

CAUGHT OVGARD

Catching sharks from shore a new favorite pastime

By LUKE OVGARD
For the East Oregonian



Photo Contributed by Luke Ovgard

The author poses with that first nurse shark. It measured just over 4 feet long and weighed about 40 or 50 pounds.

MARATHON, Florida — The most dangerous apex predators like to swim. They destroy fish and anything that crosses their path at an alarming rate. They are the subjects of classic horror films, are responsible for the most gruesome and grisly deaths and are capable of unimaginable evils.

For sharks, these dangerous apex predators, humans, pose a major threat.

According to *USA Today*, humans kill 100 million sharks per year while just six — yes, six — humans are killed by sharks annually.

In the water, the most widespread predators are sharks. Sure, orcas are a threat to some sharks where they share waters, but sharks live from the coldest depths of the Arctic Ocean to the warmest tropical seas in shallows and depths alike. Orcas and tunas and billfish don't persist everywhere as sharks do.

Despite the best efforts of the cleaver that is humanity, there are areas where sharks still thrive.

Earlier this week, I was fortunate enough to spend some time in one of these havens: the Florida Keys.

The Keys

US-1 spans the entirety of the Keys; "The Overseas Highway" is the gateway to everything from Key Largo to Key West.

In planning my trip there, I had planned numerous stops at bridges along the archipelago to chase the dozens of exotic fishes that can be found there.

My first stop, just outside of Islamorada, resulted in 51 fish representing 12 species — six of which I'd never caught before. Not bad for a two-hour pit stop. I moved on in a state of ecstasy brought on by heat and an hours-long dose of dopamine.

Polishing off a cold brew coffee, I pulled into the second location to meet a friend I'd met on Instagram, Casey Shanaberger (@cjfishes). I arrived a few minutes before him, and I began talking to the guys fishing nearby.

"There was just a big-a** shark here, man," one said, obviously a little excited.

They chatted about it awhile, and it got me thinking. Sabikis or herring jigs tipped with bait are a blast, but I never turn down the chance at a big fish.

Casey showed up and began catching fish immediately.

I rigged up the chum bag and caught a larger grunt for bait, sticking my finger on one of its spines. The blood pooled slowly, and I dipped it in the brine, adding to the blood in the water before again fishing for dinks.

A brown blur on the bottom crept up from the dark water, and I knew it was a shark.

At that, I got excited, too.

I checked the heavy rod I typically use for sturgeon back home, seeing it was still wedged firmly between two rocks, slightly pulsating as the bait wriggled to escape the hook.

I landed another Bermuda chub, and it projectile-crapped all over me. Seriously. They shoot it out of their anal vents. They're famous for that bad habit. They're also famous for having no table or bait value. Other fish won't even eat them.

I was already soaked in the unrelenting heat, and that was bad enough, but a massive smear that looked like it came from the diaper of a sick baby? Hard pass.

Lamenting my now soiled shirt, I ripped it off and continued fishing, starting a mental sunburn timer for my pale Nordic skin.

Moments later — my luck — this location went from a crapshoot to "Holy crap!"

The Take

The large rod began sinking as something much, much larger began to pull, throbbing and pulsating at once rhythmically and violently.

Though it took a second to get it out of the rocks, I was ready.

In a strong but metered lift, I ensured the 5/0 circle hook was set and began hauling in the beast.

Casey encouraged me, grabbed pliers, got the camera app on my phone ready and walked with me as I battled the brute over to the sandy boat ramp maybe 50 yards away. I would have to land it there because there was no way I could lift a four-and-half-foot shark up a sea wall.

Unmistakably brown with blue-green eyes devoid of pupils and a long, slightly-round tail, I knew at once it was a nurse shark.

Known for fighting much more like massive catfish than other sharks, these fish are strong, bulldog fighters that pull hard down and away. They don't jump or make blistering runs like some other sharks, but they pull and pull and pull.

Minutes felt like hours in the sun, as I baked and slicked with sweat, but I got the shark to the beachhead, and Casey helped me land it.

The Handling

I kicked off my flip flops and stood feet away from a shark in nothing but shorts and a hat.

"Watch your toes and fingers," warned someone. I obeyed.

Pliers helped me pry the circle hook free from the corner of its mouth, and I looked incredibly grateful trying to balance on the snot-slippery boat ramp while tailing the fish and trying to find a front handhold out of reach of its maw.

My feet found purchase in sand, blessed sand, and I prepared for the pictures.

Violent, lightning-fast moves to bite my hand failed as I grabbed it on the pectoral fin or pushed gently on the base of the head accordingly.

The raw strength of the fish was impressive. It measured just over four feet long and probably weighed about 40 or 50 pounds, but it was more powerful than sturgeon I'd handled twice that size, every inch of sandpaper skin atop dense muscle.

Keeping its head submerged while I maneuvered for a picture was enough to pull muscles in my forearms, but it was worth it.

I finally subdued the fish for a few pictures, and I was hooked on shark fishing.

Hooked

I'd caught sharks before, but never that big.

In three days' time, fishing for other fish with a large bait out, I hooked 10 sharks from shore, ranging from three to seven feet long and landed seven of them — either solo or with Casey. It was epic.

