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Michigan angler stumps for his favorite Au Sable River flies



IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT PAGE 11
New Publication Dates
for Fly Fisherman Magazine

Dick Gaumer is West Coast angling-writer and public relations man (not for Henry's Lake) who makes an annual pilgrimage to this Idaho spa for rejuvenation.

THE LAKE CALLED HENRY

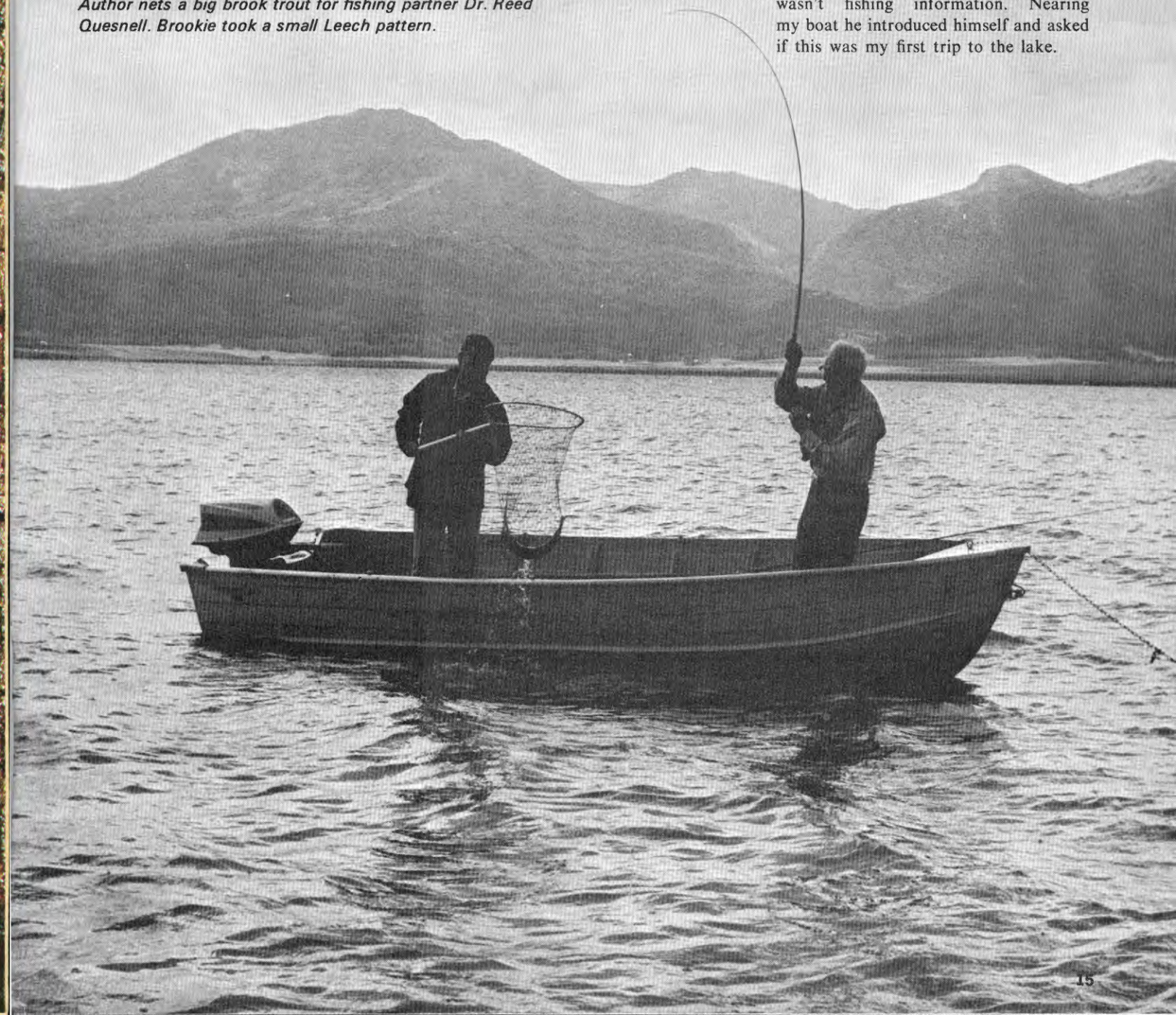
By Dick Gaumer

Author nets a big brook trout for fishing partner Dr. Reed Quesnell. Brookie took a small Leech pattern.

