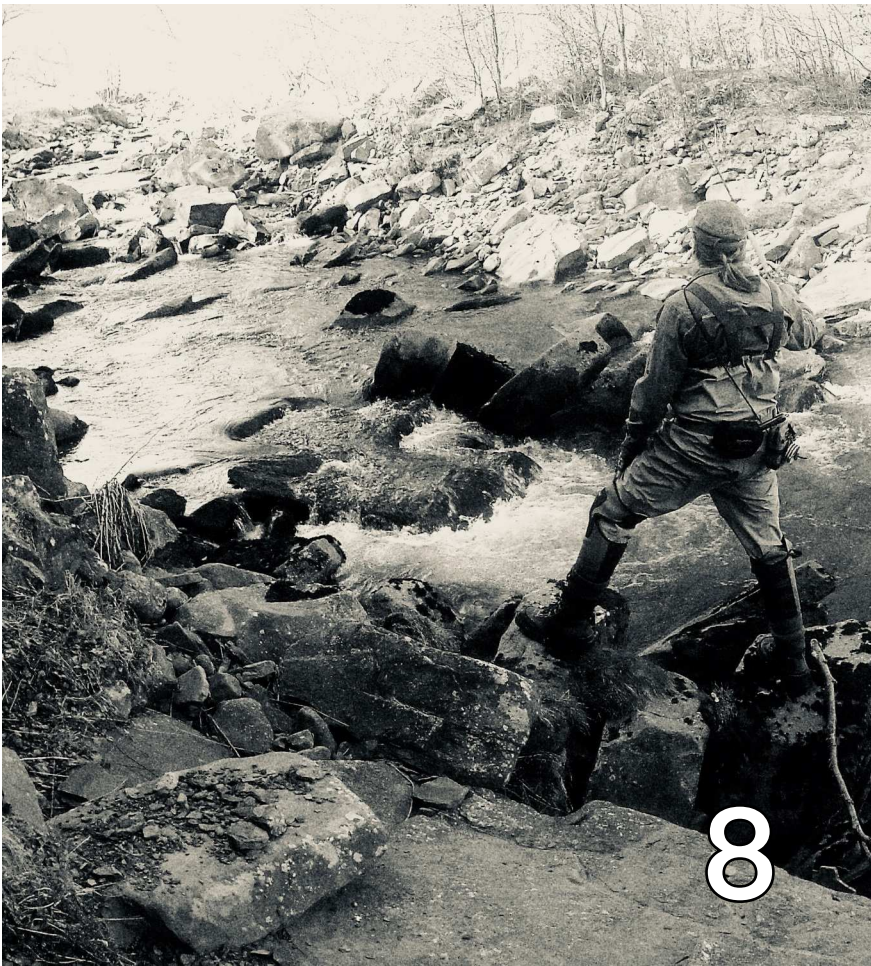


# TENIKARA ANGLER

Spring 2020  
[tenkaraangler.com](http://tenkaraangler.com)



# TENKARA ANGLER

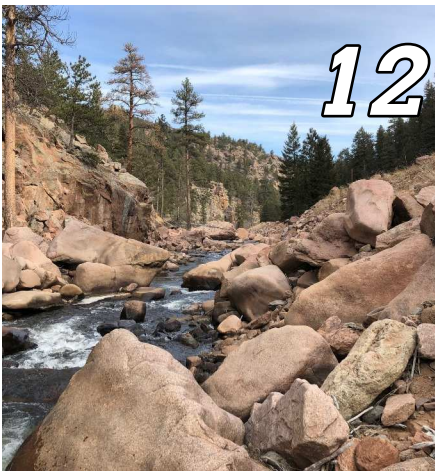
## SPRING 2020

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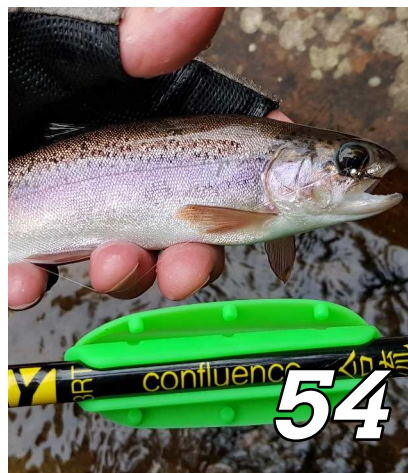
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*Back Cover: Michael Agneta*  
*Logo Design: Nick Cobler*



*Photo: Nick Pavlovski*



# ***From The Editor***

## ***It's time for a change around here..***

Wow, that COVID-19 threw us all a curveball, now didn't it? I hope this issue of Tenkara Angler provides you with a little fishing entertainment, even if you're not allowed to access your favorite body of water at the moment.

With that, I'd like to announce, or perhaps tease, some significant changes coming to Tenkara Angler magazine's future format.

First off, while it seemed to be generally well received by the tenkara community, this experiment in digital (and ancillary print) magazines seems to have run its course. Crowd-sourced article submissions have become fewer and far between over the course of the last few deadlines and putting together a quarterly magazine of quality content has become a struggle. It's not unexpected, this "free content" model doesn't really create a revenue stream, so I haven't been able to properly incentivize authors or photographers for their work, other than providing an additional venue for exposure.

Second, and closer to home, I don't particularly like the way the articles end up being represented once I add them to the page flipping, [online "Issuu" magazine](#). I've found that formats such as Issuu aren't the

easiest way to consume digital content, especially as more people are using mobile devices. The layouts are difficult to read on small screens, search engines such as Google don't do a great job recognizing their existence, and they don't handle multimedia (such as video) well. And let's be honest, the on-demand nature of the physical print magazines was expensive and as such they were overpriced. The end in-hand magazine looked great, I just never sold many at a \$20ish price point. What's the saying, "the juice wasn't worth the squeeze?"

So what does that mean? It means that you are likely reading the last quarterly issue of Tenkara Angler magazine as you know it. While I may still create the occasional online "flip magazine" on Issuu or physical printed magazine, I'm planning on utilizing [tenkaraangler.com](https://tenkaraangler.com) as the primary hub for presenting curated tenkara articles, (and hopefully continued reader-submitted essays, stories, and photography) moving forward.

I want to make it clear, the original premise has not changed, I still want to help publish our collective community's story, and this shift should make them more easily indexed and "shareable", ultimately helping

them find an even wider audience than they do today. The first step being adding the wealth of information held in all previously printed articles to the website over the next few weeks.

In addition, it's also going to allow for new "things"... including a website refresh featuring more functionality, regularly published articles and essays, expanded video features, possibly some interactive tools (think gear reviews and shopping guides), and perhaps some experimental concepts such as hosted video conferencing, tutorials, or even a podcast. It may also allow me to add some additional folks to the Tenkara Angler team in an official capacity, each with their own views on fixed-line fly fishing.

In the end, my hope is that these

upcoming changes create a more robust and consistent source of content for the tenkara and fixed-line fly fishing community. It's an extremely passionate and creative group that I absolutely love being a part of and promoting; one that I cannot even begin to thank enough for all of the over the top support to date. I'm excited about pushing Tenkara Angler into the future and sincerely hope you continue to enjoy both contributing and consuming its content moving forward.

**Michael Agneta**  
**Editor In Chief**

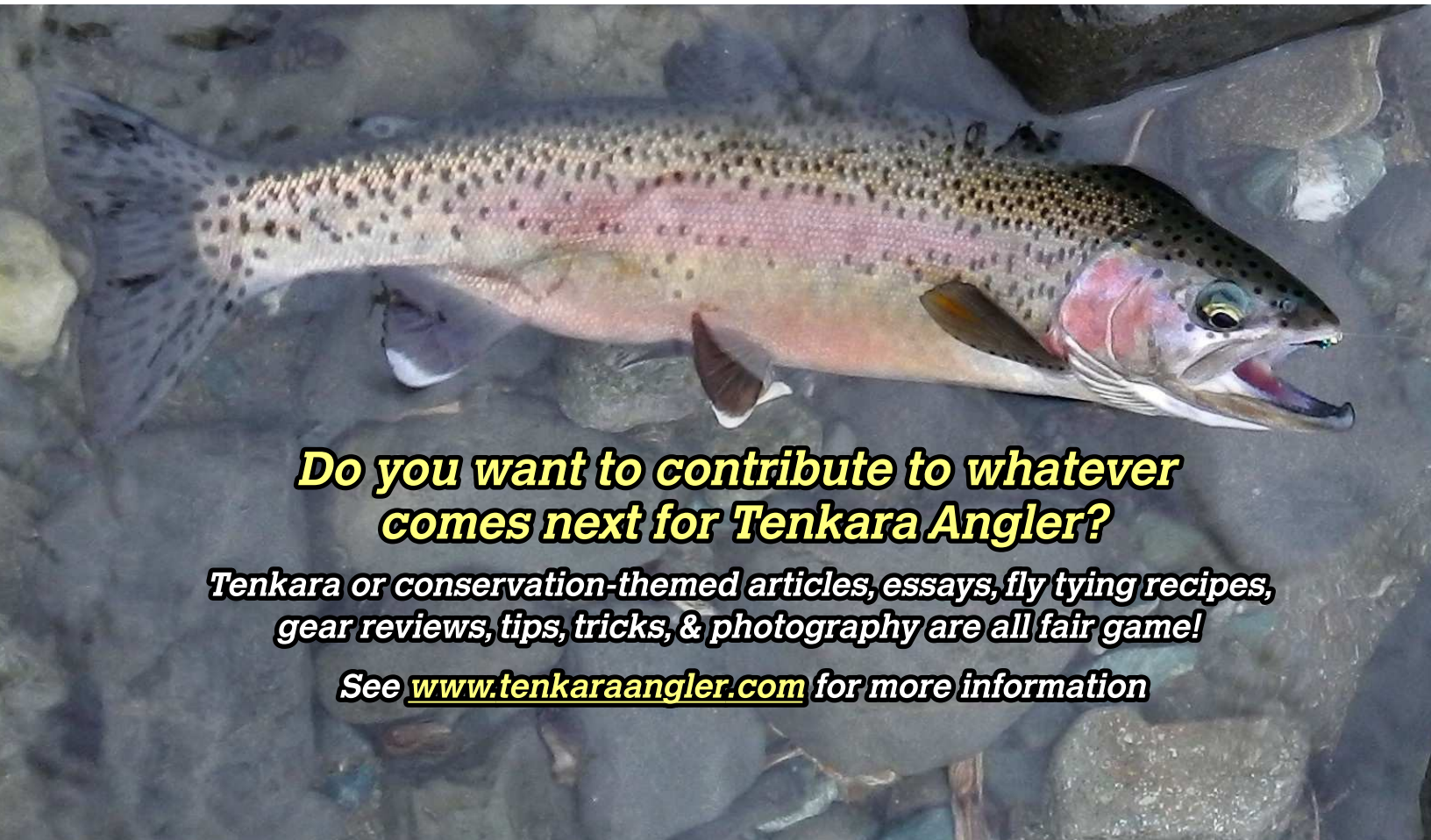


[tenkaraangler.com](http://tenkaraangler.com)

***Do you want to contribute to whatever comes next for Tenkara Angler?***

***Tenkara or conservation-themed articles, essays, fly tying recipes, gear reviews, tips, tricks, & photography are all fair game!***

***See [www.tenkaraangler.com](http://www.tenkaraangler.com) for more information***



# **In the Heart of Strathcona Park**

**by Rory E. Glennie**



**Strathcona Provincial Park on Vancouver Island, British Columbia was officially proclaimed in 1911. To date, this area largely remains a true wilderness setting. BC Highway 28 bisects the park to join the East side of the Island at Campbell River to the West side of the Island at Gold River. This narrow, two-lane strip of asphalt offers a portal to the beating heart of Strathcona Provincial Park and traces its life's blood arteries. It is in those arteries tenkara fly fishers seek their quarry.**

## **Springtime Rainbows**

**Triggered by the springtime release of melt water from the surrounding snowy mountaintops -- which raises the river level enough to give enough depth over the spawning gravel and a sense of overhead security to the migrating trout -- the rainbows appear en masse. This gold rush of lake resident Rainbow trout traditionally takes place between about mid-May and Father's Day in June.**

As you might imagine, the early runs of rainbows have purposes for being there other than feeding. Like their sea going steelhead cousins, these landlocked trout enter the stream for procreation. Groups of from a dozen to fifty or so will hold near the heads of runs or spread throughout the quickest riffles. Average size of these rainbows is about twelve inches long. Only rarely will any of these trout extend past the fifteen-inch mark.

Even so, they are quite territorially aggressive and will feed on occasion. A deep drifted nymph like a Killer Bug or a fry imitation swung through the holding areas will often elicit a solid strike. As well, on a good day, a high riding hair wing dry fly may pique their interest enough to commit a surface take. Curiously enough, in contrast with many noted rainbow trout stream fisheries elsewhere, a single-egg fly pattern is often less effective in drawing a positive response from these fish than is a buggy or fishy looking fly. Then,

seemingly as suddenly as they appeared, these early rainbows retreat back to their home lakes to live on the largesse of foodstuffs available there.

In conjunction with the early season melt-water, riffle and run rainbow fishery, there is the curious habit of a few large cutthroat trout taking up residence in the deeper pools. Curious because these fish do not show up in the catch of the early-running rainbows. They figure into the catch later, typically mid-July to early October, when trout fry are abundant and the largesse of summer's insect bounty is at its peak. These few large cutthroat -- living out seemingly solitary lives in the deeper pools and canyon waters -- become aggressive feeders. They stay in the stream until freshets from fall rains boost the low summer flows enough to coax these fish into emigrating safely back to the lake. There they over-winter, since the balance of the year the food base is inadequate to support actively feeding adult fish.



*Sunny day rainbow*

## Cutthroats are Simple Creatures

Do not get that confused with “easy to catch”, although, sometimes they do give that impression. Fortunately for us fly fishers, cutthroat trout are akin to eating machines. Rarely are they not hungry or willing to at least chase down a morsel to cram into their gullet. Lucky for us too is they like to sample from the buffet and seldom get locked into chomping down one kind of food item.

If your fly is a rough approximation of food you will usually get an initial response. After that, you may have to fine tune your offering and presentation to trigger a solid take. Then again, you could probably throw a black woolly bugger at them and be done with it, but there is some fun in the challenge an occasional picky trout offers.

Nor are cutthroats stupid creatures. You blundering around in the water will make them wary. Having a couple of their compatriots thrashing the pool as they dance on your line will also put them down. The same station they use to wait in ambush for food may well become a secure sanctuary to hide from you. When wading is necessary practice stealth, otherwise stay out of the water. Play the fish quickly, away from the feeding area to minimize disturbance.

### Wood is Good

Cutthroat trout love wood. More specifically, woody debris in the water.

Logs, root wads, a jumble of sticks or low overhanging branches touching the surface all offer possible holds for cutthroats.

Cutthroats will sidle up to the wood, hang close beneath it, park in the upstream water cushion, or hover in the downstream back eddy. As long as the flowing conveyor belt of food is near enough for a fast grab they will be there. They will be there too, after a fright has sent them for cover. They just won't be interested in taking your offering until enough time has passed to make them comfortable again. That could be a while, so go on to other venues and quietly return after your former intrusion has been forgotten.

Woody debris is renowned for eating flies. If you are not tickling the bark or clipping the stick-outs occasionally then you are not fishing close enough to interest many cutthroats. Loosing flies to snags is part of the game. A wood pile or tree branch well decorated with someone's flies is one area you can be sure is worthy of further study.

### On Your Way

Without giving exact details on where to go or naming creeks, the foregoing should be enough to whet your exploratory tenkara appetite for a Vancouver Island adventure. Getting there and finding some wilderness waters to discover at your own speed is the allure. The fish, as they say, are a bonus.





