

# Warblers and Arbutus with now and then a trout

by  
John C. Phillips

*Ardent naturalist, sportsman and Conservationist that he was, John C. Phillips, and A. L. Ripley, who composed and illustrated "A Sportsman's Scrap Book", from which this article was taken would be sick at heart to see the Cape Cod trout streams they knew and loved in their present condition. Where once the sea trout moved from the salt water to the small fresh water streams and spawning beds there are now dwellings, summer homes, ice cream stands, motels, gas stations and people numbering in summer into the millions. The loveliness of Cape Cod is long gone. On a recent trip to the Cape from Hyannis to Chatham, about 20 miles, there was not one square inch along the roadside that was not turned into a commercial enterprise. This article published in 1928 is truly historic.*



Cape Cod Trout Fisher by A.L. Ripley.

From "A Sportsman's Scrapbook," Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1928

Down on the south shore of the Bay State, from the head of Buzzard's Bay, out eastward almost to the elbow of the Cape, lies a belt of country cut by numerous little streams and rivers all flowing south and discharging into salt water creeks and marshes. Adapted especially well for trout, and highly peculiar in many of their features, their virtues and attractions have never been properly recorded either by the poet or the fisherman. The mountain streams of the Berkshires, the highlands of New Hampshire and New York have attracted their share of praise, but the lost waters of the "Cape" should be sketched into the annals of New England field sports, before their very channels are forgotten.

For every spring as the afternoon sun begins to linger warmly in the city streets and the elm buds thicken, our thoughts wander to these streams of our boyhood. We cannot curb this feeling of persistent unrest; even the motor horns cry out with a new and more plaintive lament, and the warm breeze bears upon its wings a disturbing taint of oil. These are the opening days of the trout season in Massachusetts, days rich with memories; memories of streams which long ago have ceased to exist, resolved now into chains of manmade cranberry bogs or flooded to provide reservoirs with which to flow them. Memories of care-free fishermen who have years since taken their last trout, and of others grown so serious-minded and so swamped with responsibilities as to lose all inclination for expressing the animal-like joys of the season.

These lines are not addressed to the super-aesthetic, be he fisherman or not, but to lucky characters like some I know, whose childlike minds, unaffected by the race of time, have preserved a boundless spirit of the spring.

I think it is the sheer simplicity of the "Cape" woods that convey to the city-weary fisherman an indescribable feeling of rest and peace. Only a few forms of vegetation interrupt the eye and those mostly of a green and friendly sort. Here even the shrub oaks are loath to expose their naked branches until far into the winter. If you come across from Plymouth over the rolling and once much-burned pine barrens you will get, especially on a cloudy day, the most amazing color effects, for the shrub oak hillsides take on a mauve and plum-like bloom against the intense yellow-green of the pitch-pines. Perhaps this startling effect is due somewhat to contrast and intensified also by reflection from an inky-looking sky, but mostly I am convinced it is due to the actual color of the twigs of these dwarf trees that have just felt the new rush of sap in their tardy branches. But they do not look purple close at hand.

The shadbushes, those perfect almanacs of our hesitating New England spring, have not yet brightened the landscape, although around the city they may be fully blossomed, for be it known that the southwest wind from Buzzard's Bay and Vineyard Sound blowing across the "Cape" over a still wintry ocean is as cold as a northwest wind at Boston, and all vegetation along the south shore is very far behind. Along the cold springy margins of the trout rivers it is even more delayed, which enables you to watch to full advantage the whole warbler migration amid bare trees and shrubs at a time when those little birds are screened by budding vegetation in other regions near by.

In the woody places the evergreen inkberry bushes glisten among the rugged mossy pines; vivid andromeda and sheep laurel brighten the little round swamps, and in a few sheltered spots are some real holly trees. All these contribute to please the eye, so long used to the dreadful drab of our northern winter landscape and we seem to have come a long way south in a short sixty miles.

