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Subject: : Paflyfish General Forum

Topic: : Late Summer Outing II

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A few anecdotes from this trip have been shared [here \(C&R\)](#) and [here \(large wild browns in freestoners\)](#). A few fill-in the details paragraphs are in order, as well as some pictures.

No tree branches were harmed or removed in the making of this weekend 😊

Following a planned trip in the summer to somewhere in Virginia with my brother, that had to be scratched because of his vacation schedule, the weekend following Labor Day was the next chance we had to get together. It worked out that I was in training Thursday afternoon in State College and with my brother not arriving until sometime Saturday morning, I had an evening and a day to myself. I knew that water levels were relatively low and with no rain for a few days, the streams would be clear. However, unlike some years in the past, I also expected the streams to be cold, as others had passed along temperature readings that were well below normal.

I arrived streamside with about an hour and a half before sunset to fish. I hurried downstream for about a mile and confirmed the low, clear, but cold conditions (64 degrees). Stream sections that had been hidden earlier in the year were completely exposed, with more rock surface showing than water surface. And, either because of the low water, predation, angling pressure, or the few weeks we had this summer of hot weather, the fish had mostly reacted or moved. I managed to scare up just a few brookies and once nice brown, that I realized when I got home and uploaded my photos, and after comparing photos from last year, was the same fish I caught in June. And tonight, I also realized I caught the same fish in September of last year as well.

The chance to take that same brownie on a mouse fly for the third time enticed me out Thursday night. I sat in the car for a bit, to let darkness fall. And then I let it fall some more. I dozed a bit, and finally, about 10:30, I lined up, flipped off the light and let my eyes adjust. The forecast was for a low of 37 degrees, which usually means clear skies. And the skies were clear as could be. That night, there was no moon, as the lunar cycle was at new moon. However, as my eyes adjusted, the pale cold starlight lit up the night just enough that I could see. I shuffled along the streambed under that starlight, back to my brownie hole, and tossed my hand-tied deer hair mouse into the water. I'd cast, and take a few steps forward, and then pause, looking up at the beauty of the heavens. I managed to catch a tree a few times, which has happened over the years as I night fish. But, I've also managed to always extract my fly, kind of like Sam's Elvish rope in Eryn Muir. But, tonight, my luck finally ran out, as the starlight did not reveal a sizeable tree that was in front of me. I got a solid hookset on the tree, but eventually, the tippet broke, and not wanting to burn the hole with a light yet, I turned around in the dark, and selected my next mouse choice, a Blair Mouse Project.

I moved well below the trees and a small log jam, and managed a handful of strikes, but either the brown was sulking or his brethren were absent, or they were all upstream, staring at a mouse in the tree. I trudged back to the car. I had planned to setup a tent, but it being after midnight, no longer felt like it, so I crawled into my

sleeping bag in the front sleep, covered with a blanket, and spent a rather chilly and uncomfortable night dozing.

The next morning broke foggy. Since I had the day to fish, I planned to head upstream. Again, feeling a bit lazy, I didn't fire up the stove to make any real breakfast, but instead munched on some snacks. This would prove to be a mistake by day's end. But, I did throw my stove into my fishing pack and decided a bowl of hot soup would taste good for lunch. I remembered to grab a spoon out of my kitchen bag but decided there was no sense in hauling the whole thing around for the day, so I tossed it in the car. I threw in a few more snacks for the day and began to fish. Whether because of the cold night, or low waters, or warm spells, the stretch I started in was all but devoid of fish. It was 10:20 in the morning until I picked up my first fish, a stocker that had started to color up nicely. There was still a chill in the air, but the fog had burnt off, and the sky was as bright blue as could be.

I continued to fish and just before noon, spotted a lone riser at the head of a pool. I cast, and hooked the fish. It looked like a brown as he swam around the pool, but I was thrilled to bring the fish to hand and see it was a tiger! I've caught four tigers in my life. One was most likely a stocked fish in a DHFFO section of stream, and I caught it about ten years ago. The other three all came this year, and with this fish, two of them had come from the same drainage. Again, as a testament to C&R, this same fish was caught by another board member earlier this year.