THERE WERE ONLY TWO of us fishing the springs, and I was sure the fellow in the other boat had completely lost his mind. Each time after completing his cast he would jam his rod tip into the water and then start his retrieve.

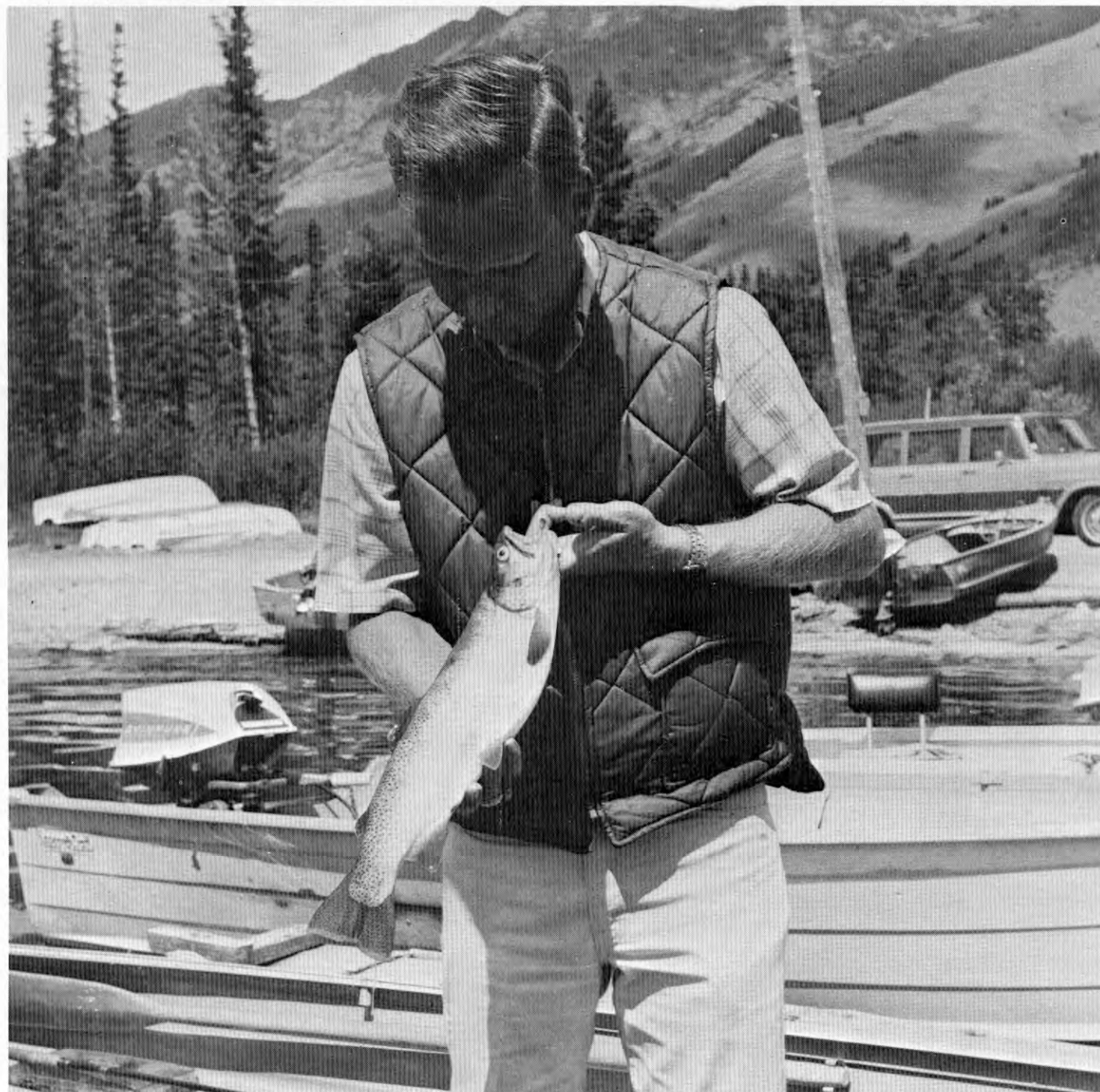
I had heard a lot about the fantastic wet-fly fishing in Henry's Lake, but I wasn't prepared for my first encounter with the unorthodox retrieve which is of vital importance to score on Henry's huge cutthroats.

