

CAUGHT OVGARD

Microfishing easily accomplished just about anywhere

By LUKE OVGARD
For the East Oregonian

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Microfishing is still relatively new to me, and the newness of it all is partially why I love it so much. This method has yet to hit the mainstream, but microfishing is a gem.

In combination, the ability to sight fish, to actually see the fish you're targeting and the inherent challenges of getting small fish to bite on tiny tackle is an incredibly underrated pursuit.

Further, there are micros everywhere — even in the heavily pressured waters nearby you don't think twice about — and given its relative lack of awareness, you can probably microfish within walking distance of your house.

Micros are tough to “fish out” because they're typically too small to have food value to humans, and though they can be delicate, they are usually plentiful.

Everywhere you go, there are sculpins, chubs, minnows, killifish, anchovies, shad, darters, or shiners.

Play hard

One of my favorite experiences microfishing started out with me chasing northern pike the size of my leg and ended with me catching fish the size of my toe.

While visiting Buffalo, New York, for a teaching conference, I used every afternoon to get out and fish. After the conference, I bowed out to the Niagara River faster than the Bills have bowed out of the playoffs in recent years.

Arriving at my destination, the Tiff Nature



These little fish are a staple in the north and considered to be one of the most commercially valuable fish in the Great Lakes despite their size.

Photo contributed by Luke Ovgard

Reserve, I grabbed a heavy rod for pike and a smaller rod just in case any micros were visible.

I quickly spotted a nice pike. Unfortunately, it was more lifeless than the Raptors' Finals hopes before LeBron went to the Western Conference.

Sadly, upon my arrival at a public slough of the Niagara River, a dead 3-foot northern pike was the first thing I saw.

The second thing I saw was a school of micros, patrolling the shoreline just far enough out that I couldn't

easily reach them with my micro rod. Still, fish you can see should take priority when microfishing, so I opted to try anyhow.

I set down my regular rod, which happened to be tipped with a jig and worm. It fell into the water and caught a rock bass, which I quickly reeled in, released, and resumed microfishing.

Micros

Some micros are notoriously difficult to catch. Most micros — especially cyprinids — are notoriously tough to identify. I couldn't tell

what these fish were in the water, and as I battled the wind to place my tiny piece of worm in the path of the school, I had no idea what they were.

The Great Lakes are home to dozens of micros alone. Often, identifying micros is tougher than catching them, and if the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources didn't have “The Baitfish Primer” (a free PDF for Lake Ontario micros), identification would be rough.

Catching them was no walk in the park, but eventually I did get one to bite

my Owner New Half Moon hook.

It was obviously a cyprinid, and I assumed a shiner, but I wasn't sure on the species. I was sure that the iridescent green-blue contrasted with bright silver was absolutely gorgeous.

Often, I'll spend hours fishing a school of micros in hopes of catching more than one species, but these were pretty obviously the same species as the one I'd caught. I hadn't identified the species yet, but I was enough of a naturalist to see they were the same, and it was

time to move to greener (or at least slightly less emerald) pastures.

I carefully unhooked the fish and put it into the photo tank to take pictures.

Photo tanks are glass or plastic boxes not actually designed for holding fish but repurposed by enterprising microfishermen to take highly detailed photographs of fish with their fins fully extended.

Most species retract their fins when handled, and the number of anal fin rays, dorsal fin rays, fin shape, fin size, and a host of other factors can be lost if fish are held out of the water.

I've always tried holding fish in my wet palm just under the surface of the water to spread out their fins, but it doesn't always work. You also risk losing the fish before a good picture is taken.

Thus, photo tank.

I took a few pictures, but the tank I had at the time was old and all scratched up. Further, it was windy and I didn't have anything to wipe water droplets off the side of the tank, so I couldn't get the best photo.

In this case, it was enough to identify the fish: emerald shiner (*Notropis atherinoides*). Fitting, considering just 730 words ago I told you that microfishing is a hidden gem.

To learn more about microfishing and the gear you'll need, check out <https://caughtovgard.com/gear-up/gear-up-micro/>.

Order CaughtOvgard performance fishing apparel or read more at caughtovgard.com; Follow on Instagram and Fishbrain @lukeovgard; Contact lukeovgard@gmail.com.

57-mile bike ride offers challenge, beautiful scenery

By MAVIS HARTZ
For the East Oregonian

MISSION — The 57-mile bicycling route starting at the Wildhorse RV Park near Mission and ending at the beautiful Ukiah-Dale Forest State Scenic Corridor Campground on Camas Creek near Ukiah is a physically challenging trip but one with expansive views and points of historical interest.

Begin your day early at the Wildhorse RV Park, ready for 3,866 feet of elevation gain.

Exit the Wildhorse Resort complex turning south on Highway 331, South Market Road. Continue over the freeway and back in to rolling grass and wheat farms. Gaze to the east and imagine the Oregon Trail wagons rolling straight down the foothills of the Blue Mountains, cutting ruts deep enough to weather over a century of erosion and grazing. Look southwest toward Pilot Rock in search of the basalt cliff memorialized by the pioneers as a way finding point. Approximately 4 miles into the ride, spin west onto County Road 950, Best Road.

