



ATTENTION: © Copyright Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. All materials cited must be attributed to Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections.



This interview was conducted with Gilbert Hull (1911-2001) in the fall of 1992. The interviewer is Danny Beatty. Gilbert was a commercial fisherman in southeast Alaska for about 20 years. He retired from fishing in 1976.

Editors Note: On February 3, 2009 I (Danny Beatty) visited with Gilbert's widow, Margaret Hull. She told me the following: Gilbert and Margaret lived in Bellingham for about a year. They moved to Mount Vernon and opened and ran a store until 1943 when Gilbert went into the Navy. Margaret moved to Anacortes with their two young children.

He was discharged from service at the end of 1945. Early 1946 they bought property at Rosario and have lived at that location ever since. I also learned that their son John, mentioned later in the interview, now lives next door to his mother.

DB: When did you first fish in Pass Lake?

GH: In 1938. Let me look for my quail. (DB: There is a small flock of quail at the edge of the yard.)

DB: Were you living in Anacortes?

GH: We were living in Bellingham at that time. When I would get a chance to get away (it had to be on weekends), I would come down and borrow a skiff that I knew was available to me down there and I would go out on Pass Lake. I was trolling spinners; the fly fishermen all divorced me for this—

DB: Oh it's okay. (1938 was before the regulation change to fly fishing only.)

GH: But I was trolling spinners or worms or anything that they would hit. On one of my trips down here I encountered a couple of visiting fishermen, I know not from where. They seemed to be pretty adept and knowledgeable of what they were doing. They had their skiff anchored from the bow, they had it anchored from the stern so it would hold pretty safe. They were single egging and this was as legal as it could be, see, in those days. And they were producing and they were bringing trout out like the kind that we dream about. They must have limited because they left and I fiddled and fooled around there and probably caught one fish; I know it wasn't any more than that.

In 1947 a fellow and his wife, his name was Fred Ball from Seattle, he'd come up here with a kayak, the closest description of what we have nowadays, on top of his car, he could handle it alone. He was a devoted avid fly fisherman. I guess he could see me drooling with tears in my eyes and so he stopped one time and visited with me a bit. His main passion at that time was Heart Lake, but about every fourth trip or so up here, he would go over and try Pass Lake. He not only explained to me what kind of gear to get and how he thought I could best use it, but he gave me three flies and they were all Carey Specials. So I caught my first fish on a fly in Heart Lake. Brought it home, couldn't eat it, it tasted like a hand full of moss. We put it in a dish for the cat, and the cat backed away from it. But that didn't stop me from going to Heart Lake and I would catch those big beauties, some of them probably eighteen or twenty inches long, and I'd have my fun

with them; the skiff was sturdy enough that I could get on my hands and knees in the stern and carefully unhook those and let them go. But the first one I made the mistake of just releasing him and turning him loose and he went down belly-up and I think maybe he died, I think maybe he drowned. But I learned from it and then I would unhook them very carefully, hold them right side up in my hand, just letting them lay there and then they'd pump their old gills for a while and when they'd take off under their own power, I think they were safe, I think they made it. So that was probably my indoctrination (to catch and release).

DB: And you learned that on your own?

GH: I had to learn that on my own because there was nobody fishing with me.

DB: Right.

GH: Then I started venturing over into Pass Lake. But there it was like I was up against the pros and I was an extreme amateur. I could see fish caught, but I was seldom joining in with their success. But maybe a year or two later, a little bit more experience, a little bit more enthusiasm then I started catching fish in Pass Lake. But most of the time I was casting out to whatever my limitations were and then moving the oars a little bit and kind of mooching the fly.

DB: Pretty common way to do it.

GH: My son started kind of copying my style. He got where he was fishing about equally as well as I was and we'd each go to Pass Lake in a little skiff and I remember a fellow in a red felt hat from Oak Harbor. He would see me playing a fish, and he was rowing way to fast, he was like in a boat race and every so often he would lap us. But every time he would say, —What are you using now?" And I'd say, —Oh my old favorite, Carey Special." and he'd make another circle of the lake and he'd maybe come to my son this time, —What are you using now?" And my son would say, —Oh Carey Special." On he would go. I bet you he came to us three times that morning wanting to know what we were using. And we would even haul it in and show him what we were using and we never saw him catch a fish. But he was working too hard.

