



# *The Flyline*

*The Newsletter of the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association*

*June, 2020*



"Morning Mist"

Second Place Winner HFFA Photo Contest by Jeff Moore



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# The President's Hatch

I haven't heard yet as to whether we raised funds to do more stream acquisition or restoration work, but I'm confident that the show was successful. We had the best vendor displays that I have ever seen at a small venue show (excluding Denver, Chicago, and Great Waters). There were attractive booths with a great variety of items available. As the vendors were packing up on Sunday, Tim Landwehr took time to tell me how impressed he was with the auditorium that was used for the presentations. He said that he had done hundreds of presentations and never in a facility as good as Best Western Plus had available. The presentations were great and varied. Kayak fishing by Mel Hayner was particularly interesting to me. It persuaded me to buy the "Mayfly," a kayak specifically designed for fly fishers. The tying room seemed to be busy every time I went there, with plenty of space for those watching and those walking through. I hope everyone had a good time, I sure did, but more importantly, thanks for supporting the HFFA. As you may have noticed at the members meeting, there are many members enthusiastic about keeping the HFFA strong and viable on the environmental scene.

In this time of "Social Distancing," you may have noticed that the outdoors has become a refuge for those wanting to get off of the couch. There are many great



John Carl Miller

organizations that work to provide habitat and recreation areas for Iowa. Many of them partner with the HFFA and the DNR to make fishing locations available for us. The first that comes to mind is the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, INHF, as they are usually the ones that can purchase the property and then make agreements with HFFA, Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy, TU and others to gather the funds to allow its transfer to the DNR. If you want to know more about how this works, how about getting on the HFFA board or becoming a committee chair (or member).

If you have listened to the news lately, you may have noticed that small businesses are hurting because of this pandemic. It's time to support your local fly shop or supplier of fly tying goods by ordering locally. All of the Fly Fishing Shows this year were cancelled (after ours). The big shows, such as Great Waters, are where many of them go from potentially being in the red to making a profit for the year. Suppliers, such as Mike Jacobs, Mat Wagner, Geri Meyer, Tim Landwehr, Mel Hayner, and many others are ready to ship directly to you or maybe walk your order out to you as you wait in your car. Take an extra minute to think of something that you have wished for, and, if you can, order it now. Any order will help them make it through these times, and they will be there later, when you need them.

Escape to home waters to prevent the spread of the virus. It's easy to maintain social distancing while fly fishing. You can even enjoy the camaraderie of friends if you drive separately and maintain normal fishing etiquette. But, TU-DARE, the Driftless Angler, and many others are requesting that you stay in your local waters to fish. Be safe and enjoy.

*John*

Frank Potter sent this nice photo of the top three titles from his list in the last issue.



**Help Support  
Port-a-Potties at N&S Bear Creeks  
Go Fund Me**

<https://www.gofundme.com/port-a-potty>

# Contacts & Meetings

## 2020 Board of Directors

### John Miller, President

1890 Wood St.  
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### Dave Jones, Secretary

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jc.channon@mchsi.com

### Mike Stallsmith, Director

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### Martin Acerbo, Director

3114 34th Place  
Des Moines, IA 50310  
macerbo@iastate.edu

### CR/IC, Director

Vacant

### Hank Moeller, Work Day Contact

hankjmoe@gmail.com  
319-389-1334

### Davis Horton, Conservation Chair

dhorton@hardincountyia.gov  
515-577-6619

## Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing

Meets 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of Month  
5:30 pm

VA Central Iowa Health System  
Behavioral Health Bldg 6M RM204  
Des Moines, IA  
Contact: Dale Sanders  
iaflyfisher@q.com

## Quad Cities Chapter

Meets 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday 6:00 pm  
October to May

Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday 6:00 pm June to  
September

Riverdale Fire Station, 110 Manor  
Drive, Riverdale, IA

Contact: John Channon  
jc.channon@mchsi.com

## Dubuque Fly Fishers

Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Monday 7:00 pm  
October to May

Swiss Valley Nature Center  
13606 Swiss Valley Rd., Dubuque,  
IA

Contact: Mike Stallsmith  
president@dubuqueflyfishers.org

## Central Iowa Fly Fishers

Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday 9:00 am Sep-  
tember to May

Our Lady's Immaculate Heart  
Church

510 East 1<sup>st</sup> St., Ankeny, IA

Contact: Martin Acerbo  
macerbo@iastate.edu

## Iowa City Chapter

Contact: Ryan Maas  
maas\_ryan@yahoo.com

## Cedar Rapids Fly Fishers

Contact: Lance Zook  
l.a.zook@mchsi.com

## TROUT UNLIMITED NORTH BEAR CHAPTER

Meetings held second Thursday  
of month

September – May, Starting at  
6:30 pm.

