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CHARLIE CRAVEN'S
PROBLEM CHILD

THE LEADING MAGAZINE OF FLY FISHING

> TUGUR **TAIMEN**

FINALLY, OVER 100 POUNDS ON A FLY

HOW TO
SPEY FOR TROUT

> **BLUE-LINING**

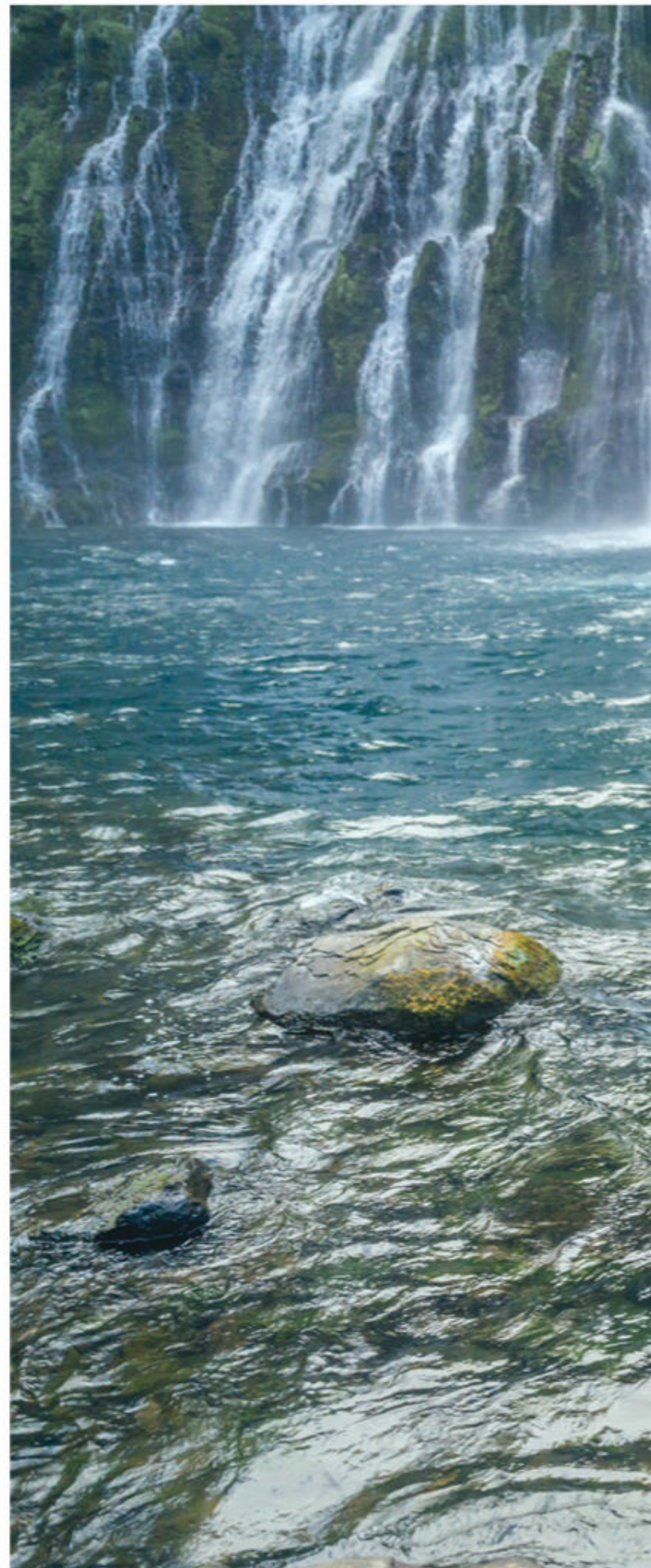
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Just another day in paradise. Mikey Wier navigates a NorCal nirvana in search of a few rainbows. JEREMIAH WATT © 2020 Patagonia, Inc.

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TUGUR TAIMEN

Exploring the vast wilderness rivers of Siberia

KEITH ROSE-INNES

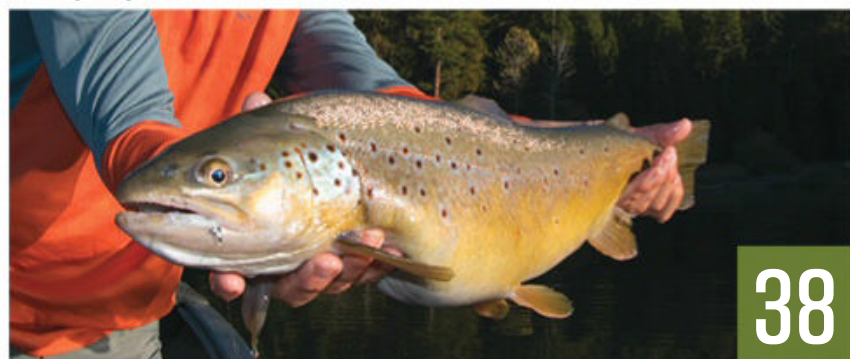


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ON OUR COVER

Keith Rose-Innes holds a *Hucho taimen* weighing 109 pounds from the Tugur River in Siberia. Read the full story, "TUGUR TAIMEN" on page 30, about his 17-year quest to find the giants of the Russian Far East.

KEITH ROSE-INNES / PHOTO

Taimen & Excitement in Mongolia

*The steppes of Mongolia are an adventure beyond any mere fishing trip.
Far more than you can imagine!*

MONGOLIA IS THE least densely populated country in the world. It is as large as Alaska, yet outside the capitol city of Ulaanbaatar it is a vast wilderness with no property ownership, no fences, and what roads that do exist are dirt. The few people you may encounter beyond the city will likely be nomads on horseback who live off the land tending their herds of cows, sheep, goats, yaks, and camels.

To most, it is simply recognized as the fabled homeland of the fierce nomad warrior Genghis Khan. But in Mongolia only the sport fish are fierce.

Northern Mongolia is home to some of the largest remaining tracts of wilderness on Earth and rich with clear, free-flowing rivers that have carved their way through dramatic canyons and wind through majestic valleys. It is a place of snowcapped mountains, vast golden forests of birch, aspen, larch and alder, and riverside meadows carpeted by wildflowers. First-time visitors are often awestruck this wild, unbroken land, visually reminiscent of how Montana and the American West must have appeared before settlement. And each day's float in this part of the world is a breathtaking, scenic experience, far more spectacular than even a visit to Yellowstone or Yosemite.

Though it's the spectacular fishing and the sheer majesty of the landscape that often draws people to this unique world, it's usually the smiling native people that travelers remember most.

And of course the taimen
– the largest salmonid on Earth!

Mongolia's taimen fishing season is from mid-June through late October and The Fly Shop® offers a choice of one and two-week float trips that begin in Ulaanbaatar (*after a direct flight from either Seoul, Moscow, or Beijing*).

Travellers often add a few days on the front end of the journey, touring the capitol and adding a cultural facet to what is already an epic visit to a mysterious land forgotten by time.

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Anglers spend each thrilling day accompanied by a fly-savvy team of guides, floating and wading in the shadow of some of the most beautiful terrain imaginable. It's a thrilling experience from rafts and drift boats in broad, shallow, freestone rivers. Taimen are usually large, often hug the shoreline, and their near-fluorescent red tails are easy to spot in crystal clear alpine rivers that also harbor Amur trout, grayling, pike, and an ancient strain of Siberian trout.

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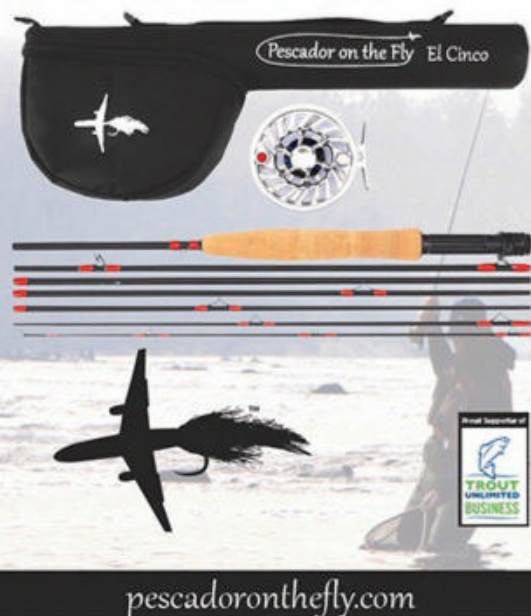
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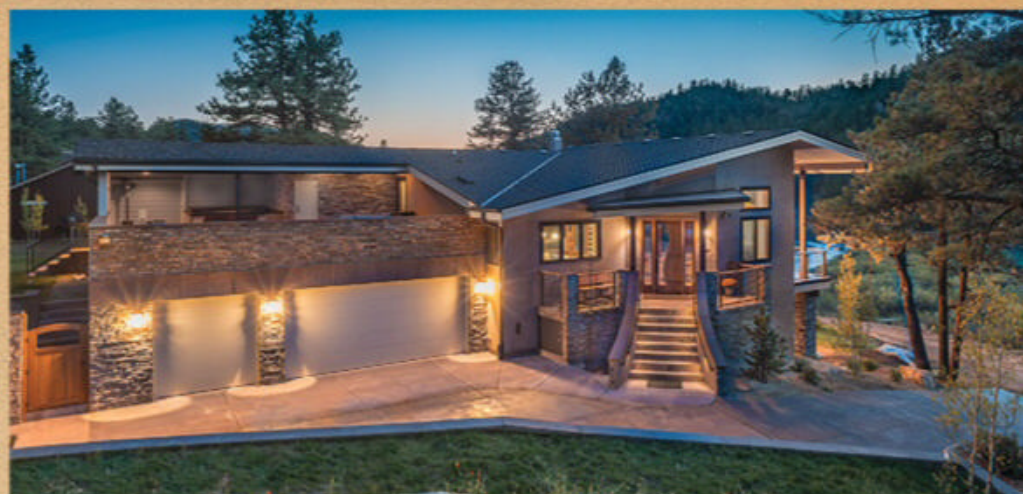
An advertisement for Daiichi Premium Fishing Hooks. It features a large Daiichi hook at the top, several packages of Daiichi hooks below it, and a fishing reel at the bottom. The text reads: 'INTRODUCING THE "/>

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-Fly Fisherman magazine



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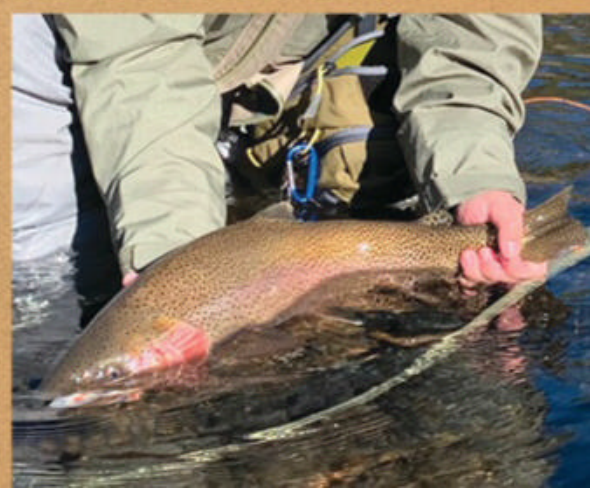
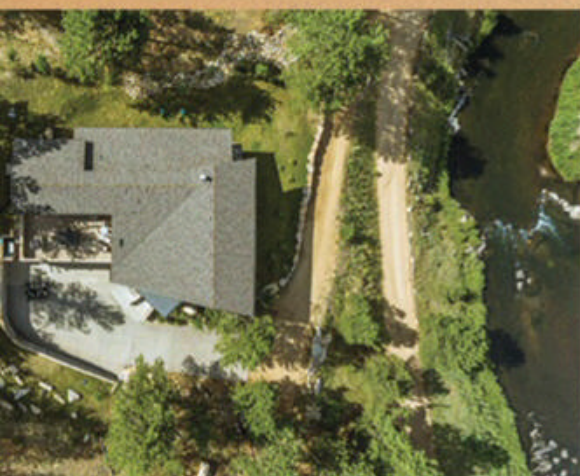
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VIEW FROM FRONT DECK



ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

SMALL FISH CAN BE CAPTIVATING, AND A NATIVE EASTERN BROOK TROUT MIGHT BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SALMONID YOU EVER HOLD IN YOUR HAND. AS HENRY RAMSAY POINTS OUT IN HIS STORY “A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE” (PAGE 44), THE MOST WORTHWHILE FISHING IN PENNSYLVANIA IS LIKELY IN TINY HEAD-WATER STREAMS FAR FROM THE TRAILHEADS WHERE YOU’LL EVADE THE REST OF HUMANITY, AND FIND VESTIGE POPULATIONS OF GREEN, LAVENDER, AND CRIMSON *SALVELINUS FONTINALIS* OR BRIGHTLY COLORED WILD BROWN TROUT. THESE SPARKLING STREAMS DEEP INSIDE STATE FORESTS AND DESIGNATED WILDERNESS AREAS ARE CLASS A WILD TROUT STREAMS, WHICH MEANS BY DEFINITION THE STATE CANNOT POLLUTE THEM WITH STOCKED TROUT OF ANY KIND.

Although we are all rooted by small streams, short casts, and small fish, it’s also fascinating to discover the limits of our sport, and author Keith Rose-Innes (on our cover) and his fishing buddies have certainly done that with their 17-year-long exploration of Siberia. Over that time, Rose-Innes, his friend Ilya Sherbovich, and others explored more than two dozen rivers, landing taimen up to 67 pounds (in 2014), which at that time became an IGFA world record. After years of refining their tackle and tactics, and learning when and where giant taimen feed most aggressively, they had a week of fishing for the ages—multiple fish of over 100 pounds, three different IGFA line-class records, and the all-tackle record of 115 pounds (page 30).

It’s an oft-repeated adage that *Hucho taimen* are the largest salmonids on Earth, but that belief up to now was based on unverified historical anecdotes. The largest documented salmonids in modern history have for many decades been Chinook salmon from the Kenai River in Alaska, but now for the first time, the legendary status of taimen has been accurately documented, and Sherbovich will forever be associated with not just the largest taimen ever caught with hook and line, but the largest salmonid—a group that includes all the salmon, char, and trout in the world.

While the size of fish always fascinates fishermen of all types, what’s really most important to us fly fishers is *how* we do it. Rose-Innes didn’t chase taimen with lures or bait—it had to be with fly tackle, and everyone who reads this magazine understands that we fish in ways that aren’t always the most practical or effective. We choose this path precisely because it’s more challenging, more sublime, or more poetic. We prefer to fish dry flies, tug streamers for big browns, or sight-fish because it brings us more joy on the water.

There’s no better example of this than Whitney Gould’s preference to fish on Montana’s Missouri River with two-handed Spey rods—baby Speys, as she calls them—that are specifically designed for trout (page 50). Gould is a seven-time Spey-O-Rama



HENRY RAMSAY / PHOTO

world champion, and holds the female world record with a Spey cast of 150 feet, so if you’re going to learn to Spey cast, there’s no better mentor. Her flies and strategies for the Missouri also work on other big rivers like the Colorado, Sacramento, and Green, and the new specialized Spey tackle that has been downsized for trout fishing opens a whole new world of possibilities. —

RP

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NO FLY ZONE

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed the article "No Fly Zone" by Joe Mahler in the February-March 2020 issue. In a magazine packed with great articles, this one really stood out. It seems as though every time I'm fortunate enough to find something written by Mahler, I leave with real-world applicable knowledge that can be immediately put to work on the water. His ability to explain difficult concepts in such a clear, concise way is unparalleled in the fly-fishing world. Any chance we can start seeing lots more from him?

JOE SLAVOSKI

MONUMENT, COLORADO

CLEAR THE LANES

Joe Mahler's suggestions on how to share the casting lanes in a boat were great. I am a member of the Queen City Anglers Guild, and one of the things we always talk about is how to respect each other's water on our frequent float trips. This topic is so important, and the article is so insightful and well-written, I plan on sharing it with other club members.

ED BURGHARD

LOVELAND, OHIO

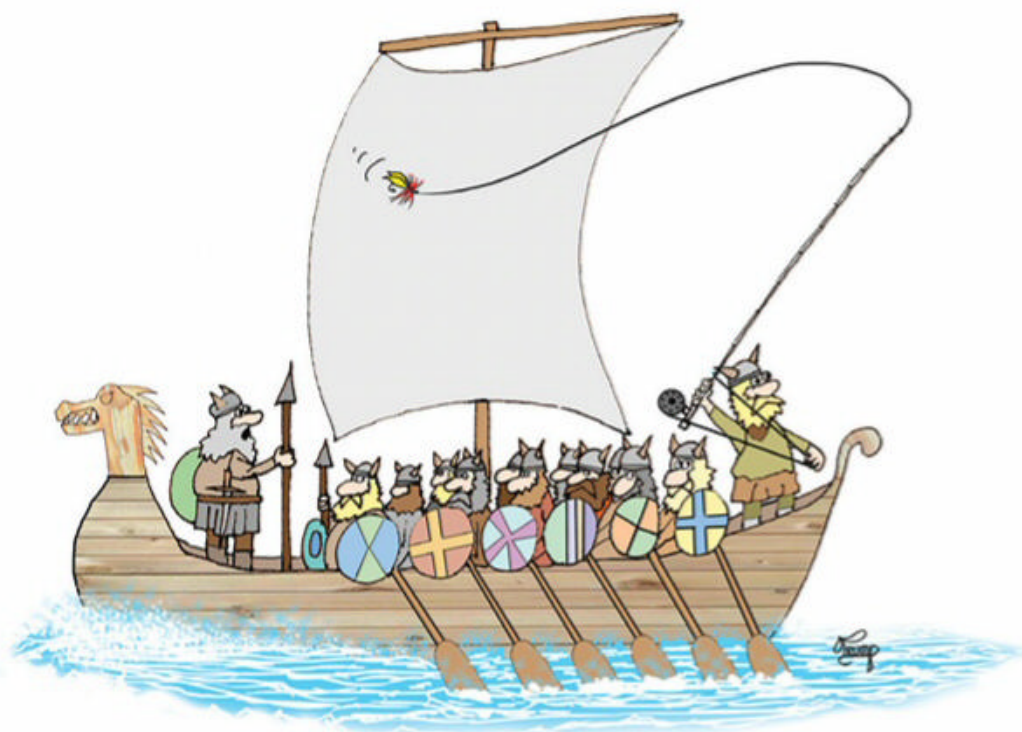
STEELHEAD ISSUE

I want to thank you for the October-December 2019 issue dubbed "The Steelhead Issue." There were many great articles that brought back memories of my own steelhead escapades. I was fortunate enough to fish for steelhead and salmon on a few of the great rivers: the Rogue and Chetco rivers in Oregon, and the Klamath, Trinity, and Sacramento rivers in Northern California. My largest steelhead was 9 pounds from the Rogue; my largest salmon was 22 pounds from the Klamath.

In my younger years I fished just about every trout stream that flowed down from the Sierra into the Sacramento Valley. I was never taught the proper protocol for fly fishing. My father, grandfather, and uncles all fished and hunted to put food on the table, and we used any bait or lure necessary to catch fish. I did catch fish on flies, but most of the trout hooked themselves. I never had the right equipment or training to be any good until later in life when I started reading FLY FISHERMAN and I became more proficient.

RON BARSOTTI

EDMOND, OKLAHOMA



"For the love of Odin . . . Sven not now!"

GENE TRUMP / ILLUSTRATION

BRING THE RODS

Reading Michael Wier's story on Yosemite Browns [June-July 2019 issue] instantly brought me back to a trip I made to the park back in 2006. We took a rest day from climbing, and decided to float what amounts to a "lazy river" theme park float down the Merced River. It was during this float I realized my major trip-planning miscalculation. Spotting enormous browns and rainbows cruising in the gin-clear water below our boat had me cursing every climbing book I read religiously in preparation. None of them mentioned (or even hinted) you might want to bring a rod for fishing. The Merced and Tuolumne rivers are sleeper trout streams, and millions of visitors never know that "the boogeyman" lurks in the depths of these rivers. This story reminded me it's time to go back, and this time, put climbing in the backseat.

