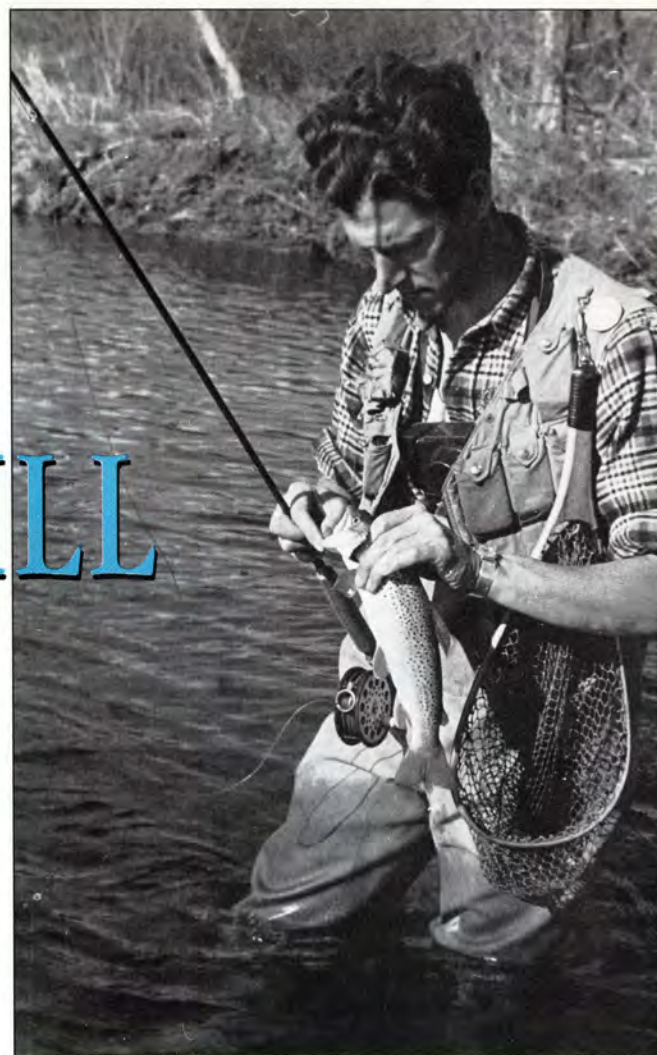


WULFF'S BATTENKILL

*His remembrances
of a great river
in its heyday*

LEE WULFF



Lee Wulff with a Battenkill brown in the 1930s

EDITOR'S NOTE: Last year Lee Wulff began a retrospective book on the great rivers he had fished and his first experiences on them. He had written three chapters when he died suddenly in a plane crash April 28. This chapter on his first experiences on the Battenkill we feel is a fine memorial to the man and his great passions for fishing and conservation.

I MET CY PERKINS AT A PARTY in Schenectady, New York, in the spring 1930. "So you're a trout fisherman," he said. And in a moment he asked if I would like to go fishing with him the next day.

I told him I would like to but had no tackle. He said he could lend me a fly-fishing outfit but no boots. I said, "Let's go."

We left Schenectady at dawn in his Model A and drove toward Saratoga Springs, where I could see the Green Mountains in an uneven silhouette against the sky. "We're going over to those mountains," Cy said, "where there aren't many fishermen. I know a real good place."

His "good place" was a little stream that flowed into a bigger river he called the Battenkill. Once at the little stream, Cy got out the tackle. The rod he'd brought for me was a twin of his own, a Horrocks-Ibbotson split-cane with a small reel and some level Otselic line on it. He had a few flies in a sheepskin folder, which he gave to me, saying, "I usually use worms." Then we beat our way through some alders to reach the stream.

Cy had hip boots. I had only sneakers. It was cool and windy on that April day, and we wore warm clothes. He had brought two cans of worms, and I accepted mine with thanks, although I hoped I wouldn't have to resort to them. I was dedicated to flies whenever I could make them work. "You fish up. I'll fish down to the main river then leapfrog up above you," he said, and with a genial wave he went out of sight.

