

Hickory NC Trout Unlimited July 2020 Newsletter



Visit us on Facebook at [Hickory NC Trout Unlimited Chapter 032](#)

CHAPTER MEETINGS

The Hickory Chapter of TU takes a break in July and August. The next chapter meeting will be this fall. Watch in the newsletter, on Facebook, or our website for details.

ESSENTIAL WORKERS FREE MEMBERSHIP OFFER

We wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those workers on the front lines keeping us safe, treating the sick, delivering necessities, and feeding our nation. If you are an essential worker who loves to fish (or wants to learn) and cares about conservation, we invite you to enjoy a free one-year Trout Unlimited membership.

Time on the water can provide refuge, joy, healing ... and hope, which is so important during difficult times. We offer camaraderie and good times along with the pleasure of being part of a community that is dedicated to a brighter future for America's rivers, streams and fish. Our 300,000 members and supporters are joining the conversation online right now while our local chapters plan for when we are all able to be together again.

If you are new to Trout Unlimited, we hope you will accept this free invitation. Join us today. Together, we can look to the future with hope. Sign up at:

https://gifts.tu.org/essentialworkers_join

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"If politicians fished instead of spoke publicly, we would be at peace with the world."Will Rogers

AN OLD DOG LEARNS A NEW TRICK

By Jim Brady



On Monday, March 9, Neal Mitchell and I enjoyed a wonderful day on Helton Creek. The previous week saw heavy rain but the river had cleared and returned to slightly higher than normal levels. Even though we had arrived by 10:30, we had to pass up several spots already occupied by earlier risers. We drove upstream towards the campground and eventually parked a few hundred feet downstream of the entrance. Neal went for a well known hole marked by a familiar rock formation. I headed for the run along the road just below the campground.

One of many questions swirling in my head was what to use. Over several years I developed a yellowish-orange stonefly that has served me well under conditions of high water. I like to use it instead of weight attached to the leader because it's heavy enough to bounce off the bottom and tied on a size eight or six hook, the eye is large enough to add another piece of leader. In this case, about twelve inches of 4X to which I fastened a Y2K. I hesitate to even mention I know of the latter pattern, let alone that I sometimes get it wet. But the fish are hatchery raised, after all, and do respond to bright colors.

The question now became if I should use a strike indicator. I assume that whatever I have tied on is only temporary because a snag, root mass or hungry rock will consume my rig at some point. I was internally debating whether I should donate my only strike indicator to Nature or hold it in reserve. I opted for fishing without an indicator, trying to revisit my central Pennsylvania roots.

I haven't resorted to this technique for at least a year but I needn't have been concerned. My cast was directed toward the target with the rod tip held high and with excessive force, plunging the nymph toward the bottom immediately upon impacting the water's surface. I quickly stripped in whatever slack accumulated and continued to do so as the fly (or flies) drifted downstream towards me. At the same time, I held the rod at a high, steep angle to the water to aid control of the slack (hence the name "high sticking"). My attention was focused on the white line point. I struck back immediately to any interruption of a "normal" drift of the line point. Whether the fly hung up on a stick or a rock or was actually taken by a fish, I couldn't know. I simply reacted according to the dictum, "Strike first, ask questions later;" (a friend says that nine times out of ten, you get sticks and stones; the other ten percent of the time you get scales). My instincts kicked in and I was striking at what I don't know but something alive wriggled on the other end. I found myself

standing less than ten feet from a pod of brookies who couldn't resist a Y2K.

This technique worked well and I took nine fish before lunch. The last was in the campground, not far below the bridge and I reacted so fast I almost didn't consciously detect the take. Then I had the pleasure of directing Neal to a hole that usually has a few willing fish. He found four. It was gratifying to see him tighten on one fish after another. He said I would make a good guide. From my perspective, even a "good" guide can't make up for deficiencies in a fisherman's technique. Neal did his job well.



