



# Gordon's Quill

Vol. XXIII, No. 28

Spring 2015

## IN THIS ISSUE

### Lead Story

*In the Space of an Angling Life Span . . .*  
by Richard Franklin



### President's Message

Page 2



### Dealing with Multiple Hatches

Page 3



### Standing Athwart the River Yelling Stop: Reflections on Fly-Rod Materials, Fly-Rod Design, and the Factors That Drive Them

Page 4



### Both Sides Now

Page 7



## In the Space of an Angling Life Span . . .

Richard Franklin

I was once an invited guest to observe a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation electrofishing of Cairns Eddy on the famed Beaverkill River. An aluminum boat with fore-and-aft umbrella shockers was launched, and the deepest hole a third of the way down the pool was charged. Dozens of large fish, probably the biggest in the pool, up to twenty-three inches, bellied up to the surface and were scooped up in biologists' nets, placed in a mesh holding tank near the shore, and measured, weighed, and scale sampled. Following collection of data, which took only a minute or so, each trout was summarily tossed back in the water.

I put down my camera and grabbed a twenty-incher, righted it, and strove to revive it. The team laughed at me. "You don't have to do that. He'll be fine. It's not like he was yanked around by a fly fisherman, building up lactic acid in his bloodstream or anything." Sure enough, after a few moments to recover from its electrical hangover, each fish righted itself and zoomed back to its day lie.

A main subject to be addressed by the survey was the percentage of browns that were wild, stream-bred fish and those that were hatchery holdovers. Both the head biologist for the DEC region and I, the amateur ichthyologist and fly nut, believed we could visually identify the difference between the two. I opined that very few of the larger fish were from a hatchery, since most die shortly after stocking, with just a small percentage lasting to the next season, still exhibiting fin deformation from their cement juvenile environment and occasionally the complete absence of a fin. He believed many were products of his hatcheries and that wild fish were the rarity. There was a particular hen we argued about, big, maybe twenty-one inches, not particularly beautiful in form or color, a somewhat grayish lady, but clean finned and, as I said, large. I knew she was wild, and he was certain she was one of his. Her scale sample was notated, and when the results were tallied, he called and apologized. She was indeed a naturally spawned



(continued on page 5)



**THEODORE GORDON FLYFISHERS, INC.**

**OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS 2015-2016**

**President**

Bert Darrow

**Treasurer**

Lauren Suter

**Vice President, Conservation**

Chuck Neuner

**Vice President, Membership**

Pat Key

**Vice President, Secretary**

Charles Flickinger

**Vice President, Events**

**Coordinator**

David Berman

**Vice President, Education**

Karen Kaplan

**Directors**

**Terms expiring in 2015**

David Berman

Bert Darrow

John Happersett

Bud Bynack

Lauren Suter

**Terms expiring in 2016**

John Barone

Shannon Brightman

Joel Filner

Charles Flickinger

Richard R. Machin

**Terms expiring in 2017**

Karen Kaplan

Pat Key

David Kramer

Steve Lieb

Chuck Neuner

**GORDON'S QUILL**

**Staff**

**Publisher**

**Editor-in-Chief**

Bud Bynack

**Art Director**

Richard R. Machin

All correspondence regarding *Gordon's Quill* should be sent by e-mail to editor@tgf.org or by post to: Editor, TGF PO Box 2345, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163-2345 Copyright 2015. All rights reserved.

**President's Message** April 2015



Warm temperatures that wake up our trout rivers are arriving late this spring. As anglers, we have been teased with a few warm days that give us hope that the aquatic insect life will come alive, and then the cold comes back and the river temperatures drop again. We learn to have patience and know that things will change.

