



# *Fly Lines*

*The official publication of the British Columbia Federation of Fly Fishers*

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## *Fly Lines*

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On Our cover . . .



*Whether from the east or west coast of Canada, a good fish is a good fish. Newfoundland guide Mark Hobbs with a beauty.*

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## President's Message



Where did it go!?? Every year it's the same. Summer- it is so fleeting compared to the other seasons. All of our plans and desires never seem to fit adequately into that tight little time period.

Summer is the time when everyone seems to disappear, and very little "work" gets done. Nowhere is this truer than in volunteer organizations, especially those connected with fishing, like BCFFF. We are all madly trying to cram in as much water time as we can, amongst things like family commitments, mowing lawns and generally keeping the old homestead from collapsing under neglect.

Once again, Art has prepared an aesthetically pleasing and informative *Fly Lines*. So – to offset that, the remainder of my report is all business.

Here is something for everyone to think about between now and next May. We are going to have a couple of key executive vacancies in BCFFF. Ken Burgess, our long serving Treasurer, will not be seeking re-election. He will be taking a well deserved respite. Also, Art Lingren will be finishing out his stint as editor of "Fly Lines" after having produced a number of wonderful "collector" style editions. So, these jobs will be up for grabs and I'm hoping that there will be some folks out there willing to step up to the plate to help our organization.

I have some strong feelings on "newsletters" that I think are worth mentioning. Most importantly, a newsletter for an organization like ours must be regular. Next, it must provide information that is useful and of interest to the membership. Beyond that, the BCFFF editor has pretty much free rein to put whatever personal touches into it that he/she desires. It is a creative process with the reward being satisfaction. No-one considering the editor's role should feel daunted by what the previous editor has done. As long as those key objectives are met, the newsletter can be a very simple production. The editor's job could also be a "learn in place" situation where an individual would have the freedom to acquire newsletter skills as time progresses.

More business – in order to keep some summer momentum alive in BCFFF, I met with our two Vice Presidents (Gil Sage and Keith MacDonald) in late August to discuss a number of issues facing us. I want to briefly make you aware of the outcome of this meeting.

First, let's look at our Gilly Fund. BCFFF clubs use the annual income that this fund generates to support worthy projects. These days, ultra-safe places to park money (like GICs) generate very little return. So, we are exploring the possibility of having the fund managed by a non-profit foundation that will provide a better return, and simplify the administration of the fund for BCFFF volunteers. This is proving to be quite complex, and it may require setting up our own charitable foundation (ie "The Gilly Foundation"). We are still a long way from bringing recommendations to the membership.

There are certainly more "fisheries issues" than our committee has people to attend to. Most of these issues are related to sea-run fish, particularly steelhead. On the fall horizon are a series of workshops on Thompson steelhead recovery that the BC Wildlife Federation is organizing. Funding is provided by the government and other coffers (Living Rivers). The workshops are to be held in Spences Bridge, Merritt and Chilliwack during October/November. It is important that BCFFF attend these as part of our on-going concern for these fish. We also have potential "seats"



on the Sport Fish Advisory Board (SFAB) and the Family Fishing Society which, for now, we can only monitor. In truth, there are more “jobs” than willing folks.

We are thinking about some tweaking of the BCFFF structure to better encompass the interests and needs of BC fly anglers. Since so much of our time is presently spent on steelhead issues, we feel that other important issues, such as those associated with lakes and saltwater ([see urgent saltwater notice later in this issue](#)) may be getting short shrift. Again, our ability to do this will depend on members willing to take on these roles- Any volunteers?

Please note that next year’s AGM and Auction/Dinner fundraiser will be in Victoria, hosted by the Haig Brown Fly Fishing Association. The proposed date is the weekend of May 26, 27, 28 at the University of Victoria. Springtime in Victoria – how neat is that!? Mark your calendars now.

Send me an e-mail ([pandlcaverhill@shaw.ca](mailto:pandlcaverhill@shaw.ca)) if you have any comments or questions about BCFFF.

## **Upcoming Events, Notices and Items of Interest**

### **2006 AGM**

From Garth Fowler of the Haig-Brown Fly Fishing Association: Dates for next year’s AGM will be the 27 - 28 May 2006 at UVic. The planning is about to begin. I would also point out for those that are interested in some salmon fishing before or after should take advantage of the run of large Chinook salmon that should be in the Strait of Juan de Fuca at that time. There are a number of Marina's in the area that have boat rentals and charters. The fishing can be quite spectacular out there.

### ***Urgent Notice (To all BCFFF Members and BC Fly Anglers)***

#### **Pending Major Loss of Angling Opportunity in Saltwater**

As the years go by, BC anglers are losing more and more angling opportunities. There are many reasons that conspire to keep anglers off the water– to name a few - fish stock conservation, urbanization and the exercising of “property rights”.

Federal Fisheries and Oceans Canada is currently proposing a number of “Rockfish Conservation Areas” (RCAs) for the Strait of Georgia. If you are a beach fly fisher who loves to chase coho, pink salmon and cutthroat trout (or even if you have thought that you might like to do this sometime) **you need to pay attention to this “notice” and be prepared to take some action!!!**

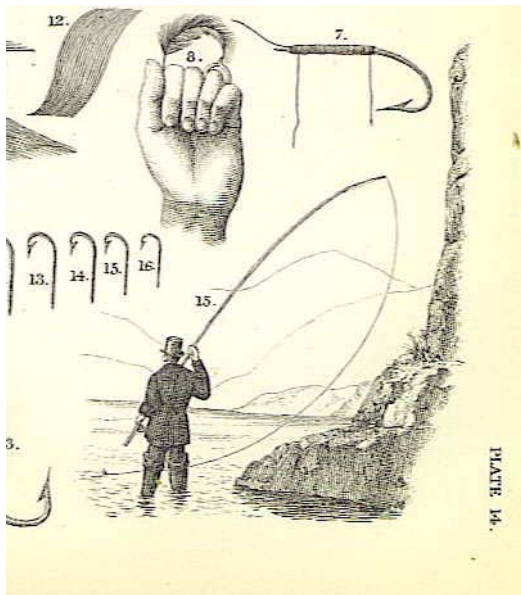
Rockfish Conservation Areas are aimed at preserving our dwindling stocks of these fish along our coastline –very important stuff! However, these RCAs will preclude all angling. Where these proposed areas touch on the land, you will not be able to wade the beach or launch a small craft to fish the intertidal zone for salmon and trout. A number of the proposals include very popular areas for beach fishing, or areas that may have potential for this. For example, there is a large beach area in Oyster Bay (on the salmon approach area to the Oyster River) that is among the RCA proposals.

BCFFF urges you (BCFFF members/clubs; BC fly anglers) to go to the DFO website and review the proposed sites. Each site has a link to provide DFO with comments. In addition, this site provides a consultation meeting schedule for this fall. Meetings are scheduled throughout coastal BC, so folks can discuss proposals with DFO.

**Perhaps the simplest way to reach this web location is to use the Google Search function – type in “Fisheries and Oceans Canada rockfish conservation”**

### A Spey Casting History

In the next two possibly three issue of *Fly Lines* Art Lingren will share with you the abridged history of the Spey cast dating from the early part of 19<sup>th</sup> Century into the 1990s. Included in this history are passages from the important angling literature from the earliest 1850 reference to those of mid-1980s.



Much of that history is recorded in the angling literature of Great Britain’s Atlantic salmon fisheries, however, there are three important ones in North America dating from the 1930s through to the late 1960s. In the early 1980s, the double handed rod made its initial comeback to BC. The history will document who the important players were as well as the role played a prominent British Atlantic salmon fly fisher, writer and filmmaker as well as the American connection. This resurgence in Spey casting was a British Columbia thing starting in the early 1980s which in the later 1980s spread south into Washington State then else where in the USA.

