



# The American Fly Fisher

*Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*

FALL 1999

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 4

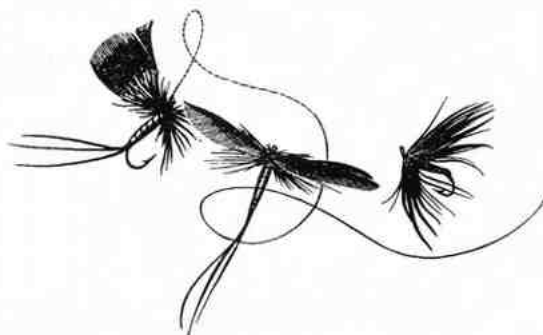


Illustration by Alex and Charles Jardine  
from *The Essential G. E. M. Skues*.

## A Saint, A Scout, and Skues

I FIRST ENTERED THE BASILICA of San Zeno several years ago. My husband was doing business in Verona, and I took time to visit Italy and get a city fix. The twelfth-century church dedicated to the city's patron saint (a previous church of San Zeno at the site had been destroyed in 900 A.D.) was the first of half a dozen churches I visited, and I was most taken with it. Did it make the deepest impression on me because it was the first impression? Or was it the fourteenth-century marble statue of a laughing San Zeno that won my heart? San Zeno, with a fish hanging from the staff in his left hand?

Alvaro Masseini discusses the importance of a particular depiction of San Zeno in the history of fly fishing in this issue's Notes & Comments piece, "Fly Fishing in Early Renaissance Italy? A Few Revealing Documents." Considering the Valsesian-style rod that appears in a 1538 painting of the saint by Jacopo da Bassano, Masseini theorizes the historical significance of da Bassano's interpretation in light of the biographical information at hand about the artist. His article begins on page 10.

It has been delightful working with Douglas R. Precourt over the last several months. His article, "Fishing with Baden-Powell: Stories of the Chief Scout and His Love of Angling," begins on page 14. Having personally led a scouting-free existence, this history—no doubt familiar to many—was new to me. Precourt has focused on Lord Baden-Powell's fly-fishing life, culling various stories and quotes from the writings of both

Baden-Powell and his daughter, Heather. The paper's research was completed as part of Precourt's advanced scout leader training.

*The Essential G. E. M. Skues*, edited by Kenneth Robson, was published in 1998 by the Lyons Press under a special arrangement with A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd. Robert Berls, editor of the *Bulletin of the Anglers' Club of New York* and the American correspondent for the *Flyfishers' Journal*, wrote the afterword to the book. We are pleased to include that afterword in this issue, beginning on page 2. Berls kindly chose some excerpts of Skues's writings that were included in Robson's book; these appear with his brief introduction at the end of the article. The excerpts offer examples of Skues's then-original thinking about the nymph and nymph fishing on chalk streams.

From the stacks of our library, we bring you Andrew Lang's "The Confessions of a Duffer," a humorous look at the everyday perils and frustrations of fly fishing. This piece, which begins on page 21, is a part of Lang's 1891 book, *Angling Sketches*, a collection of his experiences fishing in his native Scotland. And on pages 12 and 13, Executive Director Gary Tanner shares some photos from the Museum's first-ever fly-fishing saltwater tournament.

So welcome to the Fall 1999 issue. It's a good one. Be prepared.

KATHLEEN ACHOR  
EDITOR



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ON THE COVER: Lord Baden-Powell fishing the Waikato River in New Zealand. Photo courtesy of the Auckland Weekly News.

*The American Fly Fisher* is published

four times a year by the Museum at P.O. Box 42, Manchester, Vermont 05254.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The American Fly Fisher*, P.O. Box 42, Manchester, Vermont 05254.

EMAIL: amff@together.net WEBSITE: www.amff.com

# The Importance of G. E. M. Skues: An Angler-Writer for Today

by Robert H. Berls

IN 1998, the Lyons Press, by special arrangement with A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd., published *The Essential G. E. M. Skues*, edited by Kenneth Robson. The collection includes some of the best of Skues's writings from his books, articles, unpublished manuscripts, and correspondence. Robert Berls, editor of the *Bulletin of the Anglers' Club of New York* and the American correspondent for the *Flyfishers' Journal*, wrote an afterword to the book that we would like to share with you here. Additionally, Mr. Berls has chosen a few passages from the book, which follow.

—EDITOR



*Fishing on the Itchen by Winnal gas works, 1935. This was a favorite reach of Skues, and his ashes were scattered nearby.*

**G**E. M. SKUES may be drifting from our ken; this is not as it should be for the most important fly-fishing writer of the twentieth century. This essay sets out his fundamental importance to fly fishing for trout at the end of the century.

In 1947, Skues was corresponding with a French angler and wanted to send an experimental beetle pattern to him. Skues delayed replying while he combed the meadows along the River Nadder, where he was then living, hoping to find a specimen of the actual beetle to send along with his imitation. He noted at that time of year, the small thistles with pale pinkish flowers that bloom in the meadows should be covered with the insects, but he thought that cold weather must have killed them off at an earlier stage. "For I have hunted the meadows for six days since the thistles were in bloom and have not found a single specimen." Skues was then a month short of his eighty-ninth birthday. The anecdote reveals the man: the observant eye, the persistence, the inquiring mind, the experimental angler. Though no longer able to fish or tie flies, he was still searching for a better way and trying to aid another angler.

Skues began fishing the River Itchen in 1883, by which time the dry fly was already established there—since the 1870s and probably the 1860s. In 1885, H. S. Hall wrote about the dry fly for the Badminton Library, and Frederic Halford published his first two books in 1886 and 1889, "after which," Skues wrote, "the dry fly on chalk streams became at first a rage and then a religion." John Waller Hills said in his fine autobiography, *My*

*Sporting Life* (1934), that he bought Halford's *Floating Flies* in 1886: "I do not know how often I read it. I believe I knew it by heart. So clear was the writing, so unimpassioned, so convincing that I, like most others, took it as gospel." Hills added "no angler of this age can realize the effect Halford's books had upon our generation." Of Halford's 1886 book, he said it "was a revolution and a revelation." Skues wrote of Halford's second, 1889 book, *Dry Fly Fishing*: "I think I was at one with most anglers of the day in feeling that the last word had been written on the art of chalk-stream fishing."

Skues later lamented that "one result of the triumph of the dry fly . . . was the obliteration from the minds of men . . . of all the wet-fly lore which had served many generations of chalk stream anglers well." Anglers thought that only the dry fly could be effectively used on chalk streams. Halford asserted that the wet fly was not successful on chalk streams and that it was hopeless on hot, bright, calm days. He believed that the wet-fly angler who fished the chalk streams with an open mind would become a convert to the dry fly. Skues thought that Halford did more than anyone to discredit the wet fly on chalk streams.

But Skues had two advantages over Halford. As a young angler, he had spent much of his off-season time in the British Museum reading the fly-fishing literature and was aware of the wet-fly history on the chalk streams. In *The Way of a Trout with a Fly*, he said there is "scarcely a book on trout-fly dressing and trout fishing which I have not studied and analyzed." Also, Skues had fished the wet fly on British north-country rivers (as had Hills). Halford began his fly fishing directly with the dry

All photos courtesy The Lyons Press





*Skues in his fishing garb.*

fly and, as Skues observed, there is "no evidence Halford made any study of the older writers on fly dressing."

Skues also had conversations with one of the last of the old wet-fly men on the Itchen. He learned how they filled good baskets fishing downstream with long 13- or 14-foot rods, keeping their light hair lines off the water as much as possible, and drifting their wet flies over trout lying at the tails of the weed beds.

The method didn't appeal to Skues. A downstream wind was needed, since the line was too light to cast into the wind, and without a wind ripple on the super-clear chalk stream water, the downstream angler was exposed to the trout. Skues couldn't pick his days, so when he could get to the Itchen, it might be bright, calm, and the water glassy smooth.

### A HAPPY ACCIDENT ON THE ITCHEN

Skues's first wet-fly experience on the Itchen came by accident. In 1892, he wrote, "after some patient years of dry-fly practice, I had my first experi-

ence of the efficacy of the wet fly on the Itchen." His wet-fly success occurred when dry flies with inadequate hackles were immediately seized by trout when they sank after having been refused when floating. Several years later, after another accidental success with the wet fly on a difficult German limestone river, Skues began to think seriously about the systematic use of the wet fly on chalk streams.

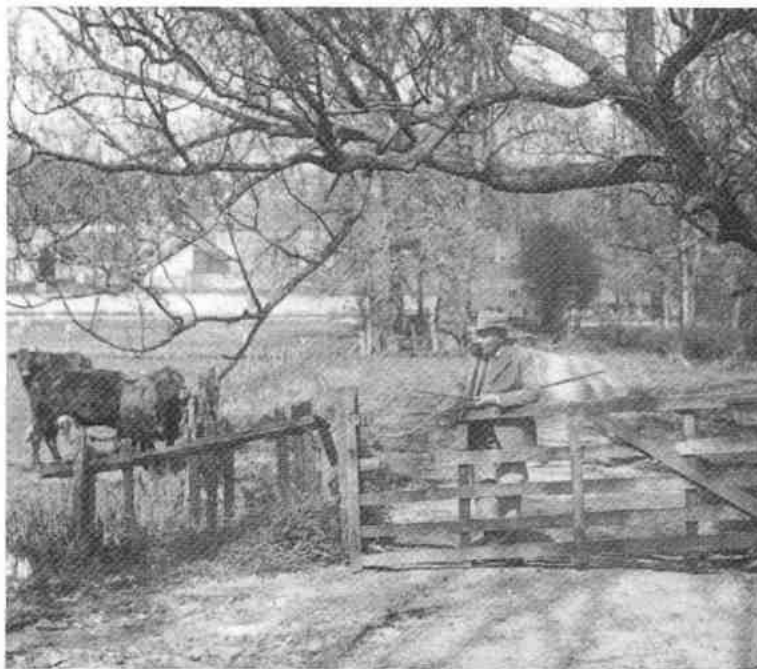
Skues reasoned that if he were to succeed with the wet fly, and having eschewed the old downstream technique, it must be by a wet-fly modification of the dry-fly method of upstream casting to individual fish. He began with the bulgers.

For many years, Skues wrote, bulgers were the despair of his life. The trout would be seen actively feeding under the surface, swirling left and right, thereby making a boil or bulge in the surface. Skues cited a letter written to *The Fishing Gazette* in which the writer complained that if the "trout were bulging you might as well chuck your hat at them" as a fly. Halford had advised dry-fly anglers to leave bulging fish alone. But Skues had

fished the Tweed where the trout bulged all the time, and the Tweed wet-fly men had success with them. So Skues showed the Itchen trout an old Tweed wet pattern, the Greenwell's Glory, well soaked, cast upstream to the feeding fish "like a floating fly" but sunk, and had success with it.

Skues sent a short article to *The Field* in 1899, which he regarded as the "first public statement of the modern theory of wet-fly fishing on chalk streams . . ." The article, modestly titled "A Wet-Fly Suggestion," described his antidote to the bitter complaints of dry-fly men that the trout are bulging more each year, taking nymphs as they come up to hatch. So Skues asked, "What is the moral for the dry-fly man? . . . When your fish are bulging give it to them wet." In the past, he observed, "anglers used to get good baskets on Itchen and Test with the wet fly. They will have to come back to it again. Someday they will learn to combine . . . wet-fly science and dry-fly art . . ."

In the same year as Skues's article, Sir Edward Grey published his classic book, *Fly Fishing*, and opined that north-country wet-fly tactics will not work on the



*Skues at the gate between Nun's Walk and the fishery.  
Abbots Barton Farm is behind him.*

southern chalk streams, and in any case, he knew the wet fly well enough to be sure that it had "very narrow limits" on a chalk stream. Grey was wrong.

