

The 1992 CH2M Fishing Trip

In memory of Archie H. Rice



Archie Rice, 1992

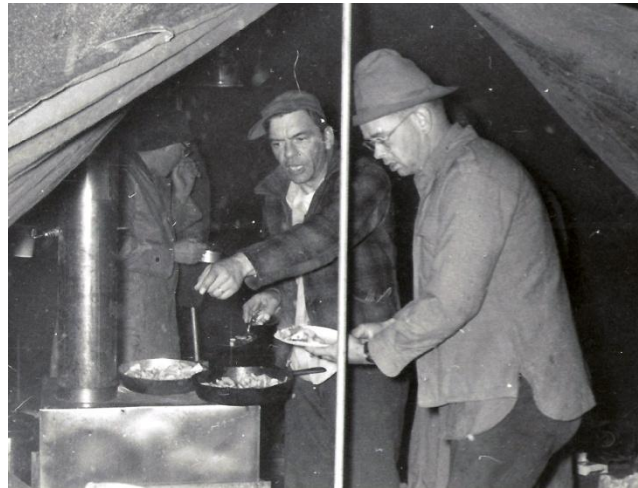
By Mac Stuart, 1992

THE LAST CH2M FIRM-SPONSORED FISHING TRIP

I read Archie's letter a couple of times, even though I knew the content weeks earlier. It was sad and I felt a certain amount of hostility toward those firm members who had to make the negative decision regarding continuation of the annual company-sponsored fishing trip. Simply put, the female faction of the firm wanted to be a part of a 40-plus year old, all-male outing. Management had, over the years, funded portions of the trip and this discrimination issue resulted in the cancellation of the event. Sad -- but true!

I remember the first year I attended the outing as if it were just last year. That was 1953 and now, 39 years later, on this particular Tuesday morning, two days after Fathers Day, Ken (Stuart), Archie and I were about to head over east to the mountain lakes and streams in search of the ever evasive lunker trout. Charlie (Shotts) would meet us at Sheeps Bridge campground sometime around noon. This would complete our advance party, and then -- on with the program.

Archie Rice, second tier of the company brass, started the annual program a couple years after the corporation got started in 1947. In those early years, it was a weekend trip to one of the coastal freshwater lakes. At that time most of the men in the organization, officer and employee alike, attended. The camaraderie was a real plus even though the partners always treated everyone as if they were a part of one big happy family with first name familiarization commonplace throughout.



Swede Nordquist and Archie - 1953



Charlie Shotts - 1959

Ken Stuart, with 40-plus years under his belt with the company, has been the designated chair-person (notice I said chair-person instead of chairman) for a good many years. He has seen to it that everyone has a voice in the planning, and above all, has a good time. He has been invaluable in his ability to work with people. He is, in addition to all his other attributes, my brother and best friend.

Charlie Shotts is another story. One of these days I'll try and put it all together if I can. He sort of inherited his role as "guide" for the annual event from Archie's college buddy, Horace Beene. Horace was a Crescent, Oregon box mill owner, premier fly-fisherman, and resident information source for the group. Horace passed away in 1969.

Charlie is the past general manager of the Gilchrist Lumber Co., one of the largest private lumber mills in central Oregon. The first time I met him he was "woods boss" in charge of the timber cutting crews for Gilchrist. He loves casting a long line, as we all do, but his lust at the poker table can only be summed up in one word---win!

As for me, I was endeared to the company for 20 very enjoyable years. Following that tenure, I was presented with a perpetual invitation to the annual corporate fishing trip. I have cherished and accepted that invitation every year since.



Charlie Shotts and Mac Stuart

That brings us up to date on the individual people in our party, though there are many others that participated in these trips and have contributed to its success.

Tuesday

This Tuesday morning was similar to the last couple beginnings. I was towing my 22-foot travel trailer and Archie was bringing the jet sled and his cartopper. I was to meet Archie and Ken in Pleasant Hill, the halfway point where we would stretch, coffee-up and then continue on to get to the Sheeps Bridge campground.

Sheeps Bridge was an undeveloped Forest Service area that has been the base camp for quite a few years. It is close to the water and spacious enough to accommodate our large group. Charlie, enjoying his recent retirement, was waiting for us when we drove into the campground. Thirty minutes later we had the trailer set up and we were "settled-in" for the week.

Notice I said "week", which is a far cry from the Saturday and Sunday period we enjoyed years ago. In the early years, the advance party would arrive mid Friday to rope out an area for the group which would arrive later that evening or early Saturday morning. For most, this is still the general time for arrival. For our group, the retirees, we have made a few "improvements."

