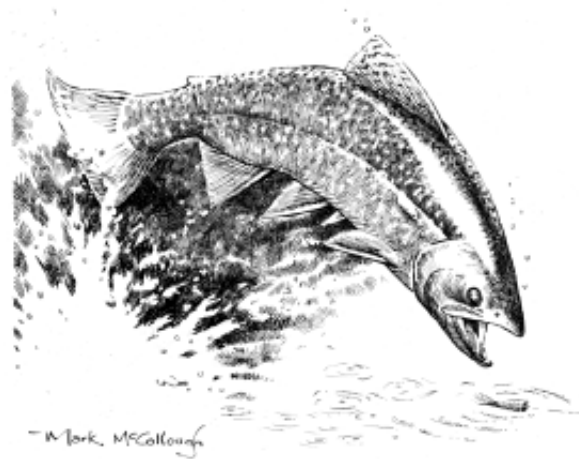


Fly Fishing Maine

Rivers, Brooks and Streams



Bob Leeman

Illustrations by Mark McCollough

Maps and Sketches by Bob Leeman

With a Foreword by
V. Paul Reynolds

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Cover photo provided by V. Paul Reynolds

Sketches by Mark McCollough

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*For Alice,
my wife, my friend,
and my typist.*

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of two long-time, fly fishing addicts and close friends, Bill Bowdoin of Brewer, Maine, and Roger Wakefield of Machias, Maine, with whom I spent many happy hours on rivers and streams statewide.

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Foreword

Although Bob Leeman has been writing about fishing for the Northwoods Sporting Journal for a decade, I didn't really get to know him as a friend until a few years ago. Prior to that, I had edited his monthly columns and bumped into him at the supermarket once in a while. We never fished together. He was, and is today, a pleasure to read. His prose flows like the rivers and streams he writes about. As his editor, who happens also to enjoy fly fishing, I always look forward to his monthly fishing column.

Since his teen years, Bob has been an outdoors guy. A Master Maine Guide, former Game Warden and trapper, his main passion has always been fly fishing for salmon and trout. This is his second book about how to seduce Maine trout and salmon. The first one sold out.

When Bob became part of our family, marrying my son Scotty's mother-in-law, Alice Drinkwater, Bob and Scotty started fishing a lot together. Bob has shown Scotty some great Honey Holes for fat brookies. I mean, they catch fish! The word filtered back to me. "Dad," Scotty said, "Bob knows some great fishin' spots, I'm tellin' you!" Suddenly, I was no longer the family fishing guide. Scotty, who has been my fishing and hunting buddy for nearly 40 years, was spending more fishing time with Bob than with the Old Man. So, I took matters into my own hands. I wormed (figure of speech) an invitation to fish with Bob one day, at his beloved Grand Lake Stream.

It was an eye-opener. Bob knows the Stream like the back of his hand. He knows the pools. He knows which side of the rocks the fish like, and what fly turns them on. His knowledge of the Stream, his good humor, easy-going manner, and willingness to share his angling savvy, makes for a memorable day of fishing. I began to see why Scotty, an addicted fly fisherman, was spending so much

time with Bob. Bob and I became friends and fishing buddies, too. Since there is only room for two in Bob's canoe, Scotty and I share Bob.

This book is your chance to share Bob, too. From Grand Lake Stream to the Mattawamkeag, the Mopang, or the Roach River, Bob will take you chapter-by-chapter to all of his favorite Maine rivers, brooks, and streams. With words and pictures, he will show you how to fish, where to fish, and what fly to use.

There's a lot of history here, too, as Bob recounts those halcyon days at the Bangor Salmon Pool and other Downeast salmon rivers.

I am proud to call Bob Leeman my friend, and to have the opportunity to help him produce this special book. I also feel blessed to have shared some wonderful angling days with him, especially on Grand Lake Stream. There will be more Stream visits to come: I'm sure of it.

By the way, you can hear more of his great tips when Bob and I co-host the outdoor radio program, *Maine Outdoors*, heard every Sunday night at 7 p.m. on WVOM-FM (103.9). In his best Ed Sullivan impersonation, Bob calls it "The big shooo."

Congratulations for having purchased this book. The information and fishing tips contained within are the product of hundreds and hundreds of Bob Leeman angling days on this state's remarkable riverine sport fishery. It will help you become a more accomplished angler. Count on it!

V. Paul Reynolds, Editor
Northwoods Sporting Journal





Grand Lake Stream delivers again. Author Bob Leeman, who has spent almost a lifetime on the Stream, with a lovely, landlocked salmon. The fish hit a Barnes Special.

Chapter One

Grand Lake Stream

Just the mention of any popular Maine fishing waters perks up the ears of fly anglers. But somehow, the mention of Grand Lake Stream, more than any other, stirs unforgettable memories and conjures up stories galore.

