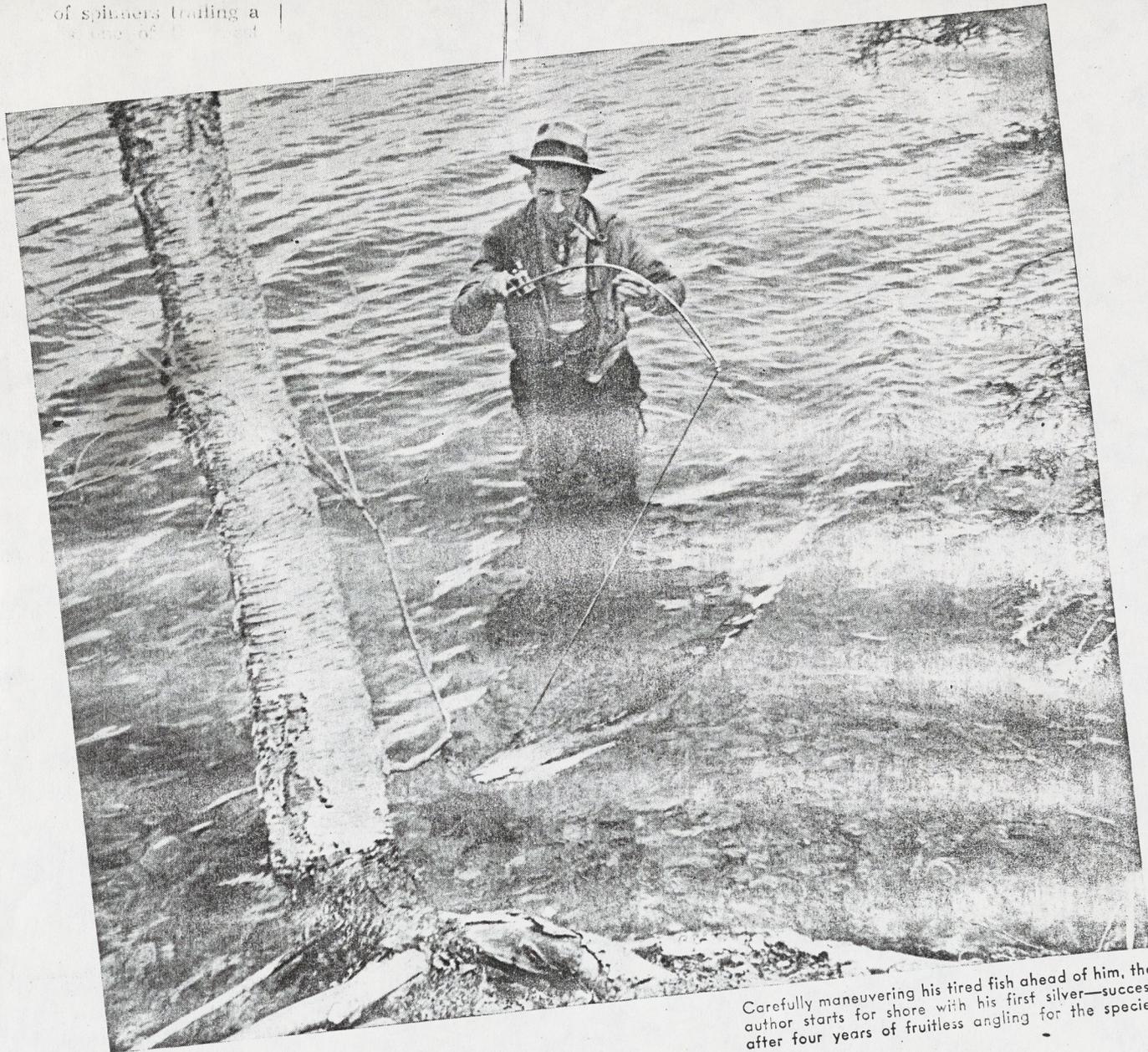


of spinners trailing a
series of ...



Carefully maneuvering his tired fish ahead of him, the author starts for shore with his first silver—success after four years of fruitless angling for the species.



Reg Howe, who had discovered the trick of taking the silvers, displays four prizes

Warrior in Silver

"YES sir, you'll be lucky if you ever see a silver, let alone get one. They bite for only three or four weeks after the ice goes out. And anyway," the old-timer added, eyeing my fishing tackle, "if you're one of them purists they talk about, you might as well stay t' home, because they don't take flies."

"Finicky about biting, are they?" I prodded.

