

TROUT AT COWICHAN BAY

BY
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TO most artistic fishermen, those who delight in fishing as a fine art, the most enjoyable form of the sport is undoubtedly to be obtained in fishing a running stream. Lake and loch fishing have been described contemptuously by some as the duffer's delight. With such a sweeping condemnation I most emphatically do not agree. Though to fish from a boat is not the ideal way of taking trout and my inclination runs towards that of the majority and leads me when possible to seek my sport in running waters, yet when I can get such sport as can be had by fishing from a boat in the salt water for the gamest fish for its weight in British Columbia waters at a time when the rivers are too swollen for wading, and therefore, in this land of thick forest, for satisfactory fishing, I am going to take advantage of it every chance that I get.

After all, we are not all in the hey-day of our youth and vigor, and there are such things as rheumatism, which are apt to bring themselves all too persistently to our notice after a long day in the water, and these are considerations that weigh in the balance when a fishing trip is in contemplation.

For the angler who wishes for a good day's sport without undue fatigue and with dry feet, within easy distance from Victoria, I can confidently recommend a trip to Cowichan Bay. Knowing the reputation that the Cowichan River has for its trout fishing, and also knowing that all the trout it contains run up from the sea, it is only natural to suppose that the bay at the mouth should contain a goodly number of trout at the right season, which is practically all through the spring and summer.

I have proved it this year by actual experience, and have never returned from there this season without a pretty basket of fish. At the actual time of writing the trout there are of large size, fairly numerous, and hungry.

Of course, it is well known out here that the sea-trout are to be had in practically all the estuaries of the coast and all the little bays into which a creek runs, but here is an almost ideal place for the visiting angler to try his luck and skill without going very far from town; indeed, it is possible to leave town by the morning train and be back the same evening with as heavy a basket of big trout as would content any but the most shameless fish-hog after a few hours spent on as lovely and picturesque a stretch of water as is on the coast.

At the head of the bay is the Cowichan valley; looking up the valley the scene is bounded by mountains gradually gaining in height as they recede further from the sea; on the one side is a rocky mountain coming steep down to the water's edge, opposite is a fringe of gradually rising land with more mountains in the far distance, with the picturesque little settlement nestled against its green background of cedar and fir and maple, and down some miles from the head the view of gleaming, dancing water is broken by the dark green background of an island. In the spring the grouse can be heard hooting on either side, their low note traveling far across the water, while ever and again a cock pheasant calls his challenge to his rivals.

As one approaches the tide-flats a lonely heron is seen standing like a stone on the alert for its meal of fish, while the more majestic white-headed eagle rises with a scream from its perch on the top of one of the piles (that mark the river channel) and wheels away to a more respectful distance from its human disturbers.

Among such surroundings as these, and given propitious weather, which is the rule rather than the exception in the summer months, and what mortal could but be happy, even without the added attraction of good fishing? Salmon can be caught in numbers there as elsewhere in the season, but they can also be fished for with good chances of success here at a time when it would be futile to troll off the Outer Wharf at Victoria, for instance; in the spring there are the steelheads and a strong run of grilse. About now the "springs" are running and being caught without difficulty by trolling, and later on the cohoes will be there in their myriads. But it is not the present intention to enlarge on the salmon fishing, but rather to explain to those who have not the requisite local knowledge how good baskets of fine sea-trout can be made angling in these waters. The fish may perhaps be easiest caught at certain stages of the tide, but it is not by any means necessary to study the tide-table too carefully before deciding on an expedition to the Bay, as I have tried it now at all stages of the tide and all times of day, and have caught them, as far as I could judge, equally well right along. This does not mean that one can fish promiscuously anywhere at any time though; at different stages of the tide different tactics more or less must be employed.

Owing to the large quantities of small-fry on the water and the fact that the trout are cannibals of the worst kind and prefer a fish diet to any other when they can get it, I have not had much success with the fly, and am afraid that it is hardly to be recommended

