

FARUK OF THE NORTH

Michael Simon



July 20, 1998 — Coppermine River, Nunavut

We were up at 6 o'clock. From our sleeping bags we could see the tents of the Minnesotans on the Melville's ridge. We prepared our Royal Breakfast and watched them pack up. They left shortly before 9:00. We fished Home Run again. I fished from

Bull's Eye to O.K. and Bill from the tail end of Honey Hole to Bull's Eye. Fish were not taking even though we could see them in the shallows and even in O.K. tailing. I took 5 fish of which one was a male of nice color.

We were supposed to go fishing below the

O.K. but Bill thought he heard a plane land at Plumer's so we stayed till noon, staking out the Home Run so that they don't disturb "our" Honey Hole chars. We ate our cheese and onion sandwiches at the first pool and had siesta for an hour. Wind had stopped and we expected the fish to be

stale all day, so we decided to go for a hike up the Melville to the upper lake where we saw moose last year. That was a hike of 3 hours in one direction. We saw ptarmigan on our way back.

The blueberries and bearberries were ripe and everywhere. Blueberries tasted great. We ate a lot. At camp we washed and prepared the four grayling and potato salad. It was good. I did not feel like going to fish again. We sat and relaxed.

July 21

Another great day. 15 degrees Celsius and sunny at 6 o'clock. We had porridge and went fishing downstream from O.K. There were lots of fish everywhere. Large ones could be seen in groups of 20 - 30 all along the shore. They were not taking readily. I left a small male in an enclosure we made - for lunch.

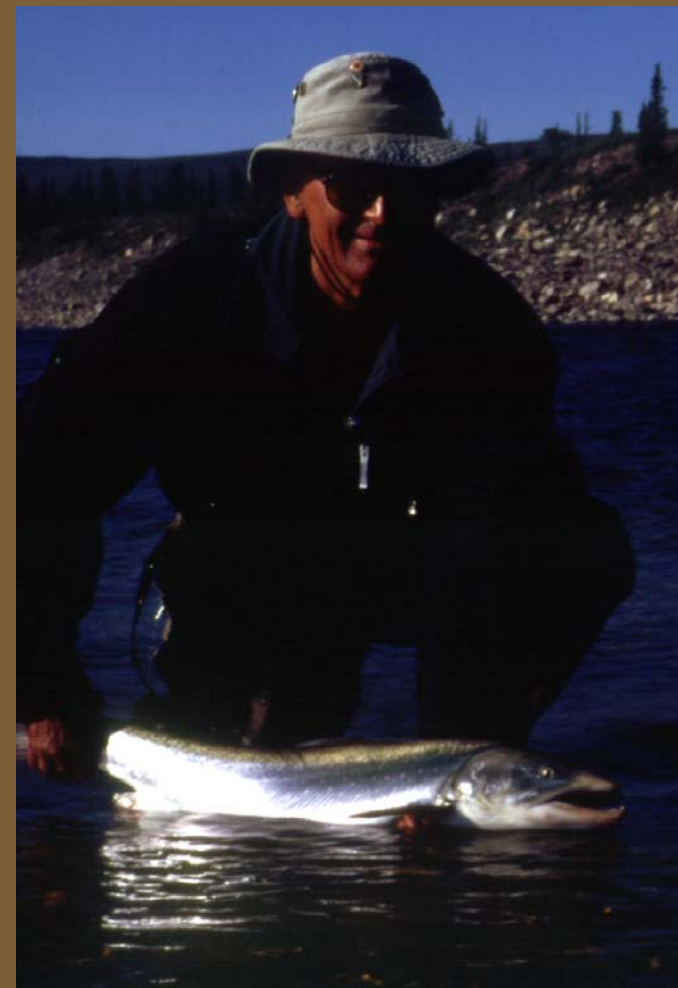
We found another fresh pile of bear shit on Grayling Pool. We fished till noon and went back to get our fish, but it was gone! We did not want to catch another one and had soup & sandwiches. After lunch and a siesta, I went into Honey Hole with mask and snorkel.

My God! What we saw the other day was nothing in comparison to this. Fish in several layers. Large males 20 - 25 lb range were covering every inch of Honey Hole. Bill estimated 1200 fish from Melville Pool through Honey Hole. I stayed a long time a foot away from some. They did not mind my presence. Colors were beautiful on some...

