

staples-bruce-2017-04-21.mp4

Bruce Staples [00:00:10] You know it's something that's developed over the years it's become kind of like an intellectual game. You know when you're fishing more so in fly fishing than fishing with natural baits or whatever, there's a lot more variables to look at and to consider. And to me part of the joy of it is I'll never be able to figure out the impact of all these variables together. But what does mean something is when I have success and I can observe that certain variables have helped in that success. You know true there's some other, others off in the distance that I'll never be able to figure out. To me that's that's part of the fun of it is trying to get back towards these unknown variables or what the influence of them is. So in order to do that I, keep a log. And it goes back to like nineteen seventy six about my third year in fly fishing. And I've accumulated that much information and from that I've just developed the interest in fly fishing just see how things can come together variables that you have a little bit of control of like what time of day or fishing at a certain water temperature or a certain barometric conditions. I can see trends and I can actually do some statistical analysis if I have a whole string of data from this sort of thing. And just doing just doing that has been so much rewarding and so much rewarding results for me personally.

Bruce Staples [00:01:51] I started out as an analytical chemist in laboratories and I ended up as a process chemist out of the Idaho National Lab. We were developing waste forms for a nuclear waste disposal and it became almost as interesting as fly fishing or maybe as interesting. There are times when I put fly fishing in the back pocket and worked with the statistics or the mathematics of how effective these forms were. Then there were other times and gee I've got to go to such and such a stream or something like that with fish you know I just have a longing and I anticipate, and bang. Off I go then come back to the work and the cycle we go around and back to the fishing.

Bruce Staples [00:02:39] Probably the realization that again this is personal. The realization that I'll never have control over all the variables that affect fishing success, if you will. There are some like I say I just mentioned that yeah you can't control, but that's only part of the equation. You know I tell people that fishing success, fly fishing success, is a big ole' partial differential equation in the sky in certain forms are quite easy. You know the dependence of dissolved oxygen and water temperature. That's easy to figure. It's an inverse relationship. But there's other things like say the mood of a fish to feed, who can predict that? You know there's others you'll never be able to have a term for that. Whereas the water you know water temperature term, yeah you can define that physically. And it's like I say, it's a big string of variables and you'll never have control of all of them, and sometimes you'll never realize that you have control with some of them and sometimes you realize you don't have control. And to me, realizing that is part of, is a big chunk of the fun in this game.

Bruce Staples [00:03:55] When I first came here, I hate to admit it, but I was a bait fisherman. And then a couple of my colleagues out there at work, so-called professional fly fisherman or accomplished amateurs, got me into fly fishing. And one of them was a very prominent fly fisher and commercial fly tyer in this area by the name of Stan Yamamura. This is back in the 60s and into the 70s. He kind of shamed me into fishing. He said you don't realize how much fun this is gonna be. And I think he was the first one to use, to me, the term intellectual game. And as soon as I realized what was going on, it took a while of course like with anybody, say hey this is for me this fly fishing is really something. And on top of that I've always had a a say a wish or determination to explore and get to know new places and of course I had my favorite places and I'd go to these places of renown and

fish them and fish them. But I was always looking over to the other side of the hill and muttering what's over there? You know, what stream of water is over there that I should I should visit as well as places that everybody visits. That's been my theme I would say for the last maybe 30 30 40 years or so, fishing.

Bruce Staples [00:05:23] Yeah I did I fished ya know, it was bait fishing, like I'd ride my bike. This was in New Hampshire up to a little stream called Palmer Brook and catch them little brookies and bring them home and my mother would cook them for me. Or also go out to one of the local lakes and catch some yellow perch or sunfish, bluegills whatever you know and it was always fun. It was always fun, but I never really had the idea of fly fishing until my grandfather's brother, which would make him my great uncle I guess, introduced me to fly fishing. But when you're 14 or 15 there's other things on your mind than fly fishing. So I never completed it from that end. But when I came out here and was I'll use the term shamed into it and I realized my gosh this is great. What have I missed these other years you know these years that I didn't do it. And along with that eventually if I can elaborate a bit. It took a while and I think many of us as fly fishermen go through this, you start out and you want to see if you can catch the most fish and the biggest fish and I know you've heard that before. But as my experience broadened, I got to the point where I wondered why is there quality here? Who was here before me? Who else appreciates this like I do? And I think it broadened my appreciation like it would for anybody of quality in certain places. And it just enhanced my desire to go out and explore and find different places.

