



Everything that matters

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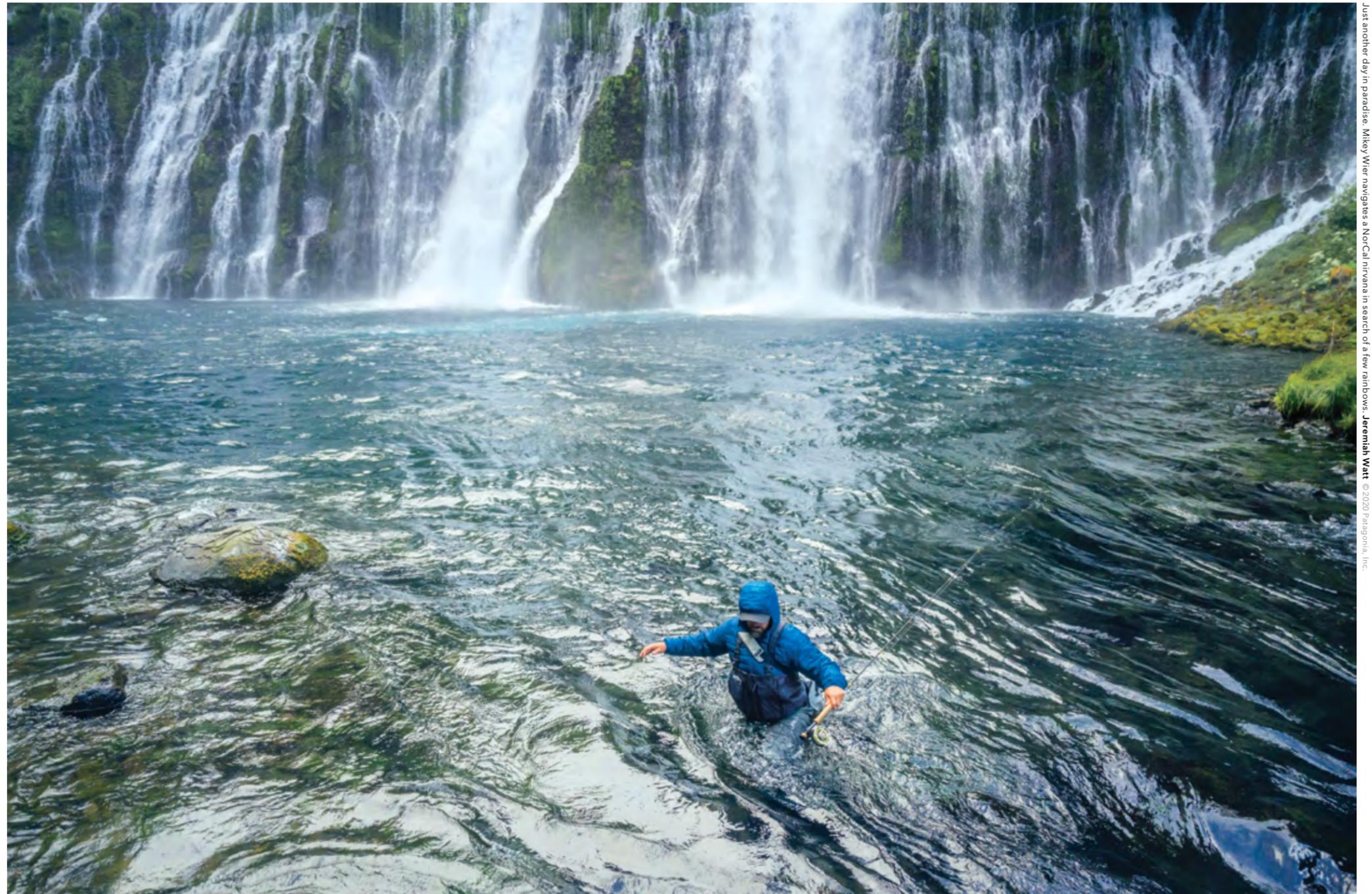
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THE GREAT AWAITS

*SCOF Winter Flutter*



*Photo: Yucatan, Mexico - January 2020, Steve Seiberg*





Photo: *East Tennessee - February 2020, Rand Harcz*





Photo: *Watuaga River, Tennessee - January 2020, Rand Harcz*



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**S.C.O.F**  
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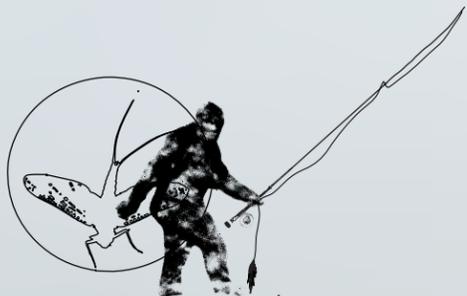
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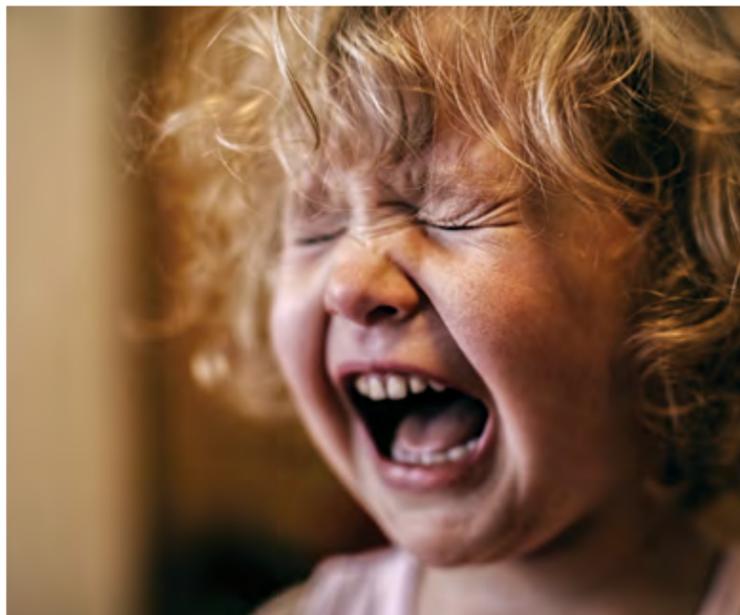
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# THINGS THAT DON'T



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Winter 2019

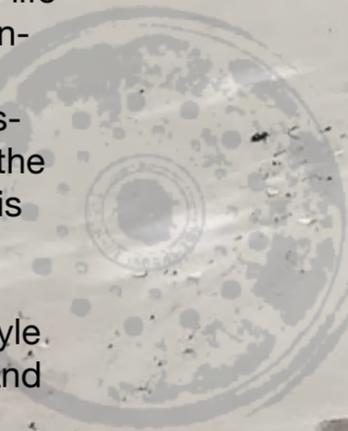
Rumspringa? Oh, are you not familiar with the Amish tradition of casting their inexperienced children out into the real world to snort, smoke, drink, and fornicate their way to a decision on whether to return to the buggy and plow or remain in the modern world of temptation and moral corruption? I'm sorry. I thought everyone was down with the Amish. My favorite aspect of their culture: You can say or post anything you want about them digitally and there will never be any blowback. They don't believe in computers. Seriously watch this. "Fact: The average Amish beard is poorly groomed." I will receive no angry emails, DM's or anything else on my stance on Amish beardery. They live in 1854. But I digress — the idea of rumspringa is a practical one at its essence. Being Amish is, let's call it a "lifestyle choice." Anyone who would pick that lifestyle should at least get to find out how the other 99.9 percent of people live. Now, once the predetermined rumspringa period has expired you are left with a choice: butter churn or a small studio apartment just outside of Philly? You have to pay if you want to keep playing. The payment here translates to a complete and utter abandonment of your former

life. No communication or visitation with anyone with a poorly groomed beard (including your mother). In my estimation this quirky bunch of barnraisers might just be onto something here. I dig the "shit or get off the pot" finality of it.

Let's use winter for our own mini-rumspringas. Go somewhere. Play for a week or two. If you live somewhere cold, go somewhere warm. If you live somewhere warm, go somewhere warmer. This could involve saltwater, jungles, or even a trip south of the equator, if you know what I mean. [Copy editor's note: he literally means south of the equator per personal experience.] At the end of your trip you will be faced with the same choice as all those slack-jawed Amish kids — leave your family, community, and money behind and create a new life free of the chains of central Pennsylvania values, or go back and be content until your next rumspringa opportunity arises. Unlike the Amish, I feel we should make this choice at least every winter and a couple of trips in the summer and fall just to make sure. Lifestyle choices should be made often and in warm places.



D. [Signature]



Defining Everything that Matters



NO. 1  
FALL 2011



NO. 2  
WINTER 2012



NO. 3  
SPRING 2012



NO. 4  
SUMMER 2012



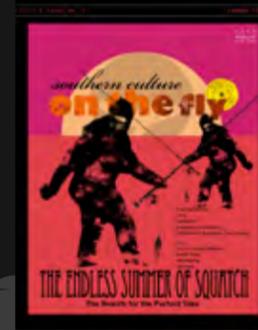
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WINTER 2014



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NO. 12  
SUMMER 2014



NO. 13  
FALL 2014



NO. 14  
WINTER 2015



NO. 15  
SPRING 2015



NO. 16  
SUMMER 2015



NO. 17  
FALL 2015



NO. 18  
WINTER 2016



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SPRING 2016



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SUMMER 2016



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FALL 2016



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FALL 2017



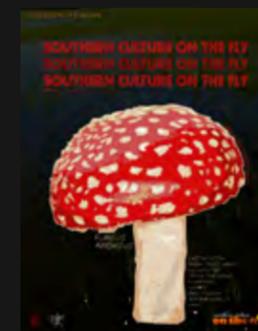
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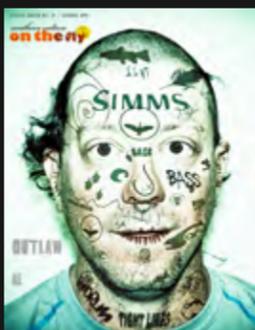
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# Haiku

