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Fishing for Trout in a Sporting Way

Sporting magazines have fostered a popular fiction to the effect that no gentleman would catch a trout in any manner but on a fly on a nine-foot tapered leader attached to a double-tapered fly line cast from a forty-five-dollar four-and-a-half-ounce rod.

There is reason for this putting of trout fishing into the class of a rich man's diversions. Outdoor magazines are supported by their advertising. The advertisers are putting out expensive goods suited to the understocked, over-fished streams of the Eastern United States where only fly fishing is allowed. So the sporting writers pound their typewriters in praise of the fine and far-off fishing of streams like the Beaverskill and Esopus, whose fame is built on the catches of twenty years ago and take every opportunity to stigmatize the bait fisherman.

The old-timer, firmly implanted in the seat of the scornful, reads the twaddle of the American trout-fishing critics and smiles. He knows the comparative value of bait and fly. He knows that at certain seasons the fly is a far more killing lure than any natural bait. And he knows that on some streams the fly will catch only small trout. He also knows that bait fishing for trout with light tackle and a leader is as sportsmanlike as fly fishing, that it is the only practical method on thousands of streams and that day in and day out through the season it will catch infinitely larger trout in exactly as sportsmanlike a way as fly fishing.

Worms, grubs, beetles, crickets and grasshoppers are some of the best trout baits. But worms and hoppers are those most widely used.

There are three kinds of earthworms. Two of them are good for trout fishing and the third is absolutely useless. The big night crawlers come out of their holes in the grass in the night, and enough for a good canful can be easily picked up after dark with the aid of a flashlight. They are really too large and thick for trout bait and are much better for bass, but are far better than nothing.

Common angleworms are easy to get in the spring but are sometimes impossible to find in a long dry spell in the summer. They can be dug after a rain and kept alive in a big box full of earth until they are needed.

A large quantity of worms can be transported a long way by keeping them in a small tin pail full of moist coffee grounds. Coffee grounds stay moist and keep the worms much better than earth, which dries and does not absorb the water evenly. Too much water will kill the garden hackles as quickly as not enough. Worms kept in coffee grounds will be clean and fresh for fishing.

Pale yellowish worms which are found under manure piles look like angleworms, but are really a distinct species. They have an offensive odor and taste and trout do not like them.

The novice at trout fishing with worms needs to know a few general rules, but in the main he must work out his own destiny as every stream differs. The following rules are applicable everywhere, however.

Always approach a hole cautiously so as not to frighten the trout.

Never let your shadow fall over a hole.

Use plenty of bait and keep the point and shank of your hook covered.

Remember that the most difficult places to get your bait into are the most likely to contain big trout. Other people will have fished the easy holes.

Watch the line at the tip of your pole. As soon as it straightens the least bit, strike with your wrist. Don't wait for a jerk before striking.

Always drop your bait a little before the head of a hole and then lower the tip of your rod so that the current will roll your bait naturally into the hole.

Little wrinkles like those make the difference between gelling a small and foolish trout who will strike at anything out of a hole and fooling some big old-timer that will only strike at a bait that is absolutely natural.

Worms are best used on the small, brushy creeks, full of logs and deep holes that must be fished from the banks. They are superior to grasshoppers on streams that must be fished from the bank because if there are hoppers in the grass along the stream they are stirred up by the fisherman and a number usually land in the stream. The trout will take a free hopper swirling down the current every time in preference to one attached to a leader.

On streams that can be waded grasshoppers are the premier bait. They are cast exactly as a fly, except that you try and minimize the snap to avoid whipping off the bait.

Trout rise to a hopper far more readily than they do to a fly, and they are bigger trout. If you want to insure catching big trout, put three good-sized hoppers on the hook. Put the hook in under the chin of the grasshopper and carry it back through the thorax. A triple hopper bait is too large for the smaller trout to hit, and tempts the old whangle berries.

The big difficulty about fishing the grasshoppers has always been the difficulty of catching them. The classic way is to get up early in morning before the sun has dried the dew, and catch the hoppers while they are still stiff and cold and unable to hop more than a feeble foot or two. They are found under the side of logs in a clearing and along the grass stems.

Any fisherman who has chased a lively grasshopper in the heat of the day will appreciate the method of catching them invented by Jacques Pentecost, an old-time north shore trout fisher.

In a clearing or around an old lumber camp where hoppers usually abound, they can be obtained in plentiful quantities by the Pentecost method. Let two men each hold the end of a ten-yard strip of mosquito netting and run into the wind with it. The netting bellies out like a seine, and the grasshoppers flying downwind are soon swarming in the net seine, which is held only a few inches above the ground. Then you flop the netting together and pick the hoppers out and put them in your hopper bottles. This method takes all the labor out of hopper catching.

Grubs, beetles of all kinds, hornet grubs, trout fins, chunks of liver from a partridge or duck are all emergency baits that will catch trout when you are in the bush and cannot get worms or hoppers.

Muddlers, or miller's thumbs, little flat-headed minnows that look like miniature catfish, are very killing baits for big trout. They live under rocks in fast water, and are very difficult to catch.

The usual method is to go after them with a small dip net or a fork fastened to a stick, and try to spear them or scoop them up as they shoot out when you turn the rocks over.

An unfortunate experience wherein I speared my big toe, mistaking it for a muddler in the rapids of the Black River, has prejudiced me against them.

All those baits will catch trout. If you are fishing with a light rod and a leader, the trout has exactly the same chance as though you were fly fishing. In addition you are at least giving the trout something for his money—if he gets away he has a good meal instead of just a memory of tinsel and feathers. And when you are fishing with grasshoppers you will find that unless you have a wrist that is two shades quicker than an otter trap, you will present the trout with a lot of free meals this summer.