



HAIG-BROWN

Remembering Angling's Modern Oracle

by VAN GORMAN EGAN

Real change comes slowly in the ways of humankind. So it has been with the realization of Roderick Haig-Brown's dreams to halt small stream destruction along Canada's west coast (and elsewhere) and to bring into being a generation truly educated in the value of the priceless resources of water and fish. He knew all too well that entrenched attitudes, good or bad, turn ever so slowly.

Well before his death in 1976 Haig-Brown set himself the task of bringing about a change of public attitude toward small coastal streams and was gradually convincing the public and professionals alike of their collective worth to the salmonid stocks of British Columbia. But the prevailing habits have a way of holding firm, at best allowing change to proceed grudgingly. Substantive change may have its beginnings with adults, and that a minority, but will only be fully realized with the understanding and acceptance of the young. Toward this goal of a caring generation Haig-Brown proposed that the children of individual schools "adopt" small nearby streams and become directly involved in protecting and enhancing its fishery potential.

Haig-Brown wrote and spoke convincingly to stop the environmental abuses causing the persistent declines of fish stocks, and used his considerable influence in the halls of policy making. The endless procession of threats to the fishery resources were met and took their toll. Yet it wasn't enough to expend himself entirely in the matters of destructive proposals or broad policy making. Nearby, in part on his farm, there flowed the perfect example of the abandoned, nay condemned—and all but forgotten—coastal stream. To restore it became his personal commitment.

Kingfisher Creek had been shunted aside shortly after the turn of the century when the lower part of the Campbell River was being logged. Stump farms sprung up in the low lands and the small village of Campbellton came into being. With all this, Kingfisher Creek continued to support spawning

runs of hundreds of coho salmon and, incidentally, provide swimming holes for the growing Haig-Brown children. A decade after World War II the exponential growth pattern of the Campbell River area began and with it a series of assaults on Kingfisher Creek. Expanding commercial and industrial developments led to containing its waters in a maze of ditches and culverts and in one massive insult, covering its lower reach in concrete thick enough to support a lumber storage yard. Still, a few enigmatic coho ran the gauntlet to arrive on upstream spawning gravels, but clearly the survival of creek and fish would require radical surgery.



Roderick Haig-Brown

In 1974 and '75 Haig-Brown brought together all the parties that would be affected by his plan to divert Kingfisher Creek back into its old channel, which meant reconstructing much of it through his farm. At one point agreement seemed to be reached. The government agencies—Fisheries, Highways and the Municipality—the School Board, under whose property a portion of the creek had been culverted, and one other private landowner had agreed to what each would commit in the way of money or land use. Engineering plans were drawn up by the federal Department of Fisheries. And then it all fell through.

With no explanation Fisheries backed out, though later it was learned that

the cost/benefit ratio was too low for their limited budget. Haig-Brown was deeply disappointed and privately mourned what he now saw as its eventual and certain death. What he was not to see was the depth to which his teachings had reached his following of friends and readers.

Haig-Brown had taught his lessons well, and three years following his death a small group of Campbell Riverites convened over a series of lunchtime meetings to revive his plan to rehabilitate Kingfisher Creek. The huge west coast Salmonid Enhancement Program had been launched by the federal government in 1977, which included a provision for public involvement in cooperative stream rehabilitation ventures. SEP's Project Coordinator for Vancouver Island, Bob Hurst, rescued the Kingfisher Creek plan from Fisheries' files and started the wheels revolving.

The meetings that began in the fall of 1979 continued through the winter. As ideas and plans were generated and distilled it became apparent that more than the rehabilitation of Kingfisher Creek was at issue. Haig-Brown's endowment exceeded his efforts on behalf of the salmonid resources. Indeed, here was a man who articulated with authority the resource and recreational needs of humankind, who inspired sensible people to responsible roles in combating the unending threats of environmental abuses, who helped an awakening public to appreciate and voice their concern for the whole natural world that was being eroded around them. Through his books he appealed particularly to anglers, perhaps as no other writer has this century. His readers became frequent visitors to Vancouver Island and often could not resist the temptation to stop by his house. The Haig-Brown house continues to be a source of enduring interest, a heritage that belongs not just to Campbell River but to that great community of conservationists... and naturalists... and anglers. All this was given due consideration.