And learning to have patience pays off. A number of years ago, TGF was very involved with a project to remove two large culvert pipes from Horse Brook, a tributary to the Beaverkill River. This tributary has been a very important part of the natural spawning process that benefits the

Beaverkill's wild-trout population. The project moved forward over a couple of years, but only in fits and starts. Finally, the project came to a halt when permits were not signed by the town supervisor to move the project ahead. But now, things have changed, and the culvert pipes will be replaced with a stable, bridgelike structure that will not be an obstruction to trout moving upstream to spawn. I would like to thank Tracy Brown, Northeastern restoration coordinator for Trout Unlimited for getting this project back on track to be completed by this year. TGF has helped to support this project with a huge amount of man hours and funds since 2008.

Our new conservation committee chair, Chuck Neuner, will be evaluating other stream-restoration projects this year, and we will be hearing more about them in the future.

In March, we had our Annual Day Dinner and meeting at the Anglers' Club of New York City, and it was a great success. Charles Flickinger did a tremendous job making preparations for the evening and running the event. I want to thank him for doing this job for the board of directors and the membership. At the meeting, we elected a new board member, Bud Bynack, who replaced Sara Low as a director. Bud is our new *Quill* editor and is doing a great job in that role.

Charles Flickinger was elected by the board to be secretary and will replace Sara Low in that position. Both of these people are great volunteers for TGF.

I want to thank Sara Low for her work with TGF while serving as secretary. In that role, she has done an excellent job since 2008. Her recorded minutes of the meetings and input at those meetings were the very best. She arranged for our meeting places, helped to put together the agenda every month with me, and kept board members up to date on everything with which TGF was involved. Along with serving as secretary, Sara also served as our Outings Committee chair and on the Founders Fund Committee. With all of these duties, she still took on the responsibility as chair of our Annual Day festivities last year. She has also helped many of the other board members with preparations of other TGF activities. Sara's valuable input to the board and to me will be greatly missed. I am happy that she will remain on the Founders Fund Committee.

Bert Darrow, President  
Theodore Gordon Flyfishers

# Dealing with Multiple Hatches

Larry Solomon

One of the great gifts from Mother Nature is the abundance of insects that live in a healthy river and supply food for our beloved trout. This sparks the interest of the fly tier to imitate these insects in their various underwater and surface stages, to entice the trout into thinking that these are real bugs to eat. That's the game we play.

The more involved that the enthusiastic fly fisher becomes, the more he or she wants to know, and usually, at least in my case, the more the angler will focus on surface-feeding activity, even though the fish feed more under the surface than on top. It is the magic of visual stimuli, which is similar to the excitement caused by tailing bonefish, cruising tarpon in shallow water, or rolling salmon.

It is interesting and helpful to the angler that most hatches follow a reasonably consistent emergence schedule, which can vary a bit with changing weather, water temperatures, and water levels. But for the most part, the angler who is familiar with the normal progression will have a pretty good idea of what hatch to expect and which one will follow.

However, there are times—and this can vary from river to river—when Mom Nature will throw multiple hatches at you at the same time. I have seen it enough times that it is worthwhile to understand the possibilities, which can prevent you from getting too frustrated and wondering what fly to fish. You should be able to take some fish with one of the flies, but the answer could be all of them.

Remember, nothing is guaranteed to occur the same way all the time. Different situations can make bugs and trout fickle. The purpose here is to give you what I have experienced as real possibilities and approaches that have often brought good results so that you have options to try to help you deal with multiple hatches, which may also result in a better understanding of trout behavior.

Take, for example, the following, which I have experienced a number of times over the years on several of Catskill streams. In early May, as the hatches get into full bloom, there may be times when *Ephemerella subvaria* (Light Hendrickson mayflies, size 14), *Brachycentrus numerosus* (the Shad Fly caddis, size 16), and *Paraleptophlebia adoptiva* (the Mahogany Dun, size 18) are all hatching and on the water at the same time. The difference between the insects is fairly easy to see, and the trout are rising.

Well, what's the game plan? It can vary, depending on when different flies started hatching and whether they are continuing to hatch. The following are theories that have proven fairly valid. Since I have not figured out a direct line to Mom Nature to ask about her agenda, I have to deal with theories and the results of experience.

