

Valley Angler

Indian Curses and Some Fishing Too

by Bill Thompson

It is amazing what a little rain can do. Judging by what I read in Monday and Tuesday's Daily Sun there were a few who found this out the hard way. It doesn't take much to turn the Saco into a very dangerous place. The odd thing about this is that we have to relearn this every year. The same headlines and dramatic photos appear every year on the front page of The Conway Daily Sun.

Many locals, especially those who live on the Maine side, are familiar with the old Indian curse placed upon the Saco. Some residents still stay away from the river each year until the curse has been fulfilled.

The quick version of the curse is that some early English sailors, who had anchored their ship near Biddeford Pool, encountered a group of Native Americans. One sailor told another that Indian children could swim at birth. In order to test the theory one of the sailors grabbed an infant from its mother's arms and threw the child into the river. The theory proved to be a myth and the baby sank to the bottom. The distraught mother jumped in and retrieved the child, but alas, it was too late. The father of the drowned infant was a powerful chief by the name of Squandro. After mourning the child for three days Squandro went down to the river and asked the river spirits to take the lives of three white men every year until the white men were driven from the river. For a more poetic version of the story I urge you to look up John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "The Truce of Piscataqua".

Whether or not you believe in Indian curses there are those who fail to respect the river and pay the price every year. Fortunately, this time, those who failed to take the river seriously were lucky enough to escape with their lives. Many have the illusion that the Saco is nothing more than some kind of water ride in an amusement park and unfortunately the river is often packaged and sold to the vacationing public as just that.

By the end of the month, when school is out, the Saco will become a virtual highway for canoes, kayaks and rubber tubes manned by happy tourists. Sad to say a lot of these floating parties are fueled by alcohol. Much of the mayhem that happens on the river is confined to the Maine side, but we have our fair share right here and it seems to get a little worse each year. Freyburg and the other river towns in Maine have gone to great effort to curtail the rowdiness. My great fear is that the time is not far off when we will have to deal with the same problems on our part of the river.

Needless to say the high water put an end to the great fishing we had been enjoying. The nice thing about New Hampshire is that if one river isn't fishing well there is always another that is. Sunday I took some time away from the shop and headed up to the Androscoggin. This was my first time this year to fish the Androscoggin and it proved to be a good day.

My real mission for the day was to head up to Stewartstown to get some photos of Matallak's grave. The story of Matallak, "The lone Indian of the Megalloway", has always fascinated me. I have on numerous occasions visited the grave, but for some reason or another had never taken any pictures.

It was raining hard when I left in the morning, however, the weatherman promised that there would be sunny skies in "The Great North Woods" and for the most part he was right. Although the moment I

stepped out of my truck at North Hill Cemetery in Stewartstown, to take my pictures, the skies opened up. Talk about Indian curses. I got my shots despite the rain and paid my respects to Matallak as well.

After visiting the cemetery I headed back down to the Androscoggin for a few hours of fishing. I stopped in Erroll and picked up a sub at the Erroll Country Store and headed down to Smokey Camp Brook to enjoy my lunch. There were three cars pulled over, but there was room for one more so I pulled in. While I ate my sub the fishermen who was parked next to me broke out his grill and begin prepared his lunch. Two other anglers walked over and soon we were all engaged in conversation. Two of the men were from Dover and the angling chef was from Massachusetts. The two from Dover were on their way home from fishing in Rangeley and the other fellow was just beginning his expedition. We traded information and the two companions headed into the river to fish. I headed south and ended up fishing at Seven Islands for a while before heading down to the Pontook dam. I did catch a few small brook trout at the bridge, but as usual Pontook proved to be the better spot.

When I arrived at the dam there was a family of three fishing; Dad with a fly rig and mother and daughter were spin fishing. They didn't seem to be having much luck. I walked up closer to dam and started casting into the eddy close to the bank. I was rewarded with a small bass almost on my first cast. I waded out a little and began casting again. I must have fished for over a half an hour with no success. The family left and I had the whole place to myself.

I went through a whole arsenal of flies before hitting on the right one. Almost in desperation I tied on a large Stimulator. I threw back into the same eddy that the bass had come from and wham, a nice rainbow slammed the fly. After taking his picture I slipped the hook and released him back into the river. I cast for another few minutes before once again casting back into the eddy. This time a nice salmon hammered the fly. He put on a pretty good show, leaping several times before I had hold of the leader. I was about to snap his picture when he gave a final shake and got off the hook. No problem, I thought: "I'll get you the next time".

I missed a couple of strikes and noticed that it was starting to get colder as the sun started to go down. There didn't seem to be any evidence of any great hatch about to come off so I waded out of the river and walked back up to the truck. I clipped off the fly and placed it on the drying patch on my vest. I took the rod apart and put it back in the bag and then into its aluminum tube. I took my time getting my waders off while setting on the tail gate of the Ford. I sat there for a moment and watched the river and thought what it might have looked like back when Matallak lived here. No dams back then and probably some pretty fair fishing too. Matallak and Squandro would probably agree that things were a lot better back then.

See you on the river.