

# Fishing Without a Pole, In A Stream of Consciousness

By Scott Beall

It was a true “on the road” experience. With two glorious weeks in California to explore and reconnect with my native home, there was no shortage of choices. After spending the night with my buddy Dan in the Mayacamas mountains above Sonoma and meeting with my spiritual teacher and guru in Richmond, I found myself in Berkeley, contemplating my next move. I knew what it would be, and in fact had been anticipating this moment for months. I jumped in my rented Prius and headed up to Yosemite, carrying scant camping gear, a cooler for the car camp nights, and a backpack for a possible backcountry trek. I hadn't been backpacking for a couple of seasons, so the pull of my Sierra home was screaming.

The Tuolumne Meadows Store was packed, bustling with families snatching up goodies for evening campfire gatherings, running off to the safety of their car camping nests along the Tuolumne River. A circus show unfolded in the parking lot--mountain climbers weighted down with racks of clips and gear hanging from their hips, sporting svelte bodies and bronze gleaming skin--born of the mountain. Random tourist-drivers passed through the high country, gawking. I was gawking, and sitting there, considering what to do next. Even just sitting in the parking lot sent me into a mini nirvana. There's nothing like that high elevation hypoxic high.

Several days earlier I had made an open invite to various friends for a hiking companion. It bore fruit at the last minute, and my buddy Henry was able to summon the elusive escape velocity from the Bay Area to join me for several days. It always seems like that—escape velocity--as though you need a Herculean burst of will and energy to escape the gravity of work, family, and the inner voice droning “this is too difficult, you're too tired, its not worth it, you can't afford to take the time....” It had been nearly 30 years since Henry had been backpacking, but his youth was rich with backpacking experiences, and he was hungry to rekindle it. Bravo man, escape!

Throughout my life as a backpacker, a huge draw has been the allure of high mountain trout fishing. A curious thing though--in latter years I'd lost some of my Jones for that, and I'm not sure exactly why. It was a mixture of a deeper environmental sensitivity I suppose, that as the

years passed, in almost all areas I'd fished in the Sierra, the quality of fishing had declined. And not the least of it, I'd had some existential moments in recent fishing trips. How about grabbing a work-of-art gorgeous innocent creature in your hands after plucking it from its paradise home with a huge steel hook through its lips, bashing its head against a rock, splatting blood everywhere, watching and feeling the last electric pulses of life and agony bolt through its body, until it was finally dead. Hmmm. Maybe I have a hang-up, but something about that aesthetic struck me like never before as being fundamentally, well, unsettling....? What was it all about? With ever decreasing habitat and native trout a fragile commodity, did I really need this fish dinner? Did I need to prove to myself I was a hunter? Where was my ego? But then again, maybe eating this fish carried less impact on the planet than buying farmed fish, or other food from the industrial systems in the cities. Quandary. I had the hunch that this trip would be some kind of defining moment of insight. In the end my deeper Jones for fishing won out. I began inventorying my gear with great anticipation.

Henry met me in the Tuolumne Store parking lot as I was pulling gear and sorting for packing. Supplies were spread all over, some on the car, some on the ground. Henry arrived and off we drove, just one mile up the road to the trailhead. We packed our packs, scrutinizing each item, evaluating weight vs. comfort, need, and the like. Then came the last piece to be attached my pack—the fishing pole. I looked through the car....where was it? Then, I noticed half of my pole on the roof of my car. Half my pole. But I didn't take it out of the car yet. MY GOD!! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! I left the pole on top of the car back in the Tuolumne Store parking lot and drove off! Half of it actually stayed on top of the car, (thanks to the sleek aerodynamic grooves that Prius roofs have). I immediately raced back, scouring the roadway and parking lot for the lost pole piece, to no avail.

In most other backpack trips this event would have been complete disaster—hiking into fishing country without a pole would be unthinkable, the thing of nightmares (yes, I've had those nightmares). In earlier days I would have postponed the trip, driven miles for a pole, done absolutely whatever necessary, but Henry and I had only two nights in the backcountry, and it was already 2:00 pm. Finding another pole was not an option. So with a deep breath I tapped into my waning fishing Jones and rationalized that it would be good to do a trip without fishing. I removed my reel and lures from my backpack, and set off into the back country with no fishing gear whatsoever.

