

Fishing Far From the Crowds on the High Lakes

by *Gleb Velikanov*

Imagine having hiked into a choice fishing area, with comforts of your tent steps away, far from the crowds, seemingly on another planet. Imagine campfire coals glowing in the dark while a couple of freshly-caught trout are sizzling in a frying pan, begging to be eaten. To reach such a place, you do not have to travel to some far corner of Idaho or Montana, just trek over to Oregon's high lakes, some of which are within an hour or two's drive of Portland.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife actively promotes backcountry fishing, hoping to attract sportsmen and women to remote areas. According to Scott Patterson, ODFW's Fish Propagation Manager, the department has been stocking these high lakes for about 50 years, hauling fish in by foot or by packhorse. "On odd years, we release approximately 350,000 fish in the high mountain lakes to create recreational opportunities," said Patterson.

These days, helicopters carry a custom-made shuttle, with 30 individual canisters, each holding a few gallons of water and up to 1000 fingerlings of brook, cutthroat or rainbow trout. Canisters open individually by remote control, while the helicopter hovers over a lake. The young fish used are said to have a better chance of enduring the 50-100 foot fall, compared to adult fish. In this way, barren lakes receive a trout population capable of surviving for three to five years.

Most of these lakes are accessible only by trail; to fish there, you have to hike in! So this is a trip that combines fishing with backpacking, carrying all your food and gear to set up camp. It's worth the effort because a remote, recently-stocked lake means less competition and more chances of hooking a fish.

Planning

A good place to start your planning is the trout stocking schedule on ODFW's website

(www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/). Here, department staff maintain a database of all stocked lakes in the state, divided into five geographic zones, listing the date fish were released, their approximate size and numbers. A handy link to a Google-based map helps find the desired lake. From there, you can make an educated guess as to which lake to choose, considering such how recently the lake was stocked, personal experience with fishing for trout, and the lake's proximity to access roads.

There is a plethora of available information, found in online forums and websites, guide books, newspapers and magazines. Figuring out the best trail to access the lake can be done using a guidebook and a paper map, or any type of online guide, database or navigational website or smartphone app. There are many options: long-distance or short, day hike, overnight, or a multiple day trip.

For example, the ODFW lists Averill Lake as last stocked in 2011, with 1400 brook trout. A quick search on www.portlandhikersfieldguide.com reveals that this is located in the Mt. Hood National Forest and is "a clear and pleasant lake surrounded by many campsites," accessible from either Red Lake trailhead or the Pacific Crest Trail by Olallie Lake; under five miles from either direction.

According to ODFW Regional Information Officer Rick Swart, "a good lake should not be too shallow, which means it will not freeze solid in the winter, or overheat in the summer, while having enough underwater structure to provide the fish with optimal living conditions." All those factors make Averill Lake a nearly-perfect destination for an overnight hike, with a possibility of getting to the shore early enough to fish in the evening, then rising early in the morning and fishing again, before heading back to civilization.

Equipment

The ins and outs of modern



Perfect summer fishing.

equipment choices seem to be an essential part of most recreational activities, including fishing and backpacking. Combining the two makes choosing gear extremely important; after all, you will need a temporary roof over your head, along with a rod suitable to catch something for dinner! It is essential to realize that modern gear has evolved greatly, compared to the old style frame backpacks and waxed-cotton tents. "The nature of backpacking gear has been going the lightweight direction, making hiking more comfortable, and ultimately resulting in a better back-

country experience," said Andrew Sullivan, Camping Buyer/ Manager at Next Adventure, a local outdoor outfitter.

For the purposes of high lakes fishing, it makes sense to use lightweight gear, in order to save some weight for your fishing tackle. Perhaps the latest ultralight backpacking trend is not necessary, but a general "common sense" approach to packing for a trip in the backcountry should be used. Backpacking gear for an expedition like this can be pretty basic: a tent, a sleeping bag and sleeping pad, a headlamp, a water

purification system, a pair of water bottles, a knife, some fire starter-like material and a lighter, a navigation device, like a GPS, or a tried-and-true combination of a topographic map and a compass.