*with Every Guide, Everywhere*

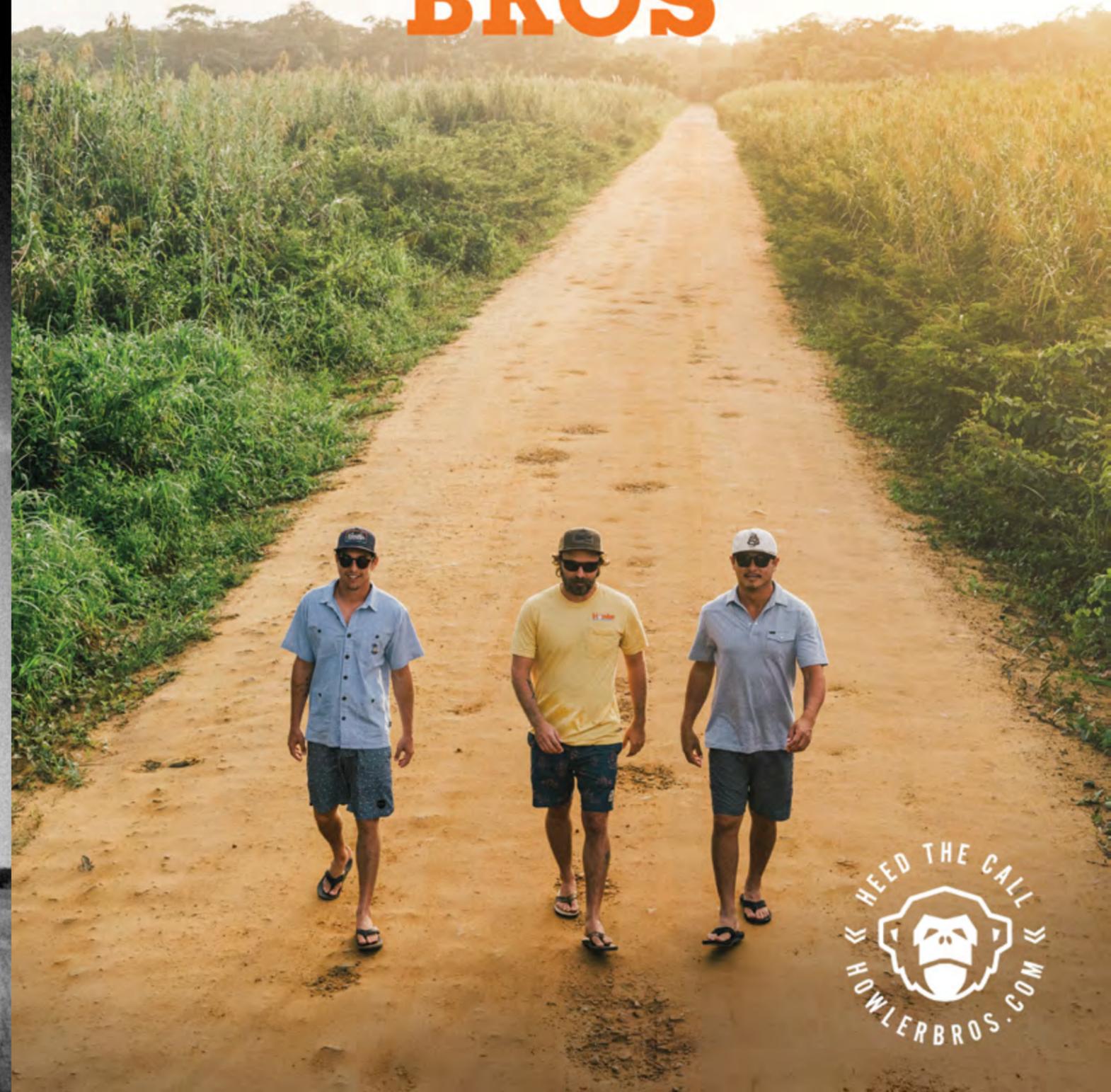
His flies buzz my face

Please don't cast over  
the boat

STOP FUCKING CASTING



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# ***THE TAILING***

By David Grossman  
Photos: Steve Seiberg



Traveling abroad in the off-season for saltwater fishing is an edge that cuts both ways. Most lodges offer discounts making one of these trips actually doable with the proper scrimping and saving. On the other hand, nothing in life is free. In this case that 20 percent discount might cost you a higher likelihood of crap weather, or a skeleton staff who's not as excited to see you as you are them. None of this really bothers me. Weather is part of the game we play no matter what time of year it's played. I also don't need nor enjoy anyone doting on me. Decent food on a plate, hot water in the shower, and sheets on the bed is all I require. A simple man with way-above-average intelligence, that's me. So with a few extra bucks in my pocket and mediocre expectations of permit in my heart, I was off to the Yucatan.



Walking into the enormous palapa at the lodge was a study in awkward silence. There was a bar, a kitchen, a dinner table with thirty chairs, and not a soul to be seen. Have you ever been to a place so quiet that when you talk outloud your own voice seems jarring? The manager's footsteps coming up the stairs finally broke the silence. He seemed almost startled to see us, further driving home the prior awkwardness. He was brown-skinned and Mr. Clean bald. He immediately took an interest in my traveling companion, Steve. Almost as if they had met previously. He showed us to our room, let us know we were the only guests at the lodge, and informed us when dinner would be. Our encounter was as short as it was strained. I could have been mistaken, but during our brief conversation I picked up on a sense of what can only be described as pity tinged by guilt.





A black and white photograph of a large, open-plan living area. The room features a high ceiling with exposed wooden beams. On the right side, there is a prominent wooden staircase with a decorative railing. In the center, a dining table with several chairs is set up. In the background, a person is standing near a large window or doorway. The walls are light-colored, and there are some framed pictures or artwork on the left wall. The overall atmosphere is quiet and somewhat somber.

My sleep that night was fitful. It could have been the newness of laying my head on an unfamiliar pillow or the impending deadlines to get words to paper. At those early moments I couldn't help thinking that I might benefit from this ghost town of a lodge, robbing me of the social distractions I crave when a deadline is on the horizon.





The next morning, my previous night's misgivings behind me, Steve and I wandered through the mangrove tunnels to meet our guide at the lodge's dock. Upon arrival, I was surprised to find not one, but two guides standing next to each other welcoming us. They were dressed identically and were both saying something in Spanish in unison. It was hard to make out at first, but as we drew closer I could make it out:

*“Hola Steve. Ven a jugar con nosotros. Ven a jugar con nosotros Steve. Por Siempre y siempre y siempre”.*



“ Steve swore he didn’t know what was going on, but unlike his mouth his face never lied. ”



Weird. How did they know Steve? Why were they talking at the same time? What does “ven a jugar” mean? These questions were not answered until later, or even at all. The whole thing started to seem like a joke that everyone was in on but me. Steve swore he didn’t know what was going on, but unlike his mouth, his face never lied. Something was awry but fish would have to be caught if any writing was to be done. Steve was first on the bow and pulled a small permit within the first few feet of the first flat. As I made way to the sharp end of the boat, the clouds converged and the winds began to rip. Along with the clouds and the wind, my anger began to rise to a level equal to the swells now crashing over the bow.







The clouds did not part nor did the wind die that day. I managed to eek out a couple of nice bonefish, but no permit to hand. Back at the lodge our solitary existence continued. Silence followed us all over the property. The only face I saw was Steve's. He didn't gloat about his permit externally, but internally he was taking great joy from rubbing my face in it. After dinner, I adjourned to the lounge to write about my feelings. I poured my soul onto the page. With a sense of accomplishment, I grabbed my margarita from the side table. When I turned my eyes back to the page the only thing that was written was, "All bonefish and no permit makes Dave an angry boy." Page after page after page of that same line. I knew I didn't write it but there it was, like the ravings of a lunatic.

AYAN  
LA TIERRA LATE



When I turned my eyes back to the page the only thing that was written was, "All bonefish and no permit makes Dave an angry boy".





While my rational mind spun, my gut screamed it was Steve, or maybe that weird manager. Feeling the slightest bit discombobulated by this latest Stevian betrayal, I decided the only thing left to do was to confront him in a calm, reasonable manner.

I grabbed the machete by the shed and made my way to our room. I planned to ask Steve to join me for a beachside fire. The machete was to cut firewood. Obviously. But once Steve saw me he really started freaking out. I could see him through the window running around the room frantically with a wet pant leg, screaming something or other about not wanting to die. I tried to open the door but that rascal Steve had chained it shut. I was barely able to squeeze my head through the door and say, "It's me, Dave." I told him if he didn't calm down I'd have to hack the chain lock off with my machete.

Well this did nothing to ease his mania, so that's exactly what I did. I hacked that chain with a single mighty hack. I burst through the door trying to tackle Steve so I could hug him tightly like an autistic child in the throes of a tantrum. Sadly Steve is not only wiry but slippery, like a watermelon covered in Crisco. He was able to squeeze past me and make his way into the mangrove jungle behind the lodge. I gave chase using the machete to hack my path all the while screaming, "Here comes Dave," thinking the childlike language might soothe him. It did not. The last time I saw him, he was getting into the manager's car, painting the jungle red with taillights bound for Tulum.

The next day I took the shuttle van back to Cancun with no permit, no Steve, and a burning desire to fish the prime season next time.







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THOSE  
WHO NEED  
WATER  
TO BREATHE



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- 2020 -

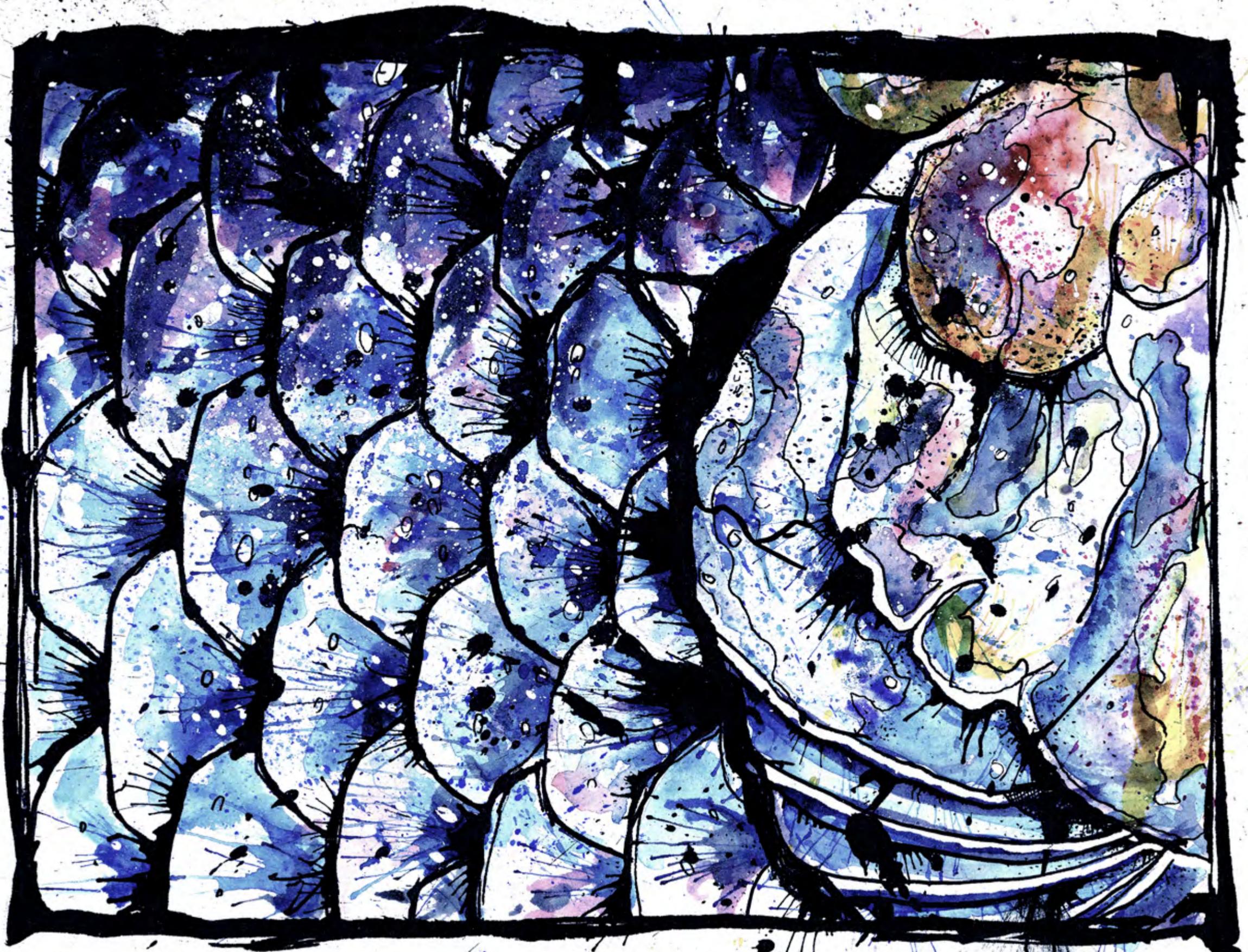
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# RYAN KEENE