In brief, the emerging ad hoc committee set out a list of objectives that included the creek rehabilitation, con-

structing a trail system for visitor access, gaining heritage status for the Haig-Brown house and gardens, and providing educational opportunities in the matters of resource conservation, particularly to school children. To achieve these goals and to provide for the future care and maintenance of the property a legal organization was needed. The Haig-Brown Kingfisher Creek Society was incorporated under the B.C. Societies Act on May 27, 1980, and the ad hoc committee of seven served as its Directors until the first Annual General Meeting was held in October of that year, at which they were elected.

Six years have passed and most of the objectives have been realized or are approaching completion. Kingfisher Creek has been re-routed, clay lined and gravelled, and coho salmon have spawned successfully in the new channel in 1984 and '85. Cohoes have also travelled through to the upstream gravel beds, a journey made easier through the absence of concrete flume, open ditches and endless culverts.

A trail system is in place with benches and tables along the Campbell River and a boardwalk along Kingfisher Creek through the seasonally soggy woodlot. One may come upon naturalists almost anywhere, imbibing their special or general interests—birds, wild flowers, fish—in their seasons. Along the Campbell one meets a pic-



nicking family, an angler working the Line-fence Pool, a fly fisherman with line stripped onto a table while a faulty reel gets repaired. To relive a moment in angling history, how about a short rest by the river beneath a sycamore (or maple) tree?

The house, with its extensive gardens, has been granted official heritage status by the provincial government, and special projects carried out to preserve the library and fishing tackle. Ann Haig-Brown continues to live in the house and receives visitors in the gracious manner that so many have experienced. Three successive Open Houses have been well attended and have contributed to the favorable response the public has given the Society's efforts.

This year the children of Campbellton Elementary School will formally "adopt" Kingfisher Creek, which carries with it responsibilities for its fish stocks and conducting investigations to better manage and enhance them. Campbellton students have, since the first coho fry hatched out in May of 1985, undertaken the task of supplemental feedings, and raised \$2,000 for trail and stream work. Through writing letters and field trips they exchange information and ideas with students of like age in a Comox school 30 miles south of Campbell River, who have also "adopted" a nearby salmon-bearing stream. The idea of school children getting hands-on experiences through stream adoption is gaining force and being encouraged by educators with the Salmonid Enhancement Program.

So our major objectives are being met. This year the Society should complete its construction work to improve the flows, flood control and spawning areas of Kingfisher Creek. But nothing ends there. There will always be a need to maintain what is now in place, and we have not been spared the presence

of that ubiquitous human subspecies, the vandal. There remains ideas that have not yet been acted upon—water storage reservoirs in the uplands, fish rearing facilities within the creek, laboratory facilities in the barn, a special interpretive program in the use of native plants to coastal Indians. And new ideas spring into being. The Society has sponsored fly fishing schools in each of the last three years. Each year the curriculum has been expanded, yet seems never to meet fully the demand.

From where comes the energy and money? The volunteer energy comes heavily from seven elected Directors, with healthy assists from local members and students. The paid help has come through federal work programs to provide employment for the unemployed and for university and high school students during summer breaks. We have been fortunate to obtain project managers and workers who, taking an interest in the objectives of the Society, have given good service for minimum wages. While the grants cover wages, they provide inadequately for materials and tools. It has been for the Society to make up this shortfall. Generous benefactors have consistently provided working cash through membership and donation. Fly fishing organizations in particular (FFF included) have contributed substantial sums. The evidence is undeniable, Haig-Brown touched many lives, and through this project many have found a way to pay their respect.

