

Newspetter94

Keith's Corner/McGill News

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Oscar Creek and the KCC Dams

The Duck Creek dams built in the early days of McGill, were built to supply water to the copper reduction plant. Some of it was used by the folks above 1st street and townsite.

As a young, McGill, heathen in the late 30s and 40s, the dams were a place of mystery and conjecture. Stories of monster fish being caught were the thing. I personally never saw any such fish. The dams of course were off limits to us peasants. Most of us McGill urchins were taught the finer techniques of creek fishing at about age 5. Such things as how to poke your fishing pole thru a bunch of thick willow and how to get the fish out onto the bank. How to clean them and to keep them moist in your straw creel with some wet grass. The best place to get good worms. There was a place just before the KCC ranch. There was a spring alongside the road(which was a dirt road back then). There was a tiny , 2x2 white building that marked the place.

Also, the best way to catch a grasshopper. You aimed your swatter just in front of them as they usually jumped forward. Another great bait was helgramites, found under rocks in the creeks. Fish eyes were good in a pinch.

How to watch for snakes was very important, as the rushing waters would usually muffle the rattles. Whenever possible, we waded up the creek. We waded upstream, because the fish are usually watching up current for food. Other gems of knowledge, were, how to get your bait up under a bank and what riffles and pools to try. The big thing was to not catch a snag.

One of the mysteries of creek fishing, was that I always got thirsty, even though a stream of clear, cold, pure water was right below me. Creek fishing was exciting and remained so all my life. Great exercise and it took a lot of coordination and reasoning power. Plus, freshly caught, ice cold creek rainbows, cooked over an open fire are the best.

My favorite creeks, were Timber and then upper Berry, maybe because they were far away. We usually fished Bird and East Creeks, as they were closer.

I was fishing one time with Dale “Snort”, “Poacher” Cottrell on Bird creek. We started at the top and fished down to the intake. There was an 8 ft chain link fence around it. I had tried many times to float a line in and under the fence, but with no luck. Snort showed me how he did it, by poking the rod thru the fence. Guess, I was too young, as it didn’t work. He said that we should try Oscar Creek sometime. Now I had heard about it, but had no idea where it was. As we drove home that day, he showed me where it was and how to get to it.

Years later as teeny boppers with our own cars, some of us would sneak in and fish. Now, Oscar Creek was the stream that fed into the two dams. The large trout would head up the stream to spawn, but they ended up in a pool fed from a large pipe about 5 feet above the pool. It was the water from the combined creeks of Timber and upper Berry. The fish would try to swim up into the pipe, but the force of the falling water was too great and they fell back into the pool. The pool was loaded with big rainbows and were easy to catch with a good worm. One day, we caught a whole gunny sack of nice ones. We went to Ely and gave most of them to the White Pine Hospital by the courthouse. The others we kept or gave away to friends. Oscar Creek had to be the best fishing hole on the entire mud ball, we humans live on.

Many years later, early 2000s, I was living at the dam and walked up to the pool and took some nice video of the fish trying to get into the pipe. The pool was washed out in spots and not as big as before, nor as deep.. The fish seemed smaller. I never went back.

I did fish the dams, but the biggest fish caught was about 21 inches. Certainly not like the ones Danny Symes and I caught back in June of 1957. Danny and I were imbibing a few “Oly stubbys”. A short and stubby bottle of Olympia beer, popular at that time. The caretaker in charge of the KCC dams, Enus, came in.

He asked us if we would like to come out the next day and catch a bunch of fish for him to take to his brother in California. We, being of sound mind, highly intelligent and high moral character, didn't hesitate to say, yes. We got there early the next morning and met with Enus. He gave us two Coleman coolers to put the fish in and told us not to bother cleaning them, as he would. We fished with lures and casting rods and since it was a warm day we rolled up our pants and waded out from the south end of the ponds, to about our knees. There were large rainbows and browns swimming all around our legs. Each cast meant a big fish. They were a little longer than the inside of the cooler. About every 2 hours, Enus came and picked up the coolers and left 2 more with cold beer and sandwiches. Life doesn't get much better.

By 3 that afternoon our arms were so tired that we finally quit. Enus, was happy as could be, but I am sure not ever as much as we were. What a perfect day.

In the middle 1970s, I was the Nevada State Health Inspector for this area. Part of the job was to take water sampled of all drinking water. The state sent over a man that was manager of Nevada's water resources. We took his official state car out to the KCC dams and told Enus that we needed to sample the water going into the dams. He gave me a key to the gates to the Oscar Creek pool. He always called me Keet with his Basque accent. He said, "Keet, don't you boys catch more fish than you can eat." He wasn't fooled a bit. We caught some nice one.

A few months later the state sent over an engineer, George Gerogeson (sp). I introduced him to Enus and we all went up on the dam. George said he wanted to ask Enus how many second feet of water came into the dam. I told George that it would be better to talk to Frank Ball, the KCC engineer in McGill. Well, George was stubborn and so he asked Enus, how many second feet of water came in and went out to McGill. Enus scratched his head and thought for a minute. Then he pointed to the spot where the water came in from Oscar Creek and said, "if more water comes in there, than goes out the pipe to McGill, the dam, she runs over. If more water goes out to McGill than comes in, the dam, she goes down." I asked George if that answered his question. He grumbled and we went in to ask Frank Ball. Seems, city dudes have to complicate things.

Those two dams and Oscar Creek provided us McGill weirdos a lot of fun and many, many, memories.

McGill News

We may have a new business in town. I heard a rumor that someone bought the empty lot where the Commissary and Boarding House used to be. The big empty lot by the Post Office. Possible small drive up coffee type shop. Hope it is true. It would pull a lot of the tourists off the road. At least it might slow them down. So many of them zip thru McGill at high speeds. Someone is going to be hit one of these days. Why does it always take a tragedy to wake highway officials up????

Old Photos



1925-26 photo showing the large Commissary and Boarding house, mentioned in the above McGill News.