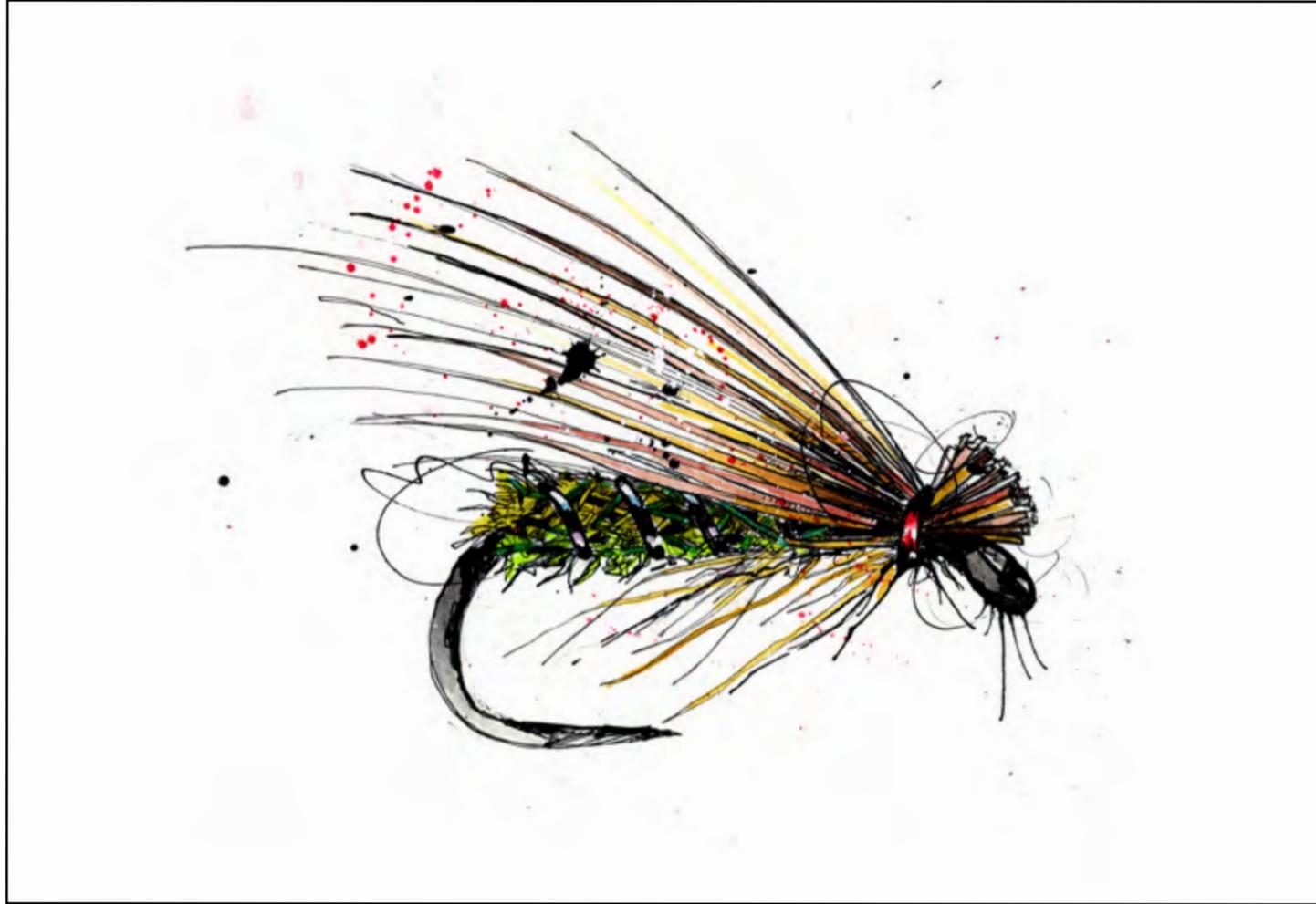




Somewhere between the softness of watercolors and the rigidity of linework exists the art of Ryan Keene. Originally a large-scale installation artist, health problems brought Ryan back to paper, paint, and pen. In his work you will find familiar subjects of field and stream, but the mixed media gives it a sense of movement and anticipation that's a far cry from more traditional sporting art. The clear juxtaposition of watercolor and pen draws the eye to every fish, fly, and bird. The more modern elements of spatter and drawn circles highlight the underlying paint work in an almost asymmetric, playful dialogue.

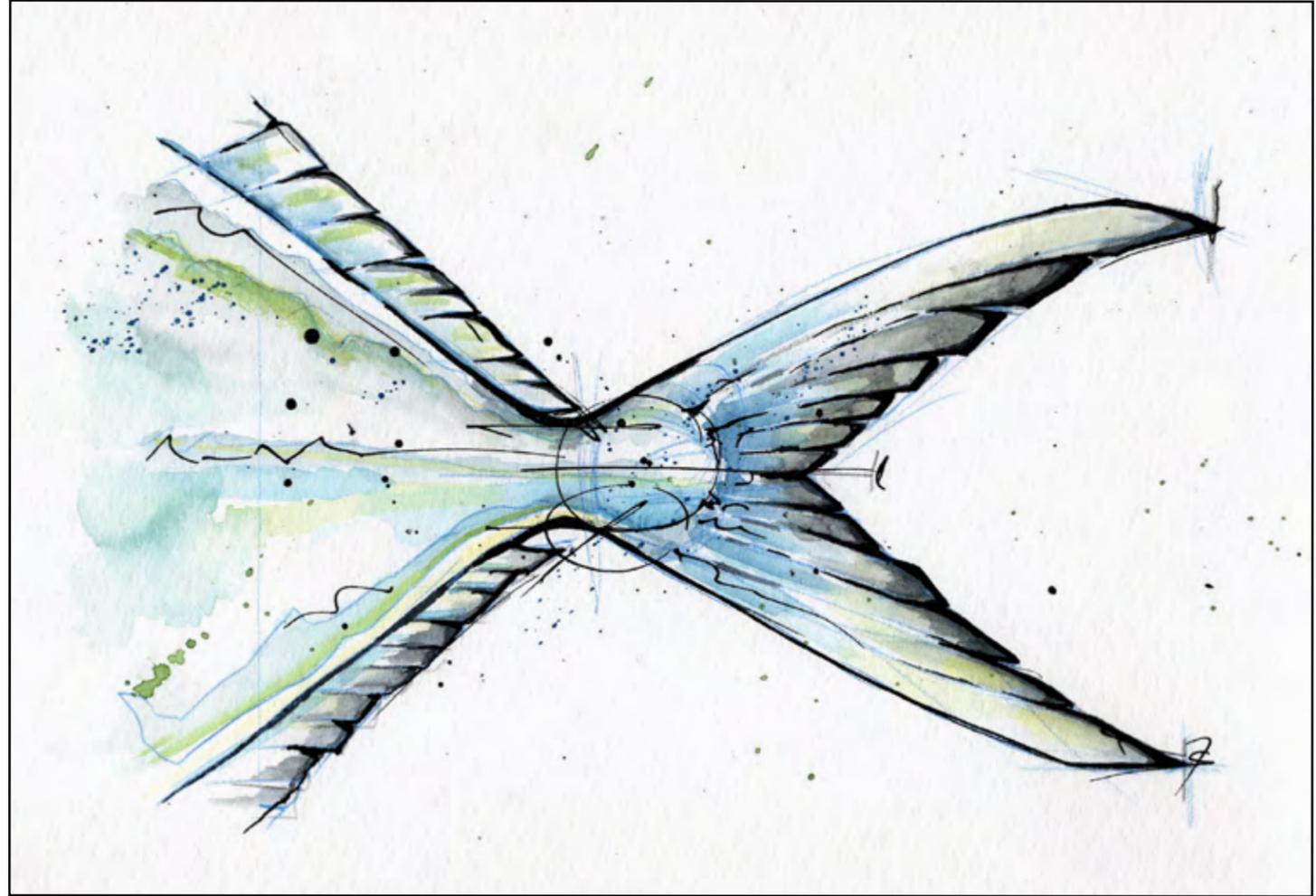
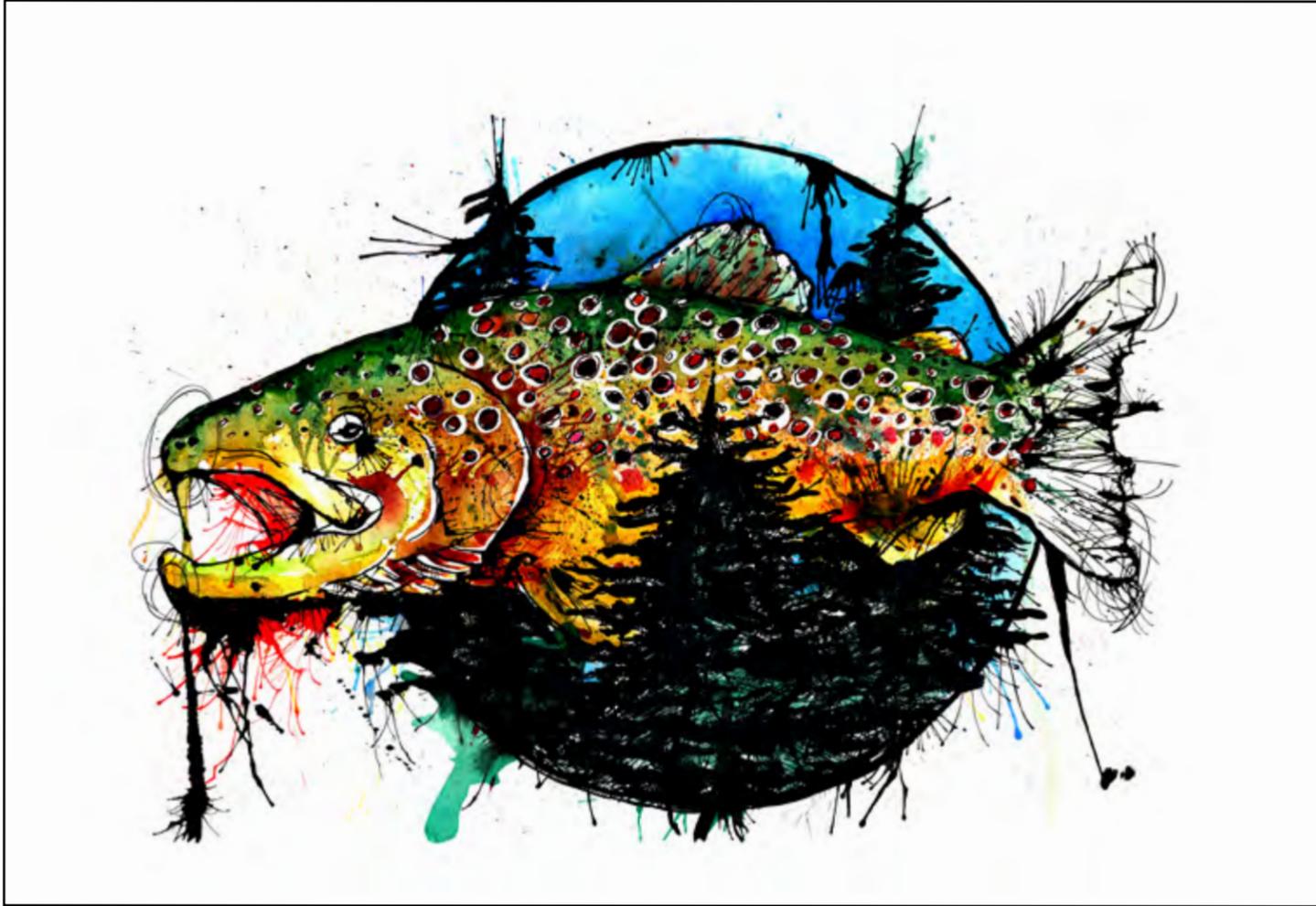
From his art, Ryan sees our world in a way most of us can't, but wish we could. Find more of Ryan's work at [rakart.net](http://rakart.net)







