



GHOSTS & VAPORS

photos and words by Jeff Bright

FROM THE WORK IN PROGRESS "IN THE HOUSE OF MYKISS: PHOTOGRAPHS & THOUGHTS FROM THE MONUMENTAL NORTHERN WORLD OF STEELHEAD FLYFISHING"



There is a certain mystery and allure about steelhead and the places we go to find them. Their favored settings are rugged and remote, always formidable, and occasionally hostile. Shrouded in a veil of mist, there is a world indifferent to our needs and desires, one where events transpire outside our perception and details are nearly impossible to see. Yet, we go. We seek them out. Deep in the forests and canyons, by the river's edge, we witness the epic tales written by water and time. And, if fortune prevails, in the rumbling flow, we connect with the electric charge of life's primal force.

But, it's never easy. Steelhead are strikingly beautiful — and maddeningly elusive. Migratory creatures, they're here one day and gone the next. In perhaps the cruelest irony, what makes them so attractive is also beyond possession. Try to own a steelhead and the very qualities you cherish in it will disappear. Most times, catching one on a fly is a daunting task, a collision of skill and luck

that never seems to happen quite often enough. When it does happen, the affair is too fleeting, an ephemeral experience...present, in your grasp, then gone...like a mixing of ghosts and vapors.

Maybe this is why steelhead fly fishing is so seductive. Why, in the world of sport fishing, steelhead seem to count just a little more than other fish. They symbolize and connect us with something bigger than ourselves, something mythic. For me, o. mykiss embodies the far-off and natural north, a perfect foil to the folly and trappings of our increasingly insulated, modern life. Though they and their world present us with what may be unknowable mysteries, this much seems clear: as a gift of spirit and identity — as food for our collective Cascadian soul — we need wild steelhead swimming in the ocean and returning strong each year to the rivers of the Great Pacific Northwest.

— Jeff Bright























