







DRAWRERS
&
Brawnings

feat.
Alexandra
Nicole





Alexandra Nicole is a wildlife biologist turned artist from Georgia whose work spotlights the landscapes and wildlife of the south with strong nod to the coast where she grew up. Raised in the rich tidewaters of the lowcountry, her childhood cultivated a desire to center her life around the natural world.

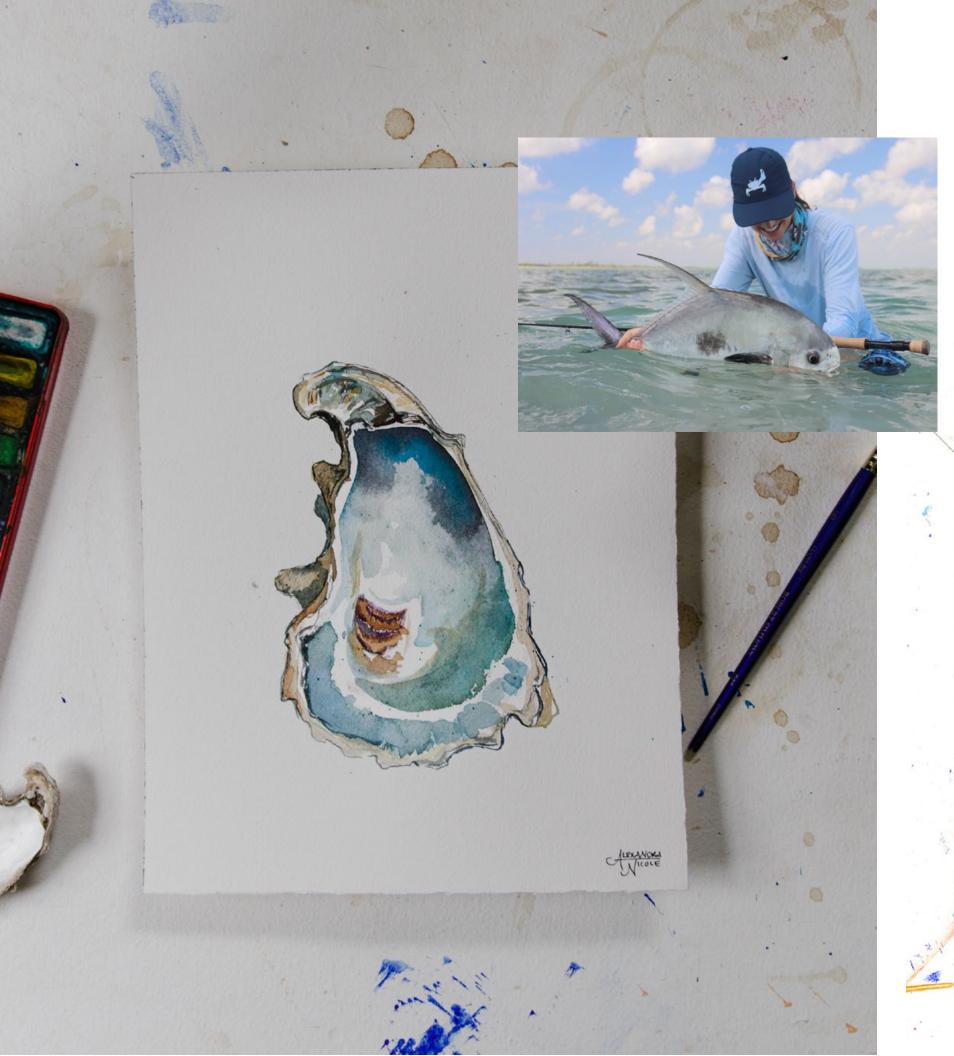
Alexandra started fishing around the age of 4, when her father began taking her out on the water. In an old, aluminum john boat they cruised the intercoastal waterway cast netting for shrimp, sight fishing triple tail, and targeting red drum in the creeks near her home. Those early days on the water laid the foundation, not only for her love of the coast, but her lifelong obsession with fishing.

Her angling career progressed naturally from bluegill on crickets, to redfish on shrimp, to tarpon on fly. Now, at 32 years old, fishing has deeply connected her to places and people around the world and is the primary inspiration for her artwork. Her hope is for her work to help foster a relationship between people and nature and perhaps inspire them to seek out this connection for themselves.















artbyalexandranicole.com

If you'd like to commission work from Alexandra or read more about her art and angling, check out her website.

She didn't mention this in her bio, but she is also a bad ass cattle rancher. If you want to learn about that, search for "Habitat Ranch Georgia" on the Google machine or

click right here.



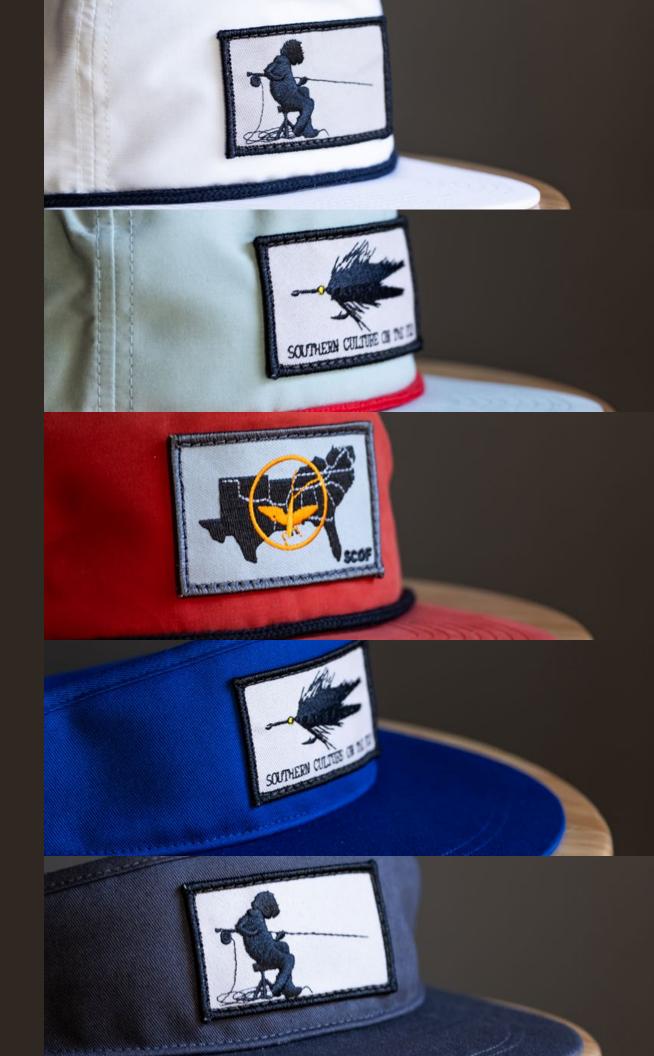
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SHOP THE SCOF STORE

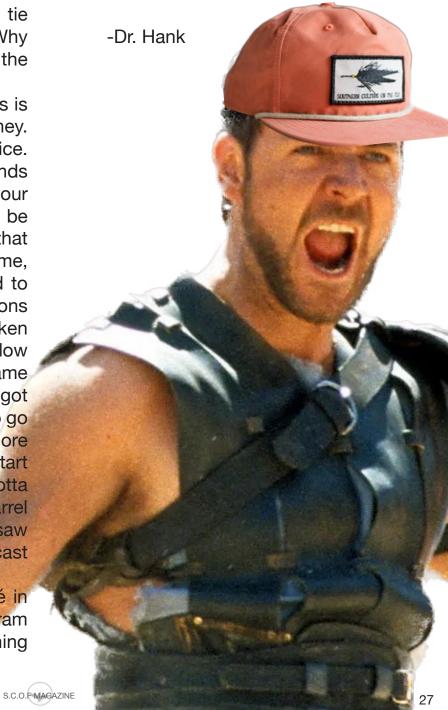




Now that everybody wants more than they can steal, it seems like a no-brainer to turn your free time into a bread machine. Mama always said, do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life. Life would be so easy if everybody wanted to pay you to screw around in your man cave. But, if you're doing what you love and it's not making you any money, what's the point? Why play in a band if you're not booking gigs? Why keep a sketch book if nobody's wearing your designs? Why pour your heart into prose if nobody's printing it? Why tie flies if you're not stocking fly shops? Why go fishing if nobody's tipping you at the boat ramp? Gotta find a way.

Deciding to monetize your hobbies is deciding that your talents are worth money. For a lot of people, that's a scary precipice. If you take the leap, and nobody extends their wallet to catch you, what makes your talents worth pursuing? Maybe you will be caught. But, what nobody tells you is that once you turn your free time into work time, and there is money in it, it's really hard to find time to do what you love for the reasons that you love it. Ask anybody who has taken the leap what the view is like from below and they all have versions of the same story: there's something in the way. I've got so many clients that I never have time to go fishing with my friends. I've got five more Shih Tzu portraits to make before I can start the landscape I've been sketching. I've gotta get through a hundred more double barrel poppers before I can try that tweaker I saw on YouTube. I've gotta finish this podcast script before I can... Nevermind.

Hot dog-moms weaving macramé in their vans make it look so easy. Instagram dangles the carrot in front of us, beckoning us to play their algorithmic games for the chance at validation, and some extra bread. "Even you can earn up to 5k a week if you follow these simple steps." My challenge to those of you on the precipice is to dig deep and answer for yourself whether it's worth the leap. If you really love what you do, maybe think about keeping it for yourself. Or, if Polly really wants that cracker, go for it. But don't be surprised when you start hearing the chants: here we are now. Entertain us.



MATKU matt smythe

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The Al Aquarium

By John Agricola

Al Bot: One of the strengths of this piece is its vivid descriptions of the settings and characters.

John: The task at hand was to sell SCOF swag at a fly fishing event in Chattanooga. Mike, the editor-at-large for our little digital mag endeavor, he and I were to rendezvous behind Hatch Outfitters. When we arrived an hour late we were relegated to the spot in the alley behind the store with a cool puddle-like stream running through it. This was as it should be for our gritty little rag, but I had my father and his 17-year-old lab named Me Too. Me Too was similarly cool tempered and she laid her nipples in the cool flow for relief from the spring sun on her black body of fur.

The author's use of sensory details, such as the "cool puddle-like stream," "spring sun," and "nipples" of the lab, adds depth and texture to the narrative.

Later in the day after only selling about 300 dollars worth of t-shirts, stickers, and hats, we retired to our vacation house rental. I rented a cabin because my father missed the Abaco trip this year due to his relentless degeneration of mind resulting from his Alzheimer's condition. He still knew who I was and for that we had reason to celebrate. However his body was breaking down. He had two athletic knees that were no longer sporty, and as a way of bathing him I decided we would try out the hot tub together. I was mindful that if he became too relaxed it would be

like trying to dump tuna out of a can onto a plate, and I really did not want to dump the water out of this can, mostly because a fork large enough to pry him out of the tub would not be forthcoming in a rental. As you might imagine, his brain lost the ability to talk to his legs, and I had to coax him into the right body movement to get out of the tub. It was challenging with his pecker so close to my embrace of his debilitated extremities to ensure he did not fall down.

The characters, including the father with Alzheimer's and the young son, are also well-drawn, and their quirks and idiosyncrasies are portrayed with sensitivity and nuance. The narrative also raises some ethical concerns. The author's decision to take their father, who has Alzheimer's, into a hot tub without proper precautions raises questions about informed consent and the care of vulnerable individuals.

We decided to take this mini weekend vacation because my wife, her sister, and her stepmother were in town on a separate vacation to the zoo and the aquarium. We were decidedly not allowed to participate in the zoo visit, but she sent me photos of the occurrence. It was a small win, and this place I was existing in as a husband and father was pretty tenuous if I was thrilled just to receive photos. The next day was the aquarium visit.

We ate Indian food for lunch, then met the women and Trey at Burger Republic. When we arrived, we found Trey laying on the booth on his back refusing to eat chicken fingers as opposed to chicken nuggets. I took him



to the restroom to assert my usefulness only to have the little punk throw an absolute tantrum in the stall. He spread his legs so far apart that it split the only diaper we had for the day. My wife was forced to go back to the hotel before our aquarium visit. So much for usefulness.

Another weakness is the author's tone, which can be abrasive and dismissive at times. The way the author describes the son as a "little punk" and the father's debilitated body as a "can" can be offputting and detract from the emotional impact of the narrative.