I decided that catching the fish was good timing to stop for a bit of lunch. So I threw down alongside the bank, unpacked my food and stove and cookpot, and then it dawned on me. My ultralight backpacking stove has a piezo-electric lighter built in. The stove I was carrying was not my ultralight backpacking stove. No problem - I carry matches in my kitchen bag for these times. And...the kitchen bag was back in the car to save weight. The thought of eating cold Lipton noodle soup was unappealing, so I rationed my two granola bars and my sunflower seeds for the rest of the afternoon, and splurged by eating one whole granola bar for lunch.

The afternoon passed quickly, and either due to allergies, or lack of food and/or dehydration, I had a splitting headache by late afternoon. I walked back to the car and tried to doze a bit but decided I was well enough to drive out for a meal and so that's what I did. I managed to make it back, but the headache hadn't lessened, and so I spent another uncomfortable, cold night in the car, first falling asleep without my sleeping bag or a blanket and then scrounging for both in the dark. Night fishing wasn't in the picture for Friday night.

Saturday morning, my brother arrived, having spent Friday evening at a Phillies game and waking up early Saturday morning to finish the drive. We divvied up gear, filled up our packs and skipped the section I had fished the day before. Water temps in that stretch were in a healthy 54-58 degrees. We started fishing about noon, but fishing was extremely slow. The day before, I had noticed a Ford Expedition parked on the other side of the stream, and given the slowness of the fishing, and the evidence of the obvious return path in the beaten down weeds streamside, we were pretty sure we weren't the first people to fish that stretch in the last 24 hours. Nevertheless, we still managed a dozen or so fish each and since we hadn't fished together for a long time, it was nice to be back on the stream together.

We arrived at camp in mid-afternoon, having somehow managed to skip eating lunch. But the lure of a nearby hole, that for the past year had held a sizeable fish that I had not managed to catch made me skip lunch. With the stream being low and clear, my first few casts were from afar, but I moved nothing. I moved up closer, wondering if the fish (that I dubbed Solomon last year) had died or moved on. And then, as I was looking into the bottom of the pool, I saw him. His white mouth gave him away. He was just laying there, as if to say he didn't care if I was present or not. I left for a bit, but came back, and this time, changed my tactic, creeping up, sizing my offering down, and when the head shook, I knew I had hooked the fish for the third time in two years. Instantly, he ran for the root system and dragged my line up through it, before coming out at the head of the pool. There was a slim chance I could coax the fish back through that root system, but the greater probability was that the tippet would give up the ghost, and the greater probability materialized and the line snapped.

I sulked a bit, but determined not to be beaten by this fish, I came back in a bit for the third time. The fish was nowhere to be seen. I figured he had tucked up in the root system and my next chance might come at night. But as I sat there, watching the water, I saw the white inside of his mouth opening and closing, just sticking out from underneath the top edge of a small rock. And spotting that, it was pretty easy to see the tail of the trout at the bottom edge of the small rock, as he had clearly picked an undersized (but the only) rock to hide under. I've often caught brookies and small browns by dapping a fly (usually a buggler) in likely nooks and crannies in low water conditions (I call it English Muffin fishing). So I figured I had nothing to lose using that same tactic with this fish, so staying out of sight, I dropped my offering just above the rock. He pounced, I set the hook, and this time, I managed to steer the fish away from the root system, but not before he managed to wrap himself around a stick protruding through the pool. I grabbed my net, he pulled that tippet more around the stick and I wished I would have replaced more of it after he initially took me into the root system earlier. But, I managed to net the fish, and with my line still wrapped around the stick, extracted the fish, my previous offering, and my current offering out of the water.

He taped out just over 21", which remains a length I cannot seem to break. I have caught five 21" wild browns in my life and that size is where I seem to be stuck. Surprisingly, when I netted the fish, another, far spookier large trout came out from underneath the same rock the big fish had been hiding under.

