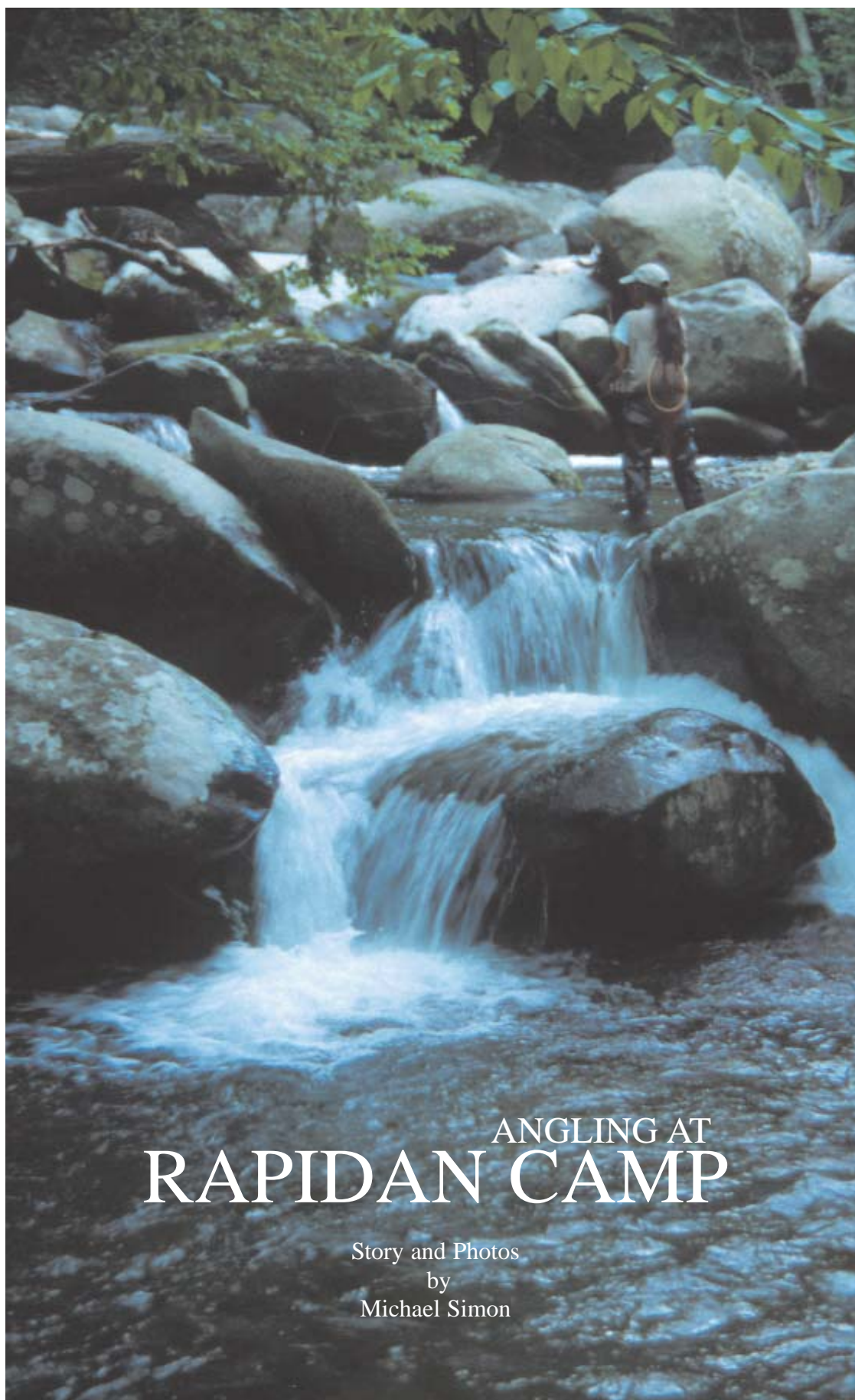


A brief while ago, while introducing LeAnne to the gentle art of angling, we decided to hike a bit farther than usual to the upper reaches of the Rapidan. Leaving the car at the trailhead, we left the small horde of weekend anglers to the popular lower pools and set out to discover Herbert and Lou Hoover's idyllic mountain retreat, Rapidan Camp.

It is a short and pleasant hike to the meeting of Laurel Prong and Mill Prong, the two small, tumbling tributaries merging to create the lovely Rapidan. Here at this little confluence, the Hoovers planned and built the first Summer White House. At an elevation of roughly 2,500 feet, the site was chosen for its wild beauty, its accessibility from Washington (a road was built from Criglersville by the Marines), its balmy, mosquito-free summer temperatures and of course, fishing rights to the Rapidan – chock-full of *salvelinus fontinalis*, otherwise known in the day as speckled beauties.