Although we are here to catch trout, we must notice other things: the tiny pink bells of the upland cranberry along the double-rutted, sandy cart tracks, and if we look ever so closely a white star buried among dry oak leaves. Down must we go on all fours scratching like the noisiest cheewink among the partridge berries, sending last year's papery oak leaves flying,

and suddenly exposing not one but a whole chain, maybe several chains, of white or pinky-white flowerlets. You who never have gathered arbutus will hardly realize the sport, the woodcraft, the friendly rivalry, and the rush for an even likelier bed. Never know the mushroom-like smell of the fresh-pulled stems, the very essence of spring-thawed soil, mixed with the priceless odor of the flowers themselves. That odor so intoxicating to the senses. You lose that earthy root-smell after a little, though the flowers may keep fresh for days, and even in their final decay give out, scarcely diminished, their exotic, almost overpowering scent. What would the perfume makers of Grasse not give for an acre or two of our Cape arbutus to bottle up for the mirrored boudoirs along the Riviera!

No one who has been there can quite forget the thrill of the first April day upon the Agawam, the Mashpee, or the Slug. There was something so entirely different about the surroundings of those streams, and their waters were so clean and pure, so even bank-full and so seldom in flood that they had a more permanent, a more perfect look than many another more famous. They never shrank to a greasy trickle in summer, or hid away amid rank tussock grass so that you could scarce follow their windings. Those Cape streams were gentlemen streams for all of their few short miles. Their beds were hard sand or bright beautiful gravel and the water flowed along under lovely clumps of andromeda, sheep laurel, or thickets of wild roses, dwarf alders, and little stunted birches. Then they would go murmuring deep through the heart of a pine and maple swamp and the sun shone through the gray-green beards of the usnea moss or sparkled on the scarlet flowers of the maples themselves. They did not rage around slippery boulders or roar down in troublesome falls, but their courses led them from gentle rapids and sparkling ripples into great pools that hollowed out caverns under the fantastic roots of a stunted, druid-like beech or maple, or anon burrowed down various back channels where ice-cold springs crept in under beds of the cleanest sphagnum moss.

Formed by nature to support a great wealth of fish life, instead of getting warmer, as most streams do in their descent, they actually grew colder clear down to tidal water. I often took midsummer temperatures in the Agawam through the "sandy stretch" down past Eagle Hill to Glen Charlie Pond, and always found the water several degrees colder downstream than upstream. It was this interesting condition that made these Cape streams possible for the ever-elusive sea-run trout, for these phantom-like fish could run to tidal creeks in winter and up into cold water in stream or pond when the ocean water got too warm. So you mostly had two rather different types of trout. The ghostly wanderers from the bay that came and went like shadows in the night, but did not usually appear upstream in numbers until mid-May or later, and the longer, thinner, darker brook trout more or less independent of the sea-run habit.

Up these pearly white streams in late April, May, and June came great shoals of alewives to their spawning grounds in the ponds at the headwaters. We would stand on some bridge or near a sandy open piece of water watching with never ending fascination these mighty hosts forging up against the current, now fast, now haltingly, now in sudden panic forced back, the vanguard rushing upon the rear ranks until the whole vast army was in a turmoil and entire silvery regiments were splashing about on the sand bars, forced out of water by the pressure of their crowding companions.

We loved to see the alewives because the big seatrout followed in their wake, although it was sometimes impossible to throw a line with any chance of success until one alewife army, charging up on the flood tide, had paraded past and left a quiet interval before the next arrived.

There were other fish too, the most beautiful, as well as the rarest, the small red-fins with brilliant blood-red paddles

that we used to take occasionally in the upper Agawam along with hundreds of the common brook chub that were a positive nuisance at certain seasons. Great suckers as much as two or three pounds in weight came up the stream in May, and sometimes we would man a canoe and pole up the "sandy stretch" above Eagle Hill to try for them with a spear. These great fish always gave you a thrill, for in quick water they looked like grandpa trout. They loved the deep, still sandy pools, pools usually avoided by trout, but darting a spear at them in moving water from the bow of a canoe was far harder than it looked, and successful strikes were the exception. But it was a novel method of fishing and required pretty good team work between the spearman and the paddler.