*The earliest drawing of a Spey Caster*

*Who is the character in the middle and what was his role?*



## BUZZES, BUMBLES AND BI-VISIBLES

By Van Egan

John Atherton, the late artist-angler, described in his book, *The Fly and the Fish* (1951), a code of fly imitation he called "impressionism," after the school of artists of the same name. The term impressionism suggests something more blurred than sharp, more broken than solid, more imaginative than concrete. And so it is, as imaginative as Nature in creating the interrupted, cryptic, often times fuzzy forms that are at once both beautiful and deceptive. Beauty is most likely a sensation confined to the human beast, but deception is a common integer, along with reproduction, in the universal law of survival. As Atherton points out, Nature's colors are seldom solid, though the effect to the casual eye (perhaps fish as well as human) may be, and likely is, and the interrupted color patterns one sees on close inspections play their parts in the reflected forces of life and vitality that inspire fish to seize them.

In other words, in making imitative flies, mixed dabbings of colors are preferred to a solid color. To this Atherton advises soft outlines rather than hard; blended furs rather than solid flosses. The two, broken colors and soft outlines, work well together, giving us a variety of buggy-looking invertebrate flies, from fuzzy nymphs to impressionistic dry flies useful in meeting a range of insects or other aquatic life on which fish feed.

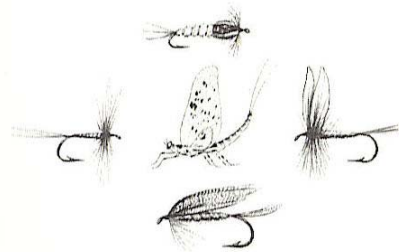
Within the group of impressionistic dry flies are those I will call the palmers, for want of a better term. If you're not familiar with this term, it refers to a style of hackling in which the hackle feather is wrapped along the full length of the body. In some flies the hackle is the body, and the flies only other component is a tail; in others the hackle is spiralled along a body composed of fur, tinsel or floss. The latter style has become something of a convention in the making of caddis flies, though I am at a loss as to why, since caddis flies, like mayflies, have three pairs of legs all attached to their thorax.

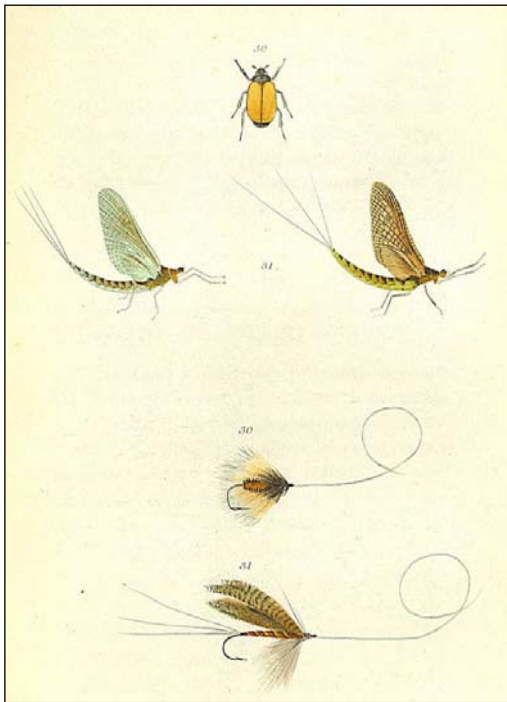
But the practice is an old one, dating back at least to Ronalds (*The Fly-fisher's Entomology*, 2nd ed., 1839). In this pioneer book Ronalds describes 44 species of fly, three or four to be tied "buzz", by which he meant to spiral the hackle along the length of the body. One fly he called the Marlow Buzz was an imitation of a beetle. What is apparent by Ronald's choice of words is that he recognized the life-like quality hackle can give to the over-all image of an imitation fly.

# THE FLY *and the* FISH

by

JOHN ATHERTON






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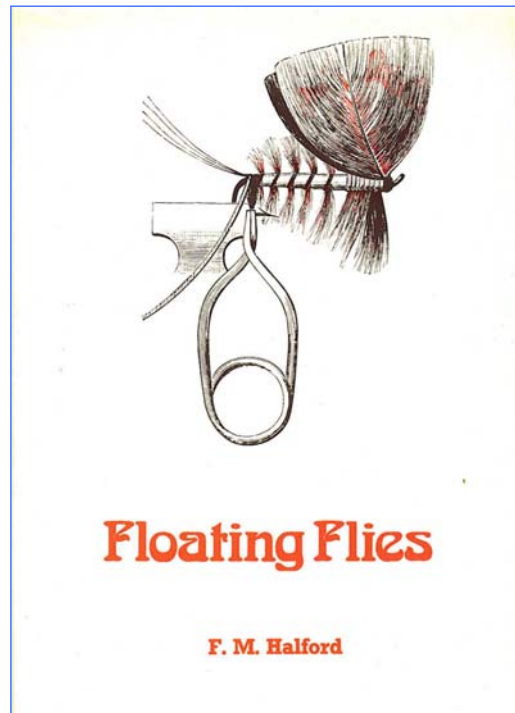
*A hand-painted page from Ronalds' The Fly-Fisher's Entomology. One fly, number 30, he called the Marlow Buzz, which was an imitation of a beetle.*

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That tyrant of the dry fly, Frederic Halford, also had use for the buzzed hackle, though his instructions in tying use the more sedate expression that the hackle be "carried right down body." In *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them* (1886) eleven of 81 listed flies have hackles "carried right down body," and of six patterns for the Green Drake alone, four are palmered. Of the first eleven, six are sedge imitations and three are Bumbles. Now there's a name for you!

When I first came across Bumbles, I of course immediately thought of bumble-bees. But Bumbles are not bumble-bees. They are in fact, if not of intent, the most exaggerated kind of impressionism. At best they may represent a caterpillar, if they represent any specific insect or insect group at all, but Halford mentions no living counterpart for his Bumbles, only that they are good hot weather flies, and good for grayling. This tells me that Halford was not always the immaculate purist, matching the hatch at every cast, but at least in the dog-days of summer might consent to join with those lesser brethren of the fly to which most of us belong. I rather like that thought, so I believe I shall keep it.

Leave it to a North American, though, to carry a buzzed fly to the epitome of feathered excess. When I was learning to tie flies, one of the first dry flies I made was a Brown





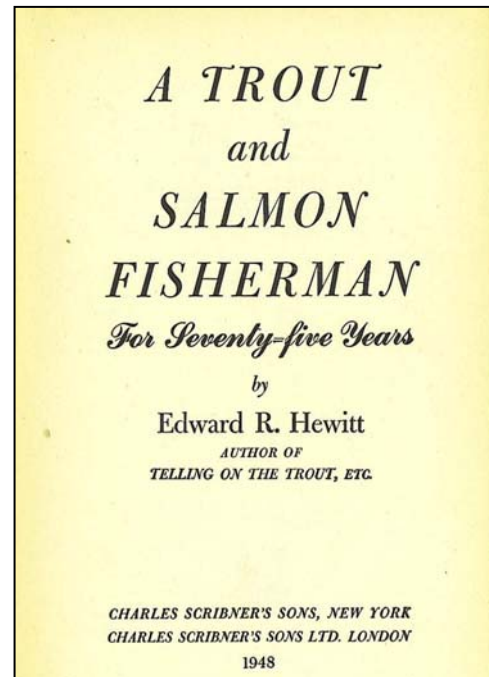
Palmer: two hackle tips for a tail and all the rest packed hackle right to the head. After I mastered that I managed to extend my talent to include Edward Hewitt's improvised Palmer, the Bi-visible, adding two or three turns of white hackle at the front for better visibility in low light. As much as these concoctions lacked an even rudimentary insect shape and very little in the way of broken color impressionism, they—surprisingly-caught fish. I shouldn't say surprisingly, for in my days of learning, Bi-visibles were much in use by successful fishermen and, besides, one of my most influential teachers Ed Hewitt, in *A Trout and Salmon Fisherman for Seventy-five Years*, said it was a killer.

