





A Little Piece of Heaven

—fly fishing an old beaver pond

By Bruce Van Deuson

Summer dawns come early, and for the fisherman, it's most often the best time to be out, especially in a quiet, secret place. Some of my favorite memories are of visiting my old fishing haunt, a beaver pond tucked away from prying eyes. I loved being out with the first rays of sunlight filtering through the surrounding forest. A beaver, silently going about its morning business, would telegraph subtle ripples across the otherwise smooth surface of the old pond. The only disturbance was the gentle scraping of my canoe as I slid it into the dark, tannin-stained water.

I first discovered the pond when my parents rented a house on the property for

several years during my youth. Teenage enthusiasm demanded that the estate's many acres be explored, and my constant companions were only too eager to share in boyish adventures. From the cover of bank-side willows and blueberry bushes, many idyllic days were spent along the pond's banks, observing beaver, muskrat, wood ducks, kingfishers and herons as they went about their daily activities.

After moving away, a stint in the service, marriage and the demands of a regular job, I had all but forgotten about the pond until I read an article about the excellent fly fishing that can occur on well-established beaver ponds. My curiosity was piqued, so when I saw an

article in the local paper about how the property had been left to the church and was to be used as a conference center, summer camp, and small museum, I decided a visit was in order.

While at the museum, I had a lovely chat with the curator, describing to her what the property was like in the late 1950s. When I broached the subject about the possibility of fishing on the pond, she seemed receptive, but told me I'd have to check with the caretaker of the property whose house was just down the road. Imagine my surprise when the caretaker turned out to be Don, the father of a boy I had played and gone to school with while living there. He invited me in, and somewhere between coffee and talking about old times, I asked about the possibility of fishing on the beaver pond. He said he had never heard of anyone fishing up there and doubted the existence of fish, but that I was welcome to give it a try.

After a few hours of fishing, I was rewarded with more than a dozen brook trout. I only kept three; all in the 9- to 11-inch range. These were not stockers, but wild and possibly true native brookies with flesh a rather shocking shade of orange. Don could not believe it when I showed him on my way home, and he told me I could come up any time, but requested that I bring no one, and not tell anyone either—a promise I happily kept. It was an angler's dream come true—a private fishing hole!



Scott Cornett

If you've never seen a wild brookie, they are a gorgeous fish. In the black water of this pond, their upper bodies are almost black with pronounced, olive-tan vermiculations and a sprinkling of ruby-colored spots. Their white- and black-edged orange fins and orange bellies add a vivid contrast to their appearance.

Over the next several years, I made regular visits to the pond. Talking with the local conservation officers, I learned that because the pond and its entire watershed were on private land, no stocking had ever been carried out by the state. Estate records indicated no evidence of private stocking either, and I realized the fish in that old beaver pond were a real treasure, especially because 11-inch wild brook trout were considered large for that time and place. Barbless hooks and catch-and-release fishing soon became watchwords I lived by. If I wanted dinner, the stocked streams were easily available.

When I ventured out, a boat cushion, canoe, wood paddle for stealth, bailing sponge, pre-rigged 8½-foot fiberglass fly rod, well-stocked fishing vest, and a thermos of hot coffee were all that I needed for a morning's fishing. With as little disturbance as possible, I would ease the canoe into the first lane of water between the aquatic bushes and water lilies. Constant attention by the resident beavers kept the travel lanes open (which is typical of an active beaver pond many years old).

My favorite dry fly was a high-floating, rather bushy #12 March Brown. On more than one occasion, my casts were rewarded with a splashy strike. While not all strikes ended with a catch, they were always thrilling. I spent many a morning catching and releasing any number of magnificent wild brookies while savoring my good fortune at having this private place to enjoy the wonders of nature. I once heard it said, "A day spent fishing is a day added to one's life." I believe that.



DEC Bureau of Fisheries



James Clayton

It's been 50 years since I first discovered my pond, and although many miles currently separate me from that wonderful place, e-mail conversations with the property's administrators indicate they have hired experts to determine exactly what flora and fauna reside on the property and how best to preserve them for posterity. I have a standing invitation to visit and can only hope those jewels of the north remain alive and well. Upon my last inspection, the beavers

were still active, their dam was growing over with willow and maple, and a bog was gradually filling in the upper end. Regardless of these changes, I hope to bring my grandchildren there so they too can marvel at one of nature's wonders.

Bruce Van Deuson was raised on the north shore of Oneida Lake in Oswego County where he learned to fly fish. He currently resides in North Carolina.