



The author salmon fishing in Newfoundland (1929).



Zane Grey with a brace of fly-caught steelhead, taken from Oregon's North Umpqua in 1939.

The late novelist rode both the purple sage and the ocean swells in his quest for the good life, but too few readers know that he was first and last a fly fisherman of considerable dedication.

The Madness of the Game

ZANE GREY

ALMOST EVERY FISHERMAN, whether or not he be a rabid saltwater angler like myself, a muskellunge devotee, a live-bait bass chaser, a plug caster for the game little bronze backs, or just a lazy sun basker on the piers or banks, fishing for anything that will bite—almost everyone who loves the rod and reel is willing to admit that fly-fishing is the finest and highest type of fishing there is.

If you find someone who has an adverse opinion, it is almost a certainty that he does not know fly-fishing from experience. For it is a fact that all the attributes that make general fishing such an ineradicable passion for millions are magnified in the mastering of fly-fishing.

To explain this statement fully would require a volume. The best I can do in a few pages is to put the reader on the track to the answer. The more it takes to capture a gamefish, the more sport and satisfaction there is in it. The fact that a few experts can make a trout or steelhead or salmon rise to a fly, where the great majority of anglers would fail, lies at the root of

Most of the articles in FLY FISHERMAN that I have read seem to be devoted to treatises by today's experts on how to lure a wary trout or saltwater fish to take a fly.

It might, however, be enjoyable to look into the past and read an article written many years ago by Zane Grey (my father) on the joys of fly-fishing. Though he honestly admitted that he was not as accomplished in this field as he was in deep-sea angling, the article illustrates that he was truly a passionate devotee of the art.

This story originally appeared in a tackle-company publication in 1936, but I think it is as timely today as when it was first written.—Dr. Loren Grey

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the matter. This is an incontestable, insupportable truth that galls all of us miserable anglers who aspire to be listed among the few great.

In all classes of fishing there is a marvelous range of tackle and method. To make your own outfit goes back to the bent pin and cotton thread days of boyhood. What angler but has risen from that? To accumulate tackle and to learn how to use it, desirable as that happy state becomes, is less than half the battle. You must invent, and then by some incredible cunning and skill and patience, do what the other anglers cannot do. To be sure, if there were not another angler in the world beside yourself, it would be sport, but it would never be torture. Sometimes I wish I were the only angler in the world! But sometimes, very rarely, when I am not only casting better than I know how and having wonderful luck, I would like to have all the other anglers in the world watching from the bank. This is one evidence of the madness of the game, which I am sure all fishermen share with me. And it illustrates what states of despair and elation are common to the game.

I am always peeved when someone tells or writes me that he thought I was a saltwater angler and did not go in for fly-fishing. As a matter of fact I have spent as much time, years on end, upon the one phase as I have upon the other. On the sea, good luck and patience and endurance have earned me world records in great gamefish and new species and fame, but few know me as a persistent and indefatigable fly fisherman.

Both my sons can beat me on a trout or salmon stream; and I began to try to cast flies and raise fish before they were born. It is very trying, especially when they tell me how to tie a fly or make a cast.

I have never yet, however, taken a back seat to them, or to any other anglers, when it comes to sheer love of

Zane Grey . . .

fishing, in the joy that abides along the silent or the melodious river, under the great fir trees or the mossy cliffs, and the haunting rapture of the wild.

More than twenty years ago, coincident with my succumbing to the lure of literature, I began to learn to cast a fly. On the Delaware River and the Lackawaxen for smallmouth black bass, and later on for trout in the brooks of that lovely mountainous region. But I never really got very far until I came West and fell under the influence of Burnham and Wharton and the other fly fishermen of the Rogue River. Every year since 1910 I have spent part of each summer in Oregon.

And as I write this at sea on my return from the most amazing and successful saltwater fishing I've ever had—when I caught seventy great gamefish weighing a total of 21,000 pounds, including both the black marlin and striped marlin records for Australia, and the world-record tiger shark, a thousand thirty-six pounds—I cannot be happy or satisfied, or even at peace, because my boys, Romer and Loren, are fly-fishing the Umpqua in Oregon and they report a grand run of steelhead . . . and I cannot be there or get there in time!

I do not see how I could say any more for fly-fishing.

IN A MODEST WAY I have graduated from wet-fly to dry-fly fishing. At least I recognize the supremacy of the dry-fly method. I might master even that some day if I could stick at it. But to use dry-fly rods and fine leaders and tiny floating flies, and cast upstream, and practice methods wholly at variance with wet-fly fishing, when all the while I know I could raise and get fast to a big steelhead with an underwater fly—this is an heroic task impossible to me all the time.

On the Nova Scotia rivers my guide took me out in a boat and taught me how to cast a dry fly downstream, giving the rod a certain twitch that brought the fly back upstream to drop it light as thistledown and then let it float with the current. This was fine and very thrilling, even if it was not wholly according to Hoyle. Once I jerked my fly too far back; it dropped right by the left

oarlock. A salmon rose to that fly, took it, leaped in the boat, and I fell on top of that fourteen-pound Atlantic salmon. You see, I had never progressed far enough in the mystical ethics of dry-fly fishing to overcome my natural instincts to capture the fish.

In Newfoundland I fished the South Shore rivers—they call those grand rivers "brooks"—using the wet fly, and in Burnt Island Brook, Grandy's Brook, the Gray River and the Bay du Nord River, I had wonderful salmon fishing. I also fished the Grand Codroy on the west coast of Newfoundland, failing in this beautiful river with the dry fly. I also had a crack at the Miramichi, and some rivers of the Gaspé Peninsula, but I do not want to brag about that experience.

One incident, however, is worth mentioning. Some anglers were salmon fishing above an old dam where there were a lot of big salmon on the take. Every time they raised and hooked a salmon, the fish would run down a chute through the dam and break off. Then along comes an old guy with a keen eye and a whippy rod and a dry fly, and when he hooked a salmon he made it run upstream. Every salmon would run upstream, and this old fellow would lick it. I was probably more overcome with despair than any of those other anglers. Anyway they found relief in a big bottle. The only relief I had was a mental outburst like this: "I'll be --- --- if that marvelous old duffer of a dry-fly fisherman could make a twelve-pound Oregon steelhead run upstream!"

WELL, TO GET BACK TO OREGON, even on paper, is something. The last few years, since the advent of the bucktail steelhead fly, we have been learning to tie our own flies. This, I think, is the last word in the fascination of fly-fishing. There is nothing to keep a fellow from letting his fancy run riot. I was always crazy about color anyway, and some of my elaborations scared the wits out of steelhead. On the other hand, I hit upon a combination that was a killer. How many steelhead I raised and lost I never counted, but I caught a good many, some of them eight- and nine-pounders, and one eleven and a half.

The boys knew I had some kind of a fly that was raising fish, and despite my efforts to keep my secret, Loren discovered it. He stole my idea, elaborated upon it, and certainly improved vastly upon it—for he developed the greatest skill at tying flies—and for that summer he ran his score up to one hundred steelhead. Of course he released many of them, particularly those not badly hooked.

Summing up these few remarks, I would like to give the impression that fly-fishing is the greatest of outdoor sports. It is within the reach of all anglers. It has all the virtues the outdoors can give a man—health, rest, rejuvenation, color and beauty. It is also the most exasperating and hopelessly despairing game ever invented. It has everything and its future is limitless. It panders to the egotism and inspires the inventive powers of every genus *homo*. Perhaps its sublime gift to man, however, is the strange quality of eliminating evil, selfishness, hatred, greed from his heart while he is fishing. 🐟

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