Eastern

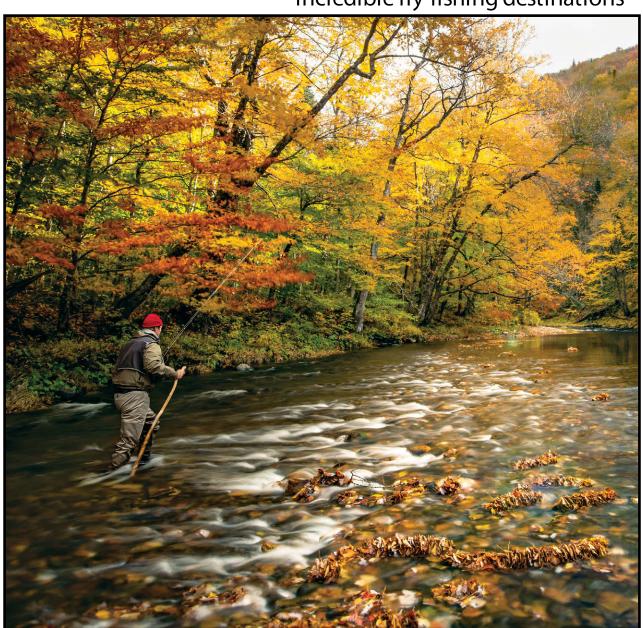
Niagara River Muskies New York

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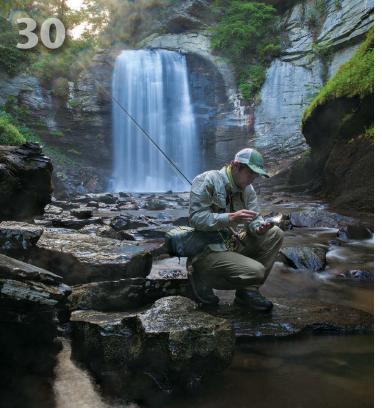
FISH FOOD Leeches

EXPOSURE

The Colors of Pisgah



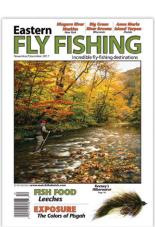












Cover: In search of fall salmon in the highlands of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

Photo by: Peter Leverman



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From the Editor

For the Birds

've written many books; a couple of them are pretty good. Until this year, all but one were within the fly-fishing genre. But my latest is a departure. I wrote a bird book—a field guide to identifying birds, to be exact—and I must admit that I wondered what my fly-angling acquaintances would think of that. I mean, there's no denying it now: I like birds, always have. I find them interesting, and I like to know what I'm looking at and what I'm hearing, even if the birding sometimes supersedes the fishing.

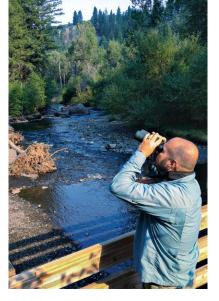
My regular fishing partners, and they number just a few, either tolerate my birding, often bemusedly, or join in. One of them has more expertise in the regional birds, while the others express curiosity or fascination or appreciation at some bird sightings while being completely oblivious to others. It's hard to miss the grouse exploding from the trailside brush on the way to a favorite pool or the golden eagle soaring by at nearly eye level or the vibrant red-winged blackbirds scolding from the reeds; it can be easier to miss the black swifts chasing insects on the wing high above the canyon, the owl roosting silently up against the trunk of a cottonwood, the hummingbird feeding on the blooms across the river.

So I wasn't sure how my little piece of the fly-fishing world would react to my bird book, but upon its release I was quickly and pleasantly surprised to discover that many, many fly anglers I know also enjoy bird-watching. One fly shop even sells the book because the owner himself loves birding.

In retrospect, I should not have been surprised. Fly fishing and bird-watching share some commonality: both activities place you in close quarters with the natural world; both hobbies hinge on observation. In fact, the more acute your observational skills, the more success you'll enjoy at fly fishing and at bird-watching. Moreover, both activities teach you to be a better observer. Many other outdoor pursuits are equally adept

at doing so, and I'm sure—after seeing the reaction to my bird book—that if I wrote a book about, say, reptiles or wildflowers or mushrooms or rocks, I'd find that many fly anglers embrace these subjects as well and for the same reason. Simply put, fly anglers tend to be multidimensional, and that's a trait that makes people interesting.





Eastern FLY FISHING

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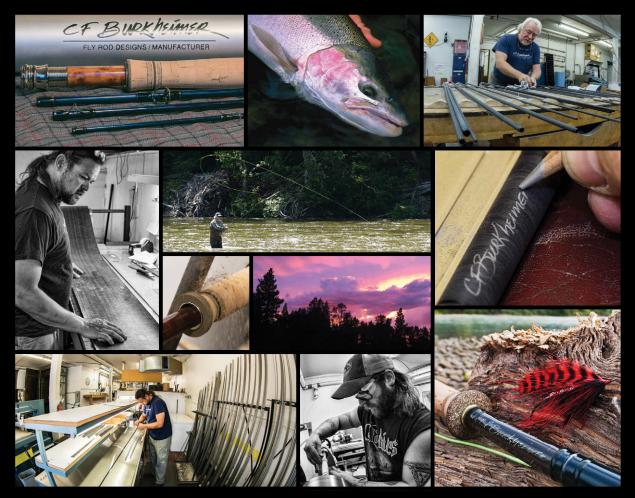
FROM THE STAFF

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November/December 2017 Contest





September/October 2017 Finalists

- 1. "But my cellphone said, 'Turn right at bridge. "

 Tom Curtis, Boise, Idaho
- 2. "Uh, Dad, is this a bad time to ask to borrow the car tonight?"

Greg Kirkwood, Middletown, Maryland

3. "Let's just say 'left' or 'right' from now on instead of 'port' or 'starboard. "

Cody Coyne, Starkville, Mississippi



"Son, your reason not to find a job is here!"

Mike Space, Albuquerque, New Mexico

ach issue we present a Gene Trump cartoon in need of a caption. In return, we ask that you, the readers, submit captions online from which we choose finalists. Caption submissions for this issue's contest must be received online by November 6, 2017. Above left are the finalists for the September/October 2017 contest; please go online to vote for your favorite. The winner will be announced in the January/February 2018 issue and will receive a T-shirt displaying the cartoon and the winning caption. The July/August 2017 winner appears above right.

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Masters at the Bench



eathers and Flashabou haven't always been among the most colorful elements in Matt Callies's life. In fact, when compared with life-threatening situations in hostile environments, fly tying and the sundry materials associated with fly tying all fall under the rather pastoral glow of normality. Although he is reluctant to delve

into a lot of detail, upon completing basic emergency medical technician (EMT) training, Callies went to work in some of the sketchier neighborhoods of South-Central Los Angeles—places where, in his words, "a called-in chest pain could be either a heart attack or a gunshot wound."

Callies recalls an instance of responding to a call in a neighborhood where all the street signs had been removed by rival gangs and where protocol dictated waiting for police backup before entering the doorway of the emergency. "In this 'hood," says Callies, "we were not allowed to leave our rigs on the street unattended ... or all your rims and equipment would be gone in the blink of an eye. When we got to this par-



ticular scene the patient was already in cardiac arrest."

But while standing outside waiting for backup, Callies and his EMT cohorts were approached by "a very distraught man toting a military-style rifle" who shouted at them to get on inside and please help his grandma. The gun-toting grandson became their impromptu backup. When the EMTs emerged from the building carrying the elderly patient on a stretcher, he was still there, calmly and resolutely guarding their vehicle. "I could talk for hours about shootings and stabbings and being shot at while on the scene, but," says Callies, only half-joking, "that's for future movie scripts."

Of course, Callies's life was not always this exciting. He was born and raised in the relative quiet of Southern California suburbia—palm trees and green lawns and ocean surf mere blocks from home. When he was 5 years old his father took him to fish for crappies on Lake Hodges. One of his dad's friends had dialed in a secret spot—the one and only piece of submerged timber on the entire lake. The positive reinforcement of hooking crappie after crappie was more than a 5-year-old brain could process or, perhaps more to the point, resist. From that day forward, says Callies, "I remember just always fishing at every opportunity, be it in the ocean on a surfboard or at the local golf course pond for largemouth and sunfish."

Callies and his friends used a Thomas Guide to identify and pinpoint potential fisheries, especially among the abundant, under-exploited waterways tucked away in the region's myriad golf courses. "We always kept the greenskeepers and security guards on their toes," he confesses.

When Callies reached age 12, his father and uncle pitched in together to buy him some basic fly-tying equipment and materials, a secondhand fly rod, and a clicker-style Martin fly reel. There was no looking back. Not only did his sporting horizons expand, but





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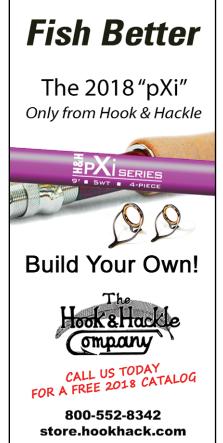
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so did his geographical horizons. Callies and his angling friends took to "following the blue lines on various maps" as a way to target trout in the Sierra Nevada. Upon completing high school, Callies took ground-level jobs in sales and pizza delivery gigs. However, rather than bemoaning what to others may have seemed like menial occupations, he saw the positive side, regarding the driving involved in these jobs as an advantage "because it got me access to a ton of private ponds, and if not a specific water, at least the lay of the land."

One reason Callies gravitated to emergency medical services was the nature of the scheduling, which entailed long continuous shifts followed by several days off. "I attended paramedic and fire academy school in Northern California near Mount Shasta, during the downtime fishing the upper Sac and every other piece of water I could find," he says. When he wasn't in class, he went "kind of rogue," choosing to live down by the river, sleep in his truck, and tie flies in order to replenish his arsenal.

Bob Grace at the Ted Fay Fly Shop in Dunsmuir took notice of Callies's compulsions and talked him into designing and tying more patterns. "Tying became my life. The rivers became my home," says Callies. "For quite some time, I was either 'homeless' or on a couch at a fire station ... until I met my future wife."

Smiling, shaking his head, he continues, "For some reason it seemed to her like a good idea to marry a dirtbag who lived in a truck and fished. We ended up buying a modest home ... and a black Lab ... and [of course] a drift boat."

While working more or less continuously as a royalty-paid fly tier, Callies veered into being a river guide, and ultimately started his own outdoor sports rep business. Recently he took on a new position as the director of product development at Loon Outdoors, while continuing to rep for Rajeff Sports and Fulling Mill flies. Despite the duties and responsibilities that come with wearing different professional hats, the esoteric realm of fly tying always occupies some part of Callies's mind.

"I spend a lot of time underwater," he explains, "partially because I miss free diving in the ocean but also because I'm a bug nerd."

