

Fly Fishing the Legendary North Umpqua for Steelhead

With Joe Howell

D. Roger Maves: [00:00:00] Welcome to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, your source for learning more about fly fishing in cold water, warm water, and saltwater. Hello, I'm Roger Maves, your host for tonight's show. On this broadcast, we'll be featuring Joe Howell, and he'll be answering your questions on Fly Fishing the Legendary North Umpqua for Steelhead.

This show will be 90 minutes in length, and we're broadcasting live over the internet. If you'd like to ask Joe a question, just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and use the Q&A text box to send us your question. We'll receive your question immediately, and we'll try to answer as many of them as possible on the show tonight.

And while you're there, make sure you sign up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future live broadcasts. Just fill out the form on the right side of our homepage, and we'll let you know when the next live show will be. This broadcast is being recorded and will be available for playback on our website about 48 hours after the show ends.

You can also find it on any of the podcast sites like Apple Podcasts, [00:01:00] Spotify, Pocket Casts, or wherever you listen to your podcasts. So if you have to leave early, you can return to our website or any of the podcast platforms at your convenience and listen to the recording at any time. If you're out and about on Facebook, Instagram, or X, we'd sure appreciate it if you could share our podcasts.

And when you do, use #askaboutflyfishing and #flyfishing. If, in fact, you have a moment and wouldn't mind doing that right now, we'd really appreciate it. The content of this broadcast is copyrighted, and it's the property of The Knowledge Group Inc., doing business as Ask About Fly Fishing. When we return, we'll be talking with Joe Howell about Fly Fishing the Legendary North Umpqua for Steelhead.

Fly Fishers International needs your support. Its conservation projects at both the national and club level are addressing critical issues of importance to fly fishers. The organization provides grants to help with the restoration of habitats like Wolf Creek in Idaho and Sands Creek in Delaware County, New York, and funds projects that collect [00:02:00] valuable data about fish and their habitats, like the Peacock Bass Study in Miami, Florida.

FFI serves as a strong advocate for fly fishing in all waters for all fish to preserve and to promote the arts of fly casting and fly tying, and to help ensure future generations can continue to enjoy these one-of-a-kind experiences. These efforts won't be nearly as effective without your help. If you're not already a member, we invite you to join Fly Fishers International as they work to cultivate conservation, education, and community within the sport of fly fishing.

Join Fly Fishers International today and help support their fine work. For more information, go to their website at flyfishersinternational.org. Again, that's flyfishersinternational.org. Before we introduce Joe, we'd like to let you know about the great prizes we have to give away tonight. For our

drawing tonight, we'll be giving away a one-year membership to Fly Fishers International and a one-year membership to Trout Unlimited. [00:03:00]

Now, if you haven't registered yet for the drawing, you can do so now. Just go to our homepage, which is at askaboutflyfishing.com, and look for the link under tonight's section that says register for our free drawing. Click on that link and fill out the form, and we'll announce the winners at the end of the show.

We will also be giving away a copy of Joe's book, *Fly Fishing Guide to the North Umpqua*, courtesy of Stackpole Books. Now, to find out more about what Stackpole has to offer, you can go to stackpolebooks.com and see all the publications they have on fly fishing and other subjects as well. We also have a link to Joe's book on the homepage tonight, so if you wanna take a look there, you can, uh, take a look there as well.

Now, here's how you can win. You must be the first person to answer the question I ask at the end of the show. The question will be about something that Joe and I talk about during the show, and you must submit your answer along with your name and location in the text box on our homepage. So listen closely, use your best typing [00:04:00] skills, take notes, type fast, and maybe you'll be the proud winner of Joe's book, *Fly Fishing Guide to the North Umpqua*.

Tonight our guest is Joe Howell. The North Umpqua has been Joe's passion since he first fished it when he was eight years old. He had the privilege of living on this river with his wife for 45 years. He enjoyed sharing his love of fly fishing through 30 years of guiding, and by owning the Blue Heron Fly Shop. During that time, he created many new steelhead fly patterns.

Though now retired, he is still active in the fly fishing community, and enjoys coming up with creative patterns and sharing them with other fly fishermen. He is a contract tyer for Umpqua Feather Merchants, where his Starlite Leech, Joe's Prawn, Coon Muddler, and Tiger Paw are produced and sold commercially.

The Starlite Leech can still be found in many of the fly shops, and it's one of the most copied and productive patterns for steelhead and salmon. [00:05:00] He received the Oregon Council of the Federation of Fly Fishermen's Fly Tyer of the Year award in 1992.

Joe, welcome to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio.

Joe Howell: Well, thank you for having me.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, good to have you, and talk about steelhead, the, uh, those hard to catch little buggers, right?

Joe Howell: They are hard to catch, and I always tell people, "You mean there's another type of fish?"

D. Roger Maves: Oh, gosh.

Joe Howell: And I fish a lot of different streams.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, boy.

Joe Howell: Anyway, yeah, that's been my passion, steelhead.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. Well, your relationship with the North Umpqua began during family trout fishing trips. What do you remember about those first encounters with the river, and how did they affect you?

Joe Howell: Well, I was right around eight years old when I first started coming up with my folks and my aunt and uncle. And after Idlewild Park, right [00:06:00] around area of where Baker Park is now, there on up it was still gravel road.

And up past Steamboat was still gravel road. I remember sections above the upper river that was just dirt road, and they still had bulldozers pushing dirt and rocks into the water, which of course they couldn't do today. But, so those are some of my earliest memories, and I was tying primarily trout flies.

I remember my first 15-inch trout, which was the biggest trout I'd ever caught at that time, from a... I think I was, like, 11 or 12- I'd gotten a Boy Scout fly tying kit for my birthday, for my 11th birthday, and it was a wonderful gift. I didn't realize that there was such a thing as hackle size or a certain hook or anything like that, [00:07:00] or proportions.

Anyway, I had tied this bright blue chenille woolly worm with a size two badger hackle palmered on, and caught that 15-inch trout on that ugly old stringy fly. So that's some of my first memories of, the trout fishing and ...

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Well, what began your fascination with steelhead then?

Joe Howell: Oh, I was, uh, 14 or 15, still going upriver. My dad was a, drove a log truck for 33 years, and when he was up on North Umpqua in the summer months, I would often have him drop me off at Steamboat, and he'd pick me up on his third and last trip down the mountain. And he'd come tooting his horn, and I'd scramble up the bank. I'd have to be in a certain area-

D. Roger Maves: Oh

Joe Howell: At a certain time. And if I missed that, I slept in the bushes, you know, but I never missed the ride home. But, [00:08:00] I remember the first real encounter with steelhead, and it wasn't even on my line. My brother and I had gone up and had been dropped off, and we'd been fishing that day, and we were out at the station pool from the roadside, and narrow little slot.

And this guy comes wading across from the trail side, obviously that we were there, but I didn't know anything about fishing etiquette in those days. Obviously, he didn't either. But anyway, he made a few casts literally right at my feet, and a few feet down, he hooks this steelhead, and it arched skyward in a big arching...

It looked enormous, but now I realize it was probably about eight pounds, and, uh, just, uh, all silver against the blue sky. That's the day I was hooked. I went, "I'm gonna have to leave the trout flies home and just carry steelhead flies if I wanna catch them."

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Is it North Umpqua is known more for steelhead than [00:09:00] trout fishing, but trout fishing is available there as well?

Joe Howell: Yeah, trout fishing is available. It's all-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: Catch and release wild trout fishery. And there's a few hardcore trout fishermen that climb up and down the banks. The, the river's a lot of very steep banks, and so when I was guiding, I used to tell people it was a young man's river, and how little I was writing my own future, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Right. Right.

Joe Howell: There's places I'd love to go down, but they're just too big of boulders and too steep, and can't wade well anymore, so- But I have a lot of memories and that's a good thing.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. How did, uh... You started tying your own steelhead flies, right? And did that deepen your fascination with steelhead did it-

Joe Howell: Well, it- ...

