

# Tale of a trophy trout

Twenty years ago this month Clinch produced state record

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There's a big rock in the river a couple miles below Norris Dam where the most magnificent trout on the Clinch once lived.

During periods of high water, the enormous female used that boulder and others like it as shields from the swift, icy current and as a hiding place to ambush unsuspecting prey washing downstream.

That rock was her place of refuge until she fell for a fishermen's lure late in the afternoon of Aug. 30, 1988.

And like a tombstone, the boulder remains in the riverbed today as a monument to the greatest brown trout ever caught in Tennessee waters.

The fish and her legacy have been constant companions for almost half of Greg Ensor's life. The 1980 graduate of Halls High

caught the state record trout nearly two decades ago with the help of fishing buddy Tim Webb.

Ensor, now 45 and still living in Knoxville, said of all the stories that have been told about his trout over the years, the most common misconception is about where she was caught.

Rumor is the fish came from a section of river downstream of Massengill Bridge, an area of many deep holes with downed timber where big browns are said to frequent.

Ensor said he actually caught his trophy trout from Webb's boat while fishing a couple hundred yards upstream of the Miller Island Access at the intersection of Hwy. 441 and River Road.

"They were running two generators at the dam that day, but the water wasn't unusually high. It was good and fishable," said Ensor, who recalls his historic catch as if it were yesterday.

"It was maybe 5 or 5:30 in the



Greg Ensor, now 45, still marvels at the sheer size of the state record brown trout he pulled from the icy waters of Clinch River below Norris Dam 20 years ago this month.

Photo by Dwane Wilder

afternoon. We made one drift, and the fish came up and swirled at Tim's lure. It made a swirl that was enormous. We thought we might've spooked it, so we decided to let it rest for a few minutes and ran back up to the weir dam to fish."

Both men were fishing with spinning tackle. So, during the return trip downstream, Webb talked Ensor into tying on one of his favorite plugs, a five-inch floating Bagley Bang-O-Lure, gold colored with black stripes.

When they neared the rock, Ensor cast his big balsa wood plug where he had seen the huge trout swipe at Webb's lure.

"I pulled the lure down and I saw a big fish following it," said Ensor, who thought it was a carp until the trout engulfed the bait, then made its first jump.

Despite having only 8 lb. test line, Ensor said the fight didn't last long, maybe 10 minutes at the most.

Webb netted the trout, but it took both men to wrestle it into the boat.

"As soon as we got it into the boat, it thrashed around a lot. I said, 'Man, I think it might be a world record,'" said Ensor.

Webb agreed.

So, for the next couple of hours, they drove around Anderson and north Knox counties looking for a set of certified scales big enough to weigh the fish. They finally ended up in the seafood aisle of the Clinton Hwy. Kroger.

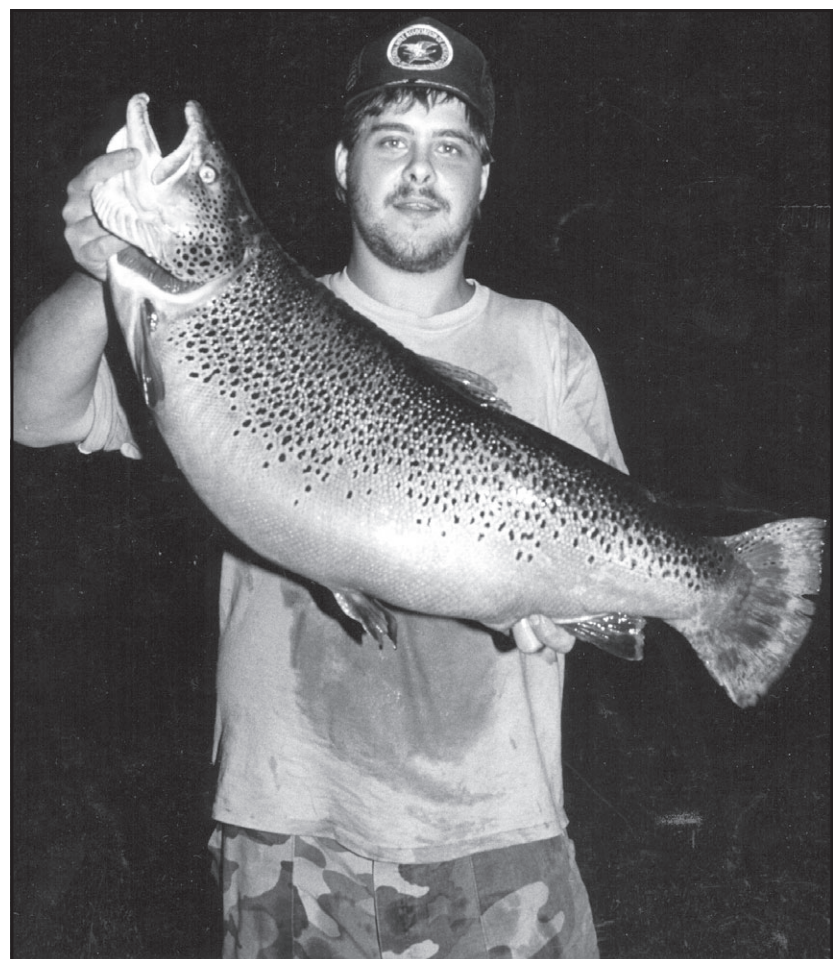
Ensor chuckled as he remembered the bizarre scene of two grungy fishermen carrying a huge trout through the grocery store.

