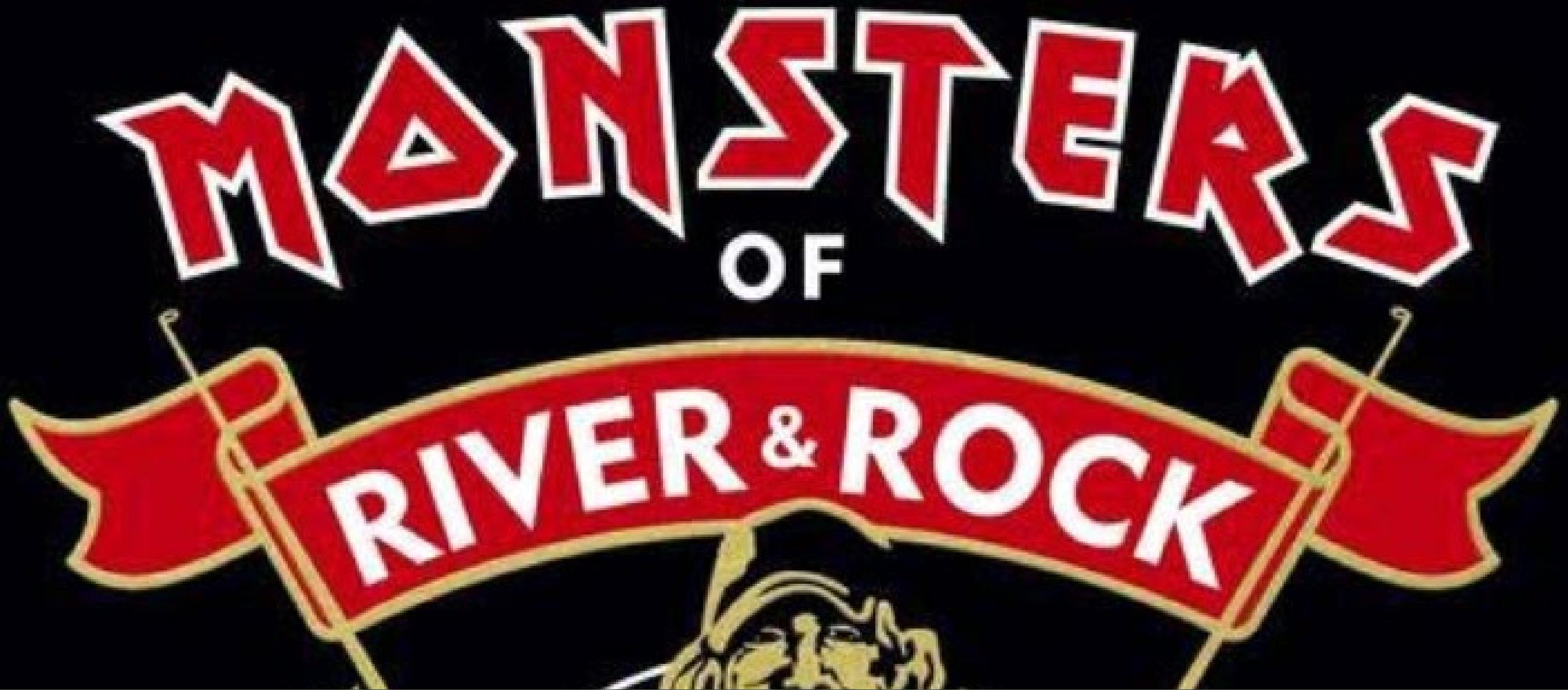


MONSTERS OF RIVER & ROCK



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Monsters of River & Rock

By Dana Sturn | August 2021

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Monsters of River & Rock is the new book by Adrian Smith, who just happens to be a songwriter and guitarist for the hard-core band Iron Maiden. It turns out he's also a pretty serious angler, and he's been lugging his tackle around on world tours since the 1980s. So, rather than pen a tell-all about those wild Maiden world tours, for his first book he decided to write about fishing.

But you didn't really think I was going to launch into a review of a rock n' roll n' reels book without a little mood music did you? Not a chance. So here's your homework: pop over to YouTube and search up any of the Iron Maiden songs listed below to get a feel for how Smith rolls. Then join me back here and we'll have a little chat about this fishing book.

