

Trey Combs's Winter Steelhead Techniques

DECEMBER 1991  
Volume 23 • No. 1  
DISPLAY UNTIL DECEMBER 23

# FLY FISHERMAN

## FLY-TYING SECTION

Sand Eels  
Clark's Stonefly  
Peacock Patterns

ARGENTINA:  
How to find  
the best fishing

CALIFORNIA'S  
Eagle Lake Rainbows

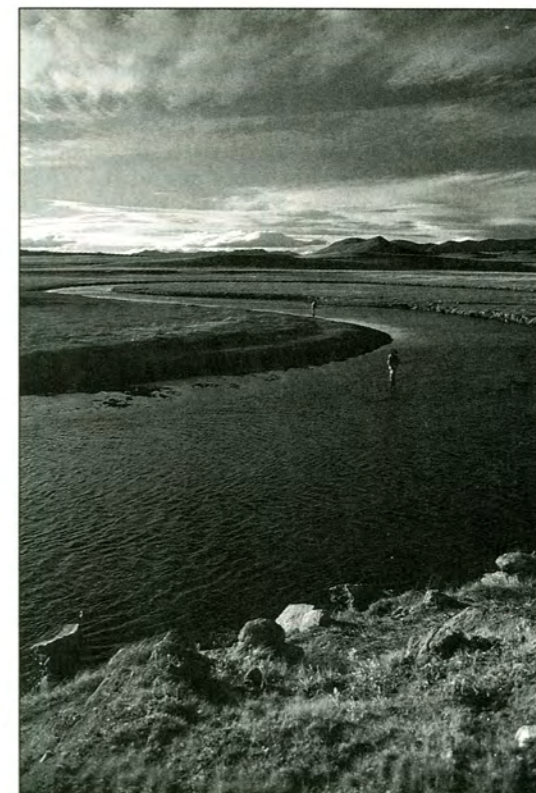
Understand  
and Beat  
Drag

## Hog Holes

*Developing more quality fisheries can reduce overcrowding and provide economic benefits.*

JOHN GIERACH

IF YOU FISH FOR TROUT, you're either part of the ongoing debate over hog holes or you've been overhearing it. We all know what a hog hole is, though some use other names for it: It's a piece of water—usually a tailwater river—that's filled with big wild trout. The local wildlife agency probably describes it in florid terms—"a jewel in the crown of the state's fisheries," or something like that. It's also public and every fisherman in a three- or four-state area knows about it.



Colorado's South Platte River between Spinney and Eleven-mile reservoirs.

Your typical hog hole is a blessing and a curse. There are big trout and lots of them, so the fishing is great, but the crowds are often horrifying, so the fishing is lousy.

There are some tricks to fishing hog holes. An old one is to go during lousy, cold, rainy weather, the kind that scares off all but the most rugged fishermen. This is an old trick because it doesn't work like it once did. Trout fishing is often at its best when the weather is bad. Also, modern fly fishermen have become wise in the ways of the sport. They're also somewhat tough, despite their yuppie reputations. After all, a lot of these guys live on grain and water, and run like horses every morning, so a little foul weather doesn't bother them.

You can go during the week, carefully avoiding weekends and major holidays. That doesn't always work, either, but it's at least an even bet.

On the other hand, I spoke with a man not long ago who said the best time to fish a hog hole is *precisely* on holidays like the Fourth of July or Memorial Day. "Everyone assumes they'll be crowded," he said, "so no one goes, and voila!"

I've never had the guts to try it myself, but I admire that kind of thinking.

If you know the river well, or have a good local source, you can sometimes arrange to slip in at odd times during the season, between the famous hatches that draw the worst crowds. If the place really is a hog hole, the big fish will still be there and they'll still have to eat. As a guide on a famous crowded river once told me of his off-season, "There are fewer rising trout now, but there are more rising trout *per fisherman*."

Sometimes you can camp onsite and get in a few uncrowded hours in the early morning while everyone else is driving out from town. Or you can show up late, have a leisurely shore supper while everyone else is leaving, and then fish at night. Naturally, this works best in areas where the majority of fishermen day-trip.

When a new hog hole opens up in the same general area as an old one, you can ignore it and keep fishing the old one. With everyone going nuts over the latest hot spot, the crowd on the old river will sometimes thin out significantly for a season or two.

You can become sociable and cagey, as some have done, speaking nicely to all the other fishermen, sharing advice and coffee, while staking out your spot

*Continued on page 22*



7 Kaycee Loop Road  
Plattsburgh NY 12901

FREE CATALOG-USA  
(Canada-\$1 Overseas-\$3)

Order Toll Free US-800-552-8342

Canada-800-248-8342

Fax-518-561-0336

Typical 1991 Catalog Prices

LAMIGLAS ESPRIT GRAPHITE FLY RODS  
WITH ALUMINUM ROD CASE-A BEST BUY.