MIKE STANISLAW

DOYLESTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

GUIDE BEER

I don't drink a lot, but your editorial "Guide Beer Grant" in the October-November-December issue made me want to go out and buy some Guide Beer just to be able to help with this great cause. As soon as I find someplace locally that sells it, I will buy some just for that reason. Thanks for that inspiring story, and for a great magazine.

TERRY CHESTER

DECATUR, TEXAS

MICHIGAN RESPECT

Thank you for the interesting article "The Yosemite Boogeyman" by Michael Wier in the June-July 2019 issue in which he states "Brown trout have been part of California's ecosystem for over 150 years." Not that it changes the course of human history, but the U.S. Fish Commission first released 4,900 brown trout fry into the Baldwin River, a tributary of the Pere Marquette River in Michigan, in April 1884 (about 135 years ago). According to many sources, this was the first release of brown trout into U.S. waters, and brown trout didn't make it to California until some later date.

BILL MOGREN

NORTH MUSKEGON, MICHIGAN

[Author Michael Wier gets a pass on this one, the 150 years was wrongly inserted by our editorial staff. You are absolutely correct that Michigan is the "birthplace" of brown trout in America, and we've got some time to go before we reach a 150-year anniversary. THE EDITOR.]

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THE MIGRATION

THE BONES ARE BACK

IN 1992 I WAS 18 YEARS OLD AND WORKING AS A BELL CAPTAIN AT LEONA HELMSLEY'S SOUTH LIDO KEY FLORIDA BEACH RESORT, CALLED THE HARLEY SANDCASTLE. THAT'S WHEN I WHEN I FELL IN LOVE WITH SALTWATER FLY FISHING. I LEARNED TO TIE FLIES TUESDAY NIGHTS AT THE ORVIS SHOP ON SIESTA KEY. I MET A LIFELONG FLY-FISHING BUDDY WHO TAUGHT ME HOW TO CAST AND TIE KNOTS. HE INTRODUCED ME TO BONEFISHING IN THE FLORIDA KEYS. ON OUR FIRST VISIT TO THE KEYS, WE CAMPED AT LONG KEY STATE PARK AND FOUND OURSELVES FISHING TO HUGE TAILING BONEFISH RIGHT IN FRONT OF OUR CAMPSITE. IT WAS THEN I KNEW I WOULD MOVE TO THE KEYS TO PURSUE MY GOAL TO BECOME A FLY-FISHING GUIDE.



The Florida Keys suffered decreasing bonefish numbers every year from 1998 until the “big freeze” of 2010, when they hit rock bottom. Now things are turning around.

JEFF EDVALDS / PHOTO

SMALL BONEFISH IN THE FLORIDA KEYS ARE COMING FROM THE GULF STREAM

CAPT. BRUCE CHARD

Six weeks later I was living on Big Pine Key, learning the waters from Marathon to Key West. I immediately started bonefishing all over the Keys, consistently experiencing acres and acres of tailing bonefish on popular flats from Key Largo to the Marquesas. At that time I believed that the Keys had some of the best big bonefishing in the world.

The number of boats and fisherman on the water was light. The catch-and-release bonefishing tournaments in Islamorada commonly recorded bonefish over 12, 13, and 14 pounds. It seemed that a potential world record bonefish could be caught on any given day. On the rare occasion that

we landed a fish that was under 25 inches, it was considered small. Then came 1998.

BOOM AND BUST

In 1998 the housing market in the Keys was booming, dramatically increasing the population along this tiny strand of limestone and oolite. This surge in construction resulted in more boat traffic and more fishermen on the water.

In September 1998, Hurricane George made landfall in the Lower Keys. After the storm, a good friend of mine needed some



JEFF EDVALDS / PHOTO

■ In 2014, 2015, and 2016, new waves of larval bonefish began to repopulate the Florida Keys with fish that are now about 18 to 25 inches.

help cleaning his yard. He noticed that his in-ground swimming pool that was about 20 feet from his seawall must have a leak somewhere, as he was losing water. In order to find the leak, he dumped red dye into the pool water, and it didn't take long for the nearby canal to turn red as well. The pool water was leaking out of the crack and into the porous Lower Keys fossilized caprock and right into the salt water of the nearby canal.

It was then clear to me how much impact Keys residents have on this sensitive ecosystem. It explained why at my house on Big Pine Key, my plumbing would sometimes back up when heavy rain or high full-moon tides would not allow my leach field in my septic tank to drain properly. And it wasn't just my house. Everyone's house had leaching septic fields that backed up during high tides and drained on low tides. There was no doubt that systems of this type were contaminating our waters daily.

Immediately after Hurricane George, the bonefishing started to change. I don't know if it was all the new houses that had been built in the previous few years,

or the fact that the hurricane had cleaned out everyone's septic systems, but after 1998 things started to go downhill. There were fewer bonefish, and some particular bonefish flats just went dormant with no bonefish at all.

As the years passed, there were more houses—all with their own septic systems and leach fields—and more vacationers and more angling pressure, but every year, fewer and fewer bonefish. In 2005, housing in the Keys was at its peak. It didn't seem there was anywhere left to build, and in October, Hurricane Wilma rolled through the Keys with a very strong storm surge.

Then in January 2010 came a dagger to the heart. A weather anomaly happened, causing three back-to-back-to-back cold fronts to roll through the Florida Keys. Usually when cold fronts move through the Keys there is a warming period before the next front rolls through. In this circumstance, three cold fronts moved through so close together that water temperatures in Florida Bay dropped into the upper 30s. The cold fronts caused fish kills that crushed shallow-water

gamefish across the state of Florida.

Bonefishing had been in decline for a decade, but after 2010 it was decimated. Many guides theorized that even the food bonefish eat on the flats was killed by low water temperatures, forcing the remnant bonefish population to Key West areas, where the impacts were less severe.

Interestingly, there was an influx of redfish that moved onto Keys flats in the years after the big freeze. The Keys has always had some redfish, but never like this. It seemed that water quality in the Everglades and in South Florida had gotten so poor, redfish were forced south to the Keys to survive.

WATER QUALITY

Back in 1999, all Florida Keys municipal sewage went to shallow injection wells, septic tanks, leach fields, and in some cases cesspits. In that year, the state of Florida ordered Monroe County to build a contained wastewater sewer system. It took a decade to get funding, buy land, and begin construction, but

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AND THE REWARDS OF COMING IN LAST OFF THE WATER.

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Although Monroe County has solved its municipal sewage problems, water quality in the Florida Keys continues to be a problem, with agricultural and residential wastewater coming from the mainland.

by 2011 a multiyear project to improve Keys water quality began. It was a \$1 billion project that included \$170 million in state and federal aid. By 2017 the last major wastewater facility was completed in the Lower Keys, and more than 80 percent of the county's 77,000 residents were connected to it.

and then the fishing recently rebounded just as the new sewer system was coming online. I wanted to see if these two events were correlated, or just coincidental, so I reached out to Ross Boucek, Florida Keys initiative manager for the Bonefish & Tarpon Trust (bonefishtarpontrust.org).

"We funded an intensive study to

BONEFISH HAVE A VERY UNIQUE WAY OF REPRODUCING. THEY ARE ISLAND FISH, AND USE THEIR LARVAE TO COLONIZE OR REPOPULATE OTHER ISLANDS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DECIMATED BY A HURRICANE.

Interestingly, as sections of the sewer system were completed, and more and more residents hooked up to it, we began to see more and more bonefish on the flats, and most of them were much smaller than we had seen in the glory days.

By 2018 I noticed the largest increase of bonefish numbers I have seen in the Keys in over a decade, and there were some larger fish mixed in as well. These bonefish seemed to be less migratory in their habits, and would often just hang around certain flats, tailing and feeding. They seemed happy and comfortable.

It seemed like an incredible coincidence to me that the bonefish numbers seemed to decline when our local wastewater was going straight into the ocean,

look at long-term trends of bonefish to determine what environmental factors could have been responsible for the decline," said Boucek. "Results suggested it was not any one factor, but many interacting factors—including water quality—that led to the demise of bonefish in the Florida Keys.

"The conversion from septic to a contained municipal sewer system was a great conservation victory, and we have seen improvements in specific areas where that pollution was impacting our fish, wildlife, and habitats," said Boucek. But he says local sewage is just the tip of the iceberg. The biggest source of pollution is residential and agricultural pollutants coming from the mainland.

"In the Keys, we have a new era of water quality issues," said Boucek. "Exponentially growing populations on the mainland are pumping more pollution into estuaries upcurrent of the Keys. These sources of pollution are more distant, but reach the Keys with favorable ocean currents. King tides are becoming more pronounced and tropical storms are more frequent and more intense, inundating urban areas and flushing pollution from roads, lawns, and other sources into the ocean."

NEW RECRUITS

Boucek says those large bonefish spawned in the early 1990s died of old age, and for more than a decade the Keys weren't getting any new bonefish recruitment.

"There are a couple reasons why we stopped getting new bonefish," said Boucek. "First, our larval supply chain could have been disrupted. In the early 2000s, BTT put a lot of effort into catching larval bonefish in the Keys. After soaking many larval traps, we only captured a total of nine larval bonefish. When we set those same traps in the Bahamas we get hundreds of larvae in each trap every time. The lack of larvae could either be from a lack of spawning fish in Florida, or from changes in the ocean currents that prevented larvae spawned in Belize, Mexico, or Cuba from getting to the Keys as in previous decades.

"Juvenile fish are also very hard to keep alive. If the structure isn't there, or the water quality is bad, then they won't survive. BTT has funded three different studies to find juvenile bonefish in Florida. The only place we seem to catch them is in Garfield Bight in Florida Bay, and that's the epicenter of a 60,000-acre seagrass die-off. There is reason to believe that juvenile habitat degradation was, and still is, playing a role keeping our bonefish population from reaching its potential."

Despite all that, Boucek agrees that since 2014, new bonefish are appearing on Florida Keys flats.

"Starting in 2014, a new wave of babies came in, followed by two more new generations in 2015 and 2016," said Boucek. "The size classes are approximately 15 to 18 inches (2016 fish), 18 to 20 inches (2015 fish), and 22 to 25 inches (2014 fish). Although these new fish are encouraging, we don't know where they came from, or if more new fish will continue to enter the Keys population.

“Bonefish have a very unique way of reproducing. They are island fish, and use their larvae to colonize or repopulate other islands that may have been decimated by a hurricane. When bonefish spawn, they migrate from places as far as 70 miles away to a specific site. There, they form aggregations that can exceed 10,000 bonefish. In the evenings, those fish swim to blue water, dive to depths greater than 200 feet, and deposit their larvae in ocean currents like the Gulf Stream. Their larvae can live in these currents for up to 70 days before they need to settle. This unique way of reproducing is why we have bonefish in crazy places like Christmas Island.

“From an evolutionary angle, this is a great strategy to keep the species going. However, from a conservation perspective, to keep any one bonefish population thriving means making sure all those other neighboring populations that supply larvae are healthy.

“Once our bonefish population started to decline in the Keys, and we learned about how they reproduce, we conducted a genetic study on Keys bonefish. We learned that a significant percentage of Florida Keys bonefish are spawned in places like Mexico and Belize. Learning this, we established a long-term conservation hub in that region to reduce commercial harvest of the species and protect the habitats that support them. Bonefish are designated as catch-and-release only in Belize, and we hope Mexico follows suit. The bonefish decline in the Keys is likely a result of many small stresses that added up. This is one of the stresses that we are working hard to heal.”

After speaking with Boucek it became clear that the municipal sewage treatment in the Keys is just one small part of the equation, but there is hope for the future as healthy bonefish populations in foreign waters continue to use the Gulf Stream to seed our waters, and it seems that the spawning events and the currents have been favorable the past few years. It’s amazing to me that these fish end up on our flats at all, but as Dr. Malcolm says in *Jurassic Park*: “Life, uh, finds a way.” 🐟

Bruce Chard has been a Florida Keys guide for more than 25 years. He is a frequent contributor to FLY FISHERMAN. His previous stories include “Tarpon Caviar,” the cover story of the June-July 2016 issue, and “Inherit the Salt” in the June-July 2018 issue.



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RISING TIDES

THE PROTECTOR

THE MAHAKALI RIVER, ALSO COLLOQUIALLY REFERRED TO AS THE KALI RIVER, DEFINES THE BORDER BETWEEN WESTERN NEPAL AND NORTHERN INDIA. A BROAD, CREAMY-GREEN RIPARIAN GEM, THE RIVER IS NOT ONLY HOME TO A THRIVING POPULATION OF THE PRIZED GAMEFISH GOLDEN MAHSEER, BUT IS ALSO THE FOCUS OF A 1996 TREATY BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE TREATY OUTLINES THE PANCHESHWAR PROJECT, A JOINT INDIA-NEPAL VISION TO CONSTRUCT THE WORLD'S HIGHEST DAM, WHICH WOULD TOWER AT 311 METERS. CONSTRUCTION HAS ALREADY BEGUN, AND WHEN COMPLETE, WILL DISPLACE 30,000 VILLAGERS AND 62 TERRACED FARMING COMMUNITIES IN INDIA ALONE. THESE HAMLETS JOINED A HINDU TEMPLE NEAR THEIR NEW HOME 1,000 FEET UNDERWATER.



The Sarayu River in India, just one mile from Nepal, runs through a brilliant valley that will be drowned when the Pancheshwar Dam Project is complete.

IF IT'S BUILT, PANCHESHWAR DAM WILL FLOOD A MAHSEER RIVER AND DISPLACE 30,000 PEOPLE

BRIAN IRWIN
PHOTOGRAPHY & TEXT

The Sarayu River winds through miles of verdant forest, terraced farms, and steep canyon walls, as it courses through India on its way to the confluence with the Kali. Roiling eddies and wavetrains rich with large, dashing mahseer splay out amid the Himalayan foothills. At the confluence of the Sarayu and the Kali rests a point of rocks. On that point sits the aforementioned temple, ribbons of prayer flags and ceremonial clothing flapping in the wind. Inside that temple lives Baba.

Baba is a holy man who has committed himself to a simple life without material goods. Despite harsh winters, he hasn't worn shoes in 20 years. He has no flashlight nor headlamp, which led to a midnight tumble down 100 steps into a river, breaking

his wrist. He is a tough man with leathery soles and palms, and dreadlocks due to a lack of grooming supplies. He's lived here for decades, watching change in the river, its patterns, and its users. He views himself as its protector.

I came to fish the Sarayu with three friends: Andy Danylchuk, Patagonia ambassador, fish biologist, and professor at The University of Massachusetts Amherst; Suman Panwar, Indian native, angler, and advocate; and Aaron Alter, an American who has spent his life understanding Indian conservation and policy as it pertains to fish conservation, striving to protect all things finned. We came to the Sarayu and Kali as the first legal fishermen in two years. The river had been closed before due to

Baba, a local holy man who considers himself the river's protector, has been able to stave off poachers and bait fishermen, but he is depending on the god Shiva The Destroyer to stop the dam project.



poaching on other rivers in the region. This is something Baba doesn't tolerate.

He spoke to us in Hindi, through Panwar's translation, about the river.

"This river is special. These fish, they should be allowed to live. They cannot be taken. If I hear of someone taking the mahseer, I report it to the authorities."

Reporting poaching requires many miles of foot travel for Baba. But he feels it is worth preserving the rivers. If caught, poachers face imprisonment, or in some rare cases, even a stern beating.

"The right people come to fish. They put them back. Others feed them doughballs with hooks in them. This is very, very bad."

We were camped on the Sarayu a few hundred yards upstream from the confluence. Our outfitter arranged comfortable tents, a cook center with delicious food ranging from *dahl* to rich *saag*, and bottomless cups of chai. Local guides joined us every day as we explored the Sarayu,

looking for gold with 9-weight rods.

Each day we ambled across the bridge over the Sarayu to a gentle path that followed the river upstream. We passed locals carrying loads from their fields, and the occasional cow or monkey. The river below the path was accessible throughout the roughly 3- to 5-kilometer (2- to 3-mile) walk we'd take each day. Typically we started before sunrise to fish the morning bite. The majority of the water we passed appeared to be outstanding habitat, and we'd often fish our way back to camp in the afternoon, landing 6 to 10 fish of various sizes. Most were at least 6 pounds.

The apex of our daily trek was a giant double meander in the river where riffles laid out into slick emerald water. Here, the fishing was very productive. One morning I had a fish strike my 1/0 Zonker, run on a smooth drag, and cleanly snap my 18-pound-test leader. Minutes earlier, Alter suffered the same fate as a strike totally

straightened his hook. Panwar landed a handful here, and Danylchuk managed to glide a 20-pound mahseer to the shore.

Mahseer are stunning fish. They have half-dollar-sized scales, calloused lips from sucking nymphs from round boulders, and a golden color as rich as doubloons. Mahseer use their lips to flip round river rocks, then Hoover up the abundant invertebrates on the underside. If the Pancheshwar Dam is completed, mahseer in this watershed stand to become eradicated.

The Pancheshwar Dam will actually be two dams working in tandem, simply because that's what it will take to restrain the massive amount of water behind the primary, 311-meter-high dam. The project is expected to submerge 11,600 hectares (45 square miles) of mountain terrain, 7,600 of which (29 square miles) would be in India. However, the locals aren't accepting the project as presented. Protests have begun.

The compensation and approval process for the dam has fallen under scrutiny, as the initial meetings were held during the monsoons when local representation was poor due to high water, frequent road washouts, and difficult travel conditions. Further, the proposal documents were drafted in English, making them uninterpretable by the people who would be most affected by the project. Opponents cite the \$5 billion U.S. price tag, catastrophic risk from the submersion of five seismic zones, and destruction of habitat that currently protects an endangered tiger species. Then there's the runoff issue, deforestation, pollution, and the displacement of 30,000 people.

September 9 is Himalayan Day, a regional holiday long celebrated in the hilly states adjacent to the Himalayas. However, in recent years there's been a transformation in tradition, such that it has become a day of conflict. Senior environmentalists and activists of the state of Uttarakhand began to celebrate Himalayan Day as a way to bring recognition to the hill country. However, according to numerous published reports, the local government purportedly "grabbed [that] day for its propaganda," promoting the dam among other initiatives. Citing that the project would not only generate jobs but over 5,000 megawatts of power, the regional government remains in strong support of the project. However, the opposing Uttarakhand Parivartan Party in turn marked the day officially as Pancheshwar Dam Protest Day, staging peaceful protests.



FOR
THOSE
WHO NEED
WATER
TO BREATHE



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Golden mahseer live in high-gradient rivers falling from the Himalayas. India's demand for electricity puts these fish at risk.

THE DESTROYER

The last day we fished the Sarayu was on Holi, a national holiday celebrating the triumph of good over evil in honor of the Hindu god Vishnu. Along with Prahlada and Shiva, the three comprise the holy trinity of Hinduism. In Hindu tradition it is believed that Shiva is the supreme deity who protects and transforms the universe. Also referred to as “The Destroyer,” Shiva is considered the great crusher of evil, persevering for all things peaceful.

On Holi I awoke early. The full moon had slipped behind the hills, and the Milky Way had tossed a dusty band across the sky. That night was a noisy one, as on Holi social norms and in some cases even the respect for laws go out the window. Alcohol, rarely ingested by Indians, is a popular commodity on Holi. Jeers of celebration and the whistle of the occasional firework reverberated off the valley walls as I eased out of a slumber and into my damp wading boots. After the group rose, so did the amber hue of the sun, as we again walked up the valley in search of mahseer.

After a successful morning we returned to camp for a lunch of curried mutton and masala vegetables. Baba was there. He'd walked barefoot up from the temple at the confluence to present us with a bowl of purple powder. On Holi it is tradition to celebrate by coloring one's face with such dust. He smiled as he smudged color across our foreheads.

And with that, he pressed his palms together, uttered “Namaste,” and ambled down a rocky road toward the bridge back to home.

