



ENCLOSING ANGLER
WINDMILL TO THE LEFT

Fishing the Northshire

Hooked for Life

by Robert F. Jones

THERE ARE DAYS here in the Northshire when an angler can stand knee-deep in cool, swift, dancing water and take rising trout on every cast. It's almost too good to be true. At times like this, I'm put in mind of a wicked little short story called "Mr. Theodore Castwell," by the great British angling writer G.E.M. Skues.

It seems that Mr. Castwell, a pompous, upper crust English sportsman, has died and, in the fullness of time, appeared before the Pearly Gates to await judgement. St. Peter duly consults his Ledger, cocks a skeptical eyebrow, but finally presents Mr. Castwell with a magnificent split-cane flyrod, a celestial reel, and an infinite supply of irresistible dry flies, then deposits him on the banks of a "beautiful clear chalk stream" in the company of an angelic riverkeeper. Trout are rising everywhere to a non-stop hatch, and Mr. Castwell is soon into a guileless but scrappy two-and-a-half pound brown, which the ghillie deftly nets.

"'Heavens,' cried Mr. Castwell. 'This is something like!'"

But now another plump trout is rising — in precisely the same spot — and Mr. C. is quickly fast to him. Then another, and another, and another, all from the same lie, all hooked on the first cast, all of the exact same size. It's getting, well, rawther boring! But Mr. Castwell consoles himself that the hatch is bound to end soon, night must fall, and then he can at last get off the river.

The ghillie, though, smiles cryptically and shakes his head.

"Then do you mean that I have to go on catching these damned two-and-a-half pounders at this corner forever and ever?"

The keeper nodded.

"'Hell!' said Mr. Castwell.

"'Yes,' said his keeper."

Well, the fishing's not quite that devilishly good in these parts, but at times it comes close. I recently toted up the number of rivers, creeks, brooks, and ponds in the so-called "Northshire" where I've regularly taken fish over the past years and came up with a conservative figure of 20, all of them within half an hour from my door. If I extend that range by fifteen minutes, into southern Rutland County to the north, and down to Bennington on the south, I can more than double that number.

"Every mile I go I can find a trout stream," says Tom Rosenbauer of Orvis, a fine angling writer and a far better fisherman than I can ever hope to be. "And there's probably more. But they're small streams mostly, which means small fish."

Small, though, can be beautiful, and some of the most delightful, intriguing hours I've spent in more than a half century of fishing have come on the crisp, cold, often nameless highland brooks — the Scots would call them "burns" — that thread the green hills of the Northshire like spilled quicksilver. These streams, some of them

START 'EM YOUNG

HUBERT SCHRIERL



Making memories with a worm and a bobber.

This is a great place to fish with your kids, but you have to be selective about what kind of fishing trip you invite your child along on. He could become mightily frustrated trying to hook one of the wily trout of the Bat-tenkill which, according to some anglers, have seen every fly pattern in the book, and are smart enough to pass a college equivalency test in entomology.

Your kids will have more success at a place like Lake Saint Catherine State Park which has plenty of friendly sunfish and perch to willingly take your child's worm, even if it's crudely attached to a hook on a common cane pole. The lake also has picnic tables and a swimming beach if the fishing proves unsuccessful.

Both Dorset and Manchester have fishing derbies for kids in the early part of the season. Most communities do, since the state of Ver-

mont has cheerfully offered to stock a body of water in any community which will host such an affair. The town of Dorset, for instance, has designated the mill pond in the center of town as a fishing spot for under-license-age kids only. This picturesque pond is also the location of the children's fishing derby, which always begins promptly at noon on the appointed Saturday and continues on with plenty of hot dogs and drinks for the anglers provided by the Dorset Sportsmen's Club. As one club member said, "This is one event where it doesn't pay to be stylishly late." It doesn't take long for most of the stocked fish to be either caught or so satiated with worms they can't eat another bite.

