

Southern Culture

on the fly

TK

MIX TAPE 2016

N.R. | DOLBY | IN OUT

choko 3 way, warm water conspiracies, monsters under my bed, whiskey stones, sheepy, pres-
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Photo: Steve Seiberg

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I have set goals for myself since I was a little kid when I had multiple coaches, teachers, and other such authority figures beat it into my head that the only way to be anything in life was to be goal-oriented. Lucky for me, fly fisherman fell right into that "anything" category. I think we instinctively seek structure in our lives, some lofty finish line to gravitate toward and eventually cross in order to prove to ourselves that we accomplished something:

"I will make a ton of money."

"I will find out what that rash is."

"I will work out three times a week"

"I will drink less than a case... every other week."

We do the same thing in fly fishing. We associate success with specificity:

"I will catch a brown over 24 this winter"

"I will catch a tarpon my next trip"

"I will move a musky (or whatever yardstick of success is popular amongst the masochists these days)."

I no longer live in this type of box. I am outside the box, metaphysically free-balling it and loving every minute. I used to be just like you guys, a slave to a ruler in my head,

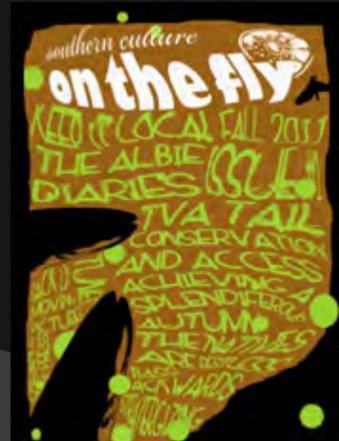
or even worse, shackled by indentured servitude to a fish. No more. Like the late '90s all-women R&B quartet En Vogue said way back in the day, "free your mind, and the rest will follow." Preach it sisters.

My list of goals for this season is pretty succinct. Be on the water. It's going to work out well for my fragile ego. Every time I get on the water, I've already accomplished my goal. I shoot for the moon. The stars are way too far away.

I think my chances of catching fish, catching big fish, and all the rest of the imaginary lines I used to impose on myself, are just as good now as they were when those were my goals. I do know for a fact that if I fail in meeting my goal of being on the water, the rest of that stuff will never happen anyway.

Like I said we do need goals -- I think we all just might have lost sight of what the goal should be in fly fishing. Just being on the water kicks ass. All the rest of that stuff also kicks ass. But the latter ass still gets kicked without the former ass ever seeing a foot.

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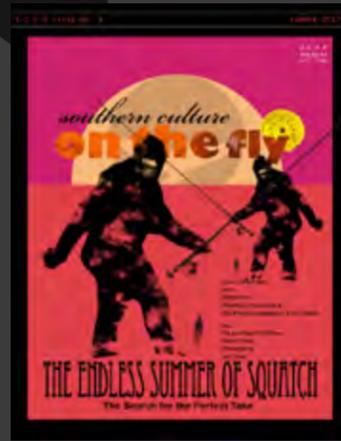
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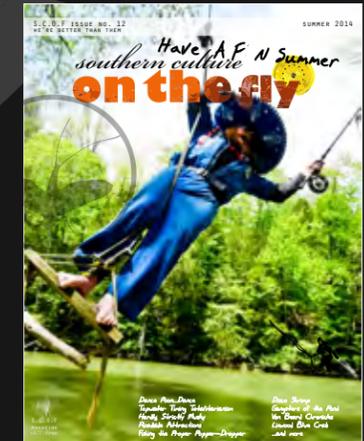
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Haiku

with Will Abbott

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My head hurts.

This time of year the abacus upstairs is clacking loudly. A lot of calculations to make, trips to re-plan, piscatorial fornication to wait out, and Spanish weather patterns to take into consideration. Spring with all its variables, quirks, and downright unpredictability will poop on your chest just to humiliate you, and hours later lift you up on its shoulders and carry you to the best time on the water you've ever experienced. Spring is a fine line that is constantly being redrawn.



I recently found myself wandering the back roads of southwest Virginia looking for a hot day with a warm water companion. Musky were still spawning, smallmouth were wherever they go after a bad cold snap, and the stripers were just starting to run up the river to do the nasty. That's three species that were in different stages of behavior controlled by weather, water temperature, and the goat that was slaughtered in their honor the night before. While all of those particular species were acting based on different reasons, their behaviors did commonly piss us off. A male musky that follows three times out of 10 on the strip only to lay up two feet off the boat and give me what can only be described as stink-eye. Smallmouth that never showed themselves in gin-clear water, not even to scurry away spooked when the boat rolled over them. Stripers that were in onesies and twosies, but never the tensies and fiftensies one comes to expect when fishing the river that time of year. They were late.







Fish were caught, but the fish were far outnumbered by hypotheses as to what had happened to our best laid plans. All the usual players were in attendance: weather, moon phase, and oddly, the fullness of the fishies' gullets. In the end, nothing was proven, but we were pretty sure that at least one of the hundreds of theories we came up with in those two days was the culprit. I'm sure this great meeting of the minds is typical all over the South in boats and banks from Florida to Texas, and I am also sure that none of those theories ever get proven. It's the one place and the one time of year that coming up with ideas is almost as satisfying as coming up with an answer.





Fortunately for the spring conspiracy theorist, spring in the South is not a season of answers. Even when the stars and the moon are in their fifth rotation around Venus and you have that day of spring fishing you dreamt of all winter, the success is just as much a mystery as all those days short on fish and long on theories. Every fish caught is one step closer to having absolutely no idea what is going on. All you can do most of the spring is hope to be in the right place at the right time. Outside of that bring some theories to the table...nothing is too out there.



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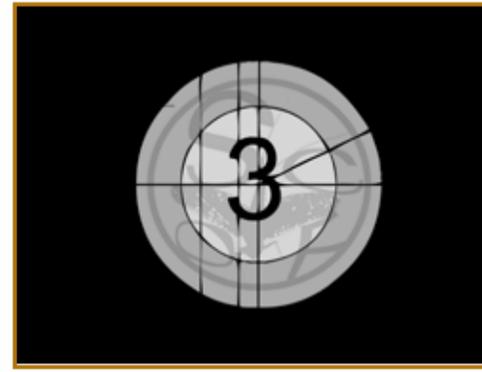
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The Choctaw Three Way

Stories by:
Allen Gillespie
Scott Davis
Louis Gaudet

Photos: Steve Seinberg

Departing Chatham Bend

Allien Gillespie

Arrival: After a quick cattle car flight down to Orlando and a meaningless drive to Melbourne, I materialize in the humid Florida air sometime after midnight. We discuss the week's activities; the mood is as light as the air is thick. As I tuck myself in with whatever remnants of whiskey I can find above the stove, Steve shouts a reminder to shut the door to the night air as the peacocks will invite themselves into my room with the morning light.

Day 1: First light and we are up hooking the skiff to the truck headed over the causeway to meet Rick at Harry Goode's before heading south through the chaos that is South Florida. After some time on the turnpike, a miscue lands us at the Whole Foods in suburban Coral Springs where old Jewish women ferry their older Jewish mothers across a vast parking lot for a bite to eat before a quick sweep of the Stein Mart and the afternoon's nap. Somehow I'm blamed for our misadventure, my alien body struggling to get into

the regular grid pattern of this completely manufactured world. The traffic and the boat conspire to whip Steve into a frenzy as he hunts for the last gas before we brave the 70-odd miles across the tip of the state. As we cross Alligator Alley, pastel Porsches and "blu" Maseratis whip past us in a race to poor taste.

Some four hours later and we arrive at the end of the Earth. On a centuries-old shell midden sits Chokoloskee, enveloped by the only thing left that is real in the whole state of Florida. Contrary to what others may claim, there are no ghosts in modern Chokoloskee, only lizards from the North who arrive two-by-two in their giant Airstreams pulling bay boats. After finding our bearings, the rental house and the marina, boats are launched and rods are strung. In light of the low tidal situation, we make our way slowly across the bay. I throw gurglers at oyster bars. Red fish oblige, but do not come to hand.

