



Tim Alpers, Watchman on the Wall: Helping to Protect, Preserve, and Improve Trout Fishing in California

By Bill Creitz



“Growing the ultimate trout in pristine waters”; that’s my motto” declared Tim Alpers, legend and icon of the Eastern Sierras, upon our meeting last October at his Alpers’ Owens River Ranch in preparation for this interview for *Casting Times*.

Tim would punctuate our interview with frequent repetitions of his motto as he showed me around his hatchery and research operations at the Ranch.

In October 2006, I had the privilege of spending several hours touring the 210-acre Alpers’ Owens River Ranch in the company of its owner, manager, and resident-fly-fishing-enthusiast-turned-entrepreneur, Tim Alpers. I came away from that interview with the belief that there is no better friend to fly fishermen than Tim Alpers.

Having inherited the Alpers’ Owens River Ranch from his dad, Tim has applied his enthusiasm, passion for excellence, vision, and exceptional people skills to making the Ranch a successful operation that, he hopes one day, will be expanded, in cooperation with the Department of Fish and Game, and comprised of one-half research and one-half production facility.

Second in name recognition only to Mammoth Mountain’s owner/developer Dave McCoy, Tim Alpers’ tall frame, easy smile, and steely determination, combined with his easily-recognizable Alpers-logo trout planting trucks make for an unmistakable impression of professionalism by fisherman and conservationist alike.

Inheriting the family ranch and its traditions from his dad, Bill, Tim continues the age-old, non-mass production, quality-first, hand-crafted product in trout production and even ranching operations which, while more expensive,

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President’s Message

2007 Club Renewal and Status

We have had another banner year for renewals, and I want to extend a special **THANK YOU** to you, the SCCC members. Your generosity and support are greatly appreciated. It makes all the planning such a joy and shows us that we have a good thing going.

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... *Tim Alpers*

results in a higher quality product. For example, Tim and staff still move fish between holding areas manually without using pumps. “Innovation for innovation’s sake is not something that characterizes the Alpers operation,” says Tim. To reinforce that selective approach to the business of trout management, he also reminded me that Alpers trout are still only planted in the finest waters. Perhaps that is why one writer described Tim Alpers and his fish as “...symbolic of big, beautiful fish and an example of an Eastern Sierra entrepreneur who has hooked a lot of fans over the decades.”

The famous Alpers Ranch has been in the family for over one-hundred years. As German immigrants, Tim’s grandparents used the ranch as their summer grazing area since 1860 when it was originally homesteaded. Tim’s father, who worked for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP), bought the Ranch from his brothers and sisters in 1952. The cabins, still without television and Internet connection, date to the era of the construction of what is known as the “Second Aqueduct” while others pre-date the pipeline construction project (the current office was built in 1920 of hand-hewn logs).

Having caught the famous Alpers trout in the headwaters of Mammoth Creek and also in Lake Crowley, I was familiar with the fighting qualities, coloration, and muscular physique of the Alpers trout we discussed. What I wasn’t prepared for was the fact that they are the embodiment of Tim’s philosophy of growing fish that are as wild as can be by raising them in an as-close-to-nature habitat as possible. No concrete pens for these fish.

It was with great pride that Tim pointed out the crystal clear headwaters of the Owens River where nearly-pure water, some at the almost-ideal temperature of 58 degrees, from underground springs, a few producing as much as 2,000 gallons per minute and taking years to disgorge their product, is used to raise his trout intended for planting, for research, and for table faire. When asked about the comparison with other pure waters like, say, Lake Tahoe, Tim explained that his spring-fed stream would compare favorably with even the famed Lake Tahoe waters except that the Owens has a higher phosphorous content.

Interestingly, when I asked about how and when Tim became interested in fly fishing, he said that when he was young, he had a fly rod and a basketball in his hands almost perpetually. In fact, in his earlier years, Tim was an assistant basketball coach at Tulsa University in Oklahoma and he still indulges in that “other passion” whenever possible. Equally conversant in both things trout related and basketball, Tim knows and very much admires former UCLA coach, John Wooden and, to this day, he loves the player development and recruiting aspects of basketball, as well as being a “shot doc” helping to teach shooting skills when given the chance. Not surprisingly, when asked what he would be doing if he were not raising and stocking trout, Tim responded, “I would be in elected office or maybe a basketball coach.”