Eels, of course, came up at times, and some of our greatest disappointments were connected with their taking, for a smallish eel on a light rod can simulate for a few moments a very heavy trout. I can scarcely attempt to describe the sensation which comes over the elated and breathless angler when his soaring hopes are shattered by a sudden view of the nasty little black head of a wriggling eel attached to his leader, the hook always swallowed in toto.

There may be better trout to eat than the native trout of Eagle Hill Brook; there may be fatter ones, whiter-sided, and more elegantly shaped; but I have never seen them. Even a little two-year-old fellow of six or seven inches has all the perfect grace of a salmon in miniature, almost the same type of coloration too, with his belly and sides so white that the pink spots are never a prominent feature. We seldom see in Eagle Hill those slim dark snaky fish that are typical of other Massachusetts and New Hampshire streams, long-headed, under-shot, with tapering bodies and wide brilliant-red spots, although dark fish do occur in Red Brook where the water is stained. The color of Eagle Hill fish was in perfect harmony with the silvery sands and brilliant white or golden-yellow pebbles that paved the floors of their home, and their rapid growth and thickly muscled bodies were made possible by a tremendous supply of food; salt water minnows, smelts, and shrimps. In the spring their stomachs were just crammed with caddis larvae, water beetles and helgramites, while in late summer they were provided with millions of young alewives caught on their first migration to the sea. These were happy, lucky trout.

I have sketched after a fashion some of the features of these lost Cape streams and hope that I have pointed out the reasons for thinking them unique. There are others somewhat similar, so I am told, on Long Island, but of them I cannot speak except at second hand.

And now let me try to convey an impression of the changing seasons on our old stream at Eagle Hill from the opening day in April to those May days, when the barren Cape uplands come to life.

There are at least three things that we go to the Cape streams for nowadays where formerly there was only one, the all-important trout. Now our first fishing day must be in part devoted to the search for arbutus which is at its best from early April to the end of that month. In severe seasons even later than that.

Thirty years ago we started fishing on April 1st and many a rough day have we waded from the "stave" mill down past Eagle Hill to the "end of fishing," our lines perhaps freezing on our reels and the northwest wind whistling across the open pine barrens. But it was always surprising to find how comparatively comfortable the temperature would feel while we were wading the stream bed sheltered from the worst of the wind. The bright spring sun shining down and glancing off the ripples had such power that toward afternoon we would find our unaccustomed winter-weakened eyes sore and tired. Something of the motion of the stream would be imparted to our tired

heads so that we felt quite dizzy and "heady" by evening.

Life along the stream was not at its best those first days, but the sheer joy of feeling your feet on the stream bottom, of stepping slowly and quietly so as to approach a well-remembered spot without kicking up a bunch of waterweeds, or disturbing the softer sand banks was more than enough excitement even though trout were scarce. There was the joy of seeing each pool again---they were every one known by name---and searching for minute over-winter changes in their depths or the set of the current under the bank.

Here a once famous trout haunt silted up with too much sand and changed into a chub or sucker hole, there a new gravelly run appearing under a maple root where was only sand before, a spot which might rush to sudden fame by holding its first fish. And then the associations of each and every turn of the river: here is "seven-trout pool" where we stood in our tracks one long-ago day and took as many beauties, one after another. There is "pounder pool," a little gravelly spring that a stranger would never think worthy of the trouble of a rather difficult cast to the left and under a maple tree; here "double-hook run," where a quarter-pounder swallowed a minnow, ran across stream and took a worm bait, and was then reeled up simultaneously by a surprised pair of anglers, both fast in the same fish.

Yes, the first day was glorious, but the big ones had not arrived and the woods were still silent except for the whistle of newly arrived field sparrows or the welcome of the chickadees. But grouse were feeding along the stream banks in goodly numbers; sufficient to warm the sportsman's heart, and they would burst away in the most tempting fashion, though if you followed this stream in November you were sure to be sadly disappointed. And if it was a warm season and the day fine, the angler might be greeted by the few liquid notes of a Wilson's thrush.

