

Exit Laughing

BY ED ZERN

One of several questions to which I don't know the answer is why most of the books on fishing, and especially those of some real or attempted literary merit, are devoted to the salmonids—trout and Atlantic salmon especially, and char, with an occasional nod to Pacific salmon and grayling—whereas authors of angling books are, as a rule, inclined to ignore squawfish, bullheads, suckers, carp, "walleyed pike," fallfish, sheepsheads, shad, gars, and such. But it's a fact of angling literature: writers simply don't get dewy-eyed and choked up about grindles, or longeared sunfish, or chain pickerel.

Schubert never wrote a quintet and called it *Die Red-Horse Sucker*. Alfred Tennyson never, in reference to a brook, called attention to "here and there a shovelhead catfish, and here and there a big old hawg bass." No way. But I have shelves crammed with books whose authors grow positively giddy over brown and brook trout, rhapsodic over rainbows, starry-eyed over steelhead, and positively maudlin over Atlantic salmon and sea trout. Oh, it's true that non-salmonid species are sometimes the subject of passable verse, but usually the lines are less than laudatory, as witness this English bard's reaction to a suggestion that American catfish be introduced to British water, three-quarters of a century ago:

NO CATFISH PLEASE!

*Oh, do not bring the catfish here!
The catfish is a name to fear.
Oh, spare each stream and spring:
The Kennet swift, the Wandle clear,
The lake, the loch, the broad, the mere,
From that detested thing!*

*The catfish is a hideous beast,
A bottom-feeder that doth feast
Upon unholy bait.*

*He's no addition to your meal,
He's rather richer than the eel
And ranker than the skate.*

*His face is broad, and flat, and glum;
He's like some monstrous miller's thumb;
He's bearded like the pard.
Beholding him the grayling flee,
And trout take refuge in the sea;
The gudgeons go on guard!*

*He grows into a startling size;
The British matron 'twould surprise,
And raise her burning blush,
To see white catfish, large as man,
Through waters dark and Stygian
Come with an ugly rush!*

*They say the catfish climbs the trees
And robs the roost, and, down the breeze,
Prolongs his caterwaul.*



HOW TO MAKE A MARTINI!

*Ah, leave him to his western flood,
Where Mississippi churns the mud;
Don't bring him here at all!*

(I lifted that from *The Game Fishes Of The World* by Charles Frederick Holder, published in 1913; he cribbed it from an even earlier issue of *Punch* but didn't give the author's name. And I prefer not to identify the guy who wrote: *To catch a one-pound trout than a hundred-pound tuna I would suna.*)

I thought of this predilection for certain subjects the other day when it occurred to me that there are scores of jokes about martinis, and none whatsoever, as far as I'm aware, about Pink Ladys or Harvey Wallbangers. Possibly it's because people are opinionated about martinis but have no strong views on Bloody Marys or Horse's Necks. I was fishing Upper Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks one evening, years ago, with David Kirkbride, and when I told him how I had nearly got myself flung into the pokey in Three Forks, Montana, in 1955 on account of ordering a dry martini, Dave said, "Hell, everybody knows how to make a martini." We had

passed a spiffy new diner that boasted a bar near Paul Smith's that morning, and I bet him a dollar they wouldn't know how to make a proper dry martini; it was a good excuse to knock off fishing, which was slow, and head for the diner.

Arriving there we ordered a brace of dry martinis, and I watched glumly as the bartender, only slightly consternated by the order, made the proper choice of French vermouth rather than Italian, and although he poured it with a too-lavish hand for my taste, his ratio of vermouth to gin, roughly one to four or five, was in the solid conservative stance extolled by Bernard De Voto and other traditionalists, and although I might have claimed a foul at the absence of the optional olive I reached for my wallet to pay my bet as the bartender set our properly chilled potions before us.

Then, before I could extract a dollar bill, the bartender said, "Oops—nearly forgot!" and popped a marischino cherry into each of our drinks. David handed me a dollar and we paid for our martinis and left. So far as I can recall, it was the last time I won a bet on something important.



