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Investigator
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An Interview with

R. R. Meigs, Park Hill
Oklahoma

A destructive method of obtaining fish through the use of powerful explosives had its origin in Indian Territory days. There were then no fish and game laws in operation. The streams were full of many fish of various kinds and during many years the people of the hills and forests had caught all the fish necessary for food purposes with hooks and lines, with spears or gigs and occasionally by the use of pounded buck-eye roots, but in order to obtain large numbers of fish in a short time the use of dynamite was resorted to by numbers of persons. Some were citizens of the Cherokee Nation and some were non-citizens or persons temporarily living in the Cherokee Country.

As early as 1884, according to recollections of some of the old residents of various sections, giant powder, as it was designated, was being used from time to time in the Illinois and Barren Fork rivers, the principal streams of the hills in the Tahlequah district, now Cherokee County.

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Sometimes a good-sized company of men visited the deep stretches of water and after attaching fuses to portions of sticks of the explosive, lighted the fuses and tossed the "shot" into the water. A stone was often attached to the portion of explosive so that it sank to the bottom of the stream. Blue smoke from the fuse soon became visible on the surface of the water, quickly followed by the muffled roar of the explosion. Numbers of fish, killed outright, or stunned to helplessness, floated to the surface and were gathered by the fishermen.

When a number of persons composed the fishing expedition a man was sometimes selected to apportion the fish. This man turned his back to the crowd, another man selected two fish and shouted "Whose are these?" The other or first man thereupon called out the name of someone in the party and the fish were handed to him, and the names of others were called until all had received a number of fish.

Besides the larger fish, untold numbers of small fish were destroyed by the explosive. Schools of minnows, large numbers of small perch, young fish of several varieties were eliminated and

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there were no fish left in the once famous fishing pools and stretches of blue water. Fishermen, using hooks and lines found that practically no fish were to be found in the places where the explosive had been used, so there was scarcity during several years.

The old-time residents in the localities in the vicinity of the streams looked with much disfavor upon the use of explosives, realizing that great damage was being done to the fish but it was not until a number of years had elapsed that the practice was forbidden by statute and even then there were persons who risked arrest and trial in court by dynamiting streams in isolated sections of the Hills. Stringent laws against the use of poison or explosives for purposes of securing fish were enacted by the legislature of Oklahoma and the use of giant powder or dynamite has ceased, except that on infrequent occasions a "shot" has been exploded by persons who prefer to secure fish by lawless methods.

Several years after the widespread practice of dynamite fishing ceased there was a noticeable increase of fish.

Authorities: Personal recollections.

R. R. Meigs, Park Hill.