Suppose it is now a little later. We have just recovered from our astonishment at the first startling green along the edge of the Sudbury meadows, where the water drop and the new sedge is suddenly exposed as a band of blazing green. Never have we seen, never shall see, such vivid green again. Banked up against the faded brown of last year's matted skeletons of grasses it spreads away upriver a dazzling emerald strip following the windings of the stream. Each day the barren sproutclothed hills around Boston are taking on richer, more varied tints, and here and there a single tree matured beyond its fellows stands out a blushing tender kind of green. How goes it now with our little Cape rivers? What changes have these few weeks brought, what luck shall reward our trout-hungry souls?

This is to all, especially the fisherman, the most intoxicating season of the year. Against the pitch-pine and inkberry woods along the Cape roads the shadbush flowers, the common and the bronzy-leaved kinds, have appeared like magic snow we never quite know whence, so unsuspected their presence a few days before. The white oaks have scarcely changed at all since our last visit and the low shrub oaks are as bare and purple as they were a couple of weeks since.

But the stream is no longer the silent river. It is fairly bursting with the drowsy gurgling sizzle of the parulas, "chip-er-chi-er, chee-ee-ee-ee," coming from the red-budded swamp maples. The little blue and yellow creatures are flashing back and forth across the stream and now and then one alights within a few feet of the lone fisherman. The males carry on their mimic warfare at a couple of yards from his face and help to make the day eventful. These are among the first of the warblers to arrive in large numbers, and soon they are joined by great flights of redstarts, black-and-white creepers, chestnut-sided and Maryland yellowthroats, that seem to use these sheltered northpointing valleys as regular migration roads. Nowhere else in Massachusetts have I seen these particular species so concentrated as on certain parts of the Cape streams. So much so, that it used to

be a regular habit with us, after the day's trouting was over at Eagle Hill, to pole a canoe up-river and float silently down, just watching the hosts of the warbler tribe. Not a great many species would be identified on these paddles, but owing to the yet leafless trees the birds were a far more notable sight than in other places and one got much closer to them than when walking about with a pair of field glasses at home.

The great flight of parulas is largely over by the last week in May, but a goodly number remain to breed, and sometimes in June your face will collide with a tuft of usnea moss hanging over the brook, out of which there will pop a nesting warbler. A peek inside discloses a craftily concealed set of eggs in the interior of one of those gray maple beards.

Cheewinks and catbirds help to make the stream banks lively and under the pitch-pines the needles are torn aside where the industrious "ground robins" dig their hundreds of little holes. The stream banks may still look dead enough with an array of faded sweet-fern, steeple bush, and wild-rose stems, but they are not all asleep, for there now hangs over the water's edge an occasional cluster of pure white bells, the first flowers of the leather leaf or andromeda. Flowers are not plentiful in these cold-bottomed valleys, so the few violets that grow there are all the more appreciated.

The trout are come now and so are the alewives, and often the latter are so thickly concentrated in a favorite trout hole that we have to wait until they pass in order to fish in peace. Sometimes we foul-hooked one of these nervous fellows when casting for nobler quarry, and a lively run would the silvery little fish make if he was fast in the tail or belly.

In early May the water was still cold and the trout could be found in the warmer parts of the streams; those places would be deserted later on. Sometimes far upstream, where the brook was mostly pond water and had not yet been joined by many springs, it paid to fish the open, unsheltered riffles out in mid-stream, not for large fish, but for the little seven-and eight-inch beauties that were as fat as butter and as white as a ghost. Although the worm was about as deadly as any lure, a trout fin or a minnow was quite as good, and better for teasing out the larger fish. Flies were all right for the small ones out in mid-stream, but we did little with them in the deep pools or in the holes under the banks, where we had to float a bait very cautiously.

The "sandy stretch" in Eagle Hill was at its best in early May; a mile-long piece of wide river, well grown up to water weeds later on, but having the most delectable little gravelly-floored pockets here and there under the banks that we had to approach carefully, because the stream slipped along quietly here and it could easily be "riled" if one stepped in the wrong place. Just such another piece of water was the lower Monument River, a little above the tidewater, but muddier and harder to fish.

