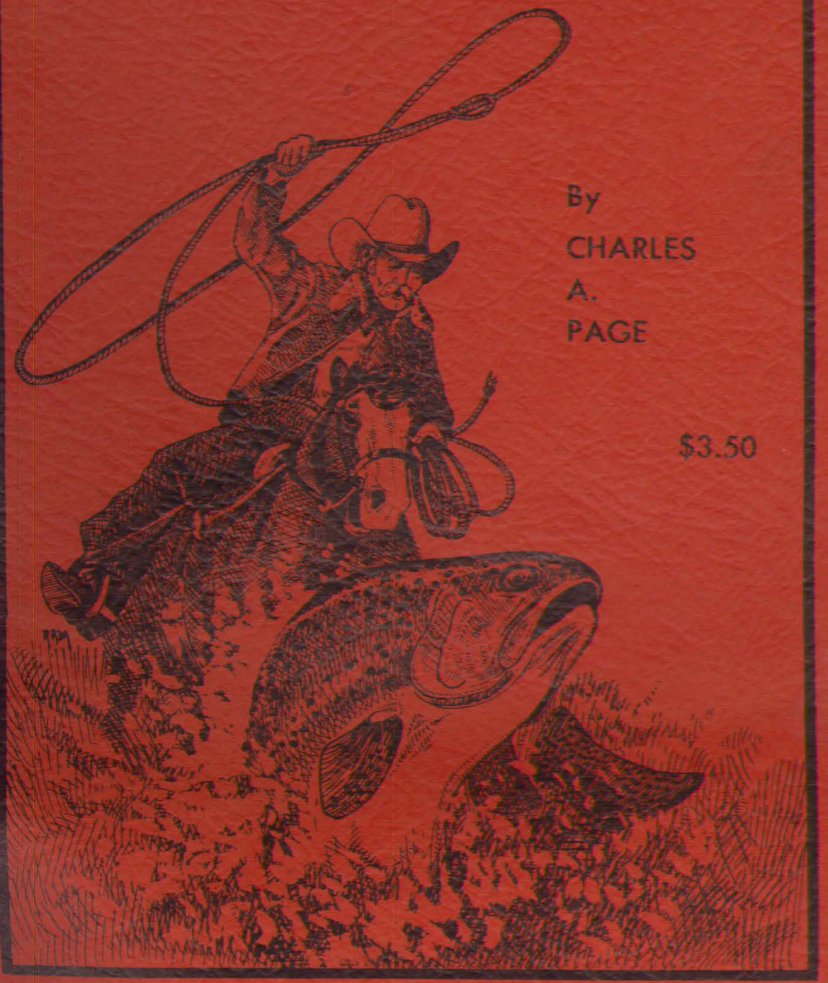
ROCKY MOUNTAIN FISH TALES



By
CHARLES
A.
PAGE

$3.50

COVER AND CHAPTER ILLUSTRATIONS

by Rudl Mergelman

. . . a Gunnison Country native, who has already gone far with his paintings and sculptures, and who will travel great distances in the future with his outstanding professionalism. The author is indebted to him for allowing his artistry to improve the words within these pages.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN FISH TALES

by Charles A. Page

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Also by Charles A. Page . . .

YOUR PASSPORT TO THE GUNNISON COUNTRY

WHAT'S IN A NAME IN THE GUNNISON COUNTRY

The following selections by the author have been printed elsewhere and are reprinted here with permission of the publishers:

"Opening Day Memories," THE FLY FISHERMAN, Manchester, VT, April, 1974

"Life with Ms Fisherman," EMPIRE, Denver, Colo., May, 1974

"Fish Talk," EMPIRE, Denver, Colo., 1975

"Biggest Pancake," EMPIRE, Denver, Colo., Sept., 1971

"Bent Pin, String and a Willow," EMPIRE, Denver, Colo., Aug., 1971

"Yesterday's Tips, Good for Today," MOUNTAIN GAZETTE, Denver, Colo., Nov., 1973

"Before the River Dies," THE FLYFISHER, Seattle, Wash., June-July, 1971

"Fishing & Other Things," GOOD OLD DAYS, Seabrook, N.H., July, 1974

"Galley Spouse Lament," MOTOR BOATING, New York, 1969

"Twelve Laws of A Fisherman," VIRGINIA WILDLIFE, Richmond, VA., Feb., 1972

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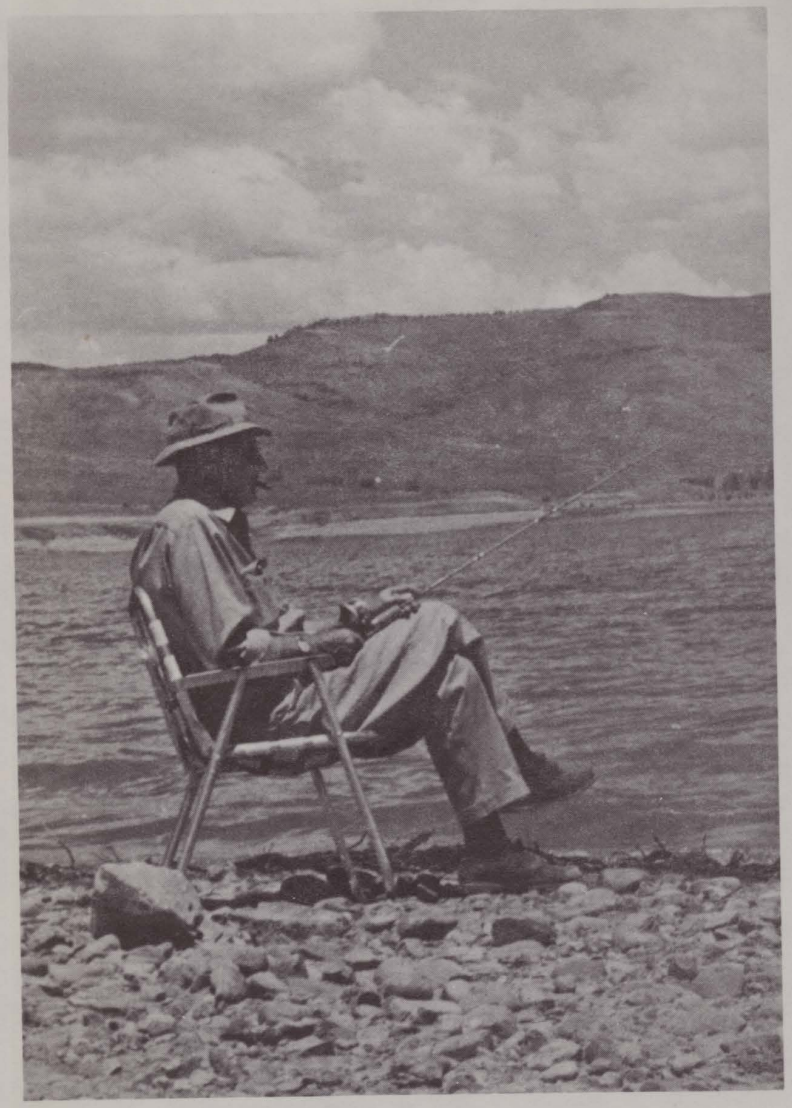
To

DOLORES



AH! THE LIFE OF A FISHERMAN

FOREWARD

The purpose of writing, they say, is to make you laugh, think, cry or all three. After you have read ROCKY MOUNTAIN FISH TAILS, I hope you had a laugh or at least a tiny grin. I hope certain parts made you think, just a little. And I am sure it didn't make you cry. Aside from more serious moments of life, about the only times a fisherman deserves a sob or two is when he has fought a big trout and lost, or when he misses a good day of fishing because he must mow the lawn or the family out-votes him and says, "No, today you spend with us and not at the end of a fly rod."

This is not a "How to" book. Hundreds of very fine ones already exist. If any so-called techniques appear in these pages, they sneaked in by accident. With more than 65 million fishermen in this country, you might find yourself in one of the stories. When it comes to fishing, I don't mind laughing at myself, and I'm positive other fishermen feel the same way.

After starting to put ROCKY MOUNTAIN FISH TAILS together, I read Robert Traver's TROUT MADNESS, passed on to me by my Mother. I thought, "Oh, oh! There's a similarity here." But with all writers and all fishermen being different, I had no qualms about this project. However, I would suggest you read his book. It is almost as enjoyable as fishing itself.

A few points should be made, because they tell me that is the purpose of a foreward or preface. . . . a chance to make excuses. When I use the word "fisherman," I'm referring to men, women, and children. This eliminates continually saying he or she, him or her or such things as fisherperson. I don't know of any ladies who call themselves fisherpersons.

It is not a general practice to capitalize Rainbow, Brown, Brook, Cutthroat, etc. However, trout deserve the honor of being in the upper and not the lower case.

Several chapters and some other matter included here have been published previously by magazines. Where they appeared is listed elsewhere. One fiction story was used, but since we are talking about fishing, that's permissible because all fishing stories aren't necessarily fact. Like Robert Traver, I don't know a soul who would release a monstrous trout after catching it, as does the person in this story. Such a person would be completely out of his mind. You may agree after you read "Before the River Dies."

One chapter, "Bent Pin, String and a Willow," appeared in another little book of mine, YOUR PASSPORT TO THE GUNNISON COUNTRY. My advisors said it should definitely be in FISH TAILS. The verse, "Galley Spouse Lament," was written after I heard the wife of a boat owner friend say, "I wouldn't know a thing about **his** boat. He lets me ride in it once in a while, but I never get to run it."

Finally, my thanks to all the people I've ever fished with, or even talked with about fishing. Without them, these yarns could never have been written. Although I don't have a huge Rainbow or Brown nailed to a slab of wood over my fireplace, I'll never give up. Unlike the man who said he would quit if he ever bowled a perfect 300-game, I will never stop fishing. It's too much fun and too relaxing. . . the best reasons I know for "goin' fishing."

Charles A. Page
Gunnison, Colorado
January, 1975

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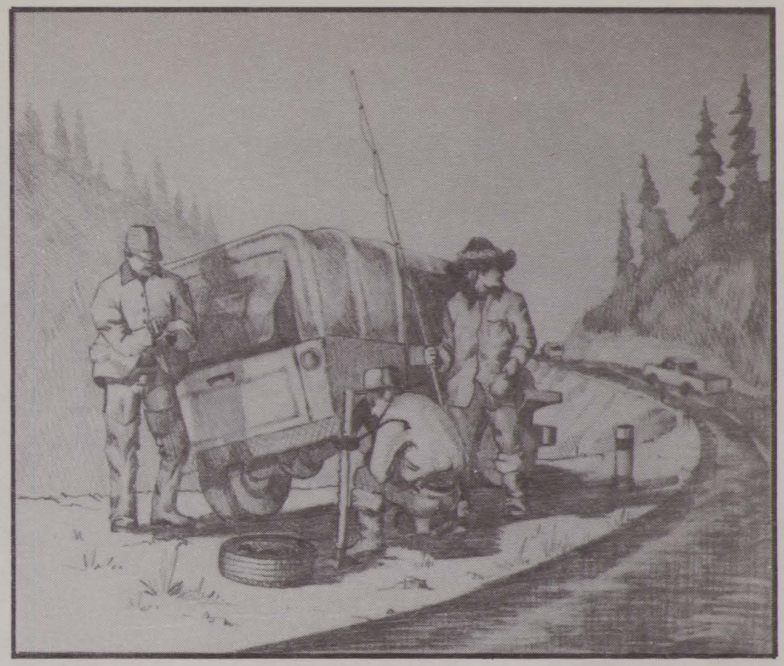


1
OPENING DAY MEMORIES

Every once in a while, like nearly every spring, the trout fishing fans around Gunnison converge on the coffee pots to talk about the "good old days" when Colorado had an official opening day for fishing season, rather than a year-around season.

There are mixed emotions about the whole thing. Some of the boys reminisce about preparing all winter long for that one **big day,** even if the third Saturday in May showed up with a little snow and ice around the fringes of streams and lakes. You can almost detect the sign of a tear in the eyes of one or two of the "Opening Day" advocates.

Some of the crew who are in business say the economy has gone to pot because they don't get that surge of cash register ringing when the season began. A few highway watchers miss seeing — on Friday night prior to the opening Saturday — the long string of cars pouring into town from the large cities on the Eastern Slope of Colorado. Two or three of the bunch used to park out by the cemetery road and count the headlights com-

ing down U.S. Highway 50. They even took along popcorn and soda pop, sort of like a drive-in movie.

Now fishing is a year-around thing, making the **big day** whichever one of the 365 you pick for your trip of the year.

More than likely the excitement of that particular Saturday in May is gone forever. What tension! What anticipation! Getting the gear ready weeks in advance, replacing old fishing line with new, patching holes in hip boots or waders, buying a new supply of flies, unless you tied them yourself, and telling the kids, "No, you can't go. The first day's strictly for grown-ups," as if it were a very private thing.

The coffee pot conversation brought to light one of those never-to-be-forgotten days, one that makes your heart bleed for the past.

After a pre-dawn breakfast at four o'clock, prepared by one of the ever-loving wives who lost the toss of the coin, four fishermen piled their gear and themselves into Charlie's station wagon. Everything went fine until they reached a point three or four miles above Almont on the Taylor River.

"Pow-wee!" went a rear tire. That didn't deter them. In the brisk mountain air, they removed the flat. Sam reached for the spare, but even before he touched the tire, it gave out a sort of moanful groan and a wheeze. All by itself, it just went flat.

Joe snapped his fingers. "We passed a Denver car down the road. I bet the tire size is the same." So they walked back, found the other station wagon, searched the shrubbery along the banks of Taylor River and discovered the fisherman up to his hips in the ice water. They motioned him over and told him their problem. "Could we borrow your spare to get us back to Almont to have ours fixed?" Now that took a lot of guts.

As he hesitated a moment, they fumbled for their drivers' licenses and other identification, but he said, "Okay." They unloaded almost all his stuff in the wagon to reach the spare. "We'll return it right away," Charlie promised, to assure him of their honesty.

"No problem," he replied heading for the river. "I'll be fishing along here somewhere."

Because the little station at Almont wasn't open that early, they drove back to Gunnison. Reaching town, Sam came up

with a brilliant idea. "Why wait to get our tire fixed. Let's leave your wagon at the station, and use my car."

Impatient to start fishing, they agreed, so at the tire shop they transferred all the stuff. Rods, creels, lunches and etcetera, which is guite important for a one-day fishing trip. Soon they headed back up Taylor Canyon. They dropped off the man's spare. When he refused an offer of pay, they put a six-pack of beer into his cooler, when he wasn't looking. Later Charlie received a letter from him. He didn't drink, but he appreciated the gesture.

After being cooped up all winter with a good case of cabin fever, they looked forward to these few hours of the world's finest sport. With Sam skillfully maneuvering through this beautiful canyon, they knew they were on their way.

Joe and Mike in the back seat decided to break down one of the fly rods sticking out an open window to avoid catching it in a bush or tree along the narrow road. The struggle might have resembled a two-man tug-of-war. Finally, when the sections popped loose, Joe hit Mike in the mouth with his fist, leaving a good bruise and a bloody lip.

Joe felt bad. Bad enough to reach into his creel stowed on the floor and pull a fifth of whiskey out of it. Then, "It might be a little early for you guys, but I'm having a good, stiff snort." After a strong pull straight from the bottle, he asked, "Anybody else?" They all turned him down. Joe set the bottle on the floor and said, "Help yourself any time."

The upper reaches of the canyon road followed the river's edge, and the sight brought out fish stories from last season. This went on until they drove up around Taylor Dam to start the descent into the park area. Their main objective was the Taylor River above the reservoir, so naturally they kept busy looking into the high country, ignoring the sharp bends in the road. As they made the last turn, Sam at the wheel stuck his nose into the air and sniffed. "You guys smell something?"

They all got into the sniffing act. "Sure, but what is it?" It definitely wasn't a burning odor.

"Not a fire," Joe said, "It's more like. . . . "

"Booze!" Mike suggested.

Joe ducked and came up with the fifth of whiskey. He hadn't replaced the cap. Most of his liquid refreshment had run out onto the floor. It got pretty strong, so they opened all

the windows. "What's your wife going to say tomorrow, Sam, when she takes the kids to church?"

After hitting the park, it didn't take long to drive to the river inlet. They hopped out, started rigging their rods and got ready to see who would make the first catch. Joe, Sam, and Mike were all set, not Charlie. In transferring gear to Sam's car, they had left half his flyrod in the station wagon back in town.

Joe, still feeling bad about his run of luck said, "Maybe we'd better quit right now before something really serious happens. One of us might fall into the creek and drown or something."

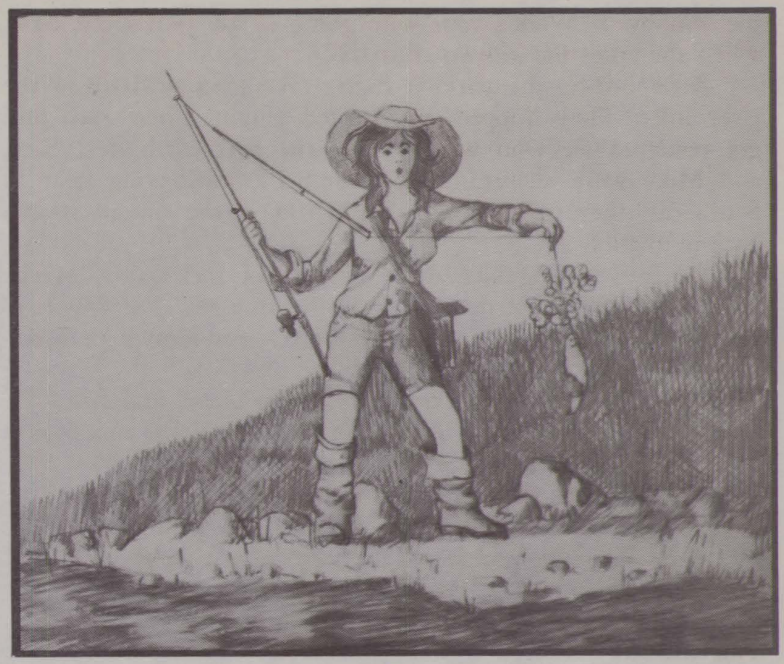
Charlie told them not to worry, to go ahead and fish. "I'll drive back down to the little store near the lake and rent a rod," which he did.