Although he closely studies the size, silhouette, and color of the aquatic insect he intends to imitate, Callies is not a slave to detail, instead opting to create an impression rather than a mirror image of the natural. One of the strategies he employs for boiling a pattern down to its essence is to start by tying 10 or more versions of the same fly, leaving out steps and/or materials with each successive version. Then he stream-tests the pattern in all its different versions to determine just how much—or, more precisely, just how little—tying material is required to construct a pattern that will consistently elicit strikes.

"Most of my tying is very functional, sparse, and suggestive," says Callies. "That said, I often like to incorporate a hot spot or bright feature into a pattern in order to get the trout's attention. I relate this to our natural inclination for human watching. If a woman walks by wearing bright red lipstick, everyone will look; it's almost involuntary. You may not find her attractive, but, hey, you looked."

While Callies's trout flies may be seen as an exercise in restraint, his more traditionally inspired steelhead patterns—which, by the way, he never names—tend toward the elaborate and sumptuous, incorporating a meticulously tied matrix of mostly natural fibers. "I think that steelhead flies are a lot like cars," he theorizes. "They can be big and bulky, like muscle cars, with appeal to a certain crowd. Then you have the low-water stuff that's sleek and sexy, like a sports car. Find the right key for the fish and you're in for a hell of a ride!"

Don Roberts is a freelance writer and flyfishing historian who lives in central Oregon.





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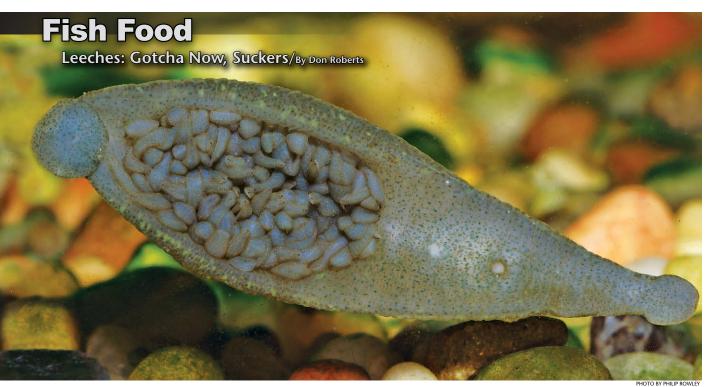
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side from the fly-fishing community and some members of the medical profession, leeches don't have many friends. The creature's name alone—sans any description of its creepy, legless, squirmy physical characteristics—has a vaguely repulsive or sinister ring to it; to wit, pronunciation of the word "leech" on the back of one's teeth prompts a chill. And, of course, creatures that sneakily glom on to unwilling hosts and suck their blood do not generate much in the way of sentiment and warm fuzzies.

Medically speaking, leeches—specifically the class of leeches known scientifically as *Hirudo medicinalis*—have been therapeutically employed since 600 BC, when Indian physician Sushruta wrote a treatise describing their application in surgical procedures. Over the ages many ancient cultures, most notably in Greece and Egypt, used leeches to treat a variety of ailments, including wounds, bruising, swelling, skin diseases, sciatica, and arthritis. Early physicians realized

that not only did leeches secrete a mysterious anticlotting enzyme but also a healing antibiotic agent. Although physicians of the time had no inkling of the complex chemistry involved, they quite correctly observed that secreted leech saliva had anesthetizing, anti-inflammatory, and vasodilating (widening of the cavity in blood vessels) properties.

During the Middle Ages the use of medicinal leeches took a turn for the worse when physicians routinely believed that many, if not most, diseases, including mental incapacity and personality disorders, arose from having an excess of blood in one's body. Blood-letting—whether by perforation or a squadron of leeches—remained a widespread

medical practice well into the 1800s. For instance, famed Russian dramatist Nikolai Gogol, who admittedly already had one foot in the grave, was no doubt hastened to his end by the throng of leeches attached to his face.

Advances in microsurgery in the 1970s ushered in a worldwide comeback in medicinal leech therapy. Today, leeches are commonly applied postoperatively to diminish the pooling of blood and to stimulate circulation at the site of reattached body parts, particularly fingers, and in reconstructive surgery of the ears, nose, lips, and eyelids.

As fascinating as the hemophagic (blood-sucking) leeches are, in terms of anglers' awareness and appreciation, hundreds of sister species also occupy the freshwater realm. Approximately 100 species dwell only in the ocean, and 90 others live on land, though typically confined to soggy, marshy areas. While aquatic leeches tend to be almost boringly similar in appearance, the lifestyles of the different species vary considerably. As has already been



acknowledged here, the most famous of these are parasitic, feeding off the blood of fish or mammals, becoming spontaneously amphibious when latching onto the latter. Other species dine opportunistically, siphoning body

fluids, in the manner of a spider, from whatever smallish critter runs afoul of the leech's sucker mouth. Incidentally, all true leeches possess both an anterior sucker, the business end for piercing and feeding, and a posterior sucker, a larger, toothless suction mechanism for purchasing a grip on their prey. Yet other leeches, perhaps the oldest species from which all others evolved, are grazers, feeding primarily on detritus.

Mature leeches typically range from about 1 to 3 inches long-though some tropical monsters can exceed 8 inches—with semi-cylindrical bodies at the head (anterior) end and more of a compressed, flattened shape toward the posterior. Coloration often mimics the aquatic environment, dominated by muted greens, browns, greenish browns, and mottled black, usually with a darker tone on the dorsal side and a lighter ventral side, or underbelly. In some of the species preferred by trout, a thin red line runs the length of the dorsal side, accounting for the strip of tinsel tied along the body in many leech imitations.

One of the most engrossing features of leech anatomy involves its overall arrangement. Like other annelids (worms), the leech is a segmented animal. However, the external segmentation of the leech's body does not uniformly correspond to the segmentation of its internal organs, quite unlike its fellow annelids. While the leech's body surface, or hide, consists of 102 ringlike structures (segments), its internal organs—brain, guts, reproductive organs—are divided into 32 segments. Though every internal segment has its own autonomy, they unite via a longitudinal framework of tendons to perform as a single body for functions such as locomotion.

As if such compartmentalized physiology wasn't already passing strange, leeches are hermaphrodites, possessing both male and female reproductive organs. They mate by reciprocal fertilization—a kind of leech orgy (best not to think about it)—and in due course the fertilized eggs are deposited into a sticky, glutinous sac secreted by the leech's

clitellum (a thick, nonsegmented band near the head). Once the sac contains a clutch of up to 50 eggs, it's deposited in a shaded, dampish spot, such as under leaves, rocks, or logs, on the shore, but not under water. Newborn leeches are

identical to adults, only infinitesimally smaller. Growth into adulthood begins with the juvenile leech's first meal.

Trying to remove a leech from its feeding station, typically someone's lower leg, reveals not only its astonishing stretchability—a rubber-band-like capacity to withstand being pulled to two or three times its resting length—but also its surprising tensile strength, traits that make leeches the BFGoodrich version of armless, eyeless, slithery netherworld creatures.

Perhaps the most singularly transfixing attribute of leeches is their slow, sinuous, undulating style of locomotion. Viewed poetically, leeches swim like sunken ripples. Viewed practically from the angler's standpoint, leeches swim like a strip-retrieved Woolly Bugger—probably the most universally productive fly pattern on the planet. The beauty of leeches is that they can be effectively fished in any number of ways, including swung, dead-drifted (on both streams and lakes), trolled on sinking lines, or cast and slowly retrieved (the broadest, most orthodox method). The foremost thing to keep in mind when tying or buying leech patterns is the use of supple materials that simulate a swimming motion in water. It's hard to go wrong with marabou for the tail, soft breathable hen for the hackle (arguably optional), and Angora goat, seal fur, or a synthetic blend for the dubbed body. The addition of a beadhead, especially tungsten, will speed the fly's sink rate and impart more, though decidedly dodgy, motion. The use of a nonslip loop knot is a critical factor in ensuring the free swimming motion of the imitation.

In the 1950s, British naturalist and angling author Oliver Kite proposed that

the behavior, or lifelike movement, of a fly in the water column could, in and of itself, produce what he called an "induced take." Though Kite was addressing the subject of nymphs, he could have as easily been referring to leeches. A trout's response to the undulating motion of a slowly stripped leech, after all, is nothing if not the most quintessential of induced takes.



Fly courtesy of Umpqua

Pioneers & Legends

Homer Circle, 1914–2012 A Good Ol' Boy Who Could Charm the Stripes Off a Ring-tailed Polecat By Don Roberts

or myriad reasons, fly fishers as a cultural group don't typically rally around the pursuit of bass. It's more a sport seen through the mirrored lenses

of anglers mentally hardwired to deploy heavy ordnance: stout rods and level-wind reels capable of efficiently and accurately chucking big meaty plugs, crankbaits, spinnerbaits, Carolina rigs, and hideous, oversize plastic "soft baits." Not, mind you, relatively dainty foam poppers and deer-hair bugs. Homer Circle, fishing editor for Sports Afield from 1968 to 2002—one of the longest, if not the longest, tenures in the outdoor magazine business—tried to change all that; he did his damnedest to sway the perception of fly fishing for bass, particularly largemouth bass, as far more than an infrequent novelty, indeed, as an unsurpassed approach to hooking headturning numbers of bass.

In his tome *Bass Wisdom* (2000), regarded by many as his defining book, Circle wrote, "Fly rodding just may be the best all-around method for catching the greatest number of bass. This conviction grows on me with each passing season."

Despite repeatedly saying so at sports shows and in TV appearances, not just over the years but over the decades, and despite reiterating said conviction in dozens of magazine columns and features, Circle never really managed to persuade the bass-angling masses to even half-heartedly, or more than occasionally, embrace fly fishing, admitting that "it's rare to see one fly rodder among thousands of bass anglers."

True to his temperament, however, Circle never

stopped trying, cheerfully soldiering on in his attempt to garner larger favor and acceptance for "fly-rod bass bugging" (more on this later). If for nothing else, you've

got to love a guy graced with such dogged persistence.

The Three Homers

Circle was born in Springfield, Ohio, in 1914. As soon as he was old enough to find his own path to the pond, he took up fishing with a long cane pole and a length of cotton-twist line fixed at the tip (way pre-tenkara). Like so many of his neighbors in those days, he fished for fun, sure, but whether the quarry was catfish or crappies, the end product was always meat on the table. Circle's obsession with bass was ignited when, as a callow 12-year-old, he had the good fortune to be invited by a school chum and his dad on a fishing foray in rural southern Ohio. As ludicrous as this may sound, all three fishing companions on that excursion shared the same first name. Three anglers, three amigos, three Homers. Think about that: how many Homers have most of us ever known? They caught bass and the bass caught Homer. In essence, the Three Homers trip launched the beginning of a lifelong



Filmmaker Glen Lau asked Circle to be the designated fisherman for Bigmouth (1974), an in-depth documentary about largemouth bass. Almost overnight, Circle was transformed from a bag-and-brag angler into a learn-and-concern sportsman. Another Lau production, Bigmouth Forever, followed in the 1990s, again starring Circle. By then, Circle had become a staunch proponent of catch-and-release angling.

preoccupation-cum-profession devoted to all things bass.

