

Valley Angler

Last Minute Summer Reading

by Bill Thomson

I know that summer is just about over and that by next week many will have already gone back to school, but there is still time to add a couple of more books to your summer reading list. Just maybe you will be fortunate enough to get in one more beach day before then and you will be looking for something to read while soaking in those last summer rays.

I have just finished reading “The Founding Fish” by John McPhee and, like all of his books, this is a must read. Most outdoors people are probably most familiar with McPhee's “The Survival of the Bark Canoe”, and if not you should be. “The Survival of the Bark Canoe” is the story of Henri Vaillancourt of Greenland, New Hampshire who builds birch bark canoes and a trip on the Allagash River in Maine in one of Vaillancourt's canoes. “Coming Into The Country”, about Alaska before Shara, is also a must for the outdoor set.

“The Founding Fish” is all about the American Shad. McPhee covers just about every aspect of this noble fish from the its great spawning runs in most every river on the east coast from The St. Johns River in Florida to the Miramichi in New Brunswick, Canada. Especially interesting is the importance of the shad in the history of our country. The spring runs of these fish along with the Atlantic Salmon were an important food source for the early colonists. Shad may have even played an important part in saving Washington's army from starvation at Valley Forge. Although McPhee points out that where as the army did indeed enjoy the bounty of the spring run of 1776 it arrived after the army had already been resupplied. A great story even though it is probably more myth than reality.

McPhee does go into some detail of how to fish for shad, but the book is far more than just a “how to fish” book. There is even a discussion about “catch and release” and those wacky folks from PETA. The issue is not treated lightly and a great deal of credence is given to their argument. Those who share the PETA viewpoint should pay attention here and read this book. I guess that in the end though McPhee makes clear his view on the subject as the last chapter is titled “Cooking Shad”.

This book is not new on the market and in fact was first printed in 2002. I have been wanting to read it for some time and have finally found time to get to it. The book is everything that the first reviewers said it was, so don't take my word for it get your own copy.

Another interesting book that you might want to get a hold of is “North of Easie” by Robert J. Romano, Jr., published by Birch Book Press. This book has just come on the market and I received mine just a few days ago, so I must admit I have not read it yet. However, if it is anything like his first two books, “Fishing With Faeries” and “Shadows in the Stream, I am confident that I will like it and you will too. Roberts’s books are centered around the Rangeley Lakes region in Maine and do, of course, contain some fishing content. The new book is a novel and a slight departure from his first two works.

Janet and I have been taking a very short vacation this week. The shop has been in the competent hands of Nate Hill. Yes, we do plan on getting a little fishing in and maybe a little down time reading a good book.

See you on the river.