Mike was the first to arrive back at the car, after about an hour of fishing, with only two small rainbows to his credit. He had even forgotten about his sore mouth in the thrill of getting on the stream. His breakfast was wearing thin, so for some quick energy, he unwrapped a chocolate bar with nuts. The first bite shattered a tooth, probably cracked by the force of Joe's fist. No toothache, but it took several minutes to get out all the loose pieces through the process of elimination.

Fishing had been good all over the Gunnison Country that day — except under the cloud of the gloomy four. The wind blew and it grew cold. Their catch was limited to three or four each, and nothing worth entering the local fish contest. Yet everyone else seemed to have done all right that day.

The finale came when they dropped Charlie off at the service station in town. He knew the first tire had been ruined, so he had no particular regrets. But the tire shop man met him at the station wagon. "Sorry, Charlie, your spare was paper thin. We fixed it, put it on, and it blew out just from the weight of the car."

Yes, sir. They sure spoiled fishing when they took away that wonderful Opening Day and all its happy memories.



2

LIFE WITH MS FISHERMAN

"No, Charlie," she said. "I'm too squeamish to stick a fish hook through those hairy bugs!"

What a shock! What a disappointment in discovering after twenty-four years of marriage, Dolores hadn't been giving me the attention I deserve. She didn't know those "hairy bugs" were really artificial flies for fishing. No wonder she never questioned my spending a lot of money for each of those hand-tied trout killers.

I decided not to tell her the truth. As frugal as she is, I'm afraid we would have a scene.

Dolores tried. She really did. I thought maybe, just maybe I could try her with a neater form of angling — my favorite — fly fishing. But I finally gave up.

"I won't put those little flies on a hook, especially if they're alive."

That final straw broke this fisherman's determination. All those wasted years of trying to make a fishing companion out of my wife went down the drain.

Married halfway through my Navy hitch, we weren't together much, other than a week's honeymoon, until my last year at San Diego. I drove her crazy talking about getting back to Colorado, settling down and going fishing. She looked forward to the first two, but I wasn't so sure about the third.

But she said, "Sounds like fun."

I reminisced about my fishing trips as a kid, as if they happened yesterday.

"Sounds interesting, Charlie."

Still almost newly-weds, we were no doubt star-struck. I wasn't so star-struck I couldn't take my fishing thoughts seriously. "We will buy a station wagon and sleep in the back in the mountains alongside a stream."

She snuggled up a little closer. "Sounds delicious."

Eventually we settled down in the Gunnison Country of the Colorado Rockies. On our first trip I let Dolores watch me fish so she could get the feel for the sport. While I waded the middle of the Gunnison River, she followed along the bank where she could see me cast a fly line. I talked on and on about the proper techniques.

"You don't have to reach clear across the river," I explained. "Just play the riffles on your side. There are plenty of fish."

I talked and talked and she listened. Or at least I thought she did. Pretty soon I looked over my shoulder. She was gone. She hadn't fallen in or I would have heard the splash. Retrieving my line, I waded over to the bank. I finally found her gathering "pretty rocks." So much for the first fishing lesson. Our overnight camping trip ended the next morning after I told her you don't try to start a campfire with an old railroad tie.

Deciding to handle the next trip differently, I bought her an inexpensive casting rod and reel, because she kept insisting she wanted to be a fishing pal.

We went back to the river. I found a big hole where she could bait fish. I went through the simple rudimentary steps of casting. "Now get a worm."

"You mean those squiggly things?" she asked, pointing to the bait can.

"Sure. Just pick one up and put it on the hook."

Gingerly with thumb and forefinger poised over the can, she went at it as if picking up a 10-carat diamond but was

afraid she might drop it. The closer the fingers got to the can, the quicker they retreated.

"Charlie, I can't do it."

"Sure you can." I grabbed a worm and put it on the palm of her hand. A jerky movement flipped it into the air.

Anxious to start fly fishing, I said, "Okay, I'll start you out just once." Looking away as I impaled the creature on the hook, she gave out a sort of disgusted "ugh!"

"It's that simple," I told her. "Now toss it into the pool and just wait. I'll go downstream."

With her line in the water, she smiled and was satisfied. So was I. Now I could fish. I moved on, hitting some likely looking spots and got a few strikes. So I smiled too. In less than five minutes I heard a scream that even shook the willows along the bank.

"I got one. Charlie! I got one!"

Sure enough I could see her rod bend and quiver. "Take it slow. Ease him out," I hollered back. It's very important to not horse a trout out of the water. Very important. To show some interest in her first trout, I headed toward her.

Dolores handled the rod like a deep-sea rig. Then all of a sudden she whipped the little rod as hard as she could. The helpless Rainbow went sailing over her head into the long grass. "Well, that's one way to do it," I said to myself, but not very scientific.

"What'll I do now?" Dolores hollered again, even though by this time I stood right beside her.

"Take him off the hook and bang his head against a rock."

She frowned sadly. "Oh, I couldn't do that." She backed off.

"See, it's easy." I took care of the chore. "now bait up again and catch another one."

She had to be happy, catching her first trout, but she didn't look it. "Charlie, would you mind putting on the worm for me? Just one more time?"

I did my husbandly deed and went back upstream, anxious to catch something myself.

This time when she waved and screamed, I waved back and kept on fishing. "After all, Charlie, she has to learn to do it herself," I said aloud.

Thirty minutes later, after I had caught and released a lot

of small ones and kept a couple nice Rainbows, I walked back downstream.

Dolores didn't hear me. She was on her knees trying to put a worm on the hook, only this time she wore a pair of cotton gloves.

"Where did you get those things?"

"You had them in the back of the station wagon."

With the poor worm squirming for its very life, she closed her eyes and rammed the hook through. I couldn't forsee a great future for her as a fisherman.

"Have you been getting any more bites?"

She pointed to five fair-sized trout on the grass beside her. They seemed badly bruised, but at least it was more than I had.

"How come they got beat up like that?"

"I couldn't hold them long enough to hit their heads on anything, so I dropped a big rock on them. Still seems awfully cruel to me."

I didn't let her see me shake my head in wonderment.

"Charlie," she said, "please do something about that one fish. I think the poor thing is still breathing.

I did something about it.

"You should have left me your butterfly net. One I caught went clear up to the road when I flipped it out."

"Butterfly net?"

"That thing." She pointed at my long-handled Gunnison crutch. Well, I guess it does resemble a butterfly net.

As we started to secure our gear, Dolores said, "I wish now I hadn't caught any fish."

"How come? Wasn't it fun?"

"Well," she stammered, "maybe. But I'm not going to clean them."

My visions of producing a fishing companion got much dimmer.

From then on, every time I asked her to go with me, she had an excuse. "I've got washing to do." Or, "I have a headache." Or, "I'm too tired." Finally through the years, I gave up trying.

Whenever I came home with a nice catch, however, she showed interest. "Oh, those are nice. How big is that one." And so on.

Once or twice she cooked a batch of trout for me, but us-

"Big Trout Need Big Flies"

ually when I brought them home, she'd say, "Charlie, Mr. and Mrs. Radeka said they liked trout. Why don't you be nice and give them some?"

I could see the method in her madness. She not only didn't like to bait the hook, or kill a trout, she also hated cooking them. "Smells up the whole house," she'd say.

My Mother loved trout and fried potatoes. After one of her visits, Dolores cornered me. "Charlie, do you know something?"

"No, what?"

"Your Mother fries those fish with their heads still on."

"What's the matter with that?"

"The way those eyes pop out is really gruesome. And I told her about it too."

"Hope you didn't make her angry."

"I don't think so."

Anyway, the next time Mother came up, I noticed she cut off the heads before she cooked trout.

One summer evening when I got home from a good productive day of fishing on the Gunnison River, I tossed the beauties in the kitchen sink until I could eat a sandwich and have a glass of cold beer. Sitting there relaxed I came up with an idea. "I know how I can win a prize in that fishing tip contest."

"How?" Dolores asked while using a can of air freshener around the kitchen and living room to kill the fishy smell.

"After gutting them, I'll use a toothbrush to clean the bloodline along the backbone."

She went "ugh!" Then, "If you're crazy enough to try it, be darn certain you don't accidently put **that** toothbrush back into the bathroom. I'd hate to brush my teeth with it."

She didn't say, "ugh," however, when I went to the post office the next week to pick up my $150 camera for first place.

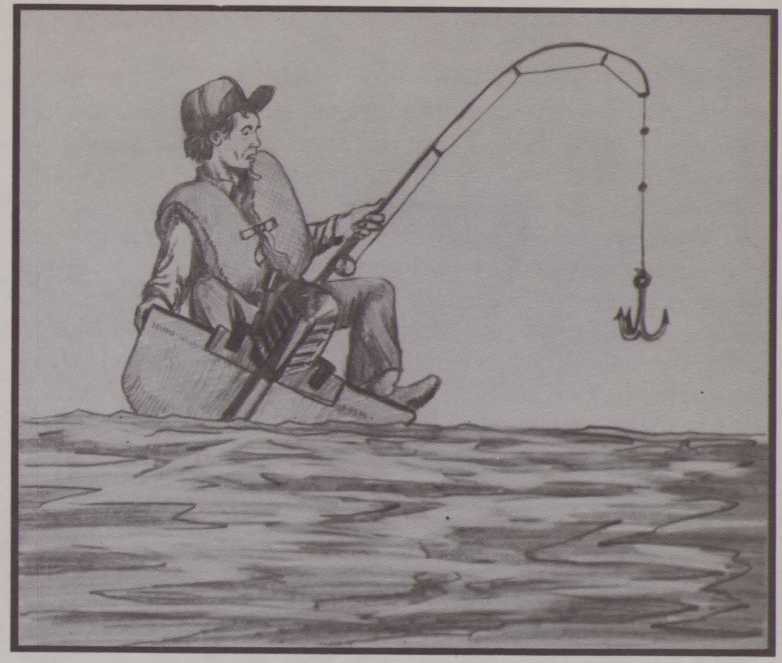
After all these years Dolores got the urge to get out more with me to enjoy the wonderful country. So I decided maybe fly fishing would be more up her alley. When she thought those expensive flies I buy were the real thing, I just gave up trying to make a fishing companion out of her.

But you know, I don't really care. When I get home in the evening after a good summer's day of fishing, she's got a nice supper waiting for me and she's interested in my luck.

I don't mind. I'm satisfied with her just as she is. Besides, when I'm fishing I don't like to visit with people. Not even my wife.

Someone said he liked fishing, not because he thinks it is so important, but because so many of the other concerns of men are equally unimportant. . . . and not nearly so much fun as fishing.

——Author Unknown



3

FISH TALK

After another busy summer of listening to fishermen talk, it seemed necessary to compile a list of definitions which may be helpful to new Colorado anglers. More technical information can be gathered from many volumes written by more scientific experts. These are just a few terms a beginner might memorize during the winter months.

ANY LUCK? — The first two words you should say to another fisherman as you approach him (or her) either along a stream or lake. Usually, regardless of how good or bad the fishing has been for him, his response will always be "Oh, I've just caught a couple of small ones." It is not good fishing etiquette to ask to see them, because if he has been doing quite well, his creel is probably loaded with some big Rainbows or Browns, and he doesn't want you to know that, or you might try to steal **his** fishing place.Or he doesn't have anything at all,

and he doesn't want you to know what a lousy fisherman he really is.

BAIT — One meaning of the word is "to lure, entice, harass," which leads to the definition we want — "to apply bait to a hook." Bait can be of almost any description. In Colorado, for example, there are certain rules which apply to live minnows, meaning some places you can and some places you cannot. Some other forms of bait are worms, salmon eggs or cavier, parts of certain dead fish, cheese, corn on a hook but not for chumming (see Chum), a piece of T-Bone steak and so on. One thing can be said for bait fishing. If you are caught out in the tullies and run out of food, you can always eat the cavier, cheese, corn and the remnants of the T-Bone steak.

CRAMPGROUND — This is a campground, public or private, where the campers are cramped in as closely together as possible, thereby keeping them from getting lonely. One lady writing a chamber of commerce said, "We don't want to stay in a crampground."

CHRISTMAS TREE — This is one definition of a device used in trolling behind a boat to attract the fish. It is also called "pop-gear" and "cow bells," and there are others. It can be as short as 12 inches or as long as three feet, consisting of many bright, attractive spinner elements strung on a metal line or what looks to be a light cable. Moving action makes each element rotate, flashing bright colors of all descriptions. To a human being they may look like Christmas trees, but cow-bells they do not look like, and to a fish, which has seen neither, it is just something to get his attention to a worm or lure attached to the lower end.

CHUM — This is not a friend or pal or even a roomy, as the dictionary tells us. "To chum" means to place large quantities of fish, parts or fish or other material such as corn, salmon eggs, etc., in the water for the purpose of attracting fish to a particular area in order that they may be taken more easily. In other words, the fisherman is being a "chum" to the fish, or it could also mean the trout are more chummy by getting together in a group. This is against the law in Colorado. Some fishermen using worms or eggs, who continually lose their bait, and therefore deposit lots of worms or eggs in the water accidentally, can almost be described as chumming, but not on purpose.

"Some People Catch Ducks"

CASTING TECHNIQUES — Hollywood has a great many people who have casting techniques, and they are known as casting directors. But with anglers, casting techniques mean the various methods of getting a fishing line out on the water in the place where you expect fish to be in such a manner as not to disturb any other fish. A Hollywood casting director could certainly find a spot in a film for some of the antics performed by fishermen using casting techniques.

FISHING POLE — According to some so-called fishing experts, only amateurs call a fishing rod a "fishing pole." If a man should slip and use the word "pole," he would automatically be kicked out of the fisherman's fraternity. No matter how often the early anglers wrote the word "rod" you still get the feeling, by looking at the sketches of the 18-foot long affairs, that they were in truth "poles" rather than "rods."

FISHING ROD — (See Fishing pole). The correct term for a device on which is attached several metal loops through which a line is strung, as a means of getting close to trout. This is not the same "rod" referred to by G-Man Melvin Purvis when he tells his officers, "Come on, men. Grab your rods. We are going after a bunch of fish."

FISH HOG — This is not a hog preferring fish on his diet, nor a fish that looks like a hog. It is a two-legged species, mistakenly classified as a "man." If you saw him along the stream or lake, you couldn't distinguish him from anyone else with his friendly smile and cordial words, but behind those facades evil lurks. He catches and keeps more than the legal limit, he is one of the causes of fish shortages, and therefore puts a tremendous load on the hatcheries. Watch him closely. He keeps everything he catches, then when he thinks no one is looking, he "caches" some of the smaller ones under a bush or other hiding place. Later, he will gather them up. Back at his vehicle, he will leave his legal limit in his creel or put it in the ice chest, and scattered the rest in such secret hiding places as hub caps, under the dirty laundry in his camper, at the bottom of a camera case, or behind a bookshelf in a trailer where he keeps all his "How to be a Sport" books. Later he can be detected by an odor should he forget where he hid some of them and they begin to rot away. I have only known two real live fish hogs. Both crossed the Divide several years ago. One I am sure is still broiling his trout over the hot coals down there.

FLEA ROD — This is not for catching fleas, but a 6 to 6½ foot rod for fishing on small, brush-lined streams.

GRAPPLING HOOK — This is a clawed implement formerly used to hold an enemy ship alongside for boarding. A smaller version is used for dragging things from the bottom of rivers and lakes. An even smaller version is used for dragging fish from the same places, and is referred to as a treble hook. There are several advantages of lures with one or more treble hooks. Fewer trout are probably caught with treble hooks than by a single hook. Another advantage is this: they are much easier to get snagged on the bottom. Loss of such a lure means the factory will have to make more, resulting in high employment in the sporting goods industry which is good for the economy.

GUNNISON CRUTCH -- Usually in many fish books, a net or landing net is referred to as a short-handled affair. A Gunnison Crutch,which no doubt goes by other names across the country, is nothing more than a long-handled landing net made of wood or metal. A center on a basketball team would need a much longer one than I do, which is about 4 feet 3

inches. It is tucked in the arm-pit and comfortably becomes a crutch to give balance while standing in a swift river, and can be used as a walking stick. The uninitiated often call it a butterfly net.

LIMIT — This means the number of fish you can catch and keep within the limits of the law. I know one man who doesn't boast about his fishing, which is unusual at best. When someone asks him if he got his limit, he'll pull one scrawny Rainbow out of his creel and say, "Yep."

NICE MESS — Oliver Hardy used to say to Stan Laurel, "Now you've got us into a fine mess." But when Grandma used to say this, "Why don't you boys bring back a nice mess and I'll fix them for supper with fried potatoes," she was talking about trout.

NICE CATCH — Denver Bronco fans will scream and holler when the wide receiver does his job on a long pass, "Nice catch." In fishing you'll say it to a fellow fisherman who has just landed a good-sized trout. If the fisherman is a small boy and even if the trout is small, you will also say the same thing.

PICKUP — This is not what you are thinking, nor is it a certain type of truck, but a method of retrieving or "picking up" the fly so it won't disturb the water and scare the fish.

SHINGLES — These can be put on your roof. But they have another purpose in fishing. In order to catch very large trout from the middle of a lake you can't reach by casting, you tie a small field mouse onto a big bait hook. Don't stick the hook into the mouse, because you want to give him a chance to survive. Then you get on the windward side of the lake. Place the mouse on a shingle and let the wind carry it out into the center. Then you pull the mouse off the shingle. He is sure to attract a huge Rainbow or Brown, and if he's lucky he will escape.

