**IT’S NOT ABOUT THE FLY – Tim Rolston**

**A mostly imaginary scenario on a trout stream.**

There are a few trout rising here and there on the crystal clear stream, the angler, a seasoned veteran carefully looks for signs of fish, ignoring the one rising in the distance for the moment. He knows that there is a good chance that there will be another trout close at hand and that an injudicious step will probably spook the unseen quarry and more than likely upset the riser as well.

He cleans is polarized glasses and scans the pockets in front of him, taking special care to look right at the back where the fish frequently hold and are as frequently spooked by an incautious fisherman. A shadow gradually turns into a feeding fish as he focuses carefully. The trout is in a tricky spot, the currents are complex and drag, on this stream a dead giveaway to the trout, has to be avoided. He could make a reach mend but that is risky and if he can edge a little closer and close down the angle he will make the cast much more easily.

He has taken some trouble in preparing for his outing, his clothing is dull and muted and his shirt is actually camouflage just to be on the safe side. He has matted down the blank of his rod to avoid unnecessary rod flash and has removed his watch. His fishing reel is matt black, the shiny silver ones look nice in the shop but pragmatism suggests the dull tackle will catch more fish. Anything that might glint is hidden inside his vest and he moves cautiously so as not to bang the rocks together as he wades.

The fish have been tricky, catch and release has educated them and he knows that he probably won’t have a second chance. The leader has been lengthened to something in the region of eighteen feet, and fined down to 7X in the hope of hiding the presentation and giving a more natural float to the fly.

He selects a fly from his box and carefully sharpens it with a diamond dust hook hone, no matter what it says on the packet about chemical sharpening. Our angler knows that there is no point in going to all this trouble to fish with a blunt hook; he tests it on his finger before he is satisfied. Then he adds a hint of fly floatant paste, he doesn’t like the sprays as they tend to spread over the rest of the leader and make the tippet float. He carefully degreases the tippet with another paste, at pains to use different fingers and avoid adding floatant where it isn’t wanted. The leader itself is monofilament, braided leaders in these situations, the angler knows, spray water and scare fish and fluorocarbon, although he uses that in the dams, isn’t as flexible as the mono and won’t give quite such good presentation.

He has glued the butt of the leader into the tip of the fly line, knots at this junction will catch in the rod rings, making casting tricky and possibly leading to the loss of a fish should the joint catch up at a critical point during the fight.

In fact our angler doesn’t like knots much at all, so he has used a tapered leader for the first nine feet and then added sections of various diameters to achieve the final result. He has tested it and refined it based on the flies he is using and the wind conditions of the day and is satisfied that it is turning over well, giving both accuracy and slack at the same time. He doesn’t want to make a mistake; this is going to be a one cast shot before the fish spooks. Finally he is ready, pulling line off the reel and estimating the distance the angler makes a trial cast upstream and away from the fish, insuring that he can see the tiny fly and that he has got the distance correct. Finally he makes his cast, landing the fly just a foot or two in front of the fish and directly in the current lane in which the trout is feeding. He mends the line slightly where it is going a little faster under his rod tip and waits.

He can see that the fish has spotted the pattern, its demeanor in the water has changed, looking more focused than a moment previously and tipping its fins the trout rises in the water to intercept the fly. Not so much a take, more allowing the pattern to drift straight down its throat such was the accuracy of the cast. A pause and the angler strikes, immediately giving line to protect the fine tippet and allowing the soft actioned rod to absorb the shock as the startled fish takes off. A brisk battle and the trout is netted and released, it is the twentieth one for the morning and that probably took not a lot more than fifty casts to achieve.

As he puts the fish back into the water a voice from the bushes, an angler has been watching from a distance, “what fly are you using?” he asks..

It is the perennial call of the uninitiated, a question of almost hallowed import and so far from the mark as to make it laughable. Although perhaps the fly made a difference it isn’t the main reason for our angler’s success. Most fly fishermen put far too much stock on the pattern and that in itself leads them to ignore all the other little refinements that go into good fishing and success on the water. Anglers like Pascal Cognard who has individually won numerous World Fly Fishing Championships on various continents isn’t successful because each time he ventures out he has a different fly to everyone else. It is technique and preparation that produce the results and whilst a selection of flies may well add to the confidence of the fisherman and provide options on difficult days, the fly box is only one of many variables which need to be mastered for success. If you are battling next time you are out on the water, give a thought to all those other things before you start changing flies, it will probably be worth the effort.