Fly Lines

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Upcoming Events: **The Haig-Brown Festival, Vernon's 2005 AGM**
Book Reviews by Andrew Williams and Art Lingren: ***Tube Flies: A Tying, Fishing & Historical Guide*; *Kispiox River*;** and ***Fly Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout***

The End: Last Rites

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On Our cover . . .

Art Lingren photograph of Roderick Haig-Brown fly fishing paraphernalia

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President's Message

This will reach you as summer is winding down and the good fall steelhead and lake trouting is about to start. I hope that all of you have had a safe and satisfying few months, whether it has been casting a fly or simply pulling weeds.
The summer is always a difficult time to motivate the inner resources to concentrate on business and issues. We have, however, been busy working on a number of items of importance to our fly fishing clubs and members.

Foremost is the ongoing need to make the running of the BCFFF as efficient and simple as possible. The *Senior Advisory Committee* (SAC) is continuing to put together written descriptions for BCFFF positions and committees, and to incorporate this into a living "Operations Manual". The OP Manual will be the bible for our organization, and will provide much needed information for those who take on jobs in the future.

The *Gilly Fund Committee* has had a number of requests for project funding. From the Interior, the Penticton Fly Fishers received $10,000 in funding support for habitat work on Penticton Creek. The Lonely Loons Fly Fishers of Kelowna received $3,500 in support of their wind driven aeration project on Spring Lake, which will be managed as a trophy water. On the Island, the Island Waters Fly Fishers (Nanaimo) requested support for a Marsh Habitat viewing platform. This is part of the Cat Stream watershed, near Nanaimo, where they did work and applied BCFFF funds last year. Direct Member Joe Saysell (the "keeper of the Cowichan") has asked for funds to help with signage on the Cowichan River. We also want to look at a number of options to improve our overall management of the Gilly fund. So it's turning out to be an unusually busy year for the fund and its committee!

Liability Insurance costs have gone through the roof, making individual BCFFF club insurance almost impossible. We are looking into other possibilities, and will likely be coming to member clubs (via the club contacts), requesting information on club activities. This will probably be in the form of a questionnaire to fill out. This info will allow the insurer to make a cost quote. So, stay tuned on this.

BCFFF has always been up to the top of its chest waders with fisheries issues, and this summer is no exception. The big time-consumer, as usual, concerns steelhead and the plight that they face, primarily in the south-west part of the province. Georgia Basin steelhead are having a particularly hard time. Members of the executive and the *Fisheries Issues Committee* have attended meetings and reviewed government drafts to do with Thompson River Steelhead and Georgia Basin steelhead (we are participants in the South Coast Steelhead Coalition both in the Lower Mainland and on the Island). We have also prepared our own draft position statements on "angling closures for wild steelhead" and "hatchery programs". In addition to these positions, we have prepared a Thompson River specific statement, where we affirm that it is not the intention of BCFFF to press for fly fishing only on the river. We have done this to allay the concerns that other angling stakeholders may have about the motives of BCFFF. These concerns are a holdover from sixteen years ago ("The Thompson River Great Bait Debate"), when some pretty bold statements were made by the fly community. We feel that it is important to foster cooperation among the stakeholders in any Thompson River steelhead recovery discussions that take place.

The Cowichan River, on the Island, is experiencing severe low flows this summer. On our behalf, Joe Saysell has attended a number of meetings with stakeholders, industry and government. It appears that the seriousness of the situation has now registered with the politicians, and solutions will be sought. It will likely require raising the weir at the outlet to Cowichan Lake. There have been two major articles on this problem, presented in the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Victoria Colonist* newspapers (thanks to Joe's urgings).

The Provincial Government has finally produced a draft Policy and Procedure statement for how steelhead streams in BC are "classified". The classification will direct the management of steelhead stocks in these streams. The emphasis is on wild steelhead, with some opportunity for hatchery development under careful conditions. BCFFF executive and Fisheries Issues Committee have reviewed the draft, and have prepared a response to government. Generally, we are very pleased with this draft.

BCFFF has also been involved, as a committee member, on the long running Provincial Government "Angling Guide and Classified Waters" review process. This is drawing to a close, and the results will set the scene for how classified water angling is managed into the future.

In closing, I'd like to say to all of you that if you have any concerns about the focus, activities or decisions of BCFFF, contact me. Please do this with suggestions for improvement, or even (the fishing gods forbid) if you think we are on the right track!

Pete Caverhill

Upcoming Events

A young Rod Haig-Brown in 1927

Campbell River Hosts the Haig-Brown Festival
September 25 and 26th, 2004

The Haig-Brown Festival celebrates the memory of this renowned author, fly fishing enthusiast, outdoorsman and conservationist with a two day festival including fly fishing events, an antique book fair and fresh, regional foods. Top off the weekend with a garden party on the Haig-Brown Heritage Property and you have the perfect family outing with something for everyone. Take this opportunity to experience coastal culture as it existed during Roderick Haig-Brown's life in his beloved Campbell River here on the east coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada.

Vernon: 2005 AGM

The Kalamalka Fly Fishers of Vernon are the host club for the BCFFF's Fly Fishing British Columbia 2005 show. More details to come but mark Saturday, May 14, 2005 on your calendar and remember.
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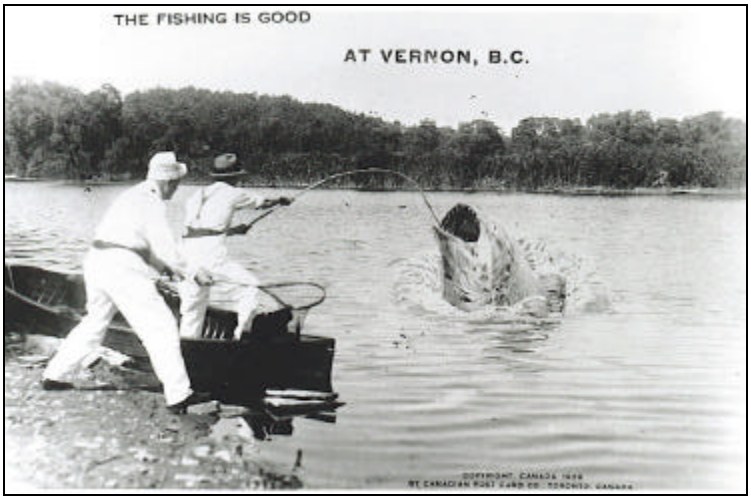


Photo courtesy of Vernon Museum and Archives

The Thompson River and its Fabled Steelhead

By Art Lingren

In October 2003, British Columbia's Provincial Director of Fisheries, announced the closure of the Thompson River to angling. This closure was to come into effect on November 17 and was necessary because the estimated return of the summer-run Thompson River steelhead had dwindled to only 800 fish. This closure was not just for the remainder of the 2003 season but would persist until the runs improved and could support a sustainable sport fishery. The local Spences Bridge community, concerned about its community well-being, lobbied the government and had the closure postponed until December 31, the normal closing date. However, the river will be closed to sport angling on October 1, 2004 of this year and will not open until the runs improve.