Flight of Icarus (1983)
2 Minutes to Midnight (1984)
Wasted Years (1986)
The Evil that Men Do (1988)
Moonchild (1988)
The Wicker Man (2000)

All wired up?

Good!
Let's begin.

For me, the full title Monsters of River & Rock: My Life as Iron

Maiden's Compulsive Angler conjures imaginings of a wealthy rock-star jetting around the world, haunting the halls of fancy lodges, and of course fly fishing all the great places because . . . that's exactly what I would do if I were Iron Maiden's compulsive angler. So when I cracked the spine, I settled in for what I was sure would be an entertaining fly-fishing memoir.

Monsters is a fishing book for sure. But it's not really a fly-fishing book. I'm a bit hesitant to mention this though, because I don't want to put you off, even though early on it jumps right out at you just like an Iron Maiden album cover. But if you're willing to leave your fly rods in the gear van most of the time, you'll like Monsters, just as I did.

Most of the book details Smith's keen interest in coarse fishing—bait fishing for carp, barbel, tench, and sometimes pike—in the waterways near his home in England. He also finds bass in New York and sturgeon in Canada. Smith does a good job weaving in the how-to, and I came away with enough information about baiting up a carp swim to respect the skill required to do it well, even though I'd probably never want to.

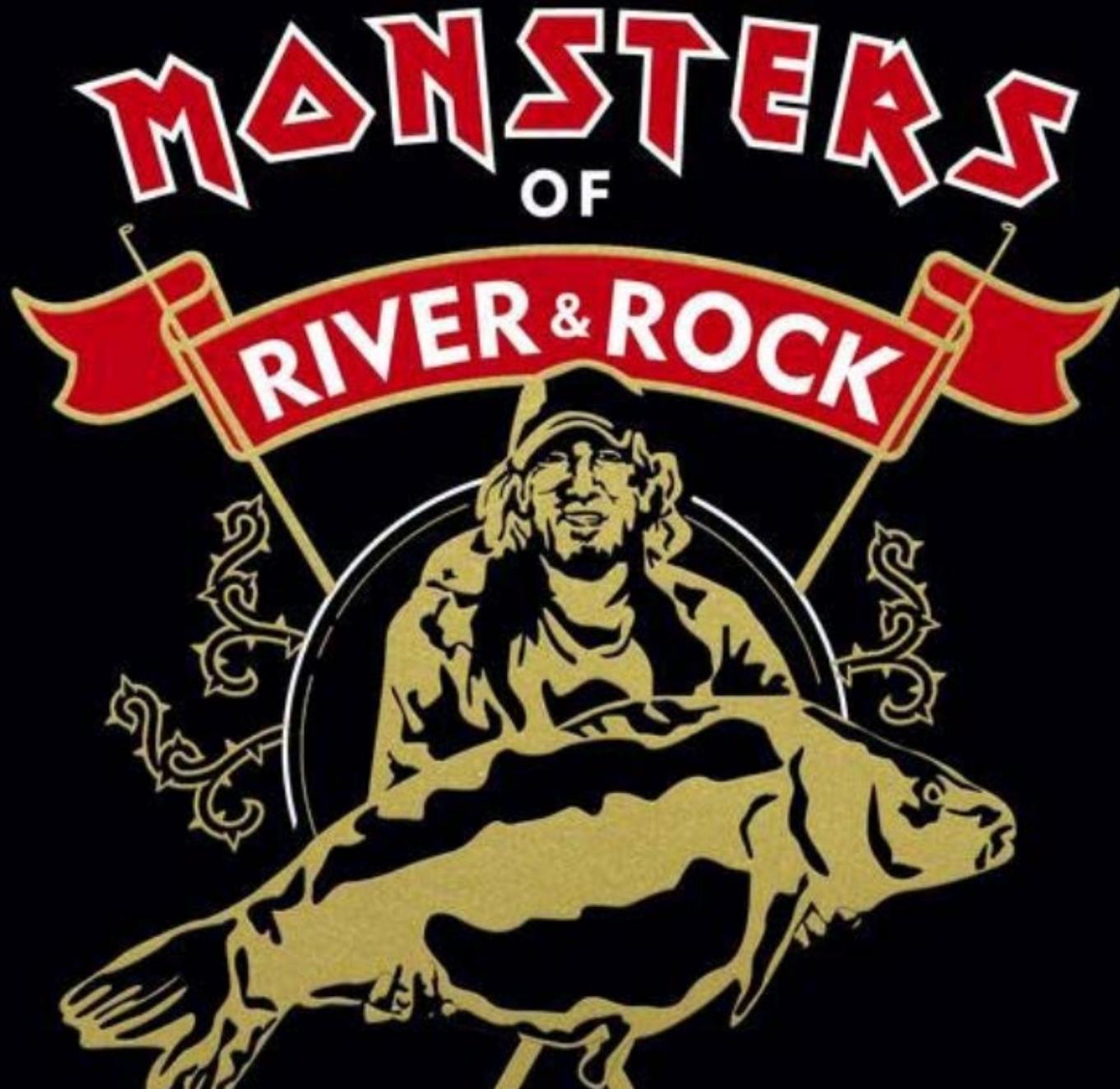
When the fly fishing does appear,

it's in places I love, or places I can't wait to visit. He finds rainbow trout in the lakes surrounding a remote, fly-in wilderness lodge in British Columbia. Here, a brief encounter with a black bear stokes the requisite bearanoia we all must weather in the Canadian outback. In New Zealand, large difficult brown trout force him to refine his casting, and have him wishing for a heavier fly rod. And finally, in the Bahamas, a day on the bonefish flats doesn't quite go as expected.

