

INTRODUCTION

So you want to be a winter dry fly person? Well, if you have the will, I've got the way. The way is a skinny road that climbs the tallest mountain in fly fishing. There are many parts of the road that are under construction with a rough gravel surface. Other sections have sharp 90-degree turns, there are many intersections that lead to nowhere, and you will encounter slick surfaces that will totally spin you out. There is an abundance of fog blocking your vision and you're subject to falling into large chuckholes. Many of the drivers on this path are speeders who forget to read the road signs and they end up in the ditch or retreat down the hill. At times you'll need 4-wheel drive to ascend the steepness of the grade. In awesome fleeting moments you glimpse the summit and then it is obscured by clouds, wind, and snow. Try as you might, that summit is a sacred place where none of us will ever go and stay. We can only aspire to climb higher.

I've been on that hill for a long time and have seen the many pitfalls that must be navigated. You could say I have a roadmap, but it's never perfect or totally precise. My guidance will need to be altered, adjusted, and molded to your specific situation. If there is one thing predictable about a wintertime fish, he will always be unpredictable.

There are four major skills that will always keep you in the game and give you a fighting chance. To succeed on a dry fly in winter, one must thoroughly grasp the following concepts:

- 1) UNDERSTAND THE PERSONALITY OF A WINTERTIME FISH. You cannot outthink your advisory unless you understand his tendencies, habits, and weaknesses.
- 2) There are two tiny WINTER BUGS. They are Blue Wing Olives and Midges and you must know them intimately.
- 3) FLY SELECTION is the art of having the right bug at the right time in the right place. There are THREE methods to consistently accomplish this goal.
- 4) Finally, there's a perfect DELIVERY or cast for every fish. You must recognize water conditions in coordination with where a fish is living to make precise, drag-free deliveries.

Understanding these four principles will flat-out hook a bunch of winter fish, but there are other integral ingredients. Proper GEARING and proven STRATEGIES AND TACTICS will up your productivity as well.

Mother Nature plays an enormous role in winter fishing and she serves it up in the form of WIND AND WEATHER. It's pretty easy to handle rain, snow, sleet, etc. with a good rain jacket. But your greatest enemy is hard wind, and there's a lot of it in winter. I'll provide an extensive repertoire of solutions to help you fish hard wind.

In a perfect world there would be trout rising all the time and your task would be to put the perfect bug exactly on his nose. In reality we can't be that lucky. In the heart of winter insects are few,

hatch windows are short, and you may only see a few fish rise all day. You will never be judged by the fish you hook when they're rising. One should excel in those moments. The true test comes when there's no fish rising at all. Can you read holding water, select the right bug, and bring those fish to the surface and eat outside the hatch? An entire chapter is dedicated to searcher fishing. It's your answer to no rising fish.

In November of 1983 I began designing and tying winter dry flies. Over the years a select few of those bugs have risen to the upper echelon of acceptability to a fish. In the final chapter, "Brum's Top 10 Winter Dry Flies," I will share these patterns with you along with photos and recipes. Create or acquire these patterns because they are lights-out over a smart winter fish.

Since the inception of Dry Fly Innovations, we have created one of the great resources of dry fly information. Every fishing trip my son or I experience is captured in our Fishing Report Blog. It is an extensive history of a dry fly being fished in every season of the year. No venue is left off the table as we fish high mountain lakes to spring creeks and everything in between. These blogs are written with extensive detail. It's like receiving real-time insight and problem solving sourced from the river directly to you. An integral part of this book is the infusion of these blogs to express concepts as they occur on the water. Take these lessons to heart, digest them carefully, visualize, and read between the lines because woven within these paragraphs is a road map to awesome success with a dry fly. These are not fish stories. Most of the fish netted were photo'd and the fly that caught them is photo'd in the fish's mouth.

With the purchase of this book, you automatically qualify for a 1-year subscription to our entire collection of blogs, a \$20 value. For current subscribers to the Fishing Report Blog, a 1-year extension will be added to your current subscription. Contact us at www.dryflyinnovations.com. to start yours/extend yours.

You will now have access to over 800 entries to the blog. Any blog used in the book that states Day 1 or Day 4 will indicate that this was a multiple-day fishing trip. You can go to our website, click on Fishing Report Blog, look up the date, and read the events of the entire trip. Often fishing strategies are developed over multiple days and you can incorporate those important adjustments.

Note: The blogs are the field notes of the author, written hastily so the learning experiences and details reached paper. They are unaltered and unedited from their original state so you might relive the experiences exactly as the writer saw them.

The use of videos will be displayed numerically in the coming pages. We have accumulated hundreds of hours fishing a dry fly in all seasons of the year. By selecting targeted footage, we will show you the essential concepts expressed in the book on video. This added use of visual will cement retention of important tactics.

Saddle up the horses and manny up the pack string because you'll need a lot of cargo space to pack this wealth of information. I'm coming at you fully loaded with a game plan that will provide high excitement for the rest of your life. Believe in the concepts, study the still photos, indulge in the blogs and learn from the video clips because messaged within them is a blueprint for successfully fishing *Winter on a Dry Fly*.

