

Lines & Leaders

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November 2012

The Newsletter of The Connecticut Fly Fisherman's Association

FROM THE VEST OF THE PRESIDENT

NOVEMBER MEETING

Derrick Kirkpatrick
Tommy Baranowski

GREEN ROCK WORM

By Dick Wemmell



Yellowstone



From The Vest Of The President

"The trout that swim in these waters have remained relatively unchanged physically since they first became cutthroat trout, but that should not imply that they are inherently stupid fish."

Tom Walinchus/Tom Travis
Fly Fishing the Yellowstone
River 1995

As the sun slips behind the Gallatin mountains I'm about to step foot for the first time ever into the Yellowstone River. To the east, the peaks of the Absaroka Range glow orange in the darkening sky. Horses prance and graze on a sprawling ranch on the other side of the river as a bald eagle soars above the water searching for dinner. At the top of the riverbank behind me is the log cabin we've rented. I have not yet unpacked anything except some fishing gear. From a window of the cabin I had seen anglers go by in a drift boat, but now I have the river all to myself as far as I can see, a good quarter mile both upstream and down. The

Yellowstone is about sixty yards wide here, fast and deep and cold despite this being near the end of the warm and dry season in southern Montana. I can't wade out very far. I see no signs of fish.

I see one gray caddis fly flitting about, so I tie on a gray Klinkhamer Special with a black poly post because black is more visible in the glare of the low sunlight. I cast it upstream along a current seam and repeatedly mend the line trying to get the fly to drift naturally. The drift on my third cast looks very natural to me, but apparently I'm the only one because the fly floats undisturbed to the end of its run and swings in the current. I'm in no hurry to recast. The surrounding scenery is all so new to me that I have to take a moment and just enjoy it. Still gazing up at the mountains, I absentmindedly begin to gather the fly line in preparation for another cast, but the line does not want to be gathered. It wants to point tightly at a fish

thrashing on the surface. The fish leaps and dashes into the strong current where it feels more powerful than its twelve inches. I pull it upstream and ease it over the lip of my net. I've seen enough pictures to know what the orange gash beneath each jawbone means: my first cutthroat trout!

It always feels a bit cheap when I catch a trout that way on a dry fly. When they take it on the drift I feel like it's more the result of my skill and less a matter of dumb luck. It helps some when I remember that I selected the right fly - in this case I also made the fly - and that all my knots held. Cheap or not, it feels pretty good to catch my first native Yellowstone cutthroat on the third cast I ever made in the Rocky Mountains. It makes me think there are plenty of trout here and that they are easy to catch. As it turns out, that was only half right.

This was not really a fishing trip. Chris and I were celebrating 30 years of marriage and this trip was our gift to each other. We both wanted to visit Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks for the first time. We stayed in the cabin on the Yellowstone River during the first part of the vacation. It's about 30 miles north of the North Entrance to Yellowstone National Park in an area known, very appropriately, as Paradise Valley. The Yellowstone River flows north out of the park through this picturesque valley then on to Livingston where the river turns east on its way to join the Missouri and eventually the Mississippi. Livingston is



Vest

an artsy little western town that features the Federation of Fly Fishers' Discovery Center, Dan Bailey's original 1938 Fly Shop, and a railroad museum at a busy working depot, among other attractions.

Dave Handl owns the cabin we rented and he's also a fishing guide. A couple of days after we arrived Dave took us on a memorable drift boat trip down the Yellowstone. Chris sat in the stern enjoying the non-stop scenery, Dave worked the oars and I casted my arm off. I had forgotten how rapid-fire the fishing can be in a drift boat. There is usually no going back, so you only get one shot at each spot that is likely to hold fish. You have to keep one eye on where your next cast should go and one eye on your fly in the water. You've got to pick it up before it drags, make a quick back cast, turn it over onto the new spot, mend the line, and repeat, again and again. All while factoring in the motion of the boat and the wind, plus trying not to hook your wife, your guide or yourself. As if all that wasn't enough, Dave

had me casting a two-fly rig, both dry flies: a large foam stonefly/hopper followed by a size 14 parachute beetle. The beetle saw most of the action. We landed 21 trout that trip, plus a few mountain whitefish. Most were native cutthroats in the ten to fourteen inch range, and the others included hybrid cutbows, rainbows and a couple of large browns that would have been somewhere in the upper teens if we had stopped to measure. All of those can be considered wild fish as Montana has managed all its trout fisheries as "wild" since the 1970's. I also had many hits from fish that never came to hand, and I was beginning to think maybe they were not all so easy to catch.

