

# The Old Time Humboldt River



The Flowers family with fish caught at Lower South Fork off bullion Road, museum archives photo

The Humboldt River, as it flows through Elko, is a nasty mess. It is easy to forget the river did not always look like this. Not too long ago, it was a thriving river, one that offered good fishing. Fishing the river was a popular pastime for Elko residents.

An emigrant traveling the California Trail in 1863 described Shoshone Indians near today's Elko. The Shoshone traded cutthroat trout to the emigrants, fish that were 18-24" in length. The Shoshone created rock dams across the Humboldt west of Elko, along with lower

Susie Creek, and the South Fork of the Humboldt. Every 2-4 days, they removed baskets of fish weighing up to two hundred pounds.

The *Elko Independent* in 1869 reported boys catching cutthroat trout in the Humboldt River near Carlin, using grasshopper bait. The boys carried large stringers of 5-8 pound fish. In 1897, the *Tuscarora Times-Review* reported a fishing trip on the North Fork of the Humboldt caught 328 trout, averaging over a pound each.

The Reese River *Reveille* recorded in 1868 “The Baron Brothers [a popular restaurant] ...Yesterday...bought the large lot of six hundred pounds of trout from the Humboldt [River], with which they propose to supply their tables daily.”

Much of Elko County was a good fishery in those days. Each year, Shoshone people traveled north to fish the Snake River drainage for salmon and steelhead trout. Salmon migrated each year from the Pacific Ocean into the Owyhee, Bruneau, Jarbidge and Salmon Falls drainages. One Indian band regularly fished the Jack Creek tributary on the west side of the Independence Mountains.

One of the reasons the Duck Valley Indian Reservation was placed at today’s Owyhee, was so the annual salmon runs would provide food for the native peoples. Only a few years after the creation of the reservation, the first dam went up on the Salmon River and stopped all future salmon runs.

Early settlers reporting catching salmon on Jerritt Creek and Marsh Creek, located along the east side of the Independence Mountains. The preferred method of capture in the small streams was a spear or pitchfork.

This historical content comes from George Gruell and Sherman Swanson’s book *Nevada’s Changing Wildlife Habitat* and a document named the Humboldt River Chronology.

April 2015

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