

Hooks!

A retrospective on fishing.

By Bill Hole

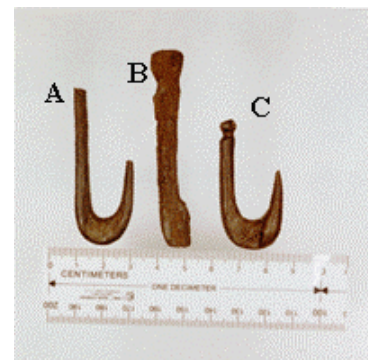
There are over 800 different kinds and sizes, circle, regular wire, heavy wire, offset, worm, bait, standout, wide gap, treble, octopus, bleeding, trailer, size 22, size 9/0, long shank, short shank, jig hooks, treble, 30 degree eye, 60 degree eye, 90 degree eye, barbless, dry fly (big and small), nymph, egg, and the list just keeps going on.

A novel has a hook once your start reading you can't put the book down, and so does a good salesman, when you bite he just reels you in. I want a hook at the end of my fishing line as sharp as and a Dale Carnegie graduate in a custom tailored three piece suit or as agile as a used car salesman closing in on the sale. I don't want to lose a fish because the hook couldn't seal the deal.

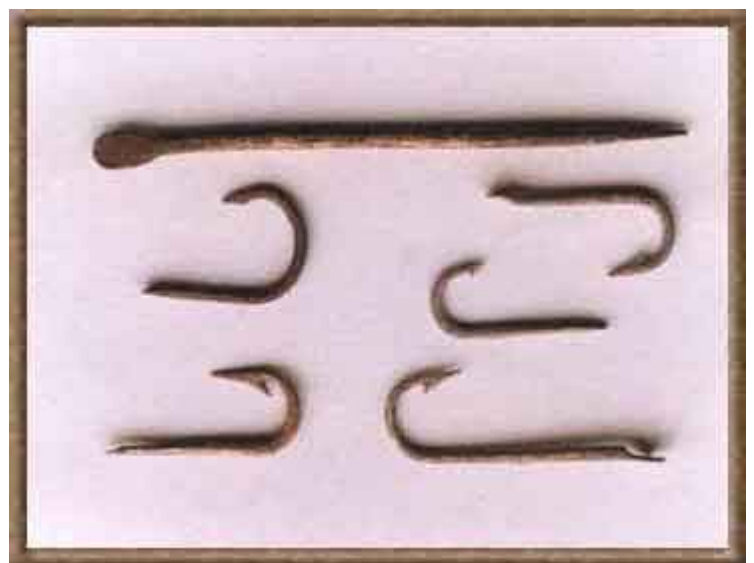
Nobody knows for sure but it is believed Cro-Magnon man fashioned hooks from wood 30 to 40,000 years ago. No actual hooks survive today because the materials he used were too fragile to last. However cave drawings show anglers did exist and the drawings do show hooks. In prehistoric times (Neolithic Age about 4000 to 6000 years ago), ancient "walleye and bass" fishermen fashioned hooks from animal bones, shells, antlers (which indicates these early anglers were hunters too), flint and sometimes from bones of their vanquished enemies. Prehistoric fly fishermen carved hooks from bone, shells and antlers too. Yes there were fly fishermen, they had not developed the fly rod that came much later, however the hooks were heavy enough to "cast". The ancient angler didn't cast far either because this was thousands of years before the invention of the reel. The earliest hooks showed a great deal of skill and craftsmanship. The hooks were barbless. Fish were plentiful so most kept what they caught; catch and release had not been invented yet. The hooks were large, probably an indication of the size of fish most commonly caught, or that these anglers were after trophies as much as food. You know the mantra "big baits, big fish", I believe Neolithic fishermen then as modern fishermen today lived by that rule. Socrates was claimed to have said, "Teach a man to fish, teach his wife to clean the catch!" Aristotle was an avid fisherman he claimed fighting a fish on a rod made him feel young. Archimedes, when he wasn't sticking stuff in water calculating volumes and densities or working on math or physics problems of his day, would spend hours making hooks to use



No one will dispute the beauty of this hook. It was found at Jortveit in Eide, Aust-Agder County, Norway, and is considered to be 4,000 years old.



A. Hemmings
Figure 2: J-shaped hooks, collected in a. 1995, b. 1997, c. 1996.



Early prehistoric hand carved hooks. Found in Norway

on local ponds, the guy was a fishing nut. I hear he never got the recognition due him as a fisherman. He lived in Syracuse, great fishing in Syracuse. Not to be upstaged by the Greeks the ancient Romans encouraged recreational fishing “Fishing is good for the soul”, they would say. I

think the Romans really learned fishing from the Jews, all the Apostles were very good fishermen.

