

Vampire Steel

'TWILIGHT' FOR MANY METALHEADS COMES IN THE FORM OF THE DEADLY HATCHERY DRIFT ON THE BOGACHIEL BELOW FORKS.



FORKS, Wash.—Many times when taking off steelheading, I'll simply say I'm going to The Coast, The Peninsula, or Forks.

Most often it's because I really don't know which river – or rivers – I'm going to end up fishing. Be assured of one thing, though: When it comes to December, I will be on part of the Quillayute River system.

The Quilly, with its main tributaries, the Bogachiel, Sol Duc, Calawah, and Dickey rivers, drains the largest watershed on the north Olympic Peninsula. But more importantly, this translates into the largest run of hatchery steelhead that bombard Washington in the month of December.

For Seattleites, this means a long, three- to four-hour trek, and while that may seem like a bit much of a trip, especially for a one-day journey, history tells me I have a chance at multiple hookups on one of these rivers – sometimes double-digit days. A single hookup can be considered good on Seattle-area streams. Indeed, what's one of the most important rules of fishing? Fish where the fish are!

IT'S USUALLY AN EASY CHOICE picking which river to tackle – the Bogachiel, or Bogy.

Why? I consider it a two for one.

All the fish that are returning to the Calawah have to come up the Bogy

until it branches off at the confluence. Not only do we get to try and intercept those headed for the state hatchery on the Bogy itself, but we can double up on the Calawah fish.

So why not fish the Quillayute River then and get all the rivers in the system before branching off? Simple: The mainstem of the Quillayute is not designed for my type of fishing (though many anglers plunk at Richwine Bar), and most fish are just flying through until they get to the smaller bodies of water. Think of it as the Columbia and all of its tribs, but on a much smaller scale.

Since these are hatchery fish and it is December, it's a no-brainer as to where to target: from The Ponds down.

For bankies, which I generally am, I start at the state hatchery at the end of Bogachiel Way west of Forks and work my way down to the confluence of the Calawah. Lots of fantastic bank access here. From the Bogy it's usually drift fishing your normal gear (eggs, Corkies, pink worms). It's actually very good drift fishing water. From that point I'll either work my way back up the hatchery, or change gears and go over to the Calawah. Personally I like the Calawah better for bank fishing because it's suited more for float and jig, my favorite. On the Calawah the fish will hold throughout the short stretch from the confluence to the hatchery, bank to bank. Some decent water for drift fishing, but





1. Hatchery Drift This stretch gets crowds for one reason: It holds fish! They hold in the fast water in the upper portion of this drift, especially in low water. The tailout and the rocks below it hold fish in all but the lowest of flows.

Generally drift fishing and float fishing are the only two means of fishing this run, as crowds usually make plugging impossible.

2. Calawah Confluence Best if fished from the south bank. Fish hold in the heavy flows all the way across this drift.

Drift fishing is typically the best way to approach this run. (If bank fishing the Calawah itself, float fishing offers the best method from the confluence up to the hatchery.)

3. Tall Timbers This spot is located just below the Calawah confluence. Traveling fish will hold along the entire stretch of gravel bar on the north side of the river and in the deeper water along the cut bank on the south side.

Bank anglers working the gravel bar score by drift fishing eggs or shrimp with either a Corky, Puff Ball, or rag if the water is up.

Back-trolling plugs and bait divers, and float fishing will take fish on the south side of the drift. Once again, if the fish are in, expect some traffic in this run.

4. Crescent Hole Pulling plugs and float fishing the upper portion of this run will draw strikes, and from the point on down is excellent drift fishing water. The hole's tailout on the north side is great plugging water as well.

5. Ice Box This hole is located at the cut bank on the corner below Crescent. The upper portion of this run holds fish in low to medium flows, and fish will hold on the cut bank from the creek into the tailout in any flow.

Drift fishing works great in the upper portion of this run while back-trolling plugs and bait divers takes fish along the cut bank.

The tailout is ideal water for float fishing. "I could fish the tailout with a bobber all day and hook fish when they're in," says guide Mike Zavadlov. "It's the absolute perfect water for float fishing."

6. Hundley Flats A small rapid separates this from the Ice Box. Fish hold throughout this entire run. In medium to high flows, both the north and south shores will hold fish and the tailout on the south side is excellent in all but the lowest of flows.

Cover this run best by drift fishing.

7. Mary Lou The river plows into a rock wall on the north side, forming this deep pool. In low flows, fish will hold in the heavy current along the wall at the top of the run. Back-trolling plugs along the rock wall and into the tailout takes fish, as does drift fishing the broad, deep tailout.

8. Goodman Mainline In high flows, plunkers score big on the gravel bar on the north side of the river. As waters recede fish will hold under the bridge on the south side and along the entire south bank to the tailout. Bait divers and plugs work well here if the plunkers don't have all the access. Make sure and give them some room so you don't have lead thrown at you.

this water is ideal for float and jig. Many times the fish will be holding in the boulders you can see just a few feet off the shore.

WANT MULTIPLE hookups? Stupid question. Your best bet is to drift the Bogy.

Mike Zavadlov of Mike Z's Guide Service (360-640-8109) agrees: "The Bogy is a December river. If you want numbers, that's where you go."

He suggests concentrating on the tailouts.

"The fish tend to stack in the tailout of each hole before moving up to the next section of holding water," Zav says.

Because these are hatchery-bound fish, the Hatchery Drift is your only real choice of a float. Launch at the rearing ponds and take out at either Wilson's Bridge, at the end of Wilson Road, or Leyendecker Park, at the confluence with the Sol Duc.

From the top of the hatchery drift to Wilson's is only 3.4 miles, but is cramp-packed full of fish waiting for your offering (also cramp-packed full of fishermen).

To cover more water, Leyendecker is another 5.0 miles downstream. Neither are a long drift, but there's a hole on every corner.

And while we've all heard the horror stories of boats going down on coastal streams, the Hatchery Drift is probably the easiest and least technical. That said, any river should be considered dangerous and safety should always be your No. 1 concern.

With any river it's not a bad idea to hire a qualified guide the first time out to show you the river and how to fish it. I highly recommend Mike Z.

AT LEFT IS A step-by-step introduction to each of the holes down the drift. My suggestion for methods used is only that, a suggestion. I've fished side by side with others when one will be drift fishing and the other float fishing. You never know which method the fish are looking for on some days. If it works, keep to it. If what you're using isn't, switch up. **-Terry Wiest**