*Woody debris pool*



*Vancouver Island  
native cutthroat trout*



## **Nana korobi ya oki** *by David West Beale*

### **七転び八起き**

**Nana korobi ya oki - fall down seven times, stand up eight.**

**In these days of challenge, we find out who we really are.**

My rivers were flooded out and un-fishable for the most part all winter and fall. For this and for other reasons that warrant no place in an angling journal, I have never yearned for spring so badly. Yet here we all are, in different stages of different versions of an indeterminate 'lockdown'.

The version of lockdown we are in *here* says that we can't go fishing at all. For most that would be the least of worries, while for others it feels like a profound spiritual dislocation. We can try to deal with this by distraction - I've cleaned my rods and checked my tippet caddy (*again*), tied many flies

(*too many*), read and re-read the tenkara sources (*illuminating*) and I've browsed the online tenkara stores (*dangerous*).

Which is all good. Which is all enjoyable. But actually, *fishing tenkara*, it is not. So, at least for the foreseeable future, my tenkara trips will be journeys of the mind - made from re-living the highlights of my fishing diary and borrowed from fragments of memory laying around in my chaotic tenkara mind-movie archive.

So, for those, who like me, can't now fish tenkara in their favorite places - I thought I'd share a few entries from last summer...

#### *May 2019 - upland headwater*

*As we watch, the fly skips and flutters in the air just above the surface of the water...* It touches down onto the surface film, pausing momentarily before lifting off and flying back across the pool. On the edge of the current, the fly drops onto the water again, lifting and re-settling in a hopping motion, perhaps laying eggs into the stream.

Exhausted now, it's stuck in the film, lacking the strength to lift off again, and the fly's struggles to get airborne send little concentric ripples radiating out across the water. The fly is dead center now of a bull's eye of its own making, and as we watch, a trout hurtles up from the depths to snatch it down. In one last Herculean effort the fly manages to rise from the water, but

the trout propels upwards like a little torpedo and intercepts the fly in midair, a few inches above the water, turning with its prize in a flash of bronze and butter. But all is not quite as it seems, for the fly is a kebari and it's attached, tippet to line to tenkara rod, and after a spirited fight the trout comes quickly to hand. In this little stream it's a good fish too and probably King of the Pool. I'm dead chuffed.

This is my first visit to this particular headwater, and I'm here today with John Pearson. The lively upstream breeze this morning is a gift from the Gods. And though some anglers may think that the blustery conditions would wreck tenkara, we just can't believe our luck. It's a chance to fish aerial presentations to the trout - a whole added dimension to surface fishing...

#### *June 2019 - lowland river*

*This moment was inevitable, and my heart is in my mouth...* The fly lands just ahead of the fish, off to one side. A tail twitch but *no take* and I'm wondering if the crimson hothead is too much today as the fly swiftly drifts back towards me, unmolested. But for some reason the fish turns at the last second, pursuing the kebari downstream, jaws open, hunting it down, hooking itself, I can't miss. A good fish, a couple of pounds and the first proper test of the horsehair line and of the bamboo rod now bucking in my grip. There is no time to wonder now if either are up to the job, as the

fish pulls strongly towards the snags. Rod over to the side, parallel to the water, turn the fish, another run, same again then rod held high, get the fishes head up, tire it quickly. Fish in the net, breathe, sense of relief then a realization that my fishing system of bamboo & horsehair was never really challenged at all. Evolved, tried, tested and used for generations by those who know.

So it works, surprisingly well, and thinking about that last statement, there shouldn't really be any surprise at all. But there is more. While I'm not sure if this system will enable me to do more or *different* things on stream (though time alone will tell on that) there is another dimension to the experience of fishing with bamboo and horsehair, in that it *feels* different, both physically and metaphysically..

### *July 2019 - chalkstream*

*A dazzling glare on the water serves to disguise me from the grayling pod finning about downstream.* I'm drifting my stiff hackle kebari down the feeding lane, letting it pause at the end of the drift, pulling it back and feeding the kebari down again on a new line. An emphatic take as a grayling turns on the fly and it's on - careering and a leaping, twisting and turning on the end of the line as only grayling can. Adrenalin spikes as hours of zero convert to hero in a few seconds. I'm happy how the bamboo rod absorbs the lunges, cushions the horsehair line and tippet. I bring the grayling to the net twice but it's strong and not yet a

ready. A good trout and a much bigger grayling have followed it in towards the net, out of curiosity I guess, fading back again as my fish makes another run.

I'm fishing a line longer than the rod and I'm hand lining the grayling into the net now, keen to show my friend. He's never seen a grayling before and I'm keen to inspire him with this Narnian-looking fish. But the grayling twists right at the net and wins just enough slack that the hook drops free.

I'm happy enough though. Maybe I did rush it a bit but I'm not a fan of playing a good fish to a standstill, particularly in such hot weather.

A second cast and this time a really walloping take off the top, I fancy from the big grayling that just followed my last one in. A long broad back and sail-like fin breach the surface as the fish rolls, easily my biggest grayling to date - by any method, but that image is short lived. The rod thumps round, cane flexing into its fighting curve, side strain applied with rod held over... the big fish kites for a second just under the surface and across the flow and... *twang!*.. the fly pings skyward back towards me and all is quiet and still again...

### *August 2019 - lowland river*

*There is no breeze and the flat calm surface is like glass, so that any slight movement scares the little fish, causing them to dart this way and that.* No place for false casts or flies stuck

in branches. Each cast must be placed, fly only, in the feeding lane tight to the woodwork. I'm using a small drab brown jun kebari I tied up a few days ago, and I'm keen to try it here because I think a subtle fly is called for. It gets hit by a tiny chub on my first cast, and I quickly draw the fish out from the shoal and release it.

Today I don't want a numbers game, just a big fish, and crazy little chublets careering about the pool with my kebari will put my fish down. So short drifts, show them the fly to work up some interest amongst the smaller fish, but lift off and recast before a take. Hopefully the little commotion I'm causing will seem enough like a feeding frenzy to tempt the bigger fish out to investigate.

Perhaps it's more luck today than judgment, but it works. A dark shape fins out sideways from the shadow, a white flash as a mouth opens where I think my submerged kebari drifts. My heart skips a beat, but my hand flicks the rod up without thought, the rod bounces, not a casting stick but a shock absorber now.

I shan't tell of all the fight because it would feel too much like writing fishing-porn, but powerful lunges and runs and tangles in branches all feature. So does an even bigger chub that emerges from deep within the shade to learn what all the fuss is about. But despite the drama my fish does come safely to hand, so big and beautiful and brassy is he, and right back on the feeding station he goes, soon after release. *It's such a perfect day after all...*

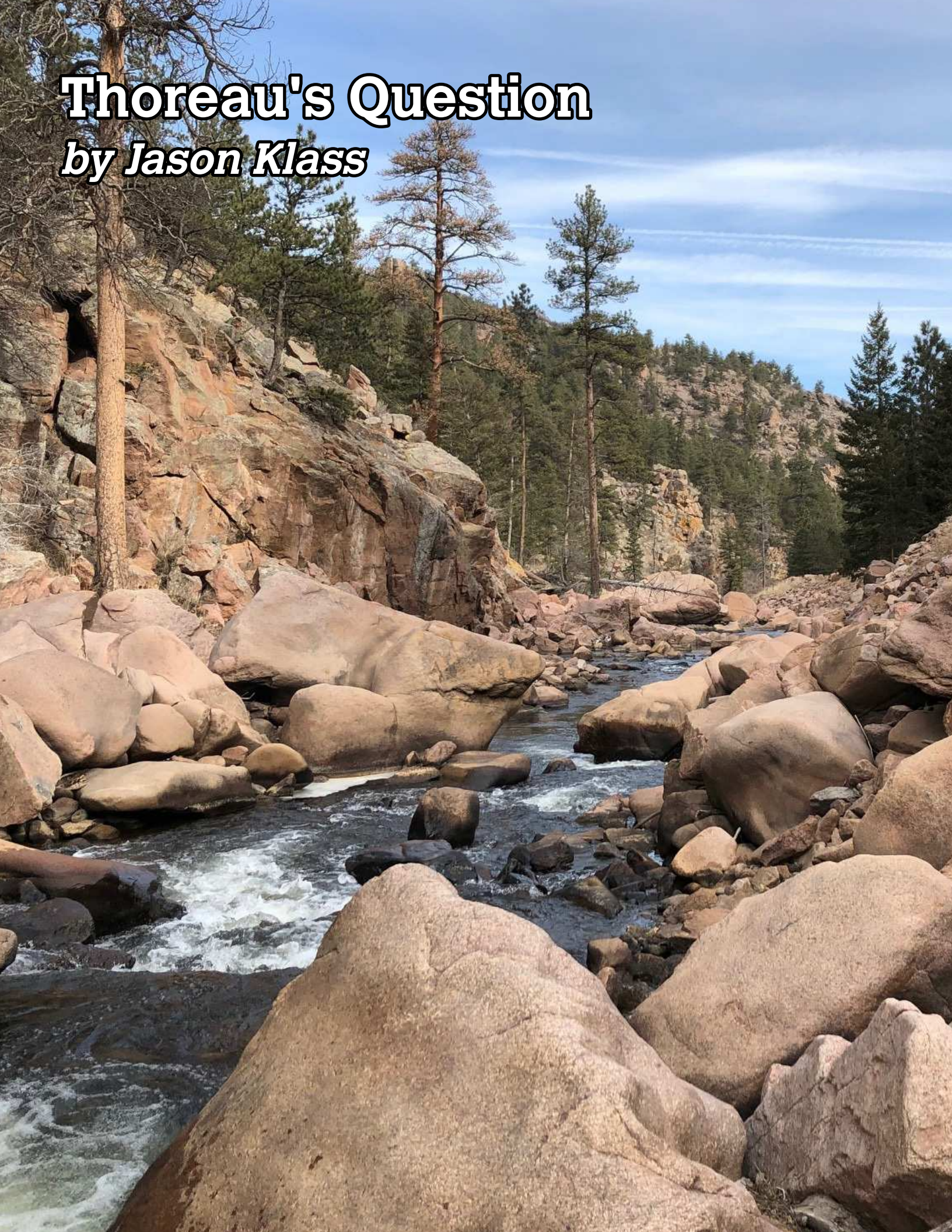
Though only last summer, these adventures now seem to belong to another time, another life even, and I wonder how well they might fit in to an uncertain future. But it occurs to me too, reading through these entries again, that so much of fishing is looking forward while looking back. It's just that right now we are having to look forward much further than we are accustomed. But the good times will come back, and though we may be knocked off our stride, knocked down even, we'll get back up.

Although the rocks may be slippery - nana korobi ya oki.



# Thoreau's Question

*by Jason Klass*



Henry David Thoreau said, “Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.” As a novice angler, my goal was to catch as many fish as possible. After all, it’s called “fishing”. Numbers measured my success and fishless days were considered “failures”—something to be rectified the next outing. But decades into my angling life, I have pondered Thoreau’s quote many times.

Today, I no longer care about how many fish I catch nor their size. I don’t feel the competitive need for “bragging rights” among other anglers. I don’t care about trophies or hero shots. So then, what exactly is it that I’m after?

If you’ve read Thoreau’s *Walden*, then you’re familiar with his philosophies on solitude and simplicity. 166 years ago, he audaciously did what many of us secretly want to do today: dropped out of society to live a simple life in the woods, away from the bustling, masturbatory business of society.

While many of us can’t simply “drop out” of modern life because we have obligations to our families or otherwise, I wonder if going fishing is our mini version of Thoreau’s sabbatical. Maybe we can’t disappear into the woods, seclude ourselves in a rustic cabin, gather and fish our food, or fall asleep fireside every night, but we can get our brief respites on the river from time to time. And maybe that’s what we’re ultimately “after”.

I know the answer to the question will be different for everyone, but for me, it’s unequivocally “solitude”. I now consider a successful day on the water when I haven’t seen another soul and have just absorbed the wilderness around me. The Japanese call it *shinrin-yoku*, or “forest bathing”. I just call it “fishing”.

It’s the witnessing of nature without being spoiled by human contrivance. An escape from the noise of traffic, construction, music, and idle chatter. Away from all of these things, one finally has a chance to be present in the quietness of nature. A chance to shed the poison of modern life for a moment and just “be” without expectation or complication. To me, fishing is a form of meditation—as legitimate and sacred as anything monks in remote Tibetan monasteries do. There are many paths to presence, and standing in a river waving a stick has been more efficacious for me than sitting on a cushion for hours.

When I return from the water, someone will ask me, “did you catch anything”. I’ll reply that I did. And the inevitable follow-up is, “how many”. “I don’t know” is typically my answer because, honestly, I don’t count anymore. I could tell you details about the deer I saw crossing the stream, the colors of the wildflowers, or the stonefly I watched crawl onto a rock and hatch before my eyes. But, ironically, the assumed “goal” of the sport, in its very name, is a side note to me. And that tells me the reason I’m there. “Fishing” is just the excuse.



## **If the Fish Don't Care, Then Neither Do I** *by Matt Sment*

I'd like to tell you it was some sort of plan, or that it came to me in a dream, or that I had an experiment in mind. The truth is simply that I had a pile of random flies and the luxury of time to fish them. In 2019, I spent six months on the road living out of my minivan while traveling the US. The trip included Wisconsin's Driftless region, Great Smoky Mountain National Park in Appalachia, Rocky Mountain National Park and North central Colorado, Utah's Provo river and amazing southern canyon land,

southwest Colorado's Grand Mesa region, and California's Yosemite, King's Canyon, and Sequoia National Parks.

Regretfully, circumstances kept me from visiting the Pacific Northwest or bouncing back to Appalachia in the fall as I intended, but I sure got around for a while. I learned a lot along the way, sharpening my tenkara rod fishing skills and adapting to new conditions as I traveled. As it turns out, I had almost completely overlooked



preparing for the trip when it came to stocking flies. But that turned out to be a good thing, because I noticed a definite theme as I shifted from place to place – the fish didn't seem to care what fly I tied on, and I was able to produce reasonable success with just about any pattern on any water – so long as I focused on a few principles.

First, while your dedicated “match the hatch” angler could fill a dozen boxes just stocking themselves up with a single region's pattern's, filling rows and rows with natural imitations in various sizes in colors, that's never been my speed. I've never been much of a match the hatch angler, instead choosing to focus on targeting specific places and depths where trout are looking for food. This “hone the zone” approach focuses more on the idea that “*something*” that looks like food placed where a hungry trout is looking for food will trigger a strike. It's not science, but it's an approach that's worked better for me than any attempt I've made to match hatches.

Second, to put that fly in “The Zone” you must deliver it into position and control its behavior. After the cast, the laws of physics dictate that there are only a certain number of things you can do to a fly. Every manipulation is a variation of time (Stop, Go, Slow, Fast) and space (Up, Down, Left, Right). Convincing trout that a fly is something worth eating is matter of making it behave as other natural food options do in the trout's environment – making it appear normal in the local flow of time and space.

Based on these personal angling principles, my tenkara rod fishing style has increasingly focused on creating and maintaining line tension – because without it I cannot control the fly into effective manipulations or receive accurate feedback from the overall system. Ideally, I'm looking for minimal slack in the line the very moment the fly hits the water. With that I can sense strikes easier, control the fly with more precision, and score clean hooksets. I've been focusing on creating instant line tension by stopping the rod tip at specific positions, depending on the intended range and position of the casting target. With practice and consistent rigging, you can really dial in your range, stopping that rod tip at the right point during the cast to allow the line to reach full extension as the fly lands. Creating and maintaining line tension is critical to manipulating the fly in my tenkara rod fishing.