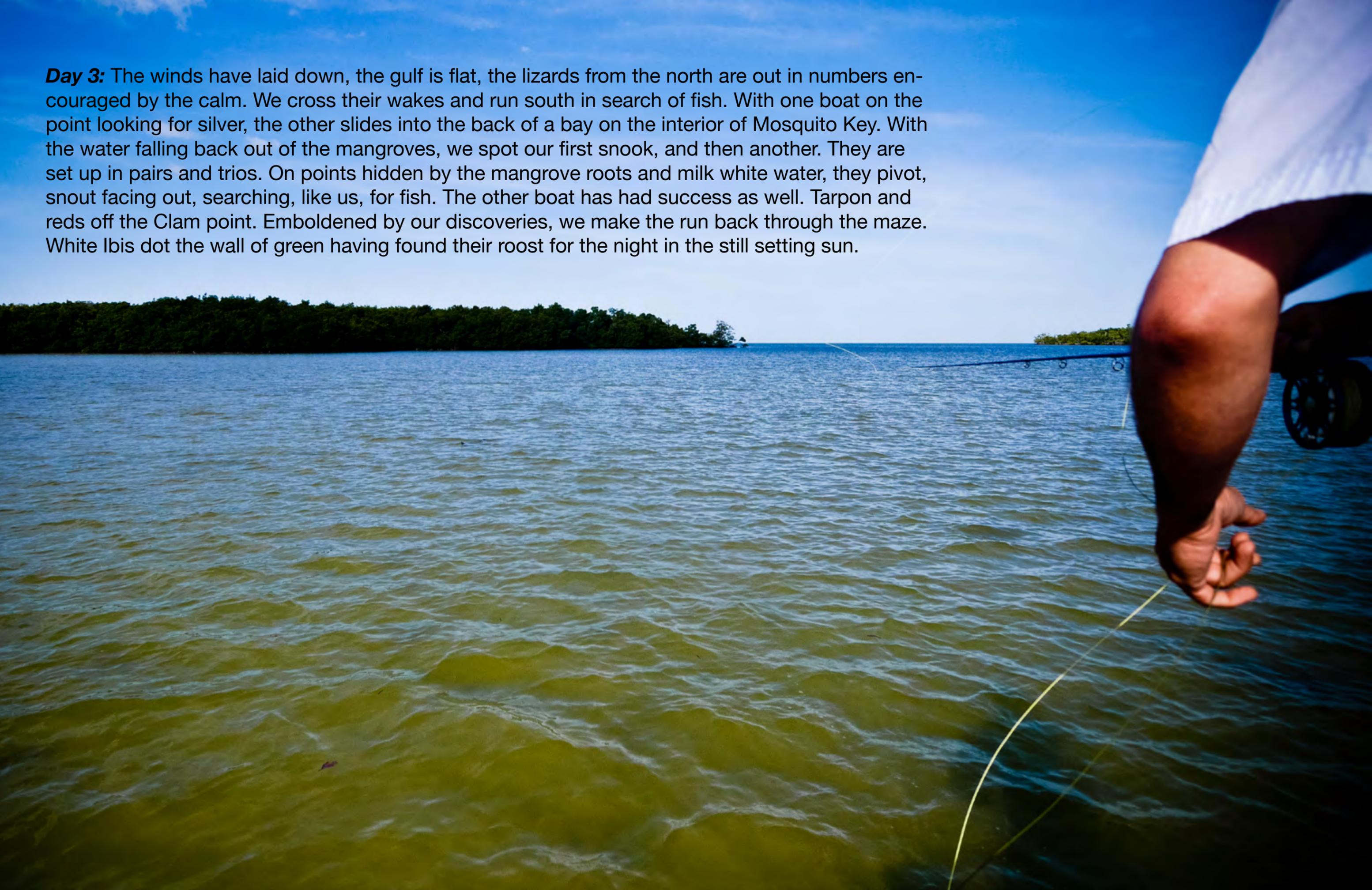




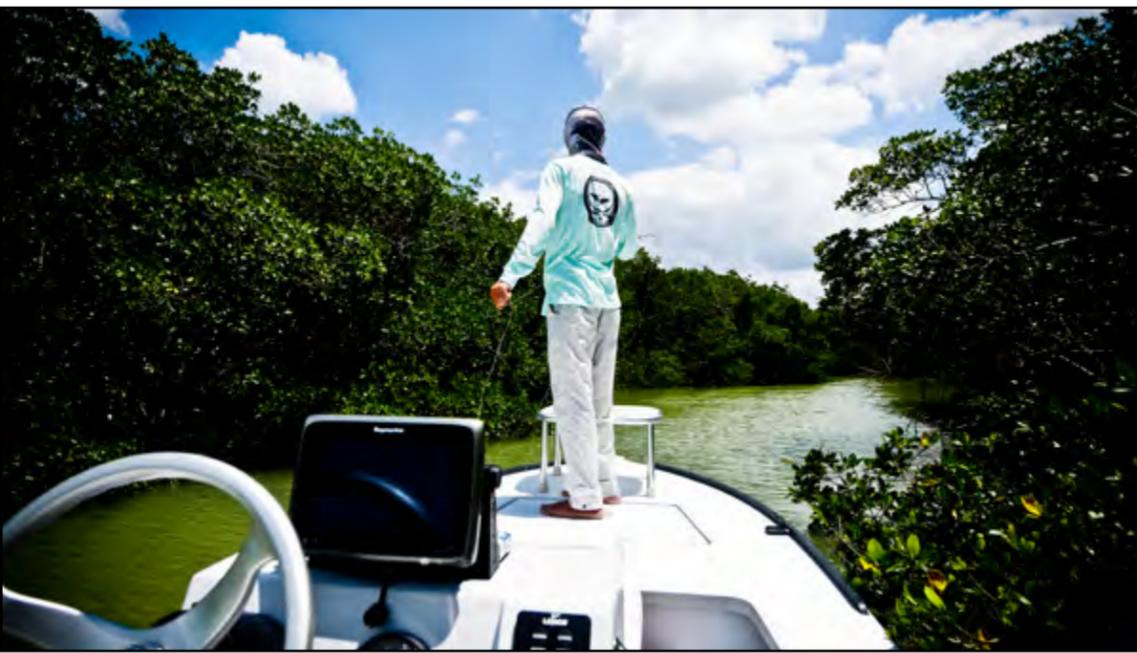
Day 2: The others are up early pouring over charts and maps. I'm less concerned; not having a piece of fiberglass in the mix, I'm happy to be along for the ride. Flats boats are fantastic right up until that moment when they are not. In the early dawn light, up on plane, their hulls chatter rhythmically with the light chop of the protected bay where the winds are still relatively light. Winding our way through a corridor of mangrove and the black water of the backcountry, we find our route through to the gulf, up the Lopez River and back down the Chatham -- a vacuum of time.

The winds are up and the gulf is awash with white-tipped waves. In the lee of Pavilion Key, off her southern point, shadows are spotted swimming precisely where one would expect. Hugging the Key's western shore, protected from the eastern wind, reds and snook patrol the wood, visible only when it's already too late. We seek new water, new keys, on borrowed time. The tides, influenced by a waxing gibbous moon and a strong easterly wind, come four times a day. There is no time to ponder or linger -- in an hour the tide will be moving again.

Day 3: The winds have laid down, the gulf is flat, the lizards from the north are out in numbers encouraged by the calm. We cross their wakes and run south in search of fish. With one boat on the point looking for silver, the other slides into the back of a bay on the interior of Mosquito Key. With the water falling back out of the mangroves, we spot our first snook, and then another. They are set up in pairs and trios. On points hidden by the mangrove roots and milk white water, they pivot, snout facing out, searching, like us, for fish. The other boat has had success as well. Tarpon and reds off the Clam point. Emboldened by our discoveries, we make the run back through the maze. White Ibis dot the wall of green having found their roost for the night in the still setting sun.







Day 4: The winds have returned. Our glory from yesterday slides beneath the waves. Aquatic landmarks from just the day before are nearly unrecognizable. We push back into the southern bay on dead low and to our surprise, a laid up tarpon with its back out of the water explodes off the bow of the boat. The boats split: one poles the mangroves in search of snook, the other poles south and finds a tarpon that refuses the fly. The snook are there, in the back of the mangroves, an unimaginable ecology illustrated only by the sounds of their attacks. The east wind builds. Our bay is unprotected. Searching for the familiar, we return to the lee of Pavilion Key with little to show save for a few snook and salt-encrusted hair. Like the tide, spirits have fallen. In the evening, there is a sickness and packing.



