From a Trout's Perspective

We are too quick to blame the fly. I guess it is about control. As a fly-fishing guide, I have come to realize fishing proves a break from many of the things that control our daily lives. Moreover, when we are fishing, we are the ones in power. Sure, there are factors out of our direct control while fishing, like clouds, water clarity, regulations, phases of the moon, luck . . . but, if nothing else, we sure can control what is at the end of our tippet!

Not withstanding those hatches when trout become very selective, flies get too much credit for whether we are catching or not. Perhaps the reason we are so infatuated with changing the fly is that on the surface changing the fly seems to be the quickest fix for a fishless situation. Well, it is not! The fly is only one aspect of **Presentation**. In addition to the fly, most fly fishermen agree that there are five other factors that influence a take, and they can be considered and adjusted far faster than a fly can be changed. They are:

- The Location we cast,
- The **Depth** we fish,
- The **Movement** we place on the fly,
- The Equipment we use, and
- The **Time** we fish.

Each of these elements is worthy of volumes of commentary. Each is so significant that no cast should be made without its due consideration. Each so noteworthy that any attempt at prioritization should be made with extreme care. Finally, and most importantly, each should be thought through from the perspective of the trout's most basic needs of **Food**, **Protection (Cover/Current)**, **Temperature** and **Oxygen**, before it is adjusted.

You are bright; you place considerable research and thought into your initial pattern selection. Therefore, it is often not so much as **"What"** you are using, as it is **"How"** you are using it that may be defeating you. That is one of my major talking points. The others being **"Control!"** and **"Pay attention to detail!"**

So, rather than think about immediately changing the fly in a fishless situation . . . let's consider the five other elements of presentation and a few accompanying comments. As you read the comments ask yourself: "Is this related to food (Fd), protection (cover (Cov)/current (Cur)), or temperature and oxygen (T/O) from a trout's perspective? To assist you in this activity I have associated a scoring grid with each comment.

Instructions:

- 1) <u>Check every box in the scoring grid that applies to the statement.</u> A statement may address more than one trout need. You get a point for each!
- 2) Some comments are just thoughts and not applicable (NA) directly to the needs of a trout.
- Example: "Look for, and cast to, transition zones: foam lines, shadow lines, weed lines, Fd Cov Cur T/O NA mud lines, thermoclines, and transition currents."
- Answer:Foam lines address Food and Cover.Shadow lines and Mud lines address Cover.Weedlines provide Cover and habitat for Food.Thermoclines address Temperature and Oxygen.Transition currents address Current concerns.

So grab your pencil (or Mouse) and get started . . .

LOCATION: If there are no fish where you are casting . . . you are wasting your time. I know that sounds rather sarcastic, however it is extremely profound. Consider the hours that you have fished in areas that were probably void of fish. Have a reason for fishing where you are casting. Stop and observe from a comfortable distance before you cast. Think in terms of the trout's needs: **Food, Protection (Cover and Current), Temperature and Oxygen.** Take your time and rig with thought. Secondly, move; do not keep casting from or to the same spot! Most anglers stay too long in one place. It may have been a great spot, but after several casts, the fish have been "put down". Do not take my word for it; watch others fish. Time them. The ones that are moving and casting with thought are catching the fish.

- 1. Look for, and cast to, *transition zones*: foam lines, shadow lines, weed lines, mud lines, thermoclines, and transition currents.
- 2. Look for raising fish or nervous water. Determine the direction that the trout is moving and cast appropriately. Remember: "*Not knowing the direction that the trout is headed, casting short is an error on the side of caution. There is less of a chance of `lining' the trout.*"
- 3. Whether the water is "moving" or "still". Read the water. Look for *'trout lies*': holding, protective, feeding, and prime. Trout will be found beside, in front, and behind rocks and structure in streams and rivers. Explore eddies in streams and rivers.
- 4. Trout generally face upstream in moving water. They also tend to face into the wind in lakes during a hatch, waiting for a morsel to come their direction . . . fish with the wind at your back.
- 5. Shallow riffles will contain trout, particularly when shade provides cover. Shallow riffles will contain trout for a variety of reasons, particularly when shade provides cover.

DEPTH: It is estimated that over 99% of the food that fish eat is subsurface; if you do not see fish feeding on the surface, they are still feeding! Do not be so quick to use that dry fly. It is your job to present your fly in a natural or stimulatingly suggestive manner in the trout's feed zone for the longest time possible, no matter what the depth. Finally, good fly fishermen not only determine the depth of their target fish, but know why the fish are there.

- 1. Before fishing for big fish in deep water in a lake consider . . . they do not go to deep water to feed; they go there for other reasons.
- 2. When wind causes a chop on water fish are less fearful to come closer to the surface.
- 3. A strike indicator signals a take, controls depth, and in wind adds a jigging motion to your fly. Choose one that is easily adjustable and less prone to tangling. Better yet, use a large dry fly for an indicator (e.g. Stimulator or Grasshopper).
- 4. Whether using floating or sinking lines, maintain consistent control of depth by counting down.
- Temperatures vary greatly with regard to depth. Cold water holds a lot more dissolved oxygen than warm. Trout prefer temperatures between 54° F and 64° F. Use your thermometer. Don't have one? Get one!

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| Fd | Cov | Cur | T/O | NA |
| Fd | Cov | Cur | T/O | NA |

Fd Cov Cur T/O NA

| Fd Cov | Cur | T/O | NA |
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| Fd | Cov | Cur | T/O | NA |
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|] | Fd | Cov | Cur | T/O | NA |
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MOVEMENT: If the drag-free float of a dry fly is the basic mantra to dry fly-fishing . . . then presenting your fly in an enticing manner at the correct depth and speed of retrieve/pause is the mantra of fishing beneath the surface. Some flies are tied as imitations of actual food sources (Blue Wing Olives) yet others are tied to stimulate a bite through movement and suggestivity (Wooly Bugger). (See the Denny Rickards interview, this issue) Knowing how, when, and what movement to use, if any, is imperative.

