



## The Frog Water



©John Field 2014 | First published by Sexyloops, Tuesday, 3 November 2015

**Lake Ontario, one of North America's Great Lakes, functions like a freshwater inland sea. If not for the water quality problems in its tributaries back in the 1800s, the lake would still have a freshwater population of native Atlantic Salmon. The only native salmonid left is the lake trout. Since the Atlantics were extirpated, a variety of invasive non-native salmonids from the Pacific have been stocked.**

Today, much of the fishing for spawn run fish on Lake Ontario's tributaries on the U.S. side is like a carnival. Many anglers buy licenses and feel entitled to their share of fish flesh and can get a little aggressive getting it. One rationale is the inevitable fact that the transplanted Pacific salmon will die within a month of entering the rivers. People using a variety of techniques and types of tackle share the same water and often have a cultural clash.

I wait until the carnival is over to fish the end of the brown trout run and the beginning of the winter-long steelhead runs. If you get a winter rain or snowmelt, it can stimulate a run of new bright fish. Staggering the run is nature's way of helping insure the steelhead's survival. The banks are lined with the skeletons of departed salmon, with only their fins and head remaining. The gulls, mink and raccoons have picked them clean. Unfortunately, I've even seen rows of dead brown trout that didn't make it through the gauntlet of anglers and died of post release stress.

Solitude when fishing can be obtained in several ways and I almost always

seek it. It can be obtained by paying for it, by luck, or by taking advantage of information and by using your experience. Fishing alone or being the first to fish water that's been rested often makes the fishing more successful and enjoyable. I reveled in a situation many years back that gave me solitude and good unexpected results, on this fishery that's usually heavily pressured. I was once again staying above my friend Ron's fly shop in "The Honeymoon Suite," near a small Lake Ontario tributary, on a trip for late winter steelhead. After a day of so-so fishing, Ron asked if I wanted to catch some big brown trout in a new spot. I said yes. Ron took me at night with a canoe a friend hid for him to catch big brown trout in the Frog Water. He named it that because it is located in the estuary portion of the creek, just upstream of where it pours into the lake. I'd seen fisherman in motorboats fishing for king salmon downstream near the lake in the deep slow water, but I didn't know about fishing in the mile-long transition from stream to estuary, because I never heard of it being done.

The banks are lined with reeds and the small islands have tall weeds. It has a deep meandering channel and the water is slow with shallow backwaters and islands. The key feature is a deep hole on an outside bend against a cliff, with a big blow-down in the water.

When we arrived, we cast from an island. We used a five-foot sink tip and a white bunny leech and it worked great. The object was to cast upstream of the blow-down and let your fly sink, then strip it back. You could feel the branches of the tree deep in the water with your fly. Other times, you'd feel a big tug of a brown.

We caught big browns that recovered from the stresses of spawning and being caught several times a few months earlier. Then they feed heavily on the variety of finned prey in the estuary. These fish were not the orange bellied, large spotted fish of fall but like sea-run browns, were silver with small black spots. I then knew there were probably more of these in other similar shoreline estuaries and it gave me a new winter option.

I returned for a steelhead trip the next season and my timing wasn't very good. There were few fish and those present were uncooperative. To make matters worse, the wind was blowing thirty miles an hour. Everybody else who came up to fish in the area disappeared and I had it to myself. I had the idea to go to the Frog Water but try it during the day. Since I could safely wade down to the spot in daylight, I didn't ask about borrowing a canoe.

I decided to use a 200 grain fast-sink line on an 11' 6" switch-rod. I would use the same white bunny leech fly as with Ron. The longer rod would help prevent the constant snags on the weeds in my backcast I experienced with Ron and help me fight the wind.

It was blowing hard and little whitecaps formed on the river. This didn't discourage me because I've seen browns and other fish feed confidently under a broken surface without concern for anglers or other predators. I guess their instinct says, what can't see me, can't hurt me.

I cast my switch rod one-handed and doubled hauled to reach the far bank. I was fishing deeper than I had with Ron, since I assumed the fish would hold there in daylight. When I knocked, I did find them at home. I caught five fat browns from about 3 to 12 lbs. until they stopped biting. I could have explored down stream for more deep holes and more fish, or I could have changed flies and maybe caught more fish where I was, but I went home with a grin and hopes of catching more lake or sea-run browns in the future. Since then, a program to restore runs of Atlantic salmon in another Lake Ontario Tributary, the Salmon River, has shown good results and may offer some bonus fishing.