"Halfway pool," "tin-can pool," "the two islands," and "the Eagle tree," what memories do those names unfold! And here it should be recorded that Eagle Hill or Agawam River twenty-five years ago was a veritable resort for these great birds. On a fine morning in May or June when the alewives were well on the run, we could see from the cape door two or three, sometimes as many as five or six huge eagles sitting on the bare branches of the great dead white pine about a quarter of a mile up the stream. Directly below their perch the river was wide and shallow and the sand bars were covered with "herring scales" where the big birds had torn off the silver scales before bolting their breakfast. The place was well chosen, for from it they could watch the schools approaching and when a lot of black-backed herring were stranded on a sand bar they could pounce down and take as many as they wished. But now that alewives have failed to run as they used to on the Agawam, eagles have gone elsewhere, and one the striking sights of that lovely river has passed forever.

That stream was a good place to see the rare otter, and I suppose I have run across the shy beasts at least eight or ten

times in the course of many wanderings with rod and canoe --- a good many glimpses for a place only fifty miles from Boston. Once I watched a pair playing and fishing and saw one of them dive and bring up a huge red perch, when both of them swam ashore with it and disappeared in thick brush. A few deer held out in this little wilderness, and in the Falmouth woods when there were none in the rest of eastern Massachusetts; but for some reason or other we seldom saw anything but their tracks.

As you walked downstream in May ugly suckers disturbed in schools from mid-stream, dashed up on both sides, so clumsily that they often hit your boot a resounding whack. The chubs could be approached so closely that one could look right down at the little fellows while wading past, but the trout was a different matter entirely. Every now and then as you made a step forward a darting shadow broke away for the deepest edge of the river and under cover of the bank raced up abreast of you and then behind you upstream. But so many vague shadows of flitting warblers were darting back and forth on the golden stream floor that half the time you scarcely knew which were fish and which birds.

Then suddenly as you fished there came a violent pull, perhaps a pinky flash in a dark hole and an angry splash followed by a murmur of line in the ferrules, as your five feet of slack ran out. No chub this. There is a sulky pause and a worrying series of sharp tugs. You struck and turned over a pink or silver bar of flesh, all zigzagging dash and animation. Gradually you drew him up so that you could see him clearly, a ghost fish looking scarcely real or solid, poised in this colorless stream. And it was always astonishing to see how the size of fish in those Cape streams was dwarfed. They never, while at the end of the leader, looked nearly as large as they really were, although I remember waters elsewhere that dwarfed the fish instead of magnifying them. So at last when you finally made a neat swoop with the net you were a little surprised to find this ghost fish a solid body, threshing mightily amid the net strands.

May was the best month of all on most of the Cape trout waters. A typical May morning would be cold, often frosty, with perhaps a brisk breeze from the northwest. By the time the sun was up it beat warmly against the door of the camp at Eagle Hill and the newly risen, shivering campers, still half dressed, cast it open to let in the grateful rays, for it was far warmer outside than in. If the water was too cold the trouter would do well not to start before eight or nine o'clock and from then until early afternoon he would have all the best of it. Probably by eleven or twelve the wind would have shifted to a brisk southwester, coming up the river and making casting difficult, but that was the best time to take trout.

Those were no balmy inland southwesterers, but cold bracing sea-winds, ruffling up the whole length of the bay and boreal enough to hold back the vegetation all along its path. But they had desirable features in that they and the cold spring water kept the mosquitoes in check until long after fishing in the brooks around Boston became a near torture. Frosts were and are almost the rule in those valleys well into June, and I well remember an extremely severe one in July, so late that it actually withered the full-grown white oak leaves high up on the larger trees.

Quiet as those days were on the upper Agawam there would come to us in the first days of May the regular fusillades of the shooters in Hog Island Narrows intercepting the White-winged scoters or "May white wings" as they came north up the bay to fly overland across the Cape. And we sometimes took a hand in this picturesque style of shooting, now almost forgotten.

