

Catch of the Day... Episode #1

By James Allen Lippold

Since retirement I'm always on the lookout for new, interesting hobbies that might be fun (if they made me rich, all the better).

Several weeks ago, I caught wind of something new to do to waste free-time and entertain myself in the process. It's called Magnet Fishing. Here's how it works: get a very high powered magnet (Amazon of course), hook it to a rope & toss it into any body of water, reel it in & see what treasures you've snagged. Then it's just a matter of going to the bank and cash in on all the valuables. Sounds easy doesn't it? Not so much for me as it turns out.

Got my magnet: "Uolor Double Side Round Neodymium Fishing Magnet, Combined 660 LBS Pulling Force, ultra-strong with eyebolt." Cost about fifty bucks. Got a length of heavy duty nylon rope with a carabiner attached to one end. Based on my experience, every new hobby comes with hidden costs that invariably include a multitude of extras and specialized paraphernalia. For example, getting into encaustic art, painting with melted, colored wax requires a whole bunch of stuff to create the artwork. Anyway, I got almost everything needed to start magnet fishing and am ready to venture out on my first expedition.

After a stop at the hardware store to fetch a new bucket & canvass bag to carry all the weighty artifacts I will gather at each outing, I start my new venture I like to call The Great Spokane River Magnet Adventure Outfitters.

After careful thought and precise planning, I decide on a promising location to begin my treasure hunt. I decide on a spot on the Spokane River just down from Sisters of the Holy Names former convent. What makes this spot attractive to a magnet fisherman is that it has become a favorite swimming hole for many young folks in the summer and a natural stop-over point for rafters. There's also an old bridge - maybe formerly used for a water pipe but is now used by kids to jump off into the river. So, maybe they've lost stuff of value into the depths of the river. This spot is close to home & I can see the mobile park just across the river. The other and most important reason is that at this time of year and on a bad weather winter day is that it will be deserted - so no audience to my strange roping antics. I pulled into the old nursing school parking lot & park in a 'no parking' spot (it was Sat. so thought it was safe). I packed up my gear carefully trying to anticipate any eventuality, as I would not be making multiple trips back and forth between the car & shore because of the steep trail down from the parking lot. I threw everything in

the new bucket, including the magnet, rope, new neoprene gloves, duffle bag, and plastic trowel to scrape anything magnetic but unwanted from the magnet face and head over to the foot trail next to the parking lot that leads down to the river bank.

I was filled with a mix of excitement, anticipation, and some trepidation as well due the unknowns of the situation. There were no souls in site, the pines swaying in the light breeze, eerily quiet under overcast skies and it was cool low 40's. Walking past the "Private Property No Trespassing" sign added an additional shot of angst about what I'm doing. The path is muddy and the downward pitch got steeper and steeper.

One of my first observations while walking was, "Hey, I'm walking!" That's an odd thing to be doing for a total devotee to the life of quite literal leisure - no effort, ever. Here's the recliner, TV remote, Computer/screen/mouse, sound bar remote, bottle of water, ashtray, cannabis pipe, chocolate all within arm's reach to minimize unnecessary movement. Therefore, it is at this point that one of the first self-terrorizing thoughts begins... "Shit, I'm a 70 year-old unrepentant extreme couch potatoe (note spell), and for every step downhill will mean a corresponding step uphill all too soon." I calm myself and continue.

The last 50 feet the trail turned into rutted primitive set of switchbacks over mud, loose gravel and wet rock. Launching forward in this final stretch of trail, my mind calls up the muscle memory of an agile, fleet-footed young man. But that was only a distant memory. My legs actually manifest an astounding display of ineptness, with jello- muscled legs and a complete lack of coordination and balance. As I fumbled downward, I realized that these next few steps could either land me in the hospital or at my planned destination - I give myself 50/50 odds.

I finally arrived somehow physically intact but emotionally traumatized at the river's edge with magnet gear in hand, huffing and puffing and needing to sit on a rock pronto for a little recovery. A cigarette might be in order.

The stress and strain of the hike (and I suspect this might be related to advancing age as well) my bowels chose that inopportune time for an urgent alert. If you have not already, you will learn that most anything can easily become a crisis when you're old. I wasn't at all confident of ever being able to "scramble" back up the trail to find a bathroom. In fact, I realized that the reality is that I'm going to be lucky to make it back up even once, let alone twice. Suffice it to say, it kind of worked out. Have you ever tried to become invisible?

What I had not realized, is that this spot in the river was heavily populated by

large boulders and mid-size rocks in the water. A huge learning was that large boulders and submerged river rock are not particularly magnet fishing friendly. More on that later.

Even though the rope came neatly packaged, it still took me several minutes to unwind and straighten it out to be ready for the first cast as I somehow created knots and tangles where there were none. With low frustration tolerance, swearing frequently helped me to wrestle the rope into submission.

Then I wound up, gave a heave ho & the magnet went flying... a short 10 feet beyond the shore as my foot was inadvertently on the rope. Saying, "Ok, I can do this, it's not rocket science," I made my second cast.

You may be beginning to think poorly of my magnet fishing prowess, but let me tell you there were instances of actual forethought that prevented even more ridiculousness from happening. Namely, I tied one end of the rope to my arm, anticipating that a good cast might end up taking the whole rope with it into the river

Over the next few casts, the magnet kept trying to get hung up in the crotches between boulders. Once, fairly seriously stuck, I had to move up and down the shore to finally shake it loose. I vow to not lose a magnet lightly since they're not cheap and imagine myself wading out over slippery rocks and fast-moving water risking life and limb for a measly magnet. By about cast nine or ten, I'd only retrieved an old bobby-pin & a bunch of magnetic stones and bits of metal fragments. I know that all the cash boxes and safes containing gold and silver were still out there.

On the next cast it happened. While reeling the rope in I felt a tug on the line. Continuing to pull on whatever the magnet had latched onto, it eventually released and I was able to get the rope all the way back in. When the last several feet of rope appeared above the water I could see that the carabiner was empty - no magnet!

The magnet is connected to a screw-in eye bolt that connects to the carabiner that connects to the rope. The magnet had come unscrewed completely and released to magnet into the depths of the river. Since my casting had improved, the magnet was lost toward the middle, deepest section of the river.

I then demonstrated a rare bit of good sense and decided to bring my first adventure in magnet fishing to an end. So, I packed up what was left of my gear and braced myself for the arduous hike out. After several breather stops, I made it back to the parking lot relieved to having the maiden voyage of my new hobby behind me.

I wrote to the manufacturer of the fishing magnet to complain about how quickly

and easily the eye bolt came unscrewed. I saw several other magnets for sale later that come with a thread "locking" fluid to prevent what happened to me, so I knew it was a somewhat common problem that I thought they should have warned new users about. To my shock and surprise the company replied with a nice customer note of apology and they said a new replacement was on its way at no charge. So, I'm still not rich (yet), but learned some valuable lessons during this 'shake-down' first outing.

- I'm old. But I'm physically much older than necessary due to inactivity. I will change this, if for no other reason than to be able to throw magnets into various bodies of water around Spokane.
- Rocks, especially big rocks are not good for magnet fishing.
- I must mitigate the "unscrewed" problem with my next magnet.
- Consider rubber boots and waterproof pants (more extra spending with new hobbies). And finally,
- Consider a different hobby... perhaps more sedentary or go back to encaustic painting...

So, that was it. My big adventure shaking things up and exploring new activities. I look forward to your tales and adventures in retirement...