

THE ANGLING REPORT

Hardy reel sang all the appropriate hymns. There is nothing so exciting as the song of a Hardy reel when powered by a fish.

The other hot spot was at the ocean. We flew over some low hills, landed on a lake and hiked down to its outlet. There was a small waterfall at the outlet maybe two feet high, and the fish stacked behind it like cattle in the Chicago stockyards. The char there could have jumped the falls but chose not to do so. In an hour or so the tide would come in and they could swim over without any effort. Their laziness made for a fish on every cast. I have no idea of how many fish I caught. Perhaps 50 from seven to 15 pounds, with much bigger fish hooked but which usually got away by running around a rock. No matter; next cast I hooked another. I recall a river in Alaska where I caught and landed 22 char in one day, seven on consecutive casts. This was better, much better.

All of the fishing here is by fly fishing only and with barbless hooks. All the fish were good fighters, although I don't think they jump enough. The largest fish I caught was a 37-incher taken in the saltwater of Ungava Bay. I fished with a 15-foot Spey rod I was testing for the first time. I am sure an experienced fly fisherman could achieve equal or better results with a single-handed rod. Casts beyond 80 or 90 feet are seldom necessary.

I should point out that Lagacé never gave me any fishing advice. In fact, he watched me fishing all wrong the first day, when we walked to some nearby fishing. He never said a word. Most guides give me far too much advice. I was fishing as you would for Atlantic salmon or steelhead, using a slow retrieve with an occasional twitch. That was all wrong. You must let the fly sink briefly, then retrieve with fast jerks of about 12 to 15 inches. Char will not hit a slow-moving fly. Monte instructed me on the correct manner to fish.

Some other noteworthy observa-

tions: During my stay, there were a number of university students in camp at the time doing geological research. They were evaluating the prospects of finding uranium in the area. I would hate to think what will happen to the fishing if the mining companies move into the area. As for that crashed plane, a salvage crew flew in the day after the accident and had the wreckage ashore and dismantled in a few hours.

So would I go back? Don't really know. On the plus side, the fishing was excellent. But there are lots of minuses. First, the weather. I got about four days of fishing instead of the six I paid for; however, this can happen in any remote location, as my visits to Alaska can attest. So, maybe I shouldn't condemn the trip for that.



The long distance is another minus, but all my fishing hotspots are far away. Then there's the cost of \$6,200. That's rich, but not prohibitive. I don't have many years left, so cost shouldn't count. It will depend on whether I can find a better spot. Lastly, I almost forgot to mention the blackflies. I wore a headnet under a hooded jacket and rubber bands on my wrists and they still got me. Deet does not deter them either. All of that said, when the memory of those flies has faded next year and all I recall is the scream of my old Hardy reel, I probably will go back.

If you look at a map of the area, you will see rivers with no names. Your eyes should light up. This is a wilderness area, and the lack of names means that no one lives there, not even in a native settlement. My kind

of country. Even the fishing camp is not permanent. It's built on raised supports and can be erased if necessary. — *John Baskin.*

(Postscript: Fly-out trips for arctic char fishing are available here August 8 through September 15 only. A five-night trip for the 2008 season runs \$5,990; six nights are \$7,024. Packages include air transportation from Montreal to Kuujuaq and Barnoin camp; daily flyouts; guiding; lodging; and meals. Additional costs include federal and provincial taxes, airline taxes and fishing permits. Lagacé only takes two or three anglers per week throughout the six-week season. In 2008, incidentally, he says that he will provide full guiding services, including help with fly selection and technique. Subscribers interested in learning more about this trip may contact Baskin by e-mail at Jonbaskin@netzero.net.)

DATELINE: IDAHO

Free Fishing Report This Overnight Float Is A Real Winner

(Editor Note: We recently sent subscriber Michael Miller on a FREE Fishing trip to check out the overnight floattrip offered by WorldCast Anglers on the South Fork of the Snake River. All Miller had to do in return was share the following detailed account of his trip. See box on page 6 for more details about our FREE Fishing Program.)

I was thrilled when *The Angling Report* selected me as angler correspondent for a FREE Fishing Trip offered by WorldCast Anglers on the South Fork of Idaho's Snake River. The trip was for a two-day float with an overnight stay in what was billed as a safari-style luxury tent camp. I spent numerous weeks last summer fishing Alaska from safari-style camps and rustic outposts, so I felt qualified to review this trip and was anxious to experience WorldCast Anglers' "South Fork Hilton" Camp. Considering Vice President Dick Cheney is a perennial client for this

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trip, how bad could it be?