Of course, as fate would have it, as we entered the wilderness we came across the most beautiful classic high mountain stream imaginable (but I was FINE with it, really....!). Crossing the bridge we came across a young family with two children who were fishing. Fishing these streams is traditionally extremely challenging, and most day tripping casual fisher people catch little to nothing, or at best, tiny fish. Then Henry pointed it out to me—in the water on a stringer sat three gorgeous, twelve inch plus native brook trout glistening in the sun, bobbing in the current. Oh my God. Ok, Ok, so this was a REALLY amazing stream. Damn. I thought to myself, but no, no, no, it's a GOOD thing we're not fishing... really, a good exercise in experiencing the backcountry without the fisherman-hunter trance descending on me every day by 4:00 in the afternoon... THIS was a good thing...a good experiment... I convinced myself.

Henry was very curious about fishing. He had done it a bit but was hungry to learn what he could to actually be successful at it. He had great respect of my experience and expertise. I'd gathered fishing prowess from nearly 40 years of mountain trips, largely self taught and working from logic and intuition. That was it for me--common sense, experience, observation, logic and intuition. I never read books or had teachers for fishing beyond one trip as kid with a neighbor's family. I had simply accumulated a sense for it over the years, and developed some skill with the pole.

On our layover day Henry and I decided to take a trek up the stream as far as we felt like going. It was one of those shimmering Sierra days, crisp light, with everything crackling with perfection. As we walked, I was naturally pulled to the stream, making observations like, "that would be a great place to cast", or "great pool...", and such. Occasionally I went deeper--"if you laid down a lure at 30 degrees with a medium velocity just in front of that bank and drew it across the eddy by the V shaped rock, speeding up your reeling and then slowing down just on the other side of it to cover the side eddies of the main rapid above the main pool, pulling it up a bit and then speeding up just at the end in the still water on the side, you would surely nail something...." Henry could see me drifting into "the zone", the trance state that the full fishing experience induces. He started asking questions.

As Henry's questions continued, our walk up the stream evolved into a "virtual" fishing trip. I began using trekking pole as a prop, a mock fishing pole, and we decided to really do it—cover the stream in all

aspects as if we were really fishing. I would *verbalize* the events and steps of the fishing process rather than *do* them, with some help from my prop. What started as a fun game would turn out to be an amazing experience, and I would soon discover that forgetting my pole was the best thing to happen.

I first explained to Henry that steam fishing is a highly dynamic activity, in all respects. As we “fished”, I realized how much information and knowledge I had encoded into my being through my life without realizing it. I say “into my being” because that is simply the case—successful fishing is much more than knowledge or conscious decisions and calculations—it’s a zone, a feel, a trance, a shift in consciousness. Only when your concentration is piqued and your awareness is consumed by the geography of each moment can you expect to be consistently successful. And indeed, when you are fully consumed like this, “success” becomes secondary. I’ve found this true in music, art, and business for that matter. You must be in a full state of presence with the situation at hand. As soon as you start taking measure of your success or failure, listening or watching for results, your gaining ego mind takes over, you lose the zone, the channel of inspiration closes, and it’s over. Success seems to only happen when it doesn’t matter, or at least when you’re not paying attention to it. As Charlie Parker said—“Learn your instrument, learn your music, forget it all, and go play.”

I began:

”Now this is a super important point-- you can’t stay in any one place very long. Stream fishing requires covering lots of ground—(or river), constantly, quite rapidly, constantly moving. It’s not the image people have of sitting back on the bank with pole in the water, contemplating the clouds. The stream fishermen that sit in one place see little success. There really is something quite universal about this. I’m not sure if he ever went fishing but I recall the great physicist Richard Feynman on the features of effective problem solving: “Have a lot of ways of representing things—if one way doesn’t work, switch quickly to another one.”

“Really... so maybe that works great for being a genius, but how does this work for fishing?” Henry asked.