He also reminded me about the importance of depressions in the stream bottom. These sunken "holes" allow fish to rest and hold out of the force of the current. Neal put me onto one that my discerning eye had seen a hundred times without realizing the significance of. He pointed out that the depth of these depressions caused the color of the stream to darken. The dark color is a giveaway to receptive fishermen, even those as clueless as myself. I filed Neal's tip away in my memory banks.

He continued to probe a depression with his Hare's Ear nymph so I wandered upstream. I stumbled onto another spot that gave me plenty of action, including a gorgeous sixteen-inch brown. He inhaled my stonefly nymph and put up a fine struggle against my light four weight rod. I slipped the big fly out of his upper lip and he disappeared as quickly as he made his presence known.

We checked out a few more spots farther upstream. I caught three out of a typically reliable run but they seemed to require more than the normal amount of effort. I finally reeled in and searched for Neal. He had returned to an old haunt, the location of which would require a lot of alcohol for me to divulge (which would, incidentally, hamper my ability to recall where the spot is). It was another depression in the stream bottom in an out-of-the-way location. I enjoyed watching him play another fish before he called it a day. After a day of stumbling along a slick stream bottom and connecting with a few fish, I usually reach the point of satisfaction and lose the need to catch fish. Not the urge, mind you, just the need. By this time, I had had enough.

My feeling of satisfaction was reinforced by a John Gierach comment I stumbled upon recently re-reading one of his stories. He opined "you would be a lot happier if your definition of good fishing depends more on poetry than body counts."¹ Amen to that.

We turned for home and relaxed reviewing a fine day on the water. I hadn't had the opportunity to fish with Neal before but I won't pass up the chance to do it again. Although I reincarnated an old reliable technique, Neal taught me how to look at a familiar piece of water in a new way. I can hardly wait to learn something new again. Thanks, Neal.

Citation

Gierach, John; *Standing in a River Waving a Stick*;

Simon&Shuster, New

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Small Stream Structure- Holes, Bends, Runs Etc.

Photos by Louis Cahill

By Jason Tucker



In the public mind there is probably no feature that comes more readily to mind than the Ole Fishin' Hole.

A lot of non-fishers think that is what fishing is about-going to a big, well-known hole, soaking bait, waiting for the fish to bite. I certainly spent a lot of my childhood believing this was the way to fish.

Especially once you get into fly fishing, you realize those big holes don't hold all the fish, and probably are some of the least interesting places for the fly angler. After all, fish on the bottom of that big hole aren't likely to rise eight feet through the water to hit your fly. Learning to identify fish holding water and cover on a small stream is just as important as your casting and fly selection. It is especially important because you need to identify these spots from a distance, pick out the likely fish holding lies, so that you can stealthily approach the spot and present your fly. I can't tell you the number of times I have (and still do) failed to properly identify fish holding structure and blundered into a spot that was a great opportunity just waiting for my fly.

Holes. After demeaning them at the outset, it is time to redeem them. Holes hold fish, lots of fish, but it's not enough to approach one and start flogging. The problem with holes is



that a true hole will be too deep to fish a dry fly unless you see fish lingering near the surface feeding. This does happen, and if you run into that

situation, by all means move into position and start casting. More often you will find yourself happening on a hole with no perceptible action and will need a game plan. There are four areas to concentrate on when you get to a hole: the tailout, the margins, the head, and the hole itself.



If you're fishing from downstream, the tailout is what you want to concentrate on first. I spent many a summer day observing big holes in rivers as a child. There was a bridge on a hole that we always fished. The bridge was in the middle of nowhere, not even on a road. I believe that

landowner had the bridge repaired at some point, as it was in good shape. It was originally a stagecoach bridge in Michigan's logging days. It served an old hotel that used to be there. Nostalgia aside, I learned a lot sitting on that bridge soaking worms.

