

OUTDOORS

Trout country is a tranquil escape

I FLIPPED a chunk of crawler toward the undercut bank and let the current do its thing, naturally, as the line peeled off the spinning reel until the bait reached its destination.

The scribbler was working a deep hole on a sharp corner of the Deerskin River, trying to get the crawler to the same level as the big brookies I hoped were hiding under that bank.

It's truly an adventure when you hit a tranquil national forest

trout stream just after dawn — the gurgling waters, songbirds, waterfowl, distant loons and the occasional calls of a pileated woodpecker being the only audible sounds.

Just the sound of trickling water is enough to mesmerize an angler, soothing the spirit and that part of us that longs for wild places with no human distractions.

But there's also those beautiful, tasty brook trout, and only seconds passed before one grabbed the crawler tail that had been waving in the current in a teasing manner.

My favorite hits are the ones where there is no chewing, which can indicate a smaller fish, and where there is nothing but heavy, slow head movement showing on the rod tip. Those are generally the bigger fish, and they seem to be more active this time of year before the sun hits the stream.

After a few seconds, it was time for a mighty hook-set with the five-foot ultralight rod, which doubled over as the weight of the trout and the current worked against me.

Nice fish, I thought, still trying to get it out of the hole and near the surface to get a better look at it. Wide flashes of its silvery side suggested it was a dandy brook trout, so I moved downstream with a net

in hand in hopes that it would stay away from wood and bottom debris just long enough.

Eventually I slid a net under an 11-inch brookie, a native with a dark green back and a bright orange belly. The sides of a brookie are a mix of green and silver, decorated with little red dots inside slightly larger blue dots.

These fish are so remarkably colored that it appears they were hand-painted by God Himself.

They have a green camouflage back, an orange belly and fins you'd expect on a saltwater fish — deep orange offset by black-and-white striping. Few fish species, at least in freshwater, can rival the beauty of a native brook trout.

The scribbler was once again escaping the boat traffic, noise and congestion that can come with lake fishing this time of year, as the heart of the skiing, tubing and general water recreation season is in high gear.

This stream is some of the wildest country in Wisconsin, as I've run across bears, fawns, strutting grouse, beavers and otters. With the Blackjack Springs Wilderness Area fronting the river's south shore, there is added tranquility you can't find everywhere.

I was late in my return to the Deerskin this year, so I missed the big mayfly hatches that often occur in late June and early July.

You can always tell when it's mayfly season, for the spiderwebs strung across nearby branches will hold their captive insects for days.

Few rivers I've ever fished have the sand and gravel bottom of the Deerskin, allowing an old crawler angler like myself to fish downstream without kicking up a bunch



The brook trout is as beautiful as the back country streams that harbor them, and those such as the Deerskin, the Elvov and the Brule cut through a national forest that is full of wild things. —Photo By The Author

of mud and silt. I fish with spinners from time to time, but prefer to float pieces of crawler into holes and undercut banks.

And when the weight and drag of the bait disappears, you realize that it either caught up on a snag or was grabbed by a trout. So you reel up the slack and carefully try to figure out which event occurred.

On this brief morning trip the scribbler caught about 10 trout, keeping a limit of three decent fish for the frying pan. But that's not what the adventure was all about, even though you can't beat the flavor of a native brook trout.

This trip was about taking a break; doing something different in some of the most scenic country in

Wisconsin. There's just something about trout country that no other fishing seems to offer — so remote and secluded. It was just me, the walls of the river valley and a gin-clear stream embraced by tag elder.

As the years pass, my appreciation of the Deerskin River deepens. It's a rare find to have a gravel-bottom river just 12 minutes from the office, in a system where the water is so cold it will numb your warm-weather hands.

The water is so clear you can see every color in the gravel on those fast-water stretches. And it's a long river, the good trout stretches going for miles. Yet so many anglers overlook it.

And if you spend enough

time and enough years, the river becomes an old friend — a story to tell and a fish to remember from just about every bank and corner.

I recall that almost two decades ago, on a unique corner with a large rock in the stream, I did battle with a 13-inch brookie on a lunch-hour outing. It was overcast, and it's no secret that big fish, in general, are more active under those conditions.

Whether you are stressed by a hectic society, a tough work schedule or too much activity on your favorite lake, the trout stream is a great place to find some relief.

There's no better place to spend some quality time, catch a few fish and just take in whatever Mother Nature has to offer.

In the Outdoors

By Kurt Krueger



Vilas, Oneida counties quarantined due to moth caterpillar infestations

Large areas of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF) are being impacted by spongy moth caterpillars, including Vilas and Oneida counties.

In addition to the two local quarantines, the current infestation has placed the following eight counties in the CNNF under quarantine for spongy moths: Ashland, Bayfield, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, Price and Taylor. The quarantine aims to help reduce the spread of the spongy moth.