Bruce Staples [00:07:00] You know, I would say yes to a degree. Some people never get out of the first stage or the second stage and you have to look at this way. Maybe they're having fun, maybe that's all they want. But in my personal case, it was fun yes but it wasn't satisfying from the standpoint of you know from the intellectual standpoint. Why is that fish taking that fly now? Why is he not responding to this water temperature like he did at that water temperature? Listen, why is this insect located here when they tell me it shouldn't be in this one place and yet here it is. These kinds of things you know they just widen my curiosity and I just had to get more experienced in order to try to find solutions to these questions.

Bruce Staples [00:07:58] Yes. Yeah. Well that that part there's two answers to your question: one's appreciation, and the other is is enriching your fly fishing experience. Now I think that somebody who stays in this for a long time realizes that, hey it's not so much catching fish, it's being here, being in certain places if you will, you know, means to me anyways as much as successful fly fishing. I mean we all have that, we all have certain places that we love or are particularly attractive to us. I've got mine, you've got yours and you talked to any fly fisherman you'll find the same thing.

Bruce Staples [00:08:45] You know I do and a lot of these waters are ones that I've pretty much discovered on my own like Fall River Basin up here in the southwest corner of the park, you know, the Fall Fall River system. Bechler River, Mountain Ash Creek, Boundary Creek, Beulah lake. These waters have a special meaning because they're so close to being in a natural state. Don't get me wrong, we've got very beautiful waters that have been altered by man. A good example is the Henry's Fork. You know it's stillwater fishery for many miles downstream below Island Park Reservoir. But it's a phenomenal fishery. But you look at the history of that river, it's not what it used to be. You go back into the 1930s or so and it was a cutthroat fishery. And then along comes man doing things like altering the river itself and altering the salmonid makeup. You know the the inflow or the introduction of rainbow trout from commercial or private interests. Its changed the river

from what it was say 70 years ago, 60 70 years ago. And you know even with that change, it's one of the best rivers in the world. The same things happened on the Madison. It used to be a cutthroat, Grayling fishery. Now it's rainbows and browns, but it's still a phenomenal fishery. You know these these things kind of fascinate me that something tells you about the quality of these streams that they can undergo huge salmonid changes like that and still retain their quality.

Bruce Staples [00:10:37] Definitely. To me definitely. You know something like, to me it's it's special because it's almost like you respect these fish. They've been around, they've managed to sustain their populations even though there's been all these changes. You know they're they're taken out of an equilibrium state with nature, and these other changes have been introduced and yeah you can see in places where it's just devastated the population, not just cutthroat but also Grayling. You know I'd say that, like it or not you have to admire whitefish because they've hung on whereas these other two salmonids have had problems. So I guess I have to tell people, hey treat those whiteys with respect, they deserve it.

Bruce Staples [00:11:32] Yeah let me start out, let me do it chronologically if you will.

James Thull [00:11:35] Please do.

Bruce Staples [00:11:37] I got to know some of the some of the good authors around like Gary LaFontaine, and so it's Gary who's Gary Borger and this is one of the advantages of having something like the Federation of Fly Fishers. It gives you the opportunity to be able to talk to people like these you know these icon people. And both of those people, they're people people you know, Gary was a psychologist I guess, Gary LaFontaine, theres two Gary's. And I'm not sure but Gary Borgers field may have been biology, I could be wrong there. But I got to know them through the federation and talking, exchanging experience ideas like any fly fisherman would do. And Gary LaFontaine asked me one time, this is before he became ya know this is oh gee whiz back in the 80s, "have you ever considered writing a book on your experiences?" Because we talk about like I say the Fall River basins the Heart Lake Basins, Centennial Valley up here in Montana or upper Blackfoot River drainage here just east of town. And I thought about it a bit but at the time the work I was doing out there was pretty intense from the standpoint it took a lot of time. Gary Borger came to town, and did a program for our local club. And talked to me a little bit about this. He wrote down, he sat down, and wrote a query letter, showed me how to approach a publisher. So I had an idea for a book that I wanted to call Snake River Country but that, that title was already out. Anyways, I sent query letters out to several publishers, most of them turned me down except for Frank Amato, and he wrote me a contract and we did a book called Snake River Country Flies and Waters. That's the first book I put out, that was back in 92 or 93 I forget which one. It kind of broke the ice with respect to books being written about eastern Idaho. It was probably the first really comprehensive book, if you will, on fishing in eastern Idaho. Many books on the Henry's Fork, many books on the Madison River. But there's country around here in eastern Idaho that's backcountry, and sometimes is difficult to get to. It doesn't have the renown but it doesn't matter, the fishing is great if you're there at the right time. See this is where experience helps. So we did that book and it's all very well it's all very well just because it was you know the first book, it was kind of general. Well a few years later, about 95, he approached me again because I talked to Frank a bit about fishing in the park. He did a series called River journal series and you may have some in your collection up in the trout collection. He asked me if I'd be interested in doing the river journal on Yello-, fishing Yellowstone Park. So that was a second one we did. And I retired from out of the lab back