Grand Lake Stream is about a mile or so of scenic and very fishable water that empties from a large dam, holding back West Grand Lake, and eventually flows into Big Lake.

In its course is a small village with a store, church, museum, a few houses and camps, and a lengthy, wooded area. It also has one of Maine's oldest fish hatcheries, located on the bank of the stream in the center of town. All this is ten miles west of Route 1 from Princeton, Maine.

Once, long ago, there were log drives here, a secluded fishing lodge, and a hemlock bark factory, where tannic acid was secreted, mostly for use in tanning hides. All that has gone now, and today this quiet little town, with a bridge and rippling waterflow, headed up by a host of sporting lodges, has become an inviting haven for fly anglers, seeking to test their skills on a fair population of land-locked salmon.

From all over the world, the hopefuls come. That includes such places as New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, all over New England, and even some foreign countries. Many of the locals just sit back and admire, take in a few profits, and carry on a rather scant living, but one with little or no tension. Employment in the area comes from guiding, with about 150 guides available locally, also working at a nearby mill, working in the woods, and fashioning the famous Grand Lake Stream canoe - don't make the mistake of calling it a boat! Many have acquired the skills of being electricians, plumbers, and even master builders.

Fishing The River

The fishing season at Grand Lake Stream opens on April 1st these days. Usually the salmon fishing is quite good, especially at the Dam Pool where many “slinks” are taken even before the ice has left the big lake above the dam. Often some experienced fly anglers, using sinking tip flylines and bright streamer flies and wooly buggers, score very well, with fish averaging from one-and-a-half to two pounds or more. Most of the salmon are carefully released,



(Photo by Bob Leeman)

Hookup!

being on the thin side and not being the best table fare. All fishermen must fish below the red markers, one-hundred and fifty feet above and below the dam.

Sometimes, being April and all, the weather is not very cooperative. In 2007, opening day had a temperature of fourteen degrees, with chilly winds. A few days later, a foot of snow dulled fishing efforts, then high water conditions dampened the spirits of visitors, making for a tough early season all around. On opening

day, with nearly a hundred anglers around, only three fish were caught.

The usual month of May finds the stream's popular pools, such as the Dam Pool , Hatchery Pool, Little Falls, and Big Falls, often getting a run of giant-sized suckers early in the month. A few landlocked salmon move into the waterway with these "decoys," and later begin increased migrations, following a scant smelt run into the lower river, along with increased insect hatches beginning to happen by mid-month, and warming water temperatures. Observant and knowledgeable fly anglers keep aware of surface-rising fish seeking emergents of blue wing, olive mayflies and other seasonal hatches, along with experimenting with weighted nymphs and such.

During the month of May, and even into early June and beyond, small imitation streamer flies, cast and twitched to imitate a wounded minnow, will often cause an inexperienced fisherman to jump out of his or her boots, when a landlocked salmon attacks the fly.

Along this waterway, some of the most popular small, single-hook, streamer flies consist of: Black ghost, Barnes special, Joe's smelt, white and black (often beaded) wooly buggers, grey ghost, and many others with white, yellow, red, and orange creations.

Most recently, small-sized, beaded nymphs of colors varying from grey to green work well to entice the local population of migrating salmon. Too, emergers and stonefly imitations are good evening flies to use. Even spinner flies work at times, for experienced casters.

Giant smallmouth bass migrate in and out of the stream in early and late June after spawning.

June will bring forth the fly fisherman's favorite time for imitating his or her creations of caddisfly patterns on an almost-guaranteed massive caddis hatch. At this time, the salmon fishing is probably at its best.

As this month wanes into July, some of the year's finest fishing occurs, especially when an evening hatch of caddisflies clouds the air over the stream's favorite pools.

The water begins a warming transition in July but, early in

the month, many salmon hang around for the swarming hatches of giant-sized caddisfly with mottled wings.

Exploring anglers along this famous waterway will discover some of the more “quiet” fishing locations. Some of those spots are named: Willow Pool, Bridge Pool, Bryan’s Pool, and on down the river to the Conservation Pool, Glide Pool, Cable Pool, Rips Pools, Woods Pools, Sweet Hole (or Big Rock Pool), Rocky’s Pool, Flat Rock Pool, Bathtub Pool, Driscoll’s Run, Leeman’s Ledge, and lastly, the Meadows.

Late Season Fishing

Things are fairly quiet on Grand Lake Stream during late July and about all of August and into mid-September. It is then that the late-season salmon spawning runs begin to happen; slowly at first, and peaking at a season-ending date of October 20th.

