

MARK KOVACH FLY FISHING SCHOOLS

By Keith Kaufman

"It's the same wrist motion you use to toss a frisbee." Yeah, sure I thought, say what you want, but there's just no way fly casting can be that easy. Then, to my utter astonishment, the premier Mid-Atlantic fly fisherman who had made the frisbee comment compared proper flycasting motion — are you ready for this? — to the arm and wrist movements used to whip water and paint from a paintbrush when cleaning it. Wait a minute! What about the flycasting mystique I had heard so much about? I was stunned. Here was an expert comparing casting to something as pedestrian as cleaning a paintbrush!

The speaker, who would soon prove his points and crush my misconceptions about the difficulty involved in flycasting and fly fishing, was Mark Kovach, a Potomac River float-fishing guide well known throughout Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and beyond. On that day I was attending Mark's basic and intermediate fly fishing school that he conducts several times each year. The morning I walked into that one-day class I had never attempted a single cast with a fly rod, and I was convinced there was no way I could learn to cast in a single day. Yet by that afternoon my knowledge and appreciation of fly fishing had grown immensely, plus, I had actually cast a fly with a fair degree of success, and enjoyed the thrill of catching my first-ever fish on a fly rod!

LEARN BY DOING. Obviously, students in Mark's classes do much more than sit and listen — his fly fishing classes are very visual and hands-on. In the basic and intermediate class, casting stroke and loop shape are easy to see and understand thanks the use of a "yarn rod." Students are equipped with fly rods and develop casting and line control techniques in an open field. Rope is used to assist in knot-tying demonstrations. Bugs in jars provide close-up views of the aquatic insects that fish eat. And perhaps best of all, students put their new

knowledge into action as the class features an on-the-water fishing session.

Classes are small, enabling Mark and his associates to provide everyone in the class with individualized attention. The basic and intermediate class I attended had six students: an angler from Pasadena, Maryland, two from Washington D.C., a mother and pre-teen son from Wrightsville, Pennsylvania, and yours truly from Delaware.

COMPLETE COVERAGE. The day began with a discussion of fly lines and their characteristics and uses. From there Mark covered everything a beginner needs to know to get off to a good start in fly fishing: Fly rod construction and action, reels, leaders and tippets, hook/fly selection, and tackle maintenance.



After the classroom session and before hitting the water for fishing, students in Mark Kovach's fly fishing schools receive individualized attention as they practice casting in an open field.

knowledge were all thoroughly explained.

That's a lot of information for a one-day class yet Mark's casual and entertaining teaching style makes it easy to comprehend and remember. Plus, each student receives plenty of hand-outs containing photos, diagrams and descriptions that perfectly complement Mark's presentations.

I took home from the class enough materials to begin my own at-home fly fishing library. Among those items were an issue of *Scientific Anglers Fly Fishing Made Easy*, catalogs from *Scientific Anglers* and *Dan Bailey's Fly Shop*, a catalog of fly fishing books, knot tying diagrams, a list of Mark's recommended trout flies, articles on fishing dry flies, streamers and nymphs, and maps that pinpoint hot spots in Hunting Creek, Patuxent River, Little Seneca Creek, Little Falls, Gunpowder Falls, Morgan Run and other productive fly fishing waters.

Flies! Mark brings to class more flies than you'll find at a typical Fourth of July picnic. Nymphs, streamer patterns and terrestrials are included in the collection. Mark encourages students to inspect them as he explains exactly how, when and where to effectively fish them.

YOUR SKILLS IN ACTION. A vest is a fly fisherman's tackle box, and before the fishing session of the class begins Mark lends each student a vest and demonstrates how to properly equip it so everything is easily accessible when wading waist deep while holding a rod in one hand. During the fishing session Mark and his associates wade from student to student to offer tips on reading the water and locating and identifying the insects that are present, plus they pass along any advice that may be needed concerning casting stroke, fly selection and fish-fighting tactics. In the class I attended, five students, including the youngster from Wrightsville, caught small-mouth bass.