Males are on the bottom, or close to it, and upper layers are females. I have never seen anything like this - even on film. I held myself in place by holding onto rocks and just watched in awe. One grayling came to investigate me and nibbled hair on my finger. I had to get out when, even in my wet suit, I got cold.

When Faruk Ekich speaks of the Coppermine, it leaves no doubt that this man is absolutely in love with this river. Whether he is describing the golden dusting on the shoulders of a particularly brilliant Arctic char or recalling the intensity of the gaze in the eyes of a Peregrine falcon, his passion is almost palpable. He has been recording his observations of the flora and fauna of the Arctic tundra in journals for the past twelve years. Since making his first fly-in float of the Coppermine River in 1990 with his friends Bill Mitchel and Dennis Kulhanek, he returns to it year after year. Although Ekich speaks of the Coppermine as if he were its honorary river keeper, he will tell you in sincerity that he believes the Coppermine is Manitou's river.

Over the course of twelve years and twelve raft





trips down his beloved Coppermine River, rituals have evolved, one by one. The longest standing ritual involves the feeding of his camp “landlords,” Chip and Dale, the sik-siks (the ground squirrels of Nunavut), the bald and golden eagles, Lapland sparrows, (a pair brought their young to camp to be fed), and even the grayling of “Bosna Creek.” For the sik-siks, Ekich has packed-in dried fruit, nuts and porridge. The eagles (and the seagulls) feast on the remains of the few char Ekich and his companions keep for dinner. Deer flies which seem to abound in the Arctic, are swatted and collected, then tossed to the eager grayling of the Bosna Pool.

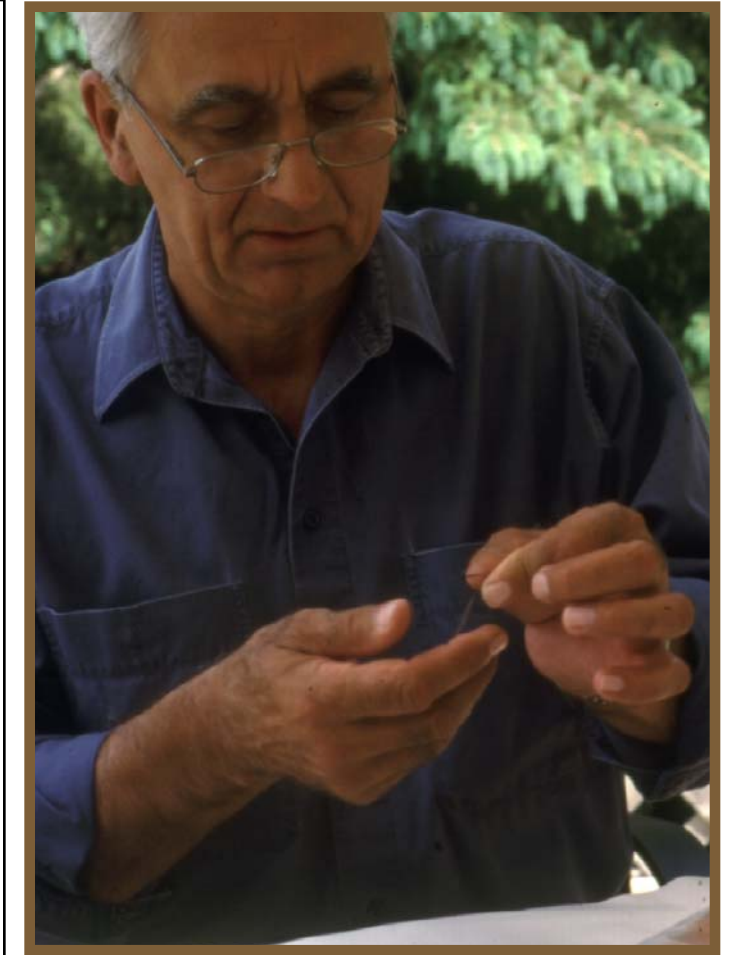
Then there is the ritual of the “adult beverages.” At great sacrifice, precious kilos of the limited-weight allowance are reserved for a few, very choice liquids. A fifth of Dalwhinnie single malt Scotch is sipped in the glow of an Arctic evening as Ekich reflects on the day’s events and records them in his journal. The other precious bottle is a mature vintage of a wine most of us only read about in a Sotheby’s auction listing. For example, in 1998 Ekich and his friend Bill Blatch celebrated a memorable mid-July day with a bottle of 1982 Chateau La Tour. Blatch is a wine broker from Bordeaux and Ekich’s frequent partner on these Arctic expeditions.

