

Valley Angler

Opening Day Luck

by Bill Thompson

Last Saturday's opening day of trout ponds proved to be a good day by all accounts. Just about everyone I have talked to that went fishing had banner days. The rain that came on Monday pretty much put an end to it, but better days are still ahead.

Needless to say it will be awhile before we are able to fish the Saco. Local anglers are familiar with the ways of our local rivers and have learned to wait until the end of May before attempting to fish the river. I found it quite amusing that Channel 9 sent a broadcast truck to First Bridge on Tuesday. I suspect that they went away disappointed that the bridge didn't go out. Must have been a slow news day in Manchester.

Janet was the first in our family to catch a trout on Saturday. She was on the pond at first light and had her first fish by 5:30. Summer and I took the opportunity to catch up on our beauty sleep. Janet said that when she first arrived there was no one else on the pond. She said that the pond was still covered in an early morning fog and quite beautiful and peaceful. While she was finishing up her morning coffee she noticed a few rises close to the shore. After rigging up she made her first cast standing some twenty feet from the bank. A smart move as she was able to hook up on her third cast. Even as far back from the water as she was she said that she had already spooked the larger fish. There is a lesson to be learned here; how often do we charge into the water without first taking the time to observe what is going on?

I didn't get into my first trout until the next day. Sunday, along with one of my favorite fishing buddies, Rick Davidson, I traveled down to Stonehouse Pond in Barrington. This was only the second time that we had ever fished this pond. I was so confident that I knew how to get there that I failed to bring my New Hampshire Atlas & Gazetteer. Needless to say we got lost. We did eventually find the place after what all men find to be a most humiliating act. We had to stop to ask for directions. Our wives, however, were proud of us for making the effort. Let's face it, it would have been hard to come home and try to explain why we never got to our destination or worse yet we could have still been driving around down there.

Stonehouse Pond is perhaps one of the state's prettiest ponds. It is off of a dirt road that, yes, is hard to find. That gives the place a remote feeling even though it is in a fairly heavenly populated area. The pond is fly fishing only and no gas motors are allowed. There is very little opportunity to fish from the shore so some kind car topped water craft is needed. We took a pair of Hobie Float Cats which in my opinion are one of the best fishing crafts ever devised. The float Cat is a one man pontoon boat that is rowed. Unlike float tubes, you set out of the water so that you are high and dry.

Considering that it was the second day of the season there were only two canoes on the pond. Rick and I split up, he went to one side of the pond and I went to the other. It wasn't long before we were into fish.

I started with a streamer fly, but soon changed over to traditional Gold Ribbed Hares' Ear wet fly. This did the trick and I soon had my first trout of the day. A nice fat brook trout, no doubt fresh from the hatchery. It became apparent that a small midge hatch was begging to take place. Fish began to rise all around the boat. Being a crafty old angler I surmised that the trout were taking the bugs just under the surface. The adult insects appeared to be a yellow or cream color. I carefully searched my fly box and selected a cream colored soft hackle. The first cast and a fish struck the fly and of course I missed him. It didn't take long before I had another and this time landed and released him.

I only had a couple of these flies and it wasn't long before the first one was destroyed. The second fly lasted for a while, but soon it had lost its hackle. This didn't seem to bother the fish much as they kept taking the fly. I was quite proud of my angling powers and thought that I had figured out the hatch.

Sometime later I caught up with Rick and I rowed along side of him. All this time he had been catching just as many trout as I had been. I inquired as to what fly he was using, figuring that he too had unraveled the midge hatch mystery. He replied that he had been using a Black Gnat and then had changed to a brown nymph. So much for science. Fresh from the hatchery these trout didn't care if it was a midge or a grasshopper.

See you on the river.