For many years now Thompson River summer-run steelhead stocks have been in serious decline with the average10-year return being 1800 returning adults. Return lows had been below 1000 fish in 1991 but the run in 2003 is believed to be the worst on record. According to provincial fisheries' estimates, the Thompson River carrying capacity for steelhead is between 3000 and 4000 fish.

The Thompson summer-run steelhead has a world-wide reputation as being one of the hardest fighting. Art Lingren photo

This is quite a spread, but when scientists refer to "carrying capacity", they are referring to the capacity of freshwater stream spawning/rearing habitat to produce steelhead smolts bound for the ocean. Capacity can be considered in the "historical" sense (watershed untouched by man, hence the greatest capacity with the best chance of largest adult returns) or "current" sense (decades of habitat loss and therefore a lower capacity and adult return).

First Nations have been harvesting Thompson steelhead since time immemorial. Non-native commercial fishing in the marine approach waters and Fraser River began well over one hundred years ago. It is doubtful if there was ever a year where steelhead returned unmolested to their home river. Farming,

ranching and other land uses have been affecting spawning and rearing habitat along the banks of this great river and its tributaries for 150 years. It is doubtful that the historical runs exceeded 20,000 fish, with 10,000 more likely. In 1985 the run was approximately 3600 and in 1993 about 3100. The provincial target escapement was set at 4000 spawners but in the 25 years of records that target has not been met. In a response to an email enquiry on target escapement, Robert Bison biologist in Region 3 office in Kamloops, writes

We no longer refer to single "target" escapement. Rather we use two abundance reference points, both of which are a function of stock carrying capacity.

Anglers are mere specks on the runs of this very large river. Art Lingren Photo

The lower abundance reference point is called the "limit reference point" and the higher abundance reference point is called the "conservation concern threshold". These two reference points delineate 3 zones of stock status: if the abundance of a stock is below the limit reference point, then the stock is classified as being in an extreme conservation concern zone. Between the limit reference point and the conservation concern threshold, the stock is classified as a conservation concern. And above the conservation concern threshold, the stock is considered healthy. The limit reference point for steelhead is the abundance at about 15% of stock carrying capacity. The conservation concern threshold is the abundance at about 35% of carrying capacity. For the Thompson, there is a large uncertainty about carrying capacity, but the available insights suggest that it was, historically at least, in the low tens of the thousands. Estimates from various studies range from 3000 to 40000 adults. Since the downward shift in smolt to adult survival rate in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the carrying capacity of Thompson is estimated at about 3000. Assuming that the present smolt to adult survival rate is below average, the true carrying capacity is a number greater than 3000. For Keogh River steelhead (winter run stock on northern Vancouver Island), the decline in smolt to adult survival during the late 80's/early 90's was estimated to be 3-4 fold. If Thompson were affected similarly, then we would expect carrying capacity under what is considered "average" smolt to adult survival to be 3-4 times 3000 = 9000-12000 or in other words around 10000 adults. This is highly speculative of course which is why we are continuing to not only monitor escapements and reconstruct the abundance of unfished returns, but also exploring the relationship between spawner abundance and parr abundance.

There is little if any mainstem spawning of Thompson River steelhead. The steelhead are destined to three main tributary streams: the Nicola, Bonaparte and Deadman rivers. Thompson steelhead are late- running, summer-run steelhead which enter the Fraser River through late summer and early fall. Two thirds of the run calls the Nicola River and its tributaries home.

B.C. rivers are not rich in food life. In fact, most are quite barren. Some of the interior streams, including the Thompson, produce more food, but since the growing season is short, most fish take two or three years before they become silver-coated smolts and journey to the sea. In their sea lives, some steelhead will feed for only a few months and some will feed for a year or more. Most Thompson River steelhead, however, spend two to three years feeding at sea before they return to the river to spawn.

Biologists use a system of age designation that consists of two numbers separated by a decimal—for example, 3.2+. The first number indicates the number of winters a fish has spent in fresh water (3), the number after the decimal indicates the number of winters the fish has spent at sea (2), and the plus (+) indicates a partial year of sea feeding with a return to fresh water before the third winter. Thus, in this example, the fish would be a six-year-old when it eventually spawns the following spring. The run in any particular year consists of fish with freshwater and saltwater lives of varying lengths. Approximately 3 percent of Thompson steelhead return to spawn again. In summary, the majority of Thompson fish spend two winters in fresh water before smoltification takes place, two winters plus several months of sea feeding and another seven to nine months of upstream migration and holding in fresh water, and they are five-year-olds when they spawn.

Bob Taylor with a 38-inch long male from the Thompson. Art Lingren photo

Contributing Factors in the Decline of Thompson River Steelhead

There are many factors contributing to the low returns of Thompson steelhead. Broadly, they fall into the following categories: Freshwater (habitat loss, natural environmental conditions, harvest including poaching) Ocean (survival conditions, harvest). All have an effect on the run in any given year, but there are years when they conditions become accumulative and the effects become extreme.

Habitat Loss and Environmental Conditions

Those who fish the Thompson River know that it is a very large river even at its very lowest stage of water. Some runs measure two hundred yards across at steelhead season in the fall. This large river size does offer the fish reasonable sanctuary as they wait through the fall and winter for the urge that will move them into spawning tributaries in early spring. These main spawning tributaries are the Nicola, Bonaparte and Deadman rivers. It is in these much smaller streams that the spawned eggs will hatch and the young steelhead will rear for two to three years before leaving, as smolts, for the ocean via the main Thompson and Fraser rivers. These tributaries pose considerable problems for Thompson River steelhead during their freshwater life history. They flow through a semi-desert climate where rainfall is minimal.

This country has a long history of farming and ranching, so water for stock watering, crop irrigation and community use is in high demand. Human needs for water have usually out shadowed the needs of fish. Stream flow conditions for rearing steelhead can often be critical. Adding to the difficulties has been the loss of streamside vegetation, which is critical for providing shade, keeping the stream cooler and providing stream bank stabilization. Cattle and other livestock have been allowed to trample the river banks causing more loss of vegetation and erosion. I have fished the Thompson since 1969 and there has been little or no progress in protecting the riparian zone from cattle and other human destruction. Water is extracted to grow crops and supply the needs of the urban and farming communities.

In a recent Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council report authors Mark Angelo and Dr. Marvin Rosenau highlighted the habitat problems on two British Columbia rivers. The Englishman River is located on Vancouver Island, in the coastal rainforest, and the Thompson River is in the dry belt Interior. A summary of this report was published in the *Steelheader News* (2004 winter issue) and outlined the problems that water extraction is imposing on steelhead and other salmonids. The magazine summary says:

"We are at a crisis point," said PFRCC member Mark Angelo, world-renowned rivers specialist and report co-author. "Already we know our extreme thirst for fresh water has likely contributed to the decline of some southern-interior coho salmon stocks, to the point that they are now an endangered species."