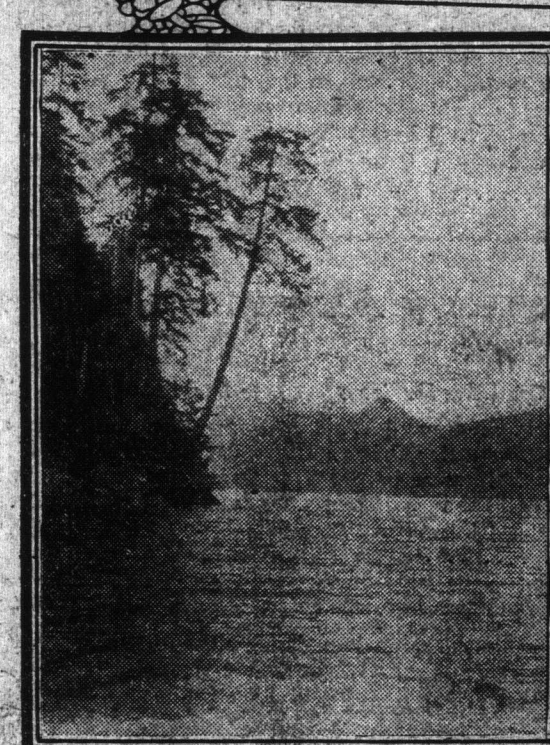
whenever there are large quantities of these little fish present for their larger and wiser relatives to prey on; but a small spoon can be used in such a way as to give almost equal sport to that which could be obtained by the use of the fly if it were practicable. The great objection to trolling is and always will be the use of a lead to sink the line to the requisite depth to attract the fish; after the fish is hooked the weight of the sinker on the trace prevents the free play that a fish will give on an unweighted line. In this kind of fishing this objection is done away with, as no lead is necessary or desirable, and only the smallest size of spoon is needed. The best to use is a little round spoon about the size of the thumb-nail on a single gut trace or an ordinary fly cast. Let out enough line to allow the spoon to keep just below the surface and no more, and row the boat only just fast enough to ensure the proper spinning of the bait. When the tide is high the best water to try is the river current, which can be readily distinguished by the oiliness of the water and the smooth streak which it causes in the ripple of the bay. Patience will be necessary, as in the current one will often hook a "green" fish, in other words, a piece of floating weed, but it is here that the best fish will be found to feed, and the best chances are of making connection with them. Keep well up towards the shallows and as near as can be judged to the line where the mud-flats end and the deep water begins. At low tide it is easy to recognize a well-marked line, as the flats end abruptly, and the change of the tide will show a marked line where the muddy water ends and the blue water begins, and here is the place where you will get the fish, which hang round the patches of sea grass or weed, which can be seen when the tide is out. The little spoon without a weight spins along an inch or two below the surface, and the cannibal darts out from the patch of weed where he is lying in wait for the unwary small-fry of his own and his cousin the salmon's tribe, and once you have him on your hook you may expect a good hard tussle before you bring him exhausted to your landing net; by the way, this latter is a necessity, as the fish are big, and it is well to take no chances in lifting them into the boat. Once the fish is hooked on this light tackle the sport it affords, though granted not as fine and exciting as it would be in a rushing stream, is nevertheless just as good as if a fly had been used, and indeed at times when the natural supply of fry, or shiners, to use a localism, is not plentiful in the vicinity, I see no reason why the fly should not do execution here as elsewhere on similar waters with which I am well acquainted.

There is perhaps one drawback to this kind of fishing about the present time, and that is, that a very considerable percentage of the angler's time will be taken up with releasing from his hook the voracious little samlets, which seem to have an appetite and a capacity for hooks quite out of all proportion to their size, but patience will be rewarded, and there will be no mistaking the bite of the worthier fish when it comes, and if the angler is alone, and the rod in the bottom of the boat when a bite comes, he wants to lose no time in seizing the rod before some three or four pounder drags it overboard in its first mad rush.

For the benefit of the intending visitor, it may be said that the quickest way to reach Cowichan Bay is by train from Victoria to Cowichan station, from there is about thirty-five minutes sharp walking, or about fifteen minutes ride on a wheel over a good road, with one steep hill near the end, and another rideable one near the station. Rigs can be obtained to make the trip to and from the railway. At the bay, close to the water's edge, there is first-class accommodation and a good supply of excellent boats for hire at the usual rates for this coast. Five minutes after reaching his quarters the angler can be on the water and, as soon as on the water, he can wet his line with a good chance of feeling a response from the other end.

