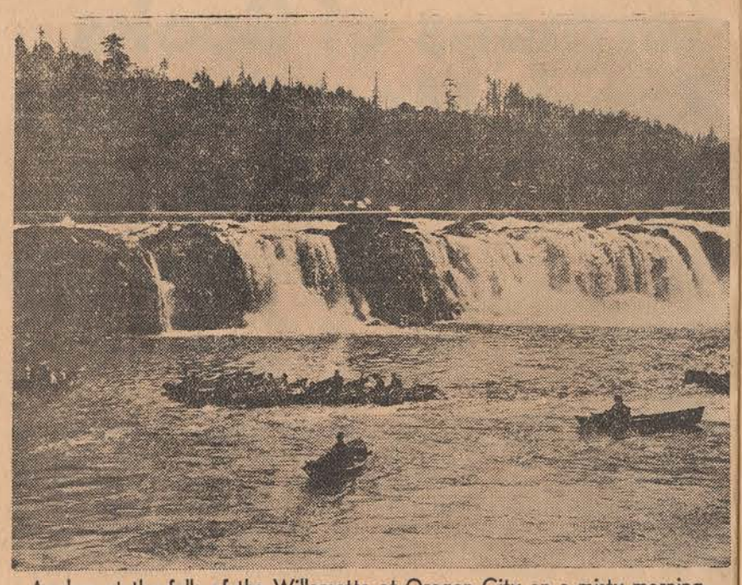


Anglers at the falls of the Willamette at Oregon City on a misty morning in 1914.

Journal - May 7, 1939

Trolling for Chinooks Yesterday and Today

By William Finley and Ed. F. Averill

WHEN Bill and John Jennings were running the old farm at Jennings Landing some 40 years ago, they liked salmon fishing better than plowing.

"We can make more cash pulling in salmon than sweating in a hay field," said Bill. "The other evening John and I drifted down several times with our net and hauled in a good load of Chinooks. We harnessed the team and drove into Portland and returned with $22 apiece."

It is hard to estimate the big runs of spring and fall Chinooks that bat-

Tom Spooner, who was a veteran on the river, had good luck fishing from a boat, September 26, 1908.

tled up the Willamette to spawn 40 or 50 years ago. How did they get above the falls at Oregon City? Well, they just did. There was no sign of a fish ladder "in them days," but the Chinooks didn't need a ladder. They had the surprising power and urge to leap 15 or 20 feet, and for untold generations had been accustomed to jump the old falls as easily as they struggle up the fishways today.

As the power and paper companies gradually blocked the water above the dam and the main current plunged through the mills instead of sweeping over the rock walls, a fishway had to be built so the salmon could work on up stream. Then began the gradual changes that started these big fish schools on the down grade.

"There is no better trolling for Chinooks anywhere than here at Jennings Landing," said old Tom Spooner, whose home was a picturesque spot on the river bank where he spent his last days fishing. I get some of my best trolling in May, when the water is clear, but I have more fun and catch bigger fish in September," said the be-whiskered old fisherman, as he sat on a log looking across the river. "Yesterday in a couple of hours I had landed two medium sized salmon. Then the excitement started. The reel hummed. The line zipped out in long spurts. As the fish rushed and pulled, and circled I could tell he was to be my biggest catch. I played him patiently for an hour before I landed this 52-pound Chinook."

"I have fished many of the streams in California but none have the excitement of the Willamette," said John P. Finley as he came walking up the bank with a salmon the afternoon of September 30, 1908. "With increased population and pollution of the Sacramento river in California, the salmon runs are diminishing. I am wondering whether this will happen on the Willamette."

This was over 30 years ago. Today no angler trolls for salmon at Jennings Lodge in summer or fall. A salmon can't pass through the Portland sewage in summer. In the Willamette the fall run of Chinooks and Silversides have been exterminated. Years ago a troller could catch more spring Chinooks in two hours than he can today in two weeks anywhere between Portland and Oregon City.

"Sport has been unusually good during the spring of 1914," wrote John Gill in the June, 1914, issue of the Oregon Sportsman. "The catch of rod fishermen this season was a considerable supply of the finest salmon in Portland markets, nearly a ton a day having been sold to the markets for revenue only."

What a picture today compared with years ago. "I have been out every day for two weeks. What fine days, no rain, the water clear, but for some reason I haven't had a single strike," said an old fisherman as he stepped out at Madison's boathouse one day last week.

"Pretty tough luck on the river these days," said Madison. "We can't make anything out of our boats when there are no fish to catch."

Old Mother Nature 'Temperamental,' Too

"Well, what's the cause?" asked the young school teacher who had spent all day Sunday sitting in a boat and felt conscience stricken about his Sunday school class of boys. "I'll tell you what I think," he continued. "All they have to do today is to report that several million eggs have been taken from the salmon and the river is full of fingerlings. It's the same old story that has fooled the sportsmen and commercial fishermen for years. How can a hatcheryman spawn salmon and fertilize the eggs better than a fish knows how to do it, and rear fingerlings in troughs better than they can grow in their native mountain streams? The natural spawning of our valuable spring Chinooks at the headwaters of our rivers is the only way this particular species can survive."

"I guess you're right," answered the old angler. "Some fish can be propagated artifically and some can't."