The ritual even closer to my heart than the “adult beverage” ritual is the “Bosna Creek ritual.” Ekich



makes the annual pilgrimage to the Arctic primarily for the opportunity to cast his Spey flies, tube flies and Waller Wakers for the magnificent specimens of *Salvelinus alpinus* which abound in the Coppermine. However, as a diversion to the enticing, hooking and fighting of these char (which Ekich believes surpasses even Atlantic salmon and Ouananiche for their fighting qualities), he takes a sabbatical and makes a short journey to Bosna Creek, a tiny tributary to the Coppermine, and angles for grayling in the manner he learned as a boy in the former Yugoslav state of Bosna. That “manner” can best be described as “far and fine” — with a small hand-tied hackled dry fly delivered at the end of a braided horse hair line terminating in a single strand.

I asked Ekich to show me how he tied these minuscule flies without the support of the vise, bobbin and hackle pliers that we mortals depend on, and he pleasantly indulged me. After collecting the materials, Ekich attached the slender thread to a #16 hook; English, I believe. In mere moments, he had attached three fibers for a tail and dubbed a slender, tapered rust-colored fur body. After adding a tiny dark dun hackle, the little fly quickly and effortlessly materialized from his fingers. Ekich glanced up with his twinkling brown eyes and explained in his charming, soft central-European voice that this little fly was a virtual replica of the pattern he was taught to tie as a boy in his



native Bosna. It was a traditional pattern used to catch the grayling of the Vrbas, the lovely limestone river that flowed through Ekich's home town of Banja Luka. Ekich told me with a smile, that grayling (*lipjen* in his native language) were held in somewhat higher esteem than the brown trout they shared the Vrbas with.

As I watched Ekich tie the fly off with a series of half-hitches, I became aware of two quite remarkable things: one, that I was witnessing a direct link to the very origins of fly tying — Ekich's pattern was nearly identical to that famous fly tied by a nameless Macedonian and recorded by the Roman historian, Claudius Aelianus, in the third century, and secondly, that the man who had just tied a delicate, size 16 dry fly in his hands (with a facility surpassing even that of Lee Wulff), was the same man who had designed an ingenious bobbin for fly tiers (such as myself) who lack the adroitness of a Wulff or an Ekich.

