

Your fishing success depends on it.

The Approach

A NGLING SUCCESS to a large degree depends on how you approach fish you hope to catch. This applies to the saltwater angler moving in on a school of tuna "busting" bait on the surface as well as to the fisherman sneaking up on a nervous trout hiding under a log in a clear creek.

The correct approach in trout fishing begins with the type of clothing you wear. When I fished in England with John Goddard (one of the two best trout anglers I've known) a few years ago on the fabled chalkstreams, he emphasized the importance of his camouflage-colored fishing clothes. The English landscape is lush green. I wore a khaki fly-fishing vest; John wore a forest-green one. In two days of fishing I became a convert. Now if I fish where the vegetation and woodlands are mainly green most of the year, I wear a green fly vest and shirt. But, when I fish where the basic landscape color is a light brown, I use the conventional khaki vest.

I should add that the modern hardware that anglers carry on the outside of their fishing clothes can affect the approach. I use the Richardson Fly Box, an aluminum container that sits on the chest and holds all the dries I need for most trips. Long ago I began painting the box with flat-black paint. Yo-yo retrievers that hold hemostats, or other flashy equipment, should be hidden inside the jacket or painted a dull color.



AUTHOR'S PHOTO

LEFTY KREH



JIM VINCENT PHOTO

The Approach . . .

Stay low and wear colors that match the surroundings to camouflage your approach when the water is low and clear (right). Fish can hear the rumbling and scratching of rocks made by noisy wading. A quiet approach will keep fish from scattering (below). Cathy Beck kneels and uses shadows to help conceal herself on a small mountain stream (next page).



AUTHOR'S PHOTO

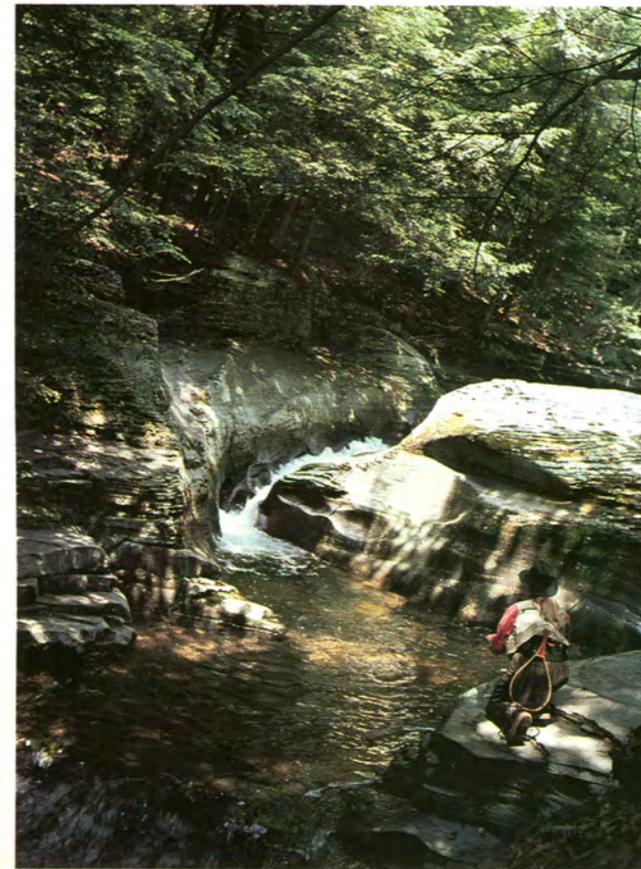
BRIAN O'KEEFE PHOTO



Approach Basics

TROUT AND OTHER FISH have three basic requirements: they must eat, rest and hide from danger. If they are alerted to a possible threat, they stop feeding and hide or flee. Remember this as you make your approach. There are several common mistakes fishermen make when approaching trout. Anglers who move up to a stream with their body silhouetted against the sky catch few fish. George Harvey, perhaps this country's best trout angler, is a joy to watch when he fishes, especially if he is on a small stream. Slipping along the creek bank, he reminds you of an Indian stalking another warrior. Keeping low in the grass or tight against the bushes, George moves ever so slowly, stopping to observe before he makes a presentation. His rod is never waved against the skyline, and occasionally he makes a side cast to prevent the trout from seeing its motion.

Stream banks often act like an amplifier, sending the sound vibrations of your footsteps through the banks and water to the fish. Two common approach mistakes are often made in such cases. Most meadow creeks are bordered by fences, and frequently an angler climbs them and then leaps down onto the soft, spongy stream bank. That heavy thump of his feet on the ground alerts trout for many yards from the impact point. Also, if you prowls along a pool that has a gravelly shoreline, try walking on the grass; the crunch of your boots on the gravel tells trout that you are approaching. On smaller creeks use what I call the three



JIM VINCENT PHOTO

C's approach: crouch, creep or crawl. Remember, a good small-creek trout fisherman will wear out the knees of hip boots first.

For many trout fishermen, catching fish in a long, quiet pool is one of their greatest challenges. These fish eat just like fish living in riffles, but approach is all-important in taking flat-water trout.

You must wade a quiet pool without creating visible ripples on the water. To the fish that isn't just a wave that radiates from the angler as he moves forward . . . it is a *shock* wave. Waves created by a careless or hurried wader make catching a fish in that kind of pool nearly impossible.

Trout face into the current, but the current does not always come from upstream. If there is an eddy, the fish may be looking downstream or sideways to the current, so study any eddy carefully before you approach it to fish.