The stream, which I later learned was called Camden Brook, was overgrown and shadowed by big trees. There were pools that were as much as two feet deep but no deeper, and there were trout under the overhanging roots and vegetation, good trout as he

had promised, fish of from eight to twelve inches, and quite a few of them. When Cy had fished his way to the big river and come back upstream to join or pass me, he had seven keepers of eight inches or over, and I'd taken eleven, all on flies. I'd taken some by creeping up to the edge and dancing my fly over the water with part of the leader still in the guides.

"How about going down to the big river?" I suggested. "Maybe there are some bigger fish there."

We had a pretty good catch of fish. Enough for both our families, I judged. I liked the idea of getting a big trout, though, something to compare with those I'd caught as a kid in Alaska. I felt it would be more fun on the main stream, which was comparable to the Esopus and the other Catskill streams I could reach from New York City and was getting to know.

Cy nodded. "I know a place there, too." So we headed back toward the car.

We drove to a farm with the name Russell on the mailbox. "Got to say hello," Cy said as he headed for the big old colonial house that stood surrounded by some ancient locust trees. I waited by the car.

When he returned he said, "Nobody's fished here today so it should be good."

Because I was wading in sneakers and pants, the chill hit me. My eyes were on the far, deep waters where the big trout should be lying. I got to knee depth and started casting, but I couldn't reach more than halfway across. I stopped to look up at Cy.

He was at the head of the pool, dropping his worm into pockets behind big rocks in easily wadeable water. I waded deeper and cast as far as I could. I still had on the flies I'd used in the little brook—a Leadwing Coachman and a Black Gnat. Down through the pool I moved, casting steadily but with never a strike.

I came back to the shallow water and moved up toward the head of the pool again. Cy, still farther upstream, held up two fingers and pointed to his creel. I waded out again, this time going out until the water hit my crotch and passed it. It was cold, and my sneakers were just barely holding on the gravelly bottom. I still couldn't reach the swirls beside the steep rock face, where I was sure the biggest fish would be, but I did reach some new and deeper water. Halfway down the pool I had a strike.

My rod bent down hard. I knew I had hooked a very good fish. He hung for a minute or two in the



We crossed some meadow to reach the place he knew. It was a long, deep pool that pressed in against a steep bank on the eastern shore. Above the river, covering the steep slope, was a forest of hemlocks. They were big old trees that looked like they'd grown there forever. It was only eleven o'clock, and the pool was still in shadow. Water rippled in at the head of the pool, struck a sharp rock ledge under the hemlocks, then slowed and deepened. The water was as clear as in any river I'd ever seen. It was hard to tell how deep the pool was on the far side by the ledge rocks. I waded out but didn't get far.

deep water where he'd taken the fly. The line made a big belly through the flow, and I held as hard as I dared. I realized that I had to make him work if he was to tire, so I jiggled the rod. Nothing happened the first time, but when I jiggled the rod again, the fish swam deliberately upstream on the far side, close in to the steep, rocky shore. Fortunately there was enough line on that borrowed reel to let him make the short run. Then he began drifting slowly back to the tail of the pool.

Eventually I was able to bring him over to my side of the pool and into deep water below where I'd

hooked him. I could see an occasional long creamy-silvery flash but couldn't really make out his true size. Cy came down to stand beside me. Neither of us had a net, because Cy hadn't figured on fishing the main river. There was a sloping beach just below us, and Cy suggested that we could beach him there; with two of us to grab hold or corral the fish, we could manage. Finally we saw the fish as I brought him in until the leader knot touched the rod tip. Then, when everything seemed to be going well, the fly came free.