The Tavern Pizza & Pasta Grill  
1755 50th St.

West Des Moines, IA

Website: tu-northbear.org

Jason Hochstetler - President  
president@tu-northbear.org

## TROUT UNLIMITED DRIFTLESS CHAPTER

Meets the first Thursday of the  
month October through May @  
7:00 pm in the basement of

T-Bocks Sports Bar and Grill,  
206 Water St. Decorah

www.iadriftless.org

## Iowa Women Fly Fishers

Beginner or Skilled

Meet other Women Fly Fishers

Des Moines or North Liberty

katelodge25@gmail.com

willacamp@gmail.com

## Trout Unlimited Spring Creeks Chapter

Ryan Maas – President

Check Their Web Site

www.tu-springcreeks.org

## Iowa's Coldwater

### Conservancy

Tom Murray

jandtmurray@gmail.com

# Event Calendar

**All Events Could be In Doubt Or  
Cancelled Due To Coronavirus  
Contact Local Representative**

## June 2020

### **Wisconsin Women's Fly Fishing Clinics**

Cancelled check for next year

#### **On The Water Skills Clinic 2020**

West Fork Sportsman's Club

Avalanche, WI

wisconsinwomenflyfishing@gmail.com

Cancelled check for next year

#### **Women's Fly Fishing Clinic Basics**

West Fork Sportsman's Club

Avalanche, WI

wisconsinwomenflyfishing@gmail.com

## July 2020

July 12 - 17

#### **Project Aware - River Cleanup**

Middle and South Raccoon Rivers

www/iowaprojectaware.org

Cancelled check for next year

#### **FFI Fly Fishing Fair**

Montana State University

Bozeman, MT

www.flyfishersinternational.org

July 31

#### **Deadline for State Fair Tying Contest**

State Fair Administration

P.O. Box 57130

Des Moines, Iowa 50317

## August 2020

## September 2020

September 12

#### **6th Annual Brule River Spey Day**

Lake Superior Steelhead Assn.

Brule River @ McNeil House

Brule, WI

www.Steelheaders.org

September ?

#### **Driftless TU Meet and Greet Potluck**

Details unclear at this time

Theresa Shay

tashay1966@gmail.com

563-379-6103

September ?

#### **Driftless TU Cleanup Day**

Details unclear at this time

Steve Perry

steve.perry1267@gmail.com

641-583-1604

September ?

#### **HFFA - Iowa DNR Work Day**

Manchester Trout Hatchery

22693 205th Ave., Manchester, IA

Hank Moeller

hankjmoe@gmail.com

## October 2020

October 2 - 4

#### **4th Annual Driftless Flyathon**

Yellow river State Forest

Registration April 11th

65 positions available

flyathon@driftlessonthefly.com

October 2 - 4

#### **2020 Casting for Recovery IA**

Camp Ewalu's Stone Retreat Center

Strawberry Point, IA 52076

norrisk@ihanoline.org

Apply by July 24th

## November 2020

## December 2020

## January 2021

January ?

#### **Southern Wisconsin TU Icebreaker**

American Family Insurance

Madison, WI

www.swtu.org

## February 2021

February ?

#### **Badger Fly Fishers**

Fly Fishing Spring Opener

American Family Insurance

Madison, WI

www.badgerflyfishers.com

February 6

#### **Wisconsin TU Council Banquet**

Oshkosh, WI

Scott Allen

jscottallen12@gmail.com

## March 2021

March 12 - 14

#### **HFFA Annual Fly Fishing Show**

FFA Enrichment Center

1055 SW Prairie Trail Parkway

Ankeny, Iowa 50023

Martin Acerbo

macerbo@iastate.edu

March 19 - 21

#### **Great Waters Fly Fishing Expo**

Hamline University

St. Paul, MN

info@greatwatersflyexpo.com

The Flyline is the official publication of the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association. It is published in April, June, September, and December. The HFFA is a chapter of the Fly Fishers International. Articles may be submitted as MS Word or as a text file. Typed, printed or clearly handwritten documents are also accepted. Photos can be submitted digitally. Send original jpeg. Deadline is one month before publication.

