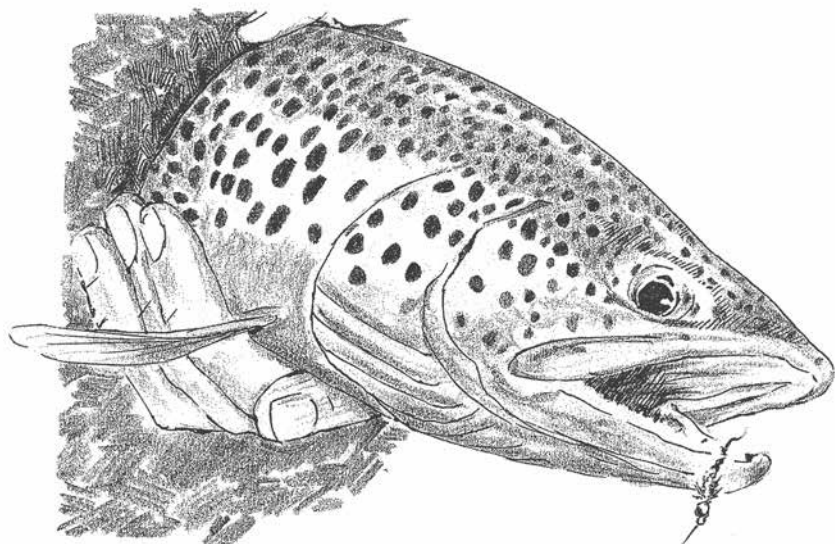


CHAPTER 5

FLY FISHING PONDS AND LAKES

My friends and I will usually show up at a farm pond all decked out for high sport with neoprene waders, belly boats, fly rods, cameras: the whole thing. We remember when it was different, but this is just how we do it now. We have become fly fishermen.

JOHN GIERACH, EVEN BROOK TROUT GET THE BLUES



One day, back in 1972, I was parked in a car at the side of a small pond, more like a tank really, near Kamberg in KwaZulu-Natal, waiting out a storm. I was with John Beams, and we'd positioned the car to watch the water. Trout started nosing as soon as the thunder moved off and, on a whim, I decided to try a dry fly. Maybe the smallness of the pond spurred me on (it was crystal-clear and I guessed the trout could see from one end of it to the other), or maybe the slow confidence of the fish showing at the surface was more than I could resist. Also, after a few years away from the fast waters in the Western Cape, I suspect I was probably

just plain longing to use a dry fly for the pure sake of it. I can't remember, and it doesn't matter. The fact is we weren't using dry flies on stillwater at the time, so back then there was probably also something mildly revolutionary, or at least unconventional, about my choice of fly. I caught a honey first cast, and I'm willing to bet that particular trout kick-started our dry fly approach to stillwater. Yours might have had different origins, but certainly back in 1972 that cast galvanised us. That much I *can* vouch for.

From then on we tried dries every time a fish threw a ring on a lake, even started *prospecting* with them in stillwater shallows, and, finally, got around to using floating lines to fish weighted, wet flies and nymphs. In fact, in the end we fished nothing other than floating lines on rivers and lakes, until the Intermediate fly lines came in. At the time, though, we thought the stillwater dry fly bit was pretty heady stuff.

Then at one stage we went through a phase of using both a floater *and* a sinker on lakes (meaning we carried two rods around wherever we went), until the Intermediate line came in, when we ended up with *three*, and it all got to look more like hard work than fun, or at least a questionable ergonomic practice. There was also the comical side to people wandering around weedbeds like nomadic tackle dealers with forests of fly rods set up; plus there was always the risk you'd step back on one of the spares while you were playing a fish, or forget where you'd actually left the other rods if you happened to get carried away with the fishing and wander off too far. That happened more than once.

So gradually we drifted back to using one rod and kept our options open by carrying spare spools in a vest pocket. That way we could still play the percentages game if we really had to.

The three-rod trick is fine on float-tubes though, because you're in one place with everything in easy reach. But I've developed a more philosophical approach to outcomes in fishing anyway, so

I don't even bother with taking out spare spools, even on float-tubes, the sense being that if fish won't take on a floater I don't know that I'm really that interested in taking them on anything else. I suppose you could read into this the incipient signs of early decay creeping into my approach, but I don't think it's an entirely impractical call. Also, I'm inherently lazy, so I avoid anything that looks like unnecessary work. Where this cloistered view of mine leaks at the seams is when it comes to Intermediate lines. They could just be the better choice if you're going to limit yourself to one line.

DRY FLY ON STILLWATERS

There's always been a little resistance to using dry flies on stillwater, probably for the same reasons that small patterns are also not as widely used. This could be because of tradition, habit, lack of confidence, ignorance, you name it. Of course, with a full-blown hatch on and fish leaping around the choice is easy. Dry flies pick themselves. But the fact that you don't need to wait for a hatch or a rise to use a dry fly on a lake doesn't dawn on enough people.

One of the best times to put a fly on the surface of a lake is precisely when things are slow below it, even in the middle of a hot day. And that's not as oblique as it sounds if you think about it, because when nymphs aren't generally active under the water, surface flies naturally have a better chance of getting attention. Also, lake trout are partial to taking the odd insect off the top, especially terrestrials (the need for a change in diet maybe has something to do with it) and as we know, terrestrials are most active in the *middle* of the day. So prospecting with a large dry fly, like a yellow DDD, for example (the colour yellow brings grasshoppers to mind, but is otherwise unimportant), makes sense.

I suppose prospecting, by loose definition anyway, implies fishing 'blind', but it pays to add some guile to the act by, say, twitching

the fly occasionally, or drifting it with the wind onto the edge of reedbeds. You can even fish a dry fly right in among reeds (yes, right in the reeds, but for safety, only just, if you know what I mean). Or you can fish it so that it's drifting onto structure, like weedbeds, or the shallow water near a shelf or an inlet stream, or just let it drift onto a windblown shoreline, that sort of thing.

The best thing about prospecting, though, is it easily doubles the joy of any take. For my money it's probably one of the most exciting things you can do with a fly rod on stillwater.

One of the key secrets to dry fly on stillwater is covering any rise quickly, especially the sporadic rise. You want to get there in a split second – faster, if you can. The reason for this is that the rise locates a *moving* trout and if you don't use the indicator quickly you lose the chance of the trout seeing your fly at all. The rise to a full-blown hatch on a lake is something altogether different; like an evening midge hatch when trout come up so predictably you can plot the exact spot they'll surface next and know exactly where to put your fly. That kind of hatch needs a particular approach – small fly, good imitation, enough lead on the fish, careful positioning – but that's not what I'm talking about here. I'm talking about the rises that come out of the blue, unexpectedly, sometimes in the middle of the day, often over deep water and more often over the middle-water and shallows. A rise like this means (1) a fish is prepared to grab something off the surface, and (2) apparently against the run of play in that there's no obvious hatch, no insects on the water, and (3) as we said, that the fish is cruising for sure, meaning it's not going to stay in the same place for very long. That's why you need to cover the rise quickly.

