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The Pardón de Meana

On fly fishing and fly tying in Spain

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Have you ever considered fly fishing in Spain? It is well worth considering, as Spain has many fantastic rivers and lakes throughout the country. The Northwest, for instance, is known for its salmon and sea trout rivers, while mountainous regions like the Pyrenees and Picos de Europa offer good fishing for brown trout. Those interested in fly fishing for other species like barb, white fish or carp, will not be disappointed either:

SPAIN HAS STRONG fly fishing history with its own distinctive fly tying tradition. Written history can be traced back to the 16th and 17th centuries and more recently a wonderful book, by Luis Meana Baeza, has been published in both Spanish and English. The title is *The Pardón de Meana and the feather of Gallo de León*. More on this book later.

In the early 1980s I travelled to Spain annually. As a fly fishing novice I gained experience fishing Pyrenean waters like Rio Cinca, Rio Bello, Rio Ara and Rio Noguera Pallaresa; their azure blue water and deep pools being ideal for taking a refreshing dive on warm summer days. Fly fishing was a different matter since the trout were very shy and inactive in daytime. Early

in the morning and in the evening I was more successful. Still, I had a very good time trying to improve my casting and presenting flies. I even managed to fool some trout. Helpful Spanish fishermen advised me where to fish; they also helped me to understand the complicated fishing regulations and license system.

In the mid-1980s my wanderings brought me into Central Spain where I discovered some interesting waters. The wild nature of the mountain area where the Tajo rises made a deep and lasting impression on me. It was mid-July, extremely warm, and the river carried little water. In the crystal-clear pools there was no shortage of trout, but the fish took refuge as soon as I showed up. In a nearby village, Paralejos de las Truchas, people told



Luis Meana with a magnificent Tormes River brown trout.

me that the trout season was past and that I'd better come back next year March or April.

I was luckier fishing the upper Rio Tormes some 40km south of Salamanca. Downstream from a dam I found a promising stretch for which I could obtain a license. Here I succeeded catching some very good trout rising for white sedges that were hatching in great numbers. I also retain happy memories of the provinces Asturias and especially León, where I fished various rivers on the north and south side of the Picos de Europe mountain range. One day, fishing the Rio Esla, I got talking to an elder fisherman who told me in half Spanish, half French about the

ancient history of fly fishing in his native region.

I often met fishermen in those years. Most of them fished with spinning rods and line set ups consisting of two or three flies and a plastic float; the same method that I had learned to fish for trout in Norway when I was a boy. I must confess that I was a bit skeptical at first, but this soon changed into admiration when I observed a fisherman. He succeeded in making his flies dance just over the water by raising his spinning rod all the time, thus imitating the dance of egg laying up winged flies over the water in a really convincing way. With my fly rod I could not have imitated this elegant

and spectacular demonstration of skill.

Historical texts

Much later, in the mid-1990s, when I started reading about the history of fly fishing, I realized what that fly fisherman in León had tried to tell me. I found information on very old Spanish fly fishing texts. One of them, Fernando Basurto's, 'Dialogos Between a Hunter and a Fisher' was written back in 1539. Basurto examines the technique of fishing with a fly and the type of equipment that should be used. He underlines the importance of observing hatching insects and choosing artificials with

correct colors. He ties his fly with silk bodies and hackles them with cock or duck feathers.

Almost a century later, in 1624, Juan de Bergera wrote the famous Astorga manuscript in which he presents a collection of flies used by local fishermen. He describes when these flies should be used and the materials they are tied with. Most are wet flies but in some places the phrase: 'dos vueltas de...' appears,

meaning two turns of hackle; this could possibly refer to dry flies. These flies have silk bodies too. A new and important development here is the use of the Leónese rooster feathers (coq de León). I was really amazed when I discovered that people raised roosters for fly tying feathers some four hundred years ago.

The third text that I would like to mention is a manuscript written by Luis Peña in 1825. It contains

dressings of forty-one wet flies: again, with silk bodies and the typical half round hackle of Leónese coq hackle fibres. It is remarkable that the style of these Spanish wet flies have remained unchanged. Most Spanish fishermen fish these flies with a spinning rod and plastic float (buldo), but some prefer to fish them with the fly rod, in the same manner in fact as Spiders, like the Partridge & Orange are being fished.



Gallo Rojiza Pardo.



Pardon de Meana Danica and Roja.

After 1950

It goes without saying that developments in international fly fishing didn't pass unnoticed in Spain. It is difficult to establish when exactly modern fly fishing was introduced, but we can say that Louis Carrère, famous French fly fisher, visited the León area before World War II. Here he took notice of the Astorga manuscript and described it in his book, *Mouche Noyée*, 1937.

Real interest in modern fly fishing started in the 1950s and grew especially after the death of General Franco in the seventies. From that time on it became easier to obtain materials, magazines and books on fly fishing abroad. There were a few men who did a lot for Spanish fly fishing; these include Luis Pereda and Luis Antunez, who are rightly considered as the main pioneers. Among Spanish fly fishing authors Rafael del Pozo Obeso must also be mentioned. His book *Moscas para la Pesca* (1987), a real masterwork on entomology and fly tying, is a classic. It has been the bible for generations of Spanish fishermen. All of the flies that Del Pozo shows are tied with the breathtaking, beautiful feathers of