To any fly fisher, a few days spent on Alpers’ Owens River Ranch is a dream vacation. While photographing the ranch for this article, I met Steve Ellis, co-owner of the Fisherman’s Spot in Van Nuys, as well as other expectant anglers—all with that characteristic, bordering on goofy, smile on their faces that belies the fact that they are quite aware of the fact that they are hiking through trout fishing Nirvana, trout stick in hand, to discover and engage the legendary Alpers trout in its own waters and on its own terms.

Fishermen are born honest,
but they get over it.
Ed Zern

Along with his fish raising, smoked trout operation, and fine restaurant-quality trout operations (he has provided eating-fish stock from Tasmania, Australia to the renowned Restaurant at Convict Lake since 1993), Tim Alpers is working to develop a web site detailing his operations and conservation efforts; the recent successes of his Hot Creek Hatchery Foundation; the expansion of his trout planting operations to Southern California, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, and Washington; and his efforts to raise a disease resistant strain of trout.



NEW PRODUCT NEWS

by Bill Creitz

With any sport, there are various new items and new twists on old items that we all use; it's the "stuff" of fly fishing. Spring 2007 is no exception. The following is a list of some of the most noteworthy items that you will begin to see in your local fly shop:

Waterproof fly boxes are making a big splash this season. As proof, Orvis, Flambeau, and C&F Designs are debuting three new models this year.

Orvis' Watershed box (five models priced from \$19.95 to \$39.95) is protected by a water-resistant gasket and tight locking mechanism that, together, keep water away from your flies until you're ready to do the honors. It contains closed-cell foam with individual slots to keep flies arranged in rows, and comes with several spring-loaded compartments in various sizes to enable customizing your collection. For more information check out www.orvis.com.

Flambeau offers its Blue Ribbon fly box (three sizes and nine custom configurations priced from \$19 to \$39), also with a waterproof gasket, in an attractive two-tone gray and black swing-latch design that contains rubber pads on the exterior to minimize slippage on rocks, boat decks, or the hood of your car (yeah, we've all done that). Moveable dividers; spring-loaded compartments with ripple foam; clear, durable lids; and a flip-latch system complete the design.

The M-Series fly boxes from C&F Designs (four models priced at \$39.95) offer the fly fisherman a slimmer, shorter profile designed to fit more easily into jacket and vest pockets. Boxes are waterproof; contain what is called Micro-Slit Foam; specially configured for streamers, nymphs, and dry flies; and designed to avoid squishing your favorite flies. Contact www.scientificanglers.com or call 800-430-5000 for more information.

For the fisherman who wants true aesthetics combined with functionality, the Wiley's Fly Boxes (models from \$21.95 to \$24.95) might be the thing. Made of handsome alder wood with laser-etched illustrations on the cover, these fly boxes feature a magnetic latch, double hinges, and ripple foam on one side and solid foam on the other. Visit www.wileysflies.com or call 970-278-0941 for additional information.

... Tim Alpers

Speaking of disease resistant trout, Tim has begun importing to California the Hofer trout, a descendant of the first Rainbow trout taken to Germany from California in exchange for their German Brown strain. The Hofer trout, raised in the Bavarian Alps, is a blend of the California Rainbow and German Brown trout raised for a century in Germany that, according to Tim, "Is an original California trout that's come home."

Working with three state fish hatcheries and two private hatcheries, Alpers' Ranch and Mt. Lassen, Tim is developing a disease resistant Rainbow referred to by his team as the "Ultimate Trout." With Ron Hedrick and Bill Cox of the University of California, Davis, the ultimate trout will be a hybrid of the Hofer trout and the Kamloops trout that will augment the Alpers' Ranch planting operations.

Breeding of a disease resistant trout for stocking seems entirely consistent with Tim and his wife, Pam's, passion for perfection in whatever they do.

Tim and Pam Alpers, in addition to managing the Ranch's hatchery and planting operations, also find time to support non-profit organizations as a way to give back something for all they have benefited from the trout fishing industry.

