



## The Return of the Rockfish

*Narrated by Stanley Woodward*

### 1. What is a muddle?

<Video opens showing Doug Brown>

**D. Brown:** You want-anybody-anybody ain't never eat a rockfish muddle needs to try it, 'cause it ain't nothin' but the truth. It's a fish stew. A lot of people cook it with the bones in it, but I take mine, cook my fish and take the bones out and then you can eat it by the-by the forkful.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**D. Brown:** I don't like to pick bones out of there.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**D. Brown:** So everybody's got their own idea, you know? Some people take a little piece of side meat, a little piece of bacon, fry it and get a little bit of the grease out to season it you know. You can make it however you want it.

**S. Woodward:** Some people-

**D. Brown:** Fresh green-fresh green onions or spring onions, and yellow onions, fresh green parsley, rockfish or catfish filleted and uh, and some crushed red peppers all-and potatoes is all you need, really, you know. Just cook it-you cook it down where it's kind of thick. You know, you pick it up with a fork, you know. It ain't soupy. If it's real soupy, it's not a muddle. It has to be kinda thick.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**D. Brown:** So that's the reason why I put a few potatoes in there. Let the potatoes cook all to pieces and that'll thicken it up see.

**S. Woodward:** Yeah.

**D. Brown:** But that's old-that's old [Roanoke] River specialty.

**S. Woodward:** How far back do you reckon a muddle goes?

**D. Brown:** <Spits> Far back as my grandpa can remember.

<Video shows another man>

**S. Woodward:** How long you been livin' on the river?

**Man:** All my life.

**S. Woodward:** Tell me about fish muddle.

**Man:** Damn good if-if it's fixed right.

**S. Woodward:** Yeah.

**Man:** If it ain't fixed right, it ain't worth a damn.

<Video shows Doug Brown>

**D. Brown:** It's the best thing you ever put in your mouth. <Man laughs> I can't imagine nobody that don't know what a rockfish muddle is.

**S. Woodward:** Really?

**D. Brown:** Yeah. It ain't nothin' in the world but rockfish, and green onions, and parsley, and yellow onions cooked up in there with some potatoes and cook the potatoes all to pieces to thicken it up and uh, put a little black pepper, a little crushed red pepper in it. Man that's good stew. And you wanna make it real good, you get you a channel cat and put one catfish in there with it.

**S. Woodward:** Oh really? Yeah.

**D. Brown:** Yeah. Ain't nothin' but the truth.

**S. Woodward:** Wow.

**D. Brown:** Yeah. I been eating it fifty nine years.

**S. Woodward:** Fifty nine years?

**D. Brown:** Yeah, I'm fifty nine years old. I been eatin' it all my life.

**S. Woodward:** Well they-if you fifty nine years old, they must have fed it to you for Pablum.

**D. Brown:** They did fed it to me when I was a baby. My granddaddy fed it to me when I was a baby.

## 2. Howarton Finch on rockfish muddles (01:42)

<Video opens with Howarton Finch>

**H. Finch:** ...would be way less. It would take at least two-

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**H. Finch:** -uh thirty pound fish to really make a good muddle for a good sized, uh, family of people. I mean friends, you know, come up. They didn't sell it, they just made it and had a good time enjoying it-

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**H. Finch:** -because [they] were fishermen and that-that was the way they enjoyed themselves.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**H. Finch:** And uh, and maybe sometime they may have a little beer, but most of the time it was cornbread and more onions and bacon and all that stuff you put in that, but it was, it was delicious really.

*<Video cuts to another clip of Howarton Finch>*

**H. Finch:** Uh, if you over salt it, people didn't like a lot of salt.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**H. Finch:** And if you put too much pepper, some people didn't like a lot of pepper.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**H. Finch:** So they'd put a little bit of each-

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**H. Finch:** -it's just salt and pepper, spring onions, smoked meat, and fish is the way they cooked'em.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

*<Video cuts to another clip of Howarton Finch>*

**S. Woodward:** What's cut back on the cooking of fish muddles, more than anything else?

**H. Finch:** Because they-they just wasn't the right size. They hadn't-they were too small. Uh, you take a three pound fish, you'd have to have a whole lot of three pound fish to make a good muddle and back then when they did cook a lot of muddles, they were catching great big fish. They had nineteen, twenty pounds, eighteen pounds, uh from ten up...