A fishing buddy and I met up with one of WorldCast Anglers' owners, Mike Dawes, this past July in south-eastern Idaho, close to the Wyoming

border. This is where the South Fork flows from the 20-mile-long Palisades Reservoir, forming a 64-mile stretch of legendary fly fishing tailwater. At 2,000 to 3,000 trout per mile, it's

considered one of the most productive rivers in the country. Stocking was discontinued over 20 years ago, but more than a decade of protective regulations by Idaho Fish and Game

□ Form, Function and Folly

Trends At The Recent Fly Fishing Retailer Show

By Hugh Gardner

(Editor Note: The 2007 Fly Fishing Retailer show was held at the Denver Convention Center this past September. Long-time correspondent Hugh Gardner lives in the nearby foothills, so we commissioned him to do a special report on the latest fly fishing industry trends and buzz. His usual column covering choice western destinations will resume next month.)

■ It's been a while since I bothered to go to the annual Fly Fishing Retailer show (FFR) show in Denver, even though it's convenient for me. I guess I figured that if there was anything truly new in the way of fly fishing tools, I didn't urgently need to know about it, compared to spending the same time actually fishing.

Boy, was I wrong! Amidst all the glitz, glamour, and hype presented by some 240 exhibitors, it wasn't hard to see that some important changes have taken place in the last few years. A couple of these are true breakthroughs; most are positive or at least benign; and one, in particular, is downright unfortunate and ugly.

Boots and Waders: The most obvious trend is the growth of studded boots for trout fishing in fast, slippery, Rocky Mountain rivers. I've never used them, but many friends swear by them, and now all wading boot-makers have their own models. Design and materials vary widely, from removable sheet-metal screws to recessed titanium alloy implants. My own choice for the ideal wading boot would be the new Riverwalker from Patagonia, also available in studded felt-soled models. This is a state-of-the-art boot, no doubt, but titanium-studded felt soles is not the reason I'd buy them. These boots offer a revolutionary third option, a "sticky rubber" sole similar to climbing shoes (a Patagonia specialty). Their proprietary formula is molded into a knobby "star-tread" pattern, like an off-road tire. Patagonia claims it offers "the highest traction and durability for surprisingly positive grip on slick, sandy, rocky bottom(s)," and in addition, "is mud-shedding and will not ice up when the mercury plunges."

Patagonia does not seem to grasp fully what they have here. If "sticky rubber" technology pans out for wading boots, this would be a tremendous breakthrough in preventing the spread of destructive invasive species such as the parasite that causes whirling disease, New Zealand mussels, and most recently, a diatom called *Didymosphenia* (a.k.a. "Didymo" for short), which is spreading algae-like blooms of "rock snot" throughout the region

(more on this in a later issue). The prime vector for these invasions to our mountain trout streams – let's face it – has been felt-soled wading boots. And cleaning these perfect habitats for hitch-hiking invaders with high heat or chemicals just isn't happening enough to make a difference. If "sticky rubber" wading boots work out well enough to replace felt soles, this could be the biggest breakthrough yet in controlling small invasive organisms threatening trout.

As for waders, I didn't look too deeply, but my general impression is that they just keep getting better, and that overseas manufacturing has led to healthy price competition and improvements in consumer value. There are now several models made especially for women, and Hodgman claims to have finally solved the leakage problem with zippered flies (we'll see). Simms also stands behind their zippered model and warranties against leaks.

Reels: I haven't paid much attention to reels for a while, since my set of trusty old Abels is as good as any reels ever need to be, but here too it's clear that value for the money is steadily improving. Smaller companies like Galvan and Islander are delivering low-priced, high-performance reels better than those costing twice as much 10 years ago. On the high end, the most noticeable trend is a surge of competition from European manufacturers, particularly in big-game reels. Previously, the FFR has been pretty much an All-American show. This year, there were exhibitors from Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway and South Africa, showing big-game reels every bit the equal, if not better, than those made here.

Lines: Again, I didn't look too deeply into the latest in lines and leaders; I'm normally content with whatever my local shop recommends. Rio made a big splash at FFR with its new ultra-slick lines, but not having tried them, it's not clear if the splash was for true performance improvement or just the fact that this small Idaho company is now owned and backed by Sage. Friends in the know say Jim Teeny lines are still the best, newly-fashionable sinking tips included. Woven leaders are catching on, though expensive, for their proven success in international competition.