The type of wading staff you use can often affect the success of your approach. I vividly recall fishing with another angler on the upper Delaware River one summer day. Whenever this angler moved along the bank I could hear him from more than a quarter mile away. Dangling behind him he had a metallic ski pole. It sounded to me like someone dragging chains—God knows what the trout thought. Every time he came near, the fish around me stopped hitting.

Although you've done things pretty well and made a cast and hooked a fish, you may still have made the wrong approach. I recall West Yellowstone guide Bob Lewis showing me a log on the Gallatin River that he said held a big trout. Approaching from below, I dropped a hopper along the log and the fly disappeared in a splash. I set the hook and the big trout dove under the log—popping my leader.

"You know, Lefty," Bob said, "if you had approached that fish from the side and made a cast straight across the current, you'd have had a better chance of holding that fish away from the log." Bob was right and the following season I took two nice fish there, but only by making the approach from the side, as Bob suggested.

Refinements

THERE ARE MANY angling situations in which the approach is critical. If you wade small streams for bass or sunfish, you soon learn that wading downstream results in fewer strikes. Apparently the debris and muddied water kicked up by your feet flows to the fish, alerting them to possible danger.

Even fly-fishing a farm pond requires thought. If you are right handed and you wade in the water along the pond edge with the shoreline on your right (water to your left) you will be making your backcast over the weeds, tall grass, fences and other obstructions. Turn around and walk in the opposite direction to put your backcast over the water.

The same problem occurs when you are working a shoreline from a canoe or boat. When fishing with a companion, who is paddling, the safest and most prac-

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The Approach . . .

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ticable approach is to cast over the water in front of the canoe. For a right-hander fishing the left shoreline, that's okay, but if the same angler has to fish the right shore, it means the cast will travel between him and his companion—a dangerous situation. By planning, you can often make your approach so the fly caster throws his line over the water instead of over the canoe.

When Joe Brooks got me a job in Florida back in the mid-1960s I knew I would be leaving Maryland and my beloved smallmouth bass fishing, so I spent most of the last month on the Potomac River. During that October I caught 29 smallmouths (most of them on a fly rod) that exceeded three pounds, and many that topped four pounds. My best was a beauty that topped 5 1/4 pounds. What made a deep and lasting impression on me was that I caught most of those big bass from a half-dozen spots. The lure had to come from a specific direction before the bass would take it. That also meant I had to anchor the boat perfectly to make the correct cast.

The same approach applies to steelheading, nymph fishing, even tossing a dry fly. *In any pool there is always one best position from which to present your fly.* Being aware of that, and remembering the details of your approach and each successful presentation, means hook-ups.

When you fish any open water, either a freshwater lake or a tidal basin, consider the wind and tide directions then plan your approach. When possible, in salt water try to drift down silently on your quarry—that's why many Keys guides pole their boats when flats fishing. They use electric motors when the water is too deep for poling, but most experienced guides admit that even the relatively silent electric motor alerts fish that something is nearby. Bass fishermen should learn from this, for I'm convinced that if you can approach a good bass spot without using any motor—electric or gas-powered—you stand a better chance of a hook-up.

Perhaps the greatest offender of a stealthy approach is the modern bass fisherman who roars up to a fishing hole in a one-ton boat powered by a huge motor. He cuts the motor where he plans to fish and a foot-high wave rolls across the water, crashing to the bank. No comment.

The other person who ruins fishing for himself and everyone else is the angler who sees fish breaking on the surface of the sea and runs right into the mass of feeding fish. The fish sound and the action ends. Had the careless angler stayed on the perimeter of the school,

the fish would have continued to feed, with every fisherman getting a shot at them.

Saltwater Approaches

EXPERIENCED SALTWATER anglers who sight-fish know that they will see more fish if they keep the sun at their back, or at least to their side. Moving into the glare created by the sun is hopeless. Just as important is to notice the skyline. If there are huge banks of white clouds, they will be reflected as white glare on the water and an approach in a direction that eliminates the glare allows you to see more fish.

Knowing the habits of the fish you seek helps you plan your approach. Captain Flip Pallot once described how bonefish feed—and it's the best analogy I've heard. "Bonefish hunt much the same way a bird dog does," Flip says. "A dog goes downwind and works into it, picking up the scents that are wafted to him. A bonefish swims into the tide, locating shrimp, crabs, sea worms and other morsels as their odors are carried to the fish on the tide. Most other flats species feed this way too." Once you understand what Flip described, you will know which way (direction) the fish are moving, so you can intercept them.

When fishing in very shallow water, keep loud talking to a minimum. With so little water between you and the fish, loud talking is easily transmitted to the fish. This is a danger signal often disregarded by fishermen, but it's important.

IN ALMOST EVERY area of fly fishing the method of your approach to the fish is vital to angling success. There are a few basic rules to follow: Make as little noise or movement as possible as you near the fish. Stay as far away from fish as you can and still make an effective cast. Wear nonreflective clothing (even bright canoes and boats can sometimes flash and warn fish). Consider the best time of day to make an approach (the best tide phase or a cooler time of day in the middle of summer, for example). And the direction from which you approach can affect how well the fly drifts and its speed of drift. A fish will take a fly that comes naturally to it on the current or tide, rather than one that comes at almost in an "attack" approach.

There are many factors that determine if you will consistently hook fish. One of the most important and often overlooked is the approach. 

LEFTY KREH, a FLY FISHERMAN Contributing Editor, recently revised and updated his book *Fly Fishing in Salt Water*, published by Nick Lyons Books/Winchester Press.

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