**S. Woodward:** Right.

**H. Finch:** ...would be good fish size, muddle fish you know.

**S. Woodward:** How many mu-how many fish that size would you need to make a muddle?

**H. Finch:** Well, you need about three ten pounders, which would be around thirty pounds.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

**H. Finch:** So if you catch one, say, weigh thirty pounds, time you head him and, you know, and got him cleaned up for-for muddling, he would be way less. It would take at least two.

**S. Woodward:** Um hum.

*<Video cuts to another clip of Howarton Finch>*

**H. Finch:** But this year, since they've sent the big fishes back, I think you'll start seeing more muddlin' now than what you did because, with my knowledge, I've passed it on to my oldest boy and he can cook one. Then he's passed it on to the next oldest boy and now they know how to cook'em. So it's been passed down through history.

### **3. J. E. Evans cooks a muddle (03:38)**

*<Video opens with J.E. Evans and another man>*

**Man:** ...you're gonna have to hold him for a minute 'til I can [????]. You got him?

**J.E. Evans:** I got him.

*<Video shows a pan of bacon cooking and then J.E. Evans>*

**J.E. Evans:** Then I'm gonna cook some-another pan of gr-uh, bacon. I'm'a put that in there. Then I'm'a put my onion in there and I'm'a start cookin' it.

*<Video shows J.E. Evans slicing spring onions>*

**J.E. Evans:** These are spring onions. That's what I cook first.

**S. Woodward:** Is that the first thing in the pot?

**J.E. Evans:** First thing in the pot.

*<Video shows parsley on a cutting board>*

**J.E. Evans:** This is the parsley I'm cuttin' up. I got three bundles. If I didn't have but a few fish I'd put one bundle in it. I figure three is plenty.

*<Video shows J.E. Evans>*

**J.E. Evans:** We put a little hot pepper in it as we go along.

<Video shows J.E. Evans cutting the fish>

<Video shows J.E. Evans>

**J.E. Evans:** Uh, I'm gonna put this grease in there and start, uh, cookin' the onions and, uh, we'll be on our way.

<Video shows J.E. Evans adding grease to the pot>

**Man 2:** That's plenty grease.

**J.E. Evans:** Well there's another drop. <They laugh>

**Man 3:** He-he squeezed the grease [????]

<Video shows J.E. Evans adding onions to the pot>

**Child:** Onions [too]?

**Woman:** Yeah.

<Video shows J.E. Evans adding parsley and then adding fish>

**Man 4:** Alright, I got some more fish ready.

**J.E. Evans:** Through them in here.

**Man 4:** Alright.

**Man 5:** Lookin' good! That is lookin' good.

<Video shows J.E. Evans adding bacon bits>

**J.E. Evans:** It's bacon bits.

<Video shows J.E. Evans adding red pepper>

**J.E. Evans:** Red pepper.

<Video shows J.E. Evans holding the red pepper up to the video camera>

**J.E. Evans:** See I didn't put that much in there. That ain't much for that-all that.

<Video show J.E. Evans>

**J.E. Evans:** You wind up. You got to wash all the dishes, take care of everything, 'cause when they eat, he's goin' to say, "I got to go. I got an appointment with somebody." So they got to go. So you wind up and that's the reason I quit cookin'...years ago.

<Video shows J.E. Evans with a bowl of muddle>

**J.E. Evans:** Mmm!

<Video shows J.E. Evans pushing down on his muddle>

**J.E. Evans:** See the juice in there?

**S. Woodward:** Yeah.

**J.E. Evans:** That's a wet one.

*<Video shows J.E. Evans>*

**J.E. Evans:** That's good.

*<Video shows a woman eating>*

**Woman 2:** Mmm.

*<Video shows J.E. Evans>*

**J.E. Evans:** When it comes off the bone, you know it's done.

*<Video shows a woman going to get more muddle>*

**Woman 3:** I'm getting' a refill.

#### **4. Jimmy Storey and muddles (02:17)**

*<Video opens with Jimmy Storey>*

**S. Woodward:** [Remember] when you were young, were you part of the Mush Island gang or...?

**J. Storey:** Well I guess you would ca-I guess you would call it that. I-I was, uh, I netted and-netted [the] fish up here and-and-and sold'em. Uh, it was a way of life for me back then. Really, I mean, it was a way of survival almost. You know, I came up in the cotton-in the textile mills and didn't make a whole lot of money and-and we come down here and caught fish and-and um, peddled'em around and sold'em and uh-