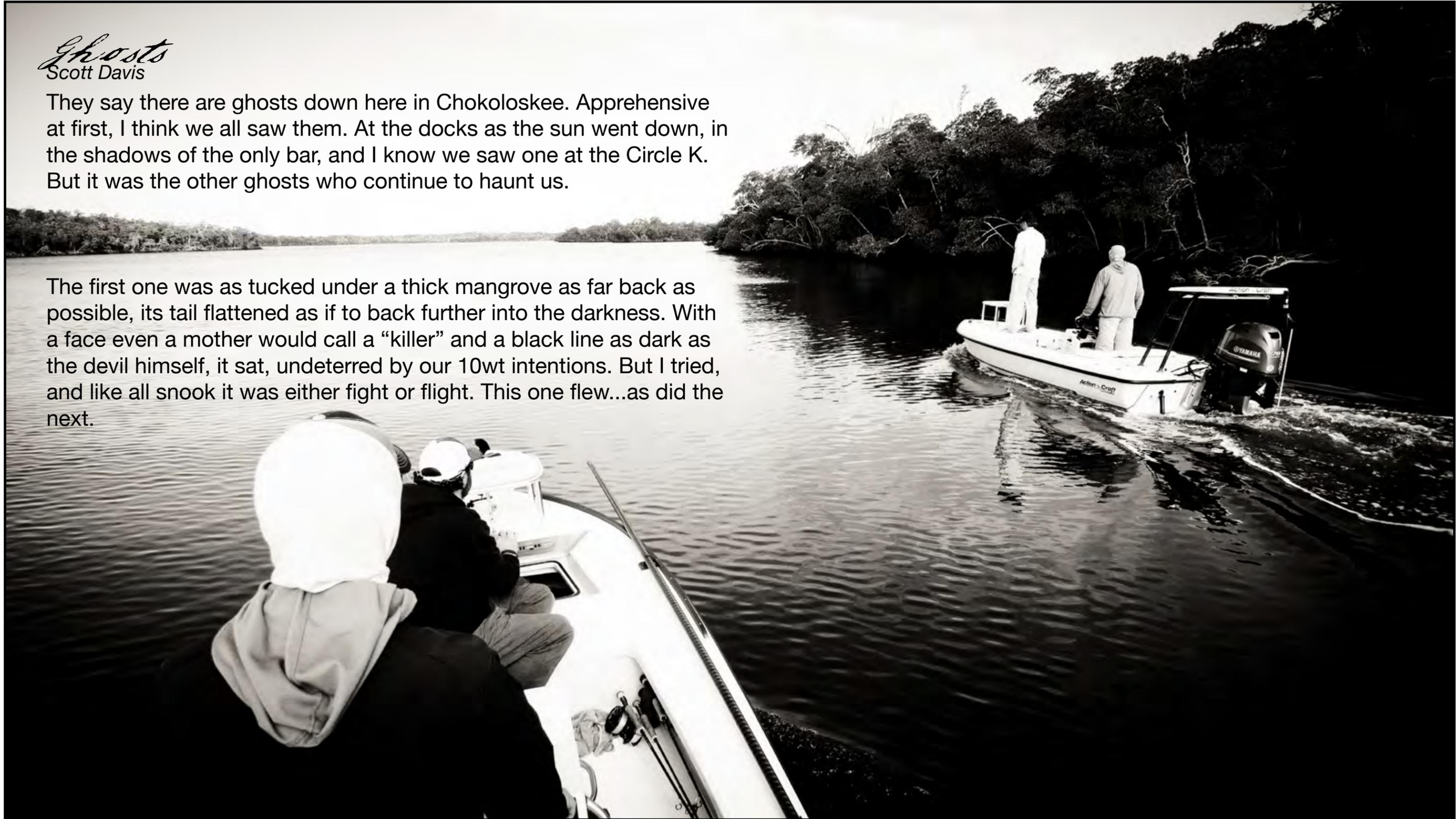


Departures: In the morning there are just two of us left. The others having departed for home. The winds are sustained and persistent; despite them, we make the run to the gulf. There are no other boats out on a day like today. The point where the skiff has become a misery has been achieved. There is no angle we can run to keep the spray off of our faces. There is no loud talk, Mr. Watson's now gone from Chatham Bend, and I have found Rick's sickness somewhere during the night. The desolation of the surroundings has inhabited us, it is time to go.

Ghosts
Scott Davis

They say there are ghosts down here in Chokoloskee. Apprehensive at first, I think we all saw them. At the docks as the sun went down, in the shadows of the only bar, and I know we saw one at the Circle K. But it was the other ghosts who continue to haunt us.

The first one was as tucked under a thick mangrove as far back as possible, its tail flattened as if to back further into the darkness. With a face even a mother would call a “killer” and a black line as dark as the devil himself, it sat, undeterred by our 10wt intentions. But I tried, and like all snook it was either fight or flight. This one flew...as did the next.





It seemed like a sure thing: Bring a SCOF editor, two fly shop owners, and two world class guides, and figure this mythological Mecca for snook and tarpon out on our own. However cocktail napkin war plans, well-packed coolers, and enough gear to stock Rhode Island was just the start of what we needed. Choko is far from easy. Even running a boat the first day was like being dropped on the moon. (Local) knowledge was what we needed so we did what we do and gathered intel. After learning our southern accents weren't southern enough by the town's only bartender, and figuring the way out of the bay from local crabbers over a cold barley pop, we had enough to venture out into the Everglades.

We found the tarpon fairly easy, although I think it's hard to miss 100-pound fish snaking through water one-foot deep. Either they weren't interested in my black and purple fly that sat in my lap during the 10-hour road trip, or that joke about the fish gods being total bitches didn't play well with the lady in silver and we had no hook-ups. I don't think we needed them honestly: sharing a skiff with good friends watching something prehistoric go down was enough...almost enough.

The size of some of the snook in Chokoloskee would make Lefty blush, and the speed in which they attack would send a shockwave through your very being. It's a place and a fish that reward you with well-placed casts, as if to say "if you think you can pull me outta here, then gimme your best shot, chief. I'll eat your silly fly." And they do. It's with that ease and simplicity you become an obsessed snook fisherman -- and you just stepped on the bow.







Death of a Fish Bum

Louis Gaudet

A few months back, Steve and I are bullshitting over a few drinks and we start talking about how we need to take a fishing trip somewhere. After some debate, we settle on Chokoloskee -- a place neither of us had been but both have wanted to fish. As the plan evolves, Steve says he's got a few buddies who will go and that the magazine will pay for a house to rent for the week and he can do a story on it for the next issue. Awesome: free place to stay, have months in advance to tell my wife I'm going as well as my boss, probably the most advanced planning I've ever done for a trip. What could go wrong?

As the months pass, everything is falling into place: boss is good with it, made sure to complete as many things on my honey-do list as I can so the wife will have no qualms with me going. For once in my life I'm doing the responsible adult things when it comes to prepar-

ing for a fishing trip. So Saturday rolls around and we are planning to leave late morning Sunday, and I get a bit of a wild hair and decide to take a ride down to the inlet somewhat near my house and swing a few flies. Fishing was okay, and as I'm leaving heading back north up A1A, my truck dies. It's now 10pm, my phone battery died about an hour ago, and the only two phone numbers I know are my childhood home and my wife's cell. Lucky for me she worked that day and was already fast asleep. I figure, fuck it I'll just walk. It won't be that bad. 4.5 hours and 12 miles later, I finally make it home, call AAA and have my truck brought to my house. The next morning, I call Steve and let him know I'll have to leave later in the day once I get the truck back up and running. Of course I never really get it fixed to the point that I feel safe driving to southwest Florida.



As I sit in my living room drinking and brainstorming on what to do, it finally hits me: I am no longer a fishing bum. I tried to hold onto that lifestyle as long as I could, but I thought to myself, "It's now over." I came to the realization that my truck will not get me there and even if I rent something, I'll come home to a broken truck and no way to work. Five years ago I would have just left that heap of shit on the side of the road and hitchhiked my way to Chokoloskee, figuring out my vehicle situation when I got back. Looking around my living room, the dark reality hit me that I have a mortgage, a wife, I care that my lawn gets mowed, I pay my bills on time, and worry about my credit score. Long gone are the days of living in the back of a Dodge Ram on the river, hatching mayflies in my parent's basement, and spending every waking thought on fish. So to all you fish bums out there, enjoy that life while it lasts, because soon it will all come crashing down around you. Soon responsibility will catch up with you and you will yearn for those days of ramen noodles and sleeping in the bed of a truck.





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Thawing out the Whiskey Stones
By Joshua Parks



It was late when Sean finally pulled into the campground. We'd changed sites at the last moment and hoped our voice-mail made sense.

Jim and I sat next to the fire, sipping beers colder than the weather, staying warm while chili mac simmered in a dutch oven set deep in a bed of red coals when a set of headlights shone around the closest bend in the road.

"Think that's him?"

Jim shrugged and turned back to the fire as the car swerved left and swung back right into the campground. I watched, silently eating a steaming bowl of pasta, as the car paused for a moment at each campsite before moving on. Eventually, we heard a hoarse voice call out over the twinkle of the river.

-Are you my friends?



Sean had repeated that question at every campground in the twenty miles that separated us from cell coverage.

We were camping at the North River Campground on what's become our annual Spring Break trip. To clarify, the camping trip is now annual; the North River was a simple lack of planning. We'd planned on camping at the Holly Flats campground and fishing the more isolated Bald River. We hadn't planned on running into two locked gates and little chance to advertise our change of plans.

Ending up on the North River was simply a portent of things to come.

This was the trip we'd looked forward to as winter began to thaw. An offseason spent whipping up a dozen flies gets old quickly when the beer outpaces the tying, especially for those of us who prefer wet wading. You can fish year-round in the South, but cold rivers feel mighty stingy when your balls feel like whisky stones in a snifter of frosty waders.

Still, we'd managed to go out a number of times that winter, picking up a few fish here and there. Some were even worth a picture or two. But mostly, we sat around our houses bitching about the weather and watching football. An eight-inch mantling of snow covered Chattanooga the previous month, and I sat on my porch watching cars slide down the hilly roads, thinking of wild rainbows slashing eagerly at bushy stimulators as cottontail clouds floated through an azure sky. Toss in a couple naked girls tickling each other in the shallows, and the cliché would be complete.

Jim and I left town an hour before sunrise and planned to lap our limit by noon. We made it to the river just after sunrise and drank coffee with the heater on for an hour, waiting for the morning to warm up. We had the cobalt sky; we could almost taste the slimy kiss of the first fish.

Instead, we spent the day under lead skies, casting to fish sleeping cozily under a blanket of 40-degree water.



Sean rolling in a six-pack deep was the kick in the ass we needed.

His black Jeep crunched as it rolled through the gravel into our campsite and stopped just inside the pale. There was a slight pause and the car rocked for a moment before the door sprung open and snapped back into a muttered shit. Sean stepped out and surveyed the situation. His glasses gleamed like possum eyes in the firelight. Seemingly satisfied, he tossed his duffel bag at our tents and held up a bottle of Gentleman Jack.

“Bottoms up, motherfuckers.”

Sean and I sat up late that night, drinking and trading stories by the campfire. Between two marriages and a baby, we just don't see each other as much as we did in our twenties. Once, we chased a bat out of my living room; now, we see each other when we need help installing a light fixture. We catch up with each other over campfires as words flow like Old Number 7 from a bottle. This is the great mystery of spending a night in the woods: men who would normally sit next to each other in silence for hours will spill their guts next to a campfire. This is therapy for those who think beards and flannel

protect them from anxiety and hurt feelings.

