

*When the water is dirty with run-off,
it's time to "chuck-and-duck" in the Rockies.*



High-water drift fishing is different from the laid-back smoothness of dry-fly fishing. Using the author's techniques, you can take extremely large trout in unusual fishing conditions.

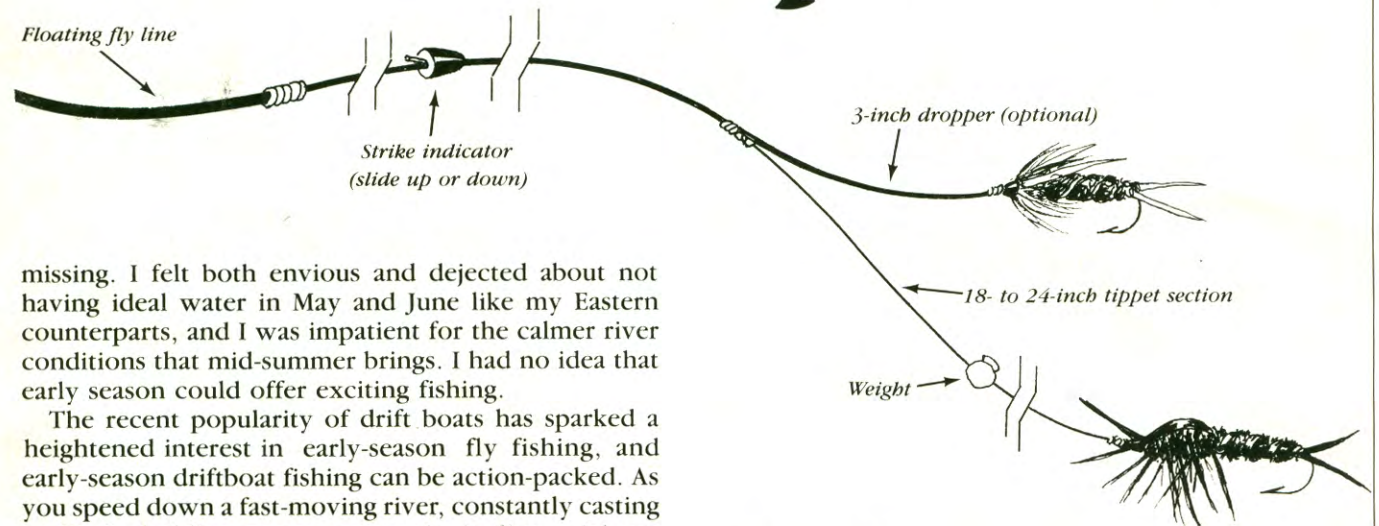
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Early-Season Drift Fishing

ROD WALINCHUS

EARLY SEASON IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS means high water from snow melt in the high country. High, fast, unwadable waters with a visibility of about a foot are normal springtime conditions on rivers like my home river, the North Platte in southern Wyoming. When these rough conditions prevailed, I formerly looked at the river and then headed off to some pond, lake or small stream in search of more fishable water. When I did fish the river, I did so half-heartedly, not expecting to catch fish and certainly not expecting to catch many fish.

Oh, how wrong I was. I had no clue to what I was



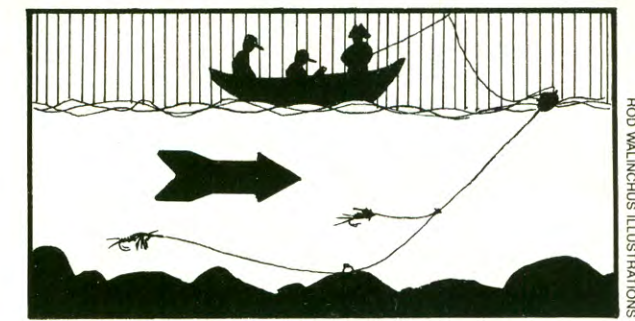
missing. I felt both envious and dejected about not having ideal water in May and June like my Eastern counterparts, and I was impatient for the calmer river conditions that mid-summer brings. I had no idea that early season could offer exciting fishing.

The recent popularity of drift boats has sparked a heightened interest in early-season fly fishing, and early-season driftboat fishing can be action-packed. As you speed down a fast-moving river, constantly casting to likely holding water, you strip in line, pick up your fly and cast to the next spot. A fish takes your sunken fly; you play it to the boat, and—yikes—it runs *under* the boat. If you're lucky, you might even land a fish or two.

It's different fishing from the laid-back smoothness of casting a dry fly to quietly sipping trout or the intense concentration of watching for the subtle twitch that signals the take of a nymph.