Following our arrival, and after a leisurely lunch, we drove up to Gales Landing on Crane Prairie to check out the reservoir. The days prior to our arrival had been pretty windy and fishing was slow for the fly fishers, though some of the bait fishermen were connecting in the deep channel near the dam. We opted to return to Sheeps Bridge and check out the channel north of the campground. This area had produced some nice



**Dick Worthington, left,
Horace Beene, right - 1959**

Browns in past years and the reservoir level looked about right to give it a try. Ken and I took to the float tubes while Archie and Charlie manned the 18-foot "jet sled."

I couldn't resist tying on a green Montana with a 20-foot sinking tip line. It had been a deadly combination the last year or two and I was anxious to try it out again this year. The second cast dropped at the edge of the reeds and was almost an instantaneous strike. The aggressiveness of the attack indicated the big Browns were feeding and we were positioned for an evening of great fishing. Ten minutes later an 18 incher was hanging on the stringer. My luck stayed with me throughout the evening and I returned to camp with two fish over 17 inches and three at 12 inches. Archie, Ken and Charlie didn't fare quite as well but then tomorrow another will be another day.

Second only to the fly fishing was our evening poker game with Charlie being the main event. His nickname should be "make-it-a-quarter." When his turn arrives he almost always increases the bet by at least 25 cents. No matter what someone bets, he raises it a quarter. It makes things interesting! I have a problem playing with these pros, but then I haven't finished reading the fun-damentals yet. Maybe next year.

Wednesday

Wednesday morning we decided to go back to Gales Landing and give it a whirl. I launched the sled at the new ramp as Archie and Charlie struggled with the 13-foot car-topper. Not really much of a struggle when you have a motorized boat loader though. We headed straight for the Deschutes channel, a proven productive area with Rainbows to 10 pounds. It is a great habitat with many standing and fallen snags offering shelter for the big (and small) bows. The shallow 3 to 12 foot depth generally warmed enough by mid-morning to hatch the Caddis, May and Damsel larvae and provided the bows with a late breakfast.

A major hatch never did occur as we had hoped, so we picked up our anchor and motored down to the Cultus Channel, a few miles west. A lone fisherman was guarding the point where the channel meets the reservoir. Swirls of feeding fish surrounded him, all just out of casting range of the fly caster. I tied on a Hares ear while Ken was debating his choice.

Fish were bulging all around the boat with some in the lunker class. Unfortunately, it was calm with the water surface looking like a mirror. A slight riff would have helped, but then it's not often it all comes together at the same time. After two or three hours of changing patterns and locations we decided to pick up anchor and head back to camp. We hadn't touched a fish! We paid for moorage at the lodge and left the boats at Gales Landing.

Harry Teel planned to meet us in camp around two o'clock this afternoon. We had reservations at Lake In The Dunes for this evening and Thursday and we would all travel down together. Harry had recently sold his fly-fishing tackle shop in Sisters. He was an employee of the firm and a long time friend. His shop, and another, jointly leased the fishing rights to this area. The shops then offered daily fishing rights to the public for a moderate fee along with a guest house that would sleep six or seven people.



Harry Teel – 1957

Carved in the pumice floor of the eastern Oregon desert were three finger-shaped lakes fed by the gin-clear waters of an artesian well. All three lakes had been planted with rainbows some years ago and with the barbless hook and hook and release requirements, many of the fish range from four to eight pounds, with some even larger. Charlie caught one in the ten-pound class a few years earlier.

We arrived at the house about 4 PM in the middle of one of the desert downpours. The rains were a duplication of last year's trip, coming down so hard we had trouble seeing the lines on the road. After unloading our gear and selecting a bunk, we pulled on the Orvis neoprene waders and boots (Harry was an Orvis dealer), a raincoat and headed out to survey the situation. The winds were holding the fish down but Archie and Ken each connected on No. 1 Pond using a sinking tip line and a Hares ear nymph. Harry, Charlie and I were fishing Ponds No.2 and No.3, which were considerably shallower with somewhat less luck.

Evening closed in and we returned to the cabin for a libation, dinner and a game of chance or two. God! Where the heck did Charlie get all those quarters?

Thursday

It was early when I woke up Thursday morning. Even Archie was still quiet which was very unusual. I lay there fantasizing about the trophy I was going to catch. What pattern fly? Which pond? A dry line or a wet tip?

