

July 1993
DARK HOLLOW
By Datus Proper
A way of life has died,
but the trout are still there.

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W on down

FISH A PLACE LONG ENOUGH and it becomes a homestead, a personal stretch of boulders and water and trout. I've been proving my claim on Dark Hollow Run for twenty years now. So it's understandable that I'd wonder about the other car parked on Skyline Drive, right where I always start my hike down to the stream. Maybe the visitor was just the usual refugee from the city, out for a stroll on the Appalachian Trail, but then again I might find a fisherman ahead of me. I hurried down the mountainside with my rod and rucksack.

The visitor was easy to catch. "Hill's getting hard to pull," she said. Her hair was more gray than red where it fell over the lace collar of her dress. Her name was Betty Cave and her only burden was a bunch of flowers, but it established a claim 200 years older than mine. I read the names of her family when we got to what used to be the Dark Hollow settlement.

There were more headstones in the clearing than Betty had flowers to decorate—rough fieldstones, big ones and little ones, lots of little ones. One of the unmarked stones was for the Cave who brought the family's red hair from Ireland to the Blue Ridge long ago. The oldest legible marker was for John G. Cave of the Virginia Light Artillery, C.S.A. Near it there were stones for Betty's parents and her sister Lula Belle.

Not far away was a fireplace, stones chinked with mud, standing lonely in the woods. Betty Cave had stories to go with that old hearth. It had been part of her family's cabin, once, and she remembered the days when her mother tended the fire and her father came home with food.

Daddy used to bring a leather pouch with trout spilling over the top. He caught 'em on worms—big fish, like this—a foot long, some of 'em. They was real pretty. Mama cleaned 'em all and kept 'em cool in a stone jar in the springhouse. The meat was pink when she cooked 'em. They tasted awful good.

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dark-water fly, and worked upstream making backcasts when I could, but otherwise just pushing the line out. This sounds impossible—like pushing a string—but you get good at push-casting on Dark Hollow Run. When there is brush behind, you just pile line on the water at your feet, hold the rod straight up, and make half a roll-cast, the forward half. It's not a way to break distance records. The line goes where the rod-tip points though, and the fish are not far away. The little fly rights itself, shimmies its peacock body at the trout, and flashes you a V-for-victory sign with white wings. You hold the rod tip high so that the line does not get caught in the fast water at the tail of the pool. You want the fly to take life easy, like a big trout.

Watching a good fly is like watching a bird dog that knows what it's doing. You have faith. Almost every pool has at least a small fish—in the middle, where a trout can hold in slow water and foray into the current for a passing snack, or in the calm patch above a boulder, or in little eddies at the head of the pool. When the fly dallies over just the right spot, the fish responds. A little one is a sparkle, making up its mind and pouncing in the same instant. A big trout is a shadow, a lovely lazy rise without fuss.

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We had 400 acres, all grass but for the orchard and the hemlocks around the house. We kept the brush cut down till the government made us leave. We grazed six beifers and a horse and two milk cows, and Mama stored the butter in the springhouse.

Grandma planted that snowball bush, too. It blooms every June and the apple trees still set fruit, but the pears and peaches are shaded out now. Mama used to can all the fruit. Mama and Daddy worked hard, but we weren't hungry.

I worked hard, too, sneaking up to the tails of pools, sitting on a rock to

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keep my head below the trout's line of sight, and planning before each cast. The brook trout that took the fly were 2-year-olds about 7 inches long. None of the big 3-year-olds would rise to my fly. The concentration was tiring, more so than the walk down the mountain. I was relieved to reach the Lunch Pool, sit on a patch of moss, and pull out my food.

Spore
The Lunch Pool is one of those places that just grew around me over the years. Maybe it was in the middle of my homesteadwater because I deserved a break, or maybe I staked my claim knowing that the pool was available. The sycamore tree beat me there by a long time, anyhow. It may have been growing even in the days of Great-grandfather Cave. The trunk was as thick as four Dark Hollow girls standing back to back, pale toes wriggling down into the pool.

9 1/2
I ate each of my rye crackers with a sardine dripping oil on it and halfway through lunch there was a grumble over the ridge to the south. Dark clouds moved overhead fast but the thunder stayed lazy. A few raindrops made rings in the pool while I rushed through my apple, and then there was another ring made from below the water. I stripped line off the reel and covered the fish with one false cast, not standing up. The trout drifted under the fly and took it and pulled with a strength almost unseemly on such a small battlefield. Then the fish gave up and lay in my left hand. Both its mouth and its girth were big for its length of 9 1/2 inches and its belly was the deep red-orange of a maple tree. This was a three-year-old, survivor of two spawning seasons but programmed by its genes to die before another. It died instead for my wife's dinner.

The shower was steady by then, and I wasted no time. Another good fish took my fly in the next pool but the hook lost its grip. I changed to a fly with more clearance between point of hook and fat herl body, and in the two pools upstream I caught two more big fish, which meant that both my wife and I could have dinner. That's how it goes on Dark Hollow Run: you can fish for hours without a venerable trout, but the first shower gives you satisfaction.

The old fish hide when the water gets low. Then the rain comes and they move out, chase the small fry away from the best spots in the pools, and lie in wait, tails moving, eyes looking up.

Even the first few raindrops revive some genetic recollection of the wetter, colder climate Betty Cave describes.

I let the cat out one time and it froze in the snow before it got back in. I cried and cried.

My Daddy biked down to the old copper mine for work in winter. He didn't have no boots—had to put socks over his shoes and tie them up with tar strings. The snow was so deep that his clothes was froze up to his waist when he got home. We were happy to get the money.

There was eight cabins in Dark Hollow then, and the church. They was awful good people, good Christian people. Daddy went around with a lantern in the snow when the diphtheria came. He visited the houses of sick people to pray. Two children died the same day. Daddy had to cut up a church bench to make a coffin for them.

The climb back up through the woods to Skyline Drive was slow, my excuse being that I wanted to take an inventory of my homestead. Rain made that easier, too. The violets stood straighter, the wild geraniums glowed pink-purple, and the first white trilliums began to open. In what was left of the orchard at Betty Cave's old place, a mountain pheasant twisted off through gray trunks. We call them ruffed grouse now. I saw no woodcock, but further along the path a gray squirrel darted to the back side of its tree and I wondered why it was so spooky till a goshawk buzzed me. Its nest must have been nearby, with young hungry for small game.

Two bunches of deer, on the other hand, stood watching me tamely. Recently deer have become too abundant for their forage—a problem common in the national parks. Hunting is not allowed and there are not enough big predators to control populations.

I don't remember deer in the '30s. Never heard Daddy name a deer, but he hunted mountain pheasants here in the hollow and walked to Big Meadow to shoot wood hens. They was funny little birds with long bills and round heads and big eyes.

We heard a mountain panther screamin' and hollerin' like a baby one time, and our dog was so scared we let him inside. I looked out the window and saw the panther coming closer [sic] and closer. It had eyes like a piece of fire.

A bear broke into our smokehouse one

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Daddy tracked rabbits and squirrels with his little dog, and they did smell good when Mama cooked 'em. I remember she baked raccoons, too, with potatoes and carrots from the garden. We ate the muskrats and sold their hides. We didn't eat 'possums, but some folks did—fattened them up and cooked 'em.

muskrats

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With humans gone, the original vegetation returned, and if the young hardwoods drank some of the stream's water, they also protected the watershed from erosion. The trout were not big but they were doing better here than in most parts of their ancestral range. I expected to find the native wildlife waiting for me as long as I could manage the hard pull.

Something beautiful had been saved for me—and taken from the Caves.

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After awhile, the government pushed us off our land and made it part of Shenandoah National Park. That was before the war started—1939 or the edge of '40, I think. Daddy got a dollar an acre. Friends gave us use of a house outside the Park—they knew we couldn't pay rent. We wanted to go back to Dark Hollow but the government burnt down all eight cabins. Burnt the church, too.

Daddy didn't have any work. All he knew was farming and hunting and fishing. I remember him sitting outside every evening, cryin' and cryin'.

Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
(406) 388-3345

(Title page for section)

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PEOPLE OF THE STREAM ✓

DARK HOLLOW

(computer name: Cave) ✓

BAILEY'S SECRET

(Spigler) ✓

ARTIST WITH THE FLY ROD

(Chapman) ✓

AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

(Marinaro) ✓

LUNCH BY THE STREAM

(Curt) ✓

~~BIG JOHN~~

~~(John)~~ moved to Birdbook

THE BEST OF IT

(Ned) ✓

THE FIRST TIME

(Women) ✓

About 2050 words

People
Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
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(406) 388-3345

(Comput name: Cove)

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About 1850 words

Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
(406) 388-3345

BAILEY'S SECRETS

Bailey Spigler took me fishing shortly after I first moved to Washington, D.C., and wanted to get out of it. On the first free Saturday I bought a license and followed the Potomac River upstream, but I didn't meet Bailey that day. Another old man was at the landing to rent boats and provide advice, which was a responsibility he took seriously. He told me that I would catch more smallmouth bass by wading if I did not mind getting wet.

I didn't. Fishing wasn't much with the water at 84°, but I put a few little bass back and kept enough yellowbelly sunfish for dinner. The old man said that they would be better eating than bass, and we talked awhile, and when he decided that I was all right he told me that the best trout fisherman thereabouts was Bailey Spigler in Sharpsburg.

Bailey agreed to find me some trout. He may have recognized a sincerely desperate young fisherman when he heard one on the telephone. And then too, Bailey may have reached the point in life when he welcomed recognition of his learning.

Next Saturday just after dawn I was at the door of Bailey's white frame house. I did not step inside or meet his family -- never did, on that occasion or the others when I fished with him. People near the Mason-Dixon Line liked privacy, in those days. There was nothing suburban about Sharpsburg yet, no barbecue grills or gift shops. There were small old houses and Bailey just appeared at the door of one of them, hip boots on his feet, 3-piece fly rod strung with line but broken down, bait hook up against the tip-top.

I drove while Bailey gave directions to a tiny tributary of Antietam creek that did not look like trout water, and wasn't. There he unfurled a seine between two sticks, stuck their bottom ends in the gravel, and told me to herd some minnows downstream toward him. Two were in the net when he lifted it. Some folks settled for bait-shop shiners, Bailey said, but there was nothing like real stream-dwelling bull-minnows to fool the trout. I suspected that he did not believe in wasting 75 cents on boughten bait, either.

We got to know each other during the half-hour it took us to catch our minnows. Bailey was of average height and weight and his dark hair made him seem no more than middle-aged, but he did not move fast. What caught me was his good humor. I had thought of chasing minnows as just something that had to be done before we could go fishing, but Bailey took pleasure in the details -- miniature pools and runs, a seine bagging in the current, warty

little fish flapping in the meshes with mouths open but silent. We wound up admiring the trophies among bull-minnows.

I had been afraid that everyone else would beat us to the big fish, but it was still early enough for mist to be rising from the Potomac River when we drove across it. Bailey mentioned that he knew of a few cool springs, deep in the bed of the river, and that in years gone by he had caught real brook trout there. He supposed that the native fish had drifted down from shady headwaters and taken refuge in the springs when the Potomac turned warm on its way to Washington. He thought that maybe he was the only man alive who still knew about those springs.

I wanted to look for the cold water right away, though I could not have said at the time why refugee trout seemed so desirable. I did have enough sense to back off when Bailey shook his head. Hadn't seen any of those big brook trout lately, he said. Maybe the pollution got them all.

He knew of a good place elsewhere, though. We bounced along a gravel road, paused on an iron bridge over Opequon creek, and looked downstream. A fish boiled below a rapid -- maybe just a fallfish (another warty creation) cornering bull minnows in the rapids. But I knew nothing of warm streams and Bailey went along with my salmonoid fantasies.

Then he parked and put together the pieces of his white steel fly rod, an antique even then. I was trying to get a 2-pound-test line through the guides of a light spinning rod. He gave me a hook like his and split our stock of bait, pouring my

minnows into a marmalade jar. He took care to show me how the bait ought to be rigged and I can picture the process still, hook going in the mouth and out through the gills and then back through again to form a loop. Then he pushed the hook through the minnow ahead of its tail and adjusted the loop until the body was pulled into a gentle curve by the leader. Bailey got tiny silver scales on his thumb and finger and the minnow had a faint smell of stream-bottom mud.

Bailey waded into Opequon Creek then, me right behind him, and eased downstream to a place where the water ran deep and shady under the right bank. He stripped off thirty feet of a dark, level fly-line and started roll-casting the minnow toward the good spot. The old steel rod was heavy and slow, by modern standards -- but it did not tear the bait. The line just cartwheeled out and the minnow plopped down where he wanted it. Bailey let it sink a couple of feet, drifting downstream, and then retrieved it barely fast enough to make it turn over. I watched it flicker, sink, struggle ahead, flicker, sink. After about ten casts and ten yards of stream, Bailey dropped his rod tip. The floating line was pulled deeper into the water by a fish I had not seen. Bailey eased the line back through his fingers till he felt a heavy beat and then struck. The rod bent alarmingly, because there was not much spine to it, but that trout was as good as fried in cornmeal. It rolled and dived a couple of times and then lay in Bailey's net, wondering what had gone wrong with the world.

We admired the fish and I remember that scene too. It's odd how some fragments of these old movies play back after more important memories have disappeared. Bailey's net had a rubber handle and a spring-steel bow that could be unscrewed and collapsed for travel. The meshes were of faded cotton. The fish was a rainbow, plump and good-sized, almost a pound, but it was clearly a hatchery specimen, fins rounded, brain vestigial. It didn't hurt that Bailey knew exactly where the truck was wont to dump its load.

I moved off to do my own fishing, then. My short rod was not as effective as Bailey's but my line was good, a wispy monofilament that let me cast a bull-minnow thirty feet with one split shot. The trout I remember was on the hook when Bailey stopped by to see how I was doing, and I was doing fine. A boy on the bank was telling me to haul the fish in before it wiggled loose, while Bailey explained that I couldn't horse a trout on 2-pound line. The boy was too excited to listen, what with all the splashing. Those man-made rainbows did not have much for brains but they remembered how to pull.

Bailey and I fished together two or three more times that season and were contented in each other's company, mutually relieved to be with someone who understood the good things in life without explanation. Hatchery trout that I would have scorned, in Montana, seemed valuable when they pulled me away from a miasmal city. My memory may not be reliable in every respect, of course. Sometimes Bailey Spigler gets confused with

all the other old men who saw something in me worth rescuing, but I think I have the important details right.

On our last trip of the season, Bailey guided me to a farmhouse in an unpromising part of the West Virginia limestone country, right off U.S. 11, and there he talked to a man he'd evidently known for years. The farmer gave fishing permission and Bailey took it, which sounds one-sided, but the two seemed equally happy to see each other. This was before Americans had decided that spring-creek fishing was worth paying for.

Bailey went downstream and I up. The stream had been abused, like most others in the region, banks beaten down and bottom silted, but for all that there was water-buttercup waving in the current and two trout spooked when I waded close. I sneaked up on the third before it saw me and it was a real native. The event seemed miraculous, an apparition -- little trout at the surface taking invisible insects, white-edged fins clear. I cast a 1/16-ounce spinner far above the trout, brought it back glittering, and was almost relieved when the fish fled. Modern trinkets were all right for modern manmade trout but not for the real thing.

Bailey had two brook trout between 8 and 9 inches long -- lovely fish, we agreed, if not as big as the ones that hid out in the Potomac springs. He had caught the pair on worms drifted underneath some brush. They lay in his creel, glistening on a comforter of ferns, and I admired them fervently. Bailey was as near ebullience as I'd ever seen him. Last year, he said, he'd

been in the veteran's hospital at this season, and the doctors had not been sure that he would fish again. They'd treated him right, though. He had always been proud of fighting for his country in World War II and he felt prouder than ever when he walked out of that hospital. He'd have been glad if I'd caught a trout too but I was content to see the sun shining on Bailey alone. Nice day it was, too, wind from the west blowing off the haze.

