

Trout Tale 1

My favorite fish is a trout. They are beautiful, they fight hard, they can be wily and hard to catch, and they taste great when prepared properly with butter and lemon. I've caught many types of trout, in many locations, and under many different conditions. I love sharing fish stories about them because recalling the circumstances, the weather, and most importantly, matching wits with a fish you've caught, makes the stories more vivid and enjoyable.

I have three favorite stories I wish to share in this series -- the first in a small (Two inches deep, six inches wide) tributary to the Poudre River high in the Rockies west of Ft. Collins, Colorado; the second in the upper reaches of the Laramie River before it flows northward across the Colorado/Wyoming border; and the third on the Colorado River about fifty miles downstream from Lees Ferry, but above the Little Colorado, in northern Arizona.

I don't like large rivers for catching trout. Maybe I'm afraid of slipping on mossy rocks and drowning in fast-moving water when my hip boots might fill with water and drag me under. And, I don't like fishing lakes of any size. They remind me of fishing farm ponds when I was a kid that were boring.

What I do like are small creeks and streams that have lots of pools, riffles, rocks, and logs for trout to hide around. Fishing small water allows one to match wits with a fish. You must sneak up on them because it's easier for a trout to hear and see you coming in small streams.

Placing a fly in just the right spot in a small stream, however, requires patience, precision, and knowledge about where trout like to hang out. They like to hide behind rocks and logs where the current is slower, under riffles where they think they are hidden, and along the edges and overhangs of a creek.

Approaching these key spots may require you to crawl over boulders and around trees while trying your best to make no sound or reveal yourself to the fish by sight or shadow. And remember, the water refracts the light, so they see you at a low angle. Fishing small water is much like hunting deer. You must always consider how the fish may sense your presence.

Now, to my first story. I decided one Saturday I wanted to try fishing some small water in the high country of Colorado, just below the Never Summer Range in the Rocky Mountain National Park, in the Poudre watershed outside the Park. I drove some 20 miles up a dirt road from the Poudre River and crossed a small stream with just a trickle of water. From the road I could see the tiny stream in the valley a half mile below leading to some beaver ponds. This was what I was looking for -- small water but containing pools that might contain some nice-sized trout.

Since most of the stream was small and the terrain very rough I chose to just wear my leather boots, forgo rubber boots, and leave my net and creel behind. I walked downstream to the beaver ponds and fished for about an hour. I didn't raise a single fish. Strange. It was such attractive water. There must have been a lot of fishermen through this area to clean out all the fish.

So, I decided to continue down the tiny trickle of water and, hopefully, find a small pool somewhere that contained some nice-sized trout. I walked for a good mile downhill through some rough terrain. There wasn't enough water in the little trickle to float a fly, let alone support a trout.

Just before I gave up and headed back to my car, I saw a patch of green bushes ahead, through which the stream flowed. When I got closer I could see that there was a pool about the size of a bathtub surrounded by the bushes. It was going to be very difficult to dangle a fly over the small opening to the water. At least, I thought, very few fishermen would likely have bothered to have walked this far to get to such a small pool.

I carefully approached the opening, leaned over the pool as far as possible, and carefully let my fly drop into the darkness below. I'm not sure if the fly even reached the surface of the water before I had a tremendous tug on my line. Suddenly there was splashing and flipping and jerking of my pole.

I was so surprised, it took me a few seconds to respond. The bushes were so thick over the pool, I saw there was no graceful way to land a fish. I hadn't brought my net to conserve weight, so, my only choice was to lift my fish straight up through the bushes as gently as possibly, so it wouldn't break free.

I pulled carefully upward as the fish flopped around. I was finally able to get it above the bushes and onto the grass. Laying at my feet was a beautiful 3-pound rainbow trout. I was amazed that a 3-pound trout could have come from a pool that probably held less than a hundred gallons of water!

But, now I had a decision to make. Was I going to return this beautiful trout to the pool or take it with me for dinner? One problem. Oh, ye of little faith. I had not really believed I would catch a sizeable trout in the beaver pond above, so I hadn't brought either my net or my creel. I would have to carry this beautiful fish back to the car in my hand.

I made my decision. I just couldn't leave such a trophy. I had to take it with me to show Jeannette how beautiful it was before eating it for dinner. But, I miscalculated the time it would take for me to climb back uphill in such rugged terrain. By the time I made it to the car, I wished I had returned the trout to the stream. I was fatigued to the point of exhaustion and my fish, which had died mercifully fast, was so desiccated in the heat and dryness, that it was no longer beautiful. We ate it for supper, but it was not the trophy I had expected.

I did learn one very valuable lesson from this experience, however. Never fish downhill! Always climb uphill in unfamiliar country and never leave your net and creel behind.