About that time Ken came down the ladder from the loft above heading for the john. He grunted something that was close to "good morning" and I grunted back.

It wasn't long until the group was assembled for breakfast and Ken was off on his "eggs Benedict" trip again. Poached eggs on toast with corned-beef hash, juice, and a breakfast sausage. Man, are we ever living!

After we finished the dishes, we suited up for the morning attack. Harry tied on a #14 or

#16 Comparadun, his favorite fly for this fishery. I still had a #16 Hares ear on a four-pound tippet on my line and decided to start that way even though I respected Harry's judgment. Harry and I have fished together for almost 40 years and I like to get in a punch or two even though I know his knowledge of the area far exceeds mine.

Harry and I headed for No. 3 Pond, Charlie to No. 2, and Ken and Archie roaming No. 1. Harry and I had a ball! We fished opposite sides of the pond casting toward each other with that competitive air you feel only in your subconscious. Both fly types were proving themselves and that was gratifying for both of us. The shallow depth of the lake and the Polaroid glasses allowed me to follow the fish and hopefully help in presenting the fly with the least disturbance. Though we landed and released seven or eight fish each that morning, none were in the lunker class. Two to two-and-a-half pounders were the maximum size we caught.

A rehash of the morning's events over lunch indicated that the No. 1 and No. 3 Ponds were producing today with the No. 2 Pond offering the least of the trio. A nap seemed to be in order for Ken and Archie. I think Ken could sleep standing up. Archie, on the other hand, has been having trouble with his hip and it looks like he may have to get some surgical help in the next year or so. Harry joined the ranks of the "Z" chasers too while Charlie and I climbed back into our waders for the afternoon attack. I headed for No. 1 Pond while Charlie walked east to No. 3.



Archie at Crane Prairie - 1983

Normally the afternoon winds on the desert were fairly strong, creating some casting problems. Today the winds were sporadic with periods of calm followed by light to moderate breezes. No. 1 Pond was the deepest of three and had a greater amount of sub-surface greenery which makes it harder to locate the fish though they have little problem in locating you.

As I approached the lake, I looked back to see Charlie crossing over the pumice ridge that divided the other two ponds. I stopped well back from the water's edge to scan the shoreline. Two swirls appeared close to the inlet channel on my right. Deciding not to chase these two, I continued to search the waters as I tied a #14 Blue Dun on my four-pound tippet. A couple of 17 inchers cruised by as I made a number of false casts to get my line in the air. The weight-forward line tugged at the rod as I shot it straight out in front of me. The fly slapped the water, indicative of a poor cast.

A light ruffle covered the lake and I was having trouble locating the fly. A swirl appeared in what was the approximate area of the Dun and I automatically raised the tip of the rod to set the hook. The line went taught and the rod started jumping in my hand as I worked to crank the excess line back and get the fish on-the-reel. He did a lot of head shaking as he made a bee-line for the outlet end of the lake stripping line into the

backing. After showing himself in jump after jump he slowed, turning back, and giving in slowly to the pressure of the rod. Ten minutes later I slid the exhausted red-sided bow into some bunchgrass at the water's edge. The fish was 20-plus inches, definitely in the 5-pound class. The barbless Dun slid out of his mouth easily as I held him in the water, gently moving him back and forth forcing water through his gills until he regained his strength. I released his tail and he slowly disappeared into the depths of the lake.

This was what it was all about! If I didn't catch another fish this trip I would be more than satisfied. That was not to happen however. The wind calmed and the water surface turned into a mirror, dimpled with concentric rings formed by the feeding fish. Casting to the feeders with these conditions required much more care in the presentation of the Dun than I was willing to exercise though I continued to chase each swirl that was within my casting range. Later the winds returned and a well placed cast connected with the twin of my earlier catch. It sure had been a day where the adrenalin flowed freely.



Archie at Lake in the Dunes - 1990

It was late afternoon when we gathered our gear and packed up for our return to Sheeps Bridge campground. Lake in the Dunes had been good to us another year. Archie rode part of the way back with Harry and Ken and I kept Charlie company, all the while trading stories of the day.

We gassed up in Lapine, saw Harry off, picked up a few groceries, had a chicken-fried steak and then headed back to Sheeps Bridge. By now, some of the other firm members would be showing up with their tents, campers, boats and trailers, all ready to compete in the big-fish and team contests. Contest rules have changed many times over the years, but only fish caught on Friday and Saturday could be entered in the competition. The faces of those participating have also changed to the point where Charlie and I recognize very few of them any more though there are some, like the four in our group, that wouldn't miss the trip for anything.