Send all materials to:

Don Otto, The Flyline Editor

hawkeyeflyfisher@gmail.com

641-230-1468

### **Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association Membership Application**

☐ New

☐ Renewal

☐ Change of Address Information

#### **Check Membership Category:**

- ☐ \$25 Member
- ☐ \$10 Youth Member (18 and under)
- ☐ \$15 Senior Member (65 or older)
- ☐ \$45 Family Membership
- ☐ \$300 Life Member

#### **Conservation Contribution:**

- ☐ \$10 (Glass)
- ☐ \$20 (Graphite)
- ☐ \$30 (Boron)
- ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_ (Cane, over \$50)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to & mail to:

Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association

P.O. Box 8145

Cedar Rapids, IA 52408





# Editor's Notes

This Houston County, Minn. carp weighed around nine pounds, and was somewhat painfully caught by Craig Moorhead, a former conservation chair, former director and past president of the HFFA.

"I was trying to tempt a nice crappie from a large pool below a flood control structure which was built many years ago on a local trout stream," he said. "Warm water species swim in and sometimes wash from the lake, and some nice trout mix with them when water temperatures for cooler and warm water fish overlap, such as early Fall, when this photo was taken.



"It's fun to catch wild brown and brook, and an occasional stocked rainbow trout side by side with bass, bluegill, crappie, and even northern pike," the flyfisher noted. "This bruiser grabbed a #12 tungsten bead head with a simple sparse dressing and got hooked right in it's fleshy lip. From there the slow-motion fight was on. Yours truly has to admit that it was the toughest fish to land of the 2019 season. My arms were actually beginning to ache by the time the fish decided to stop for a breather and got landed, pretty much by accident."

Moorhead and wife Laura Lea live on a Houston County farm about 15 miles north of the Iowa line. The couple have the beginnings of a small trout stream in their pasture, which burbles night and day, and can be heard from the porch. Craig now works as a newspaper reporter/photographer for the Caledonia Argus. (Craig responded to my request for a Carp story. Thanks Craig! Don)



John "Duke" Welter of Viroqua, Wisconsin announced his retirement as the Outreach Coordinator for TUDARE (Trout Unlimited Driftless Area Restoration Effort). I met Duke at the Sportsman's Motel in Dorchester, Iowa several years ago. Duke has always been good to put me in touch with the folks "that know". He has been tireless in his efforts to improve stream quality. Even though he says he is retired, I suspect his efforts will go on. He may just have a little more time to fish. **Happy retirement Duke!** Don

The last year with Charlene's companionship was memorable and an honor. We kicked off our year celebrating the association and rubbing elbows with some amazing anglers. Despite the amount of game changers being tied that weekend, Charlene didn't surrender any feathers to Mr. Chocklett.

Charlene oversaw much of my fly tying and fishing preparations, perched high above where any loving bird could reach. She was there to hold the net when Jayson Hayes helped put me on my first Pike. She was a gracious campsite host at the Bluegill outing, but didn't do much to help contribute when it came to cleaning fish I understand.

Charlene even got in on the stream shock survey, last September at Spring Branch Creek.

Our year together FLEW by quickly. Like all good things, this too must come to an end. It was a privilege to look after Charlene. Please help me in passing her along to another member who will continue to broaden her long love of fly fishing.

*Thanks, Hank*

(Hank Moeller, Work Day Contact, Passed Charlene to John Carl Miller at the 2020 HFFA Show)



I received notice of two long time members passing last winter. Nate Hopkins emailed me that Dan Tubbs passed on December 3, 2019. Nate told me that Dan had been a HFFA President. Martin Acerbo emailed me that Ron Sutphin passed January 24, 2020. I know that both of these guys were well respected fly fishers and had contributed a lot to HFFA.

The HFFA board held a phone conference on May 27, 2020. Discussions were tabled for the time being. Current health concerns are putting a mark on all endeavors.