The sporadic rise depends a lot on chance; on the sudden arrival on the surface of a grasshopper or a downed damsel, or a returning egg-laying caddis, whatever, and the coincidental arrival of a trout. Trout are specialist opportunistic feeders and whatever the day's

like, or wherever you happen to be on a lake, you can bet your last fly there's a fish cruising around with half an eye on the surface. In rivers, trout are less likely to cruise. Lake trout cruise, river trout hold. I'm generalising, sure, but it's about right. And it's why prospecting with a dry fly makes sense on lakes. It's also why you don't have to first see a rise, or a hatch, to be in with a chance any time with a dry fly.

Having said that, I suppose I take most fish prospecting with a dry fly on sunny days, especially when the wind puts a chop on the surface; in other words, perfect conditions and timing for wind-blown terrestrials to suddenly hit the water. If you've seen a rise, well, technically you're not actually prospecting. You're fishing a rise. It's an important point, because it talks to the fact that the *absence* of rising fish doesn't rule out successful dry fly fishing on lakes.

A big DDD is fine for prospecting; in fact, I prospect with little else. But any solid dry fly around size 10 to 14 works perfectly, like hairwing caddisflies, the Royal Coachman, Wulffs, Humpies (especially Humpies), Kaufmann's Simulators, ant patterns and, of course, hoppers. Let me not forget hoppers. Ed would be in on the kill like a pack of wild dogs. He loves hoppers.

For prospecting, I put the fly out into the wind on a standard leader with a longish tippet and hope to get the fly to drift back towards me, or across wind, in a way that doesn't quickly straighten the line or the leader. I think you can pick up drag drifting a dry fly on stillwater nearly as quickly as on a river. More importantly, I suspect, the effects are much the same. So I try to keep a little slack in the line. I don't want to see the leader straighten. When it does, I lift the fly off and cast again. A bonus to casting into the wind is that the resistance of the dry fly always drops slack into the leader for you. What also helps is not casting too far so that you can actually watch the leader.

Some people twitch a stillwater dry fly and some don't. Those who do, swear blind that twitching accounts for fish they otherwise wouldn't have got, but personal experience tells me the vast majority of trout I got on a DDD took it static. The risk in adding movement is overdoing it. If you add movement, it shouldn't be any more than the movement a natural makes, which amounts to minor vibrations, or tiny pulses of forward motion. You want ripples that frame the fly delicately over a radius of no more than an inch. Also, the movements insects make on water are pulsing and transitory, interspersed with longer periods when they sit dead-still. So if you add movement, do it frugally and intermittently. Don't start what amounts to a retrieve. That's not the point of dry fly fishing. Lift the rod tip gradually until the line and leader connect with the fly, then twitch the tip, maybe an inch or three, but not much more than that. One drawback to twitching is that it straightens the leader.

Finally, there's a generalisation when it comes to timing the strike with a dry fly on lakes. Why it should be so I'm not sure, but I have a theory. First the generalisation: leave the strike until the trout turns down with the fly. Differently put, don't strike early, as you might on a stream. The reason, I think, is that lake trout get used to lazy rises because there is no current to contend with. Their prey is static in a lake, whereas in a river it's moving away with the current, sometimes at speed. There are exceptions to the rule, of course, just as there are to any general rule worth its weight.

SIGNS OF FISH IN STILLWATER

The obvious sign is a rise and most are easy enough to see, except that some can be a little cryptic, as in when fish are feeding just sub-surface on emerging nymphs or pupae. Subtle rises also happen more on windy days, when the surface chop disguises the more

discreet feeders. With sub-surface feeders, the water bulges slightly, or an area the size of the seat of your pants suddenly *flattens*. This sort of rise often gets missed. We called them flat spots. You need to have someone point out one or two flat spots to get to know how they look. Just be aware that a flat spot in choppy water could be a sign of a feeding fish.

There are other signs of feeding fish that are no less cryptic. One of them is movement in structure, like in water grass or in the stems of reeds, or in surface weeds. When all else is quiet and smooth, trout cause movement when they feed, especially near the surface around plant structure. I make a habit of parking off reeds to fish the edge of what amounts to structure. I keep an eye on the surface for signs of trout, but I also watch the reeds for movement. Big fish often bump reeds as they swim by and the movement can be quite marked.

Then finally, I make a habit of casting immediately to any sudden change I see on the surface.

DAMSELS



The large eyes, slender body and leaf-like tails of the damselfly nymph

I was up on the Mooi, a brown-trout stream in KwaZulu-Natal, when the fishing got slow on the river. We dumped our fly rods into the back of the truck and headed up the road to a couple of ponds on top of a nearby hill. They were small waters, maybe a little larger than a tennis court, but not much larger, with weeded margins and deep, clear water in the middle. I waded out to the

edge of a weedbed and cast a long line into the open water, letting the nymph sink slowly.

I noticed a little activity around me in the grassy fronds carpeting the surface, and saw that tiny, lime-green damselfly nymphs were hatching, wriggling out of their skins and spreading fragile wings to dry in the sun. At first there was just the occasional insect, but within ten minutes the place was crawling with damsels. A few drifted out into open water and got socked by trout, and it wasn't long before large fish were cruising the edges, taking stragglers with gliding, head-and-shoulder rises like frolicking porpoises. They took airborne adults with a splash and a clipped pneumatic sucking sound: 'wumpf'. (Well, not quite; but near enough.)

I've bumped the odd mass hatch of damsels, but not often enough to make an issue out of it. In fact, I think a full-blown hatch is a pretty rare event in daylight, judging by the years I've fished and the number I have seen. All of them were on small, weeded ponds on mild, sunny days without wind, and all produced bright-green insects, mostly the colour of freshly-cut grass, but with a resinous, glassy quality about them, which I guess has something to do with the nymphs storing oxygen under the skin just prior to hatching. And if they are a rare event it's because, as we now know, most mass hatches of damsels happen at night. That's the occurrence problem solved.

Damsel nymphs swim around freely between feeding grounds. I see them often in lakes, more now that we have float-tubes where you're closer to the water and often bored enough to be looking around anyway. Mostly the nymphs swim between clumps of weed, insects any colour you like, from soot black to transparent, almost colourless bugs. But mostly they're shades of brown or green, and then mostly a very bright, verdant green. Their progress in the water is slow and laboured, the body-wiggle of a belly dancer more than the action of a swimmer, and they stop often to rest, slowly sinking

with their legs outspread while they do, which is maybe important to remember when tying up damsel patterns, or fishing them.