We noticed, as we pulled into camp, that many of the guys had arrived while we were gone. Ken hurriedly dismounted Charlie's van and made the rounds to see who was here and naturally to find out if anyone had caught any big ones. While Ken did his thing, Archie, Charlie, and I decided to partake of a libation and get out the cards before hitting the sack. We were well into the games before Ken returned.

He indicated most the guys had been fishing here in the channel though a few had gone up to Gales Landing. There were no lunkers in the catch but the numbers caught were encouraging. Inasmuch as the boats were at Gales Landing, we decided to give it a try in the morning even though it would probably be more productive in the channel.

Friday

It was frosty Friday morning as we loaded our gear into the boats. The wooden plank walkway to the boat slips was a little hazardous, but we got loaded up without any problems. Archie and Charlie were in the cartopper again today while Ken and I manned the sled.

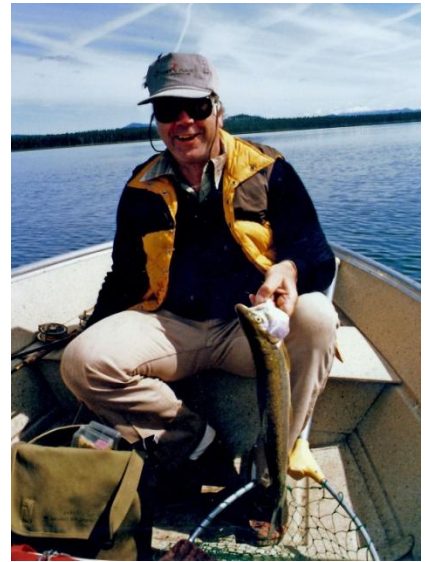
The fishing was great, but the catching was a duplication of a couple days earlier. We tried everything in our fly box but we never did connect with anything of size. Remember, these are the two days that we compete both teamwise and individually so, if it isn't over 12 inches today, it goes back to grow up.

It was noon when Ken and I decided to chase down Archie and Charlie. We were at Cultus Channel and we reasoned that they were back in the Deschutes Channel. Ken fired up the Mercury. It wouldn't come up to speed so we stopped and raked the weeds out of the suction grate. These jets are great on the big rivers but they can be temperamental in the shallows areas of a lake. Twenty minutes later we located Charlie and Archie where we had guessed they were and slid alongside the cartopper, tied up to it, and broke out a couple of beers while we complained about the lack of action. We ate lunch while we discussed a new game plan.

The consensus was to head back to camp and chase the big Browns in channel. So we packed it in and headed back to camp.

Later that afternoon Ken and I manned our float tubes and headed up channel to try for another Brown or two. Water conditions were close to perfect with a slight breeze providing a light riffle on the surface and Mayflies and Caddis hatching in the slack waters. We maneuvered our tubes into position to cast to the edge of the reeds and marsh grass. Ken had a green Woolly Buzzer on his line and I still had the Hares ear on that I had tied on while we were at the Cultus Channel. Ken hooked-up on the reeds on his first cast and drifted off to my left cursing the weeds. I dropped the Hare's Ear into all the likely looking areas I could but nothing happened. I looked back to see Ken's rod arched and twitching under the strain of a large fish.

The neat thing about a float tube is the ability to follow the action, and Ken was doing just that. Some minutes later he landed a beautiful 19-inch Brown. He smiles, as only Ken can, as he strung it on his stringer. It was a great evening with both of us more than satisfied with our catch even though Ken was the big winner tonight with two four pounders hanging on the stringer.



Ken Stuart at Davis Lake - 1986

Saturday

Saturday morning was one of those cold, windy, and rainy times that make you want to do absolutely nothing. Archie had us up at six anyway. He finished tucking his khaki shirt in his pants and reached over and swilled down a modicum of startin' fluid. "Mornin' A.H.", he said. Charlie was sleeping in his van, and Ken rolled him out on his way to the "house of the half-moon." We decided on a leisurely breakfast and wait out the rain. Ken fixed poached eggs (another annual event) while Archie made the toast for Ken's specialty. Here we are roughin' it, again.

In the early years we placed a three-and-a-half foot square piece of steel plate over an open fire and cooked fried eggs and pancakes for the whole camp. Over the years the plate sagged in the middle and made a perfect built-in bowl for scrambled eggs. I'm not sure what was more fun, but life in the trailer is definitely warmer and dryer than the tent was in the past.