On a personal note, I have been staying at home due to several things. This has left me with a bad case of cabin fever. So if you see the above license plate in a parking lot next fall, please give me some space. LOL

*Waiting for a Tug, Don*

# *Just Living the Dream (No, Really)*

*Second Place HFFA Essay Contest 2020*

*by Tom Hoskins*

Here's my story and I'm sticking to it! After teaching high school social studies (American history, world history, government, economics, AP geography, sociology and psychology at various times) and PE, as well as coaching softball, boys and girls track, basketball and football, I was ready to be done. Kids were changing how they learned and technology was becoming more and more important. Needless to say I am not a technology kind of guy. Heck, Pleasant Valley still has a memorial 16mm projector in the AV room with my name on it! So I retired in 2014 after 34 years.

In the early 1990's we watched the movie "A River Runs Through It" and I was hooked! We started going out west to see the mountains and I fell in love with trout and everything associated with them. My first trout fishing experience was hand fishing in the Big Thompson River near Estes Park, Colorado. I went to the local hardware store and bought some 4lb test line, split shot sinkers, hooks and some worms. Oh yes, and a license! I had a blast and caught some of the most beautiful fish I had ever seen. I needed and wanted more.

After retirement I decided I needed a hobby so I jumped into net making. I searched the internet for "how to" articles and videos from which I taught myself the basics. My first attempt, although functional, was bad. After some trial and error and more research, they started to look pretty good. I changed designs, modified them, experimented with new designs and since I first started have developed a number of different shapes and sizes. As of today, I make four basic nets: large bow, narrow bow, my version of a tenkara style net and an offset bow. These come in various lengths ranging from 21-42 inches. Check them out on my website [www.hoskinsnets.com](http://www.hoskinsnets.com).

I've been asked many times how long it takes to make a net. That is a difficult one to answer because it is a process that takes time. You don't just start a net and finish it in a day or two. My best answer is about two weeks and I usually make two at a time. I had to start by making my forms. Once they are made, they can be used over and over. Next I cut my handles in the size I need for the net I am making. Virtually all of my bows are made from three laminated strips using my band saw. Using a finish sander and oscillating spindle sander they are made ready for the next step. Instead of steaming my bow strips, I soak them in a PVC tube over night. Additionally, before I bend them on my form, I change out the water and replace it with hot water for about 30 minutes. After towel drying them, all three strips are clamped to my form at the same time. I let them dry for at least a week before removing them. Next I'll use a rubber band around the base and separate them slightly to continue drying for a couple more days.

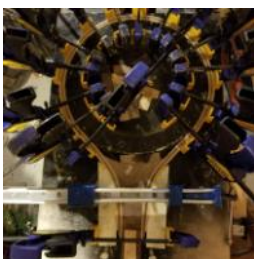
Once the strips are dry its time to glue. I use gorilla glue which, when dry, makes for a mess! I forgot to say, if you plan on making a net, be sure to wax your form so you can remove your net from the form after the glue dries. Now it's time to finish the net. Using a putty knife I remove as much of the dry glue as possible. Since the strips seldom fit perfectly, I also use a small hand plane to even out the wood as much as I can before the sanding begins. Next I drill holes for the lanyard in the handle and in the bow so the net bag can be attached. A finish sander with 60 grit paper starts the process and eventually I use 240 grit paper for the final sand.

Now we're close to finishing the net. I use Danish oil to bring out the wood grain and let that dry for about three days. The final finish coat is three or four applications of an outdoor spar urethane. The net bag is attached using para cord as well as the lanyard which I make from para cord too. So this process is about two weeks, give or take a week if its summer and I'm golfing!!

Another question I'm often asked is what woods do I use. The answer is quite a few but lately, I've been making most of my handles out of walnut, cherry and maple. My favorite is probably the walnut and cherry. For the bow strips I find that ash and maple bend the best with walnut or cherry in the middle. I've also used birch, coffee wood, mahogany, aspen, honey locust, catalpa and cypress (thanks John!) in the process.