F 765.....7 1/2' 5 WT.....	133.00
F 804.....8' 4 WT.....	133.00
F 866.....8 1/2' 6 WT.....	136.00
F 906.....9' 6 WT.....	142.00
F 908.....9' 8 WT.....	142.00

LAMIGLAS G-1000 GRAPHITE RODS (no case)

G1292.....5'9" 4 WT.....	60.90
G1295.....7'6" 5 WT.....	70.00
G1296.....8' 6 WT.....	73.00
G1297-6.....8'6" 6 WT.....	73.00
G1298-6.....9' 6 WT.....	76.00
G1298-8.....9' 8 WT.....	76.00

Scientific Anglers Air Cel Ultra<sup>2</sup> Floating Fly  
Line. DT-3-F to DT-8-F and WF-3-F to WF-9-F  
in Tan or Orange. Each.....29.95

Cortland 333 Floating Fly Line. DT-4-F to DT-7-  
F and WF-5-F to WF-8-F in Green, Yellow or  
White. Each.....14.10

Martin MG3SS Fly Reel - Ea.....34.65

Scientific Anglers System Fly Reels and  
Spools

System	Model	Reel	Spool
I	456	49.95	15.00
II	67,78	120.00	29.95
II	89,1011	130.95	33.25
II-L	ALL	102.95	25.30

Henry's Fork II Vest- Tan or Green. 25 Pockets.  
Sizes S, M, L, XL. Each.....51.20

Thompson PRO Fly Tying Vise.....19.25

Red Ball ST Flyweight Waders. Pr.....43.20

Red Ball Felt Soled Wading Shoe. Pr.....37.65

Red Ball Neoprene Waders. Pr.....75.00

Weinbrenner "Borger Boots" Pr.....66.95  
Add \$2 for sizes 13,14.

Pro-Line Velcro-close Felt Soled Wading Shoe.  
Pr.....31.25

Shipping extra - Min \$5  
WALK-IN SERVICE MON-FRI 10AM TO 4 PM  
MASTERCARD, VISA, DISCOVER AND  
AMERICAN EXPRESS CARDS ACCEPTED

## Forum . . .

Continued from page 21  
like some bait fishers.

Or you can bag the hog holes for the most part and fish the loneliest little creeks, mountain lakes, and beaver ponds you can find. That's still possible in the right parts of the country, and I highly recommend it. You'll rediscover a sense of adventure; you'll slow down, chill out, catch some fish, and usually meet few enough other anglers that you'll want to stop and chat with them. Then if you want to hit the big famous river for a change, you can do it philosophically. On bad days you can even feel sorry for the poor saps who think this is fishing.

There are a lot of things you can do, but the problem remains: Many of our best public fisheries are just too crowded. The fish themselves are usually protected by some kind of tackle restrictions and no-kill or slot-limit regulations, although even that can result in some fish mortality, as well as hook-scarred and otherwise beat up trout.

And even when the fish fare well enough, the quality of the experience is often badly marred. Fishing is—or should be—a quiet, solitary, contemplative sport. Doing it in a crowd is not unlike taking a shower in a raincoat.

For years there's been talk of solving the problem by somehow limiting the number of fishermen per day on some of our most popular trout streams. The Nature Conservancy has done that on some of their preserves and proved that it has the desired effect, but nothing much has been done yet on public water. To populist-minded American fishermen, limiting access is a distasteful idea, even when we recognize the necessity of it. Some complain about the fees that will surely be part of any limited-access program, but it's mostly a matter of principle. This is the United States of America, by God, and public fishing should be free and unlimited.

So, for now at least, many of us have accepted the idea that if we're going to fish some of the country's best and most famous trout streams, we'll have to do it with a lot of company.

Maybe I've mellowed some in recent years, or maybe I just got tired of the lopsidedness of having infinite patience with fish and almost none with my fellow humans, but I'm beginning to get a somewhat different perspective on crowded trout streams. It turns out that there is more than one way to look at this.

For one thing, fisheries conservation—as a subheading under conservation in general—is a serious political issue that will only get more important

with time. With that in mind I can now sometimes look up and down a river and see not so much a crowd as a constituency: a mob of people that any politician would be happy to see at a rally if they supported him, or terrified to see if they didn't. There are days when I even wish there were two or three more people on the water, like maybe the governor and a couple of congressmen. Not even the President of the United States is immune to "the environmental thing."

Exchange the politician for an investment banker and another perspective kicks in. Call it environmental economics or, if you prefer, economic environmentalism.