When we would walk out on the bridge it was common to watch thirty or more fish scoot for cover in the deepest part of the hole. The thing to do then was to sit still and wait for the fish to relax and return to their feeding lies. After ten minutes small fish would start to move back out into feeding positions. After twenty minutes they would start to feed again. After thirty minutes even the larger fish would become visible if they were going to feed. A lot of the prime lies were near the bank on the deep side, and also at the head of the hole, but a lot of fish would drift back to the tailout and wait to feed. So when you are approaching a hole this is where you want your first cast to go. You'll want your fly to land where the color changes from dark to lighter. The fish here may be sensitive to being cast over, so you don't want to cast too far into the center of the hole and line the fish. Make a few casts to the tailout and work the whole area from shallow to deep before moving onto your next target.

The next target is the margins of the hole. Typically at least one side of the hole has a gradual slope to the bank. Fish that want to feed will often move out of the hole into water on that margin that is two to four feet deep in order to be within reach of the surface. That margin is often the most overlooked part of a hole, and one of the most productive. It can be one of your best chances at catching a big fish. Fish in the margin also tend to be less line shy. You are targeting the color change from clear, shallow water near the bank, to the darker water as it deepens toward the hole. Often fish will be holding right on the border between the clear and the colored water.

The border between the clear and colored water also often denotes a current break, with the faster current being in the dark water, and the clear shallow water running slow to still. You can usually get a good consistent drift down that darker

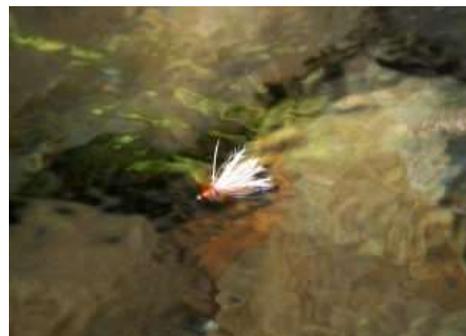


water right next to the clear. If this doesn't work, an often deadly tactic is to cast to the clear water right next to the dark. You will need to make sure your

entire line is in that slower water, and that your fly is drifting right on the border of the faster darker water. Often a fish holding in that deeper water can't resist sliding out to grab a fly that is lingering right next to the deeper water. This is great water for nymphing as well.

Head of the hole. Perhaps the most obvious spot to fish is where the current dumps into the hole. Fish that want the first crack at food floating downstream will be positioned here at the drop-off. If the hole is big enough there may be several good lies to hit. On a small stream it may just be one. Some holes on small streams are small enough that you may be better off skipping the other areas and casting straight to the head of the hole if you think that is where the best fish will be. Some holes will be small enough that no matter where the fly hits a fish will move to take it. With experience you'll figure out whether you need to break a hole into its constituent parts or treat it as a single lie. Rising fish will always be your best indicator of where to cast.

The hole itself. I'll here define the hole as the deepest part of the hole, if that makes any sense. It is deep, dark water that is normally too deep to fish with a dry fly to fish resting on the bottom. Fish on the bottom of a hole are typically not interested in feeding on the surface. They will be resting,



hiding, or feeding on nymphs drifting by. There won't be much you can do to interest them in the surface. If you can get a nymph down deep and get a good drift, you have a shot.

There are exceptions to this, such as when fish suspend to feed on emerging insects. A lot of fish will move to the other areas to feed, but some will suspend in the hole if the current is delivering food. I will always keep an eye out for fish feeding on the hole itself while not concentrating on it. If there is a strainer or brush on the surface, look for fish feeding on the leading edge of it where current concentrates drifting flies.

Another exception to this is that holes tend to be relative to the size of the stream you are fishing, and we are discussing small streams. On a small enough stream a hole may be the size of a bathtub and be the very best spot to place a fly. They may be the only places that hold fish. Adjust your mindset to the stream you are fishing, and above all let the fish and the stream tell you how to fish it.

