

Worldwide Directory to Hunting & Angling Destinations

Gray's Sporting Journal

2020 Expeditions & Guides Annual

VOLUME FORTY-FOUR ISSUE 7



Bradford

A time warp, complete with relics



ad Camps

fish and zero cell signal. by Brian Irwin



I tried to catch blueback trout on a trip to northern Maine with my father. These brilliantly colored fish are notoriously difficult to catch unless you time your efforts just right. Bluebacks prefer water temperatures that are 50 degrees or lower. Each year, they spend only a short time near the surface before the heat of summer drives them to deeper water, beyond the reach of fly tackle.



(Clockwise) A fine and beautiful wild brook trout from No Name Pond comes to hand. Robert Irwin, the author's father, lands a wild brook trout at No Name Pond. Sikorsky's camp sits amid this sweeping forest of conifers, as seen from the flight to Bradford Camps. His land easement protects, in perpetuity, 750,000 acres of untouched wilderness



Salvelinus alpinus oquassa. Though commonly known as blueback trout, these fish aren't blue at all, and though a salmonid, they're not a trout. They're a rare species of arctic char that has survived in relic populations that remained in 12 lakes after the Pleistocene glaciers receded from what is now northern Maine. They are native to Maine, and unfortunately, they have been extirpated from some of the lakes, as introductions of landlocked Atlantic salmon and rainbow smelts accelerated their demise.

Although we were in the right area to have a shot at the bluebacks, they evaded us completely. We did, however, find bright brookies in still waters and the wonderful Allagash River, and experienced

genuine rustic charm at Bradford Camps in the far northern part of the state.

Igor Sikorsky III is a gentle, kind man. Fifty-six years old, he's the grandson of the Igor Sikorsky of aviation fame and the inventor of the modern helicopter among scores of other achievements. Sikorsky III is a floatplane pilot with more than 25 years' experience and owns, along with his wife, Karen, the Bradford Camps.

We went to Bradford Camps to understand its history and what it's been offering guests since opening in the 1890s. A turn-of-the-century sporting

camp in classic Thoreau style, Bradford Camps sits on the northern shore of Munsungan Lake, a salmon-thronged boomerang-shaped pond where Sikorsky lands his Kelly green 1968 Cessna 172. Every day during his six-month season, he glides into the lake with guests looking for piscatorial inspiration, relaxation, or both.

He's an environmentalist and wildlife conservationist as well. Around 10 years ago, he learned that nearby Big Reed Pond had a dwindling population of bluebacks that were being choked out by the invasive smelts that had likely been introduced into the pond by bait fishermen.

Working with the Maine Department of Inland

Fisheries and Wildlife, Sikorsky and some 25 volunteers used gill nets to harvest fish from the pond and took in a mere 14 bluebacks along with the only other fish native to that same pond—brook trout and dace. They flew the fish to a private hatchery, where during the course of a year, fisheries biologists raised a sizable number of fingerlings of each species.

Meanwhile, as that year progressed, Sikorsky and the project's team from Fisheries and Wildlife sterilized the pond with a naturally occurring pesticide and piscicide known as rotenone, which they dropped into the pond from, ironically, two Sikorsky Black-hawks contracted from the National Guard. After confirming that all remaining fish had succumbed to

the chemicals and then giving the water time to recover well enough to support fish, they reintroduced the bluebacks, brookies, and dace. And I'm happy to report that Big Reed Pond has a population of naturally reproducing blueback trout and Fisheries and Wildlife now has a blueprint for restoration in other lakes where blueback trout are threatened or extirpated.

Continued on page 112

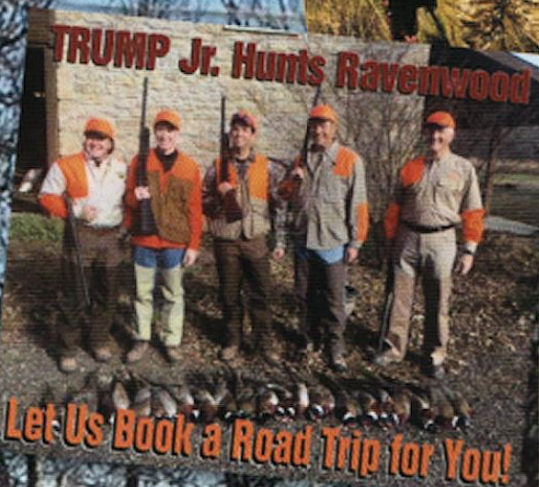


(Clockwise) With a palate of colors suitable for the finest art, another brookie slides out of the Allagash River. Loons are common in the water near Bradford Camps, and this lucky one stole our catch in one brisk swallow. The idyllic library at Bradford Camp's main lodge is a great place to unwind after a day of chasing fish.