That evening we were to leave, tackling a circuitous 12-hour, molar-jostling drive over high mountain passes rife with landslides to Delhi, where our adventure would end. So we spent that afternoon fishing downstream, toward the confluence with the Mahakali and near Baba's home. Danylchuk swiftly pulled in two plump mahseer, Panwar one. I fished

downstream from them, working rapids and eddies, slowly working my way toward the confluence on the opposite side of the Sarayu from the temple. I made my way down to the confluence, past a set of concrete stairs that pours into the river, allowing people to wade in prayer. By those stairs was a whirling eddy. Danylchuk took my place on the stairs while I angled, until out of sight, downstream, where the clear emerald water of the Sarayu melded with the Mahakali's creamy green flow.

As I cast into the seam of the river I heard a scream. “Big fish! Brian, get the camera! Big fish coming at you!”

It was Alter shouting. From behind a slight knoll of rounded rocks shot a lime green fly line, like a laser beam being fired from upstream. It was Danylchuk's line, and it rapidly ripped a gash in the water from his stance near the prayer stairs, through the quick water and into the flatter water at the confluence. He was into his backing by the time I saw the line, and was sprinting with Alter, Panwar, and two

guides down the shoreline.

Danylchuk made his way to the shore of the confluence and gingerly, but powerfully, eased the fish into the calmer water. He reeled down on the fish and eventually brought a 35-pound mahseer to his hand. With one hand cupped under the fish's draping belly and another on its tail, Danylchuk, still donning purple color on his forehead, lifted the fish for a moment while I fired some frames with the confluence and Baba's home in the background. Within a minute he released the powerful fish into the crisp water of the Mahakali River.

Before leaving, we visited Baba. We entered under threatening skies, leaving our shoes at the threshold of the temple. Baba greeted us and prayed for us, smearing holy ashes on our foreheads as a sign of compassion. As we walked through the temple, the wind kicked up and the clouds opened. Large, fat drops of rain dashed through the sky. Baba gestured to us, and we followed him into a dark, tiny, doorless single room with a small firepit in the middle. This was his room, his home.

As the rain pelted the prayer flags and the colorful ceramic tiles of the courtyard, Baba spoke about the poachers, his role in the world, and the proposed dam that

MAHSEER ARE STUNNING FISH. THEY HAVE HALF-DOLLAR-SIZED SCALES, CALLOUSED LIPS FROM SUCKING NYMPHS FROM ROUND BOULDERS, AND A GOLDEN COLOR AS RICH AS DOUBLOONS.

would flood the valley. A broken clock rested in the corner. Dirty tin chai cups littered the floor. He pulled out a hand-rolled cigarette and some damp matches and lit it. Smoke cartwheeled through his thick beard, tumbling out the door and into the rainy sky. Panwar asked about the dam.

“What will you do when it's built, when your home is gone, when you have nowhere to go?”

Baba took a pull of the limp cigarette, exhaled, and spoke.

“It won't happen. I'm not worried. Because it can't happen. Shiva won't let it happen. He will protect us.”

With those words the precipitation tapered. A ray of sun sliced through the clouds, through a fading sheet of rain, and into the room, casting a beam across Baba's face. He took another drag and looked at us.

“You see? Shiva won't allow it.”

Dr. Brian Irwin practices medicine in North Conway, New Hampshire and is FLY FISHERMAN's New England field editor.

VAYA



MANUFACTURED IN MONTROSE, COLORADO
ABELREELS.COM



RIO INTOUCH TECHNICAL TROUT

This line is built to present small flies gently to selective trout at a distance. Our field tester fished this on two different rivers in Pennsylvania, a technical spring creek and a limestone stream. He found it to be a great match for small dry flies, wet flies, and smaller nymphs. A long 52-foot head allowed for tight loops when casting longer lengths of line. It was able to turn over the long leaders needed for spooky fish and present small flies accurately and delicately. The ultra-low-stretch ConnectCore made setting the hook fast and offered a high level of sensitivity while nymph fishing. The sky blue head blends in on a bright day, while the peach middle section is highly visible in all light conditions. Even

at shorter distances, the front taper lands smoothly and softly. The Technical Trout series comes in two other versions, a weight-forward (Technical Trout WF) and double-taper (Technical Trout DT) line.

\$100

RIOPRODUCTS.COM



CORTLAND STREAMER SERIES *FLOATING, 10' SINK TIP, 15' SINK TIP*

The new Streamer Series from Cortland has an aggressive front taper to turn over large flies, and a short 26-foot body with a stepped, functional rear taper that gives you some ability to roll cast and mend when you are fishing in tight streams with a lot of brush and pocketwater. The lines are overweighted by a full AFTTA-standard line size (the 5-weight is actually a 6) so it makes your stiff streamer rod bend deeply with just one false cast, and launch quickly. A clear color change at the start of the 64-foot running line gives you a visual reference point so you know when it's easiest to both pick up and shoot line. The Stream-

er Series comes in three versions: floating, with a 10-foot type 6 sink tip, and with a 15-foot type 6 sink tip. In rivers this covers 99% of the situations, whether you're fishing the banks from a drift boat or plunge pools and boulder gardens in freestone streams. Use it anywhere you are sniping specific spots. The only time you wouldn't use this line is if you are wading large, broad rivers and sweeping runs where you want to make long casts, mend, and control the fly through the entire swing.

\$80

CORTLANDLINE.COM



SCIENTIFIC ANGLERS ABSOLUTE LEADERS

Fly fishers are generally pretty good about picking up after themselves. When I see litter along the stream, it's often in the form of Styrofoam bait containers, balls of monofilament, or cigarette butts. And walking on isolated beaches it's water bottles, flip-flops, and other debris. I rarely see leader packages. But when Scientific Anglers came out with an entire new product line of Absolute tapered leaders, someone still had the foresight to responsibly create all the paper-based packaging. The product envelope—including the biodegradable clear cellophane window—is all recyclable. Yes, the leaders are excellent. There are extruded nylon and fluorocarbon leaders for general-

purpose trout, long and delicate presentations, streamers, nymphing, stillwater trout, bass, and also for flats species like bonefish and permit. Scientific Anglers came out with 15 new leader products for 2020, and while from a personal perspective, one leader package here and there is a little innocuous in terms of the global pollution, it's nice to see a company that cares enough to make the packaging of an entire product category fall in line with passionate consumers who care about our rivers and streams.

\$7

SCIENTIFICANGLERS.COM

THE BEST NEW FLY-FISHING GEAR

SIMMS DRY CREEK Z BACKPACK

Waterproof zippers have been around for years, but the TruZip toothless waterproof closure on this new submersible pack from Simms is not something we've seen before. A normal zipper has hundreds of tiny teeth, and each one has to lock perfectly onto the next to create a waterproof seal. If just one of those teeth breaks or deforms—or if sand and salt jam the teeth—then the bag leaks, or more commonly, the zipper won't even close. The Dry Creek Z Backpack avoids these hundreds of potential problems with a toothless zipper that is silent, dustproof, and reliable. The bag is constructed from 300D ripstop polyester with a PU coating on the face of the bag, and a TPU coating on the backside. With a 35-liter interior plus a water-resistant exterior stash pocket, this backpack is at home in any boat, rainstorm, or wherever you wade deep. It has exterior cam-strap lash points, a centered D-ring net holder, and a loop field for wet flies. The interior organizational pockets for passports, wallets, keys, and iPhone make this perfect for travel abroad as well. Available in cloud camo (shown) and tan.



\$300 | [SIMMSFISHING.COM](https://simmsfishing.com)

THE DRY CREEK Z COLLECTION ALSO INCLUDES A 10-LITER HIP PACK AND 15-LITER SLING PACK AVAILABLE IN CLOUD CAMO GRAY, PACIFIC, OR TAN.



\$230

\$200



PATAGONIA BLACK HOLE WHEELED DUFFEL 100L

I've taken the original Patagonia Black Hole Wheeled Duffel to Chile, Argentina, Seychelles, New Zealand, Mongolia, and Russia. The wheels have rolled across sandy beaches in Mexico, Belize, and the Bahamas, and through mud and rocks in Bolivia and Brazil. I can tell you that these are the sturdiest, most durable wheels (and retractable handle) I've ever experienced. The most important thing Patagonia has changed with this new version is improving the exterior fabric from nylon to a tough 100% recycled polyester ripstop with weather-resistant TPU film laminate and a durable water repellent (DWR) finish. That means the new bags with the new Patagonia logo designs can sit in the rain on airport runways, get pelted with salt spray in the boat, and your stuff will stay dry. The bag has a cavernous 100-liter interior, but there's also a zippered side pocket and two interior mesh zippered pockets to help keep things organized.



\$350 | [PATAGONIA.COM](https://patagonia.com)

NEW & NOTABLE

ORVIS PRO WADERS

Orvis is always pioneering new technology and pushing the limits of design to build some of the best fly-fishing products available. The new Pro waders series (\$500, orvis.com), available in both men's and women's versions, is the best wader they have ever produced. These waders are "designed for anglers, built for athletes" and after 9,000 hours of guide testing, these waders can take some serious abuse.

The proprietary Cordura fabric shell tops 5 layers on the bottom, and 4 layers on the top, providing a durable exterior that is highly resistant to punctures and abrasion. Low-profile seams and a gusseted crotch allow for a wider range of motion and less stress on the seams. Anatomically correct neoprene stockingfeet have less bulk and fit more comfortably inside your wading boots. Water drag is a common problem with poor-fitting waders. Orvis negates this by making the Pro wader a trimmer fit. The waders also have gravel guards with PU-reinforced mesh in the rear that stretches and grips the heels of your boots firmly, making you more streamlined while wading.

To say this wader is feature-rich is an understatement—it's a tool-docking and storage dream. The front pocket has a YKK AquaGuard water-resistant zipper, fly patch, and rubberized daisy chain. A flip-out removable pocket acts like a small chest pack with its two pockets and rubberized daisy chain. A kangaroo-style, fleece-lined handwarmer pocket with AquaGuard zippers creates a deep pouch and cozy place to warm your hands. A stretch mesh internal pocket lays flat when it's empty so it doesn't interfere with your layering. An interior hook-and-loop patch accommodates the Orvis waterproof pocket (sold separately). OrthoLite removable kneepads offer protection and stealthiness when you are kneeling to cast to wary fish—competition fly fishers will like this addition. Adjustable elastic suspenders have opposing buckles for waist-high conversion. A small D-ring is on the rear connection of the suspenders.

The women's Pro wader is also an athletic fit, cut for women, and offers a total of 14 sizes, including subcategories of petite, regular, and tall. All features are available on both waders. The men's version comes in 14 sizes.



DENVER OUTFITTERS ROD VAULT 2

On my first fly-fishing trip, I slid my assembled rod into the back of our orange Toyota Corolla and snapped the tip cleanly off. I was seven years old, and I cried. Since then, rod-carrying systems have come a long way, and we've evolved all the way up to the Denver Outfitters Rod Vault 2 (\$400, denveroutfitters.com).

The vault is slick and easy to install. I was able to attach it in a few minutes, securing it to my roof rack with hardware to withstand the most aggressive automatic car wash. The tubes are aircraft-grade aluminum, and at top speed, the rack stays as silent as a spring creek. When I'm driving, I don't notice they are up there. The vault holds rods up to 10.5 feet and coddles them in non-abrasive plastic lining inside the tubes.

Although it's called the Rod Vault, this is a safe, secure place for your reels also, which are meant to be kept on the rods when you store them. The rod safes aren't cheap, but with a lockable case, your kit will stay safe even while fishing Philadelphia's Wissahickon Creek.

When I first fired my rod into the vault I was delighted to find it slid in without catching. Likewise, the simple but practical design allowed me to pull out my rod and dash to the riffles faster than an archer could rip an arrow from a quiver.

The Rod Vault 2 holds two rods, but there is also a Rod Vault 4 that holds four rods (\$600) and the company also offers custom lengths for longer rods.

While the Rod Vault 2 is not essential for occasional fly fishers, it's perfect for extended road trips, guides, and anyone who fishes often and wants to maximize their time on the water. It also just might save you some tears in the end.

—Brian Irwin



ROSS SAN MIGUEL

The classic San Miguel is instantly recognizable because of its high-gloss black finish on a solid frame, and the “flower petal” porting on the spool. This is the reel that built the Ross brand more than 20 years ago.

The new San Miguel (\$595, rossreels.com) has the same design aesthetics, but the updated version has a smooth, wide-range sealed drag system constructed of stacked disks of carbon fiber and stainless steel. The new San Miguel also has an updated canvas Micarta handle, a material used in knives to improve grip when wet. We’ve used the same type of handle on larger Ross saltwater reels, and the material provides more traction—especially when wet—than machined aluminum or plastic handles.

The San Miguel has a large-arbor spool with a stainless steel push-button release and is available in three sizes: 3/4, 4/5, and 5/6.



COSTA DIEGO WITH SUNRISE SILVER MIRROR LENSES

These are the same 580 glass polarized lenses that have already set Costa apart from other brands in terms of clarity and fish-spotting acuity. Sunrise lenses are the best choice when conditions are tough—mornings, evenings, dark cloudy days—in other words, when it matters the most.

However, the Diego frames (\$280, costadelmar.com) are new for 2020 and after testing them for weeks in the steamy jungles of Bolivia and Brazil’s Amazon rainforest, I can report they are the highest-performing frames I’ve ever had on my sweaty face. The frames have a nose pad and temple venting system that works in tropical conditions to keep the lenses from fogging, top and side shields to block light, and sweat management channels on the interior to redirect stinging sweat away from your eyes. The arm tips are built with holes for a retainer, and the frames have tough, 100-degree hinges that can stand up to rugged conditions.

—Ross Purnell



FISH CAT CRUZER

New for 2020, the Cruiser is modeled after the top selling Fish Cat 4; equipped with 2-piece oars so you can cover more water with ease. Above-water seating helps you stay dry, warm and make longer more accurate casts. Features include oar rests, two cargo pockets, and a new adjustable magnetic apron attachment system. Available at outcastboats.com or 844.243.2473



PUBLIC COMMENT ON DAM REMOVAL

In 2016 a U.S. District Court judge ordered the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to restore Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead, and specifically to consider dam removal and climate change in a plan for recovery. Now, the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and the Bonneville Power Administration are responding with a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Columbia River Basin, expected in early spring 2020. Following the release of the draft EIS, there will be a 45-day public comment period.

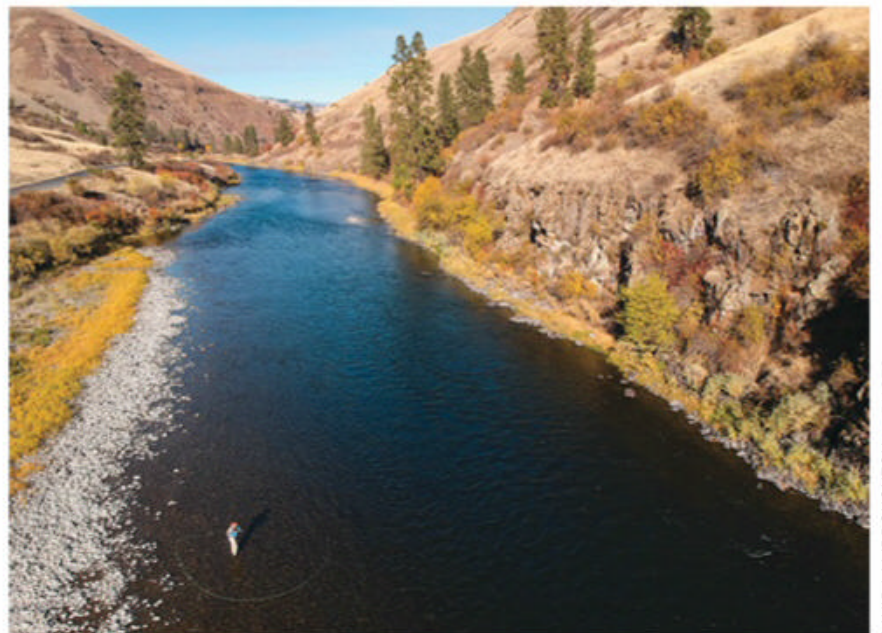
A focus of the EIS will be the lethal warmwater reservoirs created by the four lower Snake River dams. The outcome of the EIS will affect some of the West's most historic steelhead rivers, including Snake River tributaries like the Grande Ronde River in Oregon and the Clearwater River in Idaho.

The Clearwater was closed to steelhead fishing in the fall of 2019 due to poor returns, and returning adult salmon and steelhead numbers in the whole Columbia River Basin were some of the lowest on record. Only 6,863 spring/summer Chinook and nearly 11,000 steelhead were counted in 2019 in the entire watershed, according to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council.

According to Wendy McDermott, Northwest director of American Rivers (americanrivers.org), it's critical that the public is properly represented in the final EIS, expected in the summer of 2020.

"We need people to go on record and let the federal government know they want self-sustaining, harvestable populations of salmon and steelhead in these rivers. Right now, these rivers are on life support. We want the new plan to not just hit the goals of getting these salmon off the endangered species list, we want to plan for robust salmon stocks for future generations," said McDermott.

"Removing the four lower Snake dams must be part of any real salmon and steelhead restoration strategy. Not only will 140 miles of the lower Snake once again turn into a free-flowing river with habitat complexity, but 5,500 miles of high-elevation



DAVID LAMBROUGHTON / PHOTO

The Grande Ronde River in Oregon (a tributary of the Snake) is one of many rivers that would benefit from removal of the four lower dams on the Snake River.

spawning habitat will become more accessible to salmon and steelhead.

"Any plan to remove the dams to recover salmon and steelhead must also be a part of a broader platform that makes strategic investments to modernize our new energy future, meets our obligations to sovereign tribal nations, improves aging infrastructure, and supports a growing agricultural economy."

During most of the year, the energy produced by the four lower Snake River dams acts as reserve, needed only in times of peak demand. Changes in the energy market, including more energy efficiencies in the Pacific Northwest, cheap natural gas, and other renewable sources of energy such as wind and solar, have made hydroelectric power from the lower Snake River dams unnecessary.

To comment on the draft EIS for the Columbia River Basin, visit nwd.usace.army.mil/CRSO/.

QUERENCIA, THE FILM

The village of Questa in northern New Mexico is an idyllic town surrounded by mountains and streams, with the deep gorge of the Rio Grande running nearby. Hard times hit this small community in recent years when their beloved 170-year-old church and their mining-based economy crumbled simultaneously.



JOSH DUPLICHIAN / PHOTO

Residents of Questa, New Mexico, hope that restored Rio Grande cutthroat populations will be part of a new economy, and a new path forward for the community.

The residents of Questa have rebuilt their church, and their new economy is based on restoration of Rio Grande cutthroat trout and the community's cultural ties to the natural landscape. This is the story told in *Querencia*, a film about a resilient community resurrecting its economy. Rio Grande cutthroat trout restoration has taken many forms here in recent years: raising the water tables to sustain the cooler water temperatures needed for these fish and for climate resilience; reducing nonnative trout populations; habitat restoration work; and reintroducing the small communities around the Enchanted Circle area to Rio Grande cutthroat and their cultural significance.

This film shows the resilience of a community at an economic crossroads, where residents' deep love of their home guides them through rebuilding their church, their economy, and their pride. You can find the film at tu.org. And if you're in northern New Mexico, swing into Questa to fish for native Rio Grande cutthroat trout in spectacular country with delicious local food.

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ТУГЛА

Taimen have huge mouths that enable them to consume their prey whole. After feeding heavily, they may enter a catatonic state that makes them extremely difficult to catch.

TAIMEN

EXPLORING THE VAST
WILDERNESS RIVERS OF SIBERIA

KEITH ROSE-INNES

PHOTOGRAPHY & TEXT

HUGE TAIMEN CAN REACH SIX FEET IN LENGTH, AND WEIGH MORE THAN 150 POUNDS. JUST THOSE TWO MEASUREMENTS ALONE TELL YOU ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WHY MY FRIEND ILYA SHERBOVICH AND I HAVE SPENT THE BETTER PART OF TWO DECADES SEARCHING FOR THESE INCREDIBLE SALMONIDS. THEY ARE THE LARGEST MEMBERS OF A FAMILY THAT INCLUDES PACIFIC AND ATLANTIC SALMON, CHAR, AND ALL THE TROUT SPECIES.