The wing-drying period is brief, the insects twitchy on the grass and not still for a second, stretching all they can to split their old skins, anxious to dry off and get airborne.

That day we hooked a few really heavy fish, nearly all with damsels still in their mouths, but the hatch didn't last long and within an hour we were down to just the occasional insect struggling to get off the surface. But damsel-nymph imitations fished dead slow on a floater still took fish, and the fishing continued like that until a wind got up.

Damsels have to be right up there with dragonfly nymphs as a pretty safe bet for fooling stillwater trout. I like sparsely-dressed, delicate patterns in green or brown (it doesn't seem to matter), lightly weighted, if weighted at all. In my experience, damsels are margin or structure feeders and you find most of them in mid-to shallow water. I doubt you'll find many in water deeper than a metre, so heavy weighting is unnecessary. Besides, damsels are slow-moving, light insects, easily buffeted by surface currents, and weight robs imitations of the ability to move subtly, tending to make them drop like a lifeless lead sinker into weeds. And if you retrieve fast to keep from getting hung up, the imitation resembles an escaping minnow more than a damsel, and I lose interest in fishing it.

With damsels, I think the two most important triggers are the slender body and the ultra-slow movement through the water. The wave-like abdominal movements of the swimming insect appeals to most fly-tyers though, and people spend hours holed up in attics with only an apple and a candle, you know the sort of thing, trying to work out how best to imitate the wiggle. The detached body nymph comes close, though I don't use them. To my mind, hinging an extended body out the back of the hook is mildly unsporting and way too busy. Trailing fibres of soft marabou work well enough

if you want movement, but the longer the tail the sooner it wraps around the hook shank, which happens about straight after your first cast. So I just concentrate on what's easy to achieve; a thin body in pale-green seal's fur, a short tail of green marabou and a slow retrieve with plenty of pauses.

Our first patterns were rudimentary: just a long-shank hook dressed in green seal's fur. From this, the Hugh Huntley Red-Eye Damsel Nymph evolved, not out of necessity as much as out of a combination of chance and plain just wanting to fix something that worked.

One of the most productive places to throw a damselfly nymph from a float-tube is towards the shore, especially when there's a stiff onshore breeze. Wind causes waves, and waves rock weedbeds; that loosens up insects, or dislodges them, and trout know it. Fishing back to the shoreline, you're casting from deep into shallow water, and if it's a bright day on a clear-water lake, there's the additional advantage of being somewhat concealed in the deep water. There's also something pleasant about retrieving a fly against waves, rather than with them or across them. It tends to build natural tension into the line and to keep the line straight, and that helps you connect smartly when a fish takes. It also happens to be easier casting with the wind than against it, but you already knew that, right?

Some lakes are just better damsel lakes than others. Generally, clear lakes with well-defined shallows and weed margins are richer than long, deep, steep-sided lakes. Altitude makes little difference, though really high lakes are less fertile generally and have smaller populations of damsels than lakes in the middle country.

For better or worse, I prefer fishing damsel nymphs during the warm part of the day when the adults are more active. They work at other times, but not as well as when the sun's warmed the water. (If you hang about in float-tubes long enough you'll notice that nymphs generally become more active as the water warms.)

Weed, of course, is a double-edged sword. It might be where most stillwater insects hang out (and, therefore, where you should be fishing), but weed snags hooks, and fish have a knack of diving straight into it the moment they feel the barb. One day on a lake in the mountains near Swartberg I lost fish after fish in weeds. The beds hung in thick walls, and once a fish got into the stuff there was little chance of getting it out. Clearly, they'd worked out how to get off a hook, swerving left or right with practised nonchalance the moment they realised their mistake. I tried heavier and heavier tippets, ending up with a section of 2X that didn't seem to put fish off and gave me half a chance to land them. I think I kept three or four in the end, one of them a deep fish over seven pounds.

I suspect if you're not losing fish in weeds, or for that matter hooking up or tapping weed fronds occasionally, you're fishing the wrong places. Deep retrieves over weeds don't work out, though. You hang up too often. So I pick a spot and retrieve an unweighted fly so slowly it can take an age just to fish a tiny open pocket. It means you're at least imitating the natural action of the insect and your fly is where you want it for longer – right up close to the weeds.

Once, up at *Briar Mains*, Fritz Hoch's lovely farm on the road to Giants Castle, Tony Biggs caught trout with his fly sitting dead-still on weedbeds. They were cruising past and picking up the fly as it lay there. It's not the sort of trick you can pull off every day, or on just any dam, but it illustrates the point about having your fly close to weeds. It was a technique Tony used just often enough to sort of convince me he might be onto something, so I tried it; but I must admit I never had the sort of success he did.

*

With damsels you don't need ultra-long leaders because you're not aiming for the fly to go very deep to start with. Eight to nine feet is long enough. On water where there's the chance of a really big fish, I don't mess around with light tippets. I know light tippets are fashionable and sporting and might even help fool the odd fish, or give the fly a more lifelike action, but in weeded lakes with documented big rainbows in them, light tippets are a short cut to frustration. One thing the Old Dam taught me quickly was to use 'strong string', which was 'Huntley-speak' for heavy tippet material. In practice, it meant sometimes using 2 or 3X. That way we'd shed fewer tears. But I don't want to leave you with the idea that all your fishing should be with tippets this strong. You have to measure the odds carefully.

I like the hand-twist retrieve because I can slow the damsel down to a virtual standstill. Also, it means that I don't have a heap of loose fly line lying around. And even during an ultra-slow retrieve I stop and rest the fly maybe ten or twelve times each retrieve, give it time to sink slowly, in fact, get the fly to behave like a natural.

*

For years I went around shaking out handfuls of weed over buckets to see what insects fell out. As far as damsels went, I never learnt much new doing it: I found that your average lake has a high population of damsels providing the weeds are healthy, and that most of them are green through tan and around twenty millimetres long. That you'll discover in a day. A year later you won't have found much more to get excited about. The occasional nymph is almost transparent, and most are a little like smoked glass and just transparent enough to make out the alimentary canal quite easily. Eyes are large in relation to the size of the insect and there's general agreement the damsel's eyes are an obvious trigger to imitate.

DRAGONFLY NYMPHS



The large eyes and coffin-shaped body of the dragonfly nymph

Damsels are perfect nymphs to imitate on lakes, but not quite as much fun to fish as dragonfly nymphs. Dragons are more robust and faster through the water, and they tend to provoke extravagant takes.

For me the nut to crack imitating dragons is (a) posture in the water and (b) the sink rate. I find a lot of imitations sink unnaturally fast or turn upside down, or both. Most appear to be convincing enough (fierce-looking, neatly segmented, coffin-shaped, fat flies) and you're easily inclined to believe in them right up until you actually fish them. Then their bad habits came to light – fast sink, upside down in the retrieve, that sort of thing.