DB: Yes, yes, I understand that. What's your son's name?

GH: John.

DB: And where does he live?

GH: Out here in Summer Park.

DB: Okay and he fished with you then. He was one of your fishing partners?

GH: Yes, and he loves it today.

DB: Does he still fish there?

GH: Oh you bet.

DB: Okay. And was there anyone else that you fished with? Were there any other people in particular or do you remember other people than this Fred Ball, do you remember any other names?

GH: Emory Harrison.

DB: Okay, I know that name.

GH: Now Emory and I didn't go fishing together, we wouldn't start together but we would wind up out there and visit.

DB: I understand. Flyfishers kind of fished alone. I knew Emory pretty well, years ago. He was a member of our club. I took him on his last fishing trip.

GH: Oh did you?

DB: To Canada. Yes. We went up and he caught a nice big trout and he was really happy. In fact I have one of his rods. I bought it from his family; I think it was his sister.

GH: Oh how nice, how nice. You will cherish that the rest of your life. The biggest trout I ever caught was right across the Pass here in this little Cranberry Lake, I got a five-pounder out of there a couple years ago.

DB: Oh a couple years ago? Oh, yes. I've heard they've had some big fish in there.

GH: Yes, those Montana Browns, I think it is.

DB: Yes, there's some like that, not that big yet, but they're in Pass Lake too.

GH: Oh, yes; I've never taken one that size out of Pass Lake.

DB: Have you continued to fish Pass Lake since those years?

GH: No, my enthusiasm for Pass Lake dropped off when it started getting various regulations.

DB: I see.

GH: You know like the barb-less hook and the *release this kind*, and *keep that kind* if you wish. I felt like I should have a lawyer along in the boat.

DB: Oh, okay, I understand what you're saying. It really isn't that difficult—

GH: I suppose not.

DB: Not now. It's pretty definite and pretty well set. But there for a while there were some changes going on, that's true. What area of the lake—did you have a particular part of the lake that was your favorite area?

GH: I don't think so, it seemed to me in this lake fishing, if its good and they're hitting down here they'll be hitting up here too.

DB: Okay. And the fact that you mooched and moved and rowed with the boat, you wouldn't—

GH: You had to cover some area whether you wished to or not.

DB: Okay.

GH: I'll tell you something that might be interesting to you. He's been dead and gone for years, but he was an old local character. He got his neck bowed that the State was not going to be successful in poisoning these lakes and getting rid of the scrap fish. They had poisoned the lake and shortly afterwards when he felt that was all dissipated and cleared away, he would put some perch back in there.

DB: Oh dear.

GH: Now the game department probably knows who he was, and Louie (Corbin) would know who it was.

DB: Is he still alive?

GH: No, no. He's been gone quite a few years. And he did the same thing at Heart Lake.

DB: Are you at liberty to say who it was?

GH: No.

DB: Is he someone we would all recognize?

GH: Oh everybody would know; he was a local character.

DB: Oh, okay. Well, when you fished the lake it was primarily open from like April to October, wasn't it?

GH: [Yes].

DB: It wasn't like today when it's open year-round.

GH: No, no.

DB: Did you enjoy it more in the spring or the fall or what time of the year? Or did it matter?

GH: Whenever I could get away.

DB: Mostly when you had time to get there.

GH: Yes when I could steal some time. But my recollection was, I was a novice and I was always looking over my shoulder and envying and admiring the expert.

DB: Well it doesn't sound like that's quite totally true because you had success fishing there.

GH: Oh heavens, you know, I've limited in the lake many times when, what the heck the limit used to be—

DB: Eight or ten fish?

GH: Oh more than that.

DB: Oh really?

GH: Oh I'm sure I've limited when it was fifteen.