The Tugur River is a labyrinth of channels often clogged with logjams and fallen trees. It's a low-gradient river with a riverbed of sand, gravel, and small rocks—perfect spawning habitat for Pacific salmon.



Sherbovich, the owner of the Ponoï River Company, first got the itch for taimen after a trip to northeast Siberia in July 2002. Two years later, I stumbled into the picture. While we were sitting on the Ponoï River on the Kola Peninsula, Sherbovich invited me to join his next big expedition. Little did we know that this would be the start of a 17-year taimen hunt that would include an enormous amount of research and exploratory visits to more than two dozen rivers.

Historically, taimen were distributed across a huge territory stretching from European Russia (the Volga and Pechora River basins) more than 3,700 miles (6,000 kilometers) to the east (Yana River and Amur River basins). While taimen are neither as plentiful nor as widespread as they once were, Russia still boasts a potential taimen area of more than 3.8 million square miles (10 million square kilometers) to search, if one focuses on all river and stream environments with steady flow. In general, taimen migrate between larger, deeper rivers and smaller, shallower streams. We factored all this into our hunt, as well as the usual variables such as weather and the guesswork of water heights that can be witnessed only when arriving at the river. The expression “a needle in a haystack” would be an understatement, and the search would probably seem too much of a challenge if we were not constantly reminding ourselves of those two potential

measurements: more than 6 feet long and 150 pounds.

Working his way through the haystack over the last 17 years, after significant research and exclusions, Sherbovich has organized expeditions to fish the Lena, Dyanyshka, Menkere, Dzhardzhan, Kuranakh-Siktyakh, Uel'-Siktyakh, Muna, Natara, Sobolokh-Mayan, Eyekit, Besyuke, Olenyok, Pur, Bytantay, Tugur, Konin, Koninikan, Munikan, Ulgi, Bytantay, and quite a few others rivers we'll keep to ourselves. The biggest challenge with exploring for Siberian taimen is logistics, and to cover the above-mentioned rivers, Sherbovich required logistical solutions of gargantuan proportions. This includes an incredibly skilled team from Ponoï River Company, who had to mobilize our group of anglers for more than 11 trips and 118 days of fishing in those 17 years.

GETTING HOOKED

My introduction to this amazing adventure kicked off in 2005 with an airplane charter to Tiksi. Situated on the coast of Yakutia on the shore of the stormy Laptev Sea, inside the Arctic Circle, this town is one of the northernmost settlements in the world. Two Mi8 helicopters whisked us away and over the immense delta of the Lena River, which has its source in the

north-central Siberian plain, from which it flows northeast before emptying into the Laptev Sea. Flying upstream along the Lena and over to the upper reaches of the Olenyok River, I had the first of many reality checks, as it dawned on me just how vast Siberia is and how challenging the search was going to be. We sat spellbound by the great green carpets of tundra lichens and mosses cut by incomprehensible quantities of water flowing into majestic clear rivers just waiting to be fished.

On that 2005 trip, we spent two weeks on various tributaries of the Lena and Olenyok as we rafted downstream, bouncing on tumbling water and gliding over a silver-dappled paradise, fishing each pool, soaking up the beauty of the river. The scenery of this region would take forever to describe. Around every corner there is a different rapid or pool that reminds you of somewhere else in the world. The highlight of the trip was when we found a pool on a tributary of the Lena that was stacked with fish, and we had our first taste of big taimen. Sherbovich landed a fish weighing 39 pounds, 10 ounces, which became the IGFA 20-pound-test-tippet fly-fishing record. We caught many taimen on the trip, but more important, we were humbled by the natural beauty of Siberia, and filled with a burning desire to experience much more of this wilderness in search of a monster taimen.

Fast forward 10 years (and a few more trips) to 2014, when Sherbovich started hearing about massive taimen in a remote watershed 500 miles northwest of the city of Khabarovsk, deep in the Russian Far East, on the Konin and Tugur rivers. The first trip to the Tugur in October 2014 resulted in no big fish after seven days of fishing in perfect water conditions. Instead of a success story, we enjoyed a week of vigorous casting, split fingers, and stiff backs. A normal person would question our sanity, considering the number of days spent casting huge flies into hundreds of Siberian rivers with little to show for it. But the proof of the presence of monster taimen was there. Alexander Abramov, owner of Lodge Konin, had a bunch of framed pictures of massive taimen caught during previous seasons on conventional tackle.

Inspired by these photos, Sherbovich was back in 2015. The days flew by quickly with not a single fish hooked or landed, and it would seem no amount of luck, skill, and effort would prevail. A belt of cold weather set in, canceling the helicopter flight out, which gave him another day's grace. The snow and sleet couldn't hold him back from one more attempt. And then it happened: Sherbovich hooked and landed the first ever *Hucho taimen* over 66 pounds (30 kilograms) on a fly. It was a pivotal moment, announcing emphatically that these monsters can in fact be caught on flies. This amazing fish weighed in at a massive 67 pounds (30.4 kilograms) and was awarded the IGFA 20-pound-test tippet record. His catch also proved that the Konin and Tugur rivers were good places to do it. Always keen to go bigger, we knew there was a possibility of catching a taimen over 100 pounds using fly tackle.

Old Russian folk tales suggest that the Lena River system holds fish up to 200 pounds, which meant that we weren't finished with this area. A year later our team was reassembled and we were back exploring. This time we did everything on a larger scale so that no stone would be left unturned. The trip extended over 15 days and 11 rivers. We experienced rivers in flood, rivers in prime condition with no taimen, and finally a river full of taimen. The most impressive fishing was in the same section of river we had fished 11 years earlier with very little success, which sparked another reality check. You can't rule out rivers you've previously fished with no success, because these fish migrate, sometimes stacking up in pools rather than spreading out through the whole system. The trip resulted in some incredible taimen fishing, with many caught on mouse patterns, but our group failed to find a monster.

BACK TO THE TUGUR

It was obvious that the Tugur-Konin system was the place, so in 2019 we returned for another crack at it. These rivers enjoy strong runs of chum salmon, which are the main source of sustenance



TUGUR TO BE TRUE

Konin Lodge (thelodgekonin.com) was built on private land controlled by prominent Russian fly fisher and entrepreneur Alexander Abramov. Nicknamed the "Taimen Tsar," Abramov has created a unique fishery for giant taimen in Russia's Far East where the Tugur River—and its two tributaries, the Konin and the Munikan—are guarded and protected.

The lodge sits just outside of the new Tugursky Nature Reserve created in 2014 with support from Oleg Abramov, The Wild Salmon Center, Khabarovsk Wildlife Foundation, and other partners to protect 197,000 acres of critical habitat within the Tugur watershed in the Khabarovsk Region.



Taimen on the Tugur River feed on whole, mature chum salmon. Author Keith Rose-Innes used a 15-foot Thomas & Thomas DNA Spey rod and two flies tied in tandem. The tail fly was a 10-inch Tan & Gold Flymen Skull-Head Game Changer tied on a 6/0 Kona Big Game Hunter hook, and the top fly was a 5-inch Polish Dog tube fly. His line was a Scientific Anglers 850-grain Deep Water Express, and the reel a Shilton SR12. His largest fish (shown on the cover of this magazine) was 62.6 inches long and weighed 109 pounds.

for these massive taimen. They grow large enough to engulf an entire adult salmon in one bite.

Difficult rivers are synonymous with big fish, and the banks of the Tugur and Konin rivers are lined with logjams and fallen trees. Some sections are impenetrable, with densely stacked trees and a labyrinth of channels. Others are navigable only after lengthy chainsaw sessions. The rivers meander at a steady pace, but never too fast—there are no rapids and no large rocky areas to define any distinctive lies. The riverbeds are mostly sand, gravel, and small rocks, forming perfect spawning habitat for salmon.

In 2019 we fished the same water that had left us fishless the previous year, but with improved tackle and refined techniques we caught giant taimen almost on a daily basis. Why had they been so difficult to catch, and why hadn't we been successful on the occasions we fished there before? We surmised that these taimen feed actively only for a short period of time, just as salmon are arriving. After they gorge themselves, they probably enter into a catatonic state while digesting. It's a matter of being in the right section of river just before the peak of the salmon run, and while the taimen are still hunting. Otherwise, your fly competes with a fresh, full-size salmon on every cast.

On the last day of an already successful week, we headed an hour and a half downstream to an area I had fished unsuccessfully on the first day. I can't explain how relaxed I felt without any pressure to catch another fish. It had been a week of incredible proportions, and I had landed several great fish up to 78 pounds (35.5 kilograms) and witnessed other group members catch taimen exceeding 66 pounds (30 kilograms). Already content with the trip and set on enjoying the last day, I took my time, and messed around with some huge fly combinations to make sure I could get the fly down and the fish would see it. I started fishing just after 11 A.M. The sun came out, making the experience even more pleasant, until my third cast came to an abrupt stop and the line wrenched through my fingers, breaking the 30-pound-test Maxima tippet, leaving behind two burnt

train tracks on my fingers.

"Shit!"

I had broken off a big taimen—probably the only action I would have for the day. I messed around with some more fly combinations, trying to match the fly I had broken off, then took some more photos and had a couple of vodkas to drown my sorrows before fishing again. A few casts later, I hooked up again, and minutes later we landed a fin-perfect fish of 68 pounds (31 kilograms). We collected all measurements needed for the scientific data records, and took some close-up photos of the right cheek, because all taimen have unique, identifiable markings.

While I was taking photos, out of the corner of my eye I saw a stretch of glassy water showing distinctive small bow waves, which I initially mistook for a wind line. A few minutes later I noticed the same thing, but this time it was definitely from moving fish. Taimen were hunting in the pool, which is something I thought I'd never see. A few casts later, I hooked up again. We landed a similar fish, weighing more than 66 pounds (30 kilograms), took photos, and released the amazing creature. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of both gratitude and guilty gluttony that overcame my will to continue fishing.

We sat and watched the pool for a while and noticed a few more fish rolling on the other side of the river near a cutbank packed with fallen trees. The chase became more intense and visible as taimen chased their prey through the shallow tail of a glassy pool. My guilt trip subsided just enough for another chance to catch one of these waking fish, which looked to be larger than any I had caught so far. I made a short cast from a stationary boat first, and then a long one into the area where I had seen the movement. The fly swung momentarily before I was hooked up to a taimen that behaved completely differently than the previous two, as it headed downstream at a rate measurable in knots. We drifted out of the pool before using the motor to get to the opposite bank, where we could pursue the fish on foot. I could feel that this fish was much bigger because the head shakes were more violent and the runs longer.

A man with a beard, wearing a blue beanie and a dark, waterproof jacket, stands waist-deep in a river. He is holding a massive taimen by its tail. The fish is long and slender, with a prominent dorsal fin and a large head. The water is dark and rippled. In the background, a forest of tall trees lines the riverbank.

AS HAPPENS WITH ALL REALLY BIG FISH, THERE WAS A PAUSE BEFORE A VIOLENT HEAD SHAKE AND A RUN THAT HEADED OFF TOWARD A LOGJAM ON THE OPPOSITE BANK. AFTER 25 MINUTES AND A FIGHT THAT DRAGGED THEM FAR DOWNSTREAM, THE TAIMEN SLOWLY MOVED TO THE RIVER'S EDGE, WHERE MAMAEV WAS READY WITH THE NET.

Ilya Sherbovich's all-tackle IGFA world record taimen was 64.6 inches (164.5 centimeters) long with a girth of 33.5 inches (85 centimeters). In an IGFA-certified sling scale it weighed 115 pounds (52.12 kilograms).

On his last day of fishing, author Keith Rose-Innes broke off one taimen and landed three others. On the same trip, his friend Ilya Sherbovich secured three different pending IGFA line-class records plus the all-tackle world record for taimen.



Fifteen minutes later I had my first glimpse of the fish as Sergei, my guide, swept with the net. On his first attempt, he managed to get only half the fish into the net. It measured 62.6 inches (159 centimeters) long, with a girth of 29.9 inches (76 centimeters) and weighed 109 pounds (49.4 kilograms).

Dripping wet after the taimen's explosive departure, I was officially done. How could you finish on a better note? I cut my fly off and saved it to place in a framed picture. Shocked with disbelief at what had just happened, we watched more giant fish hunting in the same place.

Upon arrival at the lodge I could see that I wasn't the only one who'd had an experience beyond expectations. My roommate Steve Estella was also grinning from ear to ear. He had caught a monster of close to 100 pounds. For most of the group it was the end to an amazing week of fishing.

But for Sherbovich and Max Mamaev, Ponoï head guide, the trip wasn't over. Abramov invited them to stay for an extra few days. Mamaev and Sherbovich fished unguided, relying on their years of experience to figure out where to cast. They fished multiple unnamed pools. Some held no fish, but at least a few times a day they found pools that produced. They both exceeded the 88-pound (40-kilogram) mark before their second day. The final tally of the taimen they caught is likely never to be repeated. Realizing how special the fishing was in that short window, Ilya decided to experiment with some light leaders, and managed to land three fish that were submitted to IGFA for world records: 12-pound-test class at 65 pounds, 5 ounces (29.62 kilograms); 16-pound-test class at 96 pounds, 15 ounces (43.98 kilograms); and 20-pound-test class at 101 pounds, 11 ounces (46.12 kilograms).

On their last day, the fog lifted from the river and they headed to a section of river that Mamaev had named "monster pool" earlier in the week. They fished through the pool with no action. In disbelief, they discussed moving to another pool before deciding to give it a few more casts. Sherbovich made a cast and let the fly swing before moving it slowly to feel a constant tension as if he had snagged the bottom. As happens with all really big fish,

there was a pause before a violent head shake and a run that headed off toward a logjam on the opposite bank. After 25 minutes and a fight that dragged them far downstream, the taimen slowly moved to the river's edge, where Mamaev was ready with the net. Once the fish was subdued, they immediately realized that this was the biggest fish they had ever seen. It measured 64.6 inches (164.5 centimeters) with a girth of 33.5 inches (85 centimeters). Keeping the fish in the water, they pushed it gently into the fish sling and lifted it with the scale attached. The numbers quickly raced past the 110-pound (50-kilogram) mark before settling on 115 pounds (52.12 kilograms)—the first taimen over 110 pounds ever caught on fly, and the biggest fly-caught taimen ever measured and weighed. It is the pending IGFA all-tackle world record for taimen.

That night a fair amount of vodka was sacrificed in thanks to the Tugur River gods for finally delivering the payload on an amazing 17-year journey that had seen us fish the most remote and beautiful places. The Siberian winter was coming, and it was time to head home. The atmosphere that evening overwhelmed the team as they sat spellbound by the experience of spending weeks surrounded by the sheer beauty of one of the last few untouched places on the planet and of coming face to face with the ancient beasts that call it home. 🐟



Keith Rose-Innes is a former head guide at Ponoï River Company and is the founder and now managing partner of Alphonse Fishing Company (alphonsefishingco.com), the premier fly-fishing outfitter in the Seychelles with operations on Alphonse, Cosmoledo, Poivre, Astove, and Farquhar atolls. When he's not at Alphonse, he lives with his wife and children in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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In March and April the trout feed in the northern shallows of the lake where the water first starts to warm. Through the spring, summer, and fall they move around based on water temperatures and food sources.

LAKE ALMANOR

SEASONAL STRATEGIES FOR TROPHY TROUT AND BASS

LANCE GRAY



THE *HEXAGENIA* OR HEX HATCH OCCURS IN LATE EVENING AND LASTS UNTIL DARK. THESE LARGE MAYFLIES SWIM FROM THE MUD FLOOR OF THE LAKE, RISE TO THE SURFACE, HATCH FROM THEIR EXOSKELETONS, BEAT THEIR WINGS, AND TRY TO FLY AWAY BEFORE BEING EATEN. IT'S A LITTLE BIT LIKE A DAY AT THE BEACH WHEN JAWS SHOWS UP. SUDDENLY NOBODY WANTS TO BE IN THE WATER.

At Lake Almanor, the Hex hatch creates a feeding frenzy among rainbow and brown trout that are measured in pounds, not inches, but that doesn't mean the fishing is easy. One night after fishing the Hex hatch on Lake Almanor, one of my guests handed me a good tip while saying, "Thanks for all your help, and thanks for not laughing at me." It was a crazy night on the water he will not soon forget.

We started the evening by fishing sinking lines with *Hexagenia* nymph imitations. We normally either troll them slowly from a float tube, or cast the flies and use the countdown method. In this case, Steve was trolling from a float tube and I was close by, coaching him through each step. The hatch was just getting underway when he shouted "Fish on!" This trout took his fly and immediately went airborne. It re-entered the water and gave a series of head shakes, before diving deep. I could tell this fish was big and smart—probably a brown trout.

The fish dove, swam under his tube, and jumped out of the water behind him. I yelled, “Spin the tube and keep him in front of you.” Just as Steve spun around, the fish dove under the float tube again, doubled back, and jumped out of the water. Just as Steve righted his boat, the fish whirled and dove under him again. I watched as Steve lost his hat, then a swimming fin, but he stayed in the fight and with a quick swoop, the 8-pound brown was in the net. Steve looked like he’d been through the grinder. He was disheveled, with sweat pouring down his brow and his gear floating on the water, but he had a huge smile. That is what Lake Almanor is all about—big smiles, big fish, and bigger experiences.

PLUMAS COUNTY TROUT

Lake Almanor is located just south of the small community of Chester, California at the foot of famed Mount Lassen. It sits in a small saddle that marks the end of the Cascades and the start of the Sierra Nevada mountain ranges. It is bordered by State Highway 36, State Highway 89, and State Highway 147.

Almanor is a strong fishery with abundant numbers of rainbows, browns, and smallmouth bass. The rainbows are almost all infertile triploid trout that were introduced to the lake at competitive sizes, and they grow quickly in the fertile lake. The brown trout are both stocked and wild, and can push into the double-digit range. It is a public, large-fish paradise that can be accessed by boat, float tube, or personal pontoon, with big fish being landed by fly fishers nearly every day in the spring, summer, and fall.

The Lake Almanor area has a rich history. It was founded on the site of what the California Maidu natives called “Nakam-Koyo” or Big Meadows. The Maidu summered in Big Meadows for centuries. In the 1840s, settlers and then gold miners traveling west on the Emigrant Trail also settled in the meadow, competing for land and resources. Stories of gold in

this valley caused the population to explode.

In 1901, Julius Howells visited Big Meadows. Mr. Howells envisioned a reservoir in the meadow that would generate electrical power for the growing Sacramento Valley. Upon his return to San Francisco, he formed the Western Power Company along with brothers Edwin and Guy C. Earl. In 1914, Canyon Dam became the first dam completed at the southern portion of the valley. The reservoir was named by Guy C. Earl. He combined the names of his three daughters Alice, Martha and Elinor, to give us “Lake Al-ma-nor.”