SNAG — More fishermen catch these than anything else. This is proven, because when you ask a fisherman how he is doing, he will respond with, "I've got my limit of snags." A beginner will ask, "What is the limit of snags? Are they good eating, and what is the best bait to use?" Location of snags depends on the type of fisherman. A fly fisherman always catches his snags in the trees behind him or in the bushes clear across the creek. Bait and lure fishermen always catch theirs in the water on old logs, rocks or other debris. Bait and lure

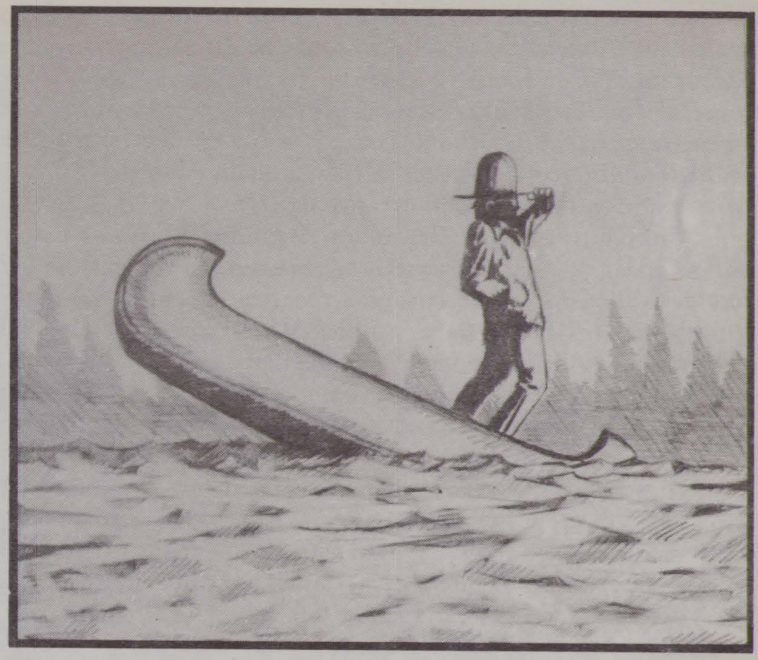
users are much better catchers of snags than are fly fishermen, which puts down the old theory that the latter are more capable with rod and reel. Manufacturers of hooks, sinkers and leaders constantly lobby for snag fishermen because they want to increase their production. There is a rumor that such lobbyiests are trying for legislation in the game and fish departments to set aside certain areas of streams and rivers for "snag fishing only," just as there are "fly fishing only" areas.

STRIKE — This is something workers go out on, or batters get called for. Here it means the fish striking at a fly or lure. Some folks believe the fish actually **strike at** the fly with one of his fins, as if he were "hitting" at it. This is why some people prefer to call a "strike" a "hit." Oh, yes, in referring back to the first definition of strike, it is also something many wives "go out on" in the midst of summer when they want their husbands to do something other than just "fish."

GALLEY SPOUSE LAMENT

It's not my job to run the boat,
The whistle I can't blow.
It's not my job to say how far
Our boat's allowed to go.

It's not my job to rev her up,
Nor even clang the bell.
But let the damn boat hit a snag,
Then see who catches hell!



4

LEGEND OF RUNAMUCK, A FISHING GUIDE

Because the Ute Indians hunted and fished in the Gunnison Country in south-central Colorado, many legends have become a part of the folklore of the area. Some of the better known Ute names connected with this Indian heritage are Chipeta, Cochetopa, Ouray, Curecanti, Sapinero and Shavano. Two familiar expressions can be seen today along the highways imprinted on signs prepared by the State Highway Department: Deer Crossing and Falling Rock. Contrary to rumors these are not names of Ute warriors.

Another name also has nothing to do with the Utes. It is a modern-day legend known by a handful of locals and a very few outsiders. It is "Runamuck."

A legend is supposed to be an unverifiable popular story handed down from the past. Although parts of the Runamuck story are verifiable, many natives believe it should be classified as legend. Since it involves a real-life person everyone has agreed

his real name should never be mentioned in print or conversations. The natives, or anyone who has heard the story, believe "Runamuck" still wanders aimlessly in the West Elk Wilderness Area north of Blue Mesa Lake. No sightings have been made recently.

Although many versions of the Runamuck story exist, I can vouch for the accuracy of only one.

Lynn Sanner, one of Denver's well-known television sportscasters, spoke at a large Saturday night awards banquet. It had become a practice in recent years for the hosts to take the speaker and his family out on Blue Mesa Lake the following day. Lynn had heard about Colorado's largest lake with its 96-mile shoreline, but he had never seen it. Not concerned about catching trout himself, he did want his 8-year-old son, Pat, to hook at least one, so he accepted.

Ron, the committee chairman, had the responsibility of lining up boats, bait, gear, and prodded the wives into preparing a picnic lunch for us. He also took it upon himself to find the best local expert to direct us to where the trout were hitting.

Three boatloads of us met at Elk Creek Marina at 6:30 a.m. after a long night of banqueting and other things. A thin film of ice covered the dock planking that brisk late spring day. In spite of the hour and the long night, everybody anxiously awaited a good day's fishing. Ron got fidgety. His expert hadn't shown up.

"Let's just leave without him," somebody suggested.

Most of us fished the lake off and on, so we might have found some good spots, but for the sake of Lynn Sanner's young son, we wanted to be certain of a successful day.

Suddenly, mystically appearing out of the rocks and sagebrush surrounding the marina, this tall, fishy-type person showed up. It wasn't Ron's expert. To me the most distinctive thing about him was the black, wide-brimmed felt hat, something I had seen before, maybe in a movie. Then I recognized the beaded hat-band from a performance of a local theatre group. This guy,whoever he was, may have purchased it from the thrift shop after the performance.

His beard wasn't particularly outstanding in this day and age of unusual beards. It sort of began roughly at the end of one sideburn and meandered around until it reached the other sideburn. It certainly was no barn-burner.

"Runamuck"

He had heard us stewing over the lateness of our fishing expert. "I can spare some time if you would like me to show you where the big ones are hitting."

Ron whispered to me, trying not to be too obvious. "Where did this guy come from? Do you know him?"

I shook my head. I'd never seen him before.

The big fellow kept his hands hidden deep in the pockets of his heavy coat. The turned-up collar protected his raggity beard from the very light snow drizzle and wind. "I don't charge for my guiding services as long as you have a little lunch and maybe some liquid refreshments."

We had both. Ron glanced around at all of us and finally said, "What the hell can we lose? Okay, let's go before our feet freeze to the dock."

The first forecast from our guide was, "The weather will take a turn for the better." So we foolishly left our heavy jackets in the cars. Later in the morning, while we sat or stood around shivering and complaining of the cold, I remembered the expert's advice. He could read our minds. "Don't pay attention to what I say, just what I do." Yes, he was comfortable in his mackinaw.

We split up into three boats with most of the party going aboard Ron's boat, sometimes called a barge, because of its

large flat-decked, lots-of-room appearance. I got into a boat owned and driven by Joe, who himself was nearly an expert. Purely by coincidence, this big, black hatted fellow got in also.

As we headed out into the main channel, Joe turned back to me. "Which way do we go, Charlie?" I think he was trying to ignore our newly acquired guide.

Before I could answer, Big Brim took one hand out of a pocket and pointed. "West Elk inlet." The hand went back into the pocket. This self-made guide gave the impression most of the day that he knew what he was talking about. "This time of year," he said, "the Rainbows are spawning in the inlets. This gives the big Browns something to eat."

Although a large man, over six feet and more than 200 pounds, he appeared to be quite agile and physically fit. While we cruised along, Big Brim dug a pair of bifocals out of his pocket and rigged up one of the fishing rods. As we neared the muddy bank he gracefully went forward, grabbed up the line and poised on the bow, still wearing the glasses.

He leaped like a fawn, well, maybe more like a lumbering bull elk, and landed flat on his face in the mud. His big black hat, true to movie style, remained on his head. After slowly forcing himself to his feet with his front covered with sticky mud, he put his glasses back into a pocket. "Just got these last week. They'll take some getting used to."

Brushing aside his embarrassment, he lined up everybody at what he called the best holes. After explaining the feeding habits of trout, ignoring the fact that some of us claimed to have been born with fishing rods in our hands, he made certain each fisherman used something different. "This way," he said, "We can find out what they're hitting without wasting a lot of time." We alternated with salmon eggs, worms, night crawlers, spinners and he even ordered one man to use wet flies.

After a couple of no-luck hours went by, he showed a little impatience, while most of us were furious, especially because we wanted our guest, Lynn Sanner and his son, Pat, to catch some fish.

Big Brim donned his bifocals to help the small boy bait his hook. A few minutes later he climbed to a high spot on the bank above the shoreline and waved his hands. "Everybody to the boats. Now we'll try the Soap Creek inlet."

I edged over toward Ron. "What do you think?"

Ron shook his head in disgust. "Might as well do as he says. It can't be any worse than what we're doing now."

Big Brim started down the bank. Sure enough, he looked through the wrong piece of lens, and after one long step, came crashing down the slippery slope. We were almost certain, seeing him sprawled there flat on his back this time, he would throw those glasses into the lake. But he thought better of it, calmly putting them into a coat pocket before standing up.

Helping him into our boat, I recalled something I had heard during a fish tale session not long before, and that's how I remember part of the legend. About a week before, the Park Service reported someone had been cruising the lake late at night with his throttle wide open. He had forgotten about Moncrief's Island and drove his boat right up onto it, nearly tearing out the bottom.

After Big Brim got in, I asked him, "Do you own a boat?"

"Yes, but it is in dry dock for some very minor repairs."

The armada headed downstream toward the open part of Blue Mesa and turned to starboard to reach the Soap Creek inlet. One of our passengers, trying his luck at trolling with an attractive lure, caught three nice Kokanee salmon. I suggested we retrace our course to cover the spot again, but our leader shook his head.

"Runamuck and His Friends"

"Bigger and better fish in the Soap Creek inlet. No sense wasting time."

That's where we went. After all, you can't argue with a famous fishing guide, even if you don't pay him and even if he sort of horned in on the fishing party.

Finally, after a couple more hours of trolling the inlet and still-fishing from the anchored boats, we ended up on the shore to build a small fire to thaw us out, even though it was nearly noon. Our guide stared at the water as if trying to cast a spell over the trout.

Ron, very disappointed our guest weren't catching any fish, said, "I can see why this character doesn't charge anything for his guide service."

We watched Big Brim run from one fisherman to the next, checking their bait or lures, shaking his head and going on to the next one. Those of us who had fished here before, couldn't imagine what was wrong. Usually in the inlets in the spring or early summer, you got your limit easily and quickly. Maybe we had a hoodoo on us.

While the guide flitted from one to another, someone at our fireside said, "Runamuck."

The name stuck.

Gradually, one fisherman after another gave up dangling a worm in the cold water and headed for the campfire. Runamuck remained with the last fisherman, then slowly wandered toward us. Unless he had a hearing problem, he caught every word.

"Boy, this guy is a real dud."

"I don't think he knows anything about fishing or the lake."

"I'll bet he's one of those conservationists and didn't want us to catch any trout in the first place."

"Runamuck is a pretty good name for him. He's been running amuck all morning."

"Why don't we give up? I have a friend in town with a private pond. We can take the kids there where they're sure to catch at least a couple of little ones."

"Quiet," I said, "here he comes."

The conversation went off into other tangents.

"Some People Don't Use Fishing Guides"

Edging up to the fire, he warmed his hands, and put them back into his coat pockets. "My usefulness has run its course."

Nods went around like in a circle of dominos. "Guess we should head back," Ron suggested. "Winds will be coming up soon. We can eat our sandwiches and fried chicken on the way back."

We gathered up our gear, put out the fire and headed for the boats tied along the shoreline. The boat captains, as is the rule, made head counts to avoid leaving any of the kids behind. One person was missing. Runamuck! Standing high on the bank with his hands shoved into his pockets, he made no move to come on board.

"Come on, let's go," Ron hollered at him.

"I leave the way I came. Your guide will return to the forest."

He pointed toward the high mountains of the West Elk Wilderness Area and walked into the timber, hands in pockets, head bowed low.

"Ron," I said, "we better not leave him behind. It's a long walk around the inlet to the highway at the dam."

"We can't physically force him. Besides, where'd he come from? I've had a feeling all day that he isn't real."

Through the trees, we could still see the black, wide-brimmed hat tipped down as if he were watching every step he took.

"Well, he's running amuck heading into that wild country."

As we backed off the beach and headed slowly toward the main part of the lake, one of the older boys said, "Runamuck will become a legend disappearing like that."

And he did.

"The best time to go fishing is when you can get away." This has been attributed to that excellent writer of fishing stories, Robert Traver, but we all say it.

5

BIGGEST PANCAKE EVER

Not long ago while driving down U.S. Highway 50 between Salida and Canon City, Colo., I again saw the tumbled-down remnants of a building not far from the road.

It used to be my Uncle Dan's ranch house. At least that's what he called it.

Before the war my folks often took us for fishing weekends to Uncle Dan's, either to stay for a visit with his family, or as a stopping-off place on our way to Buena Vista. It took nearly four hours on the old graveled highway from Pueblo — dusty and washboardy and hot in the rumble seat of a Whippet. The place seemed nothing more than four rooms at most, including the kitchen. I remember it as pots and pans with a table in the middle, covered by a red and white oil cloth. A wood stove with an oven stood in the corner. A dishpan served as a sink.

This particular Friday night we arrived tired and hungry. We kids got peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and milk. The

folks got peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and coffee. I think Uncle Dan gave Dad something else out by the well, and it wasn't coffee. It didn't take long to go to sleep, thinking about tomorrow. It would be our fishing day.

Early next morning Uncle Dan got a hot fire going to heat the griddle and mixed up a batch of pancake batter. By the time we got up, Dad was already in the kitchen. In fact, I think they both had been up for hours. The ladies, my mother and Aunt Bessie, stayed in bed — they knew this was a fishing day and wanted to keep out of range.

"You kids wash your faces and get around that table," Uncle Dan said.

"Why just our faces?" one of us asked.

With his usual twinkle, he said, "Let's see you wash your faces without at least getting your hands wet."

He had filled the dish pan with warm water, so we half-heartedly splashed a little on our faces and dried. Since my brothers, Larry and Garry and I were guests, we got first dip, while our cousins, Rod and Dick, came last. After we grabbed chairs my Dad put a few spoons of coffee into our milk glasses as a treat.

My two cousins sat on one side of the table and we sat on the other. We patiently waited for the pancakes.

Time after time, Uncle Dan poured dough onto the griddle, and when the first side was done, he loosened up a pancake with the spatula and then, after laughing and joking with Dad, he flipped it into the air and caught it expertly on the griddle.

Being the oldest, but not by much, I was on the tailend of getting a pancake. By the time my turn came, the pancakes got bigger, and Uncle Dan flipped them higher and higher into the air.

Finally he made one more for Dad, then he filled the whole griddle with batter. He had a time getting the cake, a little larger than a dinner plate, loosened enough for flipping. He didn't see Aunt Bessie and mother standing at the kitchen door in their robes. All our laughing and carrying on woke them.

Uncle Dan rubbed his hands together as he always did out of habit, took a half-dollar from his pocket and laid it in front of Dad's plate. "Even money?"

"Man's Best Friend"

"Even money," Dad said, and took another sip of coffee.

My uncle rubbed his hands once more, then loosened the huge cake until it slipped easily around on the griddle. He made several false starts, sort of dancing a little jig as he did so. With a flourishing twist of the wrist, he tossed the pancake high in the air.

My Dad, my two brothers, my two cousins and I watched as the giant pancake went up and over into the air. The biggest pancake we had ever seen sailed up toward the 12-foot ceiling and splattered against it with a thud — and stuck there.

Aunt Bessie broke the silence. "Oh, Dan, no!"

Uncle Dan turned slowly around. "I guess the dough was a little too sticky," he said.

My Dad put the 50-cent piece into his pocket. "Thanks, Dan. Better luck next time."

We boys finished our own pancakes as the batter from the giant on the ceiling dripped and sputtered onto the hot stove in dribbles that cooked into miniature pancakes.

Aunt Bessie, ignoring the new ceiling decoration, walked over and looked into the bowl holding only a spoon or two of batter. "Well, Josephine," she told my mother, "guess we'll have to cook some eggs and toast."

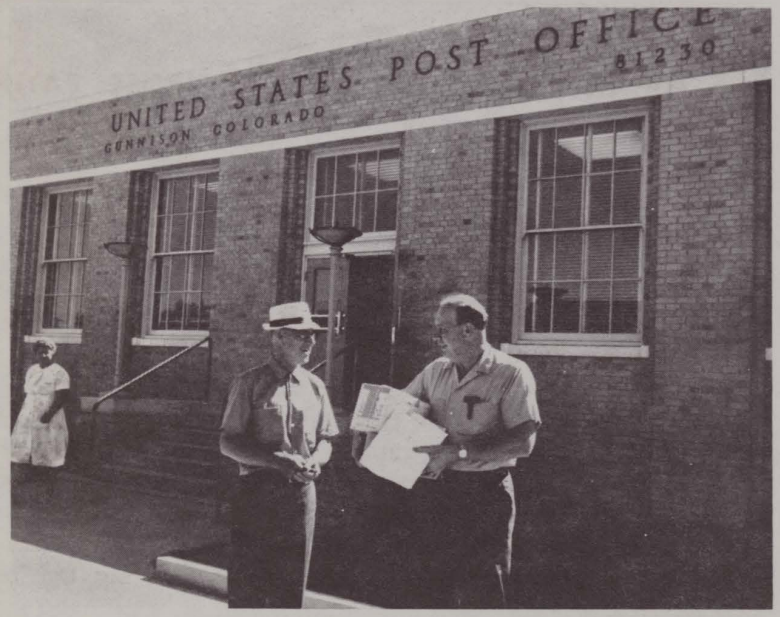
Uncle Dan sat down at the table. "Bessie, would you mind frying me a couple eggs, too? My breakfast is up there." He motioned toward the ceiling.

It's strange, but as vividly as I remember that morning of the biggest pancake ever, I can't remember a thing about going fishing.

