

In Search of the Triploid Rainbow Trout ,”Frankenfish”

by Betty Pfeifer

Triploid rainbow trout are genetically engineered fish. The fertilized trout eggs are treated with heat or pressure resulting in three chromosomes instead of the normal two. Since triploids are sterile, all their energy goes into body growth and over time they become trophy size fish. Because these fish have enormous bodies relative to their heads, we call them “Frankenfish”.

In the state of Washington, the Colville Indian Tribe raise triploid trout in pens in the Columbia River 20 miles up stream from Chief Joseph Dam. Downstream from the rearing pens was the destination for our triploid fishing adventure last July (2010). I was the only lady among three seasoned fly fishing anglers, my husband Keith, his fishing buddy of 40 years, John, and another friend, Scott. After an hour boat ride, we could see large trout swimming along the edge of the river. Everyone was excited with the anticipation of catching some of these gigantic trout. I was pretty nervous since I wanted to show the men that I could catch big fish too.

We fished for about two hours with no one getting any “hits” on our streamers. I was getting a lot of practice casting and stripping my olive green, bead head wooly bugger. Then I decided to twitch my fly at the end of the drift and BAM! A fish was on and WOW was he strong. John started coaching me. “Don’t touch the line. Let him run. Now reel in.” What a powerful fish! I wondered if my 5 wt. rod was enough to control this monster. After 15 minutes I got the fish closer to the boat. He was huge. “Keep his head up. Reel in!” shouted John. Finally, Scott netted the whopper! He was a triploid rainbow trout 24” long and 7-8 lbs. The biggest fish I ever caught!!! What a battle ! What fun!

After lunch we were back trolling when BAM!!!, another big fish was on my line. This fish was humongous! It was bigger and stronger than the first one. John shouted, “Holy cow, hold on!” The bend in my 5 wt. rod looked like a “U”. With this bad boy “bull dogging” my line, I kept trying to get his head up and get him close to the boat. After about 20 minutes with the guys cheering me on, I thought this brute was done, but with one last effort he jumped, twisted and flipped in the air. BOOM!! He broke the line and swam away with my wooly bugger. John and Scott said he was the biggest triploid they had ever seen in this part of the Columbia River. They guessed that he was around 12-14 pounds. What a fish!! What a battle!!

I lost one more smaller fish before we called it a day. I was very happy with my day of fishing for monster triploid trout. The guys didn’t have much success but said watching me battle those two BIG fish made their day. I was the MAN!! They said I could go fishing with them anytime!!!