“Ok, let’s start at the beginning. This stream is small, and crystal clear. In most places you can see every square inch of the terrain under the water, or at least you *think* you can see it. This makes things very

challenging. The fish are highly aware of your presence, and almost impossible to see, but they can see you perfectly. At all times you have to realize you are hunting, you are creeping up on your prey like a cat stalks a mouse. Your movement above the water, first and foremost, is critical. Make one wrong move and the announcement has been made in fish world—‘humans present! Don’t eat anything that looks weird...!’ So with this constant movement it’s much easier to manage if you cover your ground moving from upstream, downward.”

“ I still don’t really see why that matters...moving from upstream downward.”

Ok, let’s get some of the fundamentals straight. What we’re talking about here is stream fishing with lures, period. This is what I know, what I like, what I do. Frankly, lure fishing, or “spin” fishing has gotten something of a bad rap in the shadow of highly romanticized fly-fishing. I suppose spin fishing is not as glamorous by some measure, but in my view, it’s every bit as complex, challenging, magical, and all the rest. One point though is that in some stream environments you can only appeal to the fish using flies, and in others only flies will catch the really big fish. But it’s really about knowing what you’re doing with spinners. And take note, every single fishing “rule” and piece of advice will have exceptions—there is nothing absolute about this!!! These are fish, this is nature, and I swear, while there are certain principles that hold, there will always be exceptions.

Now, in this type of fishing you “always” cast downstream and pull your lure against the current, upstream, period. Why? The spinners need current to work against to generate the action and movement that makes them appealing to the fish. It’s bizarre, I do sometimes see fishermen casting upstream, but I don’t really know how that works for them, if it does at all. (Again, maybe the rare exception thing...) The spinners I’m using are designed for fast current. I use Mepps and Panther Martins primarily. Some spinners are good with no current, like in a lake or a very calm stretch of a stream, but you can always compensate for the amount of current by the rate at which you reel in. We can talk about that later. So the basic rule, cast downstream and reel upstream, with your rod at about a 120 degree obtuse angle with the line as you reel. This is super important so that when a fish strikes you have the shock absorbing quality of the rod to maintain tension on the line. So when you consider this, and the fact that you need to creep up on the fish, it makes sense that you cover streams moving

from upstream downstream, so you don't have to always walk around the key fishing holes, potentially scaring fish, in order to get to a position to cast downstream. When you work from upstream down, you can virtually walk down the middle of the stream. Its beyond awesome. It adds to the zone. I don't want to sound weird here--its just hard to put in words--but there is a sort of sensual intimacy with the all of nature, the stream ecosystem, the mountains above you, the amazing light, your solitude, and all the rest, that is piqued when you dissolve the boundaries, and merge with the river, walking down its spine, wallowing in its innards, caressing its inner surfaces.

"Ok... " Henry went along with me.

"So, backing up a bit further.... The instant a fish touches your lure they know something's wrong... yikes, they think, (do fish think...?) this is not a bug, this is a big metal object that has no business being in my mouth!!! So what do they do, they try to spit it out. Now think about it, you have to imagine the fish perspective (do they have a perspective?), what if it were you, if you had a metal hook in you and it was being pulled by a giant creature trying to drag you under the sea, what would you do to get it out?

Henry felt uncomfortable with this... maybe this fishing thing really is inhumane...

"You would have to immediately stop the pulling, so you would move toward the pulling to eliminate the tension so you could work it out of your mouth. This concept comes into play in other ways we'll see later, but back to the point—if your rod is at an angle with the line, the fish can't reduce the tension right away, and if, (which they will), try to swim toward you to get rid of the tension a rod angle will give you a moment to start reeling in, sometimes frantically, to keep that tension. One key part of playing a fish is to keep the tension on the line. Hell, they'll jump wildly, do everything they can to get off, and many of them will, for sure. But then, once you've reeled in, you've lost another part of the shock absorbing quality. Fishing line stretches, and a long line has lots of stretch like a big rubber band. The longer the rubber band, the more stretch capacity. When you only have about 15 feet of line out, things get dicey because a sizable, active, flailing fish has more opportunities to create sharp impacts on the line, side to side, or down the length of it, which can break it.