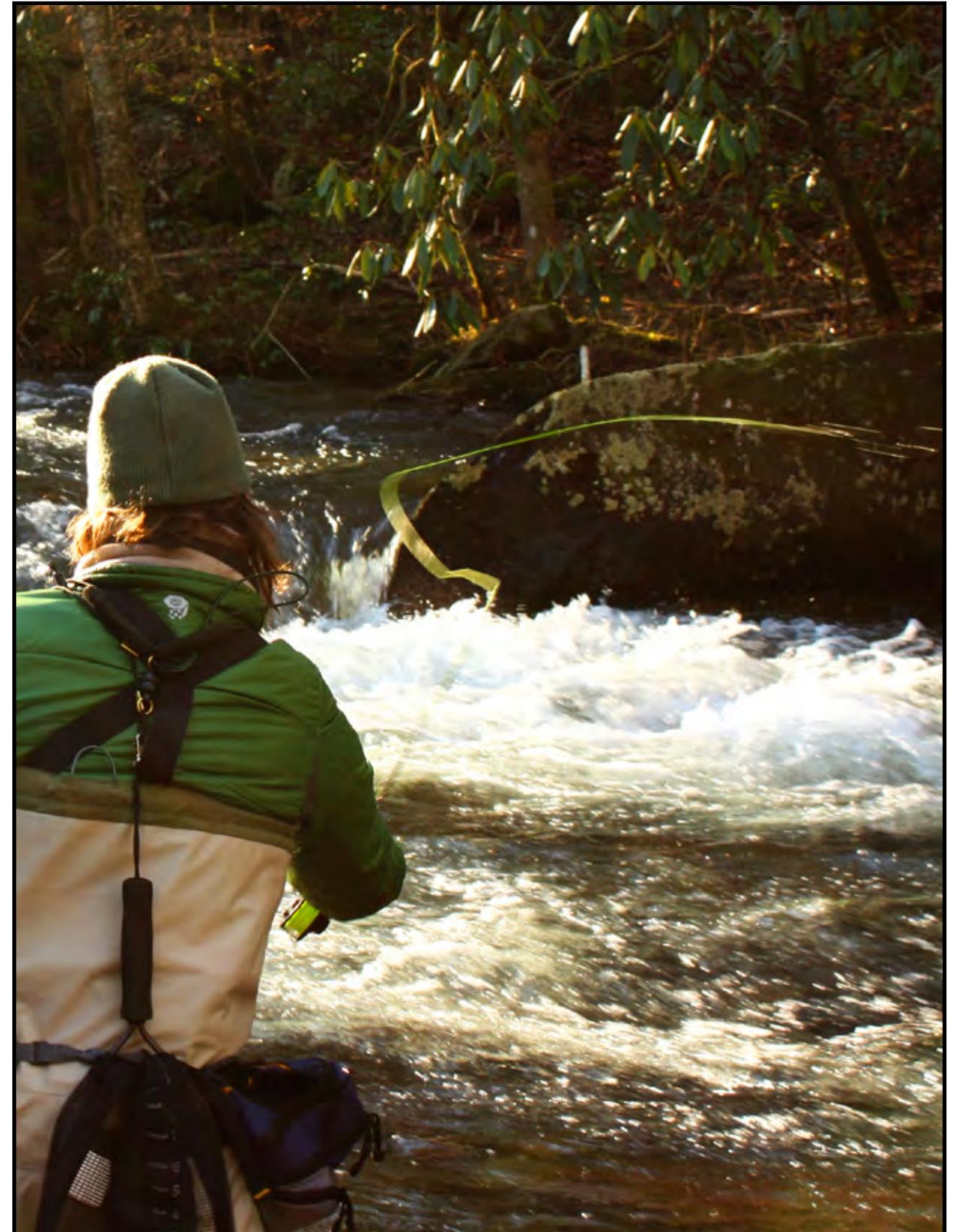
I have no idea what we talked about that night, but the next morning birds sang in the fresh spring sun, and my hangover soared like a buzzard.

The rest of the bottle disappeared between breakfast and our lunchtime hike into the Bald River Gorge. We tucked fly boxes into our shirt pockets and hiked in wearing our waders waist high.

We trekked up the riverside trail and climbed a few hundred feet through a series of switchbacks to the top of small ridge jutting into a rounded belly of river. This ridge is a significant landmark. It separates the barren shelf rock of the lower river from the pocket water of the Gorge. We formed clumps of coarse old man's beard into makeshift coasters and loafed in the sun like cats.

We descended and fished up river through dense stands of rhododendron. Sean slid over the filmy streambed, saving his flies from the perilous plant like a lumber-sexual Don Quixote.

Eventually, he hung up next to some faster water and waded down a steep rock shelf to save a two-dollar hopper-dropper.



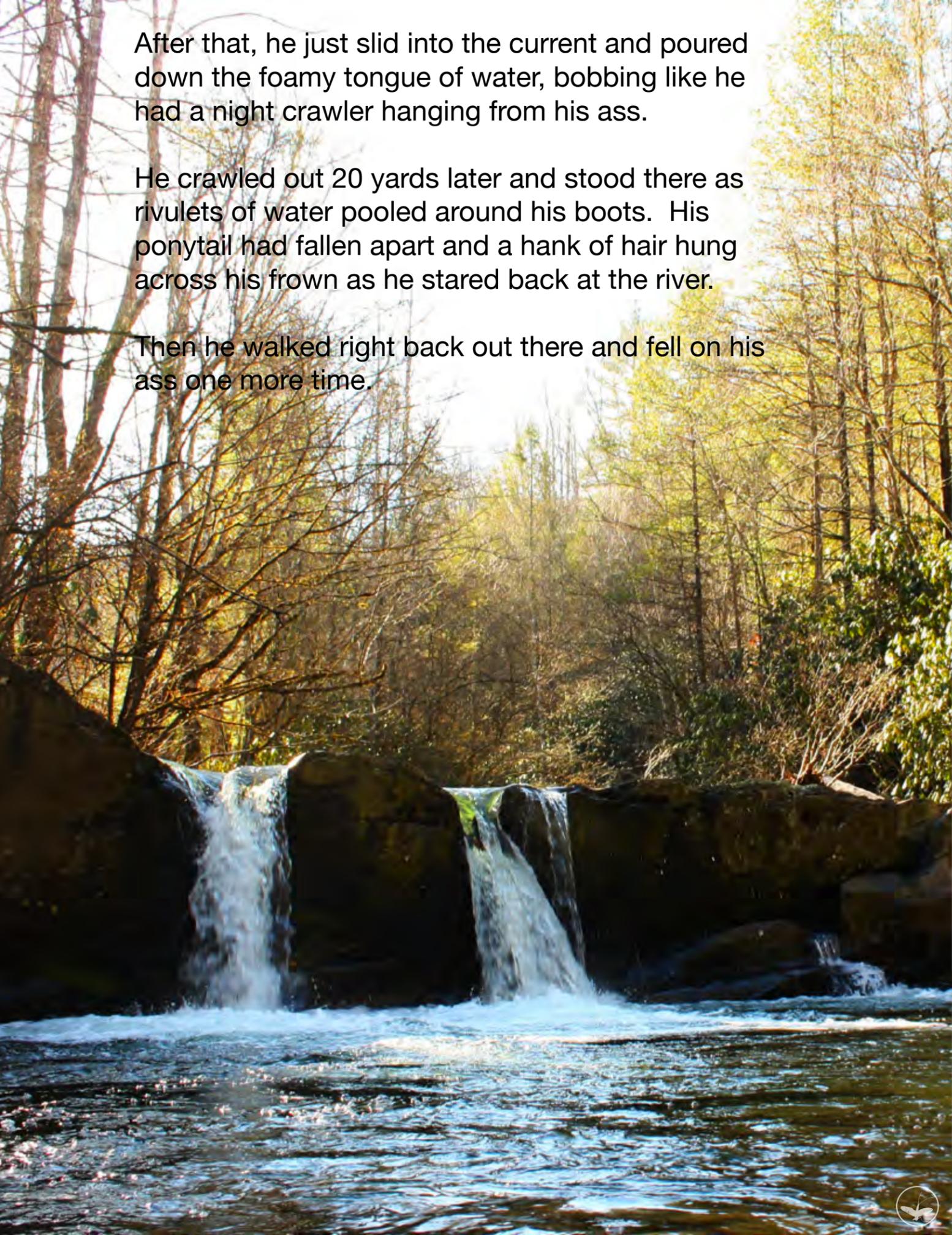
He shuffled onto the shelf. His small steps kept his footing as his studded boots gripped the rock. As he closed in on the current seam separating him from his quarry, he slipped for the first time and grinned back at us through the knots of his matted beard. He turned back to the water and gingerly continued as sweat began to bead on his forehead like nervous dew. The second slip put him on his knees. Water crested his waders, weighing him down as he reached out for his flies and slid and tumbled and hit the water with the grace of a boulder. He turned, eyes wide and gasping, and clawed for dry land. His feet churned in the water like a circus elephant on a bike.



After that, he just slid into the current and poured down the foamy tongue of water, bobbing like he had a night crawler hanging from his ass.