In 1900, Skues began fishing a fly that later became famous, the Tup's Indispensable. The originator of the fly intended it for a spinner (it was a wingless, cock's hackled pattern), but Skues discovered that dressed with a shorter, softer hackle and fished wet, it worked better with the bulgers than his winged wet Greenwell's. When soaked, "it was a remarkable imitation of a nymph he got from a trout's mouth." It became the foundation of a small number of nymph patterns. In his early experiments, Skues thought his wet flies were taken for hatching nymphs. But then he found nymphs in trout's mouths "with no show of wings." This led him to experiment with short-hackled, wingless patterns dressed to imitate nymphs.

Skues always found "that pernicious insect," the blue-winged olive hatch, to be difficult. Dry flies didn't work for him. He tied his first specific nymph imitation for this hatch. With a dubbed body of olive seal's and bear's furs and a turn of a tiny blue hackle, he had immediate success with it after the trout, as usual, declined his floaters. But "on this

subject," he noted, "I am only at the beginning of inquiry."

Other anglers had not "suspected the propensity of chalk stream trout," Skues observed, "to feed largely on nymphs (outside the practice of bulging)." Most chalk-stream anglers were unaware that "for hours and days at a time the trout were feeding on nymphs and were letting the natural hatched-out insect go by." These anglers kept casting dry flies at "trout which were seen to be breaking the surface." Skues's observations of the overwhelming propensity of trout to feed on nymphs were confirmed by his analyses of stomach contents. "Up to the present," he wrote in a 1930 article, "I do not think there has been a trout whose stomach has yielded two percent of winged duns. Nymphs, nymphs, nymphs, all nymphs."

He thought that the vast majority of even highly experienced anglers were ignorant of the nymph's existence, its form and character. Halford, however, was not one of them. Skues noted that Halford's analyses of stomach contents revealed to him that the vast bulk of the trout's food was under water. But Halford ignored the implication because he believed the nymph could not be imitated. In his 1886 book, *Floating Flies*,

Halford advised the dry-fly angler to avoid trout feeding on larvae, shrimp, and snail. And in his 1889 book, *Dry Fly Fishing*, he pronounced that head and tail rises of trout were a bad sign because it indicated that the trout were feeding on larvae close to the surface. He came to warn dry-fly anglers off bulgers and tailers too.

John Waller Hills remembers in *My Sporting Life* that when he first started to fish the Ramsbury water on the Kennet in 1902, the purist "reigned a despot: nothing was admitted but the dry fly. Nymphs were not dreamed of." Hills continued: "Halford's very real invention and advance had reached its limit and had run itself out. We went to sleep over our oars. We became set and inflexible and it was not until we read Mr. Skues's *Minor Tactics* in 1910 that we woke up." After describing recent changes in dry flies—his introduction of the spent spinner and new dry-fly designs for duns—he turned back to Skues. "But the greatest change was started by Mr. Skues's book. I was fascinated by it . . ." He also noted that Skues's reform made way slowly. And Halford did not yield an inch.

In his last book, *The Dry Fly Man's Handbook* of 1913 (he was dead the next year), Halford gave what amounts to a



"There's the first  
blue-winged olive of the season." 1923



Fishing the Back Stream in 1921. The bottom of  
Duck's Nest Spinney with aqueduct.

reply to *Minor Tactics*. "I am told, however, that there is a school of fly fishermen who only fish the sunk fly over a feeding fish or one in position if it will not take a floating fly. This . . . is a third method of wet-fly fishing, the other two being the more ordinary of fishing the water with sunk fly either upstream or downstream. Candidly, I have never seen this method in practice, and I have grave doubts as to its efficacy."

### THE NYMPH'S EFFICACY

Skues had no doubt as to the nymph's efficacy. In 1939, he reflected that his method of nymph fishing "constitutes as real if not as great an advance in the art of fly fishing as the dry fly indubitably did. It has the merit of superseding or getting over serious difficulties and limitations of the dry fly . . ."

Skues's great insight was that trout in chalk streams mainly eat nymphs, including during hatches, and not the adult, emerged flies. He developed the flies and the fishing method to implement that insight. Halford's dry flies were a final flowering of the Victorian dry fly, which was essentially the old winged wet fly made "vertical." But nymphs tied specifically as imitations of larvae were new and radical. No one else

did this before Skues with the exception of George Selwyn Marryat, the gray eminence behind Halford, who had tied nymph imitations in 1883 but soon abandoned them. Marryat probably fished them downstream in the old wet-fly style. (George Holland, the renowned professional fly tyer in Winchester, who dressed the nymphs for Marryat according to his specifications, told Skues that Marryat never caught any trout with them.) Skues had a truly modern mind, and he saw, generations ahead, what is becoming the predominant approach today in fishing hatches on fertile, insect-rich streams on either side of the Atlantic. The combination of low-floating dry flies, so-called emergers or nymphs fished in the surface or fractionally below it, and in the upstream style to rising fish, owes its origin to Skues.

As with many profound innovations, Skues's discovery and development of nymphs and his method of fishing them seems simple in retrospect, but it wasn't. The great Marryat didn't do it, Halford couldn't do it, Skues did. He had his own early failure. Skues remembered that as early as 1888 he "was already intrigued by the idea of representing the nymph artificially," but like Marryat, Skues also abandoned it "for a long time, discour-

aged no doubt by the failure of G. S. Marryat and Holland . . ." But Skues returned to the idea, persisted, and changed the world of fly fishing for trout.

Skues thought that his nymph fishing was a new art, or perhaps he thought it was "fairer to say, a new phase of an old and largely forgotten art." John Waller Hills was right that Skues led a counter-reformation of the wet fly against the dry fly, but only partly right, for the fully aware and deliberate representation (Skues always preferred that word to imitation) of the nymph was new. So it was a counter-reformation with a new theology and not just a revival of the old faith.

Skues had always maintained that the nymph was supplemental to the dry fly. At the time of publication of *Minor Tactics*, I think he believed it; my judgment is that he no longer did by his later writings, but maintained the assertion as a defensive position. Later in life my reading is that he saw the nymph as the central method of chalk-stream fishing. In the fourth 1949 edition of *The Way of a Trout with a Fly*, he added a chapter called "The Constant Nymph," referring to the predilection of trout to feed on nymphs over duns—"the strong attraction of the constant nymph." It was

"nymphs, nymphs, nymphs, all nymphs" as he declared in his 1930 article. In the posthumously published *Itchen Memories* (1951), Skues said in the preface that "for several years past, therefore, I have only fished the floating fly when I was definitely convinced that that was what the trout were taking . . ." In "The Constant Nymph," Skues summed up: "... the angler who offers his trout a proper pattern of nymph stands a better chance of sport than does one who offers it a floating fly." He never abandoned the dry fly, of course; there were times it fished best when the trout actually were on the emerged duns (and, of course, spinners), and he still enjoyed fishing dry flies. He came then, I believe, to feel that the nymph was the major method on chalk streams, not an auxiliary to the dry fly. Why didn't he say so explicitly? Because he knew he was holding a red flag in his hands and he did not want to wave it, too, at the dry-fly men. So he maintained his deflationary title in 1921 when he subtitled his book *And Some Further Studies in Minor Tactics*, and he maintained his deflationary position in the 1939 statement cited earlier, so as to try to turn away wrath with a soft word. He knew that the statement quoted from the preface to *Itchen Memories* would not be published until after his death.

Halford was long gone, but his followers remained and they were still a problem for Skues. The members of the Abbots Barton syndicate on the Itchen, to which he belonged, came to disapprove of his use of the nymph; then Skues was "a minority of one," as he put it, against restocking the water, and guest days were gradually restricted until he was required to share a rod with a guest or let the guest do all the fishing. Skues wrote "more and more I resented these restrictions," and he resigned his rod on the Itchen in 1938 where he had fished for fifty-six years.

That same year, Skues took part in a "star chamber" of a debate (as Donald Overfield has described it) at the Flyfishers' Club, which essentially put on trial his life's work in establishing the nymph as an effective and ethical method on chalk streams. Opinion at the debate went against Skues. To then make a claim for the nymph as the central technique of chalk-stream fishing and the demotion of the dry fly to second rank would have only intensified Skues's problems and brought them on earlier.

Skues kept other things to himself.

- Gordon Mackie wrote in *Trout and Salmon* magazine some years ago that Skues knew the "induced take" (moving the nymph slightly as it comes close to a trout to stimulate a take), but avoided writing about it for fear that any intentional movement of the fly would have aroused cries of his using the old downstream and dragging wet fly.
- Skues had corresponded extensively with James Leisenring, and probably was aware of the "lift" technique, but if so, he again refrained from writing of it.
- Frank Sawyer, in his 1958 book, *Nymphs and the Trout*, had criticized Skues for writing that nymphs floated inertly in the surface. Sawyer argued that there is always some movement in the nymph. But Sawyer's statement is only partly true: periods of vigorous movement to break from the shuck alternate with inert rest. The struggle to escape the shuck is not continuous. This is certainly true of the nymphs of the *Baetis* and *Ephemerella* genera in insect-rich, flat-water spring creeks in the United States. These genera also would have been the two most important to Skues and the chalk streams. Henrik Thomsen, the Danish fly tyer, made the same observation of alternating struggle and inert drift in his

excellent 1981 paper, "G. E. M. Skues: The Conservative Rebel."

Skues was too close an observer not to have been aware of any characteristic movement of nymphs as they drifted in or just below the surface. His assertion of a comprehensive inertia may have been debate-tactical. If Skues had admitted that nymphs move as they drift under the surface, he would have yielded the argument over the effectiveness of nymph fishing to Halford, who, of course, asserted that nymphs could not be imitated because of their vigorous wiggling movement. Skues needed to maintain his no-movement assertion, or his counter-argument to Halford would have been severely weakened—as a debating matter, not in actuality.

Vincent Marinaro criticized Skues for not "emancipating" the dry fly as he did the wet. I do not know whether Skues could have done so, but he was not likely to focus on it after 1921 or so, when the dry fly became less and less important to his thinking. The dry fly wasn't central to him or to his estimation of generally effective chalk-stream fishing anymore. His awareness of "the constant nymph" pushed aside the dry fly's importance.

Skues thought that many dry flies, winged floating patterns, were only taken by the trout because of their resemblance to nymphs anyway, the wings being ignored. He believed that nymphs were far more precise imitations than wet flies and "probably more exact than floating artificial flies are of the floating natural duns or spinners." He was convinced that it was more important to offer the right nymph to the trout than the right dry fly "for the trout gets a clearer view of its subaqueous food than it does of its surface prey." These are not the considerations of a man who believes the dry fly to be central to chalk-stream fishing and the nymph its auxiliary.



John Waller Hills described how the trout beat him one evening on the Test, with Skues as his guest, in the blue-winged olive hatch. Skues saw that the "trout were taking not the hatched fly, but the hatching nymph, on or just below the surface. A difficult thing to spot: fish are not moving about as when bulging, but stationary, apparently rising. He had seen this, I had not. He had caught fish, I had not." Skues was a master at reading the message of the rise form.

Skues wrote in 1939: "The due appreciation of how a trout is rising forms the very essence of fishing, whether it be with floating fly or artificial nymph—and it is often no easy matter." Prior to Skues, there had been "no systematic attempt [my emphasis] to differentiate the varying forms of the rise of trout" in angling literature. In *The Way of a Trout with a Fly*, Skues analyzed the types of rises because he believed that "close study of the form of the rise may often give the observant angler a clue, otherwise lacking, to the type of fly which the trout is taking, and to the stage and condition in which he is taking it."

Norman McCaskie described "Skues's differentiation of the rise forms of trout as the greatest feat of pure observation in the annals of fishing." Even given that McCaskie, no mean angler or writer himself, was a friend of Skues, this high praise still stands. Skues's differentiation of rise forms was a direct influence on Vincent Marinaro, who thought that recognizing the various rise forms by the trout fisherman "is as important as a fingerprint or footprint in human affairs."

