

WASH! COULD YOU LAND ONE OF THESE ROGUE RIVER STEELHEADS?

There May be Fall and Winter Sport More Royal But It Isn't On Record.



A Two-Pounder.

Casting for "Big Game."

Playing a Big One.

A Big One Landed.

A Slightly Riffle.

Hooked!

BY W. E. BACKUS.

NOT long ago two men were discussing the merits of various trout streams. One of them had fished all the best streams in Colorado, including the famous Gunnison and Rio Grande, and was boasting of the large fish to be taken there. During 10 years of fishing he said he had taken many fish over three pounds in weight, including one of six and another of eight pounds.

Whereupon the Oregon Booster replied that on the Rogue River in Southern Oregon, it was quite the regular thing for an angler to take half a dozen six-pound trout in one afternoon. And I can vouch for the Oregon man's statement, for I have been fortunate in getting some of these big Rogue River fish. Together with three other Portland people, I spent 10 days on the Rogue recently, and our entire party enjoyed fishing of the highest order.

"I'll call one of them Texas Jack. He is a finished fly caster, and can do things with a casting line that I imagine even a Texas cowpuncher can't do with his rope. When his long Thomas rod was working right, which seemed to be all the time, he would send his fly sailing over the riffles in a way calculated to fool the wisest of steelheads. No pool was too wide, and no angle too difficult. He fished everything in sight with a coolness and skill that was a pleasure to watch.

I've read a good many tales of the salmon fly fishing in Scotland. There my lord, or the duke, will fish the famous salmon, and they always have with them a sort of hired man called "the Gillie." It seems to be the Gillie's duty to carry all the extra gear, point out to the most likely places and do all the gaffing of fish, should any such emergency arise. He is a sort of general all-around handy man, and his chief function is to tote all the spare tackle which his employer is sure to have.

"I shall call one of our bunch "the Gillie." Not that he wasn't a full-fledged angler, and most decidedly nobody's flunkey, but he seemed to have a mania for carrying with him everything in camp that wasn't fastened down. I don't believe he ever went for a day on the river without a shoulder pack containing a small camp stove, a big camera, two automatic pistols, lunch enough for the party, three or four pairs of extra boots and socks, and enough odds and ends to start a crossroads store. He isn't a very big fellow, yet he would carry that pack in the heat all day with a smile on his face, and if in the evening his load was increased by half a dozen four-pound steelheads, his countenance was a study in ecstasy.

I suppose I should call the remaining member of our party Mrs. Gillie, and let it go at that, but I won't. In most hunting tales I've read, where the lady's name is not mentioned, it is customary to refer to her as Diana. So Diana it will be, and if ever a little woman was deserving of the title, it was our Diana. She would trudge all day over the hot sand and bedrock, covering miles of rough country, and when necessary would take to the water without hesitation.

Texas Jack declared that she is the gamest woman he's ever seen in the woods, and we all agree with him. To be sure, there were moments when she resembled Diana but very little. There was the time when she got in over the tops of her waders and came ashore with them full of water. At that particular moment she closely resembled a dainty Chinese lady out for an afternoon stroll. But this is to be a fishing story, so I'll just hurry along.

When it comes to catching big trout

on the artificial fly, the Rogue River is the best stream in the State, the finest on the Pacific Slope, and if there's a better one in all North America I wish someone would speak up. I'd like to hear the name.

To be sure, it's no easy fishing. To take steelhead trout with the fly on the Rogue requires long and skillful casting, deep wading and lots of it, and knowledge of the habits of the big fish. It's hard fishing, but who wants to get six and eight-pound fish without working for them? None of our party was afraid of getting wet, and we all cast enough line to get into the game, so it was a question of locating fish. In this respect there are a number of don'ts to be observed.

Steelheads don't like shallow, pebbly riffles; they don't like deep, sandy bottom eddies, and on a hot day they don't like open water of any kind if they can avoid it. Furthermore, they don't like to have flies presented to them the way we usually fish for ordinary trout. They seem to have a fondness for water with a bedrock bottom. Rock bottom riffles of moderate width, with the water from three to ten feet deep are their favorite lurking places. If the bottom is full of seams and cracks, so much the better, as these crevices are ideal haunts for the big fellows. Then, when you have located such a place, don't drag your fly along the edge of the current, as in trout fishing, but work out a good length of line, casting it clear across the body of the stream and let it swing down without further motion if you are in luck, the fish will do the rest.

I know of a place on the Rogue which comes as near being a perfect steelhead riffle as any place I've ever seen. At this point the river goes round a horseshoe bend, in a series of falls. Just above the upper fall the river broadens to a width of a hundred feet, with solid bedrock stretching from bank to bank. The fish struggle through the quarter-mile of rapids, then find this perfect resting pool just above the final jump and it's no wonder that they tarry awhile before going on upstream. One side of the river is hopeless, but on the opposite shore a reef of broken rock juts out some 50 feet, affording a good casting point. For centuries the river has been stinging gravel over this reef during the winter freshets, and if there is a more slippery piece of wading I've never seen it. It was on this reef that Diana filled her waders, so don't judge her too harshly. We reached this place in the early morning, and Texas Jack was the first one ready for the water.