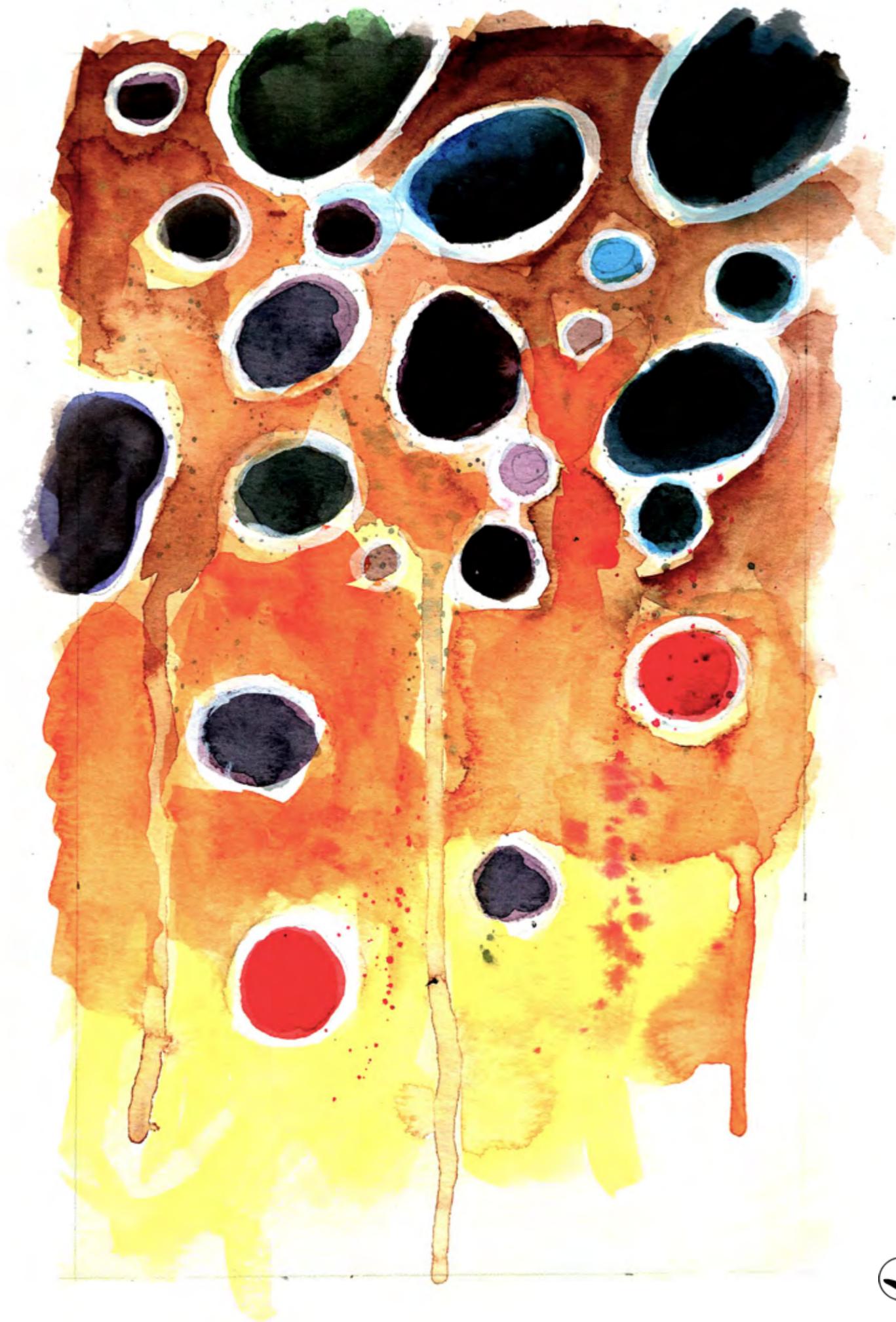






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*Al Keller*  
**BACKCOUNTRY STROKER**

Don Gapen made the first Muddler Minnow fly pattern using spun/clipped deer hair for its head. Originally used to imitate a sculpin or a baitfish, spinning deer hair is used for everything from grasshoppers to large saltwater flies.

Deer belly hair is one of my favorite fly tying materials—messy and fun. Use just one color to create the head or stack multiple colors to mimic baitfish patterns.

Most flies have a tail, body, head, and maybe some eyes. I prefer what's used in this step-by-step description, but it can be changed to fit your materials at hand.

The more time you spend spinning, stacking, and trimming, the quicker the entire process will become second nature to you.



**Material List:**

GSP or Flat Wax Tying Thread  
Gamakatsu SC-15 1/0 Hook  
Magnum Zonker Tail  
EP Craft Fur Brush  
Saddle Hackle or 1 Marabou Feather  
Deer Belly Hair  
Bead Chain Eyes

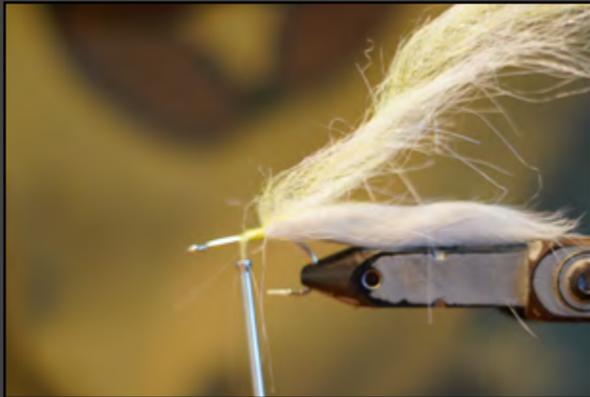
1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



**Step 1** - Tie in thread.

**Step 2** - Attach magnum zonker tail to top of the hook. Use whichever method you prefer for an anti-fouling guard with monofilament.

**Step 3** - Palmer your choice of color EP craft fur brush just ahead of the zonker strip.

**Step 4** - Wrap the brush 4 or 5 times around the hook shank to build the body. Cut and trim off.

**Step 5** - Tie in a small piece of feather.

**Step 6** - Palmer just ahead of the EP brush.

**Step 7** - Select your deer belly hair about the size of a pencil and trim from the hide. Clean the underfur from the base of the hair with a comb.

**Step 8** - Place the clean deer hair at a 45-degree angle of the hook shank. Wrap your thread around the clump of deer hair and hook shank with 3 loose wraps. After wrapping 3 times, start pulling down on the thread, which will cause the hair to flare. Bring thread forward of the wrapped hair and make a couple of tight wraps. With your fingers or a tool, push the hair together to tighten.

9



10



11



12



13



14



**Step 9,10** - Repeat the steps to form the head. You can use multiple colors of your choice for the head to create a pattern.

**Step 11** - There are many types of eyes that can be used on this fly. This pattern uses bead chain eyes which allows the fly to float just under the surface of the water. Tie in eyes just in front of deer hair.

**Step 12,13** - Tie in one more small clump of deer hair behind the eyes, and one or two more in front of the eyes.

**Step 14** - Whip finish.

15



**Step 15** - Trim the deer hair with serrated scissors to start, and finish up with a double-sided razor blade. Remember to trim slowly—you cannot put it back on. Start with trimming down the bottom of the fly and then the top and sides. Then detail-trim to create the head.



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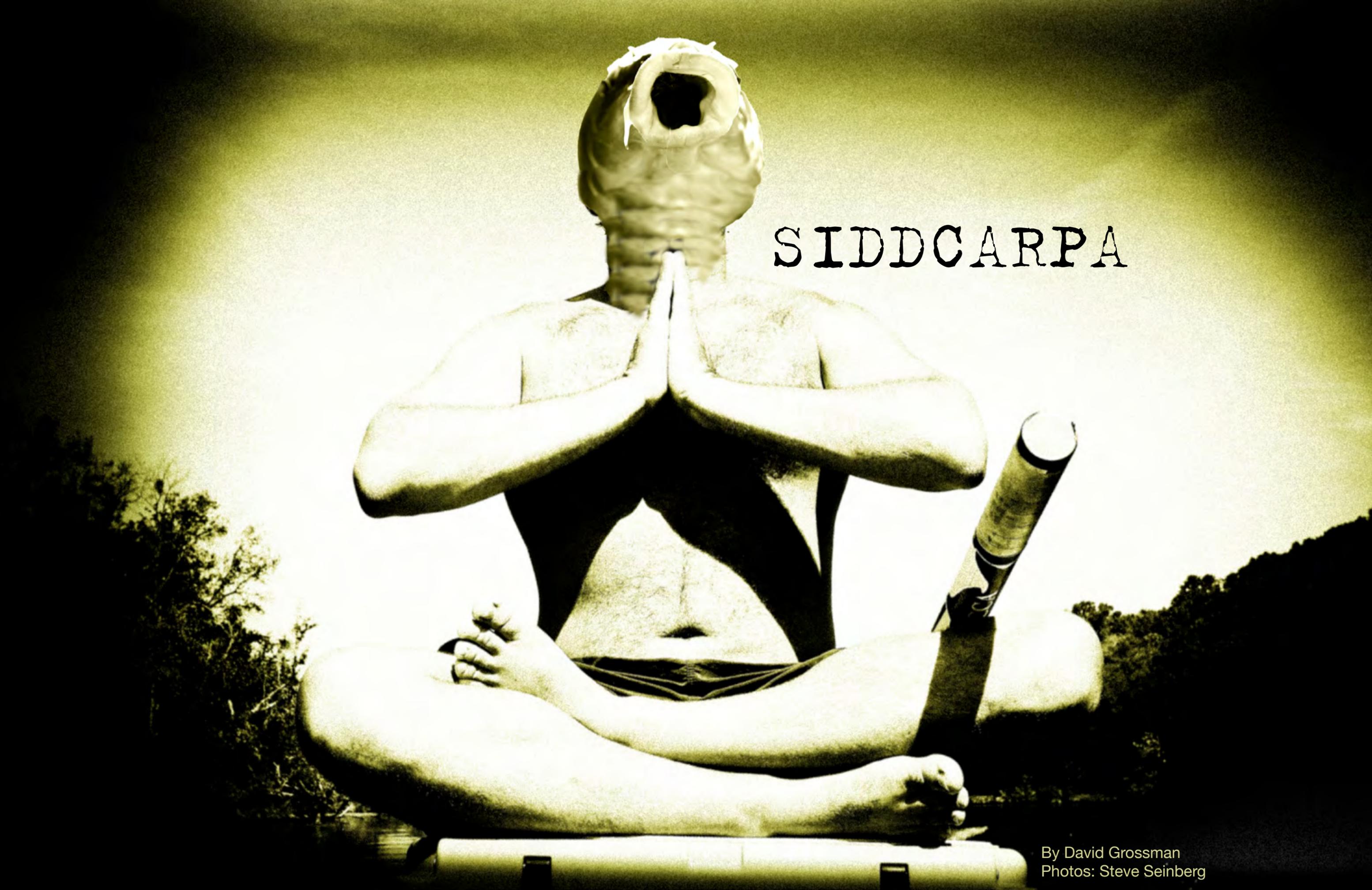
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## GUIDED TRIPS AND TRAVEL



A monochromatic, high-contrast photograph of a person sitting in a meditative pose (Padmasana) on a rolled-up mat. The person's head is replaced by a snake's head, which is coiled around their neck. The person's hands are in a prayer position (Anjali Mudra) at their chest. The background is a bright, hazy outdoor setting with some foliage visible on the left and right sides. The overall tone is somber and surreal.

# SIDDHARPA

By David Grossman  
Photos: Steve Seiberger

## Part One



photo: Rand Harcz

## The Son Of A Trout Angler

---

In the shade of the cutbank, in the sunshine of the midriver above the riffle, Siddcarpa was born to prominent trout anglers. Siddcarpa was as handsome as a cooler model. He developed his trout skills at an early age. Before his voice dropped he was taking part in fly tying circles with the most experienced fly tyers. His father was overjoyed to see his young son show such early aptitude for the art of fooling trout with feather and fur. He taught Siddcarpa every technique he knew to catch a trout, from European nymphing to tandem streamers. Siddcarpa mastered them all in short order leaving his father sure that Siddcarpa would take his rightful spot as the most expert angler in the trout community. His skills as an angler and his Galloup-esque looks made it so that the entire community held Siddcarpa in the highest regard. But no one loved him more than his best friend Govarden. Govarden was also born to trout anglers. He constructed his calendar based on the same hatches as Siddcarpa.

Govarden's love and admiration did not stem from Siddcarpa's ease with which he caught trout, but his deep dissatisfaction with catching them. Both Siddcarpa and by default his faithful companion Govarden were on a path to reach angling enlightenment, and had come to the conclusion that trout were spiritually lacking. Dissecting a run with heavy weight and catching every trout in it had left his soul as empty as the run from which he walked. Siddcarpa knew there must be more to life than catching trout after trout for the rest of his days.

One evening while swinging soft hackles with hollow success, Siddartha told Govarden, "Tomorrow I will renounce all material things associated with my trout status and I will join the musky fisherman. Through their perpetual self-denial of joy and angling satisfaction I hope to find enlightenment."

Govarden was frightened by his friend's decision, but quickly realized that Siddcarpa's path was inevitable and that he would follow him down this arduous ascetic road where nirvana would hopefully be waiting. When the sun had set, Siddcarpa told his father of his decision hoping to find his blessing. His father stood silent. Only after many moments did he finally break his gaze from between Siddcarpa's eyes, "It would be beneath a trout angler to tell you what I feel in my heart."



Siddcarpa eased into his father's tying station and began to tie size 26 dry flies. Perplexed by this reaction, his father asked him what purpose this served. Siddcarpa only said, "You know, Father."

Throughout the night, Siddcarpa tied tiny dry flies of the highest quality. When the sun arose, his father found him half-buried in adult chrimonid imitations, still furiously tying. "Why are you still tying?", asked his father.

"You know why," responded Siddcarpa robotically.

"If I don't give you my blessing to hunt 'ski, will you tie midges forever? Your eyes will shrivel, and your fingertips will fall off like a leper," remarked his father.

"I will continue," was all Siddcarpa said.

