

How to Catch *Bigger* Trout

And Other Secrets of the Pros



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From Havalon's Trout Fishing Experts

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4 Trout Lures That Do It All!

By Darl Black

The spring trout opener is a rite of passage for anglers, signaling an end to winter and the start of a new fishing season. In Pennsylvania the first day of trout season is probably second only to the opening day of deer season in terms of participation numbers. It's pretty much the same in every state with a trout program – if the state fisheries agency stocks a stream, fishermen will come.

Anglers generally face less than perfect stream conditions in the early season. Spring rains generate strong flows and roiled water. Fly fishing is a hit-and-miss proposition in the early season with hatches disrupted by high, cold water.



Rather than live bait or prepared bait, give artificial lures a try during the spring trout opener.

Many fishermen believe they must rely on live bait options such as red worms, night crawler, minnows, or jars of cured salmon eggs. Some even use flavored paste bait. Unfortunately, paste bait is messy and live bait is troublesome to carry. Another negative - the ongoing costs associated with continually buying a fresh supply.

Artificial Lures Are Often Overlooked

On the other hand, consider artificial lures. Watch out for the old wives' tale about stocked trout not hitting artificial bait unless they look like the pellet feed used in hatcheries. I've never caught a fish on a "pellet" but I *have* caught a lot of stocked trout on lures – in both high and low water situations.

Lures can be easily carried in a small utility case stored in your vehicle along with a rod. This provides an individual with the opportunity to dabble in a trout stream on the way home from work or whenever he has a few spare minutes. Unlike using a couple dozen night crawlers, you can always have artificial baits and they'll last indefinitely.

The iconic image of a trout rising for a hatching insect is certainly true. All species of trout feed on aquatic and terrestrial insects – but they also eat small fish. The small fish in trout streams include minnows, emerald shiners, dace and sculpin.

Lure choices should be representative of forage size available in typical trout streams. This translates to 2" to 3" slender minnow-like prey. If fishing larger waters (i.e. small rivers), you will want to include slightly larger profile baits.

Four basic types of artificial lures produce well in the early season: spinners, small spoons, downsized long minnow plugs and ultra-light small hair/feather jigs.



Do Not Leave Home Without These Trout Lures:

1. **Straight Shaft-Spinners:** Spinners are classic stream trout lures. Most anglers carry silver or gold blade spinners in size #00, #0 and #1. For really dingy water, I always have a larger, bold-colored one. On the other hand, you ought to also be ready for an exceptionally clear water stream. In that case, I suggest breaking out a dark blade, like the Mepps Black Fury, because too much flash can spook trout. To reduce line twist, be sure to attach a spinner to the line with a small ball-bearing swivel or beaded chain swivel. Spinners generally produce best in faster moving water such as ripple areas. Cast a spinner perpendicular to the flow and retrieve slowly but steadily as the current sweeps it downstream.
2. **Wobbling Spoons:** Here is a lure not routinely found in a trout angler's pack: the small wobbling spoon. I'm referring to models about 1" to 1½" long weighing 1/8 to 3/16-ounce. As minnow imitators, small spoons have a place in trout streams – that place is the deeper, stronger runs. The revolving blades of spinners tend to lift the bait; unless additional weight is added, spinners may not reach the bottom in deep, moving-water holes. But a compact wobbling spoon will get down and stay down – even when the stream is running high. Fish spoons with a slow rolling retrieve.



Minnow plugs are very effective for larger trout.

- 3. Long Minnow Plugs:** Nothing says *minnow* like a 2" to 4" long minnow plug. In my experience, minnow plugs catch bigger trout. It's a good idea to have all three types: floating, suspending and sinking models. The floating model can be slowly retrieved through extremely shallow water, while a sinking model can be slowly retrieved in deeper pools.

However, I find a suspending model to be the most useful. With a suspending model, the retrieval can be stopped periodically and the plug will simply hang in the water just like a real minnow. You can also utilize a jerk-pause injured minnow presentation, often energizing a trout into striking. Suspending models are available, or you can turn a floating model into a suspending model by using weighted adhesive [Storm SuspenDots](#) which will fine-tune your suspending lure quickly and easily.



Marabou jigs are representative of small minnows.

- 4. Hair/Feather Jigs:** Normally, hand-tied hair/feather jigs are associated with crappie or larger game fish rather than trout. Unless, of course you are a steelhead angler. I admit it was the exposure to steelhead fishing that got me thinking about small hair jigs for stocked trout. Once wet, marabou plume or rabbit fur compresses into a streamline lure with perfect minnow movements when fished with a slow swimming retrieve. A 1/16-ounce jig can be easily fished on ultra-light rod, while lighter weight ones may be fished with a float as steelhead anglers do.

Having these four basic lures, with color and size variations, means you'll be prepared for just about anything on the trout opener, or any day.

Trout Fishing: Seven Mistakes to Avoid

By Mike Bleech

Countless articles have told you the things you *should* do while fishing for trout. Now look at this from another perspective: Here are seven things you *should not* do while fishing for trout.

Don't wear bright colors along a trout stream. Especially avoid loud colored hats.



1. Don't wear bright, colorful clothing.

Anything that stands out just serves to make you more visible to the trout. Especially avoid red, orange, yellow, purple, blue and any fluorescent colors. Don't wear bright colors along a trout stream. Especially avoid loud colored hats. Most importantly, never, ever, wear those bright colors on your head or upper torso. Those are the parts of your body that trout can see first. Forget about looking good. Never try to stand out. Quite the opposite, you want to blend in with your surroundings just like a bow hunter might do.

2. Don't use over-size hooks.

Never use hooks that can't be at least partially hidden by the bait. Fine wire hooks usually are just right for trout fishing. Overly large hooks will kill your bait. Even if you are not using live bait, big hooks will tear any bait apart.

3. Don't forget your hook hone.

Bring it, or a file, or whatever you prefer for sharpening hooks. During fishing seminars, I usually begin by guaranteeing that I can double the number of fish everyone will catch. Then, I explain how to sharpen hooks. For small hooks that are usually used for trout fishing, make the point needle sharp. Larger hooks may need knife-like edges.



Mike used a stick bait that dives a little deeper than most to tempt this nice brown trout.

