

The big brookie

A lifelong memory

By LEN HARRIS

I almost always fish with spinners and cast upstream and bring the spinners back to me. I have through the years been told that fishing with spinners is for children and that I should kick off the training wheels and graduate to a more difficult method of chasing trout. The story below is a true teaching tool.

I stumbled upon this sweet hide for brook trout. My typical approach was not available. A down tree at the bottom of the hole stopped me from getting in there stealthily. The underbrush on both sides of the hole made it very hard to get in there without spooking all of the brook trout that were laying in there.

I sat there for quite some time assessing the water and its nuances. The water was crystal clear and the trout were very spooky. I like to assess a hole like a jigsaw puzzle. This one was a little difficult.

As I watched, I noticed a couple bigger brook trout going up into the broken water at the top of the run feeding. I was certain that this would be a one trout only hole. The second that I hooked a fish the rest would be alerted and it would be done.

Spotting the 'Wow' fish

There were a couple brook trout in there that were big and there was one in there that was a 'Wow' fish. I thought it might be a brown trout due to it being so much bigger than the rest. After a little more watching, I decided it was a brook trout and it was pushing my personal best.

Blasting through the brush on the sides of the hole was a no go. A stealthy downstream cast was the only answer to the question. I watched where the big trout kept going and she went right to the middle of the fast lane at the top of the hole. I patterned her for about 15 minutes and she kept doing it, so I thought I knew where she would be.

The water was so clear I decided to size down my spinner. I also decided a new spinner was too flashy to work properly. I picked one from my box that I had used before. The blade was a little duller and it would not spook the hole.

I looped around the hole and crawled the last 15 feet to the opening in the brush. Prior to me beginning my crawl, I had decided my cast needed to be a short one and in the fast water just below the initial lip in the hole.

I casted from my belly and just held the spinner in the current just at the edge of the current step drop. The current kept the spinner spinning exactly where I wanted it and it was hammered within about two seconds. I got up quickly to battle the trout because I needed the leverage on what seemed to be a decent-sized trout.

My first instinct told me that the fish was good sized and was probably a brown. It was in the broken water, so I could not see it at first and I nonchalantly battled it. I then saw a red and white fin. I knew it was a brook trout and got quite excited then. I loosened my drag and battled her into my net.

Yes, I netted a female brook trout in my steelhead net. I looked at her in awe for a couple seconds. I had no measuring tape with me. I sat right down in the stream to revive her. I set up my camera on a timer and tripod hastily. She blasted out of my hands and promptly swam downstream into the downed tree.

The brook trout population in my home waters is quite low and this jewel of a brook trout ended my outing for the day. There was more stream ahead of me but I thought: "Why mess with perfection?"

I thought about if I fished a different method how I would fish it. My friends, Andy and John, could have handled casting downstream with their fly rod and used a dry or a nymph and caught her. My buddy Joe 'dirt' Chadwick could have caught her floating a crawler to her. All methods could have scored and none were using training wheels.

All the way walking back to the car, I was smiling and thinking how lucky I was and how beautiful the brook trout truly are. They were my father's favorite species of trout and he held them in high regard. It will be a lifelong memory for me for sure.



LEN USED a tripod and timer to capture this memory. Hey, remember the General Inland Fishing season opens Saturday, May 6, in Wisconsin.



MASSIVE DESTRUCTION OCCURRED on Thursday, April 27, when a BNSF train derailed on tracks along the Mississippi River. Combined, 20 cars and two locomotives left the tracks in the derailment. In this drone photo, railroad cars are shown partially in the river to their right, while efforts to build an approach to the tracks from Highway 35 are visible at the top of the photo. Photo by LaCrosse Aerial Photography (Facebook Page)

Derailment in DeSoto

Mishap sends 20 rail cars off tracks and four BNSF employees are hurt

By GILLIAN POMPLUN & CHARLEY PREUSSER

The derailment of a south-bound Burlington Northern Santa Fe train just south of DeSoto on Thursday, April 27, at 12:15 p.m. sent 20 railroad cars and two locomotives off the tracks.

Many rail cars and the shipping containers strapped to them slumped into the adjacent water. Four injured BNSF workers were rescued by the responding Ferryville Fire Department—none suffered life-threatening injuries.

As of Sunday, April 30, train traffic was resumed, according to Crawford County Emergency Management (CEEM) Director Jim Hackett.

"Burlington Northern Santa Fe has been cleared to resume rail traffic by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)," Hackett said.

