

Valley Angler

The Last Angler

by Bill Thompson

The first weeks of the season have already passed and if you haven't been out yet what are you waiting for? By now all of the areas trout ponds have been visited by the stocking truck. Granted, we did have a few days of higher than normal wind, but there are ways around that and a skillful fly fisher should be able to handle it and those using spin gear should have no trouble at all. OK, I admit it, I did beg off one evening when it was blowing particularly hard. Other than the wind there should be no excuse. So where are all the fishermen?

Last Saturday, on my way to the shop, I passed two of the best trout ponds in the state and there was no one fishing at either location. Both of these ponds are general law and I no for a fact had been stocked. Sunday morning was not much better; only one lone boat was spotted.

My wife, Janet, is by far the most aggressive fisher person in the family. Opening day she was on the water at 5:00 A.M. and had caught her first trout by the time anyone else had appeared. Summer and I were able to contain our enthusiasm and remained in bed until it was time to get up and go to work. As a gentleman I prefer to fish the evening rise and it would appear that Summer, as a lady, subscribes to the same theory. It would seem that most anglers feel this way as Janet was joined by only two other fisherman by the time she had to leave to go to work.

The big question is where are all the fishermen? There was a time, not that long ago, when "opening day" was a celebrated holiday and fishermen thronged to the streams on mass. It is no secret that the sales of hunting and fishing licenses are have been slipping in the last few years. A fact that no doubt delights the PETA crowd. Those of us in the industry have many theories as to why this is happening. We have created a society that pretty much demands far more than the forty hour work week that was once almost guaranteed. If you work in this Valley it is a good bet that weekends are part of your work week. Sport fishing has always been practiced by the leisure class, but today even the leisure class has to work longer hours to stay afloat.

Maybe because we have less time we don't spend as much time with our children. Playing catch in the back yard or taking the kids fishing are fading fast as an American icon. Norman Rockwell would have a hard time finding inspiration for Saturday Evening Post covers these days. Even the Boy Scouts are losing membership. Some say it is because kids spend so much time with their computers and game machines that they fail to play in the great outdoors. I think that today's parents are afraid to let their kids play in any kind of unsupervised situation. Kid's lives are almost entirely planned for them. I can't help thinking about that ad where the suburban housewife is driving in her SUV with her kids. Each kid is being chattered to a different activity; they begin to chant their different destinations: oboe, ballet, soccer and karate, over and over again until you hit the remote button.

Kids do love to fish and judging by the photos in this weeks Conway Daily Sun taken at the Carroll County Fish and Game Club's fishing derby, they like it a lot. Groups like Carroll

County Fish and Game are doing their best to stem the tide. Good friend, John Buckley who guides out of the North Country Angler, took time away from his fishing to spend his morning at the club demonstrating fly casting and fly tying. Other groups like the Federation of Fly Fishers and Trout Unlimited all have programs to get kids and families interested in hunting and fishing. The Seacoast Chapter of Trout Unlimited is holding a fly fishing camp for kids this year and our local chapter, Saco Valley Anglers, is sending a kid. FFF has a wonderful program that works with the Boy Scouts. I just read where the Girl Scouts are considering adding a merit badge for fly fishing. New Hampshire Fish and Game has a "Lets Go Fishing" program for kids and last weekend they held an event, at their headquarters in Concord, designed to introduce kids and their families to hunting and fishing. In the next few weeks just about every town in our area will have a fishing derby for kids. These events are put on by local clubs and fire departments and always provide a good time for everyone who participates.

In the end though, it comes back to the Moms and Dads of the world to take some time off and go fishing with their kids. You may never catch a fish, but you're bound to make some good memories and who knows you might even create a Norman Rockwell "moment".

See you on the river.