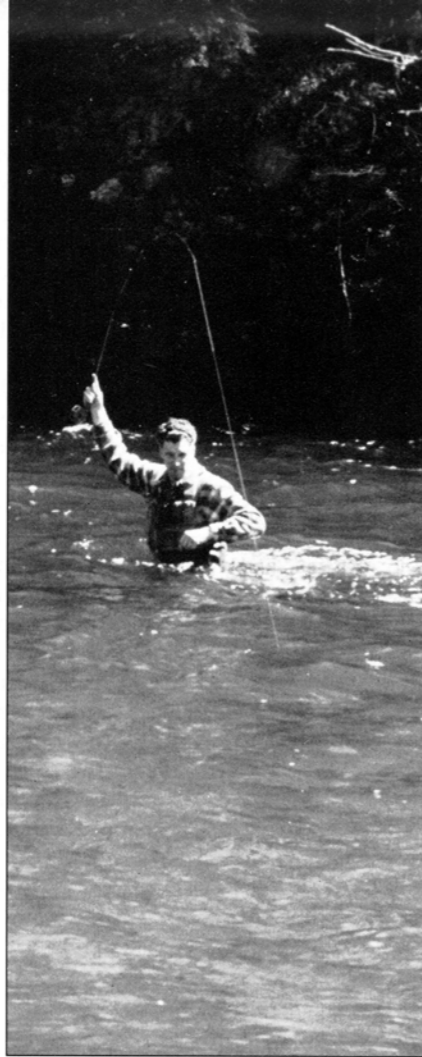
Cy guessed him as a five-pounder. My guess was maybe four. At any rate, he was a hell of a fish, and from that moment on the Battenkill became my favorite trout stream. The afternoon was waning. Cy had gone over his low boots and complained of the cold. My teeth were chattering, and I had goose bumps all over. We agreed it was time to go home. We'd had a great day, even though there'd been a lot of shivering in it, and we hadn't seen even one other fisherman.

No Smiles for Dan

THE NEXT TIME I FISHED the 'Kill was two years later. By that time I'd grown civilized and bought a pair of waist waders, and I had a lot of my own flies and spare gear in a vest I'd sewn together. I had my own rod, a 9-foot Granger, and a lot more flies. I still didn't have my own car and had talked my friend Bela "Dan" Dankovzsky into driving us up in his Model A. We left New York right after work on a Friday in May for the long six-hour drive. It was after dark when we pitched our tent in Russell's meadow.

Daylight saw bacon and eggs on the fire. The sun was just kissing the stream when we started to fish just below the first bridge downstream. We fished that first pool together and neither of us had a strike. Then I opted to go down half a mile or so to give Dan a good stretch to fish.

With that big brown of my first visit still vividly in mind, I put on a large streamer, a size 4. It was a flashy thing with badger hackle wings and a body of the new Moistureproof Cellophane material. I was working at that time as a package designer for the Cellophane company and had access to it before it



LEE WULFF PHOTOS

Above: Lee Wulff fighting a trout on his beloved Battenkill.

Right: Al Prindle and a friend await a rise of fish on the Vermont 'Kill.

Below: Prindle wondering the obvious: "Did I strike too hard?"



was generally available. I swept that streamer across the current as I waded my way downstream, covering all the likely water. Midway through a long meadow pool more than a quarter of a mile above the place where the Camden Brook emptied into the Battenkill, I had a strike and knew immediately that it was a good fish. I played it carefully; the memory of losing that earlier Battenkill brown at the last minute was still with me.

This fish fought doggedly and stayed in the deep water. Fortunately the flow in that meadow pool was slow. I didn't have to worry about a big belly in my line. It seemed ages before I could bring the fish in close enough to see him. When I did I got a shock. Flashing up to me through the Battenkill's clear water were the brilliant colors of a great brook trout, the biggest one I had ever seen. My heart pounded and my hands may have been unsteady, but slowly and surely I drew the great fish toward me.