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SportsLeisure

OUTDOORS/Peter Bodo

Believe It: Fishermen Lie, Lie, Lie

Although the theory is usually postulated on the suspect platform of hideous T-shirts, gimme caps and hokey greeting cards, the plain truth is that, yes, fishermen are liars. And so are fisherwomen, just in case you thought there was some kind of difference.

I'm not just talking about 12-year-old fantasists, back-country reprobates, or bass fishermen who look like marsupials nursing kegs of beer. I mean that crusty worm fisherman and the guy who has more flies on him than a road kill. We are all fishermen and we are all in this together.

I don't profess to know why fishermen lie. I'm sure various pop anthropologists have ideas about it. Frankly, I find such debates a little embarrassing because you always end up throwing around words like "psyche," and windbagging about what it was like to be a caveman, as if you might possibly know. Nevertheless, I do know how fishermen lie (through their teeth, mostly) and the things they like to lie about (catching fish, invariably).

The truth about us dawned on me years ago, after a luncheon at my fishing club, the Théodore Gordon Flyfishers. There had been a prolific hatch of caddis flies on the Beaverkill on the previous Sunday, and I had managed to hang five or six trout. I was pretty pleased with myself until one of our resident experts delivered his own glowing report, which left me thinking that maybe I'd used the wrong fly, and just happened to slap it down in front of the six dumbest fish in the entire watershed.

So I approached this genius after lunch and politely asked him how many trout he had caught.

"Thirty-four," he whispered, averting his eyes. He cleared his throat, rubbed his nose, and looked around like he had suggested something dirty.

Now, it is theoretically possible to catch 34 fish in one session on the Beaverkill (I know for a fact that there are more than 34 trout in the river), but nobody I know has ever done it. Furthermore, most of my fishing companions would lose track after landing, say, 15 fish.

The funny thing is, I kind of like having the potential lie embedded in every fishing conversation, like a wild card in a poker hand. I take a certain

measure of comfort in knowing that fishermen are not entirely respectable. Besides, being on the receiving end of a whopping lie helps all of us who must fish under freeway bridges or at the mouths of concrete culverts retain the hope that somewhere there still are big fish and lots of them, even if amoral booze- or pot-addled cretins are the only folks who say they are catching them.

For reasons I have yet to figure out, fishermen are disproportionately serious about themselves and their endeavors, often acting as if the number of fish they catch actually matters. Thus, the capacity to do something as fundamentally silly as lie bestows upon them a pleasant, childlike quality. I'd rather think of that club expert as an awkward liar than as some geek who hits the stream with an abacus strapped to his back.

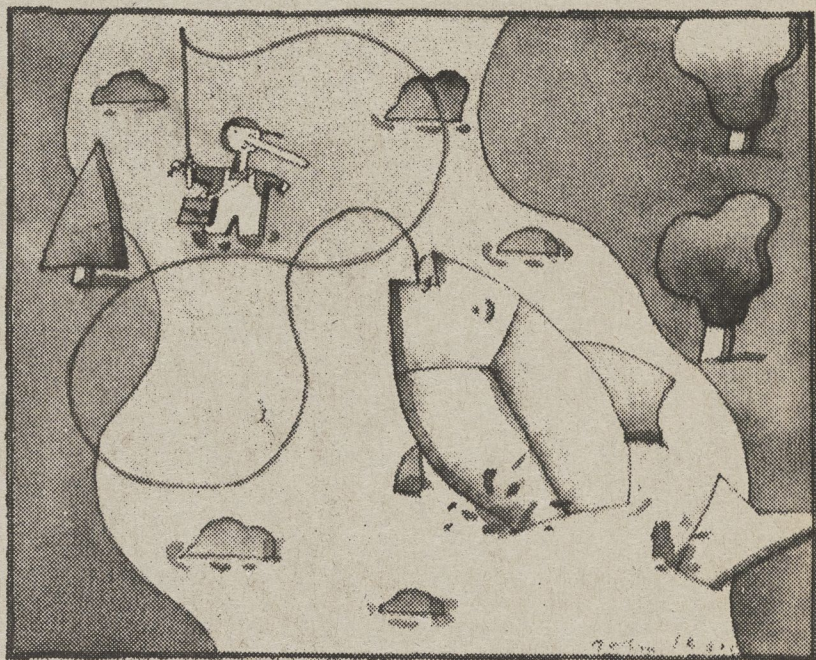
Think of it this way: lying introduces another element of guesswork into a pastime founded on speculation. I mean, when was the last time you went on a fishing trip and none of your buddies came up with some cockamamie theory about what and why the fish were or weren't taking?