"Many had hoped that the implementation of a new provincial Fish Protection Act, combined with changes to the provincial Water Act, would help governments better protect water flows for fish. But that hasn't happened. So, despite a lot of provincial and federal legislation, policy and regulation, historic problems with the over allocation and often inefficient use of water persist...as does the salmon's struggle to survive," Angelo added.

The Deadman River is one of the three main spawning tributaries. In its pristine state it would have been lined with shade providing trees along both banks. Art Lingren photo

Dr. Marvin Rosenau, a provincial fisheries biologist and recipient of the Murray A. Newman Award for Excellence in Aquatic Conservation, is the other report author.

The magazine summary goes on to say:

Water flow is critical for sustaining the salmon's lifecycle – the amount of water flowing in a stream during the spawning, incubation and early life stages of salmon and steelhead is essential to their health and survival. Low water flows impact on salmon and steelhead reproduction by reducing habitat capacity. As well, low water flows can stress or kill adult and young fish through increased summer water temperatures. Lowered water flows can also interrupt the passage of adult and juvenile fish to spawning and rearing areas.

The PFRCC commissioned report notes that new applications for water allocation are still being sought and, in some cases, actually granted in areas where extreme water extraction is already having an adverse impact on salmon and steelhead. This situation is currently compounded by the fact that efforts to increase water flows have stalled in much of the province. The reasons for this problem range from inadequate monitoring of existing extractions to an apparent complacency about degraded habitats.

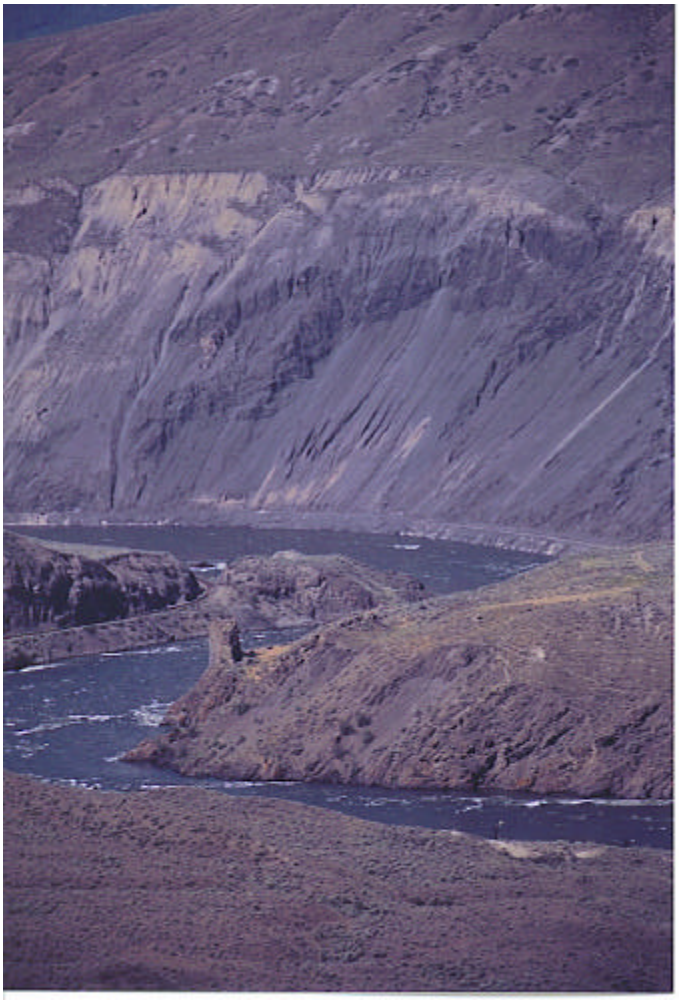
As noted, the report focuses in on two British Columbia watersheds: 1) the Nicola River basin, located in the south-central part of the province within the Thompson River drainage; and 2) the Englishman River watershed, situated on the central east coast of Vancouver Island.

In the arid Nicola River basin, extensive withdrawals of water by the agricultural sector, some in excess of legally licensed amounts, have long been seen as having substantive effects in this important salmon and

steelhead drainage. Some of the steps that could be taken to resolve flow-related problems for the Nicola River Basin include:

- *The establishment of a moratorium on water licensing for diversion or extraction.*
- *A review and update of the Nicola Basin Strategic Plan, now 20 years old.*
- *The development of a hydrological budgeting process, throughout the watershed, in order to allocate water to fish and agriculture in a fair, transparent and legal manner.*
- *The launching of a license-compliance and beneficial-use audit of existing water licenses and water use in the basin.*
- *The updating of the flow-release regime that is part of the Nicola Lake dam-operation plan to protect fish and meet appropriate water requirements.*
- *The exploration of opportunities to buy back water licenses for fish and ecosystem values similar to initiatives undertaken in parts of the western United States*

The latest political buzzword of the 1990s is sustainability. British Columbia has had a long history on non-sustainable land and water use policies. Although the politicians give a fair amount of lip service to sustainability, the persisting fish habitat problems in the Thompson River watershed are proof that we continue to practice non-sustainable land-use activities.



Much of the Thompson River runs through arid land with a semiodesert climate .

Art Lingren Photo

Habitat degradation issues associated with urbanization, ranching, farming, and water extraction presently occur on all three key steelhead spawning streams. They are contributing strongly to the demise of Thompson River steelhead. On top of the long standing problems that are more directly human caused (like the removal of streamside vegetation and a subsequent increase in stream temperatures) conditions have not been favourable for fish. There have been a number of milder years where the precipitation, in the form of snow and rainfall, has been lower. This means that stream flows will be lower and warmer in the critical summer months, when rearing fish can be highly stressed by these conditions. Sometimes temperatures can reach lethal levels for salmonids.

I have often heard biologists state that the number of smolts ultimately leaving a watershed for the ocean is determined by the worst environmental conditions they will experience during their two or three year stay in their rearing stream. For Thompson steelhead rearing in the tributaries, those extreme condition occur during the hot days of late summer when ambient temperatures in the Spences Bridge, Merritt, Ashcroft areas can reach 35 to 40 Celsius (95 to 105 Fahrenheit) for days on end when the streams are at low flow levels. The natural mortality during such weather events is exacerbated by low flows due to water extraction and the increased stream temperatures due to the loss of streamside vegetation.