The best dragon imitations I ever used were the simplest. Our earliest ones amounted to a hook sparsely dressed with a green seal's fur dubbing, not even a tail, just a few fibres hanging out the back, with extra turns of dubbing at the thorax over Tuff-chenille eyes. Even the legs were just straggly bits of seal's fur teased out of the thorax. The pattern was easy to tie, easy to fish, and I guess there weren't a lot of trout around that didn't see one without at least thinking about taking it.

The secret to any successful fly pattern is in unlocking the main triggers – in the case of dragons, big eyes, tight waist (clearly separating body from thorax) and a coffin-shaped abdomen. Seal's fur mixtures are ideal for creating the right texture and colour, but seal's fur has become scarce. I also prefer using a wool underbody (neutral density nymph), but I'll leave the discussion on patterns and materials to the chapter on fly tying. There's more to tying dragons than you'd expect.

Again, it's a waste of time fishing dragons any way other than in and around reeds or weedbeds, but more especially, just off, or just in reeds, then to add a short, jerky retrieve so the fly moves forward over a short distance with speed, interspersed with static periods. I'm talking here of a matter of a few inches of retrieve at a time and a short pause, maybe a second or two. Because the fly is better fished near the surface than deep, I use floating or Intermediate fly lines and a short leader, say around nine foot, with 12 inches of tippet. Then again, I don't cut the tippet down to much below 3 or 4X to cope with the take, and the added leverage long-shank hooks cause. Also, it's always been common practice to fish bigger dragons than small ones, say 6s and 8s rather than 10s and 12s, or at least larger patterns than you usually use imitating most stillwater insects I can think of. I believe this is the right direction to go, because fishing dragons you're appealing to the less subtle, more aggressive side of trout behaviour, and over-statement fits in better with the overall plot.

Interesting is to ask yourself when you can expect to get the most hits – in other words, in the static or active phase of the retrieve. I'd say it's about equal. But if you were to ask when you lose most fish on a dragon there's no horse in the race. It's in the static phase, and that's usually because of slack line between you and the fly. The answer is to make a habit of (a) gently taking up any loose slack as soon as you rest the fly and (b) making a point of *immediately* watching the end of the fly line, and the leader, right at that moment, for signs of a take.

Dragons are all-weather patterns, as good at night as when the sun's boiling down from straight overhead, but remember to occasionally fish a dragon at dusk, dead slow in the shallows, even, if you like, plumb through the middle of a midge hatch when fish are going dilly on the surface. You want a darker pattern in low light, almost black.

Just a word on Woolly Buggers. They work extremely well, olive Woolly Buggers especially, fished into what I call middle-water (see later) and brought back deep towards a shallow shelf. But, on a moderate retrieve, no-one is going to convince me that trout don't take them for large dragon nymphs.

THE MIDGES



The adult midge (left) and the midge pupa (right)

There were years when the midge fishing was brilliant on our stillwaters and years when it wasn't, but don't ask me to explain that. I suspect it might have had something to do with drought, because in the driest years the lakes could drop that much that breeding grounds along the fringes in the mud substrate got exposed and dried up. And that was clearly disastrous. But it wasn't the only reason. We had the odd bad year, but there were years when the dams looked good and conditions had been right for a season or two, yet midge fishing still wasn't up to scratch. I also suspect that when the midge fishing isn't that good, stillwater fly fishing generally isn't that good either, period. It says something about how important midges are in the stillwater food chain.

Midge hatches are mostly evening events, and then mainly calm, summer-evening events, though occasionally midges hatch in light rain, or even in strong winds or in generally unsettled weather. Maybe midges hatch more in the mornings than I'm aware of, because we weren't ever consistently early starters, especially not

early enough to see the sun come up. We started early occasionally, sure, but we never made a habit of it. And, thinking back, the times we did see the sun come up, I don't remember any dense midge hatches. *Caenis* hatches, yes, but not midges.

Midges like to hatch in the lee of the wind, especially on the edge of a ripple bordering a flat calm. The ripples help them break through the surface-film, and because they're very delicate creatures they need all the help they can get.

I could get very confused fishing midge hatches and it probably cost me a lot of fish. The confusion came from not making up my mind exactly what option to choose, and then sticking with it long enough to know if it really was or wasn't working. The average hatch brings up plenty of trout, and often (mainly, actually) I wasn't ever that sure if I shouldn't be on the *sunken* pupa when I was actually fishing the *adult* say, or on a *suspended* pupa when I'd chosen a *sunken* one, and so on. It boiled down to indecision laced with a touch of confusion. Probably I'd have done better consistently picking one strategy and sticking with it – though that's never easy in a midge hatch when fish are rising like bubbles in a beer mug.

But let me explain.

Scientifically speaking (here we go!), in a midge hatch the order of things is: (1) the pupa rises slowly to the surface, not once, but many times before it gets there; (2) when the pupa is under the surface it hangs around for a while, resting, anything from one to ten minutes; (3) it breaks through the surface; (4) it hatches, in the sense of shedding the pupal skin, drying its wings; (5) all going well it flies off. That can also take a few minutes.

What they fail to tell you in the fine print is that *all* these phases are happening simultaneously in any midge hatch, so at any one moment you have x number of pupae *rising*, with y number hanging *suspended* just under the surface, and z number *hatching*, or actually *hatched* and taking off. One solution is to imitate one stage

and stay with it. For my money, you can't go far wrong imitating the newly hatched adult with a fly called the Griffith's Gnat, say size 16. I describe the pattern in the chapter on fly tying.

Suspended midges are fine, but somehow I never really got too taken with flies that have polystyrene foam balls on them wrapped in pantyhose. If I fish a pupa in a hatch, and I do sometimes, then I prefer a sunken imitation. I fish the sunken pupa on a greased leader about six inches below the surface, and keep the fly dead-still. And I don't hunt individual fish. I just prospect with the fly and wait for the take. It's a technique that works as long as the fly lands roughly where midges are hatching, and as long as you keep your eyes sharply focused on the water around the end of the leader, and, of course, especially the end of the leader itself.

There are hundreds of different sunken midge patterns, but I happen to like seal's-fur dressings, preferably wine-coloured seal's fur, ribbed with mono or clear plastic. I dress the hook with 8/0 silk and tie in a tuft of soft, white feather right on the bend of the hook (the soft flue from any feather is good enough as long as its white). The fibres need only protrude a fraction. Run the wine-coloured seal's fur to the eye and rib with 5X mono or a thin strip of clear plastic. Tie in a small tuft of white feather at the thorax to protrude forward just beyond the eye. Build up a thorax with glossy peacock herl.