Gear options are vast, with a multitude of choices, anything from water treatment drops to pump or squeeze filters and touch-screen GPS units to GPS apps for a smartphone. The most important thing about gear is to know how to use it, so you do not end up with a

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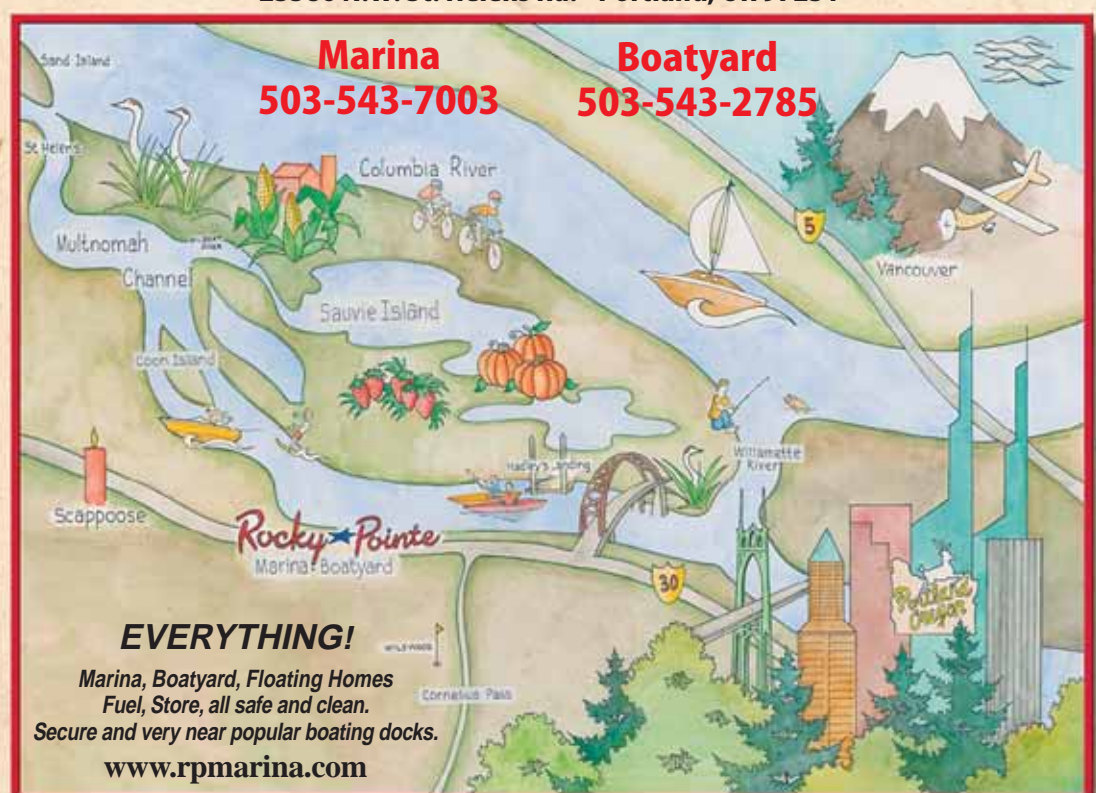
Camping by the lake.



~ Photos by Aaron Breniman ~

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At the Center of it All

Riding on Air

by Adam Fry

A Fast Cruise down the Lower Columbia

Seafaring voyages have always been a great interest to me—heroic sailing adventures to faraway places that require great ocean crossings. However, there have been



Adam Fry

some incredible trips made in inflatable boats. One of the most noteworthy was made by Alain Bombard, who in 1952 drifted 2700 miles across the Atlantic to test and prove potential survival skills at sea. More recently in 2010, survival expert Bear Grylls piloted a sophisticated rigid-hulled inflatable boat nearly 6000 miles across the Northwest passage.

These expeditions sparked an interest in my co-worker and I to undertake a longer distance cruise

in our own inflatables. Running the lower Columbia river to Astoria and back was our goal, “just to do it” was our motto. The two boats, 12’ and 14’ long, departed North Portland harbor at 7 am loaded with fuel, camping gear, safety equipment, handheld GPS units and hand-held radios.

With limited time and a desire to see the sights along the way, the trip was carefully planned. We estimated that with our small outboard engines of 15 and 20 hp, 22-24 gallons of fuel would be needed to complete the full distance of 158 nautical miles. This required that each boat squeeze in four additional five-gallon jerry cans of fuel.