Ocean Survival and Climate Change

The Thompson River is a main tributary of the Fraser River and the Fraser discharges into the ocean in a body of water called Georgia Strait. In the spring, after their second or third winter of rearing, Thompson steelhead smolts head for the sea. This is a journey of about 325 kilometres (200 miles). What happens to these smolts when the reach the sea has always been a mystery. We don't know if Thompson steelhead migrate north through Georgia Strait to the north end of Vancouver Island or head southwest and go through the Strait of Juan de Fuca. We do know that steelhead runs from those rivers that enter the Greater Georgia Strait Basin, have experienced serious decline through the later 1980s to present time. The Thompson River is a Greater Georgia Basin river and it too has been adversely affected by marine survival-but why? An interesting new and very large scale scientific study involving scientists from Canada and the USA is the Pacific Ocean Shelf Tracking (POST). It is a program that aims to learn about the migration of salmon and steelhead smolts in the ocean. It involves implanting acoustic tags in salmon. This will allow individual fish to be tracked. As of this date there is no plan to put tags in Thompson steelhead, however, it could provide important information that would be applicable to Thompson River steelhead smolt migrations.

A recent annual report (2002) prepared by Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council in BC summarizes ocean factors and says:

Last year's [2000-2001] annual report set out an exhaustive explanation of ocean conditions and the growing body of information about the significance of ocean factors in determining salmon health and future prospects. It illustrated how recent higher productivity can be attributed to changes in climate and availability of food for salmon in the ocean.

The combination of changing ocean conditions and in some locations deteriorating fresh water conditions, had previously resulted in major decreases in survival and production of wild salmon and many other fish species, and marine birds and mammals. With more favourable ocean conditions, there are indications that survival is improving and that stocks may eventually rebuild to acceptable levels.

However, scientific understanding of ocean climate change and its impact on salmon stocks remains primitive and little can be said with confidence about long-term trends, especially in the presence of global climate change.

The Greater Georgia Basin steelhead stocks are considerably less abundant than in the past. Some stocks are bordering on extinction. Georgia Straight functions like an almost self contained "ocean" with two relatively narrow connections to the outside Pacific Ocean. One of these connections is at the southern tip of Vancouver Island and the other is near Port Hardy at the northern end of Vancouver Island. These connections act as tidal flow controls with water entering the basin on an incoming tide and exiting on outflow tides. The majority of BC's population lives around the Georgia Basin. This means that the basin receives a considerable amount of pollution from industrial, domestic and agricultural (including fish farming) sources. This may be a factor contributing to the poor health of Georgia Basin steelhead. Climate change is also believed to be having an adverse effect on the Georgia Basin waters and the tributaries that flow into it, however this is poorly understood at present.

Commercial Interception

For nearly 125 years commercial fishermen have targeted the runs of salmon homing in on the Fraser system. First Nation harvesters have caught salmon since the beginning of human habitation in this part of North America. Both groups have taken Thompson River steelhead as a by-catch to these fisheries. In recent years, fisheries staff, both federal and provincial, has worked to reduce the impact of these fisheries on stocks of salmon and steelhead. Because of Federal Fisheries and Ocean's conservation concerns for certain stocks of pacific salmon, little commercial fishing has taken place during the late summer Thompson steelhead migration time. Similarly, Native fisheries have also been curtailed. When these fisheries were closed anglers expected there would be a large increase in Thompson steelhead. This has not happened. The poor salmon runs into the Fraser system coincided with the poor returns of Georgia Basin steelhead, which are the least abundant of anadromous salmonids in the Thompson system and if other more abundant stocks were in decline it is logical that the lesser stocks would be in decline as well.

Sport Fishing

Angling for Thompson River steelhead, with rod and line, has been going in earnest since Lee Straight wrote a column about these fabulous, large fish in a January1948 column of *The Vancouver Sun.* Anglers began flocking to the stream and have "mined" the river for the last four decades. The river received steelhead release regulations (zero kill) in 1989 as the numbers of fish declined. This has helped somewhat. However, steelhead are still being lost to hooking and release mortality and this is a concern when the numbers of fish returning are very low. Poaching is another concern but is hard to quantify. (I can't call those who poach sport fishers. They are nothing but common criminals.)

Fishing with an artificial fly is one of the least effective ways to catch a steelhead on the Thompson. Its implementation would allow all gear types to fish, maintain an angler presence and cause the least harm to Thompson steelhead in a catch and release fishery. Fisheries managers are reluctant to impose additional gear restrictions such as banning bait, going to artificial fly only or even imposing a catch and release limit. Anglers resist change and we often look away from ourselves to others for the reasons why the fish are in decline. In a way we are like the commercial fleet. Years ago when the fleet was too large, the government bought back licenses to reduce the fleet. The remaining fishermen took advantage of electronic technology and larger boats and were soon catching more of what few fish remained. Sport fishers on the Thompson are no different. Anglers have become more efficient at accessing and catching the fish for example we have pontoon boats, jet boats, level wind reels with longer rods and double handed fly rods that permit more water to be fished. Some try less effective methods when there is a good run of fish, but when the fishing gets tough they revert back to more efficient methods to maintain a level of catch that soothes their egos. When the run is near conservation level, concerned anglers should be putting personal restrictions on their methods and catch to lessen their impact.

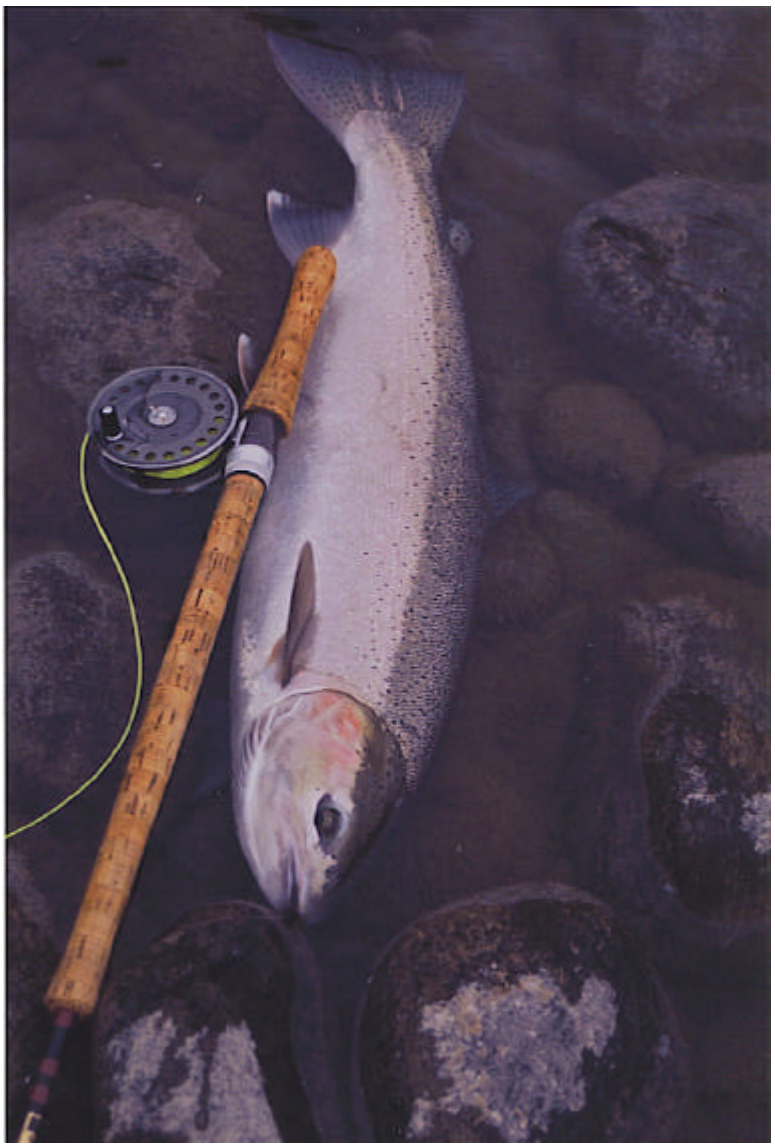
Bringing one into shallow water for a picture

