



## November 2, 2021 Henry's Fork Winter Dry Fly Fishing Report

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### 44°/Heavy overcast and rain early, then overcast/Virtually no wind

I had been excited about today's weather since I saw the prediction. I've fished my entire stay on the Henry's under bright blue sky and sun, but today was the first prediction of rain. Overcast and rain are the perfect conditions to blow up a small bug hatch of BWOs and midges. Well, the BWOs didn't make a very good showing, but the midges were in full bloom.

Before I start today's blog, I'd like to share some insights on fishing a tiny midge pattern. It would always be a preference in dry fly to fish a pattern that's big enough to readily see. But when the bug hatch is a Size 26 or 24 midge and that's all the fish will eat, you better have an answer because it won't be the last time it happens to you. First principle: Don't get freaked out by a small hook, don't underestimate its power and forget about ever seeing it floating on the surface. When I mention tiny flies to my clients, there is almost a universal response: I can't see the eye to thread the tippet and I can never see it on the water. My answer—wear readers around your neck to see the threading of the hook and although you may never see the fly, a fish can't eat it unless he makes a ring. Don't hunt for the fly, see the ring and respond with a gentle hookset.

There is nothing easy about fishing a small bug, but if you master the following suggestions, it will be the most exciting dry fly fishing in your lifetime. It's the reason I love the winter because it creates a rendezvous of a small bug with a big fish, which is my ultimate passion. So let's talk dry fly in a tiny (Size 26 or Size 24) midge hatch.

1. A tiny midge pattern can only be fished in the hatch. It's too small of an offering to searcher fish, so it must be served to a rising fish.
2. The natural question then is where do I find rising fish focused on a midge hatch? Fish do not stage up on tiny bugs in fast-moving water, so don't hunt the hatch in riffle water. The most common places to encounter fish eating midges are in:
  1. Back eddies with slow-moving water that accumulate large numbers of small bugs.
  2. Against slow-moving edges in shallow water in push-off areas that again accumulate bugs.
  3. At the bottom of riffle water that meets slower-moving, slick-surface water.
  4. Big sections of deep, slow-moving water with murky bottoms rather than cobblestone.
  5. On slow-moving seams that move around structure.
  6. Rip-rap edges with lots of structure in the form of large boulders.

Please note: The one similarity in each of these locations is slow-moving, slick-surface water.

1. When you encounter fish eating midges, their rise form and cadence will expose the hatch they are targeting. The cadence will be quick with the fish roaming under the surface eating repeatedly. This defines a fish eating a midge or other small insects, rapid fire rises with the feeder hovering just under the surface. There will be four consistent rise forms when the fish are on midges:
  1. Most of the rises will be emerger bites where the ring is present with no body parts above the meniscus.

2. There will be many full-head out or nose-out eats.
  3. Slashing is common in the rise form where the fish will lunge sideways in current on a full-body out. I refer to this as scooping because the fish sees an opportunity to eat multiple bugs in a single rise.
  4. The last rise form commonly seen would be a view of the fish's back and shoulders with a slight hesitation before the tail disappears.
2. When the hatch is identified and you have rising fish, the post-up and approach must be perfectly executed. The best approach is to carefully wade up under the risers to point-blank range at 20 feet or less. The post-up is exactly below the fish you're targeting. Now is when tippets and leader become paramount. I use an 18 to 20-foot leader in this scenario and the last 6-7 feet is 6X that attaches to the hook. By using a long leader, I never put dry fly line on or near a fish. Simply drop the fly a couple of feet ahead of the last rise on a soft cast. The 6X tippet is invisible and it's the only section of leader that ever floats over the target. Only make a cast immediately after seeing the rise because fish never stay stationary in a midge hatch. They will be constantly moving in a wide arc, and I've seen that arc be 15 feet wide at times.
  3. It's rare to cast to a fish a single time and hook him, as often happens on larger fly patterns. You're using a tiny midge pattern, casting it into a field of naturals, and you're hoping the fish finds yours. It may happen on the first cast, but it's much more likely you'll make multiple deliveries to each fish before your midge is exactly in front of the fish. If you're using the right tiny midge pattern like our Mighty-Mite Midge, the target will eat it every time as long as it appears exactly in the strike zone. **Please note:** The reason you don't want to cast downward to the rise is the dry fly line will come in contact with the fish if he doesn't eat the fly. And you know it will take many casts to get the fly in the right position.
  4. The next major hurdle to overcome is hookset. I'm a person who sees my dry fly almost always, but that is not the case when I fish a tiny midge pattern. In fact, I never see it, but I'm not freaked out because I control the environment where the hook is landing. Remember, the post-up is super close to the fish, which makes it easy to land the fly consistently a couple of feet above the last rise. When the fly lands, it will only be seconds before it comes into the view of the riser. You've already judged the speed of current and know any rise in proper timing is probably to your offering. That will initiate a soft hookset that won't disturb the surface water if the fish didn't eat your fly. If you come up empty-handed, simply keep serving the target until he eats.
  5. Last but not least, fighting big fish on 6X tippet and a Size 26 hook is a challenging operation. Set your drag a click or two lighter and be prepared for long struggles with chasing the fish downward. Apply constant pressure with no gorilla tension and never try to bring a fish up to you in hard current. Move downward and leverage him on a low rod toward the edge. When the fish reaches the edge, don't try to lift his head to scoop him in the net. Keep applying pressure guiding him completely to the edge. He'll reach shallow water that he can no longer swim in and lay over on his side. He can then be scooped in the net with the least amount of harsh pressure. You'll be totally shocked at how many big fish can be landed on tiny hooks as long as too much pressure is not exerted.

If you follow these guidelines, the impossible can be reality and when you have this experience, it's like none other in the world of fishing. The game of dry fly is always about tackling the greatest challenges; but when you win on tiny hooks, you've scaled one of the highest peaks.

Getting back to today's fishing, I'll sum it up this way. There is nothing that I've written in this blog that I didn't experience today, and I'll let the photos speak for the results.

**Final Note:** No one ever wants to resort to a small bug to accomplish one's work. Before I tie on a Size 26 midge, I try every option of a midge pattern in a larger size. But I just spent 6 days on the Henry's Fork where the fish demanded you match the size of what was floating. And that was a standard Size 26 with late afternoon midges a little larger, in a Size 24. It should be mentioned that there were times that I made a large hook size work in the form of #22 Blood Midges, #22 Black with Black Shuck Colored Emerger, or a #22 or #20 BWO patterns. But there wasn't a single day that at least one pod of fish forced me to go small.

Flies that Caught Fish:

[#22 Black with Black Shuck Colored Emerger](#)

[#24 Mighty-Mite Midge](#)

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**Henry's Fork** (Note: Photos here are thumbnails and will not enlarge like the blog photos do. This is a representation of what displays in our Fishing Report Blogs.)