If one particular insect started hatching considerably before the other two, and some trout start feeding on that, and it continues to hatch, the fish may very likely key on that insect and not bother with the other two, as long as it's available in enough quantity . . . even if it's the smaller insect. Which one starts first? You have to observe or experiment.

If numerous trout are feeding . . . oh boy! You put on a Hendrickson, since it's the largest of the flies, and pitch it out there. The first fish rejects it, the second does also. The third takes it, and so on. Then you put on a Shad Fly. One of the fish that rejected Hendrickson takes it, as does another, then others refuse it. What? If you then put on a size 18 Mahogany Dun, you might find that some of the fish that

(continued on page 5)



# Standing Athwart the River Yelling Stop: Reflections on Fly-Rod Materials, Fly-Rod Design, and the Factors That Drive Them

Charles Neuner

Fly rods can be constructed from a variety of materials, and each has its advantages, depending on the length of the rod, its designated line weight, and the conditions for which it is intended. Fly rods can also be designed in different configurations, with each design lending itself better to different rod materials, depending on its intended purpose and the requirements of its user.

The move from bamboo to synthetic materials began with fiberglass and was driven primarily by manufacturing cost, as opposed to a search for better rod materials. Bamboo continued to be an excellent material to make fly rods, but fiberglass rods were easier and faster to manufacture and could be sold to a growing postwar leisure market at a more affordable price.

While fiberglass rods became increasingly popular, bamboo rods continued to be held up as the standard of excellence. Phrases such as “casts just like a bamboo fly rod” and “comparable to the finest bamboo fly rod” were common fly-rod marketing hyperbole at the time, and this was the beginning of a pattern that continues to this day. A contemporary example would be a current manufacturer’s new graphite formulation promising to deliver “the sweet casting and delicate fly presentation of IM6 graphite rods.” There is a particular irony in that, because an argument could always be made in support of one material over another in terms of cost, but in this case, the new material is being promoted as being equal in performance to a less expensive material that the manufacturer is still capable of producing.

Graphite rods were introduced soon after fiberglass, and many of the early graphite rods were excellent. Before minimal weight and casting power became the measure of a fly rod, they were designed for technical fishing conditions and presentation requirements, and many of these early graphite rods are among the best fly rods ever made. Fiberglass fly-rod design also reached its zenith at this time, and many wonderful examples are coveted by collectors.

The common theme in all of this is that just as rod materials begin to reap the benefits of their application in rod-design evolution, the rod-making industry introduces a new material and promotes the current material as being outdated. The current material continues to be viable, but the new materials are promoted as being superior solely on the virtues of their intrinsic physical properties and rarely, if ever, in the context of overall rod design. The reasons for this range from progress for its own sake to marketing strategy, but in each case, the way in which the rod material is used does not have the opportunity to benefit from continued evolution in rod design.

By accepting that new rod-making materials are necessarily better solely by virtue of their intrinsic physical characteristics, exclusive of their context in overall rod design, we relegate materials such as bamboo, fiberglass, and earlier graphite types to a place that either sets them apart in terms of relevance or that holds them in such historical esteem that their performance as a material becomes secondary to their tradition and aesthetics.

*(continued on page 6)*

## In the Space of an Angling Life Span . . . (continued from page 1)

fish. In fact, almost all of them were. There were a couple of twelve-inch holdovers, but all the larger fish were wild.

This was in the 1980s, and seasons were wetter and cooler than they are now. The water table was naturally replenished, there were fewer wells drilled, and there was less development, though it was well underway. Wild Delaware River browns and even a few rainbows (they preferred the East Branch) would ascend the Beaverkill, even the upper river, and the Willowemoc to spawn, and some would remain there as long as conditions were favorable. Back then, a skilled and lucky fly fisher could actually anticipate a large riser during a major hatch—the Hendricksons, the big Gray Foxes and March Browns. And for those steely nerved enough not to wade into the water until the Green Drake spinners touched down at near dark, truly big heads would glint in the afterlight, right near shore, greedily gorging on imagoes until their bellies felt crunchy when you cradled them for release.

