

# FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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*News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine*

**FREE**

## **To the St. John**

Ten years old. A scrawny kid whose concern was whether summer lawn money would be enough for the Charles Atlas bodybuilding course. No more kick sand in his face. Night before we'd loaded Phil Carroll's 1953 Plymouth station wagon to the rafters with stuff for the new St. John River fishing cabin. Dad the Doctor and Phil the Druggist in the front seat we crossed the old Trenton Bridge as shades of pink crept up the eastern sky wedged between bedding, tackle, boxes, cartons of food, coolers, hundred-pound cylinder of propane, outboard motor and cans of gas. I had just enough room to change a daydream on occasion. This was not a lift of plywood cargo space of later versions.

By hungry midmorning we'd be in a diner in Bingham listening to talk of water levels and fish and finishing a breakfast not like your mother used to make.

In all the years of fishing the St. John I don't recall ever driving up in the rain. This morning was gorgeous with the bright sun playing off the water around the rafts of logs behind Bingham Dam waiting to be shipped down river to the various mills and paper companies. Little did we realize we were witnessing the end of a fascinating era in Maine history.

With the first leg behind, the Plymouth labored up the remainder of Route 201 spruce fir mountains to the frontier town of Jackman where we picked up the last perishables, topped off with gas, bought a few more worms and the "just in case necessities" which added to already bulging tackle boxes.

Sun was working on high noon as we climbed the last border mountain into the customs enclave which seemed to cling in a tenacious way to the south face. As today at Canadian customs the main concern was tobacco and how much brown water the Doctor and Druggist had brought along for evening antidote to sore casting arms. From there we rolled through the foothills past the first small French Canadian farms with weather beaten buildings and prevailing front porches. Down into the town of St. George and its huge and overpowering (to me) Catholic church. At the height of town we turned due east.

The trip now became a journey. Gravel roads, long, straight, dusty roads. Windows up and temperature with them. Before air conditioning. Dust rolled up around and still got in. Wagon color blue was soon indecipherable. Conversation dropped as driver focused on the often elusive highway as other vehicles kept visibility to a minimum. Occasionally we'd stop and catch a cup of water from a roadside spring. Wash the dust off. Sweep dust from hidden windows. Thoughts of the river kept us going. Finally after what seemed like hours (3-4), a short stretch of asphalt would sing under the tires as we rolled into Daaquam and the sight of one of the

St. John's northern tributaries. Getting close. Another leg. Completed another fuel top off (wiping well around the cap of course).

American customs was next. A trickier passage, replete with paperwork. Explanations for the full load. Then more paperwork at the Scott Paper Company gate. We were chosen few. One of Dad the Doctor's patients was a large shareholder in Scott Paper Co. Through this gentleman, Dad had managed for Phil to lease land and build a fishing cabin on the St. John. This was an almost unheard of opportunity in this tightly controlled northern Maine timberland owned by the giants.

Some twenty more miles to go. This over logging roads still recovering from winter heaves and spring thaw. Ruts dug deep by truck and trailer trains. Mud holes deep enough to half swallow the wagon as we came up to the bulldozed entrance "driveway". Phil picked his way in around minor boulders and sloughs that had a habit of finding bottom metal.

The new cabin sat on a bluff appropriately called Rolling Banks and for some reason, known perhaps only to the dozer operator, the road ended a few hundred feet below. Tired, late afternoon, covered with dust and blessed only by gentle breezes from the river we carried everything except perishables, stayed in the spring brook, up the hill.

With cabin opened and organized, mouse mess and droppings swept, wood box full, Phil the Cook and always Phil the Cook, would start dinner. Tonight's dinner would flow from the Coleman. Tomorrow and each night thereafter adding to summer's heat, the old cookstove would be fired. Tonight was simple. Tomorrow we'd have fiddlehead greens, fried potatoes and fresh brook trout if the river didn't let us down.

Young, used to cold water, when the wagon was unloaded I grabbed my shorts, and slipped down the path and found a pool, held onto sunken rocks to avoid being pulled downriver as best possible and slid into the river. How sweet that river felt. Layers of sweat and dust swept away in seconds. To this day I revel in the end of a day swim and remark "makes it all worthwhile".

With dinner over, dishes washed and put away and sun ebbing over the river, time had finally come to try out the new Johnson Century, a closed face spinning reel that Dad and Mother had given me that Christmas. Replaced the "snarl a minute" bait caster I'd had forever.

Armed with a can of worms, daredevil and super duper lures, I headed back down to the river and the green black shadows playing over the pools and made my first cast. It was pure joy. I could send the bait well out, could drop it where I wished. I was in heaven. I threw into fast water, beside huge boulders, dropped into pools and skipped into places I'd never before dreamed of. I looked up river at Dad and Phil as they laid out their flylines, watched the reflections as rivulets of spray flayed out from lines lifted for another cast. Three in the group of heaven.

Phil caught the first. A beautiful brook trout. Then another on his next cast. Dad fishing downstream hooked up and then it was my turn as the last tendrils of light turned to dark. There'd be fresh trout for breakfast and tomorrow this wild and beautiful river, this wilderness border river of northern Maine, would be ours again.

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And from the lovely ladies of Lake Placid who collaborated on "Placid Eating" cookbook back in 1954, a recipe for Blueberry Bread which I confess to not trying yet. All good intentions this weekend.

### **Blueberry Bread**

1 cup sugar	2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 cup butter	1 1/2 cups blueberries
3/4 cup milk	Salt
2 cups flour	

Cream sugar and butter; add milk; then add flour, baking powder and salt which have been sifted together. Fold in blueberries last and bake 30 minutes at 325 degrees F or until done.

Fair winds and good roads.

*Lee S. Wilbur*