

Valley Angler

The Andro, One More Time

by Bill Thompson

Recently Nate Hill had been enticing me with stories of big fish in the lower Androscoggin River near Gorham. Those who read this column are well aware that I love to fish the Androscoggin in the Thirteen Mile Woods section from the Errol Dam down to the Pontook Dam. In my haste to get up to Errol I drive right past what is perhaps one of the best wild fisheries in New Hampshire. I have fished this section on many occasions in the past, but there is just something about Thirteen Mile Woods that keeps me coming back. At the urging of Nate I agreed to give the lower section a try.

Nate and I met up with our good friend Rob Upton at Kringle's in Jackson at nine in the morning last Sunday. When I got there Nate and Rob were waiting for me in the parking lot. Nate was inside ordering a breakfast sandwich and a sub to go. Had I been thinking I would have done the same, apparently I was not fully awake yet. Nate rode with me and chowed down on the breakfast sandwich as we headed up through Pinkham Notch. The delicious aroma, from the sandwich, nearly drove me crazy.

The idea was to check out an area of the river where Nate had been catching some big rainbows and also explore a couple of new spots where none of us had tried before. One of the reasons that I usually fish north of Gorham is my misconception that this portion of the river is in a rather urban area. I had forgotten how pretty the Androscoggin is in this section. In some places you are reminded of some of the rivers out west. The trees had already begun to show some color and the ledges that line the far bank are spectacular. Throw in a blue sky with a few wispy white clouds and you have got something.

The morning was kind of slow for all of us, but it was particularly slow for me. Nate managed a nice rainbow on a stone fly nymph as well as a few fallfish. Rob did well fishing with an Elk Hair Caddis and caught a few brook trout. As for myself, I went fish-less. Around one in the afternoon we called a halt and decided to try somewhere else. Unfortunately Rob had to leave us and we bid him a safe trip home.

Nate and I headed into Gorham in search of better water. Nate got out his Kringle's sub that he had purchased that morning while I was forced to buy an inferior sub at a chain shop. We stopped and ate our subs at a conveniently located picnic table.

Our next stop on the river proved to be most productive. We fished a small riffle and Nate was into a nice rainbow right off the bat. Nate headed up river a ways and I continued to fish the riffle. I worked my way up a little when I noticed a flash of a fish rising. At the same time I noticed a few small may flies drifting down the river drying their wings before becoming airborne. I reasoned that they might be Blue Wing Olives, but don't hold me to that. They could just as well have been any number of other species of small dun colored may fly. In any event I changed my fly to a compara-dun tied to resemble a BWO and within seconds I had my first trout of the day. Apparently the trout didn't know the difference and cared even less if the fly was a BWO or a PMD.

I generally like to start out slow and finish with a big bang. The day did start slow, but in the end it proved to be a very good day. I caught a few more in the same riffle and then moved down stream

where Nate joined me. For the next few hours we took turns hooking and releasing numerous wild rainbows. First one of us would have the hot hand and then the other. I think that the largest I caught was just about 15 inches, although I might argue that he was bigger, however Nate seems to be of the opinion that he was 15. During the afternoon we both lost trout that surely would have been larger.

I took a couple of breaks from the action and set on a soft rock while watching Nate. The trout seemed to go from taking the dry fly to the emerger. After a while I couldn't stand it any longer and went up river from Nate. I had been fishing the emerger, but just before the light of the day started to go I tied on the dry fly. For the next forty-five minutes or so I caught one trout after another stopping only to dress the fly. Nate was soon next to me and was having the same problem I was keeping fish off of my fly.

As soon as it turned dark the trout seemed to lose interest and stopped rising. Nate decided to change his fly one more time and see if a big fly would work. Nate had the luxury of having a head lamp and younger brighter eyes than mine so I headed back to the truck.

When we had parked the truck we had parked in an empty parking lot of a church. When I returned to the truck I was surprised to find that the parking lot was full of cars and that a service was in progress. I sure hope that I didn't take the reverend's parking spot. Nate soon joined me and we changed out of our waders serenaded by hymns. The scene reminded me of the opening line of "A River Runs Through It": "In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing". I am not sure that many pastors would agree with me and would no doubt be of mind that attending church would be a far better way of being closer to God than fishing, but most fly fishers find that a day on a river may be just as spiritual and may even be a religious experience in its own right.

See you on the river.