Having ended one quest, my attention turned to another, food. We cooked up some dinner and then relaxed for a bit. Earlier in the week, the weather forecast was calling for a 30% chance of a shower. And as darkness set in, it became apparent that we were not going to be falling under the 70% chance of no shower that existed with such a forecast and at dark, a steady rain set in. I've had good success fishing in the rain during the day, but on the few occasions I have tried it, I have not done well night fishing in the rain. Nevertheless, about 9:00PM, I headed down to the stream, 8wt in hand again, buggler replaced by a Blair Mouse Project fly I had used the night before.

I cast into the pool as the rain ebbed and flowed, but did not have the slightest indication of a strike. Each time the rain would slow, my hopes would pick up a bit, before a steady rain would fall again. But finally, the rain did taper off. This created another problem however. One of the senses that I definitely use more during night fishing is hearing, and with the tree leaves covered with raindrops, the normal silence, broken only by gurgling water, was broken by the constant dripping of rain falling off the leaves. I continued to cast periodically, and lulled into a bit of a doze brought on by fishing/hiking a dozen miles in two days and the higher octane of Uinta Dubhe Black IPA. And just about every time that happens, and my foggy mind thinks that maybe I should just go to bed, a fish strikes. And that's what happened. The larger splash of a fish swiping at the mouse drowned out the raindrops for a moment, but the fisherman was not attentive enough, and missed the fish. But a few minutes later, the hook set true, and the first fish, a nice 14" brown, came to hand.

Now I've only ever caught a single brown trout per night fishing episode. When I finally hook up with a fish, I throw my headlamp on, so I can see what I am doing, and facilitate myself getting down to the waters edge (not recommended to do in the dark, with a three foot drop, on rain-slicked rocks). So after throwing the headlamp on to land the first fish, I figured my night was shot. I spotted around the pool I was fishing and came up with two other fish. Their eyes show beady white, reflecting the headlamp LED. One fish, at the head of the pool, went spastic, darting around the pool and finally stopping for a moment right out in front of me. I quickly turned off my headlamp, and three casts later, he took the mouse, breaking all conventional wisdom that I had operated by over the past few years. I landed this fish, and he taped out at 16". I caught him between 5 and 10 minutes after I landed the first brown of the night.

I'd have to wait another hour and a half but a little before 12:30, I had started doing some long casts, and then doing a methodical 3-5 quick strips, with a pause. This enticed the third fish of the night to strike a couple of times, before I finally hooked him on the third strike. I landed him, and at 17", he would prove to be the big fish

of the night (well actually morning). He would also be the third fish that I could positively ID that I had caught before, coming to hand September 22, 2012, also at night (on a hopper!).

I finally went to bed at 2:30AM, tired, but extremely satisfied.

The next day, we lounged around for a bit, and finally packed up. Beside a tree near the campsite, I had noticed a pile of gray stuff on the ground, which I thought was campfire ash someone had tossed. However, as I was milling around the woods, I discovered another similar, and pretty quickly made the connection between the gray pile, and the white bugs on the tree branch above the gray pile. It turns out they were beech blight aphids, AKA Boogie-Woogie aphids, because when approached, they start wagging their little tails. We encountered at least five spots on the way out and all we had to do was look up to find the source.

We skipped fishing that afternoon and ambled out to the cars. I took a turn searching the tree where I had lost the deer hair mouse earlier, but couldn't find it. I'm not overly sentimental, but since that fly was one of the first I had tied, and had been effective on night browns, I would have retrieved it had I found it. However, it wasn't to be. I believe the Blair Mouse Project fly is every bit as effective. It's relatively simple - it has a Gurgler type head, a deer hair body, and rubber legs for the legs and tail. It makes a tiny splash when its cast, especially if it lands flat. On a quick retrieve, it makes a nice gurgle sound. And it displaces enough water to leave a small wake when retrieved. The legs really do make it look like it is something swimming. And three fish were fooled by it. I'm sold.

It's been a good year on the streams. And it's not over yet. Enjoy the pursuit.