Let us get back into the stream again, pull up our boots to the limit and look expectantly down its clear windings. We walk along the pinkish-pebbly subaqueous paths that wind between great bronzy-green beds of water crowfoot gently waving to and fro in the crystal depths. I think there is no water plant so beautiful as this aquatic buttercup, for such it really is. Late in

May there peep out from among its dark leaf masses that look wholly unlike true leaves, little white flower buds which, though small, startle one, they shine so diamond-white against the rich greens. Beside this striking plant growth are the bright scarlet leaf tufts of a rush (*Juneus militaris*) that ornament the sandy or gravelly places where the current is not too swift. These patches of intense color remind one of the bright red willow rootlets that are often seen around the edges of ponds near the base of some ancient willow tree.

It would be all too easy to linger indefinitely over the fascinating advances of the Cape spring. Each time we came across the Plymouth barrens, and it used to be pretty often, new wonders were about us. The purple color of the bare shrub oaks changed to a wide-spreading coppery bronze, for these dwarf trees were now in flower and their leaves just unfolding. Even at that stage we notice frost-nipped hollows where there has been almost no change as yet. The larger white oaks shed from their three-inch leaves a tender yellow-green color and a clump of small poplars have a bright silvery sheen by contrast. Little dwarfish cherries are in a burst of white blossom along the roadsides and the pitchpines with their two or three inches of new growth look yellower than a month ago.

Now if you come with me to the top of Eagle Hill where the old camp still stands, sixty or seventy feet above the stream, and if you look north up-river past the Eagle tree, the wealth of color is simply dazzling. For the maples have spread their scarlet seed-wings and blaze as in the autumn, while some of the new shrub oak leaves are a most amazing carmine or deep purplish magenta. Among these blood-red trees mingle delicate-leaved birches and against it all stand out the larger pines, solemnly black-green along the edge of the river.

It is not my idea to say much about the actual fishing for Cape trout, but to try to create a picture of a typical Cape stream at different seasons of the year, with the shrubs and trees and bird life that were so highly characteristic. But as long as we have slipped unaware into the subject of fishing it might be noted that although some Cape streams were almost created for the fly fisherman, with broad shallows open to the sky, and little gravelly holes under either bank, it was seldom that we could get the best fish without bait. Scores of times I have fished with a fly when trout were rising everywhere but have only been able to take an occasional small one, while a rod following close behind with a seductive worm, a "minnow", or perhaps a cross-cut section of a "scaled" herring, would be having remarkable luck.

Of course we could sink our flies with split shot, run them deep under the banks and take a good many medium-sized fish, but that is scarcely fly fishing, and if you have lost caste to that extent you might as well get the satisfaction of knowing that you are armed correctly for the big ones. True, down in the lower tidal waters large trout will in certain places rise well to the fly, yes, almost out into the open salt water, among the waving beds of eel grass, but that is only for a few short weeks in early spring. To prove this I could take you down to Amos's Landing on the Mashpee River and paddle downstream of the low tide, fishing the open places in the eel grass with a fly. It was something of a sensation when first we tried it, to take a beautiful silvery sea-run fish right out of salt water with Poponossett Bay in sight.

It seems quite certain that originally all these Cape trout ran down to brackish creeks after spawning in October, or possibly at times upstream to natural ponds. I am certain this must have been so in such streams as Eagle Hill, Tihonet, and Maple Springs. For I have very carefully fished and examined almost with a microscope the whole of Eagle Hill in January and have never seen the slightest evidence of fish life; and during one spring when a certain fish-way was out of commission below Glen Charlie, not one single trout appeared until fish navigation was made possible around the middle of May. But on the other

hand, if you placed a few thousand quarter-pound hatchery trout in the stream in late summer or autumn you would find a good many of them there on April 1st the following spring, but what a contrast they made to the beautiful fat silvery native fish. For these strangers were seedy-looking, and black with uncovered ragged gills and a half starved expression. They had not learned to forage or to migrate, and I always felt that most of them had come to grief in some way or another, for we never derived the slightest benefit by stocking a stream like Eagle Hill where the trout were free to go to the sea. This does not mean that the present-day streams, cranberry bogs, reservoirs and what not are not benefited by stocking and screening - - quite the opposite; they can only be maintained by stocking, since the old spawning places are ruined, but it was quite evident that few hatchery trout acquired the migratory habit soon enough to save themselves from a kind of slow starvation.

