

Valley Angler
A Good Week at Last
by Bill Thompson

This past week the Saco River has produced some of the best fishing I have witnessed in recent years. For the past couple of years we have experienced unusual high water during May and June which has made for pretty poor fishing. Another contributing factor to the previous years' poor fishing has been the lack of mayfly hatches that the Saco is known for. The Gray Drake spinner falls this year have been spectacular.

It is oblivious that the mayflies know more about this than we do, but for some unknown reason they had been making themselves scarce for the last few years. Nature does seem to have cycles that defy science and human logic. When you start your conversations with: "I remember when", you probably have reached the "old timer stage" of your life. I don't really think of myself as an "old timer", but I do remember years when any lighted object in the town of North Conway would be covered with swarming mayflies. I remember having to stop for gas one night after leaving work at around ten o'clock. I had to scrape the mayflies off the gas pump to read the meter.

We haven't quite got to that stage, but the swarms have been impressive for the last two weeks. They seem to be slowing down a little, but the fish will still rise to a spent wing Red Quill.

We wrapped up the last of our fly fishing schools this past weekend with a bang. One of our students caught two beautiful browns last Saturday night. Both fish were taken on a Saco River Spinner. This fellow was using an old Orvis "Far and Fine" rod. These rods are known for being full flex and when he had that first brown on that little rod was bent over like a birch tree after an ice storm. His old CFO reel was screaming on each run that big fish made. I was able to net him after about the eighth run and even then he was reluctant to give in.

I must admit I did a very un-guide like thing. I had an extra rod rigged and ready to go in case my client needed to change flies in a hurry. The last thing you want to be doing is trying to change flies in the dark when there are big fish rising all around you. As luck would have it a big fish started to rise about twenty feet in front of me. I could not resist the temptation and made a cast to him. The old boy

was in full feeding mode and never missed a beat On the first cast he ate the fly. Fortunately our client was already into his second fish of the night and Janet came running with her net and both fish were landed.

Janet ran into a pod of rising fish just below where I had hooked mine. These guys were more educated than the fish we had been catching. They were showing all the characteristics of a well educated Saco River Brown trout. She was getting refusals on every cast. They would rise and look the fly over, but in the end decline the invitation to dine. After a hurried up fly change she had an immediate strike. Unfortunately, this trout's education had also included a course on evasive tactics and he slipped the hook.

By this time it was way too dark to see and we reluctantly reeled in and headed back to the parking lot. Oddly enough we were the last car in the lot. Most anglers arrive too early and leave too early. Brown trout, or at least the smart ones, rarely come out until the sun has gone down.

The Ellis River is still not fishing up to its potential. The well known Timmy's Pool has a few fish in it, however they all seem to gather behind the barrels at the dam. Time of day plays a roll here as well. These fish are more likely to head up stream to feed in lower light conditions. Let's hope that this is the weekend that the Ellis turns on.

Quality fishing means a lot to this "Valley". Sometimes I think that the general public as well as local business owners fail to realize this. There are two full fledged fly shops in the "Valley" as well as two outlet stores that stock fly fishing gear, however the picture is far bigger than just a few tackle shops. Last week besides those anglers who attended our fly fishing school we had several groups of fishermen from out of state who spent the weekend in the Mount Washington Valley. A few had second homes or condos in the area, a couple stayed at a local campground and the rest had rooms in local motels. Needless to say they all had meals at various restaurants. We correspond with a lot of these fishermen in the off season and help them plan their spring fishing trips. Aside from the fact that we book fishing trips with them we also recommend places to stay and while they are here we recommend places to eat. I am guessing, but it's a good bet that they spend more on accommodations and meals than they do on fishing tackle. For the most part the great majority of these anglers come to our "Valley" in the slowest time of the year, Mud Season. When the hatches are on and there are fish in the river the "Valley" is a lot greener.

See you on the river.