The next phase of Circle's indoctrination was solitary, self-inflicted, or, to use appropriate educational terms, a classic case of independent instruction. His high school civics teacher owned a farm upon which was situated a spring-fed 2-acre pond. With the teacher's blessing, Circle adopted the pond as his own private laboratory for observing bass behavior—not just run-of-the-mill bass, but a

bevy of alpha largemouth. Realizing that the only way to acquire a real understanding of bass was to closely monitor the entire life cycle of the species, Circle wasted no time

live-harvesting, (aka sportfishing) several 5- to 7-pound brood bass from outlying fisheries and hastily transporting them directly back to his lab-pond.

After school he spent nearly every fair-weather afternoon either passively watching his contingent of lab-ratswith-fins—particularly their mating, nesting, and rearing rituals—or actively catching and releasing specific fish (no blind-casting) in order to determine the most effective baits and presentations. For instance, one of his favorite bass—a hen that grew to over 12 pounds and claimed a large sunken tree for her solely occupied territory—responded only intermittently or indifferently to most lures and baits, but would almost without fail rise and unhesitatingly inhale a deer-hair mouse.

Spending untold hours perched on the bank of his lab-pond gave Circle a more far-reaching perspective than he ever could have anticipated. As Circle noted in *Bass Wisdom*, published 60 years later, "The thought never

entered my young mind that one day I'd be writing a book on the subject.... But here it is, more than half a century of catchings, skunkings, studying, writing, teaching, and pursuing this wondrous and enigmatic critter."

Say Uncle

After graduating from high school, Circle found employment in a local sporting goods store, which entailed buying, stocking, and selling fishing tackle. Naturally curious and gregarious, not to mention a confirmed bassoholic, he was totally cut out for this line of work. He developed an abiding conversance with tackle manufacturers and their products, soaked up the expertise of the sales reps, and fraternized with the area's accomplished anglers. Circle disseminated the accrued acumen with much the same enthusiasm he brought to absorbing it.

In 1940, roughly eight years into Circle's sporting goods gig, the editor of

the *Ohio Daily News* in Springfield took notice and offered him the responsibility of writing a daily sports report and a weekly fishing column. On Circle's very first day on the

PIONEERS & LEGENDS continued on page 62



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Conservation

Restoration Success on Beaver Creek, Virginia/By Matthew Reilly

irroring the character of the small but active town of Ottobine, Virginia, which it flows through, Beaver Creek is not a large creek by any means. From the unmarked country road that parallels its course through the Shenandoah

Valley, it's a small crease in a working agricultural landscape, hardly a rod's length wide in most stretches. However, thanks to the generous commitment and cooperation among conservation groups, private landowners,



and the public, Beaver Creek's legacy jumps its banks.

A century ago, Beaver Creek was a respectable native brook trout fishery. Anecdotes from old-timers place 16-inch natives in the deep, cold pockets of the modern creek's ancestral state. But environmentally irresponsible land-use practices—namely, cattle walking in the creek bed—led to the creek's ruin toward the tail end of the 20th century.

In 1999, Jerry Black, a local flooring contractor, family man, and angler, was elected president of the Massanutten Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MTU). Though he always knew of the creek, it wasn't until Bob Cramer, a local flyfishing guide, told him about the brook trout that used to fin the creek that Black began to see the bigger picture. "Bob told me that we should do something, and it kind of took off from there," says Black. A born-and-raised local, Black knew all of the landowners along the creek. He spent his four-year term as president, plus a fifth year as a dedicated member of MTU, speaking to those landowners about fencing their cattle out and employing best management practices along the banks.

In the end, all agreed, and in 2002, Black had an agreement penned by a lawyer and passed around to all of the landowners for signatures, physically symbolizing a unified effort to work toward the goal of a healthy cold-water fishery.

Today, those who visit Beaver Creek can witness remarkable progress toward that goal. "We have brook trout returning to Beaver Creek in good numbers, and water temperatures through the restored sections are cooler during the summer than they were before the project," says Seth Coffman, project coordinator for

Trout Unlimited's Shenandoah Headwaters Home Rivers Initiative. "We have better flood resiliency because of the restoration work that has reconnected the floodplains to the streams. And with better habitat and fishing comes the benefit of being able to use the stream."

Anglers can, and do, travel from all over to fish for large stocked rainbows in the new Beaver Creek, after securing one of the four day passes kept at the Ottobine Country Store down the road. Passes are

free, but the store encourages donations to MTU, which are funneled directly back into stream improvements. Occasionally, an angler will be lucky enough to hook into one of the come-home brook trout, or one of the stream-born rainbows that are showing up with increasing regularity.

Project Healing Waters uses the newly restored creek to host several outings and tournaments every year for wounded war veterans, who can easily reach the creek's banks. And local schools participate in Trout Unlimited's Trout in the Classroom program, releasing fingerling brook trout into the creek and making stewards of unsuspecting brookie parents.

Thus, through the tireless work of Beaver Creek's passionate neighbors, and through the active seeking of grants, like Trout Unlimited's Embrace a Stream grant, the creek's waters have transformed the surrounding community into a more watershed-minded conglomerate, but it's just one of many with the same potential.

"The return of brook trout to Beaver Creek represents what is possible through the appropriate management strategies for cold-water spring-influenced streams in the mid-Atlantic region, ... [where] dozens and dozens once supported robust populations of native brook trout," says Coffman.

Applied to these headwater streams as a whole, the model that Beaver Creek sets forth has the potential to restore healthy water quality to entire watersheds, while achieving the same kind of social and cultural renewal that can be seen in the small town of Ottobine.

Around the East

News, Views, and Piscatorial Pursuits



Upper Hiwassee River, TN By Ty Goodwin

he Hiwassee River in southeast Tennessee is a coin with two very different sides. The Hiwassee below the Apalachia powerhouse is an excellent tailwater trout fishery with roadside access and considerable amenities (see *Eastern Fly Fishing*, January/February 2014). The river above the powerhouse, on the other hand, is a rugged backcountry bass stream best suited to anglers who relish adventure. If they were stepsisters, the lower "Hi"

would be the gorgeous debutante in a sundress with a daisy tucked behind her ear. The upper Hi would be the sultry beauty with a sleeve tattoo and brass knuckles in her purse.

The upper section is well known locally for its resident smallmouth bass. These thick-bodied thugs are more than willing to feed on the surface, and top-water action can be spectacular. Dead-drifting large flies like Turck Tarantulas or Kent Edmonds's Stealth Bombers works, but adding a twitch or two during the drift often triggers explosive strikes. If surface activity is slow, high-sticking olive crayfish patterns or big rubberleg nymphs through deep slots is a proven tactic.

Most bass range from 0.5 to 2 pounds. Five-and 6-weight rods are perfect for these fish and sturdy enough to handle the occasional 4- to 6-pound bruiser in the upper river. These huge smallmouth are not easy marks. I've heard more than one story from glassy-eyed friends about "the biggest bass of my life" rising

to a fly, only to refuse it at the last moment.

This is rough country, and precautions are in order. The river squeezes through massive rock formations throughout this stretch, so expect to do some climbing and clambering. Solid wading boots and a wading staff are important. Cell service in the gorge is nonexistent, so don't fish this area without letting someone know where you will be. It's always a good idea to fish here with a friend or two.

Also, keep in mind that all power-generation water releases from the reservoir above Apalachia Dam occur at the Apalachia powerhouse via an underground conduit and do not affect the upper Hiwassee. However, the Tennessee Valley Authority occasionally opens



the dam spillways during significant rain events, dramatically increasing the volume of water coming through the upper river. This is rare, but when it happens, this section is unfishable and dangerous. Check www.tva.gov, click on "Lake Levels," select "Apalachia," and click "View Info." If the information states that Apalachia is spilling, then avoid the upper river. Again, it's a rare event, but I never fish here without checking the website first.

The upper Hiwassee is best accessed by following railroad tracks (on the south bank) that parallel it for several miles. The John Muir Trail runs along the opposite riverbank and is also an option; however, the trail leaves the river frequently and access is spotty at best. The tracks can be accessed near the powerhouse at the terminus of Powerhouse Road. To reach the powerhouse from State



Route 30 in Reliance, turn north onto SR 315, crossing the river; then turn right on Childers Creek Road. Travel 1 mile and turn right onto Powerhouse Road. (This road is actually marked as Childers Creek Road, but soon transitions to Powerhouse Road.) At approximately 4 miles, the road ends in a small roundabout. Park here and cross the footbridge to the powerhouse. Bear left after

crossing, following the tracks upstream. There are literally miles of good fishing from that point. There are few access trails from the tracks. The best approach is to simply look for a viable place to climb down the embankment to the river. Note that this is an active railroad and a train could rumble through. Be alert and prepared to move away from the tracks if necessary.



Spring Creek, PA By R. Chad Chorney

other Nature is a mad scientist. During 2016, drought conditions plagued many of Pennsylvania's trout streams. Anglers were faced with low, clear flows and spooky trout on their favorite waters. Fish and fly anglers alike spent the winter hoping for a respite, and the spring of 2017 delivered, being exceptionally cool and wet. Trout waters across the state ran high and turbid for much of March, April, and May. Such was the case on Spring Creek, one of Pennsylvania's finest trout streams.

A spring-fed limestone stream, Spring Creek typically flows at a fairly constant level and clarity. Located in Centre County,



Spring Creek boasts one of the highest densities of wild brown trout per stream mile in Pennsylvania. Over 20 miles of the stream are classified as Class A Wild Trout Water, the highest designation given by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. The most productive fishing occurs on the lower portion of the stream, for the first several miles above its confluence with Bald Eagle Creek at Milesburg. Here, hatches are much more consistent than on Spring's upper reaches. Access is plentiful as well. Benner Spring, Fishermans Paradise, and the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission water are excellent areas that can be reached via Pennsylvania State Route 150 near the town of Bellefonte.

Beginning in April and continuing through June, anglers on Spring experience two of the stream's finest hatches: the earlyspring caddisflies and the Sulphurs. The caddisflies (tan, sizes 16 and 18) hatch during mid- to late April, typically during early afternoon. Standard patterns like the Elk Hair Caddis and Goddard Caddis in the appropriate sizes are effective during the height of the hatch. Western patterns like the Iris Caddis and X-Caddis work just as well, and are also a good choice during the emergence. When the adults aren't on the water, nymphing with a caddisfly larva or pupa imitation produces fish.