There were several categories of flies on hand when I started the trip. First, a random collection of dozens of hand-tied kebari gifted or traded to me over the years. Soft hackle, stiff hackle, classic patterns or interesting experiments, in all colors and mostly size #12 & #14. Second, about an equal number of random western patterns – killer bugs, various nymphs, some bead heads, soft hackles, scuds, caddis, and the last handful of my beloved Pass Lake wet fly stash. All anywhere from size #6 to size #18. Finally, a big pile of very basic, commercially tied #12 Takayama kebari, in a half dozen colors and

sporting an extremely oversized soft hackle. In a rush to get everything ready for a long expedition, I put them all into a fly box in no particular order. It ended up only slightly more organized than a kindergarten playroom at recess, but ready or not, it was time to throw feathers!

I'm sure I started the trip fishing whatever fly was last tied on whatever rod I chose to carry that day, because that's how I start 90% of my fishing. I don't remember what it was. I do remember the first time I re-rigged, reaching into the fly box, feeling the familiar size and oversized soft hackle of one of those cheap commercial kebari. And thinking "Meh, they'll eat anything today" as I tied it on without much more thought. And the trout being willing, and me being an innately lazy angler, the cycle continued in similar fashion for another few days. Until, on one instance...my fingers came across a small bead head hare's ear instead of a kebari. It was and had been nothing but top water action to that point, and that was really all I was after, looking to tease the trout to the surface for those splashy and exciting takes. Maybe it was my trademark laziness or maybe it was over confidence born of a few days of hot fishing, but I shrugged and said to myself "Meh, they'll eat anything today", and tied it on without more thought.

Besides adjusting to a slight weight and balance shift in the system, there was no shift in the tactics I would employ. Keep the fly in the top few

inches of the water column, because that's where the trout were visibly feeding. Yes, nymphs are most often encountered and eaten sub surface, but it looks like food, and I'm placing it where the hungry trout are looking for food. I'm looking to capitalize on the limited processing power of the trout brain and its natural instincts to react when faced with a possible meal.

I fish the little hare's ear the same way I had been fishing the Pass Lake wet fly that was tied on before it, checking the rod tip at a familiar point to the ensure the line system extends and gains tension just as the fly hits the water. I adjust the rod tip position to maintain that tension throughout the drift, allowing me to control the fly and react to environmental changes or set a strike. Applying a series of variations, I shift from dead drift, to pulse, to swing, working the same zone I've previously created success in.

It's more difficult because this pattern is smaller and harder to see than the patterns I've been fishing, but it works, and I keep catching fish at a reasonable rate, certainly no more or less than with the wet fly. Eventually the nymph was lost to tree or tooth or rock. I thought to myself "...How 'bout we let this ride?" and reached blindly into my box for another fly. I continued fishing whatever I drew for the next 6 months of the trip.

Sometimes I'd see a seamless transition between two different patterns, with little difference. Other times, I had to stretch to make the

characteristics of the fly applicable to the situation. Cold rainy day and the fish sulking low, you draw an elk hair caddis, and you've got some work cut out for you. Shallow, still, clear water makes it very hard to work a weighted pattern without startling everything within sight. But I stuck with it, and despite a few frustrating days of mismatched factors, I was able to have great days on the water everywhere I went.

If I focused on working fundamentals, fly selection was largely irrelevant to my success. No color, or shape, or characteristic was unable to produce results. Kind of like if I am standing within sight of any sort of buffet or snack table, if the food is somewhere predictable and looks good, I'm going

to go eat it. Just put something fried with ranch dressing in front of me and the reaction is predictable.

In retrospect, this experience explored the concept of the "one fly angle" approach just as much as the "any fly" approach. I truly do believe that if any fly will do, an angler who commits to fundamentals and focuses on fly control could commit to a single general-purpose pattern and generate success on just about any trout water in America. There is a good chance I'll do my 2020 tenkara rod fishing with a single pattern, to continue that exploration and compare it to the results I got last year. One thing is for sure, from now on, I'll feel confident fishing any pattern I choose. If the fish don't care, then neither do I.



# **Social Distancing**

***by Paul Vertrees***

***“Only by going alone in silence, without baggage,  
can one truly get into the heart of the wilderness”***

***-John Muir***

**“Social distancing”.** It’s a catch phrase we’ve heard daily since the global explosion of the COVID-19 pandemic in recent weeks. It’s a necessary precaution—spending time away from crowds and even expanding physical proximity when spending any amount of time in small groups—and even my employer, our local school district, has made it mandatory. I started to think about social distancing in the broader sense of the word, and realized that it’s really something I do all the time and have for decades, and that there weren’t many life-changing adjustments to be made on my part. This is a story about “social distancing” of the very best kind.

For years I’ve been backpacking, hiking, fishing, and guiding in the tiny, semi-arid canyons close to my home in southern Colorado. One particular canyon runs for some 30 miles, as the creek runs, through some of the wildest country in our part of the state. It includes two Bureau of Land Management wilderness study areas, several sections of state trust wildlife areas, and US Forest Service and BLM lands. Other than one dirt road at the bottom of the canyon, not one road crosses the canyon over its entire length. Not one barbed wire fence is stretched across the creek. There are no permanent structures, and no man-made trails. I had a plan for a long time to complete a solo traverse the entire length of the canyon all in one trip, and recent events provided me the time to get away from everyone for a few days. The trip was on!

**Day 1. March 17, 2020. 15 Miles.**

**Happy St. Patrick’s Day!** My good friend and fellow fly fishing guide, Evan, picked me up at home at 7:00 AM. I had been up since 5:00 AM, and I suspect he had too. Two days earlier Evan had followed me an hour’s drive south over dirt roads to my friend John’s home. John lives off-grid and secluded about a mile above the top of the canyon, and his property provided me a perfect place to stash my truck for my return drive home at the end of the week.

Day 1 dawned cold, foggy, and wet. The gloomy mood of the morning matched the current sad state of affairs across the globe. Evan and I drove the steep and greasy-slick mud road down to the only bridge at the bottom of the canyon. I was happy to find an empty pullout next to the bridge; I had the canyon to myself! After getting my backpack out of Evan’s truck, finishing my cup of coffee and, snapping a selfie of us that Evan called “The Last Known Photo of Paul Vertrees”, I stepped off on my walk.

I’ve spent the better part of 30 years fishing the creek flowing through the lower section of this canyon. I know every pool, bend, and pocket. Knowing I had a lot of water upstream that I had never fished, I hiked and waded my way past all of the water I already knew, with a goal of reaching the unknown water in time to set up my camp and do some fishing before dark. I was following the exact route

that Army Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike had taken in January 1807, as he explored this canyon and the lands beyond at the behest of President Thomas Jefferson and General James Wilkinson. I clambered over car-sized boulders, hiked through the soft carpets of grassy meadows, dodged cholla and prickly pear cactus, and waded the creek perhaps two or three dozen times. Ten hours and fifteen miles later I arrived at Camp 1 as the clouds cleared and the early evening sun warmed the canyon.

I had planned to complete half of the mileage the first day when I was fresh, knowing that I would wear down daily under the weight of my pack, the increasing ruggedness of the canyons, and the number of creek crossings I

would make. At the end of Day 1 I questioned my plan a bit. I was so tired it was a struggle to get through the camp chores of pitching my tent, and gathering wood and water. After my supper meal I spent a half-hour fishing a deep green bend pool upstream from my camp about a hundred yards and caught some feisty ten-inch brown and rainbow trout. My tenkara rod and nymphing line were a perfect match for a lightly weighted double nymph rig. Those trout eagerly ate both a beadhead pheasant tail and a baetis emerger with equal abandon. Seeing and feeling the bend in my tenkara rod made the all of the hard miles melt away. I drifted asleep at dusk, comforted by a warm down sleeping bag and the song of rushing water.





**Day 2. March 18, 2020. 8 Miles.**

**Awake at dawn, I fired up my ultralight wood-burning stove, waited for my frozen wading boots and waders to thaw in the heated shelter, and shot a short video to wish my father, Jim, a happy 76th birthday. It would be two more days until I had a cell signal with which to send him the greeting. By the time breakfast was finished, my rock-hard frozen boots were soft enough to pull on my feet. I tore down camp, loaded up my backpack, and stepped off for another day of hiking, wading, bouldering, and fishing. I was moving through one of the highest concentrations of mountain lions in the entire state of Colorado. Farther**

**downstream in the canyon on Day 1 I had stumbled upon the fresh remains of a Merriam's turkey that had been ambushed by a lion. It looked like a bomb went off, with feathers scattered, and two uneaten, and probably unpalatable, turkey feet laying in the dirt. Not a hundred yards beyond was a well-defined mountain lion track in the faint game trail I was following. There's nothing that makes me feel more alive than the realization that I am not at the top of the local food chain!**

**About two miles upstream from Camp 1 the canyon opens up into a large park, and the serpentine creek creates some amazing bend pools, which**

would prove to be the best pools in the entire canyon. In contrast to the sometimes willow-choked creek edges in the lower canyon, the upper canyon's big meadows have virtually no vegetation, other than grass, along the edges of the creek. This makes any and all casting very easy. The ten and twelve inch brown trout I caught in this beautiful bend pool would prove to be the final fish of the trip, for reasons I would later discover.

The entire length of the canyon is interspersed with deep and narrow gorges and wide and flat parks. After passing through several of each, I finally arrived at Camp 2. As usual, about a half-hour before my planned stop time, which is based on hours not mileage, I started looking for access to the two things necessary for any camp I set up...wood and water. If I have quality wood for my stove and easy access to drinking and fishing water, it's a perfect scenario. Sometimes I have to compromise on one or the other, but at the end of Day 2 I had both.

I had to pitch my tent in the wind, which is always a trick. Wind and weather was moving in, and the skies were now back to the moody gray from the day before. After settling in and cooking my evening meal on the hot wood stove, I ventured down to the creek to look for trout. I walked a half-mile back downstream and scrutinized every pool, pocket, and edge all the way back to camp without seeing a single brown or rainbow trout. If they were actually there, none took either

my #18 beadhead pheasant tail or the #20 black RS2 trailing ten inches behind it. I spent the time before dark writing in my journal and listening to a Steeldrivers album and a MeatEater podcast I had downloaded prior to the trip. I let the music of the creek sing me to sleep yet another night, with dreams of finding elusive trout the remaining water upstream in the canyon.

**Day 3. March 19, 2020. 8 Miles.**

Dawn found me awake and wishing I had a warm tent. I went through my usual early morning routine of rolling over in my sleeping bag, grabbing my fire kit, and lighting the wood stove without leaving the warmth of my down cocoon. Once I had a roaring fire, I boiled water for breakfast and coffee, and watched the steam rise off my wading boots, which I had hung from the ceiling the night before. I poked my head of out the tent to find an inch of new snow on the ground.

Again I went down to the creek to look for trout, but finding none I decided to tear down camp, load my pack, and head upstream in search of fish, unexplored landscape, and the end of the journey.

After picking my way up through two tight, rocky gorges I again found myself at the opening of a vast park, strewn with a giant alluvial fan. Boulders the size of cars, three-foot-thick cottonwood logs, and pieces of scattered skeletons littered the landscape. I found the front half of a





desiccated crayfish exoskeleton at least thirty yards from the creek. This was evidence of a massive water event from last summer, and the power and destruction that flash floods create in this landscape is simply amazing. I finally solved the puzzle of a total absence of trout. The flood had killed most, and washed the survivors downstream to the lower canyon. The debris left ten vertical feet above and thirty yards on either side of the creek bed left no doubt.

I continued through the final tight gorge, narrow enough to force me into the creek to make it through. I hadn't counted the creek crossings on this trip, but as I hiked I had time to think about the number. An average of five per hour put it at last a hundred. The traverse wasn't easy at all, but it wasn't immediately steep. I had gained two thousand feet in 30 miles. However, the final mile was by far the most difficult.

After the final tight gorge, I found a faint rocky path on river left, so faint in



fact I nearly missed it. Based on my GPS waypoints, I knew I was on the correct exit from the creek, so I started the slow, painful hike up out of the canyon. Head down, heart and lungs bursting, legs burning, I took one huge breath in for every step taken up. I passed more skeletons, deer mostly and lion-killed. I passed ancient mine shafts that could only be accessed by foot. I cursed myself for taking too much gear. I cursed myself for not drinking more water before the climb. I finally made it up and out of the canyon I had followed for three days.

Once on top, I turned to look north at all the wild country I had just gone through. I felt a sudden sense of gratitude to have been gifted an opportunity to take a trip I had planned for so long. On the final quarter mile to my truck I had already started planning the next long walk. A chance for another adventure in search of wild trout with a tenkara rod, and an opportunity for even more social distancing of the very best kind!





**Oh, Hermits of the World Unite!**  
*by Chris Stewart*

**If in doubt, should you go out  
Risking Covid, SARS or MERS,  
My advice is get your vise,  
Hooks, feathers and some furs.**

**Tie some flies and make up lies  
To tell when this is o'er.  
Stay at home and do not roam  
The shops for masks and more.**

**They're sold out but do not pout.  
Can't find one anyways  
Though it's a curse and will get worse,  
It ain't the End of Days.**

**Face-to-face is out of place!  
Communicate by text.  
Shaking hands is all but banned.  
You don't know who'll be next.**

**Oh, hermits of the world unite!  
At home and by yourselves.  
Your quiet nook, that well-worn book  
It's there, upon your shelves.**

**Oh, hermits of the world unite!  
No worries and no fear.  
Oh, hermits of the world unite!  
Your time is finally here.**

# **Exploring the Salt** *by Alan Luecke*



I've been interested in multi-species fishing since before it had a name. Seven years ago as I was beginning to explore fly fishing, I discovered tenkara and fell down the rabbit hole. Since then I've split my time between tenkara trout fishing (preferably for wild trout in small streams) and fixed-line fishing for as many species as I can find.

Telescopic rods fit nicely in suitcases, and mine accompany me on every trip. Nowhere has this payed-off more than

on our annual winter beach vacations to Isla Mujeres, Mexico and the gulf coast of Florida.

Over time I've settled on a basic set up for fishing beaches, sea walls and tide pools. My go to rods are Daiwa Kiyose keiryu rods at 3.3, 4.3 and 5.3 meters. I also bring 2.4 and 1.8 rods for tight places and small fish. Flashy streamers and the ever reliable White Killer Bugger will catch fish, but the reality is that bait is usually required for success. So, I'm fishing keiryu not

tenkara with stiff rods and heavy level line (because it's always windy). Terminal tackle is two BB shot and a #10 or #12 circle hook on 5X tippet. The large [Power Isome artificial sandworms](#) from TenkaraBum are my usual bait, but I also use live shrimp when available.

I'm a walker and wader, not a boater, they don't fit in the suitcase. If there is access to the water there are probably fish there. The basics of fishing: structure, holes and moving water are the same in saltwater or fresh. I started in small rocky tide pools and then expanded to beaches, jetties, docks and mangroves. A big surprise for a Kansas boy was the fishing available on flat, open, empty looking beaches with small waves.

The thin line of white water at the shore can hold multiple species

feeding on the small critters being churned up out of the sand. These fish are usually bright silver in color and totally invisible in the bright light. They range from small Gulf Kingfish (whiting) and Mojarras up to the very exciting and much sought Pompano.

There are a lot of fish in the ocean and figuring out what you just caught is a big part of the fun. I start with the [National Audubon Society Field Guide to Fishes](#) and the online guide [Fishes: Greater Caribbean](#), then Google for pictures and finally I just send a photo to my friend Vern and let him find it.

Over these last few years, I've caught 40 species of saltwater fish from a very small amount of real estate in a limited amount of time. In the ocean you simply don't know what's going to be on the end of the line.