### SKUES THE TACTICIAN

Skues was a great fly-fishing tactician, probably the best ever for the kind of fishing he loved: the fertile, insect-rich, flat-water streams of the chalk valleys. Reading Skues on tactics today is like going fishing on a great and challenging

trout stream with a friend who is the best angler you have ever met. Whether it's Skues showing you why the left bank, for a right-handed angler, with his rod-hand on the inshore side, is the bank of advantage, not a handicap; or joining his adventures with the alder fly on a German limestone river; or why a day blowing a gale, and a large dry fly, is the recipe for catching a big trout if you know where one lies; reading him on tactics is a delight, never dated, and absorbingly interesting.

Skues gave the nymph its myth, as Datus Proper said Vincent Marinaro did for terrestrials. But Skues was much concerned with terrestrials, too: he had a floating red ant imitation that would have satisfied Marinaro's criteria even though Marinaro said he could find none in the American literature and nothing acceptable in the British. Halford's ant, a whimsical Victorian version, looked like an upwinged mayfly imitation. (That may explain why Theodore Gordon thought the Royal Coachman was an ant imitation.) Skues was also much taken with beetles; he used and devised several imitations, fished both dry and wet. He ignored grasshoppers, but they are a hot-summer insect, not a usual event in Britain. Ants and beetles flourish everywhere, however.

As terrestrials have assumed large importance in modern fly fishing for trout, especially in the United States, so has the soft hackle fly. Soft hackles are prominent now in fishing hatches by both dry fly and nymph fishermen. Skues pointed out that "the hackle provides flotation and imitates wings and legs. The soft tips of the hackles make a far less alarming drag than does a cock's hackle." Datus Proper said that "Skues deserves much of the credit for bringing the soft-hackle design to the attention of modern dry-fly and nymph fishers."

In Colonel E. W. Harding's "splendid

treatise," as Marinaro called it, entitled *The Flyfisher and the Trout's Point of View* (1931), Harding noted that Skues was the first to discuss the trout's point of view systematically: that is, what the trout sees and how it sees it. Harding said that Skues's *The Way of a Trout with a Fly* was the primary inspiration for his own book. He added that "I doubt whether the value of *The Way of a Trout with a Fly* is realized even yet, nor how it must eventually affect the form of fly fishing literature."

Skues's writings on nymphs, rise forms, and the trout's point of view have directly and indirectly influenced the mainstream of writing about imitative fly fishing for trout in the twentieth century from Harding to Marinaro, Datus Proper, Clarke and Goddard, Gary Borger, and Gary LaFontaine. Harding was thought a crank on the chalk streams, and his book languished until after World War II, when Marinaro picked it up and began the dry-fly revolution of our time. Datus Proper, after acknowledging the personal influence of Marinaro and his writings, said that "only G. E. M. Skues has made a comparable impact on my thinking." Proper was referring to his own landmark book, *What the Trout Said*.

*The Way of a Trout with a Fly*, in addition to the profound insights it provides (Gary Borger said that it "can never age because it provides so many basic insights into trout fishing"), became so influential because it laid out an agenda for future studies in imitative trout fishing. That was a great thing to have done.

Alfred North Whitehead, in a famous remark, said that the safest, general characterization of European philosophy is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. In many fundamental respects, modern studies in imitative fly fishing for trout are a series of footnotes to Skues.



## Excerpts from *The Essential G. E. M. Skues*

*The following excerpts from The Essential G.E.M. Skues illustrate Skues's intellectual fascination with chalk-stream fishing and how the nymph and nymph fishing came to be in his mind and experience. His repeated failures with floating flies during hatches and his several successful accidents when his flies sank gradually led him to the intentional use of wet flies cast to surface or near-surface feeding trout. These experiences brought him to the conscious development of nymph imitations. He saw nymph fishing as a new phase of an old art, and he was generations ahead of his time. The oh-so-modern fishing of "emergers" was another aspect of his innovations.*

*Skues's original thinking about imitative fly fishing for trout is why John Goddard and Brian Clarke called him "the greatest liberator of the human mind in fly-fishing this century."*

—ROBERT H. BERLS

### THE WHY

Why does he take the artificial fly? In my opinion, in the vast majority of cases because he supposes it to be his food. On occasion the motive may be curiosity, jealousy, pugnacity or sheer excess of high spirits. But if I did not believe that the trout took the artificial fly not only as food but as food of the kind on which he is feeding, the real interest of trout fishing would be gone, so far as I am concerned. That is the reason why, for me, trout fishing on chalk streams transcends in interest any other kind of trout fishing, for on streams where the fly is comparatively scarce trout are more apt to take any kind of insect that may be on the menu, and are to be taken freely on patterns which do not represent the fly on the water. But chalk streams are rich in insect food. The duns come out in droves, and the fish show a discriminating determination to take only one pattern at a time, which convinces me that they mean to have nothing which does not satisfy them as being that on which they are feeding. Even on chalk streams there are occasions when there are exceptions to this rule, but in my experience, stretching over thirty-five years, these occasions are few.

From *The Way of a Trout with a Fly* (1921)

Illustration by Alex and Charles Jardine

Adapted by permission from *The Essential G. E. M. Skues*, The Lyons Press, 123 West 18th Street, New York, NY 10011. Copyright 1998.

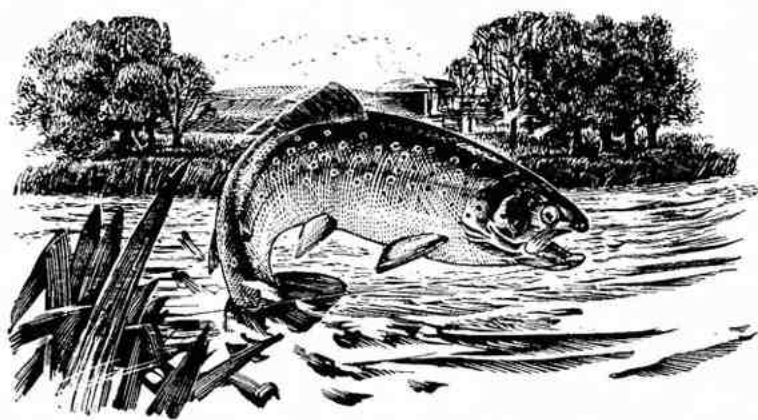
### OF THE BEGINNING OF THINGS

It was in the year 1892, after some patient years of dry-fly practice, that I had my first experience of the efficacy of the wet fly on the Itchen. It was a September day, at once blazing and muggy. Black gnats were thick upon the water, and from 9:30 A.M. or so the trout were smutting freely. In those days, with *Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice* at my fingers' ends, I began with the prescription, Pink Wickham on 16 hook, followed it with Silver Sedge on 16 hook, Red Quill on 16 hook, Orange Bumble and Furnace. I also tried two or three varieties of smut, and I rang the changes more than once.

My gut was gossamer, and, honestly, I don't think I made more mistakes than usual; but three o'clock arrived, and my creel was still "clean," when I came to a bend from which ran, through a hatch, a small current of water which fed a carrier. Against the grating which protected the hatch hole was generally a large pile of weed, and today was no exception. Against it collected a film of scum, alive with black gnats, and among them I saw a single dark olive dun lying spent. I had seen no others of his kind, but I knotted on a Dark Olive Quill and laid siege to a trout which was smutting steadily in the next little bay. The fly was a shop-tied one, beautiful to look at when new, but as a floater it was no success. The hackle was a hen's, and the dye only accentuated its natural inclination to sop up water. The oil tip had not yet arrived, and so it came about that, after the wetting it got in the first recovery, it no sooner lit on the water on the second cast than it went under. A moment later I became aware of a sort of crinkling little swirl in the water, ascending from the place where I conceived my fly might be. I was somewhat too quick in putting matters to the proof, and when my line came back to me there was no fly. I mounted another, and assailed the next fish and to my delight exactly the same thing occurred, except that this time I did not strike too hard.

The trout's belly contained a solid ball of black gnats, and not a dun of any sort. The same was the case with all the four brace more, which I secured in the next hour or so by precisely the same methods. Yet each took the Dark Olive at once when offered under water, while all day the trout had been steadily refusing the recognized floating flies recommended by the highest authority.

From *Minor Tactics of the Trout Stream* (1910)



### NYPHHS, CADDIS, ALDER LARVAE, AND SHRIMPS

For some time after my introduction to Tup's Indispensable I used it only as a dry fly, but one July I put it over a fish without avail, and cast it a second time without drying it. It was dressed with a soft hackle, and at once went under, and the trout turned at it and missed. Again I cast, and again the trout missed, to fasten soundly at the next offer. It was a discovery for me, and I tried the pattern wet over a number of fish on the same shallow with most satisfactory results. I thus satisfied myself that Tup's Indispensable could be used as a wet fly; and, indeed, when soaked its colors merge and blend so beautifully that it is hardly singular; and it was a remarkable imitation of a nymph I got from a trout's mouth.

The next step was to try it on bulging fish, and to my great delight I found it even more attractive than Greenwell's Glory. It was the foundation of a small range of nymph patterns, but for underwater feeders, whether bulging or otherwise, I seldom need anything but Tup's Indispensable, dressed with a very short, soft henny hackle in place of the bright honey or rusty dun used for the floating pattern.

The next I tried was a Blue-Winged Olive. There was a hatch of this pernicious insect one afternoon. The floating pattern is always a failure with me, and in anticipation I had tied some nymphs of appropriate color of body, and hackled with a single turn of the tiniest blue hackle of the merlin. It enabled me to get two or three excellent trout which were taking blue-winged olive nymphs greedily under the opposite bank, and which, or rather the first of which, like their predecessors, had refused to respond to a floating imitation. The body was a mixture of medium olive seal's fur and bear's hair close to the skin, tied with primrose silk, the whisk being short and soft, from the spade-shaped feather found on the shoulder of a blue dun cock.

*From Minor Tactics of the Trout Stream (1910)*

### WHAT IS NYMPH FISHING?

Nymph fishing is a comparatively new art, or perhaps it would be fairer to say a new phase of an old and largely forgotten art that has developed on chalk streams during the present century. The old art was the art of the wet fly as practiced on chalk streams for centuries before the advent of the dry fly led, through the work of F. M. Halford, George Selwyn Marryat and others, to the supersession on chalk streams of the older method by the new, and for a while to the complete and exclusive dominance of the latter. The dry fly became a sort of religion and any attempt to revert to the older practice was regarded as a sort of sin against the Holy Ghost for which there was no remission.

A few men, however, natural born heretics no doubt, being of the detached order of intellect, came in time to wonder why the old art which had for centuries served our forefathers so well, should have ceased to be effective and to have any merits, and they began to experiment by adapting to wet fly fishing the new dry fly method of casting the fly to individual rising fish, and they attained a degree of success which became embarrassing to the stern upholders of the strict faith of the dry fly. The practice led these heretics to enquire how it came about that trout were willing to accept winged flies under water; and, aided by autopsies as advocated by Halford, they became aware of a fact of which Halford was well aware, but the moral of which he had failed to appreciate: that rising trout fed more on nymphs than on their floating hatched-out subimagines. To this day, it is probable that comparatively few of the enormous number of fishers with the fly are aware of this fact or of its bearing on the art of fly fishing, and fewer still have any idea of what a natural nymph is like. But these wicked heretics decided that if the trout were willing, as for centuries they had proved themselves, to take winged artificial flies under water, it was not improbable that they would be still more willing in similar conditions to take underwater well-conceived patterns representing as faithfully as possible the larval forms on which they were for the time being feeding, and that these patterns, like the wet flies with which these sinners had been previously experimenting, could be presented to the individual trout with all the pomp and circumstance of accuracy and avoidance of undersized fish which had been hitherto the exclusive privilege of the floating fly.