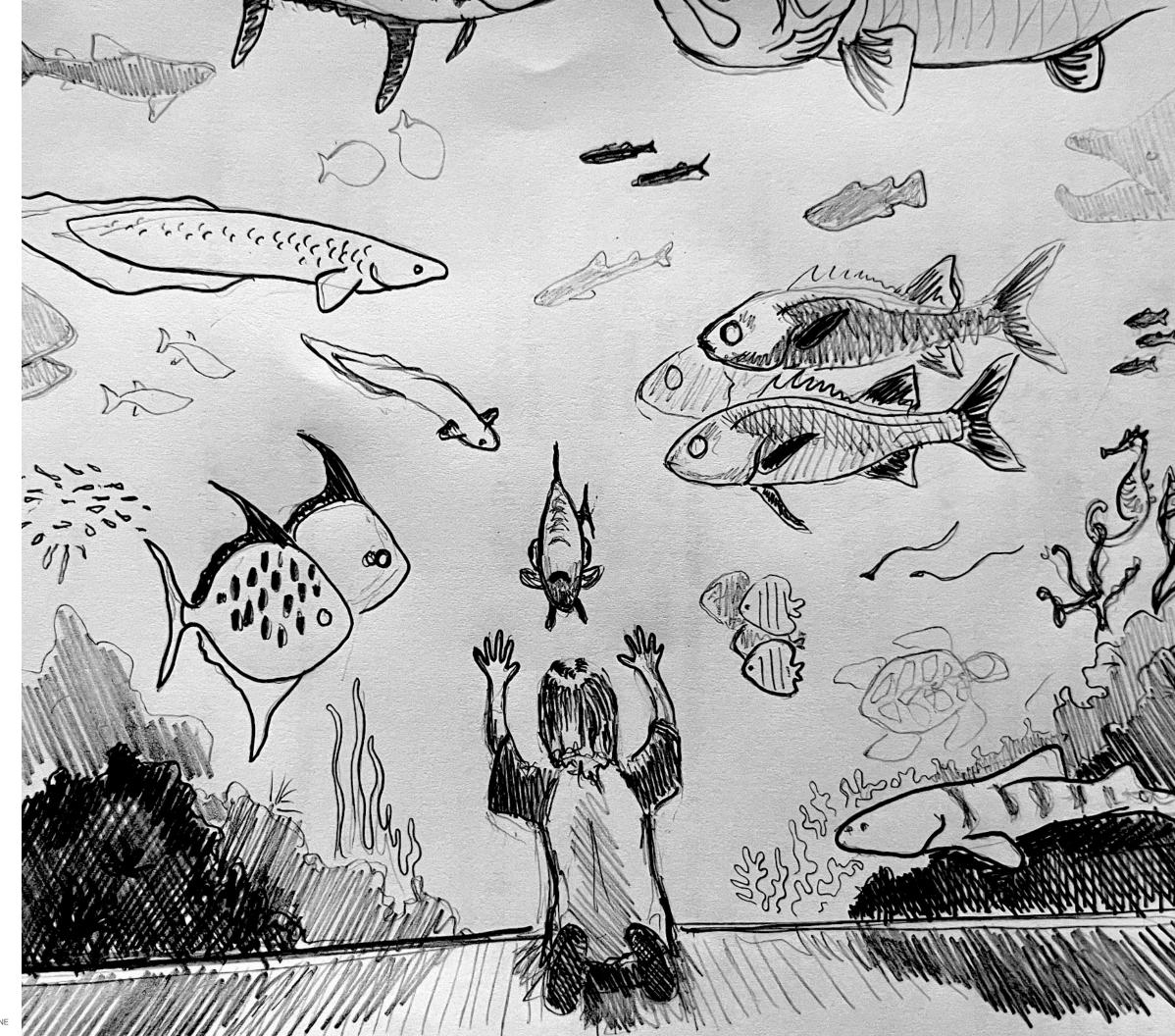
As we entered the freshwater aquarium in Chattanooga, I was early on still trying for usefulness. "Those are trout, Trey." Then he would run ahead of me intermingling with the bigger kids. It struck me that my choice to raise Trey and be a father would preclude a lot of freshwater fishy adventures, so being stuck in the middle between Trey and Jack would mean the Chattanooga Aquarium would be the only shot I might ever have to see these exotic fly fishing targets.

"Trey, these big fish are arapaima. Look at the red on their tails." He hadn't heard me. He kept onward inexorably to get to the gift shop. This linear maze of

an aquatic museum took us through a menagerie of freshwater species. I tried to get Trey to touch the sturgeon with me but he was already onto the next thing. The whole time I was trying to keep up with Trey, I was simultaneously occasionally slowing to make sure my dad was keeping up. Sometimes Trey would run to look at an Amazonian pacu, and my father was still stuck reading a museum text panel about the African tiger fish. It was an experience resembling my desire to keep up with my wife and Trey while simultaneously waiting on my father to catch up. My position between these two important John Cola's was a simulacrum of my larger life.

When we finished the river aquarium, we both tapped out by buying Trey an aquatic toy plane. I said goodbye to my wife, her sister, and Myra, so that they could do the ocean aquarium. I was sorry that I wasn't a better parent, but Me Too was baking in my friend's yard without a puddle reservoir for her nips. We departed feeling like we had accomplished nothing. But who knows, maybe Trey will remember this late impromptu five-year-old birthday. If he does that would make the whole affair worth it. Visualizing my life as a liminal walk through an aquarium with my son in front, impossible to catch, and my father behind and impossibly slow is a complicated familial experience worth reporting in human terms.

In summary, while this personal narrative has some strengths in its vivid descriptions and well-drawn characters, it also has shortcomings in its lack of coherence and abrasive tone. The narrative raises ethical concerns and may not be for everyone \bigcirc









working on a Kibbutz, with the communal infrastructure labor and maintenance expected from Alaska guides, and what I always imagined being non-sexually gay would be like. Hanging out with your buddies, fishing, drinking, building shit in the woods, and playing mario kart in the down time. But no penis stuff. Heaven. While I felt these observations were, in my mind, spot on, there was no real way to know until I saw it with my own eyes and was able to quietly sit in the corner and observe my subjects in their natural habitat. Whether it be gripping the tiller or the handmade log bar stool, there was only one way to truly know. I had to be there. A long period of inactivity on the able to confirm my hypotheses in the wait, 13 years of waiting to be exact, my long term plan of having a friend who owned an Alaska Lodge finally came boat as I am on his. One or two other

say sociopathic, former friends guide service. Like all good friendships our was formed in a crucible, this one just happened to be multi-boat guide trips spent getting front fucked by the owner. All of this meaning that Mitch and I are more than casual acquaintances.

Mitch had been guiding at Unalakleet River Lodge for a number of years when the former owner told him that he was interested in selling the whole she-bang. Mitch, being young enough not to know any better, and fully infected with Alaskan wanderlust, decided that the long finger of fate was pointing at him in this moment and that he was left bereft of both free will and soon enough

money, because the Unalakleet River Lodge must be his. The exact same thing happened to me with a raft recently.

A year of anticipation later, I found myself sitting at the bar of the lodge, eating pork belly steam buns, while enjoying a fine bourbon. I was surrounded by the guides of Unalakleet, half of which I had either guided with in E. TN, or at least had rowed them down our local jaunts enough times to feel weird about being "guided" by them. Surreal even for the most seasoned fly fishing sociologist, as most, if not all. would describe me. Friends and family week at the lodge fell on the edge of the silvers being all the way in and the big money octogenarian

clients filling up every available cabin. Essentially this was the last week of the pre-season when most of the guides were still working on the never ending list of lodge work, and sneaking in as much fishing time as they could, as the end of free time hovered on the horizon with the long days guiding and most of the season's tips right within sight. In essence the perfect time to see them in their element without the distractions of real clients, and the familiarity of old friends allowing for everyone's guard to be down and natural instinctual behaviors to take over. I spent five days amongst





them, and after those five days I was both convinced of my original hypotheses, that guiding Alaska is the pinnacle of summer camp for adults and shocked by its similarities to a different kind of camp for adults, a prison camp.

(Pause for obvious gasp)

There are no barbed wire fences, no guards, and everyone who is there chooses to be there. Human nature however, is a resilient mistress. Eight miles up river and surrounded by tundra on all sides an Alaskan lodge doesn't need fences or guards, the isolation achieves the same sociological effect in short order.

In every prison movie I have ever watched, both pornographic and non, tobacco is gold in prison. The same holds true in the Great white north. Whether it be consumed between lip and gum, or slowly drawn in a swirl of burning carpet glue, if you have tobacco you are no man's bitch, and without it you are left following around the golden leaf alpha with your two fingers in his back pocket hoping for a puff or pinch, or on the best of days a quarter of a cigarette on it's way to the ash pile. There is no reprieve in the village as Alaska's logistical wizardry conspires to equate the price of tobacco to that of cocaine with only a fraction of the power. Unsurprisingly upon my departure I was approached about sending cheap southern cigarettes back to the lodge by way of a postal carrier. As far as the USPS is concerned, I politely declined.

Food scarcity in our prisons often reduces the cost of a human life down to a .79 cent cup of noodles. In my thorough research I found many, many examples of

the shiv to noodle ratio being alarmingly out of whack for a modern society. In my time at the lodge no guide resorted to physical violence over calories...that I'm aware of, yet during the nightly cocktail hour they did slowly fill in precisely twenty minutes after hor d'oeuvres were served, wild eyed with a look of smiling desperation on their gaunt faces. Side glances were shared over salmon cakes, and desperation reached a crescendo as the last guest intimated they were full and the pack of guides were allowed to feed on the scraps. I'm not saying that someone is eventually gonna take a Gamakatsu B10s to the dome over a box of Reese's, but I'm not saying it's not going to happen either.

I could keep going with similarities, like the communal shower house, and the old, "Oops I dropped my floatant" cliche, or the lodge version of the vard. the back deck, complete with cornhole instead of weights, but I digress. The last comparison I will draw might be the most troubling, masturbation. Whether in prison with a bunkmate, or at an Alaskan lodge in a makeshift guide cabin 24" away from your neighbor, self flagellation presents a whole new set of challenges that we free people in the lower forty eight could never understand. First off, the internet is a privilege in Alaska, not a right. Let's just say most prisons don't have multiple hotspots either, although you're more likely to at least get some sort of phone signal for your carnal inspirations. No, in Alaska you have three choices: download pornographic material to some sort of offline drive like a sexual deviant, raid your fathers closet for his old print issues of SWANK and

Hustler, or worst of all abuse yourself with only your own mind like some sort of animal. NO good options. If you do happen to put your shame, or humanity aside, whichever the case may be, and clear the first hurdle, you are now facing the awkward operational feat of doing the deed without anyone knowing, it's all very socially awkward and anxiety inspiring. You can't get busted behind the boat shed, or in the lodge bathroom, no just as in the penitentiary you are only left with the thin walled privacy of your guide quarters. From my observations the best route to go is to just own it. Announce to your peers before, during, and after you have done your dirty deed, because let's be honest, everyone does it and there's no way you can hide it all season so why try.

Now, with my field work complete, I can unequivocally, irrevocably, and with an exclamation point say, that while guiding in an Alaskan lodge shares many characteristics with a penal ecosystem that guiding Alaska remains the dream, while prison remains a nightmare. I have chosen to halt my attempts to be arrested in order verify the back end of my hypothesis choosing instead to take the word of Hollywood on this matter. So in conclusion, young people, go guide Alaska before the albatross of life squarely wraps its greasy wings around your neck, also pack extra smokes, and cups of noodles, so as to avoid being anyone's "bitch". On to the next study of fly fishing and culture, French Canadians... French?... Canadian?... Neither?



With my tongue firmly planted back in my cheek, I would with all sincerity like to congratulate and wish the best things to our own local guide made good, Mitch Wisnewski, and all the guides at Unalakleet River lodge (link) on the recent ownership transition, and to thank the entire staff for the best week of fishing and eating in my entire middle aged life.

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ALL AROL



Dale Yeah – 5W Ranch: Where the Legends Play

By Dale E. Sr.

I was rushing over to 5-W bass club before the last day of the race on Sunday. I am always in a hurry. I wanted to rip a few largemouth off bed before I made my move tomorrow on the fourth to last lap. It was a quick 30-minute jaunt in my city car—a Mercury Marquis from 1974. I have had this luxury model Brougham since I joined the Winston Cup Series. As I gripped the steering wheel and pressed the pedal I couldn't help consider my twin roles as a national hero, and villain. Some are gonna cheer, and some are gonna boo. This is America after all. People are free to think what they want about me.

am from North Carolina, and though I am usually a gear guy, today I will be chucking a fly. I am never about putting on airs, but there is something about light tackle bass action. The intimidator is my moniker in pop culture Coca-Cola commercials, but my family is tied back to the ole moonshiner circuits of Carolina. My daddy, Ralph, was my hero before his heart attack at the kitchen table working on a carburetor. I have always felt that the American Dream is following in your father's footsteps. You work hard; you go places. From the time I was five, I was driven to race like Dad. Everything I have done was with the goal of making Dad proud. But it isn't easy nudging bumpers and racing like a bat out of hell.vYou need to find a way to slow down. For me that is bass fishing. A lot of racers don't like me, but so what? I am out here to feed my family. I make hard decisions to pass a buddy all the time, and sometimes they or I get scraped up. That time I broke my leg in a crash was made better by the bass I caught in places like 5-W. I am aggressive every race; fishing relaxes me. Something about the serenity of a slicked out pond with bass swirling gives me the antidote to the always getting it and letting her eat mentality.