He crawled out 20 yards later and stood there as rivulets of water pooled around his boots. His ponytail had fallen apart and a hank of hair hung across his frown as he stared back at the river.

Then he walked right back out there and fell on his ass one more time.



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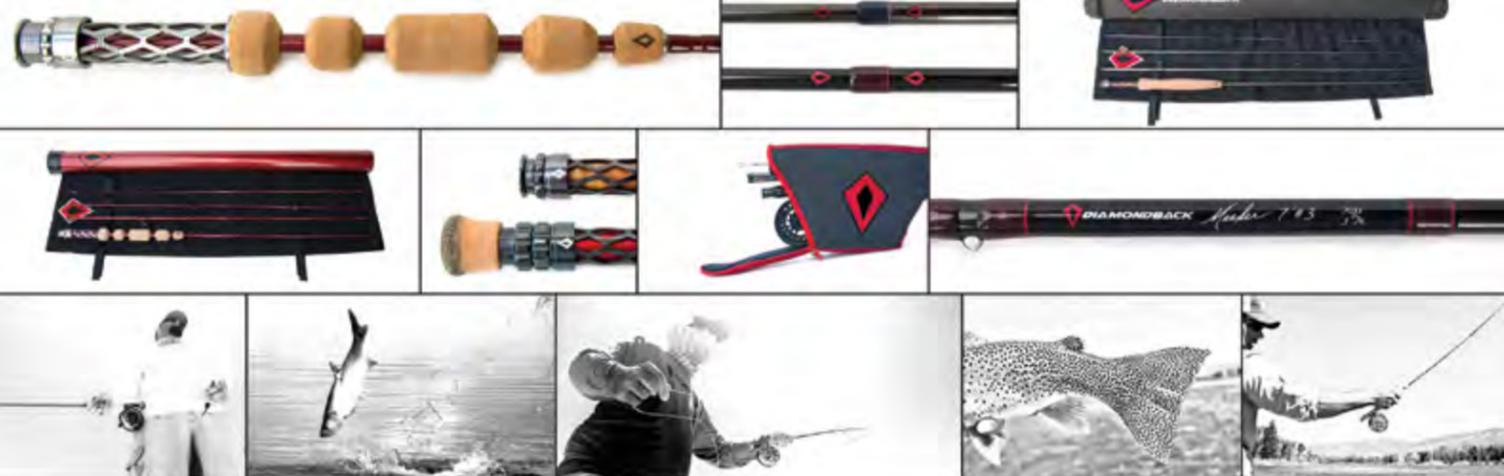
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PRESSURED WATER



If you trout fish in the South, odds are you have spent some time drifting your flies past highly “educated” fish in water as clear as Popcorn’s ‘shine. While the South does have a wide array of excellent trout streams and rivers for us to enjoy, we have far less fish per fisherman than our fellow anglers in the Rockies do. As a result, our fish are often pressured to the point of becoming neurotic. During peak fishing season on the famed South Holston, for example, you may see shell-shocked browns rise to real sulphur duns but reject them if the bugs aren’t fluttering just right. In our technical freestone rivers, such as the Davidson in Pisgah National Forest, you may witness trout literally get out of the way of the techy bwo nymph pattern you caught one of their buddies on the day before.

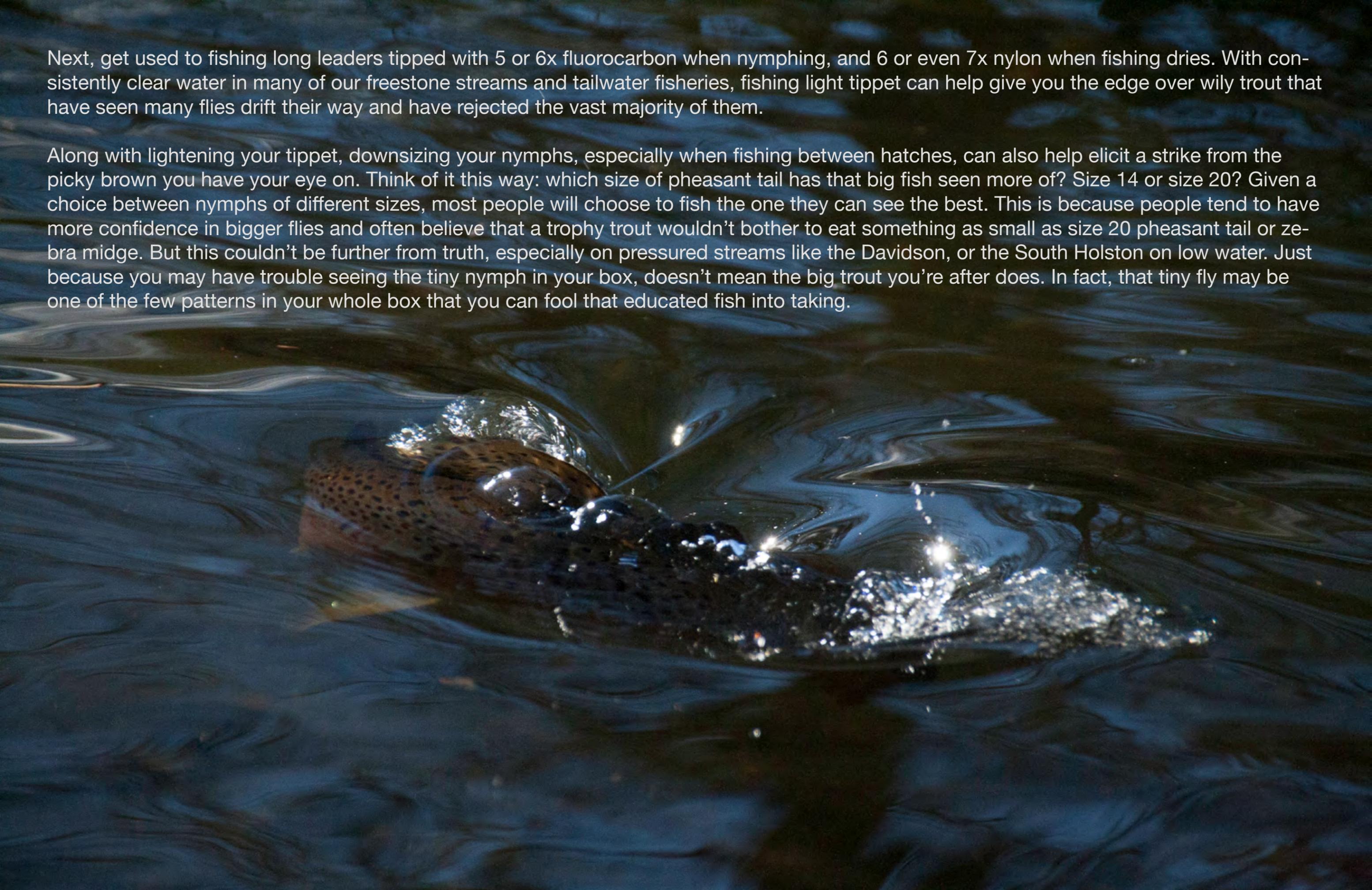


Even the simple-minded DH stockers learn to be wary, though this should come as no surprise considering how many of them are repeatedly caught and released within the first week of their freedom from the hatchery's raceways. Being bombarded by half-inch pink Thingamabobbers, #8 neon squirmy wormies, and sloppy casts contribute to them becoming skittish, as does being constantly spooked out of their runs by careless wading.

As the old adage says, "Ten percent of the fishermen catch 90% of the fish." That certainly holds true on the pressured trout streams of the South. If you're getting into fly fishing around here, there are a few things you can do that will help ensure that you become part of the minority of anglers who routinely reap the rewards of our bountiful creeks and rivers. For starters, lose the bling. In the years I've spent guiding the Davidson and other rivers in the region, I've noticed that gold beadheads and overly flashy flies are often a turn-off for educated fish. I tend to favor more naturalistic and subtle patterns. Instead of using a gold beadhead on your nymphs, try a copper or nickel one, or just tie a thread head and use a split shot to get your flies in the target zone. I'm also a fan of tying with clear beadheads, like those found on some versions of Black Beauty and Rainbow Warrior midges.

Next, get used to fishing long leaders tipped with 5 or 6x fluorocarbon when nymphing, and 6 or even 7x nylon when fishing dries. With consistently clear water in many of our freestone streams and tailwater fisheries, fishing light tippet can help give you the edge over wily trout that have seen many flies drift their way and have rejected the vast majority of them.

Along with lightening your tippet, downsizing your nymphs, especially when fishing between hatches, can also help elicit a strike from the picky brown you have your eye on. Think of it this way: which size of pheasant tail has that big fish seen more of? Size 14 or size 20? Given a choice between nymphs of different sizes, most people will choose to fish the one they can see the best. This is because people tend to have more confidence in bigger flies and often believe that a trophy trout wouldn't bother to eat something as small as size 20 pheasant tail or zebra midge. But this couldn't be further from truth, especially on pressured streams like the Davidson, or the South Holston on low water. Just because you may have trouble seeing the tiny nymph in your box, doesn't mean the big trout you're after does. In fact, that tiny fly may be one of the few patterns in your whole box that you can fool that educated fish into taking.







