

Back to basics

Feeling detached from the simple pleasures of fishing? Just pretend you're a kid again

IF you want to truly experience the magic of angling, go with a small person wearing a glow-in-the-dark compass ring. This piece of navigational equipment, you'll be assured, will keep you safe in case you get lost.

The chances are quite good the owner of the ring will have some essential bait stuffed into his pockets. Marshmallows, cheese or bacon from Mom's fridge are likely selections. Marshmallows are particularly desirable because you can nibble on them as you travel.

He will probably also have thought to bring along a survival kit, which will most likely consist of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a few cans of cream soda, a couple of chocolate bars and maybe even some Gold Mine Nugget Bubble Gum and a fistful of Pixy Stix.

There'll be no need to worry about trivial matters such as tides, directions or proper footwear. Nor will there be any need to worry about finding fish—they'll either be there or they won't. In fact, there will be no need to worry about anything. Discovering the magic will be as simple as trusting your guide and his glow-in-the-dark compass ring.

The last time I went fishing, there was no magic. I was with big people. We headed out in a boat that had an autopilot system working in synchronicity with one of the most complex compasses I've ever seen. It didn't have to glow in the dark because its tiny lights created a sadly surreal luminescence. I remember being disappointed the autopilot prevented me from steering the boat.

There was a very impressive fishfinder, too. It expressed the world beneath the surface in terms of splashes of yellow, red and orange moving slowly across the screen. Too much of the day, however, was spent looking at coloured spots and half moons that were supposedly fish. They may have been, but watching them seemed unnatural.

The boat was also equipped with fancy Global Positioning Systems integrated

with computerized oceanographic charts. And an on-board computer offered access to complex ocean temperature maps that certainly assisted the fish-finding effort. Along with comforts such as a fridge, hydraulic downriggers and padded seats, all these gadgets made for a rather predictable day.

Sure, it was very impressive and flashy, but to me the appeal of the ocean is the mystery. At a certain point, the technology seemed to be running the show, and by the end of the day, I remember interpreting the blank fluorescence of the radar screen as a complete lack of the magic I had been hoping to find.

For me, the allure of angling is found far beyond the reach of technology. Let me find some fun and adventure on my own, and of my own devices. Angling is meant to be done with a rod and reel, some line and a hook that's hidden among some clever decoy. All that other stuff often just gets in the way.

Fishing should invigorate the senses. Look for silver flashes just below the surface, or follow the seabirds as they dive for their catch. Listen for the screaming

reel or the ding-ding of a bell buoy. Smell the unique ocean breeze and the wafting scent of seaweed. Taste the salty air on your lips mixing with a warm can of cream soda. Glide your hand through the moving water and pretend you're Superman flying through the air. Feel the motion of a lure's rhythmic action. And perhaps most importantly, appreciate your earliest recollections of the sport.

Before you head out on the water again, remember that fishing should be an unadorned journey for the senses. The destination and end result are irrelevant. If you're truly committed to having a great time on your next angling adventure, leave all the superfluous junk behind. But you'd be well advised to bring along a guide chewing a big wad of bubble gum.

And wearing a glow-in-the-dark compass ring. ♦

New Westminster, B.C., writer Gordon Morrison has been known to chew big wads of bubble gum on fishing excursions.