in the year 2000, retired a little bit early, 60 years old. Retired and, gee whiz now I can go fishing, but he approached me again and asked me if I'd be interested in doing a book on fly patterns in this country. Frank had a particular interest in this neck of the woods. He was mainly a steelheader. Ok, every time I talked to Frank particularly in the winter he said "whats your water situation?" You see where I'm going? He wanted to know what water situation, with this part of the Columbia drainage, would bring down and how that would impact his steelheading on the Columbia River drainage. So we did a book called Trout Country Flies and I think I showed you back there. We did that, it came out in 03', I'd just been retired three years. Came out in 03' and what I tried to do in that book was was to distribute credit to a lot of the regional tyers, because one thing that you'll see in the fly tying game is somebody will create a fly then right away it's imitated. And you can see that with patterns from people like Rene Harrop, or Mike Lawson or people over here in Jackson Hole like Scott Sanchez people like that, Boots Allen. And I wanted to get down in print, say a certain time, when this pattern was created by a certain individual so that somebody can come along and say "hey I created that pattern!" well hey look at this here it is in this book ten years before you mentioned it, you know. And so we did that book, it was about 500 patterns and all and, it did quite well. Well I retired and of course when you retire you start looking for more things to do. I felt it, that book needed to be updated. This was back around 2010, 2011 something like that. And I approached Stackpole, about the possibility of doing a book on flies from West Yellowstone, but mainly talking about the waters of West Yellowstone. Well I'm not as qualified to do that as people like Craig Matthews, Bob Jacklin. You know some of the other icon people from up there. And we get talking, developing ideas of how about a how about a book on patterns from the Greater Yellowstone Area. Well bingo! I get out of the fly tying circuit, not as much now as I used to, I've gotten to know a lot of people you know fly tying you know. So yeah I'll consider that. So I sign you know a publication agreement to do that book. That came out in 2014. It's been rather successful I would guess. You know now they put these books on eBay as well as you know hard copy. Well get talking with people back there at Stackpole, Jay Nichols in particular, and I told him I says you know, I'm not qualified as much as many people to talk about the icon waters like the Madison or the Yellowstone or you know, say the Henry's Fork cause look Rene Harrop has got a beautiful book out on the Henry's Fork. Mike Lawson's got a guidebook on the Henry's Fork which is you know precise. You know both these people know the Henry's Fork, much better than I could ever do. But you know there's nothing really comprehensive on the back country in the Greater Yellowstone Area. Now I'm talking about the Fall River basins again, I'm talking about the Upper Lewis River drainage, you know Shoshone Lake and Lewis River channel, things like that Heart lake basin in the park, Centennial Valley again, our Blackfoot River system. Do you think Stackpole'll be interested in a book like this? Bingo! We signed a contract on that or you know a publication agreement. That's what I'm working on now. Hopefully that book will be out the end of this year and it will probably reveal in a broad sense more than anything else put out to date with respect to backcountry waters. And I state right up front in the book that, hey don't get me wrong, the icon waters you have to visit, but you're not giving the area a good go over anything like that until you visit some of these backcountry waters. Sure take a while to walk into Heart Lake and fish at the beginning of the season. You may have two or three other people in there at the most, and you'll see cutthroat trout in there that you know, will be as large as anywhere else you'll catch them. You'll also see Mackinaw to if you really know, probably not in in July but if you can fish it in June like we used to back in the 80s you know, you catch large Mackinaw just by casting from shore. Which you see places that are very unusual like this. So what I've done with that book is the waters that I think I know fairly well, I've authored sections of the book. Then I've gone around to other people that I know know some of these backcountry waters you know better than I do and ask them to contribute you know sections of this book like on certain

