

Valley Angler

The Real Last Trip to the Androscoggin

by Bill Thompson

A couple of weeks ago I wrote that I had probably made my last trip of the season up to the Androscoggin. As luck would have I did manage a second trip. This time I was fortunate to enjoy the company of good friends Rick and Pat Gerber. The Gerber's and the Thompson's have enjoyed a great many fishing adventures together over the years. For many years we traveled and fished together in Montana and Wyoming. Last weekend we fished closer to home, but the results were the same. As always we had a great time and caught a few fish in the bargain.

The Gerber's showed up rather unexpectedly, with their drift boat in tow, at the shop last Saturday morning. The offer was made that either Janet or I was to join them for a drift. Being the devoted husband that I am I deferred to Janet. Who in turn insisted that I go. The argument was settled peacefully when the Gerber's explained that they would be spending the night camping at Mollidgewock and that one of us could drift Saturday and the other on Sunday. I won the toss for the first trip.

Fortunately I keep several rods and reels in the truck at all times for just such emergencies. A few minutes later and I was headed up Route 16 trailing behind the drift boat. I think that Rick has the prettiest drift boat on the Androscoggin. It is a true wooden boat. The boat is varnished and has a warm glow to it. Rick, who is an artist, has adorned the boat with a few personal touches. The bow is painted with a Northwest Native American design depicting a salmon.

An hour latter we were pulling into Mollidgewock Campground. We had previously dropped off my truck at the take out place so that we would have a shuttle at the end of the day. This was unnecessary as Pat, who is somewhat of a physical fitness nut, (in other words is smart enough to stay in shape), dropped the trailer off and then rode her bike back up to the put in place. My hat is off to her as there is quite a good size hill between the put in place and the take out.

While waiting for Pat to return Rick and I drifted down to where Mollidgewock Brook enters the Androscoggin. It was indeed a beautiful day. Most of the color had gone by, but there was still enough to add to the brightness of the day. Another plus was that the wind was blowing downstream making rowing and casting much easier. We had no luck casting up into the brook. Pat soon showed up and Rick rowed ashore to pick her up and soon the real trip was under way.

I wasn't long before Rick had the first fish of the day; a nice fat rainbow. Pat soon followed up with a fish of her own, another rainbow. Both fish were taken on nymphs. The best producing fly of the day turned out to be a Bead Head Rainbow Prince.

A short while later we came to an out cropping of rocks in the middle of the river that forms a quasi island. The general practice is pass the island and then back the boat up until the boat just below the bottom of the island where it is anchored. From here it is possible to get out of the boat and wade. For some unknown reason we decided to fish from the boat and Rick got out and held the boat in place while Pat and I cast. Rick picked up his rod and began casting as well. As luck would have it he hooked up. During the ensuing struggle to land the fish Rick lost his grasp of the boat and Pat and I began to

drift away. No one seemed overly concerned as we slowly began to leave the captain behind. Everyone was far more interested in landing the fish and taking pictures than securing the boat.

Once the fish was landed and released I took up the oars and attempted to row the boat back up stream to where Rick was left standing. Once again it was evident why no one will let me row their boat. I struggled a bit and managed to get the boat firmly between a rock and a hard place. Fortunately it was close enough for Rick to get back into the boat and was once again back at the oars.

Not long after I hooked up with my first fish of the day. It was, in all modesty, a pretty good sized Rainbow. It was to be my only fish of the day, but, again in all modesty, it was the largest fish of the day. I prefer quality over quantity any day.

When you are drifting a river time has no meaning. The bank slips by as you continue to cast. Sometimes you forget the mission and your focus, or lack of, is drawn to other things. Perhaps an osprey flies over head or you just become transfixed by the clouds. This is of course the precise moment when a strike occurs. Time did indeed slip by and it was not until four in the afternoon that we stopped for lunch. Lunch was an informal event, served off the rear deck.

After lunch we pressed on towards the take out point. The fishing was slow and only a couple of more fish came to net. At this point in the trip it was more fun to set back and just enjoy the ride. Easy for me to say as I was not rowing. Rick did remark how glad he was that the wind was still with us.

We reached the take out place and unloaded our gear from the boat. The trailer was backed into position and the boat was winched out of the river and up on to it. Once the trucks we loaded we said our good byes and headed in our separate directions. The Gerber's to the camp ground and I headed south back to Freedom.

By now the sun had gone down and it was dark. The moon was up and it cast a silver sheen on the river as I drove towards Berlin. Driving through the Thirteen Mile Woods at night, even with an almost full moon can be a little disconcerting. On one hand it is hard to ignore the beauty, which can be mesmerizing; however on the other hand it can be dangerous. This is moose country and you never know when one of the critters will wander out in front of you. You are always hoping to see one, but at the same time you are just as happy that you didn't.

Driving over Pinkham Notch was just as exhilarating. We do live in a beautiful part of the country.

I have an old T shirt that I purchased years ago at a fly shop in Craig, Montana. In fact the Gerber's were present when I brought the shirt. Over time the shirt has become so worn from wear that it should have been consigned to the rag bag years ago. I don't wear it anymore and it sets at the bottom of my T shirt drawer. I just don't have the heart to throw it away. The shirt is emblazoned with the motto, "Romance, Adventure and a few Large Fish". In a way the motto kind of sums up any fishing trip. The romance part may not be the kind you would find in a Harlequin novel, but there is some just the same. There is always an adventure and on a good day there may be a few fish thrown into the mix. Any day spent fishing with the Gerber's is sure to have all of the above.

See you on the river.