Today and for awhile now, the Beaverkill goes skeletal in the summer, heat-absorbing rocks laid bare to the sun and spawning tribs inaccessible due to their development-induced deltas. The wild fish don't go up there much anymore, spawning primarily in the main channel of the West Branch.

Now, I suppose, they can stock the Beaverkill all they want. It does break my heart, though, that in my relatively short angling life span so much destructive human activity can render a long-famed, lovely—some used to say “perfect”—little river a nonviable habitat for wild trout. For the first time in their families' multigenerational memory, old-timers' wells regularly go dry.



---

## Dealing with Multiple Hatches (continued from page 3)

then put on a size 18 Mahogany Dun, you might find that some of the fish that rejected the first two take this one. Assuming that you are making a decent presentation, why is this happening?

Consider this. Assume that there are twelve trout rising and that the three hatches started within a reasonable time of each other. Fish numbers 1, 4, 5, and 9 started feeding on the Hendrickson, fish numbers 2, 6, 8, and 12 started feeding on the caddis, and fish numbers 3, 7, 10, and 11 started feeding on the Mahogany Dun. . . .

The theory is that the first insect on which the trout starts feeding will be what it will continue to look for and take as long as the bug is readily available. Once that stops emerging and is no longer available, the fish might focus on other insects that are available. Does it happen that way all the time? No, nothing does. But to understand what's going on and have options to play with can bring some satisfying rewards. I have had this theory confirmed on several streams on both coasts, including similar experiences on the Henrys Fork of the Snake, in Idaho.

My favorite phrase is “Observe and experiment . . . a key to learning the game.” When you do and get good results, press the “Save” button in your mind for future reference, and enjoy the challenge.



## **Reflections on Fly-Rod Materials, Fly-Rod Design, and the Factors That Drive Them** (continued from page 4)

Every rod-making material, past and present, has applications for which it was best suited and for which it continues to be best suited, and none of these materials should be exempt from further consideration in designing new rods based simply on the material's contemporaneity.

It would be easy to pass all of this off as romantic Luddism, but product design is founded on human interaction: we each prefer one tool over another for specific reasons, which vary from person to person, and fly rods are fundamentally tools. There are, of course, aesthetic aspects, as well, and people often select products based more on appearance than practicality or performance, but even in this case, it is still a personal decision based on personal needs and personal perceptions.

A more detailed discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages of each rod-making material for a given purpose would require much more space, but I encourage everyone to keep an open mind regarding fly-rod materials and to view the material as only one aspect of overall fly-rod design. Personal preferences and requirements should always prevail in the selection of one's tools, and fly rods are no exception.

A time-honored engineering axiom states: "There are no bad materials, only bad applications." So it is with rod materials and the fly rods we design with them.



---

## **TGF Annual Day Dinner**

Charles Flickinger

The Annual Day Dinner is a TGF ritual that goes back fifty years. It is an event where members and friends share fishing stories, support the Conservation Committee, and enjoy chef Carolyn Chadwick's wonderful cooking. This year's dinner, on March 11, took place, as it has for many years, at the storied Anglers' Club in lower Manhattan.



*TU's Tracy Brown*

The silent and live auctions, as usual, offered many great items: a day's fishing at the DeBruce Fly-Fishing Club, guided by Bruce Pollock; a spectacular bamboo fly rod made by board member Chuck Neuner; and a stunning salted caramel apple pie baked by dinner chairman and board member Charles Flickinger. The auctions were reason enough to attend the dinner.

Many in the large and lively crowd were drawn to the dinner to hear Tracy Brown, Northeastern restoration coordinator for Trout Unlimited, speak about the Horse Brook Restoration Project. This project, a joint TGF/TU initiative, will once again allow trout to spawn up the far reaches of Horse Brook, something that has not happened for decades. Tracy gave an excellent presentation, and if time had permitted, the follow-up conversation would have gone on for hours.