Spring run-off float fishing is fast-paced, constantly changing fishing. You must have one eye on what you're doing now and the other on what you'll do next. The river flows swiftly, the scenery shoots by, and the good-looking water sometimes comes upon you faster than you can handle it. You discover that accurate casting is more important than distance. Your errant casts snag bushes and hang up on bank obstructions, your reels sing and your leaders pop, and your fly line comes springing back to the boat. You rerig hurriedly, fumblingly—attempting in a frenzy to tie on a new fly or leader section while watching the best water of the day blow past.

Although this may sound like difficult fly fishing, it's really quite simple. A technical casting style is unnecessary, and you soon begin putting casts on target. The fishing techniques used for early-season drift fishing are easy to learn, and the tackle, although specialized, is basic.



Drift Boat Nymphing

Gearing Up

THE POPULAR McKenzie-style drift boats are by far the most comfortable and stable boats from which to fly fish. Outfitters rent them to customers, and guides use them for their clients' trips. Floating a river no longer depends on who you know. Other less stable crafts—from canoes to rafts—can also be used, but with caution. Large swift-flowing rivers are dangerous regardless of the craft being used. If you've had little boat-handling experience, it pays to hire a guide familiar with the river and his boat. The guide positions the boat while you do the fishing. On windy days you'll appreciate not having to row.

The basic tackle required for an early-season drift includes a rod capable of handling at least a 7-weight line, a reel large enough to hold a fly line and backing, a weight-forward, high-speed, high-density sinking-tip line (a 10-foot sink-tip is fine), a short section of stout leader material, and an assortment of streamers or large nymphs.

The sinking-tip line gets the fly down quickly in fast water. (Anything lighter than a 7-weight won't do the job. An 8-weight also works great.) The sinking-tip allows you to mend the floating section and slow down or accelerate the drift, and it's less difficult to mend and lift from the water than a full-sinking line. A variety of shooting-taper systems will also do the job, but

Drift Fishing . . .

if you're an occasional float fisherman you're better off with a sinking-tip.

I make my leaders no longer than four feet, so water tension on a long leader does not force the fly up and away from bottom. I use a two-section leader, with the butt section attached to the fly line and an 0X, 1X or 2X tippet section added. I find that snags are unavoidable, especially if I fire the cast to where it should land, close against the bank and deep into fishy-looking, brushy spots. I've discovered that you can't pull a snagged fly free of brush using a light tippet (2X is marginal), and light monofilament will not hold up to the nicks and abrasions that are inevitable in this kind of fishing. Besides, in turbid water conditions fish are seldom leader- or line-shy.

To save time onstream, I attach my flies using a clinch knot rather than an improved clinch or stronger knot. Tied this way, the tippet-to-fly connection is the weakest link in the system. It will take abuse, but if the fly must be forced out of a snag, I won't lose the whole leader or tippet section. It's easier, quicker, and causes less anxiety to just tie on a new fly instead of a new tippet and fly, or worse, a new nail knot to the fly line for the lost butt section, tippet, and fly.

I use a rod powerful enough and long enough (9 feet) to throw whatever line I chose with a heavily weighted fly. It's not delicate fishing, and it's not pretty. Thus some anglers prefer fiberglass rods for early-season fishing, claiming that those rods have the backbone to take the abuse. The best rod material for the fishing is a personal decision.

Any reel large enough to hold a fly line and plenty of backing is adequate. Although most hooked fish won't run you into the backing, it can happen—quickly. I once observed a companion connect with a large fish in the tail of a glide as we entered a fast riffle. The fish charged upstream, and we raced downstream so fast that no matter how hard we rowed to hold our ground the distance between us and the fish multiplied. The line screamed off the reel, and, with no backing on the reel, there soon was a large fish trailing a full length of unattached fly line. If my friend had used backing on his reel, we might have pulled the boat to the bank so he could play the fish and perhaps land it. Backing buys time—on fish and snags. I use lots of it and carry a spare line.

The flies I use are large, heavy streamers and big, ugly bugs—anything that's big and looks alive in the water. The selection of streamers is a personal choice, but I usually fish three patterns: Flash-a-buggers in three colors (I use black 90 percent of the time), Bullet-heads, and Zonkers. A Flash-a-bugger can even be effective when dead-drifted as a nymph. Big is the key, and the most effective flies breathe, move or wiggle on their own. Sculpins and attractor nymphs like the Girdle Bug, Rubber Legs, Bitch Creek, Halfback, Prince Nymph, and dark stonefly patterns work well, especially during stonefly hatch periods. My favorite fly colors are black, olive, brown, and white in that order.