It was at this moment his father realized that he had lost his son to 0/3 hooks and figure-eights that end in more casting. "Go Siddcarpa, join the musky fisherman and find enlightenment in long periods with no fish to hand, followed by even longer periods with boredom and suffering. You have my blessing."





*"One's soul must be corrupt to seek constant validation that trout so freely give."*

## With The Musky Tribe

---



Siddcarpa and Govarden were able to find the wandering musky tribe just outside their village. The tribe immediately accepted them as one of their own. They gave away their vests, five-weight rods, and all tippet spools that weighed in at less than 60 pounds. Their size-20 midges became 0/3 electric colored chickens. They fished, they casted, they caught nothing. Traveling the land foregoing all currents for the deepest slowest of holes, the pair labored furiously with figure-eights and wore their fingertips raw tying bite wire.

After some time had passed, the weight of the work in comparison to the dearth of joy took its physical toll. Siddcarpa's meager hoodie and Carhartts hung on him as if he'd stolen them from an adult who suffers from gas station malnutrition. The shrinking of Siddcarpa was especially noticeable in his face. His sunken hollow eyes showed no emotion and were as still as the last musky hole he fished. Through all of this, Siddcarpa's focus never waned. The tribe of musky devotees thought that trout fishermen were spiritually corrupt. One's soul must be corrupt to seek the constant validation that trout so freely give.

They believed it was this constant search for validation from the fish that created the largest obstacle to enlightenment. It was only when you gave up the pleasures of fin and tail that nirvana would come.

So they wandered, they tied giant streamers, they cast, and they caught nothing. They pursued the river wolf in the name self-flagellation. After a number of years of denial and torturous fishing, Siddcarpa began to have doubts about his path. He had mastered the ways of musky yet felt no closer to his destination than when he started. The ever-present monotony of throwing heavy flies on 10-weights had taught him to live alone with his thoughts when time slowed to a drip. He had denied himself the carnal pleasure of actually interacting with the fish and had all but eliminated the fish from the equation. Yet these things only gave him short periods of contentment. His mind continued to cast doubt whether this was actually going anywhere. The oldest musky acolyte seemed no closer to enlightenment than he. Could he spend the next 60 years not catching fish and no closer to enlightenment than where he had started?



At the same time these doubts were rising in Siddcarpa, there were whisperings of a great new spiritual leader. This man was said to be the reincarnation of Buddha on Earth. His path was far away from the rivers and lakes of Siddcarpa's youth, in the flats of the marsh and sea. He fished for a creature that Siddcarpa had only heard stories about as a child. A silver armored beast that could reach sizes larger than a man. The holy man's name was Buddha Megalops. Siddcarpa and Govarden approached the musky elders and informed them of their decision to find Megalops and learn from him. They were incensed with Siddcarpa in his perceived insolence to their apex deity. Siddcarpa calmly and quietly sat

down at the vice and proceeded to manipulate hackles, hairs, and epoxy into the most realistic and exotic version of a redhorse sucker the elders had ever seen. Siddcarpa knelt before the elders and offered these nine articulations as proof of what he had learned these years from them. Their silent adoration of Siddcarpa's creation was finally pierced by the gnarliest, smelliest, oldest musky elder among them, "Go Siddcarpa, learn from Megalops, we can teach you no more." With his blessing, Siddcarpa and Govarden took the sink tip lines off of their reels, respooled with tropical floating lines, and set out in search of Buddha Megalops.





*"When the grass turned to sand and the pines into palm, they reached their destination."*

# Megalops

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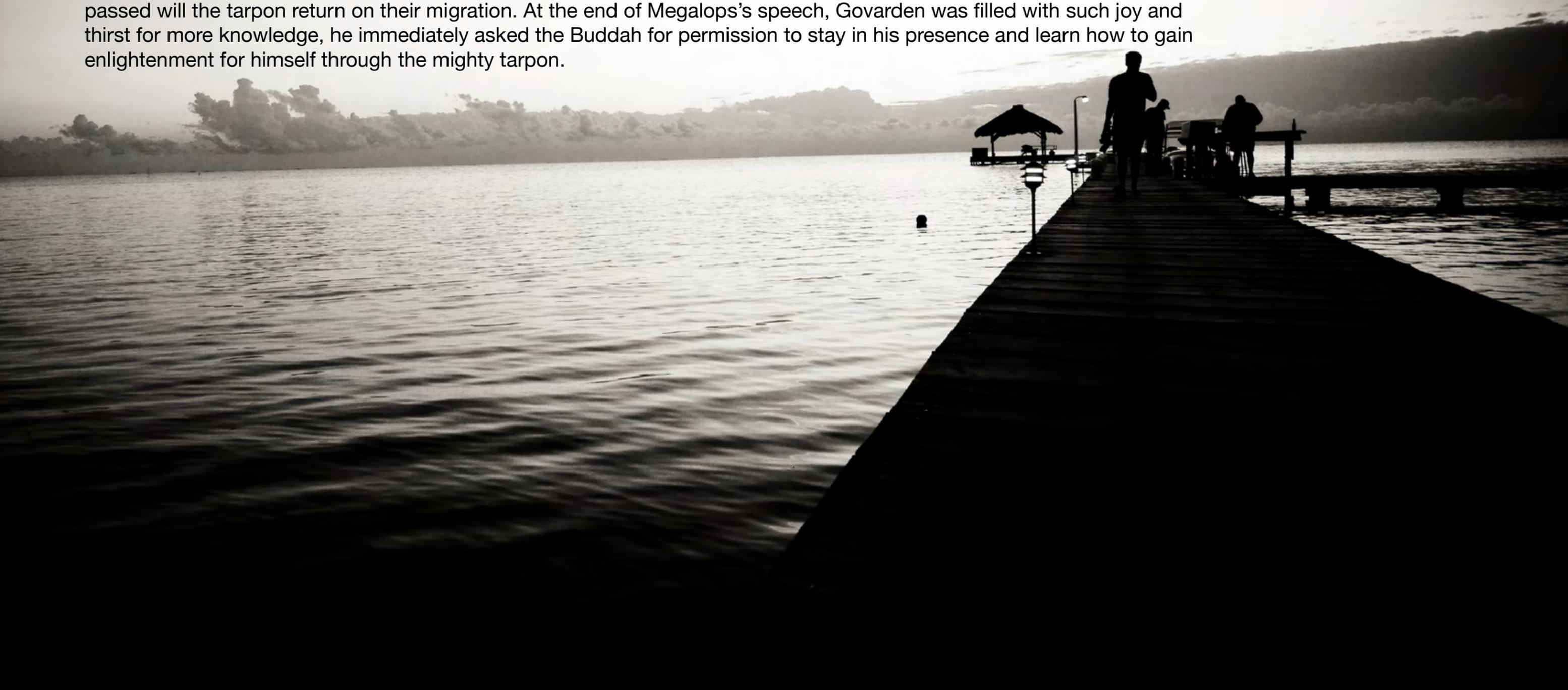
Leaving the Northwoods, the duo made the long journey to the coast, hearing more of Megalops's teachings and exaltations at every bar and roadside hotdog stand along the way. When the grass turned to sand and the pines into palm, they reached their destination. They asked around and were told the Buddha resided south of town away on a small sliver of land between the backcountry and oceanside. There, they would find him and his many followers. As they made their way to see and learn from Megalops, they saw silver flashes and finally rolling fish in the glass water that surrounded them. Both of them had never been more sure that this must be the path to nirvana.

Upon arrival, they found the Buddah had many followers, all wearing the traditional garb of the Buddha—flip-flops, boardshorts, and shiny, long-sleeve shirts, with mesh hats and dark glasses adorning their sun-darkened heads.

They wandered this way and that, discussing the finer points of 16-pound leaders and Bimini twists. Among all the bronzed monks of Megalops, Siddcarpa saw a single one sharpening hooks. There was no question this man was Megalops. In outward appearance, he seemed no different than the others, but he exuded an inner calm and peace of a man with nothing left to prove. He need not puff his chest because he carried with him the confidence of someone who had not only seen the Silver King, but through sheer focus and will had danced with him to a stalemate. Megalops's life had been full of the most violent of jumps and gill-rattling of head shakes. A man with nothing to prove is unlikely to boast.



It was clear to Siddcarpa that Megalops had summited the mountain of enlightenment that Siddcarpa was still climbing. Siddcarpa told Govarden of his suspicions and they began to follow Megalops along his walk. As all the monks made their way to the dock for the morning low tide, they could see his calm, sure manner differentiate itself from the other monks making their way. They were sure they would hear Megalops's teachings from the Buddha himself after the fishing was done. While Siddcarpa was in awe of the Buddha Megalops and the enlightenment he attained, he couldn't help but feel that the Buddha's teachings were already familiar and had not taken him any further than musky or trout could. Later that evening, the Buddha Megalops spoke to all who gathered around the driftwood fire. Megalops waxed of things out of the fisherman's control—weather, wind, and tides. Megalops told his audience that your emotions cannot be fickle like these things. What will be, will be, and the tarpon anglers' emotions cannot rise and fall like the mercury in the barometer. The tarpon angler must be patient. When all things are in harmony, and only then, can one hope to dance with the King, always humbling yourself by bowing to his mighty jumps. He also spoke of the seasons and only when the winter has passed will the tarpon return on their migration. At the end of Megalops's speech, Govarden was filled with such joy and thirst for more knowledge, he immediately asked the Buddha for permission to stay in his presence and learn how to gain enlightenment for himself through the mighty tarpon.



After accepting the many anglers who wished to stay and learn, Megalops faded into the night. Govarden was beside himself and quickly turned to Siddcarpa, impatiently asking why he had not asked to stay. With an easy smile, Siddcarpa responded, "It brings the greatest joy to see your heart joyously filled by the teachings of Megalops. There is no doubt that this path is your one true one, Govarden. But for me I know that I will no more find enlightenment here than I did in the musky forest." Govarden knew now their paths would diverge. He began a manly sob that robbed him of his sleep. The next morning when Govarden awoke, Siddcarpa was already gone.

As Siddcarpa walked the dunes he came across Megalops. He told Megalops of his great admiration for him and his decision not to stay among the mangrove tunnels and the silver scales. Megalops was surprised and inquired how he had come to this decision. Siddcarpa explained to Megalops with great reverence that he now realized no matter the teacher or the teachings, that enlightenment must be an individual quest. The Megalops's teachings were the most sound and wise he had ever heard, yet Megalops could not teach him what enlightenment was or how it felt. For this reason he would no longer seek the teachings of others, but find it for himself or perish in the effort. The Megalops thoughtfully considered what Siddcarpa had said and with a smirk turned and walked away. Siddcarpa would seek to join no other tribe. His path was now a solitary one.