When I'd bought the larger creel I needed to carry fish as big as a three-pounder I'd caught on the Ausable, I also bought a landing net large enough to land a small salmon. It had a fairly deep bag, and the mesh varied gradually from about a one-inch size at the ash rim to a quarter of an inch or less at the bottom of the bag. That was so I could catch minnows or little frogs in it, if I decided the real thing would be more effective than my flies. Slowly the beautiful, brilliant fish came in. I sank the net deep, and as I drew him over it, I relaxed my pressure. His head went down into the net as I lifted it, and he was mine.

I sat on the bank then with the big brookie beside me, just looking at him and wishing I'd had sense enough to bring my camera. Finally I broke my reverie and got some ferns for my creel. He just barely fit into it with a big bend at his tail. I was just starting back into the river to fish for another one when I saw

Dan coming up from below. He was walking the shore. I wondered why he'd quit fishing.

Dan was relatively new to trout fishing, but he was devoted to taking them on flies. As an artist, he had a sense of beauty in the flies he was learning to tie, and his casting was coming along in good shape in this, his second year of trout fishing. Yet every time we'd fished together I always caught more and bigger fish than he did. He was a better artist than I was and he made more money. It bothered him, I was certain, to have to take second place in our fishing. He was determined to break through and take the lead.

As he approached, I saw he was carrying a good fish, and when he was close enough, I could see a great smile spread all over his face. I waded ashore as he approached and sat on the grassy edge of the bank to wait for him. He came up, dropped to one knee,

"I was beginning to feel that the Battenkill . . . was my own private stream, and I wanted to make the fishing last."



and laid his fish on the bank beside me. It was a brookie, a fish a little over three pounds. He'd gone on downstream to get ahead of me to fish and just where the Camden Valley Brook emptied into the main river he'd hooked and played this fish. Having caught it, he hurried immediately back upstream to find me and show me his prize. Dan caught his on a size 10 Black Gnat, which meant he'd shown a greater skill in playing it than I had in playing mine on a size 4 streamer. Then he asked, "Did you have any luck?"

Slowly I opened my creel. He bent over to look into it, and I heard him gasp. "Good God!" he said.

I looked up into his face. There was no joy there. His smile was gone. It was many trips later that he caught a bigger fish than I.

Early Catch-and-release

THE FOLLOWING YEAR I USUALLY FISHED the 'Kill just above

the bridge at Shushan. I had a car and could drive up on weekends and camp out, leaving Fridays and getting up before dawn for the drive back on the almost empty Monday-morning roads. Gradually I was learning the river. My first fishing had been up near the

Vermont border. Each trip I tried new water farther downstream. That stretch just above the Shushan Bridge was a good one, and I was fishing it for the second time on a Sunday morning.

The water ran hard into the pool I was fishing, striking

great rocks on the true left bank with a heavy swirling sound, then slowing down to deep water before deepening into a flat, shallow riffle that moved the water on down to the pool at the bridge. There were no hatching flies, and I was fishing a small streamer with a dropper fly made of a plain gray wool body on a size 10 hook. An 11-inch brown took the dropper. I



brought him in swiftly, and after disengaging the hook, dropped him back into the river. I'd begun to realize that the Catskill streams I fished were being overfished and suffering from it. I was beginning to feel that the Battenkill, where I saw so few fishermen, was my own private stream, and I wanted to make the fishing last.

As the little trout slid back into the water, a low voice behind me on the shore said, "Now, what in hell did you do that for?"

I turned to see a short, heavysset man sitting on a log. He'd been watching me without my knowing it. He was wearing hip boots, and he sat with a fly rod across his knees. I waved and walked toward him, noting as I came close that he had three snelled flies on his leader in the old-fashioned way. He wore a suit that had seen some wear, his pockets bulging with a

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Sitting down on the log, I put out my hand and gave my name. He shook my hand and said, "I'm Al Prindle. I live right here." He turned and nodded toward a house that stood just a dozen yards or so from where we sat. It was just past midday, and the stream was quiet. We were both in the mood to relax and talk. I told him about my feeling of needing to put fish back to make sure there'd be enough good fish in the stream for ourselves as well as others to catch. To that he gave a barely perceptible nod and an "Ayuh." I told him I was camped in Russell's meadow and that I loved that stream above all the others I knew except, maybe, on some days, the Ausable.