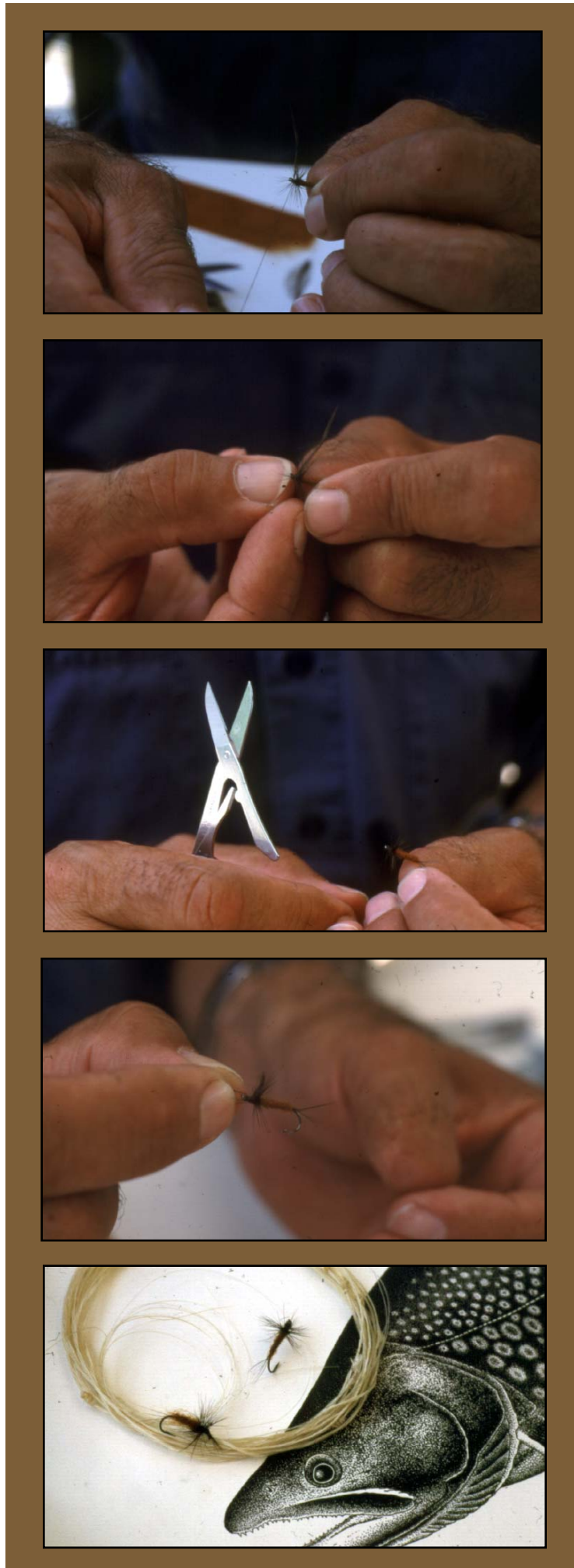
I was still further amazed when Faruk produced an ivory-colored fly line of thirty feet, perhaps, braided and knotted from strands of a white horse's tail. Ekich had been taught to braid these traditional lines by the older anglers of Banja Luka — his father was not a fisherman. Aelianus mentioned these horse hair lines as well. As I watched the age-old technique, I wondered silently if the top-of-the-line fly lines of Bosna might be tied from the tails of Lippizanner horses, perhaps.

With his brown eyes sparkling, Faruk smiled and told me about his "Bosna" ritual." It is a ritual that began in 1993 on his first return to the beautiful Coppermine River. Ekich had been drawn to the Coppermine after seeing a presentation in 1989 extolling the glorious Arctic char that ran up the river every summer. When he found grayling abounded in Melville Creek, the small tributary that entered the Coppermine at his camp, as well as in a nameless creek two kilometers upstream, Ekich returned the following year with his traditional Bosnian tackle. He then ceremoniously named the nameless creek "Bosna" and the pool at the confluence, the "Bosna Pool." Ekich angled for them in the manner he had been taught as a very young man ... with braided horsehair line, tippet and simple hackled dry fly.

Perhaps the most sublime ritual of them all takes place in the Bosna Pool as well. Ekich ties a beautiful wet fly on a Partridge up-eyed salmon fly hook. For the wings, he uses several multicolored hackles plucked from a cape that was given to him by a boyhood friend. That boyhood friend was killed in the recent war in Bosnia and in his memory, Ekich fishes the Bosna fly at the Bosna Pool until a char keeps it, or it is lost on the bottom.

Necessity is the mother of invention ... These words of wisdom inspired Frank Zappa to title his seminal and brilliant first album, but they could also serve to describe the ethic behind Ekich's designing feats involving new, and improved fly tying tools.

Showing me two familiar-looking vises, Ekich told me that he had simply felt a need to improve on these popular models in order to make them conform to his



own particular needs and style of tying. For his first model vise, he made the wheel larger and engineered new jaws from steel with a hardness that would not damage his beloved Partridge hooks. The Regal vise was the model for his second design. For this one, Faruk fabricated a spring calculated to give constant force to the jaws. He also added a simple thread-rest arm.

Ekich has handcrafted a number of other basic tools which frequently are simply angle modifications of existing models adjusted to suit his tying style. This *modus operandi* would apply to Ekich's whip finisher and dubbing crook but his unique dubbing needle serves another function beyond the application of head varnish or the picking-out of a Hare's ear body. Ekich's bodkin was fabricated from a short length from the mid-section of his Orvis Battenkill rod. I believe he broke it on a large salmon whilst fishing the Petit Saguenay. Once again Ekich's eyes twinkle as he tells me that the dubbing needle serves as a daily reminder of his "foolishness".