I tie up plenty of flies for my early-season outings because I will lose them. And I should lose flies. When

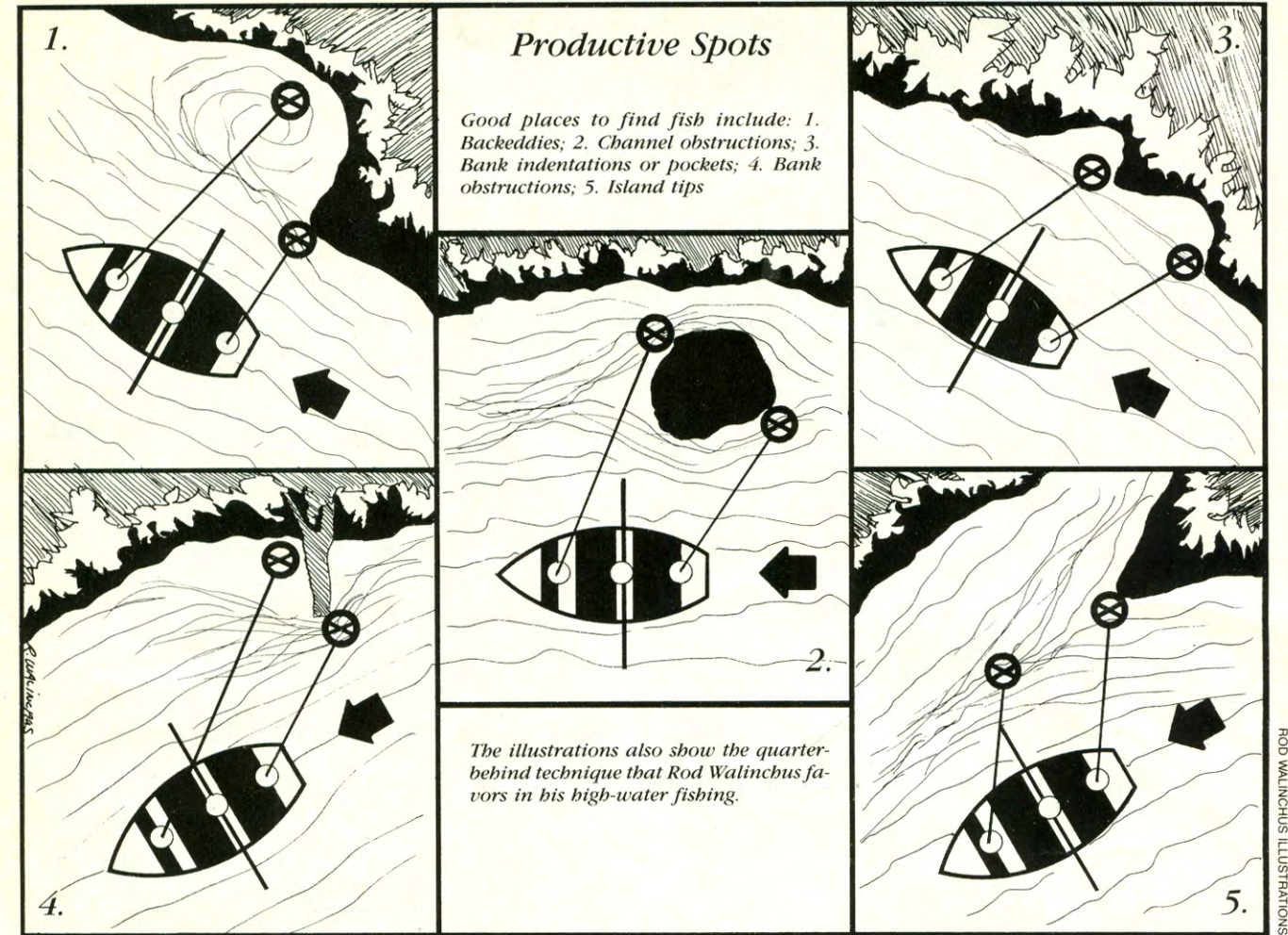
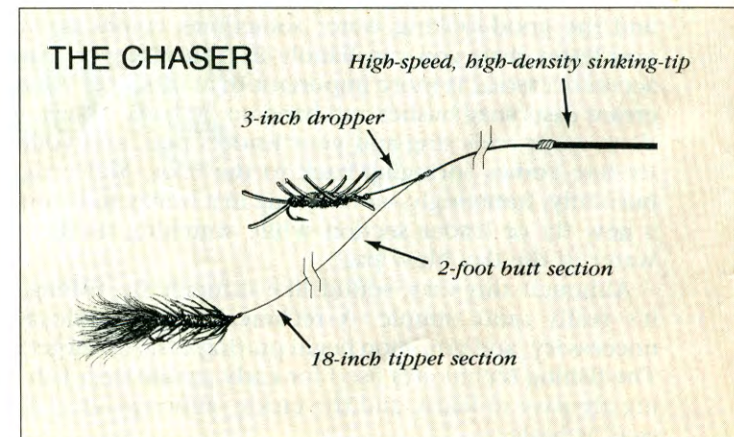
I bear down to cast into the good-looking places, I may snag, but usually I'll be rewarded with a fish. Most of the patterns I use are easy to tie, and impressionistic, so their loss is inconsequential.