DB: Oh, okay, I see I don't remember such large limits.

GH: And Heart Lake was the same.

DB: Yes, that's before my time. I guess.

GH: It was something like duck hunting; when I came here the limit was twenty.

DB: I know about that. So you're favorite method of fishing Pass Lake was [with] a Carey Special. What was your line, did it sink fairly deep?

GH: Yes, I've always used a sinking line. In fact I only own one floating line and I don't use it very often.

DB: A sinking line and then you troll? Or we'll call it a mooching troll.

GH: Just slow, slow, slow, just enough to keep it from getting down on the bottom and collecting junk.

DB: That's a good way to put it -- slow, slow, slow, because I understand that's what you're saying exactly. And just keep it off the bottom.

GH: And then some days, Danny, it seemed to me like I had better success when I let go of the oars and had just settled down somewhere towards the bottom and start stripping. But it doesn't always work—for me.

DB: I understand that too.

GH: Oh I'm sure you've done all these things.

DB: I understand; if you'd say that to some people they might not know what you're talking about, but I understand what you're saying.

GH: Okay. So then two weeks later I'm on the same lake and it might be either Pass or Heart, or Cranberry, and I think, —You know, I'm not going to forget this time, I'm going to do a lot of stripping.” And it doesn't work, it doesn't always work. It isn't a guarantee.



DB: Nope, no guarantee. So I have a bunch of questions here that I'm asking everybody that I talk to, and that's why I'm kind of looking at this as we go along. So from what you've said, the Carey Special was your favorite fly.

GH: I have caught more trout on a Carey Special than all the other patterns that I've ever tried combined.

DB: Okay, so that's just about it for flies. Which body material did you like? What color or—

GH: Well at first I used a neutral brown color sometimes it was just something I tied up myself and used the part that I could strip off of the quill itself, and just soak it in water and I'd use that. So brown I would say was the predominate color I used. But now in later years I've had probably just as much success with the yellow body.

DB: Yellow, chenille—yellow—

GH: Oh it could be chenille, or—

DB: Any different material?

GH: Or cloth.

DB: Yellow cloth was probably more common to you than the chenille, right? It didn't matter to you though.

GH: Didn't matter.

DB: Okay. Did you ever try a peacock-bodied Carey? And was that useful?

GH: And I tried the green-bodied. And I had one, maybe its still out in the box, it was kind of purple-colored. But I evidently didn't have much faith in it so I didn't ever use it much.

DB: I see. Do you have any tackle tips? Any things that you might—if you were talking to a person like yourself when you first started fishing, like this Fred Ball tried to explain it to you back forty years ago, how would you explain it to somebody now? If they had never fished Pass Lake and wanted to go out and fish. Would you have any tips for them or thoughts that might help them?

GH: I'd tell them that if their boat was moving, even if it was drifting in the wind, to slow it down. You know, trail their oars.

DB: Ok, okay.

GH: I've probably passed up way, way more fish than I ever caught by moving too fast.

DB: You said that sort of thing before, so—that's your [advice].

GH: Sorry I'm repeating myself. But I'm sold on that idea. I firmly believe it.

DB: I talk to people and its interesting how this sort of thing comes out from different ones. I've interviewed Russ Willis and Louie Corbin. I hope to talk to some younger fishermen too, but I'm trying to get some of the ones that have fished there a long time first.

GH: Alright, has anything that I've said, do you agree with? Has it happened that way with you?

DB: Oh I definitely agree with it, I definitely agree with it, you bet. Especially fishing this kind of a fly and fishing it deep, I totally agree with that, your method. Even if you're casting and stripping, you strip slowly.

GH: Oh strip slow too. Alright, now you've taught me something.

DB: Well it's the same thing, isn't it? If you're anchored, instead of the boat moving slowly, you pull the line in slow, especially for rainbows.

Interruption

DB: Tell me about other flies.