It turned out that as an eighteen-year-old he'd enlisted and fought in the Spanish-American War. He had a war disability that was minor, but it gave him a pension, so he'd had time to fish. "I work a little now, though," he said. "Got a job as postmaster. But I still fish as much as I want to."

Roosevelt had just been elected President, and in the search for a good Democrat to give the postmaster job to in that overwhelmingly Republican community, Al was a shoo-in. He went on to tell me that his wife, Annie, was always there to take over the job, so he was free to fish any time he liked.

We fished out the afternoon, he leading the way through one pool and I fishing through first on the next one. He fished a shorter line than I did, bouncing the first fly on and off the water, skimming the second, and swimming the last fly underneath the surface. When he had a strike, he lifted his rod mightily and quite often he flipped the fish, if it was a small one, all the way onto the bank behind him. We caught a few small trout, for it was one of those days on the 'Kill when the larger fish just weren't moving. We became good friends that afternoon. I can hardly remember a luckier day.

I had found a friend who loved to fish as much as I did. He lived on a beautiful trout stream that I drove to whenever I could but that was so far from New York and took so much time to reach that I could rarely find anyone else willing to put in the hours I wanted to put in and get back on a Monday morning after a six-hour drive ready to face a full day of work. All I had to do was arrive at the post office, then Al would signal to Annie that he was going fishing, and off we'd go. Al would fish as late and as long as I wanted to. He was always cheerful and the best of company.

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It was about that time that I left my job as a package designer at the Cellophane company to freelance, so I had more time to fish, and I could sometimes break away in midweek when I never could have found anyone to ride up to the 'Kill with me. Al and the Battenkill gave me some wonderful years.

New Fly Fishing Trends

I WORE MY VEST, designed to keep everything above water with lots of pockets that let me reach for any particular type or size of fly I needed. I had a small pair of scissors hanging from a pocket at the front of my vest and a small mesh creel buttoned to the bottom of the vest for the few fish I kept; I had realized the need for catch-and-release of the best breeding stock. I had a pair of sheep-skin pieces sewed to each shoulder to put dry flies in to dry before putting them back into their regular boxes. And I wore waist waders and kept current with the trends in flies.

One day when I walked in to the Shushan post office to see if Al was ready to go fishing, Annie came to the window and said, "Al's already out on the stream. He said if you came by to tell you he'd be up at the Sheep Pasture Pool." Al had an open mind and wanted to become a top fisherman. I found him there in a new pair of waist waders, wearing his hunting vest with one or two 12-gauge shells still left in their cloth loops and the shapes of his fly books and leader box showing in the pockets. From a safety pin at his neckline hung a pair of regular-size paper shears. Al was moving toward being the picture-book fly fisherman, but he was doing it his way.

I kept up with the innovations in fly fishing through the New York Angler's Club members I knew and by reading all the literature and current magazine articles I could get. I brought up George La Branche's *The Dry Fly in Fast Water* for Al to read.

The following week when I went up, I again found Al on the stream. He was fishing his usual three-fly leader, although on occasions he'd tried a dry fly and a streamer. He greeted me with the usual welcoming smile and waded to the shore where I stood. His creel was heavy. He beamed.

"That guy La Branche," he said, "he's a smartie. That part about creating a hatch by passing a lot of dry flies past a place where a trout should be! Well, I got on three Leadwing Coachmans. By the time the third one goes by, they think there's a hatch of 'em and they grab it. Look! All but one on the tail fly!" Then he opened his creel. Al hadn't yet accepted my

putting fish back. He had a dozen 10- to 12-inch trout that would grace his skillet or those of a neighbor.