Spongy moth caterpillars have a voracious appetite for deciduous tree leaves and have left many areas nearly leafless, especially on the Washburn and Lakewood-Laona ranger districts. In some places, there are currently great expanses of leafless trees in areas that would typically be lush with green leaves.

A single spongy moth caterpillar will eat a square yard of foliage of green leaves in its lifetime of just a few weeks, requiring trees to regrow leaves in order to convert carbon dioxide and water into sugars and oxygen. The trees will re-flush new leaves; however, some mortality may result in trees of lower vigor due to the stresses of defoliation, and the recent drier-than-usual conditions in the North Woods.

Most of this mortality will be seen in oak trees, especially in sandy, drought-prone areas. Spongy moth caterpillars also feed on aspen, birch, and nearly 300 other species of trees and shrubs.

"Please, do your part in helping to reduce the risk of spreading the spongy moth by



Large areas of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest are being impacted by spongy moth caterpillars, which has led to a quarantine in Vilas, Oneida and eight other counties in efforts to stop the spread of these voracious moth caterpillars. —Photo Courtesy of Steven Katovitch of the Forest Service

adhering to quarantine guidance and following USDA Forest Service firewood rules," urged CNNF Forest Supervisor Jenn Youngblood. "It is so important that we each do all that we can to help slow the spread of threats to the health of our forest and all that is dependent upon it."

Landowners can aid the fight against the spongy moth by collecting caterpillars, pupae, and egg masses on their property, while wearing gloves. These should then be dropped into soapy water or a bleach solution. Spongy moth caterpillars search out places to pupate underneath loose tree bark flaps, under the eaves of cabins and sheds, or under picnic tables.

"This will help to reduce next year's caterpillar hatch," said USDA Forest Service Silviculturist John Lampereur.

Pathogens that are naturally present in the forest are a

key factor in the fight against the spongy moth.

"Many of the natural pathogens that can help reduce the numbers of spongy moth caterpillars grow best in moist weather conditions, and right now we are experiencing drier-than-usual conditions," Lampereur said. "It is hoped that, next spring, spongy moth caterpillar populations will be greatly reduced as they ingest these pathogens."

In the coming days, visitors to the CNNF will encounter less and less spongy moth caterpillars. Those who find a spongy moth caterpillar should avoid touching them however as the hairs can cause a skin rash, welts, or other irritation. Rubbing alcohol can help to remove the hairs and chemical irritants from exposed skin. At this time, spongy moth caterpillars have already started turning into pupae that will become

moths, which do not cause a serious health risk to people.

Since 1869, when the spongy moth was first located in Massachusetts, the moth has spread to 20 eastern and Midwestern states. There is potential for this moth to spread across the entire continental United States.

Noticeable increases in spongy moths occur approximately once every 10 years. Outbreaks tend to run for two years, which means it is possible there will be heavy moth populations again next spring.

Information about how landowners can help reduce spongy moth outbreaks is available online at spongy-moth.wi.gov/pages/home.aspx. More information regarding the current spongy moth quarantine can be found online at datcp.wi.gov/pages/programs_services/smquarantineregs.aspx.

Fishing with the Guides

By George Langley



Weeds still holding walleyes, crappies

July is officially half over, along with our summer recreation season. Right now we're seeing some great morning and evening fishing, with the comfortable temperatures and lower boating traffic that go along with those times. Stick to deep weeds or deep water during the daytime. Water levels are holding and weed growth is good. Temps are holding in the upper 70s to low 80s on most bodies of water, but vary depending on rain and nighttime temps.

Walleye fishing has been pretty good for this time of year. Most fish are being found near the deep edges of the weeds. As we said, mornings and evenings are best, but you can find some fish during the daytime also. Fish close to the bottom wherever you are fishing. The weed edges are roughly 8' on the darker water lakes and 12-14' on the deeper lakes. All live bait is working now. If you are using crawlers, use half crawlers for best effect.

Bass fishing is at its summer best now, with the smallies out on rocks and feeding daily on crayfish. We have also been getting some on Rapalas twitched on calm days over those rocks. Leeches are the best live bait for these guys. Largemouth are definitely in the slop and can be in water as shallow as 3'. Plastics and spinnerbaits are working best for these fish. Crawlers will work, but the bluegills will drive you crazy.

Northerns are in the weeds and hitting well. Look for areas of deeper grass weeds for best production. Pike chubs are best for these fish, but artificials such as Mepps and Johnson Silver Minnows work well.

Muskie action has been decent with some big fish being caught throughout the area. Overall, bucktails are working best but all bait types work at this time of year. Night fishing is productive right now. It is a great time of the year to use surface baits, if your heart can stand it. There's nothing like seeing and feeling a hit on a surface bait!

Panfish action has been great, especially for crappies and bluegills. The 'gills are in the shallower weeds, and the crappies are in the deeper weeds. Both are providing great daily action for anglers of all ages. You'll also find perch in the deeper weeds and outside mud edges.

Despite the rain we're expecting, it should be a great week on the water.

Good luck and good fishin'!

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