

## Considering Trout

It was a gorgeous autumn day, the air holding on to just the right amount of summer's warmth. With clear skies and a gentle breeze, it was one of those perfect autumn days that stay long in the memory. I'd been fishing for about an hour without even a bite. It was perfect.

I have loved fly fishing for several years now. For myself, I like to clarify that it's called fishing, not catching. I would slightly modify Thoreau and say "Many people go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after." Sure, there's a thrill when you feel that tell-tale tug or see the flash of a strong and healthy wild trout attacking your fly. I won't deny it and the thrill's especially strong when it's a fly you tied. (Holy \*bleep\*, it actually worked!) Here's the thing, though. To get to the catching point, I rambled a bit up a trail, through the trees and underbrush. I picked up a dozen rocks and checked out the caddis husks. I shook willow branches and tried to figure out what those tiny bugs were. I looked at the clouds; what the heck is the weather going to do? Then, standing creekside, in divine solitude, I breathe deep and am overwhelmed by gratitude – I GET to do this. I get to spend this time, on this water, in this forest, in these mountains. How did I get so lucky? In that moment, I feel so connected, so at home. The actual catching of a fish, well, that's secondary for me. It's the entire experience, from rocks to weeds to fish, it leaves me awestruck.

The ecology of fly fishing is fascinating; considering conditions in the water, in the air, the phenology (the nature of seasonal phenomena like bug hatches). It's fun to geek out on trying to match the hatch, finding the perfect fly for the current bug conditions. OK for full transparency here, for all my talk, about a quarter of the time I choose to ignore all that and just tie a Parachute Adams and blunder on! But learning about the natural history of an area can lead to a greater appreciation of that place and doing it in the context of fishing or hiking makes it more fun and relevant than simply reading a book on the subject. You can get real attached to a place the more you know about it. And the more attached you are, the more likely you are to pay attention to current issues involving the area. Water issues are big here in the West. Public lands issues are also pressing. Some of these beautiful places where the great trout lurk are under threat. I don't believe that, as a society, we can afford to lose these places. Even when I can't get to my favorite streams and trails, I know they are there and that is comforting.

Fly fishing is another way for me to connect with nature and ground myself. I almost always leave the water more centered, more clear-headed than when I began the day. It doesn't matter if I caught anything or not. Just being there, feeling a part of the ecosystem, brings great peace. I encourage everyone to find a place that pulls at your heart. Whether it's the perfect fishing stream, that one trail that you constantly daydream of, that quiet lake where you watched that incredible sunset, find that place and learn all you can about it. Every piece of information unfolds a new layer of appreciation. Sure, you can read stuff, watch a show on nature but to really *know* it and *feel* it, you've got to get out there. The thing about fly fishing is you do have to have some patience and you can get so immersed and happily lost in that space. Thoreau got it right, it's not just the fish I'm after, but they've certainly taught me a lot.

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For anyone interested in learning to fly fish, the Colorado Mountain Club has a great and affordable school coming up in March: <http://www.cmcflyfish.org/> .

Oh, and ladies, don't be intimidated! Fly fishing is definitely not just a men's club! I've had many hours of enjoyment and met some really fantastic folks out there.