

Valley Angler Tying Voodoo Flies by Bill Thompson

As much as I hate to admit it, with a few exceptions, the fishing season has come to a halt. The time has come to hunker down by the fire and break out the fly tying gear. Truth is I tie flies all year long, but when the cold weather sets in I start to tie seriously in preparation for the next year.

Just a few days ago I started to go through my fly boxes to get an inventory on what I might need to replace. What I found was rather shocking. Just about every box had some gaping holes. I sat down and made up a partial list of what I will need to tie in order replace what was lost over the last season. Obviously by doing this you can learn a lot about what flies you favor and use the most. Like most anglers I base my choice of flies by using a mix of science and outright voodoo.

If you are a local angler you can bet that you start the season off with a bunch of Red Quills in your box. If you are like me they are pretty much used up by the end of June. The use of this fly is dictated by science. As any local can tell you the Red Quill makes a pretty good imitation of the Gray Drake spinner, a mayfly that is very active on our local rivers in June, especially the Saco.

By the same token those who frequent the Ellis will most surely have some Light Cahill's or a Gray Fox pattern in their box at the same time of year. Again science takes preference as the Gray Fox make their appearance.

I would guess that just about every angler in America carries a good selection of Elk Hair caddis in their fly box. This is a fly that would probably come under both headings; science and voodoo. The caddis is without doubt one of the most prolific insects on our streams. As a result the Elk Hair Caddis is used both as a searching pattern and as a more exact imitation when a real hatch is occurring. Needless to say it's a good idea to carry several different sizes and color combinations.

When it comes to those magic voodoo flies I carry several. These are the flies that you tie on when you haven't a clue as to what to use. They say that having faith in a fly is half the battle and it stands to reason that if you believe that the fly will work then you will fish it longer. One of my favorites is the Adams Parachute. The Adams looks buggy and fish eat it. That's all you have to know. It works just as well in fast water as it does on still water. If you need science as to why it works, your theory is as good as mine or the next guys.

The Stimulator is another great searching pattern. You could make the case that it looks like an adult stonefly, but it could just as easily be a caddis or a grasshopper. Because it is generally tied in larger sizes it makes an excellent platform to tie a dropper fly to.

As for sub-surface voodoo flies the Copper John has become in a very short time one of the most popular flies in America. The abdomen is made from copper wire giving the fly its name. Since there is very little in nature that swims in our rivers that have a copper hue its anybody's guess as to why fish take it.

Speaking of great flies tied by John Barr, the Copper John was invented by John Barr, the Slumbuster is another great fly that has gained wide spread expectance in the last few years. The Slumbuster is tied with a zonker strip made from a strip of squirrel fur. The fly uses a cone head for weight and the squirrel strip is tied over a body of crystal braid. The squirrel fur has great movement in the water and the flash combined with the weight to get the fly down to where the fish are makes this a killer fly. Like most voodoo flies it can look like a lot of different things that fish eat. It looks a little bit like a leech, or possibly a bait fish or possibly a sculpin; well you get the picture.

I guess if there had to be a grand daddy of all voodoo flies it would have to be the Royal Coachman. The Coachman has been around for a long time and is said to be named for Queen Victoria's coachman who apparently tied a few flies when not driving the Queen about London. The fly was first tied as a wet fly and than became a streamer fly. Soon after the Coachman made the transition to a dry fly and than the legendary Lee Wulff put his own stamp on it and it became the Royal Wulff. It is amazing how many other patterns have added the Coachman's signature red floss band flanked by equal bands of peacock herl and added the title of Royal to their names. The Royal Trude would be the perfect example. In any event there is something magic about the color combination that keeps the Royal Coachman in fly fishers' boxes all over the world.

If you haven't already broken out your fly tying kit why not dust it off and join me and a host of other "Valley" tiers at the North Country Angler on Saturday morning. We have an informal group of dedicated tiers of all abilities who tie every thing from Atlantic Salmon flies to Saltwater flies. It is a great way for new tiers to get started as well as a great way for more advanced tiers to learn new tricks. The coffee is free and we are always ready to provide tools and material for beginning tiers. We meet every Saturday morning from 10 to 12 A.M.

See you on the river.