

Boy lands monster catfish

Milton man says fish eclipsed state record

By Jim Leute

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JANESVILLE

Jason Kline doesn't know for sure, but he has a suspicion that he and his son might have caught and then released a state-record flathead catfish Friday on the Rock River.

The Milton residents were dragging Odd'Ball jigs for walleyes near Blackhawk Island when the fish—later measured at 54 inches, Kline said—hit one of the jigs, which was tipped with a magnum fathead.

“Darn near knocked the rod out of the rod holder,” Kline said in an email that reached The Gazette on April Fool's Day.

Kline insists, however, that their fish story is no joke.

Not realizing how big the fish was, Kline said he handed the rod to his 10-year-old son, Brayden. Fifteen minutes passed, and Brayden still had not gotten the fish to the boat.

After the father questioned the son's manhood, the fish came boat-side but stayed on the bottom.

An exhausted Brayden gave the rod to his father.

“I immediately knew the fish was huge when I took the rod,” Jason Kline said. “I kind of felt bad for heckling him about not being able to get the fish off the bottom.”

When Kline brought the fish up, he determined his net would be of no use. He handed the rod back to his son, grabbed the fish by the mouth and pulled it into the boat.

“I couldn't believe my eyes,” Kline said.

Kline measured the flathead at 54 inches, one inch longer than the state record caught in 2001 in the Mississippi River in Vernon County. That fish weighed in at 74 pounds, 5.1 ounces.

Kline said there were several other boats on the river, and he tried to find an angler with a digital scale that would weigh beyond the 25-pound limit of Kline's scale. They found a 50-pound scale, but the fish surpassed that limit, too, he said.

He tried calling a local Department of Natural Resources conservation warden but couldn't reach him.

Kline said he caught a 50-inch flathead on the Mississippi in 2010 that weighed more than 60 pounds. Based on that experience, he figured Friday's catch would be in the upper 60-pound range or even heavier.

With the fish tied to an anchor rope, he deliberated his next move for about an hour before deciding to release the fish.

There's been plenty of hindsight, he said.

Kline said he spends plenty of time on the Rock River, and 20-pound catfish aren't uncommon. Anything beyond that, he said, is uncommon.

Boyd Richter is a conservation warden with the state's Department of Natural Resources. While he said the Klines' fish is indeed a big one, there's no way to tell exactly how big.

Richter said it would not be out of the realm of possibility for a flathead that size to be roaming the Rock.

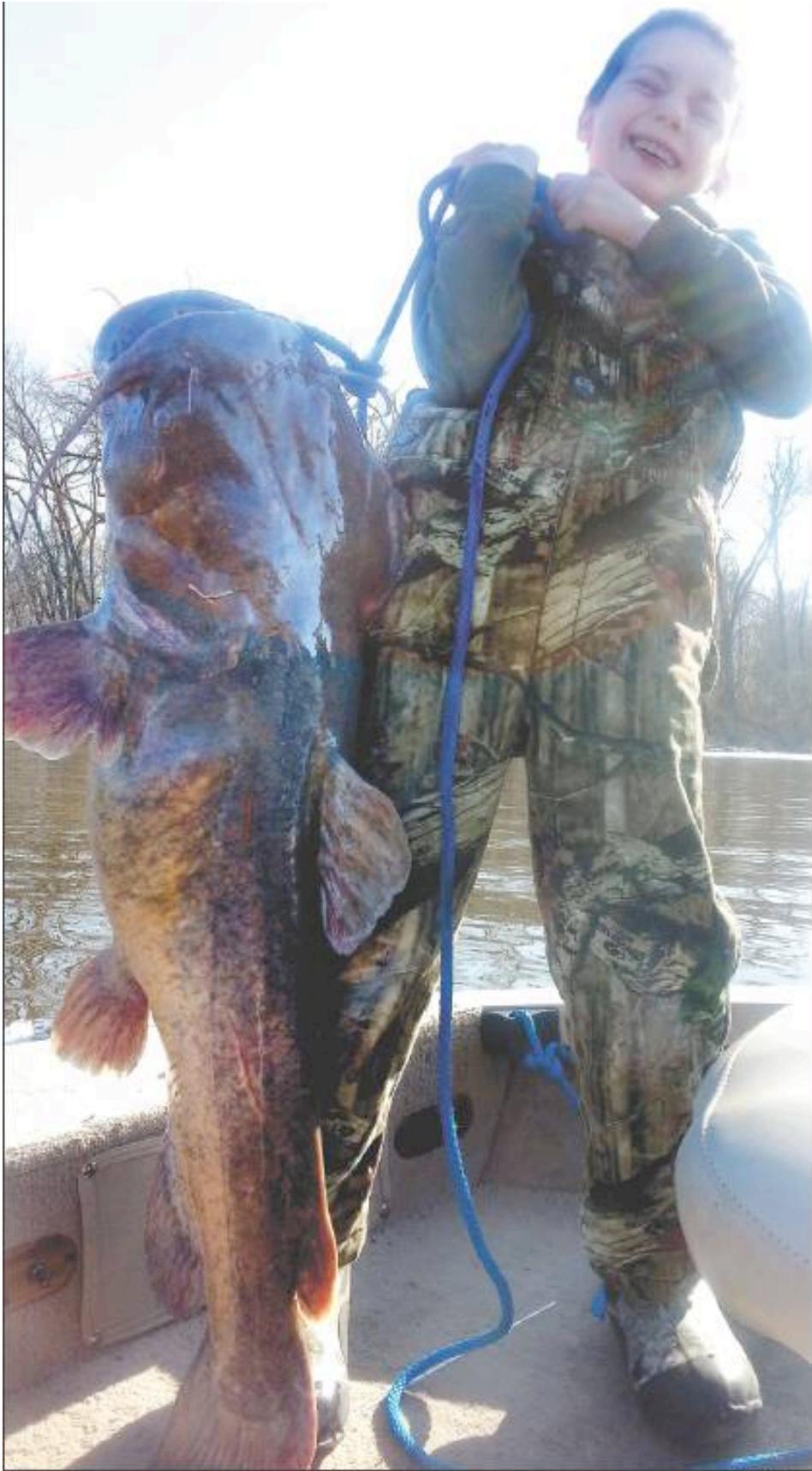
Gazette outdoor columnist Ted Peck agreed. That's due to a program launched nearly two decades ago when Illinois flatheads were transplanted into the Rock River.

"Up until that time, there were no flatheads in the Rock in Wisconsin," Peck said.

Kline said a photo he shot showing his son holding the fish is somewhat misleading because Brayden could hardly lift it off the floor of the boat. He said his son is a little taller than 5 feet, even though the proportion of his son to the 54-inch fish doesn't seem to be all that close.

"We could have released a state record catfish," he said. "It's still in there, and I'd like to see someone get it so we can get an official weight."

Until it's caught again, the mystery will continue.



Submitted photo

Brayden Kline of Milton struggles to hold up a flathead catfish his father, Jason, says Brayden caught Friday on the Rock River near Fort Atkinson. Jason Kline claims the fish, which the father and son caught and released, measured 54 inches—one inch longer than the state record. Jason Kline estimated the fish weighed in the upper 60s, perhaps even more.