Along with the basic and intermediate class, Mark also offers an advanced casting and tactics class.

In this class Mark treats participants to a unique "videotape analysis" — students are videotaped while casting and Mark reviews the video with each student so they can fine tune and perfect their casting skills. Also included in the advanced class are streamside talks on effectively fishing ledges, rocks, split currents and other structure and hours of guided fish-

ing and instruction.

Judging by the fun I had and the creel-full of knowledge I picked up in Mark's intermediate class, I'm sure even veteran flycasters will find Mark's advanced class informative and entertaining and will pick up new tricks that they'll be eager to try on trout, small-mouth bass and other fly rod favorites.

BASS AND TROUT CLASSES. Participants in both the advanced class and the basic and intermediate class have a choice: They can attend either a small-mouth bass or a trout class. I attended one of the smallmouth classes, which are held from June through October in historic and scenic Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. The indoors part of the program is in the Hilltop House Hotel which treats its occupants to a breathtaking overlook of the Needles section of the Potomac, where the fishing session is held. The trout fishing schools are in April and May at the Cozy Inn along Big Hunting Creek (near Thurmont, Md.) in the Catoctin Mountains.

Group size in both the basic and advanced classes is limited to 10 per class. The price for the basic and intermediate class is only \$125 per person, while the advanced class is \$150 per person — quite a bargain when you consider the classroom session and hand-out materials, the individualized attention during the practice casting session, plus the opportunity to fish the Potomac or Big Hunting Creek with a fly fishing authority at your side offering expert advice.

Whether you're new to the fly fishing game or have been catching fish on the long rod for decades, I highly recommend Mark's classes as a way of expanding your skills and enhancing the enjoyment you receive from the sport.

Call Mark Kovach Fishing Services and Fly Fishing Schools at (301) 588-8742 for the 1996 fly fishing school dates and other information.

For a special fly fishing treat, talk with Mark about his float-fishing trips in a 14-1/2 foot inflatable raft that covers eight miles of the Potomac in the Harper's Ferry area. While smallmouth are the most popular quarry, fly anglers (and spin fishermen too) also score with sunfish and catfish. The 10 to 12-hour trip includes a basic selection of flies and streamers, Mark's tips on reading water and locating fish, casting and wading advice, plus lunch and snacks. Mark's love and appreciation of the river and Harper's Ferry will be evident as he will inform and entertain you with the history of the area along with plenty of river lore. Float trips are two persons per trip at a cost of \$165 per angler.

DATES FOR 1996 MARK KOVACH FLY FISHING

TROUT FISHING CLASSES:

Basic & Intermediate Classes and also Advanced Classes featuring trout fishing in Big Hunting Creek at Thurmont, Maryland, are held in April and May. Here is Mark Kovach's 1996 schedule for those one-day trout fishing classes:

BASIC & INTERMEDIATE

(All Saturday Classes)

April 13, April 20 and April 27
MAy 4, May 11 and May 25

ADVANCED CLASS

(Friday Classes)

April 19, May 3

SMALLMOUTH BASS FISHING CLASSES:

Basic & Intermediate Classes and also Advanced Classes featuring smallmouth bass fishing in the Potomac River at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, are held June through October. Here is Mark Kovach's 1996 schedule for those one-day smallmouth bass fishing classes.

BASIC & INTERMEDIATE

(All Saturday Classes)

June 1, June 15, July 13, July 20, August 17,
August 24, September 21, October 12

ADVANCED CLASS

(All Saturday Classes)

June 8, June 29, September 7

*Cost For The Basic & Intermediate Class
Is \$125, While The Advanced Class is \$150.*

**PHONE: Call Mark Kovach
Fly Fishing Services at
(301) 588-8742**

*Note: Dates may change. Special dates
for groups can be arranged.*