Lastly, think outside the typical fly box. When you're out on a pressured stream, ask yourself what most people are probably fishing and try something different, especially if there is not an obvious hatch occurring. If you're on a DH stream in the winter, for example, and you think most people have been fishing eggs, worms, and attractor nymphs like Copper Johns, mix it up and try fishing nymphs that are more naturalistic, like a little black stone with a small soft hackle hare's ear as the dropper. This same strategy can certainly prove effective for wild trout as well. Think about what flies the trout have probably been seeing a lot of and then pick a fly that is different enough that it will catch their eye. This is often just a matter of fishing a slightly different color or profile. Instead of fishing a standard zebra midge, for example, try a purple Jujube. Instead of a beaded pheasant tail, try a frenchie with a hotspot. Anyways, you get the idea. Best of luck out there. Cheers.



Nick Roberts lives in Asheville and guides for Davidson River Outfitters. Check him out online: www.dead-drift.com. You can follow his fishing at: [@wnc_flyfishguide](https://www.instagram.com/wnc_flyfishguide)



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OLD HEAVY HANDS

OLD HEAVY HANDS



At some point the fans of true country music had to draw a line in the sand. We could no longer tolerate pop music with a cowboy hat. We needed outlaws, sad stories, and folks who knew what it meant to be soulful. Luckily for us, real country has made a comeback, and none too soon (CMT was getting really weird).

Throwing their hats into the great country revival ring is Old Heavy Hand with their self-titled debut. Songs of love and loss abound. The trio taps into their own personal hurt bank leaving the listener experiencing their worst moments with them, and desperately wanting to buy the guys a beer. I don't want to give you the wrong impression here, there are just as many songs on the album that make you want pull on a bottle of the brown liquor as there are that warrant tears and beers, but the sad ones are really sad. Good country always has the two ends of the spectrum, and bad country tends to take up residence in the revelry, not realizing one can't exist without the other.

This album is best listened to on back roads, with the windows down, and the volume high. Any other way just wouldn't be right. Hope y'all enjoy.

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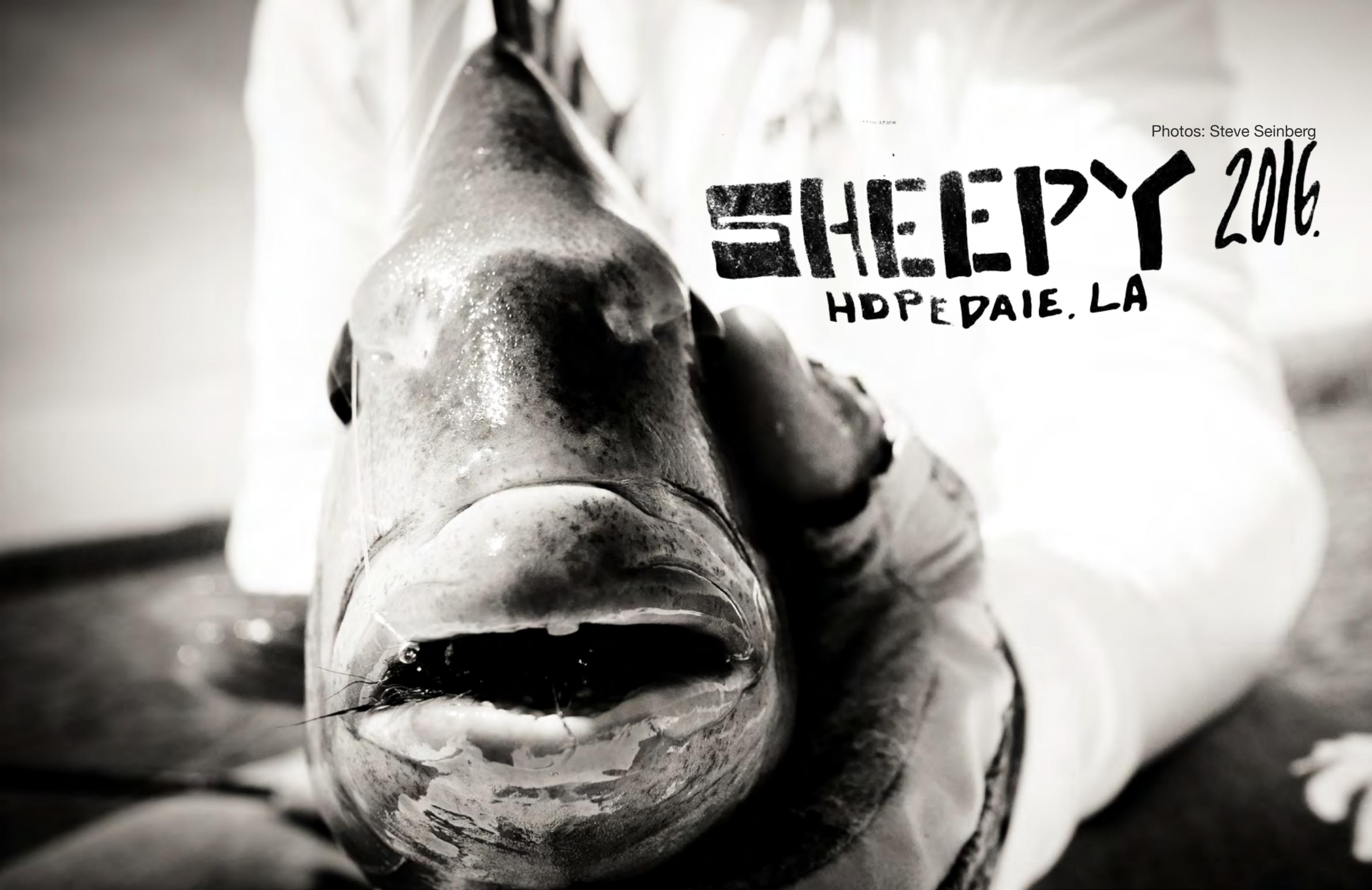
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Photos: Steve Seiberg

SHEEPY 2016.

HOPE DAIE, LA





The 2016 Sheepy has come and gone, and most of us didn't even know it. Held in the Spring and born at the breakfast tables of Penny's diner, The Sheepy focuses on the Louisiana marshes' more elusive convicts of the flats, the mighty Sheepshead. Redfish guides from all the lands and marshes come to test their mettle against their deliciously bucktoothed quarry for nothing more than the camaraderie and a wooden likeness of the cursed sheepfish. Like the knights of yore, these combatants fight a losing battle as soon as their motored sea horses leave the dock. But a few select heroes will slay the monster, eat the monster, and call themselves conqueror of the Sheepy.















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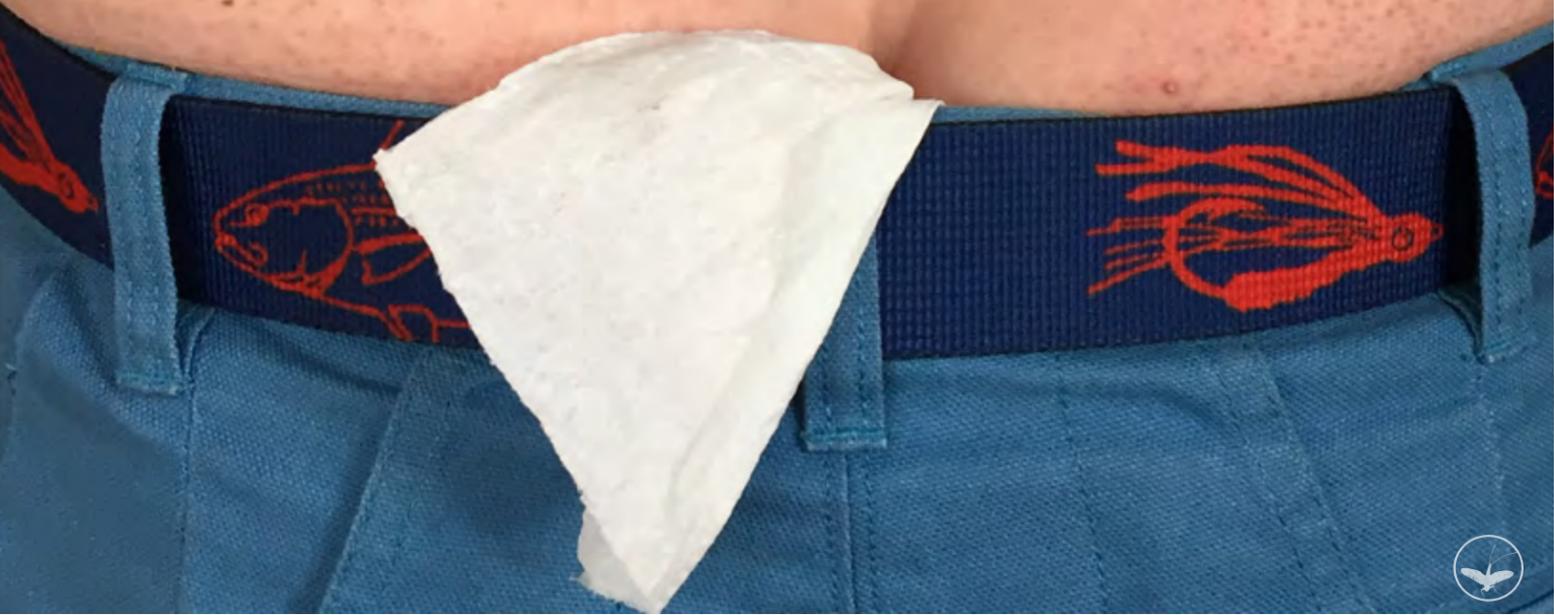
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**BLING,
BLING,
POPPER**



Brad Spink

BLING, BLING POPPER

I've been fishing with poppers longer than I have been fly fishing. When I was young, we spent a lot of family time at the lakes in South Carolina and Eastern Tennessee. My father had been talking one day with some friends about casting small poppers, or as they called them, "poppin' bugs." We used a spinning rod and casting float -- those clear floats with eyelets on each end. We caught loads of bluegill, big ones often. The storebought floats came in two options: white with black trim or yellow with black trim. They were made of cork. You fished them until the bluegill would bust them to splinters.

