

THE SAME RIVER TWICE... DON RICARDO'S LIFE & TIMES NO. 82

Edith and I had been back home about ten days before I put some new line on my reel, took down my long pole, and walked to the Rhine to fish for grayling. I hadn't gone fishing for *Aeschen* since 2003, the year the Rhine heated up to nearly 80°F and all the cold water fish died. The season closed for several years allowing for restocking and recovery. Fishing had reopened in 2008 with a daily bag limit of three and the number of fishing days cut down to four, but it hardly seemed worth the trouble. Now, with the new book out things had changed. Called *Pleasures of the High Rhine*, a lot of the pleasures in there concern fishing. One of the first things I did after the jet lag wore off was to buy a new yearly license for 2012. It seemed important to go down and test my luck; whether to complete the circle, or start another I wasn't sure.

Rigging up I chose a sparsely dressed wet fly with a tiny gold bead at the front. It still had a bit of leader tied to it and I realized this was likely the very fly I had used when I caught the big *Aesche*. I had written about catching this fish on the last day of the season, January 31, 2002. I marked it then as a major event, an omen of good fortune. Had so much time really gone by? Cycles moving in their ineluctable way, I was back at the same spot, a gravel bank upstream from the swimming area.

I remembered the saying: you cannot step in the same river twice. This wasn't the same river I was swimming in back in August, let alone the river where I caught the grayling. Ten years into the millennium the bobber floating down with the current looked smaller, the line and the attached leader impossibly thin. A simple clinch knot tied with cold fingers, and the attaching of tiny split shot had become a daunting task. It was not the same river, and I was not same man tying the knot. I guess that's why I was there, to sort out what was new, what was forever. One thing: I had written some of it down now, a tiny bit of history of this place; what we did here and allowed ourselves to dream.

While much of the book concerns the music life and stories from the road, I looked at fishing as a way of bonding with the country and I had written it into the book as a kind of ongoing theme. About the very long pole and the single action reel, like a fly reel only larger in diameter, that swiveled open to cast like a spinning reel. After I made a cast I had to flip it back and let the line unspool. It took a few casts to reacquaint myself with the routine of drift fishing under a bobber, with a tiny wet fly set to ride just above the bottom. I hardly thought about catching a fish. After so long an absence it would have been presumptuous to expect one. The *Aesche* is persnickety, the manner of catching one exacting, with multiple chances for backlash and tangles. I remembered the drill: Cast across stream and let the current take the bobber down, keeping the slack out of the line. Watch the bobber and let the line spool out until it becomes too difficult to see. Bring it back. Don't get in a hurry; keep a finger on the reel so it won't unspool, flip it sideways, cast and drift again.

I was four or five chapters into the book before I found my title. I wanted it to evoke a sense of this place, of our home a few kilometers from where the Rhine flows out of Lake Constance, just as it has the past ten-thousand years since the ice retreated. I wanted it to promise something magical and alluring. I even had a template, Henry Miller's *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. I could barely remember the book, but the title stuck. *Pleasures of the High Rhine* had a ring to it, and the promise of something worth investigating. *Hochrhein* is the word the Germans this stretch of the river but the Swiss didn't use the term. As far as I could tell, the English translation *High Rhine* wasn't used at all. So

much the better, I thought. This is after all, a world famous river; surely as much has transpired here as ever did at *Big Sur*. And where better to aim than *High*?

We have monochrome skies this morning, pearl blending into the snowy landscape this last day of grayling season. I have one more chance to go down for an hour or two of casting, drifting, and retrieving, watching for the bobber to go under. The big *Aesche* I caught back in 2002 measured forty-seven centimeters. I've put in my time on the river these recent days. Maybe it wouldn't be presumptuous to think there may be another fish waiting for me out there.

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Diessenhofen am Rhein
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**Pleasures of the High Rhine, A Texas Singer in Exile*
Available through My Texas Music, www.mytexasmusic.com/richarddobson