I pulled up to the gate at 5-W and immediately felt a calm, and camaraderie with the members. Someone would take me out in a boat with a trolling motor just before dusk, and I would wax some bass. I left my crank baits in the Merc. I did not want to be tempted to use them over my fiberglass Eagle's Claw rod. Best to not even bring 'em. I drove my Mercury to the Marathon gas station about an hour earlier than I was supposed to in order to meet David Abel and his son-in-law, Mark Haller. David was an Etowah County member of this elite bass club that's ranch style clubhouse made for a sportsman's paradise with its rusticated fireplaces, kitchen, and flatscreen luxury television. It even has a whole pig smoker in the back of the house. The walls were adorned with photographs from its 84 years of existence when it was converted from a turkey farm to a world class bass pond in 1941. It is organized as a place to retreat for the Etowah County 10 members, and the Calhoun County 10 members that constitute its total membership. Spatially located between Gadsden and Anniston, this 25- to 30-acre lake is a place where many a business deal was presumably closed, and even more it is a







place where business could be forgotten for however short a respite that 5-W can offer in a weekend. This North Alabama club on several occasions was a place where I stayed and fished while racing at nearby Talladega Superspeedway. The club was chock full of good people like Dr. Ray Cobb, who were members back in the '60s and '70s, and members like David Abel remember these pioneering members with fondness. The torch is carried by the remaining 20 members, and they have put a tremendous amount of capital into saving the dam, and controlling the algae blooms with pesticides. It is managed by a former Auburn fish biologist who gives advice on matters such as the stocking of tiger bass, structure deployments, and fertilizer usage. It is a lake fit for the kings of the county, and of the track.

On this day I quickly ascertained that the fish were on bed, and I suspected they would be because the neighboring Coosa River was in full spawn mode, and the fish had been observed to be on bed there as well. We stood along the 5-W's banks and observed complex webs of snot grass that made ideal habitat for bedding and ambushing prey. We put a white sparkly jig with a conehead and jig-eyed hook on my seven weight and began dragging and dropping the fly over a large buck bass that was guarding the bed. At first he wouldn't budge, and the fly was basically dragging across his face. Then he started getting anxious and spinning on the fly. Ultimately he took the jig up in his mouth, and we had one in the bag from the big lake.

We tried to time the boat tour of the lake with the sun going down a bit more,

S.C.O.F MAGAZINE

so we went over to the lower pond in the ATV side-by-side. These lakes are part of a larger historical tradition in the South where giant bass are grown at a scale that public impoundments cannot approach, not really anyway. Club lakes are known for extraordinary sized bass, and I once visited Mountain View Lake in Leeds. AL. This is where the state record 16-lb bass came from back in 1984. Private lakes like 5-W have resources to invest in the care and management of the algae bloom because herbicide can be used. Baitfish are sometimes grown in man made structural elements like the clusters of plastic pipe that harbor the small fish in its tubes. In some lakes, not necessarily at 5-W, there are public impoundment fish taken out of places like Guntersville, and brought in aerifier tubs to be finished in a private lake setting. I once observed a man in Guntersville take an 8-lb and an 11-lb largemouth out of the impoundment, and they were met by a man in a truck on Signal Point Rd. with two aerifier tubs in the bed of the truck. These old tanker fish are pretty smart, and the fishing decisions needed to catch them are not pervasive among every angler. My assumption is that of the membership there are ranging degrees of proficiency bringing these smart fish to hand. To satiate our need to get some rod bend action, we took the ATV over to the other pond and whooped some giant bluegill. Fish fries are a social event at clubs like 5-W.

Mark took us for a boat ride out of the massive green boathouse that holds 20 slips with 20 unique electric boats. There was apparently a fire in the '80s in the large boathouse, so this





was a relatively new facility, and it had a special feel. The kind where you would turn some lights on and fish it at night. 5-W even invested in some underwater lights called a Green Monster. A young lady, probably a daughter of a member, caught a 9-lb bass at night this recent fall. Mark zipped us around at a medium pace and we saw some submarines cruising the snot grass majestically. Light brown footballs kept blowing out and one was the biggest bass I had ever seen in a boat with a rod in my hand.

As we left in the Mercury Marquis, I was rewarded to have been allowed to fish this special leisure time enclave for Northeastern Alabamians. As my Merc glided down the dam and to the black gate I had two thoughts: "I hope I get invited back" and "I hope I win tomorrow."



Clyde, Tom Bie's dream machine





"Guiding is a great thing to do while you figure out what you are going to do next."

-Capt. Doug Henderson

I have fished with Captain Doug Henderson for about a decade. Knowing any friend that long is special, more so because you watch them develop and progress. Doug has charisma in spades, and is destined for something more than he has, and he already has a twelve year old Hell's Bay Marquesa and is the best angler I have ever known well. That vessel is a battleship, and with the help of Doug's intrepid spirit I jumped a dozen tarpon, spent thousands of dollars, and boated two big poon in the time I have known him. I had also seen him dry dock this Marquesa in an unofficial ramp when the small craft weather advisory we had just fished ran us off the water. We jumped two that day. He was enterprising enough that he took me to the Everglades for a week years ago, and we jumped one in the last hour of the trip. He was known for buzzer beaters. These last minute heroics were common unlike his worldview, which was special in a world of conformity. I feel funny admitting this, but from the beginning of our meeting in the Biloxi Marsh back in 2012 when I fished all day with dirty sunglasses and took a redfish skunking

under an overcast sky, then booked him again for my father's 64th birthday and Doug put him on a 32 pounder in the Chandeliers making the old man's saltwater career in certain respects, I have from the beginning admired Doug.

He is six years older than me. His son Jackson was a baby when I first met Doug. The way he talked about being a father made me want to start my own family which I managed to do five years ago. A few years into knowing Doug he told me about a book he read his boys called, The North Star, and its essence was exactly what Doug later modeled for them. The book was about forging your own path to find your professional destination.

For about seven years Doug the entrepreneur has been creatively churning ideas around the notion of a skiff tent. I remember the patent he reported getting on his idea around 2016. I was happy for him because on some level I knew he couldn't guide forever. He had skipped college to sail around the world in his twenties, then picked up fly fishing in his mid twenties. He jumped his first tarpon in his early twenties with Capt. Gene Strickland, and bought his first skiff a week later.

The skiff tent thing was a secret I kept, and if I had the money I might have invested in project Outlie Gear. I was honored when he invited me to experience the Outlie lifestyle this Summer. He said, "Cola, lets do a mission in the panhandle this June." He had three prototype tents that could be used for his HB Marquesa, his cousin's HB Biscayne, and a fellow guide's Maverick HPX.

Each boat had a passenger and the Captain of the vessel. The night









before we departed we loaded up on groceries for the voyage at a local Wally World. I had some doubts about my own suitability for this mission. I have not camped much, but I was confident in my angling abilities thanks in part to Doug's guidance. In 2015 the panhandle was still fairly open for poon adventures and it was really Doug and the usual suspects-- David Mangum, Gjuro Bruer, Brett Martina, and Travis Huckeba. That was the only cast of characters I knew but there were at the most roughly thirty guides trying their luck here. This was the land and sea Harry Spear left the Keys for, and we were at the end of halcyon days with the proliferation of Mangum fish porn and tournament promotion in the panhandle. People were becoming aware of this sub-region right when anglers became aware that the Keys were no longer in a golden age as they had been during the 1970s. Boat technology had changed the game over the last thirty years, but the skiff tent had the potential to revolutionize the sport even further. Not only was it a safety tool in the event of an accident, but part of its utility was that it could be used to stake out on points and sand bars that were highly competitive.

Location X, a place Mangum viewed as his intellectual property was fished day after day by the same guides under the moniker of Location Y and this place was now beset by challenges. Namely the challenge of too many anglers on it made this space highly contentious. Banditry and pirates were everywhere, and many screaming matches were the mark of the few spots in the Carabelle area. When Doug took clients out he drove the boat further and further away from the circus.

Every year it was more difficult to get the same one or two jumped fish in a three day window.

Outlie promises to change the game. More of the Gulf Coast can be explored and learned if guides are willing to sleep a few nights in skiff tents. No longer will guides do what they know will work in the same close-in spots. Now they will be able to adventure about eighty miles from their launch by "extending limits and erasing boundaries." Doug used the same Taiwanese tent builders that make Mountain Hard Wear tents, and he fabricated the clips to the cap of the boat with 3-D printing technology.

We began on a familiar spot out of Aucilla/ St Mark's. It was colloquially called the Bear Claw for its sandy clear bottom that was shaped like a claw. We saw few poon here, so we drove to Rock Island and began to see and play with strings of fish. Jennifer and Cody Cash Moody poled ahead to a bar and started casting at fish. They were a cute couple, especially when she called him-- "Coco." Cody had been teaching Jennifer to fish for four years but his schedule of clients rarely allowed Jennifer to fish under good conditions, so she was hoping to jump her first poon on this trip. Over the course of four days she would have plenty of shots.

We all staked out Keaton Beach next and we saw over twenty strings of five plus fish per. The flat was stunning like several football fields of sandy bottom next to marsh grass. These fish poured over the flats and we all took about a dozen chances there, but the full moon slowed their snappiness. No mouths opened but we all talked to many fish. We heard them rolling all night outside

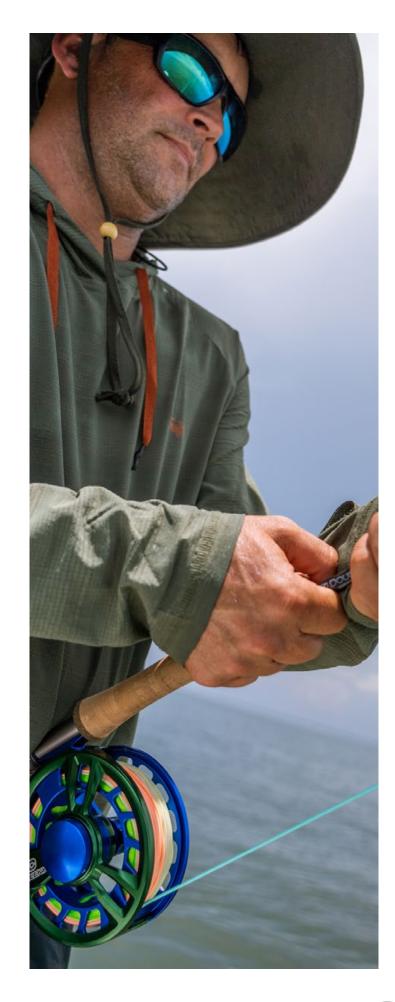
our tents. I accidentally bumped the grill where we cooked steaks off the poling platform into the shallow water. Just when I was considering a morning dip to retrieve the thing a bull shark slid into the basin and nosed the greasy grill.

Our convoy ate bacon and drank coffee for breakfast then headed to Steenhatchie for fuel, and showers at the marina. After fuel we were checking a jetty for rollers and Jennifer got in front of one at Horseshoe and I watched in amazement her first contact as a big head shaker rodeoed out of the waters skin. I screamed for her in jubilation. Declan Rogers and Hugh Williams went offshore a bit, discovering a basin of hundreds of dorsals breaching the water's surface. They began an epic session with hungry laid up poon.

Doug and I rolled all the way to Cedar Key and fished hard, but the water was too high by this point, so we eventually tired of the big winds and went to the Old Florida town of Cedar Key where I gorged on clams and drawn butter. The beauty of the tents is we were watching the landscape change from palmettos and marsh grass to mangroves with snook and ibis birds. It was like driving across the country. One minute you are in North Florida and the next you were in Central Florida near Gainesville/ Tampa. It was truly the Last American Tarpon Frontier. This was our Oregon Trail. Doug was our captain. Not only was he locating fish, but he was cooking meals and teaching us to set up our tents.

At Swanee River we slammed into a known oyster reef. We had floated over it once then all of a sudden: "Bammmm."