"Used to be a time when you could catch 'em hand over fist, all small ones, five to seven inches long. Once in a while, you'd get one near a foot long. Nowadays it's different—don't ever catch 'em, no matter what length."

This was the first time I'd ever heard about the mysterious fish of Lake Monadnock—silver trout, or *Salvelinus agassizii* if you are up on your ichthyology. As we rested on the bank of the stream, the old-timer drew from his

creel one or two of the speckled beauties he had just taken.

"Guess you'll have to look at these brookies and imagine they was all silver. They're the nearest thing to 'em you're ever likely to see."

I thought no more about silver trout until five years ago, when Reg Howe called me on the 'phone.

"Come on over," he said excitedly. "I've got something to show you that'll make your eyes look like toy balloons!"

Reg is one angler who isn't given to exaggeration, so I hustled over to his place without delay. There, set off by a bed of large, green ferns, lay four of the most beautiful trout I had ever seen, their resplendent silver bodies far surpassing all the lustre the old-timer had described to me.

"There you are," Reg exulted. "How do you like the silvers nobody ever catches?"

As Mysteriously as It Had Disappeared, a Scrappy Species of Trout Returns to a Mountain Lake, and Starts an Angler on the Oddest Quest of His Life

As I gazed with awe, I knew that my creel would never hold another trout until I was lucky enough to land one of those handsome three-pound champions. For the next four years, I numbed my hands and feet waiting for a silver-hued trout to come along. Countless times I anchored a boat at every favored spot on the lake, but the nearest I came to getting a trout was to grab a deeply dipping rod just too late to do any good. On sunny days, rainy days, breezy days, and quiet days, from May 20 until the middle of July, I made weekly or bi-weekly pilgrimages to the haven of dream fish, trying, under every conceivable condition, to interest them in the time-honored bait the old-timers swore by—a hook overloaded with garden hackle. But, though I knew they were there, I was never able to solve the mystery of the phantom silvers.

Mystery? Yes, for little is known about the origin of these fish. Legend has it that they were transplanted from a lake in Switzerland, but no record has ever been found to substantiate the contention, and, so far as authoritative sources reveal, the fish is indigenous to the New Hampshire lakes and has never been found elsewhere.

The *Salvelinus agassizii*, or Dublin Pond trout, is a member of the brook-trout family, although it has few of the red spots that distinguish its cousin, nor has it the mottled back and dorsal fin. From a white belly, its sides turn to a shimmering silver, and its back is almost black. In other respects, square tail and all, it closely resembles the other members of its family.

It is true that, two decades ago, these trout were caught easily and abundantly, though all were small. In the last ten years, comparatively few have been taken from Lake Monadnock, and most of those have averaged from two to three pounds. During this decade, Reg Howe, generally conceded to be the most successful fisherman to tackle Lake Monadnock, has caught twenty-five or thirty of these fish, only two or three of them being less than sixteen inches in length. This change in size and quantity from conditions of twenty years ago has yet to be explained.

There are persons who believe that environment changed the color of Lake Monadnock silvers. Living in the crystal-clear water of a lake nestled in the towering heights of granite-ledged Monadnock Mountain, with a bottom of light, fine-textured sand, sometimes 100 feet beneath them, may have something to do with the transformation. Possibly the mineral content of the water or

character of food supply may have caused the trout in Lake Monadnock to grow larger and more silvery than the Dublin Pond trout found in other New Hampshire lakes.

Anyway, I'll take a silver whenever I get a chance, not only for its fighting qualities but for its edibility. It tastes rather like salmon, and has a firm, deep-pink meat, not at all dry or tough as you might expect of a large-sized brook trout, and it bakes or broils equally well.

Among fishermen who have angled for these trout, not one with whom I have talked has had any luck with anything but a wad of garden worms or night crawlers. But, having seen the speedy strikes of these fighters, I maintain that it is perfectly sporting to fish them with garden hackle—they've always proved too fast for me. I have never heard of a silver's being caught with a dry fly, though I have seen the trout rise for natural flies.

But I recently learned that the silver trout *can* be taken with—wait, I'm getting ahead of my story.