RAVENWOOD LODGE

10147 S.W. 61ST, TOPEKA, KS 66610
800-656-2454
RAVENWOODLODGE.COM

Outstanding Destination



HUNTING - SPORTING CLAYS - LODGING - WEDDINGS - FUNDRAISING - RETREATS

Bradford Camps

Continued from page 44

Though it would have been great to catch a beautiful, native, and rare fish such as the blueback, we knew they would be unreachable, even with a sinking line, so we never fished Big Reed Pond. Rather, we turned our attention to beautiful and native brook trout, and each day we left the camp to fish remote water—one day by plane, one day by truck.

On the first day, we flew out to No Name Pond, where Sikorsky had cached a canoe. Under the leadership of a guide, TJ Hebert, a 32-year-old former navy hospital corps man, we angled for hours for hungry native brook trout.

No Name Pond is striking, as are most ponds you'll fish when you visit. Dotted with an island near its center, the water popped with rising fish, some of which we were able to entice to strike. The three of us fished from a single 20-foot canoe. The winds were calm, the water like glass, and the blackflies that plague anglers in June, absent. My father is a good fisherman, but this day the fish gods were particularly kind to him, allowing him to boat nearly a dozen fish—including a specimen that measured 16 inches, a nice catch in the near perfect North Country.

While growing up, I didn't have many opportunities to fish for trout until I was old enough to create my own. My father, though, taught me the art of fly casting at a weed-choked pond that was full of largemouth bass. The pond belonged to our barber, whose name was (ironically) John Barber, and if you were his client, he'd let you fish anytime. I loved that pond, where the bass grew large and which sat amid his cow pasture. I spent many Saturdays there with my father.

I was seven years old and I idolized my father. Of all his accoutrements, I most admired his fishing vest. My mother had taken one of his two army-issue dress khaki shirts and

crafted a fly vest for him. When I was 10 and she could see that fishing was not just a passing fancy for me, she took his other and last khaki shirt, and made for me a vest that matched Dad's. I wore that vest for 15 years and would have kept it longer, but while fishing in Philadelphia during medical school, I happened upon someone who had attempted suicide. I used the vest as tourniquet and subsequently had to dispose of it.

The same year my mother made the vest, I fished for trout for the first time. My dad and I fished the streams in Maryland's Catocin Mountain, adjacent to Camp David. It was a splendid place to learn the art of fly fishing, but from an early age, I had always wanted to fish the wilds of the north.

So when he and I arrived at Bradford Camps, it was a dream come true—it was the first time I'd ever organized for the two of us, and we chose this very magical and remote place that stands in stark contrast to nearly every other fly fishing lodge in the country.

On the second day, Hebert, a patient, astute guide, drove us on washboard logging roads to fish the Allagash, which is a Wild and Scenic River with rapid courses of riffles and runs. The water of the Allagash roiled with rising fish, and my line was tight more often than not. I caught about 20 fish in the few hours we angled in the warm drizzle. My father landed three times my haul. Brook trout are one of the most vibrant freshwater fish, with a pleasing pattern of emerald green wormwood on their backs, artistically placed orange sun spots on their sides, and bright orange fins. These natives tugged on our lines with great energy and natural beauty as occasional sun reflected their brilliance. Most of the fish were in the 8-to-12-inch range.

The Allagash is a riparian gem. Picturesque and wild, it is a popular canoe-tripping river. Most paddlers make their way down the flow over a one-week period, passing not a single road or habitable structure on their

journey. As a paddling adventure, most canoes float right through productive pools, their pilots focusing on navigating the occasional white-water stretches rather than wetting a line. Many angling parties, however, fish this entire stretch. Regardless, it's among the most idyllic canoe-tripping destinations in the East, rivaling Minnesota's Boundary Waters. Having paddled the Boundary Waters, I can attest to the Allagash's uncultivated feel.

I've long wanted to fish this river, as it's a rough, wild place, remote as they come in the Northeast, and often neglected by visitors. Just to access the headwaters requires hours of driving on unmarked logging roads deep into the wilderness. Get too anxious about the driving time and the urge to cast, and you'll find yourself with a dead moose across the hood or in a ditch after having been derailed by speeding logging trucks.

Effective patterns included Prince Nymphs, Pheasant-Tail Nymphs, and other nymph patterns augmented by rubber legs. Choice tippet was 4X, which proved to be just right for the fly size we were using. We angled all day in the rain, striving to differentiate rain-drop pockmarks on the surface of slick pools of water from hatching insects or the lips of feeding brookies.

As evening approached, we returned to the camp to troll Munsungan for salmon, which we did successfully. I'm a catch-and-release angler, but the booming salmon population in Munsungan is bordering on unhealthy. It has choked out much of the brook trout population, tipping the balance of that ecosystem in an unnatural way. The reasons for this are unclear but may have to do with invasive fish that provide a food source, allowing the salmon to propagate in greater numbers. So, when I caught a 20-inch landlocked salmon, I was encouraged to keep it. The next morning, any sliver of guilt was swallowed as I dined on poached salmon for breakfast.