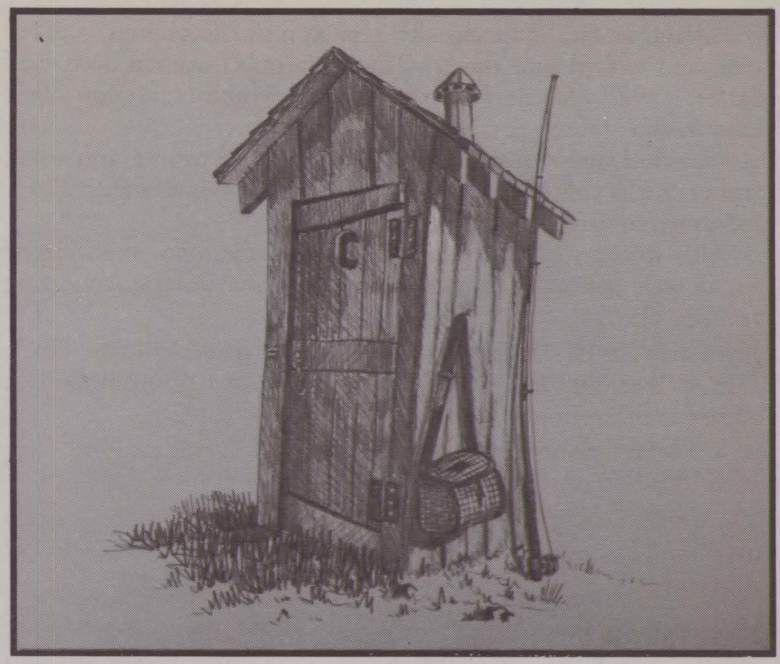
Early Sunday night as we prepared to go back home, Uncle Dan walked with us to the car. He wore one of Aunt Bessie's aprons and carried the spatula.

"You're planning to cook pancakes again tonight, are you?" Dad asked.

Uncle Dan grinned. "Nope," he said, turning the spatula over in his hand. "I'm just going to scrape that big one off the ceiling."



"A Fish Tale Being Told"



6

OH JOHNNY, OR DOWN THE PRIMROSE PATH

Summertime is meant for a lot of things like planting a garden, mowing the lawn, or painting the house. . . . to some people. To me, when feasible, it is a time to go fishing as often as possible, or to talk about it between times.

It is also a time to break the TV habit by visiting with friends over the back fence, at least until fall when a college or professional football game is scheduled, or until the first snow flake shows up.

One summer our neighbors came over for an early evening bull session on the patio. The experts in speech, communication and certainly psychology can explain why conversations veer off into the crazy directions they veer off into. We started out innocently enough talking about history because our little community was celebrating its 100th year of existence. Word association got us into trouble. Well, not real trouble, but into a delicate area.

I casually pointed out how the famous Silver King of Lead-

ville, Horace Tabor, back in the 1870's and 80's had owned the very land we were sitting on. Then the conversation moved into the realm of how tough the pioneers had it in contrast to our modern-day living. Sanitation, we said, headed the list as one of the huge problems one hundred years ago, although until recent years many small towns in the Rocky Mountain area had the same difficulty.

At first in the many old mining towns and camps, and the towns serving them, people got rid of general trash and garbage by burning or just heaving it "out back." They took care of the more delicate affairs where and when they could. Eventually a man built an outhouse behind his tent, cabin or shack, because more and more people showed up.

We went from "out back" to "outhouse," and how times have changed. According to my Oxford Universal Dictionary, published in 1933, outhouse was carefully defined as "a house or dwelling, belonging to and adjoining, and subsidiary to, a dwelling-house; e.g. a stable, barn, wash-house, etc." The "etc" was more clearly defined in the American Heritage Dictionary published in 1969, "as an enclosed outdoor toilet; a privy."

If you wonder what all this has to do with fishing, give me a few moments and I will lead into it. You, who have been fishing out in the high country, have already perceived the situation.

I explained to my visitors that one of the mysteries of my western historical research has been the question: Why the development of what we call a two-holer? Never in my life have I ever seen more than one person in an outhouse at one time. They didn't have the answer either. I can see the value of the addition of a third place closer to the floor of the little building, sometimes referred to as a "two-and-a-half-holer." Whenever I discover one of these, I know the pioneer father must have been very considerate of his small children.

Our historical discussion so far had not degenerated into indelicacies because the termonology, as mentioned earlier, is included in our finest dictionaries. Why not talk about problems of our pioneers?

"Outhouse" gets covered pretty well in one form or another. "Johnny" does not, however, and I have always been confused to know if it is just a "y" or an "ie." Not long before, I had done some reading about the British Parliament. "Would you

like me to pass along some worthless bits of information about a Privy Council?" I asked my friends.

"Not necessarily," someone said, "but go ahead."

The word, "privy," I explained, in addition to "private," means a "private place of ease." A snicker came from behind a glass of iced tea.

"Come on, you guys, you're taking it all wrong. It has something to do with a special committee."

Then one person was naive enough to ask, "What do you suppose old mountain men, trappers and early prospectors did?"

"Same as you and I when we go fishing."

I told you fishing would sneak in here, and this brought out a yarn by my neighbor to the left.

"These friends had come out to go camping and fishing with us for the first time. The wife, a very nice person, was bound and determined she wasn't going to make use of the woods. Well, of course, there wasn't anyplace eise. So the husband, slightly more outdoorsy but not much, took a hatchet, a blanket and other things and wandered off through the trees. For several minutes we could hear furious chopping and tramping around, while the wife paced nervously around the camp.

"Finally, the husband emerged with high altitude perspiration rolling off his forehead. 'Now, honey,' he told his wife, 'I remembered some of my Boy Scout training, so I got the rest-stop fixed up. The blanket will give you privacy, and I've draped little pieces of tissue on the trees so you won't get lost.' 'Thank you, dear,' she said and took off like a cross country runner, following the little flags down the trail.

"When she got back, I asked her if she had seen any bears. She turned nearly as white as the flags, and after that she didn't venture quite so far from camp. Privacy or no privacy."

Most of us in the potio bunch, er, patio bunch, had grown up either in small towns or on ranches. One lady recalled, "Even after we got modern plumbing, mother used to put a chamber pot on the floor between my bed and my sister's. 'Just to be on the safe side,' she said."

I had never heard it going by that name. To me it had always been a "thundermug," which isn't in the dictionary. Nevertheless, I understand they are a valued antique these days. I looked up "chamber pot" and sure enough, it originated about

1700 A.D. I also ran across "potty" and still don't understand the definition "of no importance . . . or. . . .trivial."

At about that time we should have all gone home to watch television or maybe got in a little evening fishing.

"Grandma's town," somebody said, "didn't have indoor plumbing. 'It' was 'out back,' so we had to go down the primrose path. Grandma cured my fear of the dark. In brief, she said, 'Whomsoever shall use the thundermug during the night, shall be responsible for dumping it in the morning.' I soon got over being scared of trudging down the path even if it happened to be midnight."

For the sake of history and science, one person asked, "Why were thick mail order catalogs so popular?"

Further discussion brought out a few points worth considering. In the first place, catalogs were free. Secondly, it gave a person something to read. And thirdly, most little towns had only one very small newspaper, which could not meet the law of supply and demand, so catalogs were put to use.

Finally, I had to tell my story which always gets two reactions. The locals, who know it is true, sort of walk off and ignore me, while newcomers and visitors smirk a little and raise their eyebrows ever so gently.

Until 1957 our town's method of disposal was to have all sewer lines head south and finally into open ditches which eventually dumped into the Big River. Up until then, when our town council built an efficient and elaborate sewerage system, some of the largest trout in the state were caught in our Big River. Local folks in the know never ate them, but they made beautiful stuffed trophies for the wall after winning lots of prizes. After construction fewer and fewer winning trout showed up. This nearly destroyed the theory that our Big River trout became big because of the great number of willow flies hatching every June.

After some frowns and an "Oh, Charlie" from the direction of my wife, we wound down our efforts at replacing television with wholesome conversations. At least it enlightened us more on the problems of the western builders and showed us the need for sound planning.

Besides, all that, the main topic is just as natural as breathing air, and lastly, it was starting to pour down rain, so we couldn't go fishing anyway.

7

BENT PIN, STRING AND A WILLOW

On that day, like yesterday in many ways, I was charged with stored enthusiasm, even though the destination Dad had chosen for our fishing trip was almost 200 miles away. As he drove along the dusty graveled highway, I knew I would have to use a willow pole and store string, but even that couldn't spoil the day. Taylor River in Taylor Park meant a strange new place, an adventure to boast about when school began in the fall.

I realized dragging me along on a fishing trip wasn't the greatest thrill Dad ever had. A fly fisherman can't babysit. You do one or the other. But he appeared happy enough, singing the old songs like Sweet Adeline, Sheik of Araby and Josephine as the miles slipped by.

At dusk we arrived at the birthplace of Colorado's Gunnison River, where the East and Taylor Rivers join. Crossing the bridge at Almont, we stopped at a grocery store opposite a few log cabins.

"This is the resort I told you about," Dad said.

A coal-oil lamp burned inside the store, and a lady came down off the porch. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Page."

"Yes, Mrs. Salisbury, it's me, the one-nighter."

"Needing a cabin for you and the boy," she said, looking at me. It wasn't a question. She had seen us coming, I'm sure, for she handed me a key. "Take the Gray Hackle this time, Mr. Page. It's ready. If you leave before I'm up, just put the money in the ice box, as usual."

"Thanks, Mrs. Salibury. We'll be up before the sun."

"Good luck," she said, disappearing into the store.

The name, "Gray Hackle," appeared above the cabin door. "Each one is named for a fly," Dad explained. "Well, let's get our stuff inside. The less we take, the quicker we leave in the morning."

I was tired, sleepy, hungry and didn't know which I wanted to do first — eat or sleep. By the time we carried the grub box inside and lit the coal-oil lamp, brightening the room with yellow light, flicking shadows around the walls and ceiling, I became more alert.

"Bud, we can fix a meal, or we can have sandwiches and milk. You make the decision."

I did not grow up in a child-dominated society. Dad dominated the society, and Mother enforced the rules. But this was my fishing trip. "Sandwiches are fine. Then we won't have any dishes."

The lamp made his eyes twinkle. "Okay, you're the boss."

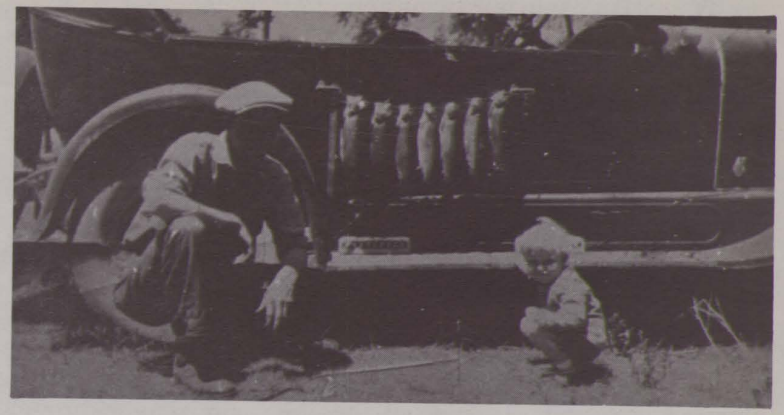
I can't remember a tastier balogna sandwich. Today, the same meat would taste like sawdust. Dad saw the galvanized water bucket on the kitchen counter was filled.

He pointed to a porcelain basin with a pitcher of water alongside. "Better wash up a little before we go to bed."

I felt the dust and grime. "All right, but first, where's the bathroom?"

He opened the back door, leading to a black, black night. "That's the. . a . . .bathroom down the path. I'll leave the door open."

Reluctantly, I stepped into the brisk air, not knowing whether to run or fake a brave walk. Dad's voice bounced off the dark stillness. "And don't forget to flush it, son." His laugh sent me running.



"Start 'em Young"

He was in bed when I got back. "We have to rise and shine early." I rushed out of my clothes, splashed water on my face and hands, dried off, and started to climb into bed.

"Going to leave the lamp burning?"

"Guess not," I answered. Grandma still used coal-oil lamps so I knew what to do. Cupping my hand around the top of the glass chimney, I blew out the flame. By the time I crawled in, Dad was snoring.

Next morning we headed up Taylor Canyon Road. "We'll eat breakfast after we reach my favorite camping spot." I yawned my approval. We drove only about 20 miles an hour and most times not even that. As the day brightened, I gradually got enough sleep out of my eyes to look around.

The rutted road had been cut for use by miners and ranchers a long time ago. Horsedrawn wagons didn't have any problems with the ruts, but a car didn't fare so well.

"No wonder Mother doesn't like this trip," I said.

"How's that, son?"

"She'd get jarred to pieces."

We went through a cleared area. Still early summer, the hay grew deep, and we saw no cattle. Dad said they had been

driven to high country to graze on forest lands. A sudden stop nearly sent me into the windshield. He caught me with his right arm. Killing the engine, he shushed me and motioned ahead. A dozen sleek mule deer lazily made their way across the road from the river and headed up a sagebrush hill.

I had never seen deer like this before, only scrawny ones in the zoo back home. Here were does, fawns and a big buck. Sensing us, they took off at a fast clip, disappearing over the hill.

Dad slapped my knee. "What do you think, Bud? Better than the old smelly zoo, huh?"

"Lots better."

Again we twisted and turned with the pair of ruts alongside the river. Occasionally aspen with their heart-shaped leaves shivered in clusters. In spite of the chilly air coming through the open window, I didn't close it. The aroma was pleasantly green and crisp and fresh.

The nearly sheer granite walls, crumbling in places, squeezed almost together, reaching up from the road and the stream bed to the limits of the blue sky. Taylor River churned white water now and sometimes lapped at the edge of the road.

"Won't be long, Bud." It was one of Dad's favorite expressions which preceded, "It's just around the next bend." He often said it on long family trips when we anxiously looked for our destination or maybe a rest stop.

This next bend meant two more before the canyon opened up like a giant door leading to a high mountain park. The river now meandered calmly across the grass and sagebrush countryside. We saw a few patches of pine trees, and when Dad reached one of these, he pulled the car off the road and into the thicket.

"This is it," he said.

I had never seen him move so fast. I knew he wanted to try the stream. A telephone technician and a ham radio operator, he never rushed. I often watched him work on his radio equipment. He carefully thought out each move, calculated the logic of things, and then skillfully did what he knew was correct.

But that morning he hastily hauled gear out of the car, tossed orders at me, put up the pup tent, and we were almost

"A Real Fly Fisherman"

ready. While he rigged his fly rod, I looked along the river for a big willow for a pole.

"Your Mother will shoot me for the way we've been eating." he said, "but I've got an idea."

"What?"

"We'll make a quick sandwich. Then around noon, we can build a fire and cook Brookies on a stick. Sound all right?"

"I'd rather fish than eat, wouldn't you?"

His laugh filled the camp and disturbed the blue-gray camp robbers, already casing our camp. "I wouldn't go as far as to say that," he replied, but we settled for a sandwich.

I found my willow finally, and was trimming the little twigs when he shouted. "Well, what do you know? Look what I found!"

Glancing toward the car, I saw him take a brand new telescopic rod and reel from under something in the back seat. I tossed the willow aside and ran over. "Gee Whiz!" I distinctly remember saying, "how do you suppose that got in there?"

In a moment he had the outfit rigged for me. His smile

broadened his little black mustache. "If you're going to fly fish, it's time you had a decent rod. You can't learn much with a willow and a string. Do you think you can cut the mustard with that?"

"Oh, boy, can I!"

No matter what happened the rest of the trip, I knew it was all worthwhile — an honest-to-goodness rod and reel. I never even wondered how he could afford it.

We started for the river and on his first cast Dad caught a small Rainbow. Carefully, he turned it back unharmed.

The way he handled a rod fascinated me. "How do you do it?"

He grinned. "I see the fish come after the fly, and when I think he's going to strike, I set the hook."

"I don't believe you can see the fish. I can't."

He waded back to the bank, and because I didn't have boots, we edged downstream a short way. "Look at the water," he said. "Relax and concentrate on the river bed, not on the surface."

At first I saw only sparkling water and rocks underneath, but suddenly the whole stream bed came alive. I saw insects on and below the surface, and then several trout. Facing upstream, they moved slowly as a kite does in a very gentle breeze. If they swam downstream for a morsel of food, they always turned back, facing the current, tails fluttering.

"Watch," Dad said. He made a short cast upstream. "Keep your eye on the fly and the water around it."

I watched the tiny feathered hook float gracefully on the surface. One fish separated from the others and swiftly propelled itself toword the lure. Precisely when the trout made its strike, Dad gave his wrist the slightest flick. He released that one too.

"Now do you believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if we're going to fill our baskets, we'd better get busy. You bait fish today to get used to the rod, and I'll start upstream."

With admiration I watched him move on. Although his six-foot frame was slender, I always thought of him as a big man.

With worms dug from a grassy bank, I caught some

Rainbows and Brooks. Keeping the Brookies for lunch, I turned back most of the small Rainbows, when I didn't hurt them. Dad always said, "If you injure a fish with a hook, keep it because it will probably die anyway."

Time vanished. Even before I got around a sharp bend in the river, I caught a whiff of a campfire. Dad was cleaning fish at water's edge. "How many Brookies did you catch?" he asked.

"Just five."

"That's plenty. With my three we'll have a good lunch. Let me clean them real quick." It was quick. Salting the seven-to-eight inch fish, he pushed sharpened sticks through two of them, and gave them to me. While I held them over the coals, he took slices of bread and a cube of butter out of his jacket pocket. Moments before the first two were done, he rubbed on a little butter. "Now watch." Pulling the fins off of one, he held it by the head and tail and ate it like corn-on-the cob. "Be careful you don't get any bones. Once in a while eat some bread. If you swallow a bone, the bread helps protect your stomach."

"What a feast!" The pink meat of the little fish was excellent. "Dad do you suppose the Ute Indians cooked trout like this?"

"Maybe the little ones," he muttered with a mouthful. "But I think they baked bigger ones in the coals."

After we finished, we rested on the warm sand bar with our backs against an old log. Facing east, we could see all of the Collegiate Range stretched out along the Continental Divide. I said, "Those mountains are pretty. Did I tell you that some dumb kid said God actually made those mountains like they are now with his bare hands?"

"What did you say to that?"

"God had a hand in it, all right, from the beginning by letting the wind, rain and snow shape them, and wear them down. But he didn't actually work like a sculptor."

"Sounds about right to me."

I could go to sleep with the warm sun burning down, tempered by the cool breeze, but Dad was anxious for more fishing. The fire had burned the fish skeletons. Dad scooped up water in his old straw hat to put out the hot coals, and then we hit the stream.

"Find Your Own Fishing Hole"

Back at camp late that afternoon we cleaned trout, packing them into creels surrounded by moist grass for coolness. Tonight would be cold enough, and we could get ice at Almont the next morning. We kept out four nice sized ones for supper.