No fly fisherman has to be shown studies to know that large amounts of money are spent on the sport—not just on tackle and licenses but also on travel, food, lodging, guides, beer, and so on. Nor does he have to be told that trout are an indicator species that need cold, clean, unspoiled water.

When most of us look at a hog hole on a normal day, we see a fine piece of trout water that's 20 times more crowded than it should be, but a sharp investment banker sees something else: He sees a situation where a healthy natural environment is not an impediment to the development of industry; he sees that in this case a healthy environment *is* the industry.

Yes, I have been hanging out with some of these guys lately. A lot of them like to fish.

When access is finally limited on some of these waters, most fishermen will see it as a shame, but already some businessmen are saying things like "Wait a minute. You mean you have a product so good you have to turn away customers?"

I cringe at the thought, but if we assume for the moment that wild trout are a product and fishermen are the customers, there may be some interesting implications.

For instance, maybe the raving radical environmentalist who was running around a decade ago demanding that the environment be saved and sighting truth, beauty, and poetry as reasons can now come back and say, "My associates and I would like to show you how minimum flows and special regulations on your stream could bring somewhere between one and three million dollars a year into the local economy."

As an earth-hippie you were treated with strained politeness at best, but now, suddenly, they're calling you "Mister" and paying for lunch, even though your agenda hasn't changed a bit.

To put it another way, you can make conservation work by convincing people that preserving this forest or that river is the right thing to do, but it works a hell of a lot better if you can show them how they'll make a profit at it.

What we're talking about here is a modest local industry, but it's one that involves no factories, no pollution, no new housing, schools, sewers, water taps, fire trucks, police, etc. Or you can see it as a tourist attraction that doesn't have to turn the town into a carnival and half its citizens into hucksters in coonskin caps. A decent trout stream won't bring in the wealth of an oil field or a factory, but it will be clean, quiet, dignified, and lucrative enough to make looking into the water rights worthwhile.

"Will this actually work?" asks one of the skeptics in the group.

"Well," you can say, "look at that quality stretch of the Such-and-such River. So many people fish it they're trying to figure out how to cut down on the crowds." At that moment you remember being elbowed out of your favorite run fondly, because you can say with conviction, "Trust me. If the trout are here, the people will come."

They won't even have to advertise. You know how hard it is to keep good fishing a secret.

To many activists, this kind of thing amounts to swimming with the sharks. I suppose it does when you think about it, but it's still possible that the most environmentally meaningful thing you can do right now is teach a banker how to fish, and then take him to the jewel in the crown of the state's fisheries on a Saturday afternoon.

From an economic standpoint, this kind of thing requires some radical thinking. After all, what we're talking about is existing in some kind of long-term harmony with the natural environment and making a decent living at it, but we're *not* talking about getting fabulously rich overnight. In other words, we're looking at the possibility—or maybe I should say the necessity—of being reasonable for a change.

Still (believe it or not) there are some businessmen out there who understand that our old boom-and-bust, exploit-the-resource-and-move-on program is just not going to work anymore. The problem is, even if you can bring yourself to sanction rape, there's getting to be a crucial shortage of victims.

And I think being reasonable should include us fishermen, too. Unfortunately, some of us have gotten

Continued on page 26

"This book easily towers  
head, shoulders and sternum  
above all other fly-fishing books

of the past ten or more years"  
says Leonard M. Wright of

# THE WAY OF THE TROUT

by M.R. Montgomery

A useful, richly informative and pleasurable  
discussion of the principles and lore of fly fishing,  
and of the way trout live and anglers fish today:

- A full history of trout fishing
- Simplified techniques, from early reel-less rods to new trends in short-line nymphing
- The development of the modern fly leader, the silk-worm, and the importance of knots
- Learning to fly-fish on the Blackfoot and Bitterroot Rivers in Montana
- What trout see, what fishermen look for
- The differences between European and American trout—and fishing habits
- How to find suitable trout waters, and what makes them special
- How the behavior of the artificially raised trout differs from that of the wild trout, and why we should stop stocking rivers that already have wild trout in them
- The art of nymph-fishing
- How water moves...how fish move, and what this means to the angler
- "A fine book to be tutored by" —Boston Globe

2nd printing • At your bookseller's • Knopf

BROOKS LODGE • KULIK LODGE • GROSVENOR LODGE

Located in Katmai National Park



Alaska's Premier Sportfishing  
Since 1950

Katmailand Inc.