# Seeing Creative Possibilities

*by Bob Long, Jr.*



**These flies are called *Elk Hair Caddis for Steelhead*. So, just how do they apply to tenkara?**

The point at which these flies (as well as lures, lines, techniques, etc.) meets Tenkara is about ‘*Creative Possibilities*.’ Which lines, tippets, flies, lures, weight, casting techniques, or presentations might work for me with my tenkara rods in any given situation? Especially, for me, with smallmouth bass in rivers, creeks and streams. While *tradition* might provide a bit of direction, a few answers, or at least a starting point, I ultimately agree with 20th Century, English writer, W. Somerset Maugham;

*“Tradition is a Guide, not a Jailer.”*

Over the next some paragraphs, I hope to lay out, in a reasonable way, how *Elk Hair Caddis for Steelhead* meeting my tenkara rods is a good representation of the concept of *creative possibilities*. However, there is another quote that has guided much of my life, including my love and fishing lives, regarding what might be considered reasonable;

*“The heart has reasons, that reason knows little of.”*

– Blaise Pascal  
French, 17th Century

So, we shall see.

These, quite non-traditional, Elk Hair Caddis are over 25 years old (I tied them in the early 90's and first wrote about them in 1994). I patterned them after the Elk Hair Caddis used for trout. For reasons I've long since forgotten, I thought the Elk Hair Caddis dry fly might work as a *wet fly or nymph* for autumn and spring-run steelhead in the Wisconsin tributaries of Lake Michigan. However, the Elk Hair Caddis dry flies (which I've always called "EHCs") as they existed were too small and wimpy for Steelhead.

So, taking the form while abandoning the function, I tied them up in sizes 6, 8 and 10 on 3X nymph and dry fly hooks, and the ever-so elegant and graceful, (3X) Tiemco 200R.

I wanted a larger size and sturdier fly as steelhead are a big, rough-and-tumble fish compared to fresh-water 'bows and browns. Also, floating on the

surface was a non-issue. I was going to fish them sub-surface in current, as a duo-service wet fly and/or nymph; to drift them anywhere from just inches off the bottom to about 6-inches below the surface.

As they were going to be used for steelhead (and anadromous brown trout) I tied them in a variety of steelhead attracting colors, not the standard, *match-the-hatch* ones (although some are also tied in softer, more muted tones). Body materials varied by whim: sparkle braid, chenille, vernille, dubbing, four-strand floss, embroidery floss. Soft, slightly longer fibered hackle is used instead of dry fly. But I still liked elk over other hairs (I liked the way it looked – on the fly and in the water).

The verdict? They worked wonderfully for those steelhead and browns, October through March/April, season



after season. And, as a bonus, I found them to be a good-looking fly; one that is fun and creatively rewarding to tie, and that photographs well.

An unexpected discovery. One hot summer evening *BT* (Before Tenkara) found me fishing my favorite smallmouth river, The Kankakee in Illinois. A marvelous, heavy-duty mayfly hatch was coming off with bugs filling the air as thick as February snowflakes. All types of fish were coming up everywhere, busily slurping flies off the surface.

I thought, *“Oh yeah, time to switch from a crayfish pattern to a full-bodied streamer (like an older, Dan Gapen-styled Muddler Minnow – a mouthful of a fly and a fave of mine) and swim it*

*just under the surface film.”* But, darn it, I had not one streamer box with me. However, while rummaging around in the back pocket of my vest looking for *something, anything*, I found a small *EHC for Steelhead box.*

*“OK,”* I sighed, *“might as well try one of these, I guess.”*

I did. They worked; marvelously. Again, I fished them as a wet fly/nymph, working them from a few inches under the surface to just off the bottom. Towards dark a number of guys passing by on their way back to their cars asked me what I was using. I told them. They looked really skeptical; more like I was B.S.ing them, actually. I showed them a couple of the *EHCs* – tied on size 6, Tiemco 200Rs – and

*It can be tough to get a fly to sink when you want it to, especially when its dressed with buoyant materials and fished in faster currents. I use a loop knot to keep the flies' action loose and fluid, and size “b” split shot as necessary to get the fly down and hold it down.*



shared how I was fishing them. I think a couple of them wanted to believe me, but the *iron grip of tradition* overruled any possible *leap of faith*. Oh well.

Since that time, whenever I go out to fly fish smallmouth, I always have a small box of *EHC for Steelhead* in my fishing box in the car. Although tied un-weighted, they aren't designed to float (and I like the lightness of sub-surface action they have un-weighted – especially when used with a non-slip loop knot). I fish them with a size 'B' split-shot or two placed right up against the loop knot to get them down as current dictates (it can be tough to get a fly to sink in current when you want it to, especially when its fished downstream and across-and-down. Over the course of my life, I've very seldom experienced split-shot being so visible to be a problem for the fish).

### [OK, so what does this have to do with tenkara?](#)

The intersection at which all of the above (flies, lures, lines, techniques, etc.) meets tenkara is about *'Possibilities.'* Such as, in this case, my tenkara rod, *Elk Hair Caddis for Steelhead* and smallmouth. Didn't see that one coming, but glad I was open to it.

*"The only limits to the possibilities in your life tomorrow are the 'yeah buts' you use today."*

- Les Brown

An unexpected tenkara discovery.

When I took up tenkara, around 2011, I was not interested in using the rods for trout - nor in using sakasa kebari. I wanted to use my newly found tenkara rods (a 6:4 and a 7:3) to fish for smallmouth in rivers, creeks and streams, using my existing smallmouth flies and small lures. (Yeah, I know, I was asking a lot; still am). One day, as I prepared to go smallie fishing, tenkara rod in hand, I again found that small *Elk Hair Caddis for Steelhead* box deep in one of my wading pouches. Although there was no hatch going on, I smiled and thought...

*"Oh yeah...these. Oh well, might as well try them with this rod and see what's cookin'."*

I did. They worked; *marvelously* – fished sub-surface with a split-shot or two as necessary. And, as a part of the discovery, I gave these *EHCs* those enticing, pulsing actions associated with tenkara and sakasa kebari (as seen in Youtube videos from Japan) as they drifted downstream; starts, stops, pauses, holding in place, swim them left and right, bring them forward, drop them back. Love that about tenkara.

While I didn't, and don't, consistently get the bigger fish with these *EHCs* (even at a size 6, 3x, the fly at 1.5" is just too small for that), the numbers and the action keep joy and hope alive.

*"To practice any art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow. So do it."*

- Kurt Vonnegut

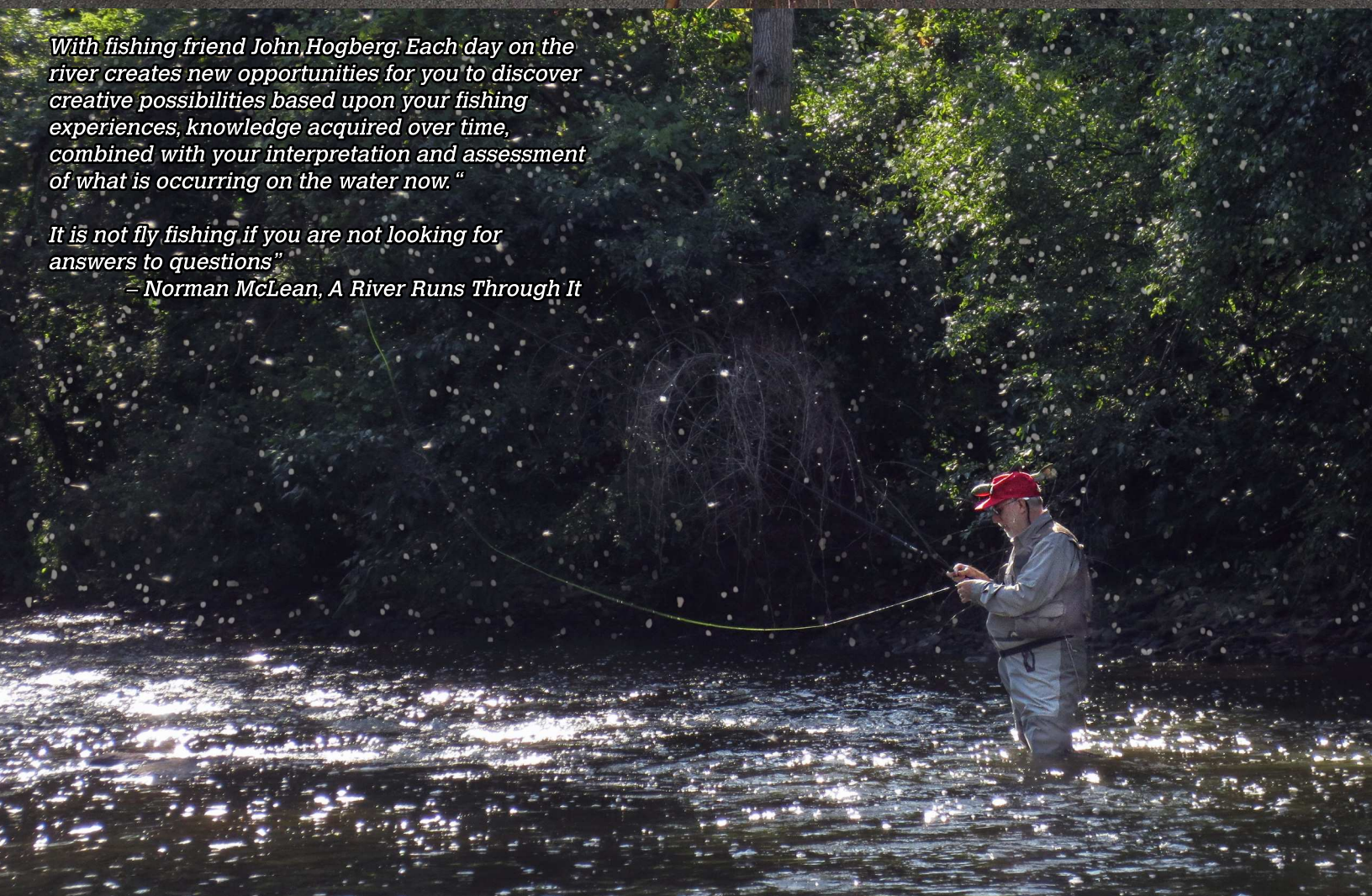
*Creative possibilities said these Elk Hair Caddis, now called EHCs for short, didn't need to be tied in subtle or muted "hatch-match" colors. They could be tied in any variety of steelhead attractor, impressionistic or muted colors as suits one feelings.*



*With fishing friend John Hogberg: Each day on the river creates new opportunities for you to discover creative possibilities based upon your fishing experiences, knowledge acquired over time, combined with your interpretation and assessment of what is occurring on the water now."*

*It is not fly fishing if you are not looking for answers to questions"*

*- Norman McLean, A River Runs Through It*



For the last 35+ years of my fly-fishing life, I've been more interested in experimentation and discovery than in following or adhering to tradition or traditional concepts. Catching fish while having fun and creating new fly-fishing paths for myself has always been most rewarding. When tenkara came into my life, it fell right into that place.  
- photo by Yuichiro Ogura



My standard tenkara set up works perfectly with EHCs: 12' - 14' tenkara rod, 10' - 12' of furred poly line, three to four-feet of 4 - 6-pound-test tippet, split shot as necessary.



I discovered several interesting differences between using *EHCs* with tenkara rods vs. western ones. One difference comes with the short, max casts of 30-feet (or less) I get with my tenkara rods. The rods 12- to 14-foot length and short, fixed length of light-weight line and leader, allows me a masterful sense of control and feel over my flies. In the clearer waters of summer, I can often see my lighter and/or brightly colored *EHCs* as they drift high through the water. Sometimes I can see the takes with the flash of a fish as it turns or, more often, when the color of the fly simply disappears.

Another difference for me when using tenkara rods is that even when I can't see the *EHC* in the water, the tenkara rod's shorter lines, tippets and minimal slack, I have a good idea of where it is, and I can respond to subtle takes via movements of my bright orange or chartreuse furred line. Third, I thought I might have some casting issues with the limber tenkara rod and fly/weight combo. I don't. In the wind, it's actually of benefit.

### Tenkara And My Attitude

Various lines of thought have been present and guided me for much of my life, among them;

- Homage to tradition, but never slavish imitation, and
- An attitude of *Shoshin*, "Beginner's Mind."

*"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's mind there are few."*

- Shunryu Suzuki  
20th Century, Soto Zen Monk

Thus, when I choose to use a tenkara rod, there is no demand, dictate or insistence upon which flies (sizes, styles or colors), lures or techniques can be, should be, or must be used. Traditions can be good, not all are bad, but often strict traditions can take the joy of discovery out of life. (Please note, my way is NOT the only way. I have no issues if you are a person who likes or benefits from varying degrees of structure and/or direction. Please, go for it.)

Still, I hope some of you may be willing to consider (just *consider*, mind you) such things as *Elk Hair Caddis for Steelhead*, as well as other *possibilities* and out-of-the-ordinary flies, techniques and tactics for your tenkara and fixed-line fly fishing. Consider what discoveries may await you in creating new paths from older ones; exploring a search for expression outside of what is expected.

*"Great things never come from comfort zones..."*

- Unknown

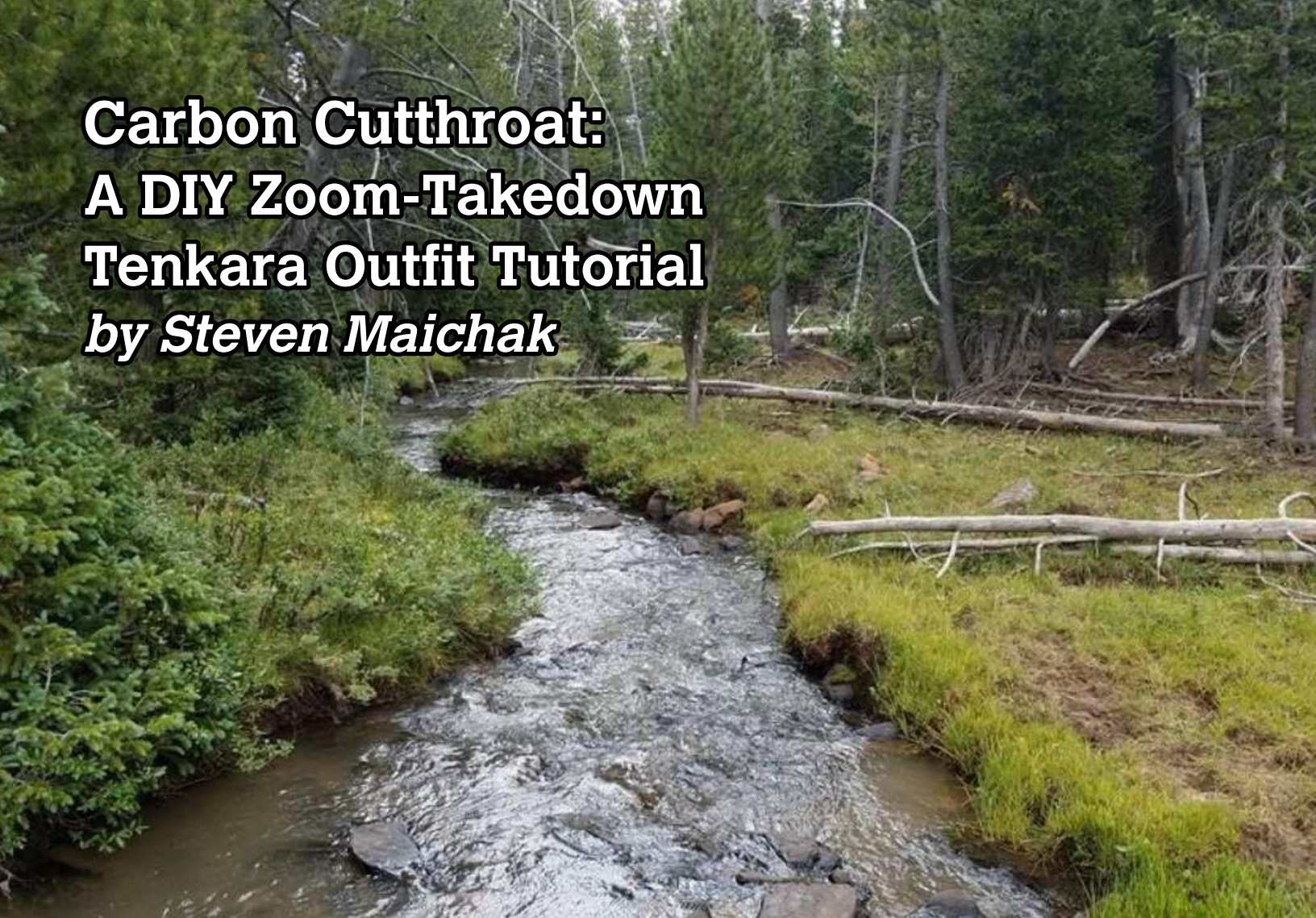
Oh yes, there is much to be discovered with this sublime and marvelous tenkara thing.