D. Roger Maves: Connect you closer or?

Joe Howell: Yeah, it did. About that time when I was, I guess I was around 14 or so, I met a adult, I never knew his name. He was just like a forest service type that [00:10:00] wore khaki shirt and khaki pants and a khaki hat, and had snow white hair. That's all I remember about him. But always really friendly, and the first time I met him was at the Mott Bridge. I was looking over the bridge like everybody does to see if there were any steelhead down in the pool, and he starts talking about flies. And I said, "Well, all I have is a bunch of these trout flies that are big enough." He said, "No, you need something like this," and he pulls out this box of, it was a metal fly box, Wheatley I think it was, and he opened that thing up and, and he had a little plastic box full of flies also.

I never saw so many colors and sparkle silver tinsel and, and much larger hooks. They were tied on sixes and fours and twos. And he said, "This is what you need for steelhead." And I bought some bigger hooks when I got home. And started tying steelhead flies. It's kind of my [00:11:00] first introduction. Had several encounters with bad tackle and no fish to the beach for- Oh, I imagine a couple of years.

Had loops of line wrapped around my reel and my, uh, reel butt, and of course the line would straighten and you lost another one, you know? But I slowly learned. I got a better reel, one with a drag, and gosh, I think that first Pflueger 9500 I think it was, it was, uh, it was a lot of money to me. It was \$10.95.

D. Roger Maves: \$10.95 .

Joe Howell: Yeah. And those-

D. Roger Maves: Boy, you... I wish you could buy one today for that, right?

Joe Howell: Yeah, right. Yeah. Used market, they're like 50 bucks for a good one.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: If, if it's a US one, not the offshore one. And so then I started, [00:12:00] uh, landing a few steelhead. But the first effects of the hatchery program hadn't really taken effect until I was in high school, about, oh, I guess I was a junior in high school, and my buddies would come up fishing. There'd usually be two, three, four of us. Way too many on a one pool river type of deal. But we didn't catch a lot of steelhead. We had a lot of fun and learned a lot, and it was just a good time to be learning, you know, something-

D. Roger Maves: Uh-huh ...

Joe Howell: Totally different.

D. Roger Maves: Were you learning just on your own or did you have a mentor of some kind?

Joe Howell: No, we just-

D. Roger Maves: Someone?

Joe Howell: Uh, w- we learned, uh, trial and error, and-

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm ...

Joe Howell: Started seeing where other fishermen were fishing, you know, that we're known steelhead fishermen. There weren't a whole lot of regular steelhead fishermen. Most of them are trout fishermen in those days, because they used [00:13:00] to plant the, uh, the river heavily with trout, which they haven't done for 30 years.

But it was a trial and error thing, and we just started-

D. Roger Maves: Wow ...

Joe Howell: looking fish, where we saw other people fishing for them, and so we knew there were just certain lies and certain waters that they favored. There was one old guy, Frank Burg, who took a liking to us, and he'd pull over and he'd watch, and we'd come up and he'd talk to us, and he'd say, "Oh, you always do that. You know, this pool might be better this time of year. The water's too thin here, or it's too fast," or whatever.

And so he was, if there was a mentor, he helped, even though it was-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: Uh, hit and miss. But-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: Most of the other old-timers, they wouldn't give us the time of day, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Oh, wow. Oh.

Joe Howell: It's just the way steelhead fishermen are, even today.

You ask them what fly they caught the fish on, it's like, you know, "What do you need to know [00:14:00] that for?" You know? So I, I made a decision, and I told Dale one time when we went into, uh, Steamboat Inn, when Frank Morso owned it, and there was a couple of guys who we knew by name, older gentlemen, and when we walked up, he grabbed his rod and put his hand over his fly.

Well, we could clearly see it was a skunk fly. You know, it's, there aren't that many black and white type flies. So I told Dale, I said, "If I ever learn this game, I'm gonna help anybody that wants help." So that's kind of where we got our start, and we've always kind of been that way.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. Let's talk about the history of the river a little bit.

How did it become one of America's most historically important steelhead rivers?

Joe Howell: Well, it was, I believe it was one of the first one, because it was one of the first ones that was set aside to protect, [00:15:00] uh, well, there was 31 miles of river set aside for fly fishing only, and it wasn't primarily at first for the steelhead.

They had closed it to protect the salmon run, and, but salmon just don't take flies readily at all that far inland. And they're dark and they're black by the time they, you know, summer rolls around. But the steelhead benefited from it, and, uh, oh, the steelhead fishing from, uh, Steamboat Inn, it had a regular clientele that gradually built up over the years.

Before that, it was Clarence Gordon's North Umpqua Lodge on the opposite side of the river, which the Forest Service canceled his lease, and they, he had to rebuild where the current Steamboat Inn is now. And he hel- he ran that as Steamboat Store for a few years [00:16:00] during all the road building years. And then Frank Moore bought it, Steamboat Inn, from, uh, I don't know, 1957, and it kind of took off from there as a destination Well, it's, it's, uh...

I think it was just because it was first set aside as a, a first fly fishing-

D. Roger Maves: Hmm ...

Joe Howell: Area that held steelhead.

D. Roger Maves: Well, what were some of the pioneers that fished the river, and what influence did they have on, on other anglers in the traditions that continue today?

Joe Howell: Well, Zane Grey visited the river for three summers until he had a stroke, and he couldn't return. But he favored that above the Rogue, which had been one of his favorites. But he, you know, he was, by today's money, he'd been a billionaire.

D. Roger Maves: Mm.

Joe Howell: So he, he fished all over the world. But he came to the Umpqua for two months a summer, [00:17:00] brought his whole entourage, secretaries, cooks, camp, everything.

D. Roger Maves: Hmm.

Joe Howell: But the real pioneers were people like Fred Burnham, and I think his name was Bill Coleman.

Can't remember his, if Bill was his right first name. There's a pool named after him. And then the Krobels, who I fished with, they f- they were probably in their 30s at the time, I would think. They were guiding in that Steamboat area, because the road was not built along the river at that time. It was high above the river, and it ended at Steamboat Creek, where there was a ranger station, or a guard station really, just a small building.

And so it was, uh, that's the only access. The boat pool got its name because they put canoes and small boats to ferry the people over to the camp area [00:18:00] until, I think Mock Bridge was completed in 1926. But then the road didn't go much past that other than being called the Umpqua Truck Road, which no public access was allowed through the road building back in the '30s.

I've never read that, that it was.

D. Roger Maves: So did Zane Grey's appearance bring more fly fishers into the area? I mean, was that-

Joe Howell: No, he was pretty closed mouth. No? He was, uh-

D. Roger Maves: Oh.

Joe Howell: He never talked... He talked about the Rogue and other places, but it wasn't till after he quit coming that he did a little writing about it.

So it was, he didn't want people coming to the North Umpqua.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: He wanted to keep it as pristine-

D. Roger Maves: Keep it for himself.

Joe Howell: Well, possibly, you know, but there was that. He unfortunately hired guides to [00:19:00] hold certain pools that he wanted to fish that day, and they would stop any angler approaching it and say, "Well, you can't fish this. Mr. Grey is gonna fish this later on."

D. Roger Maves: Oh, geez.

Joe Howell: So, so locally he wasn't, he wasn't well-liked. He was a good writer and all that stuff and... But that's the local lore, that's the local history of that.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, one thing I thought was in, 'cause I don't think I've seen another book like yours where you're going through almost every pool and riffle and everything in the, you know, a- along the river, and identifying them.

And I guess as I understood from your book, many of these pools were named back in the '20s, '30s, '40s, but the origins of some of the names have been lost, and by your book, you're trying to preserve some of those, right? Um,

Joe Howell: Exactly, and that's-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: Part of the reason, you know? It was, uh, oh, it was that. [00:20:00] I mean, I would have loved to have read stuff written by Clarence Gordon, who owned the first North Umpqua Lodge.