About all of the streamers and other imitation flies mentioned will take an “occasional” fish. But the best baits seem to be tiny, size 20, black or dark-colored, weighted nymphs - fished right on bottom.

Grand Lake Stream presently (2009) has a one-fish-daily, per-person limit on salmon, from season opening until September 30th. During the month of October, to the season end on the 20th, there is a no-fish limit, and all fish must be released.

Brook trout frequent the waterway with both native and stocked fish being taken occasionally. Whitefish and even a good-sized lake trout are hooked early in the year. A heavy stocking of brook trout in the eight to ten-inch size usually occurs by mid-May. Sometimes a few four to six-inch salmon are stocked in the stream, as well, but many are stocked in West Grand Lake above, and in Big Lake below.

Before fishing this scenic waterway, bring a camera and check your fishing regulations lawbook for length and other limits. Ignorance of the law is no excuse.

A word to the wise: high water is bad news to visiting fishermen at Grand Lake Stream. So, too, is very low water. Over the years, it seems a good to excellent-quality fishing water level is

when there is only about half of one gate open at the dam. A call to Kurt or Kathy Cressey at the Pine Tree Store in Grand Lake Stream will often save a lot of grief and traveling time in vain.
Good fishing!!



Matching the hatch: At the Stream, anglers V. Paul Reynolds and his wife Diane ready a #16 Light Cahill at the Cable Pool.
(Photo by Bob Leeman)

Chapter Two

Aroostook's Prestile Stream

This writer has fond memories of fly fishing Aroostook County's Prestile Stream. There is little doubt that this clear-flowing waterway is a fertile haven for native brook trout.

For the most part, this medium-sized, gravel-bottomed stream produces excellent fishing for brookies in the eight to twelve-inch size on a regular basis, with the occasional larger fish - some up to two or three pounds.

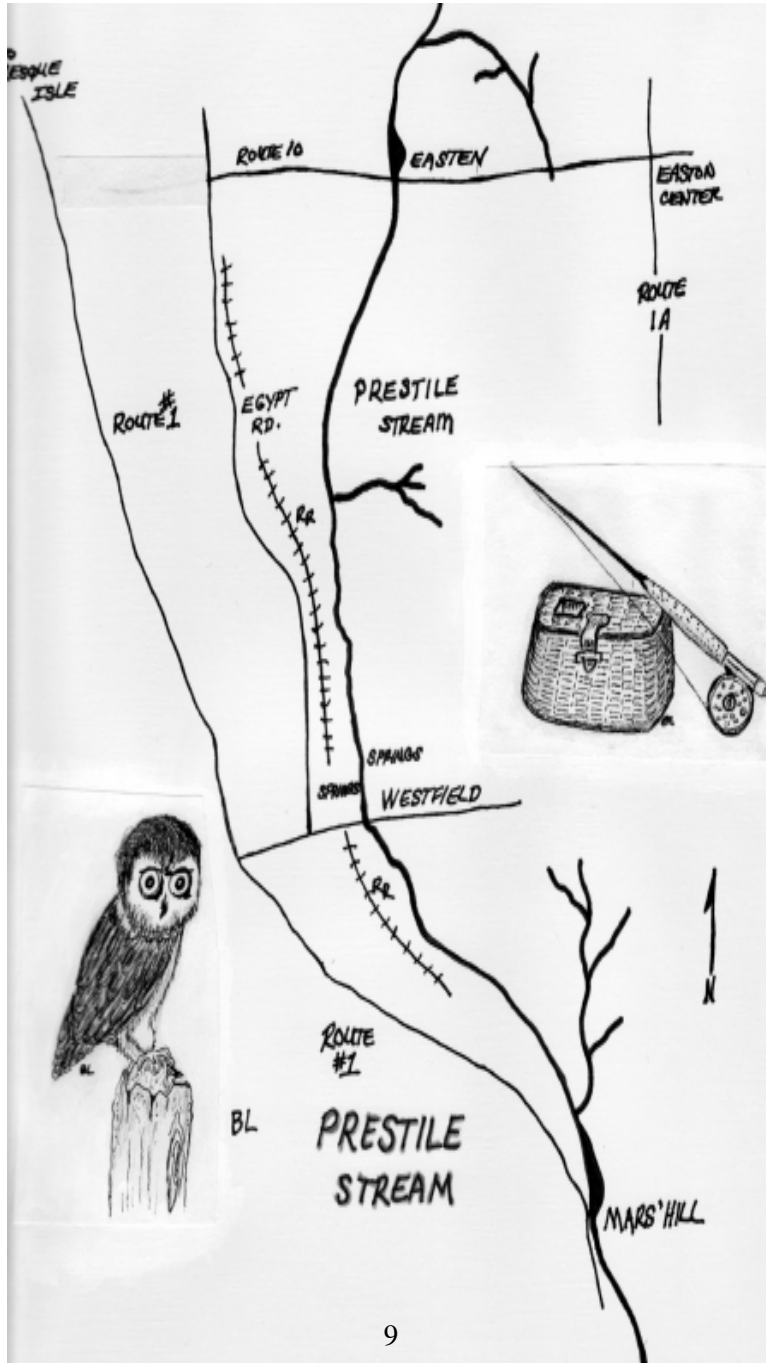
Prestile Stream's beginnings come together from a conglomerate of small brooks, located above the town of Easton, and include the entrance of Elliot Brook. It flows for about twenty miles or more southward, through Westfield, Mars Hill, Robinson, and eventually into Canada.

