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# SPORTS

3D

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## Record trout deserves Oscar



SPECIAL TO THE PIONEER PRESS, ROB DRIESLEIN OF OUTDOOR NEWS  
**Until this week**, Scott Thorpe always felt a twinge of regret about keeping the 16-pound, 6-ounce steelhead he caught 23 years ago, which he had hanging in his den. He said he feels somewhat vindicated because the fish was declared a state record holder.

In the annals of Minnesota state record fish, Scott Thorpe's rainbow trout would have to take the Academy Award for best screen-writing.

It's a fish mystery made for the movies. The plot involves fraudulent catches, old diaries, burned buildings, a preserved corpse and the discovery of a last-minute witness. Better yet, this story has a flashback: It has been 23 years, almost to the day, since the St. Paul man landed a 16-pound, 6-ounce rainbow trout, also known as a steelhead, while fishing the Devil's Track River on Lake Superior's North Shore.

But this week the Department of Natural Resources cer-

tified the trout as the new state record rainbow, ending Thorpe's months long search for recognition.

"At the time, I felt bad about killing the fish, for vanity purposes, because that's what a state record is to me," Thorpe said Tuesday. "I was practicing catch and release in the '80s, and it felt even worse because the fish wasn't the record then. So perhaps there's some vindication now."

Thorpe's trout is called a steelhead, a migratory rainbow trout that lives in Lake Superior and is considered one of the greatest of game fish. The tale of Thorpe's fish begins with the erasure of another record, that

held by Ottway Stuberud of Knife River.

Last winter, the DNR expunged Stuberud's 17-pound 6-ounce fish, caught in 1974, after the 66-year-old angler signed an affidavit saying his record application contained "incorrect information."

Stuberud never has said why he wanted the fish removed from the record books and has refused any media interviews about it.

When the DNR replaced Stuberud's fish with a 15-pound, 7-ouncer caught in 1970, Thorpe realized that the rainbow trout he caught in 1980 was the legiti-

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*Outdoors Editor*

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Weekly field report.

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# Chris Niskanen

(continued)

mate record.

When he caught the fish, Thorpe, then 28, never considered applying for the record because he knew Stuberud's fish was larger. But with Stuberud's fish gone from the record books, Thorpe spent most of this winter compiling documentation to prove his trout was the legitimate record holder.

He tracked down old newspaper clippings, a certificate of the fish from a Sports Afield magazine contest and entries from his diary on the day he caught the fish.

On April 27, 1980, his brother, David, wrote in Scott's fishing diary as Scott drove them to another fishing destination: "It was a monster — (we) screamed, hollered, hugged each other — unbelievable."

Thorpe even tracked down a witness, Buck Benson of Grand Marais, who owns a tackle and hardware store in Grand Marais where the fish was weighed. Benson remembered the fish and its weight, and he believed the fish should be declared the new record trout.

But there was one hitch: The scale on which the trout was weighed at Buck's Midway store had burned in a 1987 fire. The DNR requires that scales used for state record fish be state-certified within six months of the fish being weighed.

Without the proper scale certification, Thorpe's chances for record recognition were sunk.

But after making dozens of calls, Thorpe found that the scales at Buck's Midway and the Dollar Store, another place where he had it weighed, had

been checked on a regular basis by someone from the Weights and Measures Division of the Department of Public Service.

He called the Department of Public Service only to learn the employee had retired years ago. No one knew if he was still alive or not.

"I found out his name, called directory assistance in Duluth, they connected me and Lee Baker answered the phone," Thorpe said. "I was amazed I was able to find him."

Lee Baker, 67, has been retired from the Weights and Measures Division for a decade, but remembers certifying the scales in Grand Marais, including the ones Thorpe weighed his fish on. He happily agreed to write a letter to the DNR, confirming that the scales were accurate in 1980.

Coincidentally, Baker said he went to high school with Ottway Stuberud and recalls the angler saying that he planned to pull his record trout from the books.

"He said he had been bothered by it for too long," Baker said Tuesday. "It's funny, isn't it, that a friend of mine would turn the record in and that I would help another guy get it?"

Thorpe's fish hangs in his den. The fish that he regretted killing, that's been gathering dust on his wall for more than two decades, that was nothing but memories and newspaper clippings — it's now the state record.

"It's been sort of like getting an Oscar," Thorpe said. "I've probably talked to 15 or more people who helped me track this down. They're all getting thank-you letters. And I have to thank my mom for being so patient and taking me and my brothers steelhead fishing. She's pretty excited about it, too."

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