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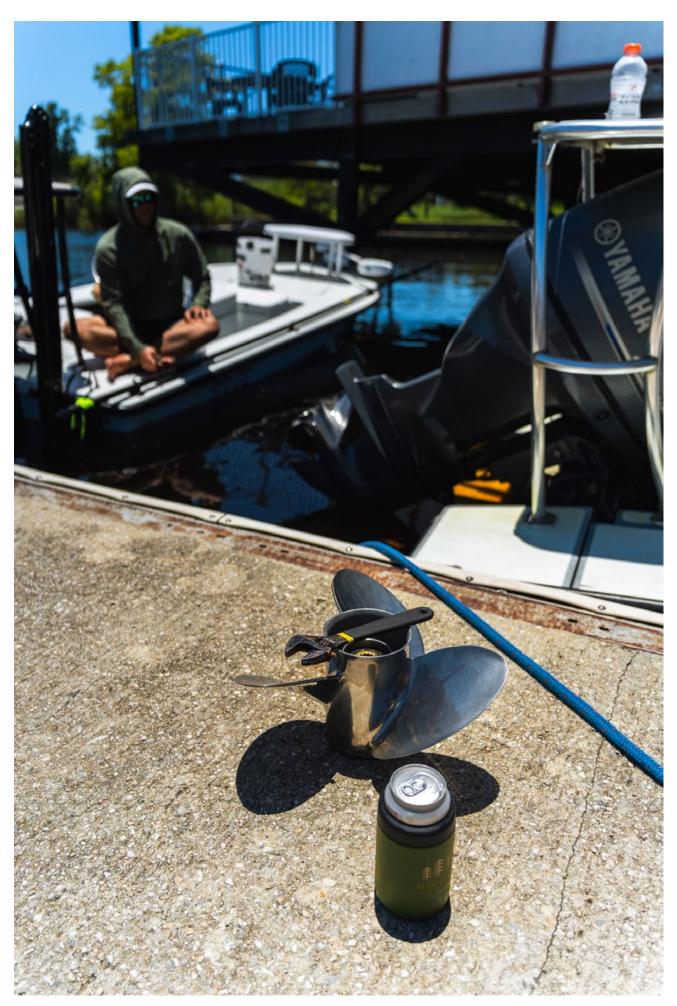












The prop and shaft were bent badly when we hit a boulder. Luckily our crew was there to tow us into a Swanee River Marina. It was not really a surprise in unchartered water that Doug hit a rock spinning the hub. It was a miracle he still had the lower unit and a smile on his face. Once again, like Outlie, he called on the people for help. At the dock we had to crowd fund Doug's newest endeavor, a 19 pitch aluminum prop from a shop thirty minutes away. Doug broke out, "I need dollars, hundreds of dollars." We opened up our wallets and sent Doug on his way. With 400\$ in cash he stepped into an F-150 driven by a retired Air Force pilot that refused to accept any payment for his shuttle service. He was one of those old dudes that lived by the rules of the road. He'd give you a ride if you were in a pinch but also lay you down with an M-1 Garand if you stole a potted plant out of his yard. Old school cool. We were very appreciative.

On the way home we fished for hours, but by now the scallopers were thick as it was the fourth day and was Friday. When we checked the weather there was a massive red system headed towards our takeout at Aucilla. We drove furiously for an hour, narrowly skirting the storm with hail and lightning crashing from the heavens.

We made it. The adventure of a lifetime gave me new perspective, and tested my limits. It could be a game changer. Doug only needs funding. Hundreds of thousands and tarpon fishing can be saved in the process.



The World's First Tent Specifically Designed For Flats Skiffs

Whether you are chasing tarpon from the Keys to the Panhandle or spending a Saturday afternoon at the sandbar - Outlie tents are ready for anything.

Erasing Limits - Extending Boundaries





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Built for the Dishwasher

by Declan Rogers

The exploration of nature has been at the forefront of business innovation for the last 10 years. Such rugged marketing campaigns are very attractive to boomers and those below them. North Face's mantra "Never Stop Exploring" and Yeti's "Built for the Wild" are brand anthems to live by. Even though most consumers use these products to explore the carpool with a cup built for the dishwasher they still like knowing their child's fleece could one day serve them well on Kilimanjaro and their coffee mug could keep warm for another 18 days, unassisted.

Not For Everyone

Our friend Doug is launching a product in this same marketing space, with similar brand values. The only difference—Doug's tent really is built for the wild, and made for exploring, you have to be legit to know, have, and use one. Outlie tents are built for fishermen who are willing to do what it takes to get where they need to go in a constantly shrinking wild world.

Does it Fish?

We set out to see how rugged you have to be, and how these tents really perform in the wild. They look cool on Instagram, but how cool are they to sleep in?

We launched in Panacea 3 boats deep. An 18 Mav piloted by Coco, followed by Doug in his 17 Marquesa, and his cousin Hugh in a small but powerful Hell's Bay Biscayne—a mighty little boat with a skiff challenge victory under its belt. As we shot out the river, all three boats spent some time playing musical trim tabs, loaded down with days' worth of provisions we had effectively made our technical skiffs, un-technical.

We raced around for five days looking for elusive tarpon, chasing rapidly changing tides. Different spots were viable during different times of the day, and as water depths changed so did the migration path of our silver friends. In order to ambush them on known points, we were mobile all day. A key variable in this game was bottom structure—in order to see migrating schools you must be over hard sand bottom ideally featureless or with very little grass. Black backs are almost impossible to spot over dark deep sea grass, so we derived this formula:

T = 4-6 ft deep + sand bottom + fly that doesn't suck

We stuck to it, with little success.

Making Camp

Every night we'd make camp on a remote pancake flat. With 3- to 4-ft tide swings, it was hard to find flats that would leave us floating come dawn.





Doug would anchor and we'd raft up to the sides of his beaten battle wagon. Most Marquesa's are garage queens, seeing more Instagram posts than engine hours every year. Doug's is not. He has thousands of hours on his tired guide rig and treats it for what it is: a tool for catching fish, not a prop for being the next brand's top ambassador.

We cooked on the poling platform, cheffing up big meats every night. Dogs, burgers, sausages, steaks. We ate well, and drank enough every night. The tents were tricky at first, pieces dropped in the water would not be retrieved till daylight, mostly due to the hammerheads we'd seen hours earlier.

Cool ocean air complemented by a sound track of tarpon eats, mullet jumps, and spray rail splashes lulled us to sleep. Waking up on one of these flats is a luxury enjoyed by the few, in this case those equipped with Outlie prototype tents. Were we the first to ever watch the sun rise over this specific sand bar, maybe?

Outlie Legacy

Outlie may not make it, the general public might not be up for real adventure and the struggles that come with it. This got me thinking about the Outlie legacy, how this story will unfold for Doug and his family.

What if Outlie does fail? Will this end up on a college students' b-school curriculum - A case study of the unsuccessful launch of Outlie Co. by Harvard Business Review? Even if the "business" were to fail, would the brand story be a shameful one to tell? I imagine around a campfire in 20 years it won't be the story of the best zipper Doug ever made, the modified rain fly, or the angel investor who helped him finalize his series A funding, but the story of what Outlie did to Doug. How this tent became the perfect excuse to spend the majority of his time in the places he loved with the only people crazy enough to go there with him.

Outlie is a mindset, defined as - setting out to do crazy things in an attempt to see what happens. This tent is trouble, it makes you go further, it encourages you to enter the danger zone, and it is the ignitor of adventure, conflict, and exploration. With it you may suffer, without it, you may never get the opportunity.









BREAM SEAR BREAM S REAFER BREAM SEAR BRAM REAR REAR





2023 TRIPLETAIL CLASSIC RESULTS

FIRST FISH	
1. SALTWATER SACALAIT	7:14AM
2. HUHN / HENSELER	7:17AM
3. ZULULAND	7:25AM
LARGEST TRIPLE TAIL	
1. SKINNY WATER D-BAGS	
2. GULF COAST FLY FISHING SCHOOL	
3. ZULULAND	
POINTS (TOTAL LENGTH)	
1. ZULULAND	58
2. SALTWATER SACALAIT	
3. SKINNY WATER D-BAGS	19

SKINNYWATER D-BAGS.

DYLAN MALONEY HARRIS REYNOLDS

GRAND CHAMPIONSHIP

1. ZULULAND....

JEFF & SAM ST. JOHN











False Alarm

by Joe Dahut illustrated by Frederick Stivers

We were shark fishing on the Gulf Edge when I felt my phone vibrate through the zipper in my backpack. I knew there were only a few phone calls that would reach us out here, and the list of them was short. Three, to be exact, and the occasions on which I would answer the calls would also be short. One, someone was pregnant. Two, someone died. Three, the worms were going off.

There was a prayer inside of me for each occasion, all of which would directly impact the night ahead, and my sleep for the foreseeable future. In some ways, the idea of a miserable phone call was more impactful than sleep, and I stared at the name of my phone before answering, some 410 number from Timonium. I'd never met anyone from Timonium, but because I grew up in a Timonium-adjacent place and hadn't spent much time there as an adult, it was not a good sign.

"We are contacting you about your car's extended warranty, do you have a minute to -"

Click. I smacked the phone face down in the empty seat beside me. "Who the fuck has the time for any of this?" I thought. I knew it was far too late for a phone call, and a little too early for the worms to be pumping. The fish under the bridge were likely stuffed after the night of rolling and pushing finally commenced. My head hurt, and I needed a break from the sun. For someone who doesn't know, a palolo worm is about a pinky finger's worth of

calories and southern blood flow for a tarpon— the perfect hangover cocktail of calories and chutzpah. When they show up, usually in the spring, it means that love is in the air, and tarpon are on the brain.

We trailered the skiff back home in the stench of slack tide. At the Cuban coffee stand, a man who resembled Cuban Jesus stood in shrimp boots with one arm leaning against a Cafe Bustelo water jug. He tugged a paper cone cup from the cylinder, filled it up once and slugged it. The paper, now noticeably flimsy, was crumbling under the weight of a second helping of water. He took that water and dumped it on his shoes, cleaning the gray fish slime on them into a Colgate white.

Roosters balk around the hens beneath the picnic tables. We pay them no mind, but marvel at what beautiful feathers they have. The hackles are spiked in discomfort from highway traffic, and they look to me like crab claws, or the back end of an old school roach fly that all the guides used to throw back in the day on 4/0 Mustads. The fishing, according to them, hasn't been good in a while.

The skiff goes back in the water, some hours, and a few cafecitos later. I am teetering on the edge of insanity when I see the bundle of tarpon swim towards us in the evening light. When I was young, I asked this girl to a slow dance, and I've never been as nervous as I was just then. One tarpon from a pack of two slid over sand with its pectoral fins glued to its side, not breaking stride. Its mouth cracked, ever so slightly, and inhaled. Chaos, alongside an adrenaline rush robust enough to knock someone out, ensued.





Do you hear banjo music? Blackberries, Wild Turkey, Bartram's Bass, and Some Trout

By Brandon Adams

When most people think of the Northeast Georgia Mountains, especially Rabun County, a lot of people, even younger than me, think of the movie Deliverance with Burt Reynolds. While you might occasionally hear someone strum on a banjo, and you might even hear the squill of a wild hog, the Chattooga River is an area that is much the way it was when the first American naturalist William Bartram first described the area along the Georgia South Carolina border before the United States even existed. The river is an untouched marvel of the natural world with waters shaping the landscape for thousands of years. The Chattooga and Chattahoochee are the two rivers I still call home despite now living in the Georgia Piedmont near the Broad and Oconee Rivers. The Chattooga has always been my favorite river to fish no matter where I have ventured.

What makes the Chattooga so fascinating to me? I know your inquiring minds want to know. Is it the megalodon trout and bass that call these waters home? Is it the deep majestic pools of water followed by falls, rapids, and more pools? Surely it's the wholesome campfire meals that are waiting on the shore for lunch and the majestic lodges that line the banks. It is none of those things. Don't get me wrong, I love a nice shore lunch as much as the next person, and it is always an adrenaline

rush to tangle with a large brown or acrobatic rainbow, but that is not what the Chattooga has to offer.

What the Chattooga offers is a step back in time. As a 24-year teacher of history, there's something about the nostalgia of the Chattooga that draws me into its water and refuses to let me go. I said at my grandfather's funeral, "Once sawdust gets in your blood, you can never get it out." Once the Chattooga's water is absorbed into your soul, you are part of the river no matter where you might roam.

The Chattooga provides that rare opportunity for an angler that you can leave the parking area headed upstream into the wilderness following trails that slowly fade into the ferns that line the banks and continue north beyond what most people are willing to go to beautiful waters that are not lined with the blue worm containers from the local sporting good stores. The trout are mostly in the six- to twelve-inch range with the occasional larger trout. Definitely no megalodons in these waters. For some of the trout, they have never seen a human before except the adventurous soul who risks the occasional encounter with copperheads and timber rattlesnakes that are much larger than any trout you will hope to catch.

The trout are not the easiest to catch, but with the rich oxygenated water the takes are often rewarded with acrobatic displays by the rainbow trout and runs that rival large fish in the tamer waters of the Chattahoochee. You also can catch all three species of Georgia trout in one pool: browns, rainbows, and brook trout.