The county's director of emergency management also communicated in a Facebook post on Sunday, April 30, that Highway 35 from DeSoto south to County B is expected to remain closed to traffic until at least Wednesday, May 3.

As of Monday, May 1, there is no word on when the Iowa and Wisconsin Departments of Transportation (DOT) will reopen Highway 82 across what is known locally as the 'Lansing Dike.'

Derailed containers from the DeSoto incident, which were reported to contain paint, floated away in the Mississippi River, passed underneath bridges along the Dike last week, before becoming mired along the shoreline to the south.

On the day of the derailment, flooding on the Mississippi River was at levels qualifying for a 'top five flood levels' from LaCrosse to Prairie du Chien. At Genoa, the flood was #4 at 635.72 feet, a level not seen since April 20, 1969 at 635.24 feet.

Just down river at Lansing, the flood level was at 19.61 feet, on its way to a #4 flood at 19.7 feet, a level not seen since April 21, 1969, at 18.88 feet. At Lynxville, the flood level was at 630.26, on its way to a #4 flood at 630.4 feet, a level not seen since April 22, 1969, at 629.42 feet. And at McGregor, Iowa (Prairie du Chien), the level was at 22.91 feet, on its way to a #3 flood at 22.9 feet, a level not seen since April 20, 2001, at 23.75 feet.

In addition to having the Mississippi River to its west, the railroad tracks on the raised bed have a waterway to the east separating it from Highway 35. The rail cars involved were carrying lithium ion batteries, paint and other cargo.

Was flooding a cause?

On the evening of Thursday, April 27, DeSoto Fire Chief Chris Mussatti stated, in an interview with television media, that he does not believe the derailment was caused by flooding.

"If it had been caused by flooding, then we would also have been having problems with Highway 35," Mussatti said.

Despite those claims from the chief, it should be noted that a derailment just south of the current incident occurred in 2016, when Rush Creek jumped out of its banks and rushed across Highway 35 with substantial depth and current, taking out a BNSF trestle, but it did not damage the roadway.

Furthermore, local roadways of all sizes have often survived feet of flooding for lengthy periods of time, with little or no consequences.

Massatti said that his primary concern after arriving on scene was to determine what the contents of the derailed cars were. He said local agencies did their best, and "waited for the cavalry to come."

"Our local fire department doesn't have the capacity to fight a toxic spill," Massatti said. "The only contents in the cars that could have been explosive were oxygen cylinders, but fortunately no explosion happened."

Massatti recalled four other derailments along the river since about the 1990s, but said that responding to this one was trickier because of its location.

Images captured by LaCrosse Aerial Photography clearly show a section of the tracks closer to the river with only water beneath it. That image was captured on day two of the incident – Friday, April 28. The image also reveals water under the tracks that the derailed train was traveling on and two of the derailed train cars.

According to Hackett, neither Crawford County nor the State of Wisconsin has authority to shut the railroad tracks down in the event of flooding. The tracks are located on private property owned by BNSF. The FRA sets the standards by which the railroad company must inspect their tracks, when trains can be run on the tracks, and when the tracks must be shut down.

"BNSF was monitoring and inspecting lines through Crawford County during the flood," Hackett explained. "The FRA is doing a full investigation into the derailment."

Hackett stated that, according to the FRA, inspections (of the tracks in Crawford County) were completed and

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GOVERNOR EVERS, along with State Senator Brad Pfaff and State Representative Loren Oldenburg, visited the site of the BNSF train derailment on Friday, April 28. Evers commended the response of local first responders, and said that "they'd done just what they trained to do in a situation like this."

Don't miss Little Britches Rodeo

The Annual Little Britches Rodeo will be held May 13 and 14 at the Crawford County Fairgrounds, Highway 131 in Gays Mills.

4-D barrel racing competition will be held on Saturday night, May 13. Registration starts at 5:30, exhibition at 6 p.m. and jackpot barrel racing at 7 p.m.

Everyone is invited to compete. The entry fee is \$20, \$5

for exhibition and \$5 office fee. A negative Coggins is required. There will be added money.

The rodeo will start on Saturday and Sunday at 9 a.m. There is an admission of \$5 each day.

There will not be any nut-ton bustin' this year. Come on out and watch contestants from the ages of 6 to 18 compete in events such as barrel racing, pole bending, calf roping, chute dogging, bull riding, bareback and saddle bronc riding, team roping and goat undecorating. There will be lunch available on the grounds.

For info contact call 608 606-3466.



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