Sorry so late

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The First Report of the White Sturgeon From Flathead Lake, Montana

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For the past several years in western Montana there have been various reports of "monsters" which were seen in different areas of Flathead Lake. Not until three or four years ago did the observers finally conclude that probably what they had been seeing were sturgeon. Evidence to support this conclusion apparently was obtained at 1:00 a.m. on May 28, 1955, at which time a Mr. C. Leslie Griffith landed a 92-inch white sturgeon, Acipenser transmontanus Richardson. Mr. Griffith's extensive fishing efforts were underwritten by Big Fish Unlimited, a committee set up for exploitation purposes and headed by J. F. McAlear of Polson, Montana. Although there was (and is) some question by the public in general as to whether this fish actually came from Flathead Lake, the authors have in their possession notarized affidavits from both Mr. Griffith and Mr. McAlear that the sturgeon was caught in Flathead Lake.

Regardless of the controversy as to the source of the fish, the authors thought it worth-while to publish certain measurements and other data which were taken from the fish. Although much work is being done on the white sturgeon by I. J. Donaldson, Fisheries Research Biologist of Bonneville Dam, in the Bonneville Dam area of Oregon, very little has been published to date on this interesting species. Sizes and "tentative" ages of a few fish were reported in an anonymous article in the Oregon State Game Commission Bulletin (1). Lengths and weights from historical records were presented by Gudger (2).

When the authors autopsied the sturgeon in question at 2:00 p.m. on May 28, the fish had already been eviscerated, but the viscera had been saved for study. The specimen was a male and had a total (live) weight of 181 pounds-1 ounce. The total length was 2.340 meters, the standard length 2.000 meters, and the fork length 2.146 meters. The greatest girth was 93.4 centimeters and the width directly behind the gills was 26.5 centimeters.

The number of plates varied slightly from that which is considered typical for the white sturgeon. There were 11 dorsal plates, 41 laterals and 5 ventro-laterals. It is doubtful that a sixth ventro-lateral plate was present.

Other measurements were taken in centimeters as follows:

Dorsal fin: base - 23.5, height - 16.8, distance from caudal - 15.1
Caudal fin: length, upper lobe - 39.0, lower lobe - 25.8
Anal fin: outer length - 24.2, length of base - 11.9
Pectoral fin: outer length - 27.6, length of base - 13.8
Distance from right mesial barbel to mouth - 10.5
Distance from right mesial barbel to nose tip - 11.0

The animal was aged by the conventional method of taking a cross-section of the main ray of the left pectoral fin close to the joint. The age was determined to be 27 ± 1 years

The fish was sexually mature and the testes were in an advanced stage of development. Although not entirely ripe, a milky secretion was present when they were cut open. The total weight of the testes was 7 pounds-12 ounces.

The stomach was empty, but some bones were found lodged in the wall of the intestine. These bones included some vertebrae (presumably perch) a cartilaginous laryngeal ring from some mammal and an opercular bone from Prosopium. The animal obviously had not eaten for some time.

The authors wish to thank Mr. McAlear and Mr. Griffith for the privilege of studying the sturgeon and, particularly, Mr. Roy Houberg for his preliminary examination of the fish.

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