Very cautiously he worked his way over the glassy rock and we watched him unlumber his "long Tom." As the sun was still low, he put on a coachman and with a master hand sent it flying over the pool. Each bend of the rod shot out another yard of line and finally the fly dropped lightly over 40 feet away. Then he lowered his rod tip and watched the fly skim over the water. Half way across, and there was nothing doing. Another 10 feet, and as the fly swept over a dark spot we saw his rod snap forward, heard him yell and the first fight was on.

Up in the air went the steelhead, straight as an arrow, his whole body quivering in frantic effort to shake out the stinging hook. Down he came like the splash of a 12-inch plank, then a sharp dash across stream, followed by two more yard-high leaps. But the hook was in firm, and the fight continued. For some minutes the big fish worked upstream, making a number of sort rushes. Then down to the bottom, moving among the sharp crevices, bringing the frail leader dangerously close to some nasty corners. A few jerks of the rod ended his boring, and

he suddenly shot off downstream toward the falls. A hundred feet of line went screaming off the reel, a slight pause, then another 50 feet flew out, as the fish tore through the white water, and Jack broke all records getting ashore. Over the rocks he ran, holding his rod high over his shoulder to keep a tight line on the fish. Below the first drop are three more, and the fish fought stubbornly through each, until Jack finally hunched him in the last eddy, fully 300 yards below the spot where the fight began.

Then just to show us that this was no fluke, he caught two more out of the same riffle, the three fish averaging five pounds each. By this time the sun was shining strong on the water and the fish seemed to lose interest in our flies.

So we journeyed around the loop, down to a riffle known as the Rattlesnake. A reef of yellowish rock winds along for a hundred yards, lying close to our shore, and its peculiar formation is probably accountable for its title. Here the water lay in shadow and at one point the rocky cut wound its way right up to the very bank, making an ideal resting place just under the hanging alders. We grouped ourselves under a bush overlooking the riffle, as the Gillie was chosen to do the fishing. The foliage made casting difficult, but after a few trials our Gillie sent out a fat yellow bodied gray hackle some 30 feet. Four pairs of eager eyes watched it drift along a few yards, then from out of the black water came a beautiful pink-tinted steelhead, straight for the hackle he went. As he neared the lure his body arched in a graceful curve, his big jaws opened, then closed with a snap—and he had missed it. Everyone gasped, except the Gillie, who nearly fainted from excitement, as it was his first rise from a steelhead. It took a few minutes to restore him to a fairly normal condition, and he made another breathless cast.

Again the steelhead rose to the occasion, and again he missed it. Another cast, and the same thing happened. The Gillie's plight was pitiful, and he looked a nervous wreck as he made his fourth try. This time the big fish meant business, for he took the fly with a vicious pull. No need for the Gillie to strike.

The fish did all the hooking and then

and I let the fly settle. It took several drifts before the fly sank properly, when I let out another 10 feet of line. Now the fly was over very likely water so I watched it closely. A slight bulge on the surface caught my eye, followed by a gentle "pull" on the line and I struck sharply.

The next moment all was commotion, for I had hooked a regular bull moose. Down stream he went, ripping off 20 feet of line at a jerk, until the reel fairly smoked. When fully 100 feet away he gave one wild leap clear of the water and then set sail for the falls, while I tried my best to get ashore before my line gave out. It was almost a dead heat, for I had but 10 feet left on the spool when I finally started down after him. Once in the pools below it was a question of wearing him out slowly, which I did very cautiously, and when a friendly wave helped wash him ashore I sure had a record-breaker. The scales showed a weight of nine and one-half pounds and he proved to be the largest fish on the entire trip.

In fact, it may be said that these fish can be taken the year around. The fly fishing always extends until late November, and with spoon and bait the fish are caught until much later.

There is something peculiar about the fly fishing for steelheads, and which has never been satisfactorily explained. On the upper river, above Medford, the big fellows begin striking the fly in July, sometimes in late June, while 40 miles down river the fly casters work in vain. Weather conditions are the same, and the water is of the same temperature, yet for some reason there is no early fly fishing. About the first of September, however, the fishermen at Grants Pass begin taking fish with the fly, and toward the end of this month the steelheads rise to the feathered lures all along the lower stretches of the river.

Last Fall was a dry season on the lower Rogue and the anglers near Billings' ranch, in the West Fork district, caught steelheads until about Christmas. Then a heavy rain colored the water and the rise brought in a run of very large fish. Bait fishing with salmon was then in order and it was during this run that Harry Hosler, of Ashland, caught what is considered the record steelhead for hook and line fishing on the Rogue. It was 26 inches long and weighed a trifle over 15 pounds.

left the water for a complete somersault in the air. Then just to show the audience that this was nothing unusual, he came down again and went around once and a half.

A gallant fight he made making several leaps clear of the water, but Diana was equal to the occasion and met every rush halfway. Twice the fish ran clear across the stream and it kept our fair angler very busy looking after her line. Finally she got it all back on her reel, and the Gillie very cleverly beached the fish, which proved to be a fine specimen, weighing over four pounds.

By this time the shadows were beginning to lengthen, so we decided to return to the favored spot above the falls. All afternoon the pool had been exposed to the hot August sun, so it struck me that any shady bit of water would be a likely spot. At the head of the pool I found just such a place where a smooth stretch of rock reached clear ashore, and lay partly in the shadow of some tall cottonwoods. Here I waded slowly out until the lazy current swirled the water around my hips.

A few casts worked out enough line