Fd Cov Cur T/O NA

- 1. A drag free float is important, however, skating a dry fly across water or retrieving a dry under the surface can also be deadly.
- 2. When stripping, try varied combinations of the length, speed, and pause. I find in still water the pause is particularly important, as this is often when the fish strikes. Most novices use too long of a strip, too fast, without a decent pause.
- 3. Don't false cast over the area where you intend to present your fly. Overhead movements make fish nervous! Also, consider shortening your retrieve distances to the length of the combination of your tippet, and leader.
- 4. Take unnecessary slack out of your line immediately, paying attention to where the line and leader meet. As you prepare to recast very slowly remove your line from the water. Secondly, note the depth and angle the fly rises through. Trout will often take the fly on that rise.
- 5. In a stream or river, swinging a nymph at the end of a drift will make it rise like a natural. Pause at the end of the swing for a possible take. Retrieve a little and pause again.

EQUIPMENT: Think, "Always balance your system to the fly you are going to use while considering your quarry." Use tippets and leaders that compliment your equipment, fly, and target fish. Catching small Sierran trout on the right equipment is a kick, especially in a location that you have discovered on your own. Over playing a large trout on light equipment can seriously harm it and take time away from catching other fish.

- 1. Before you leave your home consider where you are going to be fishing and wear clothing (shirt, vest, pants, hat, etc.) to blend in to the environment. Always use polarized glasses for spotting fish, structure, and eye protection.
- 2. Fluorocarbon tippet is less threatening to fish because it has a similar optical density to water and therefore is less visible. It is stronger than monofilament of the same diameter. However, carry an appropriate receptacle (a 35 mm film cassettes . . . remember those?) and dispose of it responsibly.
- 3. A 7¹/₂ foot, three or four weight rod and line is a good starting point in a stream; and a 9 foot, five or six weight rod and line is a good starting point in a lake or river and where larger trout are a likelihood. If wind is a possibility, be equipped to rod and line "up" at least one weight.
- 4. Learn and practice your knots: Nail knot, Blood knot, Double Overhand, Clinch, and a loop knot of your choice. Use a loop knot to attach a streamer, leech, or any fly that is designed to illustrate pulsation and movement to the trout. Fishing is not the time to practice something you can master before you get to the water.
- 5. Since water is many times denser than air sound travels much further under water than in air. The use of metal cleated-sole boots and metal wading staffs transmit sounds tremendous distances under water, alerting fish of a possible predator's presence.

TIME: I realize that once you are on the water . . . you are there, regardless of the time. However, time is a major consideration. Change is the only constant with time! The time of day (e.g. light), month (e.g. phases of the moon), and year (e.g. the seasons) . . . all contribute to your fishing success and all must be understood from a `trout needs' perspective. Strategies and tactics that work one time of day (or year) will not work other times of the day (or year). Retrieve speed is a good example. Colder water reduces both the metabolism of the aquatic food source as well as that of the trout; consequently retrieves have to be slower in colder times, day, or year.

- 1. In the summer elevated temperatures cause trout to reposition. Trout require four times more oxygen at 75° F than at forty odd degrees. (This, along with the fact that warmer water holds less oxygen, is why temperature and oxygen are often combined when considering trout needs.)
- 2. Referring to a hatch chart before you get to your destination is paramount. Nonetheless, being prepared for the emergence of hatches that are not totally predictable and/or occur for very short periods is wise as well (e.g. ants in the spring and terrestrials in the summer and early fall).
- 3. Ever fished at night? Fish do! Trout not only use light to find their prey, but they are also sensitive to vibration and chemicals.
- 4. In early spring and fall colder water is on top in a lake. Explore a bit deeper. Later, when the upper water becomes dense enough (heavier than the warmer water beneath), the lake turns over and waters mix.
- 5. During the spring thaw a condition called `*Ice Out*' occurs on formerly frozen lakes. During this time large numbers and great sizes of trout can be taken by fly fishing from shore.

| Fd Cov | Cur | T/O 1 | NA |
|--------|-----|-------|----|
| Fd Cov | Cur | T/O | NA |
| Fd Cov | Cur | T/O | NA |
| Fd Cov | Cur | T/O 1 | NA |

Fd Cov Cur T/O NA

Your Score

What does your score mean? Let me start by saying this exercise is not intended to be an analysis of your ability; it is simply meant to encourage and challenge you to think from the trout's perspective, and not be so quick to blame and change your fly . . . and, hopefully, gather a few tips along the way. There are 42 points possible. One point is awarded for a correct response and one point is deducted for an incorrect response. I will leave the interpretation to you. However, if your score is significantly below the total possible you probably didn't take all aspects of the statements into account. Reset and try again.

You have direct control over five other factors: Location, Depth, Motion, Equipment, and Time. When you do catch a fish stop and ask yourself . . . *"What was I doing right from the trout's perspective?"* In answering consider: Food, Protection (Cover/Current), Temperature and Oxygen Fly-fishing is a sport of control. In fact, many say control is probably the single most important word associated with fly fishing.

Stalk your prey like the predator that you are. Move slowly, stay low, and reduce your false casts to one or two. Tread lightly and remember if you suddenly see them chances are they have seen you. If you make a poor cast consider fishing it out rather than tear it off the water and recasting. Above all think in terms of the trout's basic needs. You are in control.