

# Outdoors in Maine: Red River country

By V. Paul Reynolds

Published: Jul 05, 2009 12:00 am



Most serious fishermen I have known tend to be secretive about their best fishing holes. I'm that way. Over the years, I've avoided writing about my most coveted trout "honeyholes" for fear of starting a stampede and spoiling a good thing.

For some reason, though, age has a way of mellowing your protectionist instincts about special fishing places. At least, that's how it is for me. So pull up a chair and pay attention. You need to know about Red River Country.

Red River Country comprises a cluster of trout ponds in northernmost Maine on a lovely tract of wildlands in the Deboullie Lake area ( T15R9) owned by you and me and managed by the Maine Bureau of Public Lands . (Check your DeLorme on page 63). A Millinocket educator, Floyd Bolstridge, first introduced this country to me back in the 1970s. Diane and I have been making our June trout-fishing pilgrimage to this area just about every year since. Back then, Floyd told about walking 20 miles with his father in the late 1940s to access these ponds. He and his Dad slept in a hastily fashioned tar paper lean-to, dined on slab-sided brookies, and stayed for weeks. Floyd said that the fishing wasn't as good 30 years later. Today, almost 40 years since Floyd recounted for me his youthful angling days in Red River Country, the fishing isn't quite as good as it was. But there are still plenty of trout and lots of ponds to fish for them.

A few weeks ago, Diane and I, along with our friends Fred and Carol Hurley, camped at Perch Pond, which is located in the heart of this pond cluster. The first day, Diane and I fished the fabled Denny Pond, which brought back some special memories of earlier years camping and fishing there with our boys and my late father. Diane and I caught a few trout on top with small mayfly imitations.

The next morning the two of us, with float tubes strapped to pack frames, hiked in to North Pond. As far as remote trout ponds go, this one is a gem. With combined obstacles of black muck underfoot, a hilly ascent and numerous blowdowns along the trail, the access is just difficult enough to discourage a parade of casual anglers. (I was saddened to learn later from Warden Sibley that it is now possible to drive almost to the pond from an Irving cutting road.) The fishing was memorable, but with easier vehicular access how long can it last? Although Diane's experience that day was dampened some by leaky waders, the trout were impressed with a buff-colored humpy that I twitched on top. A cow moose and her newborn calf studied our flailing fly rods from a safe distance.

On the third day, Fred and I decided to fish in the rain, and we dragged my big canoe down to Upper Pond, a medium-sized trout pond not far from the main road. I had never had much luck there in the early days. Fred and I were pleasantly surprised, however. Despite the rain, swirly winds and absence of a hatch, the Upper Pond brookies were hitting our elk hair caddis and parachute adams on top.

During the worst of the fog and drizzle, we explored for new access points to ponds and campsites. Since the Bureau of Public Lands acquired this Deboullie tract well over 20 years ago, it has methodically improved the overall "campability" of this area.. In fact, BPL deserves high praise for the thoughtful quality approach it has taken toward its stewardship of this ideal camping/fishing area. The toilet vaults are clean and placed inconspicuously. The fire pits, made from slate, are large and safe. Most of the camping areas have tent pads made from finely crushed stone. The picnic tables are big enough for a group and, best of all, they are not permanently attached to the ground. Since my early days in this country, before it was owned by the state, BPL has added a few additional campsites, but not too many.

At Upper Pond, which was always a difficult place to carry a canoe to because of the soft shore muck, BPL has built a short boardwalk for easy accessibility. Again, kudos to Maine's Bureau of Public Lands for its well-thought out management of its Deboullie holdings.

In this area, there is also a legendary sporting camp: Red River Camps located on Island Pond. Owned and operated for years by Mike and Rhonda Brophy, the camp's main lodge burned down last year. We stopped by to say hello to the camp's new boss lady,

Jen Brophy-Price, who, along with her husband, have taken over the camps from Mike. Jen is the daughter of Mike and Rhonda. She gave us a tour of the camp's impressive new main log lodge, which is close to finished. It was good to see Jen carrying on the family sporting-camp tradition. We had not seen her since she was a child helping Rhonda in the kitchen and delivering warm bread to our rented cabin.

Of course, like any Maine sporting camp operation, Jen and her husband have their work cut out for them. But having grown up at the camps, Jen is entitled to say that this "ain't her first rodeo." This is not always the case for new sporting camp operators. For some it is baptism under fire. For example, when the previous owner of the Red River Camps, Pete Norris, took over, he set up housekeeping at Island Pond with a new bride from California, who had only been to Maine once as a guest of Pete's parents' sporting camp. As you might surmise, this is a story in itself. Remarkably, Pete's marriage survived and his "mail order bride," Chris, became a sporting camp cook of some repute.

So whether your thing is roughing it in a tent, or being pampered at a classic Maine sporting camp with a rich history, you owe yourself a few days in Maine's unique wilderness area known as Red River country. Learn more about Red River Camps by checking out its Web site at:[www.redrivercamps.com](http://www.redrivercamps.com). For information, road maps, and camping fees you need to contact North Maine Woods. The Web site is [www.northmainewoods.org](http://www.northmainewoods.org). Their telephone number is 207-435-6213.

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