And Ray Bergman did write a, a small chapter on the North Umpqua in his book Trout in 1938, when Clarence Gordon had invited him out to fish, and he came out two different summers. But it's in like in a Model T, and you break down a lot, and just carry extra tires, and it was a long, long trek from the East Coast to, to where he was going, so they usually stayed for a month as far as I understand.

And he caught steelhead, and his early writings about that, uh, is really about the only thing out there where... But he, they were pretty much confined with fishing the camp water, an area still known as the camp water. That's where the main fishing camps were. It was, uh, [00:21:00] it held an interest of mine. It was like one of two, three books that were, had anything about the North Umpqua River when I was 14, 15 years old.

The first one was Stan Fleet's book, Steelhead to a Fly in 1950. It was published in 1950, but it was a generic, this is the river, and this is the place you go in general, and these are a couple of my favorite flies, and you should probably fish on your own because the guides want \$20 a day, and at best all they can do is show you, show you where to go, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah.

Joe Howell: Well, that's enormous on any river, is access trails and where to fish a run, where not to waste your time. So-

D. Roger Maves: So the camping-

Joe Howell: There was a... Those, those three books were almost that and, uh, Claude Kreider's.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: It just wasn't anything, [00:22:00] and, um-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: I don't think there is anything out there that has a pool by pool-

D. Roger Maves: Right

Joe Howell: Situation. Uh, it... I wanted to preserve the names when I... I might be jumping ahead of the question too, but-

D. Roger Maves: That's all right ...

Joe Howell: When, when I had the shop, I, uh, guys would come in all summer long year after year. "Well, you know," keep their excitement built up, and, "What flies you catching on? Where'd you c- Well, I don't know, but, uh, we called it Face Rock or Top Hat Rock or The Wall."

And I went, "Gee, I've never heard of any of those names," you know? So once they described where they were camping and how far up they were, I said, "Oh, that's Riprap Point." "Oh, that's what that's called." They'd make a notation in their notebook. About one in 20, you know? When I guided, I tried to get people to keep notes so they would remember.

There's only one in 50 that did.[00:23:00]

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah.

Joe Howell: But, you know, it was good for business because they came back to ask me where-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ... where that place- Where's that place again?

Joe Howell: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: So.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, now you had said that camp water, it was at the center of the river's early fishing camps-

Joe Howell: In the early fishing, there, there was a place down by Susan Creek where the Boundary Road took off, and that put you into the North Umpqua Road proper before they built the highway.

It was the old Circle H Ranch, and that burned down way before my time. But they would fish those waters that they could walk to from the lodge, uh, through, you know, I guess it was maybe a half a dozen, maybe eight areas, depending on how far you wanted to brush walk it and go down the river from that lodge.

But it was just foot... You know, rough foot trails, game trails really.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah.

Joe Howell: And that side of the river had lots of poison oak, uh, still [00:24:00] does, so I don't frequent it much.

D. Roger Maves: So when you say fishing camps back then, are these-

Joe Howell: Well, this, this was actual- ...

D. Roger Maves: great places where people camped, or were they-

Joe Howell: No, they... well, Steamboat was a fishing camp until Clarence Gordon built the first North Umpqua Lodge, and he had it, ran it for a few years. And the only thing that remains of that today are a few archival black-and-white pictures, you know. But the Forest Service wanted that for a ranger station, that land, and so he moved over to Maple Ridge, which is just a promontory of hard, hard basalt rock.

So they had to actually find a spring on the other side of the river, lay a inch and a quarter cable, and attach a water line to get water to it, you know. It was a big ordeal.

D. Roger Maves: Hmm. So when you say camps, the [00:25:00] camps are like tent camps, places for people to camp? I mean, are, or were they-

Joe Howell: They were, they were rus- rustic and unimproved.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: So you, about any flat place that you could clear would be a camp, you know.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Okay. All right.

Joe Howell: Sometimes there was an area much bigger than just for a tent, uh-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: Campfire or something.

D. Roger Maves: Right. Right.

Joe Howell: Right there at the boat pool proper above on that, that was the largest flat area. There were several camp areas there.

And before... Oh gosh, I had his name in the top of my head, now I forgot it. Before Gordon, there was a... Major Mott had a, a guide who I can't remember his name. He was a camp cook, kind of a... He kinda did everything for him. Major Mott had, as far as I'm aware, had the first actual tent [00:26:00] camp, and it was for the rustic standards, it was pretty nice. It wasn't a dirt floor. It had wood platforms built up, roll the carpet out, and the bed on a wooden platform, and then they put the tent, a large wall tent, on the wooden platform.

And I've seen photographs of that -

D. Roger Maves: Hmm ...

Joe Howell: All black and white.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: And Major Mott was first, and then Clarence Gordon was second, and Frank Moore was third.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Okay.

Joe Howell: And then it's then Jim Van Loan, and then the, um, the folks that have it now. But, so it hasn't had a lot of owners or anything like that.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. Okay, time for us to take a quick break here, Joe. Hang on and I'll be right back, and we'll talk more about Fly Fishing the Legendary North Umpqua River for Steelhead.

Joe Howell: Okay.

D. Roger Maves: The Ugly Bug Fly Shop in Casper, Wyoming has been serving fly fishers in [00:27:00] Wyoming and around the world since 1983. The selection of top of the line gear and a huge assortment of flies is one of the best in the land. All products are available in their fly shop and online. Looking for advice? Just give them a call and their expert professional staff will help you with whatever you need.

Visit the Ugly Bug Fly Shop today at uglybugflyshop.com or call them at [866] 845-9284. Again, it's the uglybugflyshop.com or call them at [866] 845-9284.

You're listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, and we're talking with Joe Howell about Fly Fishing the Legendary North Umpqua River for Steelhead.

If you'd like to ask Joe a question, go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and use that Q&A text box to send us your question.

But Joe, I always ask my guests what's going on in your fly fishing world, and I know you're retired and, but you're still actively out there [00:28:00] doing some, uh, speaking engagements and stuff or, or tying demonstrations.

Joe Howell: Oh, I'm doing, uh, some fly tying things at some different shows, but there's one coming up in October at Roseburg Fairgrounds that's held by the Umpqua Valley Fly Fishers and, uh, Umpqua Veterans, uh, Fly Fishing Group.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: So I'll be tying there. Those usually try to get... They try to get 60 or 70 tyers.

They try for 100, but about 60 or 70 sign up, and about 50 show up. So that's just the way it usually works out, but.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Okay. All right, well, good. Anything else? Any other places you'll be tying or-

Joe Howell: Uh, no, not this year.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: Just there.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Okay. All right. And again, tell people where it is at and what it's called.

Joe Howell: I'll be at, uh, Roseburg Fairgrounds October 24th, so Saturday only.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. All right. Okay, good. Good. [00:29:00] Well, back to talking about the North Umpqua. You wrote that rivers with strong traditions are more likely to be remembered and protected. What parts of the North Umpqua's history are most important for today's anglers to carry forward?

Joe Howell: I think the Camp Water area will always be the main center Uh, it was, uh, the first formal fishing area I've got primarily because that's where the road ended so many years ago. Although there are steelhead up and down, the river, like many rivers, has fallen on some lean times in the past couple of years.

Actually, they just, they closed the steelhead fishing this summer due to low returns, but we still have two generations in the ocean, and I guess they're blaming it on this super strong El Nino or something out in the ocean.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: We'll see. But we've had up and down years before. [00:30:00] I remember the first year I moved up here from Roseburg, well, I was raring and ready to go, of course, that's 45 years ago, but...

And, uh, the runs crashed. They, river was still open. They still had 3,000 or 4,000 fish, but it wasn't the eight or 10, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: But it went up and down for a few years, and then it started climbing for the next eight, nine t- years, and then it leveled off, and then it went down, went up. So it, it's just what happens to steelhead rivers. They're, they're very much-

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm ...