The upper parts of some Cape streams were naturally almost troutless owing to the warm waters which flowed out of such ponds as Half-Way, Mashpee, Great Herring, and others. And yet before these upper waters grew too warm in May or early June we could often take trout in places where they only lived a short season. It is possible that some trout made their homes deep down around cold springs, even in those pickerel infested lakes, for it was well known that along certain stretches of the shore of Mashpee Lake a fair string of fish could sometimes be taken on a fly in March or April by simply wading alongshore in two or three feet of water.

Probably under primitive conditions pickerel were not especially destructive to trout in the cooler, rapid parts of the Cape rivers, but now that their courses are interrupted by dams and flowage, the fresh-water sharks have not only grown more plentiful but seem to have increased in size. The original brook pickerel as I knew them in Eagle Hill thirty years ago were small, harmless fellows not over one-quarter of a pound in weight, usually much less, but the new lake formed by the Glen Charlie dam produced an entirely different type of pickerel that at once began to ruin the trout fishing.

It was always a thing to wonder at, even in the old days, to see the number of trout in that stream that bore marks of having been wounded by pickerel, probably on their way through the Wareham ponds in early spring. Sometimes a complete pickerel tooth pattern was printed on one side of a fresh-caught trout, and you could almost estimate the size of the pickerel that had made this unsuccessful onslaught.

The wonder is that any small trout lived to complete the journey; and I can only suppose that they must have passed up that three-mile battle front either very rapidly or by night, when the sun-loving pickerel was less actively on feed.

And how about size of trout the eager angler will ask? Well, the typical "salter" was a fish of a pound to one and a quarter pounds. Fish over one and a half were large fish even in the old days. My largest was a trout of three pounds even, taken in the Monument River just beside a steam dredger while the Cape Cod canal was building. There is a record of a fish of three pounds six ounces taken from the Tihonet waters, and rumors of four-pound fish are still to be heard. At Eagle Hill the largest I ever weighted was just two and a quarter, and a fish over one and a half was rare indeed in that stream.

Nearly a hundred years ago when Jerome Smith wrote his natural history of the fishes of Massachusetts, about the same weights for "salters" are given for these very rivers. Three pounds was considered "a very large fish" though a fabulous weight of "nearly five pounds" is mentioned by that not too reliable author.

Now if we wish we will go up the Mashpee River and start in fishing at Asher's path, where generations of trout anglers have passed before us. Marshpee, as Smith used to call it. There we would carefully "scale" a fresh-caught "herring" and divide

it into silvery chunks by making three length-wise cuts and lots of crosscuts to provide the time-honored lure, in use for a hundred years, and heaven only knows how much longer. I could point out the various shady "hides" built at the angles of the brook in order to coax the big trout to come up river. With a line about two feet long and a stiff-tipped rod the novice could learn the Indian method of teasing out "salters" by running the bait up and down far under the "hide" and jerking it up against the current with short rapid strokes. For the larger salters are not often found feeding out in the stream and nearly always lie well under the deepest shade, where you must present the bait absolutely at their noses and in such a way as to wake them up and arouse their appetites. At the same time you must learn to shake off innumerable eight - or nine-inch trout that fairly swarm in this brook and are so voracious that you can take them almost between your feet as you stand at the head of a pool.

Not sporty fishing you will say. Perhaps not, but a "salter" is a wild trout with five times the struggle of a mountain-bred fish; and when you land him, and you often don't, you feel as elated as if you had a salmon.

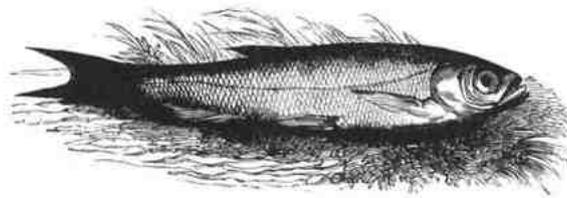
Such trout are too good to throw into a pan to be frizzled up with a lot of oily-tasting lard or bacon. Take one of three-quarters of a pound weight up to one and one-half pound or so, split him and broil him, and if he is a fresh-run "salter", you will never want to eat trout "camp fashion" again. For those fish just up from the sea are as pink and firm of flesh as any salmon, taste as good as a fresh-run grilse and ought to be treated as well in the kitchen. And they are splendid baked "a la Mashpee" in a pan of deep fat with all "innards" intact.

