

Valley Angler

The Fair and Boy Scouting

by Bill Thompson

The past week has been a busy one for residents of our “Happy Valley”. In one way or the other most of us have had some involvement with the Fryeburg Fair. Even if you didn’t attend you had to contend with the traffic. Janet and I spent two days at the Fair working with the Molly Ockett Trout Unlimited Chapter and I spent a day tying flies at the Fiber Center again this year.

As always I had a great time tying flies at the Fiber Center. Occasionally someone will ask what the heck fly tying has to do with fiber. The answer is obvious, but I take the time to explain that flies are made out just about everything that is displayed at the center and that fly tying is a craft as old as spinning. I would think that it is a good bet that fly tying is even older. I am pretty certain though that the first time some fisherman saw his wife spinning wool into yarn that he concluded that the yarn might make a darned good body material for his flies.

We also had a lot of fun working at the Molly Ockett T. U. booth. Their chapter does a lot of great things for the state of Maine and it was a pleasure to help out for a couple of days.

One of the things they do is help support a Trout Camp for kids. Something that we also do here in New Hampshire as well. The idea is to take a group of boys and girls, aged 13 to 17, for a week and teach them how to fly fish. I know a lot of older guys that have been fly fishing for years that could benefit from this sort of thing. Aside from teaching the basics of fly fishing the kids learn a little entomology, fly tying, stream etiquette and they even take a trip to one of the states fish hatcheries. Not everyone that applies is accepted and the candidate must prove themselves worthy. Each applicant must submit an essay on why they should be selected and they must all be reviewed by the board of governors. As I mentioned we do have a Trout Camp here in New Hampshire and if anyone knows of a youngster that might like to attend give me a call and I will get you in touch with the right people. Last summer our local Trout Unlimited Chapter sent a young man and I can tell you that he had a very good time and learned a great deal even though he was an experienced angler already.

On Friday I spent the morning manning the booth with Aldro French. Mr. French is by all counts a true Maine legend. Aldro owns and operates a sporting camp on the Rapid River in Maine’s famous Rangeley Region. The lodge is the former home of Louise Dickinson Rich, the author of one of Maine’s most well known books, *We Took To The Woods*. Even if Aldro had never laid eyes on the Rich home he would still be a Maine legend in his own right. Even if the fishing was lousy on the Rapid, which it isn’t, the time spent there in the company of Aldro would be time well spent.

After three days of “Fair Food” I took another day off from the shop and spent a wonderful day at Gunstock Ski Area with about five thousand Boy Scouts. This time I had my Federation of Fly Fishers hat on. For the last couple of years I have served as the Federation’s liaison to the Boy

Scouts. In our quest to get kids interested in the sport of fly fishing we held casting demonstrations at various scouting events throughout New England. This past weekend the Daniel Webster Council hosted a jamboree that included scouts from all over the region.

The staff from Daniel Webster did an outstanding job in putting on this event. They were representatives from just about every outdoor activity you can think of. The kids could rock climb, they could shoot rifles, set in heavy construction equipment compliments of NHDOT, check out the National Guard's NASCAR race car, shoot rockets off, set in a Soap Box Race car, and countless other great things. The National Guard did a fly over with a Black Hawk helicopter which impressed me.

I would guess that more than three hundred plus Scouts of all ages came through our area. Along with four other volunteers from the Federation we gave each and every one of them a hands on fly casting lesson. My favorite scouts are the Cubs; they are by far the most enthusiastic. Some of them are so small that they have to hold the rod with two hands. As strange as it may sound this is an excellent method to teach fly casting to a novice. By using two hands on the grip and by stopping the cast at the bill of your hat you learn not to bend the wrists and to stop the rod at the proper position to make a good back cast. Some of these kids are throwing some pretty long throws after only a few minutes of casting.

With rare exception most of the kids that tried it think its fun. Then there are the kids you can't get rid of, because they like it so much. There are always a few that will come back time after time. These are the ones that just might be the next generation of fly fishers.

Events like these take a lot of time, but if the sport of fishing is going to survive it is important that all sportsmen make the effort. There are so many demands and distractions on our children today it is important that they have the opportunity to share in those things that put us back in touch with nature and our beginnings.

See you on the river.