By the end of the day, it is a close contest as to who has eaten more, the trout stealing free worms, or the kids scarfing free hot dogs. ◆

Hooked for Life

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so small you can step across them in one not-so-giant stride, are full of six-to ten-inch brook trout, one behind nearly every rock. And they're always hungry, not at all choosy about what you offer them in imitation of food.

This is most properly the realm of small boys and girls with cane or alder poles, a hunk of string tied to the end, armed with a tiny hook covered by a tendril of nightcrawler or garden worm. Sitting quietly beside the stream, you can often spot the trout in their ambush sites, behind a rock or against the bank, darting out to investigate and/or eat every bit of foodlike stuff that whisks their way. All it takes, once you've marked the fish in its lie, is a careful downstream drift of the worm past the trout and — bingo! — he's on. This is the way I got hooked on fishing, at the age of five, and the way I taught my own children when they were little. I can't think of a better way to introduce a child to the joys of the natural world, and thus a lifetime of interest in conserving it, than a soft May morning spent prowling a no-name brook for trout. Grouse may be drumming nearby like feathery chainsaws, warblers and goldfinches singing on the wood edge. You might hear a wild turkey or two gobble, and I often see deer coming down to the stream to drink. But the highpoint of the outing is the trouting — the sudden savagery of the strike, the pole bent (if only slightly), and then the brookie flopping green and black and red and ivory, bright on the bank. Kids are instinctive killers, and although I usually release most of the trout I catch when I'm fishing by myself, I don't hesitate to bang a few over the head when my partner is a six-year old. But I release a few too, so the child quickly learns not to kill for the sake of killing, but only what we need for a tasty meal. If I spot fiddlehead ferns or wild leeks along the stream, I pick a few of those as well. A kid who won't touch store-bought veggies is almost guaranteed to dig into the greenery when he or she has harvested

it, and it's served along with some fresh, crisp panfried trout at the end of a hungry morning.

Small water, I've found, can be just as much fun for the adult fly fisherman, if he uses the right gear. What you need is a short, light rod, one you can cast without getting hung up in the close, low-hanging shrubbery that cloaks most brooks. A light rod also enhances the feel of the fish, once you've hooked up. When Orvis came out with its One-Weight outfit a few years back, I got one and rediscovered the joys of solitary, small-stream flyfishing. The seven-and-a-half-foot rod only weighs one and three eights ounces, the one-weight flyline is thinner than some monofilament I've used to catch marlin, and an eight-inch brookie on the end of it feels twice the size.

"I USUALLY RELEASE MOST OF THE TROUT I CATCH ... SO THE CHILD QUICKLY LEARNS NOT TO KILL FOR THE SAKE OF KILLING."

These fish are so easy to fool, though, that I quickly devised a personal rule to make the sport more challenging. I wouldn't throw anything at them that resembled a real insect — only outrageously-colored "fancy" flies (so named by the Brits to connote whatever struck the tier's fancy, or whim). Royal Coachman, Parmachene Belle, Skykomish Sunrise, even a nauseating concoction of orange, puce and lime-green polyester gleaned from my wife's sewing basket and hackled with a road-killed chipmunk's fur, which I dubbed "The Dog's Breakfast," these are the

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A SCHOOL FOR FLY FISHERMEN

THE ORVIS COMPANY



Class in session: Orvis instructor Bob Young (left) explains presentation to a willing student.

Traditionally thought of as a bastion of the English upper crust, fly fishing is now a sport we commoners can learn too, thanks to the Orvis Company. Orvis has had a lot to do with fly fishing in the Northshire. It has had a lot to do with making the Battenkill River, in particular, world-renowned in trout fishing circles. The company has been making and selling fishing tackle in Manchester continuously since 1856. And since 1967, it has also been turning out a steady stream of newly-trained graduate fly fishermen from The Orvis Fly Fishing School.