The Sulphurs follow the caddisflies, starting in early May and continuing throughout June. This is arguably the marquee hatch on Spring Creek. These are size 14 to 16, vivid-yellow mayflies. They hatch later in the day, with peak activity usually in the evening hours. Given the low-light conditions in which the bugs emerge, often-shy trout rise greedily to Sulphur duns. As the hatch progresses, anglers don their headlamps and stay on the water well past dark, awaiting the spinner fall. Indeed, some of Spring Creek's largest trout are caught then. Anglers fishing Sulphurs on Spring Creek should be prepared with a variety of flies. While Catskill-style flies still take their share of fish, parachutestyle patterns, cripples, and realistic emergers are more effective. A standard Rusty Spinner imitates that stage of the insect. Sulphur nymphs and Flashback Pheasant Tails are essential for nymphing.

Wet flies fished on the swing are also highly effective during both of these hatches. A sparse soft hackle fished just under the surface will fool some of the most selective trout. Anglers on Spring Creek looking for caddisflies and Sulphurs should always be on the lookout for other bugs; Blue-Winged Olives and March Browns are im-

portant mayflies on Spring.

Spring Creek is not the only water in the area that experiences excellent fishing during late spring. The Little Juniata River, Penns Creek, and Big Fishing Creek are great choices as well, and see the same caddisflies and Sulphurs. Green Drakes are a bonus on these waters, constituting one of the most impressive hatches in the region.

State College provides all the necessary amenities, including two excellent fly shops: Flyfisher's Paradise, (814) 234-4189, www.flyfishersparadise.com, and TCO Fly Shop, (814) 689-3654, www.tcoflyfishing.com. Both offer local and regional fly patterns, appropriate gear for area waters, and guide service.



St. Joseph River, IN/OH By Nathan Perkinson

ndiana has two Saint Joseph Rivers. One is the well-known salmon and steelhead river that flows through South Bend, draining a good portion of southern Michigan and northern Indiana into Lake Michigan. The other Saint Joe is a small warm-water river that rises in northwest Ohio and flows into Indiana, where it joins the Maumee River in Fort Wayne. This smaller Saint Joseph has little in common with its nearby namesake, but that doesn't mean it's not a great little river for fly fishers looking for a little warm-water fun.

The Saint Joe is relatively narrow and slow for most of its course. You can access the stream near Pioneer and Montpelier in Ohio, where the Saint Joe creeps along through twisting bends and deep holes that hold panfish and smallmouth bass. You can float a canoe through this section, but the river is small enough to easily wade. Be sure to observe the Buckeye State's strict wading laws on the Ohio sections of the Saint Joe: landowners adjacent to the river actually own the river bottom, so use public accesses if you're wading.

The Saint Joseph runs wider once it enters Indiana. River access laws permit waders to roam freely in the Hoosier State so long as they stay in the water. You can access the river near the small towns of Saint Joe and Spencerville, along with several points in Fort Wayne, including Shoaff Park and just off Coliseum Boulevard near the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne campus. You won't need waders to fly fish the Saint Joseph during the summer months. Memorial Day through Labor Day is the prime season for warm-water fly fishing in this area, and the Saint Joe runs bathtub-warm all summer. Spring fishing is hit or miss depending on the amount of rainfall and snowmelt, as spring flooding can transform the typically mild-mannered Saint Joe into a muddy torrent for weeks.

Autumn is a great time to fish the Saint Joseph River. Expect smallies and panfish to feed voraciously during the fall, especially on warm, sunny afternoons when water temperatures are ideal for fly fishing. Warm-water fly fishing usually

comes to a close around late October in northwest Ohio and northeast Indiana, though you may still catch fish well into November, depending on how the weather plays out.

Small poppers are excellent for bass and panfish alike, while bright Clouser Minnows, large beadhead Woolly Buggers, and crayfish are great for targeting bass. The St. Joe typically runs off-color due to farm runoff. so think either bright fluorescent or big and bushy for your streamer selections. In addition to rocky structure, especially around bridges, be sure to fish deep, sandy holes for bass. Bluegills and rock bass hold in deep pools, too, and they aren't shy about darting from their lairs to take poppers on the surface. Panfish also hold in and around the many fallen trees and sunken logs that line the banks of the Saint Joseph.

To make the most of the array of fish in the Saint Joe,



use a small popper as a searching pattern. You'll be surprised by the number and variety of fish that will move for these minuscule poppers. Catch what you can on the popper and be sure to make a mental note of the spots where you missed fish, then hit those areas with a streamer or crayfish pattern once things have settled down. An angler could spend half a day hopping from pool to pool with a popper, then the other half finishing up with a streamer on the way back to the truck.



Bristol Pond, VT By Matthew Reilly

ermont, with its spine and soul in the Green Mountains, is nearly synonymous with brook trout. But the Green Mountain State is a sleeper for warm-water species, and not just in regionally dominant Lake Champlain. It was cold and rainy, dismal for summer in New England, when I first found myself at the boat launch of Bristol Pond, inflating a one-man Water Master packraft and stringing an 8-weight rod. Bass boats buzzed across the lake's surface in the distance, rooster tails protruding skyward—not the placid canoe-and-fly-rod scene I had come to expect from still-water arenas in the Northeast.

Bristol Pond, also known as Winona Lake, is a popular fishing destination just north of the town of Bristol on the eastern edge of the Champlain Valley. Its generally shallow profile supports an array of aquatic grasses and lily pads that, along with lots of woody cover, support healthy populations of largemouth bass and northern pike. Many local anglers favor the pond for its bass, which, contrary to my Southern figuring, grow quite large, with specimens over 3 pounds relatively common. An 8-weight and large poppers and streamers that imitate sunfish and other baitfish serve fly anglers well.

What seems to be a smaller subset of anglers—of which I consider myself a part love Bristol Pond for its northern pike fish-

ery, one of the few in the state, apart from the rich Champlain fishery to the west. According to local guide Drew Price of Master Class Angling, www. masterclassangling.com, the pike fishery has suffered in recent years from a few fish kills and from anglers keeping larger pike. However, northern pike still fin the pond in numbers, and some trophy specimens persist. Flashy streamers and bucktail flies that imitate baitfish, cast with 8- or 9-weight rods and with wire leaders, take the toothy critters efficiently.

Abundant visible aquatic weeds and the woody cover along the banks provide plenty of prime real estate for fly anglers. In fact, one of my largest Bristol bass came on a top-water Kreelex fly fished in the narrow, choked canal that connects the boat ramp to the main pond. However, the best fishing is in the main pond, which is deeper and has more prime fish cover. More and bigger fish come with knowledge of the pond's depth contours. Maps are available online through the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, www. dec.vermont.gov, and the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, www.vtfishandwildlife.com.

Because of its shallow nature, Bristol Pond warms up quite quickly in the summer, which emphasizes the importance of structure fishing later in the dog days. This can also slow down the fishing quite a bit. Generally, the best fishing occurs in June.



A scenic side trip in the Champlain Valley, Bristol Pond is a gem worth exploring. Its dark, fertile waters and weed lines provide a change of pace for trout anglers, and may just distract you from the spritely brook trout of the mountain hollows.



Fires Creek, NC By Nick Carter

he water looks the same as it always did. Clear plunge pools and deep bend runs slide into skinny pocket water twisting for miles through the bottom of a rhododendron-choked valley. Striking dark gray and tan stripes remain on the river-rounded rocks.

The fishing is different, though.

Fires Creek was my home water more than a decade ago. On Forest Service land off US Highway 64 between Murphy and Hayesville, North Carolina, the stream held nothing but pretty little rainbows. They topped out at about 11 inches in some of the deeper runs and were suckers for dry flies in the way lightly pressured wild trout sometimes are.

These days, though, the creek receives a little more attention. When the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission designated a 2-mile section of the stream as delayed-harvest waters, Fires Creek became popular with more than just locals. The lure of densely stocked rainbows, browns, and brookies draws a crowd. They are protected under catch-and-release, single-hook, artificial-only regulations during the October-into-June delayed-harvest season. It's a smallstream setting with more and bigger trout than one finds in most western North Carolina creeks this size.

I count myself among the wild trout snobs who bemoaned the injection of hatchery fish into this little wild fishery. But really, the state has stocked the lower end of Fires Creek for a long time. The creek downstream







of the footbridge at the Fires Creek Picnic Area has historically been managed as hatchery-supported water. This low in the drainage, over flat land where the creek makes its final approach to join the Hiwassee River, it is a medium-size creek with spotty public access and plenty of room to air out casts.

Forest Service land begins downstream of this footbridge, which also serves as the lower boundary for the delayed-harvest section. For the next couple miles upstream, the creek is smaller and steeper. The little wild trout we used to catch were mostly displaced by larger stocked fish, but there must be a few left in this section of the creek. It is a pretty place. Around each bend lies a new challenge, another series of pools and runs gurgling over bedrock on the valley floor.

Access above the footbridge is easy on a streamside trail and also along Fires Creek Wildlife Road. This gravel track parallels the creek way up into its headwaters on the western slopes of the Tusquitee Mountains. The delayed-harvest section ends at the Forest Service 340A bridge. Upstream of this point, the trout population trends toward stream-born fish. The creek also forks into two much smaller streams.

The top end of Fires Creek is small water, but elevation changes create some interesting holes over more than 5 miles of wild trout water. Focused on such a pool while walking along the bank one spring, I stepped slap in the middle of a big timber rattler. It didn't coil or strike; it just calmly slithered away. I, on the other hand, did my best Jesus impression, walking on water to get to the other side of the creek. To this day, I jump at the sound of split shot rattling in a box.



Big Wills Creek, AL By Pete Elkins

the first Big Wills Creek redeye bass. Despite slightly stained water following a week of rain across northeast Alabama, Tidwell's confidence in his favorite bass stream had already been justified. He operates Big Wills Outfitters, renting watercraft for easy floats down this fertile stream near Duck Springs. Lots of people float the creek on weekends just for adventure and pure scenic enjoyment. But hard-core fly anglers know Big Wills as one of Alabama's best places to catch a truly large redeye bass.

Tidwell has guided capable river anglers to their first redeyes, a memorable event even for fly fishers who have caught lots of largemouth, spotted, and smallmouth bass. Throughout their limited range, redeyes rarely exceed 12 inches. Anything that large is a trophy, in my book. Yet Tidwell has landed several Big Wills Creek redeyes heavier than 2 pounds. That's akin to catching a 10-pound largemouth on a top-water bug. Alabama's record 3-pound, 2-ounce redeye came from nearby Choccolocco Creek, another Coosa River tributary. But Tidwell is adamant that he has hooked some larger Big Wills redeyes.