GH: In flies that are tied spider fashion, I think too often when we buy them off the shelf, they're tied to entice the fisherman rather than an actual fish. You buy your favorite fly in the store and its tied spider fashion and it doesn't produce. A lot of the times [you] just take it and bite some of the hackle off of it, or if you have a nail clipper, clip some of the hackle off, and when it looks worn out and ready to throw away, it starts fishing its best.

DB: Okay, I know what you're talking about, that's a good point. You're the first person that's ever commented upon it that way. That's an interesting comment. I'm going to make a note of that.

GH: Well to get back to the fellow from Oak Harbor wearing the red hat that I told you was lapping us in this lake every so often. My son and I had decided we had better come home for lunch. This is mid-day. We had both brought our skiffs up onto the beach and were going to go up to our truck and back it up. He landed, before we got back there. He started walking; I don't know if he was going towards his vehicle or towards the restroom or something. And oh well suddenly you could tell the light came on and he stopped

in mid-stride and he turned right around and picked our rods up out of the skiff. He said, —“You’ve got to be kidding.” And my son says, —“Why?” And he said, —“You’re both fishing a bare hook!” So we had pretty well worn down flies and they were fishing well.

DB: Moving on to another thing, you say you always used a sinking line. Now when you first started fishing, did they sink as well as they do today? Or do you find that there’s quite a difference in equipment?

GH: No, but in my innocence, I didn’t know that we had all this variety of lines. I was so innocent of fly fishing that I just thought a fly line was a fly line. Of course then you learn about double tapers and you learn about sinking lines and floating lines and weight forward lines and this all rubs off through the years. I was a slow learner.

DB: That’s interesting. Now do you still fish Pass Lake at all? How long has it been since you’ve been out there, quite a while?

GH: Probably three years.

DB: How do you find the quality? How do you feel about fishing it now compared to 1950 or whenever you were fishing years ago? Does the quality of the experience still keep you enthused about going up there to fish?

GH: Not as much, I have to be honest with you. Not as much.

DB: And what do you attribute that to? I mean is there something that happened?

GH: No, it’s probably just myself being obstinate. I’m still rebelling against having to fish certain ways for certain things. It isn’t a problem with the lake; it’s a problem with me.

DB: That’s fine; it’s good to hear those things from people. We get caught up so often in thinking the way we want to think that it’s good to hear another point of view and I appreciate your saying that.

GH: Well Danny, one time—just a note—fishing not on my mind at all, I had gone over across the bridge to get a newspaper and came back, here’s a man and I guess his wife and a little baby, kind of in a portable seat there on the beach. And he’s casting out with a spinning rod from the landing area. So I turned in and stopped and I said, —“Fellow,” I said, —“I’m not trying to horn in on what you’re doing, your activity. I’m not going anywhere and get on the phone and report you, but,” I said, —“just in all fairness I don’t think you realize this is a fly fishing only lake and if somebody comes along, they’re going to write you a ticket.” —“Oh no,” he says, —“I’ve got a fly on.” And I said, —“Well that still won’t cut it. You’ve got to have a complete fly fishing [outfit]—a complete [outfit]. You know, the line, the whole bit.” So I said, —“Now you just suit yourself, I’m just trying to be neighborly,” and I got in my rig and drove away.

DB: Very good way to handle something like that. That’s really what a person—a good way to try to teach someone. Did you know any of the fellows from the Washington Fly Fishing Club that actually were involved with making it fly fishing only, back in the early Forties? You know every spring they have a big party down here at the campground at Bowman’s Bay.

GH: No, the closest I would come to that, Danny, is one time for some reason or another, I stopped along the lake shore over there and the fly fishing club was there and they were cleaning up debris and junk along the lake shore. And I recognized Doug Owens—

DB: Oh, that’s our club.

GH: That’s your club?

DB: That's our Anacortes club, yes. No, I'm talking about a group in Seattle that in 1939 or 1940, were the ones that got the state to change the regulations to fly fishing only. The one name that is always mentioned is Enos Bradner.

GH: He was a writer for the [*Seattle Times*] in the sports section.

DB: That's right.

