

January 2022 – Did You Know? Non-Golfers Having Fun on the Rogue

“You're only here for a short visit. Don't hurry, don't worry. And be sure to smell the flowers along the way.” WALTER HAGEN

A couple years ago DYK looked at the Rogue River from our perspective as golfers. This month we continue exploring the Rogue – how it is viewed by others. It's used for fishing, swimming, and birding, plus floating down it in all sorts of things – canoes, kayaks, tubes, etc. Even though Blythefield owns the land on both sides, the public can use the river itself.

The Rogue starts in Newaygo County and meanders 48 miles down where it flows into the Grand River just south of Blythefield. How did the Rogue River get its name? It was a typo. Originally it was named the Rouge River, but this was inadvertently changed by a mapmaker's printing error.

As the Rogue goes through Blythefield it is mostly shallow, but there is a deep spot just downriver from no. 12 green. This was the swimming hole for locals many years ago; neighborhood kids learned to swim there. This old swimming hole did not compare in elegance to our club's classic old swimming pool, but it did provide a refreshing place for local kids in the heat of summer.

Although the Rogue River has become a prized place for sport-fishing, there was a time when it was not. The Rogue's watershed suffered decades of pollution from a variety of sources, especially downstream from Rockford. For many years, fishing in the Rogue below the Rockford tannery and the Rockford paper mill was almost non-existent. The river recovered later in the 20th Century, so now the visible pollution is gone but there is still concern of PFAS contamination.

Fishing in the Rogue varies. Above the Rockford dam the “upper Rogue” is a prized stream, mostly fly-fishing for trout. Below the dam in the “lower Rogue” there are several additional species. Fishing around Blythefield includes migratory fish such as salmon, chinook and coho coming from Lake Michigan and up the Grand River. They don't get to the upper Rogue since the Rockford dam is a barrier. Each fall we see them run as they return to spawn. In the later spring and early summer there is also some steelhead fishing around Blythefield. Other fish such as walleye and bass also come upstream from the Grand River.

One of the most knowledgeable people about fishing in the Rogue is Nick Garlock, son of our past president Jim Garlock. Nick has fished the Rogue since he was

a teen and has made fly-fishing his career as manager of the Orvis shop at Breton Village. He still fishes some around Blythefield. Interestingly, he has found golf balls on the *south* side of the river. He wonders how a tee shot on no. 13 could end up so far left! Nick also told me that the deep hole just down from our bridge – where neighborhood kids sometimes swim – is a good fishing hole for steelhead or bass, depending on the season. (Note: As part of the local Trout Unlimited chapter, Nick is involved with conservation work in the Rogue River watershed, making it better for fishermen. See <http://www.swmtu.org/> .)

The river is not only for fishermen and errant golf balls. In the summer we see folks floating on kayaks, canoes and tubes – sometimes tethered with a trailer tube for their “adult beverages”. If you see folks meandering down the river when you are on no. 13 tee, it would be polite to wait for them to go under our bridge, just in case. Some hardy souls will also kayak in the winter.



winter kayaking in the Rogue (hole no. 14 on left)



The Rogue in winter, by Terri Pippin-Grannis

Kayaking, tubing and canoeing are popular on the Rogue in the summer. The lower Rogue is fairly short stretch for kayaking, but when the conditions are right it is a good place for a short stint. Use caution if you decide to take a floating trip down the Rogue. It has proven to be dangerous, with some close calls in the past couple of years:

- Boy age 3 rescued from kayak in Rogue River: <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2020/05/boy-3-trapped-under-overturned-kayak-rescued-in-kent-county.html>
- Woman rescued from Rogue River while rafting: <https://wwmt.com/news/local/plainfield-fire-rescues-woman-trapped-against-bridge-support-while-tubing>

From my interviews of former Blythefield members, I learned that one of the many who floated down the Rogue was Harold Brink, one of the Midwest's best amateur golfers and a Blythefield member from the 1940's through 1964. His family home was just up the river from the bridge on Rogue River Road. His daughter recalls that he would take her down the river on an inflatable raft. He would also raft down to the golf course with a club or two just to practice.

Birdwatching also draws people to the Rogue. Two of our members, Jim and Liz Gregg, are experienced birdwatchers. Their home is on the Rogue River upstream

from Blythefield in the village of Rockford. They birdwatch from home and at Blythefield, their home away from home. They have seen many species at our club. The Judge told me that more than 60 species of birds can be seen along the Rogue River and its valley, and elsewhere on our course. There are many noteworthy birds, some common and some less so. Uncommon birds include bald eagle, osprey, pileated woodpecker (about 2 feet long), kingfisher, indigo bunting, green heron, wood duck and Coopers Hawk. Common birds that can often be seen or heard on the golf course include mallards and mergansers at the river, and red-bellied woodpecker (4th tee), orioles (5th hole and around flowering trees), cardinals (woods along holes 15 and 16), red tail hawks (nested in white pine near 16th tee last year), and great blue heron (often seen in the river near 14th fairway). A couple years ago, a bald eagle perched on the Bridge of Sighs causing a minor delay in play and some photo-taking opportunities.

We are fortunate to have such a prized river in our backyard.

Brent Rector

© Brent D. Rector, 2022