"We should have marshmallows for you to roast," Dad said as the fire settled down, leaving red coals gleaming at us. He puffed a cigar, his favorite smoke.

I sat close to the fire with my arms wrapped around my knees. "We can roast marshmallows any time, Dad. It's fun just sitting here."

We watched the reddish haze above the low mesa to the west gradually disappear. The moon would show up long after we went to sleep. Neither of us said a word for a while, the only sound made by the river's constant movement. With no breeze to rustle the pines, the river sound prevailed.

"Do you ever get scared up here in the mountains, Dad?"

"Maybe I would if I were alone. But with people around, you seldom get frightened. I always have a fishing partner or two."

"I guess we're fishing partners."

"You bet we are, son."

"That's good," I said, "but I'm still a little scared. Everything's so quiet. I'll bet there isn't anybody else around."

He laughed a little. "Probably not many. I figure a few fisherman are scattered in this park somewhere."

"Wonder if it will always be this way?"

"No. More people will come. We're never sure of the future, but in time we'll have lots of campground neighbors."

I thought for a moment. "They'll probably chase away all the deer and the bears. Are there any bears up here?"

"I've spotted some signs. Not many though, and I haven't seen a bear."

He put another log on the fire. "To keep a little warmth going after we're in bed," he said. I knew he did it in case I got frightened before going to sleep. The pitch crackled and popped, and the fire blazed up again, keeping itself alive a little longer.

We crawled into the pup tent with our clothes on because the night would be cold. Before I dozed off, I heard tiny footsteps on the slanting sides of the tent. It couldn't be rain. When it continued, I got spooked. "Dad, there's something on the tent."

He turned and listened a moment. "Go to sleep, son. A breeze is knocking pine needles off the trees."

I woke up the next morning for two reasons — it was chilly and I heard Dad singing while he stirred up the fire for breakfast.

I stumbled out and washed my face at the water's edge. Boy, was it cold! Back at the campfire I warmed my hands, while Dad fried bacon. Coffee in a cloth bag boiled in the sooty pot. He always claimed it was an old sock and that's why the coffee was delicious.

"How come you can cook so good on a trip like this? You never do it at home."

"I don't want your Mother to know how really smart I am," he said and grinned. "So don't tell her."

While he fried eggs, never breaking a yolk, I sipped coffee thinned with milk and watched a chipmunk skitter closer and closer to the campsite.

Dad too had been watching. "Bud," he said quietly, "toss some pieces of bread out to him with each one a little closer to you. Then keep one in your hand."

The chipmunk cautiously got the first piece, then the second and the third. I held my hand near the ground, catching my breath for fear of scaring him. His golden striped tail shimmered nearly as fast, it seemed, as a hummingbird's wings, the motion vibrating its whole nervous body. He finally came to my hand, sat up and took the food. I imagined he actually looked me in the face, shaking his head as a gesture of thanks. Then he was gone.

"Cute little guys, aren't they?"

I agreed. Maybe that's why Dad never went deer or elk hunting. He'd rather see them walking around.

"I wish we didn't have to go," I said, breaking the spell.

"Me too, son. There will be other times. Well, we'd better load up." As we packed the car, he said, "We can sneak in a couple more weekends, and then there is my whole two weeks vacation coming." He doused the fire, then shoveled dirt over the ashes.

When everything was secured and I had carefully stowed my new rod and reel, we looked back on that endless mountain park. "Just think, son, by next year this camping spot will be buried under a lot of water."

"You mean right here?"

"Right where we're standing. That's a dam they're building down in the canyon."

I wondered what would become of the little chipmunk. "Why are they damming the river?"

"People need irrigation water for their farms."

"It doesn't seem fair."

"Maybe not," he said, "but it's progress, son."

I felt tears welling up. After all, this was my first time in Taylor Park, where Dad had given me a genuine rod and reel.

"Hey, don't get upset." He pointed upstream beyond one of the low hills. "We'll find a lot more river up there and good places to camp. Maybe even better than this one."

"You mean we can come back again?"

"That's what I mean, son. We can come back again."

And we did, many, many times.

8

BOOTS, CREEL, NET, ROD, JACKET

Several years ago after I ended up on a stream about forty miles from the house without my jacket and fly book, I invented a ritual before getting into the station wagon. Putting my gear into the back, I say aloud and point at each item:

"Boots, creel, net, rod, jacket." This way I assure myself of having everything. Because my fly book is always tied by a piece of fishing line to a button hole in my jacket, I know it's always there.

Of course, the ritual can be modified, depending on the type of fishing I intend to do. For example, in early spring, I add "salmon eggs and worms." Or if I'm going out on a lake in a friend's boat, I will say, "tackle box," because it is loaded with all those fancy lures and other gear I seldom use.

When I plan to be gone two hours or more, I always have an addendum, "beer in ice chest." If it's five hours or more then I slip in "sandwiches and candy bars." Sometimes, thinking

I might not only fly fish, but perhaps try the big river or even the lake, "spinning rod" becomes a part of the list. Should the outing be with a friend, I'll click off next to last, "pick up neighbor," and finally, "don't forget gas."

All things considered, the roster as I stand in the driveway stretches into "boots, creel, net, fly rod, jacket, salmon eggs, worms, tackle box, beer, sandwich, candy bars, spinning rod, neighbor, gas."

Although I've never heard her say it, I can imagine Dolores grumbling, "If you're going to stand there all day talking to yourself, the fish will quit biting."

The rest of the ritual comes after a day or evening of fishing, when I go though the whole routine again to make certain I've put everything back into the station wagon before heading home.

There was a time when my ritual failed me. I had driven down to the Gunnison River after work to try some night flies, enjoyed so much by the Browns. The sun had gone down, making headlights almost necessary, even though it wasn't quite dark. Pulling off into my favorite spot, I dashed to the river. After more than two hours of great battles, catching two Rainbows and four Browns weighing nearly two pounds each and losing several larger ones on the snap of a leader, I walked back to the car, very pleased with myself.

Tossing in the gear and saying the magic words so I wouldn't leave anything, I got behind the wheel and turned the key. "Click."

Right then I knew something had been left out in my haste to hit the river. The thing omitted from the list had been, "turn off lights." Now I automatically said aloud, "Dead battery."

A three-mile hike along the shoulder of the highway to use a telephone at a ranch house cured me of that. So now it is also, "Lights out."

9

YESTERDAY'S TIPS, GOOD FOR TODAY

"Keep the bowels open, head cool, feet dry and there will be little, if any, sickness in camp."

This is one of the best and most accurate pieces of camping advice I've heard in a long time. It appears in an interesting and unusual booklet called "THE ANGLER'S GUIDE — How, When and Where to Fish." But I'm sorry to say you won't find it in a bookstore or on a magazine rack. This little paper back was found in an old miner's cabin near Lake City, Colorado in the San Juan Mountains. It cost only fifty cents, when published by the Field & Stream Publishing Co., and was the Fifth Annual Edition: Date — 1909.

The advice about cool head and dry feet appeared in a section called "On Health in Camp." It pertains today as it did more than 65 years ago.

Containing 242 numbered pages and many more unnumbered pages of advertising, the book is 7½ by 4½ inches.

Wainwright Randall was the editor, and in the introduction he acknowledges such people as Dr. David Starr Jordan, Dr. Edward, Breck, Louis Rhead and authorities representing railroad companies, fishing clubs and game and fish commissions from several states.

One of the ideal assets of the book, other than the tremendous contents, is its size. You can slip it into a pocket and take it anywhere. That's probably why it was found in a cabin at 11,000 in the Colorado Rockies. No doubt its owner regretted losing it before he returned from a high country fishing trip so many years ago.

The volume includes useful and practical information, while some is amusing, at least in the 1970's. In a section on "Personal Outfit" comes this handy bit of advice. "Knee trousers will be found a distinct advantage over long trousers, the bottoms of which are continually getting wet."

One suggestion my wife appreciated, probably because she does most of the family budget surveillance, was this: Serviceable old clothing is preferable to new because it gives freedom of action." The only thing new she wants me to have is a decent hat. I wear them until they are knocked down and dragged out from falling in the lake water, stuffed in the back of the car or rain-stained and soaked. So to please her I always wear a new fishing hat at the beginning of each summer and scroungy clothes when I hit the stream.

Don't forget, says the editor, "Use discrimination in taking such articles as court-plaster (sic), laxatives, vasoline, etc." That's my "sic" because I didn't know what it meant. Then I looked it up in an old dictionary to find it meant "Sticking-plaster made of silk coated with isinglass." And I still don't know what it means, unless it has something to do with a repair kit for a tent, but then why mention that in connection with laxatives and vasoline?

Tobacco came under a special heading. "Sportsmen and campers agree that there is only one time in the day when a pipe is absolutely indispensable, which is from six o'clock in the morning until ten or eleven o'clock at night." In addition to health reasons, there are a couple of times you should avoid smoking, particularly cigarettes: While changing a fly on a leader for you take the chance of a spark cutting your leader: and while trolling on a lake with monofiliment line. I had hooked a

"Old-Fashioned Fish Fry"

Gunnison News-Champion Photo

pretty good sized German Brown and during the melee of trying to get him cranked in, my cigarette came in contact with the line and melted it. Goodbye fish. Goodbye line. Goodbye expensive lure.

In 1909 long before the advent of the neat, special packs of back-packing food of all tastes and of all sizes, the editor of the ANGLER'S GUIDE gave a long dissertation on camping equipment, then using solid black capital letters. DO NOT FORGET TO TAKE A GOOD CAN OPENER.

To make certain everyone understood a recipe on bread and biscuits, Mr. Randall wrote: "Bread is made like biscuits, but it is put into the pan without cutting."

Even the ecology got mixed up in it with reference to man's relationship with the environment. "Without FLY-DOPE a trip into the north woods means misery unlimited. Most persistent pests are black fly, midge, punky, 'No-see-um' and the mosquito."

Old devil booze gained its place in the health section. Many remedies were given for toothache, ending with "also hot whisky." Poison ivy is always bothersome and painful, so after finding other self-helps you come upon, "Also applications, external, of whisky." They didn't have a word about snake bite.

Equipment prices, though they probably seemed high in 1909, weren't inflated. One rod manufacturer (Redifer Rod & Reel Co., Warren, Ohio), listed these prices for rods in this order: $25, $20, $9, $7.50 and $6. A steel fly rod could be had for $1.00 from another company. What I wouldn't do to be able to buy flies for these prices: 50 cents per dozen, and a $1.00 per dozen for a better grade. A fishing resort in Maine advertised "camp and board" for $3.00 per day or $20.00 per week.

As a filler item in the booklet, disposal of a deceased person's library on Feb. 16, 1909, told of the sale of a first edition of Izaak Walton's "COMPLEAT ANGLER," (London, 1653), selling for $3,900.

Advertising copy-writers were as full of enthusiasm then as they are in the 1970's, and I've included this copy from a full page advertisement by the Union Pacific Railroad Co. to illustrate. How could a confirmed fisherman ignore such pleadings?

"If you do not want to take a fishing trip, **do not** send for this handsomely illustrated booklet, just issued by the Union Pacific Railroad Co., describing the fishing resorts and streams along, and tributary to, its lines: because if you get it, when you see the pictures, taken in the act, and rich, red blood in your veins will leap and tumble more swiftly — aye, much more swiftly — than is its wont, and you will then and there make up your mind to 'go a-fishing.'

"After you have read the text and have taken a second look at those 'real thing' pictures, you'll get out that old tackle box, pack your kit, buy your ticket and go straight to one of the many excellent places mentioned in its pages — no doubt about it — you couldn't be kept at home by two spans of mules.

"Of course, if you say so, we'll sent it to you, but — well, you take the responsibility of its receipt, that's all."

As an accidental reader of the 1909 Field & Stream ANGLER'S GUIDE, all I can say it, if I plunked down fifty cents for a copy of the booklet with all those juicy enticements, nothing would stop me from packing my kit and tackle box and heading for that trout stream, no matter where it is.

10

WHAT A TEACHER!

You can take this tale anyway you want. I would prefer to call it fiction, but my "unnamed sources" say it is true. To protect the innocent in the town in Colorado where it supposedly took place, I have disguised it and the people involved.

"Young lady," the big tourist type said to the girl at the chamber of commerce reception desk, "I've got a complaint!" He wore dripping hip boots and a fishing jacket.

The blonde in a mini-skirt, eye-catching elsewhere and a touch of a smile wasn't flustered. "I hope I can help you, sir," she answered as nicely as possible.

The visitor, six feet plus, put both hands firmly on the counter. "I've been here three days and haven't caught a single trout! You Colorado people always brag about your great fishing country. Well, you can bet we won't be back!"

Suppressing a grin, she put on her serious, tell-me-your-

problem look. "I'm sorry, sir. We can't guarantee everybody will catch fish."

He banged the counter with a fist. "Are you a fisherman, or fisherwomen or fisherperson, or whatever they call it?"

"I catch my share."

"Yeah, you probably do, all right, but you don't tell any of us tourist where to go!"

She overlooked that opportunity and said, "I don't get out too much, but after work yesterday I caught my limit at the big bend in the river west of town."

The fisherman, long past the so-called generation gap, seemed on the verge of a heart attack. "I don't believe it! I fished there all day and didn't even get a bite. You're like all the rest. You want our money for food, lodging and the other high priced things, but you don't give a damn about us tourists once you get us here!"

The girl calmly reached under the counter. "Here's a picture my boy friend took of me last night."

He glared, but then looked at the photograph. She held a string of eight nice Rainbows and Browns. They ran 12 to 15 inches.

"That big one there," she explained, "weighed nearly a pound."

Staring at the picture mesmerized the visitor for a few moments. Then his pulse settled slightly. "Yeah, not bad. But I fished there. Tried everything too. Not even a nibble."

"What were you using?" she asked politely.

"Well, I've got a brand X rod worth 75 bucks, and that heavy duty reel didn't come cheap, and then I've got a. . . . "

She interrupted. "I mean for bait and lures?"

"I've tried everything. Worms, salmon eggs, cheese balls with a special flavor, and then I went to a flat fish thing. The man at the store said it was absolutely foolproof. Cost me three dollars. Got a snag on the first cast and lost it. Your river is chuckful of snags, which doesn't help any."

The girl, as composed as ever, had to keep him from going into another tantrum because this could be dangerous at high elevations. "Sir, if you don't think I'm being presumptuous, I'd like to show you something. But please understand, I'm no expert and don't claim to be. I just like to fish a little."

He shut up and listened.

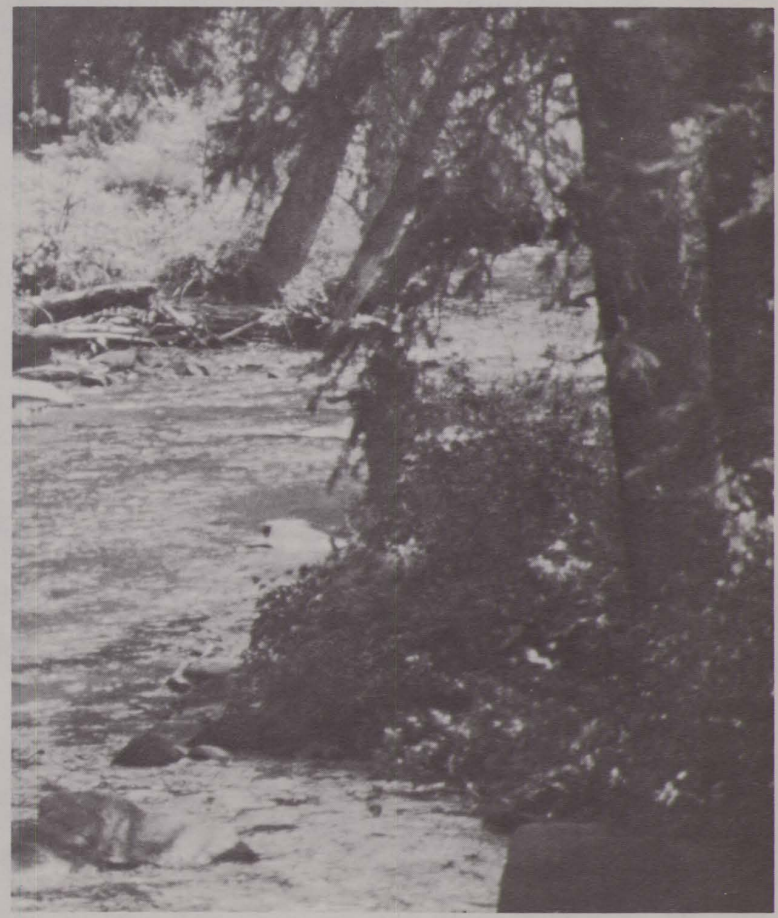
She went into the other office and came back with a lightweight, seven-foot fly rod with a small automatic reel. "I keep it in my car, but brought it in this morning to reverse the line."

"What in the world do you do with that little dinky thing?"

She grinned. "Catch trout."

"You mean that mess you showed me was caught with this midget outfit?"

"Certainly. It's all I ever use. Oh, I do have a light weight spinning rig too." She handed the fly rod across the counter and he took it as he would a new-born baby.



"Some Fishermen Like to Be Alone"

"Guess you really have to be careful with a little job like this." He jiggled it to get the feel. "Might be all right if you don't tie into something big."

The girl walked around the counter and picked a newspaper clipping off the bulletin board. The visitor had to believe it, because the clipping showed this wisp of a girl holding up a large fish. The only caption was penned in: "Five-pound Brown."

He set the rod against the wall and started to leave. "Hmm. Maybe I'd better keep trying."

The girl stopped him. " I could suggest something, if you have a few more minutes."

He listened to her "unexpert" advice.

She told him to use smaller hooks for either worms or salmon eggs. "And use only one egg," she said, "not a big gob of them. Throw away the big chunks of lead you use as a sinker, and put on three or four BB shot spread out about four to six inches apart along the leader." Like a machine gun, she kept at him. "Don't try to cast across the river, but only where you can control the line. Let your bait bounce along the bottom, and don't let it sink into the rocks. You won't get snags and it will look natural to a trout as it washes downstream."

She wished him luck and asked him to come back to report later that day on how he did.

"You may be giving this old man a snow job," he said, smiling at least, "but I'll try it."