Crane Prairie Rainbows

The sun broke out about ten o'clock and we loaded up the sled with the tubes and headed for the North Channel. Archie was giving Ken and me a bad time for taking so much getting time getting everything on board but that was sort of standard procedure. The four of us headed upstream and ten minutes later Archie drove the bow of the sled into the sand bank to let Ken and I dismount with our tubes. After a moment to relieve the kidneys, we headed for the opposite side of the channel.

May flies were starting to hatch and some fish were feeding along the edge of the weeds. I noticed a few Damsel nymphs wiggling near me as I maneuvered my tube into position. I tied on an olive Damsel nymph and moved back downstream toward a number of fish that were working around a stump.

After a half a dozen casts I connected with what felt to be a pretty nice sized fish. Archie saw the action and was filming the catch with his Sony camcorder. Unfortunately, the end result was a three pound carp, or "Channel Brown" as Archie called it. He too was also to land three of these beauties before day's end.

Ken picked up a 17 incher along with a few others in the 12 to 13 inch range. Charlie however chased one around the pond for at least a half hour before Archie tried to knock it off with the net. After a couple more tries, Archie scooped up a 26 inch, six-and-a-half pound German Brown. We felt it would be a sure winner for the big-fish prize at the bonfire ceremonies later tonight.

Ken wanted to make sure everything was in readiness for the steak fry and the campfire so we headed back to camp a little early. The barbeque pit was already dug and some of the guys were splitting wood for the campfire. When the Fish Committee showed up to measure our catch, Charlie was all puffed up as he pulled his big Brown out of the cooler. "Sure is a beauty, Charlie," one of the fellas said as he measured the fish. "It'll probably take second though. Jim McWade got an 8 pound Rainbow up at Gales Landing." Charlie just shrugged his shoulders and returned the fish to the cooler. "That's the way it goes", he said.



Archie Rice grilling the potatoes - 1960

Archie was making a tossed salad for dinner. The potatoes were baking in the oven and the ears of corn were in a pan ready to cook. It would be a little while before Ken would throw the steaks on so we sat down to see if Charlie would disgorge himself of some of his quarters. A little McNaughton's or Early Times was also in order.

A number of guys stopped by to see how we had done in the past few days and get a look at Charlie's fish. We traded stories while Ken went out to make the rounds of the group before he put the steaks on the barbeque. We continued playing three-handed poker though it's not exactly a great way to play poker.

The charcoal was glowing brightly when Ken placed four prime rib eyes on the open grate. Fire-lit, hungry faces lined the eight-foot long, steak covered grate as helping hands out of the darkness, salted, peppered and turned the slabs into golden-brown morsels. After cutting a slit in one the steaks, Ken decided they were medium-well done and removed them from the grate. Archie had just picked the potatoes out of the oven and was pouring the boiling water off the corn when Ken arrived with the steaks. As we filled our plates Archie finished sautéing the fresh Morrel mushrooms we had picked earlier that day near Crane Prairie. He spooned them onto each steak and sat down with a sigh. A meal fit for a king!



Ken Bielman grilling the steaks - 1960

Sometime around nine-thirty we all moved toward the large campfire, somewhat central to the camp, and greeted those we hadn't seen earlier. Ken called on the Prize Committee chairman to get things started and off we were. Sure enough, Charlie came in number two in the big-fish contest with Jim and his 8 pounder getting first prize. Team prizes and others were awarded before Ken finally stepped up to close the festivities.

He went back in time to talk about the beginnings of trip; its history; the people involved and finally to its originator, Archie Rice. Archie, hip hurting as he stood to address the group, stated that we were probably participating in the last of the firm-sponsored fishing trips. He indicated that he would discuss it further with management after we returned, but felt that it would, in his estimation, only be a formality. Thus, we were, with this trip, ending a tradition Archie had started some 40 years ago.

Though many of the participants of those early years no longer take part in the outing, it was disheartening to think that we would have to disband our group for the reasons offered. Many discussions followed as the light of the campfire dimmed.

Though we knew Archie's efforts to change the minds of management would be futile, the thought offered some hope to the contrary. A few weeks later Archie mailed a letter to all the fishermen of past trips indicating the outcome of his meeting. Though delicately stated, it said with conviction that we had indeed enjoyed the last of the firm-sponsored annual fishing trips. It was the end of an era and a wonderful relationship.