All of these devices are testaments to Ekich's passion for improvement, but the real gem of his invention is



the revolutionary *Ekich Bobbin*. In appearance, it has the clean skeletal lines of the type devised by Frank Matarelli over 25 years ago, but with a couple of major improvements. One arm of the Ekich bobbin terminates in a spring-loaded disk on which the standard spool of tying thread is mounted. The disk functions much like an automatic fly reel (without the bulk and weight!) in that it retrieves the slack in your tying thread when desired, with energy stored when the thread is withdrawn from the bobbin. The other



Ekich Bobbin

The *Ekich Bobbin* is designed to provide improved thread control and eliminate non-productive manual thread rewinding, while maintaining desired thread properties such as uniform tension, flatness etc., of factory wound thread spools. It will hold, dispense and automatically rewind the thread from standard plastic and styrofoam spools.

This patented design incorporates a Constant Force Spring concept, that is balanced to hold the combined weight of the bobbin and the thread spool suspended at any point chosen by the tyer. While this force (weight of 33gr or 1.1oz.), offers twice the holding power of a standard bobbin, it is well below the breaking force of even the most fragile fly tying thread such as 17/0.



The thread spool is easily placed on the bobbin's rotating table by sliding it over a centre shaft which has a rubber ring that holds the spool in place. The spool is positioned such that dispensing of the thread rotates the spool in a clockwise direction when viewed from the free side of the spool (most manufacturers place the label on this side of the spool.)

The outer rim of the bobbin extends above the surface of the rotating table in order to prevent the jamming of the thread between the bobbin and the spool. If the outside diameter of the spool end interferes with this

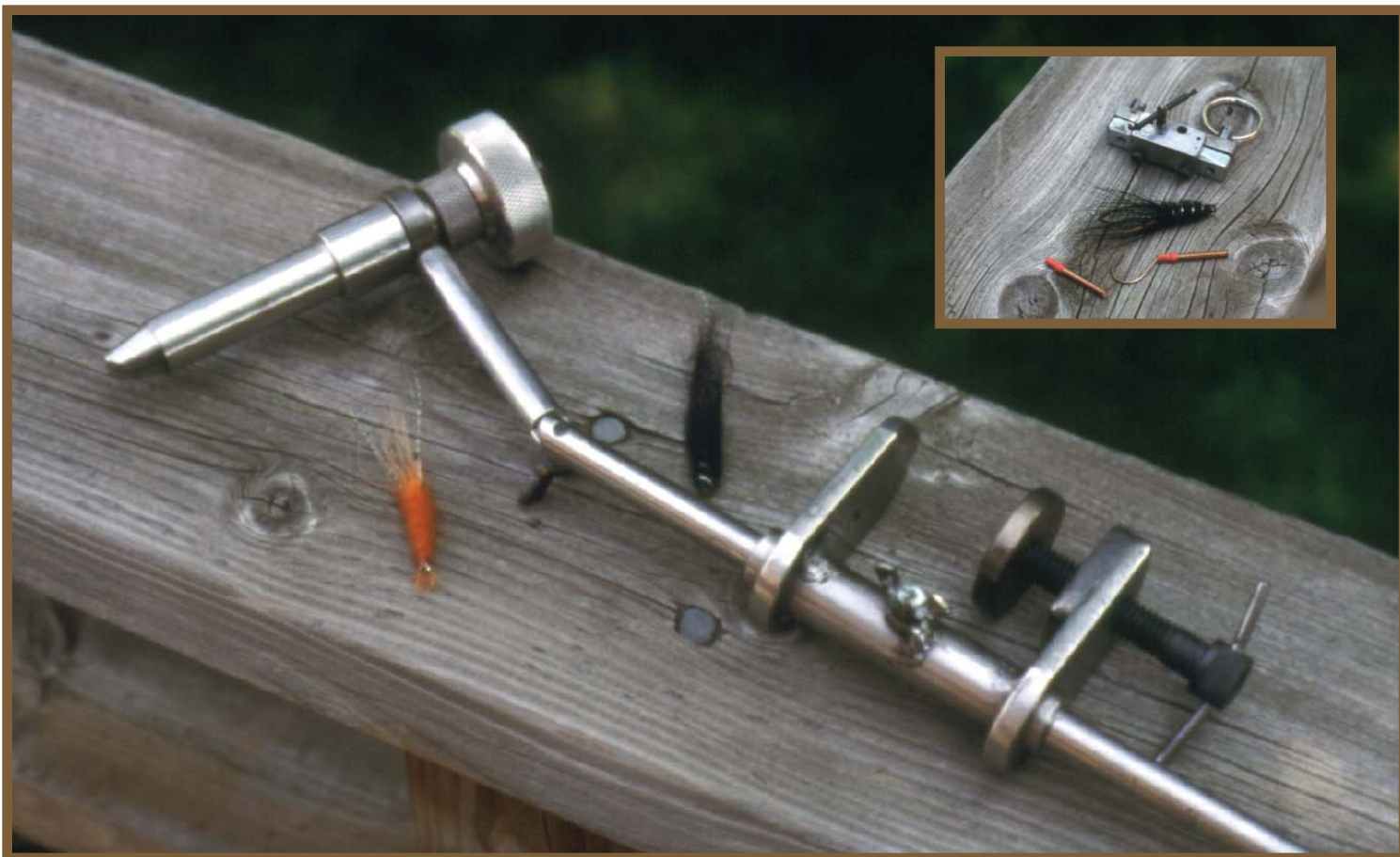
protective rim (sometimes spools have an excessive slit end used for storing the free end of the thread) then it should be trimmed.