4. Don't stand in one place.

Do not stay in one spot if you are fishing in a lake - unless you are catching fish with a good deal of regularity. Trout move; they tend to be scattered. Only rarely do trout hold in one place for long periods of time. Even if something is holding trout in a specific location, *all* of the trout in a lake will not be there. Soon, either all of the trout in that location will be caught, or more likely, at some point the trout that remain will stop hitting for one reason or another. Of course, stay in one position as long as the trout are hitting there. Then move along after a few unproductive casts.

5. Don't focus only on likely looking spots.

If your tactic is casting artificial lures, fan-cast. This means casting one direction, say to the left, then cast farther to the right in small increments. Do this until you have covered all of the water you can reach from that position. Then move along the shoreline to another position that is just far enough so that you are casting to fresh water, and repeat the process.

6. Don't be patient.

In this situation, patience is *not* a virtue. It wastes time. There is a line of thinking which tells anglers to be patient and to wait for the fish to start hitting. That's counterproductive unless you know with absolute certainty that there are trout within casting distance. And even then it only applies if and when you are very limited in how far you can move, or you are afraid of losing a good position to other anglers.

7. Don't travel lightly.

No extra weight and no extra bulk, right? All you really need is your favorite spinner and just the essentials, right? Wrong. This could not be more inaccurate. Trout are famous for being finicky. One of the surest ways to enjoy consistent success is to carry a well-stocked fishing vest.

In fact, the *more* you can carry the better.

In the artificial lure department, carry spoons, spinners and small stick baits. You should have a variety of colors of each type. Have some that run at different depths. This is most important if you fish lakes. Carry as many types of bait as you can manage. You should have at least three different types of salmon eggs, and a few types of artificial baits, (like Powerbait, which is available in several colors.) Also, a couple types of grubs and some red worms will make you a complete angler, almost. And lastly - to round it out - carry either live or salted minnows.

So, basically these things which you *should not* do are simply the flip side of those things which you *should* do - and a perspective that will help you remember better.



A flopping brown trout rewarded Jeri Blech for carrying red worms along the trout stream.

How to Study the Water for Trout

By Tom Claycomb

Every year at various sports shows and outdoor stores I do seminars on “Glassing for Big Game.” I know it sounds funny, but during these I also discuss glassing for trout.

Pause to study the stream, and you’re almost guaranteed catching more fish in less time.



Two Lessons, Years Apart

I stumbled on this idea almost by mistake. It was a combination of events which led to my discovery. The first was a family fly-fishing trip in Colorado. My brother and brother-in-law thought they saw a good hole down the mountain, but it was near the end of the day and they were tired. So, they pulled over and glassed it to see if it was worth crawling down there.

It was the only hole in that stretch of river so Bobby told Eddy to go down and he’d watch from the road. When Eddy got there he deftly laid a caddis on the water under an overhanging bush. A nice 17-inch rainbow slammed it. Bobby was able to watch everything in vivid detail through his binoculars from his vantage point above.

Years later, my boss Mike Rempke took a few of us fly-fishing on the famed Silver Creek in Idaho. I was hooked up with a guide named Nick Price. One day we pulled up to a hole and Nick said to hold on a minute. He explained how he liked to study a hole before he hit it. It amazed me what he observed that I would have missed. “See that one feeding over by the log? We’ll hit him first,” he said. “There’s one occasionally sipping flies by that grass. That’s a big fish.” A few minutes later he added, “See at the head of the hole where that one just hit? There are two feeding there.”

Nick taught me a lot that day about studying a hole before I hit it to see where the fish are, what they're feeding on, and how to plan a strategy first before ever entering the water.

His advice taught me that what I learned years earlier from Bobby wasn't a one-time occurrence. Do I always glass a stream before entering? No – not when I'm close enough to observe with my bare eyes, but whether up close or from afar, take a minute to study every hole before jumping in.

Glassing Holes Saves Time

What if you're hiking down a trail and the river is 300 yards below and you see a nice hole? Why not glass it to see if it's worth sliding down to? It may take you 45 minutes to slide down, fish and get back up to the trail. If you're in the back country that means you may only get to hit 16 different holes in a 12 hour day. Why waste nearly an hour on a dead hole? Use your time more wisely on holes in which you can see fish feeding.



Through binoculars, you can tell this is a hole where fish tend to stop as they work upstream.

I'd like to think that I can tell a good hole when I see one, but every now and then I'm fooled. For instance, last year I backpacked into the backcountry and had thrown up a camp. I hiked four to five miles downstream and found a log jam on the river. There was a little pool in front of the log jam, so I crawled out on it to hopefully catch a few fish. Gee whiz! – 18 hits later I was amazed!

Sometimes you will be unsure, so ask yourself two questions:

- Does the hole supply a good food source?
- Is it the first hole after they've swam a half mile and they're congregated up there?

You may never know but it pays to examine every fishing hole you see.

A couple years ago I backpacked in for a few days on a backcountry trip by myself. I was going down the trail when I happened to look down and notice that a back eddy fingered off the main stream.

I stopped and studied it for a minute. Wow, there were four to six decent cutthroats feeding in the dead water. It wasn't even a foot and a half deep, so I carefully approached it on my knees from downstream. I hammered a few nice fish that otherwise I would have hiked right on by if I hadn't stopped and studied the river.

I'll bet you a dollar to a donut hole, if you slow down on your next trip and study the hole before jumping in, you'll likely make a few observations that will net you more fish.

Tips for Glassing Trout Waters

1. Glass holes if you're up above them. You'll be able to choose the best.
2. Notice if there are stoneflies in the trees. Observe everything, not just the streambed and the water.
3. Notice if there are grasshoppers in the meadow – they'll feed themselves to the fish.
4. How close are other holes? If you're looking at the first hole for a half mile, fish may be congregated there.
5. Use the current to drift your fly into strategic spots – you'll be able to determine the strategic spots before getting close to the water, so you won't spook as many fish.



In a mountain area, you'll save lots of time by glassing the stream below and planning your approach to maximize your time and your catch.

Four Secrets to Catching Trout in Cold Water

By Mike Bleech



In early spring, this small stream may still have snow in its headwaters. (Photo by Mike Bleech)

It was the kind of adventure that is best done when you are a kid. Pop-up camper trailers were a new thing, and I had never seen one before I camped in one with three old-timers. One guy worked for the gas company that owned the land where we would fish, and he had a key. That meant other trout anglers would have to get up early and walk an hour to get to fish, where we could just wake up and start fishing.

