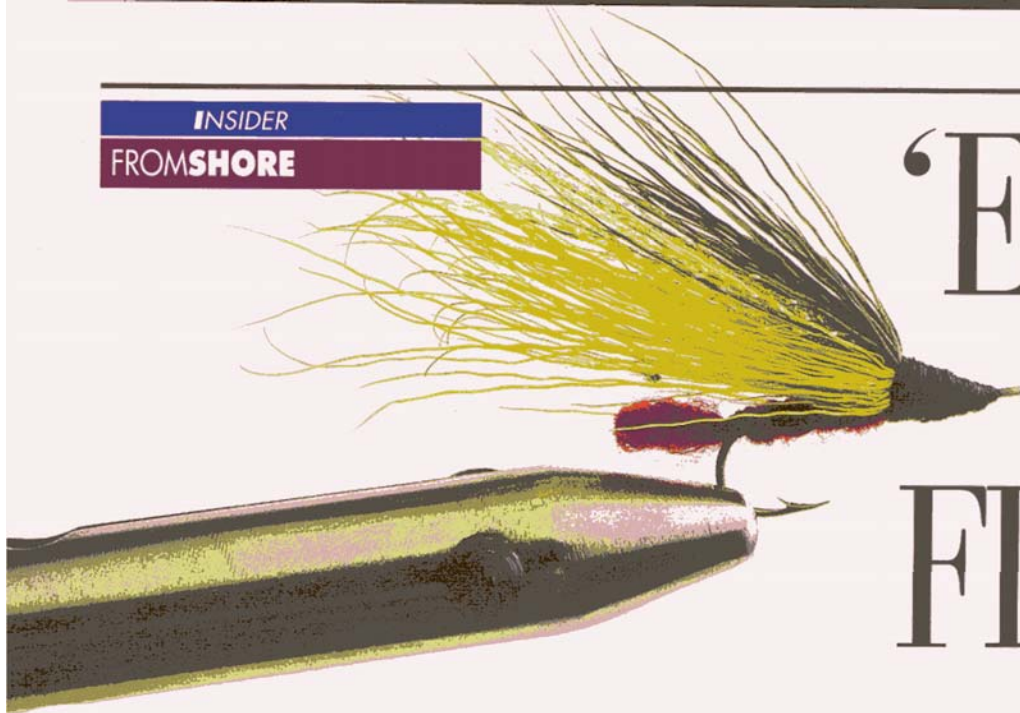


# 'EYES ON FLIES

by Tom Johnson\*



**C**addis flies rising off historic streams—the Platte, the Roaring Fork, the Madison, the Green. A lone fly-fisherman artfully casts his insect imitation to a rising trout. On a nearby reservoir, a solitary fisherman in a float-tube, fly-rod in hand, seeks to match the hatch. On Lake Winnebago, an avid walleye fisherman flip-casts a fly to nearby rock riprap, tempting a trout—whoops—walleye into striking.

A Lake Winnebago guide operating out of Tew's Two Bait and Tackle in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, consistently catches walleyes, many exceeding 4 pounds, on streamer flies, from both the lake and the Fox River where it enters Lake Winnebago. The flies he uses and the techniques he employs work anywhere walleyes roam—even in that Mecca of fly-fishermen, the West.

**Rigging the fly**—The avid western fly-fisherman selects an 8½- or 9½-foot rod, 5/6- or 7/8-weight line, a 3x or 4x tippet, and floating or sinking line. But to the 'eye fly-fisherman, these decisions have no meaning. He chooses an 8½-foot medium-heavy bait-casting rod such as Eagle Claw's "Crosswings" series SST5286MH, and 10- to 14-pound Berkley FireLine. The long heavy rod and no-stretch line are critical to presentation.

Tie the FireLine to one ring of a three-way swivel. On another ring, connect the fly with a 24- to 36-inch length of Berkley 10-pound Trilene. On the remaining ring, tie 12 inches of 10-pound test to attach a 1/16- to 3/4-ounce bell sinker.

**Location and presentation**—While the trout fisherman seeks the upper reaches of a deep pool, the 'eye fly-fisherman seeks rock

structure, preferably rock riprap along the face of a dam, a marina windbreak, or the bank of a river or stream where it enters a reservoir. If current, either wind-created or naturally occurring, is present where the river enters the reservoir, success is enhanced. He remains alert for baitfish darting among the rocks; perhaps walleyes are nearby.