Orvis claims that there's no mystery to fly fishing, and furthermore, if you're smart enough to learn to drive an automobile, you can learn to manipulate a fly rod. The school is intensive. It runs for two-and-a-half days, and includes instruction on the forward cast, roll cast, side cast, roll-cast pickup, false casting, and line shooting, among other points. The instructors will also teach you how to "read" trout water, how to wade safely, how to find and identify insects, tie flies onto your leader, and how to choose the right fly.

Thousands of people have been through the school, some of them more famous than others. On any

given summer weekend you might, if you were to enroll in the school, find yourself standing around the Orvis Company trout pond in Manchester Village, casting away, shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Eric Severied, or John Riggins who are both graduates. Orvis' Tom Rosenbauer recalls once teaching Captain Kangaroo how to hurl a tight loop.

School Coordinator Alan DeNicola says that more and more women are taking the course. Nearly 25 per cent to 30 per cent of the total number of enrollees these days, are women. That could be because fly fishing has been called the latest yuppie sport, and since more women are reaching lofty executive positions, more of them are attracted to patrician sports like fly fishing. But then, it could also be that the other 75% of the class is men.

For more information, call Alan DeNicola at Orvis (362-3750). If formal class-type instruction is not your thing, there are other options. The Brookside Anglers (362-3538) and The Battenkill Anglers (362-3184) both of Manchester, and Strictly Trout (869-3116) of Putney can offer private instruction, outfitting and guide service. ◆

Hooked for Life

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killer flies I employ on my backyard streamlets. I keep them in a special fly-box labelled "Patterns from the Planet Zog."

Sometimes, pausing to rest my legs after a slippery hike up No-Name Brook over miles of moss-grown boulders, I wonder what these scrappy brookies think they're getting when they pounce on my offerings. Probably it's as Tom Rosenbauer once suggested: "Something buggy is all they're after." There's very little in the way of hatches — stonefly, caddis or mayfly — on these hardscrabble brooks, so the trout can't afford to be selective. Brook trout were exiled to the small streams of the uplands more than a century ago, with the introduction to the richer lowland rivers of "exotic" brown and rainbow trout, which are more aggressive than the "native" brookie. The exiles have to take whatever comes along, and on these steep, fast streams it comes quickly. It's eat or go hungry.

And the small-stream brookie doesn't just eat — he *gluttonizes*. Cast a buggy fly into a small pool holding a few trout and you'll see what I mean. The moment the fly hits the water, the race is on. The fish streak out of invisibility from all sides, as six of them did one day on Hidden Valley Brook in Merck Forest for me, and the winner came clear out of the water when the hook bit home — like a mini-tarpon viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. As I stripped him in to release him, the also-rans followed my brookie, right up to the toes of my waders. I rested the pool for five minutes, then cast to the same spot — and the race was on again...

It's 4.4 road miles from the general store in my town to the house where I live, and the road parallels a chain of trout streams the entire way, one feeding into the other. I once fished the entire distance, call it five miles of small water if you take into account the meanders of the brook. The deepest hole along the way was maybe waist-deep, but most of the water came only to my ankles. I

fished it at a moderately fast walk all the way, kind of Zen-casting to likely looking spots as soon as they came into view, pausing only long enough to play the fish in and release it. I fished in the middle of the day, during the hours when most self-respecting trout are lying up to digest their early-morning breakfasts. What's more, it was early August, a time when most of the trout action is dead during daylight hours on bigger streams like the Battenkill or the Mettowee. Nonetheless, my fishing journal (which *never* lies) discloses that along the way I rose 76 trout, hooked

“THE BOY HELD A
STRINGER OF BROWN
TROUT ... YES, INDEEDY,
MAYBERRY, VERMONT.”

and released 61 — all on “fancy” dry flies, and all but four of them brookies. The exceptions were brown trout, small ones, which had moved up from the Battenkill into the lower reaches of the water. There are big browns in the stretch as well, especially during the fall when they come upstream from the Kill to spawn. After a thunderstorm, when the stream is just getting high and tawny with runoff, the local worm-fishermen slaughter them with nightcrawlers, some of them browns up to 18 and 20 inches. I once saw a fellow townsman and his son sloshing down the road with their spinning rods and a can of worms after such an outing. The boy held a stringer of brown trout in one hand that nearly dragged in the mud. Yes indeedy, Mayberry, Vermont...

