large windfall trees that had dropped over the years. These ~~lay~~ ^{were laid} at angles across and along the stream and many were moss and Mimulus covered, testifying to a river system that had not been suffering from severe water fluctuations, at least in the recent past.

The river formed many channels and braided sections in this area and was the focal point for the Cold Water Corydalis discovered near here. Most of the river was a sparkling length of riffles and shallow runs occasionally broken by a large tree trunk or some boulder stretches. There were no rapids or pocket water so common to freestone streams of this area.

The fishing was fantastic. We fished with flies or salmon eggs and never had trouble catching our limit in a short time. Rainbows and cutthroats in the 8" to 13" range were common. We lost some very large fish in the deeper runs that our gear simply would not hold. As in the Collowash, very large fish (18 - 24") could be seen but not identified. Some of these large fish could have been those that busted up our gear.

We also caught Eastern Brook (small) and what we thought were German Browns (9"ish) on several occasions. (Questions have been posed to me about whether we caught Dolly Vardens. I would say no we didn't but what we thought were German Brown as well as some of the large fish we saw in the pools could have been Dolly Varden.) I do not recall seeing any fish in the steelhead size during these trips.

The rainbows seemed to prefer the open riffles and flats at the bottom of the deeper runs while the cutthroats were in areas around logs and boulders and where the riffles fed the pools, causing little disturbances on the waters surface.

Since I remember the fishing in this area to be the best I have ever had I hope recent regulation changes for catch and release that were urged by USFS Biologists and Cole Gardner will

help this stream recover to what it once was. It is my understanding that after the road penetrated this country the fishing steadily declined. When I fished this area last summer we did not catch or see any fish of any size. On several times in those bygone days, and I hate to admit it, three of us came out of that area with our weekly limits amounting to around a 100 trout. Maybe we were the cause of the fishery demise or our predecessors or maybe our modern practices have caused the decline. I have doubts that man can work together to keep anything the way it was - maybe in this area it will be different.

Respectfully,

Gene McMullen
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