WEIGHT FOR LENGTH

It is doubtless a common experience among fishermen to feel acutely at times the need for a spring balance when the unexpected but always wished-for giant has been brought to net. It is exasperating not to be able to tell with accuracy the weight of a fish, and to have to rely wholly on guess-work and the imagination when describing the catch to the unbeliever. The following table of weight for length, compiled by Mr. Edward Sturdy, an experienced Old Country fisherman, and contributed to the Fishing Gazette, will be found quite reliable for computing the weight of trout or salmon in condition. Although the balance may be forgotten, it is always pos-



A TYPICAL POINT ON THE COAST

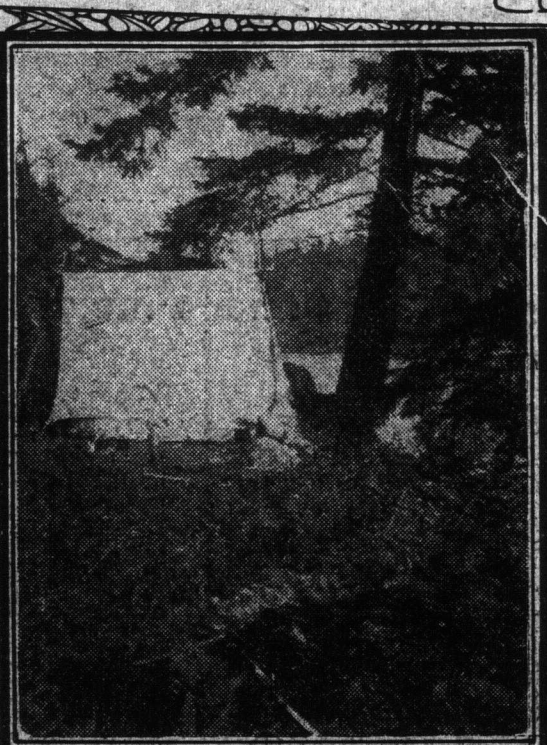
SALMON			
Lengths in Inches.	Weight in Lbs.	Lengths in Inches.	Weight in Lbs.
30	11.574	43	34.082
31	12.700	44	36.516
32	14.042	45	39.063
33	15.594	46	41.725
34	16.848	47	44.500
35	18.379	48	47.407
36	20.000	49	50.432
37	21.713	50	53.584
38	23.522	51	56.864
39	25.428	52	60.274
40	27.435	53	63.819
41	29.544	54	67.500
42	31.759	55	71.320

The measure should be taken from the snout to the middle eye of the tail fin.

WANTED—A STITCH IN TIME

The fish and game of this new country are a public asset, and it will be a sorry thing for the land if ever the enjoyment of them is allowed to get into the hands of a few rich men. At the same time it must be always borne in mind that, as the population increases and the number of sportsmen increases in proportion, something more must be done in the way of legislation to prevent the total extermination of the fish and game. No country can stand indefinitely the wholesale slaughter that has gone on in the past and been regarded with apathy by the bulk of those who should bestir themselves to moderate it.

Victoria has unfortunately gained the reputation of being slow; it is not the province of the editor of this page to discuss the water question, or the dust nuisance, or other problems that even angling cranks can but hear of, but, as Victoria has also the reputation of being the home of a large army of the best kind of sportsmen, it seems a pity that they should be so slow to bestir themselves in this matter. Victoria men will spend many dollars in securing the best of sporting dogs, and have dug down deep into their pockets some of them to pay for the introduction of species of game new to the country, and yet, when it comes to uniting to secure the necessary legislation admittedly needed on all sides to protect the fish and game and restrain the ravages of the fish and game-hog, they seem to fall down lamentably. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the game and game-fish of the country are one of its very valuable possessions and none should be at liberty to deliberately waste the natural wealth of the country. It is the business men in other parts of the province that are recognizing this and organizing to bring pressure on their representatives to compel the adequate recognition of the importance of the issue. What other settled country in the world has such totally inadequate protection of the common game? It is



CAMPED ON THE SPOT



not a question of imposing big licences on visiting sportsmen who take a head or two of big game out of the country, it is a question of protecting from an extermination that is within measurable distance of the commonest sorts of game that are now within easy reach and afford enjoyment to the multitude. We cannot eat our cake and have it too, why not be content with a reasonably sized slice at a meal and all help to see that the greedy boy does not take more than his fair share?

RIPARIAN RIGHTS

It seems to be still in dispute whether the ownership of land along a river-bank carries with it the power to prevent the general public fishing in the river. Most laymen cherish the opinion that the most the land-owner can do is to prevent trespass on his land, and that any attempt on his part to interfere with an angler wading the stream is quite illegal. This certainly seems to be just if not according to law, and if the law is definitely and finally interpreted to provide otherwise and to allow the riparian owner to put obstructions in the way of fishermen wading or poling a canoe up the river it would be as well to alter it.