In the swift, cloudy current of the spring runoff, there is little time for a fish to closely examine your offering; often it has so little time that it strikes the fly as a reaction. It's there; it's gone. Eat it or not—whap! Therefore the bugs I fish are seldom too large—they must be large (size 2 to 6) to be visible, especially under high, murky, fast-water conditions.

I'm always surprised by catching seven-inch fish on four-inch streamers. I don't know what such small fish think they are doing. And the bigger offerings often have great success on large fish, enticing them to strike at a mouthful rather than a morsel. The largest fish are more consistently caught with a streamer than any other fly patterns.

The techniques I favor for early-season fishing are based on the premise that in high, fast, off-colored water the fish hold near the banks, often in little shoreline indentations, behind obstructions, along undercuts, and in shallower, slower stream sections. When fishing under such conditions, I avoid the heavy water and swifter surface currents. The fish hold near the bottom of slacker water, where food is available in a current slowed by the bank or obstructions. Food washed free by the heavy current often gets momentarily trapped in the edges, or seams, between slow and fast water, where it becomes available to the trout. I also forget the trout holding along bottom behind midstream obstructions, because they are extremely difficult to reach. I concentrate instead on the banks, where springtime conditions force more fish to congregate.

The person at the oars must control the boat, keeping it within easy (and constant) casting distance of the bank so the angler does not have to exert himself. The oarsman must also cross the river from bank to bank depending on which side looks better, and he must safely navigate around or through potentially dangerous obstructions. Thus he usually does not fish. A guide is doing a good job if you don't have to exert yourself double-hauling casts to the bank, and if fishy-looking spots are presented to you within easy casting range.



Quarter-Behind Technique

THE ANGLER IN THE BOAT should present his offerings to fishy-looking places (see illustration) using one of several techniques. My most successful one differs from what you might expect. I call it the "quarter-behind technique," and it uses the motion of the boat and the differences in the sections of line to present the fly realistically.

The quarter-behind technique evolved through years of attempting to understand why spin fishermen had such great success when fishing high, off-colored water. The answer became obvious—they can keep their offerings nearer to bottom, thus nearer to fish, for a longer time during each cast than a fly fisherman can. The weight of the spin fisherman's lure causes it to sink quickly, and the small-diameter line creates less tension through the water so the lure stays deep for a longer time. The quarter-behind technique is the closest fly fishermen have come to keeping the offering deep for a relatively long duration. I should note that this technique is also effective throughout the year, even in low, clear water. It has become my standby technique when the wind comes up and dry-fly fishing

becomes impossible, or while drifting from spot to spot along the river.

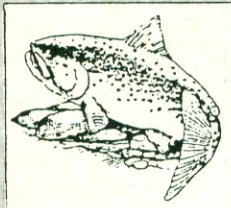
In this technique I cast to the slower water along the bank. The target should be slightly behind (upstream of) an imaginary line perpendicular to the bank and boat. In effect, I cast so that the fly lands quartering *upstream*, toward the rear of the boat and opposite to the direction of travel. This sounds easy enough, but many anglers have trouble with it, especially if they've never float-fished before. It requires patience. You must wait until the good-looking spots come into position alongside the boat, rather than casting ahead to them.

If you've never cast a 7-weight sink-tip with a heavily weighted fly on the end of it, you may not be prepared for what happens. It's nothing like casting a #18 dry on a 5-weight rod. Begin the cast by lifting the rod to bring the floating line portion quickly up and off the water. Then stroke the rod (while simultaneously hauling on the line with your line hand) swiftly up and back, with a half-sidearm motion (the half-sidearm helps to keep the weighted fly away from your neck

Continued on page 70

ROD BUILDERS

CLEMENS CATALOG



FLY TYERS

FLY FISHERMAN

Build a better rod and tie a better fly than you can buy . . .

- Incredible selection of quality components and tools including APOGEE® graphite blanks.
- Absolute finest in fly tying materials. Metz, Antron blends, plumage, furs, hairs.
- ULTRA fly lines \$19.95
- All other accessories.
- Giant 84 page catalog with Rod Building Instructions.

ONLY \$1.00

DEALER INQUIRIES INVITED

DALE CLEMENS

444 Schantz Spring Rd., B-3
Allentown, PA 18104

KOOL DRI RAINWEAR

The Breathable, Waterproof, Lightweight Rainwear

Don't let inclement weather keep you from catching that big one.

