



A really nice brown trout caught by my body Ryan Gildehaus, but he won't tell me where he caught it. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

## The know on the brown trout

I was really bored the other day, so I kicked on the television just to add to the boredom. The channel stopped on one of those fishing shows where a couple of guys buzz around a lake in a go-fast boat and intermittently catch an occasional fish. The conversation between the two anglers included several often-misinterpreted phrases.

When you hear phrases like, "I just like being out here and spending time with a dear friend," or "being out here in nature is what it's all about," "keep your guard up." Nobody goes out on a lake in a \$70,000 bass boat that skims the water at 80 miles per hour to just be out in nature.

If you were to translate what they are saying, and read between the scripted Hollywood lines, you would actually hear them saying, "Man, this stinks and it is hotter than blazes on this stupid boat," or "I haven't had a strike all day, maybe we should pack it in and find a tavern."

Alas, it was not always like that when it came to fishing, at least for me anyways. I grew up with a creek in my backyard. Rock Creek was the creek of my childhood as it flowed through our fields. The creek was lined heav-



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

ily with willows and the occasional beaver dam. I spent every hour possible on that creek, not getting next to nature, but trying to catch fish.

The creek was shallow and fast, so most of the catch was limited to brook trout in the 8-to-9-inch range, but some were small. There were a few places where the stream made some deep cuts and holes, and these were where the magic would occasionally happen. Sometimes, you could drift a fat nightcrawler gently into the deep recesses of one of these holes and catch the holy grail of the small creek fisherman's dream, the brown trout.

The deep holes, with slow moving water, is where the brown lived. These guys were much bigger than the resident brook trout, and much harder to find. Once or twice a summer, I would bring home a brown over

20 inches and my grandmother would make a wonderful supper out of it.

The most popular trout in America, the brown trout, isn't even native to this continent. It was imported from Europe in 1884. If it knew how to get back there, it would probably go. Brown trout, or *Salmo trutta* in case you were wondering, are widely distributed in Colorado. They have self-sustaining populations in just about every lake and stream in the state between 6,000 and 10,000 feet in altitude.

Brown trout first arrived in the United States from Germany in 1883. A German fish culturist named Baron Lucius von Behr shipped 80,000 red spotted brown trout eggs to an American angler named Fred Mather. At the same time, black spotted brown trout were arriving in the states from Scotland.

The brown trout eventually found its way to Colorado via England in 1885. The eggs were shipped to a hatchery in Denver. In 1890, then U.S. Sen. Henry Teller, donated eggs from Scotland to the state. At the same time, von Behr brown trout were being raised at a Leadville hatchery. What we have now is a mixture

of all three strains of trout, including the red-spotted and brown-spotted, that originated in England, Scotland, and Germany.

The belly of a brown trout is a white or cream color, except during spawning season, when it becomes a very deep yellow color. The rest of the body has an overall brown or golden color with large black spots on the top half of the body, and red spots on the lower half. The tail is square, and not forked like a brook trout's tail.

Whirling disease, which swept through our state in the 90's decimated populations of rainbow trout. It also forced the closing of several of our hatcheries. Having evolved with the parasite in Europe, brown trout can carry the disease but are not affected as severely as the rainbow trout from it. When the rainbow trout population plummeted, the brown trout flourished, keeping anglers busy as the browns filled the gaps where the rainbows were missing.

Science does not recognize any subspecies of the brown trout, but there are three different morphs (different behavioral populations within the species). First are the browns found in the freshwater rivers

known as *Salmo trutta morpha fario*. Then there are the population found in the freshwater lakes, known as *Salmo trutta morpha lacustrine*.

The last morph, is the brown trout that spends their life in the ocean before entering the freshwater rivers to spawn, called sea trout or *salmo trutta morpha trutta*.

When I visited Newfoundland, there was a species of fish the locals referred to as landlocked salmon. When I finally caught a few of them, I realized they looked exactly like brown trout. Biologists are still unsure why this morph has some that migrate to saltwater after birth, while others of the morph remain in the freshwater.

Brown trout spawn in Colorado streams during September and October. The female moves into shallow, gravelly riffles and digs a nest, called a redd, by fanning her tail. As the female deposits her eggs in the redd, the male postures himself alongside the female to fertilize the eggs.

The Colorado State record brown trout weighed in at 30 pounds 8 ounces and was caught in 1988. Although the fish was caught in the Roaring Judy Ponds located at the

state fish hatchery, it probably swam there via the Gunnison River from Blue Mesa. Blue Mesa is known for producing trophy sized brown trout.

When your fisherperson comes home, and you ask, "so where is all the fish?" And you get some nonsense back about getting out and being next to nature, rest assured that the fishing was probably awful, and they got skunked. Rest assured that they would not know old lady nature if she knocked them down and sat on them. Besides, if they did catch fish, you would have heard all about it. And if you've got a better theory, let's hear it.

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