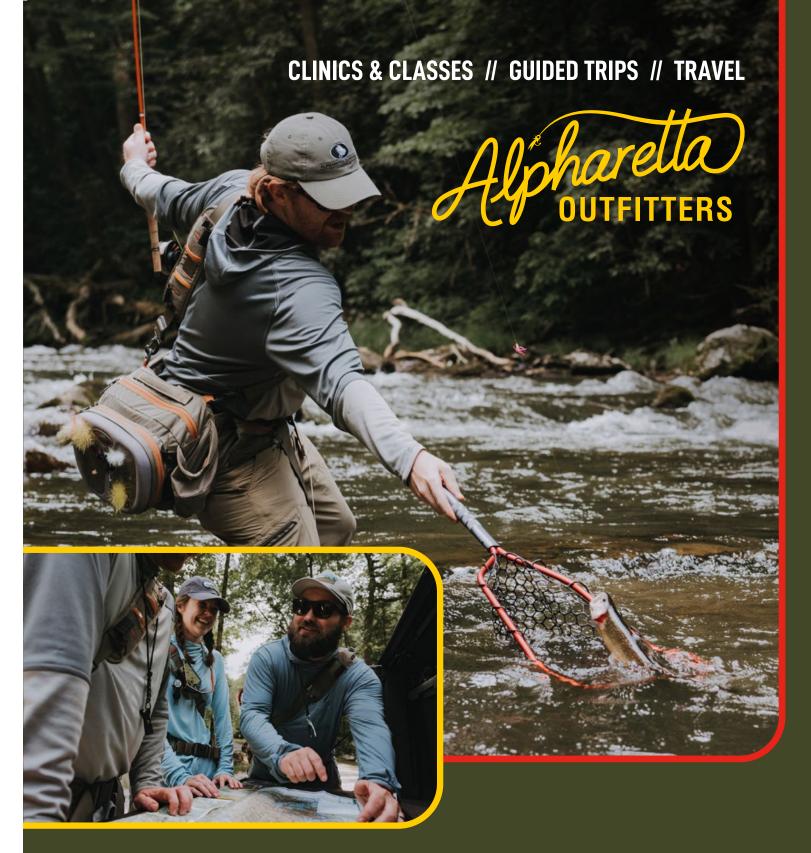
As you fish your way downstream you reach bream and Bartram's bass water where the river slows and warms in the summer months. Bartram's bass are part of the redeve bass family with each having their unique river drainage. The Bartram's bass is named after William Bartram (mentioned earlier) who described the area. Bartram's are a beautiful redeve that haunt the runs and pools in lower sections of the Chattooga before entering Lake Tugaloo and merging with the Tallulah to form Tugaloo River. The take of a Bartram's is equal to or greater than most trout of their size, and their bulldog mentality rivals that of a redfish. Thanks to the remoteness of these waters and their protective status, Bartram's are mostly genetically pure in the waters of the Chattooga.

About the time you make the transition from the upper trout water to the warmer Bartram's water, you will find openings created by the Forest Service to help provide food for local deer and turkeys. Most mornings in the spring, you will hear a gobbler or two call from their roost high on the mountains above the river, and on rare occasions you might see one that decides to move from one state to the other. These openings are also home to blackberry bushes that can provide a nice streamside meal with the possibility of a fire cooked trout if you so choose. While this might not be the streamside lunch of a lodge, the peace and solitude of being in a location with zero cell service and none of the modern day noises that clog our ears makes the food even better, and the water cooler.

What makes the Chattooga so fascinating to me? It is the remoteness

of the river? It is the rugged riverbanks that require careful planning, and not everyone can make their way up or down? Is it the lack of the modern world? No noise, no cars or trucks, no cellphones thus our brains can truly unplug? It takes you back to a simpler time that I think a lot of people yearn for even though they don't yet know it. It's you, blackberries, wild turkey (maybe not the kind you were hoping for), Bartram's bass, and trout.





YOUR FRIENDLY, FULL SERVICE FLY SHOP









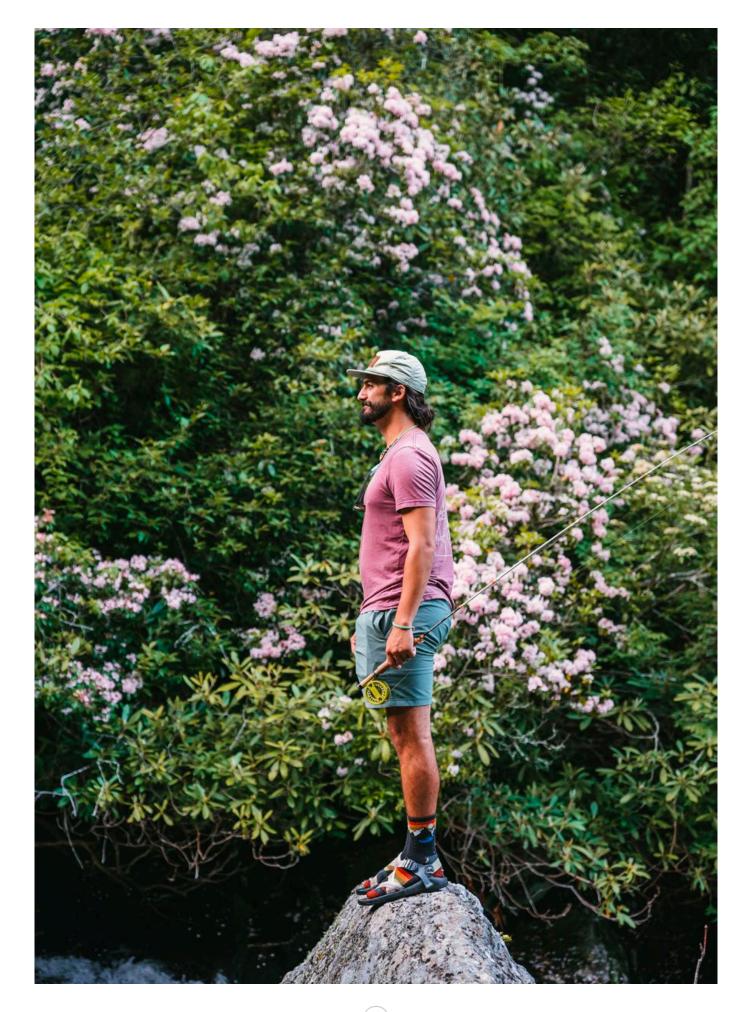


ride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, sloth, gluttony. Which comes to mind first when you think of fly fishing? The overwhelming pride felt in the accomplishment of an amazing catch? Greed towards your hoarding of time and fine equipment? Wrath towards that stupid kick of wind that ruined your presentation at the last moment? Envy towards your friend's expensive new skiff? The sloth that follows an exhausting fishing trip that ostensibly was a vacation?? Or, gluttony and the great misdeed of perhaps catching too many fish? I've run the gamut and can tell you that I have earned my scarlet letter with every single one of those sins. But gluttony, gluttony is the one sin that I think we fly fishermen don't just tolerate but revel in.

The dark days of winter leave me brooding and weak, embittered towards a world dead and dormant and longing for the days where I feel alive. The oppressive, low clouds weigh heavily on my soul. Cold water and colder spirits leave me feeling like those alligators that occasionally become mired in ice and sleep vertically like frozen logs with their snouts out of the water. Those are the dark days. The days where life goes on but without as much purpose. Eat, sleep, work, occasionally hike or fish to get what few endorphins I may, rinse and repeat. Time drags on just like this paragraph and leaves me wondering if it will ever end. And eventually, as in all things, there comes a change. A palpable excitement can be felt in the air as warmth comes, shoots from bulbs claw towards the sky and (some of) my angst evaporates from my body. A crescendo of sorts, building inexorably to those days that help keep

my head above water come winter. The days of success, the days of excess, the days of gluttony.

Late spring and early summer are a time of great change in the southeast. Where I am, the rhododendron have just finished blooming but the mountain laurel will be holding their lovely pink and white bouquets for a little while longer. The days are lengthening but now in shorter windows, the storms are growing more violent and the fishing remains oh so good if you just so happen to be fishing for the right things. The brook trout. Mother Nature's finest work of art. A watercolor brought to life. These diminutive jewels are one of the most astonishing creatures that can be found outside of a coral reef or a tropical rainforest. They are color made animate. Also, they are hungry SOBs. So full of a zeal for life that they can't quite contain themselves even when they should know better. Sitting in open pools bathed by sunlight and under-lit by sand, you wouldn't typically find a wary trout here. These backcountry denizens, though, lie thick in these places and somehow ignore our raucous laughter and lapping waves that push through their pools. They don't even seem to mind the six foot long leader I just slapped across their backs. Or if they in fact did, they misdirected their anger by attempting to eviscerate the foam hopper I just splashed in front of their noses. Sometimes you may only catch a fish like this once or twice a season. You know the ones, the fish that acted out of pure naivete without a care in the world not hesitating once to slam our offerings despite our poor presentations. Those bluegill on beds, the jack crevalle cruising in a school, or





even those emphatically stupid fish just recently dumped out of the F450 leaving the hatchery. A fish or two like this every once in a while, is worth noting. We talk about them with our friends and companions describing how "that's the way they all should be" or "if only it were always that easy". Sometimes it is that easy for a fish or two, sometimes, rare times, it's that easy for all the fish.

The brook trout of the southern Appalachians have had a hard history. They were deserted high in the mountains when the ice receded a few thousand years ago, sometimes in creeks barely requiring a person of average height to hop across to keep their feet dry. They were left here, abandoned by the frigid water that helped put them there in the first place. And there, they waited. Thousands of generations of charr lived and died in those streams as the occasional Cherokee to Penobscot stalked game beside their banks. Time continued its inevitable march and those forsaken fish became ever more isolated as streams dried, froze hard or somehow else became inhospitable. Eventually the brookies were left only in places where water quality was ideal, within their tolerance zone and present year-round. Here again they waited while the winds of change began to blow. "Civilization" eventually arrived to these mountains bringing with it an apocalyptic scenario that destroyed much and nearly took all. Ancient forests were lopped and burned, mountains were hydraulically mined off of the map, acid rain fell after toxic fumes were carried up from smelters, Eastern elk were hunted to extinction, red wolves were (effectively) eradicated and entire

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peoples were pushed out or murdered. And in all that proverbial Scouring of the Shire, a few places managed to somehow eek out an existence. They held on. Sure, old railroad ties remain still today to tell of man's trammeling but so too do the brook trout survive that carry the life of countless generations before them.

And we harassed them. Probably to excess. Catching fish after fish after fish after fish... because this is what we are. We, the guilty product of a ravenous civilization that always wants more. We are the insatiable, the gluttonous, the fly fishermen. Fishing like this is what helps keep my head above the ice come wintertime. Ironically, it also racks me with guilt. We tell ourselves that we are better than the spin fishermen who walked through our camp this morning with a quick limit caught before breakfast but we are here pestering these ingenious fish by the hundreds. Maybe I should say thousands. By my rough count I pulled about 75 brook trout off of my single dry fly this weekend. I had many, many more where I hooked my quarry, put slack into my line and allowed the fish to autorelease before reaching my hand. I have little doubt that I probably hooked 300 fish or so in our weekend's backpacking expedition and, unfortunately for the fish, my companions were no-less successful than myself. If this was a test, I believe we failed. If this was a boon, it was gratefully received.

On the final afternoon of our trip we were in a headlong rush to find the highest spring that created the magnificent stream we had been exploring. Sure, we fished along the way but we were enthralled by the opportunity to find the extreme headwaters of the brook and to potentially





even catch the highest altitude fish of the entire system. Collin and I played hopscotch with Henry and Marshall nearly busting ankles and bruising egos while racing ever upward. And up and up we went with nearly 2,000 vertical feet climbed since the beginning of our hike. As the pools and runs disappeared the waterfalls became more prevalent. We were close. You could smell it, feel it in the air. The perpetually damp moss, the moisture from the ever-smaller falls thrown into the air. "Fish, fish fish" our companions would yell from up ahead!

Damn! Could that be it, the fish? Cue the running, the sliding, the jumping and the bushwhacking. For photos yes, but also for the hunt itself. I wanted it, I felt like I needed to find that last brook trout. And finally, my brothers-in-arms and I had worked a few small cauldrons below falls with nothing to show for it. Had we done it? Had we already caught that last fish? Not yet accepting defeat I clambered up and I eventually came to a sandy pocket large enough to hold life. And there he was in all his minute glory. A six inch long brook trout with a dusky back, bright red

fins with leading white edges. This was it, had to be. I waited, patiently I may add, as my boon companions made their way to my position to observe this native miracle in all its miniscule glory. And sitting there I realized that catching this fish was not the least bit important in this moment. We had found him, walked and climbed miles, caught hundreds of fish, explored the stream to her spiritual headwaters and finally found a single iota of life that put everything into perspective. This was it, there were no others, there wasn't any more water to

discover. And thankfully, we spooked that one little beauty before ever making a cast at him. We didn't need to catch this fish anymore than we had needed to catch the innumerable fish before him but I do feel like we needed to see him. And I sat and marveled at him swimming in his tiny sandy eddy as his ancestors had done for time immemorial.

