

BOZEMAN PASSAGE

Your Guide To Everything BOZEMAN!



POLYODON SPATHULA: *Tales of the aquatic prehistoric creatures swimming our rivers.*

One of the best collections of dinosaur fossils in the world can be found in Bozeman, Montana at the Museum of the Rockies. The majority of this collection was found in Eastern Montana, as was *Polyodon Spathula*, an enormous fish with a long paddle for a snout.

Today, 17 miles North of Glendive, Montana is the Yellowstone Intake Diversion Dam, which contains one of the most unique fishing experiences in the world. Not to mention producer of caviar which igourmet.com says is "quite delectable; rich, robust and creamy with small silvery pearls". Given this is only a five-hour drive from Bozeman you need to make this trip as it's an experience you can't let pass you by.

I grew up in Eastern Montana and had eaten Paddlefish, or the descendants of *Polyodon Spathula*, many times. I had heard "the

tales" but still knew little about the process and had never been fishing for them. Recently, Kim Trangmoe, at the Glendive Chamber of Commerce, invited me to take part in Opening Weekend 2010. Doing so affords me the opportunity to provide you the information on Paddlefish, their ancestry, how to plan your trip, what it will entail, as well as information on how to buy a few ounces of Montana Caviar.

The Museum of the Rockies houses one of the most unique collections of prehistoric artifacts in the world. If you have been fortunate enough to see this, you are familiar with "Big Mike", Jack Horner and one of the largest finds discovered on the Wankel Ranch near Fort Peck Reservoir in Eastern Montana.

"You must snag them, and when you do, these 60-160 pound fish will give chase for well over an hour."

Also, found near Ft. Peck is a 60 million year old *Polyodon Spathula* specimen, maybe "Big Mike" was a sport fisher with his pole to be found when those glaciers finally melt and reveal their treasures? But it is evident that "Big Mike" was extinct before he had over fished the area, as *Polyodon Spathula*'s decedents, the modern Paddlefish, swim in the waters of Eastern Montana to this day. The Paddlefish is actually found in 22 states throughout the US and on the recently altered Yangtze River in China, the other primary location of prehistoric finds. Unfortunately, according to Dennis Scarnecchia, one of the leading researchers of Paddlefish populations, the Chinese Paddlefish has not been seen in three years, possibly due to the destruction of the free-flowing river they need to spawn.

They are found in numerous areas in the United States but from May 15th thru June 30th Glendive Montana is the place to be. The Missouri and Yellowstone populations found here travel from Lake Sacajawea in North Dakota, upstream to spawn, similar to a Salmon. They reach Glendive during the above dates to lay their eggs in the river where they hatch to travel downstream, back to Lake Sacajawea. Here males will mature for 8 to 10 years making the spawn run every one to two years, females mature for 16-18 years, spawning every two to three years. The oldest Paddlefish on record is 62 years old.

I drove five hours from Bozeman to Glendive (an alternative being to fly in to the Glendive Municipal Airport) and checked in to



my room at the Yellowstone River Inn (Phone: 406.377.4433). After driving north seventeen miles from Glendive on Highway Sixteen, I turned right at the Yellowstone Intake Diversion Dam to meet with Kim, Dennis and Daryl to sample caviar, learn about Paddlefish and how to catch them. I learned the equipment you need to fish is: several 8/0 or smaller treble hooks, 40-80 pound test line, an 8-12 foot surf rod, a heavy duty salt water spinning reel or star drag reel and a few 4-6 ounce weights. These can be purchased for around \$100, or rented by the hour from Badlands C & C at the Intake. As Daryl guided the boat around the river, he provided tactics like watching for pelicans moving to the sides of the river, meaning the schools of fish are moving out of the way of the coming swarms of Paddlefish.

Along the way the Paddlefish eats microscopic plankton, knocking it loose with its paddle or rostrum, so standard fishing techniques are ineffective. You must snag them, and when you do, these 60-160 pound fish will give chase for well over an hour.

When you finally get the beast ashore, take it to the facilities of the Glendive Chamber of Commerce where it will be weighed, measured, cleaned and filleted for you at no charge. If you are fortunate enough to catch a much larger female it is asked that you donate the eggs, or roe, so it can be processed into caviar in facilities in Glendive. From here it is shipped throughout the US and the world, half of it going to Japan. Revenue from sales is used to fund non-profits, improving fisheries and recreation in Eastern Montana and to research and maintain Paddlefish populations.

So set aside a weekend before June 30th to snag one of these peculiar fish. Contact the Glendive Chamber of Commerce (Phone: 406.377.5601) for help planning your trip and, while you have them on the phone, purchase a couple ounces of fine Montana Caviar for friends and family. Then, make the drive and build a truly one-of-a-kind fishing experience.