I've learned that Eastern fly fishermen are the best all-purpose liars. Their art flourishes under the conditions created by a combination of heavy fishing pressure and fragile watersheds where the water is often too warm, too low and too clear.

Eastern lying at its best is elaborate, creative, pseudoscientific, consisting of lies you can easily tell while pointing the stem of your pipe at some guy's chest. A wary brown trout that has been fished over a lot in the low clear water of early summer, when the major insect hatches are over, is the Eastern liar's best friend. It's got nothing to do with size.

The problem for the erstwhile prevaricators of the West is that most of the rivers really do have big fish and lots of them, and they are generally not all that hard to catch. After a little while, even the effete Eastern tourist on his first pilgrimage to the Madison River in Montana will realize this, and cease to treat a rising trout with the deference generally accorded only to the Dalai Lama. Put down one sassy, stream-bred rainbow trout with a ghastly cast and — presto — there's another one waiting five feet downstream, ready to pounce on almost anything you heave out there.

It ought to be clear by now that one of the chief Commandments of Falsity is that good fishing does not make for good lying. Keeping that in mind, beware of any citizen whom you see with fly rod in hand, peering over a bridge railing as if he had dropped his car keys into the water. Treat with utmost suspicion any group of men standing around a tailgate drinking beer on a humid afternoon. Carefully weigh the words of anybody who has just come back from down around the bend, saying, "You're not gonna believe this..."



John Segal

Peter Bodo has written for the Journal of the Atlantic Salmon Federation and Trout, as well as The Times.

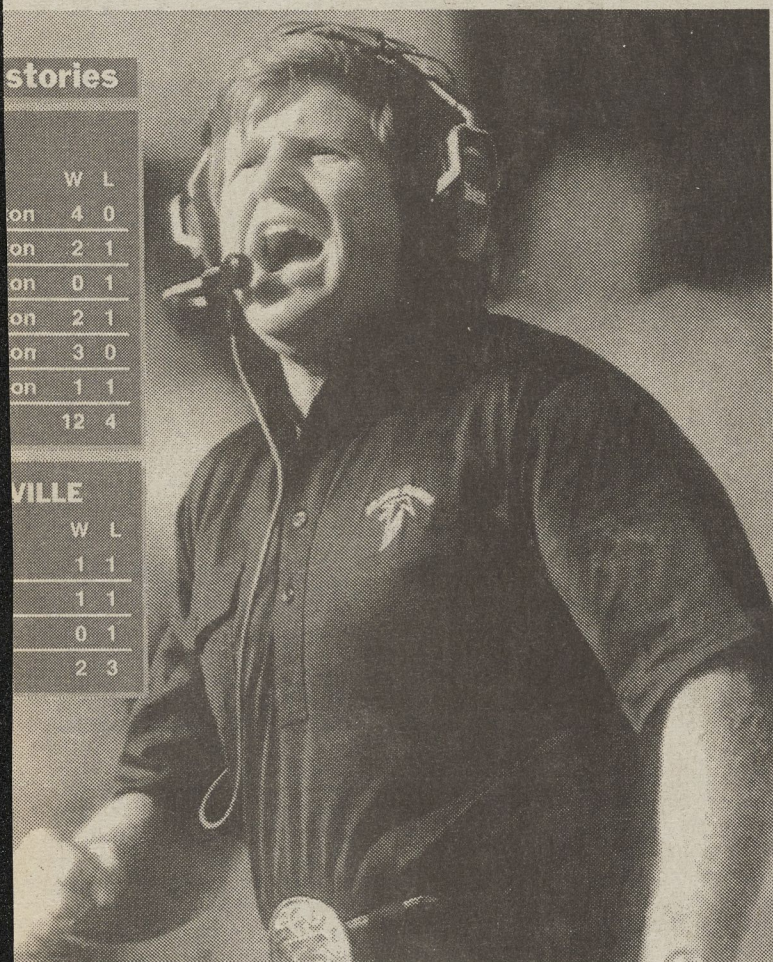
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It's Best Vs. Boast As Redskins Face Falcons