Bleeding heart that I am, I wrestle with whether catch and release fishing is an ethical thing. It is illegal in some places throughout the world and it's a common enough joke in our sport that







Before the Season

By Ryan Gary

I met Ryan for the first time at the cheapest place to buy beer besides the gas station, which isn't saying much in a western resort town. Celebrating acquiring government permits that would give him access to guide rivers few others could, I was a couple drinks behind. This was a connection through mutual friends, where I had somehow amassed enough rapport to convince him to float a river with a complete stranger. Before parting ways he mentioned his friend Nic would be joining us in the morning. Probably safe to have at least one person in the boat you've known for longer than a beer if you're not getting paid.

We passed a Frostop on the way to the ramp that I hadn't seen in close to six years, which undoubtedly brings nostalgia to people other than myself. In a couple weeks those people would come washing in, bringing revenue that fuels outfitters like Ryan's. Hoping their day on the river lives up the weeks they've been thinking about it and finishing it ordering greasy food off the vinyl letter board, reminiscing on this and previous trips. Not unlike myself. The road that passes the Frostop leads you to a river that's the only game in town, immune to the early June runoff. Waiting on their rivers to drain the alpine, Ryan and Nic had a few more weeks of sporadic work before the busy season.

Upon arrival the boat was filled with Ryan and Nic's gusto, fueled by the downpour of rain that already had us pump the boat dry twice. The stretch we were floating was chosen by the forecast and the river's morphology,

both conducive to large wire connected hooks wrapped in chicken feathers. The early June weather has a way of changing though, and before long the rain thinned and clouds dissolved. Not guite what we were hoping for given the morning's intentions. A lull period would follow. The morning would slip into afternoon and a few fish would find the net on what could be pure chance, or the guess at the nymph matching the litany of bugs the sun brought just above the water's surface. Floating downriver they amassed more volume, fluttering through the air delicately as if happy to be released from their watery prison. Dense to the point of contemplating what the subsurface scene must be. The two guides in the front of the boat on the advent of their season communicate bluntly, "I don't know what the hell's going on, there's bugs everywhere". An internal dialogue on days to come with paying customers in the boat.

On a drift after a noticeable gap in conversation and fish, a subtle ripple is spotted behind a small boulder on the bank. Swinging the oars, one arm pushing perpendicular another pulling parallel Nic slides the boat a couple yards under the rock, what I thought was too close. A content passenger, it's my own internal dialogue. Ryan, the more gregarious of the two, hunts through a fly box for the dark brown caddis that have been covering our shirts for the last hour and a half. Both leaning on the stern casting brace, looking upriver past the anchor rope vibrating in the current as it holds the boat in place. Another ripple. Without moving his eyes off the seam of water that folds around the boulder, giving house and home to the





perpetrator of the ripple, he pulls a quick series of back and forth with graphite. The fly, followed by the leader and then line. A shadow moves, but not enough. A fly change, a cast, a rejection. Repeated thrice. Back to the first fly, Nic trims the cul de canard shortening its profile. The brown wispy feathers land on the fold, float through the seam and stall in the eddy. A nose breaks the surface's tension and line comes tight. The afternoon feels light as air in the presence of elation.

Until sunset we'd replicate the same the scene. Prospecting lies tight to the bank and dropping the anchor when we found small caddis being returned to their watery prisons involuntarily. At one point Ryan yells, "Holy shit! Back in the side channel, that's the biggest fish I've ever seen!" This warrants a comical eye roll from Nic, not fazed by his common hyperboles. Success has the notion of exasperating ones qualities.

Our success comes to a standstill the same time the water does. Slowed by an irrigation dam before our takeout we're surrounded by the ripples we hunted all day. Long down river casts to fish consistently rising leads to their sudden disappearance. Slowly pushing the boat towards the takeout, anchoring whenever we spot a riser. Behind us is an older man in Sheridan Ropes hat, sliding a net under a Brown Trout. His third I've seen. He sits back down and pulls the anchor rope in front of him before moving downstream to the right of us. Then drops the anchor again. Effortlessly, he brings the rod back then forward, on the timing of a metronome that is the distance of his line. An abrupt stop, the line falls softly in front of him. He jostles the rod tip up twice, shucking line away

from him, then raises the rod tip into a bow. Sheepishly the question, "Gray or brown?" comes from our boat, the least intrusive way to ask what the hell are you doing differently than us. "It don't matter, I've used both. Size 16 or 18, just need some 6x and put it right between their eyes". We laugh as he continues to fish circles around us, and resign to pushing the boat back to the ramp feeling a front blowing in.

A few days later and a state north I'd find myself with two guys in a similar situation, just a short window from a long summer of days spent behind the oars. James, who I'd known for as long as I've been fishing, was off for the day. Evan, who I know through James was dodging phone calls to avoid working. Which is why he stayed in the truck when James and I walked into the fly shop to pick up the essentials. Given this was their day off I prompted their choice of water. Despite the lack of a reputable report, a three mile stretch of spring creek was the destination.

Behind me in the grass James and Evan played commentator of trout movements, like Al Michaels in his booth. Elevated on the bank and in the shade of a willow backdrop, all they were missing were microphones. Shaking off my small stream rust I make a handful of casts. Cognizant of the riparian in my background and waiting for their announcing to give my fly direction. The first drifts are a product of restless arm syndrome, trying not to look like a contemplative tourist standing clueless in the current. On a long cast after shucking line downriver a small green nose appears, a surprise only a couple minutes into the day. Commentary from









the booth agrees as Evan rushes down with the net.

For an hour or two we take turns, two guys lying in the grass under the shade of the willows and a third wading the creek under waning observation from the bank. At one point James misses the same fish three times, which prompts the question if there's even a hook on the fly. Laughter ensues after each failed hookset, no remaining expectations for the day after fish find the net for each of us.

A march downriver leads us past another angler, smitten with the opportunity to spend an afternoon on the creek. In common practice we agree with his remarks on the day, the chance to fish the creek and ask how his luck is faring, "Oh, not as well as you all. You know the deal, light line, long tippet, downstream casts, real religious shit. I'm just not that good at it." We laugh and then again after he compares the difficulty of fishing the creek to putting a condom on a termite, whatever the hell that means.

We'd end the day sitting outside of an old barebones cabin. James fishing a small depression on the far bank named after another friend who pulled out six fish in a row on a red chenille worm, not exactly becoming of a western spring creek. Behind us looms a storm floating over one of the mountain ranges we're pitched between, and you can feel the





day is coming to a close. The two guides converse, one laying down propped up on his elbow looking at his phone the other still working the depression with a small red midge under a dry fly. "They want to go back to the park tomorrow", spoke by one leads to an audible groan from the other. An eight hour day turns into a twelve hour day.

I can't relate to the business that is taking other people fishing, only having dabbled in it as a way of subsisting for the unending list of gear that I need. What I can relate to is the opportunity to float down a river or wade in a creek with likeminded people. The notion that you can provide this feeling to other people as a way of making a living is alluring. I imagine its days like these that provide refuge during the grind of an unfathomable amount of consecutive trips taking strangers fishing. The opportunity to marvel in defeat openly without repercussion and then celebrate in success just minutes later as if you knew what you were doing the entire time. To yell at a friend in jest after a blown opportunity or to say "Yes guide, thank you guide", after the instinct to provide overbearing instructions can't be shaken after years in the profession. I'm fortunate to know and fish with people who work on rivers.









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Hilltoppin'

By Scott Stevenson

I'm not big on birthdays at my age. It's cool if you are, but I can't recall what age I stopped really caring about them. Maybe it was 32 or 33, but either way I have the big one coming up. It is the one synonymous with a hill. It's just around the bend and down past that second set of shoals. I have been thinking about life, midlife, the shit I did right going uphill and the things I did wrong (cue Seger's "Against the Wind"). One thing I am changing going forward is reducing the noise. And by noise, I mean a lot of things.

One is the number of hobbies I have gotten into over the years. Life gets really cliché the older you get. So, stuff like brewing equipment (need some?), golf clubs, bikes, multiple music instruments all gotta go. I don't have the time anymore. I never really did have it anyway. My favorite restaurants all have one thing in common: The menus are simple and short. They only do a few things and they do them to absolute perfection whether they're a hole-in-thewall or the finest white table cloth joint in town. That's how I want to run my life going forward. And taking all that money you got from the great hobby sell-off and buying more fishing gear is really the proper thing to do. I have been working on a 150-year-old house renovation for the last five years and had zero time for even fishing. Fishing was the only thing I truly missed. So right now, as I type this out I have items listed for sale on eBay, Facebook Marketplace and my local music shop. And those golf clubs that hadn't seen any action since Obama

was in the Whitehouse are GONE. Feels so good. And let's face it, you really can't be a fisherman and play golf. I don't care what you say. One must choose in my world. I remember playing a round when I was in my twenties. We were walking the front nine after work. This course had a decent size creek that meandered through the front nine that was full of bass and panfish. I stopped to watch this bass and got lost in all of it. My foursome yelled at me to play my shot. I remember looking at them and looking back at that bass. I quit the club the next month. The onion rings sucked anyway.

Another thing I am cutting back on is relationships. I have always been blessed with many friends. But as I trim the nose, eyebrow and ear hair (on a weekly-ish basis—WTF!) so must I trim back my friends list. Quality over quantity. Only surround yourself with quality folks who nurture you in all the right ways. And that leads me to my fishing buddies who I really call my best friends these days. Since I only have time for fishing, it makes sense that the friends I really want to spend time with also fish. And they tie. And they like that feeling you get on the way to the river. And they also like that beverage you enjoy at the end of a good day at the boat ramp. Those are my people (throw a little hunting in there, too).

The last part of the noise is the outside world. The news. The politics. The things I have zero control over. I need to focus on my family. My neighbors. The zip code I call home. This is where you can make a difference. I am going to put that phone down more. Stay off the laptop confuser as much as I can outside work obligations. Go outside more and

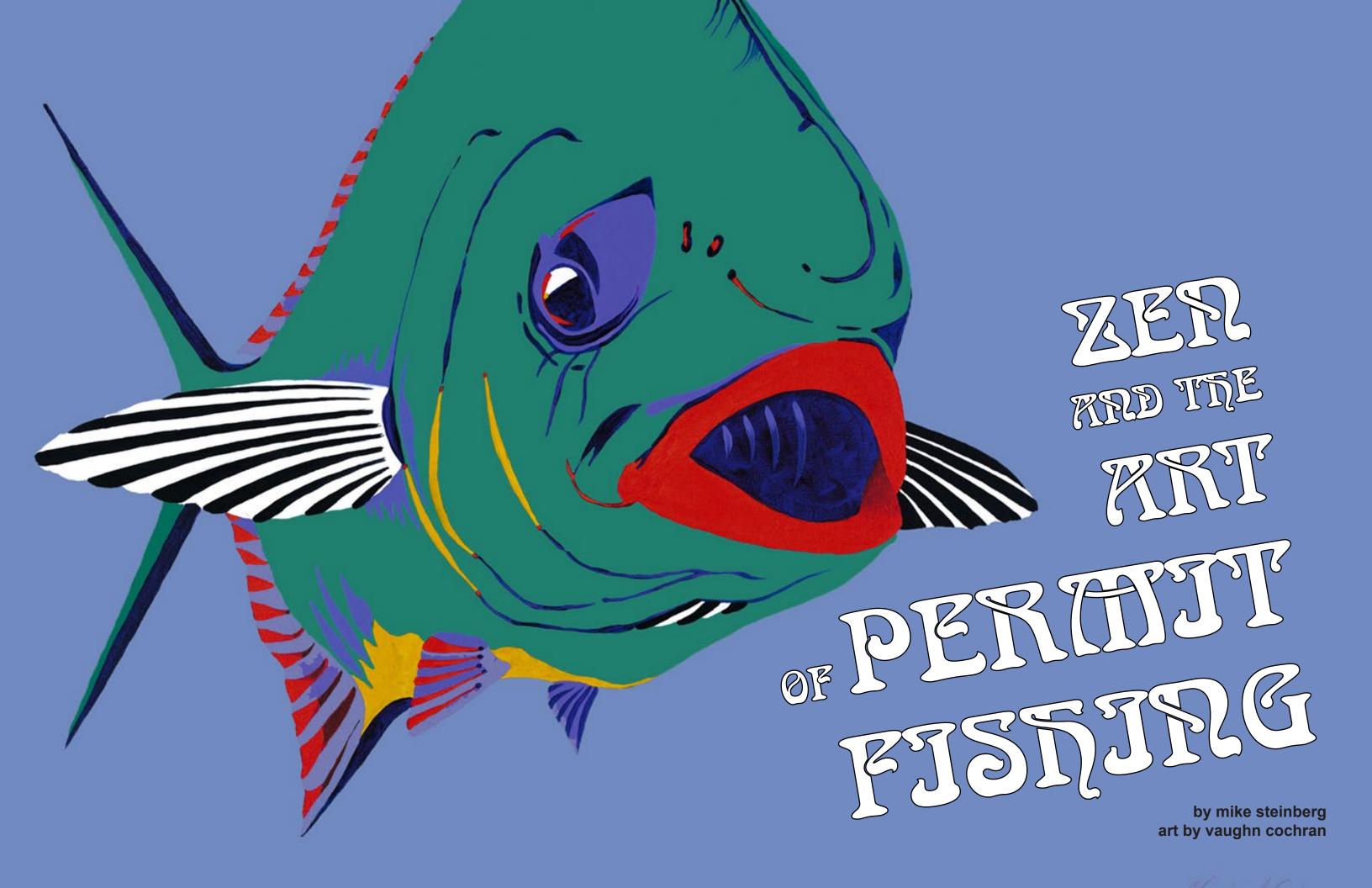






SHEP IS COOL. SHEP WEARS SCOF MERCH. BE LIKE SHEP.





