

## When Left Is Right

George Dlouhy, NOV 2015

The very first time I ever fished was in the river Labe, flowing right in the middle of the Europe in central Bohemia. On that beautiful summer morning I was caught fishing without a license and fisheries inspector wanted to know, how old I was? I remembered that my mother was telling all the inspectors, especially those inspecting train tickets that I was four and there was no need for me to have any ticket.

The inspector was impressed by my confident answer and with a great patience he then untangled my fishing line from some spiky rosehip bush behind me. Before he continued on his bicycle along the river bank, he advised me to fish in the river and not in that rosehip bush.

Soon the encounters with fisheries inspectors became a regular affair and they actually became a useful source of information. From them I learned what fish is being caught, where and how, and who is catching and who is not.

After I moved to Australia, I somehow miss all that, since in my 40 years of fishing here, I actually saw fisheries inspector only once. I even never heard about somebody being one and I feel that if I ever meet one again, I would go and buy myself a lottery ticket.

For the first fourteen days of fishing in Australia, during which I lived in Bonegilla Migrant Camp, I fished Hume Weir, which is now named Lake Hume. Its vast water surface was for me exotic and mysterious and I did not have a clue what fish I might catch. I only had a small rod with equally small reel, bought for just over four Dollars in the convenience store next to the camp. In addition to the line, in the package were included few lures, hooks and lead weights.

I tried a small, silvery lure first and I could not believe how many redfin I caught! That fish I already knew from my fishing days in Bohemia and therefore the catch was nothing exotic. What's more, all fish were almost identical in size and all were well below the minimal size, set by European standards. Certainly it would not cross my mind that in Australia the redfin is classified as a pest.

All that knowledge came to me later, although one old fisherman, sitting on the bank of that lake and rolling one cigarette after the other, tried very hard to explain to me all that. Unfortunately at that time, I did not understand the word he was saying and therefore I just happily nodded my head and from time to time uttered "OK", which was one of the few words I already learned and remembered.

During my first day in Australia I noticed that in Australia, almost everybody drives on the left side of the road. Therefore during first weeks of fishing I was surprised to see that during casting, almost everybody used their right hand, just like we used in Europe. Another surprise came after such successful cast, when they changed hands - the rod went into their left hand and they started to operate the reel with their right hand!

Soon I encountered more confusion when defining what is left and what is right. It happened some months later, when I was buying a new reel. It was a proper outdoor shop and I was asked, if I am left-handed or right-handed. After answering with my limited English that I am right-handed, they brought me a reel with the handle on the right hand side, i.e. left-handed by European standard. Since this was exactly the opposite what I wanted, I then asked for left-handed reel and thus created a bit of a sensation, being the first adult customer, who wasn't sure, if he is left or right-handed.

Another of my early acquisitions was a purchase of two Mitchell reels, made sometimes around 1955. There were without an option to change from left-handed to right-handed position and at that time, I could not understand enormous salesman's joy, when I asked especially for "left-handed" option. These reels were



gathering dust in shop's store for more than 30 years and I believe that they were bought by the store by some mistake. The salesman was so happy with my choice that he even gave me some discount, and that despite the fact that the store did not have discounting included in its policy.

Being well aware of these intricacies, I found amusing to watch fly-fishermen in Tasmania. Those which I saw, they all used their right hand to cast and left hand to wind the reel. Unfortunately, I did not see them casting a lure.

For a long time I considered this being an Australian speciality, until I came across some US fishing magazines and saw some pictures there. They

were all having "right-handed" reels! I wonder, have American fishermen educated Australians or Australian fishermen have educated Americans?

Another of my big surprises was the inaccurate portraying and treatment of carp in Australia. The belief that carp impairs the water quality is not justified, since there are many drinking water-retention dams, with plentiful population of carp and yet, despite their muddy bottom, they are all crystal clean. As an example of such retention reservoir is "Podhora", near Marianske Lazne in Czech Republic.

Carp's muddy taste, so many complain of, is only due to already muddied water carp lives in. All what it takes, is to keep carp alive in some clean water for a week or two and the muddy taste is gone. The quality of carp's meat would be then on parity with many other fresh-water species.



I also doubt that carp decimates local fish population. Again, rivers and lakes in Europe could testify, how actually beneficial the presence of carp is. What is missing in some Australian waters is effective predatory fish, which control carp's population.

From my own experience I know that for example, population of carp did not cause any problems in Tasmanian Lake Crescent. Carp's presence became problem only when the authorities became aware of it. Till then, this lake was one of the outstanding lakes, producing enormously sized trout. It is relatively shallow and although it lies fairly high on the Central Plateau, during the Tasmanian summer the water get relatively warmer than in other, deeper lakes. Fishermen visiting this lake were getting prized fish and it was generally believed that this lake produces the biggest trout from all other waters.

I considered it to be close to a miracle that in such an elevated lake, carp could not just survive, but also spawn! The other miracle was the carp's coexistence in the same environment with trout. Many European fisheries would be exceptionally happy, if they could breed carp in trout waters.



Carp has no spikes, breed in abundance and could be an excellent source of food for predatory fish like trout.

When one day a dead carp was found on the lake's shore, Tasmanian Fisheries excommunicated Lake Crescent from the list of well-behaved fishing places and closed the lake for fishing. For a long time they deliberated what to do with the carp in the lake and amongst many suggestions was considered even poisoning of the whole lake! Fortunately, the farmers along the Clyde River, which flows from the lake, successfully objected it.

In the end Tasmanian Fisheries were for many years conducting brutal extermination of carp and I believe unintentionally, but consequently, also the extermination of all other fish, caught during electric netting in the lake. Anecdotal evidence now suggests that the lake is not producing prize-sized fish any more.

Carp lived in that lake probably for many years and nobody knew about it, because nobody was fishing for carp. Should carp's carcass have not been found, this lake would be still basking in its well-deserved glory.

At the present, we are still lucky - we have plenty of fish in our rivers and lakes, but after forty years I have been fishing in Australia, I noticed that fish population is definitely dwindling. I believe this is not due to the overfishing by recreational fishermen, but due to the slowly increasing toxicity of our waterways and lakes. This is caused by run-off from farms, mines and other industries, what is killing our fish. From my experience with several waves of poisoning of the river Labe in early fifties, I noticed that carp is more resistant to pollution and it is usually the last fish to succumb to poisonous effects. It is quite possible that next generations will be glad that we did not manage to eradicate carp from our rivers and carp would become a resource, what current generation is not aware of yet. This would be probably the only inheritance, for which the next generations would be thankful to us.