Positive aspects

The run and near closure of the river in 2003 has again highlighted the problems affecting Thompson River steelhead. It may prompt some positive action to happen. We have had years in the past 15 where the run was just above the estimated 800 fish but there has been no angling closure as a result. Now, with a closure in the regulations, a core group of anglers has been stimulated to get down to the business of Thompson steelhead conservation. They are trying to bring the different stakeholders together to focus on solutions. *The closure has had the unexpected result of re-vitalizing the Steelhead Society of B.C., with a new board of directors determined to make Thompson River wild steelhead recovery a reality. President Scott Baker-McGarva believes a partial long-term solution is to purchase key properties, with their water licenses, along tributaries and manage these riparian habitats specifically for steelhead production. Society volunteers have been working with other stakeholders to identify such properties, and hope to formalize a partnership with a land trust organization later this year.*

Other conservation organizations, too, are concerned and have been working on Thompson River stocks of salmonids. For example the Pacific Salmon Foundation (PSF) has developed a comprehensive recovery plan for the Coldwater system. The Coldwater is a major steelhead spawning and rearing stream tributary to the Nicola River. The PSF is more concerned about the salmon runs but some of the work that it does will benefit steelhead. Perhaps the habitat restoration work on the Coldwater will lead the way for restoring habitat and depleted water flows for the fish on the rest of the Nicola system and on the Bonaparte and Deadman rivers. Solutions like this are now front and center in the minds of many Thompson anglers.

Unfortunately, the longer a river is closed to angling the fewer advocates it will maintain. Anglers will find other activities to fill their angling void. I believe that, instead of closing the river to angling entirely, it is better for the fish and the river to maintain some level of angling (and angler advocacy for the fish). More restrictive angling regulations, that reduce angling impact but maintain some opportunity and interest in the river are a logical way to go. For the life on me, I cannot understand why we have not explored going to a bait ban or even to artificial fly only regulations on this river to maintain the very important angler presence.



The Thompson steelhead is very fecund fish and it doesn't take many to seed the watershed with fry. Art Lingren photo

Thompson River steelhead are very special both biologically and in the hearts of anglers! The average sized steelhead in Georgia Basin streams will deposit from 3 to 5 thousand eggs. Compared to other Georgia Basin steelhead, these fish are of a much larger average size and very fecund, spawning up to 20,000 eggs. This is four to seven times more than other steelhead (which average 3000 to 5000 eggs). Thompson steelhead have evolved to these characteristics of size and fecundity, likely as a safeguard for weathering environmental fluctuations over the past millennia. It is one of Natures built in safe guards. Nature has made sure that returning Thompson steelhead with few returning adults can produce enough offspring to seed the system.

There are many problems contributing to the decline of Thompson River steelhead and the road to recovery, where abundance approaches even recent historic levels, will be a long and arduous one. If we are concerned about future generations of anglers ever being able to experience the adrenalin, the sound of line peeling from a reel or the sight of a magnificent Thompson River steelhead in the air, we have our work cut out for us. Solutions are there if we are willing to work strongly and cooperatively toward them.

THE HAIG-BROWN FRY IMITATIONS

By Van Egan

Van's Silver Brown tie with hen pheasant wing Art Lingren photo

In the early spring, west coast rivers are noisy and exuberant, cool still with the influence of winter's melt, and not much conducive to angling. But with subsiding freshets they become alive, warming in the higher sun, pregnant with renewal and the ascendency of new generations. This is a season for the fly fisher -- insects about to emerge or taking flight, salmon alevins finishing their incubation in the spaces of the river's gravels, laboring their way to the freedom of the river and the dangers of the predators that wait. These are the spring hatches. Whether insect or fry it is another step forward in their struggle to survive, to develop into the beings they were meant to be.

On coastal rivers it is the time of the salmon fry. Out of the stoney bottom they dart from shadow to shadow, seeking the dark recesses for their survival. The pinks and chums and chinooks ready to brave the river on their way to the estuary as quickly as their fins allow. It is a dangerous time, one best traversed in the darkness of night, yet often stretched marginally beyond the dimness of early dawn. And when their numbers grow into thousands, then tens of thousands, the cutthroat trout and rainbows take advantage, meeting them on their way into the rich pastures. Along their precarious journey mergansers and kingfishers seek them out. It is their time of bounty too.

This is a time suited to the fly fisherman and to those fry imitations he or she holds dear. Roderick Haig-Brown had much to say about fry imitations and created a number of flies with which to imitate them. Two that served him well were described in the first edition (and later editions) of his *The Western Angler* in 1939. The Silver Brown and Silver Lady remain favorites today. These slender counterfeits of salmon fry or pre-smolts are best tied on low-water or long-shanked hooks and dressed thinly to imitate the sleek design of the naturals. Though he did not mention hook size, a number 6 was favored for most cutthroat fishing in the spring during the downstream migration of fry, though a number 8 was especially useful during the downstream run of pink salmon fry. More on that later.

When tying flies Haig-Brown had a penchant for experimenting and the result was variations on a theme, as he says in *Fisherman's Spring*: "rarely making two of them exactly the same." And "I have never found anything that seems to me a wholly satisfactory fly, one that seems to do equally well under all conditions when trout are feeding on fry." But to begin somewhere, his dressings given in *The Western Angler* may be considered a standard.

First, the Silver Brown:

Hook: No. 6 or 8 low-water
Tail: Indian crow breast feather (or substitute)
Body: flat silver tinsel
Hackle: dark red game cock
Wings: slender strips of golden pheasant centre tail.

The original Silver Brown as per the dressing in the 1939 edition of The Western Angler Art Lingren photo

As for some of the variations he suggests enclosing several (8 to 10) polar bear hairs dyed orange within the wings, and other additions as well, like fox squirrel, very useful when used for steelhead or adult salmon. (At one time Haig-Brown successfully fished for and landed Chinook salmon, some of 30 pounds or more, that entered the Campbell River in September. He gave up this fishing after learning of the narrow energy provisions of the fish, whose stored reserves were little more than required for spawning.)

In my own flies I often make the Silver Brown using hen pheasant center tail in the wing. This softens the contrast between black and brown, and seems to me to be more readily accepted by sea-run cutthroats being heavily fished for, and when they became demandingly fastidious in their selection I went to a very different pattern, one with traces of blue and green shaded with palest gray mallard side feathers and topped with bronze mallard. I call it simply a Fry Fly, which appears to me to have much the same coloration as a fly Haig-Brown called the Humpback Fry Fly.

