

First Coast Fly Fisher

November 2005

www.fcff.org

Jacksonville, FL



Catherine Bliss on A Cool North GA Morn

MEETING & SPEAKER

Monday, Nov. 7 - Author, World Famous Fly Fisher Norm Zeigler - Norm Zeigler is an internationally known outdoor writer and journalist who fishes from Naples. His book *Rivers of Shadow, Rivers of Sun: A Fly Fisher's European Journal* was published in June 2004 by Countrysport Press. His work has also appeared in such magazines as *Gray's Sporting Journal*, *Fly Fisherman*, *Northwest Fly Fishing*, *Art of Angling Journal*, *Sporting Tales Journal*, *Saltwater Fly Fishing*, *Florida Sportsman*.

Monday, Dec. 5 - Truel Myers & David Lambert -- "Techniques For Better Fly Casting" -- Truel was the first licensed fly fishing guide in North Florida. He's become head of the world's largest fly fishing school (Orvis) and is one of the acknowledged most proficient fly casting instructors in the nation. David Lambert is a master casting instructor and an FFF Casting Board of Governor's Strategic Planning Committee member.

COMING EVENTS

Saturday, Nov. 19 - Mill Cove Outing and FCFF Family Day - Come fish Mill Cove with the club. After the outing, we're having a family day at M&M Dairy. Bring the whole family -- spouses and kids encouraged. We'll provide food and drinks.

Ted Mayhew will teach his Spoon Fly and casting instructors David Lambert and Dick Michaelson will evaluate your cast, then make suggestions. Also, we'll provide tables for a fishing/tying swap and sell. Bring any old stuff you don't want to swap or sell.

The Perfect Fishing Trip?

Big Fish, Great Weather, Friends

by Chan Ritchie

The Soque River in North Georgia was as advertised: The weather, the scenery, the food, and the fishing were all first rate. We enjoyed the first cool snap of the year. Roaring fires and a full moon provided an atmosphere for good fellowship. The morning views of the river were like a daydream. Newly cooled air blanketed the water and rose like smoke, wisping its way up into the hills until the early sun could touch it. Reflected light danced through caverns and conifers as the fall leaves rained down. Gazing into this perfectness reminded me that I am a fortunate man indeed.

Speaking of good fortune, we caught a bunch of fish. Well, some of us did. The fish were not as accommodating as in recent past. Burt, on the other hand, could do no wrong. He caught 16 on Saturday and Sunday was better; he and Sherri caught several in the 30-inch range. I realize that Reverend Burt gets a little extra consideration, but I have been on the straight-and-narrow for a couple of months now, so I discounted any divine favoritism that Burt employed.

After sneaking Burt's rod Saturday evening I changed my set-up to match his. No help. Burt's success inspired me to keep changing my drift rate, leader length and fly combos until I finally pleased the fish. I promptly caught 12 fish and hooked at least 15 more. I left them biting.

This experience called to mind 3 things: 1. Changing your ways can lead to good things. 2. A little inspiration from the right person is powerful; and, 3. Trout, like people, can distinguish a holy gentleman from an Alabama good-ole-boy.

I want to thank Don, Homer & Cathryn, Burt & Sherri and Dick Choate for being there. I'll take good friendship over fishing every time.

Top: The FCFF Crew With Their Blackhawk Hosts. Middle: Da Prez - 'Bama Hat and Big Bow. Bottom: Dick Choate with Handful and Mouthful.



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Fishing the Scenic Soque River in Clarkesville, GA

by Burt & Sherrie Froehlich

On the evening of Friday, Oct. 14, Sherrie and I arrived at Blackhawk Fly Fishers, located on the famous Soque River. We met with other FCFers Homer & Catherine Bliss, Chan Ritchie, Dick Choate, and Don Reed. Blackhawks owners, John and Abby Jackson, greeted each of us, made us feel welcome and prepared a delicious dinner for all.



The evening was abuzz with great expectations of fly fishing nearly 2 miles of prime spring-fed trout water. Media mogul Ted Turner owns a stretch of water directly downstream from the Blackhawk. Abby and John have been managing the river for nearly 8 years. The fishing is catch-and-release, fly fishers only on this private, scenic, and pristine trophy trout water. The trout are plentiful and BIG.