“Now the other side of this is, if you allow the angle of your rod to be at 180 degrees with the line in the water, that is, a straight line, you have different problem. In that case you have eliminated the shock absorbing quality of the rod, and the fish has a firmer resistance to work with. If they yank abruptly they have a greater chance of breaking the line. It’s the basic principle of flexibility—a rigid system will break more easily than a flexible system. Its like an airplane wing—you see them bouncing in the wind—that’s good. If they were totally rigid there would be greater chances of cracks... (Come to think of it, I know some people that could benefit from that advice...)

Ok, so back to casting, while I’ve seen people stream casting with lures and cast upstream many times. I think to myself, they don’t know what the hell they are doing. But, on some rare occasions I have actually caught a fish by casting upstream.

“Why did you do it, cast upstream after all you just said?” Henry asked.

“This brings up another whole issue, regarding how to access parts of the stream you want to fish. There’s a lot to say about that, but simply, sometimes you’ll find yourself in a position where it’s simply impossible to get in the position to properly draw a lure through a pool. And when you think about it, the idea of “downstream” or “upstream” is relative; the real issue isn’t downstream or upstream, in as much that you *need to draw the lure against the current*. In some pools there is backwash to the point that the current reverses, and to draw your lure against the current requires casting upstream! And moreover, this isn’t black and white. One of the really fascinating things about all of this is how it engages you in the complexity of the river’s currents, and really noticing, thinking about them, observing, analyzing (when you can’t really see) what the current must be doing in a complex shaped configuration of rocks, bank, logs, grasses, etc. What makes this so amazing is that while there are these general rules, EVERY situation is unique, sections of rivers are like fingerprints, no two are exactly alike. This is the ultimate exercise in being creative, improvising, and problem solving on the spot.

“So back to the casting thing, in some situations where I can’t do it in the exact way I would like (get in the correct position to draw the lure against the current), rather than not fishing the area at all, I’ll break the rule and just cast there. The interesting thing is, given all the unpredictable, you might get lucky. There may be a unique eddy in the pool that gives your lure a good look at a particular moment that

the resident big fish, who might happen to be looking a certain way at that moment and feeling aggressive (do fish feel....?) would grab it. Wham. You never really know what might happen..."

Henry mused for a bit and then asked..."That brings up another question. What makes the fish want to bite the lure? What exactly do they think the lure *is*?"

"Food, of some sort, for sure. But you know, this is a really fascinating and mysterious topic also. I have so often wondered what really motivates them. Of course there are all the basic logical scientific explanations, but the beauty of this is that there is a HUGE unexplainable piece, a mysterious piece. As much as fishermen, scientists, naturalists and other would like to be able to know, explain and predict what is going on, no one to my knowledge has ever been a fish. Consider the spinner. Maybe I'm missing something, but in all the years I've been fishing on streams I've never, ever seen a bug that really resembles a Mepps spinner, moving rapidly upstream under the water. Dry flies sitting on top of the stream, now that's completely logical, it directly imitates authentic food indigenous to the stream ecosystem. A piece of bait floating down with the current, a no brainer, not exactly rocket science why they like it. It directly imitates a stream event as well. But a spinner? This is a grey zone for me. There may be some naturalist/scientist reading this right now who has a clear explanation for this, but my experience and observation give me my own explanation. Obviously the fish think a spinner is a bug of some sort, or even a little minnow. Keep in mind we're talking about a certain class of spinners in particular. Some lures are like flies, actually models of little baby trout, directly imitating authentic food."

There is a type of fish psychology that I think has shown itself to me over the years in fishing with spinners. Sometimes fish will follow a spinner and inspect it, bump it, test it, as it works its entire way through pool. And sometimes, after all the scrutinizing, the fish will decide to go for it, often at the end of my pull with only 10 feet of line out! This does happen, but the bigger scores (bigger fish) usually seem to happen, something like an impulse purchase for the fish—when a fish sees the lure, and in their programming as predators, (Seize the day! He who hesitates is lost!), they impulsively attack it, before they "think" too much (do fish think?). They react viscerally, almost emotionally. (yes, fish likely don't have emotions, but when you get in the zone of intimacy with the whole process, its normal to construct a model in your mind that they do. It seems they do. And in fact, I'm convinced