LeAnne, to paraphrase Theodore Gordon, is my best angling chum. That's to say, if you take into account the fact that I've showered her with heaps of fine cane rods, reels and even genuine Wheatley fly boxes, but she'll accompany me to these fabled trout waters only with the provision that there be one or two decent vineyards along the way. One of LeAnne's favorite classic trout flies is the Hornberg, but she insists on calling it the "Horton" after a nearby vineyard of the same name.

Arriving at Rapidan Camp, LeAnne and I found ourselves delightfully alone amongst the three surviving buildings clustered on the delta of land formed by the



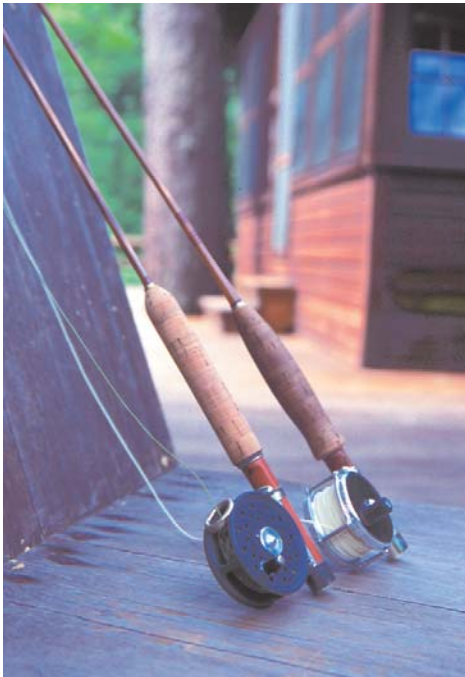
ANGLING AT RAPIDAN CAMP

Story and Photos
by
Michael Simon



LeAnne and the author at the president's cabin

American rods



joining of the Mill and Laurel prongs. We roamed the grounds of the mountain hide-away where the Hoovers left behind their woes during that last economic “unpleasantness.”

Poking around the president’s cabin, known at the time as The Brown

Hardy tackle of the sort favored by President Hoover



House, LeAnne and I found the survivors of Lou Hoover’s progressive “green” landscaping. Mrs. Hoover had insisted on the removal of as few trees as possible during construction of the camp and approved the planting of wildflowers only if they were native to the immediate area. We also

found the ornamental pool, fed by the Laurel, in which she kept her pet trout.

The spacious rear deck beckoned us with its view of the confluence, we reclined on the Adirondack chairs the Hoovers had left for us. Breathing in the fine air, we uncorked a bottle of Rose River Red and made our angling plans. We had come to fish the Rapidan with 3-weight cane rods; mine, a 6’ 8” model by Russ Gooding of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and hers a 6’ Brookie by Bob Nunley of Poteau, Oklahoma. I mention this simply to show that the two of us chose to fish *American*, whereas President Hoover fished exclusively with British Hardy Brothers tackle through the Great Depression when he could have given sustenance to any number of fine American rod builders – Leonard, Thomas, Edwards, Orvis, Hawes, Young etc. Please don’t get me wrong; I cherish my Hardy rods, and even more, my Hardy reels, but if I were President Obama and wished to spend a blissful day at Rapidan Camp, I’d probably fish an American, nay, a *Virginian*, cane rod by the likes of Chris Bogart, Carlos Santos, Hank Woolman, Rick Roberts or Richard Kevorkian.

Meanwhile, back on the deck, LeAnne and I composed our angling strategy. I had seen Hoover’s tackle a few years prior when the American Museum of Fly Fishing had brought its fabulous collection of historic fly kits to the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman, Montana. There, amongst the tackle of Daniel Webster, Ernest Hemingway, Winslow Homer and Bing Crosby, lay Hoover’s Hardy Marvel rod (7 ½’, 3-piece, 4-weight), his Hardy St. George Junior reel and a small Wheatley fly box containing mostly size 10 and 12 wet flies in the patterns of Royal Coachman, Parmachene Belle, Professor, Coachman and Brown Hackle Peacock. Not a single Mr. Rapidan to be found in that box.

After a few more sips of Rose River Red, we decided to decamp from Camp Hoover and fish our way downstream and back to our car at the trailhead.



LeAnne releases a colorful Rapidan brookie.

We wended our way slowly downstream, sharing alternate pools and runs, enjoying the incredible beauty of this gorgeous stream. Lou and Herbert had chosen well.

We did not fish Hoover's patterns, as it was not early season (when he could legally fish for trout). Nor could he have legally sipped red wine from his scenic deck in the '20s. We did fish more contemporary patterns – Elk Hair Caddis, various soft-hackle wet flies (more ancient than Hoover's patterns) and even a few European new-age dry flies that worked extremely well.

Suffice it to say that, although we didn't land great baskets of trout (I think the limit during Hoover's day may have been 20), LeAnne and I caught a reasonable number of the fish we'd spotted, cast to, or spooked. And LeAnne (as always) giddily took the best fish, a plump, ten-inch specimen of *salvelinus fontinalis hooverii*.

Michael Simon is a writer, watercolorist and a lover of trout, trout streams and the literature and tackle associated with them. Over the past 50 years he has pursued his

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