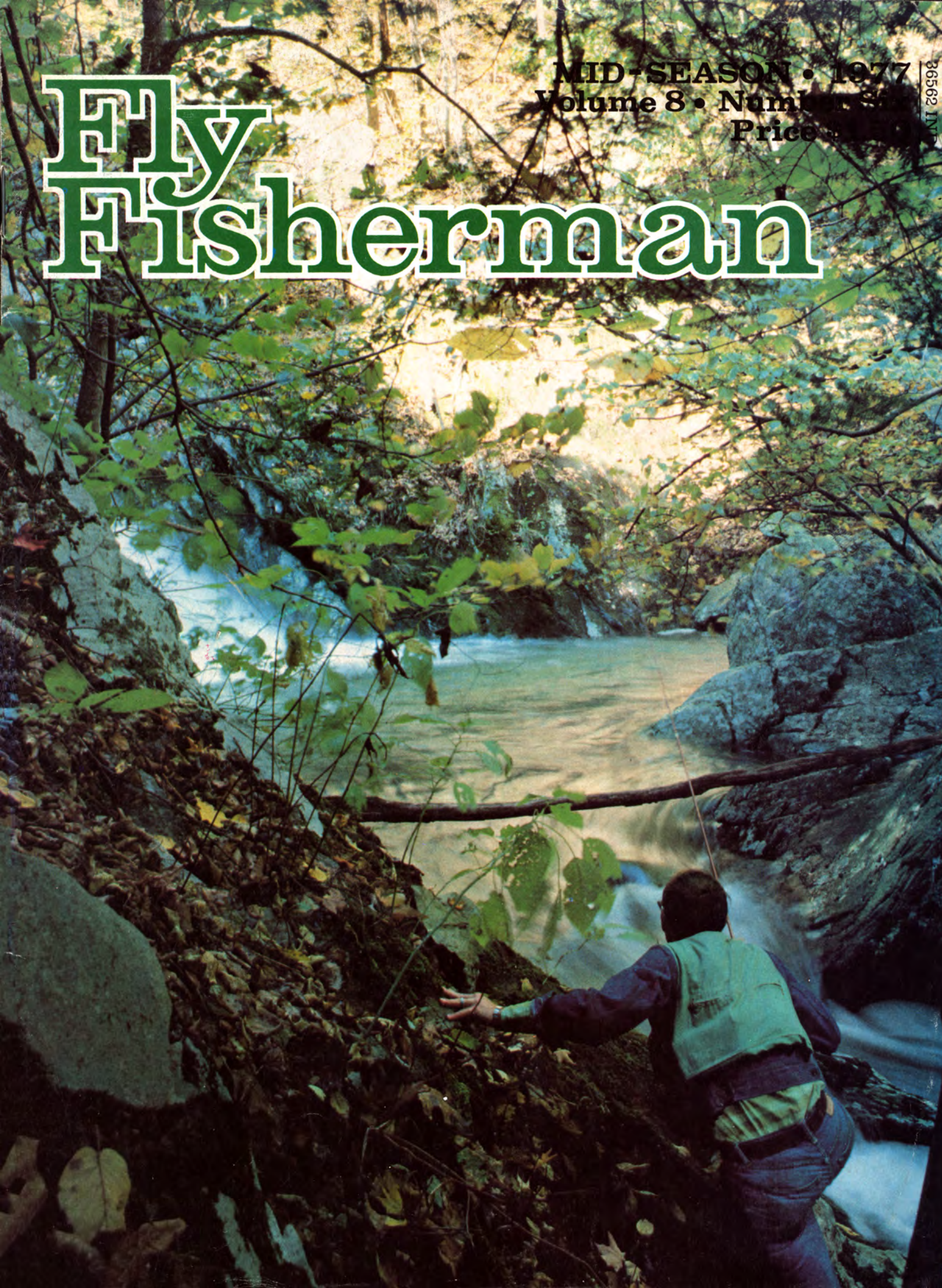


Fly Fisherman

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A sense of camaraderie usually prevails at fly-fishing schools, illustrated here during an on-stream session. Photo by the author.

The caster and the classroom . . .

Where Do You Begin?

JOAN SALVATO WULFF

OF ALL TYPES OF ANGLING, fly-fishing is the most complex. It can appear to the beginner as an imposing conglomeration of art, science, tradition and literature. Distilling this seemingly volatile mixture down into the basic technical knowledge needed to fly-fish proficiently is both the first and most important problem facing a novice — it's the base upon which novice fly fishermen build their growing skills.

Many have had to solve this problem, at least partially, on their own, reading what they can find and learning by trial and error over a long period of time. Some get an added boost from a fly-fishing friend who's willing to take the time to give them some basic instruction and a consequent short-cut to becoming a better

angler. Most recently, however, many novices (and experienced anglers as well) are starting to take advantage of programs offered by an increasing number of fly-fishing schools as the most direct route to fly-fishing proficiency.