In the Preface I shared a blog that expressed how difficult a day of winter dry fly fishing can be. Now let's examine what a pretty good day looks like. The photo on the front page of the book is a 26-inch, 9-pound rainbow delivered to the net on a #20 Blue Wing Olive Twofer mayfly. Here's the blog of that fishing day.

March 21, 2016 South Fork Boise River Dry Fly Fishing Report: 55°/Overcast/Rain/Wind downriver 5-8 MPH

Have you ever run into a fisherman who told outrageous fish stories? The fish they caught were much bigger than realistic and the stories could not have been remotely grounded in fact. Well, this blog is going to sound like that fisherman.

I started my morning around 11 AM on a rip-rap edge about midriver. There were no fish rising and my tie-on bug was a Black Gold Hardback #12. The wind was blowing downriver as it has been the last several times I've fished. A downriver wind makes it difficult to serve a searching bug upriver, especially a heavily hackled bug like the Hardback. After a couple dozen casts I got what I deserved—a major wind knot. So I'm 10 minutes in and I'm already replacing my tippet and selecting a new fly. I tied on an Olive Slow Stone #10 and restarted the operation.

*I fished for 50 yards along the bouldery edge without a fish rising to the stone pattern. Ahead of me was a large submerged boulder on the edge of the river. The water depth as it came over the boulder was about 6 inches deep and there was a deep chop riffle out ahead. I carefully waded in under the boulder and served my stonefly to the chop riffle. The fly floated all the way back to the front edge of the boulder. My rod was nearly straight up to keep my tapered leader from entering the top eye of the rod. At that exact moment a giant rainbow materializes from under the boulder and crushes the stone sideways. It was a **half-body out take** and I'm only 6 feet away from the fish. I see the brilliant red gill cover and side of the fish as he eats my bug. Wow!! I set the hook with a high rod and after an extended fight, I put the fish into the net. It was a spectacular male fish, 21 inches long, weighing over 4 lbs.*

Near the top end of the run above the submerged boulder I make a cast to a small inside riffle. As the fly floats into quiet water I see a big fish following my bug. He comes right to the fly and bumps it with his nose slightly lifting the fly. He hesitates, follows the bug, and then eats it. I finally set the hook and begin fighting the fish. The fish races out to deep water and roars downstream. About straight out from me, for no reason, the hook pops loose.

I couldn't get another fish to eat the stone pattern so I moved downriver toward the car. Straight across the river from where my car was parked was a deep riffly edge strewn with boulders. I began running corridor casts down along that edge. Just off the edge of a large boulder another very large fish eats the stone pattern. I fight that fish for 50 yards downriver, finally get below the fish, and bring him toward the net. He wallows and kicks the hook just out ahead of the net. The fish was so close to me that I almost netted the fish after the hook came loose. I had the back half of his body actually in the

net but he kicked his tail and slowly swam away. I cussed up a blue streak and waded back upriver to the bouldery edge.

I don't make a half dozen corridor runs and another big fish eats the Slow Stone. I set the hook and before the fight gets underway, the fish kicks the hook. That was the third big fish I lost in a row. I believe the fish were not quite sold on the stonefly and they were short biting rather than sucking it into their mouth. Either way, I'd used up every choice cuss word I could conjure up and it still wasn't netting fish.

The fish quit eating the stonefly and I began to notice quite a few BWOs floating the surface. Along with the new hatch arrival, two big fish began to feed on the edge of soft water against fast current. They were only about 4 feet away from the far shore. I served each of the fish my stonefly and they both snubbed the offering. I turned around, waded the river, and grabbed my 4wt rod. It was already rigged with a #20 Blood Midge and the tippet was well stretched.

I waded back across the river and set up above the two feeding fish. The BWO hatch was lean and the fish were on the move side to side. I finally get lined up on the biggest fish closer to the far shore. He rises up and false takes my Blood Midge. That fish never rose again. I target the second fish and he eats my offering. I set the hook and we start battling in the fast center current of the river. As always the fights inevitably move downriver. I finally land this fish way down river from where she was hooked. It was a 19-inch female, nearly iridescent and drop-dead gorgeous. If we were at the bar, she'd have been the first gal I'd have asked for a dance.

I wade 100 yards of fast current back to where I'd hooked the last fish and waited for another fish to rise. Up higher in the run another fish rises and I serve the Blood Midge to the target. Bingo! I hook the fish. Even though the hatch on the water was BWOs, the fish didn't hesitate to eat the midge pattern. I fought that fish for a couple of minutes as we moved downriver and eventually I lose it. It was an extremely difficult place to land fish with a lot of fast water, and I'm in the middle of the river serving the fly. I'd been watching three fishermen below me in a run of water I really wanted to fish. They conveniently left the run so I jumped in the car and ran downriver to stake claim to a new run of water. It was a location that would be much easier to land fish.