Some people make a huge thing about how testy midge fishing can get. It can, if you like it that way, otherwise it's no different to any other kind of fishing for big fish with gossamer tippet, say 6 or 7X. I keep the cast short, and when there's a bulge around the fly I lift the rod gently into the fish, holding the fly line in my left hand very lightly between index finger and thumb. I don't jerk the tip up because the fish is often moving in the opposite direction and they snap off easily. And holding the fly line between two fingers gives you the sort of touch that allows you to quickly and

easily release line into the take if you have to. Any limber, 4-weight rod will do fine. It helps to add a tiny indicator to the tippet close to the fly, say six inches away, or to grease the leader. This keeps the pupa at the right depth and the indicator helps pick up the really cryptic takes. As I said, I don't use a retrieve much and, if I do, no more than a gentle lift. But I am conscientious about taking in the slack; otherwise you're late on the strike, or too heavy-handed. You don't ever want to jar 6X tippets on fish over three pounds. You just want to stroke the rise.

As for fishing the larval stage, the bloodworm, I never quite took to that either, though many people around me did and it seemed to work for them. But then in fly fishing, as in life, some notions appeal to you and others just don't. The one advantage of bloodworm imitations, though, is they have to rate as the simplest patterns you could ever tie. What else can you say about a piece of red Tuff-chenille tied to an otherwise bare hook?

MAYFLIES

Mayflies don't have quite the status on lakes that they enjoy on rivers. The predominant stillwater species are mostly slow-moving creepers and crawlers, rarely burrowers, mostly olive to pale, sand-coloured insects. The main species are *Callibaetis*, *Leptophlebid*s, the *Cloeons* (Pond Olives), and the minute *Tricos* and *Caenis*. They're attracted to weedbeds like bees to spring flowers, crawling along fronds or occasionally swimming poorly between clumps, or dancing above them with increasing activity just before emergence. Sometimes strong winds move weedbeds enough to dislodge them, but generally mayfly nymphs are not easy stillwater prey. Trout have to forage for them.

The size of stillwater mayfly nymphs varies from small to very small; size 16 to 18 hooks match most of them. Just prior to

hatching, though, the odd species is larger and better matched with a 12 or 14 hook.

Once Mario Cesaré and I were fishing a lake outside Dullstroom on a fine late-summer morning. We noticed we were sharing the water with two elderly gents who were not doing as well as we were. But then we had twigged that the trout were a metre down, taking an imitation of ascending *Callibaetis* nymphs, one of the common stillwater mayflies and a near relative of the famous Blue-winged Olive. We were fooling them with one of Mario's olive nymphs fished on a Leisenring Lift. We met face to face with the two old guys eventually when one of them got his foot stuck in deep mud and needed help getting out. They politely enquired what we were using, so we showed them the fly and the technique. They caught four trout in an hour flat, which they later told us was four more fish than they'd seen in the previous three days.

The technique sounds complicated, but it's easy enough. I use it a lot on small lakes, and discovered that trout in dams around Lydenburg and Dullstroom are particularly susceptible to the technique for reasons I've never fully understood. On the day in question it maybe had something to do with the fact that those trout knew a lot about Walker's Killers and Mrs Simpsons and not much about Cesaré's Olive Nymphs.

As I said, the tactic boils down to a stillwater version of the Leisenring lift, and when you first see it work it makes you wonder why the hell you never thought of it yourself years ago. It goes like this: throw a lightly weighted nymph out on a long leader, say around 12 to 16 foot, and let the line drift with the wind. I don't mind what nymph you use, but for some reason Mario's Olive Nymph, in size 14 or 16, works best, although Hare's Ears, especially olive Hare's Ears, work fine. In fact, most stillwater mayfly nymphs are matched by an olive Hare's Ear if the size is right, though Mario's is a better imitation of the real thing. I describe

the pattern in the chapter on fly tying. I carefully consulted Mario on the precise recipe.

Watch the indicator for early takes while the fly is sinking in the drift. Once the wind has blown the line as far as it will go, drop the rod tip to the water, hold the line in your left hand and slowly lift the rod until it's above your head. This lifts the fly as if it were an insect ascending to hatch. When you can't lift the rod any higher, drop the tip, gather the slack, and repeat the process. On average you should get in two or three full lifts per drift. Around a quarter of the takes come on the drift and sink, but most come in the first few inches of the lift.

MICRO-MAYFLIES

The tiny stillwater mayflies, *Caenis*, should be more important to stillwater anglers than they are, or at least as important as midges. They offer good, but very testy and often frustrating fishing during hatches and spinner falls.

For practical purposes, ignore the nymphs of this species. For a start they don't swim much and they give new meaning to the word 'tiny'. But trout find adult flies irresistible and rise to them like mad, and to the spinners. The adults are tiny insects, three to five millimetres long, with mainly dark, waxy bodies and transparent wings, although some species are pale and have a hint of lemon-yellow in them. They hatch early mornings in absolutely calm conditions. In fact, if the slightest breeze creeps in, the hatch stops immediately.

A distinctive feature of *Caenis* hatches is their density. Clouds of duns come off the water and often the hatch evokes an intense rise. Whatever, for anglers the fishing is mostly a little disappointing and tough. It's a classic case of your fly literally getting crowded out by thousands of tiny naturals carpeting the surface, all of them

small enough to fit ten on the nail of your little finger. The sheer scale of the hatch, and the insignificant size of the insects involved, makes fishing the hatch look like a no-hoper beyond words, even vaguely ridiculous, but the psychological barrier is worth overcoming. That's because trout single out the artificial often enough to suggest that our hand-made imitations are somehow just that little bit more noticeable. But the yield, even in the best hands, is never really that great.

The approach is to use a standard leader, say nine to ten feet long, of which around four to five feet is a tippet of 7X. Floating nymphs (emergers) should be small, weightless and dark, and you want to fish them like the sunken midge pupa, just under the surface, with no retrieve. But imitating the adult *Caenis* is as much fun and maybe easier. I like a pale No-Hackle dry fly, say size 18 or 20, or if spinners are about, a size 18 Rusty Spinner.

Caenis hatches are something anglers need to prepare themselves for mentally. It's traditionally one of the hatches where we fall on our faces one way or another, or if we don't fall on our faces we hardly ever walk away with a sack full of trout. First off, you have to be out of bed pretty early, preferably just as, or just before, the sun gets up. Then there'll be more fish taking flies off the surface than you realised were in the lake in the first place, all rising with slow, practised nonchalance. They look dead easy. You quickly discover they aren't. They want a very small fly, either the floating nymph or the adult (I happen to think it doesn't matter which in any compound rise), and it has to be a close match for colour and size. Fish are usually pretty fussy about that.