Whether he's fishing a coarse fish ditch somewhere in England or a clear New Zealand stream, what makes Smith's memoir an angler's book is that he recalls the same things we all do: the long wait for that first catch, and the crazy, bubbling over moment when it all comes together. The eccentrics we all encounter in the angling world are there too, men and women who've made a life out of something most of us could never manage. Smith also describes the delicate balancing acts involved in keeping our fishing obsessions alive while the rest of the world demands its piece of us. Over a long fishing life, these memories remain as sharp as the moments of joy that created them. Those moments, scattered among the frustration, discomfort and boredom that often accompany us, are the things that connect us all. Smith may be describing a type

of fishing I've never done, for a fish I've never caught, but in the end every little part of it is fishing, and that's what makes it good.

While it's a fishing book, about a third of the text details Smith's adventures getting to and from his fishing trips, with many of these stories centered around his rock-and-roll life. But don't expect any lurid details here—either through selective memory or simple honesty, the rock n' roller on the road stories all come back to the fishing, which I guess is probably true for any serious angler. Along the way he's not afraid to share his missteps and failures, and refuses to take himself too seriously. As the pages turn you begin to hear the voice of a bloke you'd like to have a pint with. By the time you reach the photo insert, Smith's folksy, engaging style has reeled you in, and Monsters of River & Rock will have even the most precious among us willing to forgive him, just a little, for hooking us with a bait rig.



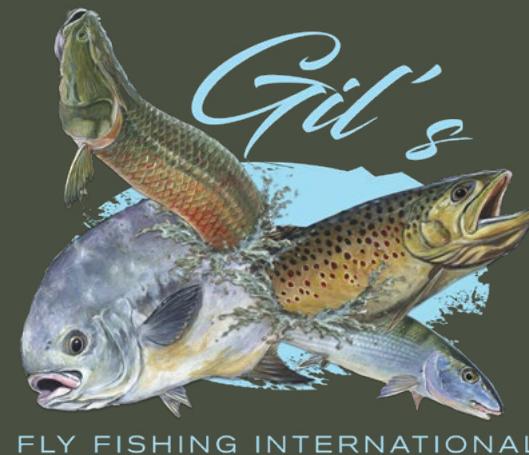
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Dana Sturn is a steelhead devotee and the founder of Spey Pages. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia and can be found each year, minus 2020 of course, swinging up chinook and steel on the Dean River, among other places. Follow him on IG @danawsturn

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www.flyfishinginternational.com
info@flyfishinginternational.com

North America:
+1 (888)-304-4334
International:
+1 (647)-268-6008

2345 Yonge Street, Suite 802
Toronto, ON, M4P 2E5, Canada.
(By Appointment Only)

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