Haig-Brown's Humpback Fry Fly is little acknowledged among the flies of the west coast. It was brought to my attention in Art Lingren's book, *Fly Patterns of Roderick Haig-Brown*, and makes a lot of sense in its plan. The wing is composed of the colors of the natural without the strong parr markings of other salmon fry. (Humpback was the more familiar name of what we now usually call pink salmon.) Haig-Brown's Humpback Fry is as follows:

Hook: No. 8 low-water
Tail: yellow hackle tip or yellow hair tuft
Body: flat silver tinsel
Hackle: yellow, soft to lie back under the hook
Wing: mixed green and blue polar bear, topped with several strands of peacock sword.

The Humpback Fry
Art Lingren photo

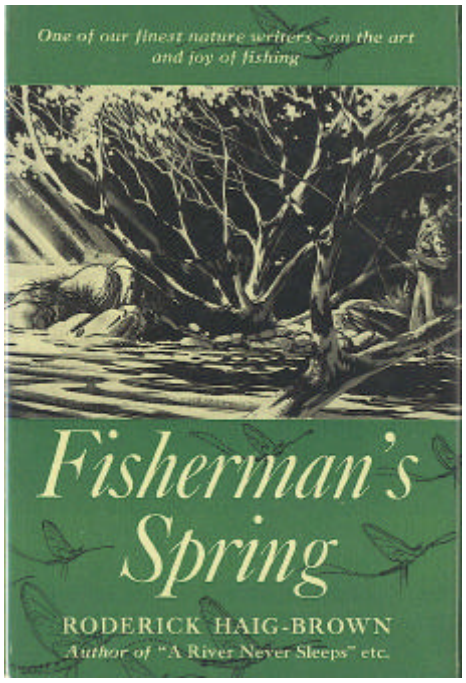
In the book mentioned Art Lingren says of the Silver Lady it "is undoubtedly one of the most

beautiful flies ever designed in British Columbia." I would agree; and one of the best river flies I have used. Haig-Brown mentions it as "excellent for summer steelhead" and for cutthroat trout. I have not used it much during the springtime fry migration, nor for steelhead, it has proven a splendid fly for fresh-run coho in the Campbell. To me, with its orange tail, it represents a pre-smolt coho, and coho salmon, both jacks and full adults, seem to care less, probably being as cannibalistic as any other salmonid species. It is, I believe, the most complex fly Haig-Brown has ever invented.

Here is the recipe:
Hook: No. 6 low-water or larger (up to 1/0 for coho)
Tail: golden pheasant tippet
Body: flat silver tinsel
Hackle: badger (to keep the fly slim I tie this to lie close under the silver tinsel)
Wing: two badger hackles tied back to back, four strands of bronze peacock her!, teal strips laid along, and topped with a golden pheasant crest
Cheeks: blue chatterer or kingfisher, or the blue feathers from beneath the tail of a Steller jay

The Silver Lady ***Art Lingren photo***

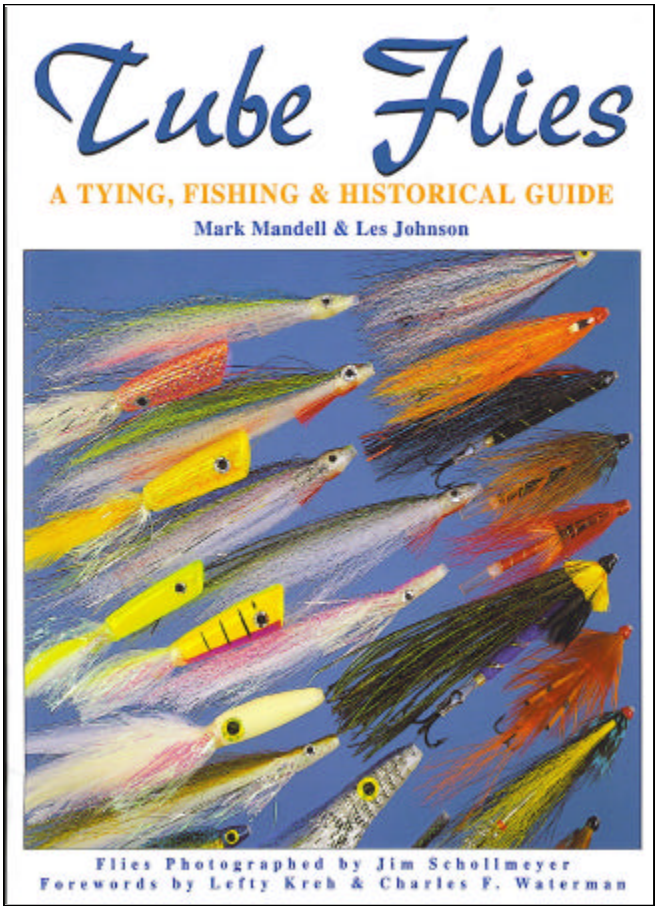
If you have never read Haig-Brown's discussion of tying, experimenting and working fry imitation type flies, you should. It is found in *Fisherman's Spring*, a chapter titled "Fry Imitations".



Book Reviews

Tube Flies: A Tying, Fishing & Historical Guide

By Mark Mendell and Les Johnson



Frank Amato Publications, Inc. P.O. Box 82112, Portland, OR 97282
2004 Reprint first published 1995, 97 pages plus advertisement, softcover $29.95 US

The authors of this book point out that the Atlantic salmon fly fishers of Great Britain embraced tube flies quickly after their invention back in the 1940s, and consequently their use spread quickly through European waters. In contrast, their use in North American Atlantic salmon and steelhead waters was sporadic and slow; as fly fishermen are generally conservative and resist change. As with so many things that originate from far away, it often takes time before some fly fisher sees some value and experiments with a new fly. However, when we flyfishers do try something and find it to our liking we embrace it with a passion. Mark's and Les' book is a testament to that passion.

The book is divided into six sections: Section 1 gives numerous reasons why a fly fisher will find tube flies useful, such as simplifying tackle, permitting the angler to adapt to changing fishing conditions, making catch-and-release fishing easier, and providing better baitfish replication. And let's not forget that the short-shanked, smaller, tube fly hook has much better holding qualities over the long-shanked streamer and salmon fly hooks on conventional flies. Section 2 is devoted to tube fly tying materials and Section 3 describes the step-by-step tying procedure. Section 4 is on Atlantic salmon tube flies and gives a history of the development of tubes for that fishery, as well as step-by-step dressings for some popular patterns. Section 5 on streamer tube flies is a testament to the ingenuity of Pacific coast fly tiers who developed tube flies for trolled Pacific salmon around the same time that tube flies for casting to Atlantic salmon were being developed in Britain. This section also includes samples of numerous streamer tube flies for a variety of game fish. Section 6 gives a brief history on poppers and sliders with examples used in tropical saltwater fisheries.

