

Valley Angler

The Internet

by Bill Thompson

I don't know about you but, I did not take the opportunity to fish on opening day. I think I did what just about everybody else did New Year's Day. I stayed home and shoveled snow and after my "New Hampshire Work Out" I watched football games on the tube. I did a little reading too. I have been reading a book about the Italian campaigns in World War II. My father took part in those battles and I wish he was still around. I would like to have his thoughts on the book. Unfortunately, like most veterans of his day, he never talked much about his experiences and I would guess for good reason.

I read on an internet bulletin board the other day that books were a thing of the past. I don't know about you, but I would rather carry a pocket book with me than lugging my lap top everywhere. I guess this guy has a good point though. There is no question that it is a lot easier to look something up on the world wide web then it is to have to trudge to the library.

I have been collecting books on fly fishing and fly tying for about twenty years and I have amassed a pretty good collection. Over the years my personal library has served me well and on more than one occasion it has been a valuable reference tool. It used to be that if you wanted to know a particular fly pattern you had to find it in a book. That is not the case anymore, just about every fly pattern ever tied can be found on the internet. Just about all you have to do is Goggle the patterns name and most likely you will find a picture and sometimes the directions on how to tie it. As slick as this may be I am not ready to get rid of my books.

As good and as much fun as the internet is it still has a lot of flaws. There is a new book out called *The Cult of the Amateur (How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture)*, by Andrew Keen. Now I have not read this book yet, but I do intend to. However, I have long thought that a great deal of what appears on the internet as fact is more likely crap. In today's world anyone with a computer and a link to the Internet can be an instant expert on anything he chooses.

Like a lot of fishermen I enjoy the various bulletin board sites that exist on the web. These are a lot of fun and they provide a sense of community among anglers and a public forum to exchange information. However these sites also have their flaws.

The web provides the opportunity for those who post the ability to remain anonymous. It is now possible to slander someone or something without fear of reprisal. Asking a question about a certain piece of gear and you are certain to get a dozen replies almost immediately. Some of the replies may be legit; however anyone with an ax to grind will surely do so. I find it particularly obnoxious on those sites run by shops when the sites owner replies to a question on a piece of equipment that he doesn't stock in his shop. He will almost certainly start off by saying that so and so company makes a great product and the owner is a great guy, but you can do better by buying what I carry.

I always get a kick out of questions about rods. They start off with: "I am considering buying a new rod from company X. How does this rod compare to company Y's?" You might as well go to a NASCAR race and ask the fans as to which are better a Ford or a Chevy? The only way to make this kind of decision is to go out and cast the rod for yourself.

Today when someone has a bad experience with a product or a provider the first thing they do is vent their rage on the Internet. The company of course has no way of defending themselves and the reader has no idea of what sparked the problem and what steps the company took to remedy the situation.

There are no secrets anymore thanks to the Internet. There may never have been to begin with, but today if someone finds a great place to fish you can bet that he will post it on the web as soon as he can get on line. True it may be great to inquire as to how the fishing is on the Androscoggin and you will get an instant answer (right or wrong) by checking the Internet.

Over time the best of sites seem to become dominated by one or two individual members. These guys are always the experts on everything. It is doubtful that anyone could have possibly enjoyed as much time on the water as these fellows claim. They can tell you what rod and reel to buy, where to fish, what scotch to drink and what cigar to smoke with impunity.

I guess if I have a real pet peeve with these sites its posts that end with JMHO (just my humble opinion) and smiley faces. Let's face it; the writer's opinion was anything but humble.

In all honesty there are a lot of good things about these sites. These are public forums and everyone has a right to be heard. Just don't be bullied by the so called "Experts". In some cases some very controversial and timely issues are brought to light that might not be given any attention in the press. They provide a place to announce various events of interest to members and have been know to promote worthy causes.

Someone even pointed out that the Internet has even served to make books even better. Unless a book is self published it is most likely subject to a certain amount of editing. Readers are at least reasonably assured that somewhere along the line someone other than the author has checked the facts before publishing.

The Internet is a lot like voting in the New Hampshire presidential primary. There is a lot of bull being spread around and it's up to us to filter out the truth and find the right candidate. When it comes to the Internet, Caveat Emptor, but that is JMHO.

See you on the river.