The secret is to grit your teeth, fish within yourself and enjoy the experience. Pick your trout, study its course and intercept it as best you can. And accept your yield will be nowhere near proportional to the number of fish you saw rising.

THE INTERMEDIATE FLY LINE

Someone once asked me if I thought the introduction of Intermediate fly lines represented a fly-fishing advancement on a par, say, with the introduction of graphite fly rods. Fortunately, before I could reply and make myself unpopular, he indicated he thought it so. Had I been missing something all these years, I wondered? The 'I' lines are useful, sure, but in the annals of advancements in fly fishing I'd rate float-tubes, even neoprene chest waders, ahead of them. The trouble with Intermediate lines is you could just as easily call them 'poor floaters' or 'inadequate sinkers'. But the fact that they do sink slowly (given time and a little TLC, of course) happens to make them ideal for retrieving nymphs over shallow weedbeds. And because the line comes in just below the surface, it leaves no wake. Therein lies the Intermediate's advantage. Except maybe for one other thing: Intermediate fly lines happen to handle very well. They feel good in the hand and they shoot like a Manchester United striker. So Intermediates have their uses, but even on lakes they play second fiddle to floaters in my book.

FLOAT-TUBES, WADERS AND WADING

What struck me most about float-tubing when I joined the new wave in angling wasn't how low you sit in the water or how silently you move over it, or how novel it felt, but how comfortable it was. I didn't like the hassle of setting them up for the day's fishing, or the hazardous backwards shuffle you have to make to get into the water in round tubes, or the tottering exits (though that's all improved with the 'U' tube versions). Whatever, as far as lake fishing in this country goes – and I guess the experience has been no different anywhere else in the world – float-tubes brought a better understanding of lakes and what we were about, especially a better understanding of insect life, the habits of fish, the role of

structure and, let me not forget it, a better understanding also of water birds. In float-tubes you get closer, presumably because the birds take you for an overweight duck or something.

The art and science of tubing has a lot to do with working the wind. You want the wind over your left shoulder (if you cast right-handed), and you want the tube to stay still. So you need to think of positioning yourself with an anchor of sorts, not too heavy an anchor either, or a traditional maritime model with curved barbs, otherwise you have to lift bales of weed every time you want to move. A lead sinker the size of a small mango pip tied onto a long piece of twine does fine.

You also need a net. A net on a float-tube is close to non-negotiable. At one stage I kitted out my tube like I imagined Del Canty did, a fellow who once regularly tubed the intimidating Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Utah. Flaming Gorge is the size of an inland sea, and he stayed out overnight on deep water hunting thirty-pound brownies – sort of extreme tubing, I suppose. So, besides my camera and spare rolls of film, I'd pack in a plastic raincoat, a jersey, a Thermos of hot coffee (or a Coke, depending on the weather), sweets, sandwiches, headache pills, binoculars and sunblock, somehow managing to squeeze this all into the left-hand side-pouch and in the storage compartment in the backrest. In the right-hand pouch I'd carry fly boxes, spare spools, stomach pump, thermometer, spare nylon, forceps, anchor rope, clippers and so on. It worked, but it was tight, and most of the stuff eventually got wet, or was lost overboard at sea if I wasn't careful extracting things or forgot to zip a pouch closed.

I was trying to avoid (a) wearing a vest, (b) going hungry, (c) getting wet, (d) getting sunstroke, and (f) forgetting anything. In the end, it got like hard work, so I scaled down. I now wear a fly vest for tubing, which means the odds and ends that normally stay in my vest, like spare nylon, thermometer, floatants and so on,

aren't left behind. In the left pouch I store a spare spool, fly boxes, camera (in a zip-lock plastic bag) and something to drink. The pouch on the right stays empty, for ease of casting and retrieving.

Neoprene chest waders made a welcome difference to the overall experience, especially in winter. For once I was comfortable, dry (or nearly so) and warm. My other windfall was a pair of Caddis flippers. They lace up like open sandals and slip on or off in a wink.

I also stuck to a few survival rules I made up as I went along; like before I launch I check valves for leaks, sit down hard on the side of the tube to see the rubber inner tube isn't about to suddenly let go, and, especially important, double-check the little safety airbag in the backrest. Then I run through my 'essentials' check list using the acronym FINN-ARTP (Flies, Intermediate [on a spare spool because I usually start with a floater], Nylon, Net – And Remember To Pee.)

If I can I start paddling out *against* the wind, so by the end of the day when I'm tired, I get to drift back with it. If the wind is really whipping through, I don't unpack the tube in the first place, not because I don't trust float-tubes in heavy wind, but because just getting out and back in a gale can eat up half a day's fishing to start with.

When I fish a new dam I spend at least two hours touring it, throwing the odd cast, but mainly checking out the structure, looking for shelves, old river channels and so on. If the water has reedbeds, I make for them first and fish along the edge of the stand, moving always in the general direction of the shallows.

A lot's been said about safety in float-tubes, and that's as it should be, but essentially they're safe vessels if you don't get reckless. Having said that, I still don't feel easy tubing alone. I prefer company, and then I like to fish within hailing distance of that company. Ed once said, 'Why? To let the guys know who gets to inherit your tackle just before you go down for the last time?'

But then he's cynical about tubing in the first place. There have been sad fatalities, sure, but the essential point is there needn't have been. With tubing it's up to you, and you alone, to make sure your craft is safe. Nobody checks on you.

At one stage we preached using longer rods in float-tubes, at least nine foot. Quite why we should have considered this a requirement I'm not sure. In fact, part of the joy of a tube is precisely that you hardly need mile-long casts, or to clear obstacles behind you, and you don't need to mend line. So, in theory at least, as far as casting and presentation go, it makes little difference what length of fly rod you use in a float-tube. What makes more difference to outcomes is how good your waders are. That, and whether you remember to have that pee before you launch.

FISHING THE MIDDLE-WATER

The concept of 'middle-water' is an interesting one. In my book it means sections that aren't shallow enough to wade but, at the same time, also aren't exactly mysterious with depth like, say, the water off the wall usually is. So middle-waters are places you can't wade, but where if you did fall in, the water would be about shoulder-deep to just over your head. The best of these spots are the ones where, for some quirky reason, you find the mean temperature is always a degree or two *cooler* than in the rest of the lake; or places where there's middle-water alongside structure, maybe surrounded by reeds, or on the edge of an old riverbed or something. Every lake has middle-waters. They fish well with Intermediate lines (or sinkers) and big nymphs thrown on longish casts and retrieved slowly. And the cooler ones get known. I remember two in the Old Dam. One was just off the Shale Heap and the other one was up the eastern end of the dam, about two hundred yards off-shore, where the temperature for some reason was always a full degree cooler.