Runs. If I could construct a stream made entirely of outside bends and runs I would. Michigan's Manistee river is near perfect, but it's a big river so I won't discuss it further. A run is a straight stretch of river with water deep enough to



to hold fish. If it has a stony bottom that produces a chop on the surface, so much the better. As a matter of fact, that surface chop is a better indicator of fish holding water than depth is. You are looking for water that is just slightly too deep to see the bottom. A lot of runs are set up like stretched out holes, with deeper water at the top with a long taper to the tail-out. A good run will be consistently deep, have

that chop, and hold fish from top to bottom. Fish in a run will be looking to feed and within reach of the surface. I break runs into cast-lengths. Don't make the mistake of moving each cast up two to three feet at a time as the fly landing just behind a fish is a good way to spook it. Cast to a length of the run, then quietly move up to where you just presented the fly and repeat until you've reached the top. Often the tail of a run will be as good as or better than the head.



Outside bends. Outside bends are another personal favorite on a small stream. They often provide sufficient depth to hold fish, consistent current for a good drift, often coupled with an undercut bank the fish love for cover. The fish will be hard up against that bank. Don't ignore the inside margin; active fish will often slide to the shallow side to feed, so keep an eye out there. Fish from the inside out. Like a run, you'll want to dice up an outside bend into cast lengths, trying not to disturb the fish in the next cast zone upstream. If you catch a fish in the bottom drift, move up to almost where you caught that fish (provided no other fish are feeding there) and hit the next drift. There will always be a line where the current is flowing next to slack water right on the bank. Your best drift will be as close to that slack water and the bank as possible. It may even be possible to reach cast and let your fly hang out in that slack water, or accomplish it with an

upstream mend. Sometimes that fly just hanging there is all it takes to make a fish go for it

Jason writes the fine blog [Fontinalis Rising](#)

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Intermediate Fly Tying:

By Al Campbell



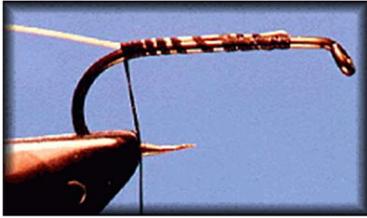
I reported in an article last month that my son has taken up rock hopping on the wild trout mountain streams. A great beauty of wild trout fishing is that they are voracious feeders and love to chase dry flies and dry fly fishing is the ultimate love of most fly fishermen. My son has reported that one of his best producers has been the elk hair caddis in sizes 16 to 12. Here is the step by step guide for tying the fly.

List of materials:

- Hook: Standard dry fly; Mustad 94840, Tiemco 100, Eagle Claw L059, Daiichi 1180. Size 10-20 For a longer fly, try a hook that's one length longer than the standard.
- Thread: 6/0 Gudebrod or equivalent, black or colored to match the body
- Tail: None, or if desired, some folks tie a short tag of red or orange poly yarn or antron.
- Body: **Anglers Choice** Llama dubbing, any other dubbing that is designed for dry flies. Color to match the body of the natural (usually brown, tan, olive or black).
- Wing: Elk hair, tied to flare slightly.
- Hackle: Brown, tan or cree saddle or neck hackle, wrapped "palmer style" over the body and ribbed down with fine gold wire.
- Rib: Fine gold wire.



Tying steps:



- 1. Start the thread and tie in a ribbing wire to the hook bend.



- 2. Dub a body of Angler's Choice Llama dubbing. I suggest this dubbing because it is microscopically hollow and floats naturally. You can use any other dubbing you like in place of the Llama dubbing.



- 3. Tie in a prepared hackle at the front of the body, curvature facing up or forward.



- 4. Wrap the hackle back to the hook bend keeping the curvature of the hackle facing forward.



- 5. Rib the hackle down to the hook with the ribbing wire. You used this same method in the woolly bugger and woolly worm.



- 6. Tie the wire off and trim the hackle and wire close to the body of the fly.



- 7. Select a clump of elk hair, remove the short hairs and fuzz, even the tips of the hair in a hair stacker and measure for length.



- 8. Hold the hair firmly in place and secure with a few loose wraps of thread behind the hook eye. Add a couple of tighter wraps of thread while holding the hair in place to cause the hair to flare a little.



- 9. Note the length of the wing and how it has flared out over the body.



- 10. Trim short the hair that extends over the hook eye.