When I began writing stories about the fishing on the Battenkill, Al was my major character. One of my pictures of him appeared on the cover of *Hunting and Fishing* magazine. Al was becoming a celebrity, a position he accepted with dignity but without any change in his character as a deadly trout predator. When Norman Rockwell moved up to our area in the Battenkill Valley, Norman used Al as a model for several covers. He was a wise old valley resident, and he looked the part.

The Battenkill was a magnificent trout stream. It flowed clear as gin from the high Green Mountains down through its valley to New York and on across the Hudson Valley to enter into the Hudson River at Schuylerville. We fished it from well up into Vermont down to the big stillwater above a paper-company dam near Greenwich. Once it crossed the New York border, it was a big, challenging stream. One could wade across it above and below most of the pools. From the state line to Shushan, it was all fishable, although there was one spot just above the bridge on the Shushan-to-Cambridge road where for a quarter of a mile the flow was deep and steady. That was one of my favorite spots. It was deep from bank to bank with a gravelly bottom that shifted with each season's spring floods. Once into that flow there was no turning back; I couldn't wade upstream against the current. It became my special water. With my over-six-foot height I could wade as deeply as any of the fishermen I knew.

The Battenkill was not a very productive river. It was more like the Neversink in the Catskills—extremely clear but with nowhere near the pounds of fish per acre to be found in the less clear but much more productive Beaverkill or Esopus. Because it was fished too little, however, there were more big fish available. I could usually count on getting a two-pound trout on any weekend I spent fishing there, but there were a lot of blank days when the browns just didn't move and I'd have to satisfy myself with fishing for the little brook trout that were always rising to midges in a few special eddies I knew.

Allan, my firstborn, was baptized on the banks of the Battenkill on some land we'd bought for a future house. I thought it fitting that he should be baptized there with water from the 'Kill in his beautiful mother Helen's arms. I hoped he'd find something in his life-

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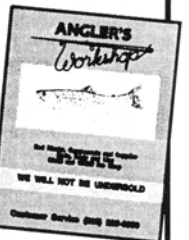
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time that would give him as much pleasure as fishing was giving me. As a youngster he had lots of chances to fish, and he took all of them. At first he fished for sunfish and rock bass in Dead Pond, one of a chain of minor lakes just over the hills from the 'Kill. He was tying flies and well into trout fishing by the time he was seven.



Lee Wulff on his Battenkill, which he called "a flow of many moods."

We moved up to live on the Battenkill in 1941. The spot I'd chosen was on a small bluff that overlooked a deep pool and a mill pond just above an old dam on the river. We could look upstream over a long stretch of placid water and see Mt. Equinox in the Green Mountains break the skyline some 15 miles away. We were in New York State a mile and a half downstream from the border. Looking across the river and the meadow beyond it, we could see the rising slopes on the far side of the valley crest on Goose Mountain's ridges 1,500 feet above the stream. It was a beautiful place to live; I felt strongly that my boys should grow up in the country where they could have a private world of their own instead of being in New York City, where no child can ever escape the continual presence of grownups, whether it be on playgrounds, parks, or vacant lots.

The Battenkill's Biggest

THE BATTENKILL WAS CHANGING. Those two big brookies Bela Dankovzsky and I had caught were the last over 13 or 14 inches long that I ever saw in the

river. And even brook trout of that size became scarcer and scarcer. My magazine stories and the general increase in fly fishing meant that instead of the half-dozen or so regulars we'd had at the start, there were many anglers coming in from Albany and New York City and Connecticut. My friend Jack Atherton, an artist I'd met in California and later in New York, came up for a

Meade Schaeffer had told me of a great trout he'd seen rise in one of the pools between Arlington and the New York border. We went up there on several evenings to fish, but the big fish never showed itself. At about that time I left to go to Cleveland for an appearance before a sportsmen's group. My film lecture went as usual, and the next morning as I was flying back on the DC3, I accepted a Cleveland paper from the hostess and turned to the outdoor column. There was a notice in the column of a 7 1/2-pound brown trout caught the day before from Vermont's Battenkill. It was caught, I read, by Meade Schaeffer on a size 12 dry fly. That roving editor had been fishing with Meade the day I left and had phoned in the story. Big fish like that were there to be caught.