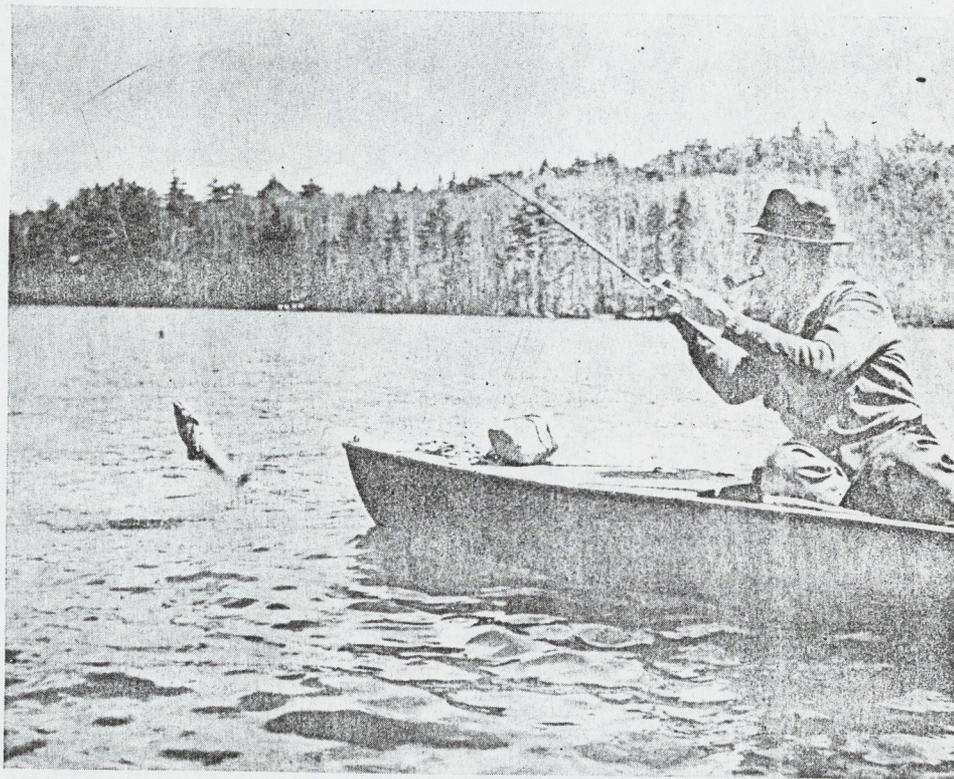
Came the Fish and Game Club supper last April, and, following the roast turkey, the boys were swapping yarns. The trout season was but a few days in the offing, so it was, naturally, the leading topic of conversation.

Waiting for the inevitable pause that comes in any general conversation, I dropped this (*Continued on page 68*)



The author with his first silver trout a few moments after it was landed. It measured 19 inches, and weighed three pounds two ounces

By
JOHN E. COFFIN



Playing the scrapper from the boat. The silver put up a fight which included just about everything a game fish is capable of—fancy diving, rolling on the line, and jumping out of the water with wild abandon

Warrior in Silver

(Continued from page 19)

challenge into the silence: "Well, boys," I boasted solemnly, "I'm betting anyone right now that I'll catch three fish this year big enough to make your mouth water. One will be a brookie longer than twelve inches, another a rainbow just as long, and—now don't laugh—a silver!"

When the snickers subsided, a few listeners might have been eager to accept a wager on it, but they remembered we'd had a few drinks at dinner, and refused to take me seriously. Which as things turned out was just as well for them.

I caught my brookie first, and he overreached the promised mark by two and a half inches, a pretty good trout for New Hampshire. Then, between trips to the haunts of the silver, I sought my rainbow in other waters, and one fine day a gleaming fighter fulfilled the second part of my boast. But the time was growing short, and I had yet to land my silver.

"Let's head east tomorrow, Charlie," I said to my usual companion on hunting and fishing trips. "I feel kind of lucky."

Charlie, as always, objected to fishing at Lake Monadnock.

"There's no sense in going over there; let's go after some rainbows."

"No soap. I'm getting a silver before this season is over." Then I added a plea: "Tomorrow's the last Sunday I'll be able to get over to Monadnock this season."

Big-hearted as he always is, Charlie gave in, and the next morning found us with the boat on the trailer, headed in the right direction. A heavy fog lay over the water when we reached Lake Monadnock, hiding from our view three or four other boatloads of hopeful Waltonites. Once on the water, we forgot fog and everything else.

"Want some of these crawlers?" asked Charlie. "They're not too lively, they're some old ones I've had."

"No, thanks, you use them today—I'm going to try some flies!"

Old or not, Charlie's crawlers proved attractive, for we hadn't been there fifteen minutes before he had a bite and a ten-inch brook trout. That pepped him up for a spell, although he was disappointed that it was "only a brookie."

