

Conditions combine to make brookies eager.

Fall Mountain Fishing

HARRY MURRAY

FOR THE SERIOUS TROUT FISHERMAN the brightly colored fall foliage of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains is the signal to get ready. Careful study and observation can make this the most rewarding trout fishing of the whole year.

Many of the small mountain streams from North Carolina on up through Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and into Pennsylvania have excellent populations of wild trout. These streams have some common characteristics which, once learned, enable us to move from one area to another and have excellent fishing wherever we go. Several years ago I fished one of these small mountain streams in Virginia one weekend and another in Potter county in northern Pennsylvania the next weekend. The same techniques and flies were productive in both areas.

These are also perfect streams on which to learn the basic rules for all serious trout fishing. The fish are there and they are willing to feed. It is entirely up to us to learn the rules and to play the game properly in order to achieve success. That wild brook trout is going to enforce the regulations more strictly than the toughest referee in the NBA. Joe Brooks once told me that he could take most good small-stream trout fishermen and make good large-stream fishermen out of them, but not necessarily the other way around. Joe was talking about building on these basic ground rules we learn on the small streams.

There are three closely linked factors which account for our outstanding fall trout fishing. They are: water temperature, available food and water level. The cool nights of September have a direct effect on the water temperature. Throughout July and August our trout are often

subjected to dangerously high water temperatures. Even though hundreds of generations of natural adaptations have provided these wild trout with the biological facilities they need to survive these high temperatures they don't feed actively in warm water.

During the hottest part of the summer I have often watched nice trout in good holding water as they lie almost motionless for extended periods. Often insects would drift by closely without causing the fish to react. The trout just seemed to be hanging on in an attempt to wait out the hot weather.

As the water temperature drops in September trout begin feeding much more actively. It seems as though they are trying to make up for all those groceries they missed over the hot months. Brookies and browns will spawn within the next month or two depending on the stream. Many fishermen feel the increased feeding in September and October is just nature's way of getting the trout ready for the big spawning event. Whatever the reason, there is no question that they are now quite willing to feed.

Autumn Insects

THE LARGE HATCHES OF QUILL GORDONS and March Browns to which trout came four months ago are long gone. Even the little yellow *Isoperla* stoneflies which kept us going during June and early July are seldom seen this late. The streams I fish have a few hatches in the fall, but normally they are so sparse the trout must look elsewhere for their food. By watching the water closely I became aware that there was a fair amount of other food available for the trout. The same little insects which Vince Marinaro and Charles Fox wrote about on Pennsylvania's limestone streams are the primary food source here.

During the fall we often find a great

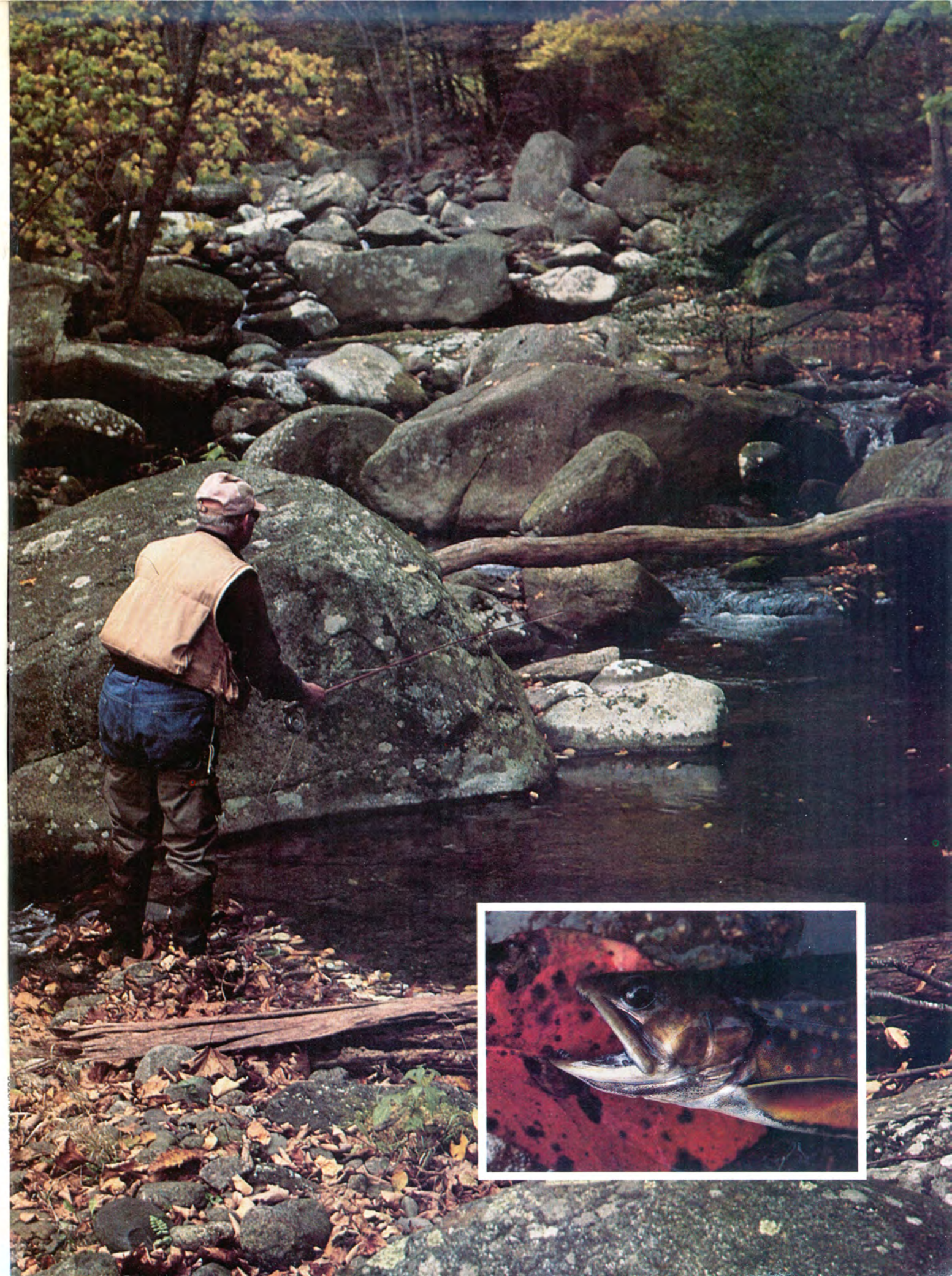
number of various beetles and ants along our mountain streams. The thick canopy of trees and shrubs over small mountain streams drop these terrestrials to the stream in a quantity that would excite any trout. We do get good hatches of true midges during the fall and these often bring up some surprisingly large trout.