Joe Howell: Driven by habitat, drought, amount of, especially droughts, and amount of snowpack and the water in the, the s- secondary streams especially, and what's going on in the ocean. They've gotta be able-

D. Roger Maves: Right ...

Joe Howell: To find enough food. And the biologists tell us that most of our fish are two years in the fresh water and two years in the salt water [00:31:00] feeding before they come back for adults.

But there's a small percentage of fish that'll be three salt fish. They'll spend three years in the ocean, and there's like 5% of those.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: Most of them are two salt fish, and there's an extremely rare fish that comes, that spends four years in the ocean. He might have swam all the way to Russia and had a hard time getting back. I don't know. But, uh, you know-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: They got a lot of, they got a lot of fishing nets to dodge.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. What's your water situation this year? Are you, are you experiencing drought like we are here in the Rockies or no?

Joe Howell: Yes. We had virtually no snowpack this year, so our water-

D. Roger Maves: Mm ...

Joe Howell: Levels are low, and they're warmer. We're like 68 degrees, which is-

D. Roger Maves: Borderline, huh?

Joe Howell: Yeah. You know, it's, it's not good, so that's one of the reasons they shut it down too is-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: Water temperatures.

D. Roger Maves: [00:32:00] Yeah.

Joe Howell: But they left the river open to trout fishing-

D. Roger Maves: Hmm ...

Joe Howell: Even though it, it's a catch and release fishery. But you can still go out and trout fish, but you better not be caught out there with a two-handed nine weight, you know?

Trying to, trying to tell some game officer you're trout fishing, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. Um-

Joe Howell: They will shoot you out of hand

D. Roger Maves: Let's talk about fishing the river. It's got a reputation of being difficult, uh, for a steelhead river. What are the three biggest... Of course, steelhead is difficult anywhere you go, right?

Joe Howell: Yes.

D. Roger Maves: Uh, but what are the three biggest challenges a first time angler must learn to overcome?

Joe Howell: Well, on this river, it's, uh, there's so many different holding spots that aren't typical of cobble or gravel bar rivers, and you have to kind of learn those. And a high fast water, I should say, that people aren't used to, mostly all bedrock. There are some gravel runs and cobble [00:33:00] runs, but there are a few. Most of it's bedrock, and much of it's unwadable. You have to be able to roll cast. If you can roll cast 30 or 40 feet, you can catch a steelhead, but if you can roll cast and control 60 or 70 feet, and with the right line and a single-handed rod, you can do that.

Now, with two-handed rods, that makes it easy. It's a no-brainer. I'm still a single-handed rod guy. I only bring out the two-handed rods in the wintertime when you can't wade to some of these spots and you need to reach out. So then the fish are just stubborn, you know? I've fished behind people and caught a fish, and, "I've been here an hour, you come right behind me, I hook one."

I said, "Well, you know, that happened to me yesterday. Somebody came behind me, I hooked one." It-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: You know, you don't know what fly they had, a different angle of swing. Another fish might have swam into the [00:34:00] position. But normally by summertime they set, unless there's rain enough to freshen up the water, they don't move much.

D. Roger Maves: Hmm. Okay.

Joe Howell: It, it takes, uh, six, eight inches of water to get them to move a little bit. Because they don't... These summer steelhead, they come in starting in May, they won't spawn till January, early February. Where winter steelhead, they come in, they're ripe, and they spawn within a few weeks of getting here, and then they're gone.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, interesting.

Joe Howell: So they are-

D. Roger Maves: I never knew that ...

Joe Howell: Our winter steelhead runs have held really strong, it was a little over 10,000 last winter, and we're expecting the same this year. And it's, uh-

D. Roger Maves: When you-

Joe Howell: It's got a pretty good following for winter steelhead fishing.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Okay. And you're talking about this volcanic bedrock-

Joe Howell: Yeah

D. Roger Maves: Rather than a gravel bottom. Where should anglers be looking, you know, for holding steelhead then?

Joe Howell: Well-

D. Roger Maves: That kind of thing ...

Joe Howell: Even water, [00:35:00] like walking speed type water, even a fast walk, drop-off ledges, rock piles, boulder piles. If you've got a rock island on some of these runs, there's a place called Split Rock, where the river splits in two separate channels almost equal.

When the water tumbles down all the rapids and hits that massive rock, it backs up and creates a cushion, and there'll be fish posted right in front of that big rock and right along the sides of the

ledges where there's least resistance. Anybody that's rafted will know, uh, when they go into an obstruction, sometimes the boil water, it'll push the raft back a little bit.

Well, take that cushion down to the bottom of the river, and the speed is only in the first foot or so of, of the surface water, and the rest of it's, well, it might be strong, it's even, and it's not pulsating.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: So they'll lay there. You just have to get through, [00:36:00] get your flies through that fast water, either by visibility or a larger fly or a sink tip.

We're not allowed to use any weighted flies in the, uh, summer months. You can use them in the winter months, but not right now.

D. Roger Maves: Why is that?

Joe Howell: There was too much poaching going on It's just one of those things that happened in stages. First they were fishing indicators, and guys would, like, have cement on their feet, and they wouldn't move out of a pool for seven hours.

Well, fishing etiquette says you sh- you take half hour to an hour and move on through and let the next guy come through.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: When they started fishing, uh, super heavy flies, a really large number two nymph with the hook cut off, they're using that as a sinker, and there's no weight allowed, so they outlawed that. And, [00:37:00] you know, I can't tell you exactly why, but it was a, a lot of political maneuvering.

I think it was needed for the pressure that was on the river during the, the '70s and '80s.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: You couldn't hardly find a parking spot, and guides who weren't guides came out of the woodwork taking people's money, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: And just say, "Stand here." When some of those big run years, they didn't have to know much, and they'd get their clients in the fish occasionally.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah.

Joe Howell: There's still so up to the fish.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. When, if somebody's taking their first trip out there, what time of year offers the best combination of fish, manageable conditions, and opportunities to learn the river?

Joe Howell: Well, I like July, because the fish are still fresh and pretty grabby. They'll chase a fly.

I've seen fish chase a [00:38:00] fly 20, 30 feet across a pool. Or fly will go and swing down past it 15, 20 feet, you're just letting it hang there, and all of a sudden something clicks in that pea brain and he turns off, races off down river, and grabs your fly. You don't even think he could see it, but-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: you know? I've seen a lot of weird things, more than once.

D. Roger Maves: I bet. I bet.

Joe Howell: Saw one spot where a guy was swinging a skunk fly, big black and white skunk, in the bright sun. Three steelhead charged that fly simultaneously, and the smallest one put on a little bit burst of extra speed and beat the two larger ones to it.

And it was about five pounds or something like that. But, so you just, you never know.

D. Roger Maves: So you say July is a good time for a first timer to come out there? What about winter?

Joe Howell: Ju- Ju- July is a good... Uh, wintertime, I would say March.

D. Roger Maves: March. Okay.

Joe Howell: Last week of [00:39:00] February till the third week of March.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. How does your approach change from early summer f- you know, fishing in June, July, to the warmer months of August and early fall?

Joe Howell: August, September, I tend to skate flies a little more. Uh, maybe a number six dry fly skater. I like to never go below a size six. Even if I'm fishing a s- reduced size eight on it, I'll still keep a size six hook. They don't know what a hook is anyway. When I've caught too many fish on a size eight hook, that just doesn't have the gap to dig into cartilage or-

D. Roger Maves: Uh-huh

Joe Howell: Go around a big bony lip, you know.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: And the smaller hooks tend, if they're just caught in the edge of the flesh, they tend to kind of tear out or cut themselves out. Usually, [00:40:00] when you're trying to get it in, and you

pull just a little bit too hard, and oh, the fly pulls free. Well, it usually probably just cut its way free because you pulled too hard.