*I admit, I'm not fond of having a limited color palette when tying flies. Just as I have many effective lures in colors found nowhere in nature, I like tying and fishing flies like that too.*



# **Carbon Cutthroat: A DIY Zoom-Takedown Tenkara Outfit Tutorial by *Steven Maichak***



***“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”***

**– Leonard Da Vinci**

In our modern world in which an abundance of high-tech solutions are the norm, tenkara fly fishing is the antihero anglers need to remind ourselves of why we originally fell in love with fishing. While advanced materials and complex equipment flood the shelves of our local sporting goods stores, tenkara harkens back to a time when cutting edge meant a cane pole, natural fiber line, simple float, and a half dozen hooks. With no more than a rod, fixed line, and fly,

tenkara fly fishing offers simplicity as a counterculture to the fishing industry’s push for selling gear that entices buyers to bite more so than the fish themselves.

My newest state of residence, Utah, is a cutthroat haven with four distinct subspecies, so it’s only natural that I decided to take part in the art of fly fishing. Tenkara, unique for its slim and trim approach, makes a healthy trout feel like a tuna on the end of your line. Because I spent my first 23 years basking in the glory of all the warm water fisheries of Oklahoma, fly fishing was a complete mystery to me. I

bought my sister a proper tenkara rod made by one of the big name manufacturers, and I of course wanted one for myself, but I didn't want to throw down another \$150 for a new rod that may never see the use it deserves.

There are numerous options available for anglers who want to dip their toes into the streamlined world of tenkara. In fact, dedicated tenkara rods run the gamut from under \$10 all the way up to the more refined options that demand more than a couple Benjamins. Perhaps, the best entry level values are the complete combo packages from Maxcatch and Angler Dream that come with all the basics a person needs to get on the water and start catching fish. After researching online the only other options I could find were the high-dollar mass produced rods or bargain bin telescoping rods that simply looked clunky or ill fit for dedicated tenkara style fly fishing.

However, I didn't find those options appealing enough for me. I had an alternative route in mind, and I just couldn't shake the thought. That's why I decided to commit to the idea of making my own tenkara rod - something with the "proper" aesthetics, dimensions, casting fluidity, zoom capabilities, and portability of the rods made by the big name manufacturers. Follow along as I present my tutorial for how to construct a DIY zoom-takedown tenkara rod outfit, a creation I christened the Carbon Cutthroat.

## Rod Blank - \$49

I wish I could tell you I designed the rod dimensions and made the graphite rod blank myself, but that would be a lie. What I can do, however, is describe my reasoning behind my particular rod blank selection. It took awhile to track down with most other rod blanks either being too short or too stiff, but I eventually found just what I needed.

The rod blank used as the foundation for my creation was far and away my most important decision, and I spent the bulk of my time on this particular part of the process. My primary inspiration for both my rod design and this overall project came from a YouTube video by John Davenport. I spent a lot of time perusing the Internet before I finally found exactly what I needed with eBay having the most usable options for a "proper" tenkara rod. My selection happened to be an 11' 2/3 wt 4-piece switch fly rod blank from Get Bent Fly Shop. Get Bent offers other rod blanks of various lengths and weights that are also suitable for tenkara, however, I felt my particular selection would be an ideal balance for trout, pan fish, and small bass.

Each rod section measures 34.5" in length, and the blank even came with a partitioned sleeve for organized storage while protecting from simple scuffs and scratches. Though less svelte and convenient than the telescoping designs from the big name manufacturers, the tip-over-butt ferrule system does allow "zoom"



capabilities. I can fish the rod with all four sections at 11', the three thinnest sections at 8'3", or the two tip sections at 5'7", which rivals the impressive Tiny Ten Rod from Tiny Tenkara. I also suspect I could create a quickattach/detach lillian that would allow me to fish the three thickest sections for an 8'3" 4/5 wt rod. The versatility of my selection means I won't have a need to purchase or make another rod in order to match all the diverse fishing scenarios I will be likely to encounter.

The entire rod blank weighs a miniscule 2.2 ounces, casts my line with grace and precision, and transfer even the lightest hits with great sensitivity. The 5:5 flex profile means it has no issue bending like a question mark, and it bow and arrow casts acceptably well. At the end of the day, it has no issues hauling in stringers big enough to fill my belly, all while breaking down into a portable package under 3' in length. If I had to do it all over again I wouldn't hesitate to get the same Get Bent rod blank, but I might go with the 3/4 wt counterpart for the added backbone and tip strength. Then again, maybe I wouldn't. I don't expect to be catching tons of trophy size trout with my outfit, so I'd rather enjoy the fight of the smaller fish I'll be typically catching.

### Grip - \$7

I debated for several days about which material to use for the rod grip. I primarily considered cork, a high-density foam, paracord, and baseball grip wrap. I finally decided on the baseball grip wrap.

The wrap maintains a slim profile that gives it more of a traditional Japanese rod aesthetic, and it provides a great purchase even when wet. A part of me wishes I had gone with a cork grip that fills my hand a bit more, but I can't deny I shied away from deviating from the black color scheme. All said, I am plenty happy with the end result, and it slides into the rod sleeve much more easily with the thin grip profile.

### Lillian - \$1 in combined material

Searching for the perfect rod blank took me the longest amount of time, but devising how to attach a lillian required the most ingenuity due to the rod tip not being hollow like the mass produced tenkara rods. I wanted a permanent solution that isn't permanently affixed to the rod. It needed to be strong and secure without damaging the tip, but I also wanted it to be easily removable if needed.

My initial design replicated that of John Davenport by using a 4-6 stud electrical ring terminal. I tried using 3/32 - 3/64" heat shrink tubing to secure the ring terminal, but the tubing wasn't big enough to fit over the stud, which then forced me to incorporate electrical tape - not a sleek design by anyone's standard. For a second there, I thought I figured out a creative way to overcome the conundrum of attaching a lillian, and it was a pretty decent idea that certainly would've worked, but it wasn't the best idea possible. With tenkara emphasizing simplicity, I found myself to be the second 'S' in the K.I.S.S. method.

Fortunately, I was struck with a better idea that was staring me in the face using the same shrink tubing I now had on hand. All I had to do was remove the ring terminal and replace it with my new idea that is more true to tenkara's elegant form anyways. The photo sequence on the following pages show my process for creating the lillian.

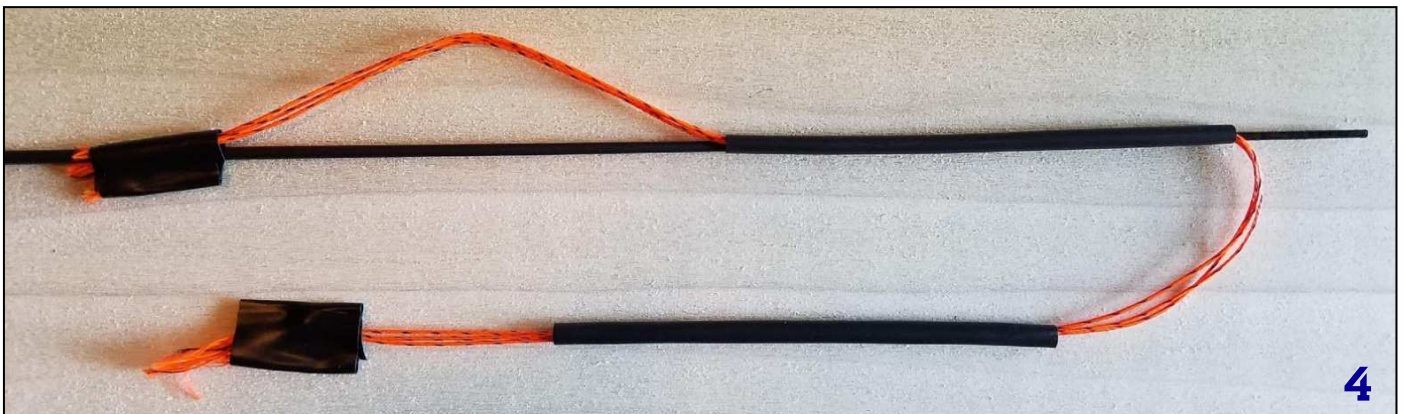
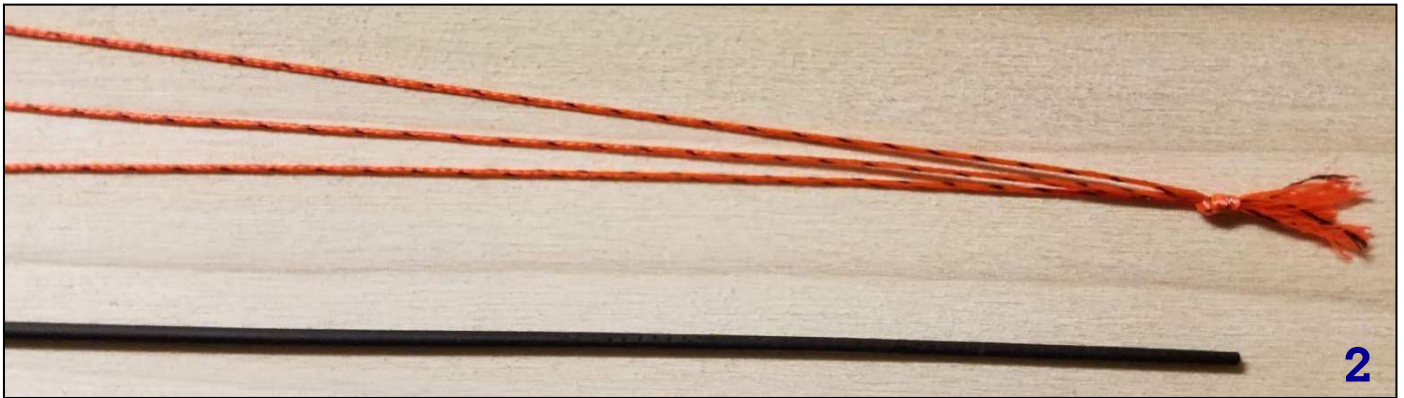
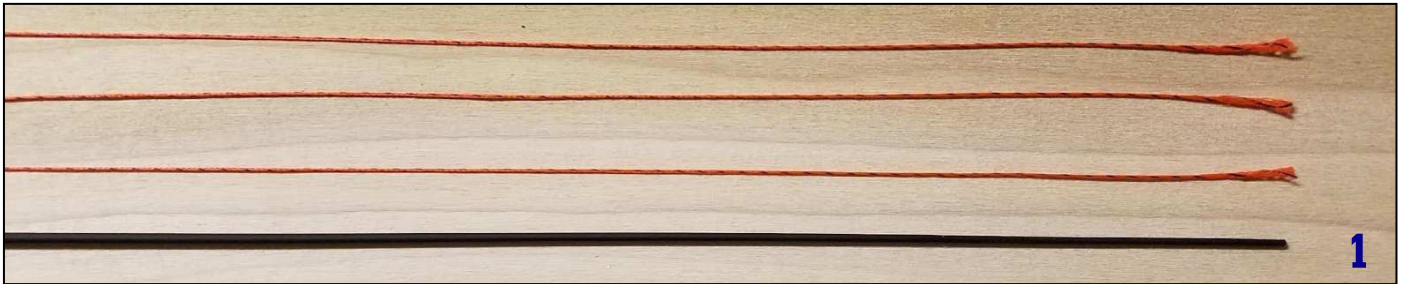
My thought behind the spiral wrap is that it will prevent the lillian from being pulled straight out. This was the most difficult part of the construction. Of course, difficult is a relative term as it only required a little patience on my end to tinker with the setup before securing the lillian. I probably didn't need to double up on the heat shrink tubing, and it certainly takes away a little sleekness from the end of the rod, but my hope is it will prolong the life of that portion of the build.

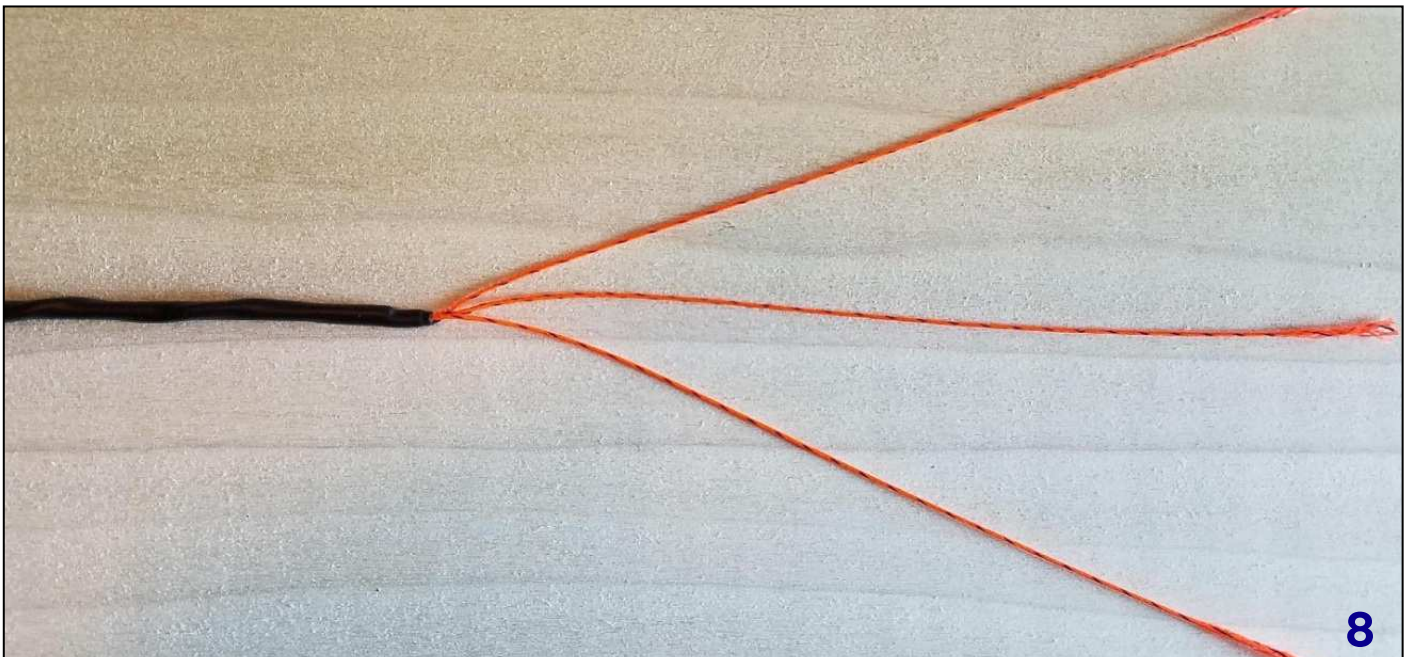
#### Line - \$20 for two lines, \$4 for tippet

The line is where I got caught up in the DIY mentality a little too much. I thought I would be able to circumnavigate the issues of homemade lines so many other anglers warned about throughout the Internet, but I should have heeded their cautions from the get-go. First, I created a line using the 20 lbs. orange fly line backing that was also used for the lillian, but it was far too limp to deliver the fly on target, certainly not with any extended range. I then made a line using a single strand of the only standard fishing line I had laying around, 8 lbs. monofilament, but it too was a monumental failure. The monofilament line wouldn't turn over, and the fly barely made it to the water when casting from the bank.