I did not call Bailey till the next March. Wouldn't have known what to say, because he was not a talkative man and the only thing we really knew how to do together was fish. If I had been older at the time, I'd have figured some excuse to strike up a conversation between seasons. All winter I'd been hoping that he'd know me well enough, in a second season, to trust me with the secret springs. I would have treated them right, Lord knows.

Bailey's wife said that he'd died. It was a short conversation. I wanted to ask for his old steel fly rod but was afraid she'd think me one of those false friends who exploit widows. I just said that I was sorry and she probably knew I meant it, but if I was tongue-tied then, maybe this will explain.

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About 1950 words

I
Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
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(406) 388-3345

AN ARTIST WITH THE FLY ROD

In Yellowstone Park, Scotty Chapman
was the first of the best.

[Typeface 1]

Cinquefoil Creek looked sterile, where we started our hike, a sluice so narrow that the willows on each bank overlapped in the middle. If anyone but Scotty Chapman had been in the lead, I would have suggested that we look for a better place to fish. But Scotty knows more about Yellowstone Park's waters than me. Perhaps he knows more than anyone.

The two of us walked upstream, looping around clumps of charred lodgepole pine. Where the trees stood singly, some had survived the great fires of 1988, and now they dotted the meadow with patches of shade. In this deep-green field, phlox and larkspur sparkled like stars in the Milky Way. We angled up a ridge, then, and when its sunburned grass had wiped the dew from our boots, Scotty paused for a breather. He did not like having to do that. Ten years earlier, when he was in his seventies, he had stopped only to capture details for his paintings.

The break from our climb suited me. Scotty is not one to sit around reminiscing, but he is good for a story on the trail.

[Typeface 2]

Scotty Chapman first saw Yellowstone in 1927, after a ten-day drive from Colorado over unpaved roads. The Wyoming headwinds brought his Model T Ford to a shuddering halt, sometimes. Sounds like a long journey -- until you remember that some of us spend all of our lives searching for the most beautiful place in the world. Scotty found what he was looking for on the first try.

He was "a fishing nut already," he says, and Yellowstone's Firehole River was at its peak in those years. Old Faithful and dozens of other sources of warm water must have created ideal conditions for growth. Trout often reached 3½ pounds, sometimes 5 -- but these were browns of European origin, too wary for the standard American methods of the time. Most anglers waded downstream, cast wet flies on leaders of stout gut, and caught the smaller trout or none at all. There was not even a fisherman's trail on the banks.

Scotty had read a book on dry-fly fishing by George La Branche, and the Firehole taught the rest of the skills needed for big, selective trout. It was a sport that followed nature's rules. You had to find a hatch of mayflies and a trout rising for them. The heavy browns usually fed under overhanging grass, so you had to sneak up the bank and kneel to cast, sometimes with

one leg in the water. You had to convince the trout that your artificial fly was the real thing.

In 1930, Scotty became a Park Ranger. In 1937, writer Ray Bergman visited Yellowstone and Scotty introduced him to the Firehole. Bergman wrote that it had "more sizable fish to the mile than I've ever seen in any other stream", but they "thumbed their noses at me."

Bergman quotes Scotty as asking: "Did you try dry flies in size 18 and smaller?" The leader had to taper down to 4X, too -- finest silkworm gut generally available, and less dependable than modern 7X. Bergman wrote that "Scotty is an artist with the fly rod.... I've watched many anglers fish, but I have never seen anyone else who could so regularly throw the line so that the fly would float without drag under any conditions."

Scotty and Ray Bergman fished together until at least 1951, when I tagged along on one trip. Many of the photos Bergman used in his stories show Scotty in his Ranger hat -- a tall, athletic angler who happened to resemble another Montanan named Gary Cooper. If you look closely, there is something else that you may notice. There are no poses of angler with captured trout, dead or alive. Scotty does not care to be seen that way.

[Typeface 1]

Scotty and I hiked over another rise and downhill to the basin where Cinquefoil Creek flattened out in meanders. In this hidden playground, the little stream was all dressed up like big

folks. There were undercuts at the outside of the bends, shady clumps of grass, and riffles that giggled between the pools. There were even mats of water buttercup, which is a plant of fertile waters.

We both strung up our fly rods but Scotty said that he would look around for awhile before he started. He did not explain -- never does -- but I guessed that he was catching the scene for his canvas.

I knotted on a small dry fly. It would look like a beetle to the trout but had little white V-wings that I would be able to see as they drifted under shady banks. Then I worked upstream with a short line, and the brook trout came for the fly but did not take it as well as they usually do. They would materialize below it, watch it for a second, and then splash at it and miss or get hooked lightly.

The problem was a good one to have. We had arrived at the perfect time of the morning -- the hour between dawn-cold and noon-hot -- and the mayflies were returning to lay their eggs on the water. It was not the kind of fishing that one expects to find on hidden little brook-trout streams. But of course an angler should not get so excited that he starts casting before he takes a look around.

I tied a long, fine tippet to the end of my leader and a sparse size-18 fly to the tippet. By that time the trout were rising as far as we could see up the creek. I slipped into the water and moved upstream, step after cautious step, like a heron,

and draped the leader over tufts of grass, hiding it from the fish. When the cast was right, they took the new fly confidently. I put some back and kept the best, eight or nine inches long.

Scotty was bored by my heron act before I landed the third trout. He picked up his tackle and rushed upstream, working out line as he went, rod drawing dark loops on blue sky. I walked to the top of a rise and watched.

Above the angler were round golden hills and purple mountains with streaks of old snow in their folds. Those are an amateur's colors -- Scotty could tell you the exact pigments. He was a tall, straight figure against the meadow, fifty years younger with the urge upon him.

The scene from my hilltop was an impressionist sketch -- dash of predator, splash of prey. He fished like an osprey, using speed and surprise rather than stealth. I don't know anyone else who can make a fly pounce on trout like that. He did not wade, seldom knelt, but cruised up the bank false-casting, pausing momentarily to drop his fly on likely spots. It was not the Firehole method, but these were not Firehole trout. They would rise in the second or two before fear overtook hunger. Scotty knew his fish with the intimacy that only a wild predator usually achieves.

By the time I rejoined him, he was cleaning five brook trout between six and ten inches in length. He had taken them "as they came," he said. Fifty years earlier, he had returned big trout to the Firehole, and that was before most people had heard of

catch-and-release fishing. He said that he no longer liked to "hot-lip" fish unless he needed them for food.

[Typeface 2]

When I started following Scotty around the Park as a teen-ager, there were times when I wondered where he was going, but I kept my thoughts to myself except on one hike cross-country through miles of lodgepole tangle that would have dizzied a compass. I said, then, that I feared we had drifted off course -- and I confess that it was a frivolous comment, aimed at getting his reaction.

There was no reaction. Scotty kept on without a word and in fifteen minutes we hit the shore of a little lake right where we wanted to fish. A golden-eye duck whistled in for a landing, cutting a long silver furrow on the pewter surface, and I promised myself that I would not venture again to tell Scotty Chapman how to find his way around Yellowstone.

He would not say this, but I suppose that nobody else has ever covered as many miles of the Park on his own two legs. Not the Sheepeater Indians. (They didn't run patrols.) Not the mountain men. (They didn't last long.) Not today's Rangers. (There are committed people among them, but they don't spend the winters on ski patrols.) You could drop Scotty without a map anywhere in Yellowstone's 3500 square miles and figure that he would hike straight to anywhere else he had a mind to be.

He was Assistant Chief Ranger and fire boss when that was

the toughest job in the Park. (Scotty would not say this either, but everybody knew it, back then.) Hundreds of fire-fighters had to be mobilized on short notice. They had to be given tools, food, experienced crew-leaders, and quick, clear orders. These were as close to military campaigns as anything in civilian life.

I was a Fire Guard during some of those summers, and we did not have the resources to put out a sizable fire all at once. Someone had to know where the burn would do more good than harm, keeping the meadows open. On steep, fragile watersheds, however, the flames had to be stopped before they could destroy the trees protecting stream quality. You had to know what you were doing -- and do it. You could not duck decisions.