Blackhawk is reputed to be a lodge, but the accommodations are quite rustic. The house/lodge dates back to the 1860s and is still being renovated to accommodate guests more comfortably. A large kitchen has been added and a dining room makes for a great gathering spot for meals and stories at the end of the day. The only need (AND I DO MEAN “NEED”) is the addition of an indoor toilet. There is “a toilet” and shower area located just outside the house. The shower room has three showerheads, which may be enticing to those who enjoy a group shower, but we hope that a more inviting arrangement offering some privacy for showering and a couple of extra toilets will be forthcoming “VERY SOON.” Another surprise about the accommodations was sharing a bedroom with another couple. This could be a big problem if you have never met the couple you are spending the night with. It was almost like being in summer camp again.

Breakfast was plentiful and good, but our main interest was the “fishing.” Abby loves to cook and all the meals were great. We got on the river about 9 in the morning. The water was lovely, light streaming through trees, shimmering off the water. The next 3 hours offered the best freshwater trout fishing Sherrie and I have ever encountered anywhere in the lower 48 states. I caught one trophy trout after another, mostly rainbows, but a few browns added

diversity. Sherrie and I lost some of the fish – those too hot or large – mostly because we were not used to catching such large fish on such small flies (less than 1/4-inch). We used a 7 and 5 weight rod respectively with 9 foot, 10-lb. tippets. Two axioms apply to fishing Blackhawk on the Soque: First, let the fish go where it wants to go; and second, take your time, be patient, don’t “horse” the fish or even the strongest tippet will break or the hook will straighten.

After a return to the lodge for lunch, we moved upstream. The fishing was slower in the afternoon, still a phenomenal number of large fish were caught compared to any other Appalachian trout streams we’ve fished. Toward evening the fish began feeding even more aggressively. At one point a huge trout jetted downstream with my nymph, opening the hook in the process. After catching several more large fish, I began to concentrate on a huge dark form moving languidly under a mountain laurel overhanging the opposite bank. After four unsuccessful casts I hooked up and the fish leaped high out of the water, swam toward me and leapt again. On the second jump the barbless hook dislodged and all I could do was laugh with joy at making the acquaintance of a trout that fought as vigorously as an Alaskan steelhead. The tally at the end of the day; I had caught nearly 30 fish, and Sherrie caught over a dozen big trout. Not a bad day in terms of total numbers, but the really impressive statistic was that all of the fish were larger than 14 inches!

Sherrie and I had worn out a lot of fish, and they had worn us out as well. We enjoyed a terrific dinner and the stories of other fortunate fellow fly fishers as well. The thought of sharing quarters and only “one” restroom soon became a distant memory (facilitated by the wine, I’m sure). We went to bed late and got up even later. All the

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SOMETHING ABOUT CHARLIE



photo: John Bottko

by David Lambert

I have a theory that God keeps the really good old Southerners around longer to show the rest of us how we ought to do it. I don't know exactly how old Charlie Heston was when he died, maybe 85, but he was the embodiment of Southern-ness, a walking reminder of a South where manners imply respect, courtesy is commonplace, and people still have worth and merit and value.

There aren't that many old Southerners left. Charlie was surely one of them, a man of quiet grace and soft dignity, a man comfortable with his place in the world, a man who didn't seem to want attention. He showed us how it ought to be done.

Charlie was a gentle man with a gentle soul, but that countenance didn't spill over into fishing. He was a serious about it, skilled, knowledgeable, and dangerous to fish.

Charlie always took the new guy fishing 'cause he could shortcut the learning curve. No telling how many anglers he hooked over 8 decades of catching fish. Charlie wouldn't give much thought to it, but there are lots of them, to be sure. Find any fishing club in North Florida and Charlie will have contributed to their ranks. Fact is, Charlie found many members their first fish.

Here's a guy who, in his 80s, could and did out fish most of us on a regular basis — not that he'd ever tell you about it. Charlie could find 'em, all right, and he could catch 'em. You just knew he caught fish by the way he talked. And he did it from a banged up 12-foot aluminum jon boat with a

reliable old kicker. It wasn't a statement, though; we learned from Charlie that fishing isn't about spending money.

My friend visited with Charlie after his first few cancer treatments. She asked if she could do anything to help him. There are those of us who might have lashed out, bitched about our illness, our discomfort, or cranked about how unfair life is. Not Charlie. About all he could think of was he needed someone to rake his lawn. Leaves were falling; it didn't look good to him, but he was too sick to do it himself.