- 11. Whip finish and thoroughly cement the head and hair where it is tied down. Palmering the hackle in the manner shown will result in a hackle that skitters easily over the water's surface without driving the fly under the water. Some tyers wrap the hackle from the back to the front of the body. This doesn't allow the fly to skitter properly and often drives the fly below the water's surface.

A fellow native Montana tyer named Al Troth designed the Elk Hair Caddis. He tied the hackle and ribbed it down in the manner shown. He also fished it by skittering it across the surface of the water in riffles leading into and out of pools. I think he had the right idea. So do a lot of fish.

GET WET: A GUIDE TO WET WADING

By [Evan Garda](#)

June 13, 2020



Wet wading and dry fly fishing are synonymous with summer. Like many anglers, when the mercury begins to rise I ditch my waders in favor of shorts and other breathable apparel. If you've never left your waders behind, I highly

suggest you try! It's also proof that you don't need a ton of gear to get started in this amazing sport. I have compiled some of my favorite options along with some other industry offerings that any angler could benefit from.

Footwear



The number one consideration I make when wet wading is my footwear. This includes my shoes, socks, and gravel guards (if applicable). Stability and traction on and around the water is paramount for safety but also makes that perfect presentation a little easier. Slipping and falling is a surefire way to spook any weary fish.

Boots

I typically wear my wading boots accompanied by wool socks and gravel guards, although there are tons of options. The stability that wading boots provide underwater is unmatched by any sandal or hiking boot that I've tried. They may not be the most lightweight option for long hikes but it's how I feel the most comfortable on the water.

Wool or synthetic socks, gravel guards, and wading boots are my choices of footwear.

If you prefer to wear wading boots I highly recommend gravel guards for two reasons. First, as their name implies, they help keep gravel and debris from getting into your boots. The other advantage is that they are typically the same thickness as the booties on waders so they will help take up space in your boots. Two options to consider are the [Orvis Neoprene Wet Wading Guard Socks](#) and the [Korkers I-DRAIN Neoprene Guard Socks](#). If you would rather not wear gravel guards, adding another set of insoles will help take up the extra room in your boots.

Sock choice is also important if you choose to wet wade in your boots. Soggy toes are never fun and the effects of standing in the water all day can be magnified by wearing cotton socks. Sticking with wool socks that naturally repel water or a purpose-built synthetic sock like the Simms Guide Wet Wading Socks would be the way to go. I personally have sworn by the [Wigwam Hiking Outdoor Socks](#) for everything from running to fishing for years.

Shoes



Orvis Men's Pro Approach Shoes Photo Courtesy of Amazon.

Orvis recently released their [Pro Approach Shoes](#), a purpose-built wet wading shoe that allows you to ditch clunky wading boots. This shoe is incredibly lightweight (the biggest downside to traditional wading boots), quick drying, breathable, and have built-in socks that function as gravel guards. These shoes are equipped with Michelin, yes the tire manufacturer, Outdoor Extreme rubber soles that are

designed to provide 43% better wet rubber traction and 25% better abrasion resistance than the competition. Other manufactures have made wet wading specific shoes like the Simms Flyweight Wet Wading Shoe, but none as purpose-built as the offering from Orvis. These might be the only real competition for my wading boots in the summer months.

Sandals

Many anglers, myself included at times, will opt for wet wading in their favorite sandals. Chacos, Teva, and Keen all make great options. After tripping on enough roots, rocks, and logs in open-toed sandals, I tend to stray away from them if I plan on covering any sort of distance that day. [Tevas](#) are typically my choice for fishing near a campsite early in the morning or meadow streams where obstacles are more limited. One advantage that [KEEN Men's Newport H2 Sandal](#) & [Women's Newport H2 Sandal](#) provide over Chacos and Tevas are the closed-toe. They may not be the most stylish sandal but they provide more protection and support while still letting you feel the cool water on a hot day. Oh, and did I mention the awesome tan lines you'll get from wearing Dad sandals all day?