In the end, I decided tenkara-specific lines were the only way to go. I no longer wanted to continue scheming workarounds and purchased two orange and black (remember, we have a theme going now) Maxcatch furred lines. Through the first part of the experimental phase I used Rio 7X tippet but quickly switched over to 4X when I realized how frustrating it is to untangle tippet with such a delicately thin diameter. Once I feel I have mastered the furred line I intend to graduate to Dragontail's hi-vis level line as it seems to be the best value available for both price and spool length.

#### Tackle Essentials - \$10 + dealer's choice on flies





**The 9 images in this spread depict the lillian attachment and construction described on the prior pages. A spiral wrap of cord in tandem with heat shrink wrap is used to affix the lillian to the rod tip and keep it in place. Braiding of the three strands finishes the lillian neatly and securely, preventing fraying.**

Of course, I needed to invest in an assortment of flies, so I went down the road to my local sporting goods store. There, I purchased a micro tackle box for \$2, forceps for \$8, and hand-picked a baker's dozen assortment of flies for another \$12. I figured the flies were a pretty good bargain, but I also had no idea which ones I should be purchasing, so I picked a wide variety that looked like it would carry me through the late winter, spring, and summer months. However, I did a bit of research and found the 'killer bug' pattern to supposedly be a year-round trout slayer, so I used the remnants of an Amazon gift card to purchase a pack of a dozen killer bugs.

### Travel Tube - \$3 in materials

As mentioned earlier, my rod blank came with a partitioned travel sleeve, but I wanted something more robust for those times when my rod starts rattling around in the back of the truck with heavier gear. The cheapest suitable material I could come up with, while sticking to the all-black theme, was ABS plumbing pipe with a 2" inside diameter. My local plumbing supplier didn't have any scrap lengths long enough for my needs, so I was forced to purchase a full 10' pipe, but the cashier threw in the end caps for free.







I took a hacksaw to the pipe to remove a 37" section so I would have a little wiggle room on each end for the rod. I remembered I had an old exercise foam mat laying around in my materials cache, so I decided to give it a workout by creating some internal padding within the tube wall as well as on the insides of the end caps. I quickly spray painted the foam mat pieces to... well, I don't know why I did that because it wasn't necessary. Nonetheless, the padding fills the void perfectly while allowing my rod to slide down into the tube without any free play for rattling.

The final step in creating my travel tube was devising how to create a shoulder strap. A strap isn't necessary for the travel tubes used to protect the mass produced telescoping tenkara rods because their lengths are so much shorter when retracted, allowing them to fit nicely into backpacks. However, my travel tube is long enough and thick enough that it would be a nuisance to carry in hand while hiking deep into the backcountry

during a trout fishing expedition. The primary design feature I wanted to incorporate was a way to secure the end caps to the strap so they can't be misplaced. I grabbed some black paracord I had laying around and braided a strap that works well when orienting the tube diagonally across my back.

#### Line Spools - free materials already on hand

Line spools seemed like a proven, effective way to have pre-rigged lines ready to go in a compact form, so I made some of my own using the exercise foam mat. To accomplish this I smashed one of the travel tube's end caps into the mat six times to score the foam with clean circle impressions. I used a fine point marker to trace the outer edges of four circles and inner edges of two other circles. Then, I ran a razor blade through the mat to cut out each circle. I determined the difference in diameter between the smaller and larger circles wasn't enough, so I used a Dremel to

reduce the smaller circles' diameters a little more. When I was satisfied with those I then super glued the layers together to create spools. I also used the Dremel to plunge holes into the centers of each spool should I ever need to carry them on the rod. If you make your own spools in the same way I did, then I recommend you also super glue the internal seams once more to prevent the layers from peeling apart.

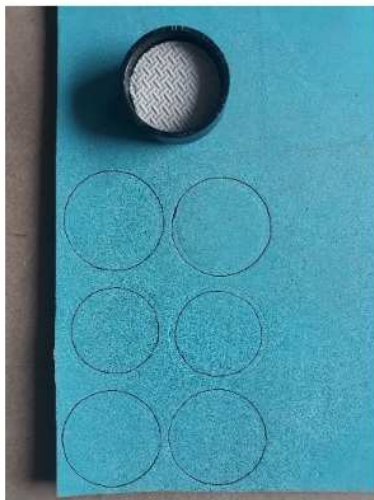
### Fishing Pack - \$16

As the final accessory, I needed a way

to carry all my new gear. In an effort to stay true to the slim and trim nature of tenkara, I purchased a simple waterproof fanny pack. Now, I'll fit in with all the old-timers on the stream...or maybe it would be best to say I won't stand out as much against the backdrop of older gentleman with western fly gear and bucket hats.

### Personalization - \$8

As the icing on the cake, I wanted a way to personalize my rod with a name. The first thing that came to mind was vinyl letter decals, so that's what I





went with. It's a little hard to admit I spent \$8 on some simple letter decals, but we can agree it's the small details that often make the biggest differences in presentation. Is that the case with my rod? Perhaps not, but I was willing to splurge on my creation to give it that extra little bit of refinement.

**Costs**

The costs listed are not for the sum totals to purchase materials not already on hand. In other words, I am not taking into account the cost of the entire 10' ABS pipe, complete spool of fly line backing, or full package of shrink tubing. Instead, I am assessing cost on a 'per unit' basis. All prices listed are the amounts I paid during time of purchase. Items are listed in my order of importance. Your costs and order of importance may vary.

The total for the entire tenkara outfit I listed in the table amounts to \$140.

I'll let you determine what items are essential versus optional for your

needs. The bare bones essentials needed to go fishing are the rod with lillian, a single line, a spool of tippet, and a single fly for a total of \$65. Of course, I would never hit the water with just those items, but you can see how my breakdown of items allows you to determine how much your own DIY tenkara outfit might cost. Consider yourself ahead of the game if you already have some of these items.

At the end of the day, my complete package listed above cost me less than most of the mass produced rods, which often come with a travel tube, furlled line, some tippet, and a few flies to get you going. However, my DIY package easily surpasses the value of those high-dollar options by also including an extra line, two spools, two dozen flies, a tackle box, and forceps. When compared to the high value combo kits from Maxcatch and Angler Dream, I am humble enough to admit my package does not quite meet the same value. However, I can say my rod does provide significantly better variability in its zoom capabilities to the point of essentially being three

Rod w/ lillian - \$50	Line - \$10	Tippet - \$4	Flies - \$29
Tackle box - \$2	Grip - \$7	Travel tube - \$3	Extra line - \$10
Spools - \$0	Forceps - \$8	Fanny pack - \$16	Letter decals - \$1

rods in one.

## Summary of Rod Qualities

### Advantages

- *Travel compactness (compared to most baitcasting, spinning, and western fly tackle)*
- *Zoom capabilities with large variability between each length*
- *Supreme value compared to high-dollar, mass produced rods*
- *Satisfaction from catching fish by using a rod of my own design*

### Drawbacks

- *Compactness for travel (compared to telescoping rod options)*
- *Time required to source materials and piece them all together*
- *“Slow” deployment and retraction*
- *No manufacturer warranty*

## Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this tutorial, you can purchase any number of different rod options for well under the price I paid for mine, and they'll all catch more fish than you can count. After all, people around the world have been successfully filling their bellies using less sophisticated equipment for centuries long before the advent of graphite rods. I could have easily kept my spending at a fraction of what I did, but my end product is irrefutably one of a kind. It may not have flashy branding, a refined finish, or a suite of boutique grade materials, but it will compete with the best of its manufacturer made competitors and put one helluva grin on my face.

I'll be the first to admit I didn't have to





do much except scheme a clever way to attach the lillian and make a simple travel tube. But that's exactly the point - you don't have to invest a lot of time or money for a new fishing experience, and your homemade creation doesn't have to give up the aesthetics or fishability of a manufacturer produced rod.

You too can build your own DIY tenkara rod. It wouldn't take you long to search around the Internet to find creative anglers making their own homemade tenkara setups for considerably less than my own rod build. Many of them even incorporate the revered telescoping design. Tenkara is a fun new fishing niche we can all explore, but that doesn't mean we should have to shell out a couple hundred dollars before being able to wet our lines. All you have to do is complete a few quick online searches for design inspirations, source some cost effective materials, grab a handful of your favorite flies, and you too will be able to fashion a tenkara package

fit for your next fishing adventure.

As for me, it's fair to say I've found my new on-the-go truck setup for those times when a surprise water body beckons to be fished. There's something to be said for catching a fish, however small it might be, with my own creation. The fish will never know the difference, but I will, and that in turn makes all the difference. I hope to cherish my creation well into the future on unnamed streams deep within our vast wildlands. Maybe we'll even run into each other out there. Until then, I bid you good luck during your DIY tenkara rod building experience.

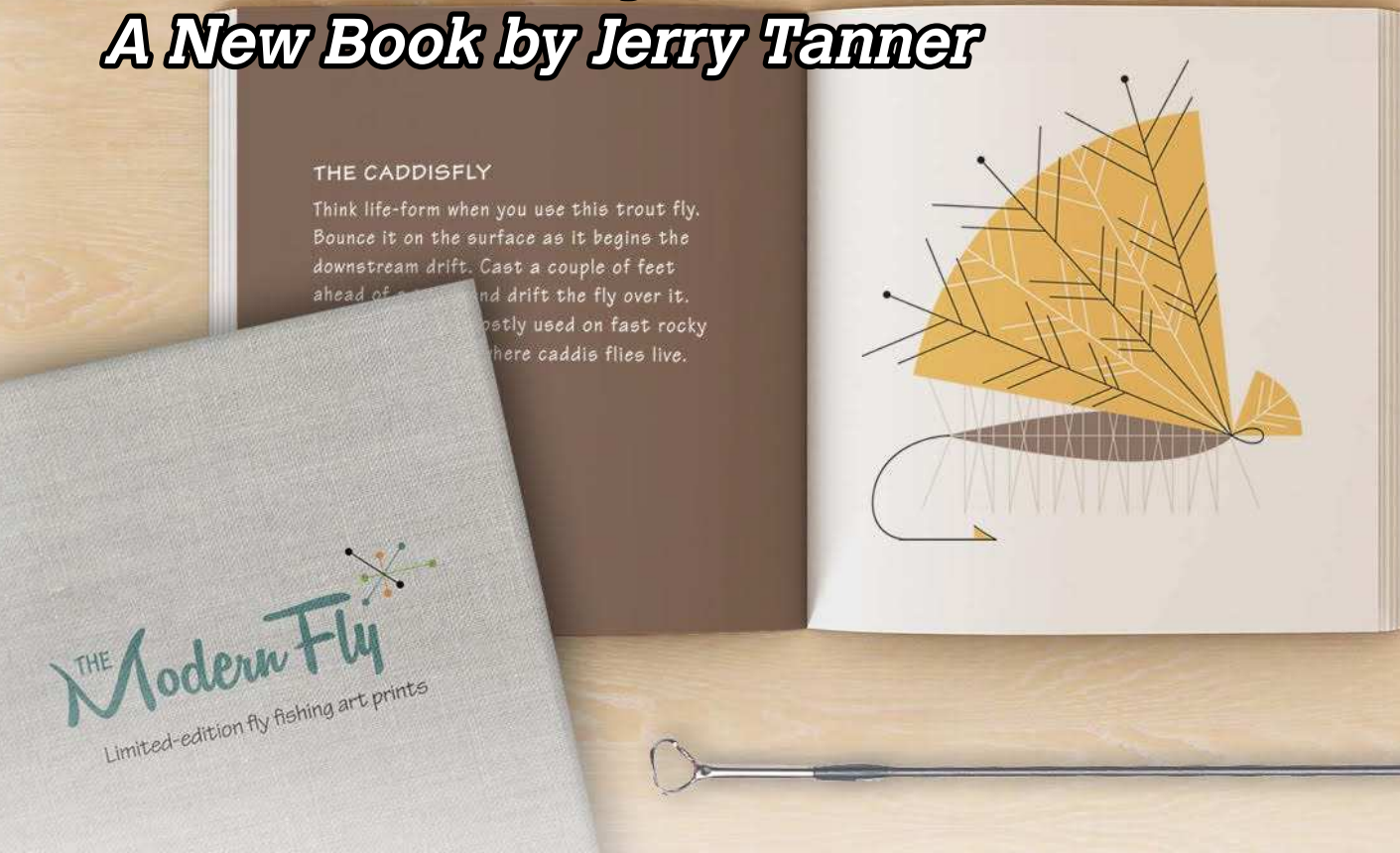
There's only one rule I expect you to remember: I already called dibs on Carbon Cutthroat.

*"To an English eye the native [Japanese] method of fly-fishing will be rude; but it is justified by its results."*

- Basil Hall Chamberlain, 1890

# The Modern Fly

## A New Book by Jerry Tanner



A new book about the “*art of the fly*” by artist, Jerry Tanner is now available at the self-publishing website [Blurb.com](http://Blurb.com). It’s a colorful and imaginative take on classic and current fly patterns.

The title “*The Modern Fly*” says it all. Jerry starts with a fly that catches his imagination. Then he recreates it in a style that has elements of mid-century style from the ‘50s and ‘60s. This results in surprisingly unique renditions of some pretty awesome fly patterns.

His book is the result of 4 years creating art based on the amazing variety of designs and colors found in

fly fishing lures. With a portfolio of more than 30 originals, Jerry is creating art that keeps him connected to one of his favorite activities, even when life’s obligations call him away from the water for extended periods of time.

*“I’m glad I have my art to remind me of a sport that I’ve enjoyed since I was a kid. When I create a new piece, part of the process is tapping into memories of the times, places, and fellow fishers I’ve enjoyed over the years,”* says Jerry.

The Modern Fly book is not just about the art. Each fly creation is accompanied by a short fact or story about the pattern, as well as a list of

the ingredients used to create the actual fly. It's informative and entertaining reading for those days you can't be out at your favorite stream or body of water.

Finally, if the book price seems a bit rich, consider the fact that it's a great way to own 14 artist originals in one book! And, if you contact Jerry Tanner,

he'll keep an eye out for a discount offer from Blurb.com (usually 30-40% off), then buy & ship the book to you.

Get a preview of his book here:

<https://www.blurb.com/b/9661858-the-modern-fly>

Jerry's website:

<https://www.themodernfly.com>

### THE TENKARA

The reverse hackle fly is probably the most iconic Tenkara pattern. No one knows why it's called Tenkara. Some say it's because tenkara means "from the sky"—suggestive of the way the flies are dapped into the water from above.