By FRANK LITSKY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 3 — The Redskins, like their coach, Joe Gibbs, are smart, methodical, relentless and almost always at their best.

The Atlanta Falcons, like their coach, Jerry Glanville, are unorthodox, flamboyant gamblers who are always boisterous and sometimes obnoxious.

Arrogance and sarcasm are part of the Falcons' everyday routine. Consider what Glanville has told The Washington Times about his relationship with Gibbs:

"I've never talked football with him," Glanville said. "He's probably on a much higher cerebral plane."

Probably so. Thus, on Saturday, when the Redskins and the Falcons meet here in the National Football League playoffs, it will almost be a case of the good guys against the bad guys.

In this case, the good guys are the Redskins. They are favored by 11 points, an unusually large margin for a playoff game.

Last weekend, the Redskins (14-2), with the N.F.L.'s best regular-season record, had a bye. Meanwhile, the Falcons rallied to upset the Saints, 27-20, in New Orleans.

The Redskins-Falcons winner will advance to the National Conference championship game a week from Sunday, where the opponent will be either the Dallas Cowboys or the Detroit Lions. And the winner of that game gets to go to the Super Bowl on Jan. 26 in Minneapolis.

Despite the forecast of rain and high winds, the Redskins-Falcons game is expected to draw the usual noisy, sellout crowd to Robert F. Kennedy Stadium.

Falcons' Aim: Chaos

The game could be intriguing if the Falcons can disrupt the Redskins' orderly style.

"Don't get the wrong idea about the Falcons," said Mark Rypien, the Redskins' quarterback. "I don't think they gamble. They have a good understanding of what they want to do."

What the Falcons' defense wants to do is cause chaos in the opposing offense. So it sometimes blitzes every available body and leaves all receivers covered one on one.

That could be catastrophic against a team as good as the Redskins. It was a catastrophe for the Falcons eight weeks ago, when the Redskins overwhelmed them here, 56-17. Rypien (16 of 31 for 442 yards) threw six touchdown passes, three of which were longer than 60 yards.

Protection to Elway

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fensive tackle Doug Smith,
vo broken ribs in the Jets
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f the regular season, the
en up 47 sacks, more than
pt New England (63), Indi-
 Tampa Bay (56).

Has Been Kinder

home might make a differ-
s permitted just 11 sacks
dium, where they won 7 of 8

the reason for that," said
s center, "but Houston,
l Seattle are loud places,
to do with it. The defenses
has. John is calling audi-

be able to hear the snap, which they couldn't do in Houston."

It was not so much the sacks, however, as it was a disastrous overall day that led to Denver's loss to Houston at the Astrodome. The Broncos had a punt and a field-goal attempt blocked. They also committed three turnovers and incurred 10 penalties.

"They were up, 28-0, by the time the game got started," Kartz said. "We didn't block well and didn't protect John, and we were out of the game early."

Elway's recollection: "We played like we were in the Super Bowl."

A Rebound From Last Season

The Broncos, of course, just can't seem to forget their Super Bowl pratfalls: three losses there in the last five seasons and an 0-4 record over all.

Last season, the Super Bowl was the least of their worries. They slipped to 5-11, their first losing season since 1975, excluding the strike-shortened 1982 campaign. This season, they won their final four games to capture the A.F.C. West title. Discarding the loss to Houston, the Broncos' other three defeats were by a total of 7 points.

They are a team built mostly on defense, ranking third against the pass and fifth over all in the National Football League