



# Bitten early by the big trout bug

A LONGTIME WISCONSIN TROUT ANGLER FINDS REASONS EACH SEASON TO SMILE.



*Story and photos by Len Harris*

I don't like fishing alone. After all, if I have a fishing partner I have someone to talk to and a photo subject, too. But last spring, I found myself fishing a woody stretch of stream alone. I wanted — no needed — to be alone. To have some “me” time. Some bad news about a friend had me thinking about life and why I spend so much of mine fishing.

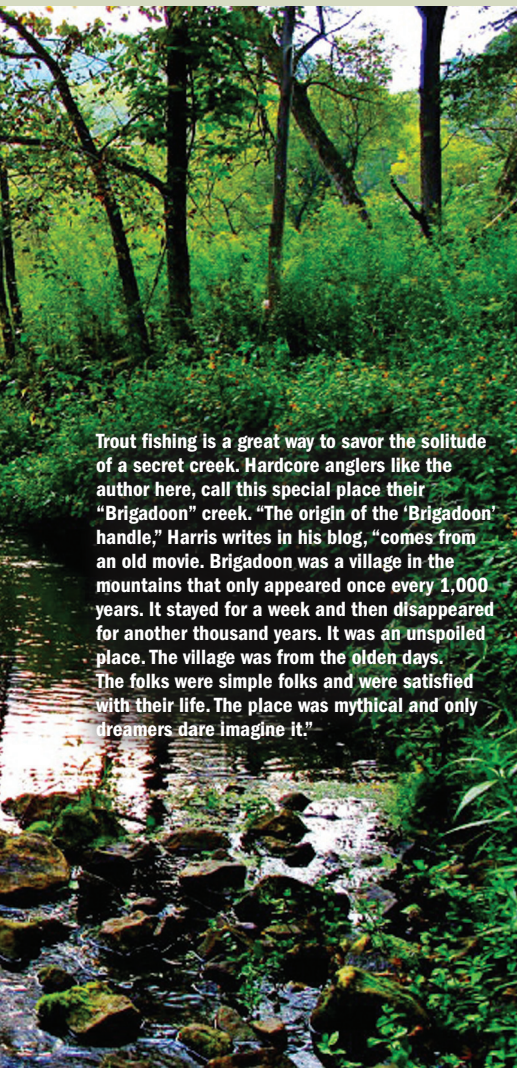
I was bitten by the big trout bug when I started on my fishing journey at age 5. I am 56 now. My first outing is still a very vivid memory. I was young and energetic.

My more recent outings, though, have been a little more labored due to my back problems. They are shorter outings, but I find time to get out every season.

I take lots of photos when I am out on a stream. Every so often I get a photo or two taken of me holding a trout. Every person who has taken a photo of me asks me why I don't smile when I am holding a big trout? I've been thinking

about that, too. I do smile. Maybe not for photos, but I smile a lot in the moments that lead up to landing the big fish. In fact, I catch myself smiling a lot when wandering the trout streams of Wisconsin. And I smile a lot when I look back and delve into my book of life, which is bookended by trout fishing seasons.

Early season trout fishing is cold and stark. The snow is typically deep and I wear out easier. The environment is not inviting like the lush greens of summer, but there is an allure to those days of frozen guides and numb fingers. The long winter has made me forget the gnats and mosquitoes of late September. My



Trout fishing is a great way to savor the solitude of a secret creek. Hardcore anglers like the author here, call this special place their "Brigadoon" creek. "The origin of the 'Brigadoon' handle," Harris writes in his blog, "comes from an old movie. Brigadoon was a village in the mountains that only appeared once every 1,000 years. It stayed for a week and then disappeared for another thousand years. It was an unspoiled place. The village was from the olden days. The folks were simple folks and were satisfied with their life. The place was mythical and only dreamers dare imagine it."

ing in spring. The ground melting has a unique scent. The trees are budding and the grasp of winter is being shed. That very first smell of a plum tree blooming triggers a smile for me. The smell is better than any expensive perfume. It makes me feel alive.

Early summer comes and with it the baby birds and the sounds of the streams sometimes swollen by the spring rains.

The trees begin to change color. The leaves lining the streams are tipped with gold. I layer up to fish because the cold wind has whispered to me that winter will come quickly. I smile because I figure, if you are not smiling when casting a fly, then you need to lay your pole down and take up golf.

Last spring, when my very good friend was diagnosed with liver and colon can-



Rain doesn't dampen the spirit of a diehard trout angler. They are willing to get up to their waist in mud if the task at hand demands it.



This female brownie is something to smile about.



A male brown trout landed in Wisconsin's driftless area.

heart yearns to brave the crisp cold days of Wisconsin's early season. I like to be the first one to place a footstep in fresh snow on opening morning. It makes me feel like I am the first angler to ever set foot on that stream.

One of my biggest smiles came while fishing as the snow was coming down hard on one of those frigid openers. The snow was going down the back of my coat and I had a broad smile painted on my face. The solitude was deafening.

Spring arrives with great anticipation to my home waters. I don't miss a beat and I am out there fishing and continuing my journey. The smells are amaz-

The first wildflowers appear. Not far after that the wood anemones and bluebells paint a tapestry on the valley floors. My stream is a veritable sensory smorgasbord. A constant smile is painted on my face. My stream is alive and me with it.

Summer brings heat and biting insects. My lust for the stream is dampened by the stifling heat, but I trudge on. What more could an angler wish for? I am one of those crazy guys who wades in water and mud up to his bellybutton and enjoys it. The only thing that could make it better would be a slow steady rain. I smile at the promise.

September comes much too quickly.

cer, despite the diagnosis, he remained upbeat and positive. I was bashful at first to talk to him about his illness; it made me feel so mortal and close to death myself.

But we did talk about it. He was candid about his condition but he also smiled a lot during our conversation.

His strength reminds me that I need to learn to smile more often. With early trout season approaching, I know I'll get my chance.

*Len Harris counts down to the opening of the early trout fishing season and blogs about his fishing excursions in "The stream of time" (<http://lenharris.blogspot.com/>).*