

Expert by Accident

For the first 18 years of my life I lived in a small Idaho community called White Bird. Hunting and fishing was part of my family's heritage. We survived by the bounty of a rod and gun.

Living in the outback of Idaho during the 1960s meant you were isolated and deprived of current fishing practices. I was introduced to dry fly fishing because I had no idea that a nymph or streamer existed. I would have readily sunk something because I was already sinking a worm and my motive was to catch fish. So my first 10 years of fly fishing was on a dry fly *simply* because I didn't know better. But I met my objective—wow did I catch fish. Not only for my family, but I supplied fish for many of our neighbors as well. I had license to catch and kill and did it daily to keep up with demand. By age 18 I'd caught more fish than an avid fly fisher would in a lifetime. And a strange connection to the rise of a trout was embedded. The primary objective in fly fishing revolved around the rise.

I then entered the real world where odd fishermen had colored bobbers on their lines and they stripped minnow patterns. Everywhere I fished someone was sinking something and it dawned on me that I was the black sheep in the crowd. I couldn't adapt to the new fishing techniques because the rise was the sole reason why I fly fished. So I kept casting a dry fly even though my fellow anglers were nymphing. The game changer has always been fly tying and the more insects I recreated at the vise, the more fish I caught. As years progressed I realized fly fishing could be played by my own rules and all the gold standards could be turned upside down. Hundreds of times a year I'm reminded of the rules such as

- 1) You should only fish a dry fly when fish are rising.
- 2) You don't catch big fish on a dry fly.
- 3) You're not going to get a fish to eat at the surface in winter.
- 4) Ninety percent of a trout's diet is acquired at the bottom of a river, thus you must nymph.
- 5) There are rivers that can't be fished on a dry fly.

My response

- 1) Over 50 percent of the fish I hook never rose before the cast.
- 2) In an average year I'll net over a 100 fish that are 20 inches or longer.
- 3) I've authored a book, *Winter on a Dry Fly* to express how successful winter dry fly fishing can be.
- 4) I would agree that a large percentage of fish have a disproportionate percentage of nymphs in their stomach. The question really is where did the fish eat the nymph—at the bottom or where they consolidated at the surface? A nymph looks the same when it leaves the bottom as it does at the surface.
- 5) I've never fished a body of fresh water in my life where trout there wouldn't eat a dry fly. And many times the dry fly fishing was lights-out on those rivers because everyone else was adhering to the rules.

So I've fished a dry fly exclusively for a lifetime and it was a freakish set of circumstances that led to it. A perfect storm of my stupidity, stubbornness and always that absurd addiction to the rise had driven it. In that journey I've learned a large portion of the awesome power of a dry fly to the extent most fly fishers would not think possible. I don't prefer to be a guru, a know-it-all, a bragger, a groundbreaker, or an authority, BUT I could be an "EXPERT BY ACCIDENT" and what I know could provide a key to unlock the most exciting fly fishing of your life.