Horse Brook and other upcoming stream-restoration projects like it are what pulls us all together for this once-a-year event. It gives us a chance to have a good time and focus on the issues most important to TGF. If you would like more information on the work of TGF's Conservation Committee or next year's Annual Dinner, contact Charles Flickinger at [CFF7@aol.com](mailto:CFF7@aol.com).



## Both Sides Now

By Bud Bynack

***Editor's Note:** Although I've been back on the East Coast for almost twelve years now, I still help edit a magazine called California Fly Fisher. In an article in its July–August 2013 issue, "Looking Through the Other End of the Telescope," Larry Kenney chronicled his transformation from a parochial West Coast fly fisher to a more open-minded angler who, despite overcoming "regional prejudices," nevertheless concluded, "I'll still look to California as the wellspring of everything I love about fly fishing." The magazine's editor asked me to respond with another look at "regional prejudices," broadening points of view, and angling on the two coasts, and this—somewhat edited—was the result.*

"As fly fishers," Larry Kenney writes, "we're branded by our angling roots, a mark that's visible on our flies and tackle, by our lore, and by the waters that we fish." And when it comes to roots, he knows where he stands. "I'm a California guy," he declares.

I admire that sort of self-knowledge, as well as his ability to expand his perspectives from such a secure base, not least because it's something to which I could never lay claim. But I think there's something to be said for being a little less absolute about the place where one stands, what fly fishing is, and where to find its resources and rewards.

I'm not talking about being rootless, but if we're going to use the metaphor of roots, I want to praise the virtues of the rhizome, a "horizontal subterranean plant stem" that "produces shoots above and roots below" and that is "distinguished from a true root in possessing buds" and "nodes," according to the people who make up the definitions in *Webster's*. That's as compared with the taproot, "a primary root that grows vertically downward." Rhizomes find nourishment and opportunities to flourish in multiple places and in multiple ways, sending up shoots and down roots in different places at the same time.

That has been my experience as an angler and more generally in life—Bud possessing buds, I guess. But that experience is perhaps a somewhat idiosyncratic result of chance—where life has taken me—and education.

To start with, I'm bicoastal—I grew up and went to school in the East (rural New York, where I dunked worms and threw Daredevils with a spinning rod as a kid, and college and grad school in Connecticut, where I didn't fish at all), returned to fishing as a backpacker while teaching in California, started fly fishing while teaching in Oregon (where it is high culture), fished as much as I could (which wasn't enough—it never is) in California when I moved back there, and for the past several years have been living in the suburbs of New York City, two hours from the Catskills and "the cradle of American fly fishing."

In the East, I'm a "West Coast guy." That means several different things. Unlike most people with whom I now hang out, I came to fly fishing late, and it wasn't on East Coast rivers. So, unlike some of my friends, I definitely haven't been "baptized in the Willowemoc," to use Larry's vivid phrase, although I have fallen into it a couple of times. When I reminisce about fishing my home waters, I'm talking about the Deschutes, and my approach to fishing the "little rivers" of the Catskills, as angling historian Mac Francis calls them, tends sometimes toward befuddlement

(continued on page 8)

when I wade into the long, slow-moving pools on these low-gradient streams and see no obvious structure to fish. And as a fly tyer, I still gravitate toward “West Coast” patterns—Cutter’s E/C Caddis is a favorite, and it’s sometimes viewed with amazement by those with whom I swap flies.