This was also during a time when weather forecasts were less reliable than they are now, so it came as a complete surprise when we woke up on the opening day of trout season greeted by 10 inches of heavy snow. The air temperature was chilly at daybreak, but it rose while we fished, and the frigid snow melt run-off quickly filled the small creek. Fishing was terrible. The first few hours passed and I never caught a single trout, nor did anyone else I talked with, until late in the morning.

#1 – One of My First Fishing Lessons

To this day, I'm thankful for this good fishing lesson... I watched one fisherman catch several trout in short order. Fortunately, he was kind enough to share his secret with a kid. He showed me how to string salted minnows on a wire harness with a split, double hook. After demonstrating the rigging, he gave me a harness and several minnows. By the time I returned to camp for lunch I was proudly carrying a limit of trout. Three old-timers were pleasantly surprised to see that the kid had out-fished them.

The stream we fished, that long-ago day, had been stocked with brook, brown, and rainbow trout. All the trout I caught, and all that were caught by the gentleman who shared his secret with me, were brookies. The obvious lesson in this is that minnows are excellent bait for brook trout in frigid water, a truth I have confirmed many times since.

#2 – Remember, Trout are Cold Water Fish

Cold water conditions lower the spirits of many trout anglers who assume trout will not hit in cold water. This makes absolutely no sense because trout are classed as cold water fish and will strike readily under ice. However, trout do behave differently in frigid water than they do in warmer water. Baits or lures should be presented slowly and close to the bottom.

That gives trout plenty of time to examine your offering, to see it and to smell it. It makes sense to add some sort of bait, or scent, to lures.

#3 – Use a Fat, Slow, Spinner Blade

One time-tested cold water lure/bait combo is the spinner tipped with a maggot. Avoid the temptation to use a slender willow leaf spinner blade – although it's easier to keep spinners of this type deep. Instead, use a spinner with a Colorado blade. The nearly round Colorado blade spins at a much slower speed than the willow leaf style, making it perfect for cold water presentation.



A salted minnow might not look very appealing to a human, but to brook trout they are a very attractive meal, and deadly in cold water. (Photo by Mike Bleech)

If the water is warm enough to flow, it is warm enough for brook trout to be active. Never let cold water be your reason for not fishing. (Photo by Mike Bleech)



With this special presentation, the spinner is not actually retrieved, but instead it is held steady in the current where the spinning blade catches the eyes of trout, and the maggot tells its acute sense of smell that this is something good to eat. Manipulating the rod tip will move the lure back and forth across the stream, a very accurate presentation

This presentation can be used all through trout season for getting your offering into tight places where there is no room to cast. Slowly let out line, which makes the lure slip downstream into those tight spots. You will be fishing in places where no one else can.

#4 – Go for Brightness in Cold Water

Brighter treble hook dressing is generally best in cold water. One of my long-time favorite spinners has a gold, Colorado blade and bright orange or yellow dressing on the hook.

Many things we encounter while fishing are difficult to explain. The explanations anglers try to come up with are often wrong, which does nothing but cause problems. Simply accepting things as you learn, with the optimistic faith of a child, will not lead you astray. The preference trout have for bright or shiny colors when the water is cold fits this line of thinking. The “why” is not what is important. What matters is that you will catch trout when few others do.

When you do, try to find a kid – and share your secret with him.

The Most Deadly Lure for Big Brown Trout

By Darl Black



I was flush with excitement when invited to join a party of outdoor writers on a visit to [Arkansas' legendary White River](#) with lodging at the famed [Gaston's Resort](#) in the Ozark Mountains. Friends who had previously fished the river advised me to expect exceptional catches. But an hour after departing the boat dock with a fishing buddy and guide in one of the classic White River drift boats, we had yet to connect with a trout.

"You should have been with us yesterday morning," said [Northland Fishing Tackle](#) representative Eric Naig, who had arrived a couple days earlier than me. "It was a trout on every cast along this very bank. Not sure why they are not biting today." However, our guide wasn't ready to offer excuses. After glancing at his watch, he promised a turnaround within 15 minutes.

12" Trout Began Gobbling our Bait

By the time we motored to our next spot and positioned the boat for a drift, the trout population had apparently undergone a change of attitude. As if an 'on switch' had been thrown, 9" to 12" rainbow trout began gobbling our live bait offerings. Apparently at this time of year, rising river levels resulting from timed releases at Bull Shoals Dam are critical to turning on the trout. The gate opening schedules are monitored closely by river guides who have realized it's like ringing the dinner bell.

Catching trout on worms is not rocket science. All species of trout relish small red wigglers. It's simply a matter of tying on a #8 light wire hook and adding the right amount of weight so the worm bounces along the bottom. Typically, in small streams with light to moderate current, one or two split-shot are crimped on the line about 18" above the bait. However, in heavier current situations, such as on the White River, a different rigging is utilized with 1/8 or 3/16-ounce bell-style or pencil sinker on a separate leader attached to a three-way swivel.

On our White River fishing trip, Eric scored a number of rainbow trout and our first brown trout with his "Pink" marabou jig. However, the larger browns came on suspending jerkbaits.



The idea of using live bait for trout would not sit well with many upper-crust fly-fishermen I know. And they would grimace at the idea of keeping a few trout. However, on the White, legal-size rainbow trout are stocked in large numbers by the state fisheries department in order to satisfy fishermen who routinely come to the river for a take-home trout dinner. Fishermen are literally expected to keep trout.

Eric and I had been tasked with providing fish for a creek side trout bake scheduled later in the day at [Gaston's](#) outdoor pavilion for all the writers in our group. It didn't take long to secure a sufficient number of eating-size rainbows for the feast.

A More Challenging Quarry – The White River’s Prized Brown Trout



Brown trout are exceptionally beautiful trout.

Our attention then turned to a more challenging quarry – the White River’s prized brown trout. Liberal harvest regulations apply to rainbow trout; however, only 1 brown trout of at least 24” may be harvested. Although we had no intention of keeping any browns, I was salivating at the thought of catching a few of these beautifully marked fish for photographs. Furthermore, stream-seasoned big browns certainly put up a better fight than stocked rainbows.