"The purpose of meditation practice is not enlightenment; it is to pay attention even at unextraordinary times, to be of the present, nothing-but-the-present, to bear this mindfulness of now into each event of ordinary life. To be anywhere else is "to paint eyeballs on chaos."

The Snow Leopard Peter Matthiessen

I believe there is a part of fly angling that transcends the purely physical, a fishing karma. I believe this from my own experiences, especially related to permit fishing. I am a firm believer that moods, confidence, positive or negative thoughts, etc. can affect any angling outcome. I think if you stand on a bow in a "tight," impatient or greedy mood, your odds of success are low. Again, I know this from much experience. If one expects failure, failure you shall receive. Permit are the perfect fish in which to view the angling adventure through a meditative, Zen-like approach, because success requires focus on the here and now, paying attention to small details, decluttering your mind, and of course remembering the Second Noble Truth of Buddhism: suffering is caused by desire. Too much desire for permit leads to tight fishing, wind knots and rushed casts.

Permit, of course, have all sorts of hype and mystique surrounding them. They are elusive, they are spooky, they are difficult to catch on a fly, yada yada yada. So, it's easy to get psyched up and psyched out by these fish. I have declared on the same trip and even on the same day that I will spend the rest of my angling days focused exclusively on permit because of the challenge, while just a short time

later declare with equal enthusiasm how much I truly hate the species. Such wild swings of emotion are not very zen-like, and probably do little to actually help me catch the fish.

The most successful permit anglers I have met all seem to have a consistent demeanor. They don't get too high or too low about success or failure. Sort of like a professional athlete after a big win or tough loss. In one memorable encounter, I was rehashing the day's events with an angler at Garbutt's Lodge in southern Belize. I had overlapped in Belize with Rob Blackbeard (a Kiwi) before, aware of his permit skill and success. I had a good day with one small permit, so I was feeling chuffed. Any permit is a good permit. When I asked Dr. Blackbeard about his day, he quietly said, "It was a good day, I landed five." Of course, I was floored and wanted details, but he waved me off and gave credit to the guide. What struck me in retrospect was he had the same attitude on successful days as on days he saw nothing or blew a cast. He reminded me that he had trips in the past when he saw zero permit. Of course, it's probably easier to be calm on slow days after having caught triple digit numbers of fish during a lifetime.

I try to remember Dr. Blackbeard and channel his demeanor when I fish for permit, but most days I'm a nervous wreck. However, every now and then, very rarely actually, I am able to approach a day of permit with the right mindset. A trip to southern Belize this past May is one such example. I only had a single day with Oliver Garbutt because of other obligations, so I didn't feel especially optimistic. I find it takes a day or three to relearn important





skills such as actually being able to see non-tailing fish or casting into 30 knot winds. I have fished with Oliver many times and enjoy his company, so if nothing else it would be fun just to catch up on the water.

But a funny thing happened on the way to failure; we saw a lot of fish and my abilities were spot on. For some unexplained reason I wasn't nervous, I didn't flinch. I wasn't particularly bothered by follows without takes because I had done everything correctly. Frustrating sure, but not cursing oneself frustration. It was truly the most relaxed I had ever been on the bow of a boat, probably because I had few expectations. I never rushed a cast. I led fish almost perfectly. I handled the wind by patiently adjusting casts. I saw cruising and feeding fish in several feet of water without the guide's help (harder than it sounds without perfect light). In the end, I caught two 20-pound fish. My casts were placed where I intended, both fish turned and ate. Sounds simple. It felt simple at the time. It is simple.

Peter Matthiessen wrote "To practice Zen means to realize one's existence in the beauty and clarity of this present moment, rather than letting life unravel in useless daydreaming of the past and future. To 'rest in the present' is a state of magical simplicity." As I write this story, I'm not sure if I will ever replicate that day—both my zen-like state of relaxation and the success. Resting in the present is sadly much more complicated than it sounds. But somehow, at least for one day, I conquered desire and was truly prepared to accept failure. It was, dare I say, liberating.



WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

The 2023 Southern One Fly is a threeday fly fishing event with a one day tournament intended to celebrate the life and legacy of Dave Whitlock while supporting Coosa Riverkeeper's efforts to protect the skinny water.

This tournament is unique in that anglers are limited to fish on the Coosa River and its tributaries while using only one fly pattern in one color throughout the day, which is slightly challenging yet still welcoming to anglers of all skill levels. Participants will be targeting members of the Black Bass family, making this event even more special!

RULES

Fishable Water

- Lake Mitchell & Tributaries
- Lake Jordan & Tributaries
- Jordan Tailwaters & Tributaries

Each participant is allowed one fly pattern of their choice, in one color & one size. Multiple flies of that combination are allowed.

Lines in at 7:00am CST. Lines out at 2:00pm CST. **No motors.**

> CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY: Participants will have the chance to eat locally & explore Wetumpka while camping alongside the Coosa River at the former Coosa Outdoor Center.

SATURDAY AM: Tournament begins at 7am CST.

SATURDAY PM: Local vendors will showcase artwork, products, and wares with interactive demonstrations & live music. The local community is invited to join Saturday's vending, live music, and demonstrations to learn about fishing, conservation, and the Coosa River. Awards ceremony at 6:30 PM.

SUNDAY:

Reflect on memories made, ensure we leave no trace, and share one last meal together along the banks of the Coosa River at the new Kelly Fitzpatrick Center for the Arts that overlooks the Coosa River and downtown Wetumpka.

SCORING

Highest total number of redeye bass (*Micropterus coosae*) & Alabama (aka spotted) bass (*Micropterus henshalli*) caught will win. There will be 1st, 2nd, & 3rd place prizes.

In an effort to reduce fish handling time, please refrain from weighing & measuring fish and follow Keep Fish Wet guidelines.

Each participant will send a photo of each fish with the token received from the Captain's Meeting visible.





y favorite Hemingway novel is The Sun Also Rises, which is set in France and Spain in the 1920s. I'm not exactly sure why it's my favorite, because much of the book centers around a handful of tragic characters leading lives that occasionally careen off into the proverbial ditch. Part of its enduring appeal is because the characters spend their days traveling, fishing, drinking, having sex, and generally reveling in their post-WWI freedom, so it's relatively easy to overlook the unfolding tragedies. Its popularity also endures because it's a novel about real-life events that is overlaid with a façade of fiction, a roman à clef in French, or novel with a key. The "key" in this case is the insight into Hemingway's social life, and that of the larger "lost generation" in Paris in the 1920s. When I read it, I'm most drawn to Hemingway's sparse but brilliant descriptions of the bullfights and fiesta of San Fermin in Pamplona, the Basque landscape in the Pyrenees Mountains, the absurd amount of excellent Spanish wine the characters consume, and of course the trout fishing on the Rio Irati.

I first read the novel more than 30 years ago, and the scenes and activities remained evocative enough that I decided to have a mini-Hemingway pilgrimage to Spain this past June and July. My quest wasn't driven by Hemingway personality worship, but instead to see and experience some of the things and places that inspired this work, to actually trace his footsteps with purpose. Hemingway first visited and fished the Irati in 1924, and returned a year later to find the river and fishing had been damaged by logging. He wrote





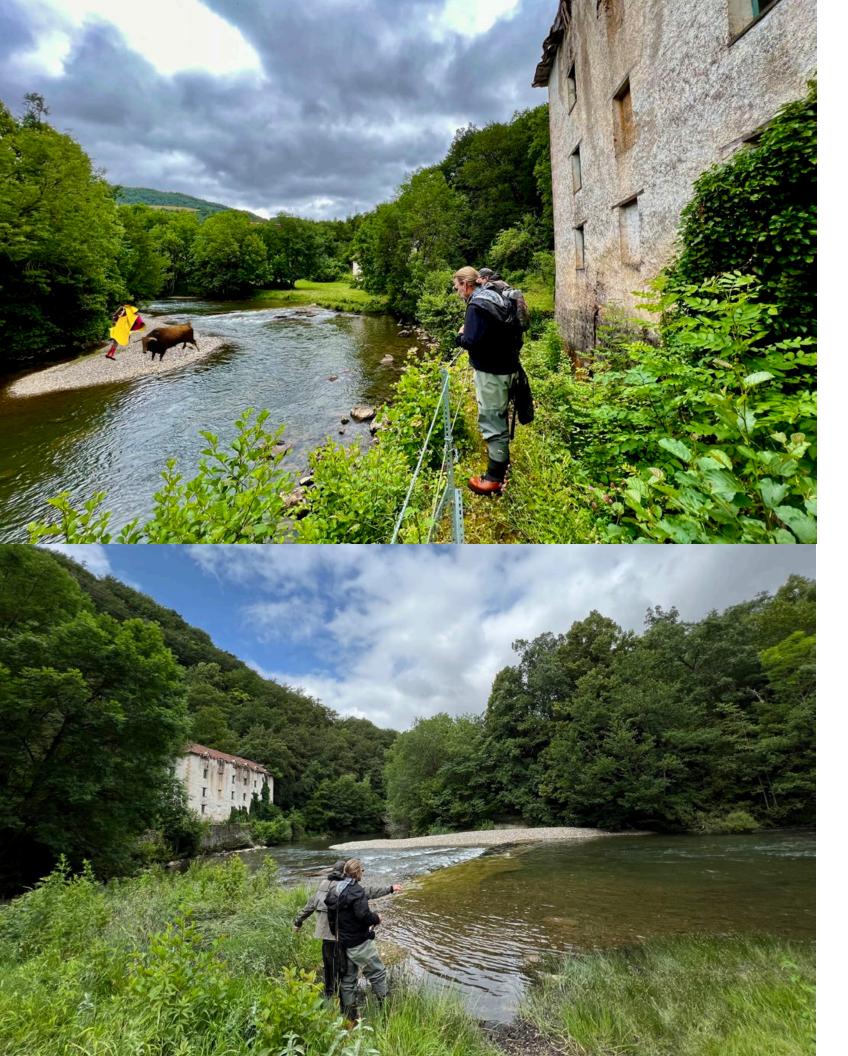
in 1925, "Fish killed, pools destroyed, dams broken." A very stark contrast to what he saw a year earlier and what I saw in 2023.

Like Hemingway my adventure began in Burquete, a small Basque village high in the Pyrenees. My trip was, initially at least, not very organized (partly due to concocting plans after two bottles of wine with my special lady friend), but we were lucky because Hostal Burguete not only had rooms available, but we were able to stay in the Hemingway room. A bit cliché perhaps, but why not? The same family owns the hostel today as it did during Hemingway's stay and their ancestors remain as stern as those described in The Sun Also Rises. The hotel locks its heavy front door at 11pm sharp. And if you have traveled in Spain, you know 11pm is not especially late. We almost missed our curfew one night after a long dinner and another bout with multiple bottles of wine. But we made it in at 10:55 and even managed to talk the proprietor out of a half-full bottle of Rioja before the lights were dimmed for the night.

Hemingway walked from Burguete to the Rio Irati, no small feat that likely took at least an hour, probably two. Luckily, my guide, Yvon Zill, met us at the hostel and we drove, stopping along the way for a café con leche in Aribe. The Rio Irati is an intensively managed river. Only eight rods are permitted each day and the season closes at the end of June, so again, I was lucky that a space was still available on the last day. The rules are enforced and poaching minimal, which maintains a healthy population of big brown trout. Yvon is somewhat of a Hemingway historian,

C.O.F MAGAZINE





so he provided exact details regarding Hemingway's whereabouts in the area. He was a methodical fishing guide as well, pointing out and really teaching me about details in the river that would have been lost on a first-time visitor. In fact, he was probably the finest teaching guide I've ever fished with. We often stood for long periods next to the river studying it intently before approaching a run or pool. On my own, I tend to fish rather carelessly and fast. I see a pool, stumble loudly into the river, whereupon every fish within 100 yards scatters. Some of the instruction seems simple, such as examining spider webs along the river to shed some light on hatches and fly selection, but important and often overlooked by anglers in a hurry.