An hour had passed and I hadn't boated a single fish, but my competitor was just releasing his sixth or seventh. I could hear his wife calling from shore to tell him breakfast was ready. He gently lifted anchor, cranked once on his 5-hp motor and then to my surprise headed toward me. I couldn't help but wonder what he wanted; I hoped it wasn't fishing information. Nearing my boat he introduced himself and asked if this was my first trip to the lake.



"If you don't mind some suggestions I think I can help you," he said with a pleasant grin spanning his weather-beaten face. "I have been fishing this lake for the past 20 years and it never ceases to amaze me. The retrieve is the key to success here. You probably noticed that I put my rod tip into the water when I started my retrieve. I do that for two reasons. By pointing the fly rod directly into the water, your line and rod are on the same angle giving you a better feel or touch when the strike comes. And, of course, with the rod and line on the same course, setting the hook is much easier and faster."

One of Henry's Lake's dividends, a 4½-lb. cutthroat.



It took me several casts and retrieves with this unusual style but it wasn't long before I hooked into a nice, fat cutthroat, all of four pounds! Unorthodox as it may be, this has got to be one of the secrets to successful fishing here at Henry's Lake.

Henry's Lake rests on the Continental Divide separating Idaho and Montana, just a few miles from the picturesque town of West Yellowstone, Montana, the westernmost entrance to the beautiful Yellowstone Park. In 1922 the dam was constructed at the south end of the lake in the hope of saving what little water was left and to protect a most valuable

fishery from extinction. Today Henry's Lake is not large, only about five or six miles long and has a width of two miles. Surrounded by the Targhee and Beaverhead National forests, and with an elevation of 6,596 feet, it boasts a spectacular setting.

I first heard about the lake's outstanding wet fly fishing from my old friend Ed Landry. Ed has been in the tackle business for many years in Montrose, California. Of course all my spare time when I wasn't fishing was spent with my feet propped up against an old pot-bellied stove Ed had in his store and listening to yarns of his trips to Henry's Lake.

In 1964 my wife Jackie and I made our first trip to the lake and since we've returned for each summer vacation there. We usually make our headquarters at Wild Rose Ranch Resort, which for the past 20 years has been owned and operated by May and Gil Day.

For those spending any length of time at Henry's, there are three resorts and one public campground located on its shores. Fishing season opens around the first of June and closes November 30. June is not normally the best month for the fly rodder, but for those who like to troll with a fly rod or light spinning outfit, very rewarding. A white-and-black bucktail streamer tied on a #2 or #4 hook, with a couple of splitshot two feet up on the leader, is the ticket to trolling triumph.

With the temperatures beginning to really warm up in July, the fishing picture completely changes on the lake. Henry's Lake is a shallow body of water with a maximum depth of 21 feet and an average depth of 12 feet. Such a shallow profile is very susceptible to weed problems, and Henry's is no exception. About the middle of July trolling comes to a standstill and the fly rod enthusiast swings into action. By then the weeds choke off most of the trollable area and by August it's almost impossible to fish anywhere except the springs.

Before the weed build-up the fish are spread out over the entire lake, but when the weeds begin to take over, the fish population moves into the springs or to the mouths of the tributary streams. Along with the fish now confining themselves to the springs, the damselflies begin their annual hatching cycle. Henry's Lake is loaded, and I mean loaded, with large cutthroats, brook, and hybrids, all of which gorge themselves on these insects. By reading the ecology report done on the lake in 1951, I learned that as many as 1,445 damselfly nymphs were consumed by a single trout during this cycle.