D. Roger Maves: Uh-huh.

Joe Howell: And that's something you see a lot of fishermen do. They'll keep the rod up in the air. When you're landing a steelhead, you should keep it down, the tip of your rod down close to the water to keep the angle closer to the fish. You'll have a better chance of not levering that hook out.

D. Roger Maves: Almost like saltwater fishing. Yeah.

Joe Howell: Yeah, it's all- Yeah ... much the same.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. During late summer, why are first light and arrival of the shade and the final light of evening more important than a particular fly being used?

Joe Howell: Well, the, uh, I think the fish feel a little safer in water that's not bright sunlit up. But really, I think it's more of a silhouette thing.

They see the [00:41:00] fly better silhouetted against a brighter skylight, and where the possibility at certain angles w- in full sun on the water, and I've caught plenty of steelhead in full sun. You're out there and you're gonna try, but I've always had the most productive times early morning or late evening or fishing shaded pools until there was no more shade.

Then in the sunny water I would go to the more rapid, flowy type runs.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: That, where the, a foam curtain might give them a little cover. This, uh, worked for me, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Okay.

Joe Howell: That's not saying I catch steelhead every time I go out, because you don't. It's just-

D. Roger Maves: If you did- ...

Joe Howell: it's a time- ...

D. Roger Maves: it wouldn't be steelhead fishing.

Joe Howell: That's right. You've seen it. We don't see it so much anymore, but you kind of dozen steelhead in a, a tail out, and the average is probably more like three to four, depending on time of year.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Joe Howell: And but when they're loaded up [00:42:00] and you've emptied everything in your fly box, and you go away, scratch your head, well, why don't they bite, you know?

You tried every trick you could think, but then the guy comes right behind you and slaps the fly down the wrong way, too big a fly for the situation, and one bolts up and grabs it. So-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: Rhyme or reason for it.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah.

Joe Howell: That's where I got this trigger and response thing. It's, and once I started doing, try to trigger response from a holding, these are holding steelhead, these aren't traveling steelhead.

Traveling steelhead are hard to take. So hope that answers that.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: Kind of thing.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Listen, I gonna need to take another break here. But when we come back, we'll, we'll start talking about, a little bit about gear and flies and-

Joe Howell: Okay ...

D. Roger Maves: Um, and go from there. All right.

Joe Howell: All right

D. Roger Maves: Discover the power of pure Skagit with Olympic Peninsula Skagit Tactics. From delicate soft tackles to hefty steelhead flies, OPST's versatile casting system [00:43:00] meets the demands of every angling situation. With Ed Ward's unparalleled Skagit rod design and casting expertise, OPST offers you a quicker route to mastering effective casting techniques. Whether battling wind and rain or targeting steelhead trout or smallmouth bass, trust OPST's innovative rods, lines, and tips to elevate your fishing experience.

Join the ranks of skilled anglers who rely on OPST for consistency, proficiency, and a superior fly fishing adventure. Unleash your potential with OPST today. Visit pureskagit.com or call them at 206-858-8476. Again, that's pureskagit.com or you can call them at 206-858-8476.

You're listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio, and we're talking with Joe Howell about Fly Fishing the Legendary North Umpqua for Steelhead.

If you'd like to ask Joe a question, just go to our homepage at askaboutflyfishing.com and [00:44:00] use that Q&A text box to send us your question.

Okay, we did get one question in here. A couple coming in. Joe, this one's from Phil in Kentucky. He says, "How important is casting ability in the areas where you fish for steelhead?"

Joe Howell: Well, if you're fishing a single-handed rod, it's pretty important. I'm not necessarily talking distance. If you can cast 50 feet, it's a, I would call the North Umpqua a medium-sized stream. It has wide sections, it's got pretty narrow slots also. But, uh, if you can cast and control the line on 50 feet, you'll be able to catch fish.

I like to try to find a imaginary dotted line down where the current flows, and I really don't want my fly out past that, because then you lose control.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: Because you gotta always have a faster tunnel of current pushing that leader or line, and you [00:45:00] have to bend and jerk and pull on it, and, and you see a lot of that with the, oh, I guess it's probably been about 10 years ago when the two-handed rods hit the river en masse just suddenly, and they don't fish the close lies.

They get out knee-deep in the water and fling it as far as they can throw it. And they catch fish, but they don't catch any more as a good single-handed-

D. Roger Maves: Hmm. Okay ...

Joe Howell: Fly rod guy who knows how to control the line. That's not saying there aren't good two-handed rod fishermen that know what they're doing. I, I know some of them, and they, they will fish the close spots first.

D. Roger Maves: Phil also had a, um, another follow-up question about how can a non-expert tell how long a steelhead has been in the ocean? You know, whether they're one, two, three, four year.

Joe Howell: Well, you can't without... Nobody can, unless they pull a scale down between the, [00:46:00] right around the adipose, between the dorsal and the adipose area, down off the side flank And have a biologist or know how to read the scale.

Those fish scales are like tree rings, and they tell you lean times when they've been in fresh water, and bountiful times when they've been in the ocean, and they fed more, and so they grow more. So just because you catch a, a five-pound steelhead or a 16-pound steelhead, they might both be two-salt fish.

D. Roger Maves: Ah, I see.

Joe Howell: I had a friend catch a summer fish, 16 pounds, which is a nice fish for this river, and, or any river really. But he pulled a couple scales, sent them in to Fish and Wildlife, and w- kind of had a little, not a bet bet, but just a... He was saying, "I bet, I just know that's a three-salt fish." I said, "One [00:47:00] thing I know is that fish are like people, some eat more than others."

"Well, I bet you it's a two-salt. I bet you it's a two-salt fish." And it came back, it was a two-salt fish. It'd only been in the ocean two years.

D. Roger Maves: Ah.

Joe Howell: So it found a very productive feeding line, where maybe the five-pounder didn't.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: Or the five-pounder went out a month or six weeks later than the, the early ones.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: Because-

D. Roger Maves: One's feeding at the smorgasbord, and the other's at the, uh, salad bar, right?

Joe Howell: Yeah, and one might, uh- ... just might get late for dinner, you know? He-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah ...

Joe Howell: He just, the fish don't hatch out, and they go through that smolting process, and then two years they suddenly go, "Oh, time to go to the ocean."

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah.

Joe Howell: They start meandering downstream, and they trickle out over a period of months. While one that just really has a, a built-in innate urge to go, he'll be in the ocean in two weeks.[00:48:00]

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah.

Joe Howell: It might take a, a month or better- Or six weeks for, for the other fish.

D. Roger Maves: Right.

Joe Howell: And the one that gets to the table first eats better, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. Now, you had started to talk about rods and lines and so forth, so what type and... You had kinda said you favor the single-handed, I think, but what type and weight rods and lines, uh, do you recommend?

Joe Howell: I fish a 10-foot, nine-weight, and as I've gotten older, a 10-foot, eight-weight for a dry fly is easier on the arm.

But I had a friend who fished a seven-weight, 10-foot all the time, but I also saw him wear out three rods, you know? So I would say a minimum would be a eight-weight for a steelhead.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: If, if you're on the Rogue River when they have a lot of half-pounders that are fish that, that are 14 to 18, maybe a big one would be 20 inchers, then a seven-weight would be fine.[00:49:00]

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm. Okay.

Joe Howell: I know people who've been shooting lighter line weights, but then what happens if you hook a real big one, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Jason in Kentucky is asking, "If you only have a single-handed rod, can you fish most of the river by wading?"

Joe Howell: You can. It would, uh, it's, like I said, it's a difficult river.

There's a highway that goes for 33 miles. You can pull off and fish any productive water, but not all water's productive. But some of those pools have to be waded. There's no other way. Or you have to be on the other side of the river. There is a trail system. There are some people who will take a little rubber dinghy and go across the river because it's better fish from the opposite side, and they don't wanna walk two miles from the nearest bridge, you know?