*From Nymph Fishing for Chalk Stream Trout (1939)*



# Fly Fishing in Early Renaissance Italy?

## A Few Revealing Documents

by Alvaro Masseini

Photo by Alvaro Masseini



Part of an altarpiece by Jacopo da Bassano (1530),  
Parish Borgo del Grappa (Treviso, Italy).

Photo by Alvaro Masseini



Medieval sculpture representing San Zeno (Verona, Italy).

IN THE SPRING 1998 ISSUE of this journal, I offered an explanation of the origins of Valsesia's autochthonous fishing technique in an article titled "Fly-Fishing in Valsesia, Italy." I based my assertions on the assumption that the earliest source of this ancient angling method was a cadastral map,

which showed an icon of a stylized figure of a fisherman using, quite likely, this technique. This map, dated 1775, is located at the city hall archives of Valmuccia.

The May/June 1998 issue of *Fly Line*, a fine Italian ecological and fly-fishing magazine, published a letter from a Venetian fly



fisherman subscriber. Included with his letter is a photograph from an exhibit catalog of the painter Jacopo da Bassano. It shows a painting of San Zeno, a former bishop of Verona, who holds a fly-fishing rod Valsesian style in his right hand (given the early period, the line was made of horsehair) with three artificial flies, one of which shows a fish—undoubtedly a grayling—hanging from it. This religious icon is part of an altarpiece by Jacopo da Bassano, which includes the portraits of San Zeno, the Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist. This painting, dated 1538, is still exhibited at the parish of Borgo del Grappa near Treviso.

Jacopo da Bassano (ca. 1510–1592) was the son of Francesco del Ponte, a pupil of the Veronese school of painting. Influenced by the work of Tiziano and Tintoretto, Jacopo da Bassano was one of the major painters of the Venetian school of the Cinquecento. According to major biographical sources, Jacopo's favorite subjects included agrarian scenes, peasants, and stable animals.<sup>1</sup> To the historian of fly fishing, the most intriguing biographical piece of information is that Jacopo "remained in Bassano despite offers and commissions from other places."<sup>2</sup> We can therefore infer that this painter could not have seen fly fishing in any other European place.

San Zeno was an African-born Christian—probably from Mauritania—who seemed to have spent time at Carthage first and then at Antioch before reaching Verona, a city that in those days was still unchristianized. He served as the eighth bishop of this town from 354 to 372 A.D., the year of his death.<sup>3</sup> San Zeno owes his fame to the fact that he was the first Christian to leave a body of homilies in Latin. Iconographic representations show a smiling and enraptured San Zeno, who always holds a fish: sometimes the fish hangs from the saint's pastoral staff, sometimes it dangles from a line and a rod.

It is well known that in early Christian symbology, the soul was represented by the image of a fish, and that for a long time this symbol was the identification mark of the members of this new religion. Fish are a constant presence in Christian thought: the Greek word for fish is *ichthys*, the letters of which are an acronym for Iesous Christos Theou Hyios Soter (Jesus Christ the Son of God

the Savior); the miracle of the multiplication of bread and fish took place during Jesus' Sermon on the Mount; two out of four evangelists were fishermen; and so on. The meaning of this recurring theme, according to a hagiographical biographer and ardent follower of this saint, is that San Zeno was a "fisher of souls."<sup>4</sup> Bigelmair, the German scholar, instead explains the fish in San Zeno iconography as "the symbol of water, and the remembrance of the cult of San Zeno as the patron who protects from the threat of floods."<sup>5</sup>

According to the popular tradition, for which the saints and the poor are usually ideally united, San Zeno is not only a "fisher of souls," but of trout and grayling as well. As folklore makes the fish the poor people's food, San Zeno, a poor man himself, is made to be fishing for food. From the fourteenth century, most representations of San Zeno include a fish and a fishing rod in the saint's portrait. From 1538—the date of Jacopo da Bassano's painting—all existing portraits of the saint represent him as using typical fly-fishing tackle. Although it is objectively difficult to establish whether San Zeno, who lived in the fourth century, was a fisher or even a fly fisher, it is significant that Jacopo da Bassano, a Renaissance painter, by drawing the fish as hanging neither from the episcopal staff—the symbol of ecclesiastical power—nor from a traditional rod, but as a grayling attached to one of the three artificial flies of a long and flexible rod, was a follower of the popular image of San Zeno. This is clearly shown by his Borgo del Grappa triptych.

It is clear that this painter—by using in his work the popular image of San Zeno and by following the highly anthropocentric spirit of the time for which even sacred representations were populated with real people in flesh and bones (e.g., the subjects of Masaccio's paintings)—portrayed the saint as a fly-fishing practitioner, which was a technique that Jacopo da Bassano could have seen practiced only on the Veneto's rivers. This triptych is extremely relevant as it shows the following path-breaking points: 1) fly-fishing techniques were known in Italy at the beginning of the sixteenth century; and 2) it is no longer certain that the ancient fly-fishing technique, which has been almost exclusively practiced in Valsesia and in a few nearby alpine valleys, originated in the geographical area of Vercelli.

If, as we can infer from some sources, fly fishing was already known in ancient Greece, we can safely assume that quite likely, before reaching England or Spain, this technique passed through Rome (for the simple fact that the Romans colonized most of Europe).<sup>6</sup> It is highly possible that fly fishing was practiced only marginally for many centuries, given that during the feudal age, fishing was an activity exclusively related to food-gathering with the use of nets and lumber poles. In those days, aristocratic landowners used to entertain themselves by practicing hunting and archery.

Then, in the Renaissance, as material and cultural conditions changed and the range of aristocratic and bourgeois pastimes broadened, fly fishing—a more sophisticated and elegant technique than other angling methods—became a sport that was no longer linked to bringing food to the table, but a game and a source of pleasure only. Available documents show that in England (the *Treatyse* by Juliana Berners of 1496), in Spain (the manuscript of Astorga of 1624), and in Italy as well (as we can infer from the clear images in the painting of San Zeno by Jacopo da Bassano), fly fishing emerged in the Renaissance century.

## ENDNOTES

1. Alessandro Niccoli, ed., *Enciclopedia dell'arte* Tuminelli (Roma: Istituto Editoriale Europeo, 1974), vol. 1, p. 233.

2. *Dizionario dell'arte e degli artisti* (Milano: Mondadori, 1970), p. 249; E. Benerit, *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs dessinateurs et graveurs* (Paris: Librairie Grun, 1966), vol. 1, p. 447. According to this source Jacopo da Bassano spent a period at the court of Vienne sometime during the second half of the sixteenth century, that is, after painting the Borgo del Grappa triptych of San Zeno.

3. G. R. Palanque, G. Bardy, P. Labriolle, *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. 3 (Torino: SAIE, 1972), p. 525.

4. G. Ederle, *La Vita di San Zeno* (Verona: 1954), Edizioni di Vita Veronese.

5. George Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in the Paintings of North East Italy* (Florence: Sansoni, 1978), pp. 1096–1100.

6. A famous passage of the *De Natura Animalium* by Claudio Eliano, called "The Sophist," describes Macedonian fishermen on the Astreus River: "... They tie some red wool around a hook and fix two bright-red feathers from a ruster's under-wattle on it. Both rod and line are 6 foot long. The fisher casts the bait and the fish, attracted by its color, comes close and gets hooked. A bitter destiny, an easy catch." Quoted in R. Pragliola, *Il pescatore con la mosca* (Florence: Editoriale Olimpia, 1985), vol. 1, p. 1.

## Worth Their Salt

*by Gary Tanner*

THE MUSEUM'S FIRST-EVER saltwater fly-fishing tournament/fundraiser was held June 19 out of Northrup's Landing, Westport, Connecticut. The event featured a morning's fishing for blues and stripers out of Captain Jeff Northrup's fleet of flats skiffs, followed by a delicious lobster and clam bake at a water-side restaurant. Twelve trustees and friends of the Museum took part, helping us net an important \$1,000 for ongoing projects in a new, fun way for us. We looked on this outing as an experiment, keeping it to a small group. All who participated felt it was a real success, and we hope to repeat the event next summer on a larger scale.

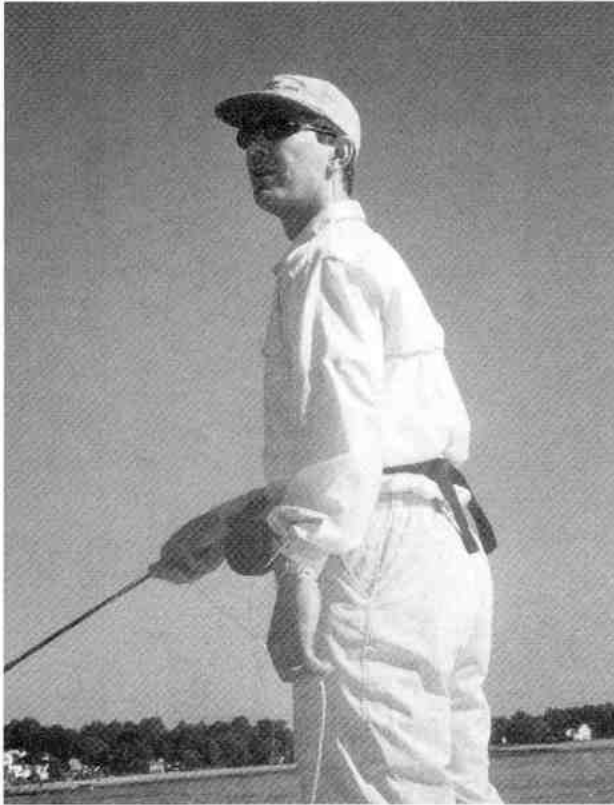
Of course, every tournament (catch and release for us!) needs winners, and the trustee team of Gardner Grant and Allan Poole won handily. (Well, actually, President Richard Tisch and his dad Dick Tisch outfished the field, but had to leave early—sorry fellas, must be present to win!)



*Eventual winners Allan Poole (standing in bow) and Gardner Grant (seated) fish the flats off Westport, Connecticut, for stripers and blues. Captain Jeff Northrup is on the platform poling.*



*Hard to win with teammates like Executive Director Gary Tanner spending his time catching sea robins!*



*John Mundt, Hartford, Connecticut, dinner/ auction chair (and the man unfortunate enough to be Tanner's teammate), scans the water before his next cast.*



*Back on shore, tournament chair Baron Becker (standing) listens as Trustee Bob Scott recounts his morning's efforts.*



*President Richard Tisch and his dad, Dick Tisch, head out for their mornings' fishing. Richard reported that at one point, they were into blues on almost every cast.*



*Captain Jeff Northrup (second from left) listens as Trustees Poole (second from right) and Grant (right) discuss ways to do it next year. They are joined by Museum supporter and member Bill Wilson.*

# Fishing with Baden-Powell: Stories of the Chief Scout and His Love of Angling

by Douglas R. Precourt

Photo courtesy Oxford University Press



Lord Baden-Powell

LORD ROBERT S. S. BADEN-POWELL of Gilwell, England, is most recognized these days for starting the worldwide Boy Scout movement in 1908, as well as for his military genius as a lieutenant-general during the Boer Wars. But B-P (as he was affectionately known among his friends and associates) was also a rabid fly fisherman who saw his time alone on a river as compensation for his charitable works, and an early proponent of an angling conservation practice that would not become fashionable nor widely accepted for nearly half a century.

## PERSONAL HISTORY

Born in London in 1857, during the Victorian era, B-P was the seventh of ten children, one of nine boys from a highly regarded, upper-class family. Academically, he performed relatively well. He excelled at team sports and performing arts, especially drama, at Rose Hill School at Turnbridge Wells, and he eventually gained acceptance to Charterhouse, a private high school in London. During the summers, B-P and his brothers spent several weeks on a small boat, together cruising the southern regions of the English coastline.

Eventually, he gained a commission as an officer in Her Majesty's Army. He traveled to India to be with the 13th Hussars Regiment, where he saw action in the Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 1880. Later, the campaign in Zululand and the Ashanti conflict in West Africa also saw his involvement. Like most British officers, he enjoyed polo and excelled at "pig sticking," a sport using many native "beaters" and long sharp lances while riding on horseback.

