

Fuel for Winter Dreams



I'm off in a daydream of summer fishing when a snowplow roaring past shocks me back to reality. A winter wonderland it may be, but compared to the peace and serenity of my daydream, harsh is the first word that comes to mind.

The snow shovel brings me no comfort or peace, but a good book does. This one, *The Longest Silence*, by Thomas McGuane, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2000, tells of fly fishing river channels deflected by a narrow, wooded island with friend Mike.

"We caught a few trout and then, fishing upstream, I hooked a fish on a nymph, a most delicate take and a rather measured reaction as I set the hook. When the fish eased out of the current to the slack water, it rolled once and I saw that it was an enormous rainbow. At first it fought, as large trout sometimes do, like an annoyed dog, shaking its head in the current, and planning off at a leisurely angle to turn and shake once again. I had enough sense of the fish's size to resist making him mad. Then, with one sand-filled boil, he turned and ran downstream. At the point where the channels rejoined each other, the river deepened too much for me to wade after him, so I pushed my fingers through the arbor of the reel and tried to slow the spool down. I got nowhere. As the line peeled off and the diameter of the spooled line decreased, everything got faster. The reel's click ran together in a little screech as the hog trout roared off."

"By now, Mike had passed me and was trying to find a path downstream to follow the fish. Thirty yards below me, the backing passed over his head, parallel to the riverbank. Watching the hundred yards of line shrink, the last look I'd had of the fish – its dull red stripe wider than my hand – seemed to hang before me as I acknowledged that this was the largest resident trout I'd ever hooked. I thought of the fish I'd stared at on restaurant walls in northern Michigan as a boy. Most of them would have seemed like *cuisine minceur* to this beast."

“Then the trout stopped. A single turn of backing remained on the spindle at the centre of my empty reel. Yet the fish had stopped right then and there! It was like literature! He paused long enough for me to consider how wonderful life could be when it had great literature-style items, such as coincidence and fate and elegant ironies. Then, in that moment of anti-magic, when literature is converted to the far more familiar aspects of the land in which we actually live and breathe and spend our days, the great trout turned and straightened my hook. I had so much line downstream that there was still a substantial bow in my rod. I had to reel it all in. I had to salute the now-absent great fish that had made such short shrift of me. The more line I reeled in, the less bow there was in my rod, and finally, with nothing to commemorate the fish except the whispering river around my knees, my rod was nothing but a straight, dead stick. But there was a terrific, evangelical silence. It is a fact that we are made almost entirely of river water, but the flesh that remains organizes this spectral borrowing from riparian valleys and, rod in hand, blesses our origins by counting coups.”

Closer to home, our photo shows three anglers fishing the gorgeous Wire Pool, below Silver’s Pool on the St. Mary’s River. Sometimes a photograph brings back special memories. Otherwise, I’ve watched many of those “nice fish!” WFN TV series, but have seen none, despite their advanced media technology, professional fishers, camera crews and travel budgets, that compare to a good book in stoking the fires of a great fishing daydream. Sure, Robert Redford’s film, “A River Runs Through It” was excellent, but remember, his movie began as a great book!

Bill Carpan, Stillwater, NS