Nets: Another breakthrough with rubber, besides wading boots, is its use in a new generation of landing nets, rapidly replacing traditional string or nylon net bags. Fisknat, out of Tacoma Washington, appears to be on the leading edge. By universal consensus, rubber bags are much less likely to

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and catch-and-release policies by local outfitters have made this a first class fishery. The predominant trout are wild native cutthroats (Yellowstone and Snake River strains), but

big browns, rainbows and hybrid cutbows also exist.

We fished the 26-mile canyon section of the South Fork. This canyon, unlike others, is fairly wide across

and on a gentle gradient, so pocket water, rapids and waterfalls do not exist. Most of this portion of the river is accessible by boat only, as roads are found only at either end. Also, rap-

injure fish or snag flies. At FFR, traditional netmaker Brodin introduced its proprietary "ghost" variation, using translucent (clear) rubber, instead of black, to reduce "net-spooking" - which has cost many a trophy fish.

Rods: The most refreshing trend in the fly rod category is that even while high-end rods get lighter and costlier, perfectly good rods equaling the best rods of 10 years ago are now available in all imaginable sizes and styles for \$150 to \$300. American companies like St. Croix and Redington (now owned by Sage) have long produced great rods for the money. Other US firms, such as Wright & McGill (with its Essentials series) and Albright (whose designer/owner Jim Murphy founded Redington), now have full high-low lines averaging in this price range.

There was considerable buzz at the show about "obscene" markups on cheap Chinese-made rods selling at 6 or 8, or even 10, times cost. The chief culprit seems to be the now-ubiquitous lifetime replacement warranty, and the huge costs of advertising/PR designed to make us want the latest stylish but pointless fad. Why am I reminded of the blind Detroit carmakers in the 1980s (which led to Toyota's eventual dominance)?

The most discouraging fly rod trend I saw at the show is the head-long rush to ever greater lightness for its own sake, shaving off yet another half-ounce for no good reason at all, except as a marketing ploy to the gullible - as if what good rods are about is some kind of technoid space race to "zero-gravity" casting. A good rod, Lefty Kreh once told me, is one that balances well with your reel and line, and allows you to place your fly exactly where you are looking with one back or roll cast. According to casting guru Mel Krieger, casting a good rod should be "essentially effortless - the rod should do the work for you - and false-casting is seldom necessary." By these or any other performance standards, I think the "industry-leading" rush to light rods is heading in the wrong direction, and counter-productive for the sport.

I'm no expert on high-modulus graphite or stress-coefficients, but I do understand elementary physics. The rod, using the power of your shoulder, arm and wrist against the weight of your line, is your lever. The lighter the lever, given the same weight of line, the lighter its inertia and the more human power it takes to load. As rods approach the vanishing point, you have to work harder and make more casts to accomplish the same results of a fractionally heavier rod with proper neurokinesthetics. Translated, this means getting reliable feedback from your lever to your

brain through your rod hand, enabling you to intuitively throw where you're looking without thinking.

There comes a point, and I think the Orvis "Zero Gravity Helios" may have reached it, where "lightness" as a marketing edge crosses over from trivial to dysfunctional. Why on earth would you want a hard-to-balance weightless rod demanding more false-casting which wears you out sooner? Which, by the way, with such super-thin tubular construction, readily breaks? Which costs so much more in good part because it will probably fail, and have to be replaced "free of charge"?

Finally, a note or two on what I perceived to be a resurgence of interest in traditional "production" (meaning inexpensive) bamboo fly rods. In my dad's day, this meant post-war broomsticks like Montague, about \$6.95 at Sears. In the 1950s and 1960s, high-quality, medium-priced production rods (made by small American outfits like Granger, Payne and Phillipson) flared brightly for a while but disappeared by 1972 (destroyed by then leading-edge fiberglass competition), and are now collectors items.

Big rod companies like Orvis and Winston have offered expensive (\$2-3K) bamboo models all along, but now good Chinese imitations are selling for \$500. New entrants like Highland Mills (which inherited Phillipson's designs) and T.L. Johnson (formerly Fish Creek) offer American-finished rods with a custom flair for \$600 to \$800. Even true custom rods - made by one master craftsman like Mike Clark from start to finish to your personal specs - are now available from other good US craftsmen (typically retired hobbyists) for \$1,000, according to my favorite bamboo fly rod consultant, Trout Bum legend John Gierach, a personal friend of Clark's.

