

Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

June 23, 2006

Fishing in the land of the pyramids

By WILLY ZIMMER

Star-Tribune staff writer

Serious fly anglers are always looking for new challenges. That's why Jeff Currier jumped at the chance to fish Africa's greatest river, and can't wait to go back again.



Stories about adventure fishing in exotic places are becoming commonplace as anglers successfully scour the globe for new opportunities. The problem is, once a place is discovered, it's likely to get pretty crowded and quickly becomes less exotic.

It's understandable then that Currier, who manages the fly shop for Jack Dennis Sports in Jackson, immediately became interested when Chris Bailey of The Sportsman Channel's "Reel Outdoors" called and asked if he knew "anything about Nile perch?"

Currier, who is the only American to medal at the World Fly-Fishing Championships (he took the bronze in 2003), knew Nile perch are voracious feeders and can grow to incredible sizes. Having never fished the species, when Bailey asked if he'd like to catch perch for a segment of his show, the answer was an emphatic "Yes!"

"He said he was going to try to work out a way to do a show up there," Currier said, "and he called me out of the blue in April and said 'If you can leave in three weeks to go to Egypt, we're going.' I said 'I'll find a way.'"

The result was a fishing trip Currier described as "untapped fishing." He and Bailey fished for the native perch on Lake Nasser, the 140-mile long lake created when Egypt built the Aswan Dam. Nile perch can grow to over 100 pounds, which meant the little ones he caught in abundance weighed 4 to 8 pounds. His biggest catch on a fly was a 40-pounder from shore.

Currier compared the experience to fly-fishing smallmouth bass, but "smallies that get up to infinite size. Nobody else in your way, and every time you threw to a rock you didn't know what was going to come out of there."

Currier said he basically used a tarpon set-up, with a 20-pound class tippet and a shock tip of 60-80 pounds to handle the "super-sharp gill plates" of the perch. He kept the leader short because "these guys aren't afraid of anything."

A sinking line was called for most of the time. The fish like to hang out 10 feet or deeper. And he needed his biggest rods -- "9-weight, 10-weight stuff. There's definitely a lot of fish in that lake that would require at least a 12-weight."

"I brought a lot of my tarpon flies and then some big concoctions I tied up. Basic minnow imitations on 3-ought to 5-ought hooks. Dark-backed type stuff with a light bottom, and they worked. They weren't super selective," Currier said.

You have to love fish that aren't picky.

If you would like to see how it's done in Egypt, Currier said Bailey's show will air the segment sometime this winter. The Sportsman Channel (www.thesportsmanchannel.com) is available through satellite subscription.

Did the terrorist bombing that injured Casper's Bruce Lamberson, Cindy Parrish and family members give pause for thought? Currier said the Aswan trip was scheduled to begin just a week after the April 24 tragedy, and the organizer indeed tried to cancel.

But Currier's fished in "uncomfortable zones" before, and he and Bailey agreed this was a chance worth taking.

The Egyptian people, it turns out, aren't terrorists in the making.

"I thought being American there would be some hostility there, but they are some of the nicest people I've ever run into," he said. "It was so cool walking around with a fishing guide that wears the dress Muslims typically use. You're throwing streamers off the front, and he's in the back of the boat praying.

"You'd think they'd be different people, but they're just like us when you get them on the water. Fishermen are all the same."

Assistant features editor Willy Zimmer can be reached at (307) 266-0524 or William.Zimmer@casperstartribune.net.