



“FISHING & BOATING MEMORIES LAST A LIFETIME” *Contest Winning Entries*

Home Waters

by Brian E. Wagner

Everyone has a home water, and mine was the upper reaches of Bushkill Creek in Northampton County. In the late 1960s, the upper Bushkill of my youth rolled mostly through woodland surrounded by farmland. Most of the water was open to fishing, and many of the good spots had names associated with them, like the “Penny Hole.” Some were associated with landmarks, like Heyer’s Mill and Hahn’s Bridge. Others had less proper names, but meaningful nonetheless, like “the cement block.”

I have many fond memories of fishing these stretches of water with my father. Before opening day, we would always go to the creek and toss bits of bread to the trout, watching them churn through the water. This ritual made the expectation of opening day much more exciting.

My first trout was most likely caught at the Stockertown Rod & Gun Club pond. Every year our family would pack the fishing gear and lawn chairs into the car and head to the children’s fishing contest. My mother would watch and make several trips to the concession stand for us, while my father would help cast and bait the hook. I remember doing quite well fishing a worm off of a dropper, which forever became known as the “pond rig.”

My later teen years were still spent on the Bushkill, but my angling experiences were expanding. With my father I fished many other streams both in the Lehigh Valley and in the Poconos, and I had my first taste of fly fishing then, and gained a friend with whom I’ve shared many angling adventures. The opening day of trout season seemed to grow in magnitude with each passing year as now Al and I would work our magic on the upper Bushkill. The scouting trips were more extensive and intensive. For several years we would hold an all-night vigil next to the stream in Al’s rustic green 1968 Ford Grand Torino station wagon. We weathered snow, cold, and flood.

I recall one year in which it was raining all day and night before the opener. Al and I drove along the stream that evening to monitor the flow, which was steadily rising. We decided to wait it out, so we pulled off the road near Hahn’s Bridge. Still in darkness, in the early morning hours, I decided to venture outside the Grand Torino. Much to my amazement, the water was almost up to the car door. Dismayed, we decided the stream would be unfishable and returned home before daybreak. Still determined not to miss out on opening day, we both returned to the stream around 8:00 a.m. and fished the “penny hole,” a long, deep run that

we deemed fishable. We didn’t catch any trout that morning, but we would not be denied the chance.

During the last couple of years, I’ve had the enjoyment of sharing some angling experiences with several friends from work. Never having many chances to fish from a boat, I was really thrilled when the opportunity arose to fish Beltzville Lake. I never saw three men fish a lake with as much determination as we did that brisk September morning. We threw every piece of hardware our tackle boxes had to offer, trying to lure some lunkers from below with no luck. Finally, fishing near the breast of the dam, we started picking up fish. They weren’t the lunkers we had envisioned in the morning, but were, instead, small panfish taken on meal worms. We had a terrific time! I must dutifully note here that the captain of the boat did catch a nice smallmouth on a shiner.

On several occasions I have had the privilege of fishing a private trout pond near the base of Blue Mountain. The owner of the pond was hungry for a trout dinner and I was simply eager to get a crack at some rainbows from stock he had put in over 15 years before. There was an occasional rise, but because I was using spinning gear, it did me no good. Eventually a trout took my tiny spinner, and the fish danced on the water for me. After landing it, I cleaned the fish right away and noticed its stomach was rock solid. I could see the fish was gorged, so I opened its stomach. Expecting to find something large like a salamander, much to my surprise, the rainbow had been feeding heavily on cinnamon ants. When I returned home I couldn’t wait to call my brother and tell him about the ants!

My memories are meeting the present. Although you might still see me on the Bushkill opening day with Al, my interests now lead me more toward wild trout and a drag-free float. I take much enjoyment from fly fishing with my brother, Randy, and his wife, Sue, and almost equal enjoyment from discussing fly fishing strategies. The winter months are spent tying flies, which now include several size 18 cinnamon ants.

As I drive along my home water, it is apparent that time has not stood still. It troubles me that future generations of anglers may not have the same opportunities that I have had. However, I have hope. Through support of conservation-minded organizations like Trout Unlimited, through cooperation with landowners, and the promotion of catch and release, our angling future can be secured. It is my wish that everyone can share in many more Pennsylvania angling memories. □



photo-courtesy of the author