Clothing



Summer is a prime opportunity to ditch your waders and get comfortable on the water.

Summer presents a lot of new opportunities to fish water that may have been frozen over or inaccessible for months.

Getting to a remote alpine lake or backcountry stream can involve a fair amount of hiking and it's always nice to wear comfortable clothing. Choosing between shorts and pants is a rather simple process for me. If I anticipate any bushwhacking or swarms of irritating insects I'll opt for quick-drying hiking pants like the [Eddie Bauer Men's Guide Pro Pants](#). There are many other hot days where I find myself



taking a dip in a plunge pool or going for a float after pounding the water with less than perfect casts. On those days, I opt for quick drying shorts like Patagonia's Baggies.

Check out the [Flylords](#)

[Store](#) for some great wet wading apparel like our synthetic t-shirts and exclusive Buffs!

It's time to ditch those jackets and layers so you can flaunt your favorite fishing shirts. Long sleeve synthetic shirts are typically my go-to whether its a more traditional fishing-style with pockets or a performance tee like the [Flylords Reel Head Performance Long Sleeve Shirt](#). Sun protection, bug protection, and breathability are key when choosing a shirt for wet wading on a hot summer afternoon. Regardless of sleeve length, I tend to stray away from cotton that takes longer to dry. A Buff and a hat typically round out my summer

wading apparel. Buff's are great for not only keeping the sun off of your neck and face, but also protecting you from swarms of insects.

Waterproof Gear



The Fishpond Thunderhead Submersible Lumbar pack is the perfect wet wading companion.

Afternoon rain showers become the norm in the summer so choosing a waterproof pack or bag is a great idea. I personally have been using the [Fishpond](#)

[Thunderhead Submersible Lumbar](#) pack for a few months now and can't say enough about it. This thing has plenty of storage for a camera, a few beers, a rain jacket, and all is that it is completely submersible thanks to the TIZIP closure. I have total faith that this pack will keep my gear safe. If you prefer a little more space, the [Fishpond Thunderhead Submersible Backpack](#) and [Thunderhead Submersible Sling](#) may be a better option.

Get Out There

Wet wading is an absolute blast during the summer when water and air temperatures rise. If you are just giving it a try for the first time, I hope these suggestions help you along your way.

Article by Evan Garda, he is on the Content Team here at Fly Lords. He can be found chasing trout throughout the west with his trusty fly rod. Check out his adventures at [@evangarda](#).

CASTING CAROLINAS 2020 EVENTS

October 9-11 NC Fall Retreat, Lake Logan Center
October 24 Tie One On Tournament in Cherokee

Casting Carolinas is a free program for women cancer survivors. To apply for a future retreat or to volunteer to help out, sign up at [www.castingcarolinas.com](#).

EAGLE ROCK CAMP

When you are shopping at Amazon, they will make a donation to the Eagle Rock Camp for Veterans at no cost to you if you access by using:

https://smile.amazon.com/.../s/V45OZCL3W.../ref=smi_cl_wl_rd_cl

You can also select Eagle Rock Camp to receive each time you give by going to [smile.amazon.com](#). Where it asks you to select a charity, type in Eagle Rock Camp and select it. For all future purchases from Amazon, enter through [smile.amazon.com](#) and it will automatically make the donation.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR POACHERS

Even with the Hatchery Supported Water open for anglers who want to catch and keep, trout poaching in all our

waters is a significant and growing concern. It's gotten so bad that NCWRC had trouble "pre-loading" the Hatchery Supported waters with fish because the poachers would just come right in and clean them out.

You'd think poachers would mostly operate in the dead of night, or far away from other anglers. That's not always the case. According to officials from the NCWRC and DuPont State Forest, a lot of poaching takes place in a crowd where the poacher has the benefit of blending in.

In visiting with Erick Folk from DuPont, I learned that one guy was apprehended with a flyrod in hand. Down one leg of his waders he'd stuffed a mini spin casting rig loaded with a treble-hook crank bait and down the other he had stuffed you guessed it several fish he'd caught and killed in the freshly stocked DH waters. That's not only stupid, illegal and expensive - it's just plain icky.