Whatever the most noted angling authority of the time might prescribe, it required some confirmation in experience, which was not long in coming. There was considerable joy (and surprise) in the dark of a late summer evening when beneath the shady canopy of tall trees my blind cast brought a repeat of an audible, though unseen, rise. Surprised, too, was the wary brown trout that had waited for the cover of nightfall to assuage his hunger, and his frightful display of smashing the placid pool into sparkling fragments enlarged on the final outcome of slipping the net beneath a trout fully thirteen inches long. In a creek that seldom gave up fish over ten inches, it was a triumph, indeed, and the fraud that perpetrated the deceit was a Grizzly Bi-visible. Just like the master said.

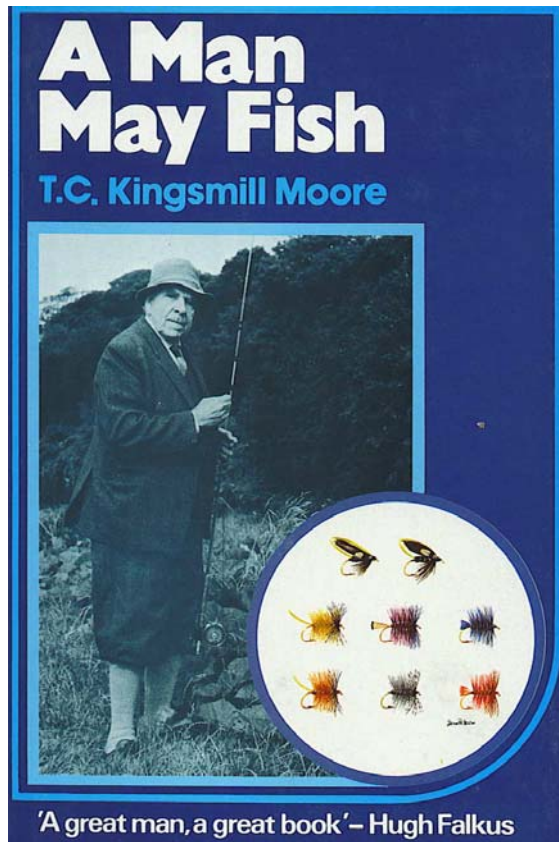
That was an encouraging beginning and should have led to a solid loyalty of the Bi-visible, but it didn't. Over the years the number of Bi-visibles in my box gradually decreased and today I find none. The numbers of trout that I managed to coax to a Bi-visible were never the equal of that first one, which I suspect has been due more to an unshakable mistrust on my part than to any inherent fault in the fly. The fault no doubt is mine—lack of confidence—and persists. A hook packed from tail to head with hackle only has as little eye appeal to me now as it ever had, which is next to none, and I can't fancy myself giving it an honest treatment in the deliverance of a feeding trout. Or for that matter, a non-feeding trout.

But that is not to say I have no use for a well-palmered fly if it fits some of the criteria that Atherton called "broken" color. And the man who I believe may have brought those principles to the peak of practical fly-tying is Mr. Justice T.C. Kingsmill Moore, a former judge of the Supreme Court of Ireland.

Kingsmill Moore published a book in 1960 titled *A Man May Fish*. As has happened before in the chronology of angling literature, his work remained unnoticed for nearly 20 years. But shortly before his death in 1979 he was encouraged to revise



and enlarge its text, and since then the new edition has gone through three printings. That in itself says the man had something important to say, and he says it very well. If I should ever have the opportunity to indulge a fancy to fish the lakes of Ireland, I should have this book as a constant companion and hang on its every word. But even if that pleasant dream should not transpire, I have been greatly entertained and wisely instructed by Kingsmill Moore. His practical advice in fly design must be heresy to the fly tier who strives for exact imitation, but would have met with approval by John Atherton, I'm sure, though a collection of flies by each, placed side by side, would bear little resemblance.



Kingsmill Moore describes a series of Bumbles—there's that fascinating name again—that thoroughly exploits the mixing and dabbing of colors, the gleams and sparkles that bring vitality and life to one's fly. His Bumbles have three parts—tail, body and hackle—all which add to the completed effect, what Atherton might call Nature's canvas. Here is a description of one, the Golden Olive Bumble:

Tail: golden pheasant topping  
 Body: golden olive seal's fur, ribbed oval gold tinsel  
 Body hackles: cock dyed golden olive and medium red natural cock  
 Shoulder hackle: blue jay

First, one should note the general brilliance and translucency of the materials chosen. The two cock hackles should be the brightest and stiffest possible and are spaced and wound in spiral fashion side by side from tail to head. The blue jay shoulder

hackle, though of a broken color, is by contrast an opaque rather dull feather. Its redeeming feature is its soft, motile action that counters the stiff, immotile barbs of the cock feathers. Moore fished these flies sunk and needed the movement that long, soft, waving hackle fibers would provide.

One of the great qualities of K.M.'s Bumbles, as I see it, is the opportunity open to innovate. In his book, Moore describes seven Bumble patterns that cover a ranges of color effects, but he also mentions having experimented with several dozens of combinations in all. What his discussion brings out is the need to find the right combination for the environmental conditions of the water being fished. We all know that coloration is of little value in identifying an organism, except within a very specific environmental venue. The color of species can vary with the background against which it struggles for survival. Each lake or pond, each stream, offers up a set of factors—bottom composition, depth,

shade conditions and the varying light intensities alterable by the; position of the sun, the changing densities of cloud and haze, and even wind when it ruffles the water's surface— factors that would give one's favorite fishing waters almost limitless boundaries for experimentation. This is appealing to the fly tier and, all working well, to the fish.

Each spring and summer my wife and I escaped often to one or another favored lake near our Vancouver Island home. If there was a good showing of sedge or chironomid there was no reason to go beyond flies close to those being taken, and if we should have timed our fishing to one of the coast's phenomenal mating flights of ant or termite, the catching of frenzied trout was more a matter of intercepting cruisers bent on stretching their stomachs to their elastic ceiling than in any difficulty of finding a fly to meet their temperament.

But when the lake is placid, insect life sparse or non-existent and trout lethargic, the kind of day when strong sunlight presses fish hard against the bottom, one can spend hours and be utterly refused by every trout under which one's fly is placed. Now the fly fisherman must trigger a reflex or an interest where Nature's familiar stimuli are absent. Something different is needed, for there are no organisms to match. Something alive, eye-catching. Something to awaken curiosity. Something vibrant in Nature's clothing. Something like a Bumble which fits all these criteria.

If the fishable water is not too deep, my choice would be a dry Bumble, with a shoulder hackle of stiff grizzly and the action imparted by subtle movements of the rod. A gentle skittering on the surface, colorful points of light transmitted through the translucent fur of seal and crystalline barbs of choice hackle, reflections from glittering tinsel. It may not be a fly to turn around the dour behavior of a lake's trout population, but two or three individuals that take the risk of their curiosity on a day when an angler's prospects for a blank are high are not to be dismissed. There is, as any camper will attest, relief in avoiding a skunk.

### **Bumbles Side Bar**





Two of the three Bumble patterns described below are from Kingsmill Moore's list in *A Man May Fish*, "Caroline" (by the author) is named after the Lady Caroline salmon fly, having been derived from some of its broken-color pattern.