There is a good deal of talk about controlled burns today. With Scotty in charge, we always had controlled burns. I don't suppose that he saw Yellowstone as his biggest canvas. That's just how life turned out.

[Typeface 1]

We were late for lunch by the time we got back to Scotty's ranch, which lies against the northern boundary of Yellowstone. With the exception of near-fatal duty in the Philippines during World War II, nothing had separated him from his Park. He had declined transfers and the promotions that would have come with them. I asked him some silly questions, over the years, but I never asked if he planned to retire in Florida.

Scotty and his wife, Louise, cooked our trout luncheon. She

had shared his commitment since 1932. During the couple's first winter in the Park, they lived in an isolated cabin on Soda Butte creek, and Louise kept the home fire burning, literally. Heating was by wood stove, and the water supply was a spring outside. Scotty was usually away on duty -- rounding up the buffalo herd or patrolling for poachers. The patrols were real cross-country work, on nine-foot skis in deep powder, two weeks at a time. "Louise never complained," Scotty says. "I did, but she didn't."

The next winter, Scotty was assigned to the Bechler River cabin, even more remote. Louise left in December to have their first child and came back with baby Bill, in January, on a dog sled. She looks like a model, pretty and fragile.

We sat at the table with afternoon sun streaming through the windows and pulled bones away from the pink, steaming meat of our trout, eating in little bites. We had enough but were not stuffed. And then we talked. I don't remember most of what we said because one casual comment by Scotty got me thinking.

He had been fishing the good spot on Cinquefoil Creek all these years, Scotty said, but he had not shown it to anyone till he took me to it that morning.

I guess I'll be keeping an eye on the place.

≈

Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
(406) 388-3345

use 2 slightly shorter version

AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

Vincent C. Marinaro's house was at 600 East Marble Street in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, but he lived on the banks of the Letort Spring Run. At least, he seemed to live there during the summers I knew him, starting in 1971. If we spent an hour or so in the house before fishing, it was because his tackle was stored there. A big Winesap tree shaded the back porch, and Vince's rods had been planed from bamboo strips in that small room. Usually we'd take one of the finished rods, or two or three, out of a battered leather case which, he said, "had been over a lot of iron bridges." I'd hold the screen door open carefully so the tips wouldn't snag. Then we'd cast on the lawn as the sun dropped. Vince would compliment the old tree for setting a crop of apples that would do him and his wife all winter. I'd compliment him on his rods, which was easy. He wouldn't compliment mine, but he would allow that one French rod might get the job done. And then we'd go fishing.

On the banks of the Letort, Vince Marinaro fit as woodcock fit in alder bottoms and brown trout fit under clots of elodea. He moved slowly in his later years, because of a bad hip, so he would take root like a gray-barked hickory stump. I'd thrash my

way through a mile of ragweed without seeing a rise -- nothing rises in the Letort while the June sun is still hot -- and then I'd thrash back, sneezing, and see Vince in the riverbank reeds, rod sticking up like a flowering stem and eyes sharp on the wrinkle of current where a fish would show when its time came. A cigar would be branching out from the corner of his mouth. Probably he did not actually smell like tobacco and bulrushes and limestone mud and the pollen of every tree in the mid-Atlantic, but that's the way my memory of him smells.

The sun would, after a thirty-two-hour day, drop behind the trees and give us a few minutes of evening. The sulphur mayflies would float down the stream and Vince would get two or three trout, including the best of the evening, which was likely to be about sixteen inches long, a little thin, with a pink sheen along the sides and big black spots: the old Letort strain, which always made Vince happy. In the near-dark, his rod would flicker a few more times, throwing line back high over the greenery, dropping "puddle casts," and perhaps bowing to another fish as a pair of late mallards whistled up the river.

Vince won't be on the Letort's bank again but I haven't a proper obituary in me. He was a private and compartmented person. He liked to talk about what was under a few of the lids and I made no attempt to open the others, which may be one reason why we got along.

Some scholar may do more research. What I have is a few years of memories that are sharp but disconnected, like film sequences without a script.

Marinaro's Books

Vince did not write two important books just because he happened to be in the right place at the right time, though of course that helped. He did everything well, if he was interested in it, and worked at it till it was perfect. His second book (In The Ring of the Rise: New York, Crown, 1976) had pictures of rising brown trout that seemed impossibly good, and if you didn't know him, you would have to wonder what tricks he pulled. You might suspect that his photographs were akin to others the outdoor magazines used to run, with fish performing faked leaps. But Marinaro's pictures were as uncompromising as the man behind the camera. He set up blinds along the banks of the upper Letort and ran countless rolls of film through his old Leica with the reflex housing. His subjects were all stream-bred trout, unconfined and rising to natural insects. The river was open to fishing, so other anglers cast to those fish. If you have tried to see Letort trout, let alone photograph them, you will understand the dimensions of the problem.

Vince's reputation, however, had been made by A Modern Dry Fly Code, first published in 1950. The worth of a book must be a matter of opinion, but I will not be alone in suggesting that this was the first great American innovative work in its field. That field is fishing with flies that imitate natural insects. There had, of course, been other good fishing books in America by 1950, and there had even been two good ones on imitative flies: by Jennings and Flick. This, however, was a subject on which Vince and I did not agree, as I discovered when he went through a

manuscript of mine in the mid-'seventies. Jennings and Flick were honest and sound; they knew their trout and their natural insects; and, in my view, both men tied splendid floating flies in the traditional design.

Vince, however, had a low opinion of the Halfordian (and Catskill) dry fly. For him there were no good traditional dry flies. In A Modern Dry Fly Code, he reproached G.E.M. Skues for not having "emancipated" the dry fly as he did the wet. The Halfordian dry fly was, he thought, no more than a maladapted wet fly -- so you can imagine his opinion of Americans who were using it late in the twentieth century.

Marinaro rethought the design of the dry fly from head to tail, and the Code provided clear alternatives. But I want to be precise on what Vince did and did not do. He proposed more successful new dry-fly designs than any writer before him. It is fair to say that he did for the dry fly what Skues had done for the wet. At the same time, the Code was squarely within the great tradition of fly-fishing. It is impossible to think of the book being written in any language but English. (This is my opinion -- not one that I recall discussing with the author.)

As between the English and American schools, Vince clearly found more guidance in the former. He collected English books, flies, and tying materials. But within the great tradition he was an entrepreneur, not an adapter.

Originality has its costs. Americans were waiting for the great American novel long after it had been published, and the Code was similarly ahead of its time. A mutual friend told me that the first edition was remaindered in Philadelphia for a

dollar a copy. A few years later, before the new edition of 1970, the 1950 edition was sold for a hundred times the remaindered price -- which, of course, did nothing for the author's bank account but must have made him feel better. In the time I knew him, Vince was wary of the angling public, and of other authors too. Perhaps the book's slow reception left a mark on him, but someone who knew him in the 'fifties would have to address that.

For me, at least, 1950 is the watershed in American fly fishing. In the years since, other good books have appeared and vast (but still incomplete) work has been done on American trout-stream insects. There could have been no better model than Marinaro. He was a lawyer, and the Code made good case law: a treatise that could be argued for decades before the court of anglers without proving flawed. Vince claimed nothing that he had not done, repeatedly. There were no evasive generalities to fail scrutiny. Sources got credit. If you open the book today for the first time, you will have no feeling that you are reading something dated. Everything in it works, and always will.

Innovations

Perhaps Vince (like Skues) left a list somewhere of contributions that he considered important. If so, I have not seen it, but here are some of the innovations in the Code:

-- Divided tails, which help in persuading a winged fly to land and float upright. As far as I know, Vince was the first who thoroughly understood what tails could do for a dry fly.

- The "thorax" tie, with hackles wound well back from the eye of the hook and a thorax formed in front of them. (Since 1950, other mayfly designs have adopted this principle.)
- An arrangement of hackles designed to make the fly float flat or slightly nose-down on the water, like a real mayfly. (Marinaro's original design is still used but is difficult to tie, and many successors use easier designs.)
- A series of terrestrial flies, including an ant with hackle in the center of the body, a jassid, an innovative grasshopper, and a beetle. I'm not clear as to precedents for all of these flies, but it is certain that Marinaro played a major role and that his book gave many American anglers the idea of fishing with terrestrials.