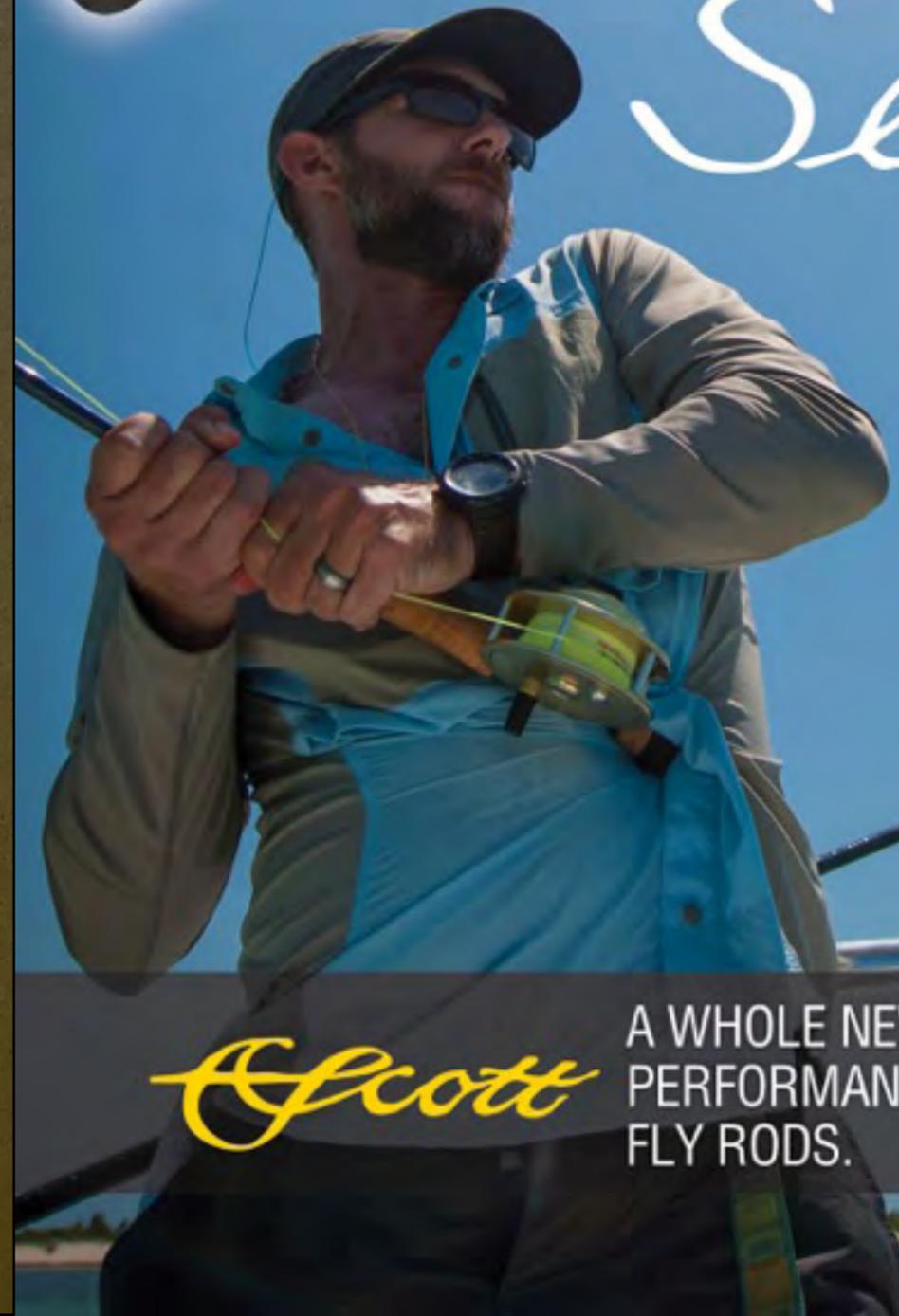
*To be continued....*



Part II of Siddcarpa will be published in the next issue of Southern Culture On The Fly, May, 2020.



# Sector



*Scott*

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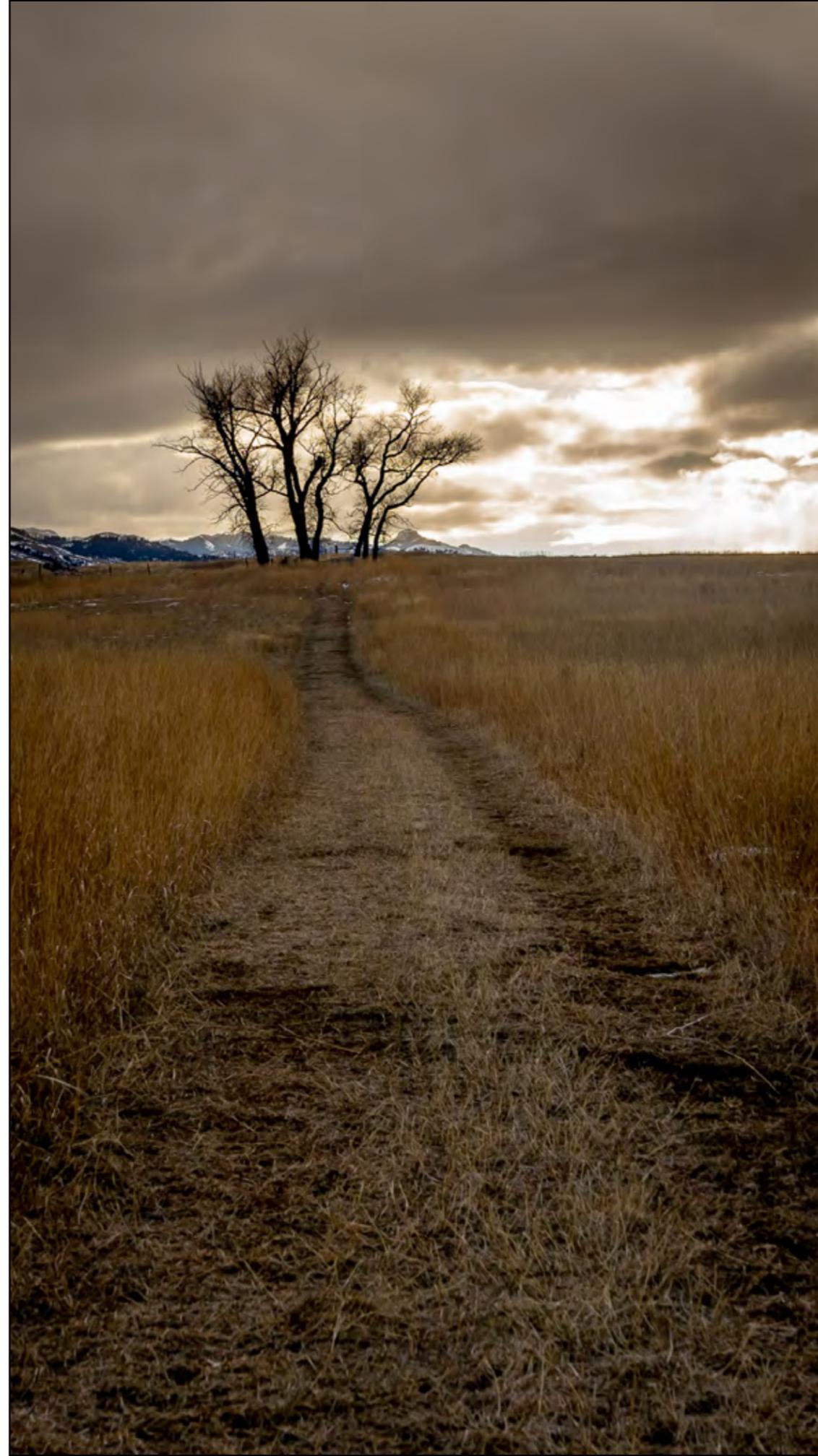
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HOMELESS IN MONTANA  
PART TWO





















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# Vuelvo al Sur

By Allen Gillespie



My first experience in Patagonia didn't come until my early thirties and involved a fateful two-day trip across The Pampas from Buenos Aires to Junín de los Andes in a borrowed Volkswagen with my pregnant Argentine girlfriend.

Somewhere in my twenties I had stumbled across a copy of Bruce Chatwin's novel *In Patagonia*. This isn't a book you simply pick up and put down, rather Chatwin's description of the region and the characters who inhabit it is revelatory. It teaches you about yourself and it invades your soul. And while I didn't know it at the time, it also planted a seed that took over a decade to sprout.

I first met my girlfriend in the lobby of a rustic hotel in La Paz, Bolivia. Upon learning that she was from Argentina, I feel certain that, among other things, I immediately recognized a conduit to Patagonia. Indeed, after we settled into a small apartment in the Buenos Aires suburb of Martínez, Patagonia was the first place I had to go.

Now 15 years later, divorced and graying with a copy of Chatwin's book stuck faithfully in my carry-on bag, I'm on the 7:15 am Delta flight from Knoxville to Atlanta hoping to rediscover my love for the region with the aid of friend and fishing guide Lucas Buxton. It took Lucas six years of correspondence to get me on this plane, perhaps because the divorce was still too fresh or the burden of raising two young sons too much. Ultimately, the draw of Patagonia, a region so steeped in lore that its very name has become synonymous with vastness and extremity, was insurmountable. I had to return to verify that while years have passed, the region remains inexplicably trapped in time.







*The relationship with a single fish is so ephemeral and yet so binding.*



-2-

Like some transformative dream, after hours on planes, only intermittent sleep, and regrettably too much alcohol, I've arrived in Bariloche and I'm standing in front of Lucas and his partner Sancho. They ferry me and my bags to the parking lot where they give me a beer from a dusty cooler sitting in the back of an even dustier Toyota Hilux replete with cracked windshield. It is late morning and the sun is brilliant against the cliffs lining the opal colored Río Limay. The wind is up and at times, when we round a corner, it catches the truck and pushes it off its line.

Estancia Tres Lagos, consists of 80,000 acres of pristine Patagonian terrain including the Filo Hua Hum river valley. The Filo Hua Hum River flows for eight miles within the estancia and holds trophy brown trout, both residential and migratory fish, which are fished Kiwi style, by sight. The house, by lodge standards, is modest and authentic and has been in the family for generations. From the deck of the house you can see nearly the entire river valley and the clouds are beginning to form. As they funnel down through the valley they begin to drop their moisture and the wind does its part blowing the rains sideways. Despite the less

than ideal conditions for sight fishing, Sancho quickly locates a nice brown in a depression above the braids a short distance from where we park the truck. I make a modest cast in the wind, which lands well out from the line of the fish. To my surprise, the fish moves off its lie and snatches the fly before I'm even aware that I'm in the game. We manage one more eat before the rain and darkness chase us off the river and we retreat toward San Martín for some dinner and sleep and the next day's adventure.

-3-

In the morning Lucas picks me up at my apartment and we drive north to meet Sancho in Junín in order to float the famous Río Chimehuin. We find Sancho with the drift boat at the boat ramp south of Junín. The game warden is in his trailer by the river and comes out to greet us and we share some yerba mate and say our morning pleasantries before dropping the boat into the swollen Chimehuin River. Immediately we are moving at an almost unperceivable speed. I'm throwing a sparkle minnow on a sinking line and banging the bank at a dizzying pace. It's all I can do to pick a spot and throw the fly before I have to immediately begin looking down stream for the next likely hole. Cast, strip, strip—cast.



The fish are awake and willing and more often than not the line comes tight and I rip a brown trout from the swell. At this pace, however, there are as many misses as there are good eats. Under a large willow I side-arm my cast and skip the sparkle minnow tight against the bank. A slight pause before I begin the retrieve and then two or three solid strips. From the bottom a silhouette rises, turns, and misses the fly. The fish is a giant—the stuff dreams are made of and as quickly as it was there it is gone again. It's these encounters that are burned into your mind. The relationship with a single fish is so ephemeral and yet so binding. It is precisely the reason we return to the waters and try again.

By late morning the sun is up and it warms the three of us in the boat. We have caught a lot of fish. Mostly browns but a few rainbows sprinkled in here and there. Lucas says it's because we are throwing streamers. He says we'll catch more rainbows after lunch if we switch to dry-dropper rigs. We make our way to the bank and dine quickly from our seats on beef milanese and quiche Sancho's wife prepared the day before. With my belly full, Lucas hands me a five weight rod with a large foam dry fly attached to the end of the leader and a nymph dropped just below it. Against a cliff, just downstream, there's an eddy. In the center, on the eddy's edges and just below there must be at least 20 rainbows in the 20-inch range sipping bugs from the surface. It is a dream and the best possible way to finish an already silly day of fishing.

-4-

Just beyond the confluence of the Chimehuin and the Collón Curá Rivers, our shuttle driver is waiting for us on the bank of the property associated with the Tres Ríos Lodge. The lodge itself is set into the bluffs above the rivers. The proprietor, also named Lucas, greets us and shows me around the place. He looks like a young Robert Redford and I regret that we won't spend much more time here. The serenity of the place is powerful.

The hour is late and Lucas and Sancho say we have one more stop to make on our way back to San Martín. We say our goodbyes and crawl slowly up and over the ridge toward the main road to town. From atop the ridge one can begin to grasp the boundlessness of the area. As far as one can see there's nothing that speaks of civilization save for the barbed wire fences and Lombardi poplars speckled in the distance advertising the existence of a house or an old home place.

Just 30 minutes from town we take a left up a drive lined with pine trees as tall as one can imagine a pine can get. We have arrived on the Estancia Cerro de los Pinos. Gauchos are working the cattle in the pens alongside the drive as we make our way into the lodge. We are greeted at the door of the lodge by the hostess, Maru, and I'm instantly infatuated.

Make no mistake, this is not an uncommon occurrence for me here in Argentina. Maru is young, articulate, and has long, red hair that belies her Welch ancestry. She shows me around the lodge, which is immaculate and luxuriant. Maru aside, Tipiluke is not my style—too formal and more like lodging in an upscale hotel. Not quite the authentic experience I seek while in Patagonia.

