

Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

Going Christmas shopping 365 days a year

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By Paul Bruun

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Clever and functional items spotted throughout the year become Christmas column candidates. Cramming them all into even an expanded space is challenging. Products that I believe gift shoppers will consider as a special piece of gear are emphasized.

This 2006 Christmas collection includes clothing, accessories, sunglasses, fishing and shooting items, books, knives and flashlights.

Improvements to modern outdoor gear gallop ahead via the utilization of technology and thoughtful design. The polarized sunglass market benefits in these areas with Smith/Action Optics, Costa Del Mar and Maui Jim remarkably enhancing the field of vision for sportsmen.

A majority of quality sunglasses are purchased because wearers like “the look.” More practical reasons to consider are fit, weight, versatility and, in my case, prescription capability. To this end a pair of Maui Jim frames with HCL Bronze progressive lenses have performed excellently for two years of hard use in a variety of fishing situations.

Although this company is dramatically promoting a new super lightweight system loaded with a clearer than clear “Maui Evolution” lens, when Dr. Ramsay suggests my new prescription, I’ll stay with the Kahuna, a mild wraparound metal frame and the all-weather bronze tint. Prescription progressive lenses are expensive, so it is worthwhile to

attempt squeezing two or three seasons from a pair as I'm currently trying to do.

Ono's Polarized Performance "Readers" I spotted in Shades of Jackson Hole on Town Square offer an array of stylish outdoor eyewear with subtle lower-lens magnification from 1.25 to 2.25. This is a practical solution for those needing a boost in knot tying and fly threading but not an overall prescription lens.

The performance fly rod world continues sliding toward multi-piece travel models with the venerable two-piece system slipping into extinction. Industry leader Sage has canned its popular XP series of quick rods in favor of a brand new Z-Axis Series that designer Jerry Siem says is truly revolutionary. Very fast, very light and very long are my observations on Siem's latest array from the lab at Bainbridge Island. I'm using longer rods (9 1/2-, 10- and even 11-footers) for both river and lake fishing and the Z-Axis performance makes these happen beginning with a 9 1/2-foot 4 weight and offering 5 through 8 weights in 9 1/2-, 10- and 11-foot lengths.

New saltwater rods arrive

Scott Rods has rolled out a new X25 Series of saltwater 9-footers for the new season. Scott's annual reintroduction of a Classics Series (available in 2007 only), such as its ARC 9 1/2- and 10-foot steelhead rods is unique, as is the Concepts collection with specialized sticks for kayakers, steelheaders, shooting head artists and even something called an Instructor's Special. Jim Bartschi and his crew down in Telluride never lack new ideas.

G. Loomis continues to expand its strong Cross Current line of mainly saltwater rods and offers a very strong one-piece (8-foot, 10-inch) series in weights 8 through 12. Imagine how relaxed fishing could be with no ferrules to worry about. Wish the Loomis designers up in Woodland, Wash., would make one-piece 5, 6 and 7 weights for trout guides. Cross Current 9-foot, 9-inch models in 8-, 9- and 10-weight, three-piece travel rods are designed for salmon and steelhead but would be useful in saltwater for flats anglers.

Considering that the roots of three of the standout fishing industry clothing companies,

Simms, Patagonia and now Cloudveil are in Jackson Hole and readers probably don't need this columnist to tell them about the latest from these innovators.

During the Fly Tackle Dealer show I visited the elaborate Simms booth and was stunned when marketing manager Whitney McDowell plunked the latest dealer workbook into my hands! The phone-book-size binder included waders, footwear, vests, outerwear, layering, clothing, luggage and accessories – a mighty long way from the prewader days when John Simms and John Krisik were snipping neoprene to make reel covers, Gravel Guards and Wrist-Loks here in Jackson.

Whitney guided me through the booth to see the latest G-4 Guide stocking foot waders (don't ask the price right away), new Keen River and Deck Sandals, Dry Creek Boat Bags and various vests and jackets.

Two things stand out about Simms in my mind. The first is that XXL is offered in most of the sized clothing products. Second is the "Custom Shop," where special fit waders and insulated boots with a variety of soles are available.

It doesn't always pay to wait

This summer Cloudveil fishing gear exploded into shops throughout town. I bought a snazzy long-sleeve Cool Shirt but sadly never learned to manage the zipper pockets well. Reports from anglers wearing the new waders and boots were that fit was excellent and comfortable. Too late in the season I attempted to purchase XL pairs of the new Two Trigger (partially fingerless) and Cold Cast (full coverage) gloves that I'd seen some clients wearing, but these products were long gone. My mistake in waiting.