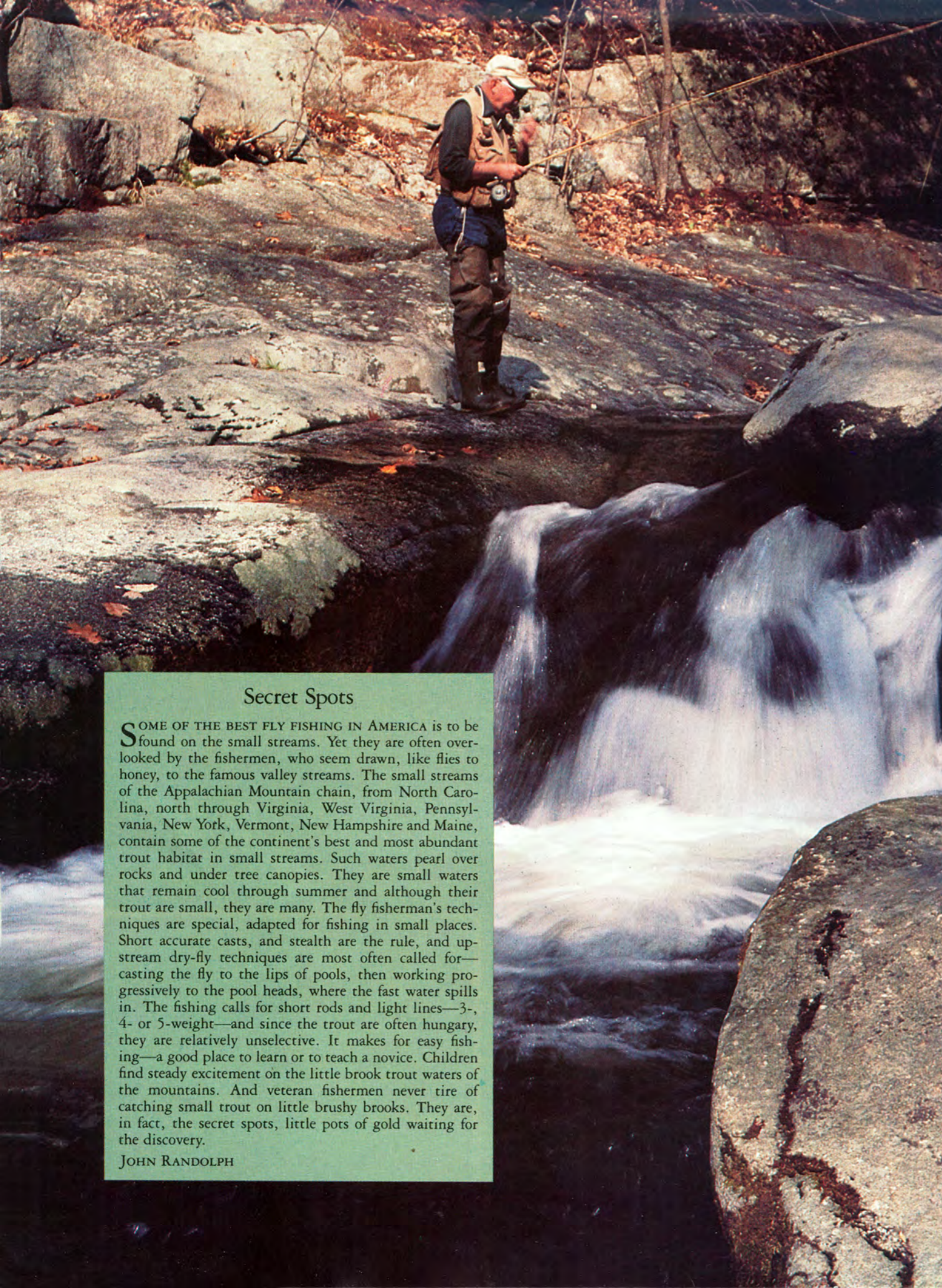
These three insects—beetles, ants and midges—represent the lion's share of the natural food available to the trout on the mountain streams I fish each fall. Regrettably, they run considerably smaller than the food most mountain anglers are accustomed to matching. Beetles, ants or midges as small as #18 or #20 are the ticket, all fished on a 6X or smaller tippet. The anglers I guide on these small streams often complain that they cannot see the small flies on the broken water. One answer, provided by veteran angler George Harvey, is to use a fly with a fluorescent back or wing. Some anglers simply paint the top of their beetles and ants with orange paint; other tie patterns with orange-dyed wing material for easy spotting on rough water. And easy-to-spot patterns such as the Royal Coachman or Royal Wulff are helpful.