-5-

In the morning Lucas and I are headed north again to the Río Malleo, a river with which I am already intimately familiar. The Malleo, relative to other Patagonian rivers, is not particularly large. It flows out of Lago Tromeo along the border with Chile. The upper Malleo flows through the National Park and is fast and furious as it drops rapidly out of the lake. The middle stretch of the river's 30 miles is all within private property operated by the Mamuil Malal and San Huberto lodges. The lower stretch flows through the Mapuche Indian Reservation and can be accessed with a fee. When I was here last I spent a great deal of time learning the river on the upper and lower stretch in that borrowed VW. The middle stretch, known as the Meadows, was out of my budget.





Mamuil Malal is simply put, surreal. The main house and the peripheral outbuildings are washed in a vibrant shade of yellow with European mounts of Red Stag hung everywhere. Owners Bertil and Dolores Grahn are the most eccentric and striking couple one could expect to encounter. Bertil could be mistaken as the Sundance Kid, complete with a Colt 45 strapped to his hip and a 10-gallon hat on his head. Dolores, though now in her early 60s, is as stunning as she is out of place. Dolores was, I am told, a model from Buenos Aires born into a socialite family. Bertil's family, well known in the polo circles around the world, happened upon her at a polo event in Buenos Aires and whisked her away to his Patago-

nian home against her family's wishes. If given the opportunity, I could spend hours merely poring over the contents of Bertil's office. The tiny nooks and crannies, the decades of handwritten ledgers, the photographs of the family. On every surface there are cartridges for rifles and pistols. Knives lay about as if abandoned, instantly at hand if one is needed.

Lucas and I say our goodbyes and make our way down to the Malleo in the middle section referred to as the meadows. The river is just as I remembered it—inviting and nearly perfect. There are pools, bends and riffles and beneath every willow, just along the seam, is a trout swaying in the



current. This morning it is alive. We pause at a bend in the river in the shadow of the volcano Lanin. There are fish on the inside of the bend, the outside, and the middle. Snouts are coming out of the water for hundreds of yards. If God intended there to be a perfect dry fly river, he made it here in Patagonia and the Mapuche Indians named it the Malleo.

--6--

On that fateful trip some 15 years prior, after having been rebuffed by the more famous San Huberto Lodge on the Río Malleo, my pregnant Argentine girlfriend and I

retreated back to San Junin de los Andes and secured more affordable lodging at Spring Creek Lodge. It was late season and the place was empty, even the staff was gone. On this day at the start of the fishing season, it is likewise more or less empty save for a couple of workers tending to the lawn. Sancho is there waiting for us with his shuttle driver. We are going to go upstream to the mouth of the river where it flows from Lago Huechulafquen. Sancho and Lucas have prefaced this trip by telling me that you only do this float early in the season while the migratory fish are still present.

We make a short eight-mile drive upriver and dump the boat in just below a massive rapid. Over the roar of the falling water, Sancho confesses that this is not a float where you take clients. Indeed, within the first 300 yards, I am soaked as the bow dips below the standing waves in the first chute on at least three occasions. If I thought the pace of the fishing on the lower river was fast I was gravely mistaken. In this upper section, the water is a cobalt blue and crystal clear. The river is dropping more than it is flowing. The gradient here is incredibly steep and somehow we are bobbing along and I am fishing. My legs are firmly locked into the casting braces in the front of the boat and I am putting on a casting clinic. The river is not terribly wide so that in spots one can cast to either bank with relative ease. Willows line the banks and I hit as many pockets as I can, but only manage a few small browns and a couple of rainbows. At lunch we managed a few post-spawn rainbows on egg patterns while wet wading for as long as our feet could stand it. The upper Chimiñuen and the lodge are as I remembered—swift, clear, beautiful and not very productive.

-7-

In the morning, Lucas and I meet his other partner, Diego. He's just returned from three days guiding on the upper Aluminé. He is transferring gear from his porch to the motor boat hitched to his truck. Our plan today is to meet Sancho at the launch on Lago Lolog and motor our way up the lake to the mouth of the Río Auquinco. The Auquinco is a small river that feeds

the lake. This early in the season it should hold some post-spawn rainbows as well as some larger resident browns. Like the Filo Hua Hum, the Auquinco lends itself to sight fishing and is completely inaccessible except via the lake.

We make the short 20-minute run from the launch to the mouth of the Auquinco in the still chilly morning air. There is very little wind. Diego beaches the boat and secures it to a bush on the shore. We pack all of the gear we aren't going to take with us in a large bag and Lucas hides it in the bushes away from the boat. This seems overly precautious to a gringo, but I'm sure they have their reasons. The beach along the lake is composed of volcanic sand and it's a struggle to make way in my heavy wading boots. I manage a few rainbows on a streamer in the first pool up from the mouth of the river. At the end of the long straight up from the lake, the river takes a dog-leg left. Just around the bend, in the tail of a small pool, there is a pod of rainbows. We take turns catching them. The drift is tough because most of the fish are holding in the slower water tight against the bank. The main flow is between us and them and one has to immediately make a significant mend in order to get a decent presentation to the fish. Strikes are hard to detect and we are all laughing and joking and giving whoever has the rod in his hand a hard time in between sips of yerba mate. At some point Lucas and Sancho begin to meander upstream in search of resident browns. Diego and I follow shortly after once we've exhausted the opportunity in the current pool.



The river is swift with its early-season charge. Crossing isn't easy and the way the river meanders requires multiple crossings, inching sideways across the flow with my dominant foot anchoring my weight against the push of the river. Diego and I find Lucas and Sancho upstream on the high far bank of a deep long pool. Lucas has spotted a good-size resident brown in a lie just beneath where he's standing. The water is three or four feet deep below Lucas's perch. From my vantage I cannot see the fish and have to trust what Lucas is telling me. I make several casts from the far side of the river but the current in the middle is too swift to get a drift where the fish is holding. I move across the current and down in order to throw straight back upstream. After some final instructions from Lucas, I cast the Chubby Chernobyl just to the outside of the stick Lucas has used to mark the fish. After a very short drift, I see the snout come out of the water and inhale the fly. I lift the rod and the line tightens. We land the fish just downstream. It is a beautiful fish of 23 or 24 inches. I'm thrilled not only for having had this opportunity, but also because in my estimation there's no finer way to catch a fish. We are still in the self-congratulatory mode when Lucas speaks up and informs us that there's another fish holding in almost the exact same spot. I move back into position and the same scenario plays out with identical results. The sun is high in the sky and I am certain that it does not get much better than this.

-8-

Nearly all the varied waters of Northern Patagonia hold trout. The variety and quality of the rivers, creeks, and lakes is staggering. Today, Diego secures us permission to fish a private lake on an estancia due south of town. We meet the owner at the northern gate. He is dressed in classic provincial gaucho garb and doesn't have a lot to say other than to tell us the best means of crossing the river is where it flows just down the hill from the gate. As we climb out of the town of San Martín in the morning the ecology of the surrounding landscape changes from that of the typical arid Patagonian steppe to a more classic Andean forest. The track down to the lake is lined with pines, ferns, and the Jurassic-like monkey puzzle trees. While the road is clearly maintained, its steep gradient and muddy nature would make it a trick to ascend if it was to rain. The weather has changed overnight. They are calling for rain in the afternoon.

Reeds line the entirety of the lake which is probably about 800 yards across at its widest point. It is early in the season, but Diego says we should try the dragon fly imitations to see if we can get any takers. I work the foam bug along the weed line like I'm fishing for smallmouth back home in Tennessee. After the fly hits the water

I let it sit for a few moments before I give it a big chug. Sit, chug, sit, chug, pick up and cast. While a fish or two swirl at our offerings none are overly cooperative. We switch to streamers on sinking lines and in no time we begin catching brook trout the size of rugby balls that fight like smallmouth. We make a slow lap of the lake finding pockets of brook trout and pockets of rainbows. The size and pull of the fish is impressive and fun, but the action is spotty. A few hours after lunch, we've had our fill.



-9-

In the morning, Lucas, Sancho, and I head south to wade the Collón Curá River. The weather has turned cold and brings with it wind and rain. Lucas assures me that we will drive out of the rain as we head west away from the range. The lodge manager has left us a key at the base of a fence post that will unlock the gates on the estancia's 200,000 acres. Down at the river, there are fish rising in the seam below the cliff face where we have parked the truck. We try the large stuff first, big foam flies with a dropper below, but only manage one fish. I begin downsizing my tippet and flies and manage several eats, but only a few fish to hand as they are being picky and difficult, something Lucas blames on the change in the weather.



We break for lunch under the willows with the wind doing its best to rip the tablecloth from beneath our plates. After lunch we head toward the lodge, which is still some distance away through the sweeping Patagonian steppe up the valley formed by the Quemquemtreu. Estancia Quemquemtreu once covered over a million acres and at that time it operated as its own town with a store, school, and anything else workers and gauchos might need. Those 30 buildings still exist, but few function in their original capacity. Irrigation ditches line the paddocks and the polo ponies begin to prance excitedly as we pull slowly closer to the house. The afternoon sun is trickling sideways through the poplars and I've forgotten about fishing for the moment. We take a walk through the many buildings and it's all I can do to try and grasp the sequence of construction. The history of each paddock, building, and walk. There are trout in the pool below the building that housed the old hydroelectric generator. They are large and fat and like the fish in the river today, they are lazy and unbothered by our presence. Lucas takes this as an affirmation that the trout in the river are feeling the pinch of the cold front, and that we made the right call cutting the fishing short.



-10-

Argentina is a country of contradictions. Patagonia, defined by its isolation, inconvenience, and eccentricity, is no exception. Chatwin came to Patagonia seeking people. Whether I knew it or not, I did, too.

Northern Patagonia is a region of incredible hospitality, expansive landscapes, and eccentric personalities, and Lucas, Sancho, and Diego epitomize all that is great about the area. To fly fish Patagonia's diverse rivers is more than just an adventure in the southern hemisphere—it's a cultural experience set in one of the most incredible backdrops one can imagine. My return south won't be my last. I've got two young sons who have yet to be introduced to this part of Argentina, and their stories in Patagonia have yet to be written...



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# TALL TIDES

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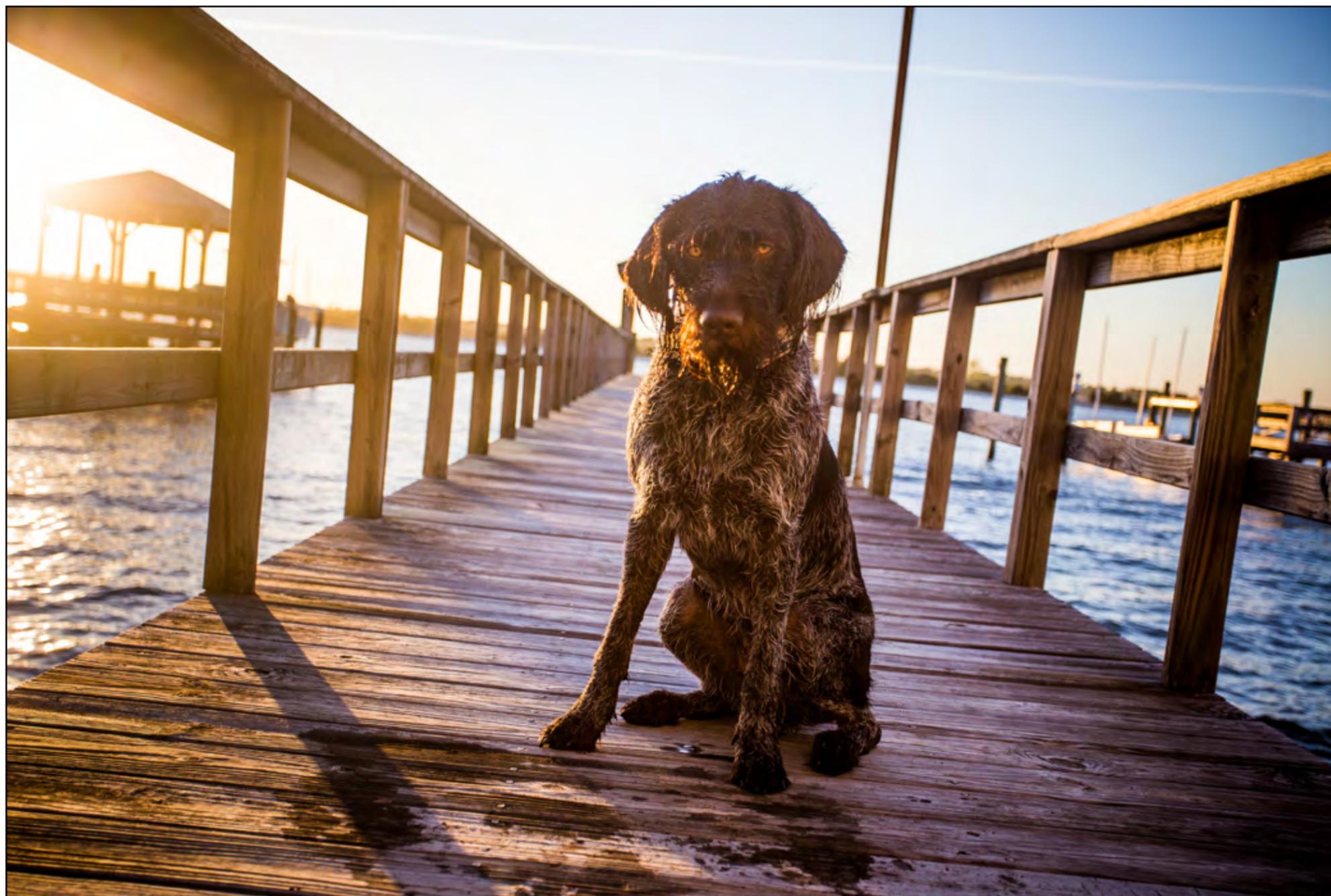