Glide along Best Road until it tees into Tutuilla Road. Counterintuitively, rotate north spooling along until County Road 1086, West McKay Drive, cuts west. Follow West McKay Drive until reaching the small community of Green Meadow on the north side of the McKay Reservoir.

McKay Reservoir is part of the 1,837-acre McKay Creek Nature Wildlife Refuge designated by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927. There are picnic areas on the refuge but no camping areas. Visiting times and locations vary depending on the fowl inhabitants and other wildlife. Turn south toward Pilot Rock on Highway 395, the Pendleton-John Day Highway, and begin the long but gradual 34-mile climb to the top of Battle Mountain.

This section on the Pendleton-John Day Highway is the most heavily trafficked road of the day, and flow is



Blooming camas can paint meadows blue.

Photo contributed by Mavis Hartz

based on travelers going to and from work in the Pendleton area. If as a cyclist you like smooth, well-maintained roads regardless of the traffic, stay on the Pendleton-John Day Highway. Those that prefer to battle the potholes over vehicles, look east as Green Meadows becomes an even smaller number of houses at the top of the hill around mile 13.3. There, between the new highway and some small residential developments, is Frontage Road. To access the road, take one of the driveway-like connectors toward a number of roads that harken to the Oregon Trail with names like Conestoga Drive.

Frontage Road morphs into Schoolhouse Road. Watch for the cutoff that crosses the main highway around mile 17 onto White Eagle Road. The cutoff is recognizable by the iconic White Eagle Grange on the west side of the main road. Veer south onto Old Highway 395 just prior to the Grange and persist along the old highway using Pilot Rock as a destination beacon until reaching the mining and tim-

ber town of Pilot Rock.

Pilot Rock is a delightful small town with a number of conveniences, and one of the last places to make any purchases for the next few days. Rise out of town on the same Highway 395 traveling toward John Day and away from mainstream society. Enjoy Jack Canyon with its birds of prey and intriguingly weathered buildings of the past as you leave the Palouse and crawl your way back to the Blue Mountains.

At the old town of Nye, now a gravel barn, veer south toward Ukiah. Spool up past Stewart Springs, topping out at 3.9% of incline, to the incredible vistas of Whittaker Flats. Enjoy the far-off mountain ranges and a brief reprieve from climbing with a less than 2% grade across the flats. After the flats, endure more climbing to toil past Webb Slough and then gape at the view at Cape Horn. Pause just prior to the 4,277-foot summit at Battle Mountain State Park.

Battle Mountain State Park, 398.47 acres of forested grandeur, was purchased in 1930 from a sheep

and land company to preserve the impressive forest of ponderosa pine, larch, Douglas-fir and spruce. The park was then named for the last major indigenous uprising, the Bannock War of 1878, and the battle that was fought in the vicinity of the park. The main impetus for the Bannock War was a little plant with a blue flower that loves marshy meadows, camas.

Camassia quamash, a member of the asparagus family, was a major food item for the indigenous population. The plants would be dug and the root prepared in a variety of manners that allowed it to be consumed year-round. Tribes would habitually visit the same camas beds for harvesting. Family groups would groom, plant and weed plots to produce the abundance they needed to survive. These plots were passed down from generation to generation to assure future survival.

When the Bannock Indians originally made a treaty with the United States of America, they attempted to reserve the right to return



Climbing out of Pilot Rock on Highway 395.

Photo contributed by Mavis Hartz

to Camas Prairie yearly to secure food for their members. Upon signing the treaty, they were then shipped off to the Fort Hall Reservation. In a saga of misinterpretation, western expansion and lack of supplies they returned to Camas Prairie multiple times to harvest the root. Yearly the chief would formally express his displeasure of finding more and more white settlers near, in and around the Camas Prairie. The tribe's final arrival at the prairie, just after the Nez Perce War of 1877, showcased livestock, particularly pigs, dining on the coveted bulbs.

The resulting bloodshed was initiated by a select group of the Bannock and Paiute Tribes. Suffering from loss of warriors, the band led by Chief Buffalo Horn until his death, then a Paiute Chief, Egan, headed toward the Umatilla Reservation envisioning a replenishing of forces. Instead, on July 8, 1878, the band engaged with General Oliver O. Howard's troops in a daylong battle, losing more warriors while a small band

from the Umatilla Reservation looked on. Members of the Umatilla Tribe later entered the camp, captured and then killed Chief Egan. Following the death of Egan the warring group disbanded and tried to melt back into the landscape.

Enjoy the superb park and the chimney built and used by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Return to the road to rocket up one more mile to the summit of Battle Mountain. Revel in the eight-mile, 976 feet of elevation loss, glide down to Snipe Creek and on past the junction to the town of Ukiah, to the Ukiah-Dale Forest State Scenic Corridor Park.

The grassy meadows around Snipe Creek seasonally host camas beds and if you are lucky, large herds of elk. The campground at the Ukiah-Dale Forest State Scenic Corridor Park is picturesque and features the lovely, pristine, bubbling waters of the aptly named Camas Creek.

Mavis Hartz is a co-owner of the Mountain Works bicycle shop in La Grande.