

Fishing Weirs in Unexpected Settings

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Recent excavations at two Oregon coast sites have identified wood stake fishing weirs in unusual settings. One is in a narrow channel under a concrete bridge, and the other is in a former dairy farm pasture. In many ways these weirs are typical of the 65 intertidal fishing weir sites I recorded as part of my dissertation research in the 1990s, but their locations are somewhat unexpected.

At site 35LNC78 at Yaquina Bay we identified a 2400 year old weir in a tidal channel under the concrete span of a bridge. The narrow tidal channel between the retaining walls held debris and appeared disturbed by currents, yet the weirs were found well preserved 20 to 70 cm below the surface in bay mud sediments. The fishing weir was partially excavated and stakes and associated materials carefully conserved by Dale Croes and Kathleen Hawes of SPSCC. Robert Kentta of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians is overseeing plans for display of the conserved stakes at the tribe's new cultural center. The site is on the National Register of Historic Places.



For more information about Oregon coast weir sites, see articles posted at <http://works.bepress.com/byram/>



Above: Don Ivy (right) and Kyle Robbins of the Coquille Indian Tribe Cultural Resources Program examine vertical wooden stakes in Feature 3 at the Prairie Weir Site.

Left: The weathered tips of wooden stakes in the "Bridge Weir" after initial exposure at site 35LNC78, Yaquina Bay.

Right: Thousands of vertical stakes make up this Native American fishing weir recently identified on the intertidal flats of an Oregon estuary. Weirs like this were used to catch a wide variety of marine fishes during all seasons.



Working on a Coquille River tidal wetland restoration project in 2009, we identified the Prairie Weir Site in a shallow channel excavation. The 1000 year old weir stakes comprise three discrete lines of stakes dispersed over 100 meters. They are preserved in saturated sediments approximately one half meter below the grassy surface of a field that was being grazed by cattle a few weeks before the excavation. Due to episodic tectonic subsidence and intervening uplift in the Cascadia region, the vertical sequence at this and nearby sites is complex. The 1000 year old weirs are 1.5 meters higher in elevation than weirs that are 700 to 800 years old. Previous archaeological projects by the Coquille Indian Tribe and University of Oregon documented numerous weirs and lattice panels in the nearby area, primarily along the intertidal riverbank. While previous modeling had predicted that weirs would be located inland from the riverbank, buried in the past by the infilling estuary, the shallow depth of the Prairie Weir site was not expected.

Close to 100 archaeological fishing weir sites have been recorded on the Oregon coast since 1993, located mostly on open tidal flats or in salt marsh channels. In many areas weirs are now more common than any other site type. The scope of research topics that can be addressed involving weirs is also growing, as exemplified by Robert Losey of the University of Alberta in the current issue of Cambridge Archaeological Journal. <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?aid=7151840>