Outdoors: The good old days of trout fishing

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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With Lake Jocassee and all of the technology available these days, we as anglers often get caught up in the complexities of trout fishing.

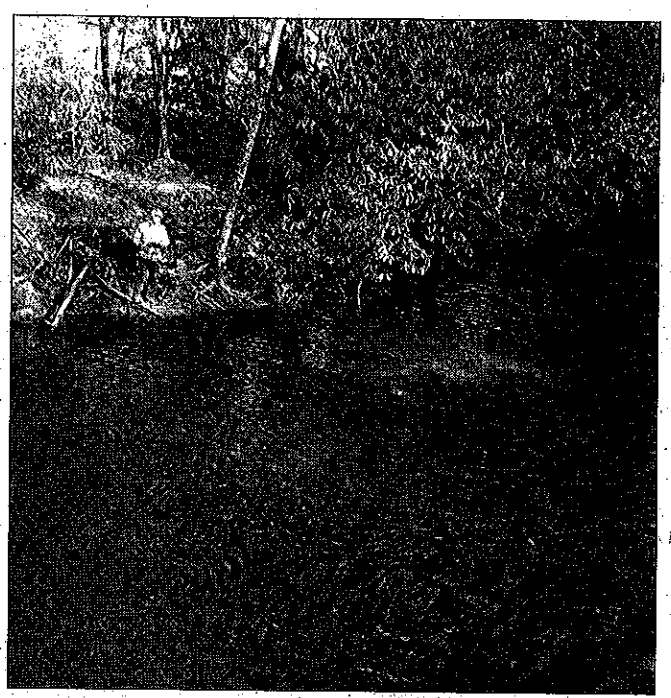
It's too easy to jump on a spacious pontoon boat, troll a bunch of hardware and come home with a couple of trout that would make any stream angler proud.

The other side of the stream, metaphorically speaking, are the folks who come dressed for the occasion in matching Sims waders and jersey, toting a thousand-dollar fly stick and spending the whole day comparing insects floating on the water with a selection of fake bugs in a box.

Don't get me wrong — there's nothing wrong with either one of these pursuits. Fishing is fishing in any shape, form or fashion, and it's all proof that God loves man because he gave us our own brand of heaven on earth to enjoy.

For me, the good old days of trout fishing were spent sitting on the banks of the Chattooga or the Chauga rivers with a spinning rod, a can of corn or a box of worms, while trying to coax a limit of rainbow trout into coming home with me for dinner.

You can pick the best bluffs to sit on while bank fishing, because they will be overlooking a deep green pool of water at the beginning or end of a set of shoals. You can also find forked sticks sticking up out of the mud and unfortunately old cans of corn, beer cans and other debris.



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The simple days of trout stream fishing are enhanced along many rivers in the Upstate thanks to a stocking program managed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

I remember the day many years ago when an older gentleman passed me on the banks of the Chauga with a box full of trout. I think the limit was 10 fish back then, and I looked in his basket with a mix of admiration and jealousy. Before we parted company, the old guy gave me a gift that I remember to this day. He showed me what he was using for bait.

"I used to use corn or worms or whatever till I discovered this little jewel," he said, opening his hand.

I recognized the lure immediately — it was a Mepps Aglia inline spinnerbait. It had a gold blade and the size was a No. 1. This particular bait had a plain treble hook. The man told me they make them with squirrel tail fur on some of them, but on picky days — and I've never met a trout that wasn't picky — the fish would nip the end of the fur and not get the hook. He said the one with the red straw was the best.

The very next day, I returned to the river with a set of leaky waders, a 5½-foot spinning rod and three of those baits. I discovered that trout lived everywhere in those streams, not just the big pools, and were especially fond of little undercut banks in the shade of an overhanging tree. If you could thread the needle and get the spinnerbait in the water just long enough to make the blade spin, a lot of times, a sneaky rainbow or brown would grab it and try its best to hang you up under the tree. It was hand-to-hand combat fishing at its finest.

Fortunately, those "good old days" are not gone. The Department of Natural Resources, having the forethought to buy the old federal trout hatchery, still grows trout in the facility up S.C. Highway 107 and even posts a schedule of when and where area rivers are stocked with trout.

This fine spring weather makes for some great trout stream fishing weather, in places where the wind can blow all it wants, and nobody seems to notice.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of "Upstate Outdoors," broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. This week, Upstate Outdoors will be broadcasting live from Portman Shoals Marina at Lake Hartwell for the Palmetto Boat Center High School Bass Fishing tournament. Contact Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.