The newly-created Hot Creek Hatchery Foundation, Inc., a public-private partnership to benefit the Eastern Sierra trout fishing community and its residents, that the Alpers have been instrumental in establishing, has raised over \$200,000. Because of the passion of Tim Alpers and other like-minded Foundation members, they have, in a rather short time, implemented a cooperative agreement with the State for the purchase of fish food and diesel fuel, and have made infrastructure improvements to the Hot Creek Hatchery near Mammoth Lakes.

In his spare time, Tim likes to help kids—on the trout stream as well as on the basketball court. To date, Tim has either established or helped with the Mammoth Lakes Kids' Fishing Festival where 2,100 kids participated and with several kids' fishing derbies. Beginning in the summer of 2008, a kids fishing section will be established at the Alpers' Owens River Ranch for youth twelve years old and under. Fly rods and barbless hooks will be required, and the fishing will be augmented with some free casting instruction. All of these efforts are what Tim considers to be important steps that



The Lure of Fly Fishing **Part One** **By Bill Creitz**

It was while riding home on the train one Friday night, thumbing mindlessly through a writing style guide, that I began day dreaming about fishing Mammoth Lakes, California.

As I was busy casting—in my dreams, that is—to resourceful rainbows in Hot Creek, bashful browns in the San Joaquin River, and what my friend calls “atomic Alpers” in Lake Crowley, I began to seriously ponder the reasons I love fly fishing, especially fly fishing for trout; the result: a six-item list of what I believe attracts people to fly fishing for this most worthy opponent.

Foremost on my list is the fish itself. Simply stated, trout are aesthetically attractive, smart, often complex, and worthy adversaries. They reward the fisherman’s exertions by fighting well and giving all they have in an effort to escape the hook; that, combined with their beautiful markings and coloration, elicit admiration from the fisherman like no other species can; trout vary the take in so many ways that they keep the fisherman constantly challenged to be both alert and innovative; and they exhibit just that perfect degree of unpredictability that keeps the angler scratching his head and wanting to re-read those yellowed articles he once filed under the title “When They Won’t Bite.”

Next, it’s the traditions. Modern fly fishing dates to the time of Izaak Walton (1650s) and contains a rich oral and written history, lore, and literature that rival that of many other age-old traditions. Rod building, sport and competitive casting, leader construction, entomology, fly tying, reading the water, strategy, line management, hook sets, playing and releasing the fish; these are what comprise the traditions that so endear us to the sport. And the challenge and reward of passing the love of fly fishing to future generations is yet another appealing aspect of our sport.

Tell me, if you can, that those illustrations depicting a grandfather and his grandson carefully handling the varied-texture flies tied with great deliberation at grandpa’s vice or the scene where the two generations of fly fishers are hip-deep in a rollicking mountain stream in mid-release of an exhausted rainbow don’t remind you of memories long past or hopes not-soon-enough realized.

The extensive literary tradition alone is worth the price of a good bamboo rod. Classic works penned by Izaak Walton, J.C. Mottram, Sir Edward Grey, J.W. Hill and, more recently, Gary Lafontaine, John Gierach, and Vince Marinaro, transport the armchair fly fisher to waters, wilderness settings, lodges, near-mythical hatches, and near-hysterical encounters with quirky enthusiasts that can be brought to life only by authors with a seemingly inexplicable passion for the fly that we all share.

The location. Which one of us doesn’t long for the cessation of winter so that we can get back to our favorite stream, secret spring creek, that glory hole that most river fishermen only dream about, or that cove where the creek mingles its offerings with that of the lake and where the weed line is home to countless midges awaiting sluicing trout.

Clear, cool spring water meandering through pine-strewn meadows; deep pools bordered by fish-laden undercut banks; tumultuous tailwaters and tailouts; jade green coves mirroring cloudless azure skies; brush-lined streams punctuated by glaciated boulders; and rivers swelled to near-capacity by melting snow from high mountain passes; all these are what make trout fishing so alluring. Often, the surroundings are so remarkable, distracting even, that you count it a good day of fishing when, in fact, you caught nothing larger than an over-zealous fingerling.