As I started fly fishing sometime later, I kept throwing them, still catching an obscene number of the flat, feisty fish. One day, I started looking at one in the tying bin from the store and it occurred to me, "I bet I could make one of those." Isn't that what all fly fisherman and tyers say many times along the way?

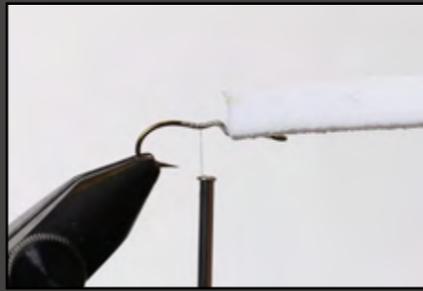
I tried tiny corks, balsam wood, and dozens of other materials. One night at a TU meeting, Anthony Hipps was making his foam poppers. I was totally fixed to his every step... I just wasn't that into the fabric paint finish. But the way he made the body build up totally got me thinking. That's what led to this bug. The sparkly craft foam was a happenstance find one day when I was wandering the local craft store.



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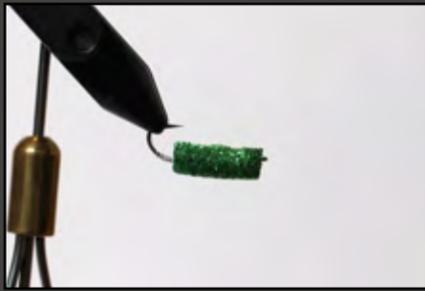
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14



15



Materials List:

Hook: #12 - 1/0 Kink Shank

Thread: 6/0 white

Underbody: closed cell foam

Popper body: Adhesive backed craft foam, sparkle (Michaels, AC Moore, Walmart, Etc)

Glue: Super glue or equivalent

Eyes: stick on eyes

Coating: UV Knot Sense or similar product

Hackle: Complementing hackle colors

Tail: Pair of hackle tips

1 Thread the hook to just behind the kink in the hook.

2 Cut a piece of closed cell to the width on the hook gap.

3 Tie the closed cell foam down with a series of wide wraps. (This is to build up bulk and create air pockets to make the head buoyant.)

4 After you have the underbody tied down, pull to tear the excess foam loss. This will make the rear narrower as to give the outer body a slight taper.

5 Cut a strip of the sparkle foam the hook shank width-and-a-half. Trim to the length of the underbody. Leave the backing on the foam. Shape around the hook.

6 Coat the underbody with super glue. Peel off the back from the sparkle foam.

7 Start at the top of the hook and press the outer body down and around the hook shank. Hold briefly to let the glue adhere and the body hold the shape. The bottom will be flat. You want the outer body to touch but making it completely round isn't necessary. Trim the underside give the body a slight taper back toward the bend of the hook.

8 Apply the stick on eyes.

9 Select your favorite UV coating and apply a generous coat to cover the body including the eyes and poppers face. Use a bodkin to evenly distribute the UV product. With the UV light harden the outer shell of the fly. Be sure all surfaces are exposed.

10 Make sure to allow it to totally set. This gives a smooth and durable finish.

11 For the tail select two matching hackle tips and tie them in with an outward splay.

12 Select a hackle and palmer it just behind the body.

13 If needed, trim off the hackle from the bottom to open up the hook gap.

14 Whip finish or half hitch the hackle secure.

15 Bling, Bling Popper.



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GANGSTERS OF THE POND

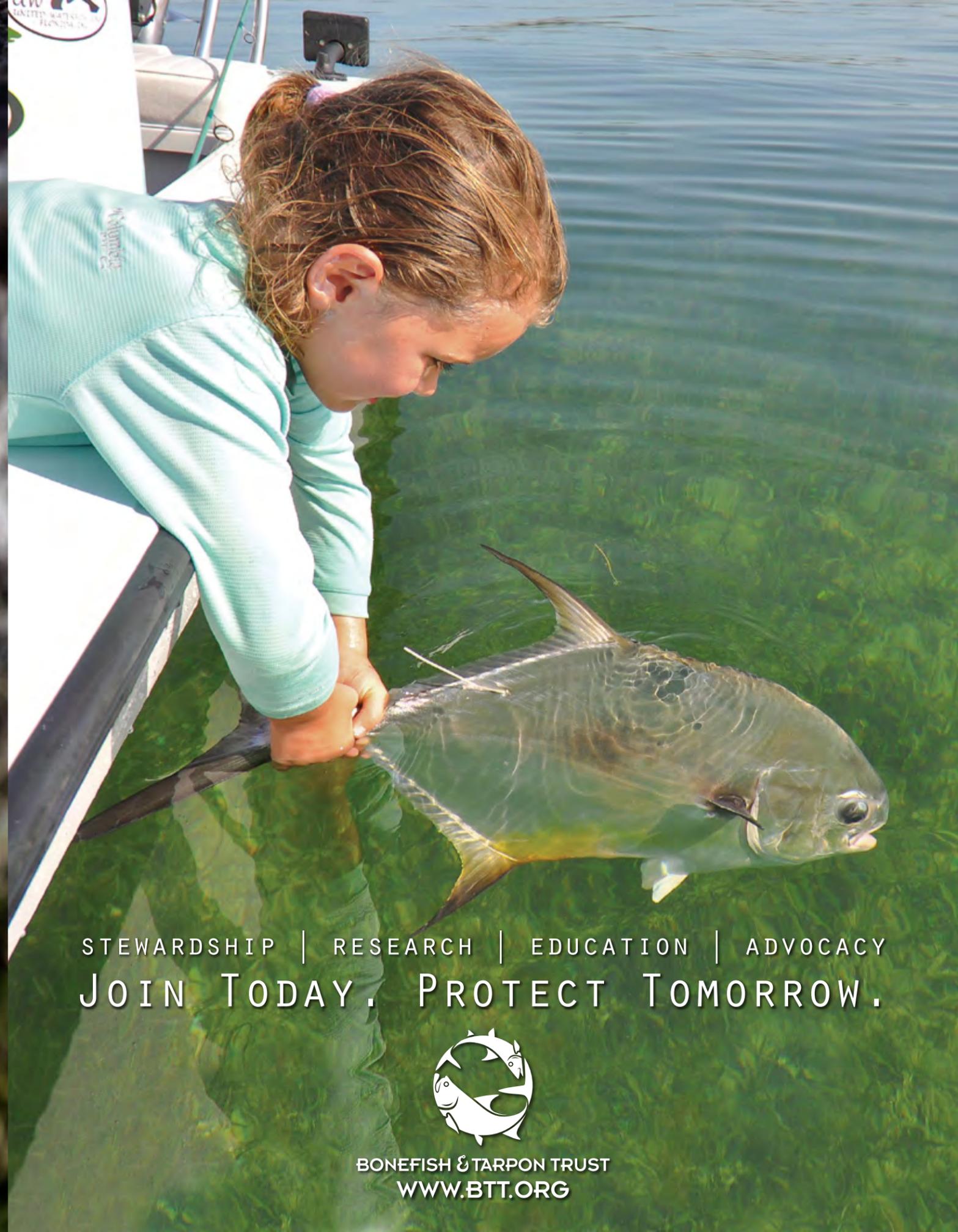


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A large striped bass is shown swimming in shallow, clear water. The fish is positioned diagonally across the frame, moving from the upper right towards the lower left. Its body is covered in characteristic dark vertical stripes on a lighter background. The water is shallow, revealing a sandy and shell-strewn bottom. The lighting is natural, creating soft reflections on the water's surface.

The Monsters Under My Bed

By Christian Fichtel

Photos: Blair Chamberlain

There are things that keep me awake at night. Things like the shots I didn't take, the times when my big mouth got me in trouble, and when my bad decisions led to things that made me question my sanity. One more thing that keeps me awake though, is the thought of tailing bonefish. Seemingly oblivious to the world around them, faces buried in the sand, they're well aware that there's something unnatural about a shrimp falling from the sky and swimming past their faces. If they aren't convinced by your presentation (and they usually aren't), they explode like grenade fragments across the flat. It has driven me crazy. It isn't the kind of crazy that makes me want to sell off my possessions and move to the islands, though. It's the kind that brings on hallucinations and causes me to drift off into the depths of my own mind at the worst possible times.



My first shots at bonefish were out of Flamingo. I landed a big tarpon that day, but the bones ignored me. They didn't spook; they just threw up a middle finger as they cruised right over well-presented flies. I landed my first on the beaches of Grand Bahama, and they were exactly the opposite. They charged every well-presented fly, and I caught a passel of 'em. My perfect bones, though, the ones that I hear dragging their chains across the floor while I try to sleep, are on Providenciales.