The day felt leisurely compared with the impending festival chaos that awaited us in Pamplona in a week (bulls, wine, massive crowds, basic insanity). We had lunch on the riverbank that included several cheeses, French bread, sausage, pâté, peaches, and red wine. Given the weather, rising trout, storied river, and company, it was a perfect day.

The Rio Irati and its watershed are a far cry from what Hemingway returned to in 1925. The river and its surrounding forests are now protected, and past mismanagement that led to Hemingway's description above are hard to fathom. We saw plenty of fish, some of the bigger browns hiding below undercut banks and others rising sporadically throughout the day. The fish were very very spooky, so I was introduced to a 10-foot, fivewt rod and silk lines to limit the surface disturbance caused by heavier lines. I had never fished with silk lines, so it was a challenge, but after a bunch of practice

and subsequent failed casts, I finally got the hang of it. I'm not going to replace my weight forward lines any time soon, but the silk line was noticeably "gentler" as it landed and drifted with less drag.

As the day progressed, I had some success after rediscovering my dry fly reflexes. I managed to lose a really big brown when it made a run upstream and dove under a bank, but I enjoyed watching it take my dry fly nonetheless. When your veteran guide is upset about a lost fish, you know it was a good one. Next year I plan to fish for multiple days to work out the kinks and foreign exchange angling woes.

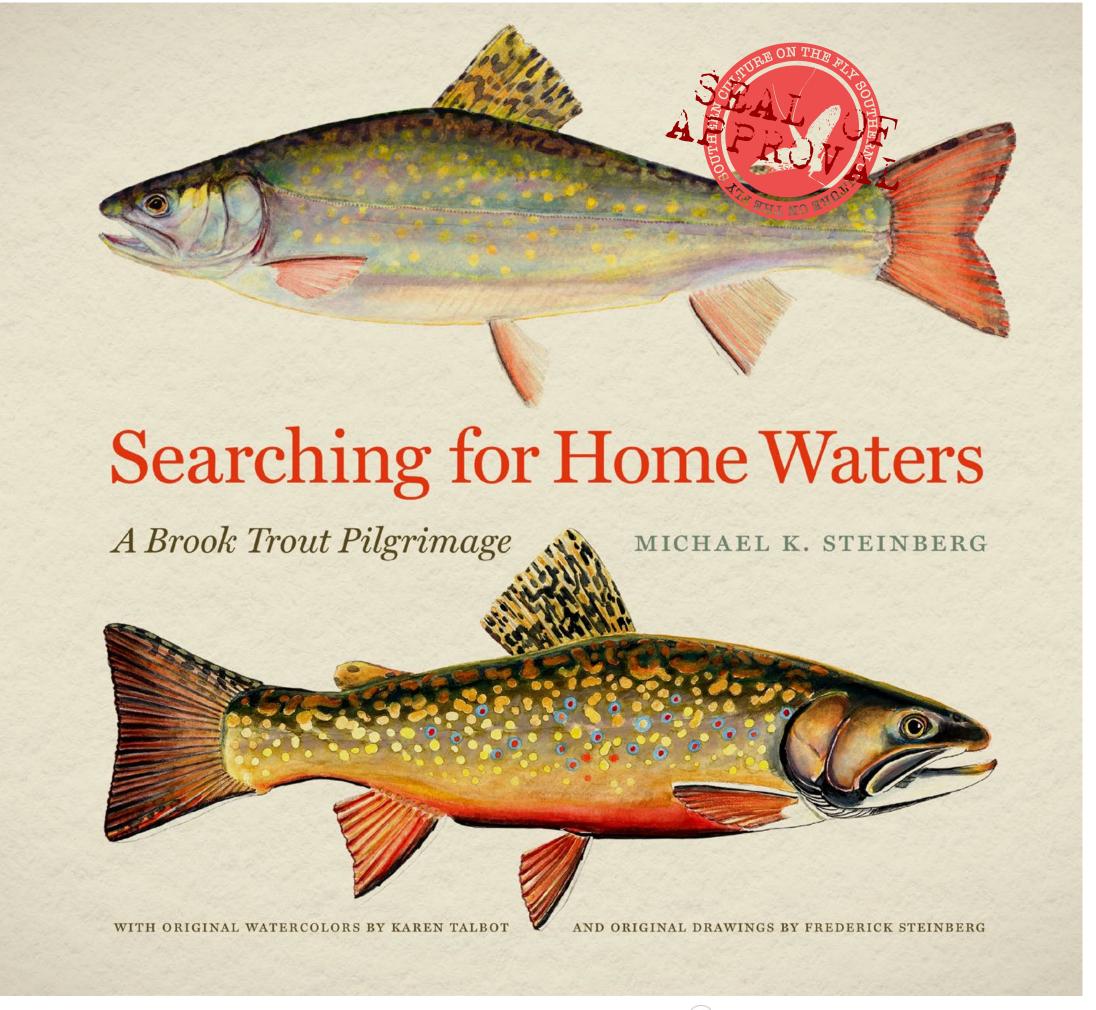
The angling scene in The Sun Also Rises serves as an interlude between the Paris and Pamplona sections (really the two core parts of the story). And as such, it's probably given cursory attention by many non-angling readers. However, it is far more important than just a side fishing trip for the main character and a friend. According to Hemingway scholar Ben Stoltzfus, nature in Hemingway's writing is a place of refuge and rebirth. Nature is the place where men find redemption. In The Sun Also Rises, the fishing scenes serve as counterpoint to the memories of war and raucous fiesta scenes and associated careening into ditches among the main characters. I'd like to think nature and fly fishing serve a similar purpose in my own life where all pressures, fears, and worries are left by the side of the stream before I enter. Now if I can just avoid the careening after I fish.

The brook trout (Salvelinus fontinalis) is an iconic species among fly anglers and cold-water conservationists in eastern North America. This fish registers as a powerful symbol for its beauty and its imagery in art and literature. Its presence also tells us a great deal about the health of the larger environment. When an angler has a brook trout in hand, there is confidence that the water is close to pristine. Besides being an important indicator species, the brook trout, with its gold and reddish markings and its camouflaged green and black back, is one of the most beautiful freshwater fish in North America. And beyond the beauty of the fish itself, the environment in which it is found is also part of its past and present appeal. To fish for brook trout is often to fish in the last remote and rugged landscapes in the East, "fishscapes" that have not been polluted by stocking trucks that dump nonnative brown and rainbow trout in most of the East's accessible cold waterways.

Searching for Home Waters is part science, part environmental history, and part personal journey of the author, Michael K. Steinberg, and those he interviewed during his travels. The work takes a broad perspective that examines the status of brook trout in the eastern United States, employing a "landscape" approach. In other words, brook trout do not exist in a vacuum; they are impacted by logging, agriculture, fishing policies, suburban development, mining, air pollution, and climate change. Thus, while the book focuses specifically on the status and management of the brook trout

⊠ from Georgia to Labrador\(\text{\subset}\)it also tells the larger story of the status of the eastern environment. As a "pilgrimage," this book is also a journey of the heart and contains Steinberg's personal reflections on his relationship with the brook trout and its geography.

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COMMITTED TO PROTECTING FLORIDA'S MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE:



Conservation Corner

with dr. professor mike

In this iteration of the Conservation Corner we highlight the efforts of the American Saltwater Guides Association (ASGA). Formed in 2018 to "activate and unite guides, small business owners and like-minded anglers, and to represent them and their voice at the federal, regional and state levels." While there are several fly and light tackle-oriented groups with sport fisheries-related missions, the ASGA is unique because it highlights the critical link between sustainable fisheries and sustainable businesses. It sounds logical and simple, but in today's political climate, conservation and science are often pitted against business interests. This is a straw man argument because without fish (and sustainable management), there is NO fishing industry - recreational or commercial. ASGA is also bit different in that they focus less on fund raisers and cocktail parties and more on direct action and even confrontation with policy makers, politicians, and groups within the sport fishing industry who are more interested in short-term harvest above the longterm health of fish stocks-and again the long-term health of the industry itself. ASGA's ethos remains that fisheries should be managed based on the best available science, and if the science can be better, we should work to improve it. We must learn from this and move forward with better data to make more informed management decisions for our fisheries. This even includes challenging federal, overestimated stock numbers that may limit short term harvests or change slot size regulations in order to

improve long-term population viability. Again, without healthy fish stocks, there is NO industry. While the ASGA's work includes a Southern flavor with redfish management in Louisiana, they are a national organization that is also working on management issues concerning the understudied false albacore (little tunny) and the ever-threatened striped bass.



by Tony Friedrich:

Policy Director/Vice President

Louisiana has environmental concerns. We can all be sure of that. However, it always comes down to (f). F is fishing mortality. If you want to recover a stock, lower f. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fish (LDWF) completed a redfish stock assessment with 2021 being the last year of data. Table 23, Annual red drum abundance-at-age and total stock size estimates shows the 2021 stock at about 8.7 million fish. In 2009, that number sat at slightly over 21 million fish.

The core problem is that Louisiana has not changed regulations for 35 years. The state offers a five fish limit with a 16-27" slot and one over slot fish allowed. That is significantly higher than any other state. If that level of pressure for over three decades wasn't enough, the trout population is also in dire straits. The absence of trout has placed even more pressure on the redfish population.



Redfish are managed on something called Escapement Rate. That is a percentage of how many juvenile redfish make it to adult spawning stock. The other factor to consider is Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR). Simply put, that is the amount of sexually mature females in the system with the largest females having the largest spawning potential. If you think about it, the Escapement Rate is just a percentage of juveniles. If there aren't many juveniles because the SPR is low, then it may not be the best measure of stock stability.

If a 35% reduction is made in harvest, SPR won't be rebuilt until 2050. If a 55% reduction is made, SPR will be rebuilt in approximately ten years. Fisheries science is not Astro physics. Some

things aren't exact. The longer a rebuilding timeline is extended, the more risk and uncertainty are inserted into the matrix.

On July 6th, our guides rejected the proposed 35% reduction and asked the State Wildlife and Fisheries Commission to approve a 55% reduction. Their jobs depend on abundant populations of big redfish. The Commission agreed and published a Notice of Intent to change the regulations to three fish with an 18-24" slot with no over slot fished allowed. This would achieve a 55% reduction and a reasonable timeline for SPR rebuild.

The NOI comment period ends on October 5th. If enough support is generated, the issue will move the Oversight Committee in the state legislature for final

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approval. Go here to learn more, sign on to our letter, and help ensure great Louisiana redfishing for generations to come.

While that takes care of the Gulf redfish, our striped bass are in even worse shape in the Atlantic. Striped bass stocks were at their highest between 2002-2006. Stock size is measured by the Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB), which is the amount of spawning-age females in the fishery. Striped Bass SSB in 2021 was measured at 143 million pounds. The threshold SSB number is 188 million pounds, and the target for the stock is 235 million pounds. We entered a rebuilding phase several years ago, hoping to get the stock size to the target number by 2029. However, the harvest numbers in 2022 skyrocketed when the 2015-year class entered the slot size. Many of us saw this coming when the slot was first implemented. Since 2019, the spawn in the Chesapeake has failed. 2019-2022 represents the lowest spawning success on record for striped bass in Maryland, which represents 60% of the coastal stock. That means that by 2027, this fishery's SSB will start to collapse. While some areas are experiencing good fishing today, the future is bleak. Management action will heat up this fall. Please look at our website to learn how to help. Striped bass are our benchmark species. We will never stop fighting for a better future for our kids and grandkids. If we mess this up, we are looking down the barrel of a moratorium again.

To ASGA, false albacore (Little Tunny) rank pretty high on the awesome and underappreciated list. Different regions view them through different lenses. In



Wellow



The Back Page

It ain't supposed to

It ain't supposed to be easy. You're be easy supposed to suffer, bleed, cry, wallow in self-pity, and doubt your very existence. by Mad Mike What good is a bonefish unless you've Benson flown to the deepest depths of the Caribbean, and slept on a Bahamian couch with a knife across your chest because the front door wont lock? Is a musky even worth the effort unless you drive across three states, lob whole roosters on 11wt's in torrential rain, miss a strike and watch your buddy catch your fish right from under your nose before you flee for your life when the river runs its banks and starts threatening to flood your riverside abode? Tarpon are just overgrown sardines unless you sleep in a hammock on a glorified dock 50 miles from the nearest civilization and act as the local blood bank for everglades mosquitos. Life is pain, fishing should reflect that. I mean I guess bluegill are cool, and sometimes you do get to sleep in air conditioning and ride in nice boats to catch a fish in salt water. Lodges are a nice treat as well if we're being honest and having a hot meal and cold beer waiting on the dock after a long, pleasant day on the water with willing fish is hard to beat. Fly fishing is supposed to test us, challenge us, push us to our limits. But sometimes that redfish tails at 20 feet and you can just flip a short cast to get the eat. I guess it ain't supposed to be easy... but it's damn sure nice when it is.



