

TOUCHET RIVER EXPEDITION IN SOUTHEASTERN WASHINGTON STATE

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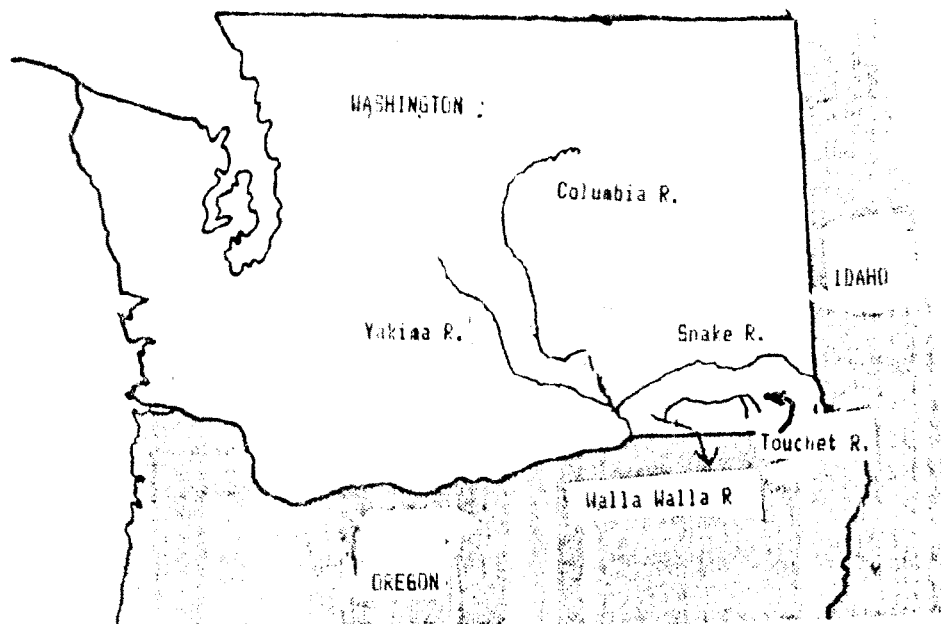
A really nice place to collect native fish is in the Touchet River in southeastern Washington. There is no great variety of species compared to the number found in the eastern United States, but what the river lacks in variety it makes up in numbers. The most common fish in the river, the Speckled Dace (Rhinichthys osculus) must number in the millions. Everywhere there are schools of them. There are also many other fish, but not in such great numbers.

The different fish that my friends and I collected last July were the Speckled Dace, Redside Shiner (Richardsonius balteatus), Northern Squawfish (Ptychocheilus oregonensis), Bridgelip Sucker (Catostomus columbianus), Chiselmouth (Acrocheilus alutaceus), a few Torrent Sculpins (Cottus rhotheus), and a Tadpole Madtom (Noturus gyrinus).

The Touchet River starts out in the mountains of southeastern Washington State and runs southwest to join the Walla Walla River. The Walla Walla then runs into the Columbia River a few miles from the Oregon-Washington border. In this desert region, winters are cold and summers are hot. The river thus becomes warm in summer.

The water is clear and visibility is good. We used masks and snorkeled downstream. We drifted past many large schools of fish. I managed to capture about 50 Speckled Dace, one madtom, eight Northern Squawfish, four Redside Shiners, and one sculpin. I let the sculpin go because I did not think it would make it for another eight days in the cooler. I did get all the other fish home live. The main task was keeping the cooler out of the sun. The water was also changed twice a day. On the way home, I used a small battery-powered air pump.

There are a great many subspecies of the Speckled Dace in Washington State. The dace near my home on the west side of the Cascade Mountains have a heavy black stripe on their side. As one travels east, the stripe seems to fade out. The Speckled Dace from the upper Touchet River seem to have almost no stripe at all, but their speckles are much more gold and lighter in color.



Some parts of the Touchet are treed with willows and poplars. Other places are barren except for some seductress. I like western Washington, but the desert in the eastern part of the state is a nice change sometimes. There are rolling hills with interesting rock formations and lots of brown grass and sagebrush. This is how it looked to me in late July on a nine-day trip collecting native fish.