Keep in mind that Kingsmill Moore tied his Bumbles to be fished wet. While the body hackles are of a highly translucent quality, stiff and shiny, his shoulder hackle is of a soft, water absorbent type (e.g. blue jay, partridge, grouse). For the Bumbles to be fished as floaters substitute dry fly quality grizzly for the softer wet fly hackle. The two hackles wound together over the body should be stripped of barbs on one side.

For the floating flies the author has found most effective, they have been tied on size 8 and 10 dry fly hooks (some on 12s). Kingsmill-Moore's method of counter ribbing the tinsel after the body hackles are in place has been followed for a more durable fly.



#### **The Claret Bumble**

Tail: 4 strands of golden pheasant tippet  
Body: claret seal's fur, counter ribbed with fine oval gold tinsel  
Body Hackles: claret and black cock hackles, wound together and spaced  
Shoulder Hackle: grizzly cock



#### **The Grey Ghost**

Tail: golden pheasant topping Tag: black ostrich herl  
Body: light grey seal's fur, counter ribbed with fine oval silver tinsel  
Body Hackles: pale blue dun and black cock, wound together and spaced  
Shoulder Hackle: grizzly cock



#### **Caroline** (author's favorite)

Tail: golden pheasant red body feather  
Body: olive and fiery brown seal's fur, mixed half and half  
Body Hackles: fiery-brown and cree (ginger-grizzly) wound together and ribbed with fine oval gold tinsel  
Shoulder Hackle: grizzly cock



# Scarce Jewels: Haig-Brown Original Flies

By Art Lingren

The Clay house on this Thanksgiving day was crowded with visiting fly fishermen. October is the month that many make the journey north in pursuit of the legendary Kispiox monster steelhead and Bob and Kathy Clay had people from all around the globe enjoying the Thanksgiving dinner. When fly fishers gather the talk is always about things related to their favourite pastime.

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**A Steelhead Bee dressed in the mid-1950s by Rod Haig-Brown and given to Van Egan**

**Art Lingren photo**

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This evening the fly fishing subjects varied but eventually Roderick Haig-Brown became the topic. One of the younger fly fishers said that he had



some Haig-Brown dressed flies. I said, “oh, ya.” Haig-Brown original ties are very scarce items and every time someone has said they had Haig-Brown flies, upon examination they didn’t look to me as if they came from the hand of Haig-Brown. The young fly fisher said, “I have them in the car, I’ll go get them.” A few minutes later he opened his hand and showed me a couple of Steelhead Bees. The Steelhead Bee is Haig-Brown’s signature fly but as soon as I saw these samples I said these flies were not tied by Haig-Brown. He said, “but the lady who gave them to me was sure they were tied by Haig-Brown.” I said, “those flies may have been given her by Haig-Brown, but he didn’t tie them.” I am afraid that the proud owner of these supposed-to-be-tied-by-Haig-Brown

flies was a little disappointed and I could tell that he didn’t want to believe me.



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**A Steelhead Bee similar to the one showed me at Bob Clay’s house and not dressed in Haig-Brown’s fly-tying style**

**Art Lingren photo**

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Why was I so sure? Fly tiers often have distinctive

styles and the style of those sample ties was not Haig-Brown's. Van Egan was one of Rod Haig-Brown's closest friends. I thought he of all people must have some Haig-Brown flies. He didn't have many but he had one, a very early tie of Haig-Brown's Steelhead Bee. He also showed me another Steelhead Bee that Rod had given him. That Bee was dressed on a light wire Atlantic salmon dry fly hook with the wings set almost horizontal over the hook eye. The



Steelhead Bee. Fly tier: Roderick Haig-Brown.

to mid 1970's vintage.

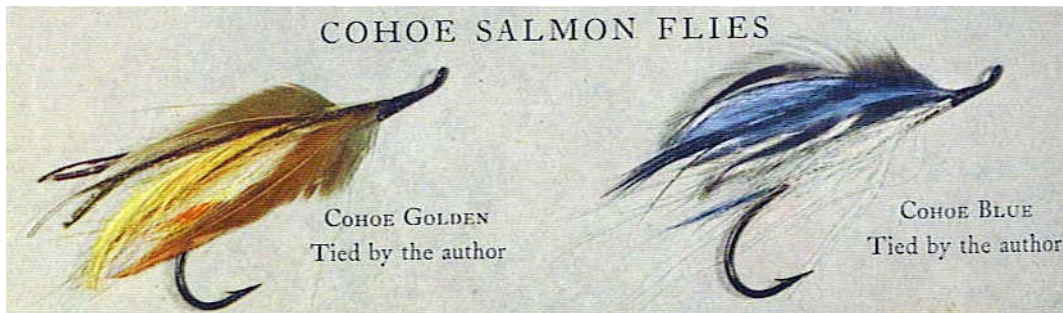
horizontal over the hook eye. The differences between the two Bees are quite striking. Van didn't know of any other person with Haig-Brown originals.

The only other sample of a Steelhead Bee that I could find is in Trey Combs' book *Steelhead Fly Fishing and Flies*. Combs' book was published in 1976 so that made his sample Haig-Brown Steelhead Bee early

In the early 1980s I purchased the limited Derrydale Press edition of Haig-Brown's *The Western Angler* (1939) and in that book there are colour pictures of eight flies dressed by Haig-Brown and as far as I know that book is the only reference books with samples of flies tied by him, other than the Steelhead Bee.







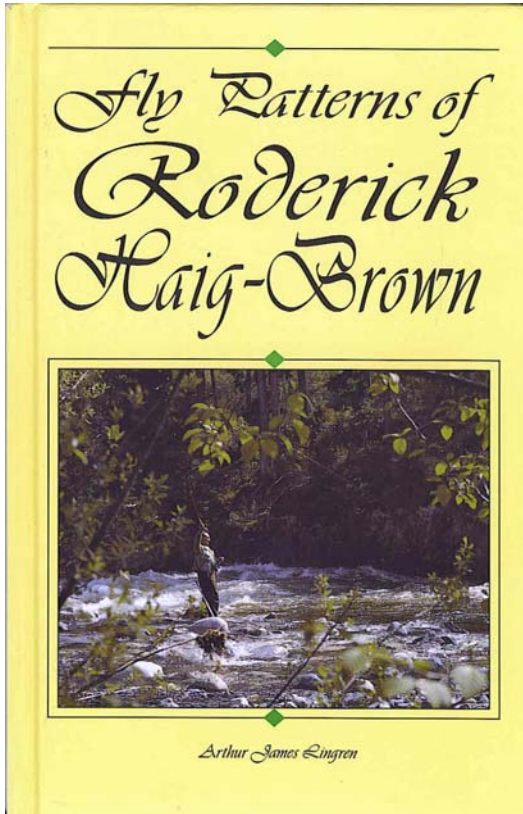
**The Silver Lady, The Silver Brown, Tinsel, Bullhead, Gammarus, Dark Caddis, Coho Golden and Coho Blue: Eight Haig-Brown dressed flies from *The Western Angler* (1939)**

I have been a Haig-Brown enthusiast for years but didn't meet him when he was alive. I did want to know more about him so in the early 1980s I made a trip to Campbell River. Ann Haig-Brown was still alive and living at Above Tide and I was allowed to go through the Haig-Brown fishing tackle collection. One of the things I was looking for were flies dressed by Haig-Brown. I didn't find one fly in all those boxes that looked as if it had been dressed by Haig-Brown. I was interested in the Haig-Brown patterns he developed and described in his many writings. In my early years as a Totem Fly Fisher I dressed a number of those Haig-Brown flies and with the help of a few Totem Haig-Brown enthusiasts we put together a short book called *Roderick Haig-Brown Patterns*. Note: The text of that book I later expanded and it was published by Amato Publication in 1993 as *Fly Patterns of Roderick Haig-Brown*. In 1984 I had fifteen copies printed of *Roderick Haig-Brown Patterns* bound with number one done in a special leather binding.



