

ENGLISH SPOKEN HERE

Don Zahner

On Angling Presidents

WHILE ONE CAN HARDLY SAY that fishing is the sport of Presidents, it has certainly been a Presidential sport. With the rise of the campaign publicist during the past half-century, every United States President has been publicly documented as having fished, after kissing his quota of babies, of course. Certainly F.D.R. was a deep-sea fisherman in his more robust years, both before and after being stricken with polio. Harry S. Truman was an habitu  of the sportfishing docks at Key West, his winter White House, and both Presidents Nixon and Ford, perhaps posed by p.r. men, have been photographed in fishing regalia (although the thought of the slice-prone Jerry Ford unleashed on a crowded trout stream gives one a certain valid concern).

But serious fly fishermen in the White House have been as scarce as Blue Dun hackle. There is a published picture of Cal Coolidge gingerly holding two trout on a South Dakota trout stream, of course, but there is also a photo of him in an Indian war bonnet, and you would have a hard time proving to his old neighbors up the road from us in Plymouth, Vermont, that Cal was a Sioux. However, there is no question as to Herbert Hoover's fly-fishing credentials—he wrote a book on his experiences on the Brule River and elsewhere called *Fishing for Fun*. And certainly "Ike" Eisenhower, schooled during World War II and afterward by aide Gen. "Beetle" Smith, followed the sport with enthusiasm, occasionally venting his spleen at well-meaning fish and game officials who insisted on planting corralled lunkers wherever Ike went to fish.

But former President Jimmy Carter is unique in 20th century White House angling annals. While he had fished and enjoyed other outdoor sports in his native Georgia, the revelation of angling in its ultimate form came to him during his early White House years, triggered, as he once told us, by a subscription to FLY FISHERMAN, a gift from his son "Chip." Soon afterward "leaks" from usually reliable sources in Washington told of a surreptitious trip by the President's daughter Amy to buy a fly vest for him at Christmas from Barry Serviente's "Angler's Art" tackle shop in D.C., followed by reports of later visits from his wife and White House associates bent on further suspicious purchases. Shortly there would be front-page photographs of President Carter fly-fishing in the nearby Catoctin Mountains



Jack Petrovich photo

of Maryland, then in Pennsylvania (see his article in this issue), and finally on to Idaho and Montana. (Just before his personal trip to China last summer, he called us to inquire about fly-fishing opportunities in Japan, where he would stop after his China visit; we turned him over to Leon Chandler of Cortland Line, who came up with a solid Japanese connection.)

But the depth of his immersion became clear as crystal when he confessed to us some two years ago that, in the early spring of 1979, while standing on the Madison portico of the White House with his wife, he had eyed wantonly a bushy-tailed squirrel on the lawn—not as a harbinger of Washington spring but as fodder for his newly installed fly-tying bench. After that, all of us here at FFM knew that there would be no turning back for Jimmy Carter.

In August of last year, along with many other anglers, he journeyed to West Yellowstone's developing fly-fishing shrine to attend the FFF International Conclave. In addressing a few informal words to attending anglers, Mr. Carter ended by saying, with warm conviction, "I am one of you." Well, that was very nice and appreciated by all, sir, but hardly necessary. As they say, it takes one to know one, and we sniffed you out long ago. Welcome to the fraternity.

Jimmy Carter, most recent and perhaps most committed of fly-fishing Presidents, following in the wake of Hoover and Eisenhower. Unlike his predecessors, the revelation of this higher calling came to him during his White House years.

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