The first bronze hooks could have been made in Egypt. There is evidence that ancient Egyptians fished with poles, fishline, and hooks, as early as 2000 BC. They started out with carved bone, then made copper and then bronze hooks. Bronze hooks found in Lake Geneva, Switzerland are believed to be from this age. The design was very similar to their carved bone and antler predecessors; snagless designs had not been invented yet (that is why hooks were found in the lake instead of tackle boxes, which probably had not been invented, either. A lot of inventing had yet to be done).

Bronze while a great advancement for the hook design was not that strong. When iron was invented that really helped the hook strength and durability. Unfortunately only a few craftsmen knew how to temper iron to keep it from bending easily. In the

1400’s hooks were commercially available however the quality was not that good, therefore many anglers still made their own hooks.

Some of the early hooks were adorned with feathers and animal hair to lure fish to bite the hook. Other early anglers would put pieces of meat on the hook to attract a fish to bite. These two schools of fishing philosophy became very popular. There were many arguments about using meat for bait versus feathers. Meat was looked down upon by the guys who used feathers on their hooks. There is no doubt the meat fisherman were more

successful and I think that there was an air of jealousy from the feather guys. The meat guys scoffed at the feather guys. At the local pubs the feather guys were the butt of jokes, if you are a feather guy who tosses feathers all day and is lucky to catch one fish versus the guys who uses meat and carries home all he can hold, you may look a little dumb. Therefore it was in the feather fisherman’s best interest to build an air of aristocracy about feather fishing which has continued to this day. The



The carving above is from Bohuslän in Sweden. These carvings often conceal a magic motif, although there are many which merely depict the happenings of everyday life



First known account of a trophy fish...Cro-Magnon man 40,000 years ago somewhere in Europe exact spot unknown (anglers today still follow the tradition “keep the best spots secret”)



Etruscan fishermen on the sea, detail from Tomba della Caccia e Pesca in Tarquinia, assumed to have been painted around 510 BC.



Egyptian hieroglyph depicting a fish cleaning station

meat guys I know still believe feather guys are elitist when it comes to fishing.

I was up to Ontario to do a little fishing with a few friends of mine we were with our guide friend, Timmy Smythe (pronounce Smith... just the Canadian

spelling. Like tire... they spell it tyre, and they use the word “aye” (pronounced “A”) to punctuate all their sentences when they talk, “aye”. It is a different country, what do you expect, aye?) We were fishing a pristine lake up north, black fly country,”aye”. Timmy when he talks to you he never uses your first name, we all go by our last names. I don’t know why, it is just a quirk of his.

A typical conversation with Timmy, “Those pesky black flies are sucking all your blood out,”aye”. Miskey do you need some bug spray, “aye”?”

“Hole, get Miskey the bug spray before his blood gets drained,”aye”.”

“Hole; pass me the bait, I just got robbed,”aye”.”

“Hole we are going to catch a limit today, “aye”.”

“Hole, does your wife like fish fries, “aye””? Are we gonna catch a bunch, “aye”, Hole.”

Timmy would say. “Aye” “Aye” Aye” all the time.... I couldn’t wait to get back to Buffalo, “you know”.

Hooks! Back to hooks. We are lucky because, today there is no need to carve your own hooks, but the feather guys still like to tie on their own feathers. The modern era of hooks has brought some great innovations in design and materials. Quality for the most part is very good no matter where the hooks are made. Modern materials and manufacturing methods has helped a lot. Hooks are manufactured all over the world Brazil, Norway, Philippines, India, France, USA, and Japan. There are hundreds of factories in China cranking out hooks.

Today Mustad is the no. 1 selling hook-brand worldwide. Present owner, Hans Mustad, is 6th generation owner, the family has been in the business a long time. They have been making hooks for 178 years. Today there are “sticky” sharp hooks, fish just swim by and get hooked not to mention everything in the tackle box your clothes and hands. Many manufactures chemically sharpen hooks to get the fine point. There is a drawback to being too fine; the point can curl over if it hits something hard like a rock, the bone in a fish’s jaw or even banged around in a tackle box. What starts out as an extremely sharp hook is quickly dulled. Mustad designed a conical point that is very sharp and durable. Then Mustad uses a special process to chemically sharpen the conical point so that it won’t curl over, making it one of the sharpest and best hooks on the market today. Many professional tournament anglers use Mustad hooks exclusively because they are tough and sharp.

Hooked yet? Lets go fishing,”aye”.