Other Writing

Vince did a lifetime of angling research, but I am aware of only the following published writing: two books already mentioned, four articles for Outdoor Life, and the foreword to my 1982 book. Everything he did will get attention from historians, so I should say a little more about the foreword, which taught me some things about him.

Most of his contributions had already been made -- via the Code -- before he saw my manuscript on the design of trout flies. Of the thirty-eight designs I listed, three were totally Marinaro and seven others had been influenced by him. Even that count excludes the impact of his V-tail, which helps a dry fly land

upright.

To my surprise, Vince had little to say about the flies I described in What The Trout Said. He must have disagreed on some points (like the usefulness of the traditional dry fly), but not on the facts. On style, he had suggestions. "Never give readers more than one thought per page," he counseled. Several times he opined that too much was packed into a passage. The chapter he seemed to like best was the first, on the importance of listening to trout. (I changed the other chapters to be more like the first.)

Vince clearly liked the idea of assessing a wide range of designs. (He had not done so, nor had he used the term "design," though he was our greatest fly-designer.)

Now, Vince could be counted on for a brutally frank critique, which was all I had sought, but his reaction encouraged me to ask him for a foreword. He thought about this for months, and worried aloud. I suppose he knew that his blessing would be important to me, though we did not discuss that. What he said was that he had been asked to read a number of manuscripts over the years and had announced a policy of writing no forewords. If he did one now, he would make other authors unhappy. (It was the only time I heard him express concern about stepping on toes.) But he said he'd think about the foreword, and when he decided to go ahead, he did so with a generosity that was also typical.

Vince seemed to feel a continuing responsibility for the book after its publication, and when we went fishing, he would give me new ideas and bits of information. On our last trip of 1985, he told me of his surprise in finding a 1966 book (by W.H.

Lawrie) which used the term "design" and analyzed traditional wet flies in terms of their design. That discovery gave me a chance to rectify an oversight before my second edition.

I suppose that, if he had not chosen to put so much of his intellectual energy into fishing, lawyer Marinaro would have enjoyed being a judge.

of the Good Rods *made by*

~~There were many~~ bamboo rods I had ~~not~~ handled, ~~but of those~~
~~I knew, the ones~~ Vince ~~made~~ were best. They started, at the long end, with a double-handed salmon rod. His personal favorite for trout was a 9-foot, three-piece, four-ounce rod for a 6-weight line. (He was unable to wade much because of his hip, so he wanted a long rod to clear the bank foliage.)

My favorites were the 8- and 7 1/2-footers, which weighed about two-thirds as much as my own rods -- and cast better. Then there was the 6-foot rod for a 3-weight line. It weighed, Vince said, just under an ounce, and it was a real fishing tool, not a toy like the old Leonard "Baby Catskill." We proved this point with long, easy casts under the old apple tree.

The tapers appealed to me even more than the weights. Correct rod tapers, for Marinaro, were not a matter of individual preference: There were specific tasks that the rod had to perform well or it was simply a bad rod. But if you have read In The Ring Of The Rise, you will know that Vince was uncharacteristically evasive about dimensions. If asked, he would say that he did not want anyone making bad rods from his convex tapers, and the other tricks of the trade were as

important as dimensions in thousandths of an inch.

I know that Vince was unhappy because no rod-maker with an adequate milling machine had ever asked him to put rods in production. (He used planing forms only because he had no alternative.) He would not sell individual rods because he didn't want "to sell a \$10,000 design for \$1,000." It was one subject on which we did argue. I urged him to put what he knew about rod-building in a book, because it was getting to be difficult enough to make bamboo rods that would hold their own against the synthetics, and he should not let the best designs disappear without a ripple. Vince did not write the book, and as far as I know, his tapers and notes are not available to rod-builders.

Passion

Fly-fishing has been called an intellectual passion, and there are few people who have proved it more thoroughly than Vince Marinaro. He figured out how to braid horsehair lines, using an authentic gadget he found at a flea market. He reconstructed the old British North-Country flies, taking pains to find authentic materials. (Who else had dotterel feathers?) But Vince's passions had nothing to do with price or prestige. I heard him express admiration for a few books, a rooster's cape with silver-colored hackles, some old Hardy silk lines, one or two Partridge hooks, good double-barreled shotguns, a rod by Tom Maxwell, and a pair of hackle pliers. "That's the only good pair of hackle pliers I ever saw," he said.

The list of things Marinaro did not like was longer but expressed with equal frankness, if anyone asked. He held

conventional wisdom in such disregard that some interlocutors found him unsettling. In addition to Halfordian flies, he disliked:

- Many prestigious bamboo rods, especially if they had stiff butts or soft middles.
- Overwhelming trout with modern technology. Vince got so that he would not willingly walk into a shop where he had to look at graphite rods, which he found lacking in soul, repulsive, "almost slimy." But, at an earlier stage, he once admitted that an Orvis 9'3" graphite rod for a 6-weight line cast well.
- Trout streams (or grouse covers) with lots of people in them.
- Writers who attract crowds by publicizing individual streams. (But, for friends who could keep their mouths shut, he was generous in sharing knowledge of the best streams in Pennsylvania.)
- Many fishing books. When I praised a well-known author and fly-tyer, Vince said that he had visited the Ausable River in Michigan with this man found him "fishing the water" (casting at random) when there were visible rises to cover. I did not know enough to press the point, but I wondered whether the other angler could see rising trout as well as Marinaro, whose eyesight was keen till the end.

The Code made clear which kind of fishing Vince liked best. He was not, however, a dry-fly purist. On one of our last trips to the Letort, he experimented with old-fashioned wet flies on

little double hooks. I don't recall seeing him nymph-fishing. One day, though, I was fishing a little beetle upstream and wet, just like a Skues-style nymph, and Vince invited me to try two small Letort fish that had refused his dry fly. He seemed delighted when they took the beetle. I think he enjoyed filing that away as another angling problem solved.

It was easy to know when Vince was not pleased. You can be sure that I did not "pollute the water" (his term) with rods of synthetic materials when we went fishing together.

Mysteries of Life

Among the subjects on which I sought Vince's advice was the relationship between women and field sports. He told me that his wife -- he called her "Mom" -- had gone fishing with him exactly once, early in their marriage. But she had never objected when, several evenings a week, he rushed home from the office and out to the Letort. Then when he returned late at night, she always had a good meal ready for him and any friend he brought along (and to this I can testify). She was "a real fisherman's wife," he said, and when she died in 1978, he floated lower in the water.

About then I started driving up to Mechanicsburg on Friday evenings, occasionally, and sleeping over so that we could make a start before dawn for the best of summer hatches. Vince had introduced me -- and the country as a whole -- to the Tricorythodes mayflies.

Taking America as a whole, the Trico hatch must now be the most important we have -- and we did not know it existed till

Marinaro's article of July 1969 in Outdoor Life. It was the angling equivalent of Columbus' discovery in 1492.

Vince took pleasure in the Tricos right through the summer of 1985, which was his last. In July he showed me an original Trico spinner design that he considered the best ever. He also explained exactly how to fish for trout "gulping" the tiny flies -- and why a bamboo rod worked better than anything else for the purpose.

After the hatch we'd go back to 600 East Marble Street for lunch. Vince never did let me stop at a restaurant, and his cooking was still good, but the old winesap tree hadn't been pruned and windfalls covered the back yard. But there was still a swath of mowed grass for casting. Inside the house there were paths between piles of waders, long-handled wading nets, fishing bags, rod cases, guns, and fly-tying gear. On the wall was a scone with three unburned candles drooping in the heat: one bending like rod on the backcast, one near surrender, and one limp. Near this were a Limestoner award and a plaque from the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers for Vince's contribution to the literature. He must have felt good about these awards, but he'd have been embarrassed if I'd mentioned them.

