

— Guest Column —

A Change of Luck

by Spencer Belson, Age 16

My grandfather and I had prepared for our trip to Rangeley for months. However, the early stages of the trip itself could be described — at best — as dismal.

When we arrived at camp, we were greeted by a cloud of mosquitoes that enveloped our car so thickly that we could hear them buzzing through the windows.

That night we went on a brief fishing excursion along the river. However, black fly bites caused my neck to turn red and swell as if I'd blown up like a balloon and then suffered a sunburn.

To make matters worse, temperatures that rose to nearly 100 degrees made it impossible to find relief, and a steady stream of salty sweat stung my bug-battle wounds.

The next morning, I hooked my first trout of the trip — a beautiful 14-inch Magalloway hen. However, it broke me off as I was reaching to scoop it up with my net, and quickly disappeared back into the depths of the river.

To say my spirits were low would have been an understatement.

Change for the Better

That all changed, though, when the two

Hordes of mosquitoes and black flies greeted the author and his grandfather the first night they arrived in the Rangeley region. Clearly things had to get better, and — to the author's relief — they did.

of us took a side trip to Little Kennebec Lake. A flashy "Native Fish Coalition" sign posted at the primitive boat ramp informed us that the lake is a State Heritage Fish Water, one of 585 stillwaters in Maine so designated. These waters have a healthy self-sustaining population of brook trout or arctic charr, and have never been stocked, or haven't been stocked in over 25 years.

With the summer heat driving the Kennebec River's cold-blooded salmonid inhabitants into the cooler, deeper waters of the lake, the evening promised to be a special one.

Tension Gone

Once we loaded the canoe and got underway, my stress and tension began to melt away like a Pine Tree Frosty ice cream cone on a hot summer day. The black flies, apparently deterred by either the open water or my improved mood, halted their seemingly incessant chase. As the sun dipped below the towering spruce and birch, the scorch-



The author fly-fishing off the ledges.

ing temperatures became slightly more tolerable, making paddling less of a chore and more of a pleasant, relaxing pursuit.

My grandfather and I paused momentarily to take a couple of casts along the sandy shoreline. As I slowly stripped the Maple Syrup nymph fished on a sink-tip line, a small fish took, and it was soon brought to the net. My first trout of the trip was a stunning seven-inch brookie, no less picturesque than the Magalloway

hen I'd hooked and lost earlier.

As I released the fish back to the cool waters of the lake, I couldn't help but hope it would be the first of many that evening.

Feeding Frenzy

When we once again began paddling, we noticed a commotion on the distant surface of the water. It was as if the powers-that-be had raised the already cranked-up temperature on the natural thermostat a notch, causing the lake to vigorously boil.

I quickly noticed that it wasn't bubbles rising to the surface — rather, it was trout beaks. I set down my rod rigged with sinking line, and picked up my 5-weight with a small foam ant tied to the end of the tippet.

I began hauling my line out to the feeding fish, but it was my grandfather who struck first, tempting another palm-sized trout to take his dry fly. I soon followed with a voracious take on my ant pattern.

Flying ants can take Western Maine anglers seeking ham-

burger-sized green drakes in late June by surprise, but the sheer numbers of fish these terrestrials bring to the surface is unmatched.

Mr. Moose

After catching numerous squaretails, and with the "hatch" waning, my grandfather and I headed to shore for dinner. As we paddled, a soft bleating emanated from the forest, getting louder as we approached. Suddenly, a large doe poked her head through the spruce and gave us a good, long once-over before she was gone as fast as the trout we had released earlier.

When we finished dinner, we agreed that we had caught our fair share of fish, and headed back to the car to load up the canoe. I couldn't believe the incredible change of luck I had experienced that day! The only way it could get better would be seeing my first-ever moose, the king of the Maine woods.

And wouldn't you know it, there came Mr. Moose, ambling across Route 16 on our way back to camp. It was the perfect ending to the perfect adventure, and one that I will not soon forget.

Katahdin

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it was. It tracked incredibly well. Of course, the Chesapeake 14 design is engineered for 5'1" tall Hannah types. I fit, but it was a little short.

I'm ordering a set of plans for the Chesapeake 16, which is convenient-

ly designed for someone my size and weight. It's important to get a correctly-sized kayak.

Okay, I fully realize anyone with average intelligence would just stroll down to a local outfitter and buy a pre-built unit. However, for me at least, part of the journey involves building my own kayak to go paddling with my

daughter. I admit, it's not the short route.

While the destination remains undetermined at this point, the journey has clearly started. It started three strokes into test riding Hannah's rig. I'll keep readers abreast of my progress in the months ahead.