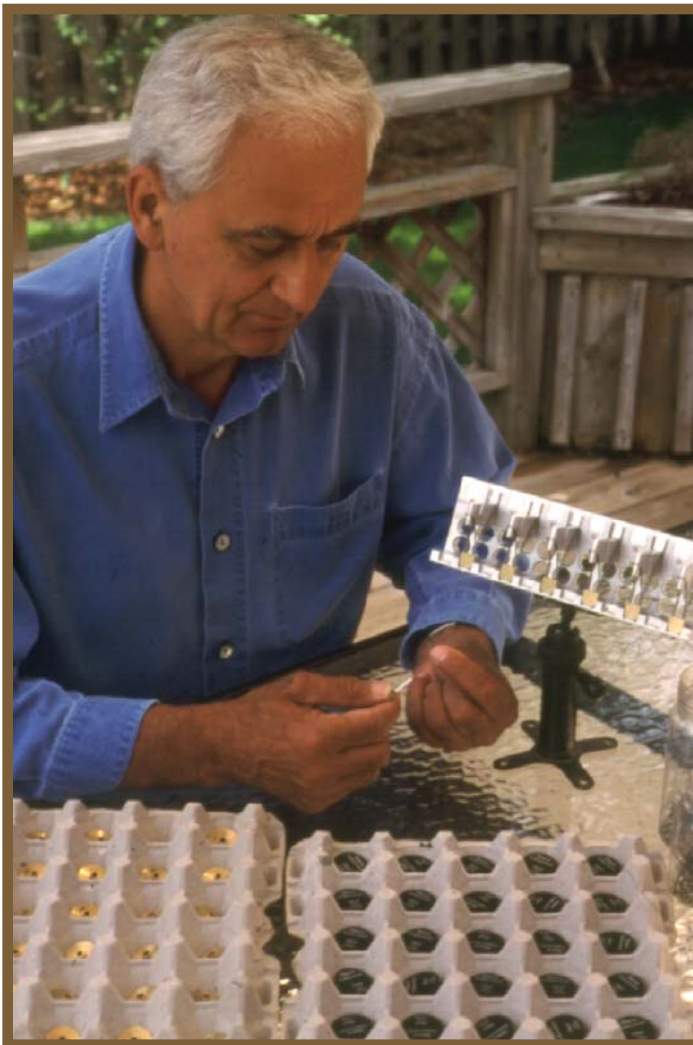
The bobbin side of the frame ergonomically fits to the inner side of the thumb and can accommodate both right hand and left hand tyers. First and middle fingers hold the bobbin in place while resting on the spool side of the frame. This leaves the small and ring finger to control the tension of the thread.

Prior to cutting of the thread, place the bobbin in a position to leave a desired length of thread extending outside the guide tube. Lift the spool approximately 3mm (1/8") from the rotating table. This disengages the drive pin from the spool and releases the tension of the spring. Press the spool back on the rotating table. This can be done by one hand grasping the free end of spool while pressing on the frame extension at the bottom end of the bobbin with the ring finger. If manual rewinding is needed, it should be done with the pin disengaged.