Redeyes share most of the creek with much larger spotted and largemouth

bass, some heavier than 5 pounds. Biologists report that Big Wills shelters at least 34 fish species. In addition to numerous bass, fly anglers land lots of sunfish, including redbreast, green, longear, redear, warmouth, and bluegills, and an occasional rock bass. A healthy mix of aquatic insects boosts the fly-fishing experience. Mayflies, caddisflies, hellgrammites, and damselflies dominate the buggy scene. Yet Tidwell's Big Wills fly box contains few insect patterns. Given the normally slightly turbid water, he prefers flashy streamers that push water, as well as noisy poppers. If he rigs three 4- to 6-weight rods in his kayak, all will have floating lines and one of the following patterns: Trout Seducer, Kreelex (a flashy gold Flashabou-body fly), and a size 6 or 8 chartreuse BoogleBug popping bug.

Big Wills is a relatively narrow stream with dense shoreline cover and overhanging sycamores and catalpas, demanding casting accuracy and tight loops to reach prime shaded eddies. While not wide, it's a long creek, flowing 80 miles from its origin near Valley Head to the Coosa River. It drains more than 350 square miles. The creek's history is equally long and fascinating. Given the abundance of Native American names for places (Attalla, for example) and waterways, it's not surprising that Big Wills Creek has a place in the pantheon. Sequoya, the famed Cherokee scholar, worked as a silversmith in Willstown, near today's Fort Payne. As he worked, Sequoya conceived and created the Cherokee alphabet.

Understanding the area's rich Native American lore enriches a float down Big Wills Creek, but my thoughts focus on the opportunity for a trophy redeye bass. Tidwell, at Big Wills Outfitters, www.bigwillsoutfitters.com, is a great source for information on water and fishing conditions, and offers kayak and canoe rentals, and shuttle service, all designed to introduce you and your fly rod to a memorable redeye bass.



www.vaflyfishingfestival.com

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EXPOSURE

The Colors of Pisgah By Patrick Williams



Southern Appalachian brook trout are the only native trout species in western North Carolina. Though anglers typically have to seek out high-altitude creeks to find these small, wild fish, some of the valley rivers hold trophy-size brood-stock fish.



Pisgah National Forest includes the Shining Rock, Middle Prong, and Linville Wilderness Areas, all offering networks of remote trails, campsites, and miles of wild waters.



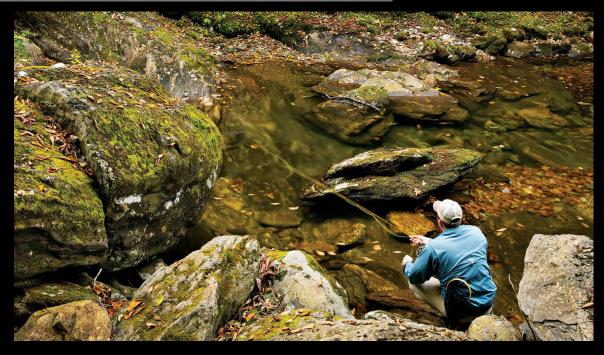
On a late afternoon in September, rainbows eat terrestrials as the sun inches toward the horizon.



Trout streams give rise to numerous fishable waterfalls in Pisgah, including the well-known and oft-photographed Looking Glass Falls.



Pisgah is dominated by the Appalachian temperate rain forest, one of the most biodiverse temperate regions on the planet. It's home to about 100 species of trees and 500 species of moss, so hang-ups are always interesting.



Drifting an October Caddis past a boulder in early fall



The wild trout of Pisgah's higher altitudes love dry flies and striking colors. Some days, a variation of the classic southern Appalachian Yallerhammer is all you need.



Ridgelines roll like waves when viewed from the Blue Ridge Parkway, which runs like a spine through the Pisgah and Grandfather Ranger Districts.



This heavily spotted brown trout was sipping Sulphur mayflies during a late-spring hatch.



With the colors of fall come lower flows, water clarity for sight-casting, and often the most weight at the end of the line.



Spotting spooky fish meandering like apparitions over polished boulders is a must for success in many Pisgah freestone streams.



Rainbows are the most plentiful trout in Pisgah National Forest streams.

Patrick Williams, www.ecoclinephoto.com, is a freelance photographer, fly-fishing guide, and teacher who lives in Asheville, North Carolina.

Anna Maria Island, FL

Heart of the Suncoast

By Rusty Chinnis

he skiff's bow rose and fell on a gently undulating swell rolling in from Tampa Bay. To the west a rose-tinged horizon signaled the approaching darkness as faint stars began to appear overhead. A balmy breeze added to the serenity, causing me to back off the throttle to savor the experience. In the distance, lights began to appear on Anna Maria Island as the day slowly yielded to night. I was returning from an afternoon of fishing Terra Ceia Bay on the southern shore of Tampa Bay, and although this memory is over two decades old it occupies a permanent place in my mind.

Anna Maria Island is a laid-back barrier island. The waters that surround it are where my passion for fly fishing was born and where it matured. It remains a paradise for me and an outstanding destination for the most discriminating anglers.

Located on Florida's west coast just south of Tampa Bay, its old beachfront homes and conspicuous lack of high-rise condominiums create a wonderful ambience. Stretching 7 miles from north to south, Anna Maria Island is bordered to the west by the Gulf of Mexico and to the east by Anna Maria Sound and Sarasota Bay. Nearby are beautiful beaches, nature preserves, the historic fishing village of Cortez, and a plethora of shopping and dining establishments. The nearby cities of Bradenton and Sarasota have theaters, a botanical garden, a marine laboratory, and numerous museums.

The island itself is composed of three communities: Anna Maria to the north, Bradenton Beach to the south, and Holmes Beach in between. All around the island, bays, mangrove shorelines, verdant grass flats, and huge white sandbars teem with fish. The presence of resident and seasonal populations of nearly every species of game fish in Florida makes it a year-round fly-fishing mecca. The bay and Gulf waters are clean and clear much of the year because there are no rivers feeding them south of Tampa Bay. Turbid water occurs only after persistent winds, heavy rainfall, and storms. The beaches are composed of white sugar sand and are among the most beautiful in Florida.





Captain Rick Grassett leans into a tarpon that took a fly off Anna Maria Island. After the initial hookup and the first run, it's time to start the outboard and motor close to the fish. When there is a lot of line out of the rod tip, it's impossible to apply any real pressure (above). A school of little tunny slash through glass minnows with their mouths open as the baitfish shower into the air in an attempt to escape. A quick cast in front of feeding fish with a small baitfish pattern or small top-water fly will almost always elicit a strike (left). Photo by Rusty Chinnis

Anna Maria Island's discovery by Europeans dates back to the 16th century, when Spanish explorers landed nearby. Its first permanent settler was George Emerson Bean, who arrived on the island in 1892 and later formed the Anna Maria Beach Development Company. Bean, his son, and associates built homes, a hotel, a bathing pavilion, a bathhouse, a church, a school, a post office, and several stores on the north end of the island between 1911 and 1912. Anna Maria, the smallest of the three townships, still retains much of that long-ago feeling, thanks to some of those historic homes, the Anna Maria City Pier, and the Roser Church. The Rod & Reel Pier, an iconic structure constructed in 1947, adds to the charm.

A decade ago, Pine Avenue, the town's main thoroughfare, was revamped to create a pedestrian-friendly city center, with shell paths and native plantings. Running east to west from the City Pier on Tampa Bay past the Roser Church to the Gulf, the project transformed a mix of historic structures, businesses, and homes into an area that enhances the island's Old Florida charm. A green-built mix of residential cottages, professional offices, and retail shops (including a full-service fly shop) caters to visitors and the surrounding community.

While Anna Maria has many attractions, the varied and vibrant environment surrounding it makes it an exceptional destination for fly fishers. Anna Maria Sound to the east has broad, healthy grass beds. To the south, Palma Sola Bay stretches east and features a wide variety of habitats. Longboat Pass, at the southern end of the island, is the first pass south of Tampa Bay and funnels clean, oxygen-rich water into the bay. East of Anna Maria, along the southeastern shore of Tampa Bay, an extensive sandbar known as The Bulkhead extends to the mouth of the Manatee River, and its mix of white sand and grass protects a fertile grass flat that spreads to the mangrove shoreline. Large tracts of this area are protected by Robinson Preserve, a 487-acre reclaimed wetland that has miles of mangrove-lined waterways. Perico Bayou borders the preserve's western boundary and has varied and rich habitat. Farther east are the Manatee River, Rattlesnake Key, and the side bays Terra Ceia and Miguel, with their resplendent grass flats, mangrove shorelines, and oyster beds.

These waters are home to healthy populations of all indigenous and seasonal game fish, but snook, redfish, speckled trout, tarpon, little tunny, and permit entice dedicated fly fishers. Fishing for snook, redfish, and trout is best in the bays and inland waters, while tarpon, little tunny, and permit favor the vicinity of the Gulf. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule, and this is certainly the case here. Although this part of Florida doesn't have distinct seasonal changes, there are specific months when fishing for a particular species is most productive. Anglers can choose the times of the year and fishing opportunities that best suit them.

Snook

Locally, snook are the most highly prized inshore game fish. Although available to fly fishers year-round, they feed more aggressively in the spring and summer. One of the most exciting ways to target snook is sight-fishing flats with bright edges, potholes, and mangrove shorelines. Palma Sola Bay, the southern shore of Tampa Bay, Perico Bayou, and Terra Ceia and Miguel Bays all offer great sight-fishing. Snook are ambush feeders and like to station themselves in areas with ample prey. Potholes, deep areas on the ends of mangrove islands, the local passes, and the edges of oyster beds and other structure with strong water flow are all good areas to explore.

Whether wading or fishing from a boat, anglers must move slowly and quietly and be prepared to make a quick and accurate presentation. Snook can sometimes be seen in full view over a light-colored bottom, but more often they appear as a shadow or partial profile on the edge of a flat or pothole. To avoid spooking unseen fish when blind-casting, cast short of the intended target initially and then move progressively to, into, and across it. If you're fishing a pothole or a mangrove island, always make a few casts to deep areas even if no snook are visible. Snook often hold in places where they can't be seen, waiting to ambush prey. When you locate snook roaming shorelines, lead them by at least 3 feet and make sure the fly is moving away from them when they intercept it.

Rigging is particularly important when you target snook. A 30- to 40-pound bite tippet is critical because of a snook's

is critical because of a snook's abrasive mouth. Baitfish patterns like the Clouser Minnow, Lefty's Deceiver, and Seaducers, along with poppers and shrimp patterns, all tied on size 1/0 or 2/0 hooks, are good choices for sight-fishing.