Staley Springs is the area located at the west side of the lake where most of the fly fishing is done. The springs are surrounded by land on one side and a tremendously heavy weed growth on the other, making it a very touchy subject when trying to land a big fish. Damselflies begin to hatch about mid-morning as the water begins to warm up. In the clear waters of the springs you can see these brownish-green bugs inching themselves to the surface during their nymph stage. This is all a lurking trout needs to send him into a feeding frenzy, the kind in which Henry's Lake specializes.





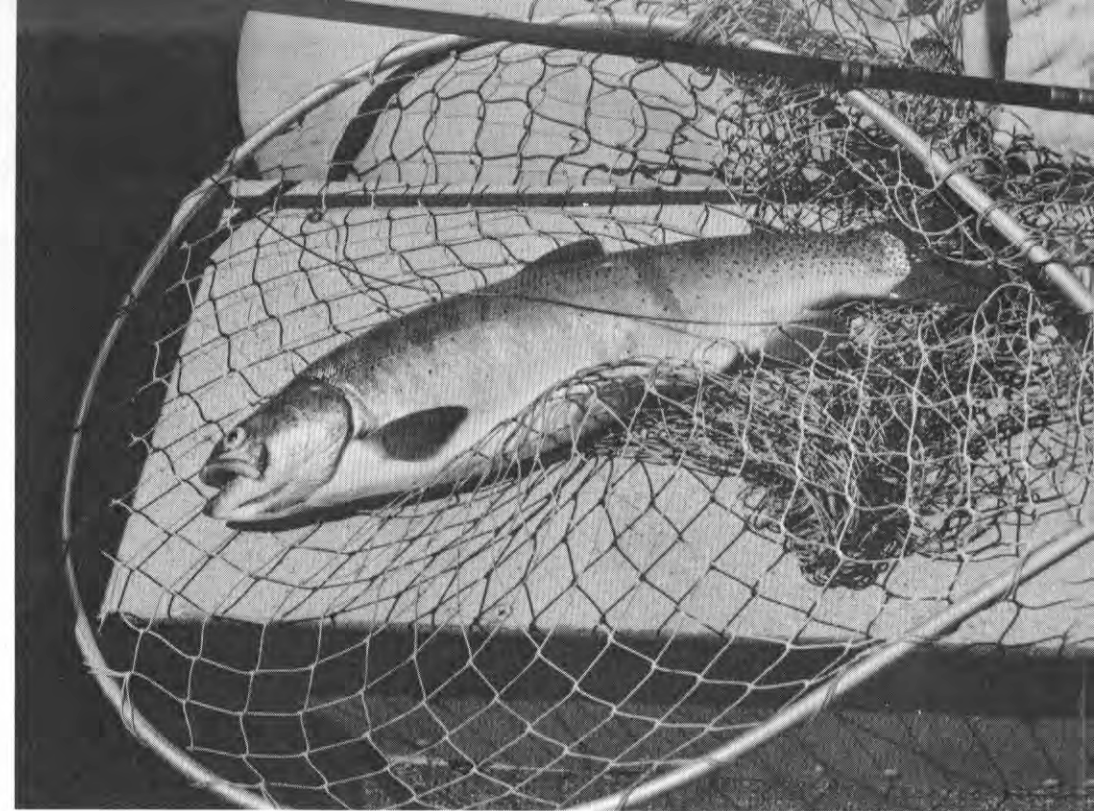
Gaumer nets a 5-lb. cutthroat on Henry's Lake.

I can remember my first damsel fly caper very well. I had just arrived at the lake and was greeted by Mickey and Warren Palmer. The Palmers are school teachers in the San Fernando Valley of southern California and spend the entire summer here. "No time to unpack," Warren said, "just get your fly rod and grab a handful of damsel fly nymphs. They're going crazy across the lake!"

I was still awkwardly trying to run the fly line through the guides of my rod as Warren scooted his 14-ft. runabout across the glassy waters to the springs. As we neared the springs I could see big trout working everywhere. We picked out a section of water that seemed to have the most action and quietly dropped anchor. I was still in the process of getting ready while Warren was already making his first retrieve.