The NEW WADER JACKET is designed to keep you dry and comfortable all day.

KOOL DRI is a breathable, tear resistant nylon rainwear. Completely WATERPROOF and LIGHTWEIGHT.

The Wader Jacket is waist length with two breast pockets, large enough to hold a six inch fly box. Pockets have hook and loop closures. Sleeves have elastic cuffs. The front has a nylon zipper with outside storm flap for maximum protection.

Sizes small thru XXX large in olive drab.

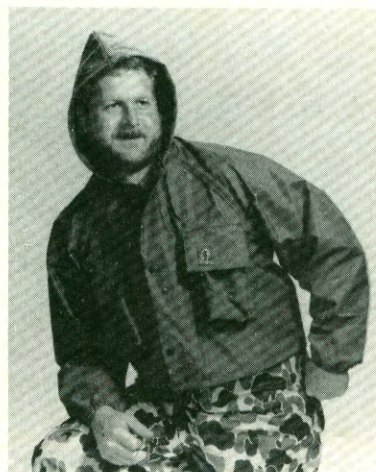
Other styles and colors available.

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

If not available from your better sporting goods dealer call toll free 1-800-523-8025. In Pennsylvania call collect 215-267-7534.

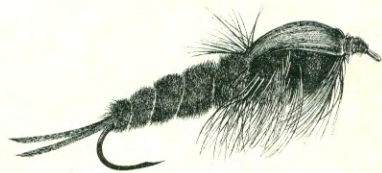
KOOL DRI RAINWEAR

P.O. Box 120, Reinholds, PA 17569



Drift Fishing . . .

Continued from page 43
and shoulder area) and an open casting arc. When you feel the weighted fly tug at the end of the backcast, stroke forward with another long and open stroke, aiming the rod tip at the end of the stroke at the spot you want to hit with the fly. Then quickly duck your head. Your "chuck and duck" cast



MAURICE MAHLER ILLUSTRATION

should allow the heavily weighted fly to clear your head and shoulders and speed the line and fly to the target.

Once I make the cast to the bank, I do nothing. I simply allow the boat to pull the line away from the bank until the line straightens behind the boat. Then I begin a stripping retrieve and set up for the next cast. It should be easy, but most anglers want to impart action to the fly immediately by stripping in line. Doing so drastically reduces the strike rate over the course of a day. The currents, and their effect on different sections of line, impart fly action.

Why does the strike rate drop if you begin stripping in line immediately? When fishing from a moving boat, everything drifts along—fly, leader, line, and fisherman are all moving, unlike a wading fisherman who is stationary and casting into flowing currents. When a weighted fly and a sink-tip line hit the water, both begin to sink and drift as soon as they land. The sink-tip sinks at a faster rate than the fly as both drift. After a short distance, the different relative water speeds affect the different sections of line. The floating section is affected by the swifter surface currents near the boat, while the sink-tip sinks through the faster surface current and pulls the fly downward and slightly away from the bank. When the faster-moving water catches the floating-line segment, it pulls the sink-tip away from the bank and toward the surface. This, in turn, accelerates the fly along bottom and away from the bank and into a rising arc.

Tracking the fly in the water after it lands, we see it begin to sink slowly as it drifts downstream, then it is pulled down and away from the bank toward bottom by the sink-tip line. As the fly nears bottom, it is still drifting downstream. It may drift near bottom for a short distance before it is pulled up and away by the tightening line. This technique is effective, and a fish

can strike anywhere during the drift. Strikes are not uncommon when the fly first hits the water. If we relate the fly to some resemblance of food, we can see that there is a brief period when it appears to be stunned as it slowly sinks toward bottom. Some action or movement is imparted to the fly by the water as the fly moves to the bottom, where a recovery or ascending escape phase occurs, caused by the line pulling the fly away from the bank and up from the bottom. This technique approximates the natural movements of a baitfish. If you begin to retrieve as soon as the fly hits the water, you prevent the fly and sink-tip from sinking as deep as they should, and you create a tension that begins lifting and pulling the fly away from the bank too soon, not allowing the fly to get down to the fish.

I have had days when many fish hit the fly as it lands on the water, but usually the fish strike as the line begins to straighten out behind the boat. I imagine that these late-striking fish have had the fly drift or tumble past them, and because it resembles a food, they follow it until it comes to life abruptly. As the fly picks up speed, it appears to the fish as something attempting to escape, which causes the fish to react by striking. It's a natural predator-prey reaction—like never run in panic from that curious grizzly. This technique covers a lot of water, keeping the fly down where the fish are and in the water for a long time. By using a fly made with breathable materials like marabou, you need not impart action to the fly. The currents do it all.