Trout prefer cool and clean. Don’t ask me why; they just do. Well, cool and clean often accompanies clear and calm. That’s what we trout fishermen like: clear water and blue skies; calm days and productive waters; a backdrop of sentinel-like trees against which robust rivers, streams, and creeks cavort on their way to the sea; and a respectfully preserved environment whose beauty is both cultivated and appreciated. Trout thrive in such locales; so do people.

Part Two in the next issue of Casting Times

If you absolutely have to go fishing
with only two flies,
they should be an Adams and a
Hare’s Ear Soft Hackle.

John Gierach

... New Product News

Infrared thermometer. I thought that I had seen about every nifty fly fishing gadget until I came across this. Designed by William Joseph, this mercury-free thermometer uses the latest point-and-shoot laser technology to give the angler accurate water temperature readings in seconds. It changes from Fahrenheit to Celsius easily, and conveniently fits in your vest pocket, waders pouch, or on a lanyard. This is just too cool. Check out your local fly shop or Google "William Joseph Infrared Thermometer" for more information. 

Conservation News and Updates: Piru Creek

Friends of the River's Jim Bloomquist informs us that the February 14 meeting with the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and those of us who are interested in maintaining Piru Creek as a year-round cold-water trout fishery did not go as planned.

It seems that both the DWR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are not open to any mitigation alternatives to de-watering the creek during the summer months, thus destroying the wild trout fishery between Piru Creek and Pyramid Lake.

It became apparent that the public meeting was held reluctantly by the DWR in response to requests from elected officials Assemblywoman Audra Strickland, State Senator George Runner, and Congressman Buck McKeon. We need to express our thanks to each of the elected officials for their concern and efforts to resolve this impasse in an equitable manner.

At this point in the process, it looks like interested casting clubs, environmental groups, recreational enthusiasts, and concerned citizens can take the following actions:

1. Request the State Water Resource Control Board to require that DWR maintain the Piru Creek trout fishery as mitigation for the original construction of Pyramid Dam. The Water Resource Control Board is a powerful agency that can, if motivated, use its influence to help recreational users of Piru Creek maintain the trout fishery.
2. Initiate a lawsuit against the DWR if it significantly reduces or eliminates the water flow in violation of Section

Trip Report - March 24th, 2007 West Fork of the San Gabriel River

Upon passing through the gate to the West Fork of the San Gabriel River, we could see a well flowing stream and no one on it. But, concern quickly rose after the first bridge where Bear Creek meets the



West Fork, because we saw how little water was flowing from Cogswell Reservoir. We continued to the second bridge where special regulation waters are set aside for fly fishers. The flow did not improve.

After parking approximately half a mile below the reservoir, we walked only several feet to the stream. Moss covered the stream bottom fluttering in the current. At times



the movement of the moss caught the sun's rays to appeared as fish lined up like cordwood.

It did not take long to find the real McCoy's. Mike was the first to report a hookup. He and Rudy nearly lost their first catches as the 2-inchers flew through the air on the back cast. Both anglers quickly adjusted the pressure needed to set the hook.

There were dozens of strikes and in all 10 fish were landed between Mike Smith, Chris Holms, Dennis Malone (SCCC guest), and Rudy Brown. The rainbows were 6-7 inches in length and wild.

The water temperature ranged between 55-56 degrees. Hendrickson and Hump's Pheasant Tails were of no interest to the West Forkers. The action was on the surface using Royal Wulffs, Blue-Wing Olives, and ants in sizes 16-18. 



... Conservation News

5937 of the California Fish and Game Code. The code requires that the dam operator maintain sufficient water for fish below a dam to ensure their good condition. Typically, these lawsuits are expensive with no guarantee of victory.

3. Continue to ask for the help of our elected officials in pressuring the Department of Water Resources to maintain the Piru Creek trout fishery as promised when the Pyramid Dam was constructed. Maintenance of the fishery was clearly a required mitigation measure that was agreed to by all parties at the time.

If you are interested in helping the Santa Clarita Casting Club speak up for the Piru Creek, please attend one of our monthly meetings (the third Wednesday of each month) to learn more about what we are doing as a club or send letters to any of the following legislators urging them to oppose DWR's dewatering plan: Senators Sheila Kuehl, Richard Alarcon, Jack Scott, Tom McClintock, and Alan Lowenthal; and Assembly members Keith Richman, Lloyd Levine, Fran Pavley, Cindy Montanez, Dario Frommer, Carol Liu, and Pedro Nava (their addresses can be found on the web).