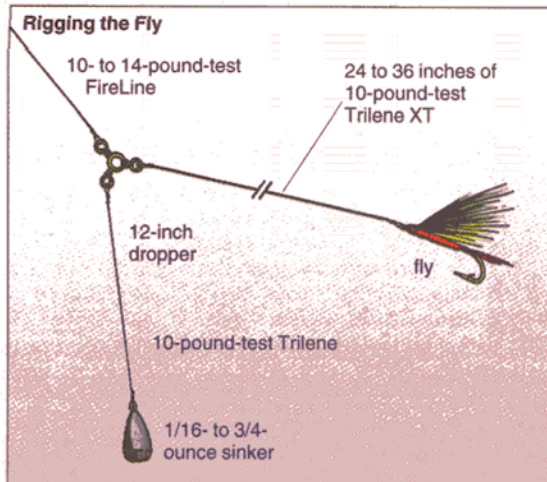
While it's possible to cast nearly parallel to riprap from the bank, using a lightweight sinker to dance the fly along the rocks, it's easier and results in fewer snags to cast from a boat. To fish riprap, position your boat so you can easily underhand flip-cast a 3-way rig close to the shoreline or exposed rock. Approach structure quietly. You won't be casting long distances and should avoid alerting feeding 'eyes to your presence. Use an underhand flip. The long rod allows for

## FLIES FOR 'EYES

*Matching the hatch is always a good option, whether you're fly-fishing for trout or for walleyes. For walleyes, the hatch to match are young-of-the-year baitfish, often perch. The body of the fly is made of red yarn. Tie the yarn near the bend of an Eagle Claw #2 non-offset #214 hook, leaving about 1/4 inch free to represent a tail. Wrap the yarn to a point near the eye of the hook, leaving room to build a head after creating a cape on the top of the hook.*

*First, tie several strands of chartreuse deer hair, slightly longer than the hook, near the eye of the hook. Then tie 6 to 8 strands of chartreuse Flashabou, approximately the same length as the deer hair. Next, tie a layer of dark green deer hair to complete the cape. Use about half as many strands of deer hair as for the initial layer, the hair slightly shorter than the layers below it. Complete the fly by creating a head for the fly with your tying thread.*

*This color combination has proven effective where perch are a primary forage. If perch aren't present and the forage base consists of shad or shiners, to match the hatch, try a light gray yarn for the body, gray deer hair, silver Flashabou, and black deer hair. Also tie this fly with red yarn instead of light gray, since red seems to trigger strikes at times.*



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pitching the rig farther and for fishing at an angle that helps avoid snags. Pitch just far enough to effectively work the rock structure.

Control your cast to enter the water as quietly as possible and to avoid tangling the 3-way rig. Keep it short; the pitch cast isn't a free-spool cast. Complete the pitch-cast with your rod at a 60-degree angle to the water. As soon as the weight of the 3-way rig enters the water, apply pressure to your reel, stopping the line. Engage the reel, and keeping your line fairly taut, drop your rod tip and follow the 3-way rig to the rocks below the surface. Watch the line carefully during this drop, as many strikes occur during this initial entry into the water. Any unnatural movements indicate a strike. Set the hook immediately.

As soon as the weight on the 3-way rig touches the rocks, lift the rod tip, pick up slack line with your reel, then drop the rod tip, repeating this process as you walk the 3-way rig slowly back to the boat. Be sure to maintain a taut line throughout the process. Most strikes occur as you lift the weight off the rocks, creating an upward darting motion of the fly, or on the drop as the fly dives downward. In current, the darting motion of the fly is enhanced, imitating the natural actions of baitfish. Early morning and early evening generally are best times for this presentation, but it's also been effective on overcast and even bright sunny days.

The low-stretch line and heavy graphite rod help detect subtle bites and allow you to "feel" your way down the riprap structure. Hang-ups occur, but the long rod helps free line. Quietly move toward the snag with your electric motor, reach over the snag, and give the rod a short quick jerk. Most of the time, the weight will free itself. If the fly is hung in the rocks, a light-wire #214 Eagle Claw hook bends, freeing your 3-way rig. Use a long-nose pliers to reshape the hook and then resume pitching the fly.

**Alternatives**—This 3-way-rig fly presentation also is effective for drift fishing rocky reefs, rockpiles, and rocky points. Hold the rod at a 45-degree angle to the water, slowly lifting and dropping the rod tip to impart a darting action to the fly. Use a quick hookset. Letting the walleye take the bait isn't necessary. ■

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#### **COMPANY CONTACTS**

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