

Trout Site-Sunapee Trout

By Bob Willis

There has been and still is a great deal of confusion about the Sunapee Trout among fisheries biologists and taxonomists about the status of the Sunapee. These trout were native to Sunapee Lake, New Hampshire; Averill Pond, Vermont; Big Dan Pond, New Hampshire; and Floods Pond, Maine. Lake Trout were introduced in Vermont and New Hampshire and all of the populations of Sunapee in those states were hybridized and no longer exist. The only original population of Sunapee in existence is in Floods Pond, Maine. Floods Pond is the water supply system for Bangor and fishing has been limited in Floods Pond for several years. The State of Maine has taken fish from Floods Pond and established reproducing populations in several other lakes in the state.



This is a nine-inch Sunapee that was caught in Maine and is a very special trout!

The real problem is that the debate about what is a Sunapee and what is not has also included another species called a Blueback Trout. This fish is native to several lakes in northwestern Maine and many say this is a subspecies of the Arctic Char while others argue that it is the same fish as the Sunapee. They are both relic Arctic Char and considered by most fisheries biologist to be the same fish. The best way to tell if they are the same fish is to catch one of each and compare. This is not very scientific, but it works for me.

The good news is that we did manage to catch a Sunapee in Long Pond and the effort it took to get to the Pond and fish on a cold rainy in July. Long Pond is in the northwest corner of Maine

and there is no vehicle access to the pond. I was fishing with Nephew Mark and immediately got a hit and reeled in a ten-inch Brook Trout. Within a few minutes I had another hit and was amazed to see something I did not recognize. The fish had a back snout and looked like something like the Dolly Varden I had caught in Alaska and out west. I realized that this was a Sunapee and took it to show Mark. We took several pictures and slipped it back into the water.

I have caught many bigger fish and have played some for 30-45 minutes, but this little Sunapee was something special. I consider this fish to be the real prize of all of the Trout that I have managed to catch. The Sunapee, Aurora, Paiute Cutthroat, and Gila are the rarest trout in North America and to be able to hold one of these fish is a special treat. To catch all four is the greatest grand slam of fly fishing. I guess I would also have to say the Blueback Trout are also somewhat rare and very difficult to catch, but not as rare as the others. That brings up a point about those that say Sunapee and Blueback are the same fish. They do not look anything alike. It is possible that Sunapee are a color variation and are still the same fish as the Blueback. But they do not look anything alike! Sunapee have colorful spots and the largest blue spots on a trout that I have ever seen. Blueback are marked like typical Arctic Char and when not in spawning colors are really kind of drab. I really think that these two relic Arctic Char need another look and more consideration as to whether or not they are the same fish.

There is a sidebar on driving the Maine back roads. There are few signs, and what signs there are do not match anything on the maps. So, you will wonder around and ask a lot of people for directions. It is a good way to make new friends. Without our crack guide Steve Law, we would have spent four or five times longer driving and gotten a lot less fishing time. Steve has been a friend for 35 years, a Maine native and a joy to share an adventure. During our search on the back roads, we encountered a culvert that had been washed out during a recent rain. There was one pick-up on our side of the wash out and two on the other side. The folks on the other side were obviously trapped. I walked up and visited with the fellow on our side of the wash out. I mentioned that it looked like he had a problem. He looked at me and smiled, "I don't have a problem," he said. "Those fellows on the other side have the problem." Steve, looked at me and smiled, "That's Maine humor right there."

Find out more about Sunapee and Blueback Trout in the book or e-book **Trout Adventures – North America** to be published in 2012 by Wilderness Adventures Press. Their website is www.wildadvpress.com and they specialize in fly fishing books.