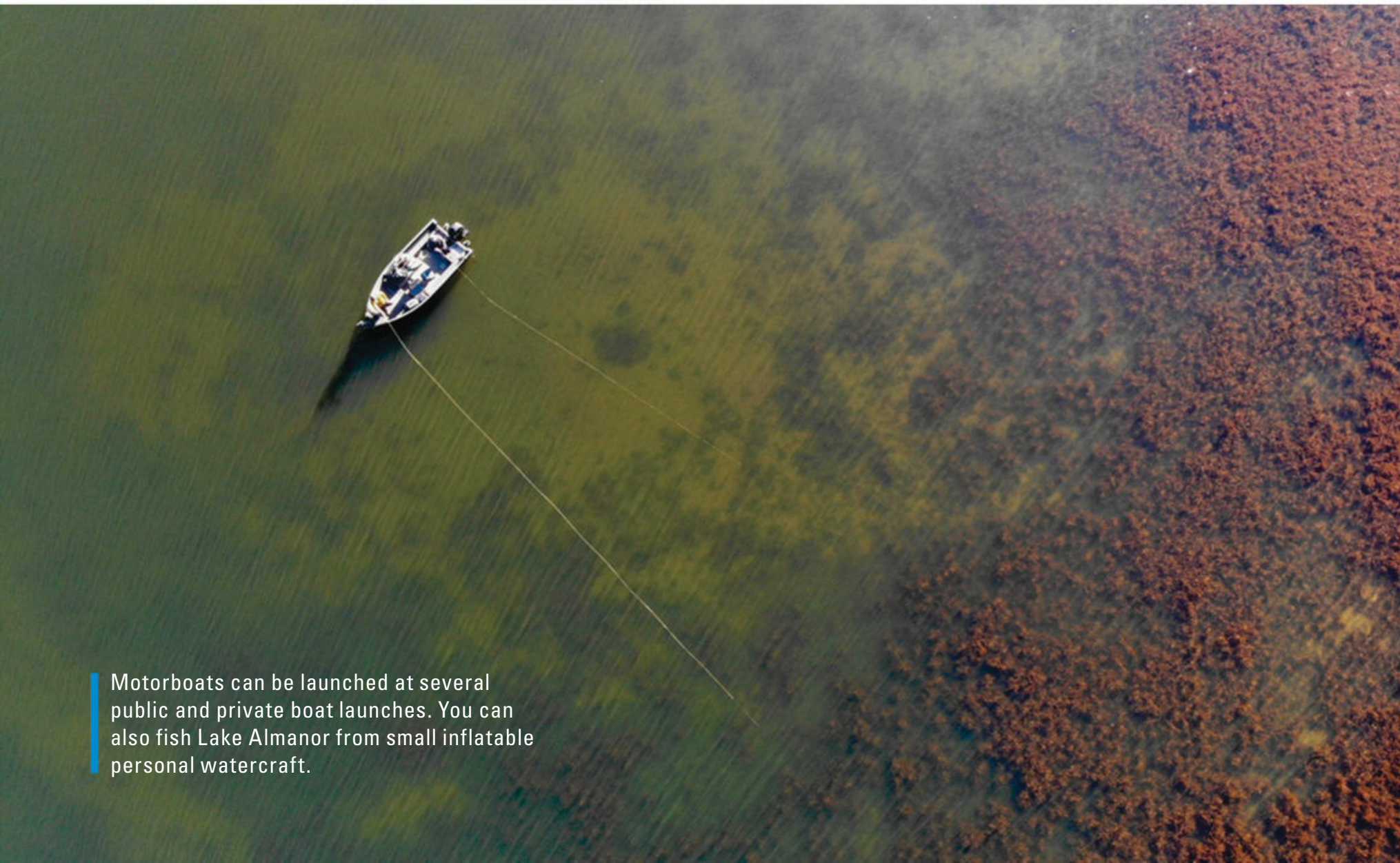
Western Power Company grew into Great Western Power Company, which was eventually acquired by Pacific Gas & Electric Company, which operates the lake to this day. The original dam was replaced in 1927.

Lake Almanor is 13 miles long and 6 miles wide, with roughly 52 square miles of fishable water. When the lake is low, you can see the steeple from the old Prattville church, one of many buildings abandoned when the second dam was completed. Many of the other buildings were relocated to higher ground on the west shoreline, which is today’s Prattville.

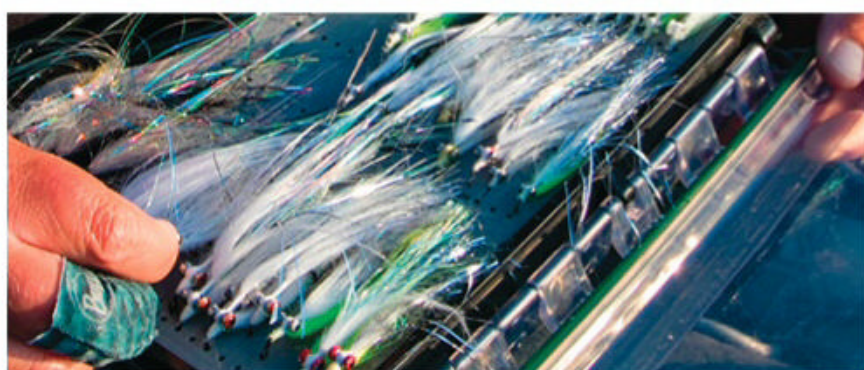
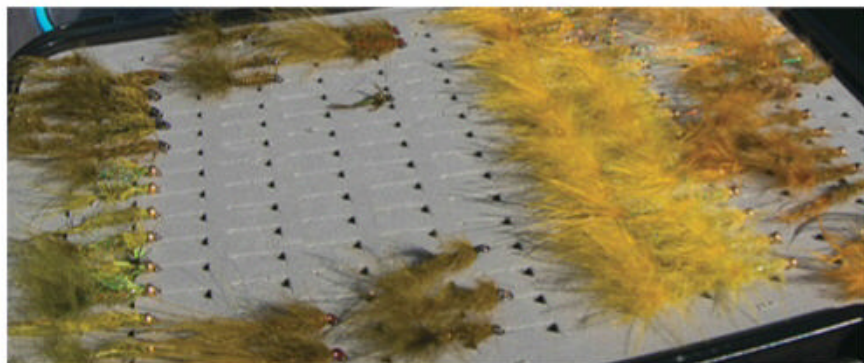
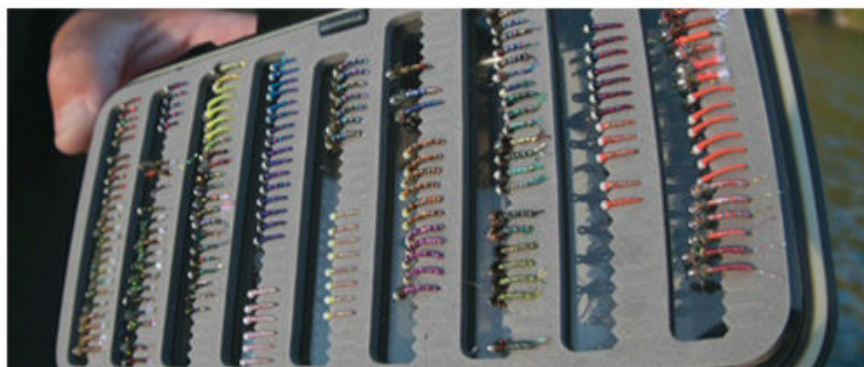
The lake fills two areas. The larger is the former meadow that lies northwest of the dam. The second is a deep underwater side canyon that lies to the northeast. The geography of the lake can best be explained as two kidneys placed next to each other. The north side of the lake is fed by three year-round streams: the North Fork of the Feather River, Benner Creek, and Last Chance Creek. The west side of the lake from Goose Bay down to Prattville is the former “big meadow.” This water is a large mud-bottom flat with a shoal that extends approximately 150 yards to a deeper section reaching between 25 and 30 feet deep.

The west side from Prattville to Canyon Dam is filled with coves showing remnants of the old canyon area. To the south, the lake’s rocky shoreline is very steep and deep. Unless you are in one of the

JOHN G. SHERMAN / PHOTO



Motorboats can be launched at several public and private boat launches. You can also fish Lake Almanor from small inflatable personal watercraft.



JOHN G. SHERMAN / PHOTOS

Midges, *Hexagenia* mayflies, and pond smelt are the three most important food sources at Lake Almanor. Pond smelt (*Hypomesus olidus*) feed on freshwater plankton and were introduced from Japan in 1959 to serve as forage fish for trout. Small white-and-gray Clouser Minnows, Crease Flies, and Lance's Crystal Poppers are all good imitations. The *Hexagenia* hatch in June and July is likely the best aquatic insect hatch of the season and provides the most consistent surface feeding.

small coves that line the south side, there isn't much of a shoal.

The east side and the peninsula area are a series of rocky shores similar to the south side, with limited shoals. The east side is also home to the Hamilton Branch, a midsize stream that comes into the lake through the small community of the same name.

The trout work the geography of the lake like a fine-tuned watch, but they run on water temperature and food sources. In March and early April, the trout are in the northern part of the lake where the water is shallow, and cold. The trout concentrate in this area to gorge themselves with blood midges, pond

smelt, and newly spawned bass fingerlings.

In May and June, the water warms and the trout scatter throughout the lake. As temperatures rise, food sources also expand. Midges, pond smelt, Black Caddis, and Blue-winged Olives also find themselves on the menu.

In June and July, the *Hexagenia* hatch occurs over the muddy bottom of the west side. The trout gorge themselves on these enormous mayflies. As the weather warms in late July and August, the trout go deep, hang around the many coldwater springs in the lake, or swim up the Hamilton Branch to cool off. The rainbows are generally more susceptible to high water

ALMANOR FISHING ASSOCIATION

The Almanor Fishing Association (AFA) is a grassroots club dedicated to providing a high-quality trout fishery. They raise rainbow and brown trout in aluminum cages—historically in the mouth of the Hamilton Branch, and now in North Cove. The California Department of Fish & Wildlife provides Eagle Lake or Shasta Lake rainbows, and/or brown trout.

When AFA receives the trout they are 4 to 6 inches long. AFA volunteers, in partnership with Chester High School and nearby Feather River Community College in Quincy, hand-feed the trout through the winter and early spring until they are large enough to successfully introduce them in the lake. When they are released starting in April or May, they are usually 10 to 13 inches long, a size where they can more successfully

avoid predation and grow quickly to trophy size.

Right now, AFA has 50,000 Shasta Lake rainbows in aluminum pens in North Cove and also 35,000 brown trout in pens at Chester High School. The teenagers raise the browns from eggs to their release into the lake, and the school program is supported by AFA and the California Department of Fish & Wildlife. It's a positive mentoring program for young volunteers who might be the fly fishers of tomorrow.

Some brown trout do spawn in Lake Almanor's tributaries in the fall. But state regulations allow anglers to take five trout per angler per day, a harvest that far exceeds the lake's ability to replenish itself naturally. The California Department of Fish & Wildlife also stocks the lake—three times in 2019.



Smallmouth bass spawn in the spring when water temperatures reach about 57 degrees. During the spawn they aggressively defend their territories, but after the spawn they move to deeper water to recover, and during this period they can be difficult to catch.

temperatures and consistently seek out cooler water.

In late September and October, the water starts to cool and the pond smelt spawn. Tens of thousands of 2-inch pond smelt populate the coves of the west shoreline. These coves have nice muddy bottoms with water depth between 10 and 12 feet. In November, the fish scatter and the browns go up the creeks to spawn. December through early March brings harsh weather with cold temperatures and snowy mountain conditions. Theoretically, you could catch fish, but not many people try.

When fishing Lake Almanor, a number of food sources can be available to the fish at any one time, so be flexible. In 2019 while guiding during the *Hexagenia* hatch, I observed a large flock of Western grebes heading toward us. As the birds started diving, we quickly switched from *Hexagenia* nymphs to pond smelt imitations. First cast, fish on. If you were eating a steak (*Hexagenia*) and a plate of jumbo shrimp (pond smelt) came by you in a bowl, wouldn't you grab some? Make sure you have all the patterns that the fish are eating throughout the year in your box, just in case. A quick switch may result in more action. Be aware that *Hexagenia* nymphs are available all year long, and Hex imitations should always be staples in your box.

The trout tactics on Almanor are common throughout Northern California. They range from midges under indicators to stripping *Hexagenia* nymphs over mud flats. My basic indicator rig is a simple 12-foot leader with an indicator that can adjust to the water depth or to the depth the fish are suspended in deeper water. Stripping techniques work for pond smelt, leeches, and *Hexagenia* imitations fished on intermediate to full-sinking lines (depending on water depth). Use short leaders

on these sinking lines—5 to 7 feet is all you need.

Dry-fly rigging is similarly easy. For the larger flies like *Hexagenias* use a 7.5-foot tapered 3X leader with a foot or two of 3X tippet. For smaller dry flies like blood midge adults or Blue-winged Olives, use a tapered 9-foot 5X leader with 24 inches of 5X tippet. These leaders rarely need to be lengthened for spooky fish. The key is to watch the feeding pattern of the trout, and anticipate its direction of travel and the rhythm of its feeding and to have your fly in the right place at the right time. For midges, Blue-winged Olives, and wind-blown terrestrials like ants and beetles, a patient dead drift is required. But when the Hex hatch is on, and fish are feeding on top, a small twitch here and there to imitate the movement of a fluttering mayfly can be effective.

I fish from a float tube or small pontoon boat, so most of my presentations are fairly horizontal. If you have a large boat, you can use the straight-line method, which has been used on the lake for decades. Find water that is 25 to 30 feet deep near the end of a mud shoal, anchor your boat, and cast a full-sinking line. Wait for the line to sink, and once the line is vertical, lift the rod and jig the fly to give it some life. If the wind is blowing, the boat will rock up and down to provide the same jigging presentation.

SEASONS OF THE BASS

For smallmouth bass, water temperature plays a role in where and what the fish are eating. Pre-spawn is a great time for big bass. The fish gather off of points near spawning areas and are highly aggressive. Smallmouths spawn in cool water, usually around 57 degrees. When the water temperature

reaches that magic number, the fish move toward the shallow water of the northern section of the lake, the coves along the west side, and the shallow water of the east side. They start making their spawning beds and they furiously protect them. Any fly that lands in the area of the bed is quickly attacked.

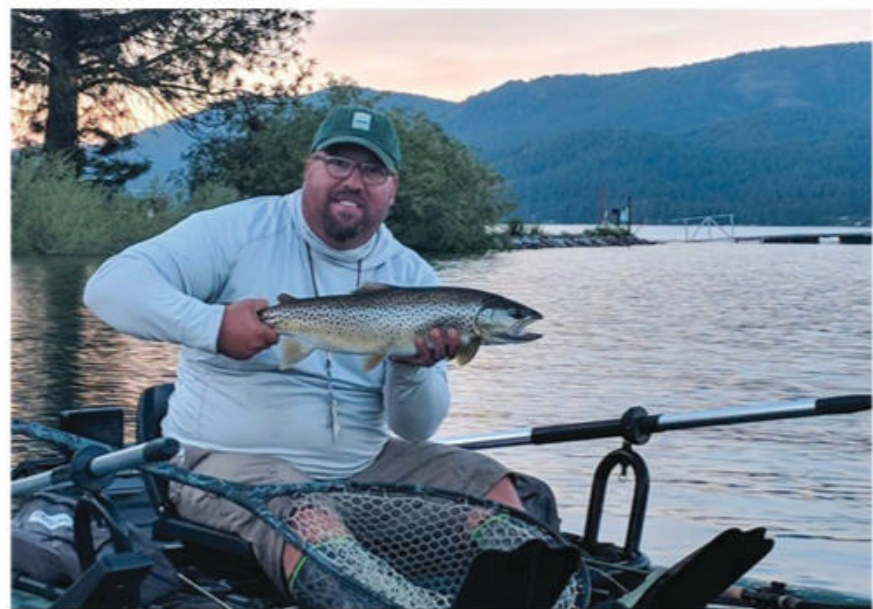
Once the bass finish spawning, they fall into recovery mode, and for a couple of weeks, they become very hard to catch. After their recovery period, the bass return to shallow water and populate the west side and the steep, rocky shorelines to the south and east sides of the lake. They eat everything from pond smelt to *Hexagenia* nymphs and crayfish.

During the pre-spawn and the spawn, use sinking lines or sinking-tip streamer lines and white-and-gray Clouser Minnows, pond smelt, or even crayfish imitations. Fish the points in the coves or the rocky shoreline, bouncing the fly down through the rocks or down over the deep drop-offs. After the spawn recovery, the bass start to eat again—and they eat everything. Topwater flies are great choices during this period. Fish longer 9-foot 2X leaders with a floating pond smelt, small Crease Flies in white and gray, or small Lance’s Crystal Poppers.

Float-n-fly tactics are also becoming more popular for both trout and bass. Using a drop leader, suspend either a lead-head jig pattern or Rowley’s Balanced Leech below a large indicator. The drop leader is usually a section of 20-pound-test fluorocarbon 8 to 10 feet long. I use Scientific Anglers Micro Swivels at both ends of the drop leader. The swivels make it easy to add the leader to your floating line, and also make it easy to add 3X or 4X tippet material to the terminal end of the drop leader. The indicator is located on the drop leader, with bobber stoppers on each side of the indicator for easier depth adjustments.

The float-n-fly rig also works from a personal watercraft or a large fishing boat.

While Lake Almanor might not have the postcard aesthetics of a Northern California trout stream like the McCloud, or a coastal steelhead river like the Klamath, it’s a dependable producer of truly large trout, and it’s a public resource that should be used and appreciated by more catch-and-release fly fishers. And at times, when big browns are gulping *Hexagenias* and rods are bent against the evening light, there’s no place I’d rather be. 🐟



KIRSTEN GRAY / PHOTO

Lance Gray is a guide who owns and operates Lance Gray & Company near Chico, California.

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Pennsylvania has thousands of miles of Class A Wild trout streams where you'll find solitude and no stocked trout.

A WALK ON THE WILD

A full-page photograph of a person fly fishing in a forest stream. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt, a tan cap, and a fishing vest, and is crouched on a large, mossy rock. The stream flows over several large, moss-covered rocks, creating small rapids. The background is a dense forest with tall trees and lush green foliage. The text "BLUE-LINING PENNSYLVANIA'S CLASS A WILD TROUT STREAMS" is overlaid in blue, and "SIDE" is overlaid in large white letters.

BLUE-LINING PENNSYLVANIA'S
CLASS A WILD TROUT STREAMS

HENRY RAMSAY
PHOTOGRAPHY & TEXT

SIDE



Eastern brook trout are native to Pennsylvania, and were historically widespread, but today native brookies survive only in wild, remote headwaters.

THE LITTLE CREEK FLOWED COLD AND CLEAR AS IT TUMBLED AND SPARKLED OVER THE STONES IN A SERIES OF RIFFLES BEFORE DROPPING AND FANNING OUT INTO A SMALL POOL OF CALMER WATER. THE POOL WAS SHADED BY THE OVERHANGING BRANCHES OF A HEMLOCK THAT GREW TIGHT AGAINST THE WATER'S EDGE. ITS ROOTS STABILIZED THE STREAMBANK, AND PROVIDED COVER AND PROTECTION FOR ANYTHING THAT MIGHT LIVE THERE.

My sidearm cast put a Female Adams back under the limbs of the hemlock, and the little fly danced and drifted on the tips of its hackles for a moment before the surface of the pool erupted and the little fly disappeared. The line went tight, and in a minute a beautifully speckled creature lay gasping with exhaustion in the palm of my hand. The wormlike markings across its back, the vividly haloed spots peppered across its flanks, and the brightly edged fins along its belly were the most beautiful things I had ever witnessed. Amazed, I held the fish briefly before letting it slip out of my hand and dart back into the dark shadows of the stream, knowing that I had just witnessed something perfect and pure.

That encounter with my first native brook trout took place almost a lifetime ago in a headwater stream called Hammersley Fork in north-central Pennsylvania. There have been many similar encounters in the 45 years since then, and I always continue to be charmed and awestruck by these wild fish and their beauty.

While I truly love the challenge of matching hatches and the game of cracking the code on big, selectively feeding trout, there's something very simple and deeply satisfying for me in exploring small headwater streams in a game known as "blue-lining." Here in the Northeast—where stocking hatchery-reared trout has been a traditional management practice on larger waters for many years—there is a definite philosophical shift taking place, and many fly fishers are choosing instead to seek out those waters where naturally reproducing populations of wild trout remain.

There also seems to be a change in values—anglers pursuing an experience that offers solitude in a wilder, more natural setting. For most blue-line anglers, it's about experiencing what nature does better than humankind ever can, and at the same time, finding a closer connection to the natural world.

In Pennsylvania, we are fortunate to have more than 86,500 miles of running water. And while many streams haven't yet been studied for wild trout populations, several thousand miles of water have been determined to hold "Class A Wild" trout populations. Numerous other streams support lower biomass levels of wild trout.

Most of the Class A Wild waters are smaller, first- or second-order creeks and brooks that are tributaries to larger streams and river drainages. Most of these waters hold resident wild brook trout, brown trout, or a mixture of both species. There are only a few streams with wild populations of naturally reproducing rainbow trout.