MOST FLY-FISHING SCHOOLS are really trout-fishing schools. If you are a novice, I believe a three-day school could save you as much as five years (as opposed to doing-it-yourself) on your way to becoming a good trout fisherman. Although all schools do not assign the same importance to the various skills or knowledge a student might feel he needs, they all impart the essentials. In fact, there is often so much information disseminated at one of these sessions, that most people can't absorb it all the first time. Many actually return to go through the same course again and find they learn almost as much on the second and even the third time around. When you are finally ready for an advanced course, you should choose your school carefully and look for exceptional instructors — anglers who have distinguished

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themselves in the field. You can learn tricks and techniques in a few minutes from a skilled instructor that it took him many years to learn.

If you're thinking about attending a fly-fishing school this summer or fall, you can take the rapid proliferation of the schools themselves as one indication of their effectiveness. In addition to several major tackle companies, numerous resort areas and individual anglers also offer programs, many of which are listed on these pages.

AS EXAMPLES, VERY SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS are run by the Orvis Company in Manchester, Vermont, which seems to have started the whole thing back in 1967, and Fenwick, based in Westminster, California, which offers a series of varied programs around the country.

It started slowly. Only 150 people went through the summer courses at Orvis in 1967. The number increased to 495 in 1970, of which 91 (18%) were women. Last year, 827 would-be anglers went through the program, of which 191 (23%) were female. Participation in the program increased by 67 percent in the last six years and, interestingly enough, female participation increased by 209 percent during the same period.

Approximately 150 people took Fenwick's first courses in 1969. Last year, there were more than 1,000. They offer both straight schools and fishing trip/school combinations. Orvis offers three-day sessions during 1977, at their Manchester, Vermont, facility for a fee of \$180, including food and lodging. Fenwick's prices range from \$120 for two days (no food or lodging) up to an all-inclusive \$960 for a six-day Alaskan school/fishing trip combination (from a particular starting point). Some of the smaller schools combine instruction and fishing, too. If you're thinking of attending a school, read the ads carefully and don't be afraid to ask for additional information. After you know whether or not the fee includes food and lodging, check for other variables such as the amount of class work versus on-stream instruction. This can be important to you, depending on your expertise—or lack of it—as a fly fisherman.

I asked Tony Skilton, the director of the Orvis schools, about the needs of his pupils. "Almost 99 percent of the people have a casting problem right from the start," Skilton revealed, "so at least half of our program involves correct casting practice designed to turn the poor caster into a more proficient one.

"The second most important thing is reading water," Tony added, "and that's where our 'dry run' comes in. After they know how to cast and step in a stream, the next question is 'where do I cast?' On the dry run, one instructor fishes while the other stands on the bank with the students and explains, step by step and in infinite detail, exactly what the fisherman is doing and why. This is the most popular session of our school."

Frank Gray, headmaster of Fenwick's schools, agrees that casting is the number one problem with most pupils. However, Frank adds, "Luckily, most people enjoy learning to cast, which makes it easier for the instructors." He feels that presentation of the fly is the next most important skill, but he stresses that stay-

ing with the basics and not trying to move too fast is the single most important part of the whole system of teaching.

I have to agree with Tony and Frank that casting and presentation are the most important skills to master. If you can cast well and cover all the water you'll have a good chance of finding fish. Reading the water is also important, but if you know where they are, as an experienced spin fisherman might, but can't put a fly to them, you're not even in the game. When you become proficient in both areas—casting and reading the water—the rest will come easily.

Some of the other areas covered by most good schools (and areas which you should explore if you're going it alone or with a more experienced friend) include the recognition of basic types of trout foods and their appropriate imitations; the habits of trout that are pertinent to fly-fishing; the art of wading; and how to determine the best position to be in for a successful cast in a given situation. And then there is another important area that should not be overlooked—the fateful moment of the strike. The emphasis on technique leading up to this moment often leaves a void as to what to do when it actually happens. Novices should also learn how to strike, play and release fish properly.

MY HUSBAND LEE AND I have been directors and instructors at a fly-fishing school for many years and we enjoyed every minute of it. Successful teaching calls for long days and hard work, but the general atmosphere is generally one of an infectious enthusiasm that carries into the discussions after the lectures and casting clinics and often into evening fly-tying sessions. It keeps everyone going.

As the class gets to know itself the fast learners seem tolerant of the slow and vice versa; the mood is one of good humor as everyone learns to laugh at himself. This spirit of camaraderie extends to the stream, too—and suddenly someone has caught the biggest trout, or fallen in, or distinguished himself by his reaction to his first fly-caught fish. I often recall one of our more retiring students, Claire Hall (she was only there to please her husband), becoming "reborn" after she landed her first trout. With screams of delight, she hugged first the fish and then instructor Bob Good while the rest of the class roared with laughter.

AS STUDENTS PROGRESS, either in a school or with a friend, they seem to blossom as they acquire certain skills or bits of knowledge and the next challenge becomes clearly visible. This is the learning pattern that leads to success and enjoyment of angling, which I can best characterize as the "opening" of students' minds as they progress.