Into his 9-month fight with the disease, soon as he was well enough, Charlie went fishing with a local guide, John Bottko. He caught a backwater slam that day — a nice redfish, a trout, a flounder. Grand slams don't come around all that often. "It was the damnedest thing," Bottko told me later. I have a photo of Charlie holding the redfish from that slam. His face is wan and thin, but he's smiling, happy to be fishing, happy to feel the sun, happy to be on home waters. You can see it in his eyes.

I'll think about Charlie next time I hear an strange accent barking at the boat ramp or see a driver festering with road rage. I'll think about how we're losing the good old Southern values, how courtesy is an inconvenience now, how manners seem out of place. I'll think about where were heading as a culture and I'll ask myself do we really need to get there?

Maybe I'll re-think my theory of how God keeps the good old ones around just to show us how it's done. Maybe I'll think it's not just a theory. Maybe I'll think it's really a prayer.

We Learned From Charlie That Fishing Isn't About Spending Money

Darter and Dace: Catching Combo For Panfish

by Dana Griffin, III

Rock bass. You gotta love ‘em! They hit a fly like a miniature linebacker and keep on pulling until you’ve slipped the hook or they’ve released themselves before you’ve had a chance to intervene.



Dace

A summer trip north found me in rock bass country, specifically on Cowpasture River in Southwest Virginia. This stream runs clear and is an ideal fly fishing venue. You fish it as though it were a trout stream, casting to pocket water, behind rock and snags and into the deeper runs. The shallow flat water can be passed over without fear of missing many fish.

But the Cowpasture is too warm for trout. Rather, it is home to pumpkinseeds, rock bass and smallmouths. The section I was on contained lots of rock bass, stacked up just like Florida’s stumpknockers. In other words, once you’ve caught the first one, keep on station. The likelihood is there’s more to come.

While the Cowpasture runs too warm for trout, it is cool enough to host goodly populations of those colorful minnows known as dace and darters. Species like red-nosed dace and rainbow darters have areas of red, orange, blue and emerald green mixed in with more somber browns, tans and blacks. All in all, they are perfect naturals around which to model flies, and here are a couple of patterns I whipped up for the occasion. The rock bass, I should say up front, loved them.

These small streamers have been used on the rivers and lakes of north Florida. Bluegill, red bellies, stumpknockers and bass find them sufficiently appealing that on some occasions I’ve had to change out flies because of the damage done by striking fish. Give them a test on your own preferred waters. You may just be pleasantly surprised by the results.



Darter

RED NOSED DACE: Hook: 9672, size 10, 12; Thread: rusty orange, 8/0; Tail: orange dyed grizzly marabou; Weight: .015” lead wraps; Body: reddish orange dubbing ; Hackle: brown hen; Bead: red ; Rib: narrow gold tinsel

RAINBOW DARTER: Hook: 9672, size 10, 12; Thread: rusty orange, 8/0; Tail: blue marabou; Body: peacock herl; Weight: .015” lead wraps; Rib: copper wire; Wings: back feathers, cock ringneck; Hackle: orange dyed hen

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Homer Bliss On A Soque Morning

photo: Catherine Bliss

Soque River -- continued from page 3

other club members hit the water early, staking out the prime pools. "We" were on vacation and had considered the first days fishing a great success. Time for fishing began late in the morning, yet we had another banner day.

Before this trip, the largest trout I had personally caught was 8 pounds. Before lunch, Sherrie and I doubled up on trout in excess of 10 pounds. Later, following lunch, we caught more enormous trout. Throughout the two days I kept besting my record for personal largest trout. Sunday afternoon I caught a trout that measured 30 inches and weighed more than our scale would measure. George Beasley, our esteemed guide, estimated the fish to weigh 13 pounds. After that I didn't care if I caught another fish - but I did catch another 6 before we brought to an end 2 memorable days on the best trout water we have ever had the privilege to fish.

If you ever want to really spoil yourself, fish the Soque River in northern Georgia. Given the price of gas and jet fuel, the relatively short trip to northern Georgia makes this trophy water all the more alluring. The river is accessible on foot, easy wading, no boats, and images of gorgeous fish up to 36 inches will keep you coming back. Blackhawk Fly Fishing more than makes up for its lack of accommodations by its incredible fishery and beautiful scenic waters.

FCFF's After-Outing Family Day

Saturday, Jan. 19 at M & M Dairy. Join us for a great time. The club will provide all food and drinks. Lambert and Michaelson will help casters and show you some new stuff. Ted Mayhew will teach his gold spoon fly. Bring The Kids. Bring your spouse or friends. Come and have some fun.

First Coast Fly Fishers

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