When he had gone, two men came out of the other office. One was the chamber of commerce manager and the other was the president. "Well," the manager said, "what do you think?"

The president waved his arms. "Don't know. It depends on what luck this guy has."

"Sally, we want to be here if and when he gets back. We'll go grab a sandwich, and since we have some papers to go over, we'll be here most of the day."

"That's fine with me," Sally said. "The girls in the information room can handle the regulars, and I'll catch the complainers. Might as well play it to the hilt."

It was nearly five o'clock when the big fisherman barged into the office as heavy-footed as he had been earlier. This time, however, he carried a fishing creel in one hand, a large box of candy in the other, and wore a smile that couldn't be

"Some Fishermen Like Company"

pried off. "Young lady, if I weren't so old, or you weren't so young, I'd climb over this counter and give you a big kiss. But since I am and you are, I brought some candy for your wonderful help."

She seemed pleased. "I'm sorry, sir, I can't accept gifts. Your thanks will be enough."

The chamber manager and president came through from the other office. "We can bend the rules this one time, Sally."

The visitor opened the creel to show his catch. He nearly scattered them all over the counter in his excitement. "Just look at those beauties," he said. "If it hadn't been for this little lady, I'd have gone home dissatisfied, and would tell all my friends never to come back to Colorado. If you're the boss around here," he said, "I'd give that girl a raise. Yes sir."

As he headed for the door, he turned back. "I'm staying another week. Already called my office and told them they can do without the boss a few more days. Yes, sir." And he was gone.

"Now what do you think?" the manager asked the organization president.

"I'm sold, and I don't think we'll have a bit of trouble selling the idea to the other directors. Hiring an extra girl, especially this one, will be well worth it."

"Sally, it looks as if you are in."

"It will be a pleasure."

The two men left the building. Outside, the manager turned to his boss. "I knew we were losing a lot of disgruntled visitors because they don't know how to fish in this country. An informal instructor was the answer."

"But wouldn't a retired guy like Ben have been better?"

"Are you kidding? What so-called fisherman would stand still for another man telling him how to fish? Very few. But a good looking girl like Sally keeps their attention, you might say."

"That's for sure. How did you find her? Haven't seen her around town."

"She's a professional. Gives casting demonstrations at sports and travel shows around the country in the winter and wanted to live here this summer. And you know what?"

"No, what?"

"She's never in her life caught a fish of any sort or size. But she's a hellava teacher."

"You can say that again."

"She's a hellava teacher."

Like the old saying, "If you have to ask the price of something, then you can't afford it," if you take fishing too seriously, then you have no business doing it.

11

BEFORE THE RIVER DIES

Downstream the man could see many fishermen working along the banks of the outlet where the big river gave up more of its life to a new lake every minute. Tomorrow enough water would be released from the high country reservoir to fill the lake, and his favorite fishing hole would be gone. This was the last day. The last chance to catch the big Rainbow. Tomorrow the **BIG ONE** could not hide in his special river place. He would be at the bottom of the lake, and if smart enough, he could live to be one of those so-called granddaddies.

Although the long shadow cast by the ridge between him and the setting sun got closer, sunlight still flirted with the water along this stretch. He had been on the river for an hour. He knew the big one would not hit until the sun slipped below the ridge, but he came early to monopolize The Spot. Usually, he had to wait for a tourist to move out, but today he had been lucky. All the fishermen seemed to be down at the inlet.

After he first hooked the big Rainbow last fall, the man became more and more selfish. He hated people who fished the spot. He hated those casting and spin fishing with grappling hooks and other gear. At least he admitted being prejudiced. He had to take the big one, and he had to do it on his light rod and reel, and with a fly. Each time he saw somebody catch a trout with a treble-hook lure and a heavy rod, he thought of a dragline dredging out an excavation.

Several minutes remained before the larger fish started hitting, so he looked around. The sixty-mile-an-hour traffic on the highway above him swished by, the drivers oblivious of him or the other fishermen. Because of the highway with its roadside park so near, this stretch of river had been thoroughly fished. Yet, in spite of their heavy gear, bait and lures, they apparently had not been teased by all the big ones in the river. They tended to fish the inlet and as the water rose, they gradually moved upstream.

To the east, from which the river flowed, he could see the sun light up the Continental Divide some forty miles away. Where he stood the sun never left until early evening, although the river went through a canyon surrounded on three sides by low ridges.

He leisurely played his line to kill time. Occasionally he looked upstream and down to make certain no other fishermen were working toward the spot just one hundred feet below him. If they did he could hurriedly walk along the bank to the place to control it. No one came near.

Not seriously, he did some casting above the place. He had changed his small flies to a Number 8 on the end, eliminating the dropper fly so he wouldn't be bothered with smaller Rainbows or Browns picking it off the surface. Instead, the Sofa Pillow, made by a friend at the local radio station, was his only ammunition. Dark brown with a slight ring of white at the front, it was almost like a standard night fly, but not quite. Different somehow. And it got strikes.

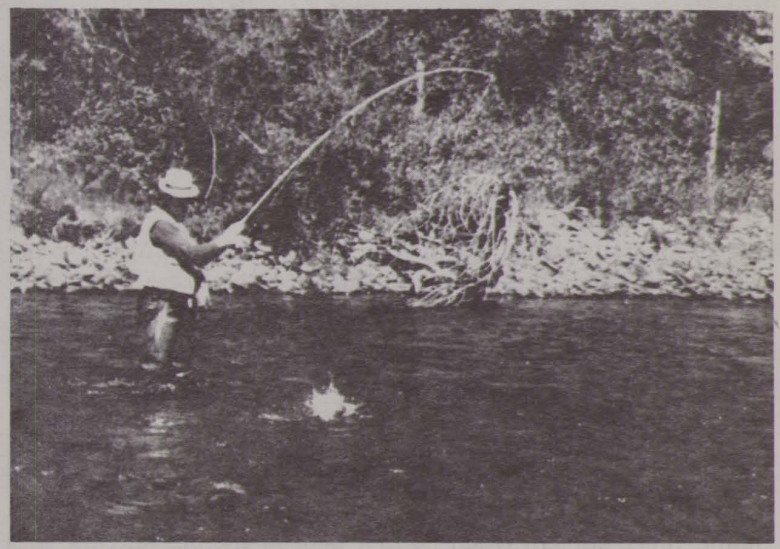
The times before, when he tangled with the big Rainbow, he always used four-pound test leader and Number 12's. But times had changed. He couldn't care less about taking fish home. Since last fall when he first hooked the big one, the idea of catching a large trout obsessed him. He wanted to win one

of the weekly big fish contests, and he wanted a worthy trophy for mounting.

In this same spot last September a good-sized one hit the large fly and was gone in a moment. The leader had snapped. The man always thought the big one had actually taken the entire fly, cutting the leader with his powerful jaws and teeth in one slash. The man stayed with the light leader for some time, but when he hooked the Rainbow again, the trout headed downstream to the white water, breaking the leader in the action. So he switched to ten-pound test and did not change back. Time after time, either the leader would break or the big one was smart enough to throw the hook.

Patiently, the man retrieved his line. He didn't want to beat the water too much. He waited until the reflection of the ridge moved farther upstream. It had to go beyond the long sweep on the hole above the sand-bar. Having done this so often, he knew how many minutes remained.

He played the fly in the upper end of the stretch, placing it in the fast water, letting it float into the smoother current below him. Using short casts at first, he stayed clear of the deeper water downstream. With a short line the man had better con-



"The Fishing Ambassador"

trol if the big one moved out of the deep hole to feed in the upper end. If not, he could gradually work his way down, each time letting the fly move farther and farther into the spot where the Rainbow usually hit.

He kept mulling over the idea that this was the last day. He had to catch the big one for first place in the contest, and have it mounted for his den. He could show it off, talk about it, and for this he had been waiting almost a year, except during those cold winter months. Out of this same stretch of river he had taken some two-pounders, but he knew the Rainbow was still there. Probably might go four or five pounds.

He had a few strikes, but only small Rainbow and Browns bumping the big fly. He was glad they weren't hooked. Playing any fish would stir things up, which he didn't want. He kept saying, "Stay away, you little devils. I don't need you."

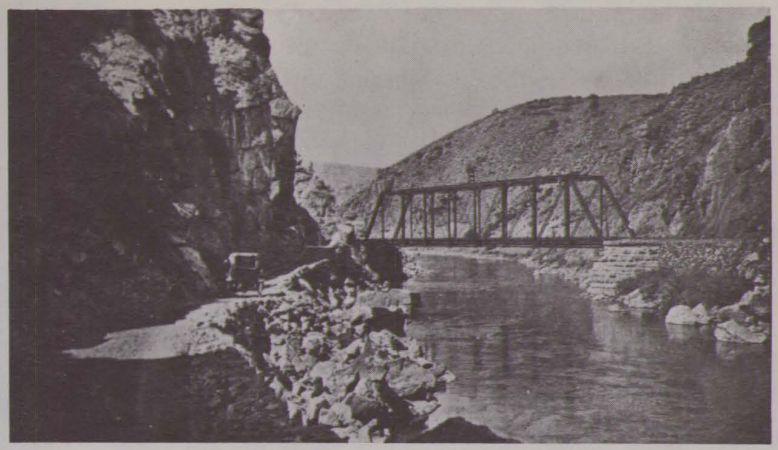
Moving downstream, he tensed. He felt it in his hands and arms. Unconsciously he braced his feet, even though the water was barely over the ankles of his hip boots. "Easy now. If he hits, you could lose him."

Soon he had the fly drifting in the upper part of what he called The Spot.

He figured the depth to be about five feet. Out in the fast current, water rolled over big boulders in the river bed, smoothing out gradually to the bank. Below the spot was a rock formation jutting out from the shore. The water became violent again before hitting the rock and moving downstream. From past experience he knew the big Rainbow stayed slightly upstream from that large rock, waiting for bugs, helgrammites and other food pushed toward him from the river's main flow. The trout drifted back and forth in and out of the fast water to the shallow. The man knew he moved into the deeper, swifter water when he sensed danger closer to shore.

Near the hole, the water eddied toward the bank over a sandy bottom and into a shallow pocket of still water. The depth of the pool depended on the level of the river. Now it was about ten inches deep. Once before, catching a two-pounder in the spot, he managed to work him into this small pond where he was easy to net.

He stopped for a moment and reached for a cigarette, changed his mind and took a mint out of his pocket. He didn't want to be bothered with a lighted cigarette if he tied into the



"On The Rainbow Route"
From A. P. Nelson's "Gunnison County"

Rainbow, or any big one. Glancing downstream toward the inlet of the lake, he mumbled, "Today has to be it."

Instead of casting this time, he retrieved the line and looked at the fly. The barb was sharp and the fly was in good shape. Satisfied, he cast upstream and let the fly drift toward the hole. It moved across the quieter water. He was about to retrieve when he saw movement a couple of feet from the fly. The dorsal fin of a large trout broke water only slightly, then disappeared. He retrieved at the right moment, knowing the trout had taken a look.

Patiently, he whipped the fly a few times, not to dry it but to delay a few moments. He laid the Sofa Pillow upstream in a slightly different angle and shortened the line to keep the fly from drifting through the exact place as before.

Sensing his hand tighten on the rod, he relaxed, firm but careful. As the big fly headed into the spot, he let it sink out of sight just a couple of inches.

That's when the Big One hit. The man's reflexes set the hook. For good measure, when certain the hook was in the fish, he raised his wrist in a short but sharp movement, holding the line taut in his left hand.

That's all it took.

The trout had a mouthful of Sofa Pillow and he didn't like it. He headed toward the fast current. The man held the rod high to keep the line upward and tight. The fiber glass rod

bent in a sweeping arc. The big one headed upstream instead of down. "Good for you," the man said aloud. "Stay upstream," knowing that if the Rainbow headed down and went around the rock below, he would be in wild fast water enabling him to get free of the hook. The man feared wading in that current, so with the fish staying above, he had a better chance of landing him.

The Rainbow again moved into the swift current and let it push him back toward the big hole. He immediately came toward the man along the more shallow, sandy shore. "Not yet, big boy, not yet. Stay off that sand." He was afraid the fish would throw the hook in shallow water.

Until now, because the trout never broke water, he could not tell the size, but he knew it was big. "Maybe even five or six pounds." Not a monster, but a winner worth mounting.

The big one went out again, playing in and out of the deep water at the edge of the current. The man looked toward the bank fishermen down at the inlet, and said, "Let them fish their way, I'll fish mine."

He lost track of time, but knew it had only been a few minutes, yet his wrist was very tired. There was a possibility of giving too much line if he shifted the rod to his left hand, so he never made that move. He let the big one take a little, then he shortened the line again. It was a matter of give and take for a few more minutes.

Smiling confidently, he realized the hook might yet be thrown, but from the fighting the trout was doing, the barb must have penetrated the toughest part of the jaw. Still, he couldn't horse him, not now. He would never get another chance with the river dying. Several times the trout went straight to the bottom and seemed to be anchored there. "Acts more like a Brown, than a Rainbow." Each time the trout rested, the man made the line taut as it came off the reel, then with his left hand he hit the butt of the rod. The jolt traveled up the pole and down the line to the bottom of the river. The big one came alive again to fight some more.

Each time, however, his efforts slowed. Finally, he headed back to the hole. The man waded out until the water was just above his knees. The fast current kept him from going farther.

Above the big one now, the man let him rest a couple of seconds in the still water. Carefully, he eased him closer to the

little eddy. That was his first look at the fish. "Damn!" he said aloud. It approached thirty inches, so it had to weigh at least ten pounds if not more.

"Can't panic now," he whispered. All he could think of was winning the prize and getting this one mounted.

"I've got to let him think he's the boss." He carefully kept the rod high. The big one very gently headed into the small opening of the eddy. "If he doesn't touch bottom, he'll swim right in there."

"Just a little more, old boy, and I've got you."

All hell broke loose. The Rainbow did touch, but when he went into violent thrashing action, his force took him straight into the shallow pond of water. He did his best to get out, but could not. The water was about ten inches deep and the man stood with his feet in the only opening to the river.

The Rainbow flopped and splashed. That's when he threw the hook, but it didn't matter. There was no escape. The man didn't even bother using his net. He laid his rod on the dry sand and squatted down, still blocking the entrance.

He was as tired as the big Rainbow. His wrist hurt, and he breathed hard. Quickly looking downstream, he wanted to shout at those other fishermen — to show them what a real trout looks like — to tell them he had caught it on a fly and not all that gear they were using — but he did not. "To hell with them," he said, staring at the big one.

Water covered most of the Rainbow so he could breath, but some of his huge body showed. This hadn't been his first battle, but naturally the only one he ever lost. The man looked closely at the head and mouth. "You've been fooled many times. I wonder if I caused any of those scars." In spite of the cruel marks along the jaw, the Rainbow would make a beautiful trophy. "Old boy, you're worth all the fishing I've ever done." He thought about what he had said one time about bowling. "If I ever roll a perfect game, I'll quit." He never did, so he still bowled.

"After you," he said, "I would never need to fish again, but I know I will."

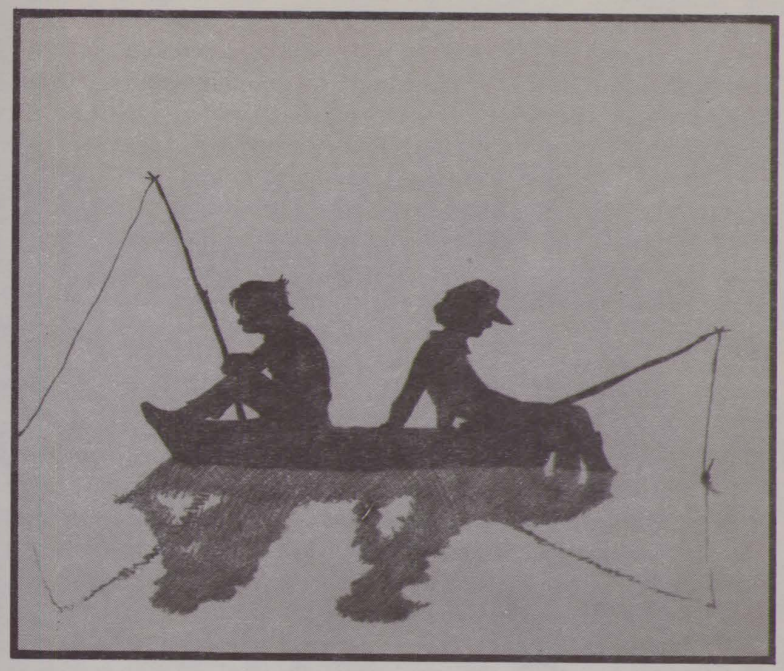
He had been right in guessing the length. . . at least thirty inches. Weight could go to twelve pounds instead of ten. The movement of the gills was slowing down, and the Rainbow began to lose its equilibrium in this shallow water.

The man looked from the fish to the men downstream. Then he did something he would never dare to explain later. He stood up, and slowly, deliberately used his boot to deepen the opening from the puddle of water to the river. Bending down he cautiously put his hands around the body of the Rainbow without force and eased him to the opening.

Still bent over, he waded out into the river a short way, then guided the fish through the opening. The big one made no effort to swim away, at first it floated partly on its side. Gills still working slowly. The man reached down and stirred up the water around the huge head to make bubbles. The oxygen helped. The Rainbow straightened, getting its ballast. The man still had his hand in the water, and the trout floated over slightly brushing against the fingers. He propelled himself into the deeper water and disappeared into the swift current, well under control of himself.

The man stared for a few minutes. "You're too smart to let those people get you, but you'll still need luck, old timer." After picking up his rod and net, the man headed back to his car, shaking his head.

We have the greatest respect for a true expert trout fisherman. . . . . but if I were an expert, then I wouldn't enjoy it, and if I didn't enjoy it, it wouldn't be fishing.



12

GRANDMA'S LAKE

Although stream fishing has always been my favorite, in recent years I've enjoyed some great times on Blue Mesa Lake with friends. Perhaps my enthusiasm for cruising started with Grandma's Lake in Buena Vista, Colorado, back in the days before the "big war." In the eyes of a pre-teenager, her lake just had to be bigger than the Pacific, Alantic, Indian and Mediterranian all put together.

