



ABOVE: Fishing a tiny creek in Central Oregon, the author carried a handgun, just in case. The rattlesnake encounter took place less than 25 yards from where Lewis and his daughter camped the night before.

TOP: Jennifer Lewis left a warning for the next campers.
Gary Lewis/Contributed Photos

Snake Shot

An unexpected encounter with a rattler



GARY LEWIS
ON THE TRAIL

Trouble comes in all sorts of packages. We were headed into the wilderness to fish a mountain creek. Rattlesnakes did not cross my mind.

My daughter, Jennifer, and I had planned this hike and camping trip for a few months. Now we shouldered backpacks and started up the trail. I carried a Model 1873 single action loaded with 158-grain hollowpoints in a holster on my hip, while Jennifer packed her Ruger SR22. Fly rods were strapped to our packs. Our goal was to find a good place to sleep for the night then cast dry flies for wild rainbows in the morning.

After an hour we found a spot where trail and creek diverged and then a nice place to throw down our sleeping bags.

In the morning, we hiked down the creek then worked our way back up, pool by pool. The little rainbows took our dries with wild abandon and when we had both caught close to a dozen, when the only thing on our minds was dead-drifting a Parachute Adams down the next riffle, a quick movement alerted me.

We were on a narrow ledge between a deep hole in the creek and a rock wall.

Leaves shuddered and the twigs moved and

a diamond-patterned snake headed straight away toward the base of the cliff.

“Snake,” I warned Jennifer, and then saw its head and tail. “A rattler.”

It ran out of options when it got to the cliff wall and gathered itself, cornered. It turned and headed straight back at me on the narrow trail, its head up eight inches in the air. That’s when I shot it.

Hit, the snake pushed off the bank and tumbled toward me. I shot it again and once more then stepped out of the way as it went by me into the creek. I fished it out, a gorgeous, hideous creature, and counted three bullet holes. The first was a bit off-center, about six inches down from the head, while the second two were less than an inch apart, about three inches below the head. Even after three hits and three minutes in the water, it still was trying to snap at me. I cut its head off and put the dangerous part in the creek where no other creature would step on it.

We were rattled.

Jennifer, who had my camera when the shooting started, captured the action in stills, the first two of which she took with the lens cap on. When we encountered the rattler, Jennifer was only a few feet behind me. When I looked again she was way up on the hill.

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Fish get a lift to safer waters in the Blue Mountains

EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Dozens of fish in a Blue Mountain stream got a ride to a new home recently. A safer new home.

The relocation was intended to protect the fish from the effects of a bridge construction project on Limber Jim Creek, a major tributary of the upper Grande Ronde River south of Starkey.

Employees from the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and Grande Ronde Model Watershed captured the fish and moved them upstream.

The movement was an important part of the project to remove an undersized, poorly aligned culvert that directs the stream beneath Forest Road 5125, the upper Grande Ronde River Road.

The previous culvert made it impossible for fish to migrate when the creek was running low, and its alignment caused the



Joseph Black/Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

Sarah Brandy, fish biologist with the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Marie Gaylord, biological field technician with the WWNF, along with Trey Montgomery and Corrina Stadler, biological field technicians with the Grande Ronde Model Watershed, set up and secure a block net before fish rescue/salvage from the construction area.

stream to erode the road on the upstream side at high flows.

The new concrete bridge is wide enough to allow fish to move

more easily, and it eliminates the erosion problem.

“Correcting obstructed fish passages is a high priority for con-

serving and restoring fish populations,” said Sarah Brandy, fish biologist for the Wallowa-Whitman. “It helps connect fish habitat and gives fish and other aquatic life access to upstream areas.”

The construction during July posed a threat to fish in nearby reaches of the stream, which prompted the relocation.

“When the U.S. Forest Service has project work that occurs in stream channels, we are required to work within a certain time-frame that will have the least amount of impact on fish and aquatic life,” said Brandy, who led the project. “We also follow permits that require isolating a construction area, removing fish from this area and moving them to a safe place upstream until the work is complete.”

To move fish, workers set up two block nets, then caught the fish in between.

The salvage crew then walked

up and down the stream, using an “electrofishing” device, which uses an electrical current to temporarily stun fish, making them easier to net.

“A fisheries biologist with appropriate training in both human and aquatic safety, runs the backpack electrofisher, ensuring that the voltage is on the lowest effective settings so that fish and aquatic life are not harmed or damaged,” Brandy said.

The other technicians captured the fish in nets and moved them upstream.

“By placing the fish upstream, they are able to migrate freely while remaining safe from the dangers of a construction site,” Brandy said.

The construction project was funded by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Bonneville Power Administration and the Forest Service.