that going with this helps a fisherman access intuition and insight and become more successful, if not at least have more fun...). The fish react within seconds of seeing the excitement generated by the gyrating, darting, point of animated energy. While it may not resemble any identifiable food source found in the stream (this is an important goal for fly fishing), it tricks them in the moment. Its as though the lure is designed to excite a piece of the fish brain to bring it into a brief moment of irrational insanity, activating its base animal hunger and competitive nature, to just react. It is clearly more irrational for a fish to attack a lure than a fly or a worm. (Now again, ok, does rationalization apply to fish?) And the competition is another aspect. If one fish shows interest, or there is a group of fish sitting around and this exciting thing presents itself, the most macho fish will jump to get it before the rest, before it even has a chance to process what it is chasing. Pure and simple alpha reaction behavior. I suppose this is universal among animals—and of course, humans. This mindless need to grab and consume without much reflection on the real benefit or value of what is being consumed...

So what does this say about how we fish? It defines so much... so much. Let's look at casting. This is really key, and really much more of an art in spin fishing than most anyone acknowledges. Since the fish are so impulsive, moody, and all the rest, you have to make sure that from the second your lure hits the water, it has this magic to it. What this means is you can't cast with a big arc of line, and then wait a second, and start reeling. If you do this the lure will plop in the water and will not immediately be in action--it will flop and start sinking, and a few seconds later, when you start reeling and the line tightens, it will look like something. To do this is no different that if you just threw a rock in the water, and made a big announcement in fishworld—'humans are here; something really weird just dropped in the water and then started moving...! Humans are here, hide and don't eat anything.' Now, what you need to do is finesse it so that the lure is in its action *the instant it hits the water!* This means that you need to cast with a minimal arc so that there is less line out, and close your bail and start reeling a split second before the lure hits the water. This way it looks like some exciting bug dove into the water and started swimming. Think about it. The split second the spinner hits the water any fish within proximity will go into feed or flight, they will interpret it as prey or predator, and react. Consequently the presentation of your spinner has to look like food instantly, and of course, to capitalize on that whole irrational 'eat-the-exciting-thing-that-

attracts-us-before-another-fish-does' phenomena. Yikes. This sounds like some people I know...

This dynamic is particularly important when you might be casting way across a stream, and the ideal holding spot for fish is at the furthest reach of your cast, right where your lure hits the water. The first second that your lure is in the water is critical. And of course, here is where your casting skill is key. To be successful, you have to be able to land a lure within a 12 inch radius target (or less) when casting as much as 30 feet away. Tricky, here's another fascinating thing about the "zone." I've found that after about 40 minutes or so of walking down the stream, merging with the all of it, I don't have to think, and find myself making ridiculously accurate casts in all sorts of circumstances. It's really enhanced when you're hungry.

It's always been a standard game on my backpacking trips to manufacture a simulated wild experience by bringing the bare minimum of food from civilization. This sets the tone—catch fish or be hungry. While the circumstances may be artificially created, they are as real as anything when you're out on a long trip. Eating a small bowl of Ramen for dinner, or days of powdered beef stroganoff tends to create a type of desperation to the hunt for fish. Add this to the fishing experience, and the zone deepens, the skills sharpen. After days of minimal servings of dehydrated food, the thought of fresh trout sautéed with rosemary and garlic activates the hunter instinct. Just being in the wilderness with minimal food generates a type of adrenaline—and you've created your own mini version of Survivor (yes, the TV show....). It's interesting to think of how and why we need to create this experience, how we've been cut off from key visceral human experiences. Indeed there are many cultures within our society that do not view camping, let alone creating situations where you are food deprived as a positive experience, for obvious reasons. Why would you want to sleep in a tent? That's what poor people need to do! Why would you want to grovel for food in the wilderness? That's what you do when you're down and out!! But the fishing thing hits something beyond this—it's a spiritual, meditative zone that activates our core humanity by awakening our relationship to our biological nature, and our absolute unity with all that lives.

So back to casting. But there are exceptions, remember? Sometimes you don't want to start reeling right away. Why? Suppose you're in a really big pool and you feel the best spot to reach fish would be in the

middle, closer to you. You might cast way out and want your spinner to sink a bit so that when you pull it through the pool it will be deeper.