"There's always been a lot of interest in bamboo rods," he says, "because they're a big part of our sport's traditional roots." Gierach says he always takes a quality bamboo as his lead rod, and a "cheap but reliable" Elkhorn graphite (generic and direct from China to Greeley, CO) as his back-up rod. "If there is a 'resurgence of interest' in bamboo rods, I think it's because the average guy can now get a good one for \$1,000 or less, and doesn't have to be afraid to actually fish it, Gierach says."

My message to the leading manufacturers of fly rods: Forget this "lightness" mania and get back to delivering products with integrity that young people can afford - or else put your own future at risk. After all, this is basically a simple sport that started out with horse hair, bird feathers, and willow shoots. - *Hugh Gardner*.

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idly fluctuating water flows make conventional river-bank wading unsafe in this river, as gravel bars can give way to the swift water. The only safe way to wadefish the South Fork is from drift boats anchored at its many mid-stream riffles.

Diversion of water flows for crop irrigation places heavy burdens on rivers used for recreational fishing throughout the West, and the South Fork is no different. Water flow dropped 1,000 cubic feet per second the night before we arrived. At 11,000 CFS, there was still lots of water at that time of year, but flows in the

South Fork diminish throughout the summer to irrigate local crops, such as



potatoes. Anglers should keep that in mind when planning a trip there.

Also, drifting this section of the South Fork can be tricky, requiring a trained boat handler and knowledge of the river. Guides must know the location of water diversion canals to avoid unfriendly currents and possible boat damage.

We launched our drift boat the first day before 8 am. Just 100 feet from the put-in, I connected with a nice 16-inch brown on a dropper nymph. We fished riffles in ankle- to knee-deep water from about 11 am to 3 pm and netted half a dozen fish each, mostly cutthroats. Drifting size 16 cripple Pale Morning Duns (PMDs) over the shallows to adjacent drop-offs proved very productive. Dawes' sharp eyes easily spotted large fish on the shelf's edge or in the upstream riffle. He watched for drag-free presentations, offering suggestions and fresh patterns when needed. As the afternoon sun moved overhead, good presentation had to be matched with progressively thinner tippets and smaller flies.

A PMD hatch wound down at 3 pm, and we finally broke for lunch. We spent the rest of the afternoon and early evening floating again, casting over drop-offs and in seams Dawes knew held fish with heavier 3X tippet and large foam bugs. Finishing up our last riffle, I lost a nice 20-inch cutthroat right at the boat. It didn't matter, though, as the day's catch was over 20 fish between the two of us.

WorldCast Anglers is the only licensed outfitter permitted to maintain a tent camp in the canyon stretch. That gives them the unique ability to get clients on the lower half of this stretch and into prime fishing areas early in the day before anyone else who may be floating the river. Our second day, we were out of camp and on the water at the mid-way point of the canyon stretch by 8:30 am. We drifted downstream prospecting tight to the banks with hopper/nymph combinations until 10 am. Unfortunately, action was very slow this second morning, but Dawes anchored at a 100-yard-long riffle with a deep adja-

Want To Go Fishing Free?

All About Our Free-Fishing Program

■ *The Angling Report* has always valued feedback from its subscribers. And the reasons are clear. For one thing, *Angling Report* subscribers are some of the world's most experienced fishermen. Hence their judgments about places are broad-based and sound. On top of that, most subscribers' insights on trips have a refreshingly candid air about them. That's because they are written from a point of view that no other publication embodies — namely, the paying client.

So, here's the deal. We have begun to encourage lodge owners, guides and others to offer us FREE visits to their facilities with the understanding we will turn these invitations over to *Angling Report* subscribers who convince us they are capable of writing useful and accurate reports on what they experience. At this point, more than 30 subscribers have been invited on FREE fishing trips here in the US or to places such as Argentina, Christmas Island, Brazil and Mexico. The total value of all that travel is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. And the good news is, more and more outfitters are offering us FREE trips in return for reviews.

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(*Postscript:* Online Extra subscribers now also get invited to review top-quality fishing tackle and then keep it. See our web site for details.)

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cent drop-off and predicted the fish would soon migrate up to the shelf and then into the shallow riffle water, eating Pale Morning Duns as they went. As if on cue, the hatch started at noontime and the fish showed up to feed. We were perfectly positioned for non-stop action. Tandem nymphing, using a size 18 split-case PMD and a small PMD nymph on the dropper, proved very productive. The cutthroats were plentiful, and I took a dozen fish, mostly on nymphs but several on dries.

