

PREFACE

I am Nate Brumley, owner of Dry Fly Innovations, and I am a dry fly-aholic. I am hopelessly and helplessly addicted to the rise of a trout. I have been this way for a long time. I started dry fly fishing in the summer when I was 8 years old and I have been doing it now for over 50 years. In that time I have never fished a streamer or sunk a nymph. The perspective of dry fly fishing shared in this book is pure. When the hatch wasn't on and fish were not feeding at the surface, I didn't sink something. I figured out what the "searcher" bug was that brought those fish back to my fly. By taking this approach, I learned how to catch fish on a dry fly when others resorted to other forms of fishing.

In sixth grade I had the great fortune to meet Buster Tenneson. You wouldn't know Buster from Adam, but he was a fly tier and a master dry fly fisherman. He taught me the fundamentals of fly tying; in a lot of ways he was way ahead of his time. I still use some of his phrases like, "If you're going to make a mosquito, a midge, or a mayfly, the abdomen must be tight and tiny." Or "If you took the time to make a fly... just as well take a little more time and make it perfect." Buster tied a mosquito fly with grizzly hackle tips for wings, black thread body with a white thread rib and grizzly hackle that owned the creeks and rivers in the country I lived. I remember to this day Buster zinging that fly to smart Eastern brook trout on slick surface, crystal-clear, slow-moving water. He caught fish when others failed and his stringers of fish were always the big premium fish that lived in every body of water we fished. I used to scare the fish he was addressing because he caught so many fish that I couldn't. I think he understood my jealousy and he would simply move downstream and start hooking fish again.

I was born in a small town in central Idaho called White Bird (population 150). The Salmon River that teemed with salmon and steelhead was a mile away from my house. My backyard was a 150-mile stretch of wilderness that extended to the Montana border. That 150 miles was chocked full of lakes, small streams, dredge ponds, and rivers. Every Friday night in the summer my family loaded the old panel and headed out on a new adventure to one of those lakes or streams. On the weekdays after fishing all weekend, I had a set routine: I'd get up, do my chores, and slip out the back door to fish White Bird Creek that flowed right behind my house. Every day I would pack another willow stringer full of fish down the dike toward home.

I even had a pretty good business going during junior high. Our neighbors living up the creek began inquiring about the fish I'd bring home daily. They wanted a share of my harvest. My mother always had plenty of fish so I started fishing for my neighbors as well. It was a clean-cut deal – I'd catch all the fish my neighbors could use and in return they provided the Gray Hackle Peacock flies I used. I even instructed them where to buy the flies. I was very specific about the size of the hook and that the Gray Hackles had to have a red tail. It was a sweet deal. I never had to buy a dry fly, I had an outlet for the hundreds of fish I would catch, my neighbors were never short on fish, and most importantly, I never had to quit fishing. It never once occurred to me that I could catch and release the fish because in the early 1960s, catch and kill was simply the rule.

By the time I graduated from high school I had caught more fish than an avid fly fisherman would catch in a lifetime. That made dry fly fishing easy for me. Most people have one intention when

they fish and that is to catch fish any way they can. I had already caught fish in mass quantities so I wasn't as fixated about catching fish as I was catching them my way... on a dry fly. If I couldn't hook a fish on a dry fly and I didn't see the rise, I was really not interested in fly fishing at all. I have been mesmerized by the rise all my life; and without the rise, there could be no real enjoyment in just catching fish.

In November 1983 I discovered the world of winter dry fly fishing. I had always been a summer dry fly guy and when the hoppers frosted out in the fall, I traded my fly rod for a shotgun and started chukar hunting. It was on one of those chukar hunts on the plateaus above the South Fork of the Boise River that an incredible moment occurred. My dog had worked a group of chukars out on the edge of the plateau. Upon arrival, I overlooked the confluence of the South Fork of the Boise River and Arrowrock Reservoir. Approximately one hundred feet below I found the surface of the water covered with feeding trout. As far as I could see upstream and down into the reservoir, a feeding frenzy was going on. There were more rising fish than I had ever seen in one place before.