The largest, a 7-foot black-tip or spinner (I never did get it close enough to tell which), broke my 45-pound steel leader after 10 minutes of blistering runs, jumps and enough adrenaline-pumping head shakes to make me smile just thinking about it.

I released all of the sharks unharmed, save for one three-foot bonnethead that managed to swallow the entire 14-inch bait and circle hook. A shore angler quickly adopted it and took it for dinner.

I felt a bit guilty, but at least it wouldn't go to waste.

Insanely enough, most of the people around me asked why I didn't kill the others as I landed them. That's an attitude that needs to change. Sharks are awesome.

This apex predator has a new favorite type of fishing, and I'll be pushing hard to conserve the only other truly worldwide apex predator.

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

Killamacue Lake offers more than just a unique name

Lake in the Elkhorn Mountains with an unusual name and a beautiful view

By JAYSON JACOBY
EO Media Group



EO Media Group Photo/Jayson Jacoby

Killamacue Lake, with its backdrop of Chloride Ridge, is one of the alpine jewels of the Elkhorn Mountains.

The elder McArthur's concept is both simple and brilliant.

After all, what Oregonian (or any reader, come to that) wouldn't be curious as to how a post office came to be called "Legality," or which items might have been tallied in the naming of "Five Hundred Flat?"

The McArthurs, who must have interviewed as many Oregonians as any pair of authors ever have, and quite likely more, endeavor to answer those and hundreds of other questions — although they're not always successful.

Legality was a short-lived post office in Gilliam County (1884-88), but the McArthurs were unable to track down an explanation of its name. Five Hundred Flat, by con-

trast, which is in Grant County, yielded a story from Al Oard, former supervisor of both the Malheur and Willowa-Whitman national forests, that the name derived from the place being a popular site for buckaroos to play a game called mumbly-peg, which involves pocketknives and is played to a score of 500. I'm not clear if that number includes fingers.

The McArthurs' information on Killamacue Lake is not exactly cyclopedic.

The sixth edition offers no theories about the name, but in the seventh the younger McArthur writes, "E.W. Coles of Haines told the compiler in 1973 that it was a rendition of a very old Indian name. He added he had once owned the

IF YOU'RE GOING

From downtown Haines, turn at the sign for Anthony Lakes and drive 1.7 miles to the first corner. Stay straight, then left on Pocahontas Road for a few hundred yards to a junction with South Rock Creek Road. Turn right (west, directly toward the Elkhorns) on South Rock Creek Road.

Follow this paved, two-lane road, which turns to well-graded gravel after about 3.5 miles. Continue west, uphill, into the mountains. The Killamacue trailhead is not marked, but it is about 2 miles from where the graded gravel ends. From there the road is rocky and rough, and best suited to four-wheel drive vehicles. The trail starts as an old roadbed that heads steeply to the right; the location is where the main road makes a sharp left turn and crosses Killamacue Creek. The old roadbed crosses an irrigation ditch and then continues for a few hundred yards to a flat area. The trail proper heads uphill to the right.

lake."

The man named in the book is Edward W. Coles, and he was the grandfather of Roger Coles of Baker City.

Roger Coles told me that his grandfather indeed did own the lake — or at least the rights to its water for irrigation, as the land surrounding the lake is part of the Willowa-Whitman National Forest. Roger Coles said his grandfather also helped to rebuild the dam at the lake's outlet after it was damaged by a landslide.

There is an outlet valve that allows irrigators to withdraw water from the lake when its level drops. Killamacue shrinks considerably by late summer. The water flows down Killamacue Creek and then into a ditch that starts near the creek's confluence with Rock Creek.

I've hiked to Killamacue Lake probably 20 times, most recently on June 22 when I was accompanied by my cousin, Ben Klecker.

The trail is in some ways the archetypal Elkhorn Mountains route. It is characteristic of trails in the range in attacking the terrain rather directly, mainly eschewing the grade-easing switchbacks that are ubiquitous on the horse-friendly paths across the Willows.

You'll ascend about 1,500 feet in a trifle over 3 miles, which makes for quite a challenging level of steepness.

The trail for the most part stays on the south side of Killamacue Creek, crossing the stream twice via wooden bridges. The route presents a lesson in the sometimes dramatic differences in vegetation in the Elkhorns between north-facing and south-facing slopes.

The trail generally is on north aspects, and the relatively cool, shady location is reflected in the trees — lots of tamaracks, which prefer such places — and a rather tangly undergrowth featuring a variety of wildflowers and shrubs, among them huckleberries which ought to ripen by late July.

Yet in areas where the canopy opens you can look north and see nearby slopes studded with sagebrush, a desert denizen that nonetheless grows in profusion in parts of the Elkhorns up to and sometimes above 8,000 feet elevation.

Although the trail is short enough for a day hike there is a large area suitable for camping near where the trail reaches the lake at its northeast corner.

The area is, if I may indulge in a bit of understatement, amenable to the production of mosquitoes.

As for the name, I have posed the question of its origin to officials from both the Umatilla and Nez Perce tribes. As of press time I hadn't received a response, but I will relate what, if anything, I find out in a later column.

If nothing else, I would be pleased to know how close to proper my pronunciation has been all these years.