In the summer, snook cruise the beach, where they forage close to the shoreline. To aid in seeing them, wear polarized sunglasses and a cap with a dark under-bill. Also wear wading boots; stingrays are present during the same time. It's important to concentrate your gaze at the waterline because snook travel tight to the beach, sometimes with their backs out of the water. When you spot a fish, take a moment to watch its movements before making a presentation. Give it a long lead (6 to 12 feet) and let it discover the fly. Most anglers start fishing midmorning, when visibility is best. While that's a good option, anglers arriving at the



Captain Bryon Chamberlin prepares to release a redfish that took a brown crab pattern on a shallow flat in Sarasota Bay. Brown or chartreuse shrimp and crab flies, with small lead eyes, are favored by local anglers sight-fishing for cruising reds (above). Nanette O'Hara holds a large snook she caught and released while wading the surf line. From spring through early fall, snook prowl the margins of the Gulf. This fish took a white Woolly Bugger in a foot of water less than 6 feet from shore (below).

beach at first light can benefit from empty beaches and less heat, as well as fish that are more forgiving of wayward presentations. Size 2 Clousers, Deceivers, Woolly Buggers, and Seaducers tied with light-colored materials mimic the snook's quarry. A 7- or 8-weight rod with a floating line is standard. Use 9- to 12-foot tapered leaders. Early in the morning, a 40-pound bite tippet works fine, but use finer material, as light as 20-pound tippet, when the sun is high and the water clear.



During sweltering Florida summers, anglers can opt for the cool of darkness and fish for snook around dock lights. Eight- and 9-weight outfits with floating lines, tapered leaders, and 30- to 40-pound bite tippet are standard. Small white baitfish patterns and shrimp flies tied with Krystal Flash on size 1/0 or 2/0 hooks imitate the small pilchards, glass minnows, and crustaceans attracted by the lights. Because you need to cast flies close to and even under the docks, flies tied with a weed guard are useful. The best spots are lights near structure where there's good tidal flow. Sometimes even a light that isn't right on the water will hold fish if it creates a shadow line. Approach a light cautiously, stopping and observing conditions before setting up for a cast. Snook lurk in the dark on the edge of the light, where they can ambush prey, so always start casting outside the cone of light and work into the brighter areas.

Redfish

Redfish, another favorite of fly fishers, are year-round residents. They are found in many of the same places as snook, especially the grass flats and around structure like docks, seawalls, and oyster beds. Late summer and early fall are especially productive times to target reds, because they congregate in big spawning schools on shallow flats. Locate them by looking for the nervous water they create as they move across a flat. The grass flats and channels in Terra Ceia, Palma Sola, and Miguel Bays, as well as Perico Bayou, are prime redfish habitat. Clousers, baitfish patterns, and shrimp flies are effective up to moderate depths, while Seaducers, Bendbacks, and other lightweight flies are best for fishing shallow water. Spoon flies are a good option for prospecting for reds when visibility is poor.

Winter is a good time to sight-fish for redfish by wading because the water is often gin clear. When you sight-fish in skinny water, wade slowly through an area with potholes and light-colored sand edges, looking for reds. Sometimes the water clarity makes them so spooky that you

Sometimes the water clarity makes them so spooky that you are required. While a 2

A tarpon crashes through a school of glass minnows chased into the shallows of a Gulf-side sandbar. Several other tarpon circle the school, taking turns attacking the baitfish (above). A large little tunny takes a long run into the backing. These feisty members of the tuna family don't jump, but make up for it with hard fights and long runs (right).

can employ an alternate strategy. Stand somewhere that has a dark bottom, a long cast away from an area with good visibility, and wait for reds to come to you. On the occasions when redfish prove the most challenging you can even make a cast into a pothole and wait for a fish to appear before starting a retrieve. Redfish don't tail as aggressively here as they do farther south, but tailers can be found during minus tides around the full and new moons. The broad shallow flats in Perico Bayou and Palma Sola Bay are prime locations.

Speckled Trout

Speckled trout, the most prolific resident species, live in these waters throughout the year. The biggest trout are found over the grass flats in early spring (March and April), but they also frequent structure along the beaches then. Trout are making something of a comeback after decades of being subject to intense harvest, and the average fish runs about 16 inches. The west coast of Florida doesn't produce the large "gator" trout found on the east coast, but trout to 24 inches are not uncommon. Trout are equal opportunity feeders and will fall for a wide range of flies. Baitfish patterns and streamers are probably the most popular, but poppers, Crease Flies, and gurglers are very effective. Some of the biggest trout are caught early and late in the day in shallow water. Wading is the best way to approach these extremely wary fish, and even then a stealthy approach and delicate long-range presentations are required. While a 20-pound bite tippet is all that's

needed for trout, most anglers use 30-pound in case a snook takes the fly. When the conditions make trout especially wary, however, you may need to drop down to 20- or even 15-pound bite tippet to elicit a strike.

Tarpon

Of all the seasonal game fish that frequent the waters around Anna Maria, tarpon are the most sought after. Prime time for tarpon is May through July, and the Gulf is the location of choice. They can also be found in the bay where the edges of The Bulkhead and Rattlesnake Key provide an alternative for anglers on days when winds roil Gulf waters.

Tarpon that frequent Anna Maria's beaches and the bay from April through August can weigh over 200 pounds, but they average about 90 pounds. The Gulf-side sandbars from

Longboat Pass to Egmont Key hold the most promise for fly anglers. Tackle should match the size of the quarry, with most anglers opting for an 11- or 12-weight outfit. Weight-forward floating, intermediate, and sinking-tip lines are all effective, and every tarpon angler has a favorite among those choices. A properly tied tarpon leader is tapered, and between 10 and 12 feet long, with a 70- to 80-pound bite tippet. Flies tied on size 1/0 and 2/0 hooks are the most productive. Patterns vary from the classic splayed-feather Keys-style flies to more complex designs, such as Tarpon Bunnies and Tarpon Toads.

Savvy anglers find the edge of a sandbar or other underwater feature that tarpon track, anchor in casting range, and wait. The key to catching tarpon on a fly is patience and accuracy. The average cast is perhaps 35 feet and the fly must land in an area the size of a dinner plate, move away from the tarpon, and be at the same depth as the fish. Accuracy cannot be overemphasized, because tarpon will seldom vary a foot or two from their path to eat a fly. It's also a good idea to keep the presentation away from the first fish in a string or school. These fish are es-

pecially wary and when spooked will take the whole school with them. Although there is always the rare exception, a fly must never travel in a path toward the intended target. Tarpon's prey species wouldn't survive long if they moved toward them, and the tarpon know it. Even when all of these factors come together, there's still a 50 percent chance that tarpon will reject a fly.

If all this weren't demanding enough, once a tarpon decides to eat, the real test of an angler's mettle begins. Tarpon are not trout, and attempting to raise the rod to set the hook is a cardinal

mistake. Fortunately, once a tarpon takes a fly there's no need to make a quick hook-set. Instead, use a strip-strike by letting the line come tight and jabbing the hook home with a combination of the line hand and the rod. The angler must set the hook in the tarpon's cement-like jaw while being ready for the fish to bolt away from the boat.

After the initial hookup, attention must go immediately to clearing the line. In most cases, the angler has been stripping-retrieving line when the fish takes the fly. This line can easily foul on the angler, the rod, or the reel. It's important to immediately take attention from the fish to the line on the deck. Hold the rod away from your

body and let the excess line pass through the stripping hand with a circle made with the thumb and forefinger. Once the line is on the reel, set the hook with several more strip-strikes.

It's critical to apply maximum pressure to a tarpon during the fight while yielding on the jumps. The pressure helps to break their spirit, while feeding line on the jumps prevents them from breaking off if they land on the fly line. It's customary to start the engine and get as close as possible after the initial and subsequent long

runs. This allows the angler to apply maximum pressure. If a tarpon is a hundred yards from the boat, the stretch of the line makes it impossible to apply any real pressure. Finally, don't try to rush the tarpon when it gets near the end of the

> fight. Catching tarpon on a fly is challenging, but it's well worth the effort. That is why guides refer to it as the apex of angling.

Must Go Tarpon Bunny By Rusty Chinnis



Hook: Owner Aki, size 2/0

Thread: Chartreuse Danville flat waxed nylon

Tail: Chartreuse rabbit strip Collar: Yellow rabbit strip Flash: Pearl Krystal Flash

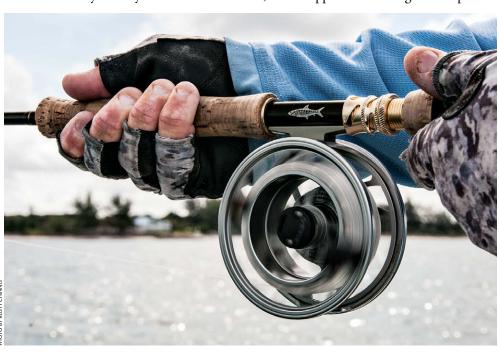
Little Tunny

Relative newcomers to the Anna Maria Island fly-fishing scene, little tunny have been present in local waters for years, but their numbers and popularity have greatly increased in the last decade. They arrive in both spring and fall, and the Tampa Bay ship channel is one of the first places they appear. At one time, local fly anglers had to travel to North Carolina's Outer Banks to fish for these hard-fighting

members of the tuna family. Now the action is so dependable in this part of Florida that anglers no longer make the trip.

Glass minnows make up much of the little tunny's diet, and the tunny's can be found on the surface crashing through schools of these baitfish, with their mouths open. Often the first indicator of feeding tunny are the birds that follow the schools as they churn the water into a froth.

Eight- to 10-weight outfits with floating, intermediate, or sinking-tip lines all work, with aggressive weight-forward tapers enabling quick casts. The most effective flies include small baitfish patterns, Crease Flies, and gurglers. Little tunny don't have teeth, so bite tippets can be as light as 20-pound.



Even on days when schools are actively feeding, little tunny can be challenging because they don't stay on the surface for long. They can appear, feed voraciously, and then disappear very quickly, popping up again out of casting range. That's when anglers can use the run-and-gun tactic to get a cast into the melee: run the boat into casting range, cut the engine, and launch a cast while the fish are still feeding on the surface. It's important not to motor too close to feeding fish and to approach and stop on the side of a school, not within the school. If you run straight at the action, the forward momentum of the boat makes it almost impossible

to launch a cast and start a quick retrieve. These speedsters don't jump, but make hard, fast runs, sometimes 50 yards or more into your backing. When releasing little tunny, launch them headfirst into the water. They will fight to exhaustion and need the extra momentum to restart their metabolism.

Permit

One of the most revered of all game fish, permit can be found in the waters around Anna Maria Island in spring, summer, and fall. Most anglers think that you have to travel to the Florida Keys or Central America to fish for

permit, but fly fishers can target these challenging fish consistently from May through July. Found in schools on the edges of the sandbars that front the beaches and Tampa Bay, permit are commonly found in about 4 feet of water. A good presentation leads them by 4 to 6 feet. When they notice the fly, you want to impart action that makes it hop along about 6 inches at a time.