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: So-

D. Roger Maves: Any, uh-

Joe Howell: A first, a first-time person, I would say get a good guide. There's not many of them around anymore, [00:50:00] but there's still, uh- Still a couple, but they're down on the Rogue and they come up here and guide on the Umpqua occasionally.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. What, uh, any particular recommendations for footwear and safety precautions 'cause of the-

Joe Howell: Uh, studded boots and-

D. Roger Maves: Studded? Okay ...

Joe Howell: Has to be straight felt, get you by on cobble, but not water worn, slick bedrock.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: I've seen people step into the current, flat piece of rock, and the current pushes them 20 feet downriver on the-

D. Roger Maves: Like skiing, huh?

Joe Howell: Like a ski, like just a slow slide.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, geez.

Joe Howell: They were in no danger or they t- they started hitting into rough rock and, but, um, you know, but y-

D. Roger Maves: Wow

Joe Howell: You know waist deep, waist deep water there, there's a lot of-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: There's a lot of pressure on you.

D. Roger Maves: Okay, let's talk about-

Joe Howell: So def- definitely studded boots and definitely a wading staff. [00:51:00]

D. Roger Maves: And a wading staff. Okay. Um-

Joe Howell: You've always got two points of contact on the river bottom that way.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. You've got a lot of fly patterns in your book, and I know, like we talked about earlier in your bio, you, you know, have a lot with Umpqua.

Which ones do you, you... Well, let me just skip to the next one. If you were assembling separate fly boxes for summer and winter, what patterns and colors would you consider essential for each of those seasons?

Joe Howell: Well, with the, uh, winter steelhead, I would add a lead-eyed leech, which is legal in those months 'cause the water's high and roily and often off-color And as far as a standard size or standard patterns, same patterns that you would use in the summer, but larger.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: So in the wintertime, you're fishing size 1/0, size 2/0. I've caught steelhead on 5/0 general practitioners, [00:52:00] which a fly is like four and a half, five inches long. You know, it's, they eat stuff bigger than that in the ocean, and just because you've got two and a half inches of wispy orange bucktail off the end of a big hook, they're gonna take the whole thing.

So I've never found that to be a real problem. But I would definitely say larger sizes. You look in a lot of these fly books, cat pattern books, you see a very predominance of darker colors. It doesn't mean there isn't the yellows, and the oranges, and the reds, and the pinks, and all-

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm ...

Joe Howell: And the combinations of that.

There are, and they work at times. Those are my wild card flies that, well, I've been doing nothing but black, or gray, or something in between, and try some of those oddball things, and they'll save the day often, more so in the summertime than the winter. Winter's definitely visibility. [00:53:00]

D. Roger Maves: Hmm.

Joe Howell: So a larger profile helps. And they fish a lot of heavier tipped in the winter. But because it's so rocky in places, and if you're not familiar with it, you might lose a, a few flies, and I've known people to lose tips also.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, wow.

Joe Howell: I mean, it's happened to me where I had to wrap the line around my elbow and back off to the bank, and the line broke behind the tip.

D. Roger Maves: Wow.

Joe Howell: So I spliced in... I always carry s- extra stuff, but you splice in a loop and put your new tip on and keep fishing, but...

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. We had a question come in from Roy Morrissey asking, um, "Do you fish the Skokomish sunrise dry?"

Joe Howell: I don't personally. I- Yes, I'm gonna... I don't know everything, you know? I, I've never heard of- a Skokomish sunrise dry. I've known people [00:54:00] to fish it, and I sold it in my shop as a wet fly, which it was originally-

D. Roger Maves: Right ...

Joe Howell: Intended. And I've guided a couple people who that was their favorite fly.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: Except that's what they always caught all their fish on, because that's the only thing they ever tied on the end of the leader.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: And, uh-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah ...

Joe Howell: And I got them switched over to, to black, dark flies, and I think you'll do better.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. Got it.

Joe Howell: In the wintertime, I would add the hot pinks also, by the way.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: Something about a hot, hot baby pink, not cerise, not red, but just a, a baby pink blood-eyed leech, it's caught fish behind when they w- ignore black.

D. Roger Maves: Interesting. Yeah. Scott in Florida, he wrote in and says, "I have fished the Great Lakes region for steelhead and found that purple and white were the most popular colors of flies. Does that still maintain out west for steelhead?"

Joe Howell: To some degree. [00:55:00] I personally like purple in June, and again in October, or actually even mid-September through October.

I'll still fish the black flies, but there's a lot in the fall, there's a lot of, uh, wind and dead leaves and different decayed matter that's being blown into the water, especially leaves. And a black fly can get lost pretty easily, but a purple fly they can pick out. So I do like purple and white under those circumstances, and I think it's just the brightness of the pattern in June, because the fish are fresh in, and they will, if they're holding-

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm

Joe Howell: They're more likely to take just the first thing they see, and the purple and whites are easy to see.

D. Roger Maves: In your book, you, um, you emphasize [00:56:00] slowing the fly down, especially in faster water. Can you explain how casting angle, line control, and upstream mends work together to create a productive swing that you want?

Joe Howell: Well, now keeping in mind that there are different currents, whether it's coming into you or going away from you, and a current that's going, turning away from you is the hardest current to fish. But by mending or by casting a basic 45-degree angle, say, and you know where the remaining drift line is, if you keep it in line with that, because the fish aren't gonna be too far off of that until the water pulls out or dumps out.

But when it pulls out, then the, the current spreads and evens out more, so they could be bank to bank. But by mending upstream and holding your fly rod upstream and low to the water. Once you're sure that fly has pulled around, I only usually try to do one mend, sometimes two, [00:57:00] sometimes three if I'm trying to position a fly to a certain point.

And then I can back that fly down just like they would from a drift boat on a plug or something, and I can stop it. It will come to a point where that fly is either holding still in the water, it's not moving, just hanging, and that's the time people wanna mend or do something. That's the time you don't touch it.

When that fly's hanging like that and it starts to move again, that's when the fish often will boil up and take it. They see it. So if you... if the current catches your line on a big boil water, and if you were to mend, you'd take it out of that fish zone. You just leave it there as long as you can, and then dip your rod from upstream towards the water to a downstream position, and you've automatically put that [00:58:00] line upstream on the mend and your line downstream, and you'll get another, depending on the speed of the current, three to six feet of holding, uh, drift, if you wanna call it that.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Joe Howell: But then when the belly's out, that fly fires out of there like a rocket. There's no stopping it. But you've covered all your... This is so you're not jerking on the fly so much and your, your primary line.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Okay.

Joe Howell: And there's times when last resort, primary lines, I'll take the fly and slap it right down on top of them, two or three feet in front of them.

But I don't mend, I don't do anything. Hit it hard enough so you've got a bunch of S curves in the line, and that current will straighten it out, and it'll drift on its own, and I've taken numbers of steelhead like that. When I slap that thing down, like, "Hey, look at this," you know? Get it-

D. Roger Maves: Right ...

Joe Howell: Pay attention.

Well, sometimes they do. [00:59:00] And sometimes nothing works. I watched a fish not too far up from the house one time, pretty nice fish, right sun, never made a move for the fly. And, and when they're laying and they're corking up and down and moving side to side, if you don't spook them, that fish has a... You have a real good chance of taking that fish.

If he's hanging, holding right on the bottom, the belly never touches the rocks by the way, but if they're right still on the bottom, he's comfortable, he's not gonna move, your chances are cut by 50, 60%.

D. Roger Maves: Hmm.

Joe Howell: So I run this fly and I threw it upstream, which is not a necessarily recommended way to catch a steelhead, but dead drift. So I kept back sacking the line, and I watched this fly sink, hit him in the nose, roll over his back, and pull away. I reeled up, and after the next cast, I did the [01:00:00] same thing. Here comes the fly. The fish moves over about eight inches, lets the fly go by- ... and moves right back to where he was. I mean, this actually happened.