It was, however, open season on his fly-boxes, and I could prowl through them as much as I liked. Then we'd scout some trout streams, desultorily, and some bird coverts, seriously. Vince would shake his head when he saw the traffic jam on the Yellow Breeches. For the last couple of years, he hadn't been willing to face that horde of anglers even to fish the white fly, which he considered a better spectacle than the Tricos. He had worked

hard to get fish-for-fun regulations on some of the limestone spring creeks, but now he preferred to fish elsewhere -- without so many trout, perhaps, but also without so many anglers. Besides, he said, he liked to eat a trout now and then.

He got more pleasure from the doves. After opening day in September, the hunting would get as crowded as the fishing, but in July the birds still whistled around, a reminder of the times when you could get two cock pheasants in any cornfield and Cedar Run still had trout in it.

To my knowledge, Vince did not write about hunting, but he enjoyed it as much as fishing: Indeed, he seemed to draw no line between the two. By the time I knew him, however, he walked so slowly that my dog (a German shorthaired pointer) found our hunting trips puzzling. I remember creeping through one woodcock covert, full of good smells, while Trooper ran back and forth in front of us, and back and forth, and back and forth. No covert has ever been covered like that one.

On a dove stand, however, legs did not matter much, and Vince was a good shot with his vintage Remington Model 32. It had a Miller single trigger for instant, effective barrel selection, and it seemed typical of him to have worked out that problem too.

But mostly we drove around slowly, revisiting Vince's favorite streams and coverts, and he shot every dove that crossed our path -- with his forefinger.

Any shotgunner would have enjoyed calculating the leads. An incoming dove would slip by at that peculiar angle which makes shots tricky and Vince would go "bang!", cackling like a nine-year-old slaying dinosaurs. He spotted more doves than I

did. "Bang!", he'd exult, wiping my eye. "You sure missed that one"! It's my other favorite memory.

Vince crossed his last iron bridge on March 2, 1986.

#

(check all stories)

About 920 words,
including sidebar

Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
(406) 388-3345

LUNCH BY THE STREAM

This is where food tastes best.

Curt Collins is a natural for next summer's Montana movie. Between beard and straw hat, his skin is oil-tanned leather, and he looks as if he could row against the current because that's what he does, 180 days a year. On his chest, furthermore, hangs a "guide's necklace" loaded with problem-solving equipment -- 1990s equivalent of a .45 caliber shell-belt. I spotted an emergency capsule of flies, spools of leader material, flotants for both regular dry flies and those with duck-butt feathers, containers of split shot and lead sleeves, a leader-clipper, and two medical forceps, which are used to remove hooks from trout. Curt mentioned that the forceps were also his "best cooking tools" for streamside lunches. I nodded as if I knew what he was talking about.

Curt spends the fishing season in Fort Smith -- a boom town built by a single natural resource, like so many others in the high west. In this case, however, the resource is aquatic insects, which nourish big, wild trout, which in turn attract fly-fishers from all over the world. The Bighorn is a destination river.

It is not an easy river to read, however. The vast solar energy in the Bighorn's depths is hidden by a big, calm surface, which makes the stream a good match for Curt Collins. When the tailwater fishery became legal in 1981, he was the first in line for an outfitter's license.

Our days on the stream started early, with hordes of little Tricos -- mayflies of the genus Tricorythodes -- falling spent on the water. At dusk there was a caddisfly hatch, also heavy. In between, I fished exactly where Curt told me with a pair of his soft-hackle sow bugs. The Bighorn's bragging trout are mostly rainbows, he said, and his boat's best for the year was an eleven-pounder. I'd have bragged about my 21-inch brown.

Our double shifts on the river were separated by a meal that Curt called lunch, though it looked more like Sunday dinner. When the trout stopped feeding, we started.

First thing out of our boat was a folding table with red-checked tablecloth and stools. Then came two propane barbecue grills and tableware, which included wine glasses. From a cooler the size of a life-raft, Curt produced a bottle of cold white wine, two cheeses, a summer sausage, strawberries, green grapes, chunks of melon, loaves of bread, a whole pie -- and the main course.

Every real cook likes to see his food appreciated, so I did the appreciating while Curt did the work. On one of the grills, he piled baked potatoes and ears of sweet corn, each pre-cooked, buttered, and wrapped in aluminum foil. He closed the lid of that

grill.. On the other, he melted a smidgen of margarine, or perhaps two smidgens, in a foil tray. When the fat was bubbling, several handfuls of big shrimp went in the tray, then filets of orange roughly, and finally a few shakes of lemon pepper, garlic pepper, and garlic powder. He manipulated the hot foil with his quick-draw forceps.

The fish and shrimp were not overcooked. The potatoes were not undercooked. The pan-sauce was just right. This is the truth, uninfluenced by September sunshine, the rustle of cottonwood trees, and the smell of buffaloberries ripening in the sun. After lunch I picked a gallon of the berries before Curt reported that trout were moving into the riffles.

Here and there in my travels, there have been a few other cooks who could put such meals together. None of them did it on portable grills, in between pulling oars and rigging lead sleeves for sow bugs.

That evening, while watching Curt Collins prepare the next day's lunch, I deduced that the man runs on solar power, like his river. He recharges himself every day and the energy keeps him going far into the night.

"You have to start with good raw materials," Curt said. He boiled home-grown corn on the cob for seven minutes, then let it sit in the water for a few more. He baked potatoes in the microwave oven, sliced them, layered them with uncooked sliced onions, and sprinkled with seasoning salt and garlic powder. He simmered Cornish hens and stuffed them. Each dish was wrapped

separately in buttered foil. While he was preparing the acorn squash with buffaloberry jam, I dozed off and missed seeing him get the trimmings ready, but all of them emerged from his cooler the next afternoon.

Fishing and cooking are both ways of living with nature, when you think about it, and one works up an appetite for the other. You are a predator, Mr. or Ms. Fly-fisher. Might as well behave like one. Even trout pause for digestion when they have caught enough of their prey.

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Ned

About 3750 words

Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
(406) 388-3345

THE BEST OF IT

A hawthorn fire sheltered our lunch-time fire from northerly gusts of drizzle but did not block our view of the River Blackwater. The view was important. Grey Flag sedges hatch in bursts on the early-May days that the Irish call "soft," and there were not so many bursts that Ned and I were willing to miss any of them. So we cooked and looked and talked. The cooking involved pink slabs of fish. The looking was for another trout that might rise splashily in the riffle, or quietly in the head of the pool. The talking was of fish and women and caddisflies and other streams and women and mayflies. That was when Ned and I were alone. Then my girl came down from the car with a loaf of brown bread, and we talked only of fishing. Anna accused us of having a limited conversational range.

The fire was Ned Maguire's doing, and without it there would have been no grilled trout or talk. After searching a couple of miles of river in the morning, I'd have settled for a rest and tea from the Volcano kettle: a contraption that boils water with newspapers for fuel. Ned was set on a full-formal luncheon, and he had prowled up and down enough hedgerows to find dry wood.

This despite the fact that he was about twice my age and half my weight, what with his plumbing having been abbreviated during one of the ulcer operations. He would have been almost invisible if he had removed his tweed jacket with the leather patches.

Ned had an experienced Billy-can for the tea water. After a bit of the Blackwater River inside the can seemed to have been sterilized, he poured in a fist of loose tea. Then when the brew was poured into the cups, he had a little glass bottle of milk for it. This gear fit inside a rough canvas bag he'd sewn up himself back when his Hardy St. George reel sold for two pounds sixteen shillings and sixpence, and there wasn't much left over for fancy bags. But no cup of tea ever tasted like the ones coming from that hand-sewn canvas. There was some special combination of north-sea mist and wood smoke and tea leaves and alkaline river water fertilized by dairy cows. After a sip of that brew, let alone a mug, we were full of conversation.

It also happens that Irish coarse bread -- they call it brown cake -- is the best in the world, and the Blackwater produces the only river trout I have ever tasted that are as good as fresh-run salmon. Moreover Anna looked like a ballet dancer having a picnic, which she was.

By this time Ned and the Blackwater, well mixed, had made a purist of me. The conversion was reluctant and temporary. Like most Americans, I had been determined to fish blind when there were no rises to cover, and I went at it with deep nymphs and wet

flies and occasionally streamers. These things had worked for refractory brown trout in the Brodhead and the Beaverkill and the Firehole. No one was going to tell me that the trout were different in County Meath. Certainly Ned did not tell me: He was a mite hard of hearing under any circumstances and stone deaf when he did not fancy the question.