Lately, I've been doing some custom nets where I can add short names or initials, trout images or river inlays. Since these are all done by hand with my hand held engraver, my expertise here is limited. If you are interested in a custom net, contact me and I'll see what I can do. If I think it's beyond my ability, I'll be honest and say so. I hope you enjoyed the read. That's my story and I'm sticking to it! Tight lines everybody. [hoskinsnets@gmail.com](mailto:hoskinsnets@gmail.com)

*Tom*



# *Fly Fishing Memories*

*by Dean Elder*

## *“Red”*

“Red” Hovden was my mentor and friend. He was also my barber and we would visit about sports car racing, fly rods and fly tying during my haircuts in the late 1950's. Trout fishing was not very good back then. Red was a decorated and wounded veteran of WWII. He was in the first invasion of North Africa and then fought all the way through Italy.

He loved fly fishing. He trained for mountain warfare in Colorado and fished the streams during his time there. He and his siblings were born near Decorah. Red worked for an old farmer who owned the stone house southwest of the Locust Church.

We would pitch his pup tent above the second ford on North Bear Creek. Most mornings before the camp fire was lit, Red would wash up with bar soap in the cold creek water. This was a habit from his days in the army.

Thunder storms would wake him up. We would talk about the sound and how it reminded him of the German army shelling the US troops with their “88's” (88mm artillery cannon).

Red was a charter member of the HFFA.

## *“More Than a Brookie”*

For about 40 years, Jim Maxted, Red, and I had gone to Prairie River north of Wausau, Wisconsin to fish the Hendrickson hatch in early May.

No bugs were hatching. I was resting at the stream. Snuggled into the alder branches, with my booted feet in the water waiting for some rises. I was taking in the beauty of the area, the trees, Marsh Marigolds and a mink sneaking along the opposite bank. All of a sudden a tiny bird lit on my shoulder, then flitted onto my waders and then proceeded to hop out along my rod to its very tip. The bird was a beautiful Golden Kinglet. The alders were just loaded with these beautiful little birds. After all these years even though the brook trout are beautiful too, I remember the little Golden Kinglet from that day.

## *“The Judge”*

Bob O'Bryon was a local attorney, who became a municipal judge. He had an artificial leg. He could wade all day, tie beautiful buck tail smallmouth flies and was the originator of the “Robyn” wet fly.

He was a very tough man. Several times while fishing in North Bear Creek he fell and broke his artificial leg. He would yell for someone to rescue his leg floating down the stream. He would crawl to his car with the “broken” leg and drive to Cedar Falls to have the leg repaired. He would be back on the stream the next morning.

I have seen him in Marshalltown during a lunch hour dressed in his judge's robe hop down on one leg to the river's edge and start fishing the fast water near the dam. Soon he would be catching smallmouth bass with one of his buck tail flies. At 1 o'clock, he would climb back up the wall, get into his car and go back to court.

He was a charter member of the HFFA. He taught most of us to tie flies and to respect clean environment in Northeast Iowa. Bob was a character to remember.

*Dean*



Dean on left doing what he likes to do, Teach. Dean on right at a CIFF meeting in Ankeny. Photos by Dale Sanders





# *Fly Tying Competition at 2020 Iowa State Fair*

## *by Larry Murphy*

The Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association will again be sponsoring the Fly Tying competition at this year's Iowa State Fair. The competition is supported by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa State Fair. The goal is to provide an opportunity for the public to view the art of fly tying and to promote fly fishing in Iowa.

This year's fair will be held from August 13th through the 23rd. The fly tying display will be in the DNR Building on the Fairgrounds during the fair. The judging is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, August 12th at 1:00 p.m. in the DNR Building.

**Fly entries need to be received at the Fair Administration post box by July 31, 2020.**

There are three divisions

- Adult division is for anyone **17 years of age and older**.
- Junior division is for anyone **16 years and younger**.
- Expert division for tiers who have **sold flies**.

There are four categories for each division. The categories are the following:

- Dry Fly
- Wet Fly/Soft Hackle/Nymph
- Streamers
- Open Class

You may enter in each of the categories, but **only one fly for each category**. **No flies smaller than size #18. No flies larger than size #2**

You must be an Iowa resident to enter or a member of the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association. If you have **ever tied flies commercially or sold the flies that you have tied, you must enter the Expert Division**. If you won a blue ribbon for one of the categories last year, you are not permitted to enter the same category this year.

The Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association will provide judges for the competition. Ribbons will be given for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners. Each fly will be judged in its category. In our contest, a panel of judges will choose the places in each category and division. The visitors to the state fair will see the flies displayed in the DNR Building

Flies must be sent to the Iowa State Fair Administration Office, P.O. Box 57130, Des Moines, IA 50317 and **received by July 31, 2020**. Each fly entered must have the **fly tier's name, address, telephone number, name of the fly, division to be entered and the category**. **Junior division entries must state the age of the fly tier**.

Judging the 2019 competition; Keith Wunder, Paul Domoto, and Dave Rosset left to right in photo on left.  
Fair goers enjoy the display in the photo on right.





# *Free Spooling*

*by Larry Niday*

I have never been graceful; I was the kid that couldn't dribble a ball on the same floor my feet were on and so my climb down the steep bank was more of a controlled fall than an actual descent. Each step started a small avalanche of dirt and rock before my foot would find a hold. With my left hand I was hanging on to the exposed roots of a giant cottonwood tree towering over the bank of the river and holding the fly rod out away from me with the right hand so I could throw it out of the way if things turned ugly.

With no small relief and a little dose of surprise, I eventually managed to plant my feet on the solid rock at the bottom. I was still vertical, and my rod was still intact, so I considered it a resounding success. Looking back at the bank, all ten feet of it, with a little trepidation, I knew that in a little while, I would have to fight my way back up and then, it would be on legs exhausted by wading against the heavy power of fast water. I turned away with a shrug of resignation. Right now, there were more pressing things on my mind. I would deal with that later.

I walked across the slabbed limestone bedrock to the river's edge and stepped into the water to take in the scene ahead of me. To my left, was a long smooth expanse of greenish stained water, moving slowly as it approached a drop-off in front of me. About a hundred yards upstream was the brown skeleton of an ancient bridge spanning the river. The wooden plank roadway had long since rotted away, leaving behind just the suggestion of a structure that, at its peak, only allowed a single car to pass the width of the river at any given time. It's sole purpose now was to provide a space hidden somewhere in its rusted beams to house a sensor placed there by the US Geological Survey to measure the amount of flow and depth of the water at the base of its supports. I knew this because I checked the web site on a regular basis to judge when the conditions were right to fish the fast water below.

From where I stood, reaching somewhat over a hundred yards across the river was the appearance of a low-head dam. The smooth surface sped up quickly a short distance from the edge, where it fell in a smooth curve over the top, crashing into a boiling froth in its escape downstream.

But this was no dam. There before me were the traces of an ancient stagecoach crossing, predating the remnants of the bridge just upstream by many decades. My attention moved back to the bank I had just descended, then across the river to its match that framed the scene. This is where the old roadbed had been and I could see where centuries of churning water had rearranged the stones in the water, turning a ford into a small waterfall. The roadway could no longer serve it's original purpose; so, nature instead, had morphed it into a well-oxygenated course of water that would support a large population of aquatic life. What had once been used for commerce had now become ideal habitat for Smallmouth Bass and a hybrid cross between White Bass and Striped Bass we know as Wipers, which was my goal for this trip.

From this low waterfall, downstream fifty yards to a gravel bar in the center, was a scattering of rough, bare rocks, churning the river into chutes and runs, boiling with white foam, changing by the foot, fast and slow stretches passing each other, until it exhausted itself into the river far below. The website I had checked, registered the water depth at the bridge support at 3.5 feet, making it calf deep in the rocks where I was standing. Deeper water was just too powerful and made wading dangerous, if not impossible on the unstable rocks, less depth meant the water below the crossing became too shallow and the fish would move out to find deeper, safer refuge.

That day, the water was at the optimum for the fish and was wadable for me, though not easily. The rushing water becomes a tremendous weight against my legs and every stone is ready to throw me off balance. Moving carefully, picking each step, testing each rock and my footing, along with a stout wading staff will usually keep me dry, but no guarantees. Getting wet, provided a certain amount of deterrent, of course, but the damage the rocks would do to my body was a bigger concern.

A surge of anticipation tensed my muscles. I started to string up the rod, but the end of the tippet had buried itself among the wraps of line on the reel. My fingers were too big to reach in to the spool and grab the end of the tippet, so with a little agitation, fueled by impatience to get started, I grabbed the rim and with my forefinger, pressed the release. The spool came loose in my hand and I was able to find the tip of the monofilament, pull a couple feet off and let it hang loose in front of me. I quickly replaced it and started feeding the line through the guides.