The manager of Gaston’s tackle shop had recommended marabou-body jigs for big browns. Fortunately, Eric had a supply of Northland’s new 1/16- and 1/8-ounce Bug-A-Boo Jigs.

Fly-fishermen offer hand-tied insect-imitating creations to trout while preaching the discipline of specific hatches. But the truth is this: big browns are basically meat eaters year round. Sure, they may slurp bugs now and then as an appetizer, but for the main course they want crawfish or large creek minnows. Marabou jigs are a good representation for both types of forage.

In an attempt to figure out the most productive color pattern for the day, Eric and I each fished a different color jig. We quickly discovered that rainbows found Eric’s “pinkie” marabou to be a more interesting meal than my black marabou. The pink marabou also scored our first moderate-size brown trout. But we still lacked a hefty brown of at least 20 inches which would allow us to say to friends, *“This is a White River trout!”*

The Most Deadly Lure for Big Browns

So I reached into my tackle bag of tricks to come up with what I consider the most deadly universally effective lure for browns – a long-minnow stickbait.

In my experience, big browns are in many ways similar to river smallmouth bass. Present what appears to be a big injured minnow close to their hide, and they cannot refuse it. Nothing says ‘injured baitfish’ better than the rhythmic pull-pause of a suspending jerkbait. I figure if it works on the streams of Pennsylvania, it will work on the streams of Arkansas.

I started with a 3-1/8" #8 Rapala X-Rap in Hot Pink – the jig color which was working so well for Eric. Following an initial long first cast, I turned the reel handle several times to drive the jerkbait to its suspending depth. Then, I paused for several seconds to let the bait hover while I rubbed a little feeling back into my chilled fingers. Suddenly, I felt the unmistakable jolt through the line of a fish inhaling the lure.

Caught more or less napping at the stick, I failed to deliver an appropriate hookset. The energetic fish decided grabbing air was the best way to throw the object-that-wasn't-prey from its mouth. However by throwing the lure in such a spectacular way, it clearly showed itself to be a nice brownie.

A few casts later – another hit. This time I was properly in tune to perform a side-sweep hook set. The second brown's spectacular air show did not result in an escape this time.



The Rapala X-Rap jerkbait performed well on the White River, accounting for numerous brown trout.

Eric battles a brown trout from a traditional White River drift boat controlled by a guide.



The brown trout is one of the most beautiful members of the trout family. Brownish in overall tone, the dark brown or gray-brown color on the back and upper sides fades into a rich creamy yellow on the lower sides. Large dark spots are outlined with pale halos on the sides, the back and the dorsal fin, with reddish-orange or yellow spots scattered on the sides. Browns truly are magnificent fish.

The Hot Pink X-Rap produced several more trout before Eric also switched to a jerkbait. When he started catching them on a different color and different model, it became evident that color wasn't the trigger as much as the jerk-pause of the stickbait. Later in the day I switched to a 5-1/2" Xcalibur Jerkbait and continued to catch brown trout.

The trout fishing remained exceptional during the remaining days of this winter fishing trip, although it did require a rise in the flow to trigger the strongest bite. Live bait and small jigs certainly produced the greatest number of small trout. But each day it took a jerk to haul in trophy-size browns.

Which Jerkbait for Trout?

On a *river* (as opposed to a smaller *stream*), a 3" to 4-1/2" jerkbait is a good choice. The bait will hang in the water around the 3' to 4' depth making an easy target for a fat lazy brown trout. My favorites include a Rapala X-Rap Slashbait; XCalibur Xt3 Twitch Bait; Sebile A-Cast Minnow; or Lucky Craft Pointer 78. For typically clear water, my color picks are natural baitfish patterns and fingerling trout patterns.

However, should the water be dingy due to runoff or a dam release, you may want to jump up to slightly larger profile bait, and select a pattern with some chartreuse or hint of a bolder color in it. I recall one day on the west branch of the [Delaware River](#) with stained water, when an XCalibur Xs4 (4-1/2") jerkbait in Sour Grape caught trout after trout, when nothing else produced. Few trout anglers would consider that large of a stickbait in such a wild color.

If you're fishing a *stream* composed mainly of shallow water runs and holes that rarely exceed three or four feet, go with a 2" to 3" jerkbait to match the size of smaller baitfish. Sometimes, a floating stickbait would be a better choice to reduce the chances of snagging the bottom. Among the smaller baits to consider are Yo-Zuri Pins Minnow Magnet; Rapala Flat Rap; and Lucky Craft Humpback Pointer.



Larger size jerkbaits often draw strikes from larger brown trout.

Baked Trout in Foil

An easy, minimal-mess recipe for Outdoor Cooks who want less time in the kitchen and more fishing time:

- 4 trout (9 to 12 inches in length)
- 1 package of onion soup mix
- 1 stick margarine
- Ground black pepper
- Four strips bacon

(Easily adjust the recipe for more trout by including another package of soup mix/butter stick and additional bacon strips)

Clean trout and remove heads. Place each trout on an individual sheet of foil. Place one strip of bacon and a couple shakes of pepper inside the cleaned cavity of each trout. Prepare soup mix by first melting one stick of margarine, then adding the dry soup mix to create soupy consistency. Pour about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the mixture on each fish. Wrap fish tightly in foil. Place on cookie sheet and bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes. Alternative to oven: the foil wrapped trout may be cooked outdoors on a charcoal grill.



Brown trout are outstanding fighters and deserve the right to be released.

Fly Fishing in Western Maine

By William Clunie

Before hiking up the three-thousand foot Western Maine Mountain, my brother-in-law, Bill Ormsbee, stopped at the side of the trailhead to say a prayer. Bill is an avid angler, hiker, and minister from Missouri, and always leads with a prayer.

“Dear Lord,” began Ormsbee,
“help us to have a safe hike, to see
all your beauty, and to enjoy this
day of fishing you have blessed
us with. Amen.”

The hike only took an hour and a half, and as we crested the summit I could see the smooth glacial pond and hear the sound of a hungry fish feeding on the other side of a huge rock that formed the south shoreline. I told Ormsbee to climb down as close as he could get to the shore, and fling his worm and bobber into the pond.