The little pond above Easton was always a popular early-season trout fishing spot, as was, and still is, the flow below Mars Hill.

Just above the Westfield Bridge, observant fly anglers will discover several, natural, cold springs seeping from both sides into the waterway. For the most part, these springs are crowded with small brook trout. But often, a look under the far bank's shady alders will reveal some lurking lunkers. Getting a fly to 'em is another matter.

It is off the mouths of the many feeder brooks that traversing anglers will find really good fishing, especially during the warmer months of the year. Some of those include Young's Brook, Whitney Brook, and Three Brooks, to name only a few.

Follow down the Egypt Road on one side, or the Ridge Road on the other side, for fairly close access to upper waters. Some visitors just prefer to park by a bridge crossing - there are several - and just prospect.



Back along, a few locals, mostly from the Presque Isle area, used to trout fish the Prestile at night. They didn't have a lot of time after working all day - and with supper and all - so they fashioned on a big, white, imitation floater of sorts, and cast it over a favorite pool. They couldn't see that well after dark, so they just waited 'til they heard a splash, and gave the rod a yank!

The well-known Joe Sterling, who once had a fly shop in Danforth, Maine, and who created the popular streamer fly named Joe's Smelt, used to spend productive evenings canoe-fishing the Prestile Stream's deadwater, located above Mars Hill. He used a chuck caddis dryfly imitation with great luck. This fly has a wing and tail of woodchuck guardhairs, a dubbed body of dark gray to



A happy, young angler, with a fat, little brookie he snagged on the Prestile Stream (Photo by Bob Leeman)

dark brown, and a scant grizzly hackle.

The best way to wade and fly fish this stream is with a sturdy pair of felt-soled waders and plenty of stamina. It is free-flowing, and the bottom is mostly rock and gravel. During the summer months, the shore is shrouded with fertile weeds up to six feet high. Canoeing is next to impossible, except in early spring, and in a few deadwater areas.

Some of the popular imitation flies used with a certain amount of success include: Mickey Finn streamer #10, small white marabou muddler #10, Slim Jim #14 and #16, hornberg #12, Hendrickson #16 (in season), and blue wing olives #16 (in season).

Best fishing on the Prestile Stream occurs in June and well into the month of July. Be sure and refer to the latest fishing regulations law book for any and all limits and other regulations that might apply.

Chapter Three

Sunkhaze Stream

Once called the most fertile brook trout water in New England, Sunkhaze Stream has long been recognized as a hotspot for big, speckled beauties.

Not too many years ago, this waterway, located in the Milford/Greenfield area and flowing through T32 MD, was known for its huge catches of gamefish.

This writer can verify hooking brook trout in the three and four-pound class at this site over the years, but being unable to land fish of this size, due to the many escape routes of deep roots, beaver caverns, and many other snags. Of course, these hook-ups were few and far between, but exciting and story-igniting, to say the least.

For the most part, brookies will average in the seven to nine -inch range, with a good catch containing a couple of larger trout.

Sunkhaze Stream spans a number of miles - approximately twelve miles or more in its course - from its beginnings in T32 MD, and finally emptying into the Penobscot River, after crossing Route 2 in Milford, Maine.

This waterway is perfect for canoe-fishing with a flyrod. This stream is NOT wadeable. The bottom is soft mud and deep in slow-moving water. Some areas do allow fishing from the stream banks, with caution. Suggested canoe put-in sites would be: below the bridge that first crosses the Stud Mill Road in early spring, above this same bridge in mid-spring, above the falls where it crosses the County Road in late spring and early summer, and above the second bridge that crosses on the Stud Mill Road in late summer. In really early spring, Sunkhaze Meadows is fairly good fishing, for a decent chance at a trophy-sized brook trout.

Early season visitors to this area launch a craft above the bridge along Route 2 in Milford, and travel upstream, trolling assorted lures and bait combos. Sure, they may hook a big bass or pickerel, but sometimes the possibility of a fat brookie is there.

