Angler caps 'Jocassee Slam' with record

Mauldin's Lee breaks brook trout standard

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When Bryan Lee watched in amazement as a bald eagle swooped down to the surface of Lake Jocassee and plucked a trout that he'd released moments earlier, he was convinced he'd witnessed the high point of his day.

Then came another bite.

"I thought it was another two-pound brown (trout), to be honest with you," Lee said. "I was kind of horsing him in, really."

It wasn't until Lee had the fish in the boat that he realized he had something well, special.

"The fish wasn't in real spawning color and the sides were kind of silver-fish, but it did have these purple dots and a cheetah-type pattern on its back," Lee said. "That's when I knew it was a brook trout, so I put him in the live well."

Good move, because the trout turned out to be a record-breaker.

The fish weighed 2.7 pounds, and fellow angler Matt McCreery, who had been fishing nearby, suggested they contact the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

They did – but not before Lee and fishing partner Lee Sakovich completed their day of fishing in preparation for the fourth Lake Jocassee Trout Tournament of the season, which was scheduled for the next day.

"We were having too much fun, catching fish left and right," Lee said. "Why would I be in a hurry to get off that lake? It was snowing and it was just beautiful up there."

The anglers finally called it quits around 3 p.m., then took the fish to be weighed on certified scales at Durham's Grocery near Six Mile. Shortly after, they took the fish to Dan Rankin, a DNR fisheries biologist who confirmed the species and discovered an added bonus – the brook appeared to be a native fish rather than a stocked trout.

Lee caught the big brookie while drifting a minnow on four-pound test line up the Toxaway River arm of the lake around 10:30 a.m. It also completed his first-ever "Jocassee Slam" – a brown, rainbow and brook trout caught on the same day.

The record brook, which was 18¼ inches long with a girth of 10 inches, officially weighed in at 2 pounds, 12 ounces. Lee's catch came three weeks to the day after 9-year-old Riley Dunn of Tigerville pulled a 2-pound, 6.08-ounce brookie from the South Saluda River in Greenville County, matching the previous state record caught in 1979.

Unchallenged for 31 years, the record has now been matched or broken twice in 21 days. It also made Lake Jocassee the state's top producer of state-record fish – the deep, cold-water reservoir has now yielded six state records, including all three trout species.

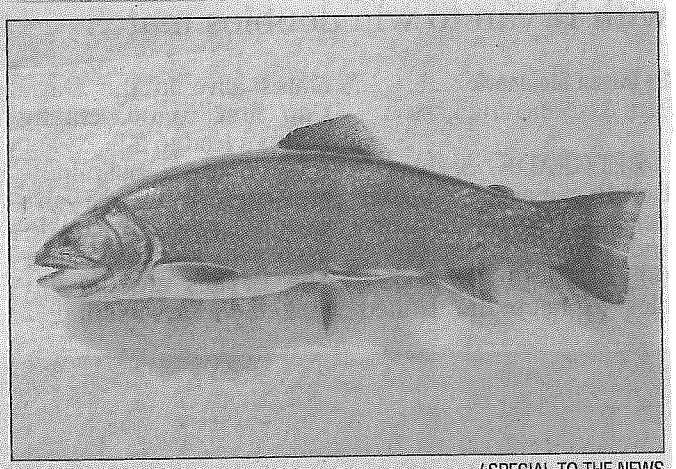
"Catching a brook trout is an honor, but catching a record brook is an even bigger honor," said Lee, a 33-year-old Mauldin resident. "I've been out fishing a lot, but I wasn't looking to catch the state-record brook trout. Fishing to me is a passion. I just love doing it – it's not something I need to be rewarded for."

In 20 years of fishing at Jocassee, it was just the third brook trout that Lee had boated.

"They're rare and usually very small," Lee said. "Every one we've ever caught has been 10 inches or less."

Lee plans on having a replica mount of the record fish made, but in the meantime he'll just keep on fishing – at Jocassee, of course.

"I guess that fish could have lost some weight in the live well, but that's a chance I was willing to take," Lee said. "You have to understand me. I'm a laid-back angler and catching a state-record trout isn't something that drives me. It's a great thing – don't get me wrong – but I'm just happy to be out there fishing on what I consider the most beautiful lake on the east coast."



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A snowy day at Jocassee yielded Lee's state-record brook trout.

JOCASEE'S RECORD CATCHES

Brook trout, 2 pounds, 12 ounces, Bryan Lee, Mauldin, 2010
Brown trout, 17 pounds, 9½ ounces, Larry Edwards, Pickens, 1987
Rainbow trout, 11 pounds, 5 ounces, Scott Coggins, Travelers Rest, 1993
Smallmouth bass, 9 pounds, 7 ounces, Terry Dodson, Rosman, N.C., 2001
Spotted bass, 8 pounds, 5 ounces, David Preston, Tryon, N.C., 2001
Redeye bass, 5 pounds, 2½ ounces, Randy Dickson, Westminster, 2001