



**Tales from a Sisters Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**Sculpin in Whychus Creek?**

Just about the time you think you know who the key players are in Whychus Creek, along comes an inquisitive, 9-year-old soon-to-be-fourth-grader from Sisters Elementary School who drags home a weird trophy from his exploration of the creek that drops jaws.

If he had his way, Daniel would get home from school and immediately head for Whychus Creek for any number of activities. He's already a fly fisherman who knows how to do it, when to do it, and where to do it.

But if the visit to the creek isn't to his liking for fly fishing, he's just as happy exploring for anything that moves in, under, over and anywhere near the creek. Once he watched a garter snake eat a fish, and for him, that was almost as good as if he'd caught it himself.

Daniel's also very happy just to be rafting in Whychus — or any other body of water — for that time-consuming activity takes him to new and different stretches of creeks, river, and lakes where he can explore for new and different critters in the flashing water around him.

So, it wasn't a big surprise for any of the Miller family when Daniel came home carrying two unknown animals that resembled fish, and one apparently eating one like it. No one in the Miller family knew what he had, and when his mom, Randi, sent the photo to me and asked what they were, I didn't know either...

But, several images from my youth did pop into my memory when I looked at the photos again and again. It came slowly, but it made no sense, my memory of them was in the wrong place...

I couldn't recall the name, but I did remember seeing something like them while clamming with my grandfather in the saltwater and sandy beaches of Long Island Sound in West Haven, Connecticut. That made no sense in Sisters, Oregon.

So, what were sculpin — a salt-water fish — doing in Whychus Creek?

To try and get a better handle on what Daniel had dragged home, I sent an email to Forest Service Fish

Biologist Nate Dachtler, but forgot to send him the photo I received from Randi Miller. When I did send Nate the image his response was, "That is a cool picture. Looks like a sculpin in the sculpin's mouth."

OK, that indicated to me it was no surprise to him that a sculpin was found eating a sculpin in Whychus Creek, but for people who don't know they were even there here's what I got off Wikipedia:

"A sculpin is a type of fish that belongs to the superfamily Cottoidea in the order, Scorpaeniformes. As of 2006, this superfamily contains 11 families, 149 genera, and 756 species.

"Sculpins occur in many types of habitat, including, ocean and freshwater (surprise to me!) They live in rivers, submarine canyons, kelp forests and shallow littoral habitat types, such as tide pools.

(And, as of today at least, swift-flowing streams



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Daniel admiring his catch of the day, frozen for posterity.

lined with volcanic rocks in Sisters.)

"Sculpins are bottom-dwellers; their pectoral fins are smooth on the upper edge and webbed with sharp rays along the lower edge, a modification that makes them specialized for gripping the substrate. This adaptation helps the fish anchor in fast-flowing water."

That's exactly where Daniel found those two he hauled home.

Now, why don't you scramble on down to Whychus Creek and see how many sculpins you can find, and when you do, ask them how they got from the Pacific Ocean, up the Columbia, up the Deschutes and into Whychus Creek.

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