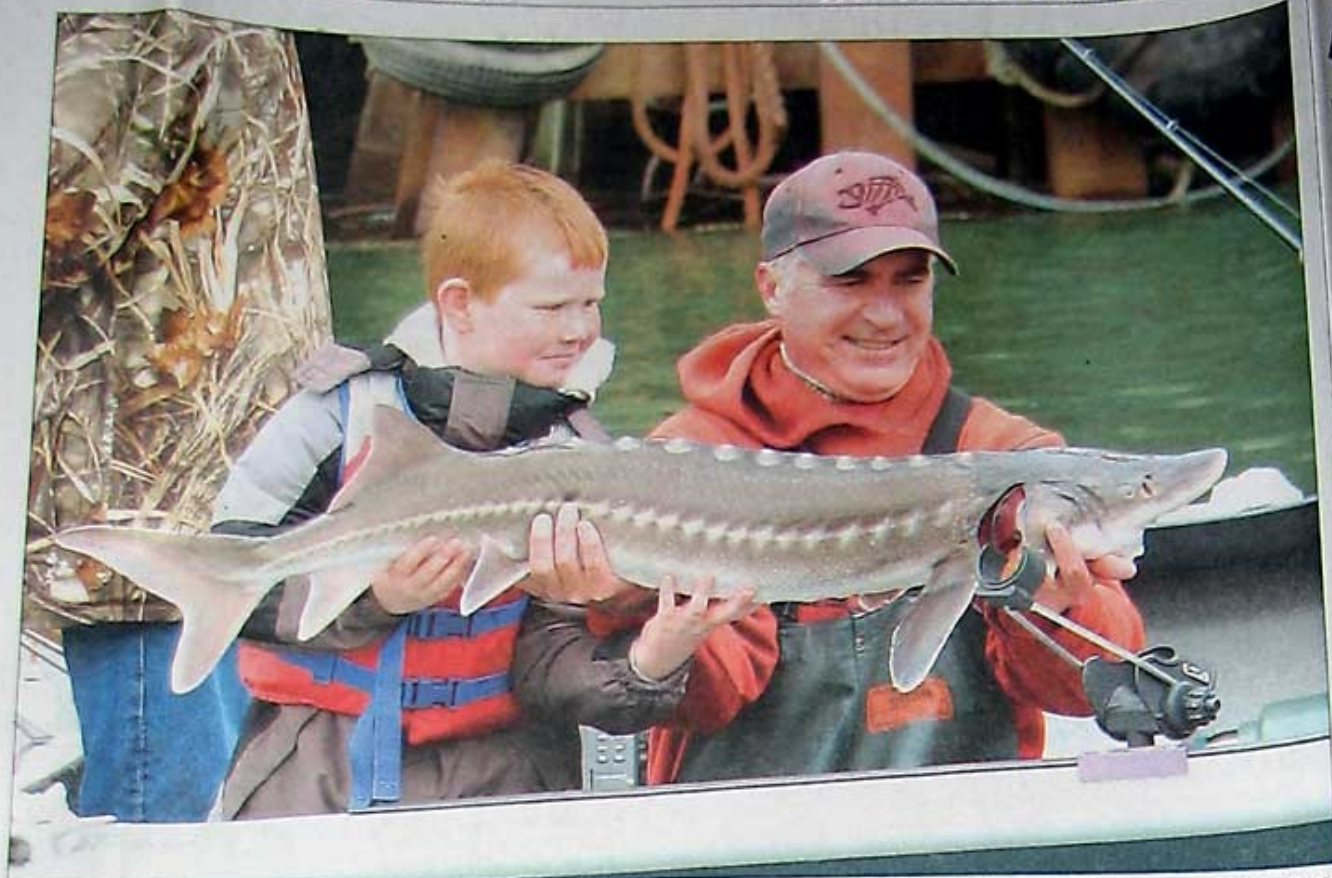


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Gary Lewis / For The Bulletin

Colby Devore of Redmond, left, and his guide Bob Stockdall admire Colby's first Willamette River "keeper."

Stumptown sturgeon: It's all about the bite

One hundred and sixty years ago, the banks of the Willamette River were sparsely populated by trailblazers, lured West by the promise of free land and a future. Oregon City drew the earliest pioneers, but a town grew downstream as well. The ring of an axe was common as big trees were cut to build a raucous community on the lower Willamette.

For several years they called it Stumptown, until the day two farsighted timber men decided it needed a classier moniker. They tossed a coin. The man from Maine scored the right to call it Portland, after his hometown. If the guy from Massachusetts had prevailed, Oregon's largest city



would have been named Boston.

Before them, the Hudson's Bay Company had established a foothold here for Britain. With the influx of Americans, England lost interest.

Lewis and Clark explored these waters in 1805. They traded with the Indians, whose villages were found at the mouth of the Willamette and upstream near the falls.

For time out of mind the Indians had made their living on the

banks of the Willamette, subsisting on mighty runs of fish. These were the Multnomah, the Watlala, the Clowwewalla, the Clackamas, the Molalla and the Kalapuyan.

But these too were newcomers, compared to the sturgeon.

They say over a million sturgeon live in the Columbia between the mouth of the river and Bonneville Dam.

That's about 6,800 sturgeon per river mile. Sturgeon prefer big, slow-moving water and the Willamette, one of the Columbia's major tributaries, is made for sturgeon and sturgeon fishermen. That's why I headed to Portland last week to fish with Bill Kremers and Ken Harrell (www.oregonrivertrails.com) on

the Willamette.

We launched at the public ramp on Swan Island and motored out the narrow passage between barges and the hulks of old rusting ships. In the main channel, we turned left and Kremers put the throttle down. The 24-foot Alumaweld got up on step and soon we were headed toward downtown Portland at full throttle.

We passed beneath the Fremont Bridge and the Broadway and anchored next to another guide's boat, downstream from the Steel Bridge. Kremers pointed at the depth finder and showed me where an underwater cliff dropped off to 80 feet. That's why he'd chosen this spot.

See Lewis / D5