I tied on a white streamer I had created to imitate the shad that was so plentiful in the river and started wading out into the fast water.

continued on next page

I false casted several times, stripping off more line each time until there was enough airborne to reach a chute of water about thirty feet out. Reading the surface of the water, it seemed sure that I could count on finding fish lying along the edge of that fast stretch of water, waiting for their food to pass like a conveyor belt. In that slack water, all they had to do was to wait until they saw what they wanted, jump in, grab it and get back out with minimal expenditure of energy. In that fast water, it meant that a strike would be instant and hard, an enormous adrenaline rush.

My judgment was right on. On the third cast, the line stopped and pulled back hard, nearly ripping the rod from my hand. It bent into a parabolic curve and with the reel screaming, the line started shooting through the guides in a straight line downstream. It was a large fish that immediately started a hard run for the Gulf of Mexico.

I leaned back on the rod and wondered if it or the leader could take the tremendous pressure this monster was exerting on it, when I saw a quick movement near my hand. The spool had come loose and was hovering in the air next to my hand momentarily before landing on the water, spinning so fast that it bounced twice before disappearing below the slick surface. It was only then I realized that in the rush to get the rod strung up, I had failed to listen for the telltale click that would have assured me it was locked in.

The buckskin colored line was still coming out of the water, twenty feet, then thirty feet in front of me as the spool washed down with the current. The line came up to my hand, burning a groove in my finger then shot through the guides and disappeared into the water twenty yards below me. The ninety feet of fly line quickly ran out, followed by fifty yards of the white nylon backing pulled by the heavy current and a fish somewhere far downstream. At this point, I was nearly helpless, hanging on to the rod with both hands and changing the position of the finger to let it cut new grooves and trying not to let the pain distract my concentration. I watched the tip of the bent rod, trying to exert what little control I had, fearing it would soon come to the end of the backing.

The backing suddenly stopped feeding out of the water. I grabbed the taut line leading to the snagged spool with my left hand and pulled. It was solid. Panic began to take hold as I realized the spool had lodged in the rocks and without any flexibility on this end, something had to give, and soon. I worked my way slowly forward to the spool, bracing my feet, reaching forward and holding the line out as far as I could with the left hand, holding the rod high with the right hand so it would flex and absorb the shock from the fish. After much straining and rather loudly venting my frustrations to Poseidon, the pressure relaxed, the spool had come free. What was going to happen when the backing unwound to the arbor of the spool was a thought I was afraid to contemplate. I had heard of the backing coming loose and losing not only the fish, but the expensive fly line and all that backing to the river. In this case, I would have to add the reel spool to the total.

After a long wait, the spool magically appeared on the surface, still tethered on a long line, bouncing like a rubber ball on the hard water. I clamped down on the line in the crook of my finger, pulling the spool to me with the left hand and began a clumsy attempt at forcing the spool back into its place in the reel. This time, waiting for that click I had missed the first time.

Then began the long arduous job of cranking in all that line to see if I still had a fish on or if I was now just fighting a strong current. It wasn't long before I felt the hard pull, telling me, despite everything that had gone wrong, there was still something heavy pulling on the end to the line.

After an inordinate amount of furious cranking on the reel, I found myself finally looking at an eight-pound Hybrid Wiper safely cradled in my net. There, was a football shaped monster with the broken black lines running the length on its white sides and the white streamer hanging out the corner of its mouth. I reached down and wiggled the fly loose and after admiring the beauty of this beast, held its head into the current to force oxygen through its gills, then gently released my grip and watched it come alive and disappear into the deep current.

That fish had fought hard, but it was over. I stood there, still leaning against the current, the rod in my right hand, with the line and the fly dancing on the water below me and the empty net in my left. I watched the spot where I saw the final flip of its tail like I was expecting it to come back up and give me some closure. I knew it wouldn't happen. In a low breath, I just said "Thanks". It was as if the world had just become respectfully quiet, leaving nothing more than the sound of the water in the background. It was no longer a challenge, a violent dual on the far end of the line. It was alive. Alive at the beginning and still at the end and now, watching the empty water, I knew it was finding its home among the rocks and would live on. It had earned its freedom. Maybe someday I will catch it again and then it will be just a little bigger.

*Larry*

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