In 1899, he wrote a training book, *Aids to Scouting*, which

outlined essential camping, stalking, and survival skills for soldiers to use during difficult conflicts. The Boer Wars in South Africa saw B-P distinguish himself as the commanding officer charged with protecting the township of Mafeking from the invading Boer forces. Using many of the skills found in his book, B-P and his men were able to survive the siege of Mafeking for 217 days before British reinforcements broke through. Back in England, B-P was a hero. Word of the relief of Mafeking arrived in London on 18 May 1900 and created a cheering and frenzied crowd in the area around Picadilly Circus.

B-P's popularity, particularly with young men, was very high, and large numbers of boys began reading *Aids to Scouting*. This worried B-P, because his book was intended as an army survival manual, not a book for boys. He recognized that young men found the subjects in his book interesting, however. Further, the Boer Wars and other conflicts left many fatherless boys who would need a program or organization to help them develop character and leadership. To this end, he wrote another book, *Scouting for Boys*, in 1908, which launched the worldwide Boy Scout movement we know today.

In 1910, B-P retired from Her Majesty's Army, onto reserve, and began his second life—that of leading the new and fast-growing scouting organization—which he did with great vigor and enthusiasm at the age of fifty-one. Having followed normal British custom, B-P had not married while an officer, but eventually fell in love with Olave Soames, a lovely woman who at the time was only twenty-two. They would be together for more than twenty-eight years and would raise three children: a son, Peter, and two daughters, Betty and Heather. Lady





*Lord Baden-Powell fishing the Waikato River in New Zealand.*

Baden-Powell would eventually take the reins of the Girl Guide Organization (called Girls Scouts in the United States) and lead its expansion for several decades. The Baden-Powells settled into a large old home named Pax Hill, located in the small, rural township of Bentley, in Hampshire, south of London.

### FISHING WITH BADEN-POWELL

B-P's daughter, Heather, has best recorded his angling exploits. Most of the following quotes come from her writings. Here she describes how he began his lifelong love of fishing.

He had inherited from his brother Warington some salmon and trout rods and box after flat tin box of flies, ranging from the most gigantic and brightly coloured salmon flies down to the tiniest little dark gnats. And with Peter at his side as a willing pupil they would jog off together with the oft-repeated chant in their minds:

*It's nice to sit and think and fish  
And fish and think and sit,  
And sit and fish and think and wish  
The fish would bite a bit.<sup>1</sup>*

B-P's new interest in fly fishing received some curious assistance from his Labrador retriever, who helped him develop his skill at playing fish.

Shawgm was my father's faithful black shadow for many years . . . Also he played a lively part acting as a salmon or trout when Dad went to practice casting a line on the lawn. As soon as he heard the rod being lifted down from its pegs, high on the wall of the verandah, he would leap to his feet and bounce round my father, then turn and dash on ahead, jumping down the banks and out across the lawn. My father then tried casting a "fly" (but substituting a white pigeon's feather) and Shawgm would seize it up and

tear away with it while the line screamed through the reel. Dad would play his "fish" for a time, then quietly reel him in to his feet—perhaps to repeat the whole game over again.<sup>2</sup>

A decade later, B-P would dive into a local river to save his blind and gray old Shawgm from drowning.<sup>3</sup>

In town, B-P initiated interest in a local river for angling purposes, involving his children and others in the venture. We also learn from Heather's recollection an uncommon form of fish resuscitation and are reminded of B-P's consistent kindness toward children.

. . . The River Wey ambles along below Bentley—about a mile to the south—on its way from Holybourne eventually to join the River Thames at Weybridge. "What a lovely little trout stream that would make," my father once thought during one of our walk-rides over the bridge past Isington Mill. . . . We found a grand occupation for ourselves in the summer holidays. Leaving our ponies loose in Carters' field, we tore off our clothes and waded into the stream, pulling out dead branches, uprooted some of the rushes and reeds and having many a lovely wet, muddy hour or more clearing the banks where they broadened out below the bridge. Putting proposition forward to a few local friends and the riparian farmers owning the river banks, my father soon found that the Bentley Fly-Fishing Club had sprung into being.

To stock the river, a lorry from Hungerford brought tanks of small fish from a trout hatchery. As we "helped" to release them into the stream, we found that some of them had fainted on the journey and had to have air breathed into their gaping mouths—they were given the "kiss of life" before they were lowered into the water and wiggled their way up-stream. An old Bentley resident can remember how, as a small girl afflicted with polio, she would watch for my father's arrival because he would lift her in and out of the stream, telling her to catch some "worms" for him

Photo courtesy Betty Abeless from *Baden-Powell: A Family Album*



*Baden Powell with his dog, Shawgm.*

to fish with. He never could resist having a laugh and a game with small children.<sup>4</sup>

After his death, the Bentley Fly-Fishing Club would be renamed the Bentley Baden-Powell Fly-Fishing Association in honor of its founder. The association continued to be responsible for stocking and caring for five miles of the River Wey.<sup>5</sup>

Although Lady Baden-Powell did not share his love of fishing and rarely accompanied him on his annual angling trips to Scotland and the west country, she did go with him once and was not allowed to forget the experience for many years.

There was the oft-quoted time when they went off to Wales to fish on the Wye and she elected to stay in the car while he went down to the river. He took a whistle with him so that when he got into a salmon he could blow for her to come and help him land it. He did get into a fish and he blew and he blew and he *blew* on his whistle. But she didn't come and she didn't come and eventually he managed to beach it by himself. When he carried his prize back up the bank to the car she was filled with surprise and delight—but why had she not heard his frantic whistle? She had brought her portable typewriter in the car and was clattering away at her letters!<sup>6</sup>

B-P also used angling as a way of helping others through their difficulties and sorrows as he did with Heather in 1934: "In mid-summer . . . the fishing-rods came out again and Dad swept me away to the River Deveron for a fortnight's fishing in Scotland. He could see that the best way to help me disentangle myself from my wrong love-life was to disentangle my fishing-line from an overhanging tree! How clever of him; it did the trick . . ."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, a few years later, when Heather turned twenty-one, B-P surprised her yet again:

. . . While out for a walk along Pall Mall with my father, he casual-

ly said "Let's go in here." I followed him in as he turned in at the door of Hardy's shop [a famous London anglers' store], and ten minutes later I followed him out again, with a beautiful three-jointed trout rod tucked under my arm . . .

And now, he thought, perhaps I'd like to try out my new trout rod? In the midst of all his London commitments, he made time to snatch a few days off and we sped away to Wales . . . We took the silver fleur-de-lys Scout badge off the bonnet (of our automobile) and substituted a humbler radiator cap and drove off into the blue, incognito.

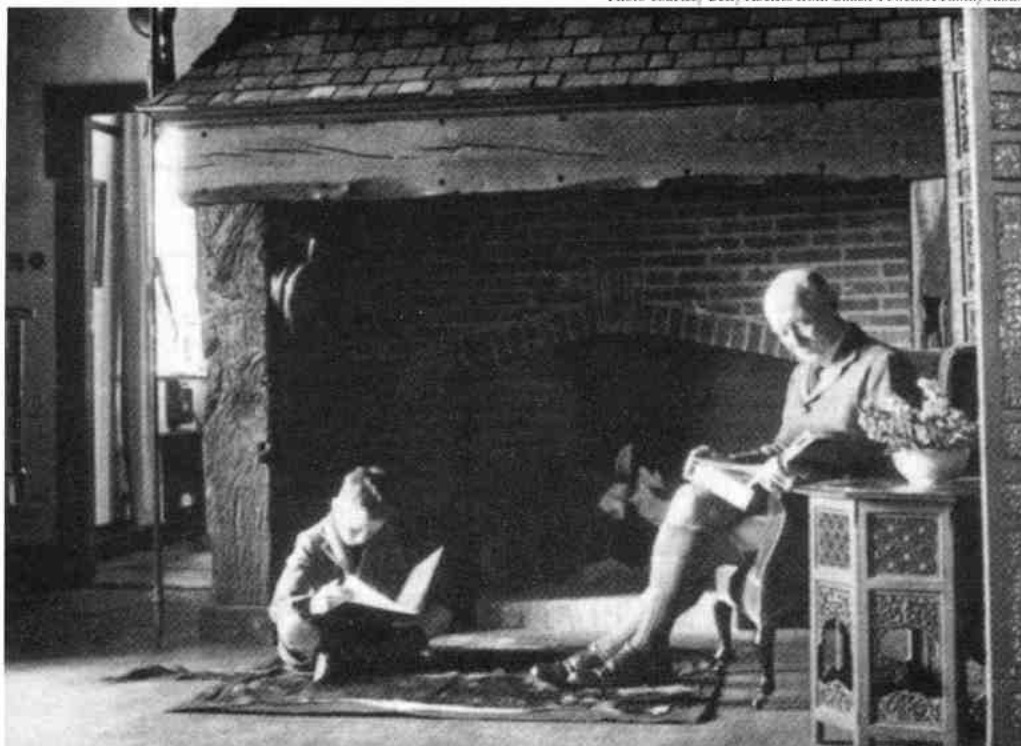
Somewhere near Ffestiniog we found the Oakley Arms and booked in as "Major Pryor and his daughter"—Major Beresford-Pryor we quickly corrected on seeing the hall-porter looking sideways at the initials (B-P) on the luggage. It was ever difficult for my father to be incognito, somebody always recognized him—somebody who had been a Scout and had seen him at a Rally, a Camp, a Jamboree. "That's what comes of being so ugly," he would reply, shaking them warmly by the left hand [the Scout hand clasp].<sup>8</sup>

E. E. Reynolds was a B-P biographer. In his book, *A Biography of Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell*, he includes the following passages about B-P's love of fishing.

A fellow angler contributes the following note on B-P as a fisherman:

I should say B-P was as good an angler as he was at most things. He preferred river fishing for sea trout or salmon, and liked to be on his own, particularly on any river requiring more than the usual care and courage.

His technique being what it was, he perhaps gave less attention to his technical appliance than is sometimes necessary in some northern rivers, and I can well remember an instance of him using a beautiful presentation rod and gaff, which had the misfortune to meet a 25-lb. salmon, with the result that both gave way at the critical moment, and but for the services of a



*Baden-Powell at Pax Hill with his son, Peter.*

gillie of courage and resource, the salmon would have won!

I think his chief joy in fishing was that it took him away from the ordinary business of life more effectively than anything else, particularly when the formalities too often connected with sport were by-passed. He was always entranced with the beauty of river life, especially in the (Scottish) highlands in the autumn, with its gorgeous colouring.

Even the Boy Scouts had to give place to science and philosophy when the day's work was finished on the river. B-P was never so supremely happy as he was when wading deep and waiting for that electrical thrill of a taking fish. I am quite sure Izaak Walton<sup>9</sup> never had a more devoted disciple.<sup>10</sup>

As the "Chief Scout" of the growing Boy Scout movement, B-P traveled the world. He oversaw the development of the organization, attended jamborees, and provided leadership and inspiration. Everywhere he went, his fly rods, reels, and fishing kit went with him so he could collect his personal "fishing fee" for the time he had given to scouting. Of B-P's fishing travels, and the way he most enjoyed them, again E. E. Reynolds provides insight.