This brings up another important idea in this fishing thing. Given the absolute uniqueness of every situation, a fisherman is the consummate problem solver and improviser, making observations, measurements, judgments, evaluations, analyzing every piece of data.

Henry: "So, where are the fish in the stream, how do you know where to cast? How fast do you reel? What makes a good place to cast?"

Ok, Ok, as I mentioned before, there is a basic principle with using spinners—they need current to get the proper action. The fish can be found and caught at almost any spot in the stream at one point or another, but generally they *hang out* in eddies behind rocks, underneath undercut banks, and so forth. In spots of less current they hang and wait for food to drift by in the neighboring areas of strong current. You want to drag your spinner right beside these pools, or through them, skirting the heavy current. In order to do this you need to be positioned in the right place upstream. This is where it gets a little tricky. Not only do you need to direct the swimming path of your lure in the right places, but the depth and action of it must be right, which depends on current. AND the drag (resistance) on your lure depends on how fast you reel of course, in combination with the speed of the current of the stream. As you reel in it's a constant dance, moderating your reeling rate to maintain a desired action and resistance of the lure. You have to moderate it according to the constantly changing stream current that the lure is passing through. To get the best predictor of this you have to scope out the geography of the bottom of the stream in the area you plan to draw your lure. The rate of the stream can be very deceiving---you can't just tell by looking at the ripples on top or even the speed. If the stream is very shallow, it will be going faster as more water has to pass through a smaller volume. If that shallow area also has a sandy bottom, the water surface may appear rather smooth, giving the impression that the current of the water is not as fast as it actually is. All these factors weigh in when you choose exactly where to stand to make your cast and pull your lure. Now, considering you have to work the angle and speed of your draw in response to the variable conditions the lure will pass through (cross currents and changing rate of stream current) you have to plant your stance in a spot that will place the tip of your pole at the optimal location. In locating this spot to stand, you need to consider that you'll need to move the rod tip in a radius that will

accommodate the adjustments you will have to make. When you're wading, standing in current on a rocky bottom, you won't be able to walk around much during the pull, so you need to scope all this out when you choose where to plant your feet before the cast.

Snags are another big issue that will weigh into all these calculations. If you misjudge the depth, current, etc, your lure will hit bottom and have much greater chance of snagging. Hitting bottom also drastically reduces your chance of catching a fish—the lure bouncing on the bottom does not look appealing to them generally, but of course, as the rule goes, there are always exceptions...

And then there is the obvious challenge of trying to navigate your pull around obstructions, some above water (branches hanging over, bushes, etc.) and those under water (huge rocks, branches, roots, etc.). There will be countless situations where you'll have to take a gamble—the ideal pool and potential holding spot for that giant trout will be messed up by some big log extending right over the spot where you will need to pull. (In these cases bait fishing offers a big advantage, where you can just plop the bait in and let it float down through the congested area.) You just have to make your call on these situations.

Another huge part of this whole game is the hunter mentality. Why do we fish? What is the attraction? Is it the puzzle? Outsmarting the fish? Physical exercise? Peace and tranquility? Connection with the beauty and pulse of nature? Yes, all of these, but there is something else that is beyond it all, something deeper and more primal. Life in modern society has significantly abstracted our connection to food, on all levels. Produce comes in frozen bags, cans, jars, plastic bags, and in racks piled high in supermarkets. We zoom in from the city street and load up. We pick up our food objects and consume them with little thought of them as living things grown of nature with all of the processes and effort necessary to get them into your local store. This is even more extreme for meat and fish. For most people, if they had to slaughter a steer in their back yard, gut it, chop up the parts in a bloody mess and then grind random chunks up before mashing it into patties, the experience of Sunday barbecued burgers would be quite different. Indeed, running to a fast food outlet or restaurant abstracts the process even further. In that case we don't even have to see the red meat, we can just peel off the wrapper and bite away, never really conscious of the process that we're a part of. What kind of meat is this? Is it meat? What is meat....? I think I've forgotten....