Class A Wild streams are the best of the best in Pennsylvania, based on the fish population levels. For a stream to qualify as a Class A Wild brook trout stream, there must be a minimum of 26.7 pounds of brook trout per stream acre, and they must comprise at least 75 percent of the total trout biomass found. A Class A Wild brown trout stream must exceed a minimum

of 35.6 pounds per acre, and browns must represent at least 75 percent of the total trout biomass. Wild rainbow trout have the least restrictive criteria and must have a minimum of 1.78 pounds per stream acre and represent at least 75 percent of the wild trout.

Fortunately, we have quite a lengthy list of streams that meet these criteria, and they are scattered statewide. There are even more streams that are designated as Class B, C, and D Wild Trout water, and there are potentially more Class A streams out there—many have just not been studied yet.

There are Class A Wild streams in every region of Pennsylvania, and many of the best small streams in the state flow through publicly accessible land within state forests, state game lands, designated wild areas, and state parks. Some of the areas worth looking at are Tiadaghton, Sproul, Tioga, Susquehannock, Tuscarora, and Loyalsock state forests. Within these are some remarkable state-designated wild areas such as Burns Run, Hammersley, Asaph, and Algerine. Although many of these little gems are on public land, some Class A Wild streams are on private land, where access requires landowner permission.

BLUE-LINING

The small-stream game often begins with long sessions studying maps to find those blue lines that indicate running water, and then determining how to access them. Every large stream system is made up of a number of smaller tributaries, and many of these support wild trout. Some streams are simple

to reach from a road or trail, but others may require a lengthy hike to get to them, and this is a big part of the experience.

While most maps identify flowing water with thin blue lines, not all of them clearly show the contours of the land. Topographic maps such as USGS quadrangles are invaluable for identifying the best approaches to a remote stream when a long hike is involved. What appears on the map to be a relatively short hike can turn into a nightmare when you find that the “short” hike takes you down the side of a mountain that drops hundreds of feet to the bottom of a stream valley. Studying the brown contour lines of a topo map will help you determine the best way to get to and back out from a small stream.

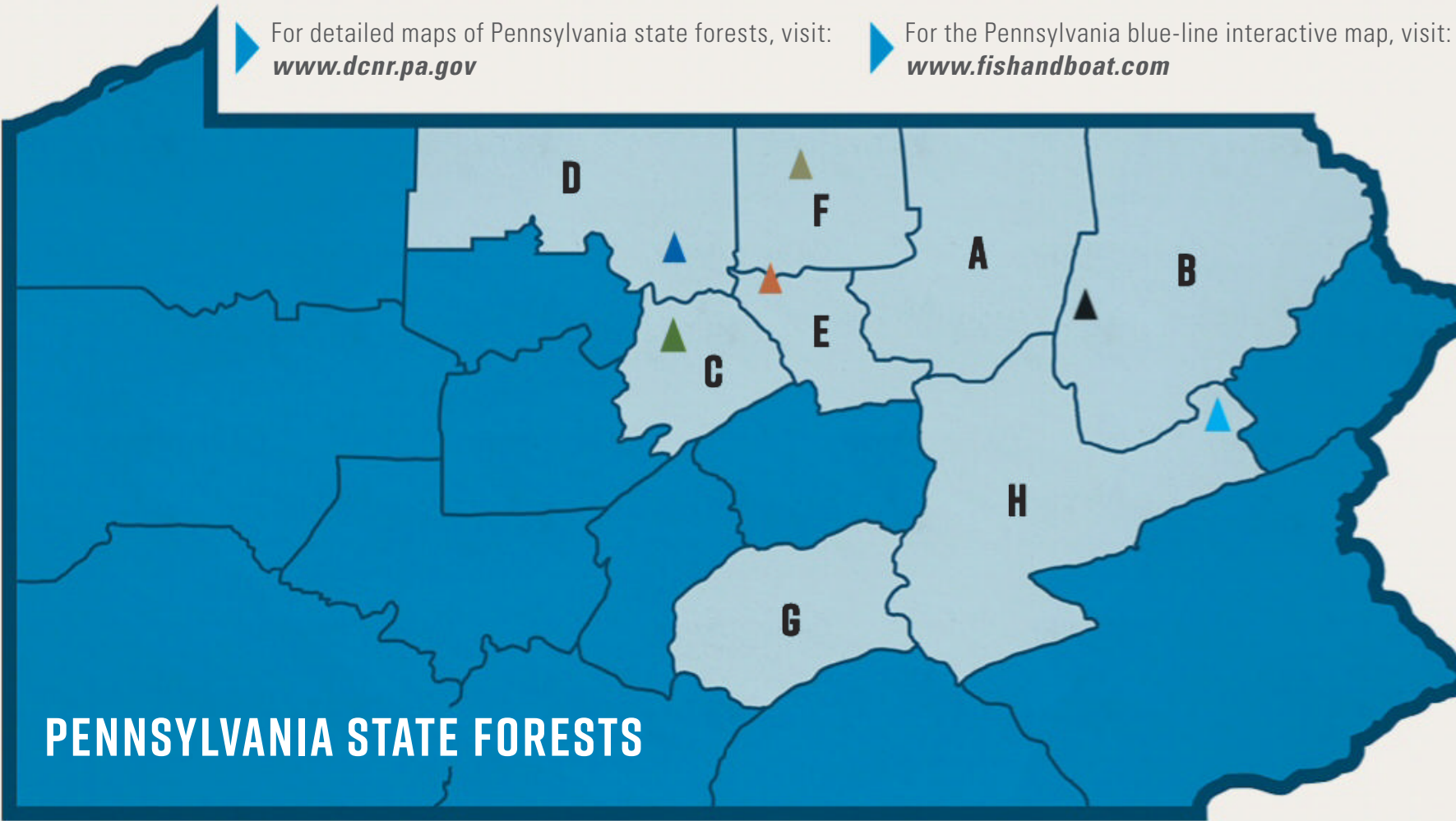
Planning the hike into a remote wild trout stream is often the most important part of the trip. Beyond that, the game can be unpredictable, which lends an additional element of excitement. You never know what you may find when you finally get there. Some of my treks into remote streams have led to discovering incredible waters, with beautiful wild brook and brown trout in remarkable surroundings that have probably never been cast over in their lives. Other streams have turned out to be nearly unfishable, with dense, impenetrable thickets of tall rhododendrons or mountain laurels that prevented me from making a cast, or even getting to the water to attempt one. There are no guarantees of what you will find at the end of a hike, and the lure of the unknown and the adventure are big parts of the pull of these ribbons of water.

For hardcore blue-liners who want to go completely off the grid, Pennsylvania has more than 75 streams that are designated as

BLUE-LINE STARTING POINTS

Here are some of the author’s favorite state forests and public points of interest with Class A Wild trout streams.

POINTS OF INTEREST	
A LOYALSOCK S.F.	E TIADAGHTON S.F.
B PINCHOT S.F.	F TIOGA STATE S.F.
C SPROUL S.F.	G TUSCARORA S.F.
D SUSQUEHANNOCK S.F.	H WEISER S.F.
▲ ALGERINE WILD AREA	▲ HAMMERSLEY WILD AREA
▲ ASAPH WILD AREA	▲ HICKORY RUN STATE PARK
▲ BURNS RUN WILD AREA	▲ RICKETTS GLEN STATE PARK





wilderness trout streams. You can find a list of these at the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission website fishandboat.com by searching for “wilderness trout.” Most of these streams require

technical fishing situations with selective fish. It’s an experience that is simple, basic, and refreshing.

It’s a great opportunity to go light, with little more than a box of flies and a few basic accessories. While 7-inch native brook trout are seldom choosy about flies, they can be spooky or difficult to cast to, and on many pools the challenge is merely getting a fly on the water. While a 40-foot cast on a larger stream is easy, a 10- or 15-foot cast on a small mountain stream can be challenging. Blue-liners often cast from their knees, making sidearm or bow-and-arrow casts to get the fly back under a low overhanging tree or rhododendron branch.

While some anglers use long fly rods on small streams, I prefer shorter rods, which are easier to transport through thick cover in the woods, and easier to cast overhead or sidearm in tight quarters. The rods I carry most often range from 6 ½ to 7 ½ feet and take line weights from 3 to 5. I fish a 7-foot 4-weight rod most of the time, but may go up or down a line size depending on water flows.

FISHING SMALL STREAMS IS OFTEN MORE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGING FISHING THAN LARGER STREAMS AND RIVERS, BUT SELDOM PUTS YOU INTO A TECHNICAL FISHING SITUATION WITH SELECTIVE FISH. IT’S AN EXPERIENCE THAT IS SIMPLE, BASIC, AND REFRESHING.

lengthy hikes to access them, but they offer prime opportunities to backpack in and camp in a remote area.

PECKING ORDER

For much of the year, a typical mountain stream holds populations of smaller brook and brown trout. A 7- or 8-inch brookie represents a real prize, and resident browns are typically under a foot. The trout establish themselves in a pecking order, with the bigger, more dominant fish taking pools that offer the best cover and feeding opportunities. The younger fish are pushed into less favorable holding lies such as smaller pools, pockets, and runs, or into the tail sections of the larger pools. It’s important to recognize this hierarchy when you encounter a larger pool, because a careless approach often scatters the smaller fish and spooks any bigger fish that might be holding in the best lies of the same pool.

Interestingly, in the late evening or at daybreak—when winged predators such as kingfishers and herons are on the roost—larger fish often drop back into the shallow tails of pools, where they can feed on crayfish, moths, minnows, sculpins, and juvenile trout. A cautious approach at these times of day might provide opportunities for larger trout in a small-stream setting.

As spring gives way to summer and stream temperatures begin to warm, larger fish that have spent the winter and spring in bigger rivers begin to seek out water that is more thermally favorable: the spring seeps and smaller headwater tributaries that often remain cold through the summer months. Larger, sexually mature brown trout often migrate into these smaller streams and remain there until they have spawned, and drop back only when water temperatures have cooled in the bigger stream below. My friend Eric Richard of Coveted Waters Guide Service and I know a pool we have named the Gum Line Pool on a very small stream, where we predictably see a pair of large browns appear every fall for the spawn.

Fishing small streams is often more physically challenging than fishing large streams and rivers, but seldom puts you into

One of the most important parts of my small-stream rig is the leader, which is critical to making an accurate cast in a confined area. Generic, prepackaged 9-foot tapered leaders are inadequate for this specialized fishing. The 7 ½-foot leaders I tie are based on a George Harvey formula, with a long, stiff butt section, a very short transition, and just enough tippet to get a clean, drag-free drift. The leader butt and transition are tied with sections of a fairly stiff nylon material such as Maxima Ultra Green, while the last two sections are made from a soft nylon tippet material such as TroutHunter. At times, you may be casting only the leader and a very short length of fly line, which makes the leader key to making accurate fly deliveries. I seldom find a need to go lighter than a 4X tippet on my leaders for this type of fishing, and a longer leader is seldom necessary.

On the terminal end, I use a very simple selection of flies that have served me well over the years. For dry flies, you can

succeed with any hairwing patterns that float well and are easy to see in broken water. I’ve been using Fran Betters’s Ausable Wulff since I first learned of it in the early 1980s. It floats well, it is easy to see, and it will support a nymph below it on a dropper. I carry these in sizes 12 and 14.

My second choice is my Little Yellow Stone in sizes 14 and 16, which imitates the Yellow Sally, *Iso-perla bilineata*. Yellow Sallies hatch on most northern Pennsylvania streams from late May through most of the summer, and trout are very fond of them. My third choice is Craig Mathews’s X-caddis tied on size 14 or 16 hooks. I carry versions with both tan and olive bodies.

I also carry a small assortment

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Pennsylvania's small headwater streams are relatively unfished, so the trout follow a natural pecking order. Larger trout take up positions in spots with the best protection from the current and feeding opportunities—deep plunge pools are obvious locations.

of nymphs and soft-hackled nymph patterns, all with tungsten beads to get them down in the zone quickly. The holding pools are sometimes smaller than a bathtub, and nymph patterns need to sink fast. I carry a few soft-hackle patterns that I can use to cover a pool from above when an upstream approach isn't possible, and a few small streamers tied on size 10 and 12 hooks.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

If you decide to give blue-lining a try, there are a few things to keep in mind. Study a map of the area you will be visiting and understand the area and its topography. There is a very good chance that you won't have Wi-Fi or cell phone service, and you should always let someone know where you will be fishing, so they will know where to start looking if something goes wrong. Carry a headlamp or a small flashlight to find your way out in the dark, a full container or two of water to stay hydrated, and a few high-calorie snack bars to maintain your energy.

For your safety, always make noise in wilderness areas—sow bears with cubs can be very aggressive and protective if you surprise them. Rattlesnakes are common in many rocky stream-side areas during the warm months, so keep your eyes open and look before you step. Snakes generally try to avoid you if you give them the chance. Fortunately, the buzz of a rattler provides a good audible warning. Copperheads also inhabit these areas and can be very hard to see with their markings that blend well with the surroundings, and they won't warn you of their presence the way a rattlesnake will. If you suddenly smell a strong odor of cucumbers, you could be very close to a copperhead.

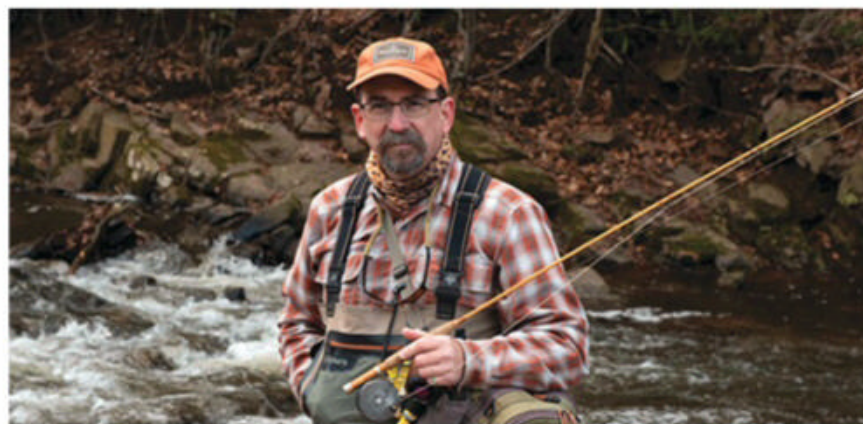
The most likely threat to your personal safety is deer ticks, which carry Lyme disease. Use insect repellent, or wear Simms BugStopper clothing to keep the ticks off. Check yourself well at the end of the day, and see a doctor as soon as you can if you have been bitten.

These small wild trout streams are important treasures, and

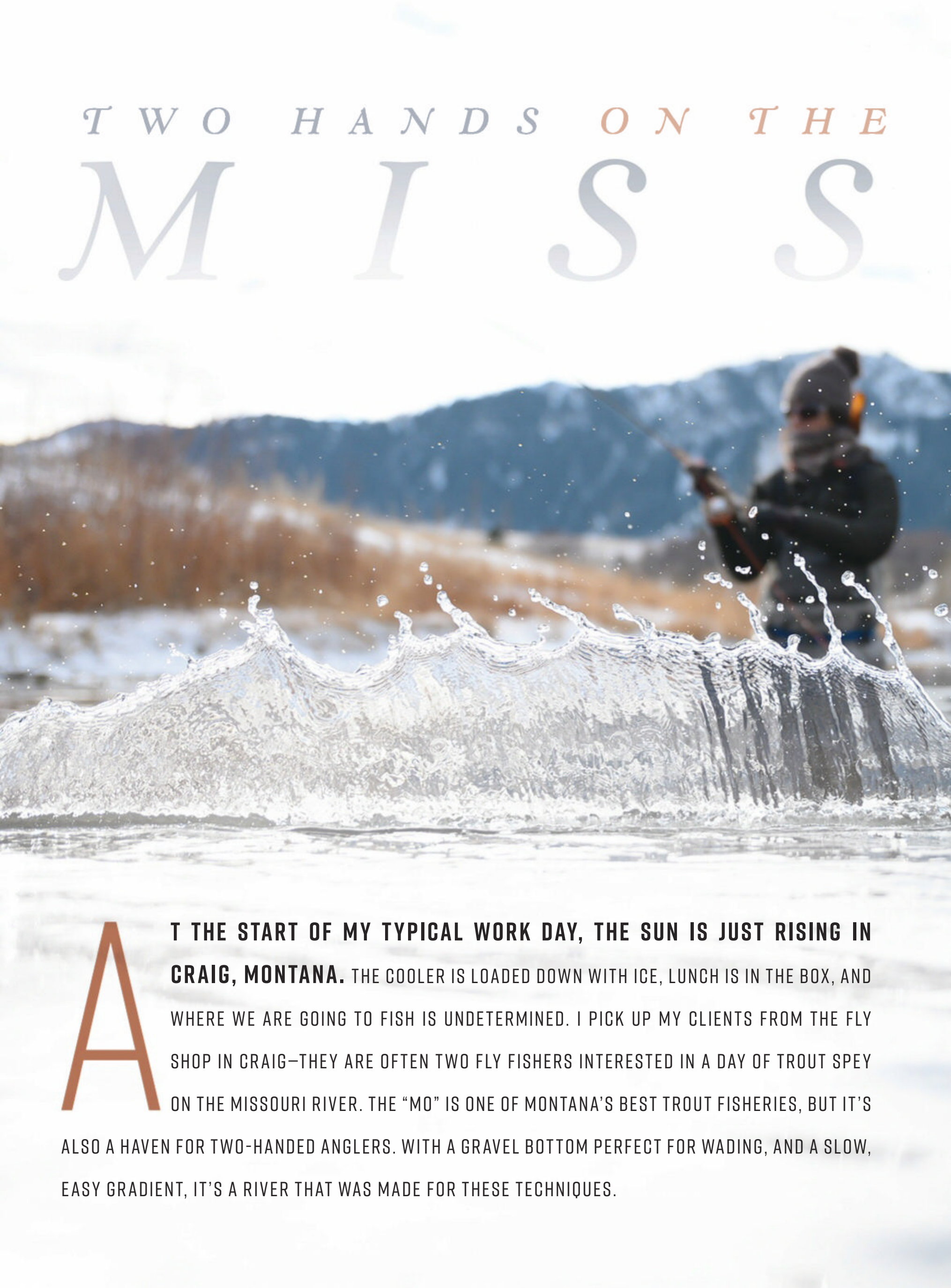
the few fly fishers who know them well enjoy and protect them. They are valuable sources of cold water for their watersheds, and indicators of the overall health of the larger ecosystem, as well as vital spawning grounds.

Remember, too, that the fish in these streams are fragile creatures and can be easily damaged by improper handling. A 7- or 8-inch wild brook trout in a mountain stream can be four or five years old, so it takes a long time to replace one. Pinch down your hook barbs, wet your hands before handling them, keep trout in the water until you are ready to shoot a picture, and release them carefully for another day. In the fall, always be on the lookout for spawning redds, and avoid fishing small streams until the spawn is over.

While the blue-line experience isn't for everyone, it offers a dose of quiet solitude and a glimpse at wild places that are often spectacular. Sometimes there is nothing better than that kind of diversion in a busy life. 🐟



Henry Ramsay is a photographer, custom fly tier, and a fly-fishing and fly-tying instructor. He is the author of *Matching Major Eastern Hatches: New Patterns for Selective Trout* (Stackpole/Headwater Books, 2011) and coauthor of *Keystone Fly Fishing* (Headwater Books, 2017). His previous FLY FISHERMAN story was "Cheesesteak Trout: Urban gems in and around the City of Brotherly Love" in the April-May 2017 issue.