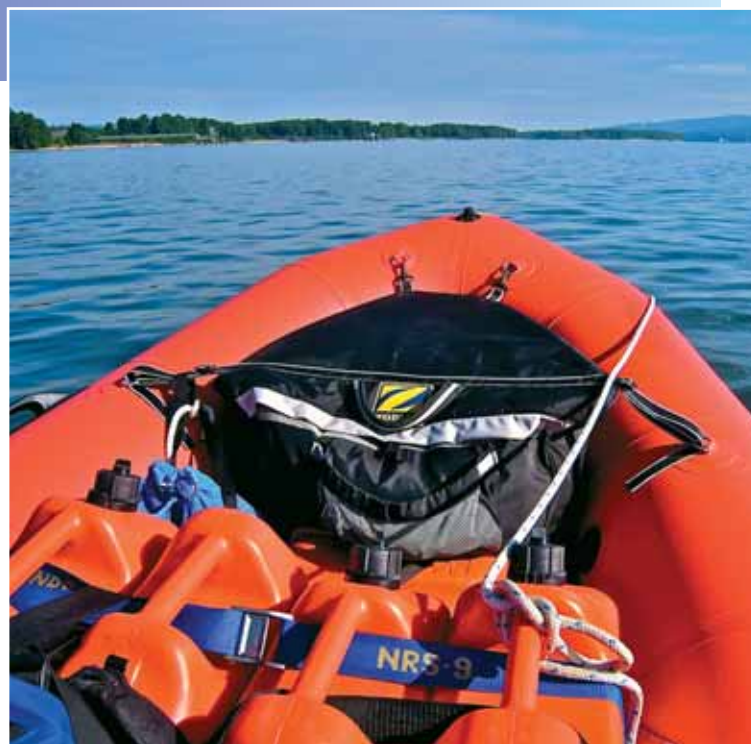
Down the river we went with the boats heavily laden, checking off the distance and planning fuel

transfers. By early afternoon, the west wind had picked up, the chop was quickly building, and Astoria was in sight. We were looking forward to lunch as we followed the range markers to guide us through the main channel and were soon tied up to Pier 39 at the east end of Astoria.

Stepping out of the small boats after hours of continuous movement felt like walking off a ship after a 50-day passage—our sea legs were good, but our land legs weren’t. We clambered up the ramp, then sat down at the bar of the Rogue Pub, where we noticed the room appeared to sway! We enjoyed our meal and soon enough, it was time to start the long journey home.

The next hour and a half was spent surfing the wind waves to Cathlamet. There, we tied up in the marina and took a walk into town, found some fire wood, and grabbed a fresh pizza-to-go. A few miles upriver, we landed on a sandy spit that formed a safe cove to moor the boats and a view of the sunset. The tents were pitched, a fire was started, and pizza was consumed.

The tide was up when we



Our inflatable stocked and loaded for our 30 hour trip.

turned in, with the boats securely tied off. The next morning, they were laying high and dry on the beach. We pulled the boats back down to the water without a problem, transferred more fuel into the outboard tank, and set off for home. The Columbia was filled with scenic views of cascading tree tops, an abundance of wildlife, and many cargo ships steaming in both directions. As the sun continued to rise, the fog burned off of the trees and the river appeared to steam.

Shortly after, the wind picked up and we encountered steep choppy water again. With less fuel to carry, the inflatables bounced along until we reached the Willamette River and Mt. Hood came into sight. We reached North Portland harbor just after noon, bringing our 30-hour marathon to an end. While it is fun to reflect on the grander voyages of famous adventurers, our trip was a two-day cake walk on the lower Columbia while “riding on air.”



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useless item when it is needed the most. Still, all that is the part of the allure of backpacking.

You probably will not need a lantern or a hatchet—a headlamp and a lightweight canister stove will keep your world illuminated and your food cooked. In fact, if feeling adventurous, you can forget about the stove, and bring only a backpacker-specific aluminum or titanium pan, a little container of olive oil, some spices and attempt to fry your freshly-caught dinner over open fire. Of course a backup meal of

bread, cold cuts or cheese, and dried fruit should always be tucked away in your pack, along with some high calorie energy bars, in case fishing success is not achieved.

A lightweight, collapsible and packable spinning rod is the logical choice for this endeavor. Fly fishing is popular elsewhere, but keeping the back cast clear of thick bushes, which usually surround high lakes can be a major challenge. Casting a small lure, however can be done in a relatively effortless fashion, producing decent results. There should be

plenty of opportunity to tinker with the selection, picking different types and colors of lures.

Wilderness Fishing

Like most freshwater fish, trout like to congregate near river and creek inlets, where the current carries tasty morsels that fish eat into the lake. Fishing around these areas, while making a special effort to let the lure pass by underwater logs and rocks, should get the fish to come out of their hiding places and bite. If the lake is not too large, it is possible to stay ashore and get away without using waders or even wading boots, but a small landing net can come in quite handy.

Keep in mind that any trout over eight inches is legal to keep in Oregon's high lakes, while the daily limit varies by location. Specific information regarding all the legal details can be obtained online, or when buying the required basic fishing license. Fishing Oregon's high lakes remains popular with a select group of anglers, ever since ODFW started stocking them.

A possible explanation for that is the unique nature of this undertaking, along with the thrill of all the particular details that go into planning and executing each outing. Rick Swart feels that “you will not fill your creel with fish, but should be able to catch a few for dinner. And that is a good time outdoors.” And it does indeed sound like an adventure...

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