"Poaching includes the illegal taking of game, fish, plants, trespassing, littering, theft, and destruction of property. With this new program and partnership, we can work together to protect our resources for the future enjoyment of all North Carolinians."

Lt. B.J. Meyer, assistant training director and communications supervisor for the Commission's Law Enforcement Division.

If you see someone poaching, we encourage you to report the violation to the NCWRC. They even have a program rewarding those who turn in poachers (\$100 to \$1,000, paid out of the fine assessed) and there are four ways to do it: If you see someone poaching, we encourage you to report the violation to the NCWRC. They even have a program rewarding those who turn in poachers (\$100 to \$1,000, paid out of the fine assessed) and there are four ways to do it:

Via website:

<https://www.tipsubmit.com/webtipforms/webform.aspx?id=127&AgencyID=1304>

Via mobile app: To install the free app, search for "TipSoft" or "TipSubmit" in the Google Play store (Android) or the Apple App Store (iOS).

Via text: To submit an anonymous tip through text messaging, type WILDTIP and your message, then send it to 274637 (CRIMES on most cell phones). Texts are anonymous, so senders must identify themselves in the body of the text in order to claim a reward. Message and data rates may apply.

Via phone: To submit a tip via phone, for reward or anonymously, dial 1-855-WILDTIP. The hotline is available 24 hours a day to handle calls from concerned citizens. This phone number is only for poaching-specific violations.

For all other wildlife violations, questions and concerns, call 1-800-662-7137.

For more information on the program visit:
<http://www.ncwildlife.org/News/wildlife-resources-commission-introduces-new-turn-in-poachers-program>.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS INVITED

If you have a great day on the river, please send us a photo to share at HkyNCTU@gmail.com If you have success on your trip, please share it with us.

Also we invite you to let us know of your upcoming events related to fly fishing for posting in our newsletter at the above email address.

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It's All in the Heart

Posted on [April 27, 2020](#) / by [Louis Cahill](#)

Photos by Louis Cahill



Bill didn't know anything about fly fishing.

That's not my judgment; he told me so. In fact, it was the first thing he told me. Standing on the bow of the skiff, staring into a Bahamian flat, looking for a fish he'd only heard of, he was as out of his element as a cat on roller skates. A tire salesman from Wisconsin, he'd walked into the local fly shop and told the guy behind the counter, *"I want to catch a tarpon on a fly. What do I need?"*

The shop guy told him you don't just buy a fly rod and catch a tarpon. He knew about the Gink and Gasoline Bonefish School and said,

"Go on this guy's trip. He'll teach you what you need to know to catch a tarpon."

When Bill told me that story, I thought, hell yes! I'll fish with this guy any day. I don't care if he doesn't know which end of the rod to hold.

The first day Bill and I fished together was not a great day for a beginner. We had some sun but the wind was howling. I'm sure Bill had some thoughts about how much he'd spent on that new eight-weight rod, that must have felt worthless in that wind. When I stepped up and punched my clearing cast into the wind, he moaned,

"Jesus! Right into the wind," and rested his face in his hands.

I've heard folks, mostly folks who know less than Bill about fly fishing say, "It's all in the wrist." Of course, it isn't. It's no more in the wrist than it is in the rod, the line or the fly. It's not in a book or a video. It isn't even in your head. Fly fishing is in your heart, and I didn't have to spend much time with Bill to see that his was full.

Bill didn't want to catch a tarpon because it would make him cool, or even because it was a challenge. He didn't want to do it so he could post the photo on Facebook or brag to his buddies. His buddies wouldn't even know what a tarpon was. Bill wanted to catch his tarpon for one simple reason. His doctor had told him he was going to die. Soon, and for whatever reason, catching a tarpon on the fly was the one thing he wanted to do first.