So I flogged away. You can't catch fish unless your fly is in the water. Ned wobbled up and down the banks with his fly out of the water, declining even to assemble his rod unless he saw a fish rise. His eyes, however, were one bit of his anatomy in good operating condition. I would come in with a tennis elbow and Ned would come in with a trout. He wouldn't have fished much: just a few casts for a fish that was demonstrably in the mood. Ned caught a lot of fish with his fly out of water.

Halford and Francis Francis were known to have fished the Blackwater, taking a train to the old Virginia Road Station and hiking down from O'Daly's Bridge. Ned and Anna and I had arrived by BMW, but we took the same hike along a river that had not changed since the Middle Ages -- at which time, for all anyone knows now, it might have been surrounded by more trees and less pasture. Certainly the river had not changed much since one Gregory Greendrake described it in the early nineteenth century. The nearby Moynalty had been even better back then, but recently it had been "drained" -- channeled, we Americans would say -- to "get the water off the land." Drainage spoiled some of the best pastures near the stream, but other land farther from the stream

was drier. It may have produced more dairy products to increase the European Community's vast surplus. The snipe were gone, and the big trout.

Meanwhile the Blackwater and Ned, both looking Medieval, had held up well. The pike and the Irish fishermen vied for the honor of eating the river's trout, but neither had succeeded entirely. The hatches and the cover and the water were good enough to keep the wariest fish ahead of the predators. And after some centuries of this, the Blackwater trout were very wary indeed. I asked Ned if he didn't think that Halford might have perfected Code of the Dry-Fly here rather than on the chalkstreams of England. In the clear, chalk-filtered water of Hampshire, you can see a trout that is not rising, and then sometimes you can catch him on frightfully unsporting flies. In the cloudy, cow-filtered Blackwater, you cannot spot a trout unless he is rising, and then a floating fly generally works better than anything else. Occasionally you do better with a fly of the kind that used to be called wet and is now a nymph. But this too must be fished near the surface, or you will not see the trout take.

Ned was not impressed by my query on the evolution of Halford's Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice. No class distinction attaches to trout in Ireland, and Ned had known, even before he could afford the tackle to fish dry, that his best chance of a good fish came on the first few casts, before the flies started to sink. That was how he got in the habit of carrying his rod unstrung and his flies dry in a pigskin book. He

reckoned that the English, though slow on the subject of Irish politics, were bright enough to figure out what trout wanted before Halford wrote about it.

Ned did not supply much evidence, but in time I got through his book collection and saw from the underlining that he had given these matters some thought. He had many of the English books of the golden age. He lamented, however, that he had never seen a copy of Aldam's Quaint Treatise on "Flees, and the Art a Artyfishall Flee Making." I finally bought a copy at a price that seemed high then, but now looks like a wise investment.

Ned, who refused to show excitement while playing a wild three-pound brown trout, was moved by the book. Twice he said "I thought I'd go to my grave without seeing Aldam." He even stopped smoking for an hour or so as not to spill ashes on the Iron Blue or Watchett.

Ned would certainly not have wanted to be remembered as a purist, so I had better correct that impression. I never saw him use anything but dry flies, small nymphs, or a team of old-fashioned wets -- all fished in or near the surface. In his youth, however, there were still a lot of salmon in the Nore, and the Maguires of Stoneyford found that fish tasted just as good when they were not in the mood for feathers. Once Ned told me that Roundwood trout wanted nothing but a real minnow in March, and I guessed that he spoke with authority. Bohernabreena reservoir was strictly flies-only -- to protect Dublin's water supply -- but Ned felt sure that the fish would not scorn a

floating fly with a maggot wiggling on the point of the hook. A crisp false-cast would then remove the evidence in case a guard got curious. Instructions for this are nowhere to be found in Halford.

On our first hunting trip, Ned admitted with his customary modesty that he had shot a March Brown. This is a fly which, as you may recall, can be tied properly only from the wing-feather of a hen pheasant. Irishmen in full physical vigor are expected to refrain from mistakes of gender when chasing pheasants. There was, I gathered, a looser code for gentlemen of a certain age who wheezed like Ned Maguire. This struck me as a civilized distinction, though it might not persuade your average Pennsylvania warden.

It remains a mystery that Ned was able to walk far enough to shoot any bird of either sex. Part of the answer is that he let his English-setter bitch do the work. She was the only dog I had seen who could range wide and fast through a heather bog, then point gently enough to hold a snipe. When snipe are wild, this may be even tougher than holding ruffed grouse. All Irish snipe are wild.

Ned could not afford the gun he wanted, London-made doubles being more expensive than stylish home-made setters. But he claimed that his father could recognize a best-grade double in the hands of a strange hunter across a wide field, and Ned supposed that he could do likewise.

Come winter, we tied a lot of March Browns and their

relatives -- in my case with the help of a vise which, I argued, had been sanctioned by Halford. Ned, as usual, scorned decadent notions, and he held the hook in his fingers. He showed me -- and a couple of million Irish television viewers -- how to do the thing. Perhaps some of the others caught on. I did not.

I got the hang of the fishing, though, and most days could find more trout than Ned by virtue of better legs, lungs, and connections thereto. There were a few days when we could find nothing rising. But Blackwater fishing was really hunting in thin disguise, and we could usually hunt up one good trout if we persisted. At such times, Ned calculated that I needed a shot worse than he did. He would spot the trout of the day, come back down a half-mile of river, find me, and lead me to the game. You anglers out there will understand the value of that gift.

The one time Ned failed was when he saw a trout the size of a grilse rising for greendrakes. He was half frightened of it, he said, for he could not run fast enough or wade deep enough to play such a fish on trout tackle. I could, but Ned had to think about giving away a river brown bigger than he had ever caught. While he was having a smoke to calm his nerves, another angler came along and caught the trout. Seven pounds.

Ned's kindnesses extended to other American anglers, which is how he found himself cited in a couple of our magazines and pictured on the cover of one. And one day Ned tried to give three trout to another Yank -- a skilled angler who has not told me his side of the story, and who will therefore remain nameless.

The Yank had spent his week's expensive holiday without an honorable trout, which was an easy trick to accomplish on the Blackwater. On the last day of the stay, Ned (by his account, now) found three big fish rising in the deeps below Carnaross Bridge. he resisted the temptation to catch even one for a sample. Instead, he guided our friend, who was well capable of doing what needed to be done.

When the trout at the bottom of the pool rose calmly, however, our friend's splendid reflexes asserted themselves and ripped the fly away just as a large neb rose from the water. By now the angler was not as calm as his two remaining, potential victims. But he restrained himself, let the middle trout take firmly -- then popped the tippet with a mighty strike. At this point, says Ned, Black Gnats began dropping from the sallies, fried alive by high-voltage adjectives.

Ah, but the third fish still rose. And rose again for the Yank's fly, which had come down the water twitching prettily because of a slight tic in the casting arm. In addition to his talents at fly-tying, rod-building, and casting, our friend proved able to hold his breath for a full five minutes, by which time the trout had been played nearly to exhaustion. It turned out, however, to have one last leap in it, and at the end of the leap fell on a short, tight line, with the inevitable rending of nylon and nerves. The angler flung a Leonard cane rod down on the rocks and pleaded: "Holy God, will you have no pity on me?" Prayer, not blasphemy.

This tale, I think, provided Ned with more nourishment than mere trout flesh. I tell the story with both sympathy and empathy, and to derive this moral: We fish for emotion. The Blackwater could be counted on to produce it. You could expect blackest depression, spiritual fatigue, the pulse of a love about to be consummated, and levitation by excitement -- all in about fifteen minutes. In the long term, it may be that even the frustrated American angler appreciated those three trout. But maybe not quite as much as Ned.