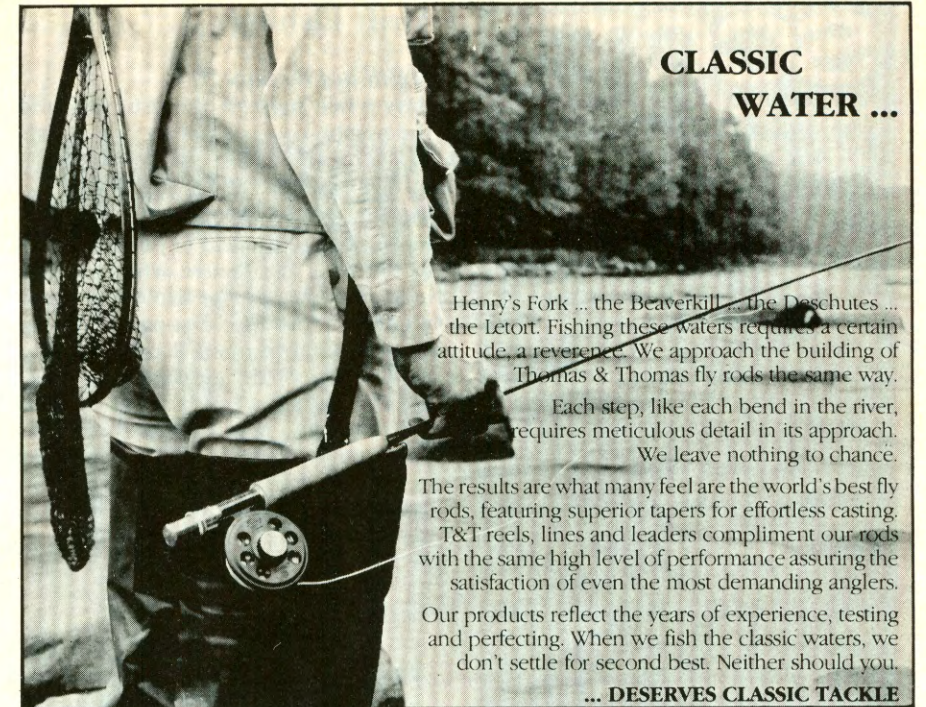
This technique works best when the boat is moving faster than, or at the same speed as, the target water. If the boat is moving slower than the target water, you'll need to manipulate the line by either mending upstream or downstream to slow or quicken the pace of the fly, or by retrieving earlier in the drift. I usually experiment to determine which method elicits the most strikes. The key element in the technique is to keep the fly near bottom for as long as possible.

Nymph Chasers

ADDING AN ATTRACTOR-TYPE nymph 18 inches ahead of a streamer on a short dropper can add to the effectiveness of early-season fishing. I call it the *chaser* (see illustration). It appears that one food source (the streamer) is chasing another (the nymph), and this can trigger a reaction from fish. And when fast water drifts the boat rapidly by good water, presenting two offerings is better than presenting one. It does not double the success rate, but I have had

Continued on page 72

CLASSIC WATER ...



Henry's Fork ... the Beaverkill ... the Deschutes ... the Letort. Fishing these waters requires a certain attitude, a reverence. We approach the building of Thomas & Thomas fly rods the same way.

Each step, like each bend in the river, requires meticulous detail in its approach. We leave nothing to chance.

The results are what many feel are the world's best fly rods, featuring superior tapers for effortless casting. T&T reels, lines and leaders compliment our rods with the same high level of performance assuring the satisfaction of even the most demanding anglers.

Our products reflect the years of experience, testing and perfecting. When we fish the classic waters, we don't settle for second best. Neither should you.

... DESERVES CLASSIC TACKLE

STEP UP TO THE ULTIMATE ...

A full color 84 page catalog, featuring the entire collection of Thomas & Thomas fly tackle, is available for \$3 (refundable with first purchase.) Credit card orders can be made by calling us at 1-800-248-2638 or send check or money order to:

Thomas & Thomas
P.O. Box 32F • Turners Falls, MA 01376

“DUE TO MOTHER’S IRON WILL, WE’VE GONE TO PIECES.”

—Tim Boyle



This vest is the product of considerable persistence on the part of our company's President. Mom.