"Rod and Gun" for this month quotes in full a letter from Mr. Benjamin Hills, of Nova Scotia, re a law-suit pending there on this very point. It is a case which should be watched with the greatest interest by every sportsman in the country, as the question the case involves is one that is even more far-reaching than appears at first sight.

Mr. Hills says: "The Medway river is a natural highway. Rising in the South Mountains, about a dozen miles from Bridgetown, in the Annapolis valley, it traverses the Southwestern Peninsula to the Atlantic at Port Medway, flowing through a country rich in mineral, lumbering, and agricultural resources. Every year thousands of logs for lumber and pulp are driven down the river for many miles. It is constantly traversed by skiffs and punts and its free use is essential to the industry of the country. For some years past, certain parties have been quietly acquiring narrow strips of land, generally about thirty feet wide, along the river banks with a view to obtaining control of the fishing. From the earliest settlement of the country the public have enjoyed undisturbed the privilege of fishing anywhere on the river. Now that about all the available land bordering on the river has been secured,

an effort is being made to keep the public off and to reserve miles of the river for the exclusive use of a few individuals.

In the case of Dwyer versus Mack, Mr. Mack is accused of taking and destroying fish and disturbing the fish. The plaintiff also asks the Court to restrain Mack and all others from taking or disturbing fish, and also to confirm his ownership of the bed of the river and of the fish therein. Should the Court grant the request of Mr. Dwyer, it would give him power to stop all stream driving. The logs cannot be driven without disturbing the fish, and most stream driving is done during the fishing season.

It would also give him power to prevent boats from passing up or down the river. For that too, of necessity disturbs the fish, especially in Mr. Dwyer's particular part of the stream. Such a judgment would also confirm the claim of every owner of land on every river of Nova Scotia. American millionaires or Nova Scotia plutocrats would soon secure every available stream in the Province. Every stream worth fishing would soon be closed to all but a favored few.

It would mean that our railway and steamship companies would have to cease to advertise Nova Scotia as the land of free fishing and hunting; that the amateur angler must throw away his rod, and that the dealer in fishing tackle might as well shut up shop. It would mean that Nova Scotia would in this sense become the land of the monopolist, and not the home of the free. The Government now maintains an expensive department for the protection of inland fisheries. The people willingly pay the cost for the public good, but they certainly will not allow themselves to be taxed to keep up the fisheries for a few monopolists. Should the present attempt to close the rivers succeed, naturally the next step will be to stop the public from hunting. If one man owns all the fish in his part of the river, surely another one owns all the game on his part of the land.

Seeing the greatness of the issue involved, the people of Queen's County are subscribing liberally to a defence fund in order that the Courts may be able to fully investigate and finally settle the whole question. It is to be hoped that all over the Province those who are in favor of maintaining the rights of the public against monopoly will subscribe to the fund.

If the monopolists are right, let it be so declared, and let them undisturbed enjoy their privileges. If they are wrong, let the public know and freely exercise their own privileges."

HOW THE EX-LIEUTENANT BAGGED THE DECOYS

I accompanied the captain, who had carefully placed under his feet a dozen decoy ducks of the latest improved pattern, imported from New York, and on the merits of which he expatiated as we drove along. Arrived on the edge of the pond, Anton and I waded out to the centre of the pond and took our respective stations on two small islets. From our cover we could see one of the darkies, under the old captain's direction, placing the decoys in a small inlet, and in the opposite direction the lieutenant was wading along through the bushes near the shore on the alert for game. Suddenly the report of the lieutenant's gun was heard, and a flock of large whistling ducks rose and circled the pond towards us, to be greeted as they passed young Anton by two barrels, and as they swung off my chance came. On gathering in the spoil we counted seven ducks. The flock flew on up the pond, and turning at its upper end came down the shore, settling in a cove a couple of hundred yards above the captain, who, with the darky, lay concealed in the mangroves patiently watching his decoys. We could see the black boy earnestly pointing out where the flock had settled, and the captain set out to stalk them. At the same time the lieutenant retraced his steps, and after some time came in sight of the decoys, whereupon he promptly dropped under cover.

I looked across at Anton, who was pointing out this phase of the proceedings, and already shaking and swaying with unholly glee. With the ponderous lightness of an elephant the corpulent army man, who was also somewhat short-sighted, crept along toward the supposed ducks, his face glowing with heat and excitement; and when within range lifted his gun and poured two charges of heavy duck shot into the decoys. At the same instant the captain was preparing for action, having almost got within range of the ducks, when, startled by the double report, they rose and sped away, unharmed up the pond.—Forest and Stream.