When he needed to get right away from everything and everybody, he would go off for a few days' fishing; this for many years was his chief sport. He was never—apart from polo—a ball-playing man, and he needed a sport which he could enjoy alone, for there were times when he could only recover tone by being solitary. This he could write to a friend in 1925, "I am a different animal to what I was two months ago thanks to a severe course of fishing." And in 1929 he wrote to an angler friend, "As to New Zealand, I shall be going there, via Panama, sailing early Feb. 1931, arriving in early March. I don't know how that suits trout fishing there—but I should indeed like to get a little if it is possible. Only I *do* like to do it alone. In X they would make up parties to go with me, which just destroyed the whole pleasure of it."<sup>11</sup>

## FISHING TO THE END

After almost constant travel, the Baden-Powells were back at Pax Hill in 1937, just in time for the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. There were thousands of sightseers, and the country was decorated for the celebration. B-P was by then recognized worldwide for Boy Scouting, which has provided guidance and leadership to so many thousands, perhaps even millions, of youth. During the summer of 1937, B-P was awarded the Order of Merit on the Coronation Honors list—an honor held by only twenty-four other people—"in appreciation of his valuable services to the Empire." He was requested to receive it personally at the hands of the new king during an informal chat in the king's study.<sup>12</sup>

Later in 1937, B-P would attend his final Boy Scout World Jamboree and bid farewell to all the scouts and leaders he loved so well. Afterward, a fishing trip to the north country was much deserved.

Now, at last after the Jamboree, Dad was ready to get away on holiday to Scotland . . . Here Dad and I enjoyed a week's fishing. We hardly caught a fish—they seemed to be away on holiday too—it was getting late in the season. But that didn't detract from the enjoyment of the scenery and the relaxation at the riverside; the tranquillity of mountains and sea, rocky islands and deep bays . . . Everybody seemed determined that Dad should get a fish, offering him the best stretches of water; the Bryce Allens offered their beat on the Aros and the Mellises said, "Come and try the sea-pools in the River Baa." Colonel Gardiner suggested his loch in Glen More and Lady Scott sent us off down to Aros Bridge. But to no avail! We had our mid-day picnics lying on burn-side banks in the bracken and heather, basking in the sun, and then in to tea with some nearby crofters. MacPail, the ghillie, took us to lovely pools on General Maitland's water, but it was too low and clear and although we

Photo courtesy Betty Abeless from *Baden-Powell: A Family Album*



*Pax Hill.*

Photo courtesy Betty Abeless from *Baden-Powell: A Family Album*



*The Library at Pax Hill.*

could see those idle salmon just loafing about enjoying themselves, never a touch did we get.<sup>13</sup>

With B-P now eighty years old and his health failing, his doctors recommended he move to a warmer climate to extend his years. The Baden-Powells would soon relocate to Nyeri, Kenya, spending B-P's last three years in a bungalow, which they named Paxtu (as in Pax Hill 2). But even in his final years of unaccustomed leisure, he found new locations to wet a line. During one family reunion at Paxtu, his family remembered: "We went by a narrow grass track down to Dad's favorite fishing place on the Thega River and took picnics down to the bend where we could see four of the best trout pools."<sup>14</sup>

### IN HIS OWN WORDS

In 1936, B-P published a rambling text of some of his favorite stories and experiences titled *Lessons from the Varsity of Life*, which included a few yarns under the heading "Fishing." These stories, sometimes humorous, shed light onto B-P's feelings as he enjoyed his fishing. His enthusiasm for angling and its rejuvenating effect on the soul is evident in the text that follows.

Which is the better, salmon or trout fishing? I don't know.

They are so different and for myself I can only say that I love them both. Salmon fishing is the heavier, harder, and more exasperating business, but when, after hours and days of blank effort, you suddenly get a tug on your line, and you feel that you are "into him" (and there are no other words that express it) it is well not to have a weak heart, for that organ certainly gets a bang and a thrill which is hard to beat.

Trout fishing, on the other hand, demands greater skill and cunning and is the more delicate art, and if less exciting is greater fun.

A few years ago I was asked what return I should like for paying a visit of inspection to some Scouts in Wales, and, knowing the

tastes of my host (the late Lord Glanusk), I said that my fee was a day's fishing. To this he readily acceded and asked me down to his charming bungalow on the Wye.

The morning after my arrival, which happened to be a Sunday, his daughter took me down to look at the river before going to church. The temptation was too great. I took a rod from the rack just to try a cast in that lovely looking pool. Just one cast. Well, one more. But—oh, I was into a fish and he a big one too. For a few minutes he swam gently round the pool, hauling steadily at me, then away he went with a rush upstream, my reel screaming its alarm.

I had to follow him, but the bank grew rocky and it was evident that I must wade in, though unprepared for it. My gallant young hostess pointed out the danger of wading, since among the rocks were holes twenty feet deep; so using the gaff as a wading staff she plunged in herself up to her waist, and, telling me to hang on to her with one hand when I could spare it from the rod, she piloted me after our fish as he dashed on up the river.

The salmon towed me downstream.

For a long distance we followed him until he got into a long open deep stretch where it was impossible for us to go farther, and he had got all my line out. The time had come when I must either hold him or he must break me.

I held on like grim death, expecting the line to go at any minute, but it held. Suddenly he turned and then came speeding down the river towards us again. Reeling in as fast as ever I could I had a slack line for an ominously long time. I thought he was off but to my ultimate relief I got the strain on him again. Then he dragged us away downstream, over the rocks, and back to his original pool, where at length we killed him; a glorious fresh-run fish of twenty-five pounds.

As we landed him great cheers burst out behind us, and to our astonishment we found that quite a concourse of people had gathered from the main road which ran close by, and were rejoiced to see the successful end of the tussle.

But this was not the last I was to hear about it, for from these





*Baden-Powell with his family (from left), Lady Baden-Powell, Heather, Peter, B-P, and seated in the front is Betty.*

people the news spread and got into the local papers.

A week later I received a document in Welsh and English from a religious conference in which it was decreed that no boy or girl of their congregations was to join the Boy Scouts or the Girl Guides because I was guilty of having fished on the Sabbath.



The Jock Scott is the great salmon fishing fly. It derived its name from the fishing ghillie at Makerstoun in old days, and he made up this particular pattern of fly for the then Duchess of Roxburgh for her to take with her to Norway, after which it became one of the most popular flies known.

Another famous ghillie at Makerstoun was Rob o' the Trows. He was apparently a quaint character if the story of him be true which relates that he was acting as ghillie to a certain peer one day when this gentleman caught and landed a salmon. The peer proceeded to take a drop of refreshment out of his flask, which he then put back in his pocket.

Rob had looked at that flask with some hope that the usual custom would be carried out of offering the ghillie a drink too.

Presently my lord caught another salmon and again he sipped, and again Rob hoped in vain.

A third time this happened, and Rob sprang into the boat and started to row away for his home.

The fisherman called after him: "Where are you off to?" And Rob simply growled: "Them as drinks alone can fish alone," and went home.



As an education in patience, fishing is par excellence, the very best school. It grips men of every kind.

How can all those fellows go and sit all day in a punt on the Thames, or six hundred of them line the bank of the Trent in competition for hours? But they do it in absolute content. Ask any one

of them if he has had good sport. "Yes, rather," he will reply, though as yet his creel is empty.

They go to fish, not to catch fish.

Still more do you learn patience when fly-fishing in a wind and your delicate gut cast ties itself up into an intricate tangle for you to unravel. That is bad enough in England, but it is ten times worse when you get it, as I did once in Australia, with a kukkaburra ("laughing jackass") chortling at you from a neighbouring tree every time you get tangled or caught in a bush.



Somehow the absence of civilization in your surroundings adds a zest to your fishing, whether it be among the ragged moorlands of Galway, or the mountains of Natal, or the forests of Canada or Tasmania; the wild has its charms.

At the same time there is a sweet attraction in the waters nearer home where, in the lush meadows of Hampshire, with the cattle knee deep among the buttercups, and the snipe drumming overhead, the rooks cawing drowsily among the stately elms, you wander slowly, stalking your trout in infinite quiet and solitude, far from the madding crowd and away from the noise and rush of modern life in towns, a comrade among the birds and water-voles.

Trout fishing is the best rest-cure in the world.

On these occasions a ghillie spoils the show. A man who cannot land his own fish is not a fisherman.<sup>15</sup>

## SEEDS OF CATCH AND RELEASE

In his book, *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell included a small chapter titled "Fishes and Fishing." As you read this passage, you will not only notice B-P's sound angling advice, but the wonderful way he communicates with, and reassures, his young readers:

Every Scout ought to be able to fish in order to get food for himself. A tenderfoot [beginner] who starved on the bank of a river full



of fish would look very silly, yet it might happen to one who had never learned to catch fish.

Fishing brings out a lot of the points in Scouting, especially if you fish with the fly. To be successful you must know about the habits and ways of the fish, what kind of haunt he frequents, in what kind of weather he feeds and at what time of the day, and so on. Without knowing these, you can fish away until you are blue in the face and never catch one.

A fish generally has his own particular haunt in the stream, and when once you discover a fish at home you can go and creep near and watch what he does.

Then you have to be able to tie very special knots with delicate gut, which is a bit of a puzzler to any boy whose fingers are all thumbs.

I will only give you a few here, but there are many others . . . [B-P then illustrates four fishing knots used to secure hooks, make loops, and fasten gut of differing sizes.—*Author*]

And you have to have infinite patience. Your line gets caught up in bushes and reeds, or in your clothes—or when it can't find any other body it ties up in a knot round itself. Well, it's no use getting angry with it. There are only two things to do—the first is to grin, and the second is to set to work very leisurely to undo it. Then you will have loads of disappointments in losing fish through the line breaking, or other mishaps. But remember they happen to everybody who begins fishing, and are the troubles that in the end make it so very enjoyable when you get them.

When you catch your fish do as I do—only keep those you

specially want for food or as specimens, put back the others the moment you have landed them. The prick of the hook in their leathery mouth does not hurt them for long, and they swim off quite happily to enjoy life in their water again.

If you use a dry fly, that is, keeping your fly sitting on top of the water instead of sunk under the surface, you have really to stalk your fish, just as you would a deer or any other game, for a trout is very sharp-eyed and shy.<sup>16</sup>

B-P's advice to boys to quickly put back those trout not needed corresponds to those time-honored words "do as I do." Another glimpse of him and his catch-and-release philosophy comes from a correspondent who wrote:

My father met B-P on the banks of the River Dove when B-P was staying at the Isaac Walton Hotel; they were both fly-fishing and they exchanged compliments and ideas which led to a friendship. My father asked B-P what sport he had had and B-P said, "Quite good. I have caught 5 brace [10] of nice fish." My father said, "May I have a look at them?" Whereupon B-P said, "I only fish for the sport of the thing, but always return the fish to the river so that they may enjoy a longer life."<sup>17</sup>

From B-P came the advice and example of a fishing philosophy known today as catch-and-release fishing, which would not be generally recognized and practiced for another half cen-



Above: The Boy Scout emblem bore the initials B P—for the motto, “Be Prepared” and perhaps to stand for Baden-Powell himself.  
Left: Drawing by Baden-Powell.

tury. The seeds of angling conservation were just beginning to germinate, later to be popularized by Lee Wulff and other great sportsmen.

### CONCLUSION

Lord Baden-Powell was a man well beloved of family, friends, and millions of khaki-uniformed boys and their leaders. It is obvious from these passages that he not only enjoyed angling for trout, salmon, and other sport fish, but that his time on the water was truly an important and often guarded time of rejuvenation. Even though he frequently ate his catch, he more often let them go “so that they may enjoy a longer life,” possibly in recognition of the sport and the enjoyment it had provided him. Perhaps the most important theme gleaned from this collection of stories is the recognition of the emotionally healthy way B-P used fishing and his time on the water to compensate for the unusually high demands his life of service required. It would appear that all of us could benefit from taking our own personal “fishing fee” for the service we provide to others, and as we do so, I am sure B-P would wish us each “good-sport.”

