

The Voyage of
Float of the Fallen

July 26 thru 29, 2012

July 26, 2012: It was shortly after 12 noon that I arrived at Abe's on the San Juan River, checked in and headed to the room. Being the first to arrive I figured I would have time to unpack and organized my gear. Only moments after I had started unpacking the door to the room opened and I was engulfed in a Greco bear hug of my fishing buddy Eric. We chatted only a few minutes before we went out for him to show me the work he had completed on our drift boat. With all the demands on his time, family, school, internship, supporting other Vets, he has done an excellent job. Eric grabbed his bags, tossed them atop one bed and said lets go launch it at the Texas hole and get fishing.



We tossed our rods and gear into the boat and headed out. Eric has the launch process down and in no time we were on the river rigging our rods. By this time most of the guides had headed down river with their clients so we had no problem securing an anchorage across the river near the downstream end of the Texas hole. The reports for the last few weeks have been the fishing is difficult, surface waters tend to be warm and fish are holding low. Contrary to these input I noticed a few fish feeding at the last surface currents of the Texas Hole so I rigged with a chocolate foam wing, size 22, and dropped a black midge, size 20. The most effective was the chocolate foam wing, which allowed me the joy of a tight line just often enough to keep me excited. Eric tied on a couple midge variations and employed a strike indicator with much the same results.

Shortly after 5 pm we headed to shore, stowed the boat on the trailer, and placed our gear in the vehicle. It was time for us to head back toward Abe's and locate something to eat. Both of us skipped lunch in favor of getting on the river sooner. Once again the Sportsman Café is under new management. They have extended us the courtesy of a place to store the boat near the river, so we stopped in to thank them in person and try their culinary fare. The fare is a wide selection of burgers and appetizers. Their burger selection does include a chicken breast burger, the Pheasant Tail, for those of us not into bovine enjoyment. They have an excellent selection of beers, from colored water types to bold strong verities properly suited for the fishermen planning to attack the monsters of the San Juan.

July 27: The next morning we started off slowly enjoying some coffee brewed in the room, fruit and sweet rolls we had packed for the trip. The greatest enjoyment was catching up on what each of us has been doing for the last few months. The star event had to be Eric's trip to Alaska, a drift trip to the Dillingham side of the Alaska Peninsula. His pictures included a number of the fish he caught, salmon, rainbow trout, dolly varden, and char. Around 8:30 am we headed back to the Texas Hole, dropping my truck off at Crusher Hole parking area, the take out at the end of the day. Upon reaching the Texas



Hole put in, we quickly launched "Float for the Fallen" and headed to our anchorage as yesterday. This day I did as Eric and rigged a couple of nymph patterns, a black midge atop and a bright red, gold bead, gold wire wrapped midge. Eric rigged a red larva lace pattern. Catch rates were slow as we had heard. The sizes this day ran from 12 to

15 inches. In addition to fishing the goal of the day was for Eric to give me pointers on taking "Float for the Fallen" down river. After a couple of hours we headed on downstream drift fishing by the boat and stopping to work deeper holes along the way. Half way through Three Island run we ran into some surface activity. The fish were surface feeding on very small adult midges. Not a lot of action but an opportunity to tune our dry fly casting and drift techniques. We also shared a late lunch of fresh made sandwiches from provisions in the cooler before continuing down river.

We anchored near shore just after passing through the rapids which serve as the demarcation between Thee Island Run and the Lower Flats. Historically this has been a very good place to fish the seam of the rapids. On this day one might even call it magical. I hooked a nice rainbow that jumped several times clear out of the water, a very nice easily 16 incher. The fish than ran way up stream taking my reel to the edge of it's backing. After holding there it than ran down stream faster than I could reel in line or strip in line. I thought I had lost it but there was still some resistance on the line. As I brought it to the boat and Eric lifted it in the net, he had landed a 7 to 8 inch brown trout. **Presto change O!**

We continued fishing on down the river, working our way slowly through Baetis Bend, past ET Rock, Simon Canyon, though the Chute to the take out at Crusher Hole, catching an occasional fish on the way. At the take out we hop in my truck and drove back to the Texas Hole to pick up Eric's vehicle and the boat trailer. Can you believe this, when Eric fishes alone he places a bicycle in the boat and rides it back to the Texas Hole to get his vehicle? WOW! There are several good size hills that have to be tackled. These would do me in, let alone having rowed a boat all day.