**S. Woodward:** Where would you sell'em?

**J. Storey:** Well I sold-it's-first we started sellin'em just local to the local people. My daddy would take'm and peddle'm in the mill village over there and sell'em, you know, by the pound. We'd pair'em up-

**Someone:** We're going to Tuckerville.

**J. Storey:** -two-two about the same size and uh, say, you know, two pound fish, whatever what size where we get two about the same size and just pair'em up and the go around and sell'em for, you know, a dollar, dollar and a quarter, whatever. You didn't make a whole lot of money, but you know, back then things was tight and it come in good. And from that it went to, uh, it went to, uh, bigger things. I mean commercial people got into it and got to buying fish and carrying'em up to New York and up north and sellin'em and

the market got really good for'em. And so then, started carrying some to Plymouth, [a little city] like that and sellin'em. Lot of'em got busted for that 'cause a lot of'em were sellin' lake fish and that was, you know, against the law. You couldn't sell the fish out of the lake, but uh, it really hurt the fishin'. I can, you know, I can see that now, it-you know. Not only here, but on the coast too. The commercial fishin', when they got-back in the seventies when the price got to seven dollars a pound in New York for'em, uh, it was a big demand for'em. And commercial fishermen and some of the other fishermen all would just catch'em anyway they could, you know and just ship'em to New York and makin' big money off of'em. Uh, but ah-while they finally clamped down on'em and uh, and-and it's helped. The fishing has come back. Uh-

**S. Woodward:** Well now what do-<*Video ends*>

### **5. Rockfish conservation (01:15)**

<*Video shows Mark Dutton*>

**S. Woodward:** What's important about protecting this fishery?

**M. Dutton:** This fishery is-is-there's nothing like it in-no where in the United States. It's one of the largest spawning grounds for striped bass for the ocean-the Atlantic Ocean striped bass and you know, if these fish have been coming up this river for hundreds of years. And if, uh, we don't protect the-the fishery and don't protect the spawning ground then the fish could be depleted. And it's at a point, um, fifteen-maybe fifteen years ago, to where this-this population of fish was really endangered. And that's when the regulations really started getting strict. The Federal Government were-you know, started the mandating it. Um, and we started the studies and started the strict enforcement on the fish: settin' size limits and creel limits and so forth. And now this fishery has come back to where it's better than it ever have-has been before. The numbers of fish that come up this river every year are just astronomical. I mean there's no-there's no way to even really measure it. Um, it's so many fish that are-come up here. And we've actually restocked this-or not restocked it, but restructured it to where this fishery is as-best as that it's ever-you know-good as it's ever been and it is probably the best you will ever see in our lifetime.

**S. Woodward:** Yeah.

## 6. Importance of rockfish conservation (01:17)

*<Video shows Mark Dutton>*

**M. Dutton:** ...ground. Basically this is the-this is the spawning ground and-for the Atlantic Ocean striped bass, uh, population. And if you don't protect the spawning ground, the times they are spawning, then we're not going to have a reproduction. And if you don't have-if you have several years of a bad reproduction then it's going to eat into the-into the number of the fish that are actually in the ocean that come up here to spawn. And it-it takes, uh, I think it takes six to eight years, uh, for a fish to come back up here to spawn-to be where it's mature enough to come up and spawn. And, you know, we need to make sure these fish are able to get to those ages. Uh, if you got-if you have a couple years that you've got some problems then your younger fish get wiped out then you're gonna have a couple years gap in your popul-in your spawning population because those-when those fish were to reach maturity they're not going to be able to be here to spawn. So there's a chance that we have of-we're gonna lose our population of our spawning fish. So that's the main reason to protect the river and to make sure that these fish are gonna be able to come up here year after year to keep spawning to keep reproducing, you know, making the population-um, sustain the population where it's a healthy population.