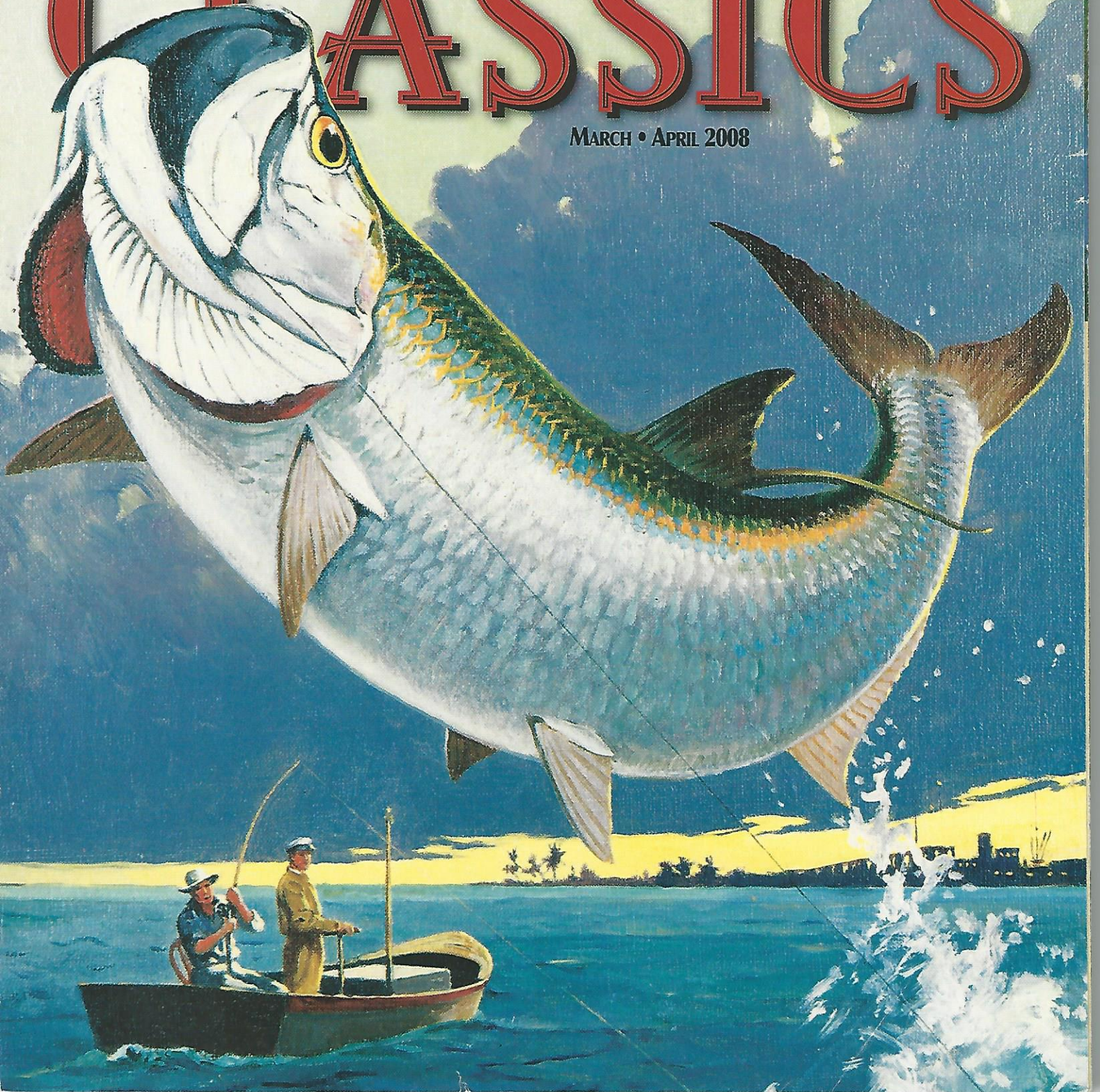


# SPORTING CLASSICS

MARCH • APRIL 2008





# Travel

By John Ross



The Yellow Breeches flowed under the iron bridge across the road from our house in the Pennsylvania village once called Craighead Siding. The old Craighead place, a two-story Victorian manse, sat back a bit from the creek next to the railroad. In it, two brothers, John and Frank, spent their summers before venturing off to Yellowstone where their research on grizzly bears brought them national renown.

Their nephew, Sammy, lived on the creek between our place and the manse. On those balmy evenings when March was a lamb, we'd sit on his dock, drink Yuengling porter from brown 16-ounce long-neck bottles, and talk about where we'd like to fish on opening day.

Then as now Pennsylvania's trout season opened on a Saturday in mid-April. It closed on Labor Day, but not really. An extended season continued through the end of February with a creel limit reduced from five trout to three. For the six weeks that no trout fishing was allowed, hatchery staff bustled about restocking streams.

Behind the boulder at the head of Sammy's dock we could see rainbows jockeying for cover. They held there, slim blue-grey shadows floating above pebbles stained topaz. We would count them, toss pellets rolled from white bread into the current, and watch them turn and take. As darkness fell, Sammy would play *Peg 'O My Heart* and *Mood Indigo* on his alto sax. By then the beer was pretty much gone.

A lot of water has flowed by Sammy's

*What's so special about the opening day of trout season is the anticipation, pure and simple, of that first fish to inhale your fly.*



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dock since our last brew. He's dead now. My kids, who on opening day used to chuck corn, salmon eggs and worms at the trout behind the boulder, are grown. My daughter's teen-age son, Lincoln, is as eager as a two-year old setter for opening day of trout season, the last Saturday in April, generally speaking, for most streams in Michigan where he lives.

Since Sammy's spring serenades, I've traveled a bit. For me, there's been no closed season other than those imposed by other work or domestic duty. Behind the back seat of my Jeep, there's a green duffel. It's stocked with three 6-piece travel rods: a 3-weight, 5-weight and a 7-weight, and reels to match. Well, that's not quite true. I stepped on the tip of the 7-weight in Alaska last summer and have yet to get it repaired.

The duffel holds my waders and wading boots. My vest is there too, along with a score of fly boxes chock full of patterns I bought once, thinking I had to have them, and of course, I did. There's a net as well, a pair of fingerless

gloves and a Gore-Tex shell. All I need for opening day is to unzip the duffel.

Not quite. I must admit I miss opening day. It's not so much the abstinence from angling that precedes the eventful morning. And it sure isn't the midnight scramble to stretch and dress the fly-line, the frantic hunt for the box of egg imitations so favored by stocked 'bows, or the bolt of remembrance of leaky waders that jolts you awake at 3 a.m. It's the anticipation, pure and simple, of sunrise.

It's lounging with friends with a last libation before a waning fire on the hearth of a cabin in Pennsylvania or Minnesota or Maine or any other state on the eve of its opening day. It's a cup of coffee and a sausage biscuit, grabbed in the dash to the car. It's finding, thank God, that nobody else has taken your spot on the run where the creek cuts against the fallen hemlock under which a lunker brown must surely hide.

It's the coke and the bacon cheeseburger with fries and the slab of banana cream pie in the diner when you and your buddies kick strategies for the afternoon. And yeah, it's a limit of stocked fish, the only ones you'll take this season, gutted and iced and waiting the skillet or grill or to be poached with shallots, peppercorns, chopped carrot, and white wine. ❄️