Places where water temperatures are constantly cooler attract trout. Inlet streams are sometimes cooler, and so are natural springs that empty into a lake underwater. The only way to find them is to make a religion out of measuring water temperatures. And your thermometer must be reliable, must stay under long enough to get an accurate reading, and must be able to reach the deepest water. It's no good just measuring the top four to five feet.

Once you locate a cool spot, check it each time you fish the lake. If it stays colder, you have a honey-hole. Also, it's worth taking the trouble to check the temperature in inlet streams. Most days the temperature is much the same as in the lake itself, but when the inlet water's cooler you know where you should be fishing.

NIGHT FISHING

For a steep adrenaline surge, night fishing on lakes takes a lot of beating for sheer visceral thrill.

We had very few rules about night fishing other than that you needed to know the layout of the territory *before* you start walking or wading around in the dark (fences, submerged and otherwise, are bad news, deep holes are worse), and that you shouldn't false-cast if you could help it.

There was a time on one particular dam near the Inhluzane when we couldn't go wrong catching big browns at night. We found out about it by chance. We happened to end off fishing quite late one day (in fact it was pitch-black), and some thoughtful soul went off and fetched the truck while we were trying to sort ourselves out. He drove it down to the water's edge, which was kind of him but, better still, he left the headlights burning. They shone over the shallows just where the inlet stream came in. I think we saw the fish at the same time, judging by the noise we all made in unison, half a dozen browns between five and six pounds chasing

minnows or something in the shallow water. Not being slow out of the blocks when opportunity knocks, I caught two and Biggs landed a third. From then on we were converts.

We learnt fast that large, black Muddler Minnows worked well, that the darker the fly the better. Later, that big DDDs were deadly, that it wasn't healthy to wade too much, to check beforehand for fences, to keep casts short, to limit false-casting, to use short, stout leaders and to *listen* for the take with dry flies. You can hear it.

Fishing the dry fly at night would go something like this: you stroke the line towards some unseen piece of black water in a single sweep, feel for slack, take it in gently, and wait. There was always the deafening chorus of frogs, and some nights the moon was out, or the stars were bright enough to give you an idea of the landscape around you. Otherwise it was just a dark and featureless world, with the lake a deep-black void ahead of you. Then through the water noises you'd suddenly hear a muffled 'wumpf' and you knew the DDD had gone under. You had to strike fast, keep the line tight and short, try to remember where those damned fences came in, work out which way the fish was running, how big it was – I could go on.

It was great fun.

DEEP STILLWATER NYMPHING LEADERS

For deep nymph fishing, use a full nine-foot compound-taper nylon leader down to 2 or 3X, or a 10-foot Mulligan's furled leader, and add between four and six feet of 4X tippet. Sometimes you need longer tippets, but long leaders are difficult to control, especially in wind. In deeper water it's an idea to shift the indicator to the tip of the fly line, and to clean the leader off with a detergent to get it to sink quickly.

THE ESSENCE OF IT ALL

Although there was a period when I came dangerously close to a life you could say was largely misspent in the pursuit of stillwater trout, the time I now spend fly fishing is more defensive, more in keeping with best domestic practice though I suspect that's nothing to necessarily feel proud about. It's just that lately I feel not so consumed by it all; more at peace than at war with fish; driven now just by the occasional need to feel water around my legs, or a rod in my hand, than by any deep compulsion to latch onto ever bigger trout. (That's still there, of course, just that the drive is not as overwhelming as it once was). Other things have changed, too. For example, even though I don't admit it, I now regularly learn things from sage young anglers old enough to be my own kids, and I'm not too proud to take the dope off them. Every little bit helps.

So, quietly, a little less urgency has crept into my fly fishing. There are longer bouts of calm introspection and fewer surging adrenaline rushes, which makes the sport, well, a lot less exhausting, I suppose. Above all, I've learnt that some minor aspects of fly fishing are great fun and just as riveting as big-ticket events. It's not a bad thing we cool off a bit as we get on.

That said, what exactly have I learnt from the years I've spent on stillwaters that's worth sharing? What thoughts can I distil and nutshell for you? What things do I think count for most? Well, there are maybe a few, but I'm not sure how you'd describe them exactly. I certainly wouldn't call them the hard-and-fast rules of stillwater angling. There aren't many of those anyway, and those we might agree on scare me a little. Fly fishing never comfortably accommodates absolutes or unequivocals.

Neither are the ideas I want to share 'truths', because, as you'll see, all are subject to exception.

And certainly they're not 'the gospel' or 'the scriptures', because that's plainly pretentious.

Let's just call them an assortment of tips, ideas, notions, bits of homely advice, maybe here and there a little outrageous heresy, carefully distilled out of a long time spent on the flat waters, offered for what it's worth and intended to make lake fishing come more alive for you. If it already is, by all means skip the rest.

THE TWO IMPORTANT WORDS IN STILLWATER FLY FISHING ARE 'SHALLOWS' AND 'STRUCTURE'

The shallows are where the action is because that's where the bulk of the food is. Mostly you want to be wading shallows a little less than waist-deep, fishing a leader anything from nine to sixteen feet, using a rod of around eight to nine foot threaded with a 4- to 5-weight floating or Intermediate fly line. If anything constitutes bread-and-butter stillwater fly fishing, this is it.

Occasionally you want to throw a fly back along the tracks you make wading, but otherwise you just fan out your casts and never take your eyes off the water. You keep looking for movement. Notice the word *movement*. You're not just looking for rises, and you will cast – without a split second's hesitation – at anything you can't exactly explain. Looking back, I guess most fish hit me in the shallows anything from one to three feet below the surface. When I say 'most', probably forty percent of them. The rest roughly went as follows: twenty percent off the top, thirty-five percent in the middle-water (say four to six feet deep), and the remaining five percent in really deep water.

There are plenty of fish off dam walls, naturally, and in the really deep water, but they are not necessarily *bigger* fish just because they live in the deepest parts of the lake, nor are there *more* of them. That's all myth. In fact, in really deep water, or off the wall for that matter, there aren't the numbers of fish you find in the shallows. Also, I have a sense that really deep water may be something of

a sanctuary to trout, and that when they choose to drop in there we maybe should be leaving them alone.

You'll find trout *anywhere* in shallows, meaning from the margins to the water under your longest cast. When you actually *believe* trout will be anywhere in shallow water, even right on the edges, you've made real progress in stillwater fly fishing.

One thing turns otherwise good shallows into stunning water: structure, meaning reedbeds, weedbeds, islands of grass, inlet streams, submerged riverbeds, tree stumps, drop-offs, old truck tyres, whatever. The closer you cast to any of these, the better your chances.