"The women were appalled, and the men were following us," he said.

At 28 lbs. 12 oz., the trout was a new state record. She was as wide (36 inches) as she was long and measured 18 inches from the tip of the dorsal fin to the bottom of her fat belly.

Ten days later, Webb caught a 14 lb. brown from the same hole on the river.

Word spread quickly, and fish-



Ensor poses with his big brown trout only a couple of hours after the historic catch on the afternoon of Aug. 30, 1988.

Photo by Lowell Branham

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Greg Ensor's recollection of the day in Aug. 1988 when he caught the state record brown trout.

ing pressure intensified almost overnight. Soon the entire 13-mile stretch of the Norris Dam tailwaters was choked with fishermen searching for an even bigger trout.

"You couldn't even get in the river for a month," said Ensor, who compared the hysteria that followed to a memorable scene from the 1975 movie Jaws, where an entire town joined in the chase for a man-eating shark.

The Bagley Bang-O-Lure Ensor used to make his historic catch also became a hot commodity.

"They got so prized at one time that you couldn't buy one (in local stores). People were ordering them from the manufacturer," he said.

Ensor said the state record belongs as much to Webb as it does him.

"He didn't get a lot of credit," said Ensor.

"But he's the one that figured out how to catch trout with big lures. If it hadn't been for Tim, I wouldn't have gone fishing that day. I was supposed to be mowing the yard.

"We still hunt and fish together. He's the best friend a guy could have."

Ensor had the record fish mounted by a taxidermist and soon afterward it began making the rounds of local sporting goods stores including The Creel, a specialty shop that catered to fly fishermen.

The trout also had a place of

honor on the wall of the Clinton Hwy. Wal-Mart, where Ensor said he actually got a discount for allowing it to be prominently displayed for patrons to gawk at.

Nowdays, the trout has taken up permanent residence on a wall in the Ensor family living room.

Over the years, fishing pressure has steadily increased on the Clinch, but no Tennessee trout has even come close to Ensor's record.

However, in 1997 Ensor said he hooked a fish in a deep hole just below the I-75 bridge over the Clinch that would've matched or exceeded 28 lbs. 12 oz.

The fish eventually broke his line when it swam into downed timber.

It's also entirely possible that Rick Bivens may have crossed paths with the very same trout.

About 10 years ago, Bivens, who is a trout biologist with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, was conducting an electroshocking stream survey on the Clinch when he encountered a brown that would've rivaled Ensor's state record fish.

Bivens lifted the massive trout onto a 25 lb. scale that he had in his boat, but the scale bottomed out.

"I'm sure it would've weighed a lot more than 25 lbs.," said Bivens.

"We've seen several 25-30 inch browns over the years, but nothing that size."



A heavy flow of water from a release at Norris Dam forms a turbulent set of rapids just below the weir dam as it roars downstream. The cold water creates a habitat that big brown trout thrive in.

Photo by Dwane Wilder



Two fishermen try their luck a couple hundred yards upstream of the Miller Island boat ramp. This is precisely the section of the Clinch River where the state record brown trout was caught.

Photo by Dwane Wilder