If you know where to look for them, like on a topo map, there are ponds in these parts which hold bigger brook

WHERE TO GO

THERE ARE TWO famous trout rivers in these parts. The Battenkill which flows south through Manchester and Arlington and then on into New York state, and the Mettowee which flows north and west through Dorset, Rupert and Pawlet.

The Mettowee is a little easier to take fish out of because the state stocks it every year. It is quite possible to catch one of the newcomers before he smartens up. The trout in the Battenkill, on the other hand, are wild (also big, old and very cagey). Both of these rivers are extremely beautiful, and worth checking out for aesthetic reasons even if you never hook a single fish. They are both quite accessible from roads which parallel them.

Some other trout rivers in the area to try are the Hoosic River in Pownal, Walloomsac River in Bennington, Winhall River in Winhall, and the West River in Weston.

All of these larger rivers are fed by hundreds of small streams and brooks which all hold trout. It's great sport to try to lure one of these wild trout to your bait, even though they will invariably be small, so make sure your equipment is small as well. Some of the better known brooks in the

area are the Roaring Branch in Arlington, Bromley Brook along Routes 11/30, the Green River west of Route 313 in Sandgate, White Creek near Rupert, Mill Brook in Danby, and Big Brook in Mount Tabor.

There are small trout ponds in the Lye Brook Wilderness, such as Stratton and Bourne Ponds which are stocked by the state and provide some good early season fishing. Other ponds nearby where you can go after trout are Adams Reservoir, Lake Shaftsbury, Hapgood Pond, Gale Meadow Pond, Barber Pond, Lake Paron, and Red Mill Pond, Little Pond, and Branch Pond.

Lake Saint Catherine is a place you can go if you have a boat and want to fish for bass. Other (smaller) bass areas are Gale Meadows Pond in Winhall, Lowell Lake, Somerset and Harriman reservoirs, and Emerald Lake State Park on Route 7 in East Dorset. A good way to find spots of your own is to get a book called *The Vermont Atlas and Gazetteer*, published by DeLorme Publishing Co. It profiles the state township by township, showing what kinds of waters flow through each area and which fish are present in the water. ♦

A misty morning on Gale Meadows Pond.

HUBERT SCHRIEBL



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trout than you'll find in the streams. Gale Meadows Pond near Bondville used to hold good-sized brown trout, as well as bass, pickerel and some of the biggest bluegills I've ever seen north of the Mason-Dixon Line. The pond was purposely drained a few years back, then refilled and stocked again, but I haven't fished it since. Hapgood Pond, Stratton

"INSTEAD OF KILLING
AND EATING THE
TROUT HE CAUGHT IN
THE LOCAL STREAMS,
HE TOTED THEM HOME
IN BUCKETS AERATED
BY A PUMP POWERED
FROM HIS TRUCK'S
CIGARETTE LIGHTER."

Pond, Little Pond, Bourn Pond and Branch Pond all contain brookies. Beaver ponds are transitory by nature, depending on the whereabouts and whims of their toothy engineers, but when they're at their peak they hold gluttonous populations of brook trout even in the hottest summer weather. A nymph or a small-bladed spinning lure — say a Mepps or a Panther-Martin — fished just off the bottom is the most productive, if you will not deign to use "garden hackle" (i.e. worms). But beaver ponds have their hazards. The dams are fragile, and shouldn't be walked on unless you enjoy being buried waist deep in sharp, muddy sticks and cold ooze. Beaver ponds also breed mosquitoes and biting gnats, so come prepared with about a gallon of DEET. Black flies bite as eagerly as beaver-pond

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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF FLY FISHING



Ogden Pleissner's painting of "Lye Brook Pool."