To be consistently successful during fall you should see your trout before you make your cast, easy in low, clear water if you approach carefully and stealthily and if you are wearing Polaroid lenses.

In low, clear water of autumn the cool waters make the fish want to feed and the abundance of terrestrial insects drifting slowly through the pools provides easy pickings for the trout. The insects are washed into large back-eddies to the sides of the main current and often trout cruise there in search of meals. Sometimes the brookies take up feeding stations in these back-eddies, but whether you are fishing cruisers or on-station trout you must spot them first.

HARRY MURRAY is a freelance writer who lives in Edinburg, Virginia.





Secret Spots

SOME OF THE BEST FLY FISHING IN AMERICA is to be found on the small streams. Yet they are often overlooked by the fishermen, who seem drawn, like flies to honey, to the famous valley streams. The small streams of the Appalachian Mountain chain, from North Carolina, north through Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, contain some of the continent's best and most abundant trout habitat in small streams. Such waters pearl over rocks and under tree canopies. They are small waters that remain cool through summer and although their trout are small, they are many. The fly fisherman's techniques are special, adapted for fishing in small places. Short accurate casts, and stealth are the rule, and upstream dry-fly techniques are most often called for—casting the fly to the lips of pools, then working progressively to the pool heads, where the fast water spills in. The fishing calls for short rods and light lines—3-, 4- or 5-weight—and since the trout are often hungry, they are relatively unselective. It makes for easy fishing—a good place to learn or to teach a novice. Children find steady excitement on the little brook trout waters of the mountains. And veteran fishermen never tire of catching small trout on little brushy brooks. They are, in fact, the secret spots, little pots of gold waiting for the discovery.

JOHN RANDOLPH



Where should you cast? Once you have spotted the trout, keep as low as possible and remain motionless for two or three minutes, observing from a crouch or a crawl to determine if it's a cruiser or an on-station feeder.

You'll be lucky to get even one shot at the fish, and your false cast, if sloppily cast, will often spook it. Make your first false cast (your measuring cast well out of the trout's view to left or right), and drop the fly delicately a foot or two in front of it. (Only one cast should actually be made in the trout's direction—your delivery cast.) When the brookie takes, simply lift

your rod tip. Keep your hooks sharp, and try flattening your hook barb before sharpening the hook point. You'll find that the barbless hook bites more effectively, and in releasing trout it simply slips free.

My favorite autumn mountain brookie flies are the Black Crow Beetles (#16 to #20) Black and Cinnamon Ants (#16 to #20) and grizzly hackled midges with olive, black, brown, gray or cream bodies (#18 to #22). I fish them all dry on 8- to 9-foot leaders tapered to 6X or 7X. My rod is light (5-weight or less), short (7-1/2 feet), short enough to cast under the tree canopy. The rod is delicate and capable of

accurate presentations in the 12- to 15-foot range where most of my casting is done.

Mountain brookie fishing sounds demanding the way I have described it, but the rewards are worth the efforts. The lessons of the little streams are the lessons of the big ones. Learn here and take your knowledge with you downstream to the rivers and spring creeks. You may abandon the mountain brooks and streams when the season's glamour hatches are on, but you'll be back. When the little mountain streams get into your spirit they stay there.

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

How To Take Big Trout at the Bank

DECEMBER 1984 \$2.95/£1.25

14323

FLY FISHERMAN

Fishing Like A Predator
Autumn Brook Trout
Leader Strategies
Go To The Ant

Tying Section