My brother Larry and I, as co-captains, commanded our own fleet, consisting of one cruiser. Because we made it, we also classified ourselves as shipbuilders as well as sailors. It had a bow, stern, poopdeck, anchor, bow and stern lines and a method of propulsion. The pre-World War Two model had to be much better than those built today.

We cruised Grandma's Lake day or night. Night, depending on Grandma's frame of mind about us being out so late during those summers we used to spend with her, or our ability to sneak out without her knowing it. Day was fine, but night

provided more daring and more fun. We'd float down near the dam to watch the townspeople and the tourists enjoying the summer nights and looking at the multi-colored lights hidden under the front of the dam. But we had to heave to or our keel-less ship might have been washed right over the top.

Usually we launched from the west shore, it being the nearest place to Grandma's house on Gunnison Avenue, across the street from the **Chaffee County Republican.** Sometimes we would go upstream on Cottonwood Creek and tie up under the trees and willows. One of the members of our "navy" lived up that way.

We preferred stream fishing, but we often used the ship to fish Grandma's Lake. We couldn't get it going fast enough to troll, so we either used our fly rods or just plain worm-fished. The best wasn't really in the lake itself, but in the stream just below the dam, and the greatest fun wasn't real fishing at all. It came when the town council drained the lake to clean out the junk people tossed into it (yes, there were litterbugs even then) and to check the headgates and the electric lights.

They simply opened the gates to let out all the water and many big trout escaped. After cleaning the lake bottom and replacing lights, they shut the gates. From that moment until the lake filled again and spilled over the dam, every barefoot kid in town was allowed to fish for trout with their hands just below the dam. "The trout," the officials said, "might not survive anyway."

During one of those trout-by-hand escapades, Larry and I and the town kids climbed down the rock-lined walls to go after the big ones. After a while, Larry, about ten years old at the time, said as calmly as could be, "I've got a rock or piece of mud struck to my foot."

When he pulled his bare foot up to look at it, the whole stream turned bright red. The rock as he called it was actually a big flap of skin, about the size of a silver dollar, hanging precariously from his heel. "I guess I cut myself on a piece of glass," he said, as unconcerned as before, with blood gushing all over the place. Everybody else panicked.

Except Brooks Mears, a teenager, who was standing on the top of the ledge. He reached down, got Larry out and carried him to Doc Ayres' office just across U.S. Highway 24. As shook up as everyone, I don't remember even trying to get into the office to be with Larry. The doctor sewed that big

"Some Don't Need to Exaggerate"
From A. P. Nelson's "Gunnison County"

chunk of skin back onto his heel without any pain-killer, except a big ice cream cone he ate while the stitches went in. Larry and Brooks reigned as heroes most of the summer: Larry because of his nerves of steel, and Brooks because he saved him.

Not long ago during a visit from my Uncle John, who spent some of his boyhood years in Buena Vista, I questioned him about the lake. "I remember the lake very well. One thing we did that I bet you didn't was to get about ten of us kids and wade out into the lake. Then when nobody was looking, we walked upstream, driving the trout ahead of us."

"Wasn't that illegal?" I asked.

"Sure, but we were careful. This one time a huge rainbow swam ahead of us and he tried to get back into the lake between our legs. Finally, he moved up into one of those little irrigation ditches and we caught him. One kid with a fishing license

got his rod, hooked a tiny fly into the jaw of that big trout, and entered him in the big fish contest."

"Did he win?"

"Yep. Weighed six pounds."

"With so many kids knowing about it, it looks as if somebody would have squealed."

"Nobody dared, because we all shared in the first prize."

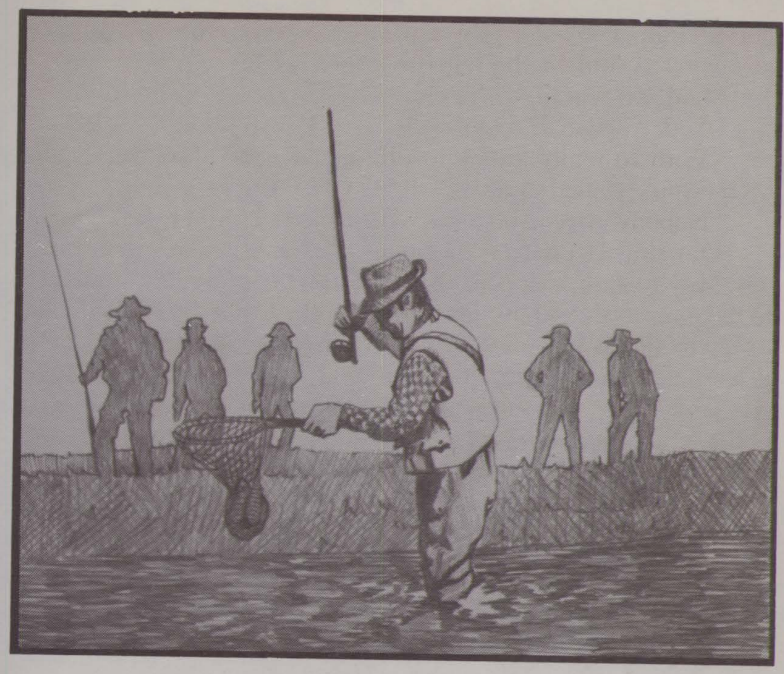
Our ship (I can't recall giving it a name) sank a few times. The way to sink a ship is to put four boys into it, tip it slightly to take in water, then sit down while it slowly fills up and drops to the sandy bottom. One thing about Grandma's Lake, it wasn't too deep except down by the dam.

I have a notion there may have been more than one "ship," perhaps a new one every summer. The one I remember best, probably a composite of many, was a flat-bottomed affair. It consisted of two pieces of scrap lumber maybe ten feet long, serving as the port and starboard sides, meeting at a point at the bow and widening to three feet at the stern. We nailed the deck boards, also scrap, and cut them with a hand-saw to make them flush. We scrounged around Grandma's shed for nails, some being the old rusty square kind.

A couple of boards across the "gunnel" became the seats. Larry, always the mechanically-minded even then, did most of the engineering. The tar for filling cracks may have been begged or borrowed, because I can't remember us heisting it or paying for it. We had tar all over everything including ourselves. Two make-shift oars became our propulsion. An old piece of iron from Grandma's backyard with a rope tied to it served as the anchor. It weighed more than the boat, I think.

I hate to admit it now, but it really wasn't Grandma's Lake at all. It belonged to the town, therefore they called it The Town Lake. But to us we had the world's greatest ship on the world's largest body of water. A few years later during World War Two, we were both out on the Pacific, much bigger than Grandma's Lake, and on board ships, much larger than our "ship".

Not long ago I stopped for a few minutes by the Town Lake in Buena Vista and remembered the fishing and boating and boy fun. No, it wasn't comparable to the Atlantic or Pacific, but it seemed so in the minds of two small boys and their stretchable imaginations.



13

THE FISHING AMBASSADOR

The minister tossed the fly carelessly across the fast water toward a slow moving eddy below a log trapped against the bank of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River. It caught on the log. "What'll I do now, Ben?" the amateur asked the fisherman standing nearby.

"Give it a little jiggle, and it'll fall off."

He jiggled. The ginger quill dropped to the water and began to float downstream. "Now what?"

"Hold the line taut and keep your eye on that fly."

The minister wore a colorful tam cocked over to one side. Although he seldom smoked, he had a lighted cigarette dangling out of the corner of his mouth. He held the rod high and peered at the tiny No. 14 dry fly. What seemed like an explosion popped the fly into the air as a fighting 12-inch Rainbow hit the quill. "Wow! What'll I do?"

"Take in the slack."

In the excitement that followed, the amateur lost his tam, burnt his chin with the cigarette, and as he was about to net his first Rainbow on a dry fly, he fell into the river, filling his hip boots. "Well, what did I do wrong, Ben?"

Ben Snyder, Gunnison's Fishing Ambassador, could have said, "Everything," but he didn't. He enjoys helping others learn a little more about the artful sport of trout fishing. . . even when catastrophies occur.

His student was Rev. Sterling McHarg and the incident happened several years ago. Rev. McHarg has left for an out-of- state church, but he will never forget his fishing trips with Ben, and he can truthfully say he knows how to dry fish under the tutelage of Gunnison's retired postmaster.

Nearing seventy-six, he looks and acts as energetic as when I first met him in 1956. Although slightly built, Ben Snyder can wade the river with more agility than a man half his age.

In the Gunnison Country no other person does as much to help others learn to fish or improve themselves, and strictly for the fun of it. In addition to being a true sportman, he has a reputation as a fine citizen, active in community and county affairs.

He keeps an accurate diary of his fishing experiences, listing number of trout caught, flies, bait or lures used, what water he fished, who was with him, and the weather conditions. He started this practice in 1941, discontinued it during World War Two, and began again in 1946. Serving as Savings Bond chairman and Red Cross chairman during the war kept him busy, in addition to his job. Along with his duties as Gunnison's postmaster, he owned and operated the local movie threatre. When the charter president of the Gunnison Lions Club went to war and could not take office, Ben was president for 18 months after the club was organized in 1942.

He started his diary to remember people he had met, especially fishermen, and found it valuable for future reference in answering questions. One of those fishing partners a few years ago was Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Byron "Whizzer" White. Justice White, staying at a local resort, wanted a fishing buddy, so Ben was called. "There wasn't much about fly fishing I could teach him," Ben said later, "He knew what he was doing."

For several years a local newspaper editor prodded Snyder

to try his hand at writing about fishing. Beginning in 1957 he wrote articles for the Gunnison Country Magazine, an annual publication distributed free to visitors. He has been quoted by many outdoor columnists, and has written several articles for COLORADO OUTDOORS, published by the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

Fishing writers have mentioned him in publications including COLORADO MAGAZINE, OUTDOOR LIFE, WESTERN OUTDOORS, SPORTS AFIELD and several government publications. EMPIRE MAGAZINE a few years ago printed his major article about fishing Blue Mesa Lake. Ben really would like to write more, but as he has said, "I would rather talk about fishing and do it, then spend a lot of time writing about it." After he retired as postmaster in January, 1966, he had a lot more time for fishing.

Many people, whom he has never met, look him up when they arrive in town. One summer day a visiting stranger cornered Ben to ask about fishing. Fortunately, the postmaster was going fishing that day with Rev. McHarg. They invited the visitor along and headed for Cebolla Creek over in the Powderhorn Valley. After a pleasant but unproductive morning, they adjourned to the grassy bank to try the sandwiches Katie Snyder had prepared. While eating, the stranger said to the minister, "You know, Reverend, I don't believe you go fishing with Mr. Snyder to get pointers."

"I don't?"

"Nope. I think you go along to eat some of this good homemade bread Mrs. Snyder uses for sandwiches. It's worth the trip."

Throughout the years, Ben has cultivated many lasting friendships with people from several states. One is with Dr. Jack Halderman, a past national director of Trout Unlimited from Big Rapids, Mich. Another is Phil Wright of Aspen, Colo., active in the same organization. On the Gunnison River one year Ben's fishing neighbor was a gentlemen from London, England.

Someone has said, "With certain fishing partners such as those Ben attracts, you don't have to be an expert." Those "certain" partners, who have all gone to other cities, were: Rev. McHarg, Community Church, Father James Friel, St. Peters Catholic Church, Rev. Martin Graebner, Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, and Father Robert Babb, Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan.

Snyder kidded Father Babb one time when he saw the Episcopal priest fishing with the now-retired Episcopal Bishop of Colorado, Edwin Thayer. "At least I haven't called on the Catholic Bishop to come to my aid," he laughed. Ben is a devout member of St. Peters, and as an active member of Knights of Columbus, he has served in all offices and became Grand Knight in 1939.

His retirement years since 1966 have not been strictly devoted to fishing. In 1960 he became a member of the Gunnison County Pioneer & Historial Society, and has been its president since 1963. Most of the planning, fund raising and construction of the Pioneer Museum took place during his term. However, he credits all the members for that successful organization.

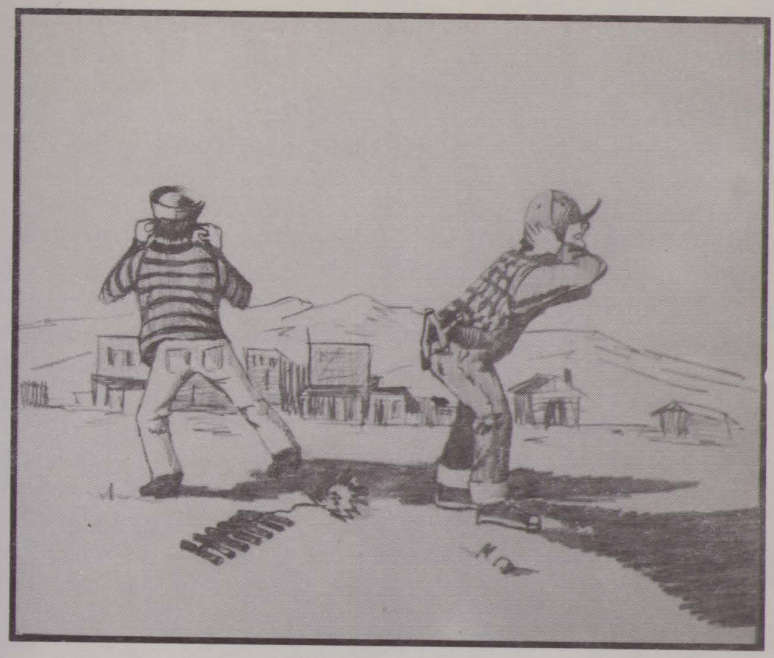
He helped organize the local chapter of Trout Unlimited and tries to devote as much time as possible to it.

Snyder's father, a coal miner, went to Crested Butte from Illinois in 1890. His mother, born in England, lived for a time in Walsenburg, Colo. Ben attended the Crested Butte School, but had to quit after the eighth grade. He worked in the post office there in 1915, and ran it for 18 months because the postmaster became ill. For a few years he was office manager for a group of mining companies beginning when he was 17, and from 1920 to 1926 he served as assistant cashier of the Bank of Crested Butte. Even with all this, he managed to get in a little fishing and there was hardly a stretch of water in the Crested Butte area he had not tried with rod and reel.

He became County Treasurer, taking office in January, 1929, was re-elected several times and served until April, 1937 when Pres. Franklin Roosevelt appointed him as Gunnison's Postmaster, a post he held until his retirement in January, 1966.

There is an expert fishermen under every rock in the Gunnison Country, but Ben Snyder deserves the title, "The Fishing Ambassador" for he continues to welcome a fishing partner as long as he is able to get away. Many times these fishing partners are strangers from across the land, looking for "The" Ben Snyder who fishes.

Going fishing with Ben presents one problem. Instead of getting your share of the sport, you spend your time just watching this craftsman with a rod and reel. The action is too good to pass up.



14

FISHING AND OTHER THINGS

Probably one of the best things about a fishing trip, especially if you are a small boy, is the extra activities that go with it. You never seem to forget some of those events.

Once upon a time I had an uncle who owned a gold mine near Alma, Colorado. He didn't really own it, just a piece of it with a partner. He gave me and my brother, Larry, each a piece of it — a small smelted chunk that looked like one of those chocolate turtles, gold colored and tiny, about the size of a little fingernail. One way or another he lost other pieces of it, and eventually he didn't have any left for himself.

What's important, he owned it during our summer fishing visit in 1938.

The population of the little town might have been one hundred, but the only people I remember seeing were Uncle

Bill, my brother and the person taking tickets at the movie house.

Although Uncle Bill couldn't have been more than twenty-eight, he seemed older and more worldly. In a way he lived in the past and in the future. He thought every rock he touched would turn to gold, making him a millionaire. Unlike his father, who was a coal miner and knew he could at least make some sort of living from it, Uncle Bill was after the big strike, like all the miners before him dreamed.

As for living in the future, he had to be adventurer. He wrote music and the words, and in one case, the family claimed a song, that had become a big hit, had been stolen from him. Who knows? He also wrote science fiction stories, full of excitement and far-out places, for I read some of his manuscripts. No one knows if he ever sold any to magazines.

One night right after we got to Alma, Uncle Bill, all dressed up in a white shirt, fancy tie and a black suit, shinning like satin, asked us, "How would you like to go to a show?"

In 1938 no television existed to babysit the kids, but there were the movies. We had seen the marque advertising a scary film starring Chester Morris, so we voted for it. Larry and I put on clean shirts and ran a rag across our shoes. After we walked two blocks down the dirt street to the theatre, he gave us money for tickets and pop corn. "I've seen this one, so if you guys don't mind, I'll keep myself occupied and meet you when the show is over."

Young as we were, we didn't think he dressed up like that just to sit in a movie house.

One of our pastimes after a hard day's fishing on the Middle Fork of the South Platte River, and when Uncle Bill didn't have to go to town or into Fairplay to "see some important people," was to read catalogs showing fantastic camping equipment and big game rifles. "I'll need these things when I go to the Philippine Islands," he told us.

"I have this offer from a big mining company and they say the contract could run for years. No reason why you boys couldn't come over to see me. I understand the fishing is great."

With his prodding and guidance we selected the fishing rods, and guns and other things we would need to take along. We didn't think for a minute we'd have a bit of trouble convincing our folks what we needed most out of life was a trip

"They Forgot A Can of Peas"

half-way round the world. Uncle Bill wasn't kidding a couple of kids. He really did plan to go across the Pacific.

A few years later while in the harbor at Hollandia, New Guinea, the nearest I got to the Philippines, I thought of Uncle Bill. I was glad he never followed through with his dream. I imagined he might have been taken prisoner during the war or even worse.

Larry and I became the best nourished kids in Alma during our two weeks stay. We didn't see any other kids around, so I'm sure we were. As for trout, we never ran out because we fished nearly every day. We ate so many I think we could have developed fins in a short time. It seems we never ate anything besides trout, oranges, fried potatoes and lots of milk and cereal, but we survived so maybe we did.

Like trout, we never ran out of oranges. Somebody with a truck came through town one day so Uncle Bill bought a big crate of them, "loaded with vitamins," he said. We had oranges morning, noon, night and sometimes in between. "Eat 'em, boys. They're good for colds." Well, in the middle of summer we didn't have colds, but we ate oranges. I don't remember him trying very many of them.