### ENDNOTES

1. Heather Baden-Powell, *Baden-Powell: A Family Album* (New York: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1986), p. 27.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.
5. Tim Jeal, *The Boy-Man: The Life of Lord Baden-Powell* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989), p. 462.
6. Heather Baden-Powell, p. 42.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84.
9. Izaak Walton wrote one of the earliest fishing texts, *The Compleat Angler*, in 1653, and to this day many anglers fancy themselves his disciples.
10. E. E. Reynolds, *A Biography of Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell, OM, GCMG, GCVO, KCB* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 223–24.
11. Reynolds, p. 223.
12. Heather Baden-Powell, p. 96.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
15. Robert Baden-Powell, *Lessons from the Varsity of Life* (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1933), pp. 60–67.
16. Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* (Portsmouth, Great Britain: Eyre & Spottiswoode at Grosvenor Press, 1908 [used 1963 printing by the Scout Association]), pp. 127–28.
17. Reynolds, p. 223.

# The Confessions of a Duffer

by Andrew Lang



AMONG THE MANY volumes in the Museum's library is a book by Andrew Lang (1844–1912) called *Angling Sketches*. Published in 1891, it is a collection of Lang's experiences fishing in his native Scotland.

Lang was a prolific writer. A 1936 collection of biographies, *British Authors of the Nineteenth Century*, lists more than sixty books as principal works and claimed that a complete catalog of his writings might be impossible. Among these principal works are books of poetry, history, biography, novels, mythology and religion, and edited collections. The list does not include *Angling Sketches*, but it is noted that Lang developed a love for angling during his years at St. Andrews University.

Lang opens his collection with an essay that refuses to equate passion with skill. —EDITOR

THESE PAPERS do not boast of great sport. They are truthful, not like the tales some fishers tell. They should appeal to many sympathies. There is no false modesty in the confidence with which I esteem myself a duffer, at fishing. Some men are born duffers; others, unlike persons of genius, become so by an infinite capacity for not taking pains. Others, again, among whom I would rank myself, combine both these elements of incompetence. Nature, that made me enthusiastically fond of fishing, gave me thumbs for fingers, shortsighted eyes, indolence, carelessness, and a temper which (usually sweet and angelic) is goaded to madness by the laws of matter and of gravitation. For example: when another man is caught up in a branch he disengages his fly; I jerk at it till something breaks. As for carelessness, in boyhood I fished, by preference, with doubtful gut and knots ill-tied; it made the risk greater, and increased the excitement if one did hook a trout. I can't keep a fly book. I stuff the flies into my pockets at random, or stick them into the leaves of a novel, or bestow them in the lining of my hat or the case of my rods. Never, till 1890, in all my days did I possess a landing-net. If I can drag a fish up a bank, or over the gravel, well; if not, he goes on his way rejoicing. On the Test I thought it seemly to carry a landing-net. It had a hinge, and doubled up. I put the handle through a buttonhole

of my coat: I saw a big fish rising, I put a dry fly over him; the idiot took it. Up stream he ran, then down stream, then he yielded to the rod and came near me. I tried to unship my landing-net from my buttonhole. Vain labor! I twisted and turned the handle, it would not budge. Finally, I stooped, and attempted to ladle the trout out with the short net; but he broke the gut, and went off. A landing-net is a tedious thing to carry, so is a creel, and a creel is, to me, a superfluity. There is never anything to put in it. If I do catch a trout, I lay him under a big stone, cover him with leaves, and never find him again. I often break my top joint; so, as I never carry string, I splice it with a bit of the line, which I bite off, for I really cannot be troubled with scissors and I always lose my knife. When a phantom minnow sticks in my clothes, I snap the gut off, and put on another, so that when I reach home I look as if a shoal of fierce minnows had attacked me and hung on like leeches. When a boy, I was—once or twice—a bait fisher, but I never carried worms in box or bag. I found them under big stones, or in the fields, wherever I had the luck. I never tie nor otherwise fasten the joints of my rod; they often slip out of the sockets and splash into the water. Mr. Hardy, however, has invented a joint-fastening which never slips. On the other hand, by letting the joint rust, you may find it difficult to take down your rod.



When I see a trout rising, I always cast so as to get hung up, and I frighten him as I disengage my hook. I invariably fall in and get half-drowned when I wade, there being an insufficiency of nails in the soles of my brogues. My waders let in water, too, and when I go out to fish I usually leave either my reel, or my flies, or my rod, at home. Perhaps no other man's average of lost flies in proportion to taken trout was ever so great as mine. I lose plenty, by striking furiously, after a series of short rises, and breaking the gut, with which the fish swims away. As to dressing a fly, one would sooner think of dressing a dinner. The result of the fly-dressing would resemble a small blacking-brush, perhaps, but nothing entomological.

Then why, a persevering reader may ask, do I fish? Well, it is stronger than myself, the love of fishing; perhaps it is an inherited instinct, without the inherited power. I may have had a fishing ancestor who bequeathed to me the passion without the art. My vocation is fixed, and I have fished to little purpose all my days. Not for salmon, an almost fabulous and yet a stupid fish, which must be moved with a rod like a weaver's beam. The trout is more delicate and dainty—not the sea trout, which any man, woman, or child can capture, but the yellow trout in clear water.

A few rises are almost all I ask for: to catch more than half a dozen fish does not fall to my lot twice a year. Of course, in a Sutherland loch one man is as good as another, the expert no better than the duffer. The fish will take, or they won't. If they won't, nobody can catch them; if they will, nobody can miss them. It is as simple as trolling a minnow from a boat in Loch Leven, probably the lowest possible form of angling. My ambition is as great as my skill is feeble; to capture big trout with the dry fly in the Test, that would content me, and nothing under that. But I can't see the natural fly on the water; I cannot see my own fly, let it sink or let it swim.

I often don't see the trout rise to me,

if he is such a fool as to rise; and I can't strike in time when I do see him. Besides, I am unteachable to tie any of the orthodox knots in the gut; it takes me half an hour to get the gut through one of these newfangled iron eyes, and, when it is through, I knot it any way. The "jam" knot is a name to me, and no more. That, perhaps, is why the hooks crack off so merrily. Then, if I do spot a rising trout, and if he does not spot me as I crawl like the serpent towards him, my fly always fixes in a nettle, a haycock, a rosebush, or what not, behind me. I undo it, or break it, and put up another, make a cast, and, "plop," all the line falls in with a splash that would frighten a crocodile. The fish's big black fin goes cutting the stream above, and there is a *sauve qui peut* of trout in all directions.

I once did manage to make a cast correctly: the fly went over the fish's nose; he rose; I hooked him, and he was a great silly brute of a grayling. The grayling is the deadest-hearted and the foolish-headed fish that swims. I would as lief catch a perch or an eel as a grayling. This is the worst of it—this ambition of the duffer's, this desire for perfection, as if the golfing imbecile should match himself against Mr. Horace Hutchinson, or as the sow of the Greek proverb challenged Athene to sing. I know it all, I deplore it, I regret the evils of ambition; but *c'est plus fort que moi*. If there is a trout rising well under the pendant boughs that trail in the water, if there is a brake of briars behind me, a strong wind downstream, for that trout, in that impregnable situation, I am impelled to fish. If I raise him I strike, miss him, catch up in his tree, swish the cast off into the briars, break my top, break my heart, but—that is the humor of it. The passion, or instinct, being in all senses blind, must no doubt be hereditary. It is full of sorrow and bitterness and hope deferred, and entails the mockery of friends, especially of the fair. But I would as soon lay down a love of books as a love of fishing.

Success with pen or rod may be

beyond one, but there is the pleasure of the pursuit, the rapture of endeavor, the delight of an impossible chase, the joys of nature—sky, trees, brooks, and birds. Happiness in these things is the legacy to us of the barbarian. Man in the future will enjoy bricks, asphalt, fog, machinery, "society," even picture galleries, as many men and most women do already. We are fortunate who inherit the older, not "the new spirit"—we who, skilled or unskilled, follow in the steps of our father, Izaak, by streams less clear, indeed, and in meadows less fragrant, than his. Still, they are meadows and streams, not wholly dispeopled yet of birds and trout; nor can any defect of art, nor certainty of laborious disappointment, keep us from the waterside when April comes.

Next to being an expert, it is well to be a contented duffer: a man who would fish if he could, and who will pleasure himself by flicking off his flies, and dreaming of impossible trout, and smoking among the sedges Hope's enchanted cigarettes. Next time we shall be more skilled, more fortunate. Next time! "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow." Gray hairs come, and stiff limbs, and shortened sight; but the spring is green and hope is fresh for all the changes in the world and in ourselves. We can tell a hawk from a hand-saw, a March Brown from a Blue Dun; and if our success be as poor as ever, our fancy can dream as well as ever of better things and more fortunate chances. For fishing is like life; and in the art of living, too, there are duffers, though they seldom give us their confessions. Yet even they are kept alive, like the incompetent angler, by this undying hope: they will be more careful, more skillful, more lucky next time. The gleaming untraveled future, the bright untried waters, allure us from day to day, from pool to pool, till, like the veteran on Coquet side, we "try a farewell throw," or, like Stoddart, look our last on Tweed.

~



# Museum News

## Recent Donations

Once again this quarter, the Museum benefited from the kind donations of our supporters. **Bob Mitchell** of Wilson, Wyoming, donated two beautiful Ogden Pleissner prints, "The Pool" and "Benedict's Crossing." The reel collection received a 1999 AYP reel from the company's owner, **Bill Varner**, of Evergreen, Colorado. Our reel collection will benefit with the addition of contemporary quality reels such as this one.

Trustee **Pamela Bates Richards** of Newburyport, Massachusetts, a regular contributor to the Museum in countless ways, donated the John Swan limited edition print "Mixture No. 79," depicting her father Colonel Joseph D. Bates Jr. Another longtime supporter, **Ray Salminen** of Acton, Massachusetts, contributed a wonderful 1930s creel that he painstakingly finished for the Museum.

**Felix and Peggy Trommer** of Old Lyme, Connecticut, donated a fine Don Leyden framing of Jim Payne working in his shop. Our call for fly-fishing art was answered by **Bob Gregory** of Essex, Connecticut. He kindly donated the limited edition number 11 of fifty set of Chet Reneson's hunting and fishing prints created for International Paper in 1972. They are truly beautiful and a major addition to the art collection.

Longtime Museum volunteer **Angus Black** and his wife **Jean Black** of Peru, Vermont, generously contributed the Federation of Fly Fishers' *The Women of the FFF*. Former curator **Sean Sonderman** of Sandgate, Vermont, added a 1959 Ted Williams fly-fishing card picturing the great slugger bonefishing in the Florida Keys.

Finally, Museum Trustee **Leigh H. Perkins** and his wife **Romi Perkins** of Manchester, Vermont, donated a unique pair of ostrich eggs adorned with stunning hand-painted salmon. We thank the Perkins and all of our donors for the kind support of the Museum.

## Sonderman Resigns

It is with sincere regret that we report Curator Sean Sonderman's resignation from the Museum staff on September 1. Sean has taken a position as a grant supervisor at the Woodstock Foundation in Woodstock, Vermont. We will miss Sean and all that he brought to the Museum, and we wish him and his family the best.

## The American Museum of Fly Fishing

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Club	\$50
Trade	\$50

Membership dues include four issues of *The American Fly Fisher*. Please send your payment to the Membership Director and include your mailing address. The Museum is a member of the American Association of Museums, the American Association of State and Local History, the New England Association of Museums, the Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance, and the International Association of Sports Museums and Halls of Fame. We are a nationally accredited, nonprofit, educational institution chartered under the laws of the state of Vermont.

## SUPPORT!

As an independent, nonprofit institution, the American Museum of Fly Fishing relies on the generosity of public-spirited individuals for substantial support. We ask that you give our museum serious consideration when planning for gifts and bequests.

## VISIT!

Hours are 10 AM to 4 PM. We are closed on major holidays.

