

SPORTS

Fly-fishing can be enjoyed by all

Too often, accomplished spin and baitcasting anglers shy away from the sport of fly-fishing.

Many people think that in order to cast a fly, you have to have the hand/eye coordination of Larry Bird, the reflexes of Don Mattingly, and the writing skills of Ernest Hemingway.

Folks, fly-fishing just isn't as difficult as it seems. You don't need world-class athletic skills or the talent for composing poetry.

True, fly-fishing is a somewhat romantic outdoor sport which links man with fish. But it is a sport that can be enjoyed by all.

Being of only marginal fly-angling skills, I enrolled in the fly fishing school provided by Mark Kovach, a Potomac River guide and angling instructor from Silver Spring. He has been instructing fly-fishing for the past 6 years. His schools provide both beginning and advanced casting classes.

Our day began at 8:30 a.m. at the Cozy Inn in Thurmont. Mark reserves a small room, serves coffee and pastries, and teaches this eight-student class in a relaxed, congenial atmosphere.

To assist him, expert fly-tier Pete

Yarrington would later collect mayfly nymph samples from nearby Big Hunting Creek. The entire morning consisted of a full explanation of rod materials and sizes, lines and their construction for specific casting purposes, leader types and tippet sizes, fly patterns and popular imitations for trout, and just about everything one would want to know — a solid, basic foundation of all facets of fly-fishing.

Next was lunchtime, and the Cozy Restaurant mid-day buffet was all any of us could eat. Again, the relaxed atmosphere, good food and setting added to the classroom experience.

After lunch, Mark gave an extensive explanation of loop sizes and demonstrated proper casting strokes with a 'yarn-rod' — a small, miniaturized fly-rod strung with yarn. Wide and tight loop formations plus the mechanics of slack line and roll casting was also demonstrated.

At the conclusion of the demonstration, Pete talked and displayed the various forms of trout food — mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies and midges. Then it was time to hit the field out back for some open-field casting practice.

The nice thing about learning from an accomplished fly angler is that you can



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begin to stop all of those bad casting habits you've gotten comfortable with over the last several years.

Both Pete and Mark worked with each of us, helping us make adjustments and improving our form.

The day culminated with a run over to Big Hunting Creek.

As Mark was explaining a presentation tactic to the group, Pete shuffled down the bank, drifted a Woolly Boogger through the pool and hooked a fine, two-pound rainbow trout that ran him all over the pool before Pete unhooked and eased the fish back into its watery domain.

It was the ultimate demonstration.

After that, we all spread out and picked a pool to test our newly-acquired skills.

J.B. Wilhelm, the 14-year-old son of well-known bass angler Brian Wilhelm, caught a 14-inch rainbow trout not far from the parking lot, and several other nice trout were caught, too.

How did I do? Well, I saw some dynamite looking water, and learned about three-times more on fly-fishing than I had known the day before.

Mark not only teaches fly-fishing in a simple, no-nonsense, easy-to-understand fashion, he also guides Potomac River float fishing trips with a custom designed 14½ foot inflatable raft.

These all-day floats run from Dam No. 3 (above Harpers Ferry) down to Brunswick.

These guide floats can handle two people, and include a full 10 to 12 hours on the water. Starting later on in May, he will base his school, which holds one-day, Saturday sessions, out of Harpers Ferry, and the prime target will be shifting to smallmouth bass.

If you are serious about enjoying the sport of fly-fishing and feel you need a sound basic understanding, then you

should consider one of Mark's classes. Believe me, it is a bargain to take either the basic or advanced class at \$80 for the entire day. Heck, you can hardly buy a good fly rod for that.

But it took only one day with Mark and Pete to gain things I've had to struggle with the last several years. I highly recommend this excellent, angling instructional service.

For class enrollment or river trips, contact: Mark E. Kovach, 737 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, Md. 21793 or call (301) 588-8742.

■ On May 8, 1988, (Sunday) the Hashawha Environmental Appreciation Center will conduct an on-water fishing workshop and demonstration. Hashawha naturalist Steve Heacock and myself will be on hand to answer questions on freshwater topics and give demos on casting, rigs, lure presentations and fish filleting. The program will last from 2 to 4 p.m. For further information call the Hashawha Environmental Appreciation Center at 857-7942 or 848-9040.

Jim Gronaw is a Times outdoors writer.