waters like for example Boots Allen's doing the Gros Ventre drainage for me, or he's done it for me even. Mike Lawson's done Warm River for me, and on and on people like that. Bob Jacklin's done the Widow's Pool which to him was you know fly fishing heaven. You know I think you've talked, you've talked to Bob he's, I'm sure he's mentioned it. You know people like that, so the book when it comes out will not be just my experience but the experience of several other people.

Bruce Staples [00:20:29] Charlie Brooks. Charlie was, when he wrote it was like he was sitting there talking to you. I don't know if you remember Charlie or not, you know he passed away I think it was in the mid 80s somewhere. But his style of writing was such that it was almost it was magical. He'd sit there and was like he was talking to you personally or something like one on one. He's one, and I get looking around, I think Gary Borger's good, and two of our renowned fly fishermen in this area Rene Harrop and Mike Lawson have both put out beautiful books. I've enjoyed reading, their style is different. Mike is almost like he's sitting there talking to you. Rene's like I had a professor, you know he's up there lecturing you on things you know details and stuff. He's a detailed guy and why not in his books too? His book is beautiful. And so is Mike's.

Bruce Staples [00:21:33] I think they're extremely important. And I'll tell you why. My best example for this region is you know preserving cutthroat trout and grayling. As you well know, the populations and the range of those, both have decreased dramatically. You know I see what's going on like in Yellowstone Lake, and like any other fly fisherman I applaud the progress they've made. But Cutthroat Trout are, just because they're native, to me makes them important. But now looking at it from an economic sense too, if we were to lose cutthroat trout out here in the Rocky Mountains, the reason for a lot of fly fishers and maybe anglers in general to visit this area would be gone. Hey you go back to Wisconsin or Pennsylvania they've got browns, they've got rainbows, they've got brook trout, sure we got them out here, but it makes it almost to the state the point that if we lost cutts, the reason to come out here would be yeah for the browns and the rainbows but under different conditions you know the scenery, maybe perhaps the crowding or the quality you know the aesthetic quality of the areas you know. You take away to me a big economic reason for people to come out this way, you know let alone hey this is part of what was here originally, why why would we want to lose it? You know I am aware of, in Yellowstone Park, they're reconditioning a few waters you know like Grayling Creek. I think this is great. You know there's so many different places and I know you and Jimmy talked about this too but I have to give you my thoughts. We got plenty of waters of rainbows and browns and everything but what about the original salmonids that were here? Don't they deserve a place in this area? I think they do, and I would like to see the opportunity to go out and be able to encounter you know the original native species here. That's um, you mentioned books another one is Howard Back's book I forget the exact words, Fishing Yellowstone with Fly and Rod or something like that? It's beautiful.

Bruce Staples [00:24:06] One of the things I say is have a little respect. They were here originally. There's no reason why they should not be here. Have you ever caught a Grayling before? I ask them that question, you want to see something you know just you know just totally beautiful. When you're fishing around a place with Grayling make sure you get a good camera. You know just the experience to be able to catch something that who knows, 10 20 30 years from now we may not be able to encounter. Doesn't that mean something to you? You know hey this cutthroat trout was here originally. Doesn't that mean something to you too? Things like that.

Bruce Staples [00:24:50] Well you you mentioned quite a few of the threats, you just mentioned climate change obviously is a big one, overfishing, the one you didn't mention which I think is extremely important is the Internet. So many of our youngsters now are, you know there's good and there's two sides of the coin here. There's good things that come out of it, but I see so much, the Internet taking youngsters away from you know living an outdoor life so to say. And to me that decreases the awareness of what's out there and that you know, the ability to enjoy what's out there. And so in addition to what you mentioned, I think you've got to consider the internet too. How do we get around that? You know how do we with that in mind how do we present to the youngsters that hey there's a whole world out there this- thats enjoyable? And certainly there's ways to do it. And I think we've got to do it with more intensity myself.