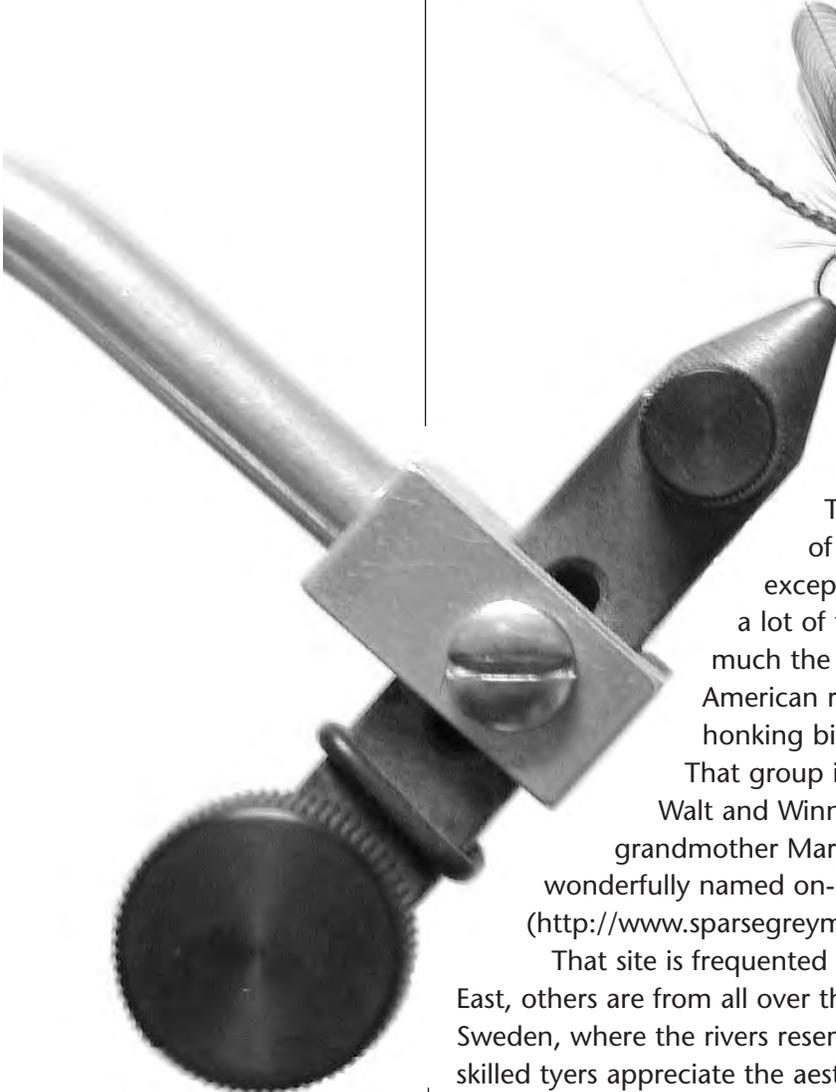
However, because I publish and edit the newsletter of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, whose mission is in part to “preserve, protect, and enhance the Catskill fly tying heritage,” I tend to hang out with a lot of traditionalists, including cane-rod purists (and builders) and folks who refuse to tie with anything other than the natural

materials available to the Darbees and the Dettas and back to Theodore Gordon himself, despite the fact that the Darbees, Dettas, and Gordon himself were pragmatists who used anything they could find that would make an effective fly. Foam flies routinely are anathematized by guild members, and at a recent meeting, I listened as one member grilled another at length about his reasons for going so far as actually to fish *beadhead nymphs*. Gasp.

That sort of thing might tend to confirm the stereotype of Eastern anglers as oriented toward the angling past, except that when they actually go out fishing, a lot of these putative traditionalists turn out to use pretty much the same modern patterns that you might find on any American river—parachutes and CDC or snowshoe-rabbit flies, honking big streamers, when appropriate, X-Caddises, and more. That group includes people such as Joe Fox, the great-grandson of Walt and Winnie Dette, who’s the current proprietor, with his grandmother Mary, of the Dette Fly Shop and the host of the wonderfully named on-line forum Sparse Grey Matter (<http://www.sparsegreymatter.com>).

That site is frequented largely by traditionalists, but while many are from the East, others are from all over the United States, with a rather active contingent from Sweden, where the rivers resemble those in the Catskills and where the stunningly skilled tyers appreciate the aesthetics of the Catskill style of dry fly. That ubiquity and transnationalism is one way in which the whole East-West dichotomy, and indeed any geographical dichotomy, breaks down.