There is plenty of public access to the prime trout water between the national park and Livingston thanks to the state of Montana maintaining a dozen well-marked fishing areas. Some of these areas offer only parking for a few wading anglers, but most have rest rooms and boat launches, and a few have campsites at \$5 per night on the honor system. That is typical of the abundant public access we experienced throughout Montana and Wyoming, even when the natural resources were not in designated parks. Montana even has a law guaranteeing recreational users access to all streams. However this is a controversial issue out there and some private landowners choose to ignore the law.

We decided to spend one day hiking and fishing in the Boulder River wilderness outside of Big Timber, MT. On our way



November Meeting

The Connecticut Fly Fisherman's Association will present a fly fishing program on Wednesday, Nov. 14, 2012 at the Veteran's Memorial Clubhouse, 100 Sunset Ridge, East Hartford, CT., at 7:00 pm

Our November meeting will feature a presentation by Derrick Kirkpatrick and Tommy Baranowski of ctfishguides will be putting on a seminar on fishing the Great Lakes tributaries for steelhead and brown trout, they will be going over proper dress, equipment, trip planning, and techniques that will make for a successful trip. Admission to our monthly club meetings is free, and as always the public is invited to attend.

For more information and directions to the meeting or visit the CFFA website at www.ctflyfish.org

through town we stopped into the U.S. Forest Service office to inquire about wild fires, bear activity and fishing access. The ranger provided a map with specific access points but warned that the National Forest signs may have been illegally removed and replaced with "private property" signs. That is exactly what we found in one place, but no one was around to give us grief as we marched right in clutching the ranger's map.

Fishing opportunities abound in Yellowstone National Park. I fished there on six different days and was only skunked on one. That's not counting the time I intended to fish the Gardner River but upon arrival found the water occupied by a bull elk and his harem, all using their big heads to splash each other. My intention here is to write about the fishing, but I have to mention that we enjoyed seeing many other forms of wildlife in and around the parks, such as pronghorns, mule deer, moose and wolves. We got stuck in a couple of traffic jams behind slow moving bison. We were trumpeted by a pair of Trumpeter Swans flying ten feet overhead. The prairie dogs were hilarious. The ospreys I observed caught fish on about 50% of their dives; the eagles were successful only about 25% of the time. Four people have died from bear attacks in Yellowstone within the past three years. We had two encounters with grizzly bears. The close one occurred as we hiked a trail just inside

the tree line along the shores of Yellowstone Lake. A momma grizzly and two cubs swam out of the lake and bounded toward the trail ahead of us. If Chris had not seen them through the trees we could have all met at the same place on the path. Chris and I began to slowly back away. Momma griz saw us. She stopped and gave us a good long look that I'll never forget. It's not every day that you lock eyes with a beast in the wild that can chase you down and serve you up for lunch. The cubs did not seem to notice us as they scampered off toward the woods. Momma turned away from us and slowly followed her cubs. I put the large aerosol can back in the holster on my belt. Nearly everyone that walks into that backcountry carries bear spray.

In August sections of the Madison River and some of its tributaries were closed to fishing due to warm water resulting mainly from geothermal features in the watershed. Geothermal features are things like geysers, fumaroles, boiling mud pots and hot springs. Yellowstone has over 10,000 geothermal features, more than half of all such features in the entire world. That's because Yellowstone contains the Earth's largest super volcano, having a caldera about 40 miles in diameter. These waters became open to fishing in September so I tried a few places on the Firehole River but the water was still warm and I never saw any signs of fish.

I did find many frisky fish in the other Yellowstone National Park waters I visited. The

regulation is catch and release only for all native species, and by the end of the season these trout have seen plenty of anglers. The good news was that these fish wanted to feed because winter would begin here in a few weeks. Slough Creek is a two mile hike uphill to an elevation of 6,600 feet with a spectacular setting of meadows, buttes, plateaus and distant mountains. While fishing there I moved 40 trout that did not come to hand. They would look at my flies, bump them, swirl around them, and even tug on them momentarily. Like educated trout everywhere, these had developed the habit of not committing to the bite. It made me hone my meager skills at line management and quick hook sets. I managed to land five, but I can't say I ever really figured it out. I did notice that whether a fly caught fish or not, it received less attention the longer it was used. It's hard to leave fish that want to play, so I just kept changing flies and having a ball with all the action.

