

# Phil's Flybox

By Phil Rowley

## Getting That Sinking Feeling –

Approximately 12 miles to the northwest of Kamloops you will find Pass Lake. It is easily accessible via a brief drive along the Lac Du Bois road from the Bachelor Hills area of Kamloops. Except in times of extreme rainfall, the road is 2-wheel drive accessible. Pass Lake is a small lake. It is ideal for either a small boat, float tube or kick boat. Motors are definitely not necessary. It drops off relatively quickly to depths of 35 feet or more. There are some shoal areas. You will find the best ones at the west end near the farm house and along the north shore about half way along the lake.



A large Kamloops rainbow that was hooked with a chironomid pupa pattern using sinking line techniques.

Pass lake is noted for its' population of large trout. Be advised however they do not come easy. Fish do not reach large sizes by being stupid! This was no exception the first time I visited this little gem. As we readied ourselves for the days fishing we noticed mating flights of Callibaetis spinners, damselfly nymphs and dragonflies were also crawling out of the water to emerge. Conditions were ideal. So I thought. It was not to be the case. I had begun the day fishing with a damselfly nymph. It seemed like a logical choice given the emerging nymphs I had seen. A damselfly nymph has been a good exploratory pattern for me on new waters as the nymphs are quite active in their habits. My Aftershaft Damselfly had been very good to me over the years and today I expected no different. Today was to be different and after 2 hours I had not had a touch on my damselfly nymph, my Callibaetis patterns or even my dragon patterns for that matter. I was beginning to get that skunked feeling.

Just when things seemed to be their darkest I noticed a local angler row out from shore and position himself in what I knew to be deep water. The depth he anchored in was over 20 feet deep. Curious, I kept my eye on him as I carried on probing the shallower areas of the lake. Within about 20 minutes he had a fish on. This was soon followed by a couple of others. I quickly figured that moving into deeper water might be an advisable strategy. I positioned myself a courteous distance away and began to change to my type 3 Uniform Sink line. While I was preparing my tackle I noticed a number of chironomid shucks on the waters' surface. I decided to tie on a #12 black chironomid pattern and cast out my wet line. A black chironomid is always a great starting point and many times it is the only color you will need. The length of line I cast was equivalent to the depth of water I was fishing, 24 feet. I allowed the line to sink and began a very slow hand twist retrieve. My attention was not completely focused when the fish struck half way through the retrieve. I can still recall the ferocity of the strike. I was fortunate that my rod was able to absorb the smash take. Over 15 minutes later I managed to land a beautiful silver 4 pound Kamloops rainbow. My arms were sore but I was grinning ear to ear with the satisfaction of my first Pass lake fish. A careful use of my stomach pump revealed heavy feeding on #12 and #14 black and gray chironomids. I carefully revived the fish and admired its' beauty as it slipped back into the depths.

This was not the first time sinking line chironomid techniques have saved the day for me. I continue to use sinking line techniques today. It is my preferred method in waters over 20 feet deep. Yet from what I have observed it is method that does not seem to get the credit it deserves. For the novice angler who is having trouble detecting strikes using floating line techniques sinking lines are a great confidence builder. The takes are often aggressive. Keep in mind that chironomids are not just



A typical chironomid pupa. Notice the prominent white gills.

creatures of the shallows but are capable at living at depths of over 40 feet or more.

As far as equipment goes you need a medium to soft action rod to absorb the firm strikes. A full sinking fly line of either a type 3 or 4 density is preferred. Naturally lesser densities will work but they will just take longer to sink. As for leader length I seldom exceed 6 feet. Bungee type leaders are now available with a shock absorbing butt material that will help deal with the strong takes associated with this method. Your selection of chironomid patterns is no different than for other methods of chironomid fishing. Although, as my friends will confirm, I do have a preference for bead head patterns.

The next key is to firmly anchor your boat, float tube or kick boat. If you are using a boat this means anchoring from both the stern and bow of the boat. If you are using a kick boat or float tube a single anchor will do. Maximum control of your retrieve is vital to success when fly fishing stillwaters. This is especially true when fishing chironomid patterns. Make sure you mark your anchor rope at regular intervals such as five feet. Accurately knowing the depth of water you are in is critical. With a marked anchor rope you simply multiply the number of intervals by the distance they are apart. For example 5 intervals, 5 feet apart equals a depth of 25 feet.



Mark your anchor rope at 5-foot intervals to accurately determine the depth of water you're fishing.