When the evening rise was over and the last reflection from the western sky had left the water, Ned and I would hike back up to O'Daly's bridge by the megalithic burial mound. It was inhabited by a great many rabbits and, by some accounts, the odd ghost or two. I kept on hoping for that emotion too but met no spirits. I did, however, find some trout sipping spinners under a crabapple tree on the far bank. Eyes of some kind were out there watching me. The darkness would be punctuated by strange splashes, by the faint swish of my silk line, and perhaps by a supernaturally spirited trout.

No other stream in Ireland was possessed by quite the same spirits, perhaps because no other was quite as wild and fertile. The Suir may have been even better once, if we can believe Sir Edward Grey, but had been drained and repeatedly poisoned by a dairy. The Maigue was the loveliest stream in Europe, what with a 13th-century castle towering above wooded banks and fertile waters. I got three or four days there before the dredges came.

(One wonders if they got enough "water off the land" to compensate for the tourist fishery. Many an American angler today pays dearly for tamer trout.)

The Nore was next best to the Blackwater, and a lot easier -- if you had exactly the right combination. Ned had grown up on the Nore's banks, and he knew. He was, however, perfectly prepared to fish away chuckling while the Yanks figured it out on their own. Served them right for those lures they called streamers and the leaded grubs they called nymphs. I had heard his tales of this, and I did not aspire to be his next victim.

By then, however, I had figured out that an "exact imitation" (in human eyes) is not the way to catch fish when several dozen of them, up and down the stream, start feeding in the twilight on the nymphs of the Blue-Winged Olive. A little later the fish switch to falling spinners. Then a fly that looks good to people also looks good to the trout -- but the spinner rise does not last long enough. As dark descends, the duns emerge and the trouts' swirls eddy deeper. At that point, a fly with a blue wing and olive body does not work badly. To be precise, it does not work at all. And this is how Ned evened the score with people who did not elect an Irish President for almost two hundred years.

Just as the light grows too dim to change flies at all, splashy rises show that a few trout still want a pudding of succulent sedge. And with luck, that is when you get the best fish of the day. I did, and my diary claims that I had about

twenty more trout first on the three stages of the BWO. The Blackwater had taught me the riddle. Ned was, I think, just as pleased by my success as he would have been by a fuming failure. But not a bit more pleased.

I wasted the fish anyhow, Ned thought, by returning them to the stream. You could not eat a Nore trout unless you were awfully hungry. Ned did not eat them, but they looked lovely, and he gave them away with a flourish. The Blackwater fish he ate himself.

Next evening we fished the King's River -- home stream of Ned's youth, with limestone water of top quality and trout flesh to match. Ned's home in Bray was named Avonree, which is Irish for King's River. But the stream was too small to stand fishing pressures, and the big fish were gone. Some mid-sized trout did rise eagerly that night, and I was just as eager to catch them. This was a great Blue-Winged Olive stream, Ned had said, and I still had plenty of BWOs in all stages. They caught worth mentioning. Ned, meanwhile, took fish of the fat variety on a sedge. He served me one for dinner.

We talked it all over that winter, after shooting Ned's quota of March Browns and mine of Snipe and Purples. Nan Maguire had served us a comfortable tea. Ned talked best when he was allowed to sip a bottle of after-tea stout and muse on what he considered important, rather than responding to questions from me on the fastest way of catching the next trout.

He told me that he had sorted out the season's memories and

decided which ones he wanted for the permanent collection. The image that had aged best, he discovered, was of the time when Anna, with cheeks flushed from the mist, grilled a Blackwater trout over the coals, for the three of us. Anna, I guessed, had supplied the mermaid ingredient, which was seldom to be found on an Irish stream. Anyhow it was Ned's fire, my trout, Anna's brown cake, and our memory. When you get to Ned's stage you collect a different kind of emotion. My diary for the day had focused on the trout.

The Blackwater was really too much for Ned -- not that he would admit it -- and I always expected to be carrying him back. He would not have been hard to lift, but I was just as glad the occasion never arose. Once Tommy Corcoran had the honor. Both Ned and Tommy told me the story, so it is confirmed. Tommy got it from a laughing nurse who helped with the operation, and who knew the difference between courageous and outrageous. She was a Kilkenny girl with the equipment for sending a man to good dreams. As Ned drifted into an anesthetized sleep of unknown destination, he reached under her mini-skirt and gave her a firm squeeze in just about the spot where a mermaid's skin would turn to scales. Who says you can't take it with you?

It is also untrue, I learned, that you can never go back. Ned fished for years after that operation, and I went back to the Blackwater twice after leaving Ireland. The fishing had actually improved: maybe just to tease me and maybe because, by then, I had figured out the places where a trout might feed

surreptitiously on Black Gnats and Greendrakes and Alders.

On those last visits, Ned and I fished nowhere but the Blackwater. We had no good alternatives. Pollution had finished off the Blue-Winged Olives in the Nore and the Greendrakes of Lough Sheelin. In Lough Ennel and the Rye Water, even the trout were dead. Some of the drained streams were producing fish again but were not pretty. The Blackwater River appeared to be the last great limestone river in its original binding.

But it could not stay ahead of the dredges for much longer. On a soft day in May, Ned and I stood on O'Daly's bridge in the little stone coves where Gregory Greendrake and Halford and Francis Francis had stepped aside to get out of the way of carriages. A crane -- the mechanical kind -- was working in the flat below the bridge, tossing tons of prehistoric gravel and a few up-to-date trout onto the banks. Ned wished that the people who took decisions could have left one proper trout stream so that his grandchildren might see what God gave Ireland.

For himself, Ned had no complaints. "I've seen the best of it," he said, and he meant it. Born June 19, 1910, he had been around when modern cars made the best of streams available. He had grown up yearning for the perfect, out-of-reach tackle in the Hardy catalog and lived to catch hundreds of trout on a Ritz rod, while leaving the heavy old Hardy canes for rough use. Only a lot of modern medicine kept him alive long enough to see technology finish off the Blackwater.

That last May, Ned and I fished a few hundred yards and a

few hundred years ahead of the technology. The Blackwater insisted on surrendering its trout to half-hearted anglers. This time I kept all the fish, like Ned. A knock on the head seemed better than their alternatives.

On a Wednesday in January, Ned Maguire shot his last woodcock. He could not get far from the car by then, so I suppose that Tommy Corcoran pushed the bird in the right direction. Anyhow, Ned had the makings of more Woodcock and Yellows than he had time to tie. The dredges caught up with him on January 2, 1983. His last letter told me that he wouldn't know where to find fishing next season anyhow.

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about 390 words

Datus Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
(406) 388-3345

THE FIRST TIME

"It's crying time again," sang Anna. "You're gonna leave me. I can see that faraway look in your eyes." Translation: My wife was hooshing me out of the house so that she could hold a meeting of her women's investment club without free advice.

By the time I reached the Madison River, it was late morning, but I would have taken time to coach the two women in clean waders and vests with empty pockets -- angling-school equivalent of the academic cap and gown. The newcomers were making thirty-foot casts in shallow water right by the parking place. When I asked what they were using, one of the women said "Prince Nymph" without looking at me, so I moved on.

A quarter-mile upstream, Baetis duns were hatching and blowing away in a gale that discouraged even swallows. Then the wind dropped -- preparing to change directions -- and the riffle above a good pool was covered by tiny sailboats tempest-tossed. Five fish began feeding on the surface and I caught two of them on a size 20 emerger. One trout was a rainbow as long as my forearm, but still thin from spawning. The other was a fat young silvery brown that jumped twice and vibrated in my hand as I removed the hook.

I released both. Fresh fish would be welcome on the table, but trout from the Madison River do not taste as good as they look.

The wind came back hard under my visor so I turned around and splashed downstream to the truck. The two women were still where I had left them, casting ten yards and wondering what to do next. (Wading takes longer to learn than casting, if you have not grown up on mossy rocks.)

When the scream came I ran to help, trained husband that I am, but the emergency was a trout, young splashing brown like mine but caught by a maiden's personal Prince. Scream turned to laugh as the fish came in at high speed and dangled in the air, swinging back and forth while the angler tried to catch it in her bare hand. She did, too. Grasped it firmly, sort of, removed the hook, turned her prey loose, and kept on screaming while cliffs on the far bank screamed back echoes.

"That's my first trout," she said.

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