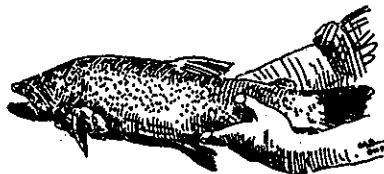
We finished the final few hours picking up quite a few more browns and cutthroats on casts just inches from the bank. I netted a 15-inch rainbow, clinching the South Fork's "Super Grand Slam," which means I managed to land all four of the South Fork's species - a native cutthroat, a brown, a rainbow and a cutbow. Dawes spotted a cutbow he estimated at 22 inches and that proved too fussy for us to hook. A similar-sized brown had also risen to my partner's hopper offering the day before. Much bigger fish are possible here, as the Idaho state record brown trout is a fish caught in the South Fork weighing over 26 pounds.

Unlike most other tailwaters, the South Fork produces some incredible stonefly hatches, including the giant salmon fly. The big salmon flies usually start to emerge on the lower river about the first of July. The hatch moves upstream, a few miles a day, and reaches the Palisades Dam by mid-July. The salmon fly hatch had stopped days before our arrival, but fish were still keyed on to their two- to three-inch size and yellow color.

We fished with six-weight rods and used a four-weight for wading riffles and casting smaller, size 16-18 flies. All the rods were rigged and ready, stored in rod holders underneath the oars on the boat's side. We managed to break a rod moving about the boat. Thankfully, Dawes keeps several back-up rigs available just in case. Be aware that the driftboat requires anglers to remain seated.

Thankfully, seats were comfortable swivel backs. I thought casting this way would be awkward, but I quickly adapted. I found fishing from the stern less desirable than the bow because the leader or tippet could easily ensnare the motor or prop.

So, what about WorldCast's "South Fork Hilton" Camp? I must say it ranks as one of the best I've ever experienced. I've stayed in many river camps during a summer in Alaska and six trips to New Zealand. WorldCast's camp is comfortable, accommodating a maximum of eight anglers, four guides and one cook. It's set back from the water, hidden by pine trees and the river canyon wall to ensure privacy. The canvas tents are spacious enough for two and feature sturdy, firm cots. Nice touches



I've not seen at other camps include bedside mineral water; wash cloths and jugs of hot and cold water at the outside wash basin and a spring-fed rock-lined holding pool to keep beverages cool. Hand sanitizer gel and bug spray were strategically placed throughout the camp, even though bugs were minimal. Dinner featured big western steaks, sides and desert, along with wine (red and white) and pre-dinner appetizers. Morning coffee accompanied French toast, bacon and fresh fruit. Lunch was sandwiches, pasta salad and fresh pineapple. Portions were adequate.

As for Mike Dawes, he knows this river intimately, is an experienced fly fisherman who can really spot trout well and also a skilled boatman. Dawes' family has deep roots in the world of fly fishing, as his grandfa-

ther helped found Deep Water Cay Bonefishing Club in the late 50s. With instructors like his grandfather and his dad making sure he got a fast start in angling, he's been immersed in the sport since age five. His passion is split between chasing permit in salt water and trout in fresh.

Would my fishing partner and I go back to the South Fork with WorldCast Anglers? We both enthusiastically agreed we would. This is a great float for fathers and sons/daughters or husbands and wives. It's competitively priced at \$1,400 for two full days of fishing for two anglers, meals and accommodations. As usual, licenses and gratuities are extra. One unique aspect about floating this part of the South Fork is the flexibility it offers to accommodate all types of fishing, from nonstop drift boat fishing to full days of casting to fish in the river's many riffles. Overnighting midway means you get more fishing time because there's no travel time to and from your lodging.

The fish on the South Fork are plentiful, wild and not easily spooked. My fishing buddy and I netted over 40 fish between us on the trip. Most were cutthroats, in the 12- to 18-inch range, but we also found browns and cutbows with the occasional pure rainbow.

Majestic canyon scenery and wildlife make this wilderness experience come alive. The South Fork runs through a lush and scenic continuous cottonwood forest, the largest in the state and abounding with great blue herons, moose, Canadian geese and even the occasional mountain lion. It is also one of the largest bald eagle habitats in the lower 48 states. This trip is truly a getaway adventure, similar in look and feel to Alaska or New Zealand. But it doesn't require extensive traveling and can be done in our own country's backyard. - *Michael D. Miller.*

(*Postscript:* Interested anglers can contact WorldCast Anglers at 800-654-0676; or visit their web site at www.worldcastanglers.com)