

About 950 words

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(For Field & Stream Junior)

NOBODY TELLS YOU TO SIT STILL

Here's how to catch trout on a worm

What I liked best about fishing in running water was that I could run, too. For most of my life -- all twelve years of it -- adults had been telling me to be patient, which of course made me impatient. Here, now, was a fishing method that let me go to the fish instead of waiting for the fish to come to me. I could sneak up and down a stream, drifting my worm to trout waiting in pools and pockets of water. It was a kind of hunting, really, and that's why I loved it from the first day Mr. Abbie took me to a little meadow stream. Mr. Abbie was a neighbor who knew what trout and children and liked.

Melting snow had made the creek overflow its banks, so my feet got wet. Mr. Abbie told me to stop splashing and move quietly, because trout hear vibrations. He showed me how to creep

up to the water on my knees and dip my worm in the best places. My knees got wet too, but the trout made me forget the chill. There was at least one fish in each pool under a little waterfall. The deep water around rocks was worth trying, and so were the undercut banks on the outside of the creek's loops and bends.

I learned to flip my worm into the water a few feet upstream from a good spot. The current would carry the bait naturally to the fish, looking like a worm that got in deep trouble all by itself. Then I'd keep my eye on the end of my line, which floated well enough to serve as a sort of bobber. If the line hesitated or dipped, I'd lift my rod's tip till I could feel the faint tugs of a trout. That was the time to set the hook. At first I had the notion that I should strike as if I were swinging at a baseball. When I did that, one little fish came off my hook and flew so far back into the brush that I had trouble finding it. After that I flipped the trout gently onto the bank. They were all real brook trout with glistening green sides and striped fins. Some were big enough for my mother to fry. There was even a seven-incher that I claimed for my own dinner.

I was lucky to have three streams within range of my bicycle. In the most fertile of them, I caught only one fish in several trips -- but that one was far too heavy to flip out on the bank. I pulled and the trout pulled, but it gave up first. I

carried it around the neighborhood, showing it off to anyone who would look. Everyone looked. Fat, wild, fifteen-inch brook trout get attention anywhere in this country.

Since then I've fished in the same way across most of America. It usually works, at least in the spring, but there are tricks. None of them cost much.

First, you need a long rod. With a short one, you cast the worm out and wait for the fish to find it. Fish are usually in no hurry. Long before they get to the worm, somebody is usually telling you to stop fidgeting. A long rod changes that. It lets you reach out and guide the worm right to the trout's nose -- or at least to a place where the trout ought to be hiding. My parents got me a second-hand nine-foot fly rod that was just right. A cane pole of about the same length would have been less convenient -- especially on my bike -- but just as good for catching fish. In Europe, where people take bait-fishing more seriously than we do, many experts prefer poles.

If you use a pole, measure its length and scrounge a piece of old, floating fly-line about three feet shorter. Tie it to the tip of the pole and then tie a leader to the end of the line. The leader is just a yard-long piece of four-pound-test monofilament line. A size 10 hook completes the tackle unless you have a rod, in which case you'll also need a reel with a full-length floating fly-line.

The next trick is the bait. Stocked trout may take almost anything, but wild ones (especially if they are brown trout) sometimes insist on bait that looks natural. Try a small worm. Thread the hook lightly through its collar, which is the only bump a worm has. If the water is too deep and swift to let an unweighted worm reach the bottom of the stream, add a split shot to the leader about a foot above the hook.

Hip boots are not exactly a trick, but they help you get through cold water to the places where trout live.

I'd like to see every young fisherman begin with this method. No other is quite as good at teaching exactly where trout lie. If you learn to strike fast -- the instant a trout takes your bait -- you will hook most of your fish in the mouth, which makes it easy to return those you don't need. You will also be well on your way to learning how to fish with an artificial nymph.

Most of the young people I know switch to fly fishing, eventually. I don't rush them. I want company. I want someone to listen with me when running water talks to rocks about springtime. I want someone to watch with me when violets push through brown leaves, lines float under dark banks, and a trout down there tugs at a worm.

April 12, 1990

Mr. Duncan Barnes, Editor
Field & Stream
2 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Dear Duncan:

A piece for the junior magazine is enclosed. It's on worm-fishing for trout, which means that it is probably about six months earlier than you need it. I had intended to hold it till fall. During the drafting, however, I learned something that might have broader implications for the junior magazine. Here it is for what it's worth, though I'm sure your market research is far ahead of mine.

My first draft was a short how-to-do-it piece. It seemed all right, till I showed it to my 13-year-old son. He thought it was terrible. Boring. Yuk. I was taken aback, because this kid goes worm-fishing with me. He also likes me to read to him. I thought I knew what he liked.

Next I showed the draft to my wife, and she agreed with the boy. She pulled out his magazines (Cricket and 3-2-1 Contact). They raised my consciousness, or something. I had always read books to the child, and the magazines were different.

It the magazines are right, child^ern want a story. They are tired of being told how to do things. They want to read about other people (usually young) having adventures. For the most part, kids' stories are heavy on fantasy. There isn't much verbal how-to-do-it. One piece on how to build model airplanes, for example, relied on pictures to provide most of the instructions, and even some of the captions were little stories.

Books, being longer than articles, have room for the stuff that interests both adult reader and young listener. My boy and I have been getting different things from the same book.

I'd blame children's attitudes on television, except that my kid grew up without it. I recall, too that my father's outdoor magazines mostly bored me when I was young. I liked the pictures, and the few writers who were yarn-spinners. Archibald Rutledge comes to mind. I couldn't see why my Dad liked Townsend Whelen and Jack O'Connor -- until I got to high school. The how-to-do-its started to appeal, then.

I'm beginning to see why children's literature, like humor,

is difficult. My first draft of the worm-fishing piece committed the writer's cardinal sin. I wrote what I thought the reader needed to know instead of what he wanted to read.

These options occurred to me:

- Short how-to-do-it pieces for high-school kids rather than young ones. (Sports Afield quickies?)
- Fiction. Robert Ruark pulled it off, but he pretended that he was writing fact, and he was awfully good. (My boy likes Ruark.)
- Stories that are, in effect, captions for elaborate illustrations. These might be major projects requiring collaboration between author and illustrator, as with children's books.
- Stories that weave in instructions. In order to do both things, the author would need some space.

The enclosed is my try at the last option. My son likes it, finally. There's a story, about me. (I recall that I always liked to read of other anglers' childhood experiences). I kept the piece to half-length and suspect that it may be too short to handle the how-to-do-it part adequately. The article would profit from drawings of the tackle, at least, and perhaps of the stream.

This letter is about as long as the article. Hope one or the other is of some use to you. If the article is off-target, I'd welcome a chance to redraft it. Obviously I'm groping -- looking for a different voice. Wish I had a topic like John Barsness's Indians, but I don't.

Yours,

Enclosed: "Nobody Tells You To Sit Still"