

Writing Readers

The Big One I Never Caught

by William W. Phillips

When I was a young man, I kept an outdoor diary, and this incident is based on entries in that diary from 50 years ago.

One warm, sunny day in the mid-summer of a year in the 1940s, I went fishing in Lycoming Creek by myself. Lycoming Creek comes down out of Tioga County and empties into the West Branch of the Susquehanna River at Williamsport. In that year, the minimum size for trout was six inches, and the minimum size for bass was nine inches. Lycoming Creek was basically a trout stream in those days, but it also contained a good number of bass up to 12 inches.

This particular day I had bass in mind. I was using a casting rod with a level-wind reel, throwing a stubby imitation of a wounded minnow. The lure floated on its side, hung two treble hooks, and had small spinners front and back.

At that time there was a big, deep hole between Field's Station and Gray's Run in Lycoming County, right in front of someone's summer cottage. The summer cottage was unoccupied on this particular day.

Several times I had cast out as far as I could into the slow current coming into the hole. On about the fifth cast, as the lure came splashing out of the current into the standing water, I saw a huge shadow beneath it. I stuttered the retrieve, hoping it might induce a strike. It didn't, and in the clear water, lazily following the lure toward me, came the largest brown trout I have ever seen.

I was standing in knee-deep water. The trout followed the plug to within about eight feet of me. I lifted the plug out of the water and the trout just stayed there, staring at me, apparently completely unafraid. I wouldn't have been surprised if it had said, "Howdy, partner, how's the fishing?"

Its spots were as big as half-dollars. I had no way of knowing for sure, but I believe that trout was over 30 inches long. It would have weighed about 10 to 12 pounds. These estimates are based on the fact that I actually saw a 28 1/2-inch brown trout that had been caught the summer before.

After several seconds, the trout slowly turned and swam back to deep water. I just stood there for a couple of minutes. My heart was racing and the blood was pounding in my temples.

How Much Does that Trout Weigh?

The following weight estimates are based on individual fish records compiled from statewide lists of surveyed waterways, so predicted weights are averages. All weights are estimates in pounds.

Inches	Brown Trout Weight	Rainbow Trout Weight	Brook Trout Weight
7	0.14	0.15	0.13
8	0.22	0.22	0.21
9	0.29	0.29	0.29
10	0.40	0.38	0.39
11	0.52	0.51	0.53
12	0.67	0.65	0.69
13	0.83	0.88	1.00
14	1.06	1.11	1.33
15	1.33	1.31	1.87
16	1.65	1.62	2.14
17	1.94	1.90	2.59
18	2.35	2.13	3.19
19	2.83	2.60	
20	3.39	3.45	
21	3.94	3.63	
22	4.26	3.80	
23	4.92		
24	5.70		
25	5.73		
26	5.95		
27	6.19		



Then I took a deep breath and tossed the lure back out into the current, and as before, when the plug came splashing out into the clear, still water, this huge trout was following it. I don't believe it had any intention of hitting the plug. I think it was just curious. This time it followed the plug to within about 10 feet of me, so I got another good look at it in the clear water.

Again, after regarding me for a few moments, it turned and slowly swam back to deep water. It was as though it said, "Who do you think you are kidding with that fake minnie?" I never saw it again. ☐