While I stood rigging my fly rod I could hear the splashing sounds of a hooked fish. Only a few minutes had passed and Ormsbee returned with a 14-inch brook trout. As I prepared to photograph him and his fish with the pond in the background, a strange noise began to break the awesome silence of the mountainous shoreline.



*A bent fly rod means “fish on” in
Western Maine glacial ponds.*

Before we could do anything, a small, single-prop plane crested the steep summit of the mountain and flew directly over our heads. It seemed to be so close that we ducked down as it passed over our position and flew straight over the pond, disappearing over the opposite edge of the mountain horizon.

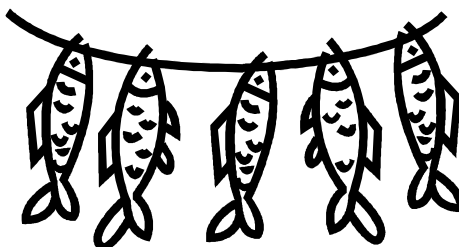
We gathered ourselves to complete the fish photo, all the while exclaiming, “What is that pilot doing? Why did he come so close to us?” The plane suddenly crested the opposite side of the mountain and headed toward us, directly over the pond. Before either of us had time to say a word, the pilot opened a bay door and dropped a huge load of hatchery trout into the still waters of the pond.

Most of the fish landed in the pond, but a large number of the four to five inch brookies landed on the rocks at the edge of the ponds – right at our feet. The flying fish didn’t hit us, but a lot of them landed around us on the shore and the shock left us standing there with our jaws hanging open. Ormsbee, the fishing minister, was the first to speak.

“I know I asked the Lord for success at fishing today,” Ormsbee exclaimed, “but I never dreamed He would send us trout from the heavens.”

We both laughed until tears rolled down our cheeks. We continued to chuckle as we scrambled to help a few of the struggling trout off the shoreline rocks and into the water. I had heard of stocking remote ponds by using planes before, but never witnessed this procedure in such an up-close and personal manner. I couldn’t believe how close the plane came to us, and the sheer number of fish dropped baffled my angling brother-in-law and me. It must have dropped several hundred in just that one load.





Heavenly Fillets

We resumed fishing and caught several more big brook trout. Brookies, the only fish they stock in the glacial ponds, are meant to be caught and eaten. I have been assured by local biologists from [Maine's Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) that the small glacial ponds that lace the mountains of Western Maine freeze nearly to the bottom during the winter months. Hardly any fish survive in a pond that freezes that deeply, so anglers are encouraged to catch and eat their limit of two fish per day.

When hiking in to fish the mountainous ponds, I always pack a sharp knife ([Havalon Baracuta](#)), a stick of butter, salt, and a pan. If I'm not able to build a little fire on the rocks to cook the fish, I'll fry them over a small stove specifically made for backpacking. *Nothing* compares to a meal of fried brook trout at three thousand feet, especially after a day of chewing on beef jerky and power bars.

When we get up the next morning, the fishing starts well before breakfast. After we catch our two-fish limit, the fires get stoked and breakfast begins. If we remember to carefully pack in some eggs, they get tossed in with the frying fish. This combination certainly makes a glorious morning meal for hungry hiking anglers.

Glacial Ponds

When the glaciers moved across the mountains of [Western Maine](#), they carved shallow pockets at the tops of many peaks. As the huge ice chunks melted, they filled these pockets with ice-cold water.



A Western Maine mountain pond with white Kifaru tipi (kifaru.net) at shoreline (lower right).

Many of the glacial ponds in Maine's mountains happen to be located on, or near, the [Appalachian Trail \(AT\)](#). The convenient thing about this is the fact that most of the well-marked AT trails near the ponds have lean-to shelters for overnight camping. This way an angler can simply use the provided shelters and enjoy the freedom of hiking without the added weight from needing to pack a tent.

Another advantage from fishing these remote, elevated ponds is that not many anglers are willing to climb a few thousand feet to go fishing. If an angler gets up early enough, he can have the whole pond to himself. Most hikers won't be at the summit at day break, leaving the pond to overnight anglers. Mornings on mountain ponds always provide early risers with the best fishing.

Around lunch time, hikers will start to straggle in – but not to worry, most of the hikers usually don't fish. By dinner time, these same hikers leave to get down off the mountain before dark. Hiking anglers that prepare to stay the night have the best trout fishing time to themselves; the early morning and late-afternoon feeding frenzy. It doesn't get much better than this.

An Appalachian Trail hut in the mountains of Western Maine provides a great shelter for hiking anglers.



Hiking In

Some anglers only hike in for a day of fishing, while others stay a few nights. Most of the glacial ponds in [Western Maine](#) require a two- to three-thousand foot hike, while a few reach closer to the four-thousand foot range. If I decide to hike in to those levels, I don't want to come right back down – I'm staying at least overnight.

As stated earlier, many of the ponds along the AT have lean-to shelters for weary hikers, or hiking anglers. I've only seen other hikers using these shelters a few times in all the hiking and fishing I've done over the years. Still, I pack a 9' X 12' silicone-treated nylon tarp just in case the "inn is full."

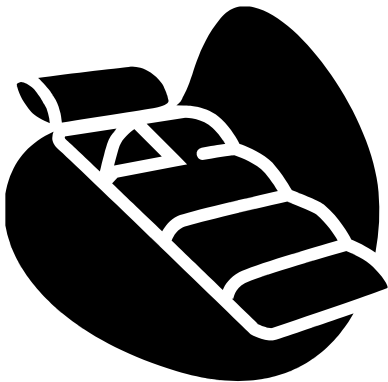
Some other gear I find to be absolutely necessary when hiking to elevated-angling locations makes a fishing trip a little easier. I don't ever hike anywhere without [SmartWool](#) socks, some kind of wicking underwear, and a fleece jacket. SmartWool socks with a pair of liners have never allowed me to get a single blister. Wicking underwear offers warmth even if the hiker works up a chilling sweat – the material wicks the moisture away from the skin. The fleece jacket gets packed until the summit is reached, and then pulled out when the evening chill sets in. It's surprising how warm a fleece jacket can be, especially if it's got a quarter-zip collar that closes right up under the chin.



I also like to pack a stove and pot that boils water quickly, as well as a number of freeze-dried meals that cook up fast with the boiling water. If I don't catch any fish, I can resort to these meals without too much fuss. I like a hot cup of coffee or tea for breakfast too, and the quick-boiling stove and pot combination take care of this in a hurry.

