

COMBAT ON THE BOISE

Date	Mid November	Time	Afternoon
Location	Boise River – Downtown Boise, ID	Weather	Overcast & cold
Fish Species	Steelhead	Size Range	23”–30”; Average is 23”-26”
Fish Caught	A couple each		
Flies Used	Purple Egg-sucking Leech		
Techniques	Dead drift on the bottom and let it swing		
Comments	It was an explosive day of combat fishing		

It has been three years since I fished Steelhead in the Boise River. I had fished the three years prior and had landed several Steelhead. It was easier when I worked near the river and could fish on a long lunch break. I wouldn't have fished this year but my brother Rick and my new fishing buddy Robert had never caught a Steelhead so I obliged. I really wanted to see them catch a Steelhead. The 4-6lb Steelhead and a few to 10lbs are a hoot to land on a fly rod.

If it were that simple I would fish every year. It requires a lot of patience dealing with tangled lines and waiting to cast due to the nature of this unique experience. Returning A-run Steelhead are caught at Hells Canyon dam and are then shipped by truck and released into the Boise River. This is the solution to mediate the dam construction that blocked Steelhead from naturally spawning in this river. To appease the sport fishermen, fish are trucked to five stops from Glenwood to Barber Park throughout November. Approximately seventy fish are dumped at each location each time but this week they dumped twice as many fish since there was a delay earlier in the month. Nice surprise!

When you hear the announcement in the paper and on the news, you can just imagine what it is like when the truck pulls up to dump the fish. It is combat fishing at its best and everybody wants a portion of the best real estate. We arrived four hours early to find that there were already fishermen waiting. We were early enough to get a good spot but had to stand to defend it.



Combat fishing on the Boise River for Steelhead

The excitement began long before the fish arrived. There was a couple of fisherman that decided they owned the river and decided to walk in front of other fishermen that had arrived first. It wasn't long before a Fish and Game officer arrived to sort it out. He gave

the men an opportunity to sort it out themselves before he got involved. It was resolved quickly but not without a little bit of chastisement from the officer letting them know that he had more important matters to attend to.

I've seen some unbelievable behavior at this event in the past. I've seen line wrapped around poles from somebody on the opposite side of the river, there have been six-way tangles, cutting lines, and swearing but those were the exceptions. My favorite was a bait fisherman standing on a rock at the top of the hole. He would cast down the river with complete disregard to those around him. There were several people upset until this man fell into the river over his waist. There was no restraint in the laughter as this man walked away due to humiliation and being wet in cold temperatures. In general people get along very well as it did this week for the most part.

When the truck finally arrived, there were approximately sixty fishermen licking their chops. I must admit that it is somewhat exhilarating seeing the big fish dumped at your feet knowing they are ticked off and waiting to strike at anything for the next few hours. I've heard people debate the sportiness of this event. I've never had a hard time arriving to catch fish that are destined to be caught or die in a farmers ditch. It is definitely a unique situation that keeps many away. Catching a Steelhead over Christmas break several years ago was more meaningful but I like the odds on the day they dump.

Rods were flying as the first fish were dumped. It didn't take long before people were hooking up. I was excited to see Robert be one of the first to land a Steelhead. His first!



It wasn't long after taking a picture of Robert and his Steelhead that I was fighting one of my own. I could tell from the fight that it was a nice Steelhead. I was using a 5-6wt rod with 12lb test. I forgot how much fun these Steelhead can be on the fly. I love it when you can feel them shaking their head. This 26" rocket gave me several runs before I brought it to the net.



It wasn't long before Robert and I had both landed another Steelhead. As excited as Rick was, I'm sure not hooking a fish at this point was getting a little discouraging. He had driven all the way from Utah for three hours of fishing. The fly rod isn't his rod of choice and he was probably wondering if he should switch over to a jig with his spinning rod.

I told him to keep the fly on the bottom and it would just be a matter of time. It is important that the fly gets to the bottom and then to let the line swing below you. I like to have a tight line with my rod near the water. It helps me to better see the line and feel the line when there is a strike. Steelhead have a subtle take so I wouldn't call it a strike. Experience helps when knowing what to feel and expect. As we were discussing the details, Rick raised his rod. The rod doubled over and the reel started screaming. Rick had just hooked into his first Steelhead!

He has landed lots of big fish so I wasn't too worried but handling fly line vs a spinning rod is different when handling big fish. You have to be able to hold the line and apply the right amount of pressure. If you play it on the reel then you have to have your drag set

tight enough but not too tight. I've had a Steelhead peel my line so fast from my reel that I ended up with a nest of line in my hand.



After a good fight I grabbed the net and then the camera. Rick had just landed his first Steelhead. It was such a great feeling to see everyone in our party experience landing a Steelhead.