TWO HANDS ON THE MISSISS

AT THE START OF MY TYPICAL WORK DAY, THE SUN IS JUST RISING IN **CRAIG, MONTANA.** THE COOLER IS LOADED DOWN WITH ICE, LUNCH IS IN THE BOX, AND WHERE WE ARE GOING TO FISH IS UNDETERMINED. I PICK UP MY CLIENTS FROM THE FLY SHOP IN CRAIG—THEY ARE OFTEN TWO FLY FISHERS INTERESTED IN A DAY OF TROUT SPEY ON THE MISSOURI RIVER. THE “MO” IS ONE OF MONTANA’S BEST TROUT FISHERIES, BUT IT’S ALSO A HAVEN FOR TWO-HANDED ANGLERS. WITH A GRAVEL BOTTOM PERFECT FOR WADING, AND A SLOW, EASY GRADIENT, IT’S A RIVER THAT WAS MADE FOR THESE TECHNIQUES.

MISSOURI

SPEY TACKLE AND TECHNIQUES FOR MONTANA TROUT

WHITNEY GOULD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA HAYDAHL RICHARDSON

Spey casting is a thing of beauty. Because both hands are involved, it causes less strain and less physical effort, but it does require practice and discipline. To take advantage of Spey tackle and techniques for trout, ditch the drift boat. You should wade while Spey casting, and luckily the Missouri has an easy cobbled bottom and a low gradient.

TROUT SPEY *SOFT-HACKLE SETUP* (FLOATING LINE)

PROLIFIC HATCHES OF STONEFLIES, MAYFLIES, AND CADDIS BRING PODS OF FISH TO THE SURFACE, PERFECT TO LET A SOFT-HACKLE PATTERN DRIFT LAZILY ON TOP, OR SINK SUBSURFACE AND THEN RISE TO THE SURFACE IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE SWING.

The longest river in North America, the Missouri begins at the confluence of the Jefferson, Gallatin, and Madison rivers, and meanders its way through seven states before converging with the Mississippi. It's far more water than any guide could ever come to know well. I focus my efforts on the section from Holter Dam to the boat launch in Cascade, Montana. Cascade is the town my husband and I call home from April through December.

The simplest thing for me to do each morning is just head up to Holter Dam, but with all of my Spey-curious clients, I gather as much information as I can ahead of time at the fly shop. Are they salmon/steelhead anglers looking to improve their casting? Is this a day of practice, or are they interested in catching big trout with Spey tackle? The answer determines our entire day—where we fish and how we fish.

"Trout Spey isn't a numbers game," I often explain. "We can fish single-hand rods from the boat, or two-hand rods while wading. Both methods are equally valuable, but it's best to commit to one or the other."

The Missouri is an incredible dry-fly fishery, and on most days you will see rising fish. Single-hand rods are best suited for picking off one rising fish at a time, but if you truly want to play the Spey game, you can't spend the day switching back and forth. With Spey casting it takes time to adjust, learn, and execute, and if you want to become truly proficient you need to put your time in.

CHOOSING A TROUT SPEY ROD

To beginners, choosing a trout Spey setup might seem more confusing than navigating Bloomingdale's After Thanksgiving Sale. As trout Spey rods have evolved, they have developed their

own classification systems. Shorter than full Spey rods yet longer than single-hand trout rods, each rod has an array of lines designed especially for their optimal use. So how do you choose?

Ultralight Spey rods—I affectionately call them baby Speys—are designed specifically for trout fishing in the Lower 48. They are sprightly compared to the full-weight Spey rods used by modern steelhead/salmon anglers. Because the rods are lighter, they require less line weight (also referred to as grain weight) than a full-weight Spey to load, and they are designed to cast predominantly with both hands. Spey rods for trout are approximately 10'6" to 11'6" long, and they are made to cast lines weighing from about 175 to 305 grains.

In their usage, these baby Speys are equivalent to single-hand fly rods in the 4- to 7-weight range. For instance, a 1-weight Sage Trout Spey HD is for light, delicate work comparable to a 4-weight single-hand rod, and for practical purposes the 2-weight is most comparable to a 5-weight single-hander. I like to think of the 3-weight Trout Spey HD as I do a single-hand 6-weight rod—the do-everything, go-to workhorse rod. While soft enough to protect lighter tippets, it can also cast larger streamers and more robust sink tips with ease. It casts farther with less effort than a single-hand rod, all without having to worry about backspace and/or double hauling.

Different rod companies label and categorize their trout-specific Spey rods differently. For instance, Scott Fly Rods has a 4-weight T3H Spey rod designed specifically for trout and for 210- and 240-grain lines. Winston Micro Speys are labeled as 3-, 4-, and 5-weight Spey rods for suggested use with 190- to 270-grain lines, 240- to 330-grain lines, and 300- to 390-grain lines, respectively. G.Loomis IMX-PRO ShortSpeys are also labeled as 3-, 4-, and 5-weight rods, and designer Steve Rajeff suggests lines weighing 270, 330, and 360 grains, respectively. Other smaller companies like Echo and Gary Anderson Custom Rods also have baby Speys that are suitable for trout fishing.

SOFT-HACKLES

From May through October on the Missouri there are prolific insect hatches, and warmer water temperatures mean the fish are actively feeding. It's a perfect time to fish soft-hackles.

When I get home from a day of guiding, there are times when I find a note next to my dinner stating that my husband has taken the dog for an evening fish. Who can argue with that? The dog is fed and walked, dinner is made, and I get a little alone time.

It was on one of these occasions that my husband and fishing partner, Mike McCune, announced that he was done fishing streamers for trout. Henceforth, he was going to focus on floating lines and soft-hackles. He was "tired of moving the fly." I took this news as odd, but Mike is a steelhead angler since

7.5' - 9' TAPERED LEADER

3MM TIPPET RING

8" 3X-4X TIPPET

24" 3X-4X TIPPET

TWO-FLY RIG

Attach tippet ring to end of leader; add two sections of tippet. On one section, approximately 8", use a Spider or a Hare's-ear Soft-hackle. The second piece of tippet should be slightly longer than the largest fish you expect to catch. For the Missouri, I use 24" (but I am extremely optimistic). On the longer tippet, use a Partridge and Orange, Partridge and Purple, or some other color combination.

childhood and he's an avid fly tier. He had spent the previous month filling fly boxes with various patterns, sizes, and colors of soft-hackles, and he wanted to use them.

Sylvester Nemes's book *The Soft-Hackled Fly* first clued me in to my husband's thinking. Nemes points out that fishing a soft-hackle is not that much different from A.H.E. Woods's approach to fishing a greased line for Atlantic salmon. The idea is to convey a natural presentation to the fly, using an upstream or a downstream mend to prevent the tightening of the fly line. According to Nemes, a "soft-hackle applies to a class of wingless, sub-aqueous flies, the hackles of which come mostly from birds such as partridge, woodcock, grouse, snipe, and starling."

Mike is quickly mastering soft-hackles. They are impressionistic flies, and the variations that have sprouted from Nemes's classic review of the genera are endless.

When you choose your fly, it's wise to match the color scheme of body and hackle to the predominant insect, but it isn't critical to have an in-depth knowledge of hatches and hatch cycles. Soft-hackles work incredibly well during hatches on the Missouri when the trout are binge feeding, but they also drum up trout when nothing is hatching.

As water levels drop on the Missouri at the end of the runoff, the fish rise just short of midriver. I fish soft-hackles with Spey rods to get more distance with less effort and better

line control. Spey rods also allow you to fish in backcast-constrained locations.

Prolific hatches of stoneflies, mayflies, and caddis bring pods of fish to the surface, perfect to let a soft-hackle pattern drift lazily on top, or sink subsurface and then rise to the surface in the last quarter of the swing. Caddis hatches in particular create perfect situations for soft-hackle techniques, and the Missouri has massive populations of these aquatic insects. When caddis are hatching, use a Partridge and Orange or a Partridge and Yellow soft-hackle with a wire or tinsel-ribbing body. The subtle shine from the tinsel or wire gives the impression of gas bubbles as the insect rises toward the surface and transforms from the aquatic to airborne aspect of its life cycle.

Early summer mornings and evenings are perfect for soft-hackle fishing with two-hand rods. The sun is at a low angle, most of the boats are off the river, the bar hatch has begun, and the chance for rising fish is higher than during the high-sun hours. We often have the river to ourselves.

The excitement of the early morning risers nourishes us through the hot afternoons when the fish are tight-lipped and obstinate. I use afternoons to work with my clients on their casting skills, catch the occasional maverick, and take in the glory of America's longest river. When the sun drops, the action often picks up again.



The Missouri River is known for its large rainbows and browns. Thanks to guide and world casting champion Whitney Gould, it's also becoming a Mecca for Spey fishing for trout.

TROUT SPEY *STREAMER SETUP* (SINKING LINE)

However, if the water temperature is below 35 degrees F., I suggest using streamers, since the trout feed less frequently and look for larger meals. If you are my husband, you'd head home and grab a book, or tie another soft-hackle.

When swinging soft-hackles, it's best to present the fly perpendicular to the current (A.H.E. Woods called this a broadside presentation) for as long as possible throughout the swing. Use upstream and/or downstream mends to control the direction of the fly and maximize the amount of time the fly is presented broadside to the fish. However, at the end of the swing, try not to rush your recast, as it is not uncommon for fish to strike at the end of the swing or on the retrieve. Be patient. Wait and consider just pulsing or twitching the fly in the current.

STREAMER SPEY

Streamers are my go-to from November to April when there are fewer insects in the water, or during times when I feel a larger meal is warranted. A huge benefit to fishing streamers is that they are effective anywhere in the water column. They imitate

a wide range of forage including small fish, crayfish, sculpins, and—more specific to the Missouri—leeches. With a two-hand fly rod, I typically default to smaller, easy-to-cast patterns—sizes 6 to 10. Woolly Buggers, Thin Mints, Pine Squirrel Leeches, Carey Specials, and Sparrows are a few of my favorite flies. On this river, there's no need to complicate things with outlandishly sized, jointed streamers.

One advantage of Spey rods are the shooting head systems that have developed along with them. It takes mass to move mass, and Skagit-style fly line systems make streamer fishing easier. The weight of the fly line allows you to cast heavier sink tips and streamers with a positive turnover. Skagit lines use a loop-to-loop system for attaching the sink tip to the belly of the fly line. This allows you to switch between sink tips with remarkable ease, and match the tip with the water you're fishing. Single-hand rod systems just don't offer this type of flexibility.

On the Missouri I carry a sink-tip wallet loaded with RIO MOW tips with various sink rates. I tend to use MOW Light (T-8) tips with a full 10 feet of T-8 in January through April to deal with cold water and sluggish trout. In these water conditions,



In the summer when insects are hatching, the trout are aggressive, and the water is warm, use floating lines and soft-hackles. When the water is cold, or during spring runoff, you'll need Skagit-style lines and sinking tips.



TWO-STREAMER RIG (FLOATING LINE)

Two streamers can also be fished using a shooting head floating line like the soft-hackle setup on pages 52-53. Attach a 5' 0X-1X leader to the floating shooting head. Add a 3mm tippet ring. Add two sections of tippet, an 8", and a 24" of 0X-1X. On the 8" section use a soft-hackle or small streamer. On the 24" section use a streamer.

I focus mostly on the inside seams of large bends. In May and June the trout get more active, and I can sometimes use 10-foot MOW tips with a shorter sinking portion, but I keep the heavy tips close at hand to deal with peak runoff.

[MOW tips are named after originators Mike McCune, Scott O'Donnell, and Ed Ward. FLO Tips from Airflo come in 10' and 12' lengths and with sink rates of 7, 8, 9, and 10 inches per second through the entire tip. Third Coast Textured Spey Tips from Scientific Anglers are available in lengths of 8' (80 grains), 10' (120 grains), and 12' (160 grains) and are multi-density sinking tips. THE EDITOR.]

From July through October, I use floating lines and smaller streamers to fish riffles and drop-offs. Angle the cast appropriate to the water you are fishing, wait for the fly to come tight under tension, then move the fly.

As the water cools down again in October, I go back to longer sinking tips and heavier flies. As water temperatures drop, the fish move to slower and deeper water. On the Missouri, we call these slow, deep holes "tanks."

In these fish tanks, it's important to get your fly down to the trout, as they aren't likely to move very far to take the fly. In these conditions my favorite tip is an iMOW or MOW Light (T-8) tip with a 5-foot sinking section. A common mistake is to go too long or too heavy with the tip, but 5 feet of T-8 is often all you need. It's better to fish above the trout rather than below them, and carefully control your swing to achieve the right depth. That slight pull you'll feel on the fly is not always the bottom. Set on anything—you'll often be pleasantly surprised.

When I first fished streamers with a two-hand rod, I defaulted to my old-school habits of tossing a large fly from a boat. I hit the banks and retrieved the fly. I've since learned that wading is the best way to take advantage of a two-handed rod, because you swing the fly into the feeding lies and you can more accurately control the speed and depth of the fly.

MOVING THE FLY

When you swing a soft-hackle, you allow just the current to move the line (and the fly) through the water, but with a streamer you often want to add a little action. It is important when you retrieve the fly to have your non-dominant hand on the fly line for line control. Choose a running line that is comfortable and that you can easily hold onto. Super thin stuff is often difficult to manage, so look for something with a larger diameter.

Here are some of my favorite retrieves for big trout water. I use these on the Missouri, but they work just as well on the Yellowstone, the Madison, or the Sacramento.

TWITCH. Cast across stream at an angle, mend, and soak the fly. Jig and twitch the fly by using your non-dominant hand to pull and release the tension while maintaining contact with the fly. This is great for retrieves in slower water. It's important to

control the speed of the jig action and the depth of the drop to account for the water speed and temperature. In cold water, take your time and allow the fly to sink deeper, and then follow with smaller twitches. In fast water you don't have to move the fly much, the current does it for you.

ROD TIP. Cast across stream at an angle, mend, drop the rod tip, and then bounce it up and down. In faster water, move your rod tip a little quicker to give the fly some action.

STRIPPING. Cast the fly across or even upstream, and strip it back under the index finger of your dominant hand using a varied retrieve. Casting upstream at an angle is great for warmer water and for when you are casting back toward the bank or through a fast, shallow riffle. A common mistake is to make strips that are too long. Short, sharp strips give the fly better action.

END OF THE SWING. Using a two-hand rod makes it easy to just pick the fly up at the end of a swing and cast again, but don't be in a rush. Instead, experiment with different retrieves. A lot of times the fish follow the fly to the dangle, and some extra teasing is required. This is especially important when you're making longer casts, and you have a lot of fishing space directly below you.

HAND TWIST. Sometimes the best retrieve at the end of the swing is a slow and steady figure-eight hand retrieve (also called a hand-twist retrieve). If the water below you is featureless and shallow, by all means pick it up and recast. But if the water downstream is thigh-deep with some contours and holding water, it makes sense to keep your fly in that zone as long as possible.

GETTING INTO THE SWING OF THINGS

Fly fishing isn't about catching the most fish. If it was, none of us would be fly fishers to begin with. It's about catching fish on your own terms. Spey tackle offers a different perspective on traditional trout fishing. It challenges you to come up with new solutions to old problems. Spey has become the means of targeting trout that I not only find the most rewarding, but also the most interesting. 



Whitney Gould is a fly-fishing guide at Headhunters Fly Shop in Craig, Montana. She has won seven consecutive Spey-O-Rama world championships and holds the female world record with a Spey cast of 150 feet. Follow her on Instagram @whitneygouldspey.

Charlie Craven's Problem Child is a Prince Nymph substitute that uses coq de León hen saddle hackle fibers in an "adapted compound loop" that can be adjusted to fit any hook size.



VIDEO AVAILABLE AT FLYFISHERMAN.COM

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HOOK: #14 DAIICHI 1160.
BEADS: PURPLE AND RED 7/64" UMPQUA RADIANT TUNGSTEN BEADS.
THREAD: RED 14/0 VEEVUS.
TAG: THREAD COATED WITH SOLAREZ BONE DRY.
TAIL: PURPLE TURKEY BIOT.

RIBBING: 1/100" OPAL MIRAGE LATERAL SCALE.
ABDOMEN: PURPLE NATURE'S SPIRIT EMERGENCE DUBBING.
COLLAR: WHITING COQ DE LEÓN HEN SADDLE FIBERS, SPUN IN A LOOP USING THE SAME DUBBING AS THE ABDOMEN.
HORNS: PURPLE TURKEY BIOT.

PROBLEM CHILD

HOW TO CREATE A SMALL SOFT-HACKLE COLLAR USING COQ DE LEÓN HEN HACKLE

CHARLIE CRAVEN

IT'S NO SECRET THAT I AM INSPIRED BY GREAT MATERIALS, WHETHER IT'S A BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF DEER OR ELK HAIR, AN EXCITING NEW DUBBING BLEND, OR A PATCH OF FEATHERS. SOME MATERIALS JUST BEG TO BE USED, AND IT'S MY JOB TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO BEST USE THEM.

When I first encountered Whiting Farms coq de León hen saddles, I was blown away by their outstanding mottling, perfect shape, huge color range, and extreme web-biness. These hen feathers share no traits with the long, stiff, glassy fibered feathers from coq de León roosters.

Coq de León hen saddles are about three or four times the size of Indian hen saddles, and the feathers themselves are much larger as well.

The longer length of the fibers makes them a lot easier to work with for the somewhat obvious uses of tails and legs on nymph patterns, but the downside to this large size and long length is I've always felt like I was missing out on using them on a conventionally wrapped soft-hackle collar. While the web-biness, fiber thickness, and variegation all hit the top of the list for a nice soft hackle feather, their extreme fiber length ruled them out for anything except fairly large streamer patterns.

I brewed this conundrum around in my head for a long time before I discovered a method that would allow me to use these perfect fibers in a downsized application.

As it turns out, the answer to using these longer-fibered feathers in smaller patterns was right in front of me—steelheaders have been doing it forever. Many modern steelhead flies are tied using dubbing loops loaded with long ostrich, rhea, and pheasant fibers to create a wrappable thread loop in lieu of the inherently thick and stiff center quill these larger feathers all share.

Extrapolating this idea to smaller flies—where I wanted to downsize the fiber length and collar size to match the hooks—was, I thought, an easy transference. My idea was to simply cut some of the coq de León hen fibers to the proper length, and insert them into a dubbing loop to create my own thread-centered feather, custom cut to size and density.

In practice, this process turned out to be a test of steadiness and patience, and in the end it's just too complicated to be viable. Only when I inadvertently placed some of the cut-to-length fibers on top of a small trace of dubbing did I discover the healing powers of this adapted compound loop trick.

The dubbing fibers act as a vehicle to help transfer the tenuously married hackle fibers into the dubbing loop without allowing them to separate or fall out. The tiny amount of dubbing that ends up in the actual loop also adds density and color to the collar of the pattern without being overwhelming.

Further experimentation resulted in collars made with mixed colors, the ability to vary the length of the fibers in the same loop, and carefully selected dubbing colors and textures to add to the finished effect.

PRINCE NYMPH ALTERNATIVE

For years I have been intermittently working on a Prince Nymph substitute, something elevated from the norm with more variational capability, and this collar technique is exactly



The author uses Nature's Spirit Emergence Dubbing for bright-colored flies, and dyed hare's mask for more natural flies.

what I needed. The Problem Child is more dense than a bead-head Prince Nymph, has a more natural curved body, and the collar doesn't just make the fly look better, it adds subtle natural movements that can make a difference between catching fish and not catching fish.

I begin this fly with a curved-shank hook, a Daiichi 1160 to be precise. This is the original Klinkhammer-style hook with a lovely black nickel finish, which adds just a bit of a tactical aspect to the finished fly.

I selected dyed turkey biots for the tail, and opposed and split them over a small, resin-coated thread hot spot. The rib is 1/100" opal Mirage Lateral scale wrapped tightly through the abdomen.

When it came to dubbing choices for the new pattern, I was overwhelmed. Something as simple as natural or dyed hare's mask makes a beautiful body for a more subtle pattern, and when I tie the Problem Child in brighter colors I opt for Nature's Spirit Emergence Dubbing, often toned down just a bit with a pinch of natural fur mixed in.