I mean, that's why I reeled up and I went, "That fish can't be taken." Not worth it. So yeah, you know, there's trigger response. You just never know what they're co- gonna take.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, we're running out of time here. We got about, uh, 12 minutes left to go here.

Joe Howell: Okay.

D. Roger Maves: But I wanted to talk about some of the, uh, productive pools. I mean, in your book, I think you named somewhere around 130, you know, uniquely named pools, riffles, runs, bridges, camp water sections, different areas, and we can't possibly talk about all those tonight.

Joe Howell: No, no, no, no. No.

D. Roger Maves: But, uh, but let's kinda just dig into a couple here that I made note of.

Joe Howell: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: Um, Deadline, The Flats, and Famous are the first major pools in the fly only water.

Joe Howell: Right.

D. Roger Maves: How would you-

Joe Howell: Deadline is where, that's where the fly fishing area begins. [01:01:00]

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: And all three of those runs can be fished dry if you're street shoes if you want. You don't have to have waders.

D. Roger Maves: Oh. Oh, okay.

Joe Howell: I've seen people out in the middle of the river at Famous and The Flats. They're stepping on fish when they do that, if they're belly deep in the water.

And so, but those three runs-

D. Roger Maves: Do you fish those differently? ...

Joe Howell: Can be fished easily. I haven't fished it recently, no.

D. Roger Maves: No, uh, have... can... do you fish them differently? Are they, different-

Joe Howell: Uh, no. No, they're... The, uh, Famous Pool is, uh, comes out of a long, slow, wide, deep section of river, and there's a submerged assault dike that runs across a river and stops that flow, and it's like spilling over the top of a bowl.

And there's one rocky, dry rock in the [01:02:00] summer, not in the winter, but, and with a submerged ledge, and right in behind that rock, it's maybe a, maybe a 30-foot cast at best. It's one of those spots, though, that you can just put it down and you don't mend, you just leave it alone, see what the current's gonna do with your fly first few casts.

And sometimes you can just change angle of your cast to, and never have to mend. And it's a short drift, and then it just spills over to a heavy rapids for 150 yards or something like that. Then it opens up into what they call The Flats, and it's a wide, riffly, boulders, bedrock bottom, cobble bottom. It's got a little bit of everything.

Well, the cobble can change from year to year, but the bedrock doesn't. And so, but it's not all that deep, so I would fish them the same, though there is more mending there. At Deadline is, one mend [01:03:00] does the best unless you're trying to position a fly to a certain point.

D. Roger Maves: I think you wrote, uh, that Famous Pool has provided some of your best exciting dry fly fishing. Is that the case?

Joe Howell: Yeah. Yeah. Well, partly because they're so close to the house and I fish it so often.

D. Roger Maves: It's so close to the house. But, uh... Well.

Joe Howell: So, it's, uh... You know, and I've gotten that advantage where I could just, uh... When I had the shop going, which I closed it in 2010 after 30 years, but get up early, go up and try to hit those three runs before I had to get back and open the shop at 8:00.

And people knew my rig, and my, my shoulders are just kind of hunched when I'd be out fishing and some guy hear a car door and down through the bushes he comes and, "I thought that was you. I know it's too early, but it sure makes it worth your while if you go out early," and open the shop for me. So I [01:04:00] always did, you know.

And he goes down, he buys two leaders. Well, I don't have time to go out and fish again, but one time I had just landed about a seven-pound buck after about the third cast, and I went, "Wow, I got three more runs to go." I heard the car door again. I never did get to fish those other couple of runs.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, geez.

Joe Howell: But I got my fish.

D. Roger Maves: I've never heard of that. Yeah.

Joe Howell: Got my fish for the day.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: It's all part of, all part of the business.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah.

Joe Howell: It's all one.

D. Roger Maves: The other, uh, others that I have down here, Baker Falls, Lower Baker, Middle Baker, Winter Hole, and Clay Creek Riffle, they all have, I guess, different fishing situations in a relatively compact area.

Joe Howell: Sure.

D. Roger Maves: Uh, how do you decide which ones to fish?

Joe Howell: Well, I like above Baker Falls, personally. I haven't done as well below the falls.
[01:05:00] It's pretty easy to fish. You can't wade it. The other spot you have to wade out to. And the place we call Winter Hole, it's a little thin on the water for my liking for summer fish.

Not so in June, but after the water takes a drop. But it's a excellent, excellent spot when the water's up in the wintertime. These fish are all in a bathtub. They come around that little curve, and they hold in a, about a 12 by 14 foot area, and that's where they're gonna be.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: I've only- I could count the fish on one hand that I've caught outside of that area. It happens, but not very often, and probably due more to water level than anything.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. You describe Boundary Pool as an early morning or late evening favorite that may remain shaded well into the morning. What makes it productive, and how should an angler approach it?

Joe Howell: Well, I, it's not [01:06:00] one of my more productive places. I've caught a number of fish there over the years. I've had some really good experiences there, but it's, doesn't go into the sun till, stays in the shade, I should say, till about 11:00 o'clock in the morning, because there's a big high ridge. And while the rest of the river is starting to flood with sunlight, it's, uh, one of a half a dozen spots that you can find shade on t- till about 11:00 o'clock.

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm.

Joe Howell: And I like fishing shaded pools.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: I tell people-

D. Roger Maves: Generally, yeah ...

Joe Howell: it's just because I don't want to stand out there sweating in waders, you know. They get really hot.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah, it's the only air conditioning you can find out there, huh? Yeah.

Joe Howell: Yeah, so I fish the shade.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah. I also made note here, it says, uh, "The stretch reached from the Mont Segment Trail includes Split Rock, Burnham Pool, Low- Lower Burnham, Laurie's Run, Leaning Tree, and Ledges, [01:07:00] and Naos Pool."

That has been a productive area. Which of these would you recommend to a first time visitor, and why?

Joe Howell: Well, they're difficult to fish from the highway side. Foot rock, you can't wade it, but the way the water runs towards you, it takes, uh, somebody either with a long rod or to fish that far ledge or to get that center cushion set up right, and then you have to be way up where the white water is, what I call the angle of the dangle.

So that line is not gonna be developing a big curve and snatching the fly out when I want it to stay. But all of those from the opposite side of the river, it's either a two-mile walk roughly down from Ott Bridge, and you either don't get in the water or you're ankle deep in water. They're very easy to fish, [01:08:00] and I believe, I think it's more productive from the trail side.

D. Roger Maves: Okay.

Joe Howell: And, but you, I have taken float tubes and little rubber rafts across, but a little split rock, just make sure you start high enough to scooch across fast enough before you end up in the middle of where you're gonna fish.

D. Roger Maves: But in general, you're not floating this river. It's a wade.

Joe Howell: No, it's not, it's not allowed to float the river.

D. Roger Maves: But you are... It's legal to take a little dinghy across, huh?

Joe Howell: You can do that, and you-

D. Roger Maves: And you just can't camp ...

Joe Howell: You can raft, you can raft or kayak the river. I've got one friend who uses a paddleboard, but he still thinks he's part mountain goat or something. But, uh, now he's just turned 50, so he's still young.

D. Roger Maves: Finish up here with the Camp Water area. It includes legendary names like Glory, the Mott Water, Kitchen, Boat Pool, Station, Hayden's Run, Sawtooth, [01:09:00] Millionaire, and

Surveyor. If an angler had only one day to explore this historic section, what would you help them, how would you help them prioritize these pools?

Joe Howell: Well, you would have time to, unless there's other anglers around, you'd have to wait your turn or skip ahead. You never cut in front of someone without saying, "You mind if I go down and fish the next pool?" Because he might be ready to reel out and head it that way anyway. It's just the polite thing to do.