I’ve heard many anglers worry about the Internet’s homogenization of tying styles, but it’s one of the truisms of current media studies that what the Internet makes possible is a twofold circulation of the global in the local, certainly, with the same patterns readily available to fly fishers in New Zealand, California, and France, for example, but also of the local in the global, so that local styles, freed from being merely local, can be seen as part of a whole universe of legitimate possibilities and can flourish in many places on their own terms. That’s happened with minor literatures (there’s been an international florescence of poetry in Welsh and Gaelic) and more broadly with ethnic identities. (Basques at home and in the Basque



diaspora feel connected with each other in ways that make the location of the Basque Country on the French/Spanish boarder less relevant.) That's also what's happening with people who, for a variety of reasons, from antiquarian interests, to pragmatic angling needs, to aesthetic appreciation, want to identify with the Catskill style. They've become nodes in a global circulation of interest and affinity. No longer a taproot, stuck in the mountains of southern New York, the Catskill style has itself become a rhizome.

I guess that from the West Coast, any discussion of the Catskill style makes me sound like an "East Coast guy," and indeed, especially in reviewing tying books for the magazine, I've sometimes pointed out that the Catskill tradition teaches some useful tying skills and that the flies still work, in addition to being gorgeous in a spare, high-modernist kind of way. But I'm a total sucker for any new approach to tying and angling, and there are plenty of innovative tyers working in the East, as well as the West—Vince Wilcox, who never met a synthetic material he didn't like, Paul Weamer, with his parachute-hackle-on-the-bottom Trueform mayfly imitations, and Rich Strolis, with his gonzo streamer patterns are three who come to mind.

However, I don't come to a sense of rhizomic rootedness and the sensibility that values looking at the world in terms of a universe of possibilities from any particular geographical perspective, whatever the accidents of life's journeys, and certainly not because of revelations made possible by the rise of the Internet. Instead, it's by virtue of an interdisciplinary education as a historian and literary critic that made me first a professor of rhetoric and then an editor of academic texts in the humanities. (As it happens, one of the original grad students in the department where I taught at Berkeley was someone who was still remembered fondly, but who had left for reasons that no one seemed quite able to grasp. His name was Larry Kenney, and he left to help found Scott Fly Rods.)

Having been trained as an academic, I'm sometimes accused of approaching the world through the library, but there's nothing wrong with that, as long as you actually take what you learn there out into the world. What I learned from a lifetime of dealing with the interpretation and construction of written texts is a kind of modesty about what anyone can claim to know and a willingness to entertain and evaluate differences in approaches to what is known and what is knowable.

To put it one way, pretty much anything can be put another way. And one reason why so much is written and spoken in the effort to interpret all kinds of texts, from poetry to the law, is that they support multiple understandings. Any extensive real-life experience with interpreting what others have written discourages you from assuming that what something means to you has to be what it means to someone else.

If that is true of something as limited as a piece of writing, how much more so is it true of our efforts to come to terms with the world, even our efforts to find ways to fool a fish? There always are alternative ways to read something, and while some alternatives are definitely better than others, many are good for something. That's true about everything from cane fly rods to foam flies, too.

When my friend was being grilled about his heretical use of beadhead nymphs, his answer could be summarized in two words: "They work." The purist's reply to that, of course, is simple: "So does dynamite!" And I can hear that same person saying "You're trying to stand on a slippery slope! Some alternatives may be better than others, but logically, what you mean is that pretty much anything goes.

Aren't you embracing a particularly wimpy form of relativism in which one thing is as good as another and 'Whatever' is the only value? And isn't that sooooo West Coast?

I don't think so. The thing about rhizomes is that they can grow in different and sometimes opposite directions and still remain rooted. Ralph Waldo Emerson had a surprisingly different name for modesty in making and assessing claims to knowledge: not "relativism," but "valor," "Valor." he wrote in the essay "Circles," "is the power of self-recovery, so that a man cannot have his flank turned, cannot be out-generated, but put him where you will, he stands." It is not a quality conditioned by place or time: "This can only be by his preferring truth to his past apprehension of truth, and his alert acceptance of it from whatever quarter." East and West, that's how I try to stand. A wading staff and studded boots help a lot, though.

