




Ice Spoons for Spring Trout

by Vic Attardo

photos by the author



I stood on the ledge of a steep cliff above Stony Fork Creek, Tioga County, looking down at a gushing stream and an immensely deep hole beside a jumble of rocks. Beneath me, the water was pale blue and the log-size trout hanging close to the bottom, in at least 10 feet of water, just taunted me.

Spin fishing anglers were farther downstream in this long glide of a hole, but there was nothing they could do to catch these trout. The current was far too strong for any sort of normal presentation, and the anglers were too far back.

Getting up, I headed to the cabin for a short, 24-inch ice rod and some ice fishing tackle. It certainly wasn't winter, but my plan was to sit on the ledge, drop a vertical line close to the cliff and present these trout something they'd probably never seen.

Actually, this strategy was a year in the making. I had spotted large trout in this same hole the previous April. After failing to get them with a fly rod and spinning gear hardware, I came up with this unusual tactic.

On the short ice rod, I tied a 1/10-ounce tear-drop spoon, the same spoon I used through the winter to catch iced-in trout, adding a few splitshots up the line. Next, I drop casted the offering, so it landed in the deep hole about 2 yards above the trout. The current pulled the line fast but not as fast as one of the trout, which dashed out from the pack to grab the tiny spoon. Now, I had what proved to be a 16-inch Rainbow Trout on a short rod with 3-pound-test line. To eventually "land" the

About the author

Vic Attardo is from Red Hill, Montgomery County, where he served as Red Hill Borough Mayor for about 10 years. He has been writing for *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* since July 1995.

"I have a collection of Pennsylvania people and places that feel like a warm bowl of oatmeal in life's tummy. From the people, I've learned a host of fishing techniques, and from the places, I've come to see that Pennsylvania is such a wonderful and diverse state. But, I'm deeply concerned about the condition of many of our waters, the overall lowering of the water table in specific areas, the effects of fracking, and of course, the demise of the Susquehanna River," said Attardo.

Attardo recalls an experience on Presque Isle Bay, Erie County, when he was standing with waders in shallow water near the monument taking photographs of an angler bringing a bass over the side of his boat. Initially, the water was only up to his wading belt. He waded over a hole and suddenly the water was at the top of his waders and seeping in. Attardo quickly placed the camera on the boat's deck but could not board the boat without footing. He also had a rotator cuff problem and could not get the leverage he needed. Then, the boat blew off station, and he was over deep water holding onto the hull with his elbows. Despite the wading belt, the water was getting in down to his feet. For a few minutes, it was a somewhat laughable situation as he was in no immediate danger. However, the angler in the boat could not lift him over the side. In desperation, he tried putting his feet to the bottom, but there was no bottom to be found. The angler in the boat even tried putting on the trolling motor to locate shallows, but it forced Attardo's legs under the hull, and he still couldn't find bottom. Finally, the angler in the boat gripped his clothes and waders, and Attardo jumped in as much as possible. He got half-way across the deck. He remembers being yanked in like a fish the rest of the way. And, the photograph went on to be a cover shot for *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* magazine.



With the barb pressed down, an ice spoon is as easy to remove as a barbless fly.

fish, I walked downstream along the ledge to where it slanted closer to the stream surface. Then, I lifted the trout a few yards through the air.

In all, I landed three big trout this way, having had other strikes and a number of fighting losses. It was this experiment that proved to me that tiny ice jigs were a viable offering for spring trout.

Spring concerns

The problem with a lot of hardware intended for trout is that it makes too big of a splash and has too large of a profile for early season use. Stocked trout startle easily and after getting hit on the head with all the heavy stuff, they tend to shy off.

But after working on them for a couple of years with tiny ice spoons and ice jigs, both in stream and lake locations, I'm convinced that the small stuff gives me an advantage.

Two years ago, a pair of anglers at a popular spot on French Creek scoffed at me when I walked into the water with one of my short ice rods. They didn't say a thing, but I saw the looks they shared.

The waterfall chute that they were fishing held a lot of trout, but after about an hour, many of the anglers on the spot became disgruntled with the uncooperative fish and walked off.

Once again, I flipped a 1/10-ounce ice spoon, complete with a creamy larva and a tiny splitshot on 3-pound-test line, up ahead into the frothy water and, holding the rod so the line stayed nearly vertical, felt the tug of a big trout before the spoon had gone more than a few feet.

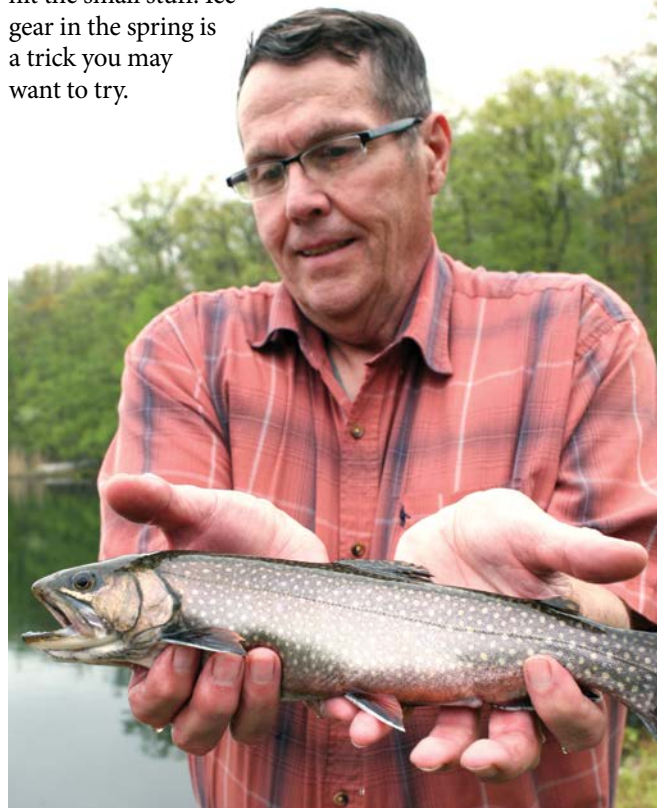
Releasing the trout, I made a second, third and fourth cast and landed some big trout. Feeling very smug, I said something like, "That's enough for today." Then, I turned and walked away.

Another way that I've found tiny ice spoons to be very useful is along a dam breast at a number of stocked state parks. In this situation, in order to get a longer cast, I employ a bobber, usually a stick slip float. The rod is a longer 5½ or

6-foot rod. Again, there are splitshots hanging on the line and a larva added to the spoon,

I get a good cast with this hardware, then slowly work the bobber back with starts and stops. When I reel line, the spoon rises up and sways back with the halt. Sometimes, I have to play with the depth position of the spoon, but usually it's between 2 and 3 feet.

Going back to the ice rod, I've even used ice spoons for Brook Trout in small streams. Once again, the splash and bait profile is not intimidating, and the Brook Trout eagerly hit the small stuff. Ice gear in the spring is a trick you may want to try.



An ice jig flipped with a short spinning rod and slip float can produce some wonderful catches.