

Sonoma Steelhead

"Downtown Fishing" Gets Results



THIS STEELHEAD WAS TAKEN FROM SONOMA CREEK last February by Doctor Wayne Craven, right, and marked his first kill on this particular breed. The creek is a tiny one but floods magnificently from time to time in wet years. Doctor Craven is shown here with August Sebastiani, owner of the Sebastiani winery in Sonoma, who is retrieving his bait from the

tule-lined creek. In the background can be seen the white line of the buildings marking downtown Sonoma. The debris in the center of the creek floats up and down with the tidal rise and fall and those experienced in fishing the area can tell from the rate of drift and the position of the mass what the fishing is likely to be like.

— Photo by Jenkins

By BILL JENKINS

Some time ago we mentioned that we had seen a real honest-to-goodness steelhead caught in Sonoma Creek, practically in the heart of the town of Sonoma. On a Sunday morning. Early.

Rummaging through the desk the other day, the old rollopp desk, we came across these pictures taken at the spot to prove it both to ourselves and to any scoffers we might run into along the way. These old rollopp desks are wonderful things, you know. All kinds of pigeon holes and little drawers and curious corners where you can put things and forget all about them.

I acquired this desk, an oak job much scuffed and worn, from Dick Eimers who is currently the chief of the Oregon Bureau of Associated Press. Dick had it sitting out in a garage adjunct that he wanted to turn into a darkroom. We were in the process of moving down here at the office and I needed a desk. As it turned out I ended up with two, the rollopp and a standard desk as well.

Dick got the desk as a present from his wife, Emma, who gave it to him so his New York City—he was living there then—den could be turned into an office.

I traded him a case of dinner wine for it. Drove up to Portland in the hunting pickup and hauled it down. Caught a miserable head cold doing it.

But, that has nothing to do with this fish that I saw caught. Or that I almost saw caught. To make a short story long enough to fill this space here's how it all happened:

We, my wife was along on the trip and so were Dick and Em Eimers, although the desk had nothing to do with this, had gone to Sonoma after the Oroville olive plant tour for a two-day holiday.

We were staying with our good friends Ted and Helen Dunlap at the Swiss Hotel there. This Ted is a real fisherman. Out almost every morning of the world as near as I can figure. Anyway, I had made a date to go with him the night before. In between learning a little about kangaroos from Tom Rooney.

This was in the cocktail bar at the hotel. You meet wonderful characters there. That's why we always recommend Sonoma for vacations. Tom is the proud owner of Sydney, the television kangaroo. Along with about 15 others, too.

Anyway, as I said before, I had this invitation to go along—and see the fun. So I was up bright and early. Ted overslept. I wandered all over Sonoma. Dick and Em took a bus home. My sister and her husband, who had joined us there, wandered off somewhere. Finally the late Mr. Dunlap showed up and we took off into the bright sun. This was along in February, right after the Red Bluff Bull Sale. We had started the trip there in

company with Fred Pope. Fred had come home instead of going south with us.

We drove a short distance out of town. So short that in the picture of the fish you can see the buildings of downtown Sonoma in the background. Parked the car and Ted put together his gear, a spinning rig with light tackle and a blob of eggs.

No action. So Ted wandered off down the canal while I fiddled with the cameras. He was soon back with the word that he had run into August Sebastiani, operator and owner of the big Sebastiani winery in Sonoma, and Doctor Wayne Craven. Craven had a fish. His first steelhead.

THE COVER

Summer wouldn't be summer if we couldn't look around us and see the green pastures full of Herefords here in the Basin. These animals posed for the photographer on the William Cunningham Ranch on the Lakeview Road.

As nearly as I can reconstruct the story the doctor had, like myself, gotten into the thing the night before and a party had been arranged. An amiable merchant opened his store that evening in order to provide a license and August and his guest were off at an early hour.

Sonoma Creek is a little stream that heads up in the hills above the town somewhere, wanders all over the landscape and finally empties into the ocean. The general appearance is much like that of a drainage ditch in our country. Deep, the banks lined with tules, crossed every so often by a bridge. Looks more like a duck stream than a fishing stream.

But the bottom is sandy and firm, there are pools gouged out where the tidal current bounces off banks and where sudden floods have scooped out hollows. Into these have fallen logs and other debris which makes for good fish conditions.

We went over to visit and see the fish. A nice, bright fish of about four pounds I should judge. Although I am not much of a judge where fish are concerned and I wouldn't want to be held to this estimate. I took some color pictures which faded out, due to some slight miscalculation on my part, no doubt. But the black and white pictures turned out alright. Miracles still happen.

There were a lot of fishermen

out that morning. I would judge that we saw fifty, more or less. But that was the only fish we saw, although we heard that a couple of youngsters had taken two nice ones just a bend or so down.

Fishermen are the same wherever you find them. They go out early, build a fire to keep warm, stand around with their hands in their pockets and trade yarns about all the fish they caught last week. And how they are going to really kill 'em later.

After a couple of hours of this sort of thing we gave up for the moment and went back to the hotel where we found the rest of the family and had breakfast in Ted's sample room.

He spent most of one winter building that sample room. A lovely thing with soft lights playing lovingly over the surface of thousands of bottles of wine representing almost all the wineries in the adjacent valleys. If you are ever down that way I suggest you ask him to show you the room. It is worth it.

Shortly after this we came home, had to put on chains at Redding and keep them on until we got to Weed, and I put the pictures back in a pigeon hole in that old desk.

But now I have found them and here they are. And I promise that I won't say anything more about Sonoma for a long, long time.