On the hike up to Trout Lake I passed a couple of anglers on their way down who, upon seeing my rod tube, warned me that I was heading toward a frustrating experience. Trout Lake is in a gorgeous alpine setting at 7,000 feet elevation. It is home to an otter that likes to show off for spectators by performing acrobatics with a log in the water. The lake is filled with large trout that can be seen cruising several feet deep. I tried for an hour but could not get one fish to even move for any of my streamers, dries, nymphs or

Catch of The Month



This "Catch of the Month" was submitted by Seth Walter, as Seth put it Hi Todd. I was the winner of the Thomas & Thomas rod and Ross reel outfit raffled off last spring. Needless to say the rod and reel performed beautifully. This is a picture of me on the Arkansas (hat is on backward so it wouldn't blow off; we were getting 20-40 mph winds by that point in the day!)

If you have a photo of the great fish you have caught, please send it to the Editor at: todd.gorman@mac.com

Dick Wemmell's Fly Box



Green Rock Worm

Hook: Size 12 Scud Hook

Thread: Green 6/0

Head: Black Tungston

Body: Green Glass Beads

Cover Beads with Super Glue

Fly tied by Dick Wemmell

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hopper/dropper combos. A couple of other guys were also fishing the lake without luck and occasionally we'd just look at each other with a shrug and a shake of the head. I worked my way around nearly all twelve acres of water before chancing upon the winning formula: a Rubber Legs Copper John suspended 30 inches off the hook bend of a big foam hopper. I tried to be smart, too. After spotting a fish I backed away from the shore and knelt down so we were not in view of each other. My cast landed as far in front of the fish as possible, then I very, very slowly brought the flies toward the fish while patiently watching the hopper. When the hopper twitched I set the hook of the nymph on a 19 inch cutthroat, my biggest of the trip. That Copper John caught two more trout including a 22 inch cutbow. I could have stayed there all day but Chris had headed back to the car to eat lunch after I caught the first fish, so I hurried down the hill ... smiling all the way.

Yellowstone has many additional waters and much of them are fly fishing only. I highly recommend the strenuous hike to Hellroaring Creek which is loaded with feisty little cutthroats, but I should mention that trail has a 700 foot elevation change and requires crossing a foot-bridge suspended over a very deep gorge. The access is much easier and the fishing just as good on the Gibbon River, much of which parallels a paved road as it meanders between forests and sagebrush prairies. Just watch out for bison pies the size of trash can lids.

For the last part of our trip we stayed in Grand Teton National Park, home of one of the most dramatic mountain ranges in the world. This was also a good base for our explorations into the southern regions of Yellowstone National Park. The major fishery in the Tetons is the Snake River and its tributaries, which eventually flow into the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean. There is plenty of free public fishing access in and around Teton National Park and much of it is near roads. This is home to the beautiful Fine Spotted Snake River Cutthroat Trout and that's pretty much what I caught there. It was common to see pods of these fish stacked-up in

the slow water beneath steep banks, but moving those fish was like trying to move Mt. Moran. I discovered that the actively feeding fish were often out further in the swifter current. They mostly liked terrestrials, with ants and beetles being my biggest producers.

When I arrived in the Rockies I bought some of the much touted western foam hopper flies, but they were not a magic bullet for me, even though many places had lots of real grasshoppers around. I caught some fish on foam hoppers and they are certainly good for suspending heavy nymphs, but perhaps the trout see too many of them. I had more hits on good old Muddlers and crickets made of deer hair that I tie for our home waters. One day I got into one of those situations on the Snake where I kept catching fish as long as I kept changing dry flies. After a lull in the action, I searched my box for something new and saw a Klinkhamer Hendrickson. I never saw anything in that environment resembling a size 14 Hendrickson, but it's one of my favorite flies so I tied it on. It took two of those finely spotted darlings before they grew tired of it.

The northern Rockies is a great fly fishing destination, and it's a destination that can be thoroughly enjoyed by companions who do not fish. Another great destination is the Great Lakes tributaries, which is the subject of our program at the November 14th meeting at the club house. Join us to hear what Connecticut based guides Derrick Kirkpatrick and Tommy Baranowski have to say about the brown trout and steelhead fishing that's just a few hours' drive away from us.

><<)))*> Bruce

Coming Events

NEXT BOARD MEETING NOV 7th

NEXT CLUB MEETING NOV 14th

Beginner Fly Tying Classes Begin Jan. 3rd
Expo & Banquet Feb. 2nd

CLUB POSITIONS THAT MUST BE FILLED

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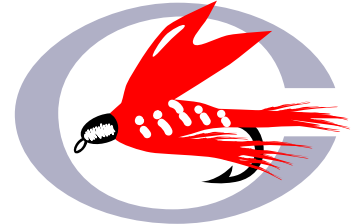
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 **Connecticut**
Fly Fisherman's Association

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