became fascinated with New Hampshire’s remote pond trout fishing more than a half century ago when, after finishing my studies at Dartmouth College (interrupted by World War II), I landed a job as managing editor of the Claremont, N.H. Daily Eagle. There I met Vic Pomiecko, a local fisherman and high school teacher. The first remote pond we visited was 12-acre Chapin Pond, five miles northeast of Claremont. We often fished 7-acre Lake Solitude, atop nearby Mount Sunapee, as well, a trip involving a demanding hike up the mountain via either the Andrews Brook or Johnson Brook trails.

Within a 15-year period, Vic and I visited many New Hampshire remote ponds. They are stocked annually, usually from the air, and access varies greatly. We found excellent fishing close to home, and rejoiced that the N.H. Fish and Game Department held the brook trout in such high esteem. Although Vic has since passed away, I still relish the memories of our fishing expeditions.

SINKING LINES

Before visiting these ponds, my fly fishing for brook trout had taken place on streams. I soon learned that stillwater fly fishing was another discipline entirely. The fundamental difference is that in summer, when the upper layer of water in lakes and ponds becomes too warm for trout, you have to use a sinking line – or at least one with a sink-tip – to probe the cold depth where trout lurk. This involves finding the deep holes, anchoring near them, throwing out a long line and letting the fly sink to various depths before beginning your retrieve. Sometimes you get a hit when your fly is only a few feet down. At other times, you have to let it reach the bottom.
There is another challenge in remote pond fly fishing: in most instances, the surrounding forest grows to the water’s edge. This leaves no room for a back cast unless wading is possible, and it often isn’t, because of water depth or a mucky bottom. Even if a pond’s shore can be waded, the trout may be in deeper water where they cannot be reached without a canoe, skiff, float tube or raft.

First-rate fishing is only one of the charms of New Hampshire’s remote ponds. The solitude they offer is another. In 50 years of flailing such waters, I have not often encountered other anglers. However, I should add that when I did, some of those meetings were pleasing.

A couple of decades ago, my partner Ruth Kirchmeier and I went from our home on Martha’s Vineyard Island to 17-acre Cole Pond in Enfield twice in one season. Our first Cole Pond sojourn that year was ideal: We were alone, save for a loon wailing from the opposite shore and a beaver swimming back and forth across the pond, gathering saplings for his house.

During our second visit, four other anglers appeared as we came ashore for lunch. I soon learned that two of them had served in the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division in Italy in World War II. Founded in 1941, many of the unit’s members were ski patrol members, forest rangers, lumberjacks and dedicated outdoorsmen. They fought for 110 days in 1945 in the bitter cold and rough terrain of northern Italy – taking all their objectives and never retreating. A thousand of them died in that effort.

I was delighted to hear their stories and was prompted to share some of my own World War II experiences as an 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper in Normandy, Holland and the Bulge.
LODGING ON THE ANDROSCOGGIN

I have stopped visiting New Hampshire’s truly remote trout ponds – I’m in my 92nd year and unable to do any serious hiking, so I now visit waterways that are easier to access. I have made yearly fishing trips to Errol, N.H., with Ruth, my son Jeff, my former son-in-law Bill Bailey and others. There are several readily accessible trout waters nearby, including Errol’s Long Pond. If you like moving water, the Androscoggin River has many miles of excellent fishing – whether by drift boat or wading – for brook trout, rainbows, land-locked salmon and smallmouth bass.

In Errol, we rent the spacious 100-year-old country home of warm-hearted hosts Bill and Debbie Freedman. From the “Lodging on the Androscoggin,” it’s only a short walk to the river from the screened-in back porch that overlooks a miniature marsh and is a delightful place to sit and chat after a day’s fishing.

In late June of 2015, our party included Ruth, Jeff, Bill and Jim Salmoiraghi. I had been looking forward to visiting the Androscoggin’s fly-fishing-only trout pool just below the Errol Dam, but the river was a rain-swollen torrent and virtually non-fishable, even in the stretches downstream of the dam pool where spinning gear is allowed.

In particular, I had wanted to try out some exquisite alder flies given to me by my friend James (Bucky) Stearns of Washingtonville, New York, who, in addition to being a generous fellow, is a master fly-tier.

Having brought two skiffs with us, we began our angling endeavors on Long Pond and caught several 10-inch brook trout. We keep our limit of Errol trout because I like to bring them home and smoke them in my electric smoker. I brine my fillets in a mixture of salt, brown sugar, garlic and pepper, and then place them in the smoker with hardwoods such as apple, hickory or mesquite wood chips for two to three hours. Smoked trout is a delicious treat!

On our second day in Errol, Bill and Jim went to Akers Pond and caught some rainbow trout. Jeff, Ruth and I went back to Long Pond and after a few hours of probing the deeper waters, we found...
concentrations of trout along the rocky east shore.

An afternoon of excellent fishing was enhanced by a moose that emerged from the conifers at the pond’s marshy north end and began feeding. We rowed to within 50 yards before it ambled back into the woods.

Back at our digs that evening, Bill got up from the porch and wandered - spinning rod in hand, down to where the Androscoggin empties into Bragg Bay. As logs and other debris floated by, he cast into the raging waters. He returned 45 minutes later with an 18-inch landlocked salmon.

“MAN OVERBOARD!”

The following morning, all of us returned to Long Pond, and for an hour or so we had trouble finding fish. Bill and Jim were on the west side of the pond in their skiff, and Ruth, Jeff and I were on the east side, about 200 yards away, when I made a move that changed our day.

Several years before, Jeff had installed a tall casting stool in the skiff for me to sit on while I fished. I stood up to adjust a pillow I had put on the stool, lost my balance and plunged headfirst into the water!

My basic emotion as I went overboard was irritation. I had screwed up our morning and now would have to go back to Errol to change my clothes.

The water, about 10 feet deep, was cold at about 60 degrees, which is great for fish, but not for me. My legs had gone under the boat and it took me - with Jeff’s help - a minute or so to get my head above water and grab the gunwale with both hands. When my head emerged, it was still adorned with my green beret and its paratrooper wings. Ruth said that she was going to dive in and help me. Peering over the gunwale at her, I said that I was doing fine, but didn’t want to spend much more time in the water. I should mention that we had lifejackets for all hands on board, and while I find them awkward to wear while casting, this is a good reason to wear one.

As this was taking place, Bill and Jim were shouting at us from across the pond: “Get over here! Get over here! The trout are hitting!” They hadn’t noticed that only two people were in our skiff.

Ruth pulled up the anchor, and she and Jeff paddled us ashore. I went back to our lodging and took a long, hot shower. Remarkng that an era had ended, I removed my casting stool from the boat before we launched again.

That afternoon, we went to nearby 10-acre Bear Brook Pond, alongside the logging road that runs west from Route 16 to Big Greenough Pond. Bill and Jim came with us to help put the skiff in the pond, then departed to probe other waters, saying they would be back in a few hours.

We never fail to catch brook trout in Bear Brook Pond, and we weren’t disappointed. By the time Bill and Jim returned, we had several more nice fish for my smoker.

Driving through the 13 Mile Woods on our way home the following morning, with my son at the helm, the mood was a bit subdued until we looked out our windows and noticed that the Androscoggin had abated considerably overnight. When we reached a stretch where we have often had excellent fishing, Jeff said, “We got an early start. We could give it a whirl.”

Such is the magic of North Country trout fishing.

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