GH: I read his articles many, many times.

DB: Okay, he was the fellow. But you weren't acquainted with him or anything?

GH: Not at all.

DB: Okay, now the next number—this next one is really one that you can help us with, because you've lived here and know the lake so well. Could you describe a little bit about the changes that took place when the roads were built? Was there a dam built in there where the boat launch ramp area is? And how has the lake changed since you first went there to fish? Do you see what I'm asking? The physical part of the lake, Louie told me it's deeper now.

GH: Well I'm recalling somewhere right in here, and I believe the floating part of it is there yet. They had an overflow that dumped the excess water down through an eight, ten, twelve-inch pipe.

DB: Yes. (The floating part was a pipe that took water out of the lake to the Fisheries research station at Bowman's Bay. There is also a culvert that goes under the launch area)

GH: And into a little stream that ran down and emptied into Bowman's Bay.

DB: That's still there.

GH: That's still there. Is it still being used?

DB: When the water is high enough, this last spring there was a lot of water running through.

GH: So that keeps the water from overflowing this parking area and the road.

DB: Do you remember when there was kind of a marsh area in where the launch area is now?

GH: No.

DB: So as far as the lake borders and so forth, you pretty much remember it as it is now.

GH: Yes. Now I was told, although I didn't get out in this part of the lake then, I was told when Fiorita tried to fulfill their contract—

DB: Spell that name, can you spell that?

GH: F-I-O-R-I-T-A

DB: Alright.

GH: (Looking at a map of the lake.) When they had the contract to build this section of highway, they ran into problems they had not anticipated when they started dumping their huge big boulders and rocks material in here. It just kept sinking. It just kept disappearing like there was no bottom. I was told that

finally, just outside of the fill area, lake-bottom material crowded up to the surface. Now whether they got an allowance on their contract or whether they absorbed that additional expense themselves, I'll never know. But they finally completed the highway around the lake shore.

DB: Interesting. You're not sure just exactly what area here that was, though.

GH: No because see, I got it verbally, so I form a word picture, I talk to you and here comes another word picture, and no, I didn't see a picture of it.

DB: I've heard this theory before and I'm wondering if—that's fine.

GH: But I would think Danny, it had to be where it came close to a rocky vertical cliff or something and there was no way they could crowd the road away from the lake onto firmer foundation, they still had to pour the material in.

DB: Yes. Possibly here, possibly up there. (We are looking at a map of Pass Lake.)

GH: Possibly here, and possibly here.

DB: Yes, okay, that's interesting. Do you think that Pass Lake is suited for fly fishing? Do you think it's a good lake for fly fishing?

GH: Oh I think it's proven itself.

DB: Do you have any anecdotes, any stories that you'd like to share with people that you remember—you mentioned the Fred Ball, comments about him. You mentioned this fellow from Oak Harbor with the red hat, he seemed to be kind of an interesting—did you know his name?

GH: No, no. But both my son and I were amused at his—he should have turned out for University of Washington rowing.

Interruption

GH: ... (Gilbert is looking at a map) just hauled him across, that's after this section of road was built, about 1948. And there was a man standing about in here, he didn't even have waders on, he just [had] hip-boots, and he was casting over towards this shore. It seemed to me like on an average of every fourth or fifth cast he was hooking a nice trout. As time went on, I couldn't stand it any longer so I went over to him and I said, "I've admired your fishing ability, but is it a secret or would you tell us all what you're using?" He said, "Yes, I'm using a Carrot Nymph." And he was using it very well. Everybody else was stopping, launching some kind of skiff off of their car or pick-up and heading away from there as fast as they could. And he stayed right there and he might have limited, I don't know.

DB: That's another fly that has been mentioned as a very popular fly for Pass Lake, the Carrot Nymph.

GH: Yes, and I've never done very much with it.

DB: But other people like it. And that's the difference in people and the way you fish and all kinds of things. But that's interesting. Well those two make a couple interesting stories, the guy with the red hat from Oak Harbor and you thought he was just going too fast.