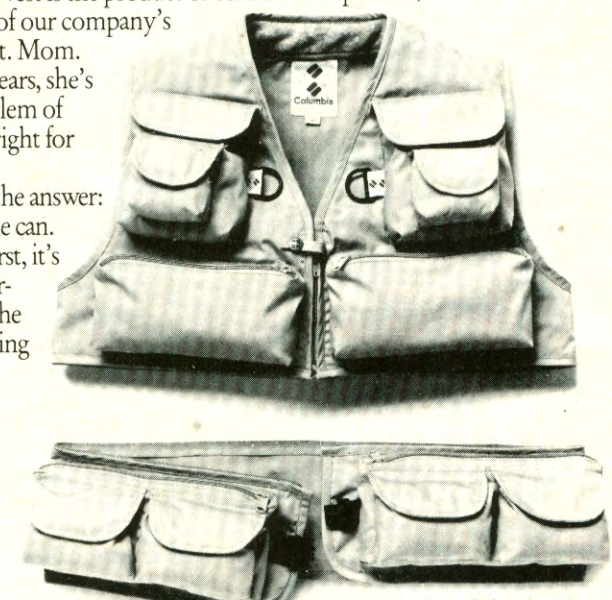
For years, she's been wrestling with the problem of how to make one vest that's right for all types of fishing.

Finally she came up with the answer: one vest can't. But three-in-one can.

Hence the Big Horn.™ First, it's a full capacity, 19-pocket super-vest. Zip the bottom off and the top becomes a shorty for wading or tubing. For hot, traveling-light days, the lower portion becomes a handy hip belt.

They say the difference between a good fisherman and a great one is patience.

Maybe that goes for fishing vest makers, too.



Our new Big Horn Vest™ is really three great garments. For any kind of angling you're up to.

Columbia
Sportswear Company

For a color brochure send \$1 to us at 6600 N. Baltimore, Dept. FF2-8, Portland, Oregon 97203

SCOTT HIGH PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE FLY RODS

SCOTT designs and builds high performance graphite fly rods for every kind of fish to which you can cast a fly.

Every SCOTT fly rod uses a light, strong internal ferrule for smooth power flow from butt to tip, and SCOTT's unique flex-rating system precisely matches tip to butt for dynamic balance and maximum performance.

Cast a SCOTT at your nearest dealer, and experience the difference a true high-performance fly rod can make to your fishing. Or write for our literature which describes all 58 SCOTT models.

**SCOTT
POWR-PLY CO.**

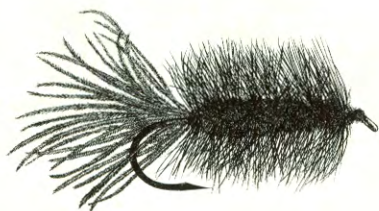
2809 TENTH STREET
BERKELEY, CA 94710
(415) 841-2444

Drift Fishing . . .

Continued on page 71
days when most of the fish preferred the nymph.

Flipping and Jigging

THE MORE TRADITIONAL float-fishing technique of casting ahead or perpendicular to the bank is effective when the fish hold tight against the bank. The technique can produce fast-paced fishing because the fly is never in one place too long. You cast tight against the bank; the fly hits the water, wiggles, or you give some action to it, and if there is no take you immediately pick it up and cast into the next pocket. I call this the "flip-and-jig technique." It's quick—the fly is there, and the fish reacts or



MAURICE MAHLER ILLUSTRATION

does not react and you cast into the next spot. Many fish strike the fly instantly after it hits the surface.

By mending the floating section of line upstream or downstream, you can extend the time the fly drifts in the water to cover an entire pocket or small indentation in the bank.

Stonefly Dead-drifts

NYPH FISHING FROM A DRIFTING BOAT can be another productive technique, especially in stonefly water. For this technique I use a floating line, a long leader, and a floating strike indicator. I attach my nymph to the leader, add some weight, and adjust the strike indicator to the desired depth. The strike indicator serves both as a visual indication of a strike, and its placement along the leader indicates whether or not the fly is deep enough. If the fly occasionally ticks bottom, I'm effectively covering the productive bottom zone. I adjust the strike indicator along the leader according to water depth and speed. If the indicator is set too shallow for the water conditions, it prevents the fly from sinking to near bottom. If it's set too deep, the fly drags unnaturally along the bottom, increasing the chances for snags. When fishing the indicator I try for a dead-drift at a natural speed.

To make the presentation, I cast the nymph perpendicular to the bank and let the whole system drift along in the current. And for a longer dead-drift, I mend upstream or downstream to

Hey! Did you tie that Fly?

The professional approach to the art of fly tying offered on one 45 min. tape.

- Five patterns that are essential for success in fly fishing.
- Allows you to learn at home at your own convenience.
- Covers the techniques necessary for successful fly tying.
- You'll say, "Yes I Tied That Fly".