**The June 10, 1984 Presentation: left to right—Ann Haig-Brown, Art Lingren, Cal Woods, and Bob Van Egan photo**

On June 10, 1984 Bob Taylor, Cal Woods, Van Egan and I visited Ann Haig-Brown and presented her with a set of Art Lingren-dressed Roderick Haig-Brown flies and a mock up copy of the *Roderick Haig-Brown Patterns* book. (The book binder had not finished his binding of the book in time for the presentation.)



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The text of that book I later expanded and it was published by Amato Publication in 1993 as *Fly Patterns of Roderick Haig-Brown*.

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Rod Haig-Brown died in October 1976 and one of the last pieces Haig-Brown authored was a piece called "The Evolution of a Steelhead Fly" for the United Fly Tiers *Roundtable* magazine. Valerie Haig-Brown included that essay in *The Master and His Fish* (1981). About the Steelhead Bee, Haig-Brown writes:

*The fly that grew out of this extensive trial and error was the Steelhead Bee. It can be tied on a wide range of hook sizes, from No. 2 to No. 10, depending on the state of the water, but sizes 6 or 8 are usually about right.*

*Tail: Fox squirrel, quite bushy*

*Body: Equal sections dark brown, yellow and dark brown silk*

*Hackle: Natural brown, sparse*

*Wings: Fox squirrel, quite bushy, tied forward, divided and straightened back within about 10° of upright.*

It's unfortunate that Combs' Steelhead Bee isn't in colour but it shows Haig-Brown Bee style and both Egan's and Combs' Steelhead Bee are dressed on regular trout hooks with the wings set slightly forward. Haig-Brown developed the Steelhead Bee as a traditional dry fly. By that I mean the fly is cast upstream and allowed to drift naturally without drag. It was during the 1970s that dry flies cast down and fished across the current



causing the fly to throw a wake became popular and was referred to by many steelheaders as dry fly fishing. The term is used to this day but it is not Haig-Brown's dry fly fishing for steelhead and the Steelhead Bee dressing was altered with the wings set forward over the hook eye to make it wake better. Up until that time steelheaders dressed the Steelhead Bee as per Haig-Brown's specifications on regular trout hooks.



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**The modern-day  
Steelhead Bee with  
wings set forward over  
the eye**

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**Art Lingren photo**

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However, as the waked fly technique became more popular fly tiers

found that the Steelhead Bee waked better if the wings were set well forward over the hook eye and it was during this time that they started to dress the Steelhead Bee on Wilson Atlantic salmon dry fly hooks. The Steelhead Bee that I saw in the hands of that young fly fishers in Bob Clay's living room in October 2004 were dressed with the wings well forward and on Wilson Atlantic salmon dry fly hooks and not typical of Haig-Brown's style.

Many fly fishers especially the later generations think that Rod Haig-Brown, because he wrote so many books about fly fishing, was a prolific fly tyer. He wasn't. His own words describe his attitude about fly tying. In the 1976 *Roundtable* article "The Evolution of a Steelhead Fly" he writes:

*I am not myself a good or even enthusiastic fly tyer. I usually turn to the vice and feathers out of irritation, or puzzlement, though I sometimes have a bright idea that will not be denied. (p. 175, The Master and His Fish)*

Most of Haig-Brown's serious fly tying was back in the earlier part of his British Columbia fly fishing years. Through much of his life Haig-Brown was a very busy man. In addition to family, he was a prolific writer, a magistrate, a member of the Pacific Salmon Commission and chancellor of the University of Victoria and sought after speaker. Because he was a very busy man, he didn't fish much during his later years and certainly didn't spend much time at the fly tying bench as his own words tell in this 1970 letter to Jack Vincent.

2250 CAMPBELL RIVER ROAD  
CAMPBELL RIVER  
BRITISH COLUMBIA  
604-287-6646

May 1st, 1970

Mr. Jack Vincent,  
9851 124 A St.,  
Surrey, B. C.

Dear Mr. Vincent:

Thank you very much for your letter of April 24th and excellent fry imitation with the silver tinsel along the side. I haven't done much fly tying for a long while now but I am still not overly fond of a tied-down wing though I know they can get good results. Rather than plastic strips under the wing, I should now be experimenting with mylar which is a very useful material indeed, just as bright as tinsel but much more flexible and, if anything, tougher. Mylar used in fly wings should be 1/64" wide, if one can obtain it that way -- two strips of 1/64 for instance, are better than one strip of 1/32. Even if you tied it down I think mylar would be more satisfactory in this pattern than tinsel as used. I say this with great respect because Earl Anderson is a far better and more experienced tyer than I am.

I am sorry to say I seem to get very little time for fishing now but my enthusiasm burns as bright as ever when I do get out.

Sincerely,

*Rod. Haig-Brown*

Roderick Haig-Brown

RHB:rs



The tell tale phrase in that letter is “*I haven’t done much fly tying for a long while now . . .*”

I am an ardent fly tyer and have been for years. I have a room set aside for fly tying and dress quite a few flies in a year but that quantity of flies now is a lot less than when I first became enamoured with the craft. Haig-Brown was never an enthusiastic fly tyer and if you don’t tie much you certainly don’t give away the few flies you do create to strangers. Shortly before I put this piece together I asked Valerie Haig-Brown about her father’s fly tying. In a November 25, 2004 email she writes:

*I rarely saw my father tie flies, although he certainly tied a few now and then to meet immediate needs or when we bugged him to have a go, but the novelty wore off that soon when we discovered how tricky it was. There is a very posed picture of the four of us gathered around a tying setup, but that was purely fiction. As I have said before, fly-tying has only become such a huge deal in the past few decades and it is now nearly 30 years since my father died. And I doubt he would have joined the fun and games -- he had more serious matters on his mind. You will know from your own researches that he mainly tied simple flies to match the potential hatches as needed.*

*Best, Valerie*



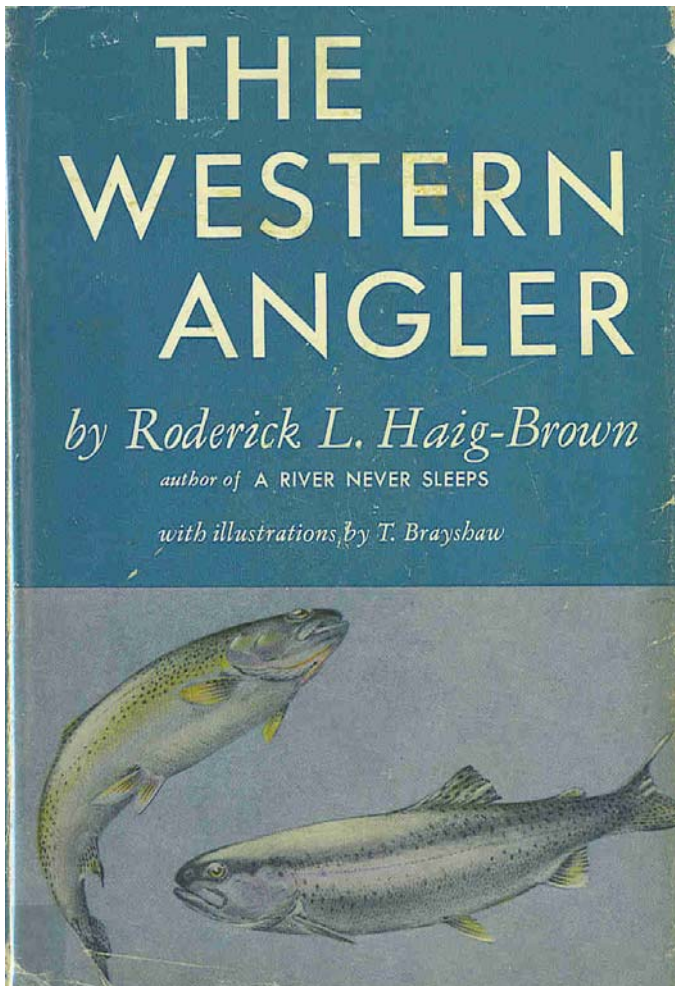
**Preston Jennings’ Lord Iris from Haig-Brown’s Noel Money Fly Box**

