

Klamath Country Icon: Rich Henry

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Be prepared for what may be the most spiritual day on the water if you are ever fortunate enough to be on the water with Rich Henry.

Rich embraces a transcendent approach to fly fishing and all things outdoors. This man is an intense observer of nature. His fly fishing day starts with watching the birds....how are behaving? Are the actions of the birds telling us anything about insect activity? How about the weather, which way is the breeze blowing, how is the sun positioned? Then, it's time to watch the water. Is anything happening? Watch the flowing water, currents and competing micro-currents. What will the currents do to the fly and the fly line? Rich observes, analyzes, and then steps towards the water's edge. Once in position, he casts once and lets his black drake spinner and line smoothly alight onto the surface of a clear Klamath area river.

While widely regarded as a sage of Klamath country fly fishing, Rich is a humble man who would rather hear none of that. Rich began his serious fly fishing at 20 years old. He



Rich Henry enjoying a fine early summer day, ready to observe trout.

Rich Henry makes a cast to a redband trout on the North Fork of the Sprague River.

later guided Oregon waters and taught countless anglers, both clients and local kids alike, the finer points of fly fishing and fly tying. Everyone he's touched is better for it. His flies, both the miniscule and the big buggers, tied with an out-of-the-box attitude, are stellar for area waters.

Rich is born to be outdoors. His upbringing with his aunt and grandparents on a ranch outside of Beatty, Oregon lead to his development as an avid outdoorsman and angler. He filled his early years with exploration of the country around him, venturing on horseback into Oregon's outback to the Sprague River and its tributaries. During this time, Rich learned the secrets of the diminutive spring creeks tucked away in this area.

Rich's fly fishing addiction took hold one day on the Sycan River. Rich was fishing the river at a pool where one of the numerous springs flowed into the river. Rich had his new Garcia

Conolon fly rod, a double taper 7 line spooled onto an automatic reel. Casting was not easy in the tight quarters of this pool, with only narrow openings through an obstacle course of bankside brush and trees. Rich ripped the water making one bad cast after another. But, despite all of this, he got the fly onto the surface of the pool. A brown trout rose to the fly; Rich set the hook, and the battle began. Rich sits back and exclaims "this experience started a fire in me that never ended. And it hasn't ended today. The world of fly fishing for me began at that time."

Rich is widely known as an ardent fly tyer, creating some of the area's most effective and beautiful flies. Rich's inauspicious start in fly tying began out of necessity; when he could never find the fly he wanted. He tells the story like it was yesterday. Rich walked into Joe's Sporting Goods in Klamath Falls,



A Rich Henry caddis pupae.



A steelhead fly, a "Rich Henry Special" in black and gold.



A parachute black drake.



A "Rich Henry Special" purple variation. This fly took Rich's first steelhead of 2018 on the Rogue River.

where he searched the fly bins only to find old-style flies, huge monstrous Royal Coachman flies and the like. The more serious fly tying took off in the later years when Rich bought a kit. He started tying more flies, gathering more material. Rich's tying improved after spending time with Polly Rosborough, who really turned him on to style and technique. As Rich proved to be a talented tyer, he got out and around on the sporting show circuit. He had opportunities to meet and observe other tyers and fly fishing luminaries. He further developed his style and technique from these shows.

As Rich's flies evolved into solid examples of area patterns, he began a study of entomology. Being the observant student that he is, Rich watched aquatic insects. "I paid attention to fly silhouettes and profiles, color and size" Rich explains. His

Rich preparing for an afternoon on the water. Rich is very deliberate in setting up his equipment, and watch the water before making a cast.



flies changed during this time. Rich goes on to say, "I was tying what I was seeing. I wasn't a pattern tyer anymore." He transformed from tying what others develop, to tying what he actually sees. He spends time picking the right materials, blending and dyeing the mix of materials. He will do this until he gets it right. Rich describes his fly tying teaching philosophy as "that's what I know, and that's how I teach it."