The last items I'll list here, the sleeping system, ranks right up there in importance. Without a good night's sleep, a hiking angler cannot function properly. Make sure to take a sleeping bag rated for the temperature extremes possible at that particular time of the year. During fishing season, even the coldest weather won't be that bad – but believe me, the tops of three- to four-thousand foot mountains can get awfully cold at night.

A good closed-cell sleeping pad helps soften the night's sleep, too. This item is quite personal; I prefer a [Therm-a-Rest](#) pad that has an inflatable air chamber. The extra support of the air chamber helps alleviate morning back pains. I've heard other folks state that the cheap Big Box store brand, foam pad works for them – to each his own.



Fishing Methods

Some anglers prefer to fish with worms and lures on ponds that allow these methods. Although dunking a worm works perfectly, I still pack a fly rod. I can hook a worm onto a small hook on the fly rod and fling it if things get desperate.

My brother-in-law uses a bobber and worm to get his bait out a little farther from the shoreline. At times the trout can be very selective, and then other times they hit everything an angler throws at them. Some of the ponds have a five-fish-limit, and at times each of us has filled this limit using worms.

Fishing with flies presents some difficulties, but not enough to make me resort to worm fishing full-time. The cold ponds don't offer much in the way of a hatch, but the warming thermals often pull insects up the mountains and deposit them in the ponds by the sheer force of the drafting winds.

After a late-afternoon heat wave, I have often noticed various types of bugs floating down from the sky. Flying ants, crickets, moths, and other terrestrials that don't hatch in the water are blown in by the strong thermal mountain winds. I simulate this phenomenon by dropping similar imitations on the surface of the glacial ponds as the thermal winds begin to die down.

Believe it or not, my most successful fly takes only a few minutes to tie. I take a number 18 to 22 hook and wrap it with silver tinsel – that's it. I don't know what it is about that silly fly, but they hit it like mad. Maybe it reminds these "fish from heaven" of the sparkly angel wings they've seen as they pass from heaven to earth?

Whatever it is, fishing glacial ponds is truly a heavenly experience.

Great Lakes Steelhead Fishing – There's No Better Time than December

By Mike Bleech

There are the seasons as defined on a calendar, and then there are seasons in the minds of steelhead anglers. December is the transitional month between fall and winter both on the calendar and along most Great Lakes tributaries. The actual date of the transition, though, does not necessarily fall on the first day of winter. It depends upon weather patterns, upon rain, snow and temperatures.



Steelhead creeks, wherever they are, tend to be among the most scenic places on earth.

What is great about December is that the steelhead have not yet become lethargic. They are full of fight and still prone to aerial acrobatics, not always by the end of the month, but almost certainly well into the month. Also, hunting has drawn the more casual steelhead anglers away from the creeks. You might get a pool to yourself on creeks where earlier anglers were crowded elbow to elbow, which is not a fitting situation for any serious steelhead angler. Steelhead fishing is one of life's great pleasures, something to be done with a degree of reverence. The carnival atmosphere during the balmy days of early summer is exciting, but the relative calm and possible solitude of December allows deeper thought, and greater appreciation.

Perhaps my best day of steelhead fishing (although I could recall several other 'best' days), happened last December on a medium-size Great Lakes tributary. It was midweek and I went alone to a favorite pool, a long pool where steelhead have plenty of room to fight. The weather was not out of the ordinary, although it was threatening to rain, which would have made it much less comfortable in the 40-degree temperatures. But it never went further than a drizzle.

I started by swinging and slowly stripping a silver and white streamer which produced one missed hit, but nothing else. I switched to my stand-by, a soft egg pattern which I tie simply by adding a very small bit of peach color yarn to the soft plastic egg to simulate skein. Fish were surfacing in front of me, but nothing took my egg so I moved upstream into deeper water. The move paid off.

After releasing two or three steelhead and losing several others at various stages of the battles, my most exciting battle with a steelhead, the largest steelhead I have ever hooked on fly-fishing gear, began. It was on that 'one more cast' because light was fading.

During a fight with a big steelhead time becomes irrelevant. I do not know how long this one lasted. The fish made only one long, low jump in the midst of its first run. Had it jumped more, certainly the fight would not have lasted so long. What that jump did accomplish however was reveal the steelhead's size which made every moment of the struggle more stimulating.

I thought the fight was nearing the end when I started to work the fish toward me. Just as I caught a glimpse of it the water exploded as the huge fish swung its broad tail. The fight was nowhere near its conclusion.

During one of its line-sizzling runs my reel, an English-made Hardy reel which was a gift from several years earlier, suddenly died. I think it got so hot that the spool warped. From that point I had to manage the fish by stripping line. Just as it seemed like I was going to win the hook came out on a tight line. The battle had lasted too long.



My immediate reaction was to slump my shoulders in grief. That lasted only briefly. Less than a minute after the encounter ended, visions of the magnificent steelhead were turning into a great memory. This image of the long, silver fish with a wide iridescent stripe of pink and purple was already burned deep into my mind. It had given me everything I could ever hope for a steelhead to give. Had I worked it into shallow water there was no one around to take a photo. I had no tripod to set up a timed photo, and I would not have taken the chance of killing the fish to do it anyway.

One advantage of ‘the one that got away’ is that it can be any size you wish. But in this case my trophy is the dead Hardy reel which is now on a shelf in my rod room, along with numerous other mementos from my countless adventures afield.



The Incredible Artificial Egg for Great Lakes Steelhead

By Mike Bleech

Collecting an endless assortment of flies is essential to the fly-fishing lifestyle.

None of what I am about to tell you, however, has limited the number of steelhead flies in my vests, boxes, drawers and shelves. It is still true nonetheless.

It occurred to me one day that a large majority of the steelhead I have hooked over my career hit some sort of egg pattern, with the most popular being a soft egg pattern sparsely dressed with yarn. I randomly surveyed some friends and acquaintances that are serious about steelhead fishing about this matter. In the end, every one of them came to the conclusion that their experience has been similar to mine. Most had their own favorite fly patterns which were not egg patterns, but upon reflection it was the various egg patterns that actually caught the most steelhead for them. More specifically, it came down to Glo Bugs, Sucker Spawn, soft egg patterns and other egg imitations.