If we never forgot the oranges, Uncle Bill never forgot a certain laundry day. This one morning a few days after we arrived, he asked, "You boys think you can handle the wash

today while I'm at the mine? The lady who usually does it is out of town."

"Sure," one of us answered. "We watch Mother do it all the time."

After he left, we went to work. Heating lots of water in pans on the coal stove, we poured it into the wash tub we all used for baths. Then we tossed in dirty clothes: blue overalls, blue work shirts, his fancy white dress shirts, underwear, socks and everything else we could find. We sloshed in plenty of soap, adding bleach to make sure things got clean. That's the way Mother did it back home. Deciding a long soaking would be the best thing that ever happened to a tub full of dirty clothes, we let them alone and went fishing.

That evening when Uncle Bill came home, he began to shave and clean up. "I have to meet some important people down at the hotel. That okay with you boys?"

Sure, we told him.

He began looking for clean underwear and a white shirt. He never found them. They were still soaking, along with everything that hadn't been nailed down, in the most awful blue colored water you have ever seen. We had forgotten all about it.

As I recall, he never got angry. He merely put his old work clothes back on, squeezed a couple of oranges with something else in a glass and said, "I guess tonight wasn't a good night to go out anyway."

He must not have been angry with us, because the next day he took us to some beaver ponds on Buckskin Creek. All we carried were our fishing rods, a salt shaker, some oranges and he had a couple bottles of beer. He fished for a while, then made a small fire so we could cook Brookies on a stick, and opened a beer. About the time we reached the fire with our fish, he busted out laughing and couldn't seem to stop. Finally, he said, "About that laundry, I remember when I was a little boy, I did the same thing to my mother."

Our short summer with Uncle Bill ended on an adventurous note. He took us to Leadville to meet our folks, our younger brother, Garry, and both grandmothers. Everybody went for the big Fourth of July celebration. We arrived in the Cloud City late on July third. Since our folks hadn't arrived, Uncle Bill rented a hotel room. After supper and before we

went to bed, he took us to a store to buy some firecrackers.

Back in our room, Uncle Bill looked into the paper bag. "You guys sure you got enough to last you tomorrow?" He grinned as he pulled a handful out of the sack. We had firebombs, strings of all sizes of little firecrackers and then several three-inchers. He put them back except for the big ones. "Dynamite?"

"No," Larry said, "they just make the best noise."

Uncle Bill laughed. "I know where you can set those off in the morning."

"Where?"

"Won't say right now. We'll go there before breakfast, to start the day off with a bang, you might say."

Next morning we followed him up the hill on the east side of town. At two miles high, even in July, it was pretty chilly, especially before sun-up. We passed a few houses until we came to a vacant place. Rusty mining machinery and equipment lay scattered around.

We had no idea why he brought us here, except maybe to keep away from houses.

"That's what I'm looking for, right there," he said, pointing to an old boiler as big as a room, thick with brown rust and with one end missing.

"Let's see those firecrackers. . . the big ones." Larry handed him the bag.

Uncle Bill took ten of the three-inchers. He tied the long fuses together, stringing them out in a line. "If the fuses burn okay, they will go off one after the other."

He put the bunch inside the open end of the boiler just near enough to reach. I don't remember which one of us lit it, maybe Larry and I flipped a coin. "Right after you light it, we'll walk down the hill toward Harrison Avenue, as if we don't know anything. Don't say a word to anybody. Okay?"

After the fuse was lit, we walked faster. It didn't take long — the big firecrackers went off in order. From inside the boiler, like a cannon, the firecrackers made the greatest sound a boy could ever hear on a Fourth of July.

Karoom! Karoom! Karoom! Each explosion echoed back and forth across the old mining town. As we reached Harrison Avenue, and headed for the cafe, the last one went off.

It was about six o'clock and the cafe had just opened. We settled at a table to order breakfast. When the sleepy-eyed waitress went back into the kitchen, I said, not too loud, "Boy, those things made a racket. I wonder what it would be like with five-inchers?"

Uncle Bill shushed me, putting his finger to his lips.

Pretty soon three or four men came in to sit on the counter stools. "I sure hadn't heard of any new mining operations going on in the area."

"Me either, but you never know."

"I know whoever it was should have his head examined, blasting this early in the morning! It ain't ethical."

"Maybe he wants to get rich quick."

"He'll think get rich! Everyone in town will want to hang him for shooting off dynamite at this hour!"

Uncle Bill grinned at us. We about busted to keep from laughing.

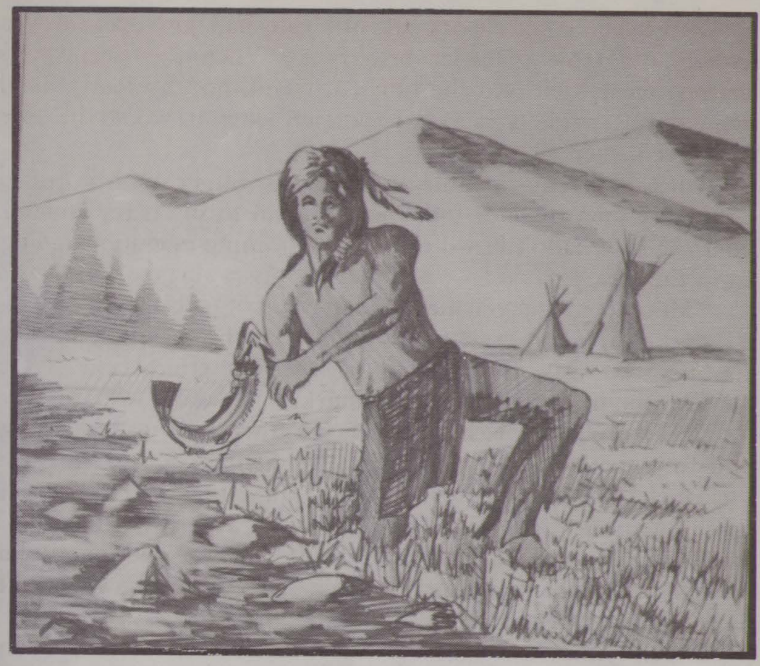
When we finished, Uncle Bill paid the check. "Let's go back to the hotel to see if your folks got in. Then we'll find some exciting things to do."

I don't know what could have been more exciting than our "dynamiting."

All over town that morning, even in the midst of the excitement of the hard-rock drilling contests and other activities, we kept hearing people say, "Oh, just some crazy miner doing some blasting."

All three of us were proud of our deception on a great Fourth of July. It was a wonderful fishing vacation, even if I don't remember too much about the fishing part.

After all these years I have finally discovered why we used to get up before dawn to go fishing. Not because the trout were hitting any better at that unthinkable hour, but because we wanted to get in as much fishing as we could in a day.



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HISTORY, MYTHS AND OTHER MATTERS

While out on the stream some fishermen think about what went on before — how did the trout get here in the first place and what other men had tried their luck?

As I slip a Brown into my wicker creel, I know — only because I read it somewhere — its ancestors first came to North America in 1883 from Germany. Wait a minute? It could be related to a Loch Leven from Scotland. Both were brought over about the same time, and because of commingling, it's doubtful an expert could tell the difference in Colorado waters. Who really cares? The Brown is a magnificent trout and some say the finest.

When I read a bit of history or fiction about the Rocky Mountain West where it tells us this mountain man or that miner caught a German Brown for a meal, it's good for a chuckle. They weren't stocked in Colorado until 1903.

Instead of tossing in our line, hooking a fish, hitting it

over the head and dropping it into a creel, maybe every once in a while we should think about the past. Trout originated in the arctic area and in prehistoric times sort of spread around the top of the globe. Eventually, being fairly intelligent, they headed south to escape the ice box.

The ones we call Browns and/or Loch Levens propelled their way into what is now Norway, Greenland, Scotland, northern Europe and Russia. Supposedly Rainbow and Cutthroat made their way south through the Bering Straits to our Pacific Coast. Somehow, the Cutthroat got as far east as the Rockies, and it is the only trout native to Colorado. The Dolly Varden was also a western trout. Eastern Brook, as the name implies, ended up along the east coast of our country. Golden Trout, perhaps through several mixed marriages, is said to have originated in the headwaters of the Kern River in California.

To set the record straight, all the trout just mentioned were native to the United States except the Brown. Native, that is, after they journeyed to southern climes. Tom Lynch, the Colorado Fish Manager, tells us, that in addition to the Cutthroat, the only other true native fish in this state are the American Eel and the Catfish. The Brook didn't get here until 1886. This squelches the thoughts of some of us who have carelessly said, "Well, all those fish were here in the first place, so we should be able to catch all we want." Not so.

Know how to win a cinch bet? Bet someone that right now — today — in spite of fishing pressures, there are more trout in streams and lakes of Colorado than there ever were on any given day prior to the 1859 Rush to the Rockies. You can't lose. Nearly all of this is due to past and present goals of the Colorado Division of Wildlife. A quick look at other fishermen before us and what has happened up to now will shed some light.

Let's say we're fishing the Gunnison River, as one example. Toss your fly upstream and let it drift past that willow over there, then think of others who took trout from the river. The first bunch of fishermen probably were the Ute Indians. There isn't much to tell us the folks who built the high-rise apartments in the Cliff Dwellings in southwestern Colorado ever did much settling along the Gunnison River, or none before them. But the Utes could have been eating tasty Cutthroat

trout as early as 1600 right along this river and as late as the 1880's.

Others who dipped a line or a net for food, and not for fun, along the west side of the Continental Divide were the Spanish. Their expeditions roughly covered the period of 1765 to 1790. People like Don Juan Rivera, Fathers Silvestre Escalante and Francisco Dominguez no doubt personally missed the pleasure of catching a fat native out of the Gunnison by having their hired hands do it to feed the explorers.

After 1800 and for nearly 50 years a few more footprints appeared along the river, made by trappers and hunters, sometimes called Mountain Men. They didn't use the trout for barter, or dash off to enter them in big fish contests. They ate 'em. Robidoux, Leroux, Carson and Wooten were a pretty good bunch of guys and not fish hogs.

Between 1842 and 1859 more footprints began to show up along the river from its beginning at Almont, Colorado to its ending at Grand Junction, Colorado. Some were missionaries, but most were engineers and others looking for easier routes to the west. If they enjoyed catching and eating trout, very little has been written about it. Some names tied to this period include Marcus Whitman, John W. Gunnison, William Gilpin, Edward Beale, John C. Fremont, Randolph Marcy and William Loring.

Most residents of the south-central part of Colorado believe the main character was Captain John Gunnison, for his name appears on nearly everything to remind us he spent just a few days encamped on the Gunnison River in September, 1853. Captain John probably never drowned a worm in the river, but his great, great nephew, John S. Gunnison Jr., and his great, great, great nephew John S. Gunnison, III, certainly have.

About 1858 some miners moved through, followed in the 1870's by ranchers, farmers and townspeople. Around these parts fishing pressure never built up too much, as it did on the eastern slope. Wherever there were settlements, such as Denver and other mining camps, the demand for fish grew, so selling them became a commercial enterprise, The very first regulation governing fishing came in 1861 when the first Territorial Assembly passed a law prohibiting the taking of fish by seine, net, basket or trap. Some folks still do it that way.

Then in 1870 the Assembly passed two more laws: no dynamiting, drugging or poisoning fish, and the other required fishways around dams and weirs. In 1872 Territorial Governor Edward N. McCook said market hunters were exterminating the fish, market hunters being those nice fellows who sold thousands of fish to stores, restaurants and hotels. Indians, miners, farmers, ranchers and small town people caught only what they could eat, since they didn't have a deep freeze, even though no daily limit existed.

By the time Colorado became a state in 1876, there still weren't too many footprints along the banks of the Gunnison River, at least in the headwaters. Most of the concern for fish still concentrated east of the Divide. In 1877 Wilson E. Sisty became the first Fish Commissioner. Probably to cut down on the catching of fish for commercial purposes, the State Assembly passed a law prohibiting fishing from December through June. In 1878 Sisty bought 459 bass from Ohio and planted them in lakes in eastern Colorado, making this the first importation into the state.

When the first official State Fish Hatchery opened in 1881 north of Denver, 100,000 Eastern Brook eggs were brought in from Plymouth, Massachusetts, and that's how the Brookies got their start in Colorado. The first planting in some of the lakes and streams took place the following year.

Because the Colorado taxpayers paid for state hatcheries and stocking, the Game and Fish Commissioners and other leaders became more protective. So about 1896 a new law prohibited the taking of trout less than six inches long. Theory being, give them a chance to grow up. This putting back of trout under six inches continued until 1952, when the experts decided the survival rate for those that had been hooked and handled wasn't too great anyway, so it was removed.

Some folks believe "tourism" to be a modernday fad. Not so. Colorado had tourists who fished even before statehood. By 1898 fishing pressure began to grow and grow, forcing for the first time a "limit". It was 20 pounds per day with no limit on the numbers. So you could keep 20 trout if each weighed one pound, or 40 if each weighed one-half pound.

A fisherman journeying to another state sometimes feels discriminated against when he has to pay more for his fishing license than a resident does. We've already seen how the

"Famous Taylor River Before the Reservoir"
Gunnison News-Champion Photo

general taxpayer in Colorado foots the bill for all expenses related to increasing the number of trout in streams and lakes.

Until 1903 — the same year Browns came into the state — there was no such thing as a license. Non-residents had to kick in $3.00 for an annual permit. This still didn't pay for the costs of maintaining the trout population.

In 1909 everyone had to have a fishing license. In 1911 non-resident dropped to $2.00, while a resident paid $1.00. In 1974 out-of-state visitors paid $10.00 for a year's license, or $5.00 for a ten-day permit. So the increases over a 71 year period since 1903 has only been about 10 cents per year average.

Did you ever hear a Ute Indian or an isolated miner complaining there weren't enough trout? Neither did I, but of course, we weren't around then. But in modern times we occasionally hear some folks say, "I'm never coming back to Colorado because you don't have any fish."

In 1973 the Division of Wildlife planted 54,652,919 fish of all kinds in Colorado waters. Forgetting the 31,400,543 warm water types, since we are concerned with the cold water species, this means 23,252,376, in addition to those already existing in streams and lakes. They included: 13,550,070 Rainbow; 193,077 Brown; 1,405,391 Native Cutthroat; 665,848 Brook; 6,805,964 Kokanee; 22,000 Grayling; and 511,026 Lake Trout.

Did you buy a fishing license in 1973? So did 611,820 other people. Of those, 412,597 were residents and 199,224 non-residents. This destroys the myth that the out-of-staters catch all the fish and go home. No way! Not only are they outnum-

bered more than two to one but they fish fewer days and most of them are not as proficient as the locals in landing a trout.

Let's shoot down another myth. "Most of your streams are fenced and we can't fish." In the Centennial State there are 7,100 miles of open public water. This gives us a pretty good chance. Because of good roads and better means of transportation, we fish in places the Utes and early settlers never even saw. In addition, in Colorado there are 800 miles of streams within private property stocked by the Division of Wildlife, but open to the public. The Division has a written agreement with the landowner that trout will be stocked if the owner lets anyone fish with permission. You'll know those places by the signs installed by the state.

What's all this fuss about inadequate limits of cold water fish? One of the least read but most important little booklets contains the state fishing regulations. I had a friendly argument going with a fishing partner last season, so we adjourned to the river bank and checked the book. Never rely on last year's, because rules change annually.

Your daily bag limit shall be: 10 Brook Trout eight inches or less. Two Mackinaw or Lake Trout 15 inches or longer. Twenty Kokanee. Eight Whitefish except in the White River. You can have eight of the aggregate of the following. (aggregate meaning eight of one kind or a mixture of eight of all types). Rainbow, Brook over eight inches, Brown, Native or Cutthroat, Whitefish, Coho Salmon, and Grayling. Forty-eight fish! Not bad.

That brings us up to date in this little history, from the folks "back in the good old days" who caught trout to eat, up to now when most of us fish for fun, relaxation and to eat too. Nowadays we have more trout to fish for, more places to fish, and a great many more types to put in our creel than anyone ever did before Colorado became a state in 1876. And we do it to enjoy it.

Edgar A. Guest said he would wade a running stream for miles, and never pout, no distance is too far for him when he is after trout. Sound familiar?

TWELVE LAWS OF A FISHERMAN

I.—A FISHERMAN IS TRUSTWORTHY. He will tell the truth and reveal a secret place when asked where he caught that nice mess of trout.

II.—A FISHERMAN IS LOYAL. He is loyal to the purism of fly fishing or bait fishing, whatever the case may be, but not so loyal that he won't switch when the occasion demands it.

III.—A FISHERMAN IS HELPFUL. He will dutifully put fresh worms on his wife's hook to keep her occupied while he gets in some good fishing.

IV.—A FISHERMAN IS FRIENDLY. While fishing from a boat, he waves cordially at water skiers who shout and holler as they roar past him stirring up the lake within a few feet of his line.

V.—A FISHERMAN IS COURTEOUS. He politely excuses himself when he stumbles and plods by another fisherman on the stream, splashing water, making loud conversation and in general scaring the fish away.

VI.—A FISHERMAN IS KIND. Although he has a special fishing spot monopolized, he humbly allows other fishermen to crowd in on him and cast their lines haphazardly in the same water.

VII.—A FISHERMAN IS OBEDIENT. He obeys all the state and federal laws, does not discard small fish in the bushes hoping to catch larger ones later on, and does not conceal extra fish in his hub caps.

VIII.—A FISHERMAN IS CHEERFUL. After losing his favorite fly or lure, or breaking the tip of his rod in the underbrush, or discovering he left his license at home—he smiles.

IX.—A FISHERMAN IS THRIFTY. He saves the rancher's cows by closing all gates behind him, does not damage fences, and practices personal thrift by saving half of a sandwich to make cheese balls for bait.

X.—A FISHERMAN IS BRAVE. He is courageous and careful as he attempts to drive back to the city through the suicidal traffic after a great weekend of fishing.

XI.—A FISHERMAN IS CLEAN. He cleans his fish without scattering the remains along the bank, does not throw beer cans or bottles into the river or lake, and does not tramp mud into his wife's kitchen.

XII.—A FISHERMAN IS REVERENT. He gives thanks for the privilage of just being able to fish, and adds a few extra words for his luck . . . whatever that might have been.

BOOKS BY CHARLES A. PAGE

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