Two days later (November 17, 1983) I hiked down the cow trail to the confluence where I had seen the fish phenomenon happen. Sure enough, slightly after 12 noon, it occurred again. This time I had my fly rod and I fished for 4½ hours over hundreds of rising fish. I got my butt kicked in royal fashion. In that time period I caught three fish – two were foul-hooked and the other fish must have been the most stupid fish in the drink because he was the only fish I hooked in the mouth. I knew right then I had a lot to learn about winter dry fly fishing. I did what I have always done. I gathered up the tiny BWOs and midges that were hatching at the surface, placed them in my specimen box, and took them home to the fly tying room. I have been tying winter dry flies since that day. I'm happy to report the winter fish are much friendlier to me now.

In a nutshell I have been dry fly fishing and tying acute dry flies almost my entire life. Now that doesn't make me unique....It just means I have done one thing for a really long time. Experience forced me to become better and that added to a library of success. There are not many dry fly fishing scenarios that I have not seen before. Selecting bugs, reading the rises, and identifying the exact locations to attack come from being there many times before.

This book is a direct effort to help you become a better dry fly fisherman. One thing I will promise you—if you fish for trout, you can catch them on a dry fly. Yes you can!! And, you can do it in every season of the year from the deep freeze of dead winter to the heat of late August. I will share with you the formulas that consistently hook fish on a dry fly. I would never ask you to trashcan your nymphs and streamers. I am of the belief that all fishing of any kind is good. But I think most anglers, if given a choice, would rather catch a fish on a dry fly. This book is all about offering you that choice. If you use the principles expressed in the blogs, video, text, and photos of this book, you will catch many more fish on a dry fly in your lifetime. I will share a blog so you might get to know me.

*December 19, 2014 South Fork Boise River Winter Dry Fly Fishing Report:
40°/Mild wind downriver/Snow, sleet, and rain all day*

Well I picked a heck of a day to forget my rain jacket. As a rule, I keep it in my car perpetually, but I'd hung it to dry after my last fishing day and neglected to get it back in the rig. So I show up to the river in a driving rainstorm and the first thing I am doing is cutting three holes in the bottom of a garbage bag and reinventing the sleeveless rain slicker. It wasn't pretty and no fashion statement was made, but my core stayed mostly dry all day in a soaking rainstorm.

Now let me explain what a tough day of fishing on a dry fly looks like. At 11 a.m. I hiked into the canyon below Danskin in a driving rainstorm—not the little pitter patter thing, the deluge thing. Three-quarters of a mile downriver I broke through the underbrush and began studying a long rip-rap edge that oftentimes has feeding fish in the soft foam lines across the river. I hunted that edge meticulously and there wasn't a single fish that raised its head.

I moved downriver to the No Trespassing sign and hunted the big slick below the riffle for a half hour. Not one fish peeked its nose out. I traversed upriver to an intermediate riffle: There were no fish feeding there. I waded to the bank of the river that illuminated the surface above me and I slowly walked the edge surveying hundreds of yards of river above me. Not a single fish broke the surface.

I stood at the base of the long hatch riffle below the island for several moments overlooking 250 yards of river surface without a single fish head piercing the meniscus. I began moving up the south edge of the river and it was there, about 125 yards ahead of me that I see a large rainbow head break the surface. He was in slow water against a rip-rap edge of boulders on my side of the river.

I slowly moved upriver working my way into position to hook that specific fish, but all the time I am scanning the rest of the run to try to mark another target. The fish I'd spotted reappeared several times and I knew exactly where he lived. I took up a position about 30 feet below the fish at a quarter angle. The night before I had put new dry fly line on my reel that I had never casted before. I made a delivery to the fish that would have embarrassed my mother. The fly lit off-target with a fairly loud landing. That fish never reappeared. I even waited for the big guy, but I had put him down on the first cast and his decision to not return was permanent. In retrospect, I should have waded above that fish and shot a cast downhill to his location. I butchered the approach!!