**Art Lingren photo**

Haig-Brown’s books made him one of the most well-know fly fishers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and one of the fruits of his labours was that fly tiers sent him flies. Preston Jennings in a March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1940 letter writes:

*For the past couple of years I have been playing with problems of light and vision, especially split or refracted light and have developed several streamer flies which are designed to suggest a minnow or other small fish as seen in terms of refracted light. The only pattern that has been thoroughly tested, worked so well for all manner of fish from Brook trout to Atlantic salmon, that I turned it over to Lyon and Coulson, of Buffalo, N.Y. to tie commercially. It is being marketed under the trade name of Iris No. 1 and I am enclosing a couple just in case you would like to try them on winter steelhead.*

Haig-Brown must have liked Jennings' flies because one month later Jennings in an April 30, 1940 letter writes:



*It was good to get your letter and find that you had been able to catch a few fish on the Iris Streamer.*

When the trade edition of *The Western Angler* was published in 1947, Haig-Brown had changed his mind about the prospect of fly fishers taking winter steelhead on the fly. Jennings' fly was one of the two he recommended for the job and on page 135 of that book Haig-Brown writes that "*The two flies that have caught me most fish have been Preston Jennings' Lord Iris, in sizes 2/0 to No. 2, and a Silver Grey, tied on 2/0 hooks.*"

In a January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943 letter Jennings writes, "*Under separate order I am sending you a few dry flies . . . .*"

If you search through the correspondence in the Haig-Brown files in the Special Collections at

the University of British Columbia you will find other documentation from fly tiers who sent Haig-Brown flies to try. Harry Darbee the famed Catskill fly tier for example when referring to his clipped deer hair bodied flies included a Haig-Brown testimonial in his book *Catskill Flytier* (1977).

*The flies with clipped deer-hair bodies were tremendously successful, often in rivers far from home. Their all-round capability brought us many friends and*



*considerable business. Roderick Haig-Brown wrote us of his experience on the Campbell River and several lakes in British Columbia:*

*Those big dry flies you gave me last year with the clipped deer-hair bodies are terrific. They were on two hook sizes, approximately #6 and #2, very light irons [then he describes the Rat-faced McDougall and Irresistible dressings]. I hope you will recognize the flies from these descriptions, because I should like to have a few more of them. Admittedly I've only lost one of the original six so far (in a heavy Kamloops spawner when the knot slipped) but I can foresee other such accidents during the current season. I have taken steelhead, cutthroat and Kamloops trout on them, and find they will move fish under the most difficult conditions on stream or lake. The other day, on Lac le Jeune [in 1956], in bright sun and a gusty wind at intervals, I rose and hooked some good big fish, including one very large one, when even the trollers were doing nothing. (p. 54)*

An underlying reason commercial fly tiers sent Haig-Brown flies was in the hope that he might give them a plug. Often he did as this testimonial to Darbee's dry flies given in *Fisherman's Summer* (1959) attests.

*I use them, especially some very beautiful ones tied with clipped deer-hair bodies by Harry and Elsie Darbee of Roscoe, N. Y. . . . (p.90)*

With flies being sent him by some of North America's finest tiers why would he go to the vice when Haig-Brown admits that he not a good or even enthusiastic fly tyer.

***Fly collecting has become a popular pastime in more recent years and my advice to collectors is to make sure you get something in writing from the fly tyer that authenticates the fly or flies in your collection.***

Haig-Brown did get asked for flies and I think he tried to oblige those request if he could. Preston Jennings closed his April 30, 1940 letter with a request for a Haig-Brown Silver Lady. Another 1972 letter from a Dr. S.B Smith asked for six each of Haig-Brown's favourite dry and wet flies for summer steelhead. Smith wanted to use Haig-Brown flies for an Atlantic salmon trip. A dozen flies is really expecting a lot. Haig-Brown sent him a few wet flies from his box—Blue Charms, Skunk—but advised him not to waste time on personal theories and to use and do what the locals were doing.

Fly collecting has become a popular pastime in more recent years and my advice to collectors is to make sure you get something in writing from the fly tyer that authenticates the fly or flies in your collection. Those few people who claim they have Haig-Brown originals can compare the style of dressing in their fly or flies to the Haig-Brown originals shown here. The proof is in the pudding and a letter or card authenticating the

fly's origin makes things absolute. Jack Vincent corresponded with Haig-Brown in 1956 about fry imitations and Haig-Brown writes:

*I enclose one of my favourite fry imitations, a streamer variation of the Silver Lady, which does work on sea-run cutthroat. The wing can be tied down on this, too, and I sometimes use dyed blue swan and teal in the wing (better, I think, on streams where spring and dog salmon fry predominate).*

Those two sentences in that letter authenticate that the fly Haig-Brown sent Vincent is an original.

In my search for Haig-Brown original flies back in the early 1980s one fly box was overlooked. Rod Haig-Brown had the deepest regard for General Noel Money of Qualicum Beach and he dedicated *The Western Angler* (1939) to the General. After the General died in May 1941, Mrs. Money gave Rod Haig-Brown the General's fly box.



**The General Money Fly Box owned by Haig-Brown for 35 years**

The box with N.M. engraved on the outside face remained in Rod's possession for 35 years. After Haig-Brown's death in October 1976, Ann Haig-Brown gave the box to Ted Pengelley. Ted worked for the General as his gillie during the last few years of the General's life, and Mrs. Money also gave Ted a number of fly fishing items belonging to the General after the General died. So when Rod died, Ann Haig-Haig Brown thought Ted should have the Money fly box because of that earlier association. A few years ago, Ted gave the box to me for safe keeping with some other things belonging to Money. One day I will find a suitable home for these historic BC fly fishing items.

During the years that Rod Haig-Brown had that box he used the flies in the box, replacing some of the empty clips with flies given him and I suspect flies dressed by Haig-Brown himself. Three flies in that box attracted my attention. One is a Preston Jennings' Lord Iris, one a salmon fry pattern, a variation of Haig-Brown Silver Lady with tell tale orange tail and wood duck wing enclosing a few strands of pale blue polar bear hair and another is a tie of General Money's Prawn Fly. Haig-Brown said in *Fisherman's Spring* (1951) that

*Every year, towards the end of the steelhead season, I tie up a dozen or so experimental fry imitations. I rarely make two of them exactly the same . . . .* (p. 26)

About the Silver Lady on page 32 of the same book he writes:

*So far as I can judge its essentials are the silver body and the wing that combines pale blue with some light barred feather such as teal, wood duck or light mallard. I usually add a badger hackle and a whole feather tail of pale pink or orange.*

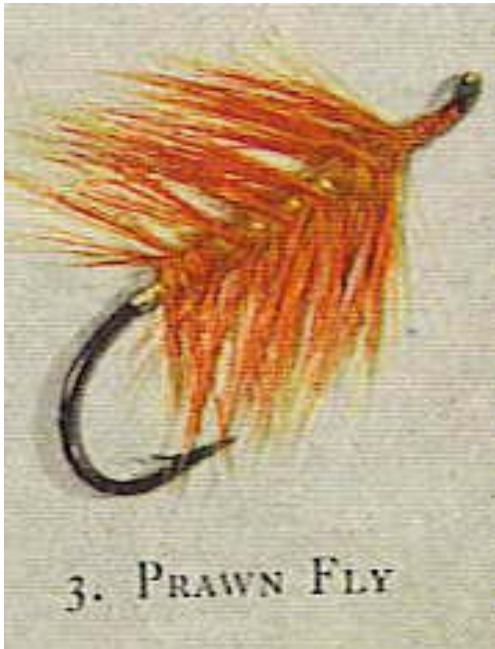


**Silver Lady Variant Found in the General Noel Money Fly Box**

**Art Lingren photo**

The style of the Silver Lady variant in Money's fly box is quite similar to Haig-Brown's. It has the essential Silver Lady ingredients and is most likely dressed by Haig-Brown. In the frontispiece of Volume II of *The Western Angler*, published in 1939, there is a Prawn Fly dressed by General Money. About Money's Prawn Fly, Haig-Brown, in "The Evolution of a Steelhead Fly" says that "*General Money also showed me his Prawn Fly which I found extremely good for winter fish.*"





The sample Prawn Fly in the box is quite different in style than the original Prawn Fly shown in *The Western Angler* and I suspect this Prawn Fly was dressed by Rod Haig-Brown.

