

Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

Caddis And The Art of Survival

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by Jeff Currier



the retail hell of a busy midseason fly shop.

For me the backcountry means peace, solitude, relaxation and a chance to unwind. Pleasant company and good weather are plusses, but throw in water and a few rising trout within range of a cozy campsite and you have paradise. Reaching such a paradise can become a desperate journey if you're escaping from

So goes my tale of one such journey.

It was a week where I must have solved a thousand dilemmas for a thousand fisherman, from nymphing maniacs to dry-fly purists. Voices from that workweek behind the Jackson Hole fly shop counter echoed endlessly in my mind as I walked out the back door, "Buddy, what flies are working on the Snake?" "Sir, do you work here?" "Hey pal, grab a map and show me your favorite hole." "What's the limit?" "Do you fish?"

"Do I fish!" I muttered angrily to myself as I plopped into the bucket seat of my old Dodge. "And if you kill one of my fish, I'll, I'll..."

About to burst, I struggled to control myself, took a deep breath and focused on my weekend, and my plans with my wife Yvonne. A backcountry campsite in the second meadow of my favorite river in Yellowstone, hiking, fishing, camping, a romantic fire-light

dinner with a bottle of wine. It was more than just a release from the workweek, it was the key to my sanity.

We loaded the car and made a quick grocery stop to splurge on two mammoth steaks and a bottle of Chardonnay - the trip was taking shape, the vision of such a dinner soothed my nerves. We drove to the trailhead and slept under the dim glow of the Milky Way.

Before the sun had time to rise we had shaken the frost from our sleeping bags and were on the trail.

We arrived at our assigned camp during mid afternoon, on the way enlightening several cutthroats to the fact that some brown drakes sting like bees. To our

disappointment our site was bleak



compared to others we'd passed nearby. Knowing we couldn't just switch, we chose not to set up camp and decided that if at 5 pm one of the others remained vacant we'd move in. On the surface a logical plan, but festering underneath was the unreasonable thought that the chaos of the past workweek was invading the backcountry, that I just wasn't able to get away from it all and relax.

One camp remained vacant when we returned from fishing that evening; we quickly moved in. Anxious to feast, Yvonne prepared dinner while I set up the tent.

"Jeff, where did you pack the steaks?" Yvonne asked.

I hadn't. I thought she had grabbed them. And then the feelings of chaos came again. It started as hunger, then the brief irrational fear that a large cooking utensil in Yvonne's hand was about to fly my way, and finally an overwhelming feeling of frustration. This was supposed to be such a great escape from all the difficulties of the last week.

"And the wine?" Yvonne asked.

"With the steaks, in the car" I replied, disgusted with myself. At least the wine would have mellowed the troubled plan I started to concoct in my head.

But it seemed there was only one solution: kill and eat a trout. Never mind that it was a sacred place to me, and many other fly fishermen. Never mind that to kill a fish here could be a fly fishing jinx for life! I grabbed my rod and headed for the river. In the first pool I arrived at several trout snatched fluttering caddis from the surface.

Minutes later two were humanely put to rest.

The trout proved delicious, and although my turmoil over the day's and week's events finally slackened, deep inside I knew I had defied the Holy Grail of fly fishing. As remorse kicked in, voices approached from the dark, and our borrowed campsite's true owners showed up. To my disbelief they were customers whom I'd sold flies to the very day before at the shop.

"Hey buddy, this is our spot. Wait. Don't I know you?" one asked shining a flashlight in my eyes.

Before I could say no and hope they wouldn't pursue the matter further another exclaimed, "Yeah he's the guy that sold us the flies that saved our day! Sit down son, we owe you a beer!"

The visiting anglers were part of a horse pack trip and had fished their way to camp. It turned out that only the flies they had bought at the last minute would hook fish, but they hooked plenty, and made for the most memorable fishing day of their lives, all on a general collection of flies that I had carefully selected for them.

Yvonne and I sat, listened and sipped beer from frosty cans while the three men rambled excitedly about their great day of fishing.

"Do you realize how happy these guys are because they caught fish thanks to the flies you sold them?" Yvonne whispered to me.

In my mellowed state, the irony wasn't lost on me. Later, lying back at our original campsite in our tent, I couldn't help but consider the fallout of the source of our evening's meal, and hope that my fishing life wouldn't be jinxed for too long.