And here let me throw in a word of caution. If you want your trout, any trout, to taste as well when you get them home as they did when you cooked them in camp, follow this. It took me ten years to find out this simple fact myself, although a moment's thought ought to have sufficed. And here is the point. Never pack your fish in sphagnum moss, tempting and cool as it always looks, unless it is such a hot day that you simply do not dare to put them unprotected into your creel. And what is more, don't carry them home packed in this way. By preference wrap each fish carefully in a piece of clean paper and then surround the lot with cracked ice, using the moss around it, that is if you are going to submit your fish to a long journey.

The fact is that if fresh trout are packed for any length of time in actual contact with moss they will acquire a muddy or slightly cellar-like flavor which is very disagreeable to some palates, though others quite as well educated do not seem to notice the difference at all. Some folks take it for granted that trout are good just because they are trout. Hence the idiotic demand for liver-fed hatchery fish that will scarce stand comparison to a sculpin!

But I am wandering more and more from the subject, if indeed I ever had one when I began this paper. It were best not to dwell too long on the advancing season for the sensation, one might almost say the astonishment of the budding time is replaced by a less exciting period. Vegetation comes then to a kind of stasis, mosquitoes swarm about the fisherman and numerous quawks croak and squabble over the spent and drifting alewives. That is a season to fish more than it is to admire, and since this in not so much of fish as fishing places, we will leave the valley until the next April

A SPORTSMAN'S SCRAPBOOK  
by John C. Phillips, 1928



## ~~Antiquity of The Fishing Reel~~

Editor *Forest and Stream*.

~~In that incomparable work "Sport with Gun and Rod" there is an article by the editor, Prof. Alfred M. Mayer, entitled "On the Invention of the Reel."~~

~~Prof. Mayer states the first mention of the reel that he has been able to find is in Barker's "Art of Angling," London, 1651. There is no mention of the reel in the first edition of Walton, 1653, but he refers to it in the second edition, 1655, as something used by others, although he seems to have had but a slight personal knowledge of its use. The American editor of Walton, Dr. Bethune, says in a footnote in the American edition of 1847 (for my copy of which I am indebted to Prof. Mayer) that "the history of the reel is a fine subject for the angling archaeologist. Its origin is as yet in deep obscurity." During the past summer I cut from a newspaper a slip, the contents of which go to show that the reel antedates Barker's mention of it at least 600 years and seems to lift its origin from obscurity. I was so interested in the newspaper cutting that I neglected to note the paper from which I took it, but think it was the *American Art Journal*. This is it:~~

~~"In some notes upon an exhibition of antiquities, which was opened in Tokio on the 1st of November, † the Japan Mail~~

~~writes: "There is one room, the contents of which alone will amply repay a visit. Its walls are entirely covered with pictures by the old Chinese masters. Two of them, gems from an antiquarian standpoint, hang inside a case which stands at the entrance. They are by painters of the Sung period - Baian and Riushomen - and, apart from their merits as works of art, one of them established the fact that reels were used by Chinese anglers in the eleventh century. What is there that Chinese civilization did not possess?"~~ Since first reading the above extract I have but little more than glanced at the American and English angling journals, and it is possible that mention has already been made therein of the fact quoted, still I trust it may prove interesting and novel to some, at least, of your readers. If the writer in the Japan Mail had given a description of the reel of the eleventh century as it appeared when delineated by Mr. Gaian or Mr. Riushomen, he would perhaps have gratified an angler's natural curiosity, but had he done so there is no guarantee that the reel would not have been patented in America inside of a month thereafter.

~~A. N. Cheney,~~

~~†1885 probably, as I cut the extract from the paper early in 1886.~~