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**From *The Western Angler* a General Noel Money Prawn Fly**

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**A Prawn Fly from the Money Fly Box dressed by Haig-Brown**  
**Art Lingren photo**

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As a final check I asked Jim Adams, a long-time antiquarian book and tackle dealer in California, whether he had ever come across any Haig-Brown original flies in his dealings. He said that he has never seen a Haig-Brown fly for sale and agreed that Haig-Brown original ties are scarce jewels indeed.

## Fly Tying

### **The Ultimate Chironomid By Hermann Fischer**

**Hook:** Size 10 to 20, Tiemco  
2457, 2x heavy

**Thread:** 8/0 black

**Body:** Clear liquid lace: for  
size 10 to 14 hooks use  
medium liquid lace and for 16  
to 20 use small

**Prowing:** Polypropylene or  
Swiss stork

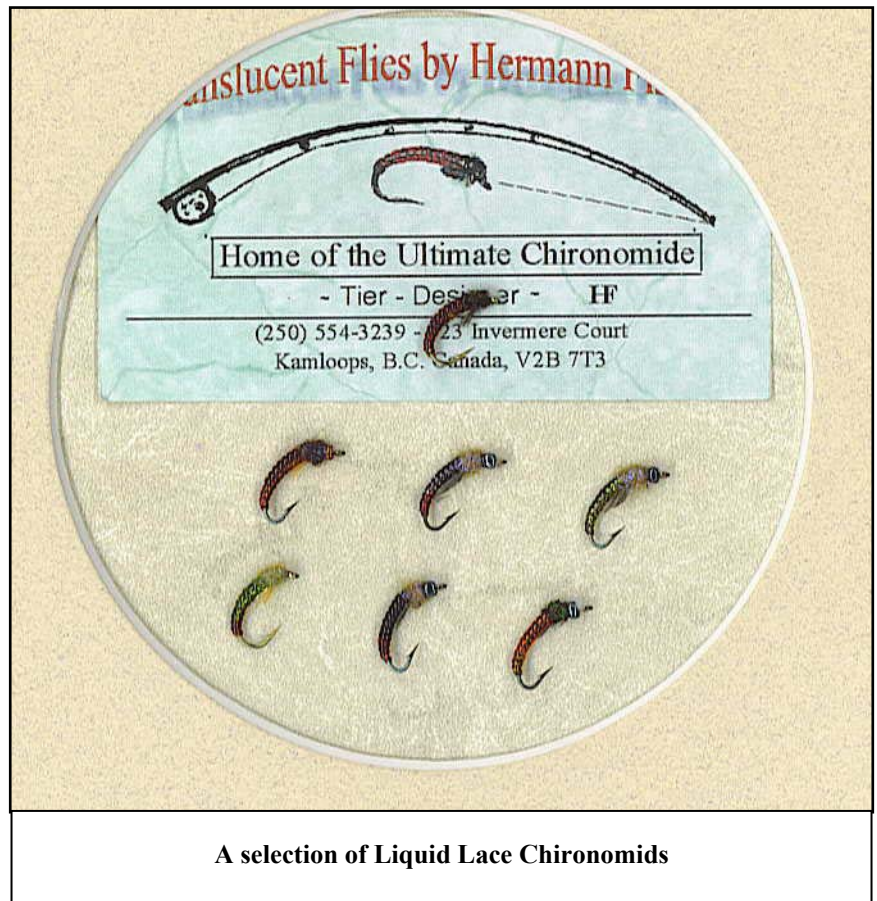
**Wincase:** Polypropylene,  
Swiss stork or 1-8" Stetch Flex

**Thorax:** Peacock herl or  
dubbing

**Gill:** White Uni-stretch or  
Antron

**Lead:** #15 or #20 soft

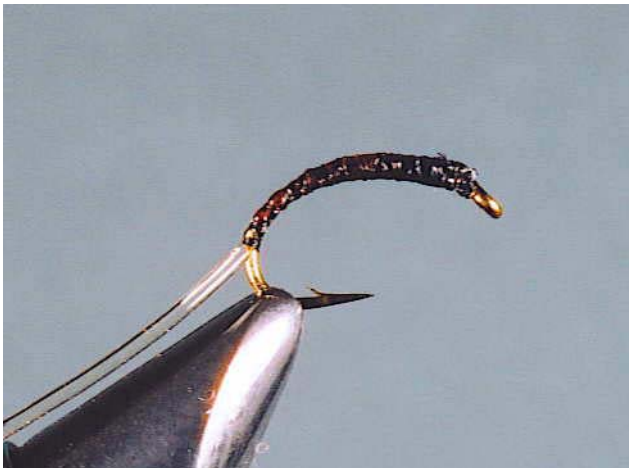
**Pantone Marker:** Opaque Red



**Step 1:** For a size 12 hook tie in on  
the top of the hook a piece of soft lead  
wire at the eye end of the hook.



**Step 2:** Using a razor blade or a cuticle cutter trim lead wire with the cut tapered towards the hook bend.



**Step 3:** Tie in a piece of medium clear liquid lace near the hook eye and bind to the shank to part way down the hook bend and then colour the body red with the Pantone Marker.



**Step 4:** Stretch the liquid lace and then take three turns up the shank, ease off and wrap forward. Tie in a prowing of polypropylene or Swiss stork.





**Step 5:** Trim prowing, add a thorax of peacock herl (4 or 5 turns), white Antron or Uni-stretch gill and a wing case of polypropylene, Swiss stork or 1/8" Stretchflex.



**Step 6:** Bring the wingcase back over the peacock thorax and trim the wingcase and gills and tie off thread and you have the finished fly.

Don't forget to pinch the bar and then you have the finish fly.

**Comments:** The Liquid Lace is filled with mineral oil using a hypodermic needle. When dressing Liquid Lace flies with lighter body colours use white or tan thread.

For information on Liquid Lace fly tying materials and flies see <http://www.liquidlace.com/> or <http://www.uniqueflyfishing.com/>

**Note:** The master fly tyer Hermann Fischer is a member of the Kamloops Fly Fishers and the 2003 recipient of the Jack Shaw Fly Tying Award.

## ***Excalibur***

*By Rob Brown*

*(This piece first appeared in Rob's The Skeena Angler column in The Terrace Standard newspaper.)*

My Traveling companions, Zoë the Greenville Terrier and Pawsome the Thornhill Retriever, sit up arrow straight in the front seat. They're antsy and badly in need of a pee after the long trip (excruciatingly long in canine time) from Terrace to Kispiox. Zoë has her paws on the dash; Pawsome has her nose pressed to the inside of the windscreen as we turn right at the sign announcing *River Watch Fly Rods* and start down the Clay's driveway, runner up in the worst driveway in the valley contest held two years ago at the Fifties Dance—a stomp *not* held to celebrate the Golden Age of Rock and Roll, but rather the fact that half a dozen valley denizens passed the half century mark that year.