"It happens that I teach biology," said the young fellow, "and the same thing applies to birds and mammals. You can propagate China pheasants and turn them loose, and most of them will go wild and breed. It's different with wild turkeys and sagehens. They must have native haunts where they live and breed with no human interference. The state officials could perhaps handle some of the deer tribe and keep them from dying off, but they couldn't do the same with the prong-horn or antelope. The antelope has a peculiar temperament, is high-strung and easily upset, and it can survive only in the open sagebrush country where it has freedom. The spring must be as wild and free as the antelope."

And so the discussions continue about the past and future of the salmon runs of the Columbia and Willamette. Those who want to mechanize the rivers contend that the spring runs will survive by hatcheries and artificial propagation. The facts show that this has failed in streams like the Sacramento.

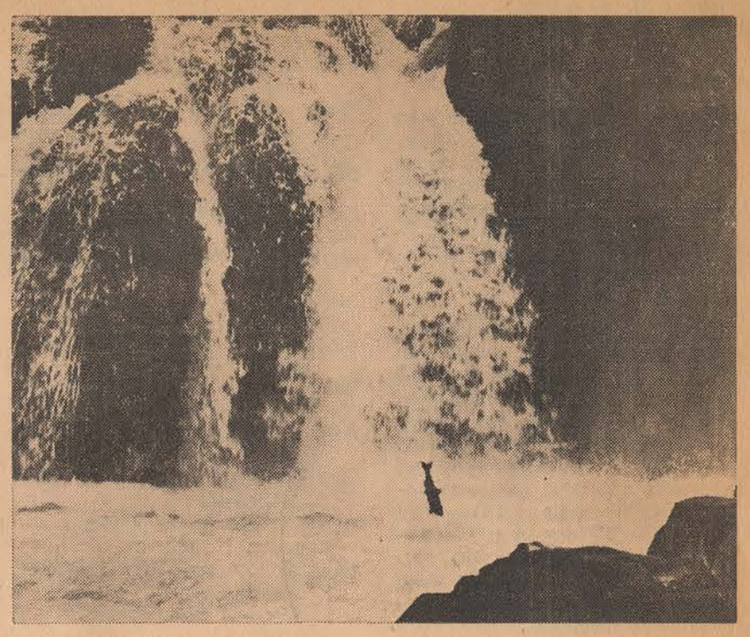
The best example of maintenance of the salmon runs and the salmon industry is in Alaska and is handled by the United States government. Years ago the rule was adopted for a 50 per cent. escapement of salmon up the Alaska rivers to their spawning beds before the season opens for commercial fishermen. It is one of the most notable methods of handling wildlife resources on a sustained-yield basis. In some of the medium sized Alaska rivers, one or two million salmon reach the headwaters before the remaining schools are trapped and netted by the fishermen.

Wide publicity has been given to the fact that some 500,000 salmon have successfully worked their way above Bonneville dam. A large proportion of these are seined and netted out of the river before they pass Celilo Falls. For a stream the size of the Columbia, this is just a drop in the bucket. The number should have been 5,000,000 to 10,000,000, salmon. But even then a run like the valuable Chinook can never survive because vast spawning areas at the headwaters have been blocked and destroyed. A campaign is now under way to restore some of these spawning areas, but it is a 10-to-1 bet that it is too late.

This fine run of spring Chinooks in the Columbia has been steadily dwindling for the last 30 years. In earlier days the salmon canners profited on these Chinooks because of their rich food quality. They disdained to can the cheap fall fish. The royal red Chinook of the spring is replaced by hatchery employes with his pale cousin of the fall.

There was good trolling for salmon in the early days of the Willamette, but as the fishermen have increased, the fish have decreased. If the proposed high dams are built on the upper tributaries of the Willamette, the native spawning beds will disappear forever, and the Royal Chinook runs will gradually follow suit.

J. P. Finley and a nice one he landed from the river at Jennings Lodge, September 30, 1908.



'Over the top,' or a good try at it, anyway, at the falls at Oregon City in 1908.

Oregon Wildlife Notes

The old question as to what is the difference between a cougar, a mountain lion, a panther and a puma has again come up. This time the inquiry comes from a friend of this page who has returned from an extended sojourn in Curry county, the land of wild hogs and wild turkeys, as well as of cougars and such. He tells us that while there he was in a never ending controversy with some of the old-timers over this question. He tried to tell them it was one and the same animal, but they would have none of it. Nevertheless our friend is correct. The various names listed above are but different designations for one and the same animal. In the New England states —before exterminated—the animal was called panther and in most of the other states he is known as cougar but in the southwest the name most commonly applied is that of mountain lion or puma.

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Robins may not care for red string as building material but those wintering in our section of Portland prefer red apples to yellow ones for food. Or possibly they like Delicious, Winesaps and Spitzenbergs better than yellow Newtowns. Robins also like suet quite as well as do the chickadees. Flickers also like apples in the winter time. An interesting sight was that of a flicker and a robin obtaining their meals from separate sides of the same apple on the Spitzenberg tree.

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W. H. Crowell, president of the Portland Audubon society and Harold S. Gilbert had the rare good fortune to see and hear a hermit thrush on Portland Heights, the last week in March. This resident of the dark woods and high mountains seemed out of place in the midst of city dwelling places, but it was none the less welcome. The song is among the most enchanting of all those furnished by our feathered friends.

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Portland is far ahead of any other city in the matter of bird-study interest, according to Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, chief of the bureau of biological survey. More than 10,000 homes in the Portland area have bird feeding stations or bird houses or both.

Feat