This hardly narrows a fly collection down. If you have done a lot of steelhead fishing, then you have caught steelhead on countless different combinations of sizes and colors. This results in feeling you must carry all of these whenever you fish for steelhead, which of course is impossible.

Upper left - Glo Bugs, lower left - Sucker spawn, lower right - soft egg patterns. For contrast, dark nymph patterns (also steelhead favorites) in the upper right.





This steelhead fell for a small egg sack dressed with a pink floater.

My good friend Jim Simonelli prefers Glo Bugs. Those he ties do not look much like Glo Bugs in tackle shops. Everyone who has tied flies for long understands that the flies most fly-fishers would choose to purchase are not the ones that are most effective on the stream.

Shoppers want full, neat, finely detailed flies. Steelhead prefer sparsely tied flies. Real life is not neat and tidy, it is messy and dirty and ragged from living.

The System

There is system to all of this disarray. Indeed, there are reasons for different fly sizes and colors. People like to narrow things down to what, where, when and why. We like to think we understand things. Whether this system for choosing egg patterns is true to the degree I believe is not what's important. All that's important is that the egg pattern works.

Usually systems start at an end and finish at another end. This steelhead system starts in the middle with eggs of natural color and size: A shade of orange and a size based on the type of egg, usually either salmon or steelhead, but sometimes sucker. These egg patterns could probably be used exclusively with a high degree of success.

Regarding steelhead eggs, they are almost always fished in the form of skein. There is not much in the way of variables, except for size. The rule of thumb with steelhead skein is to use a small piece of skein in clear water, then increase the size with darkening water color.

Salmon eggs can be fished as skein, as single eggs, or as a group of single eggs in egg sacks. This provides for much more variability. The rule of thumb with salmon eggs is to use single eggs in very clear water. With darkening water color, you ought to use egg sacks or skein in increasingly larger sizes.

Also, as the weather darkens use brighter colors on the material used for egg sacks, and add floaters, which are essentially imitation eggs, in brighter colors.

Steelhead are likely to be skittish in clear water, and mild colors including white, light pink, or orange are all effective choices. Small eggs most likely will be the ones that steelhead take, that or the Sucker Spawn pattern.

Natural colors and sizes can be effective under what most anglers would consider perfect steelhead fishing conditions, that being when the creeks have a little heavier flow and some color such as you might see during the morning of an all-day rain.

Now, by natural color I mean the tint of a natural salmon egg, a medium orange. My fly boxes will hold at least three shades of medium orange, and they are there for good reason. An exception might be after the steelhead have seen too many of these patterns, when fishing pressure is heavy. Chartreuse can be effective at a time like this.

As the water gets more and more color however switch to more brightly colored flies. Try deeper oranges, then reds. Use larger sizes. Some expert steelhead anglers will use Glow Bugs that are an inch in diameter.

Of course, like most steelhead anglers I carry a large assortment of steelhead patterns. However, if I had to stick with just one pattern it would undoubtedly be an artificial egg. That still leaves a lot of room for wiggle.



How to Troll Stocked Trout Lakes for More Fish

By Mike Bleech

Anglers who fish lakes stocked with adult trout tend to find a place along the bank where they can relax while fishing. Or, if they fish from boats, they do pretty much the same thing, but with the advantage of being able to fish just about anywhere.

Relatively few take this to the next level and troll for trout. What's the advantage of trolling? When trout numbers have been thinned by weeks of fishing, this more aggressive approach can keep you catching fish.



*Trolling stretches the time when you can catch trout from a stocked trout lake.
(Photo by Mike Bleech)*

1. Where to troll for trout?

While the majority of anglers wait for trout to come to them, which is less and less effective as the stocked trout numbers decline, trollers are more proactive. They go to the trout, increasing the number of trout that see their lures. Even at the slow speeds necessary when the water is cold, a boat might travel a few miles in a day of trolling. Imagine how many trout might be encountered by a line that stretches for miles versus a single point. This is why trollers can enjoy good fishing much longer than stationary anglers.

Lakes that are stocked with adult trout might fit many descriptions. So to keep things simple and manageable, we're talking about the following basics:

- A small lake, less than 500 surface acres, may be little more than a pond.
- On many small lakes only electric motors are allowed, which means boats will be small.
- Equipment will be minimal. This is not about downriggers and planer boards. We may be stepping up our fishing tactics, but this does not mean making life complicated.

A side benefit of trolling for trout is that it gives anglers a much better picture of where trout can most likely be found. (Make a note of this fact and file it away, because this can be carried over even into the ice fishing season.)

Holding your rod in your hand will allow you to set the hook on hits that you might not even detect when the rod is in a holder. (Photo by Mike Bleech)



2. What special gear is needed?

It's not necessary to buy special equipment just for this fishing method. Like all trout fishing, lighter line in the 4-pound to 6-pound test range produces the best results. If your favorite rig is loaded with heavier line, just add a 10-foot leader made with light line.

In deeper lakes it may be an advantage to use as many rods per angler as regulations allow, which necessitates the use of rod holders. But once you find a location pattern, you'll probably be more successful using just one rod per angler, with the rod in your hands. This lets you set the hook, which of course can't be done with the rod in a holder.

3. Which lures are most effective?

Start your trolling strategy by assembling a good selection of lures. Since trollers do not have to consider how well a lure casts, the lures you choose may be different from what you use when casting from a stationary position. The main considerations are the depth lures run and having enough of a variety to match the mood of finicky trout. Why trout might prefer stick baits over wobbling lures or spoons over spinners does not matter as long as you realize that it happens.

Colors also can be important. Perhaps one specific color will be most appealing, or shiny metallic lures will be more effective than painted lures. What this comes down to is that a larger selection of lures is an advantage, at least until reaching the point where you do not have time to use all of the lures. But face it, you probably enjoy buying lures and likely have more than you can ever use.

Determining which lure works best and which color is most successful is part of an overall process of finding a pattern which performs well at any given time. Effective combinations of lure and color can change often, even several times in one day. The angle of the sun, whether the sky is clear or overcast, and lake surface conditions all play a role. It may seem complicated, but everything has to do with the amount of light reaching the trout.