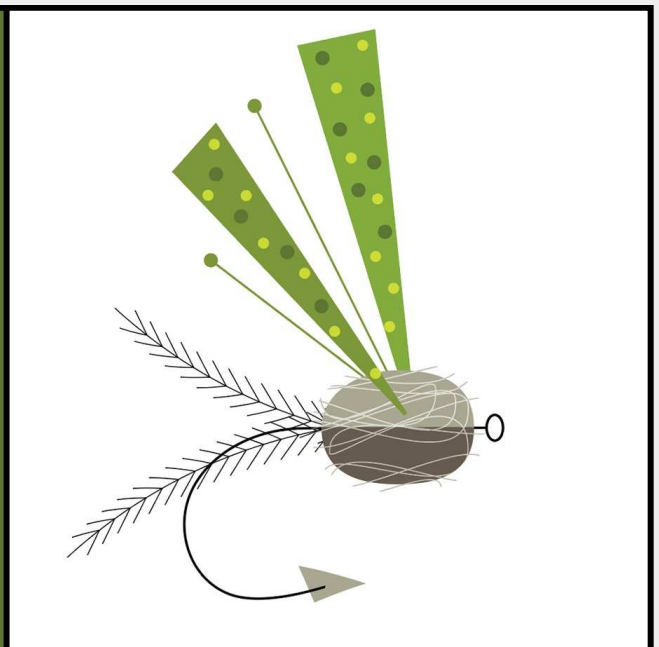
Hook: Masu No.7  
Thread: Black tying silk  
Body: Peacock herl  
Reversed Hackle: Hen pheasant



### THE BLUEGILL FLY

This is a great fly that's fast and simple to tie—and it works! Bluegill sunfish are popular panfish. They can't resist the vibrant colors and chennile bodies of the bluegill fly pattern. They will also rise to small poppers, sponge bugs, dry flies, and wet flies—such as nymphs and small streamers.

Hook: 3XL nymph hook #12  
Body: Chenille  
Tail: Black marabou  
Legs: Chartreuse speckled silicon



# Spring Reader Photos

*Some quick hits from readers out and about with their tenkara rods*

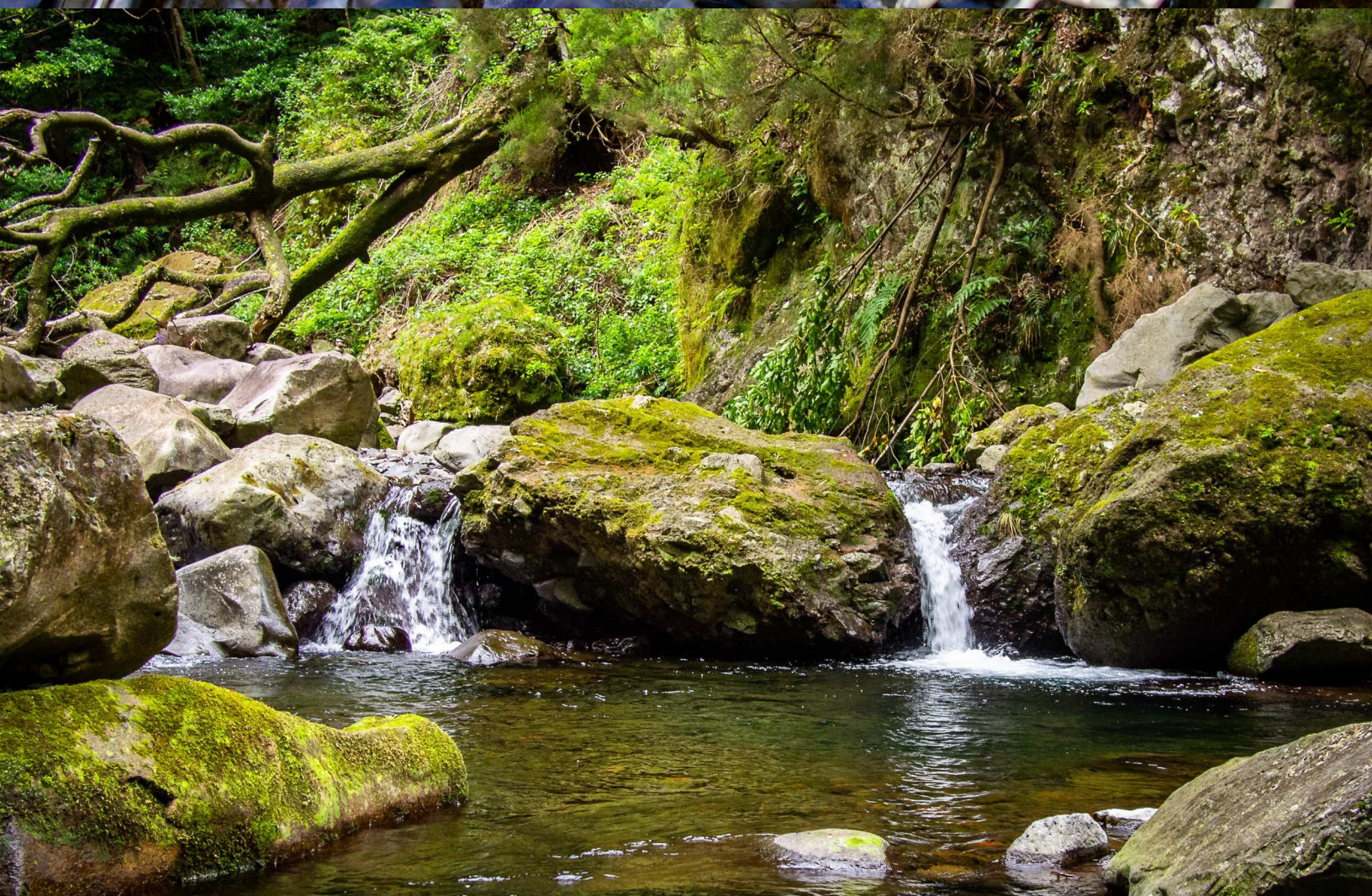


*"I live in Madeira Island, Portugal. I wanted to write something to you, but due to this COVID-19 mess the experience had to be postponed. But I will send some pics from Madeira Island trout and streams..."*

*Just for curiosity, Madeira Island stands in the Atlantic Sea, 500nm SW from Portugal and East from the African coast. In the 1950's the local government started to stock the streams with American rainbows and they did well..."*



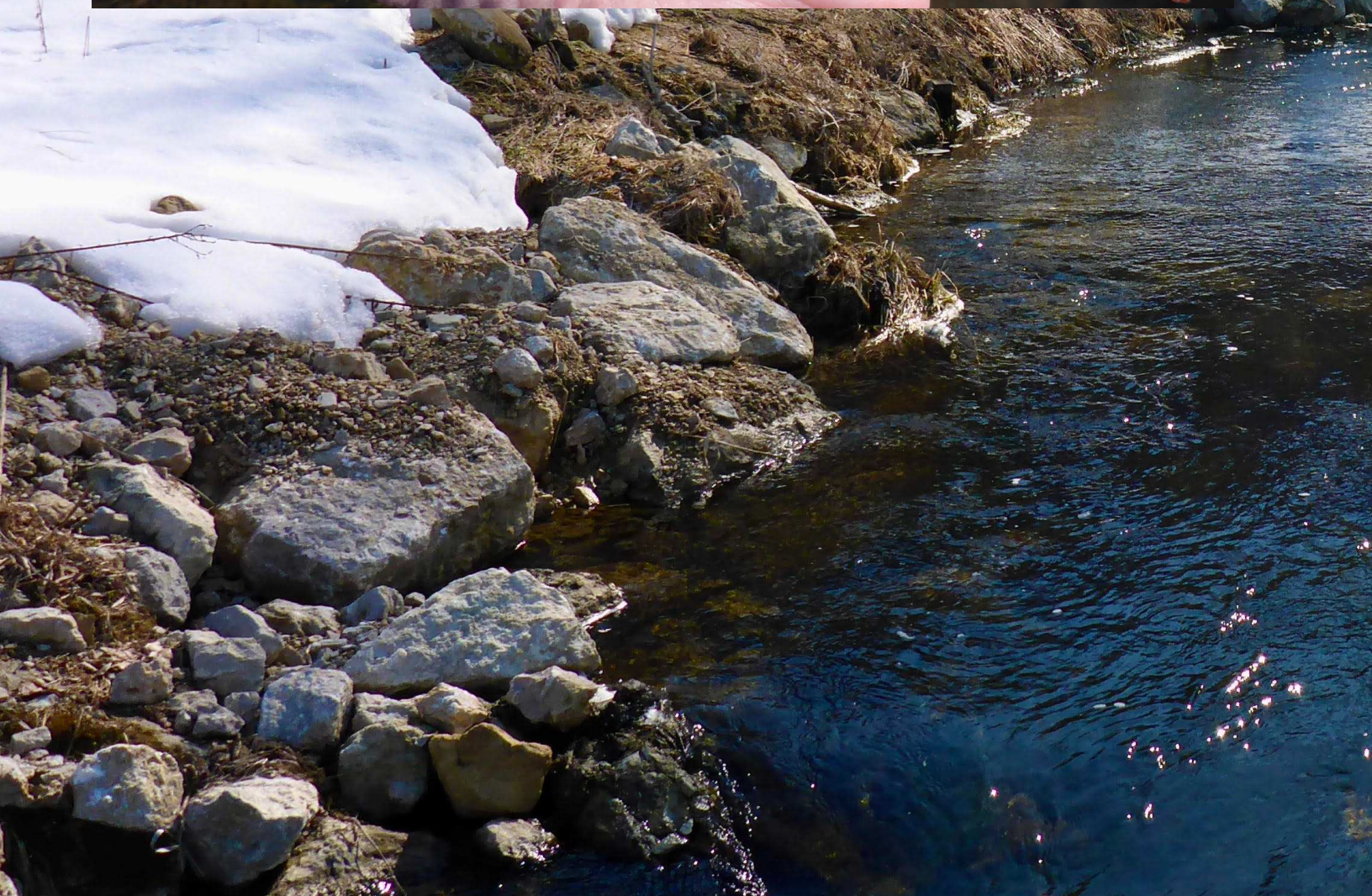


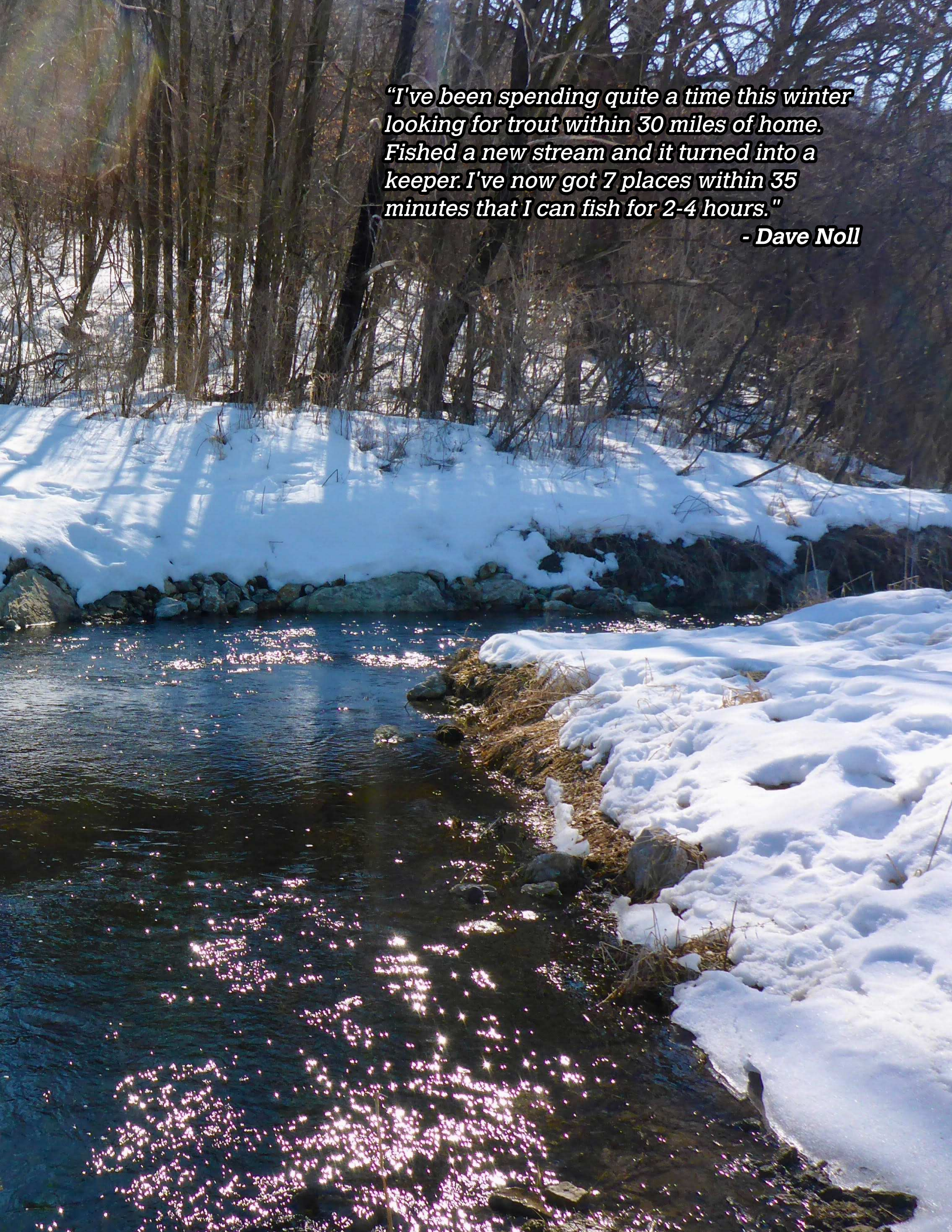


***"...We have a nice amount of streams in the island, all of them typical mountain narrow streams. I've started fly fishing in 2013 and a short time ago tenkara with a TenkaraUSA Sato that was gifted by a German friend. And I'm loving it!"***