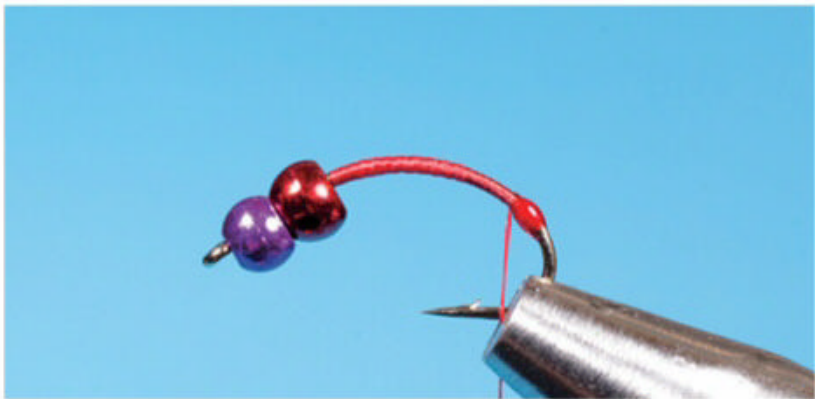
The thorax area proved challenging until I decided to go with double tungsten beads to add both weight and color variation. The space between the two beads makes a perfect slot to wrap the hackle fiber dubbing loop, and allows the rear bead to keep the collar spread and sloping brilliantly.

Finished with a dubbed collar and another pair of outward-sweeping turkey biots, the Problem Child presents a caddis-stonefly-attractor hybrid silhouette that has been great on a dropper and really fun to fish.

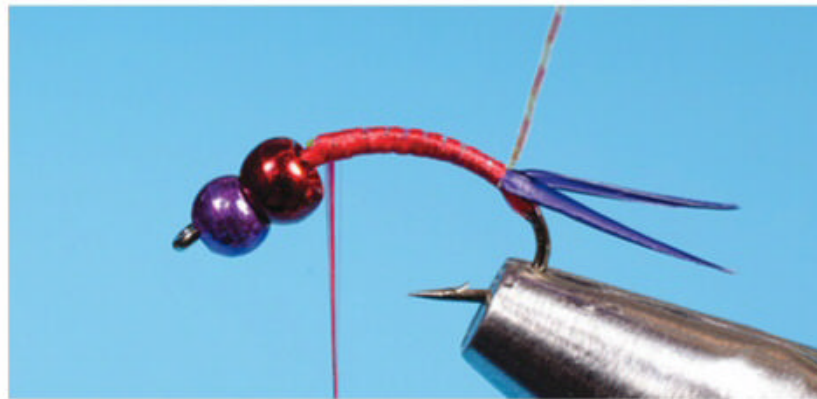
I have always loved designing flies, and great materials inspire me to make better use of them. Whiting Farms coq de León hen saddles are exquisite and really set this pattern off nicely from the crowd.

When I finally finished this fly, I knew I was going to name it after my youngest son Jonathan. He's been, to put it mildly, a handful over his younger years, but he's made of good stuff, solves problems in unique ways, and works harder than most adults I know. This one's for you, son. 🪰

Charlie Craven co-owns Charlie's Fly Box, recently moved to 7279 W. 52nd Ave in Arvada, Colorado. He is the author of two books: *Charlie's Fly Box* (Stackpole Books, 2011) and *Tying Nymphs: Essential Flies and Techniques for the Top Patterns* (Stackpole Books/Headwater Books, 2016).



1 Begin by sliding two tungsten beads up to the hook eye. Start the thread behind the beads and wrap a thread base to the bend. Create a small thread nub just beyond the hook point. Coat the nub with Solarez Bone Dry and cure it with your UV lamp.



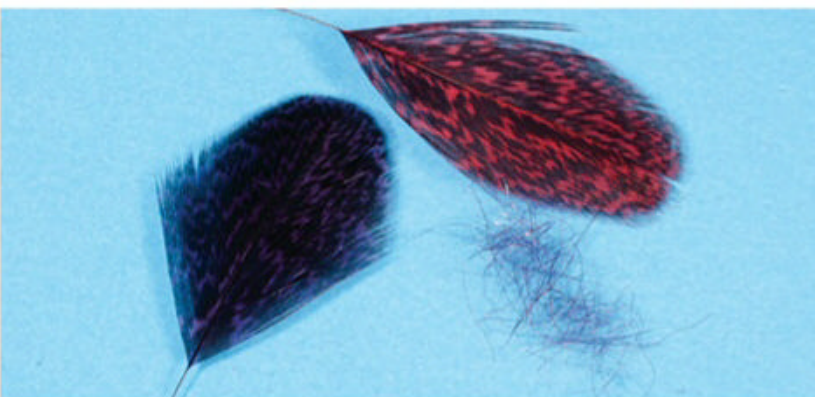
2 Tie in a pair of opposing turkey biots in front of the nub. They should be about a shank length long. Wrap over the butt ends to the bead and clip the excess. Tie in a single strand of Opal Mirage Lateral Scale and wrap back over it to the base of the biot butt ends.



3 Dub a tapered abdomen from the base of the tail to just short of the back of the front bead. Don't jam the beads tightly together with the dubbing. Spiral the tinsel forward over the abdomen and tie it off behind the bead. Clip the excess tinsel, then whip-finish the thread behind the rear bead.



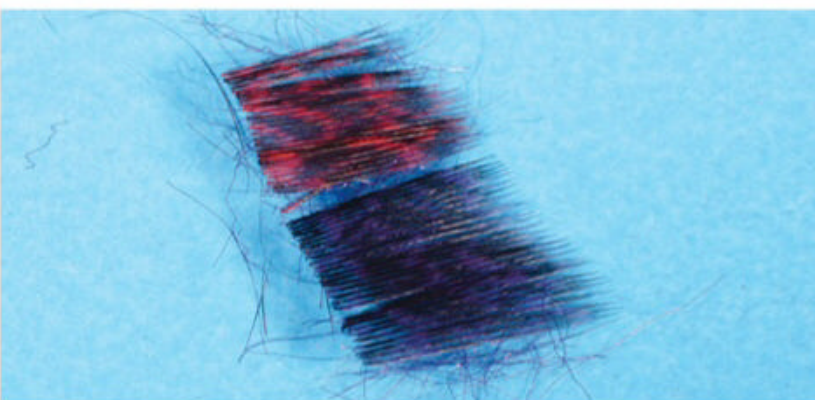
4 Jam the rear bead tight against the front of the abdomen and start the thread in front of it. Build up a few wraps of thread to force the rear bead back, and create a short dubbing loop between the beads.



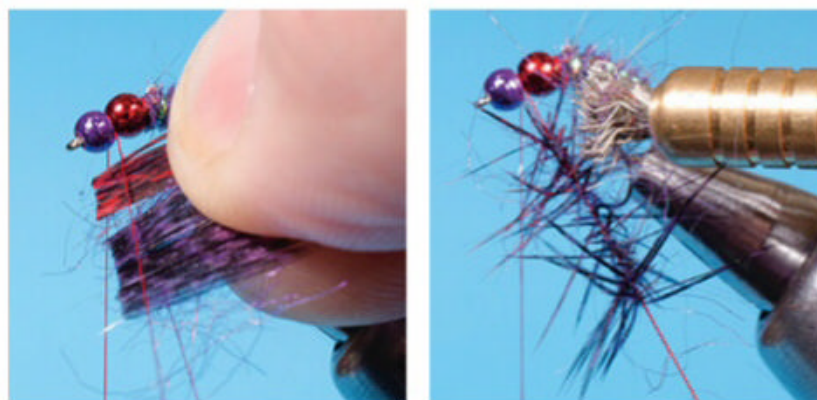
5 Now, for the fun part. Select two colors of coq de León hen feathers and prep them by stripping the fluff from the base. Separate a sparse trace of the dubbing you used for the abdomen and align it into a flattened bunch about an inch or so long. Place this clump on the edge of your desk within easy reach.



6 Select the first color of coq de León and preen a clump of fibers out from the stem so the tips are even.



7 Carefully hold the aligned hackle fibers right above the clump of dubbing and cut the fibers from the stem so they fall on top of the dubbing. I usually shoot for one half to three quarters of a shank length long for the fiber length. Repeat this process with the second color. Keep in mind the color farther from you will be the under-collar color, and be veiled by the color closer to you. Sometimes I make the second color fibers just a bit longer so they are staggered. Use the flat edge of your scissors to push the fibers down tightly onto the dubbing.



8 Carefully pick up the dubbing/hackle fiber combo and place it between the legs of the dubbing loop. I align the cut edge close to the thread loop. The dubbing here really is only acting as a vehicle to help in the transfer, although it does add a bit of color and sparkle to the finished hackle fiber brush. Pinch the loop just below the fibers and spin the loop using a dubbing whirl. Let the twist work up between your pinched fingers to create the finished hackle fiber brush.



9 Wrap the dubbing loop just as you would wrap a soft-hackle collar, complete with the folding and backward stroking of the fibers after each turn. Tie off the loop on bare thread and secure tightly in place with a couple more turns of thread behind the bead.



10 Select two wide turkey biots from lower down on the feather and clip them from the stem. Tie one in on each side of the fly just behind the front bead. These biots should be just a touch longer than a half shank, and curving outward. If you tie them curving in, you'll not only catch fewer fish but your credit score may go down as well.



11 Fold the long end of the biots back on each side and capture them under a couple firm wraps of thread. This fold keeps them from pulling out later, and is a great trick to improve durability. Once they're folded back, trim the butt ends flush to the thread wraps.



12 Dub a short collar behind the front bead and slightly overlapping onto the front of the rear bead. Whip-finish the thread by letting it slide off the back edge of the front bead and sink down under the dubbing. Clip the thread. Use a dubbing brush or piece of Velcro to tease out the dubbing collar.



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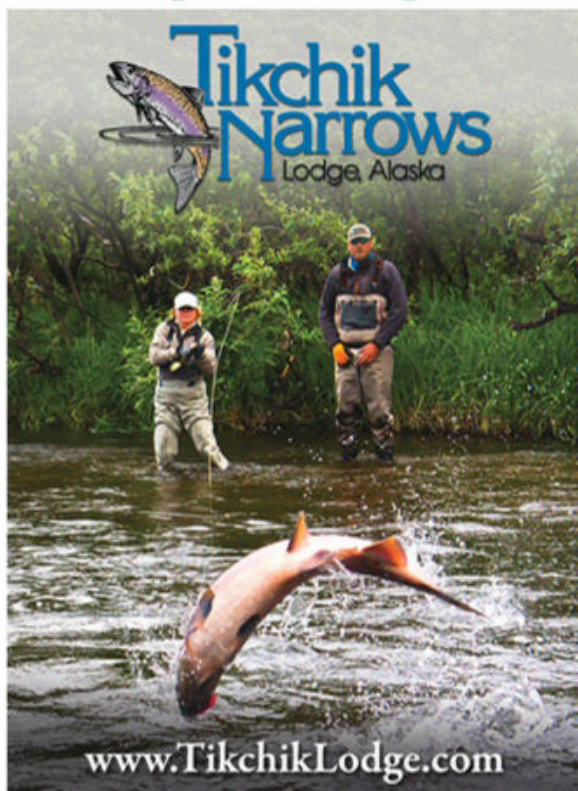



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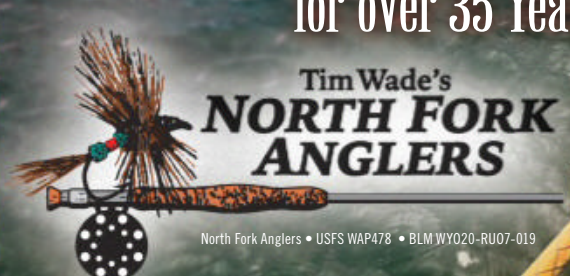
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in the current like a nymph, how different is it from a fly then, really? Taken to its logical extreme, just about any unnatural offering that can be put on the end of a hook and flung with a fly rod should be fair game, with the sole exception being a Hostess Twinkie, although even in that unlikely case, a yellow Glo-Bug tied on a long-shank size 2 hook might serve as an acceptable facsimile. The point is that the whole question of what's kosher when fly fishing can sometimes be a bit confusing.

There was a time when my publisher and I were hunting for endorsements for a book I'd just completed about fishing in Vermont. He had written to a well-known author, asking him to come up with a short blurb for my book's back cover. However, after reading the manuscript, the scribe in question took umbrage at my description of several hybrid flies I had mentioned, patterns that he protested could not be found in *Art Flick's Streamside Guide*. His conclusion was that any book that did not conform to this custom could not be considered an accurate source. Even my publisher—a stickler for detail and a fly-fishing enthusiast in his own right—thought it odd.

Thinking back on it, I seem to recall seeing some far-from-orthodox specialty patterns for sale on the counter at a shop on my very first fly-fishing trip. That summer, my mother, father, brother, and I traveled to Montana, ostensibly to do the family thing at a dude ranch. It involved a lot of horseback riding, which didn't mean all that much to me. But that was the year I was introduced to fishing for trout, which immediately became an obsession.

The whole process was pretty daunting at first, though. In addition to mastering the basic skills of the double-haul cast, there were knots, inspections of which insects were emerging on the water, reading ripples and runs, more knots, selecting the proper fly, rejecting what you once held had to be the proper fly, ripping through all your fly boxes as you puzzled what the freaking proper fly could possibly be, and resisting the urge to pack it all in and go rooting around the soil at the water's edge for earthworms. It was a lot for me to take in, particularly if you took into

account that I held the opinion back then that live bait was nature's solution to all piscatorial problems.

Still, I kept fishing for trout with flies, and 15 years later, I ended up living in Vermont, literally within walking distance of a little stream that was filled with brook, rainbow, and brown trout. I was almost exclusively into throwing dry flies back then, mainly because I liked watching them wind through the flow.



I wasn't particularly adept at fishing with nymphs either, so I stuck to the visual cues that a fish might be nearby. My eyesight was pretty good too, so this seemed like a logical plan of action. But on a quiet day in late spring, I scrambled down an embankment near a small bridge that spanned the brook and decided to try something more in line with my childhood proclivities.

I made a short roll cast, gradually peeled out about 40 or 50 feet of line, and let it all drift downstream in the current. The water was moving slowly, and I watched the knot that attached my leader to the fly line for any sign that something might have shown an interest in what I had tied onto my tippet. It turned out that someone was studying me at the same time. I didn't have any idea that this guy was even there, partly because I was concentrating on my drift, but also due to the fact that he had decided to observe me from a short distance before introducing himself. After a while, he walked up to me.

"What are you fishing there?" he said, pointing at the end of my fly line.

I was a little sheepish about responding because I had in fact garnished a size 8 hook with a little red worm. I confessed my indiscretion, and he smiled.

"Garden hackle?" he asked.

"Yeah," I replied.

My dark secret was out. I was sure that in making this public confession, I had caused my reputation permanent damage. But instead, the guy just laughed.

"You're in pretty good company then!" he told me. "You ever read *The Sun Also Rises*?"

This Ernest Hemingway novel was then, and still is now, one of my favorite books. The first time I read it in college, I fell in love with the dialogue. I very naively told a college professor, who taught a class in American literature that I had been taking, of my opinion that if it were to be lifted directly from the book, it would make a great screenplay. He smiled thinly and pointed out that 20th Century Fox had already made a poor adaptation in 1957. The professor's thinking was that the only performance worth watching in it was that of Errol Flynn as the sad drunk, Mike Campbell. It's

said that Hemingway himself felt much the same way.

But the book itself is mesmerizing, particularly the vivid description of the trip where Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton go fly fishing together in Spain. While Bill fishes with artificial flies and catches several large trout, Jake drifts earthworms in the current and cleans up on the smaller ones. Bill's superior catch might be interpreted as some kind of symbol of virility. At least that's what my college professor tried to convince me of. But I think my learned teacher missed the real point, which was that Bill had decided that friendship was more important than any "transgressions" on the water. In this same way, my new friend overlooked my own sins, and the two of us have fished together for the past 30+ years, without any further discussion of my occasional lapses into heathen ways.

Peter Cammann has been a freelance writer for more than 30 years. He is the author of two instructional books, *Fishing Vermont's Streams and Lakes* and *UltraLight Spin-Fishing*. The Kindle book *SlipKnot* is his first novel.



NAUTILUS PRO GUIDE DATA SHEET

NAME: Bepreke Karapo

BIO: Born and raised in Mekrangoti Indigenous Land in the southern Brazilian Amazon. The warrior chief of Kendjam village and Native fly fishing guide at Kendjam Lodge.

TARGET SPECIES: Peacock Bass, Wolfish, Matrinxã, Payara, Bicuda, Pacu, Redtail Catfish and many more!

GUIDED ANGLERS TO: A unique experience of getting in one of the most wild adventures in the Amazon rainforest.

BOAT: Canoes and paddles

FAVORITE KNOT: Perfect Loop FAVORITE FLY: Popper

FAVORITE RIVER/WATER: Rio Iriri my home waters

FAVORITE TYPE OF FISHING: The one when you catch fish!

FAVORITE FISH: Wolfish

FAVORITE SAYING: Tep abatoi kumet - (Many Big fish in my language)

FAVORITE NAUTILUS REEL: XL. Nautilus Reels made a special Kendjam Series for us.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT NAUTILUS REELS?: They are colorfull!

BEST DAY FISHING: The one I can catch all species I want in the same day.

DREAM DESTINATION: My waters kept intact the way it is for our next generations of Karapo

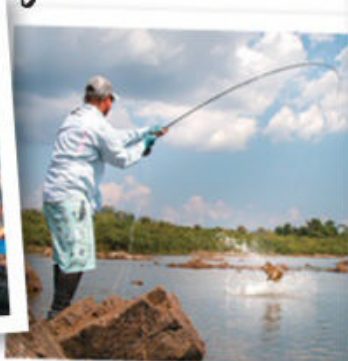
BIGGEST FISH EVER LOST: Redtail catfish on handline

WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO GUIDE ONE DAY?: More people who want to help us to protect our land.

WHERE CAN WE GET YOUR AUTOGRAPH?: In Kendjam village, and on your body!

WHEN NOT FISHING?: Spending time with my family at my village

MOST MEMORABLE CLIENT: an 82 year old angler in his first visit to the Amazon and Kendjam.



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HERESY

PETER CAMMANN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY AL HASSALL

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, MY WIFE, MY DAUGHTER, AND I CAUGHT A PERFORMANCE OF JEZ BUTTERWORTH'S PLAY *THE RIVER*, WHICH WAS THE STUDY OF A FLY FISHERMAN WHO BROUGHT TWO DIFFERENT LOVERS ON SEPARATE TRIPS TO HIS REMOTE FISHING CABIN TO INTRODUCE THEM TO HIS FIRST TRUE LOVE, FISHING FOR SEA-RUN BROWN TROUT. THE DIALOGUE DROVE THE STORY, BUT PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST RIVETING SCENES WAS ONE WITHOUT A SINGLE SPOKEN WORD. IN IT, THE MAIN CHARACTER PREPARED A TROUT FOR THE EVENING MEAL. THE AUDIENCE WAS SILENT THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS, WHICH LASTED SEVERAL MINUTES AS HE GUTTED THE FISH, CLEANED THE CAVITY WITH WATER FROM A SMALL FAUCET LOCATED ON THE EDGE OF THE STAGE, CHOPPED VEGETABLES AT A TABLE, AND THEN ASSEMBLED EVERYTHING IN A ROASTING PAN. IT MAY BE HARD TO FATHOM, BUT YOU JUST COULDN'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF IT.

To my mind, though, the most intriguing scene was one where the main character accosted one of his lovers as she returned to the cabin, after she had been missing for part of the night. He demanded an explanation, and when she told him that she had met a man fishing by the water's edge and had sex with him, he exploded in anger.

His lover laughed at his self-righteous indignation and disclosed how she had actually used her time on the stream to hook and land an enormous brown trout. Her man was greatly relieved by this news and also impressed by his lover's angling prowess, until she added that she had made her catch by impaling a Gummy Bear on a bare hook. His fury over this even greater outrage was thunderous, and it made for a genuinely funny moment. However, I could have sworn that I heard a couple of people in the audience gasp, just before everyone started laughing. Was there perhaps a little judging going on here?

Consider the possibility that a Gummy Bear could legitimately qualify as an artificial. It sure as hell isn't real food. If you drift it

San Miguel

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