My largest was a 5 1/4-pounder, a brown that took a hopper I had dropped into relatively shallow water at bankside in one of the long, relatively shallow stretches of the river below Shushan. I'd expected nothing but small fish in water of that depth, and I was fishing through and wading rapidly to get to the next deep hole downstream. I guess there was a pocket of deep water there that reached in under the overhanging grass.

Nothing could have surprised me more than that sudden swirl and then having that big fish come streaking out into midstream and racing on up to the deep water of the pool above. My 100 yards of backing paid off. The fish ran freely until it reached the pool. Then it stopped and let me catch up and gain line. I was fishing alone that day, and I'm not quite sure that Al believed me when I showed him how far that fish stretched from head to tail on my rod.

The biggest fish of all I saw in the Battenkill was a resident of the pool under Buffman's Bridge, the deep pool where I once dived from the bridge while wearing waders to show that they wouldn't bother me in swimming and that anglers wearing waders shouldn't worry about falling. I didn't catch that great trout. I didn't even hook it, but we looked at one another as antagonists at close quarters. It tried to swallow a little brookie I was playing. I wish he had. In fact, I thought it had the little trout's head well into its mouth when I pulled hard. Instead of biting into the big trout's jaw, the hook came free and that brown of somewhere near ten pounds swam leisurely away.

Lessons for Big Browns

THE BATTENKILL TAUGHT ME a great deal.

On the days when the stream seemed dead I could usually find a few small trout rising in the slow water. The smallest hooks I had were size 16 until I found that the flies I tied on them were too large to fool the fish. I sent to England for some size 18 and 20 hooks. With the flies I tied on those tiny hooks, I was able to catch those difficult trout. And I found, too, that they weren't all small trout. Some were big browns. Mostly they were rising in the eddies where a current swirled away from a cut bank. But as I had on the Ausable long before, I found some stillwater pools where big browns occasionally sipped midges. After that there were fewer trips when I didn't catch at least one 16-incher.

I loved night fishing for bass and walleyes on the nearby lakes but never cared much for fishing the stream at night. To me it lost its beauty; the delicacy and accuracy and the skill of wading well were lost in the darkness. I fished more for the pleasure of perfect casts and visual rises than just to catch big fish. But Al loved catching the big ones, which he did when he got started using plugs. He showed them off and bragged about them to everyone he knew. In the end I felt sorry I'd told him how effective they'd be, but he probably would have found out about them anyway, as the spin fishermen were beginning to come to the stream.

In 1947 I learned to fly an airplane, and I met Okey Butcher, a Camden Valley man who had learned to fly as I had at The Round Lake Flying Service, near Saratoga Springs. I had a Piper Cub, and he soon bought an Aeronca Chief, both two-place training planes. Okey made a business of selling scents to trappers. He was the finest woodsman I ever knew. He was an excellent trapper and understood wild animals as few men ever have. Once, on a bet, he hid behind a rock outcropping beside a deer trail and killed a passing deer with an axe. As we flew together, we began to hunt and fish together. While primarily a hunter and trapper, Okey had a great understanding of all living things. He was already a deadly fisherman with bait, and as we fished, he became as adept with fine tackle, delicate leaders, and small flies as anyone else I knew.


My finest memory of Okey came when the mayflies were doing their mating dance over the rivers. We were having no luck catching fish with what seemed a perfectly good imitation of the flying bugs. The spinners were only touching the water now and then and not drifting on it. We were fishing

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WULFF'S BATTENKILL ...