Bruce Staples [00:26:06] I think essentially, and this is one of the things I think that fly fishing has done for me is, I've become more aware that hey these places are special they should be, they should be protected. Whether its through a national park or a wilderness area or a state park or something. You know so many of us look at things in an economic sense. But if you dig dig deep enough into these, and the cutthroat trout and the grayling to me are a good example, is these things have value. Not just say for sporting pleasure but they have economic value, and that just doubles to me the reasons why they should be protected.

Bruce Staples [00:26:50] I think it's very important. From the standpoint that hey if you want to continue to enjoy it, or if you want to pass it on to your family or grandkids, your kids whatever, your great grandkids, you've got to be willing to take part in protecting it. If you want to try to make a living out of it, it's even more important from the standpoint hey, can I continue to make a living of this 10, 20 years from now? That sort of thing.

Bruce Staples [00:27:26] I've seen degradation of course. And you know usually the reason the reasons for this are are economic. And that's why I think it's important to have these sanctuaries that you mentioned earlier. We-, be it through state parks or national forests or you know national parks. That's why I think it's important to have these. And we've seen the equality reduced in so many waters. A really good indicator is what's happened to cutthroat and Grayling. They're in a situation where you know they're no longer in an economic or rather a natural equilibrium with these waters. And I think the least thing we can do is protect some of them for people to enjoy them. And I'm talking about not just fly fishers I'm talking about any kind of a person.

Bruce Staples [00:28:24] Well one of the things I became aware of in my experience and I'm sure this is the case with you know many fly fishers. Who was here before me? And what did they do to describe this or to bring an awareness of this particular water to anglers or fly fishers in general? I think it's important to have, you know, in a sense, have these institutions that will preserve these things because I think with experience in fly fishing you can ask anybody with the same level or even more experience than me, this is valuable to us. You know I really appreciate, say, our heritage. I've grown into that. And I think it's typical of perhaps a lot of the people that you've interviewed, have expressed this too. These are accomplished people and they understand the value of how fly fishing has progressed at least in this area. And so to me, an area that you know an organization like yours that preserves this, on a large scale, is almost almost necessary, almost a requirement, you know for people that have gained experience in fly fishing.

James Thull [00:29:52] That's great.

Bruce Staples [00:29:54] Anything I can do you know to help in this manner, you know like we have people in this area like anywhere else that you can no longer interview they've passed away. We just lost Bud Lilly, what a wonderful person that guy was. You know not too long ago we lost Sylvester Nemes, he was a good friend of mine. You know and you can't really talk to these people anymore, but you might be able to find people that can give you valuable experience from their point of view of these these people with, you know, these people have passed away. So yeah your organization I think is really, it's essential to anybody that really enjoys fly fishing.

Bruce Staples [00:30:40] You know, if you look we've lost in this area, like any area, look at what Montana just lost recently with Bud and Sylvester and, you know other people escape me right now. People, some of these people in the past, like in our area here people like Ralph Moon or Bing Lempke or gee whiz there's other other folks like that have passed and have made big contributions to the fly fishing world, Marcella Oswald out here. And I'm sure that you know these people some of them were just local or regional and others are national like Ralph Moon was renowned for building bamboo rods for example. I don't know if you know, you want to extend your work so far to include these people who are not, you know some of them like for example Ralph Moon you could talk to Mike Lawson or Rene Harrop or there's another fella in here by name of Buck Goodrich you may want to talk to about you know, some of these folks that have passed away that made big contributions to the fly fishing and fly tying world, you know. I always think of you know for example, right now Bob Jacklin has got a little project he's doing with the West Yellowstone Museum up there where he's doing, maybe he's mentioned it to you. He's doing a series on the fly shops, progression of fly shops beginning back in the 20s, right up to the present. And of course most of those people have passed away and, well a good example is George Grant. You know he's uh, I met George Grant when I was doing Trout Country Flies and the guy he was fascinating, he even tell me he says he says "its a journey to walk across my room, my bedroom" and visited him in his home in Butte and God it was fascinating. George I got to leave, you know God its going to be dark in another hour and a half, I gotta drive down to Idaho Falls. "You got this big beautiful highway, let me tell you what that was like in 1936" you know this guy says " it's take me two days to get down and fish the Big Hole." Yeah. Just fascinating stuff you know. Back in those days there's plenty of fish and the problem was getting there. Now it's a little bit the opposite, unless you know the backcountry.