4700-B Aircraft Drive  
Anchorage, Alaska 99502

• 907-243-5448 • Toll-Free Reservations 800-544-0551 • Fax 907-243-0649 •

*Continued from page 23*

into a kind of junk-bond mentality from fishing the hog holes. I've actually talked to guys who won't admit the fishing was "good" unless they were tuna-boating 20-inch trout all day long. But the fact is, many of our best hog holes are tailwater fisheries that have been artificially inflated by the effects of bottom-draw dams. Some of them weren't as good when they were wild rivers. A few actually held carp instead of trout before the dams went in.

On the other hand, a normal, run-of-the-mill, healthy trout stream that's managed properly with minimum flows and appropriate regulations will likely produce something less spectacular: say, 12- to 14-inch trout with the occasional 16- to 18-inch torpedo. Some of us could easily live with that, and maybe a few more of us ought to.

If we spread out a little more, we'll not only have more room to fish and more solitude to enjoy, we'll also spread the tourist dollar around in more businesses in more towns, maybe even generating a few new enterprises in the process. And the local chambers of commerce will begin to make the obvious connection: The better the fishing is, the more money they'll make.

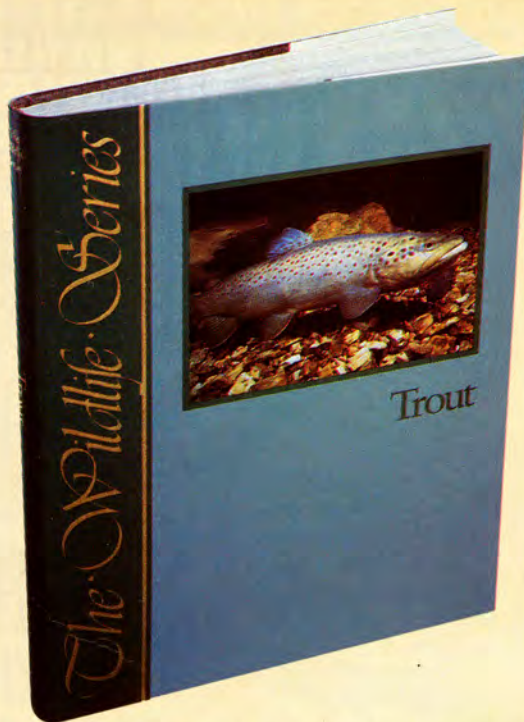
It is just conceivable that if we developed all of our fisheries to their full potential, the economic benefits would be enough to make it worthwhile. In the end it's a matter of attitude. (Remember that much of life, not to mention some great ideas, depends on nothing more than your point of view.) Crowded hog holes can be seen as proof that the sport is headed for ruin, or they can be used as evidence of just how much a good trout stream is worth.

I know this sounds like an oversimplified romantic idea, but then so did catch-and-release fishing a generation ago. I know there is a handful of businessmen who like the economic approach to conservation (or vice versa), and it's easy to see how this could be used to lever those politicians who are telling us we can have a healthy environment *and* a healthy economy. Many of those guys made that promise off the tops of their heads. Imagine how relieved they'd be to learn that it could actually happen.



JOHN GIERACH is a fly-fishing author who lives in Longmont, Colorado. His latest book is *Where the Trout Are All As Long As Your Leg*, available from Lyons & Burford, Publishers.

# The Definitive Work



- A magnificent volume of natural history. Thirty-one top trout biologists share their years of experience.
- Featuring more than 300 color photographs, 200 illustrations, and 45 maps in 384 pages.
- Great holiday gift for the trout enthusiast. \$49.95
- Covers all 13 species native to North America.

*See next page for the dealer nearest you.*

**STACKPOLE BOOKS**  
P.O. BOX 1831, HARRISBURG, PA 17105

FLY FISHERMAN

### Fly Fisherman Subscriber Service Information

- ☐ **MOVING?** Please give six weeks notice. If calling, give your new address, plus account number and old address from label. If writing, send address label and new address.
- ☐ **DUPLICATE ISSUES?** If calling, give address and account number from both labels. If writing, send both labels.
- ☐ **OTHER MAIL:** We occasionally allow other reputable firms to contact our subscribers if we feel their product or service is of value to our readers. If you would prefer not to receive such mail, just let us know.
- ☐ **TO RENEW:** To avoid lapse in service, renew as early as possible. If calling give expiration date and account number from label. If writing send address label.
- ☐ **TO SUBSCRIBE:** Allow six weeks for delivery of your first issue.

One year (6 issues) \$24.00, outside the U.S. add \$6.00.  
For questions regarding your subscription

**Call Toll Free 1-800-435-9610**

Illinois Subscribers Please Call **815-734-6309**

FLY FISHERMAN SUBSCRIBER SERVICE CENTER  
Box 3474, Mt. Morris, IL 61054