Continued from page 75

a long quiet run between Arlington and the New York border. Staying within hailing distance of each other, we occasionally checked the patterns the other one was using. We'd both missed rises with a #12 Gray Wulff, and we both stayed with that pattern. From my position at the lower end of the pool I looked up and saw Okey catch and release a good fish. I cast a little more intently and watched my fly with special care so that I wouldn't miss the rise I was sure I'd get. Before long Okey was fast to another fish. Dusk was coming on, and I knew we wouldn't be able to see much longer. Okey hooked and released another trout. To my query, "What fly?" he replied, as before, "Gray Wulff."

Darkness drove us to the car. As we met and climbed the bank to the car, I looked at his fly. It wasn't one but two. He'd tied two Gray Wulffs together at the leader tip. "It's simple," he said. "I know they're not falling to the water yet, but those bugs are mating and those trout can look up and see what they're doing. I just mated a couple of flies and let them fall to the water. That's what they were waiting for."

The Advent of Spinning

THERE WERE A GOOD MANY PLACES ON the Battenkill that couldn't be reached by a fly caster with his flies. I thought of them as sanctuaries where the trout were safe and could rest and think about the flies we'd thrown at them. They were the spots where the wise old fish could rest and wait until spawning time. All that ended swiftly with the advent of spinning tackle. Suddenly anyone with a minimum of skill could pick up a spinning outfit, stand on dry ground in his sneakers, and put his lure into any spot in the stream he wanted to and at any depth, something no fly fishermen had any hope of doing.

Instead of a trout having to move up or over several feet to take a fly, spinning lures came right by the fish's nose. Trout are curious and they have no hands with which to test things out. They must mouth things that might be food. Spinning tackle worried me. It was too deadly. When anglers find an easier way to catch fish, then to keep the same resident spawning population, there must be shorter seasons or fewer fishermen or catch-and-release. Otherwise the fishing goes to hell.

When one of the head biologists from Albany came over to check the stream, I stood on the bank with him and predicted what would happen if measures weren't taken to protect the

trout from this new danger. I explained that the take should be limited so there'd be enough big breeders left to maintain the river's fine stock of trout. He said I was a fly-fishing elitist and the kids in sneakers had as much right to fish as I did. I agreed with him completely on that. My idea was not to keep the kids or poorer anglers from fishing. "Let everyone fish," I said, "but just limit the number taken in some manner so that we'll have adequate breeding stock left in the stream." His view remained unchanged. The fly fishermen had had the streams long enough, he said. It was now the average guy's turn to take over. And take over they did. With his blessing.

The spin fishermen came from near and far. They fished hard and they caught fish in quantities and sizes that amazed the old Battenkill fishermen. The smartest ones came in just after a rise of water, especially when the flow was a bit colored by some mud in the flow. They concentrated on the spots where the feeder streams were bringing in terrestrials like angleworms and beetles. Bit by bit they were eliminating the native breeding stock. By the early 1960s we were relying entirely on stocking for our catches. It was rare when we caught a native fish, and the fish and game department's shocking showed no carry-over. It was then, in 1962, that I left the banks of the Battenkill and moved to Keene, New Hampshire.

There were many good reasons for the move. Keene had an airport with scheduled flights to New York. It was a small town where I could hunt for woodcock on the airport land. But I never could have left if the Battenkill hadn't been spoiled by uncontrolled fishing.

Keene was in beautiful country with quick access to New York City, where the film labs for my movies were. I left the 'Kill sadly but retained most of my property on the river, and later, when special regulations began to build the river back, I built a camp overlooking the river on the spot where Allan was baptized. I went back sometimes for memories, but although the river still runs clear, it will take no-kill regulations for a long period to bring it back to where it was when Cy Perkins and Al Prindle and I first came to love it.



LEE WULFF died when his airplane crashed on April 28, 1991. He had had a heart attack, which led to the crash. His wife, Joan, continues the Wulff Fly-Fishing School at Lew Beach, New York, and travels for lectures and appearances around the world.

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