I drop down the bank and enter the water. The first thing I see on the water are midges and BWOs, but there are no fish rising. I cast upriver against the wind to see if maybe a fish would come to the hook blindly. No fish rose to my offering. I'd changed flies to a #20 BWO Twofer Mayfly before I left the upper run. I was about ready to wade the river and approach the run on the other side. I bring in my line and a fish feeds about 20 feet above me against fast current. I zing the Twofer exactly to the fish. In almost slow motion a fish materializes and eats the bug. After a short tussle, I land the fish. This was a smaller fish, about 17 inches long, and not all that heavy.

There were no additional fish rising on the road side of the river so I cross to check out the other side. There was a fast riffle that ran into the top of the run and a soft edge against the fast water that ran for 200 feet downriver. I started at the top of the run serving the fly to the soft edge and letting it run along the edge of fast riffle. There were

no fish rising; but out of nowhere, a fish rises up and eats the Twofer. After a spirited fight, I net an 18-inch spotty rainbow.

I dried the fly and went back to the soft edge. The next set of events was epic. I started serving the Twofer back to the edge of soft water and hard current. On one of those deliveries about mid-drift, I see a very subtle rise at my bug. I set the hook and all I feel is pure power and weight. I knew it was a big fish as it plunged deep and ran completely across the river. In the soft water across the river, the fish jumps and I am astounded by the size and breadth of the fish. About then a car pulls up and begins to watch the fight. I mentioned they may want to stay and see this fish if I could get him landed. About that time the fish jumps two more times in the center of the river. It is absolutely enormous!!

One of the gentlemen in the vehicle jumps out and says, "I'll come help you land that fish." I said sure. He waded the river at the top of the run and came down to join me. The second he saw the fish he was shocked like I was. The battle continued downriver and my 4wt rod was way overmatched for this fish. Even in softer water I could not control any aspect of the fight. I'd get the fish in pretty close and he'd see me. He would then move out to faster water and move downriver. Toward the tail out of the run, some 150 yards below where I'd hooked the fish, he began to tire. I got the fish to shallow water and my new fishing partner took my net to land the fish. He came in above the fish and every time the fish got close to the net, he'd spook and move downriver. I finally moved the fish into shallow water and my netter moved in under the fish. Just as he extended the net to slide the fish in, he slipped and fell almost on top of the fish. There was this surreal moment where the netter was down and the giant fish was right beside him slowly swimming upstream. My netter recovered, stood up, took two steps upriver, and netted the fish tail first. The fish would barely fit into the net.

I took the net and laid the fish in a deep depression along the edge of the bank. It was a long, hard fight that took over 20 minutes to get the fish. I made extra sure the fish's head and gills were completely submerged in the water. He was a big, tired fish. I'll describe this fish as best I can.

It was a male; about 2 inches longer than my total net, which would be 26 inches long. At the widest point across its side was 8 inches and the width at its shoulders was about 4 inches across. It was a breathtakingly beautiful fish with rich deep red coloring, multiple large spots, and white tips to its fins. My new fishing buddy (the netter) and I admired the fish in semi-disbelief. I can't verify this but the fish may have weighed 9 lbs. given his length and width. We both watched as the massive fish disappeared into the milky water. I thanked my netter and little did I know he had videoed just less than 2 minutes of the fight. He also shot several photos of me holding the fish. I'll share the photos and video when he emails it over. This is the Twofer BWO Mayfly that hooked and landed the fish.

I almost quit fishing after landing the big fish, but the soft edge of riffle above me reeled me back in. The big fish had slightly bent my fly so I replaced it with another Twofer #20. I settled back in at the top of the riffle. To this point I had yet to see a fish rise along the riffle, but straight out in front of me about 20 feet I see a big fish surface. I immediately hit him on the nose with the Twofer and without hesitation, he ate it. Five minutes later,

a 22-inch fish is resting in the bottom of the net. This was an old fish beyond premium health and his tail was beginning to disintegrate. I revived the old warhorse a long time and watched him slowly swim away.

I moved back to the riffle and immediately spot another rising fish. He ate the Twofer as well and I landed the smallest fish of the day—a 17 incher. After landing that fish, I couldn't get any other fish up to the Twofer. I'd been having some luck on the Blood Midge #20 earlier in the day and there were midges on the water, so I decided to tie it back on. Almost in succession I land five fish on the Blood Midge and two of those fish were over 20 inches long. The other three were 2 18 inchers and a heavy 19 incher. The final fish of the day was hooked and landed on the Twofer #20 at the base of the run.

During the fishing event I had a couple of our clients (John and Bill) stop by. I had a fish in the net at the time. We visited for a while and I hooked and landed a fat 19 incher while we talked. I missed a fish that ate my bug while they were there also. That was the only fish I missed all afternoon. I never missed a take and I landed every fish hooked in that run. It made up for the four fish I'd lost earlier in the day.

When the dust had cleared, I shook my head and thought, "Did this really happen or was I off somewhere in Fantasy Land?" Well this is my fish tale and I have a few photos that might convince you I'm telling the truth.

Flies that Caught Fish:

*#20 Blood Midge
#20 and #22 BWO Twofer Mayfly
#10 Olive Slow Stone*



26-Inch, 9-lb. Rainbow



This is the Size 20 Twofer Mayfly that hooked the fish.