YOUR APPROACH TO LAKES

You start to fish lakes well when you start approaching them in exactly the same way you approach rivers. All the norms and rules of river fishing should apply – waiting, watching, sighting trout (when you can), keeping low and out of sight, stalking if you like, careful presentation, avoiding false-casts, careful wading, checking water temperatures, matching hatches. I could go on. Any rule you learnt for rivers applies to lakes. If you think of any exception, please let me know. And yes, drag can be a problem fishing dry fly on lakes, in case you were just getting ready to call me.

As far as really *big* lakes go, those vast, intimidating expanses of flat water stretching as far as your eye can see, the best way to approach them is the same way you would eat an ox – one bite at a time. Pick a spot, on a bay with structure in it preferably, study the water and, well, just 'set up camp' as it were.

SMALL FLIES

Generally, in lake fishing we tend to underestimate the importance of small flies. In my own fishing, the discovery that smaller flies got

more takes came as something of a breakthrough and a surprise. By smaller flies I mean nymphs around size 14 and 16, dries down to size 18. Dragon nymphs, and maybe even damsel nymphs, need to be larger, say around sizes 6 to 10 (but they're larger anyway, if only because they are traditionally tied on long-shank hooks).

In lake fishing, moving down to really small flies requires a daring leap of faith because, for most people, lakes have always meant flies around size 8, even size 6. And small flies don't exactly fill you with raw confidence on lakes, maybe something to do with the vastness of the water making small flies look, well, I don't know, at best insignificant, maybe even ridiculous. The only way to overcome this prejudice is to move to smaller flies in stages. You could start with, say, a size 12 Olive Hare's Ear nymph. Try it for an hour each outing and once you feel confident fishing it, drop down to a size 14, then eventually to a 16. But I suggest you wage your small-fly campaign around structure, to give the flies an even chance.

THE BEST TIME OF DAY ON LAKES

Who knows? It's a little like answering a question on weather patterns, in that you feel the need to start by saying something defensive but unhelpful, like 'It depends.'

But although it does actually 'depend', I think I'd probably have to settle for the period between midday and 2 to 2.30pm, when most folks are eating lunch.

At least, that's what we discovered over the years. The number of trout we caught at this time of the day is maybe surprising, but it's understandable. It has to do with rising water temperatures increasing nymph activity, and maybe more favourable changes in oxygen saturation. Certainly it isn't in any way caused by increased surface-hatching activity, because on stillwater the major

hatches are pretty well isolated to the quiet times around sunrise and sundown.

Having said all that, warm, drizzly days can be something else – sporadic rises bracketed only by full-blown hatches, the fish staying dilly all day. Then there're the drizzly days when there's no sign of fish on the surface, but electric activity everywhere under it; the sort of day when, without having seen a rise, you connect on nearly every other cast. What's happening is nymphs by the thousand are busy preparing under the water for emergence, and you stumble into it with your size 16 Olive Hare's Ear, or a slender damsel, fished along the weed margins on a tiny orange indicator, and really clean up.

The most important message, though, is never to leave off fishing a lake over lunchtime.

FALSE-CASTING OVER STILLWATER

Great sin.

You don't want to do this, at least not over clear shallows. The single cast, especially with a Single Haul added, will clear enough line to reach ninety percent of fish around you. Having the line moving at high speed time and again over the water you're supposed to be fishing stacks the odds against you. In the end, you have to spook some fish – and for what? A couple of extra yards? It's not worth it.

THE RETRIEVE

Any retrieve is fine, as long as you vary it, and as long as it tends, on average, more towards being slow than quick. Persistently fast retrieves are, sadly, more the norm than the exception. It's one of the reasons I haven't taken to the stripping basket in trout fishing.

I happen to think stripping baskets encourage the habit of high-speed retrieves.

The majority of casts should be retrieved until they are in close, but not that close you can't easily load the rod for the next cast. I begin by fishing the water right alongside me with short casts. It's a habit now. So by the time I'm throwing a long line, I know the nearby water has been covered. Then the rest of the casts can safely be fished to within a comfortable casting distance.

I don't know what there is about a free-drifting, sinking fly that fish find so attractive. Maybe the steady rocking of the line on the waves transmits subtle undulating movement to the fly, movement that trout find enticing and that fishermen can't replicate. So one of the best retrieves with a nymph is no retrieve at all. Just fish the fly on the drift, under an indicator if you like, and if you don't use an indicator, watch the leader like a hawk, not just the tip of the fly line. It's the sort of fishing that needs faith and a steely resolve, but it's also the sort of technique that produces a real hog against the run of play.

WHEN YOU CAN'T BUY A FISH

Fly fishing stillwaters can be – no, invariably is – hard work. That's an inescapable reality, certainly if you fish seriously, or plan to really get ahead. I'd be guessing, but in this country I'd say the mean yield per rod-day on lakes can't be more than four or five fish. Even on the better waters. And then there's nothing like consistency to that either, given that to average three or four fish means you have the odd outing with ten or twenty trout. But then more than just the odd one when you catch nothing.

The art and science is to make the best of the worst days and to develop coping strategies for what in the trade we call 'the dog days'. And 'dog days' there will be. They are part of the contract.

One strategy is to actually practise casting while you're fishing, on the assumption that while you aren't catching fish you might as well be doing something useful. For example, concentrate on perfecting long, Single Haul casts, or eliminating false-casting, or going for distance without sacrificing anything on accuracy, or Roll Casts, or Steeple Casts, whatever.

The second thing is to introduce a diversion tactic. I like to break the day into fifteen-to-thirty-minute spells, so that any given tactic has a *measurable* beginning and end, and isn't too long that it gets boring in the middle. For example, say things are really slow and you decide to fish a large hopper in the deep water off the wall: do it for thirty minutes then change to something else if it doesn't work. Or if you move position, give each new place a fixed amount of time. It keeps your interest up.

Then finally, I take pronouncements that trout are 'off' with a pinch of salt. Mostly, 'off' means they're probably 'on', just that you haven't actually figured out where, or to what. Trout can be very contrary. Have you noticed how often they come 'on' just when you decide to give up? In fact, every time I quit, they consistently seem to perk up. I've seen more trout landed just as someone announces he's giving in, than I've seen landed in the most extravagant summer-evening midge hatch. But staying in there sometimes needs real strength of character. Resting up is maybe a better option than actually quitting. Thinking back, I have done a fair amount of bird watching, coffee drinking or straw chewing myself over the years.

One reason I sometimes fail on lakes is that I don't change to a sinker on slow, sultry days to fish really deep. I know I should be doing just that at times, but somehow it just doesn't appeal to me. Of course, it may to you, and by all means think of doing just that when all else has failed. Perhaps the best advice I can give you about wet lines and lake fishing is that on no account

should you listen to my advice about them. I'm unreliable on this score. Get your opinion elsewhere. Just a friendly suggestion.