The most effective patterns are weighted shrimp and crab patterns, and big pink Clouser Minnows. Eight-weight rods and floating lines are standard. Use 10- to 12-foot fluorocarbon leaders with 2- to 3-foot tips of 12-pound bite tippet tied to the fly with a nonslip mono loop. Large, solo permit can appear on the sandbars, but most fish travel in schools and run 2 to 6 pounds.

Angler's Paradise

While some of the top game fish species, such as tarpon, permit, and little tunny, are seasonal, these waters offer so much diversity and so many excellent prospects that a fly angler can find more than enough to stay plenty busy. Whether you choose to fish the bay or the Gulf, in the spring, summer, fall, or winter, Anna Maria Island and the surrounding waters won't disappoint you. A trip to Anna Maria—the Heart of the Suncoast, as it's known—will delight fly fishers and offer even more options when the day on the water comes to a close and the gorgeous Florida sunsets yield to starry skies.

Florida-based Rusty Chinnis is an award-wining outdoor photographer, fly-fishing and travel writer, and U.S. Coast Guard–licensed captain.

Santa Maria Island NOTEBOOK



PHOTO BY RUSTY CHINNIS

When: Year-round. Prime times are species dependent.

Where: The west coast of FL, just below Tampa Bay, near the towns of Bradenton and Sarasota (1 hr. south of Tampa International Airport; 35 min. north of Sarasota Bradenton International Airport).

Access: Numerous marinas and boat ramps. Wade-fishing in Gulf and easy access to many bayfront flats.

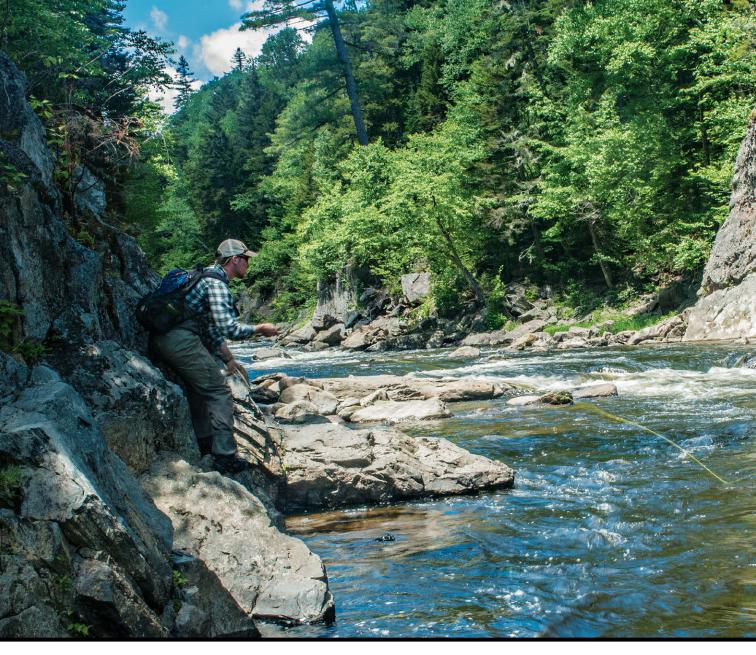
Headquarters: Anna Maria Island. *Lodging:* Mainsail Beach Inn, (888) 849-2642, www.mainsailbeachinn.com; Harrington House Beachfront Bed & Breakfast, (941) 778-5444, (888) 828-5566, www.harringtonhouse.com; Rod & Reel Resort, (800) 737-9855, www.annamaria.com/vacation-rentals/prop/the-rod-and-reel-resort.

Appropriate gear: 9- to 9.5-ft. rods in a range of weights, from 7 through 12, depending on species; floating, intermediate, and sinking-tip lines.

Useful fly patterns: Lefty's Deceivers, Clouser Deep Minnows, Clouser Minnows, Glass Minnows, Gurglers, Crease Flies, Tarpon Toads, Black Death, Tarpon Bunnies, shrimp patterns, Bendbacks, Dupre Spoon Fly, crab flies.

Fly shops/guides: AMI Outfitters, (941) 254-4996, www.amioutfitters.com. Capt. Harrison King, (941) 525-8495, www.reeljob-fishingcharters.com; Capt. Chris Hargiss, (727) 501-2484, www.flyquestcharters.com; Capt. Rick Grassett, (941) 350-9790, (941) 923-7799, www.snookfinaddict.com; Capt. David White, (941) 592-3235, www.annamariaislandflytrips.fishing.





Second College Grant, NH

Collegiate Wilderness Brook Trout in the Diamond River System

By Matthew Reilly

t a quarter after dawn, I muscled my head from the chilled earth of a North Woods summer and hopped on four wheels. After a cheap diner breakfast in the weathered, road-salted town of Errol, I drove north. North along the fabled Magalloway River—home of big brook trout and lore—to the Maine state line, then west along a barely marked gravel road to a locked gate that prevented forward progress.

I parked my car on the road's shoulder, which was matted with strips of softwood bark and gravel, and got out to more closely inspect a metal sign farther up the road, guarded by the steel gate: "SECOND COLLEGE GRANT. FOOT TRAVELERS ARE WELCOME. VEHICLE ENTRY BY PERMIT ONLY." These words, I knew from my pre-boots-on-the-ground research, were a declaration of privilege. "YOUR COOPERATION IS APPRECIATED. DARTMOUTH COLLEGE." These words explained why.

Vehicular navigation of the road that stretches beyond is reserved for those associated with Dartmouth College and those workers of the land beyond. In a sense, I stood at the edge of a semiprivate sporting club property, one that exists to benefit those with a connection to the northernmost Ivy League school, but that allows somewhat more limited utilization by others. Being a firm believer in the American public's collective ownership of natural resources, I typically begrudge such arrangements. However, this particular one I believe in.



Though the Grant sees little fishing pressure compared with other destinations in the area, some of the best fishing is in the spots that are the toughest to get to. In particular, the gorge sections hold lots of fish and can be the easiest to fish—once you get there (left).

What lies beyond that gate is an invaluable expanse of relative wilderness, a legacy of synergistic land management—and more than 40 miles of pristine streams. At the heart of it all is perhaps the state of New Hampshire's last handle on a wild population of truly large native brook trout. And the gate, at least partially, impedes their erosion, while preserving access for everyone.

Rivers and Roads

The two main flowages within the Second College Grant, the Swift Diamond and Dead Diamond Rivers, begin outside its boundaries, but their bodies are located largely within.

The Swift Diamond, the smaller of the two, begins as the outlet of Diamond Pond in Coleman State Park and flows 18 miles to its confluence with the Dead. Swift Diamond Road, which branches east from Dead Diamond Road within the property at the confluence, follows the river.

The Dead Diamond begins to the north near the town of Pittsburg, where the East, Middle, and West Branches converge. Though not officially within the Second College Grant, the Middle and East Branches of the Dead Diamond can be accessed from Magalloway Road in Pittsburg and offer great angling to those looking for smaller water. The Dead Diamond enters the Second College Grant at Hell Gate and then flows south through the length of the Grant (as it's known locally) to its confluence with the Magalloway near Errol. Dead Diamond Road parallels the river along its course through the Grant. The gates that restrict vehicular traffic are located just a quarter mile from the road's intersection with State Route 16, and at Hell Gate on the northern edge of the property.

The right to vehicular navigation of these roads is reserved for the Dartmouth-associated, who can secure and pick up gate keys from the college's Outdoor Programs Office in Hanover. Overnight camping and campfires are prohibited, but the general public is invited to access the property on foot, or on mountain bike, which is my preferred method of travel, as it allows the angler to cover road more quickly.

A handful of major tributary streams and ponds also fall within the Grant. A foot trail branches west from Dead Diamond Road and parallels Loomis Valley Brook, but the others can only be reached by bushwhacking. Those wishing to access these more remote spots (and, really, anyone venturing into the Grant) should be properly equipped with a map and compass or a GPS with extra batteries. It's easy to become turned around.

The Grant

Dartmouth's Second College Grant is a township encompassing 27,000 acres of northern forest in northern New Hampshire along the Maine border. Despite its name, it was actually the fourth parcel of land granted to the college. In 1770, the state of New Hampshire offered Eleazar Wheelock (the founder of Dartmouth College) the township of Landaff, but the offer was turned down in favor of land in Hanover, where the school was eventually established. In 1785, Vermont granted the college the township of Wheelock, and in 1789, New Hampshire granted it the township of Clarksville. Both of these grants, hospitable and accessible to settlers, were sold off quickly in small parcels to support the financial appetite of the

growing institution. In 1807, the state of New Hampshire answered a petition from the college with the Second College Grant, a landscape too rugged and remote to appeal to settlers, yet rich in softwood timber.

For decades, the timber present on the Grant provided the college with a meager but regular source of funds. Then, in 1888, logging within the Grant entered its heyday, as George Van Dyke, the great North Woods logger, signed a contract to cut 3 million board feet of softwood annually for 20 years. The rivers within the Grant, draining southeast into the big water of the Magalloway and Androscoggin Rivers, allowed for timber to be river-driven downstream to the historic timber town of Berlin, making harvest convenient.

As the nation's industrial focus aligned with wartime manufacturing during World War II, the Grant's vast yellow birch resource gained attention from aircraft manufacturers, and harvest of the hardwood timber began. However, since hardwood doesn't float, it couldn't be transported to market via the rivers as the softwood product was. So, primitive logging roads paralleling the Swift Diamond and Dead Diamond Rivers were built to allow trucks to retrieve and deliver the timber.

In 1947, Robert Monahan was hired as the college forester to oversee operations on the Grant, where he quickly recognized a valuable opportunity. With the addition of navigable roads to the property, access for sportsmen was indirectly improved. In 1948, he wrote, "The college has available an asset never visualized when the Grant was established: a substantial area of North Country wilderness where undergraduates and alumni can live in, and learn to love, the outdoors." Thus, the Grant's multiple-use philosophy began to grow.

Still, industry robs the property of a total wilderness aesthetic; the ongoing logging operation, long married to the culture of the North Woods, has taken its ecological

toll. As Edward Hoagland documented in his 1985 essay "Walking the Dead Diamond River," deer are now more plentiful than they were before, due to the availability of young hardwood sprouts the logging subsidizes, making calculated deer harvest essential to avoiding mass dieoffs after a heavy blanket of snow falls in the winter. And historic log drives have restricted the regular catching of 4-poundand-better brook trout to the recollections of aging natives.

Still, the setting behind the gates of the Grant is, in ways, more virgin than anywhere else, due to its semiprivate nature and the devoted management efforts



Gifted to Dartmouth College in 1807, the Second College Grant is managed both as a working and scientific forest and as a recreational resource for the public. Though only Dartmouth-associated visitors can unlock and travel by vehicle along the gated gravel road that dissects the property, foot and mountain bike travel is welcome.