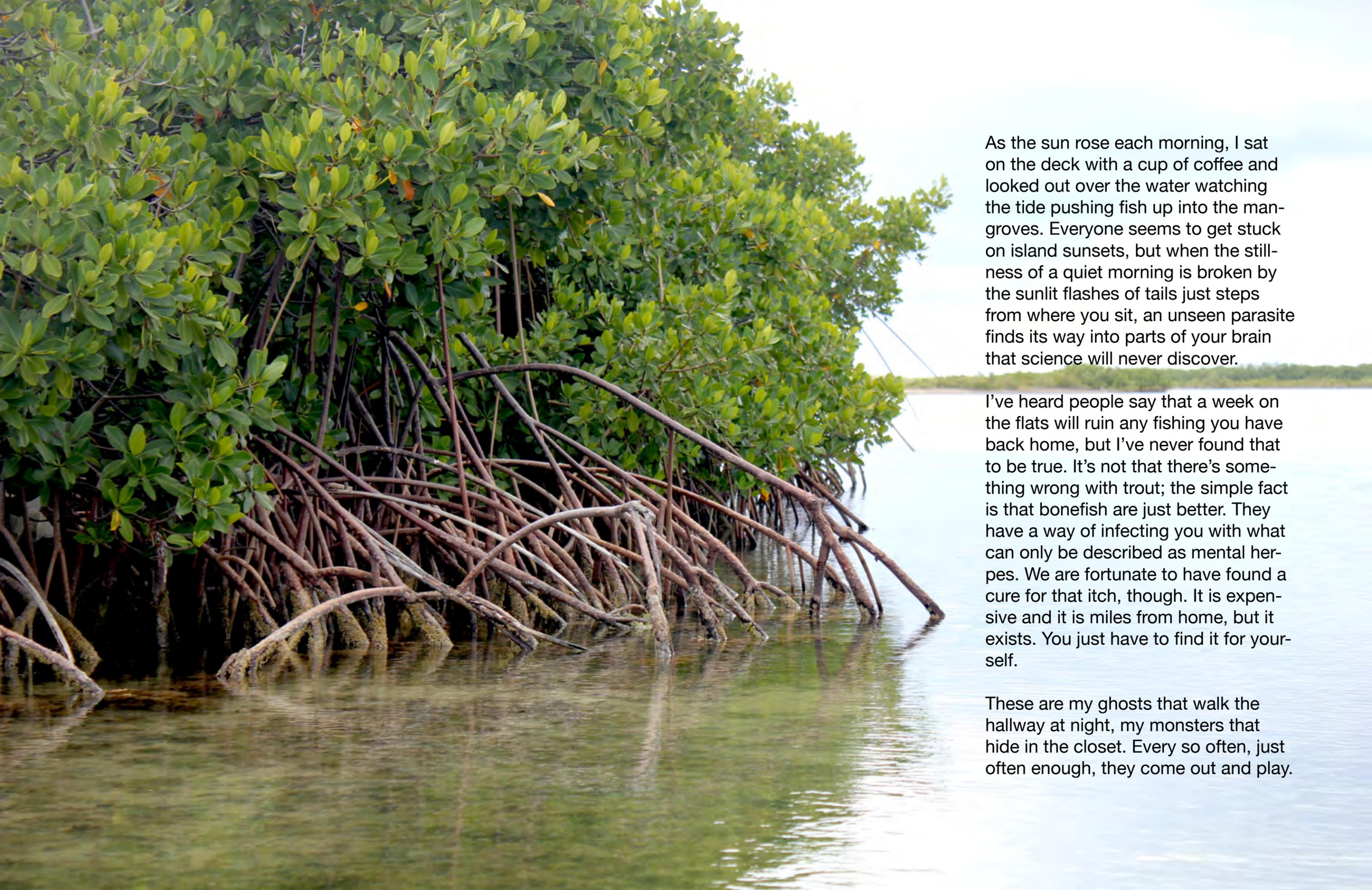




Lying about 150 miles north of Haiti, Providenciales is the most populated of the islands that comprise Turks and Caicos. While ritzy resorts line the well-known Grace Bay beach, the rest of the island is a lot less developed. There are dozens of bonefish flats with easy access, and the fish don't see many flies. This is certain to change as a result of fisheries regulations opening up much of the island currently closed to fishing. I wouldn't be surprised to see the island become a well-known bonefish destination in the very near future.

These are the perfect bonefish. They are smart, but they can be caught. And they are big. The average fish is pushing four pounds, and the big boys are always hanging out nearby. On the inland flats, protected from the wind, they can be found, in threes and fours, with their asses up and their faces in the mud. Occasionally, the perfect cast will result in a fish, but most often even the best effort will result in disappointment. I will never get tired of the stalk that precedes the initial run from a bonefish. You can keep your ketamine or heroin or whatever you kids are doing now; I'll take bonefish. And a few liters of dark rum. Maybe a few limes, too, if you've got any.





As the sun rose each morning, I sat on the deck with a cup of coffee and looked out over the water watching the tide pushing fish up into the mangroves. Everyone seems to get stuck on island sunsets, but when the stillness of a quiet morning is broken by the sunlit flashes of tails just steps from where you sit, an unseen parasite finds its way into parts of your brain that science will never discover.

I've heard people say that a week on the flats will ruin any fishing you have back home, but I've never found that to be true. It's not that there's something wrong with trout; the simple fact is that bonefish are just better. They have a way of infecting you with what can only be described as mental herpes. We are fortunate to have found a cure for that itch, though. It is expensive and it is miles from home, but it exists. You just have to find it for yourself.

These are my ghosts that walk the hallway at night, my monsters that hide in the closet. Every so often, just often enough, they come out and play.



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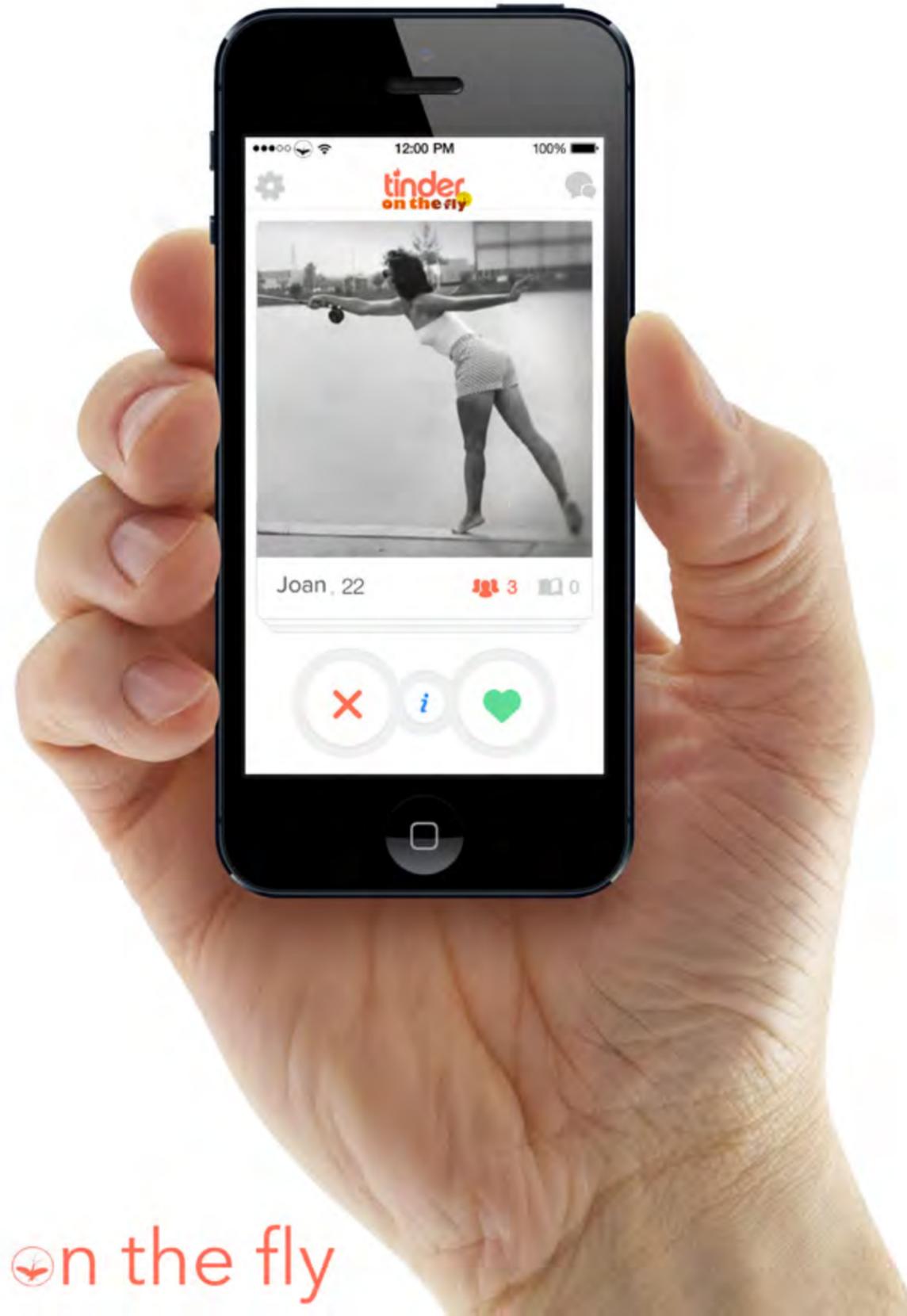
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