I ended up hooking into another really nice Steelhead. My reel buzzed as it flew downstream. Luckily it darted back up stream before I had to walk down the river and fight the crowds. It was a hot fish! There weren't any leaps but it gave a good fight. After tiring it out I started bringing it to the shallows. It put up one last head shake and the hook popped out. It would have rivaled my largest Steelhead. I cherished the fight and another great day of combat fishing with friends and family on the Boise River!

You can't have too much fun in one day!

Rick treated me to dinner at the Bonefish Grill that evening. I noticed there was Steelhead on the menu but I went with the Mahi Mahi (Dorado) with chunks of Crab and Lobster smothered in a delicious creamy sauce. Wow, what a way to end the day or not!

We had been contemplating all day to night fish for Bass. Night fishing for Bass in November? Are you crazy! How about doing it with a mouse pattern on the surface? Now we're dreaming! Sounds like a couple of fools that don't know anything about fish!

I've never fished at night with a mouse pattern but it is something that I've seen on TV and something I've always wanted to try. I should have been home dreaming in my bed but Rick and I left the house to arrive at a local Bass pond at 10:30pm. I sheepishly told my wife what we were doing and that we'd be home at midnight. Her expression said it all about us being crazy. She rolled her eyes while reminding me that I had work in the morning.

I had shown Rick pictures of huge Bass that Robert and I had caught in the last several weeks on Hoppers. I get excited every time I think about it. We decided to make the most of our time and satisfy our curiosity about Mouse patterns at night. But November? Why not! If they were taking dries during the day, why not get some protein at night.



It was a dark night but I could still see the surface and make out the silhouette of the reeds on the opposite bank. My anticipation and curiosity grew as I tied on a big Mouse pattern. I've always thought it would be cool to fish a Mouse pattern at night for a big Brown Trout. The thought of a big Bass got me just as excited. I had my doubts on such a cold night but I had caught Bass during the cold day. I assumed the Bass would be too lethargic this time of year especially top-water fishing. There was only

one way to find out!

Rick had his spinning rod already rigged with a glow-in-the-dark gadget of some sort. He had made several casts to no avail by the time I made my first cast. As I swung the big fly overhead I noticed the difference in my cast to move the big Mouse pattern. As the Mouse hit the water I heard the plop. I could see the wake that I was making as I stripped the Mouse back to me in a continuous natural swim motion. I tried this retrieve a few times with no success. Rick wasn't having any luck either.

I cast out one more time to reel in all my line to try a different location. I stripped in the mouse a few times and then let it sit while I reeled in all my loose line. As I was watching my line spool the reel I heard an explosion on the surface that was enough to startle me. A Bass had just taken my fly! I gathered myself and my line. As I lifted my rod, I felt the bend of my rod and realized I still had a fish. I raised my rod high above my head to try to keep the Bass out of the deep weeds. I was still using my 5-6wt rod with 12lb tippet that I used for Steelhead earlier.

As I brought the fish to shore I could see that it was a nice 13" Bass. I could not believe how it exploded on the fly and fought as much as it did. The water temperatures must still be warm enough for these fish to generate some energy. Maybe it was the easy protein.

Now that I knew a fish would bite I decided to vary my retrieve. I tried various retrieves until I discovered the ticket by catching another Bass. By this time Rick had given up on the spinning rod and came to watch me fish.

I walked to a fresh location and swung my fly parallel to the cattails along the bank. I made 3 or 4 hard strips and then let it rest for 5 seconds. I continued this pattern until I was almost ready to make a new cast. Suddenly, a big mouth exploded from the water and gulped my fly as it made a huge splash. I couldn't believe the sheer awesomeness that I was experiencing. It was downright explosive!

That fish doubled my rod and I could tell it was big not only from the explosion on the surface but from the power of the tug. It was all I could do to get it out of the vegetation. Rick let out a holler as he was the first one to see it with his head lamp. "You've got to land this" he exclaimed.

I was finally able to muster it to the shore. We were both in disbelief as I pulled it from the water. It measured a whopping 20". I could not believe that I just landed a Largemouth Bass that size at night on a Mouse pattern. It was a dream come true.



My 20" Bass caught at night by stripping a Mouse pattern across the surface

After that adrenaline rush I handed my fly rod to Rick and said, “You have to try this”! It wasn’t long before we were both, again, laughing in amazement as Rick landed his first Bass on the fly using a Mouse pattern.



Rick’s first Bass on a Mouse pattern

Witnessing the explosion on the surface is something else. It was hard to leave when midnight arrived. The technique we were using was deadly and we both caught our fair share of Bass. I know my 20 incher isn’t the largest Bass in the pond. I tangled with a Goliath that got the best of me in the weeds. We got one good glimpse of it as it skated across the surface shaking its head before it plunged into the depths. There wasn’t much I could do.

It was an explosive day of fishing between the Steelhead and Largemouth Bass. It was definitely a day I’ll always remember. I think Rick’s drive from Utah was well worth it!