Back at camp after trolling, we reflected on our four days in the time

TROPHY ROOM BOOKS

Specializing in **Big Game Hunting Books**
Africa, Asia, North America

Old and New books on hunting
Elephant, Wild Sheep, Buffalo, Bear
The best selection and condition.

818-889-2469
trophyroombooks.com

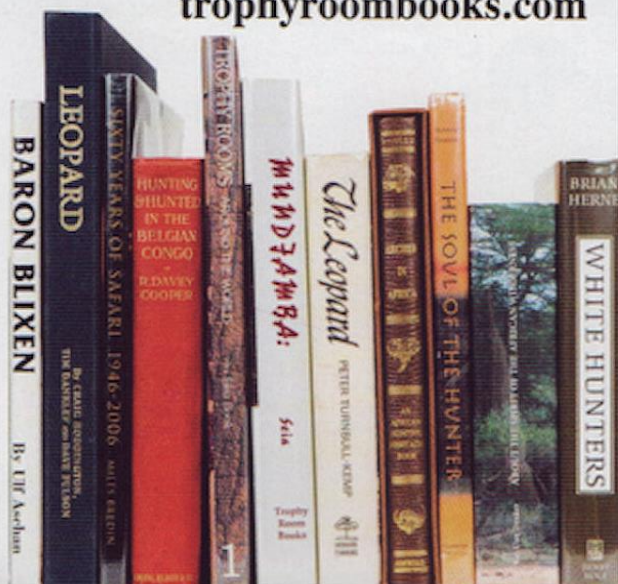
Search our website
by author, title,
keyword or price.

Collections, rare books,
antique hunting books



ILAB **LILA**
INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE OF
ANTHROPOLOGICAL BOOKSELLERS
LIGUE INTERNATIONALE
DE LA LIBRAIRIE ANCIENNE

info@trophyroombooks.com



warp that is Bradford Camps. It's simply a special place, and among commercial operations, rare as a blueback trout—one where you go back in time and enjoy an atmosphere without electronic devices (they're banned in the central lodge), complications, and the details of life in the urban world. In fact, the camps' website proclaims, "We are 50 miles away from the nearest town, paved road, power line and cell signal." We sipped Scotch and played cribbage under the glow of a propane lamp. A warm fire crackled in the fieldstone fireplace. The staff wiped off the tables, then joined us for a nightcap.

In the morning, I arose early. Thick mist hovered over Munsungan. Freighter-style canoes with outboard motors drifted adjacent to the dock. A floatplane listed with its ropes, waiting for another day of hard work under the skillful yoke of Igor Sikorsky. As I fired my camera's shutter, I saw Sikorsky walk down to the plane. A few minutes later, the engine purred, preparing to take flight and whisk us back to

the more hurried world of life. As we peeled away from the lake, the verdant carpet of Maine's Great North Woods stretched out before us. Moose waded in the streams we passed, lakes dotted the landscape in every direction, and our eyes passed over unspoiled land. I hope to return here with my father when he is in his late elder years and to find the wilderness still untouched. Just as it's been for generations. ■

Brian Irwin is a journalist and photographer from North Conway, New Hampshire. Also a physician and lifetime fly angler, he is widely published and the father of two sons, with whom he enjoys all pursuits outdoors.

IF YOU GO

Bradford Camps opens as soon as ice is out and the water is open, which typically occurs in April or May. The lodge operates until October. Fishing is good all season long, but May and June see the highest numbers of fish.

You will need to take your own fly

rods and flies. A 5-weight rod is ideal. Take a net; you'll need it. Dry patterns such as BWO or Adams are particularly effective. Bring a selection of size 12 to 16 dries, 12 to 18 nymphs, and size 20 Gray Ghost streamers and Woolly Buggers, all of which were particularly effective.

At Bradford Camps, there is no Wi-Fi or internet. There's electricity in the main lodge only during generator hours, which end in the evening. I took a battery pack to charge my camera batteries and kit for music. Pack for rain, bugs, and everything in between. Don't forget a bathing suit. If you enjoy spirits of any kind, you'll need to bring your own. Ice is available to chill your beer.



TURNBULL RESTORATION
CUSTOM BIG BORE RIFLES

**Limited Edition Turnbull Model 1886,
chambered in .475 Turnbull**

*Whether newly built or
newly restored, every fi
rearm tells a story. Get out
there and add to it with your
own memories.*

**Ask for your no-fee,
no-obligation
Turnbull Model
1886 quote.**



TURNBULL RESTORATION
SPECIALIZING IN THE ACCURATE RE-CREATION
OF HISTORICAL METAL FINISHES ON PERIOD FIREARMS
WWW.TURNBULLRESTORATION.COM

(585) 919-1085

QUOTES@TURNBULLRESTORATION.COM