We stop in the Sportsman for a bite to eat and a beer. The couple that operates it are friendly and cordial. The dining area is about half full, more guests than I have seen there in years. A good sign for

those who love to fish the river and enjoy a meeting place to eat and talk fishing. Eric and I meet a gentle man from California and compare notes. After eating and some fish talk Eric says it is almost dark, let's head back to the river and catch the evening hatch. The next thing I know Eric, myself and the man from California are back at the river casting dries and trying to tell if that last rise was anywhere near our flies. When it is so dark none of us has any idea if fish are even near the surface, we pack it in and head back to the Sportsman. The place is now a fisher only crew and over a few more beers we have all embellished our way to a good night's sleep.

July 28: Our morning again starts with freshly brewed coffee and sweet rolls. We have been awaiting the arrival of Travis Snow, a Vet friend of Eric's from the trip to Alaska. Travis lives and goes to school in the Denver area. He is a Ranger that is paralyzed from the waist down. For one of his classes he is authoring a video of his trip to Alaska as a testament to the activities that he and others can still enjoy given the will. Travis has a goal to work in restorative therapy and while helping others be a living example to them. Abe's is not exactly a hot bed for high speed data communications. However, we eventually receive a text message, Travis should arrive that evening.

Following our pattern of yesterday we drop my truck off at Crusher Hole and head on up to the Texas Hole to launch "Float for The Fallen". This is my day to be on the oars as yesterday was my training watching Eric and receiving guidance. Today will test if I listened and observed. I lived a good portion

of my childhood on a lake in Michigan so rowing is nothing new to me. (Well after 55 year it might be a tad rusty.) The lakes were deep and most rowing was accomplished by deep, long pulls of the oars, a luxury not afforded in the shallows of the river or when running through a rapid. We quickly launched the boat and headed for our favorite location on the edge of the Texas Hole. I rigged a gold ribbed hairs ear and dropped another gold bead headed and gold ribbed bright red midge. Eric too had a red larva lace midge pattern on. Both of us used strike



indicators. We were quickly on fish landing several nice rainbows. The pace was slow but productive. Eric made several changes trying olive bunny leaches and a Sculpin pattern. A one point in the morning I managed to hook up with a big full colored rainbow. The fight went on for some time as we both were using 6X tippet. Each time the trout approached the boat, he looked at the boat and Eric with the net and dove deep again. After several attempts to net him, I suggested to Eric that he need to shave his beard. At long last we had him in the boat, a worthy competitor of 20 inches with nice girth and vivid color.

At one point Eric landed a nice brown trout and we decided to see what it had been eating. I had the tool to purge its stomach into a white bowl. Though sounding invasive to the fish, properly

accomplished it does no harm. The fish had been eating only adult and nymph stage midges that were about a size 22, thus the need for small patterns.

Shortly, after about 1 pm when the boats of the guides and their clients had move down river we began our run. The first rapids of any sort I ran where at the entrance to Three Island Run. With flows at 850 CFS I needed to pay close attention to my position in the rapid and the wall of the cliff. The run was close to the wall, but manageable with a few quick strokes of the oar. As we entered Three Island Run we saw a number of fish rising along the left shore. Mid way through the run another boat was just moving out. They had been using PMDs with success in takes but no true hookups. I put on a PMD and on the third cast had my first hit, but no tight line, Eric was casting an Adams pattern and experiencing the same success or lack thereof. The fish were just nibbling small adult midges on the surface. Often we could see their dorsal fin, adipose fin and tail at the same time.