4. How fast do you troll?

Trolling speed is another important part of a pattern. Using an electric motor, speed is measured by a speed setting which usually is on the tiller handle. The relationship of setting number and actual speed varies from boat to boat and from motor to motor. Again, keeping things as simple as possible, in small boats with electric motors typically used, the '1' setting generally is best in cold water, and seldom do you need to go faster than the '3' setting.

Trolling speed has a lot to do with the lure that should be used. Most lures run properly only in a specific speed range. Test the lure alongside the boat to see if it is running properly. Spoons, which you'll probably use more than other types of lures, should wobble rather than spin.

A stiff wind will make it important to adjust the motor power setting when trolling direction changes from with the wind to against the wind. Against stiff wind, a higher speed setting might be necessary just to control a boat.

Just using these reasonably simple tips will help make you an effective troller in a stocked trout lake. It stretches the amount of time when you can catch trout by several weeks - possibly even months - longer than stationary anglers.



Using the right lure or the right lure color can mean the difference between a great day of fishing and getting skunked. Carry a good selection of lures. (Photo by Mike Bleech)

Five Strategies for Finding and Catching BIG Trout

By Judd Cooney

“Binoculars for trout fishing? Ya gotta be kiddin’,” chortled my companion as I unlimbered my pocket-sized Nikons.

“Nope, not kiddin’, right now we’re huntin’ trout. When I find the fish I want, then I’ll start fishin’.” I began glassing the 100-yard stretch of San Juan River below the high bank where we sat comfortably against a huge cottonwood tree.



Camouflage can help you get close without spooking trout.

1. Stalking the Trout

Half an hour later, I eased along the far side of the river, staying well back from the edge of the bank, and ended up crawling the last ten yards to the tail end of the long pool. It had a gravel bar on the far side and a steep cut bank on my side.

A few feet from the bank about 20 yards upstream in the pool, the current swirled around the rock and into the undercut bank. I’d glassed several large swirls right at the lower end of the rock – along with lots of little dimples from smaller fish taking flies. I figured the big swirl was a good trout feeding on the smaller fish.

2. The All-Important First Cast

Similar to the first shot at a critter being the most important, the first cast and lure presentation on a trophy sized trout is equally important. Just as tuning your rifle and your shooting skills is time well spent, practice at casting with your fly rod or spinning gear will perfect your lure placement accuracy. It's time *never* wasted.

I eased slowly onto my knees to keep my silhouette as low as possible and flipped the 2" rainbow-colored Rapala countdown into the fast water right at the upper edge of the rock. As the lure touched the water, I gave the line a couple quick, sharp jerks to make the lure dive and started a fast retrieve to keep it down.

Seconds later, I felt the jolt of a big fish hitting the lure and immediately put as much pressure on the 4-pound test mono as I dared to get the large fish to the lower end of the pool, into the riffles, and down into the next shallow pool where I could fight him into submission. It worked like a charm. Ten minutes later, I beached a hefty 6-pound and brightly colored brown trout which I quickly released.

Three more casts into the 100-yard long pool and I had two 4-pound rainbows and another 3-pound brown. I located each fish by using my binoculars before making the first cast. My client was in total shock as I had let him fish the same pool the previous day where I had caught six trout, the largest a 12" rainbow.

Big trout especially need careful handling if you plan to release them.





Use big lures for big trout.

3. You Need to Get Past the Small Trout

I like catching big trout on streams. In order to consistently catch those trophy-sized fish, once you locate them, one of the toughest problems might be getting past the smaller fish. I know umpteen trout fishermen that feel the ultimate challenge is using a 1-pound or less tippet and No. 22 dry flies for their trout fishing. They're delighted to catch lots of small trout and the occasional 12-14 inch lunker.

In my opinion, that's a cop-out for failing to catch big fish.

When trout fishing with a fly rod or spinning rod, I don't use a lot of fancy long distance casting. I sneak as quietly and close to my target as possible, often crawling into position to drop or flip my fly or lure into exactly the right spot.

4. The Best Big-Fish Lures

I use ultra-light spinning and fly rods with 4-pound test mono or 9-foot tapered leaders with 4-pound test tippets. However, when it comes to lures or flies, I want bait that is going to discourage the smaller trout and appeal to the trophy lunkers. Big fish don't get fat on tiny tidbits in the form of minuscule insects or midges unless there is a major hatch with millions of the little bugs in the air or water.

My favorite big fish lures and flies are limited to those that produce consistently. I love 2" and 3" countdown Rapalas in the rainbow and brown trout pattern. However, the gold/black is almost as deadly. Large Mepps Aglia or willow leaf spinners in sizes 2 or 3 are also deadly big trout catchers. For my fly rod, I stick to big wooly buggers in black, brown and olive green with a red yarn tail. Occasionally I'll use large streamer flies. Big lures for big trout!

5. Your Fish-Fighting Tactics

I take my time glassing and studying the water I am about to fish, watching for large telltale swirls that indicate big fish feeding. I often spend half an hour or more trying to locate several big fish in a given pool, and then I'll figure out the best way to approach and catch them with the least disturbance to the pool. I always fish upstream as trout face into the current and are a lot less likely to spook from movement behind them.

When I hook a big fish, I try to move it downstream as quickly and quietly as possible to avoid spooking other big fish in the pool. After making a catch in a small pool or area of the stream, I'll often wait patiently for half an hour or so for the pool to settle back to normal and keep watching for more big fish activity.

Like hunting, I'll take a single, up close and personal shot at a trophy anytime, over a haphazard "Hail Mary" approach. When it comes to the biggest trophy trout in the stream, trout HUNTING and CATCHING sure beats fishing for any fish that just happens to be where your lure hits.



Fishing for a trout you've hunted is truly satisfying when your plan works.

About the Authors



Darl Black - A lifelong freshwater angler and veteran writer and photographer, Darl tackles a wide variety of fishing related stories for print publications and websites. Of all fishing, angling for smallmouth bass is his favorite pastime. He may be reached for assignment at darlblack@windstream.net.



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Judd Cooney – For the past 30 years Judd has been writing, photographing, and running his guiding and outfitting operation, trying to avoid working an 8-5 job. He says, “I wouldn’t change it for the world!” He has articles or photos in many outdoor magazines each month, covering bowhunting, muzzleloading, big game, small game, plus turkeys, predators, waterfowl and upland game. He can be reached through his website, www.JuddCooney.com.

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