VHS or Beta \$29.95
plus \$3.00 shipping and handling

Prompt Delivery, Satisfaction Guaranteed



11840 SW Reid
Beaverton, OR 97005
503/643-9458
Dealer Inquiries Invited

Drift Fishing . . .

compensate for the currents between the fly and the boat. The weight added to the leader should sink the fly, but it should not give it an unnatural dead-drift. Adjustments to the weight are also necessary: In slow water I use less weight than in heavy, fast current. And



ROD WALINCHUS PHOTO

Some of the flies that the author uses when drift-fishing in the early season include: (top to bottom, left to right) Woolly Leech, Zonker, Bullet-head Marabou Muddler, Girdle Bug, Zonker, Bitch Creek, Spruce Mataka, Woolly Bugger.

when fishing, I concentrate on the strike indicator, watching for any upstream twitch or stop that might indicate a strike. Often it's a fish.

A float fisherman can cover many types of water using this technique. During the famed stonefly hatches on some Western rivers, I can have extraordinary success working banks to which the naturals migrate prior to hatching. More importantly, I can cover any section of river including those midstream tricky spots through which it is difficult to fish a streamer. Dropping a nymph in front of a midstream boulder and allowing it to drift along the boulder's side and into the slack water behind it can be extremely productive. Current edges, the disrupted water between slow and fast currents, and converging currents have always been good spots to fish, and I can fish them thoroughly and effectively with a dead-drift cast from a drift boat.

Early-season fishing on big Rocky Mountain rivers can be rewarding and enjoyable. The scenery is impressive, and wildlife often come to the river, so bring your camera. The float itself is invigorating and may reveal aspects of the river you never knew existed. Certainly early-season drift fishing is action-packed. And regardless of how many fish you catch, it's a great way to re-acquaint yourself with your favorite river before the calmer, low-water conditions of mid-summer arrive.

ROD WALINCHUS is a freelance illustrator who also runs the Platte River Anglers outfitting service in Rawlins, Wyo.

LIBRARY CASES AND BINDERS

FLY FISHERMAN

Jesse Jones Industries
499 E. Erie Avenue, Dept. FFM
Philadelphia, PA 19134

Please send _____ case(s); _____ binder(s) for

Fly Fisherman Magazine

Enclosed is \$ _____

Charge my: (minimum \$15)

American Express Visa
 Mastercard Diners Club

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Charge Orders: Call TOLL FREE 7 days,
24 hours 1-800-972-5858

Quantity	Cases	Binders
One	\$ 7.95	\$ 9.95
Three	\$21.95	\$27.95
Six	\$39.95	\$52.95

Add \$1.00 per case/binder postage and handling.
Outside U.S. \$2.50 per case/binder (US funds only).

Name _____ (print)

Address _____ (no P.O. box numbers)

City/State/Zip _____

PA residents add 6% sales tax

Fisher's New HS4™ GRAPHITE

J. Kennedy Fisher, Inc., a fishing tackle manufacturer since 1922, announces that its GT-40, UNIVERSE and STERLING fly rod series are being built from its new U.S.A. produced HS4 High Strain graphite.

This new material with an exclusive Fisher formulation has higher modulus than IM6 and greater tensile strength and strain value than any other graphite material on the market today, including those for aerospace.

For the angler, a Fisher rod made from the HS4 is lighter, stronger, more sensitive, and quicker in action. Fisher's research and development and advanced aerospace production techniques make these Fisher rods the finest available.

These high tech Fisher rods are still great casting and fishing rods which maintain the FAMOUS FISHER PROGRESSIVE ACTIONS! Perfect for short, medium and long casts

Try a Fisher rod with HS4 graphite at your local fly shop. You will enjoy it!

Ask for a catalog.
Dealer inquiries invited.

Fisher
SINCE 1922

J. KENNEDY FISHER, INC.
P.O. Box 3147 — Dept. FFM
Carson City, NV 89702
(702) 246-5220

Fantastic King and Silver Salmon, Trophy Rainbows, Grayling and more.

Full Service, Wilderness Lodge
• Bristol Bay Watershed
Quality Staff • Guided
River Boat • Fly Fishing
• Daily Flyouts Available

CALL OR
WRITE TODAY
for our FREE color
brochure.
(206) 334-8987

**Alagnak
Lodge**

8832 163rd Ave. S.E., #F-8
Snohomish, WA 98290

Powell

Maker of premium quality fly rods
for more than 80 years

For more than eighty years Powell has set the standard of quality and performance in fly rods. Regardless of price, Powell graphite rods, blanks, kits and components are the finest you'll find anywhere. Backed by a 100% guarantee of customer satisfaction, Powell product quality and performance fulfill the most exacting criteria. Available at select dealers nationwide, or from Powell Rod Company, Box 3396, Chico, CA 95927 • (916) 345-3393.

British Columbia's Best Waters

JUNE 1988 \$3.00/£1.25
CANADA \$3.50
47747

FLY FISHERMAN

**MAINE'S
Limestoners**

**Klamath
Steelhead**

**High-Water
NYMPHING**

**Harrop's
Firehole
Discovery**

Weighting

ories Brookies