If you are interested in learning more about Tube Flies then this book is for you.

Review by Art Lingren

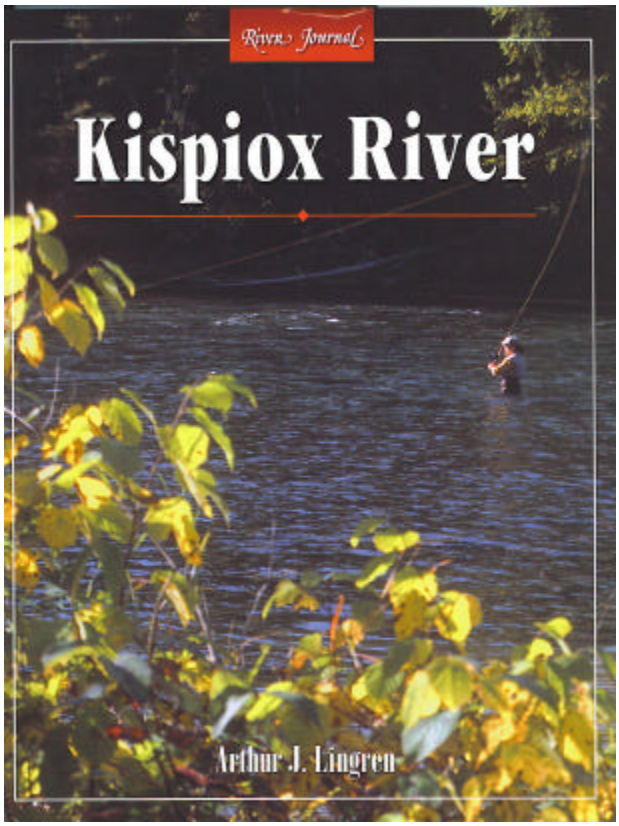
In 1984 after acquiring Hugh Falkus' book, *Salmon Fishing*, Art Lingren ordered these British tube flies. The top two, dressed on plastic tubes, are over four inches long while the bottom two, dressed on brass tubes, are 3 and 2 inches long. Heavy brass and large plastic tube flies are not something to consider casting around one's head, and are difficult if not impossible for a fly fisher to throw with a single-handed rod. However, in 1984 and 1985, the two-handed rod was well into making a comeback in British Columbia, and with the Orvis 15-foot Spey, made for the European market, and the British Hardy and Bruce & Walker rods, local flyfishers experimented with Spey-casting large tube flies. (Note: the two-handed rod was later to become commonly know as a Spey rod after American steelhead fly fishers visiting British Columbia waters saw what the locals were doing with Spey casting, including looping sink-tip lines onto 10 and 11 double taper fly lines, and returned south armed with these new methods.)

Kispiox River Journal

By Art Lingren

Frank Amato Publications, Inc. P.O. Box 82112, Portland, OR 97282
2004, 48 pages, softcover $15.95 US, hardcover $30.00 US

What steelhead angler around the world has not heard of the Kispiox River, home of Karl Mauser's world record fly-caught fish? For fifty years that records have been kept the Kispiox has produced more large steelhead than any other, and drawn anglers, neophyte and expert alike, to try to break Mauser's record. Art Lingren's new book, the *Kispiox River Journal* does an excellent job of detailing the history of the river, the anglers that have pursued its famous steelhead, and the flies they used.



Lingren is British Columbia's dean of fly fishing and fly tying history, as his previous books such as *Fly Patterns of British Columbia, Fly Patterns of Roderick Haig-Brown* and *Famous British Columbia Fly-Fishing Waters* attest. A meticulous researcher, he presents the early days of fly fishing on the Kispiox through the words of anglers John Fennelly and George McLeod, Karl Mauser and others. He also documents the river's remarkable reputation by showing how steelhead from the Kispiox placed in the top of the *Field and Stream* magazine's contest each year from 1954 to 1975.

The book also provides some interesting information about the life history of the Kispiox steelhead and how to use Sturdy's Formula to gauge the weight of a fish before releasing it. As Lingren points out, the river is catch-and-release for steelhead, so although larger fish have been caught, Mauser's record will continue to stand.

Lingren provides attractive photo plates, a little history and pattern descriptions of some of the traditional wet flies that have caught record fish, and newer tube flies and dry flies that have been developed on the Kispiox. Several of the contemporary patterns were originated by local guides Bob Clay and Wilfred Lee and regulars on the river. The assortment described is certainly adequate to give a fisherman an idea of what flies to bring to the Kispiox.

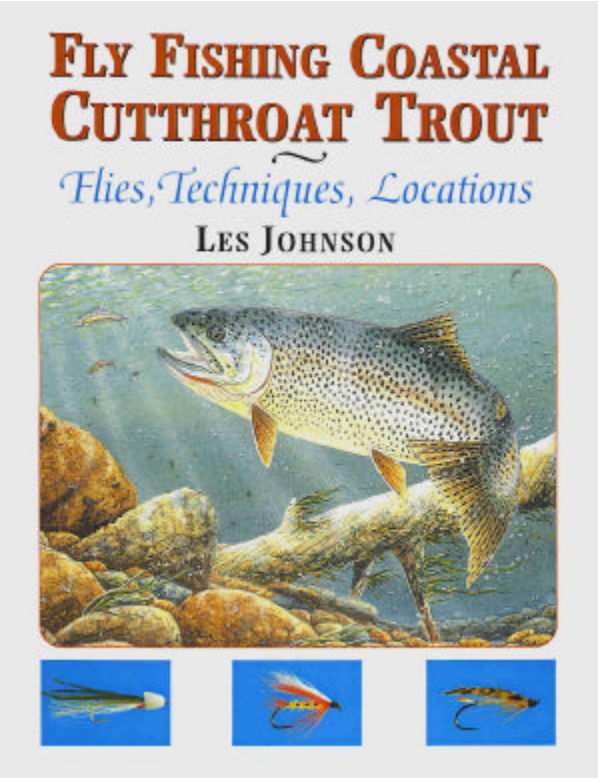
This is one of the aspects that I appreciated about Lingren's approach to presenting the Kispiox and its steelhead to readers. He certainly tantalizes the angler with well-documented tales of huge steelhead, but the book strikes a nice balance between providing a visiting angler with sufficient information about tackle, presentation, fly patterns and the services available, without revealing too many specific details about the river. A map in the frontispiece indicates all the major pools in the lower 40 miles where the majority of fishing action occurs, but they are not described further in the text.

The Kispiox is a relatively small river, and since a good gravel road parallels it, access is relatively easy and during the prime season in the fall there can be a lot of angling pressure. Lingren's *Kispiox Journal* gives the angler contacts for guiding and accommodation to help visitors explore this famous river, either by themselves or with a guide.