Patagonia has long owned the long underwear market, being the first to branch into different weights for various outdoor activities. The ever-popular Capilene, from Silkweight to Expedition has been redesigned and falls into Capilene 1 through 4. Brand new is a Merino-inspired Wool 2 through 4, which covers a broad range of exertion levels and feels very nice next to the skin. Patagonia has thoughtfully added a zipper to its fleece M's El Cap Pants to indulge aging wearers.

Perhaps quality saltwater fishing pliers appear as overkill to most Rocky Mountain anglers. However, when it comes to wrestling with a large-size hook buried in a toothy jaw or more seriously imbedded in you or a partner, size and cost are not an object. Reliability and function are more important. Both Colorado suppliers, Ross Reels of Montrose and Fishpond USA of Silverthorne have introduced heavy duty models I observed at Jack Dennis Outdoors.

Ross Pescador 6 (\$139.95) is smaller than the beefier 7.5 (\$159.95), which would be my choice due to hand size and leverage. Fishpond's brightly anodized Barracuda Pliers appear tough and durable at \$139.95. Use the safety clip! You will cry if either type drops unceremoniously into the ocean as I experienced recently.

For the second time, Ross has redesigned its major saltwater big- game fly reel, which is now called the Momentum (sizes 4-6), and features an interesting carbon fiber drag washer system. The Cimarron Large Arbor (CLA) by Ross is an excellent fly reel value and still made in the U.S.

How about a fly suitcase?

In my downtown gift explorations, I just missed Casper-based Matt Cassel, the genial owner of Cliff Outdoors, who had just visited the Jack Dennis fishing department to drop off a load of nifty new boxes. It wasn't that long ago that Matt began business with a cute "Day's Worth" fly box designed for a shirt pocket. But Matt soon realized that building small, efficient fly boxes for those of us who need a drift boat or pickup truck to carry our favorites was illogical. His handsome Bugger Barn was an instant smash hit in the tackle stores and along rivers everywhere. Now he's hit it out of the park with a dandy new monster fly suitcase called the Bugger Beast Jr. (\$39.95) and the enormous Bugger Beast (\$44.95).

JD Fishing department honch Jeff Currier, himself becoming a Human Highlight via his books, snazzy trout- and game-fish-adorned coffee cups and beer steins and lately new color trout prints, added a handsome trout sketch to several friends' Bugger Beast Jr. boxes. "I'm charging \$25 for a drawing of a brown or cutthroat trout and put it into a kitty for lunch for our crew," Jeff noted as I asked him to do one for a photograph.

Spying one of Steve Shibuya's perfectly formed king-size wooden S2 Fly Closet boxes, I asked Jeff if he'd thought of sketching one of those. "I better keep some sandpaper handy for working on Steve's box. That might make me nervous!"

Fly tying genius Scott Sanchez has created a unique collection of crazy Christmas decoration flies that are fantastic and just what I'd expect from his brilliant mind.

Jim Vail at JD's showed me a new breed of powerful and compact flashlights that is bewildering. To look like a CSI operative use a Surefire super blinding lithium Kroma (\$350) complete with three different light colors. The G-2 Nitrolon (\$35) in one color is fine but not nearly as neat as the Aviator (\$189) with two colors (red or green).

Petzl introduced my all-time favorite Zipka mini-LED headlamp about three years ago. John Slaughter at Teton Mountaineering was just loading wall pegs with Petzl's latest offerings, the Zipka Plus (4 LED-\$37.95; 3 LED-\$29.95) and the adorable little Petzl E+ Lite (\$29.95 with endless watch battery and cute case). These lights are fantastic.

Don Gaitan is always a great bet for interesting guns he collects at his Pawn and Sporting Goods location. In addition to a new 28-inch barrel Vulcan .50 BMG long-range rifle, Don collected a classic Winchester 1890 .22 Long pump rifle with an octagon barrel and an immaculate 1934 Colt Woodsman .22 as well as a discontinued S&W Model 41 .22 semi-auto target pistol

Publisher Jim Pruett of Boulder recently released a 20th Anniversary edition of John Gierach's Trout Bum. Howell Raines (Fly Fishing Through The Midlife Crisis) is back with a new yarn titled The One That Got Away.

Paul Bruun writes weekly on his adventures and misadventures in the great outdoors.