Authors such as Richard Louvre in his book *Last Child In the Woods* points out how our disconnect from our biological nature is taking a toll on our children in a wide array of behavioral abnormalities. The Harvard biologist E. O Wilson coined the term “biophilia” to acknowledge a growing body of research that indicates that human beings have a fundamental innate need to be connected with their biological essence and the natural systems that sustain them and that which they are a part of. When deprived of this connection, a type of unconscious but profound malaise sets in which manifests in a variety of ways—a type of amorphous depression, sense of meaninglessness, restlessness, lack of attention span, irritability, and much more. Howard Gardener at Harvard recently added the “naturalist” intelligence to his famous list of multiple intelligences.

The hunter mentality is not just about biophilia and connecting with our natural essence. There is a big piece of social psychology associated with it. I would be leaving out a big part of this if I didn’t share an interesting dynamic that stems from the primal mating instinct. Romancing a love interest takes many forms, from giving flowers, dining out, writing love letters, candy, to marriage proposals while skydiving. But let me add another to the list, one that trumps all. But first I have to make a disclaimer here—there is no sexism involved in this, just put that aside for a moment. This just IS.

Guys, follow these instructions: Take your sweetheart into the wilderness. At around 4:00 in the afternoon tell her, “honey, I’m going off to get our dinner, you can come along, or hang out here at camp. (Yes, of course she can, and should, fish too, but the reality is if she’s not experienced she will likely not catch anything. This has nothing to do with gender. My guy friends rarely catch anything when we go out.) This will be an arduous process, one that will require sacrifice and cunning, with no guarantee of success.” Off you go. You return at dusk with a string of gorgeous golden trout glistening like jewels in the evening light. You tell some amazing stories of scaling rock walls and crossing waterfalls on strewn logs. The fishing has made you tan and glowing—you have that Dundee vibe. You build a fire, and then walk down to the stream to gut the fish, bring them back and hang them on a tree limb by the camp. You begin chopping garlic and rosemary you carried in and wild green onions you found on your fishing journey. Into the frying pan go the fish, with the garlic, onion and rosemary to follow. The air is sweet with the indescribable essence. Sitting down amidst the most majestic mountain peaks imaginable in total solitude

with your honey, you dine on the food of the Gods, the freshest wild trout possible, with the sweetest and most firm flesh imaginable, under a full moon framed in moving clouds. Not a soul around for miles, and miles. What do you think happens next after such an evening? Forget the diamond rings, flowers or candies. This scene is a recipe for nirvana and transcendence. The rest happens naturally...you won't be disappointed...

But above all, the fishing experience taps into a most essential thread for everyone's existence, now and into the future. It places us in the front row of the Big Picture. Human civilization is facing the mother of all challenges over the coming decades. The planet as we know it (or at least any quality of civilized society) will not exist in 50 years unless we're successful at changing our mode of living from an unsustainable, "cradle to grave" open loop cycle of consumption to new designs that regenerate resources ("cradle to cradle"). The manifestation of this shift will involve energy, materials and organizational systems, but finding the engine to power it will depend on a renewed state of human consciousness. Politics, and in turn, development of new technologies, are fundamentally driven by the will of people. And the will of people will not change significantly by giving them *information or knowledge*. People cling to truths based on ideological and cultural conditioning long before they accept facts and reason to the contrary. Without a shift in *consciousness*—an evolutionary shift in values and priorities, ethically and spiritually, and a reconnection with who and what we really are--top down fixes for our footprint problem will remain stuck in "political will," quagmires within social and political systems, and over reliance on technology.

The good news is this shift in consciousness is not something extra or outside of us that we need to obtain. It is something we all possess, but has been obscured from our view or access. The advent of industrial society and all of its intoxicating toys has contributed to distracting us for say, a century? We have lost our way, and forgotten, if temporarily, a vital part of who we really are. We simply need to remove the blinders, and reclaim our essence and true nature.

So can fishing help? Maybe it's a start. But if you do choose to take up fishing, give some serious thought to leaving your pole behind. Just get out. Humans will only work to save that which they have fallen in love with. Indeed, in fishing we fall in love with the natural world, which is none other than falling love with a rediscovered part of ourselves, and humanity. When that happens, we've taken the first

and most essential step toward creating a future we can all feel optimistic about.