The book is a good read, full of interesting stories and information, even if you are not planning to visit the Kispiox, and I'm sure you will enjoy it.

Reviewed by Andrew Williams

Fly Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout



By Les Johnson

Frank Amato Publications, Inc. P.O. Box 82112, Portland, OR 97282
2004, 144 pages, Softcover $29.95 US, Hardcover $45 US, Limited Edition $125 US

In 1971, when his little 58-page blue book called *Fishing the Sea-Run Cutthroat Trout* was published, Les Johnson was already a very experienced cutthroat trout fly fisher. That little blue book has been continually in print since its original publication and over the years Les has continued to pursue fly fishing and learning more about his favourite game fish. In *Fly Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout*, Johnson shares his knowledge about this game fish gleaned after many decades of fly fishing for the cutthroat. However, as Don Roberts, the writer of the "Foreword" says

> *If you go pawing through Fly Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout looking for five ways to rig an indicator with dropper flies, you're going to be—and deserve to be—duly frustrated. If you pore through this book with the expectation of pinpointing "fishin' holes", you're going to be—and, again, deserve to be—duly frustrated, In short, this is not a guidebook. That doesn't mean that reading Fly Fishing for Coastal Cutthroat won't make you a better fisherman; because it most assuredly will. Increased acuity as an angler, after all, does not come from being spoon-fed globs of easily digestible, Gerber-formula information; it comes from a greater understanding and appreciation of a species and its ecosystem.*

A master fly fisher is someone who has pursued a particular game fish for many years. In Les Johnson's case he has pursued the cutthroat trout through much of its native range for more than six decades. This adventure began in his home State of Washington when he was a wee lad fishing with his grandfather Ed Knight. Over the ensuing decades Les has traveled widely, fishing cutthroat from California to Alaska. *Fly Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout* is not a guide book. However, in this full-colour book, Johnson has included separate chapters about the fish and the fishing to be found in California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska. In each chapter he gives some hints on which waters the cutthroat can be found. He also describes the current state of the cutthroat trout. In many places this trout has not fared well. It is the usual story of habitat degradation by man's activities. Also, in many streams the runs have been depleted by far too liberal catch limits. For a cutthroat to reach a respectable 20 inch trophy size, in most coastal waters, this trout needs to survive for a number of years. As one of North America's master fly fishers, Johnson shares his knowledge about a fish he has pursued and felt for deeply over more than half a century. You may not be spoon-fed details of where-to and how-to, but there is one heck of a lot of stuff in this book which will make you a better fly fisher.

Johnson points out early in this book that many Pacific Coast fly fishers are smitten by the bigger-is-better syndrome and pursue the larger steelhead and Pacific salmons over the cutthroat. Roderick Haig-Brown in his *A River Never Sleeps* in the "Sea-Run Cutthroat" section, about the native cutthroat writes

> *I suppose it is most improper to talk of degrees of nativeness. A fish or a bird or a mammal is native to a country or not native, and that is all there is to it. But for many reasons, most of them*

emotional and quite illogical, I feel that the cutthroat is the most native of Pacific coast game fish . . . . The cutthroat, the coastal cutthroat of tidal water waters particularly, is such a down-to-earth, workaday, unspectacular fish; he fits his environment so perfectly and makes such good, full use of it, following the tides and the salmon runs and the insect hatches to the limit of their yield; and he has not been, as the rainbow has, more or less successfully transplanted to all parts of the world. He lives in his own place in his own way and has his own special virtues. He is a little like the burned stumps and slash and new growth of the old logging works in that one must know and deeply love the country to appreciate him properly. (p. 128)

Roderick Haig-Brown was one of the first Pacific Coast anglers to really appreciate the cutthroat trout. Johnson dedicates *Fly Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout* to Haig-Brown and includes a John Robert's water colour portrait of Haig-Brown. Johnson, the master cutthroat fly fisher of today, has recognized Haig-Brown as the master cutthroat fly fisher of yesteryear.

In addition to the information on the cutthroat runs in Pacific Northwest waters, Johnson has included the dressings for 125 flies by anglers familiar with their areas. He completes the book with three chapters on tackle and accessories and fly fishing in fresh and saltwater. It doesn't matter if you are a beginner, wanting to learn more about this most native of Pacific Northwest game fish, or a long time cutthroat fly fisher, this book has something for you.

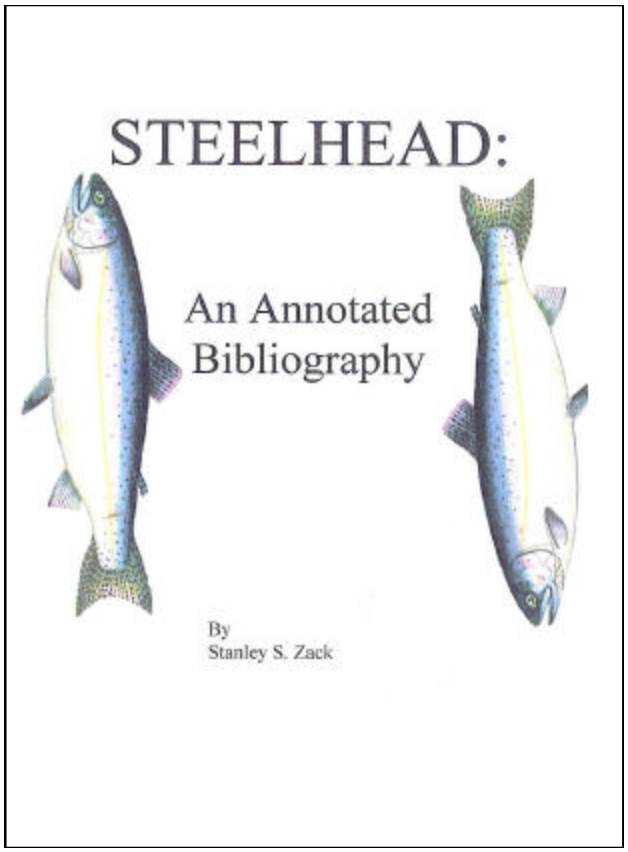
Amato Publications has forwarded a draft of *Fly Fishing Coastal Cutthroat Trout* to me for review. The book will be in stores later this year (2004).

Reviewed by Art Lingren

Steelhead: An Annotated Bibliography

Privately published by Stanley S. Zack

This is a comprehensive bibliography of books and scientific papers about steelhead and a useful publication for steelhead bibliophiles. A good number of the British Columbia steelhead listings in this book came from Barry Thornton and from Art Lingren's *British Columbia Angling and Fishing Literature Checklist*. Send inquiries about this book to the compiler, Stan Zack, at Apt 304, 333 South Eaton, Lakewood, CO, USA, 80226



Last Rites

Thirty one years ago Bob Taylor and Lee Straight journeyed to the Dean River for the first time. Lee passed away earlier this year. Lee Straight's ashes joined Bob Taylor for this last trip and on that trip Bob performed one last rite and said a final farewell to his long-time fishing companion and friend.