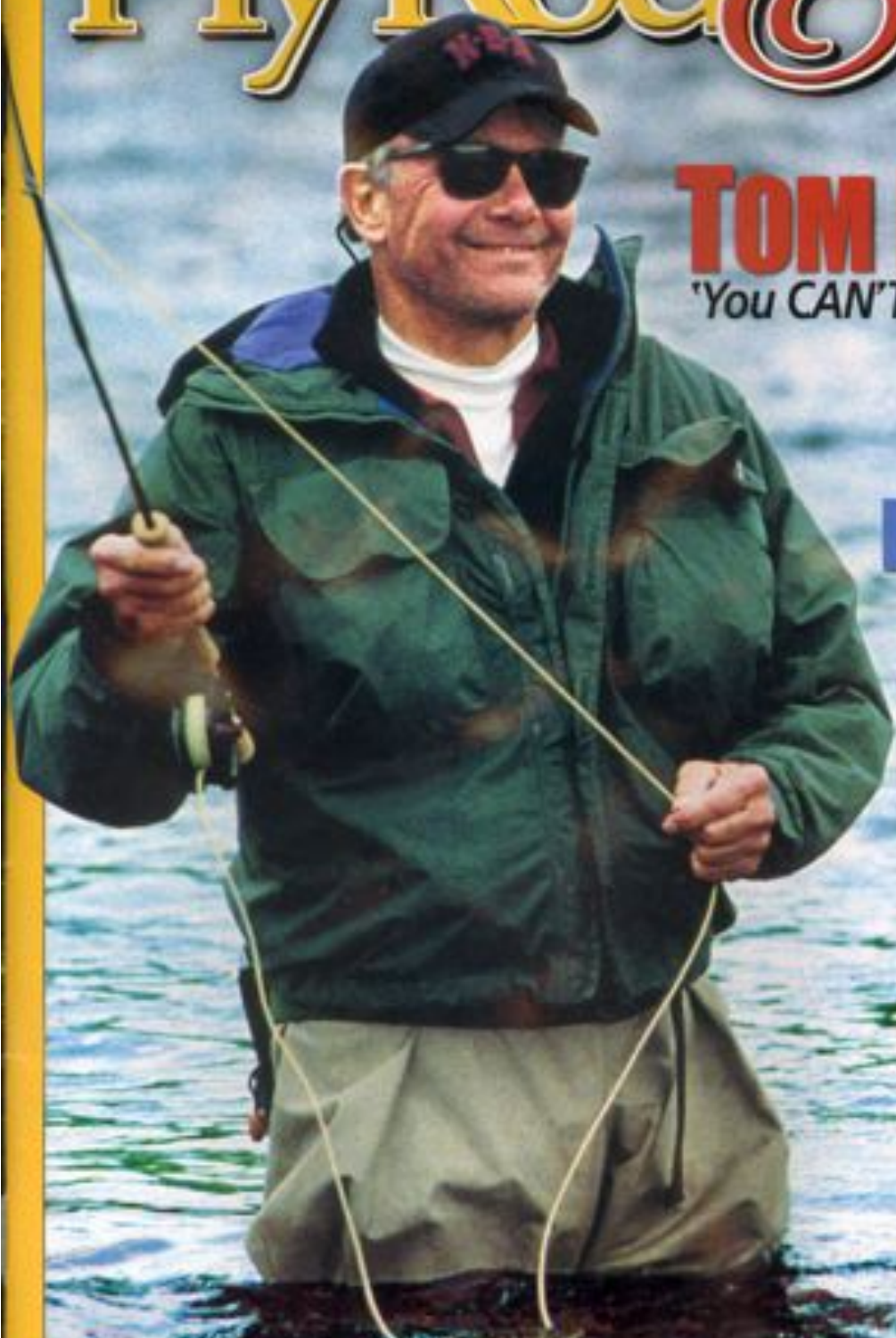


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Golden Bonefish

Of The Third Coast



This carp is much bigger than most bonefish you'll ever see—and the gorgeous "flat" it was caught on is in Lake Michigan, not the tropics.

What's the difference between carp and bonefish? BONES HAVE GOTTEN BETTER PRESS.....

BOB BUTZ
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

Like every good fishing story this one has a big fish in it, a couple of big fish, actually. But that's where the similarity ends. This story is about carp, and not only are carp infrequently pursued by the fly-fishing elite, but they seldom have stories written about them, especially here in a place as celebrated for its trout streams as northern Michigan.

After all, the Adams fly—the most versatile dryfly pattern ever conceived—was invented on the Boardman River some 20-odd miles from my home outside Traverse City. The Au Sable, due east, is where Trout Unlimited was born. Hemingway fished here. And that's just for starters.

The point is, you can't use both a fly rod and a pen in this town and not find something to say about the trout fishing; the storied waters hereabouts offer the perfect backdrop for a writer to go on about trout ad boredom. Such is not the case with carp—not here in the North or anywhere for that matter. And that's a shame.

Like most fly fishermen, I've seen carp in rivers countless times but never gave casting to them a second thought. After all, when stretches of blue-ribbon water and much more glamorous fish beckon, we miserably high-falutin' long-rod anglers don't waste time offering flies to carp. But then again, it's not all that easy to coax them into biting in the first place, and we fly fishers are awfully thin-skinned about some things, not to mention shamefully vindictive against any fish so brazen as to refuse to take a fly. The truth is, we only wish we could figure out a way to catch them legitimately. That's because carp are just plain big, and they also fight very well.

I must admit I had a bit of an attitude myself when I set out to catch some carp that July morning; I was hoping for the best, yet certain that when we spotted our first cruising fish my guide was going to snatch my Woolly Buggler and douse it with a liberal



splash of vanilla extract or some other sweet-smelling concoction under the pretext that he was just checking my knot.

But that's not how it happened at all. Nor did we do our "carping" on a river, but instead out in the great freshwater sea of Lake Michigan—the so-called Third Coast. Out here, local trout-fishing guide and small-stream specialist Dave McCool calls them "golden bonefish." For him, guiding for carp is only a sideline throughout the summer trout season. But while wading among the rocks early that morning, looking for carp cruising the crystalline waters, you might go so far to say that McCool enjoys this more.

"It's as addictive as saltwater flats fishing, only cheaper," he asserts. Certainly, the equipment was nearly identical: good optics, sure-gripping neoprene flats shoes, and long rods of either 7- or 8-weight for bucking the ever-present headwind.

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