I'm not saying that's the way people do it anymore, but they used to. My personal favorites, if I wanted a quick fish, I would fish the Boat Pool, The Kitchen, and The Mott, and then catch... Forget Glory. Nobody fishes that much anymore. It's, it holds some fish early, but it's a difficult wade, and if you flip, you go over a big cataract falls.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, gosh, okay.

Joe Howell: So, you know.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah.

Joe Howell: That's something, that's [01:10:00] something you did-

D. Roger Maves: Things to consider.

Joe Howell: That's something you did when you were 18 or 20 years old, but not now, you know? So it's something to consider, is right.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Yeah.

Joe Howell: But those three, and if the runs are open, I would fish Station on the way out, and Hayden's Run

D. Roger Maves: Mm-hmm. Okay ...

Joe Howell: Back up to the parking lot.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. Is that a full day's fishing there, would you think, or-

Joe Howell: No, I'd-

D. Roger Maves: Just in that area ...

Joe Howell: I'd call that about three or four hours.

D. Roger Maves: Oh, okay. Okay.

Joe Howell: I tend to fish a little faster.

D. Roger Maves: Okay. All right.

Joe Howell: Now I, now I fish slower.

D. Roger Maves: Right, yeah. I wade slower

Joe Howell: Yeah, I wade slower, yeah ... for sure.

D. Roger Maves: And many times saying to my son, "Hey, can you, uh, come over here and help me a little bit?"

Joe Howell: Yeah, exactly.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Well, we gotta wrap it up here, but hang tight with me here, Joe, because we're gonna give away your book. I want you around for that. [01:11:00] Um, we're gonna give away a couple other prizes here.

We're gonna give a one-year membership to Fly Fishers International and a one-year membership to Trout Unlimited. And like I just said, a copy of your book, Fly Fishing Guide to the North Umpqua, courtesy of Stackpole Books. So, uh, hang tight and we'll, we'll be right back and we'll give those gifts, those prizes away.

Joe Howell: Okay.

D. Roger Maves: The Bonefish and Tarpon Trust works very hard to safeguard the future of our beloved flats fisheries from protecting spawning sites threatened by unsustainable fishing pressure to securing historic funding to restore Florida's Everglades and estuaries. Thanks to their members, they've expanded their conservation to The Bahamas, Belize, and Mexico.

There's still much more work to be done and they need your help. With your support, they can ensure that the flats fishery is healthy and sustainable now and for generations to come. Visit btt.org and become a member of the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust today. Again, that's btt.org.

Just a reminder to everyone, before you leave the website [01:12:00] tonight, please take a minute and give us your feedback about the show. You can find a link on our homepage in the section of tonight's show that says, "What did you think of this show?" Just click on the link and leave your comments, and we'd really appreciate it.

Now is the time to give away our prizes. The winners for our drawings are randomly selected from the show's registration database.

If you didn't register for tonight's show by now, it's too late, but make sure you do so for our next show so you don't miss out on your chance at the great prizes we have to offer. If you are one of the lucky winners, we will contact you after the show to collect the information so that we can deliver your prize to you.

First thing we'll be giving away is a one-year membership to Fly Fishers International. To learn more about FFI, go to flyfishersinternational.org. And great, great organization to support. Our winner for that is... Uh, let me get down there [01:13:00] Is Robert, Robert Cartier in Connecticut. So Robert, congratulations. You just won a one-year membership to Fly Fishers International.

And now we'll give away a one-year membership to Trout Unlimited. And to learn more about Trout Unlimited, go to tu.org. Again, another great organization to support. And our winner for that is Mike Giavedoni, Giavedoni, and he's in Alabama. So, uh, there you go, Mike. Congrats on winning your membership to Trout Unlimited.

And now we'll give away a copy of Joe's book, Fly Fishing Guide to North Umpqua, courtesy of Stackpole Books. And the way we do this is I gotta clear my queue here, make sure there's no questions in there. Looks good. Okay, so the form on our homepage is where you provide your answer, and first person that gets it correct will win Joe's book, Fly Fishing Guide to the [01:14:00] North Umpqua.

All right, so the question is, there was one area of the North Umpqua that was historical and kind of the center of attention. What's the name of that area?

And Joe, we're gonna ... It takes a ... There's a like, a little delay before they hear the question, and then they have to type the answer, so we have to dance and entertain them in the meantime.

Joe Howell: Oh. All right.

D. Roger Maves: And I think they type slower than they tie flies, so that's the other problem. So-

Joe Howell: Yeah.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah. So let's see if we got a winner here yet. And checking

Okay. And we have our first one come in here. Phil in Kentucky, a longtime listener, says Camp Water. Is he correct?

Joe Howell: He is correct.

D. Roger Maves: He's correct. Okay, there you go. Phil, another one for your library. You need to get out [01:15:00] there and go fishing it sounds like. So, um, Phil, send me your address please again, and we'll get you, uh, we'll get Stackpole to send that out to you.

And another answer came in was Steamboats. The one question I wanted to ask you is how did the question, I mean, how did the name Steamboats get... Were there steamboats that go- went up this river at one time or-

Joe Howell: Well, way the story goes, 'cause I wasn't around when it happened, but they used to gold mine up in the Bohemia, up the headwaters of Steamboat Creek.

And when an area, when the gold miners left, uh, either couldn't find gold, and they called it, it was steamboated out. And-

D. Roger Maves: Oh ...

Joe Howell: They headed for another area. Or in the cases of the Mississippi, they took a steamboat points beyond, I guess, you know.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, just curious 'cause, uh- Yeah ... it doesn't sound like a, a big enough river for steamboats to be going up.

Joe Howell: No, no, no, it's not. It's just, uh-

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah ...

Joe Howell: It, [01:16:00] it was a gold mining term.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah.

Joe Howell: It steamboated out, it's time to leave.

D. Roger Maves: Yeah, yeah. Cool. Interesting. All right.

Well, Joe, hey, I appreciate you being with us tonight and sharing your knowledge over all the years you've fished this area. Um, great, great bank of knowledge and like you said, you love to share this when others haven't, and so thank you for sharing with us tonight.

Joe Howell: Well, thank you for having us, or me.

D. Roger Maves: Now, everybody, I hope you found our podcast archive on our website. If you haven't, look for the link on the top of my menu. In the archive you'll find all of our shows, over 440 shows now that you can search by keyword or keyword phrase like trout, tarpon, North Umpqua River, and so forth.

So go ahead and explore. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at, at what you discover out there. Our next broadcast will be on September 16th at 7:00 PM Mountain, 9:00 PM Eastern Time, and on that show I'll be interviewing Steve [01:17:00] Culton. Steve Culton. And the show will be Fly Fishing the Farmington River: Trout, Hatches and Tactics.

Connecticut's Farmington River offers outstanding year-round trout fishing, but consistently catching its trout requires understanding the river, its hatches, and how the fish respond to changing conditions. Steve joins us to share his hard-earned knowledge of this celebrated fishery, and we'll explore where and when to fish, seasonal strategies, important hatches, productive flies and techniques, ranging from dry flies and nymphs, to wet flies and streamers.

Whether it's your first trip or your 15th, Steve will help you fish the Farmington more effectively. So be sure and add this upcoming show to your calendar right under Steve's picture on our homepage. It says Add to Calendar button. Click on that, add it to your favorite calendar, and you'll be all set.

We would like to thank Fly Fishers International, Trout Unlimited, Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, Olympic Peninsula's Skagit Tactics, The Ugly Bug Fly Shop for sponsoring our show tonight. Don't forget to visit our [01:18:00] website at askaboutflyfishing.com, and make sure you're signed up to receive our announcements so you don't miss out on any of our future broadcasts.

Thanks for listening to Ask About Fly Fishing Internet Radio. We hope you enjoyed the show. That's it. Good night everyone, and good fishing.