The nymphs were so thick that they were trying to climb up the submerged tip of his rod. Halfway through the retrieve his rod was slapped down hard against the bow from a powerful jolting strike. The line began to fade rapidly off his reel as it cut the water, leaving a rooster-tail of spray. Seconds later a big tough hybrid poked his head out. The hybrid, a cross between the rainbow and cutthroat trout, are noted for their acrobatics. This one was no exception as he tried to tail-walk towards the closest weed patch. Warren applied enough pressure to turn him before he was able to pop himself loose in the undergrowth. Several minutes and two long runs later Warren was working the big hybrid close to the boat. I slipped the net under him, lifting this beautifully marked fish into the boat. The hook was carefully removed and the fish released. We guessed his weight between 5 1/2 to 6 lbs.

I made my first cast parallel to a stretch of weeds, hoping my damsel fly imitation would lure another one of these big fish out of its hiding place. On my fourth cast I was rewarded with a strike. I set the hook good, but the trout didn't have the quickness nor did he take off in a long run as Warren's did. I knew it was a cutthroat from his battle techniques; normally these fish don't put on a dazzling burst of speed, but twist and turn in a bulldozer-type of action. He ran into a large piece of floating debris and almost did a U-turn around my anchor rope. The cut is a close-in battler with plenty of stamina, somewhat like the largemouth black bass. But this one didn't have too much of a chance to show me his strength with that clump of weeds choking him. I reached over the boat to untangle the mess and finally released a very tired



A 4 1/2-lb. cutthroat from Henry's Lake, taken by the author on a fluorescent Green Wolly Worm.

fish. The trout was about 2 1/2 lbs., which is an average-size fish in Henry's Lake. Husky cutthroats, 6 lbs. and up, are common here and an occasional monster of 10 to 12 lbs. is not at all uncommon.

There is such a fantastic supply of natural food in the lake that the growth rate is exceptional. The fresh water shrimp exists literally in the millions along with the leech, snails, and other countless bugs which hatch continuously throughout the summer months. I have probably 100 different patterns especially designed for Henry's Lake but you can actually boil it down to a dozen good productive flies I rely on when the going gets tough.

By far the most popular fly is the Henry's Lake Green Woolly Worm. It's tied on everything from a #10 to a large 4 extra long #3. The body is green fluorescent chenille, palmered with grizzly hackle, clipped close. More fish are taken year in and year out on this fly than all others combined.

The rest of your fly box should contain a Queen Bess, Brown Woolley, Damsel Fly Nymph, Mickey Finn, Brownish-Green Shrimp, and the Leech, which is simply tied with a brown chenille body and a tail of light brown maribou.

You can throw away the rule book on this lake. One thing for sure you must not be afraid to experiment with patterns to be successful. I have seen days when the

good old standards don't bring a second look, just dig a little deeper in that jungle of feathers until you find the fly you forgot to throw away last summer and you're probably in business.

I've had some good days in the middle of the afternoon when the weather was blistering hot and the surface had not a ripple on it. Most of us would be taking a siesta about this time, but this lake seems to come alive at the most unusual times.

For equipment the 8 1/2 or 9 ft. fly rod such as the Scientific Anglers System 9 or the Fenwick FF-85 with a Wet Cel II fast-sinking or high-density line is most commonly used. I explained earlier about sticking your rod tip down into the water but I did not describe the retrieve itself. It's pretty hard to put something like that on paper so you can picture it. Pretend you were sending out the V-for-victory call using Morse code. This is done by three short dots (or pauses) and one long pause (. . . —). In other words, three quick jerks followed by a long stripping retrieve, and then repeat.

I guess to sum it all up, this is why I return to fish Henry's Lake each year. If you fish it just once you'll inevitably be lured by the unusually exciting fishing here. The challenge to the fly angler is unlike that of any lake I've probed with flies thus far. It's unique, it's inviting, it's rewarding—it's the lake called Henry.