... The President's Message

The membership summary is as follows:

- 20 members in the family program (6 families)
- 22 individual members
- 4 honorary members
- 46 Total members

We've come quite a ways since our humble beginning in September 2004, when five Santa Clarita Valley residents and fly fishing enthusiasts met to form a club. You are all part of a great beginning and an even greater vision for the future of fly fishers living in and around the Santa Clarita Valley, so keep sharing the information about our club, and we will continue to grow each year—can a hundred-member club and our own clubhouse be right around the corner? Stay tuned.

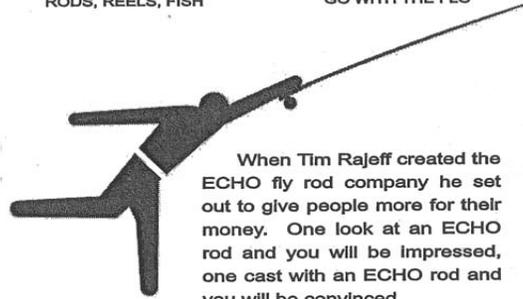
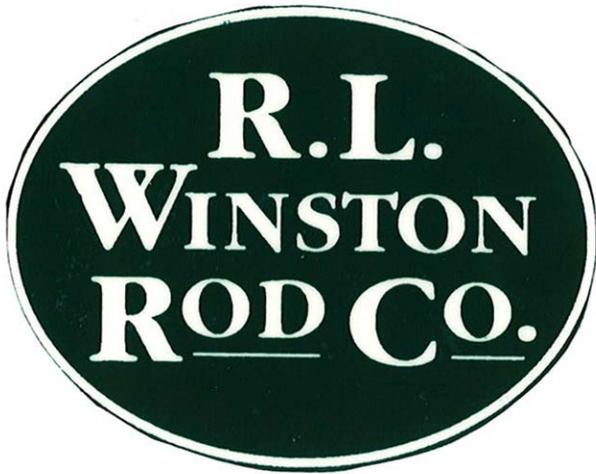
... Tim Alpers

must be taken to help ensure quality trout fishing in the Eastern Sierras for future generations.

And if being the gold standard by which all trout hatchery, stocking and restaurant-quality fish operations are compared weren't enough, Tim Alpers and his namesake fish have "wormed" their way into the movie industry with both a commercial being filmed at the Ranch and a new movie tentatively titled "Disturbia" due out in 2007 or 2008 featuring the Alpers trout.

Several Sponsors





When Tim Rajeff created the ECHO fly rod company he set out to give people more for their money. One look at an ECHO rod and you will be impressed, one cast with an ECHO rod and you will be convinced.

Airflo announces their new ridgeline fly line, the only fly line that uses ridges to reduce friction in the guides.

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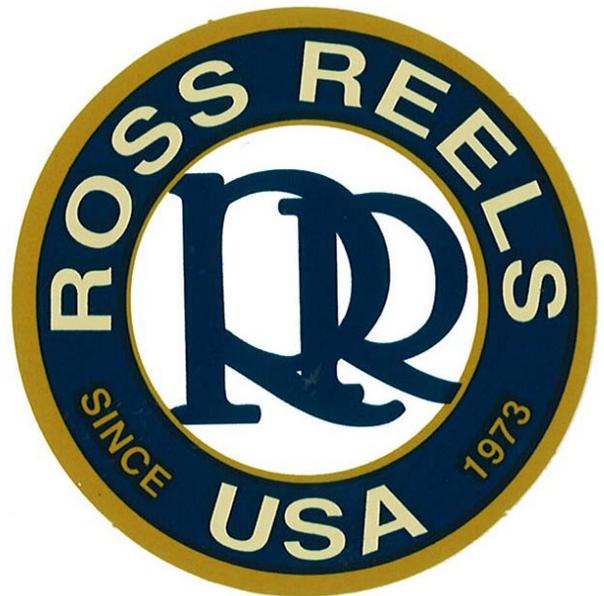


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