

# A n A r a v a i p a A d v e n t u r e

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by

B i l l E d w a r d s

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Mention Aravaipa to any Arizonan and you will immediately have their undivided attention. So, back in July, when Peter Unmack said he was organizing a NANFA outing to Aravaipa Creek, I signed up without hesitation.

Aravaipa Canyon is one of the prettiest spots in Arizona. It is a limited access wilderness area managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Nature Conservancy. It is located approximately 45 miles south of Globe in the heart of Arizona's copper mining territory. The drive alone—featuring mountain vistas, saguaro forests and riparian areas—is in itself worth the trip.

Although we would not be in the Canyon itself, our native fish experience was just one mile from the entrance to the Canyon on private land owned by Arizona State University Ullman Professor of Biology Philip Hedrick and his wife Kathy.

Our group consisted of Peter Unmack and Mike Baltzly (the pros); Phil (our host); Barbara Terkanian, Ray Cone, Rhonda Wilson and myself (the novices); and my wife Kate and daughter Emily (the tourists).

Peter and Mike provided all the equipment, permits and expertise. Shortly after gathering at Phil and Kathy's place, we headed for the creek. Aravaipa Creek is one of the few year-round desert streams in Arizona. As such, it is a wonderful place to see some of Arizona's native fishes. Indeed, it is the only place in Arizona where it is still possible to see seven native species in one place! The only Arizona native fish we didn't see was the speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus*).

Most of us had no previous experience seining and any preconceptions were immediately shattered. Seining

(at least with Peter) is an aerobic experience. We learned two basic methods, what I like to call the "shovel" and the "stampede."

In the "shovel" method, two people pick a likely spot to start. The net is stretched across the stream. The bottom of the net is flipped back, and with the poles extended in front, you charge down the stream keeping the bottom of the net as close to the creek bed as possible. Peter said the object was to move faster than the current. Sounds easy enough, but slippery rocks, unseen holes, and overhanging branches often prove difficult to negotiate. Falling down is a distinct possibility. Of course, Peter encouraged us to lift the net up if we thought we were falling. Can't be loosing any fish!

The "stampede" method is quite exciting (both to watch and to take part). In this method, two people manage a stationary net at a downstream position. The rest of the group lines up upstream. All at once they come stomping down the stream, splashing, flipping rocks and generally creating a ruckus! Kate said it reminded her of a "rabbit run" without the drums.

Native fishes netted included the Sonoran sucker (*Catostomus insignis*, Fig. 1), desert sucker (*Pantosteus clarki*), roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*), longfin dace (*Agosia chrysogaster*), loach minnow (*Tiaroga cobitis*, Fig. 2), and spikedace (*Meda fulgida*). The Sonoran suckers were the most abundant fish we encountered, and also the largest (several were around 10 inches). My favorite fishes were the loach minnow and the spikedace. Non-native species include yellow bullhead (*Ameiurus natalis*), red shiner (*Cyprinella lutrensis*) and "damnbusia" (*Gambusia affinis*).



**Fig. 1.** Sonoran sucker, *Catostomus insignis*. Photo by Mike Baltzly.

We clipped a small piece of caudal fin from 25 suckers and chubs and placed it in vials of alcohol. These fin clips were for Dr. Michael Douglas (ASU Department of Biology), who is undertaking population genetic work on roundtail chubs and Sonoran suckers using mitochondrial and nuclear DNA. The information he's collecting will help us understand population structure and perhaps identify unique populations.

Spending time in a beautiful setting with interesting people doing important work—what more could

one ask for? I'm sure we all would go back without hesitation.

Our thanks to Peter for organizing this trip. And a special "thank you" to Philip and Kathy Hedrick for their hospitality and assistance.

#### **Additional Thoughts**

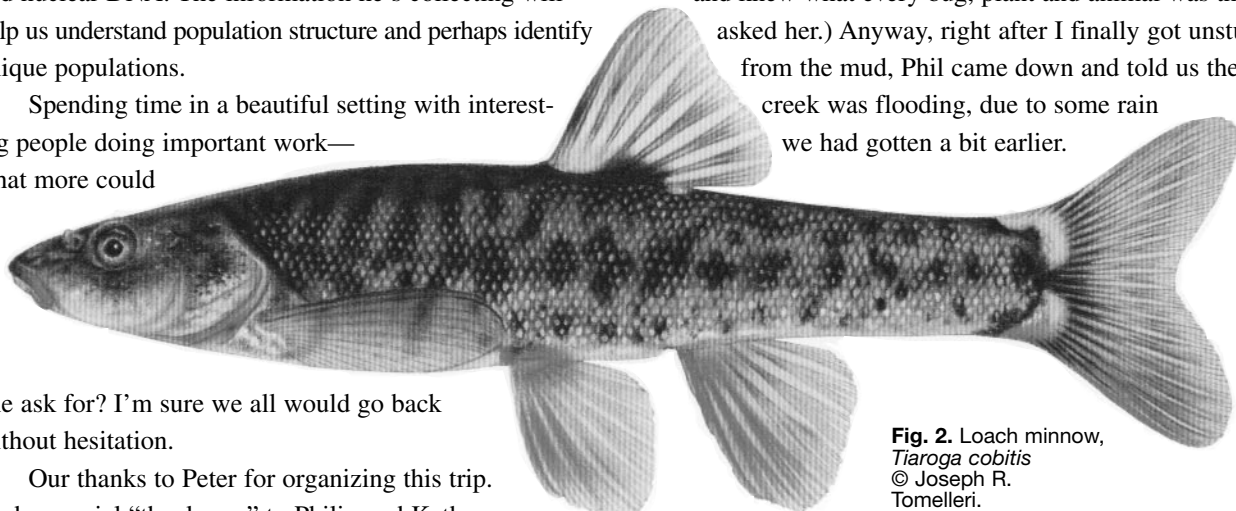
by Rhonda Wilson

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Ray and I drove up together, following Mike and Peter. They were obviously not watching what was going on outside their truck, because they missed a beautiful

herd of mountain sheep that Ray and I got to stop and see.

After the collection, a few of us stayed behind. I rode back with Mike and Peter and we stopped at one more spot so they could get some introduced fishes. Barbara stopped there also. (Barbara was a wealth of information and knew what every bug, plant and animal was that I asked her.) Anyway, right after I finally got unstuck from the mud, Phil came down and told us the creek was flooding, due to some rain we had gotten a bit earlier.



**Fig. 2.** Loach minnow, *Tiaroga cobitis*  
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Against my better judgment I ended up standing in the middle of the clear creek with Peter, Mike and Barbara as we watched the muddy water coming toward us. The water went from about a foot to probably a little over two feet. The guys took photos (I forgot to bring my camera, dang) as the water came toward us and got higher and faster, covering more and more of the land on either side of the creek.

All in all, a pretty memorable and exciting day.