

Big Fish Fable Ripples on Through Time

Twenty-five years ago, the front page of The Chronicle's sports section seemingly included news of a grisly attack by a fanged fish in Mayfield Lake.

"Tiger muskie attacks skier," screamed the bold headline.

The monstrous beast bit right through the tow line, latching on to the poor unfortunate man atop the skis, identified in the story as 31-year-old Joe Jones.

Innocent bystander Bobbi Sue Smith was shocked and dismayed.

"It was terrible," she said. "He was skiing along as happy as can be, and then all of a sudden, this gigantic monster came up and grabbed him."

The fish was estimated to be some 6 feet and 100 pounds in size.

It is perhaps one of the most terrible and unbelievable stories in the history of The Chronicle.

Unbelievable, indeed, because it never happened.

It's not that the facts were misreported, as sometimes occurs. The attack simply never took place, as astute outdoors enthusiasts among us likely assumed immediately.

An article was never published, at least not in The Chronicle.

Still, type "Tiger muskie attack" into any Internet search engine, and the first image displayed will be a news clipping from The Daily Chronicle dated July 12, 1989.

It caught the incredulous eye of former Chronicle delivery boy Warren Bieker, now the secretary of the Clark-Skamanian Fly Fishing Club.

One of the club's members brought it to him, attaching a sincere message.

"I am passing this article along from the Centralia newspaper a few years ago after they first put Tiger Muskies in Mayfield Lake," the man wrote. "This exemplifies what happens with exotic introductions."

Hook, line and sinker, as they say.

Like Bieker, I was certain the clipping was some sort of prank.

The evidence was in the details, where traces of attempted humor were clear. The name of a nurse at Morton General Hospital, for instance, was the same as a character in the psychiatric ward in the classic film "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

The names were all nondescript and reeking of parody — Joe Jones, Bobbi Sue Smith



By Eric Schwartz

Tiger muskie attacks skier

MOSBYROCK — A Centralia man was badly injured when he was attacked by a large fish while water-skiing on Mayfield Lake Saturday.

Joe Jones, 31, suffered massive lacerations to his legs and torso when a fish, described by onlookers as resembling a tiger muskie, suddenly grabbed him as he was being towed by a boat.

"It was terrible," said Bobbi Sue Smith. "He was skiing along, as happy as can be, and then all of a sudden this gigantic monster came up and grabbed him."

Onlookers said the tow rope snapped instantly as the monster muskie's teeth came into contact

Those who saw it believe it was a tiger muskie, planted in the lake last year by the Washington Department of Wildlife.

Jack Tipping, a fish biologist with the Department of Wildlife, said he could not explain the sudden attack by the huge fish. He added he doubts the fish was a muskie.

"I'm sure it was a huge squawfish," Tipping said. "I've caught lots of those in the lake, and they can be pretty mean."

Tipping said the tiger muskie he planted in the lake can't be big enough by now to attack a man.

"Oh, they might grab a child now and then, or even a small

— and the article closed with a wildlife official stating that his boss "wouldn't know a tiger muskie if it bit him on the (posterior)."

Nonetheless, my search of The Chronicle's microfilm collection took me to page C1 of the July 12, 1989, edition.

As expected, there was no such attack; however, there was some fitting text.

"Un-Bo-Lievable" read the headline above a story detailing the success of Bo Jackson at the 1989 All Star game.

Did our prankster leave clues? Probably not, but this was almost certainly an inside job.

I reached out to a former Chronicle editor who was helping lead the newsroom in 1989. He took a look at the clip and confirmed the obvious suspicions.

"It must have been a newsroom joke, but not one I was in on," the former editor said. "The headline font looks like what we used, so I doubt if someone outside would have done it. Tiger muskies were a big deal at the time, planted to eat predatory trash fish. I don't think they nipped any humans, though."

Tiger muskies were introduced to Mayfield Lake in 1988 and produced a fair amount of controversy. The fish, a cross between muskellunge and northern pike, were released to devour the non-native northern pikeminnow population.

The largest ever caught was hooked in New Meadows, Idaho, last year. It weighed 44.26 pounds and measured 52.5 inches in length, with a girth of 25 inches, according to Field and Stream.

That's a far cry from the 100-pound behemoth that *didn't* attack a skier.

Somewhere out there, someone is snickering as their prank emerges from the surface of the Internet like a fanged fish, furiously biting into the gullible.

Yes, the ripples of a joke some 25 years ago are now lapping at the banks of the present.

That's a fish story of the greatest kind.

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