Somewhere on the Three Island Run or Lower Flats we took a break for a very late lunch of fresh made sandwiches and a beer. It is always amazing how good those sandwiches are when on the river, cloths and boat smelling of fish and a few mosquitoes trying to share your lunch. We continued to drift on downstream with only a stop at Baetis Bend. There Eric hooked up and landed a nice rainbow on a dry and I managed to do the same nymphing. From here we continued down river and exited about 5:30 pm. The only real bad job of row came at the very small rapids of Simon Canyon. Just to the side were a fisherman and his dog in the very shallow area. I paid a little too much attention to the dog and positioned the boat parallel to the current too early, just about beaching us. The bottom line was we had a great day of fishing, great comradery, I rowed the length of river and we are both still here to talk about it (although I have been reminded there were still some left at the Titanic to talk about it).

After retrieving the boat's trailer from Texas Hole we headed to the Sportsman for a bite to eat and couple of drafts. At 8 pm we were back at the Texas hole fishing the late hatch. This time we were wading near the launch. When on the San Juan River sleep always seems to take a far distance second place. This was the evening we were expecting Travis Snow to join us. He got a late start leaving Denver so it would now be a 3 – 4 am arrival. Eric and I went to bed trying to get some sleep.

July 29: Dinner did not set well with me for some reason so I set up and read with a light most of the night. Eric was tossing and turning most of the time when I would look over at him. Sometime about 3:30 am he set up and saw I was awake. He said it was a difficult night and asked me to feel his shirt. He was wet, almost like falling into the river. I looked at him quizzically and he replied he was back there in the action. I apologized, had I any idea I would have attempted to carefully awaken him and bring him back to the present. He looked off to the side and said something like, "no it is ok. It is the only time that I can be with my buddies now." What a profound statement of true friendship and love for others!

Shortly, we heard the sound of a vehicle pull up to the door of our room. Eric looked out the window and saw it was Travis. Our goal was to get him comfortable and let him get a few (very few) hours of sleep before taking on the river. As we lay in our bed we continued light conversation getting to know one another. It was clear that Travis was not going to let himself and his activities be precluded by his paralysis. I mentioned that I still play tennis and he shared he use to and had recently acquired a

tennis wheel chair to get back to the game. This young Range quickly became another true hero to me. Around 8 am Eric and I went to the restaurant for some breakfast giving Travis a little longer to sleep. When we returned we brewed some coffee and Eric shared a breakfast with him.

Then it was off to the river to again Launch "Float for the Fallen" and go fishing. Since I needed to depart for Pinetop around 1 pm we spend the morning fishing the Texas Hole. Eric was in the front of the boat, Travis in the back and I was on the oars. Though Travis has fly fishing experience he had little experience with fishing a river and dead drift techniques. Between Eric and me he sure got the instructions which show what a patient, controlled young man he is. When he hooked up with his fist



fish I am confident his excitement was no greater than mine and Eric's. From each opportunity to fish with the warriors I like to think I learn how to better teach and assist them. When Travis hooked up with one fish that ran behind him I suggest he turn and face to fish keeping his rod tip high and guiding the fish in the direction he wanted it to go. Very calmly and politely he said I have one

hand on the rod, one hand on the fly line and my legs don't work how do I turn the seat? A little red faced I leaned forward and turned it for him. By 1 pm he had landed several nice fish.

When it came time to drop me at shore, more than leaving the river I regretted leaving this new friend Travis and the opportunity to become closer friends and departing from my good friend Eric. We all committed to making more fishing opportunities together. (Reposts are that after I left they continued to do well including Eric having a shore based fisherman net a 23 incher on his line.)

The drive back to Pinetop is about five and a half hours. It can be long and lonely, however after the great four days together I enjoyed the solitude and thinking back over all I had experienced and friends I had fished with. I gain so much from each outing with our warriors. Each has made sacrifices and each is extremely proud of our country. As we grow older we face new and challenging issues, impaired eyes, knees that operate like a rusty ball and socket joint, medicinal protocols that make for foggy days and more. Being with these warriors is a lesson to not allow these issues to side track living a full life. As one Vet told me, "I have been to the edge and returned. I am going to live every minute I have."



Jerry Myers
Mate, Float for the Fallen
Member, WMFFC

Make the decision to live and your freedom will be eternal. - Travis Snow