## BACK ISSUES!

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- Volume 22, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4
- Volume 23, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4
- Volume 24, Numbers 1, 2, 4
- Volume 25, Numbers 1, 2, 3

## Winter Events

### November 4

Hartford, Connecticut  
Dinner/Auction  
Farmington Marriot

### December 7

San Francisco, California  
Dinner/Auction  
To be announced

### January 8-9

The Fly Fishing Show\*  
College Park, Maryland

### January 21-23

The Fly Fishing Show\*  
Marlborough, Massachusetts

### January 28-30

The Fly Fishing Show\*  
Somerset, New Jersey

### February 19-20

The Fly Fishing Show\*  
Charlotte, North Carolina

\*The Museum will have a booth at each of these Fly Fishing Shows. For more information about these events, contact the Fly Fishing Show directly by calling 1-800-420-7582, or visiting the Fly Fishing Show website at [www.flyfishingshow.com](http://www.flyfishingshow.com).

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Alvaro Masseini** is a high-school teacher of history and philosophy in Florence, Italy, and has worked with several Italian environmental organizations. An expert on water pollution and related problems, he is the author of numerous articles on fly fishing in western and eastern European countries and in the Americas. Masseini's most recent contribution to this journal was "Fly Fishing in Valsesia, Italy: An Ancient Technique," which appeared in the Spring 1998 issue.



**Robert H. Berls** has been a reviewer of fly-fishing books for *Trout* magazine and is currently editor of the *Bulletin* of the Anglers' Club of New York and American correspondent for the *Flyfishers' Journal*. He is also doing research for books on aspects of English and American fly-fishing history and on Howard Back. Berls lives in Washington, D.C.

With this article, **Douglas R. Precourt** combined research on two of his greatest passions: fly fishing and Boy Scouting. In fact, the paper's research was completed as a part of his Wood Badge Ticket, advanced scout leader training. (He is pictured here receiving the Eagle Charge from his Uncle Harry in 1976.) Not only is he a third-generation scout, but he recently learned that he is a third-generation fly fisherman. Doug lives with his wife and four children in Hanover, Massachusetts, near the banks of the Indian Head and North rivers. He is a health insurance executive and an alumnus of Brigham Young University and Boston University. Although he does most of his fishing on local rivers, he enjoys fishing in southern New Hampshire and south-central Maine. Doug is a member of Trout Unlimited and the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

Doug is very interested in obtaining additional information about Baden-Powell and his love of fishing in the form of local news articles, book excerpts, and personal experiences for a broader writing. Feel free to contact Doug in care of this journal.





# Gifts for the Angler

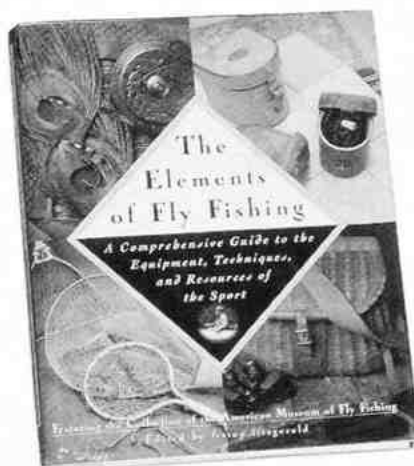
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Edited by f-stop fitzgerald, this book is a comprehensive guide to the equipment, techniques, and resources of the sport.

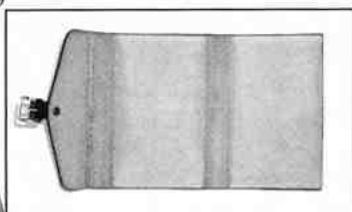
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## Leather Fly Wallet with Logo

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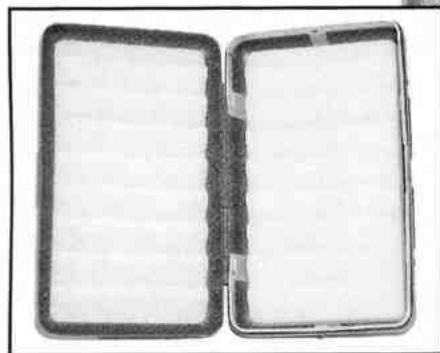
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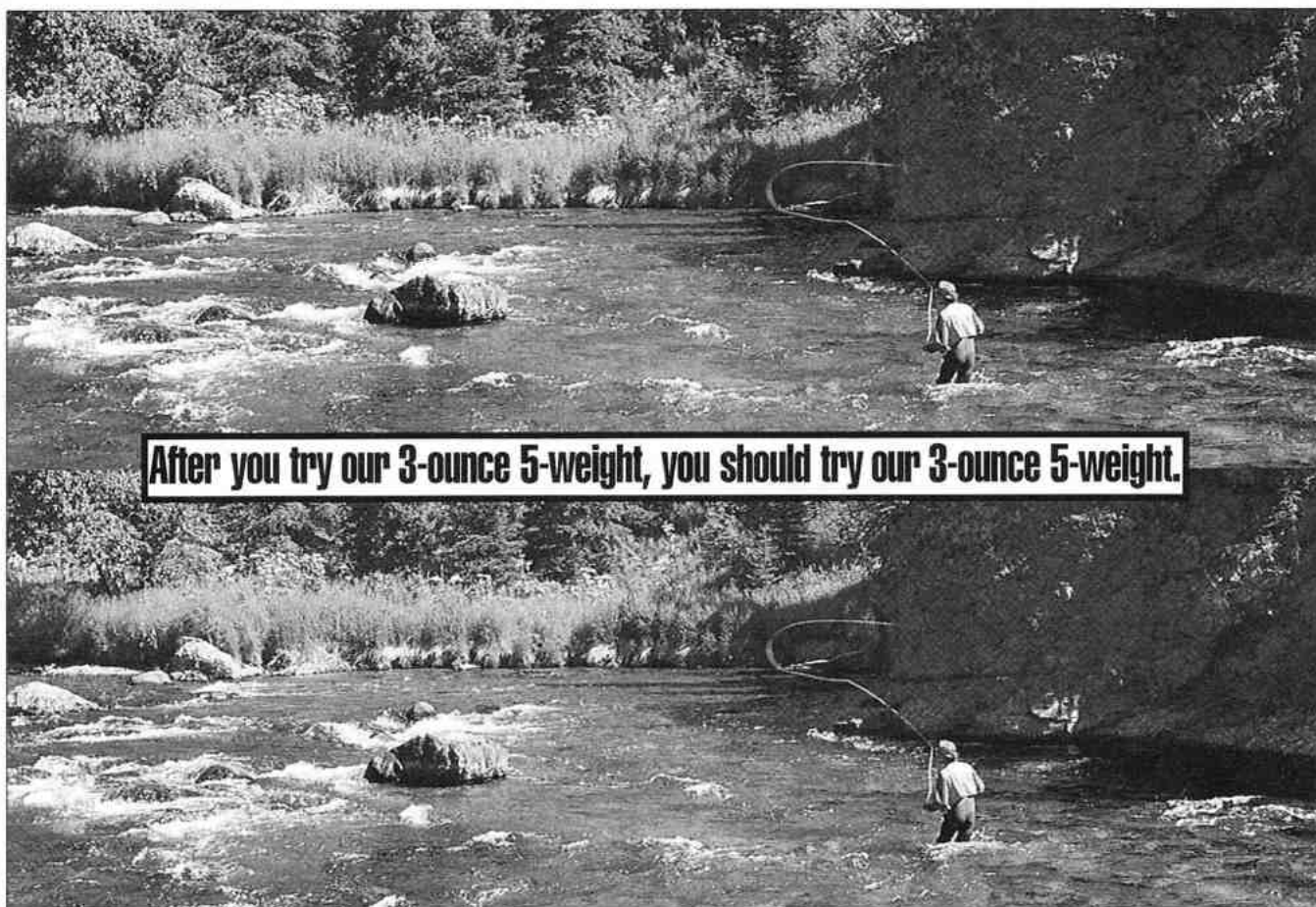
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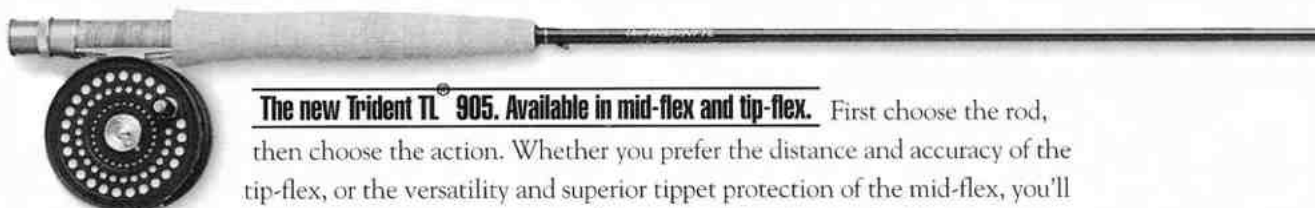
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# From Greenheart to Graphite

Margot Page



Why is there an American Museum of Fly Fishing?" This question comes to my mind daily (sometimes hourly). Of course, the answer is right in front of me, in our treasure trove of artifacts, art, and books, but sometimes one needs to get away from the dailiness of a job, step back, and take in the view. It took a recent trip to Montana (for the Heritage Award Dinner in honor of Bud Lilly—stay tuned for that complete story in the Winter 2000 issue) for me to really understand the reason for our existence.

Fly fishing is deeply rooted in the fabric of our culture. Like shards of native pottery, bits and pieces of fly-fishing history, when assembled into a whole, show it not to be (as Paul Schullery pointed out at the award dinner) an idle hobby, but rather a part of our very complex and changing regional identities.

Popular access to fly fishing and to the very *concept* of fly fishing, though, is perhaps becoming more limited than in days of yore, especially for young people. Consider this: to many of the current

generation just coming of fly-fishing age, Abercrombie & Fitch means baggy shorts and big T-shirts. Sporting goods stores are places to buy roller blades, kayaks, and snowboards. This is certainly part of today's popular culture, but fly-fishing gear has all but vanished from these places.

Of course, the tradition of fly fishing is alive and well in the thousands of wonderful fly-fishing specialty shops across the country—but how often do you see a couple of *kids* walk into one to soak up the sights, wishing for the latest rod or reel? Many of us spent chunks of childhood wishing for that latest rod and reel, but back then, fly fishing was found in those places readily accessible to everyone: the corner sporting goods store or even the hardware store.

As fly fishing becomes more specialized and separate, the American Museum of Fly Fishing becomes even more important as a vehicle of access to the sport and its history for young people. We are the keeper of the keys to fly fishing's colorful past. It is here that people like Halford and Skues, Gordon and Hewitt, Means and Martinez will stay alive for years to come, and it is here that young people can learn what these names *mean*.

From this Museum, we will send examples of the accomplishments of great men and women fly fishers to other museums as traveling exhibits. By doing this, we hope that millions of people—including those young ones just beginning to fly fish—will come to understand and appreciate the journey we've made from greenheart to graphite, develop a fascination for the culture of fly fishing (as many of us have), and become part of it. The American Museum of Fly Fishing is not only preserving the heritage of fly fishing, we are a part of helping people eventually shape that history.

Therefore we are.

GARY TANNER  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF FLY FISHING, a nationally accredited, nonprofit, educational institution dedicated to preserving the rich heritage of fly fishing, was founded in Manchester, Vermont, in 1968. The Museum serves as a repository for, and conservator to, the world's largest collection of angling and angling-related objects. The Museum's collections and exhibits provide the public with thorough documentation of the evolution of fly fishing as a sport, art form, craft, and industry in the United States and abroad from the sixteenth century to the present. Rods, reels, and flies, as well as tackle, art, books, manuscripts, and photographs form the major components of the Museum's collections.

The Museum has gained recognition as a unique educational institution. It supports a publications program through which its national quarterly journal, *The American Fly Fisher*, and books, art prints, and catalogs are regularly offered to the public. The Museum's traveling exhibits program has made it possible for educational exhibits to be viewed across the United States and abroad. The Museum also provides in-house exhibits, related interpretive programming, and research services for members, visiting scholars, authors, and students.

The Museum is an active, member-oriented nonprofit institution. For information please contact: The American Museum of Fly Fishing, P. O. Box 42, Manchester, Vermont 05254, 802-362-3300.