GH: Ha, I'll never forget it. Because—well every time he went by my son or myself, we were probably 2-300 yards apart, one or the other of us were playing a trout.

DB: That would have made it even worse for him.

GH: And it was just getting to the man so bad he couldn't stand it. And he figured we had a secret fly. Well we had no secret fly. We never had a second to tell him what we were using; we even had him come along side and showed it to him.

DB: Now do you have any other thoughts? We've pretty well gone through the questions I've outlined. Do you have any ideas, not covered in this interview that would be useful for fly fishers that are planning to fish Pass Lake for the first time or are just getting into fly fishing?

GH: No, I'm sure that the thousand fly fisherman that use that lake could give better and more advice than I could.

DB: Now, that's not always true, because you've mentioned some things that other people haven't, so no, don't feel that way.

GH: Danny, are you interested at all in the historical part about this little log cabin that used to be down here and it was a sending key for the telegraph line?

DB: I sure am. This pre-dates Heilmans I take it.

GH: Oh yes, way, way, before Heilmans, probably even before Maddens. I think Maddens were there before Heilmans.

DB: Okay, how do you spell Madden?

GH: I don't know, but if I were guessing, I would say M-A-D-D-E-N.

DB: Alright. I'll try to find out more—are there any people around that might be—

GH: No because they're probably getting pretty well along in years when I came here.

DB: Well go ahead—yes I would like to hear about this log cabin—go ahead.

GH: Well now, I have nothing in writing, there's nothing I could use to document this, but the Ginnett family who lived over here, one of their sons, Al, told me that this little—just judging from this, that it would have sat right about here—this little one room log cabin. It had a telegraph key in there. And they could contact San Francisco, which was the base of this operation, every night when they would finish work. And he told me that the telegraph key was in that little cottage. He also showed me one or two green glass insulators he had, he said that he took off of trees years and years and years after this was abandoned.

DB: That's interesting. Is Al Ginnett still alive?

GH: No, no he passed away.

DB: Does he have any children around? I know there's Ginnetts around Anacortes, yet. I had some as students in school.

GH: He had a son, Gary, and a son, Dick. But they're grown probably middle-aged men now, and I haven't heard of them for many years. But I did talk to a fellow with the name Jim Hasting from Lopez Island, and when I told him that Telegraph Slough, out here east of the bridge got its name from that telegraph line that was being constructed and the Telegraph Bite about a mile down this bluff got its name from that line, and Jim said, —Yes, and Telegraph Bay over on Lopez got its name from that telegraph line.”

DB: Okay. Now—I might check with them, but your story makes sense and there's no use really—I just thought if I could follow up. Ginnetts lived up more towards Lake Campbell, didn't they, the family—the family property—as I recall.

GH: Yes, I think it would be southwest of that corner of Lake Campbell, way down where all the lily pads are. I think they were southwest of there.

DB: I had some Campbell Lake kids in school years ago, and I can't even remember their first name—or Ginnett kids. I just can't remember, I don't remember a Gary or a Dick, but I do remember some Ginnetts. That's interesting though. So part of this telegraph line that you wrote about in your paper there—

GH: I don't know why that fascinated me.

DB: It came right around on the edge of Pass Lake then?

GH: Oh yes, it was very, very close to it, probably within a hundred, hundred and fifty yards.

DB: Right along the shoreline of where the Heilman farm is.

GH: Yes. I think what fascinated me about that story was the immensity of that thing and the difficulty of constructing it in the absence of good roads and highways and to put that much into it and then, BOOM, just overnight having to drop it and abandon it.

DB: It's hard for us to comprehend that.

GH: Oh we never will be able to.

DB: It would be like you'd take your gill net boat and go down to the net factory and buy all the net and buy all the equipment and get it all ready and then putting your boat on dry dock and forgetting about it, you know.

GH: That's absolutely valueless, there's nothing they could salvage, except the groceries that they had on hand.

DB: Yes. I know. When did you stop gill net fishing?

END OF RECORDED INTERVIEW