Above: Ekich's first hand made vise; an adaptation of the Crest vise. Inset: A tool fabricated to form flared copper tubes for tube flies. Left: Components for the assembly of the Ekich Bobbin.



radical departure from the Matarelli A-frame is found in the wire arm on the outside of the bobbin, when the bobbin is resting in your up-turned palm. This arm is accessed by the fingers of the tying hand (other than thumb and forefinger) to easily augment the degree of tension on the tying thread. I don't have to tell tiers of deer hair and other unruly materials what a boon to mankind this feature is. Ekich says his bobbin is all about "thread control" and, when all is said and done; isn't that what fly tying is all about? Mechanically speaking, anyway.

Ekich is the archetype of the Old World gentleman angler. If Faruk were a bamboo fly rod (which he isn't — in fact, he has barely cast one since breaking his Battenkill, years ago), my good friend, Marty Keane would probably describe him as ... "a classic, loaded with Old World charm." And Marty would be correct, and accurate, as always.

I visited Ekich at his home in Brampton, Ontario last June and I was treated to a wonderful week on the Northern Plain. I met his charming wife, Ghislaine, who was born in the town of Petit Saguenay, Quebec. Petit Saguenay, Quebec...(hmmm. How did an expatriate Bosnian come to meet *une belle Québécoise* in an obscure North shore town? Salmon, perhaps?) I also met two others Ekich has a passion for: his darling granddaughter, Sophie and



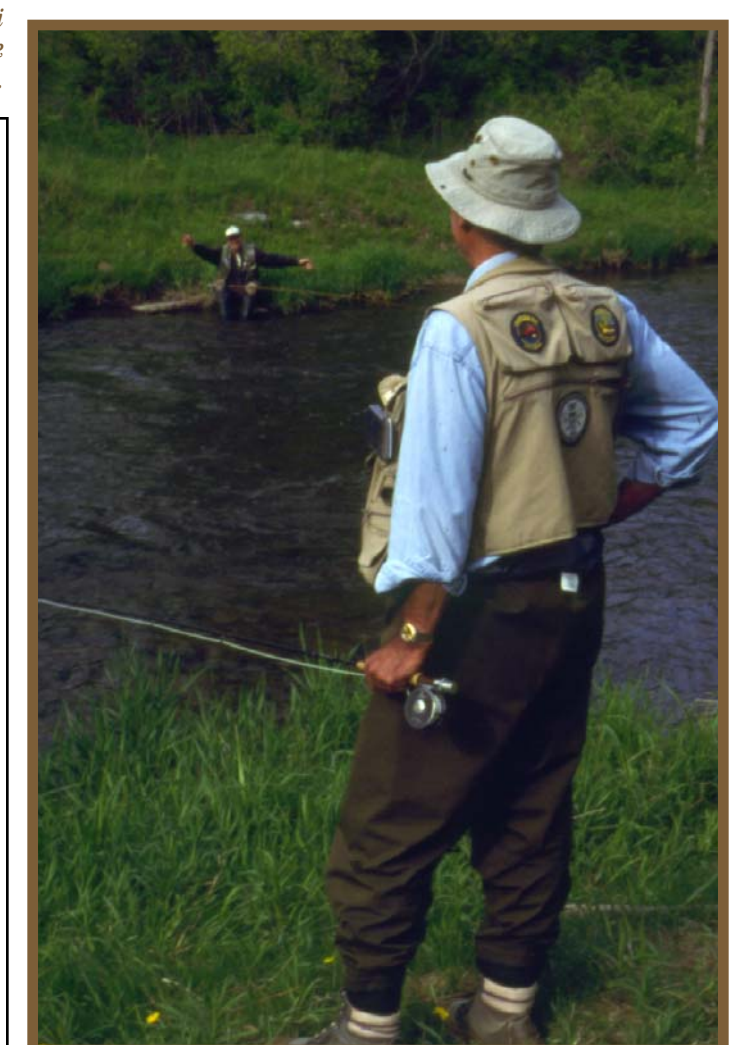
Above: Ontario's Credit River. Ekich consults with John Polowski and Blair Williams, two regulars on the Credit. Right: On the bank of the Credit River, Ekich obtains a condition report from Polowski.

grand son, Adam. Although he was in the midst of preparations for his twelfth sabbatical to Nunavut, Ekich found time to share a lovely day on his home water, the Credit River.