When Bill told me that, the weight of it came down on me like a falling piano. He already had a tarpon trip to Belize booked. He'd showed up in the Bahamas so I could teach him to catch a tarpon. A skill that takes most anglers years to develop, and I had one week and ten other anglers to teach. I couldn't bear the thought of letting him down.

I must have seemed like a drill sergeant, the way I pushed Bill that week. So much information to cram in. So many variables, so many contradictions. So much, "Yes, unless, if so, then..." I don't know how he made sense of it but his concentration never lapsed. He never got discouraged, he never took his mind off of that singular goal. Bill caught his first bonefish on the fly that day, and plenty more, but he never stopped thinking about that tarpon.



It was a great week but a week goes by pretty fast. Faster I imagine, when you have cancer. Bill had learned a lot in a short time but, when we shook hands and said goodbye at the airport, I was not confident that he was going to get his tarpon, or that I would ever hear from Bill again.

But fly fishing is in the heart, and the heart is full of surprises.

It was raining sideways when Bill showed up at the dock. His Belizean guides hoped he'd—no, expected—he'd cancel. They'd never met Bill though, and the panga was ankle deep in rain water by the time they reached the first flat. The guide said there would be no tarpon but maybe they could catch a bonefish. Bill was not excited about that but went along with the program. Before long he'd put his new found skills to work and was holding a bonefish. Not as big as the ones he'd caught in the Bahamas. Still, a fish, but not what he'd come for. He tried one more time to impress on the head guide that he really had come for tarpon. The guide gave in and fired up the motor to go on, what seemed, a fool's errand.

It was shortly after lunch, still pissing rain and gray when Bill made his next cast, stripped the fly and felt the eat. The water exploded as the big silver fish leapt into the air. It was no more complicated than that. He landed the fish and it was done. The last thing he wanted out of life. The slate was clean. The bucket list complete. Only one thing left to do.

Of course, it was only mid afternoon, and Bill didn't feel like dying, so he did the only logical thing. He stepped back up on the bow and stripped off some line. He got into his ready position, just like I'd taught him, and when his guide called for a shot, he made the cast.

"I never saw the fish," he told me later. "I knew it must be good, 'cause the guides were whooping and high fiving."



Bill had never even heard of a grand slam and he didn't know why the guides were so excited about this fish that just looked like a big jack to him. The guides were excited though, so they exchanged high fives, had a beer and called it a day.

So, a tire salesman from Wisconsin walks into a fly shop and says, I want to catch a tarpon. It sounds like a joke, until he goes to Belize and catches a grand slam. How do you top that? Your doctor tells you that your cancer is in remission, that's

how.

Bill and I remained friends and emailed once in a while for years. He quit the job selling tires and spent a lot of time in Belize. He got saltier and browner and much better with a fly rod. Last June, when I announced a last-minute cancelation for the Bonefish School, I was thrilled to get an email from Bill saying he'd take the spot. We hadn't finished our first Kalik on the beach when he told me his cancer was back.

"Do I have time for one more fishing trip?" He'd asked the doctor.

"Why not," the doctor replied.

Every morning when I rolled out of my room, Bill was sitting on the beach watching the sun rise. His heart still full, but heavy. You could see him soaking it in, slowing every second with all of his will. Wondering how many more sunrises he'd see. He was weaker than before. Not as sure of his footing. He fished well, but he fished with an eerie resolve. Not sadness exactly, but with an informed perspective. This time he knew what he was doing and that he was likely doing it for the last time.



It was shortly after that trip that I got an email from Simms, an advertisement—you might even call it junk mail. The graphic said, "You only have one life. Fish it well." It was the only time my inbox ever made me cry. Fly fishing is in the heart. I can't explain it. I can't rationalize it. I can't even justify it and if it's in your heart I don't have to. My friend Bill may not be the most skilled angler I have ever known but I hope that one day, if I work very hard, maybe I will have a heart as full as his.

Whether we realize it or not, we all take our lives one day at a time. It's been almost a year and Bill is responding well to treatment, feeling good and planning his next fishing trip. I hope I'm there to see it.

Louis Cahill

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