Rich's study of aquatic entomology study was a process having firm roots in what he learned from some time with Ernie Schwiebert and college professors at U Cal. He collected and studied insects, dissecting these insects to inspect the various parts for size and proportions, appearance, and colors. Rich explains that "after a while I learned all the Latin names. I haven't done a lot of it in a while." "When I started to tie what I see, that is when my flies became more effective, and my fish catching ability really increased." By pure observation and learning all he could about the fly fishing environment, Rich learned to elevate his fishing and become one of the leading guides in a region known for high quality fishing opportunities. This region is also renowned for wary trout. Rich would tie a fly, and watched how that fly would sink, or float. As Rich explains, observation of the actual insects in the water was key. He would watch the action of the insects, and apply his observations to fly development. He would then watch the action of a new fly in the water. He watched how the flies would sink, and raise again when stripped. This was key to the success of Rich's fly designs. He watched *callibaetis* swim, he watched the motion of a leech....then Rich would design the fly for balance and action to imitate what he observed.

Over the years, Rich learned all he could about all aspects of fly fishing beyond fly tying. Through his travels and participation in the show circuit, Rich sought out and developed relations with casting master Mel Krieger that Rich exclaims "Really got me into the world of fly casting and Steve Rajeff showed me how to make the long casts."

Rich describes fly fishing as a never ending learning experience. Rich's innate curiosity, and endless patience formed



Rich Henry and Greg Bulkley stalking Sprague River redbands.

the foundation for his guiding business. As Rich states “There is so much to do, so much to perfect, I don’t think it could be done in two or three lifetimes.” Rich cited an Izaak Walton quote - “Angling may be said to be so like the mathematics that it can never be fully learnt”. He spent time at college, but it was the on the job training in the outdoors combined with an innate curiosity that taught Rich the lessons he mastered, and went on to teach others; both as pupils, or as his clients when guiding.

Rich’s foray into guiding happened when a friend of his, who was a guide, one day asked if Rich would do a guide trip for him. Rich is happy to explain, “I worked for Weyerhaeuser, and I was getting tired of it. Next thing I know I was regularly guiding.” Prior to this career change, Rich purchased a drift boat; learning to row on the Rogue River. He guided on his homewaters of the Williamson River, Rogue River, the North Umpqua, and points farther afield outside of Bend including Hosmer Lake. Rich’s clients became regulars, and turned into friends over the years. Rich comments on his regular clientele: “It was like money in the bank, because people would fish with me regularly, every year or more often.” Rich took his fly fishing guide duties seriously, having only been late for a client once because of a flat tire. As serious as he was about his guiding, Rich admits that the guiding life for him was nothing but fun. Rich made it a point of garnering compatible clientele. Those that appreciated his sense of the water and environment, and that were open-minded enough to suit Rich’s method of instruction. Rich comments “The whole world will open up to you through the power of suggestion; you get more out of people by suggestion, not specific instruction or orders.” Rich’s guiding philosophy is to be patient, make suggestions, and soon you will have the clients doing what you need them to do. Rich recalls that one day on the North Umpqua, he noticed a lady watching from the bank. Rich asked “What are you doing?” She was not experienced on this river with notorious reputation for being difficult to master. Rich tied on a muddler, suggested where to cast, and then BANG, there was a steelhead on the line by the



*Rich Henry telling stories from his early fly fishing years.
Rich’s stories are fascinating.*

third cast. She hooked 4 or 5 steelhead that day. That night she treated Rich to dinner at the Steamboat Inn.

Rich, being the low-key fly fishing personality that he is, decided it was time to retire and reflect on his fly fishing guide days. It was his friend, another well-known fly tyer, Ken Howden who motivated Rich to get out fly fishing socially again. Rich now resides on Oregon’s southern coast. Rich fishes the coastal rivers, trading in his size 32 midges for size 6 and 8 comets, targeting chrome bright steelhead and salmon along Oregon’s Southern Coast.

It is only fitting that my last night with Rich ended much the way it began, sitting down in front of an expanse of Klamath area hillsides, meadows, a spring creek, and the symphony of flowing water, an overhead owl, and the whooping of a Sandhill Crane. Rich commented that there is nothing more magnificent than nature.and that is what it is all about. “These days, I do more observing than fishing anymore”