"THERE WERE A lot of great, museum-quality angling antiques in the Orvis store when I bought it twenty-five years ago," explains Leigh Perkins when asked how the idea arose to start a museum of fly fishing memorabilia. "And we kept getting calls from widows who wanted to get rid of collections of equipment and books left by their husbands. A lot of it was really great stuff, but there was really no place for it in the Orvis store. We wanted to be in the business of selling NEW items, not displaying old ones."

Still, the old stuff couldn't just be pitched out. It was too valuable. There were collections of period flies mounted in elegant wood and glass cases prepared for the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, and hand-crafted bamboo rods designed by craftsmen like Jim Payne, "Pinky" Gillum, Hiram Leonard and F.E. Thomas. Clearly, Perkins was going to have to find a way to house his treasures. Why not in a museum?

So back in 1967, Perkins went to renowned artist Ogden Pleissner who lived and fished in the area, and personally commissioned a painting to be done of his favorite pool on the fabled Battenkill River — the Lye Brook Pool. Then he announced in the Orvis News (a newspaper the company sends out to its customers and other fishing devotees) that

limited edition prints of the painting would be sold off to provide a nest egg to begin a museum of American fly fishing. It's a real testimony to the passion fishermen feel for their sport that the print run was sold out before the prints were even published.

The resulting \$15,000 which was raised made the American Museum of Fly Fishing a reality. It's first president was Arnold Gingrich, editor emeritus of Esquire Magazine.

Since those early days, the museum has grown and prospered, becoming the repository for and conservator to the world's largest collection of angling memorabilia. It is housed in its own building, a charming white cape-style structure on the corner of Historic Route 7A and Seminary Avenue in Manchester Village. Now in its 24th year of operation, the museum is listed as a non-profit educational institution. It publishes a national quarterly, "The American Fly Fisher," and offers books, art-prints, catalogs and newsletters to the public. It also sponsors traveling exhibitions which tour annually across the United States and abroad.

Last year, the museum sent large exhibitions to Wisconsin, Georgia (The Museum of the Jimmy Carter Library) and Norway. This year exhibits will travel to North Carolina, Wyoming, New York, Connecticut and Canada. ♦



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LARRY E. GUBB II

Hooked for Life

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brookies, and a lot more painfully.

Some of the best trout ponds in the Northshire are privately owned, and you have to know the owner if you hope to fish one. This very fact makes fishermen friendly neighbors. A guy I know called Tom Bentley, a native Vermonter who used to introduce himself as "a worm-flanger and a stone trout killer," built himself a diversion pond a few years ago on the brook that runs behind his house. Instead of killing and eating the trout he caught in the local streams, he toted them home in a big plastic bucket aerated by a pump powered from his truck's cigarette lighter. He fed the fish in his new pond, at first with Agway trout chow, then — during the summer at least — with slugs he caught in his garden. These were trout of all denominations, browns and rainbows and brookies, and very soon they were gigantic. Tom watched them and fed them every day, developed a real love for trout, and used to nearly weep when one of the big lunkers died of the fungus disease he calls "The Ick." Clearly, the pond was overpopulated with big, voracious feeders.

Tom solved the problem by instituting a Kids' Fishing Derby. During our town's annual "Old Home Days" each August, local children are invited to fish Tom's pond for all they're worth. The biggest fish taken so far was a brown trout of five-and-a-half pounds. "You should've seen that boy's eyes when he pulled it in," Tom says, his own eyes wide and happy. "He's hooked for life."

The Northshire will do that to you, whatever the size of the fish.

"Heavens," as Mr. Castwell yelled. "This is something like!" But here you can always go home at night. ♦

Robert F. Jones is a Special Contributor to Sports Illustrated and author of the forthcoming Upland Passage: A Field Dog's Education, to be published this fall by Farrar Straus & Giroux.