The Credit proved to be a nice, pastoral freestone creek (a far cry from Ekich's cherished Coppermine), but charming, nonetheless. My dear friend Jerry Kustich had written about the pleasures of the Credit in his splendid book, *At the Rivers Edge*, and I was more than a bit pleased to be guided on it, especially by Ekich.

Conditions were "iffy" at best, this being the year of the Great Northeastern Drought, but Faruk found the few stalwart rising fish and put me upon them. He also provided me with his own exquisitely tied caddis and soft hackled wets to take each of the handsome brown trout we found in a taking mood ... well, most of them.

At the start of our afternoon astream, my host introduced me to John Polowski who we found holding a vigil on the bridge pool awaiting the last of the Green drakes (or the first of the Brown drakes, I'm not sure which). John was joined shortly by his friend, Blair Williams, another Credit River regular. I was amazed and delighted by the fact that these two gentlemen were angling with the sort of tackle that I, myself, spend far too much time admiring in photographs in



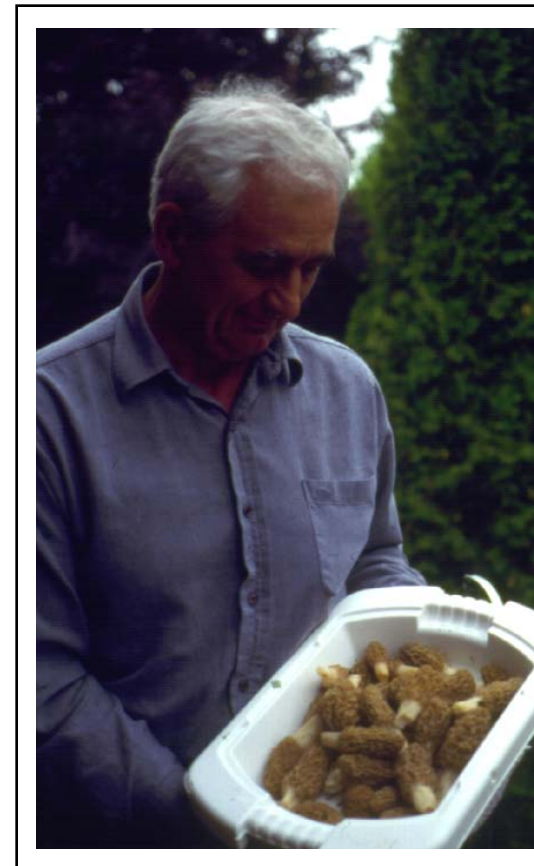


publications like, *Art of Angling Journal*, for example.

John was fishing a Hap Mills era Leonard mounted with an exquisite Walker TR-2 reel. Blair was fishing an even older Leonard from about the turn of the 20th century and his reel of choice was an Abbey & Imbrie model with hard rubber side plates.

I was impressed and made a mental note to look into becoming a Canadian in the near future. John and Blair admired my outfit which consisted of an 8-foot Michael Clark rod (3-piece for 5 weight) matched with a 2-3/4" Ted Godfrey Classic reel. John and Blair were impressed ... Ekich and I proceeded downstream.

Over the course of the next few hours, Ekich showed me with uncanny accuracy, the lies of most of the usual salmonid suspects to be found in the Credit. The patterns Ekich gave me were successful in raising, if not hooking, each of these targets. As the sun declined in the West, Ekich and I wandered back to the car through the pines, ferns and birches. At a bend in the trail we spotted the Motherlode of



I replied, "Yes."

Morels and quickly stooped to pick them. I loaded my landing net with them and stuffed the pouch of Ekich's vest with the remainder ... (we left one of each gender).

Arriving back in Brampton, I presented Ghislaine with our bounty of mushrooms and she set about to prepare a superb feast of Cornish Game Hens to compliment our catch of the day. As Ekich and I shared a dram of Dalwhinnie, I tried to call Doug Peacock in Livingston, Montana, to get his recipe for morels but he was not at home (probably searching for Mexican Grizzly bears), so Ghislaine turned the preparation of the fungi over to me.

The gorgeous and absolutely delicious meal was served with a fine salad and pilaf, and a nice Bordeaux. As we raised our glasses in honor of Ghislaine's beautiful feast, Ekich smiled and said; "Michael, you really must let me show you my Coppermine."