



An Elitist is Born

In the absence of many shore fishing opportunities, numerous anglers seek alternative destinations. For those that don't have a boat, stream and river fishing is a good option, as an angler can catch large salmon and maybe steelhead or brown trout.

It's an evolution for beginners to start with a 6-foot rod and evolve to a 10-foot rod with a spinning reel. And when they see everyone with a centerpin reel and 13-foot rod, they eventually decide to take the leap. They will not buy what they think feels good, but what internet message boards post are good.

As time passes and they fish other species without having a boat, they come back to a method where they can catch fish – river or stream float fishing for salmon and trout.

Most of the knowledge they have gained is through internet message boards. Fifteen-years ago when you wanted to fish some tributaries, you got up, took a drive and fished a river, having paid the dues to know if that river will fish well or not. Now anglers want to research it all and talk all day on *msn* before they go to a river.

They will buy the floats, jigs and all the pinkies they can carry because the internet forums told them they work, not because they have fished them on the water and realized they can work. They may even look at the guy drifting with roe and scoff.

As time passes for the angler and their talent for float fishing grows, they will be able to hook into numbers of fish. They have now come full circle as they watch other anglers fishing with spinning rods and other inferior set-ups without a great deal of luck. They feel like they are the master of the river because they can catch fish while others may still struggle to get a bite - the elitist mentality begins.

The angler now owns a digital camera and readily posts their conquests over the internet to reaffirm their 'master of the river' theory, and releases fish that in some cases will die to over exertion and improper release methods, forgetting to research that part. They may scoff at an

older guy for actually taking a fish home for the BBQ, not realizing that that same 'old school' guy released a dozen steelhead earlier and two days before released 7 bass and 4 muskies, once again confirming in their mind the 'master of the river' theory. The elitist anglers reaffirm their master of the river mentality by purchasing wading jackets, breathable waders, chest packs (because as master of the river they need to be better than all), and the elitist's mentality continues.

Now the internet chat boards have younger anglers age 12, 13, 15 etc, who have seen brothers cousins and friends become 'masters of the river' and they now feel that internet board postings and catching salmon and the odd steelhead make them 'masters in waiting', of course aspiring to have the right 'bling bling' and all the digital pictures to move up in class to a real master. They refer to "schooling you" as terms of reference to their day, failing to realize that the pre-internet anglers fished those 20,000 to 40,000 runs on the rivers some time back and could care less about catching a meager 10 fish in a day.

They read internet postings and without the trial and error factor, they know it all and readily post it, albeit many times to the chagrins of older anglers.

You see, the older guys did it through trial and error, as there was no 'road map' for fishing rivers other than to walk and watch in a trial and error method.

But of course the pre-internet anglers weren't master of the rivers; they were just ordinary Joes who liked to fish, not because it was trendy but because it was a passion.

On the River throughout a section of water no one would ever dream of fishing, resides an 85-year-old man with his daughter. He's too frail to really fish on his own, and one day he asked if he could join me fishing the river. I was glad to help this true old timer down a ladder and share a drift with him, and the stories I was told that day will remain imprinted in my mind forever. In particular, the ones about ordering centerpin reels from England decades before I was even born and how the tributaries truly fished before many of us graced good earth.

See it's not that the older guys can fish better than the young guys; it isn't a competition between old school vs. new school. It's about the pursuit of a passion; believe me when I say that those that are new would do well listening to the stories of some of these old timers. Steelheading is all about the evolution... I'm a decade's old confirmed trout bum, and I will never know everything there is to learn.

But what I do know is that the guy with the 'old school' gear and roe juice so encrusted on the neoprene waders that a belt sander is needed to clean, is the guy I want to fish beside. Why... because they more than likely understand etiquette and respect, gladly engage in conversation and is even more than willing to help land a fish.

We must pay attention to what we do while fishing rivers and streams. While the internet is a great source of information, it will never replace the 'trial and error' method. Choosing to post pictures of a great day on the water is a fantastic way to share it with friends, but a river is very different from a larger body of water. Fish are very susceptible to over harvest and as such can put an erroneous amount of pressure on a fragile resource.

The age of the internet has allowed a group of anglers to shorten the learning curve by orders of magnitude, allowing people to get on fish much faster... a great thing as long as we keep the bigger picture front and center - that is protecting a resource from over exploitation so future generations can enjoy our same passion.

Louis Milo is a long-time avid steelhead angler and is currently heavily involved with local conservation groups