I continued to analyze the 100 yards of hatch water above me and I was dumbfounded that zero fish were rising. It was 1:30 p.m. in a hard rainstorm and there were no BWOs floating the surface and no fish up, period. I waded the river toward the trail with the thoughts of moving upriver to the next hatch run. About mid-river I studied the surface around a cluster of boulders and I saw a fish rise above me, right of one of the boulders. I marked his location, finished wading the river, then moved up into position to serve that fish. The fish never rose again but I had him well marked. On the second delivery over where I thought the fish was, I saw a nose break the surface at my fly. I set the hook and landed the first fish of the day a little before 2 p.m.

From there I hunted two more hatch riffles and the run above Danskin Bridge without one single target to serve to. I jumped into the car and hastily moved upriver in search of some form of life at the surface. I was running out of hatch window desperately hunting heads. I hunted the river...nothing. I pulled into several hatch runs...nothing. I finally pulled into a long riffle a ways below the Village and

the first thing I spot is a rise ring. I immediately grab the rod and slip down to the river. At first glance there were a few BWOs floating the surface and I saw several fish rising over 50 yards of river below me. Normally I would fish my way to each of those fish, but not at 3:15 in the afternoon with only a short time left in the hatch window. I rushed the rise by identifying a fish feeding and went directly to that fish to make a delivery. I got clean shots at a half dozen fish over the next 45 minutes and I hooked and landed five of those fish. I used our BWO Convertible #22 to hook the first three fish, but I was seeing some rather largish BWOs floating the surface. I could not catch one to measure him on my Bugometer, but some of the olives had to be Size 18. The last two fish I caught on a Size 20 Dual Wing BWO (tester fly). That fly is hackled and has high, split wings. The fish were moving sideways to intercept that bug.

I exhausted the targets on the low side of the run and then moved up higher to the riffle section. As I am walking the bank upriver, I marked a big fish feeding on the edge of heavy current. I waded in under the fish and waited. Sure enough he rose again and instantly I shot him a BWO Dual Wing. He didn't eat it on the first presentation, but he did on the second and I hooked and landed a chubby 19 incher. While I was fighting the fish, I saw another nice fish rise right against the bank about 50 feet above me. I released the fish, dried the fly, and moved into position to serve the feeder tight against the bank. I moved out in current to set up a quarter-angle delivery and shot him the fly. First cast and the fish lunges sideways to eat my bug. Fish on and I landed another gorgeous 17-inch South Fork rainbow with exceptionally brilliant colors.

I spotted one other rising fish across the river and after wading to his location, I couldn't get him to rise. I left that run with zero feeding fish top to bottom. I moved upriver to a riffle where I almost always finish my day when I fish the upper South Fork. I don't know why, but the fish in that riffle will almost always come to your BWO blindly after the hatch. The fish followed suit again as I picked up a couple of nice fish to end the day.

After landing and photoing the last fish, I thought to myself how insanely addicted to dry fly am I? In a sustained rainstorm, I walked four miles of river hunting the rise. I drove eight miles of river hunting the rise. I dressed in a garbage bag half-assed blocking the rain with each of my arms weighting 15 extra pounds from super-saturated sleeves, but I am still hunting the rise. I had finally found one small stretch of river with a few rising fish and I cured my craving with some pretty nice rainbows in the net. It's going to take a lot of rehab and a massive dose of fish methadone because this might be one of the most serious addictions ever diagnosed!!

Flies that Caught Fish:

#22 BWO Convertible

#20 BWO Dual Wing (Tester Fly)



This is a photo of my first fish (left hand); I was 5 years old. It was an Eastern brook trout caught at Skookumchuck Creek, Idaho. Never mind the Davy Crockett outfit I was wearing—it was simply the hot attire of the time. I had the hat to go along with it too.