The fog soon lifted and the sun got warmer, but, apart from that brookie, a good-sized shiner, a perch, and a couple of redfins seemed to be the only hungry fish in the lake. In the meantime, contrary to all advice, I tried flies by the dozen. I went through my entire collection, fishing wet and fishing dry, trout flies and bass flies, following with bucktails, fan-wings and streamers, with spinner and without. I tried a mouse, and a miniature, striped spoon. I went through my entire fishing kit, and it's no small one, but I might as well have been fishing a rain barrel for all the results I got.

"Well," Charlie finally growled, "it's half past eleven. Guess you'll have to wait until next year for that silver fox of yours."

We had told our wives that we

would be home by 12:30, and, besides, my arm was tired from throwing flies around, so I took the hint. We pulled up anchor, spun the outboard, and turned the prow toward home.

"Might as well swing around shore instead of cutting straight for the wharf," I suggested. "Can't tell but what we might pick up a good brookie on the way in." Determined to stick to my artificial bait to the end, I hooked on a Silver Doctor streamer and a Number 2 tandem spinner. Letting our progress feed out the line, I settled back with my pipe while we headed in a roundabout way to the wharf some 300 or 400 yards away.

"Another good day wasted," lamented Charlie, as he cut down the motor, preparing to dock. "The next time anyone mentions this lake to me, I'm going to bring him straight up here and drown him."

"Think how swell it would be if we had got a silver," I said, beginning to reel in. "Oh well, next year I'll—wait a minute. Swing the boat around; I'm caught on a rock!"

I let out a few feet to ease the tension, but, no matter how much I let out, the line was still taut!

"Hey, cut the motor!" I shouted. "I got more than a rock on here!"

For five—ten—fifteen minutes, I just held on, swinging my rod this way and that, until at last a silver streak leaped upward from the depths of the pond—a leap that fortunately took him away from the boat.

That silver trout did everything from fancy diving to rolling on the line and jumping out of water. One minute, he would be just plain stubborn and not

move a bit, and the next he would gather strength enough to take yards of line away from me. I have never seen a trout exhibit more superb strength and fighting quality than this one exhibited.

"Get out the net; he's getting tired," I panted.

"Better beach him—he's too big for the net."

"No he isn't; get it out!"

Charlie rummaged for the net while old *Salvelinus agassizii* continued with his acrobatics, and why he didn't get fouled in the propeller I don't know. I know it was more luck than management on my part.

"What did you do with the net?" Charlie shouted. "I can't find the damned thing!"

"It's there somewhere," I exploded. "Are you blind?" Then it dawned on me that I had left it out to dry the afternoon before!

AT THIS critical stage of the fracas, a boat came toward us, and four pairs of bulging eyes could be seen intently following our progress. The boat drew steadily nearer with its kibitzing occupants.

"Why don't you net him?" one of the occupants asked.

"Better let him run," said another. "He'll bust your leader."

I could have stood their well-meant chatter, but, when my silver, still fighting, slanted off in their direction, I began to boil.

"Use our net," the man in the bow offered. "Here, catch it!"

"Why don't you net him?" I quickly demanded. "You're close enough!" My sarcasm had no effect. They were enjoying their ringside seats.

"Better ease away, Charlie," I suggested as I snubbed the trout up close to the rod tip. "Head for shore and I'll beach this baby before they ride over him!"

But the other boat was nearer shore than we were, and, when we started to move, it moved, too. We maneuvered just off its stern, past a couple of submerged rocks, and almost too close to a fallen tree. Just as our boat scraped the sand, I hopped from it.

By this time, my silvery antagonist was groggy, so it wasn't too difficult or risky to get him in front of me. I aimed for dry land, and, with my rod held straight ahead, I sloshed my way to the bank and tossed the fish well on shore. His few feeble flops on the brushy bank proved that he still had the heart but lacked the strength.

I had no sooner got the hook out of his mouth and my fly disengaged than the four boatmen were on me, or rather, on my fish. After eagerly scanning and pawing my catch, the like of which they had never before seen, they dashed back into their boat to "get one of them things,"—and I couldn't blame them for that!

As I write this, my arm still throbs with the scrap put up by my first silver. It won't be the last. When a silver trout tangles with a Silver Doctor, the ensuing fight is something to dream about.

When Death Took a Holiday



Parley Shaw, of North Ogden, Ut., fired at a deer with the .30/30 carbine he holds here. It fell from his hand. Later examination revealed that a bullet from the rifle of another hunter had struck Shaw's gun at the instant he had fired it