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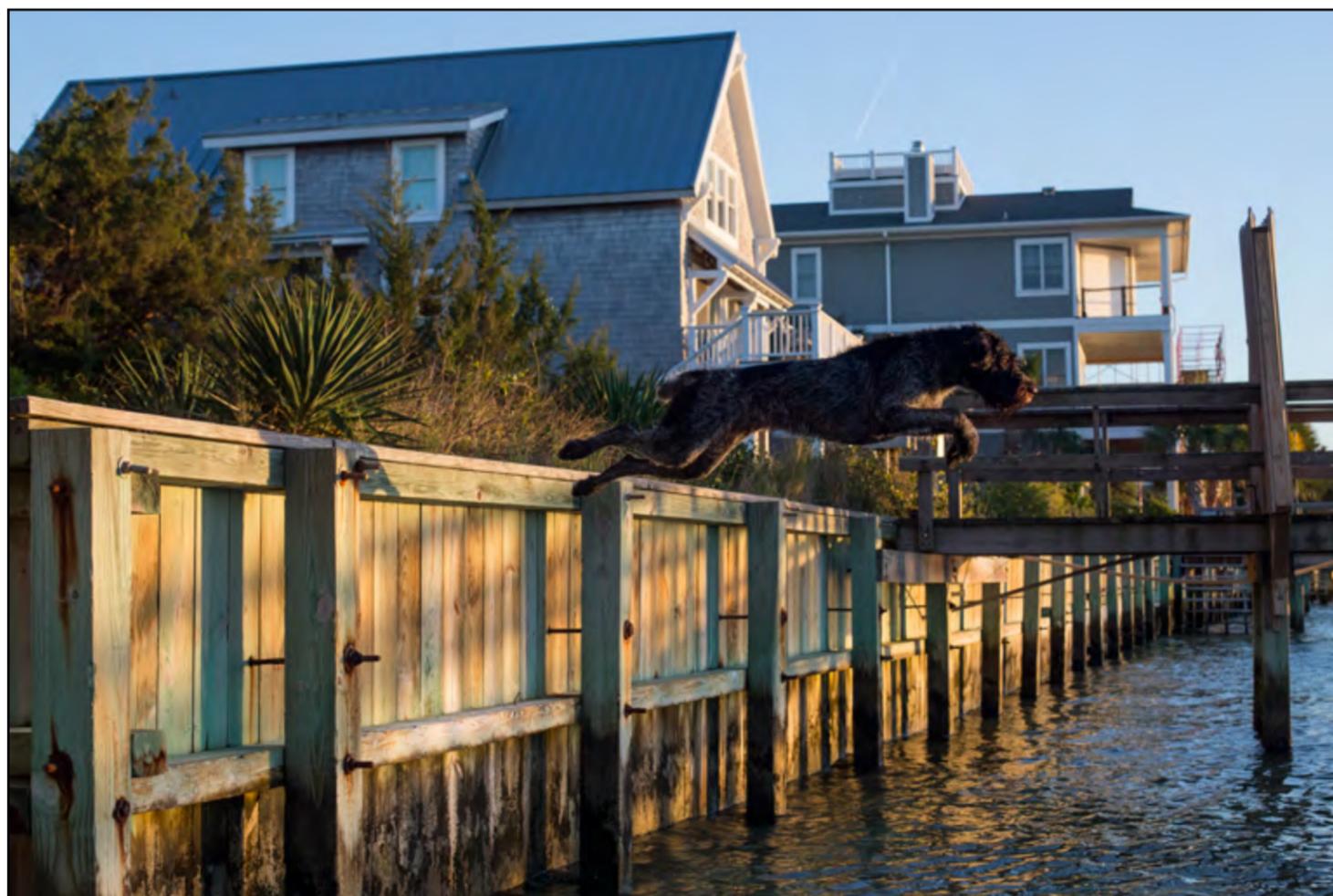
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GOOD DOG  
5 tips for fishing with your best friend



I've very rarely met a dog I didn't like. From bird dogs to boat dogs, I'm drawn to them all. Having a companion that never judges, takes the first shot, or even speaks is worth its weight in gold. This past summer, I took an unscientific poll of my clients, asking them if they would be ok with me bringing my very well-behaved dog on guide trips. He fishes with me, travels with me, and knows when and when not to be a puppy. Much to my shock, at least half of my clients have said they would rather not have a dog in the boat. I figured one or two here or there might just not be dog people, but this was way more than a couple of folks. A good portion of the people actually owned dogs or considered them themselves to be at least fair to middling dog people. Most people's fears stemmed from prior bad experiences, or worries about my pal being too much of a distraction. So for the sake of our furry friends, I thought it might be helpful to share my wisdom on fishing dogs gained from years of successfully (and sometimes not-so-successfully) fishing with dogs.



- 1. Know your dog.** If your dog is well-behaved, well-trained, and chill (i.e. old), by all means take your him fishing. If your dog is none of these things, it might be best to leave your dog at home. This is especially true if you often fish with other people. If you fish alone and want to take the time, effort, and frustration to make your dog a fishing dog, by all means go ahead. I applaud your efforts. On the other hand, if your dog gets car sick, is aggressive, or likes to take off at the first opportunity, it's probably better not to subject your friends to that kind of stress on what's supposed to be an exercise in relaxation.

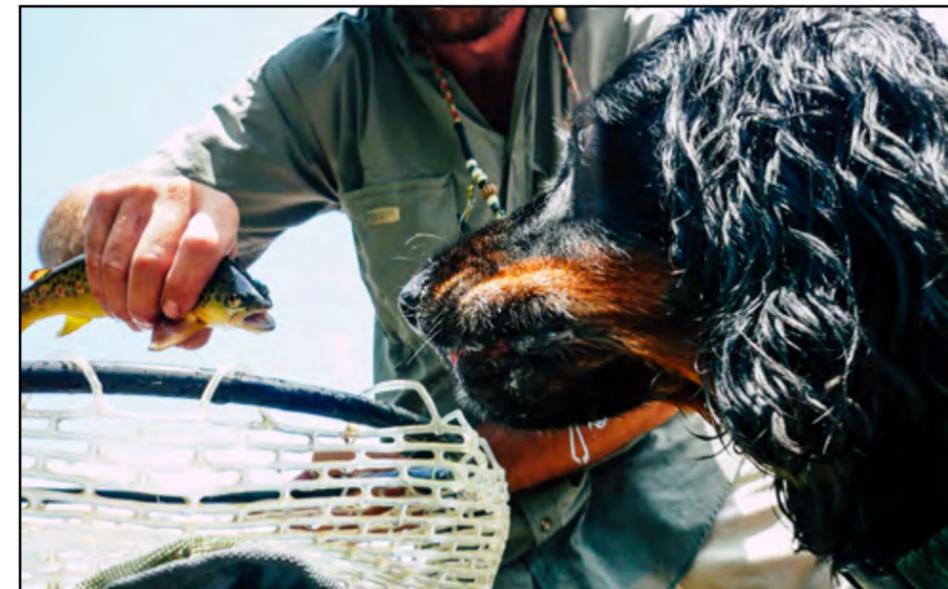


- 2. Protect your gear.** This goes for boating, wading, and driving. I'm willing to bet at least a quarter of the rods sitting in every manufacturer's warranty department met their fates at the paws or mouth of a dog. When you're boating, make sure the rods are protected from your buddy's inevitable excitement as he jumps on the gunnel every time a fish is netted. When you're wading, remember that your \$900-rod just looks like a really big stick to the eyes of a canine. Be thoughtful where you leave it and always keep a sideways eye on it if Fido is running around during lunch. The same goes for rods in the car if they are assembled. Don't set your dog up for your own disappointment.

**3. It never hurts to ask.** Even if you have the best dog in the world, don't just show up to the ramp or the lot with your dog and expect people to deal. This is especially true if it's someone else's boat or car. Your mammas taught you better than that. You wouldn't want your friend throwing his pet ferret in the back of your car or boat expecting you to just roll with it. So give them the same courtesy.

**4. Know where you're fishing.** This one is for wading with dogs. If you're going to fish the most crowded roadside stocking depository, it's probably not going to be a good spot for you and your fur baby. On the other hand, if you like getting away from crowds and enjoy hiking long miles to cast at unpressured fish, it would be weird if your dog didn't come with you. You have to walk him anyway, you might as well catch some fish while you're at it.

**5. Better safe than sorry.** If you row heavy whitewater or choose to wade above a waterfall, please be mindful of your dog's safety. He's not as tall as you, and getting tossed out of a boat on a class-four is jarring and scary to say the least. Life jackets for dogs exist for a reason. Losing a dog to the river is the worst fate I can imagine because the responsibility for the loss would fall squarely on my shoulders and my carelessness.



A good fishing dog is truly one of the greatest things in the world if you like dogs. A bad fishing dog can be one of the biggest pains in the ass whether you like dogs or not. With a little common sense and a bit of patience, sharing your adventure with your best friend is not only doable, but enriches the entire experience.



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# The Back Page Journal

with Paul Puckett and Mike Benson

Everyone has a coming-of-age moment or timeframe where they find out something about themselves that reshapes the rest of their lives, even if they don't know it's happening at that moment. My personal moment happened knee-deep in a trout stream in Western North Carolina, but in truth it probably started a little before that.

I was 16, and had recently been grounded by my parents for allegedly hot-boxing my mom's '95 Dodge Caravan. Under house arrest for two months, I was pretty much forbidden from hanging out with most of my friends forever, so even after I got my keys back and could leave the house again, I was limited on what I could do. So, I went back to my fly fishing roots.

Up to this point in my life I had only fly fished as an occasional thing with my dad and grandfather, but that was about to change. I found out there was a fly shop in my hometown, so I decided to see what that was about. What followed was months of me trying to teach myself how to fly fish small wild streams and spending every free second not on the water in the shop bugging the hell out of the guys working there.



At some point the shop owner struck up a conversation and offered me a free fly he had just tied—a small, foam, Yellow Sally imitation. I took that fly with me on my next trip and in a small plunge pool, under an overhanging laurel limb, I caught a wild brown trout that utterly changed the course of my entire life.

My world was molded by shop rats and fishing guides. Guys who owned two pairs of jeans, a fist full of t-shirts, and a closet full of free hats they got from tackle reps. They shaped me from raw clay with their nicotine-stained fingers into an alcohol-fueled fishing machine they could be proud of. Much like god created Adam, I was molded into their image.

Now in my mid-30s, I hardly resemble the 16-year-old who stumbled out of that creek hell-bent on doing nothing but fishing for the rest of my life. But he still lives down inside me, and every once in a while, when I find myself in Home Depot on a beautiful Sunday picking out flower pots or some such nonsense, I can hear him, like a small voice in the back of my head, "Fuck this shit. Let's go fishing."





*everything that matters*