Most instructors feel an obligation, whether to the novice or to the experienced angler, to do more than just teach the simple elements of fly-fishing. Here's how Lee looks at it.

"Although we, as instructors, are all involved in making sure that there is an adequate understanding of tackle and casting techniques, to my mind the most im-

portant factor in catching fish is to understand the fish themselves. Fish, like people, vary widely. The technique that works on one wise old trout may not be effective on another. I hope pupils will move along, step by step, solving the challenges that fly-fishing gives them, but always thinking from the viewpoint of the fish. This is, after all, the measure of whether or not the job is being done well. I want to give them both a fishing ability and an open, inquisitive mind."

It was all summed up for Lee and me one night after we had turned in after a full day of lecturing, demonstrating and instructing, followed by fly-tying and the

usual questions asked of experienced anglers. Suddenly we heard a strange yet familiar sound in the quiet Western night—line being pulled off a fly reel. We ran to the window and, in the moonlight, saw a student doing what you'd think he'd be too tired to do, practicing his fly-casting.

Perhaps he wanted to practice while no one was looking, but more probably something had clicked in his mind during the evening's discussion that made him suddenly understand what he had been trying to accomplish in some facet of his casting. He couldn't wait till morning.

1977 Fly-Fishing Schools

THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST of fly-fishing schools around the country offering courses and clinics this summer and fall. Instruction ranges from basic introductory programs for novices to advanced seminars for experienced anglers. The list includes addresses, phone numbers and individual contacts so that you may inquire for complete information. (Not included are courses on fly-fishing and related subjects conducted by universities and colleges—check with local campuses if you are interested in instruction on this basis.)



Photo courtesy the Orvis Company.

Chase Ranch for Young People, Millegan Route, Great Falls, Mont. 59401; (406) 727-6233; Dr. Alston Chase. Complete summer program for boys and girls as well as a program designed for adults.

The Complete Fly Fisher, P.O. Box 105, Wise River, Mont. 59762; (406) 839-2243; Philip N. Wright, Jr. Individual and group instruction.

Creative Sports, 2333 Boulevard Circle, Walnut Creek, Calif. 94595; (415) 938-2255; Dave Inks or Andy Puyans. Two one-week seminars (June 27-July 3, Sept. 26-Oct. 2) conducted in Yellowstone Park.

Eastern Fly-Fishing Workshop, Dale C. Spartas, E.F.W., P.O. Box 324, Lyndonville, Vt. 05851; (802) 626-9232. Complete fly-fishing, conservation and camping program

for young people, introducing them to the famous trout streams of the East.

John B. Emery, 7770 Sunset Drive, Miami, Fla. 33143; (305) 279-7969. Tutoring.

Fenwick Fly-Fishing Schools, Dept. B-76, P.O. Box 729, Westminster, Calif. 92683; (714) 897-1066; Jodi Nelson. Nationwide sessions for novices and advanced anglers, featuring a variety of programs.

Garcia Fly-Fishing Schools, 650 South Lipan Street, Denver, Colo. 80223; (303) 744-1881; Bob Good. Three-day comprehensive programs.

Leonard Rod Company Store, P.O. Box 491, Central Valley, N.Y. 10917; (914) 928-2301; Ron Kusse. Three-day sessions with a maximum of 24 students, also free casting lessons on Saturdays.

Bud Lilly Trout Shop, Box 698, West Yellowstone, Mont. 59758; (406) 646-7801; Greg Lilly. Three-day tutoring sessions, also sessions designed for ladies only.

McClane Fishing School, P.O. Box 722, Palm Beach, Fla. 33480; (616) 947-5019; Bing McClellan, President. Freshwater and saltwater fly-fishing programs in the Bahamas and Maine. Three-day, four-day or one-week sessions.

Montana School of Fly-Fishing, Box 6, Nye, Mont. 59061; (406) 327-4365 or 327-4304; John Mouat. Six-day basic course, wilderness fishing expedition/school, combination school/dude-ranch package.

Orvis Fly-Fishing Schools, Manchester, Vt. 05254; (802) 362-1300; Pam Newhouse. Three-day sessions twice weekly, April-August. Tenth year.

Rangeley Region Sports Shop, Box 850, Rangeley, Me. 04970; (207) 864-3309; Dick Frost. Free casting lessons every Tuesday.

Eric Leiser's The Rivergate, Box 275 (Rte. 9), Cold Spring, N.Y. 10516; (914) 265-2318; Eric Leiser. Free casting lessons on Sundays.

The Snug Company, P.O. Box 598, Sun Valley, Idaho 83353; (208) 622-9305; Bill Mason. Individual and class instruction, also advanced seminars.

Doug Swisher Fly-Fishing Schools, R.F.D. Box 9037, Spirit Lake, Iowa 51360; (712) 336-3825; Doug Swisher. Nationwide clinic and school schedule.

Yellow Breeches Fly Shop, Box 200, Rte. 174, Boiling Springs, Pa. 17007; (717) 258-6752; Bill Skilton. Individual tutoring.