As I bump and thump over the lumpy roadway, looking for all the world as if it has been shelled by heavy artillery recently, I wonder what the drive to the winner's house must be like.

Before Thanksgiving Day Labrador retrievers and turkeys led by a puffed up Tom are the welcoming committee to the Clay's spread. After that the labs alone perform the greeting chores: a black mob made up of Waker, the retired stud, Ripples and Flow (bitches both) and Ouzel, the lab hybrid found as a homeless pup on the steps of Wrinch Memorial Hospital on the cold winter day when the youngest Clay, Kaili, had to be checked in and out of the that institution after a kick in the head from one of the mules.

Pawsome and Zoë look out apprehensively at the squirming, tail-wagging, drooling, muscular, black canine mass pressing itself against the driver's side door of the pickup. I open the door and step out. Pawsome bounds out into the melee, dials up her Border collie genes and sprints off before the labs realize what's happened. Meanwhile Zoë, looking strikingly white and awfully puny next to the dark pack, refuses to leave the sanctuary of the cab. After a tug on her collar, she jumps down and, after a frenzy of sniffing, decides she belongs.

The Clay's three mules and a horse have clomped up to the fence rails to see what all the fuss is about. I weave through the dogs and look in the shop. There's nobody there, so I walk to the house, stopping momentarily to look down at the Home Pool, the upper part of the Upper Potato Patch. The river is high. The view is striking, ever changing and never tiring, the kind of view that chases away the yen to travel. Bob built his house so that most of the windows and all the large ones face the river. You can sit at his kitchen in the fall, sip coffee and watch steelheaders drift through the orange and yellow corridor; Bob can sit at his fly-tying bench on the bottom floor, glancing up to drink in the view while dressing flies.

I knock. Bob answers. I apologize for being later than I'd said I would be. Bob tells me there's no problem. It turns out he spent the time well—poured some cement for the foundation of a neighbour's prospective house and slaughtered a goose.

We walk to the shop. It's long and narrow inside. The walls are covered with pictures of fishers and fish against the russet backdrop of fading Kispiox forests. Above us, Bamboo culms that look like the handles of giant garden rakes are suspended ready to

be split, planed, shaved, scraped glued, baked, finished and lacquered. Against the wall stands a rack full of bamboo rods, some sold and waiting to be shipped, others wait to be cast by Bob and me.

Rods nowadays are built from the hydrocarbonated forests that stood before and when dinosaurs roamed the earth. Carbon fibres drawn from this fossilized fauna was the result of NASA's quest for a tough, lightweight material required for the race to space. Not long after the US won the race, commercial applications, like the fishing rod construction, were found.

Fibreglass, the previous lightweight rod building innovation was inspired by war technology. Cane from Tonkin, the preeminent rod material was a result of British colonization during that nation's Imperium. Before that, rods were made of cumbersome hardwoods like Greenheart. With imperial expansion came silk for clothes and fly lines, which were formerly made of horse hair along with exotic plumage, which soon festooned salmon flies, and that wonderful stuff called bamboo, light and resilient, ideal for tuning up recalcitrant schoolboys and for casting flies.

Panda bears are not bears; they are raccoons. Bamboo, the pandas' favourite food, is not a wood but a grass. And the Brits, a nation with a long angling tradition embraced the tough grass, especially after some long forgotten genius discovered that by splitting the stuff into six laths and gluing them into a hexagonal shape, a rod maker could create an exceedingly strong rod blank and the foundation of a rod building tradition that continues to this day.

Bob Clay is one of the craftsmen carrying on that tradition. The bamboo rod, he says, is a work in progress. It is stronger than graphite and casts as well or better than one made of plastic. To this end he is experimenting with hollowing, splices, different tapers and different geometric shapes.

It can be argued that some graphite have appealing actions. I have a twenty year old Hardy "De-Luxe" built on a J. Kennedy Fisher carbon fibre blank. It is a very soothing pole to cast, but when compared to a good cane rod, it lacks something. You can write a letter to a friend with a Bic pen, but it's not the same as writing it with a Mont Blanc fountain pen.

We cast Bob's new rods. Bob's son, Jed, arrives and gives them a go. Kateri, the middle Clay girl, drives up and is soon casting the new six-weight rod her dad has built for her. Two foresters arrive and spend their lunch hour watching. Wes, the forester with the fishing bug, tries one of the rods.

When the session is over, I tell Bob his rods are fine, better than any I've cast. Thanks, he says, but I'm not there yet. I'm still looking for Excalibur.

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From The Vancouver Sun, 1957

# Rod, Reel Action Slow, But News Flowing Fast

by PETE BROOMHALL

Mid-week rod and reel action slowed to a crawl. But the wacky world of fishing spun crazily with news of proposed regulation changes, data on deadliness of fish-roe bait and a cut-back in steelhead smolt liberations.

Low water levels have been blamed for lack of effort and poor catches on local steelhead streams while low temperatures seemingly discouraged sea fishermen.

\* \* \*

But, while anglers may take poor fishing philosophically, not all will react so calmly to other issues.

Among PROPOSED B.C. sport fishing regulation changes this writer endorses, but not likely to receive 100 per cent sportsman support, are:

The closure of **Cheekye River** (Squamish district) and its tributaries.

That no person shall use more than one line when angling.

\* \* \*

That no person shall take, in one day, more than two game fish over 20 inches, except in the Northern District, where the daily limit is three.

That the daily bag limit or salmon (king and coho) in non-tidal waters be set at two over 20 inches and six under 20 inches with the aggregate not to exceed six.

That the minimum size limit for salmon in non-tidal waters be raised to eight inches from six inches.

\* \* \*

The proposed amendments were made public recently in a circular issued from the **Fish and Game Branch** to sportsmen clubs.

The Fish Branch's December summary, a separate report, told of a 50 per cent loss to the 20,000 11-inch steelhead smolts at Cultas Lake hatchery.

The fish were killed by water supply difficulties during a flash flood nearly two months ago.

The surviving 10,000 smolts, progeny of Cap steelhead, will be liberated in the Capilano this spring. Scheduled experimental plantings to **Coquitlam** and **Vedder rivers** have been cancelled.

Also contained in the summary was a mention of a steelhead investigation program carried out on **Morice River**, a **Skeena River** tributary.

\* \* \*

**Charlie Lyons**, the Fish Branch's **Northern District regional biologist** and an expert steelheader, made the survey Nov. 25. It included testing effectiveness of lures and fish roe.

Included in his report was the following data:

"We (Lyons and one companion) observed how deadly roe can be. A run was fished unsuccessfully for 30 minutes by teaspoon and crocodile then fresh roe baits were prepared. It seemed almost every cast with roe produced a strike or a fish. Some dozen fish were landed in short order and I believe many more could have been taken.

"I sincerely believe a number of roe fishermen could seriously deplete a steelhead run and thus make fishing more difficult for the artificial user.

\* \* \*

"A roe ban certainly is effective in distributing the

available fish over a larger segment of the fishing population."

All "kindergarten bait" proponents should remember the foregoing report was written by a SCIENTIST.

When asked for comment on the controversial topic of whether or not roe should be banned province-wide.

**The Department of Recreation's chief fishery biologist Bob McMynn said:**

\* \* \*

"Personally, I'm for banning roe throughout the province. But, although I am not alone in this, it is not the opinion of the Fish Branch at this time.

"I think that today, sport fish biologists have a greater responsibility than merely assuring a maximum harvest. They should consider the means of that harvest. In that regard, rules of the game are paramount."

There can be little doubt that those words will endear Mr. McMynn in the eyes of all thinking anglers.

\* \* \*