Now that you have firmly anchored yourself and know the depth of water you are fishing you can prepare for your presentation. Simply strip off an amount of fly line equal to the depth of the water you are anchored in. Usually one pull equals roughly 2 feet. Once your line length is determined make your cast and allow the line to sink until it is hanging directly below you. Confident the fly has reached the bottom you can now begin your retrieve. A very, very slow hand twist retrieve is typically best. The hand twist is a busy retrieve that keeps your hands occupied without retrieving your pattern too fast. Depending upon the depth a retrieve of over 2 minutes or more is not unheard of. It is OK to mix in the odd quick strip to draw attention to your pattern but don't overdue it.

Be prepared for savage takes when using this method. Your takes will typically be near the water's surface. You might be tempted to switch to a dry line thinking the fish are cruising near the surface. Resist this temptation. The trout will follow your pattern up to the surface carefully inspecting it. It is believed that once near the surface the trout has to decide whether or not to take the offering. If the trout takes the pattern it will come over the top and take the pattern as it swims back down. This registers as a very firm and aggressive strike. The force feels like the rod will be ripped from your hands and that if your rod is too stiff or you are heavy handed you will experience break offs. Your fish will typically be hooked firmly in the upper jaw.



A slow steady hand twist retrieve is best for imitating a pupa's ascent.

Sinking line techniques have worked incredibly well for me over the years. With this method I have been successful on numerous lakes in B.C. and Western Washington. I have used this method in water over 30 feet deep if chironomids are coming off. The next time you see swallows, Bonaparte gulls or NightHawks actively working over deep water. Row over and investigate. If chironomids are coming off put on a wet line and get that sinking feeling. And remember to hang on tight.

Two of my favorite chironomid pupa patterns:

### **Bead Head Pupa:**

Thread: Color to Suit

Hook: Tiemco 2457 #8-#16

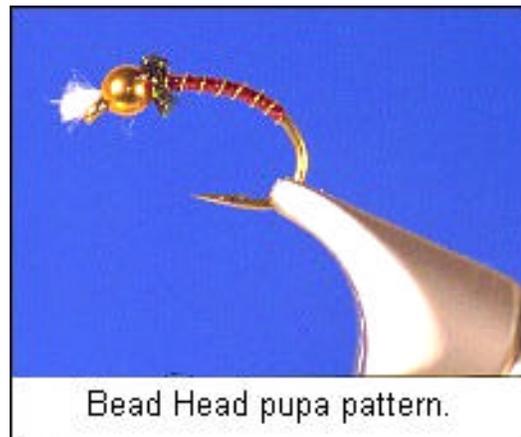
Rib: Fine Copper, Silver or Gold wire

Body: Frostbite, Flashabou, or Crystal Hair depending upon your color preference

Thorax: Peacock Herl

Head: Gold, Copper or Black Bead

Gills: White Sparkle Yarn



Bead Head pupa pattern.

### **Emerald Red Butt:**

Thread: Olive 8/0 Uni Thread

Hook: Tiemco 3761 #8-#14

Over Body: Olive V-Rib

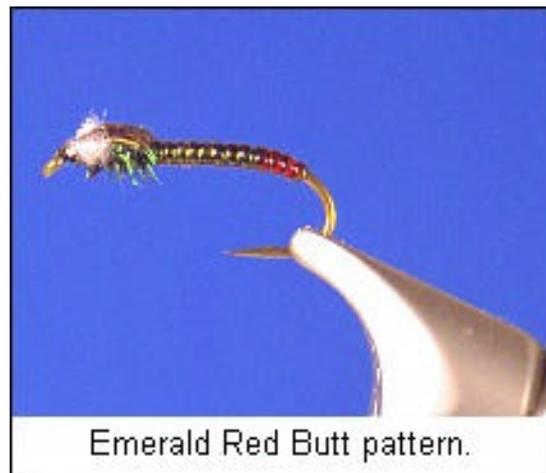
Butt: Bright Red Flashabou

Under Body: Emerald Green Crystal Hair

Wing Case: Pheasant Rump

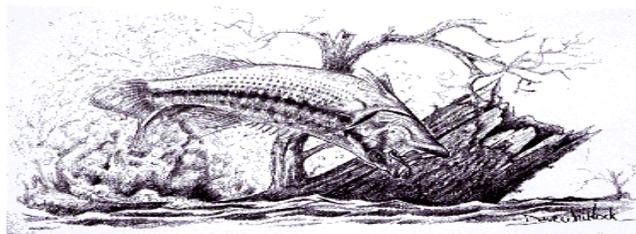
Thorax: Peacock Herl

Gills: White Sparkle Yarn



Emerald Red Butt pattern.

**Got a favorite pattern you would like to share with fellow club members? Please let me know and I will feature it in a future issue. - Phil at [flycraft@uniserve.com](mailto:flycraft@uniserve.com)**



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