***- Joao Mota***



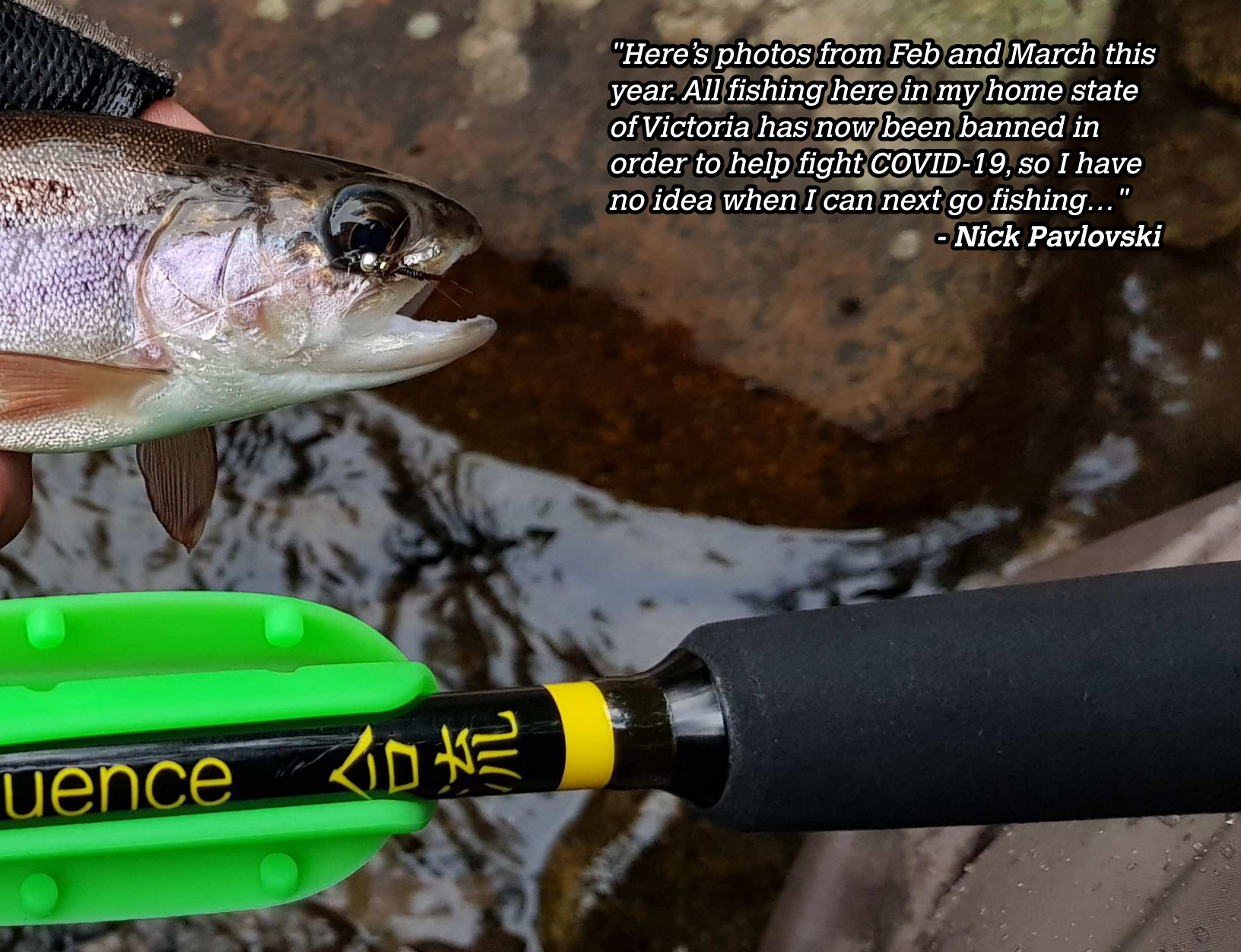




*"I've been spending quite a time this winter looking for trout within 30 miles of home. Fished a new stream and it turned into a keeper. I've now got 7 places within 35 minutes that I can fish for 2-4 hours."*

**- Dave Noll**





*"Here's photos from Feb and March this year. All fishing here in my home state of Victoria has now been banned in order to help fight COVID-19, so I have no idea when I can next go fishing..."*

*- Nick Pavlovski*

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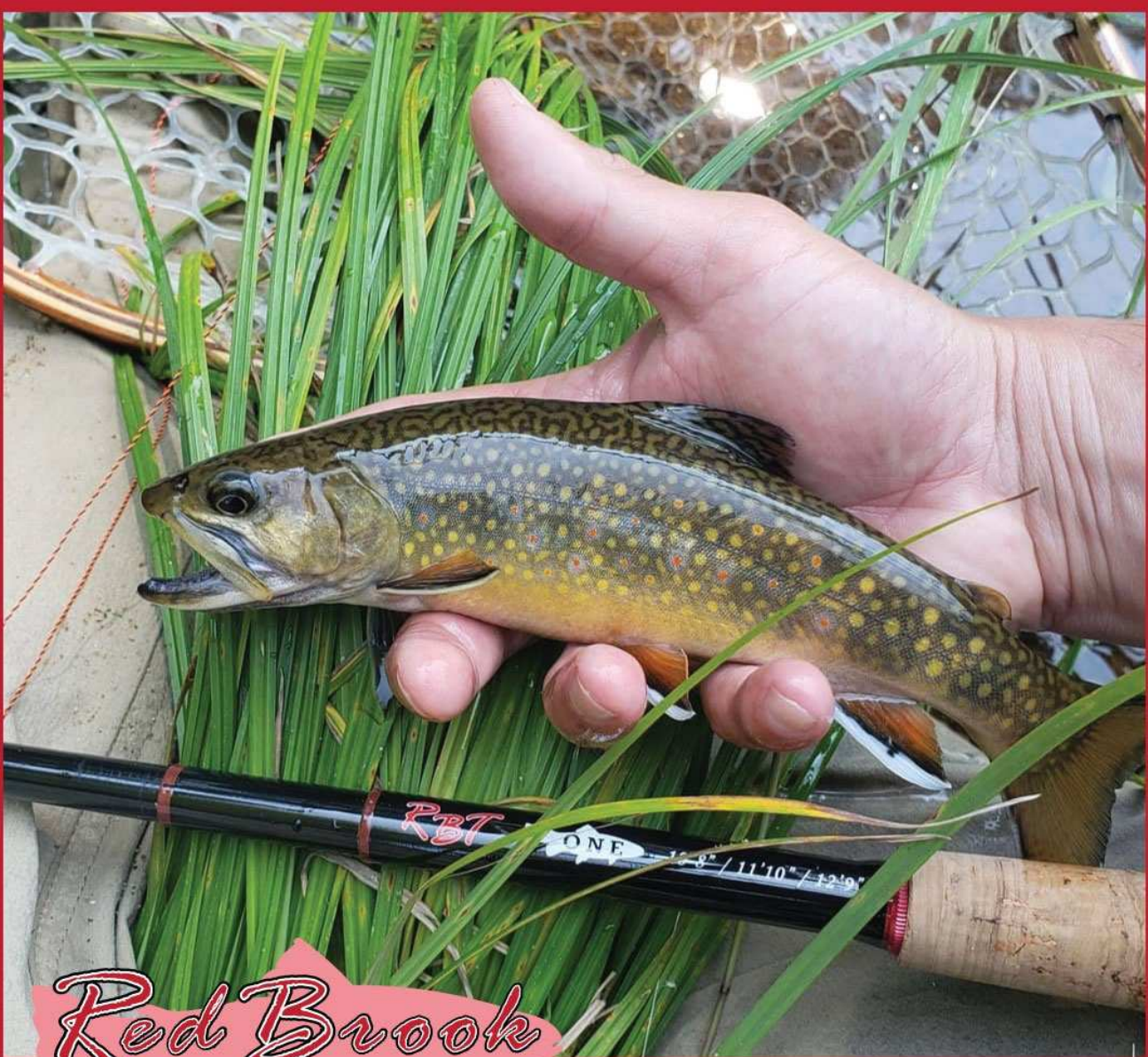
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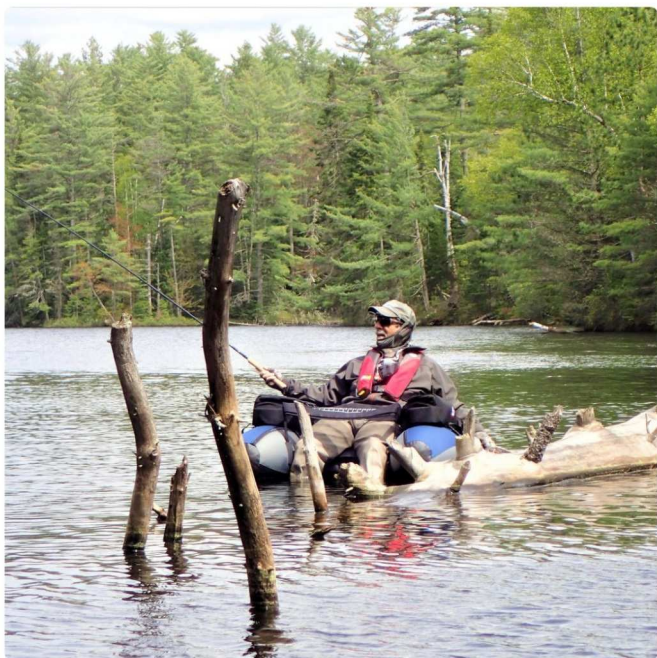
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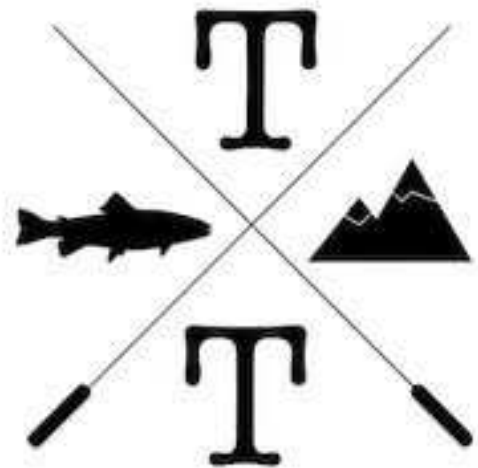


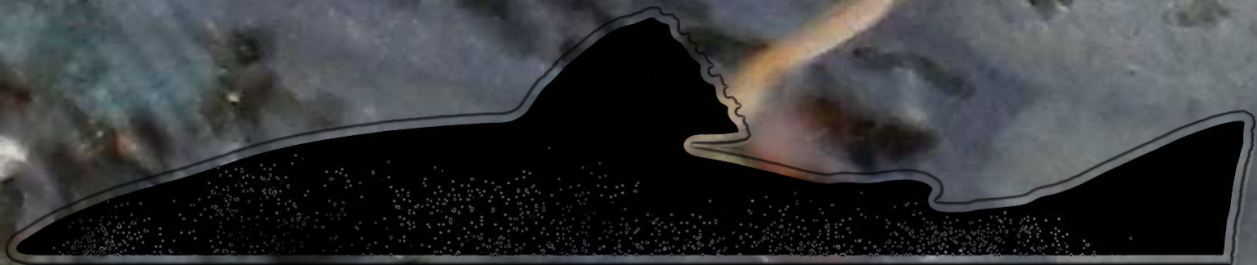
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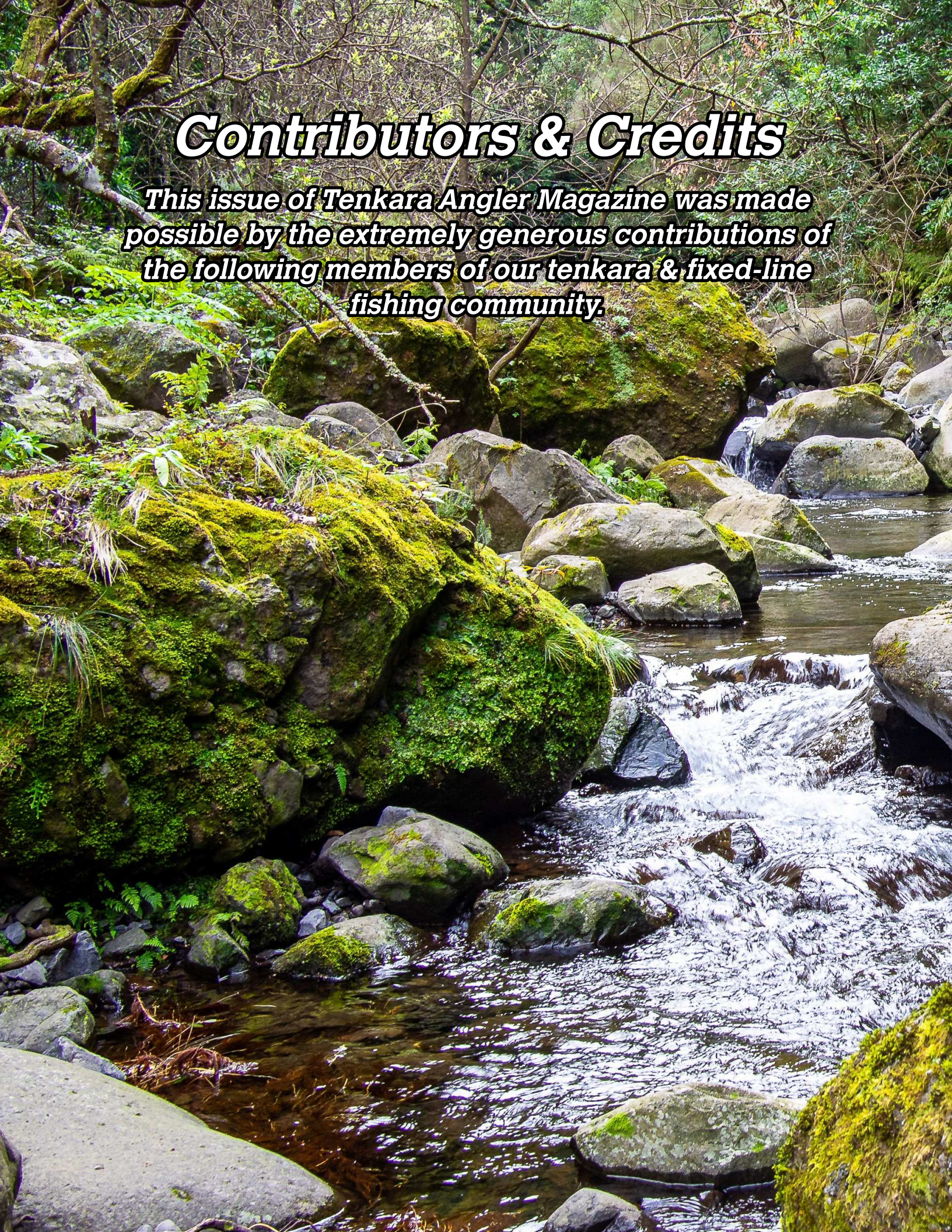
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***This issue of Tenkara Angler Magazine was made possible by the extremely generous contributions of the following members of our tenkara & fixed-line fishing community.***



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A resident of Vancouver Island, British Columbia who has been fly fishing the mountain streams for wild, native-born trout since 1970. The only Canadian member of Tenkara USA Guide Network. Staff writer for Island Fisherman Magazine since 2009.

### ***Bob Long, Jr.***

Bob is in charge of Chicago's Fish'N Kids Program which takes kids ages 8-12, teens, adults, seniors and people with disabilities of all types fishing. He also teaches many tenkara and fly tying.

### ***Jason Klass***

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### ***Paul Vertrees***

Paul Vertrees was one of the first professional tenkara guides in the US and works as a guide for Royal Gorge Anglers in Cañon City, Colorado. He writes on his personal blog, [Tenkara Tracks](http://TenkaraTracks.com), as well as various online and print publications.

### ***Matt Sment***

enjoys exploring tenkara rod fishing while pursuing a wide variety of species. Instructor, guide, co-founder of Badger Tenkara, and creator of the Midwest Tenkara Fest, his career in the outdoor education, leadership, and training fields stretches over two decades.

### ***Steven Maichak***

is a conservation field biologist and the writer behind *Adventure Life Freelance* ([advfreelance.com](http://advfreelance.com)). His fishing roots are in Oklahoma, but he first cast his tenkara line in the mountain streams of Utah where he now lives in pursuit of the state's Cutthroat Slam.

### ***Chris Stewart***

(aka) the TenkaraBum, grew up in Colorado and is currently based in NYC. He is the owner, CEO, & shipping clerk of [TenkaraBum LLC](http://TenkaraBumLLC.com). He usually can't be found because he's wearing camo.

### ***Alan Luecke***

A retired contractor and musician lives in Kansas City. He chases trout in Missouri spring creeks, the Driftless and the Rocky Mountain west. He fishes for everything else wherever he happens to be.

### ***Jerry Tanner***

has been a graphic designer for more than 40 years and has been interested in art for as long as he can remember. You are welcome to visit [themodernfly.com](http://themodernfly.com) to learn more about his art.

### ***David West Beale***

Lives in England, UK, where he fishes for anything that swims with his fly rod. You can follow his adventures at [tenkaratales.blogspot.com](http://tenkaratales.blogspot.com).

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Danièle Beaulieu, Dave Noll, Joao Mota, Yuichiro Ogura, Nick Pavlovski



*Photo: Joao Mota*





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**[Daniel Galhardo has recently started back up the Tenkara Cast podcast, featuring \[tips on reading water...\]\(#\)](#)**



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Spring 2020

