A Matter of Time and Tide (and Maybe Skill)

by Ken McLaughlin - Sept. 2000

I've just had the best summer of beach fishing ever. I put fourteen fish into the freezer, and Island river, I must have caught and released at least that many in one spectacular day. So i I must be getting the hang about this....finally.

I've got it figured out. I'm not talking about Nile Creek, where I lost two dozen flies, caught nineteen Bullheads, two starfish, and (I'm not making this up) an oyster. Two fly fisherman and a bait caster watched me do it.

God, give me strength. Please. Let me tell you about one of the good days

Last weekend in July. Left home early morning with Larry Miller; but it's a long way, so didn't start fishing until 10 or 10:30 am. First fish on: fish landed: fourth cast. Second fish landed: sixth cast. Several fish caught and released over as we worked our way down toward the mouth of the estuary, where we were informed fishi Walked down to the mouth ...about a 10 minute walk. Tide very low, just beginning to rise. F eight other fishermen were working the mouth of the river, standing in the shallows, casting channel. As we approached, we could see flashes of silver in the shallows behind them, so th fished...in water approximately knee deep, casting to hundreds, no, probably thousands of fi out of the dark blue ocean and crossed the shallows. I can't clearly remember catching fish, certainly did. (We limited out.) What stays in my mind, however, was an endless river of fish depths, and the flashing silver bodies around our knees.

>We slowly worked our way back up the stream with the tide, catching fish all the way. Fina a gravel bar and fished a hole just below the riffle. As fast as we could catch and release a fi another.

Then the tide reached us, and suddenly, nothing. About a mile up in an upstream pool, the fi biting: we tried it, but downstream, nothing

We puzzled over this and speculated that the tide (or river current) somehow affected the be making them bite in the fast moving water, but not once it slows or stops.

But is it so? Why? Let me tell you about another day

One week later. (What a difference a week makes.) Half tides. My son, Kyle, and I arrive late Tide rising, but slowly. Still plenty of fish in the estuary, but the mighty flow up out of the oc a trickle. We fished all day. Skunked. See several fish taken, but not many. Next day: I land j doesn't touch anything. Curiously, I see two fly fishermen in particular who are still doing ver admit to having to 'work for their fish'.

At the upstream pool, fish bite on about every second or third cast...at the top end of the pool. They show all the way down, and we can see the shadowy schools clearly. There must be several thousand fish in the pool. From just over halfway down, where the current slows, to the tailout, it is difficult to raise a nibble.Again the speculation: Can currents somehow affect the behavior of fish? I've noticed this before, on the Little Qualicum, where I can often catch cutts in the riffles, but in slower water, such as the Whiskey Creek Pool, it's much more difficult (at least for me). Did the half tide sc behavior of the fish in the river estuary? Did the currents upstream do the same thing in the Where the current of the river was strong, the fish bit aggressively, even though they are no fresh out of the ocean as those down below. Where the river slowed, the fish weren't interes

I have to say I don't like the hypotheses that fast water makes the fish bite and the slow wat see any logic to it. Maybe in the gentler water the fish have more time to look at the fly and fish in the slow water holes downstream didn't reject the fly the previous week. Why not? An sound too plaintive here, but I watched two fly fishers in particular, pick off fish after fish all weekend, when I couldn't touch a thing. It wasn't the fly. One of them gave me one. So wha that I wasn't?

Here's one thing I did notice: the rising tide complicates the currents in the estuary. The tide while the downstream flow of the fresh water rides over top. This means your line moves in a different directions at once, depending on depth. Maybe the current isn't affecting the fish at affecting the fly. I like this theory better, because it explains why experienced fly fishers like watching caught fish while I did not. The explanation: skill.

So I haven't got the hang of it just yet.

But I do know how to catch an oyster. Ask me sometime. You can catch them any time, any skill.