

Fly Tying Bench— THE PICKET PIN *by Charlie Most*

THE PICKET PIN, A FLY FOR ALL REASONS

Leaving the job after two years as head night houseman at Sun Valley Lodge was a bit traumatic. The work took only four to five hours a night, leaving much of the day for either skiing or fishing, depending on the season. Talk about heaven on earth!

I still had lots of trout flies but I was going home to study wildlife biology, and Oklahoma had no trout fishing in those days, and certainly no skiing.

The Izaak Walton League clubhouse and lake about two miles north of Oklahoma State (then Oklahoma A & M) was said to have some fish, and I walked out there to see. The fly I tried didn't imitate any insect I've seen but had proved deadly in Idaho's Trail Creek beaver ponds and the high lakes of the Pioneer Range just east of Sun Valley.

It was called the Picket Pin and developed by Jack Boehme of Missoula, Montana. The wing was tail hair from a small ground squirrel and since the little rodents were known as picket pins, that became the fly's name. When alerted, these creatures stand upright to resemble the stake or picket pin cowhands carried to tie their horses.

Since ground squirrel fleas are known vectors of bubonic plague, most tiers no longer touch them because safer gray squirrel tail hair makes a fine substitute.

I let the fly sink along some lily pads near shore and saw that telltale twitch of the leader and tightened up on a nice bluegill. That was only the first of many that day, and the Picket Pin has since become one of my most effective panfish flies.

MATERIALS:

- Hook ----- Mustad 9671 or 9672, Size 8-10
- Thread ----- Black or olive
- Tail ----- Fiery brown hackle fibers
- Hackle ----- Fiery brown hen or saddle.
- Body ----- Peacock herls, reinforced with brass wire
- Wing ----- Gray squirrel tail hair
- Head ----- Peacock Herl

INSTRUCTIONS:

Step 1. Start the thread at least two eye-widths behind the hook eye and wrap back to the hook bend. Strip a dozen fibers from a fiery brown hackle and tie them in as a tail. Tie in the tip of a fiery brown hackle feather. High quality neck hackles are wasted here since you don't need floatation, so use a hen hackle feather if long enough or do like I do and tie in a narrow saddle hackle by the tip.

Step 2. Tie in a three inch strand of gold wire or gold colored thread along with the tips of four peacock herls after first breaking the herls back a half inch from that fragile end.

Step 3. Twist the herls around the gold wire or thread (thread is easier but not as tough) and grasp this bundle with hackle pliers. Twist herls and wire/thread until you get a rope-like section an inch up from the hook. Wrap that inch around the shank working towards the eye. Now twist another inch section and wrap it forward. If you try to twist up too long a section, some of the tips may break. On reaching where the thread was originally attached, tie off the herl and wire strands. Now wrap the hackle forward and it tie off.

Step 4. Clip off a round toothpick-size bundle of gray squirrel tail, comb out the base fluff and stack to even the tips. Hold this bundle directly above the front of the body and take a turn of thread around the hair only. Lower that hair bundle down to the hook while adding light tension to the thread. Squirrel hair is very hard and will not compress under the thread wrap so this tightening loop helps keep the hair from slipping out. After three or four wraps, clip the hair on a diagonal from the hook shank up and back, and cover the butts with gentle thread wraps. Now touch the wrapped hair butts with a small drop of super glue.

Step 5. The head is a single peacock herl wrapped over the squirrel tail butts. Be sure to break off a half inch of a single herl, tie it in and wrap forward to just behind the eye. Whip finish and the fly is done.



Picket Pin; Tied and photographed by Charlie Most