To Chartierville, QB aimed at reversing the effects of the early, environmentally irresponsible logging. A walk through these woods is like a step back in time, and remains a rich experience. NEW HAMPSHIRE To Colebrook Wild Brook 🟮 US Highway Trout Refuge State Route Though regular runins with truly large brook trout are a thing of the past within the Grant, as they are in most other places in the United States, the fishery is thriving, despite ever-present challenges in the form of growing angler pressure and climate change. Scientific studies conducted within the Grant have also identified its waters as what might be New Hampshire's last remaining refuge for large wild brook trout, though these monstrous

The waters within the Second College Grant have not been stocked in decades. "The main stem of the Dead Diamond has never been stocked within the [Grant] boundaries," says New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFGD) coldwater fisheries biologist Dianne Timmins. "The Swift Diamond was stocked in the headwaters for some time. but that was terminated, and the last stocking occurred in 2006. The population is self-sustaining, and genetics has confirmed individual populations exist in the main stem and some of the tributaries."

specimens are hardly ever seen or caught.

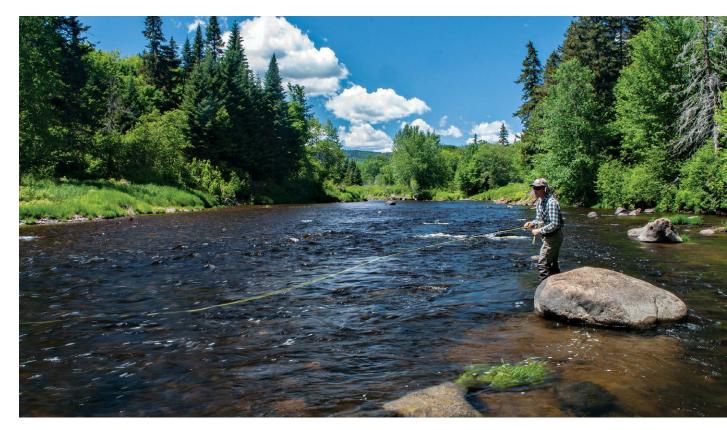
Unfortunately, most anywhere there is a healthy and growing trout population, there are anglers who are attracted to its bounty. The Grant's fisheries are no different. "As the word got out about the fabulous fishery that exists here, angling effort skyrocketed," says Timmins. Harvest of brook trout increased as well. However, most of the increase occurred in the lower river below the Grant boundary, as, according to Timmins, the gates of the property served as a buffer for angling pressure and fish harvest. In response to this change in pressure, regulations on the lower stretch of the river within the Grant were changed to catch-and-release for trout, while a five-fish limit remains in place in the interior.

The challenge of a warming environment doesn't have such a simple fix. "We have less winter and erratic weather patterns—thaws in January and February, and then deep snow later. Runoff isn't tempered like it used to be," says

Timmins. "This erratic weather leads to unstable flow events, which increases instability in stream banks and exacerbates erosion." But increased stream bank erosion is just one of several potential threats to wild brook trout in a warming environment.

Timmins and the NHFGD are currently exploring what specific impacts rising air temperatures will have on groundwater inputs to the rivers and the character of the forest within the Grant so they can more effectively and proactively manage the working forest. "As the environment changes, these forested areas with healthy groundwater inputs and shaded habitats are going to be critical for the survival of brook trout. Right now the Grant has all of that going for it," says Timmins. Currently, a healthy number of larger trees are falling into the rivers and providing excellent cover for brook trout. However, should a rising average air temperature affect the amount of shade and woody debris the forest can provide to the rivers within the Grant, the brook trout will be at risk.

The current health of the fisheries within the Grant can be largely tied to quality, connected habitat. A recent study by the NHFGD revealed the presence of large, wild fish within the system. Tagging these fish showed that, during periods of low, warm water in the Dead Diamond,



During the peak of the fishing season within the Grant—in the spring before the water warms enough to concentrate fish in tributaries and spring holes—swinging small streamers and wet flies can be a very effective way to cover and search lots of water.

these fish often move into connected habitat within the same watershed seeking thermal refuge, and sometimes they don't return until the spawn the following year. "This behavior speaks to the importance of habitat connectivity and demonstrates the use of the habitat within the entire broad-scale watershed both in Maine and New Hampshire," says Timmins, who led the project. Further research is being conducted, mapping the seasonal movements of these fish, in an effort to better understand the nature of the species in a relatively connected and healthy watershed.

Fishing the Grant

The waters within the Grant are as diverse as they are rich.

The Dead Diamond River has some excellent rapids that run through the gorge sections of the river, where brook trout lie in wait in the pockets and seams created by boulders and sweepers. However, much of the river is tamer in nature, meandering through the grassy bottomlands of the Grant in deep, dark pools. The Swift Diamond contains a bounty of classic pocket water, which, along with its smaller size, can make finding and catching brook trout a bit easier. Countless small tributaries of these rivers, including Loomis Valley Brook and Lamb Valley Brook, also contain brook trout.

Stillwater fishing exists in the remote Lamb Valley Pond, in Hell Gate Pond, and in most any beaver pond or backwater found within close proximity of the aforementioned waters. To protect the wild brook trout populations within this watershed, the waters are all managed under special regulations and open to fishing from January 1 through Labor Day. All fish must be released, with the exception of fish caught in the Dead Diamond River from the headwaters to its confluence with the Swift Diamond.

The bottom line is that the Grant offers endless opportunities for exploratory angling in a wilderness setting. And, with the restriction of vehicular travel and overnight camping, exploring all of it becomes nearly impossible. Thankfully, the fishing is great everywhere. At least that's been the experience of David Van Wie, a Dartmouth graduate and coauthor of a book titled *The Confluence: Fly-Fishing & Friendship in the Dartmouth College Grant.*

"My first trip to the Grant was senior year, cross-country skiing into one of the cabins with gear on a sled," he says. "Ten years later, my buddy Phil got a fly rod and asked if I wanted to go again. Now a whole group of us goes up every June and proceeds to try to solve the wild brook trout fishery there."

He adds, "For a long time, we thought the gorge was a barrier," speaking of a very high-gradient stretch of river just upstream of Dead Diamond Road's first river crossing.

However, Dianne Timmins' fish tagging study revealed that this was not the case. Her findings suggested that brook trout begin to migrate back into the Dead Diamond and Swift Diamond Rivers around Memorial Day, when water temperatures reach 53 F. There they remain until rising summer water temperatures and low flows drive them out. They return to spawn in late September and early October, but by then the fishing season is closed to take pressure off the reproducing fish.

Thus, Van Wie has had great success in the early part of June, when he typically makes the trip to the Grant, but the fishing can be great throughout the season. "I've had fabulous days in July and August," he says. "But I wouldn't recommend fishing in August, because of the water temperature."

Strong hatches are the exception rather than the rule on the Dead Diamond and Swift Diamond, so anglers shouldn't put too much stress on matching hatches. Classic dry flies, like the Elk Hair Caddis, Adams, gnats, or any small dry suggestive of the many no-see-ums and mosquitoes that buzz around in the summer, will take fish. General hair and attractor nymphs and streamers, like the Hornberg, will too.

If you can find brook trout, which isn't usually a struggle in the Grant, you can usually get them to cooperate. However, it should be noted that, though large fish do exist within this watershed, fish over 18 inches are very seldom caught. "Set your thrill-o-meter at 8 inches," says Van Wie. And I've found truth in that.

Down in the Gorge

With a mountain bike I borrowed in Vermont earlier in the summer, and with fewer miles under my belt, I walked around the gate closing off the lower entrance road to the Second College Grant and tackled the road ahead on two wheels.

It was an easy pedal, with a smooth road and not much of a grade. My eyes wandered through the screen of trees. The Dead Diamond River meandered lazily through prime moose habitat, with not an excited patch on its glassy surface. Being a native of Appalachia—Shenandoah, specifically, where the rivers are steep and the water points to where the brook trout lie—I pedaled on until the road turned steep.

When it did, I dismounted and stashed my bike in the roadside bushes, figuring the road's grade mirrored the river's and I would find more moving water below. As I did, a black bear exploded from nearby cover and made a beeline for the ridgetop, and a white-tailed deer bounded deeper into the forest, waving its white flag.

I descended a steep gorge with my fly rod in hand, arriving at a large boulder with a grassy edge, where I unhooked my small streamer and began swinging it in the current. In no time, a spritely brook trout grabbed my fly as it swung through a likely-looking seam. And, despite the road to my back and the relatively short distance between me and Errol, my need for a classic, romantic, wilderness experience was fulfilled.

Virginia resident Matthew Reilly is a regular contributor to Eastern Fly Fishing magazine.

Second College Grant NOTEBOOK



When: January–Labor Day; best after mid-May (iceout).

Where: Northern NH, 10 mi. north of Errol.

Access: An unimproved gravel access road is permanently gated, restricting vehicle traffic by all but those who work within the Grant. Dartmouth-affiliated individuals and their guests can rent cabins within the Grant and get a key through the college's Outdoor Program Office in Hanover. Overnight camping and campfires are prohibited. Foot and mountain bike travel is welcomed.

Headquarters: Errol is the closest town to the Grant. Groceries: Errol General Store, (603) 482-3235. Lodging: Errol Motel, (603) 482-3256, www.errol-motel. com; Mount Dustan Cabins, (603) 482-3898, www. mtdustancountrystore.com; Coleman State Park campsites, (603) 237-5382www.nhstateparks.org. Information: New Hampshire Fish and Game, (603) 271-3421, www.wildlife.state.nh.us.

Appropriate gear: 4- and 5-wt. rods, floating line.

Useful fly patterns: Parachute Adams, Black Gnat, Elk Hair Caddis, White Wulff, Stimulator, Mickey Finn, Black Nose Dace, Hornberg, Muddler Minnow, Gray Ghost, CK Nymph, Hare's Ear Nymph, Pheasant Tail Nymph, Golden Retriever.

Necessary accessories: Chest waders/boots, polarized sunglasses, headlamp, backpack, plenty of water, food, first-aid kit, GPS/map, compass, non-lead split shot, bug spray, mountain bike.

Nonresident license: \$15/1 day, \$28/3 days, \$35/7 days, \$63/annual. Information/purchase: www.wildlife. state.nh.us/licensing.

Fly shops/guides: Errol: L.L. Cote Sports Center, (603) 482-7777, (800) 287-7700, www.llcote.com.

Books/maps: The Confluence by David A. Van Wie et al. New Hampshire Atlas & Gazetteer by DeLorme; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.



Niagara River, NY

So Many Options, So Much Time

By Ryan Shea

ew York's Niagara River never ceases to amaze me. Its biodiversity is unsurpassed. It drains four of the five Great Lakes (Huron, Michigan, Superior, and Erie). It forms one of the planet's most powerful waterfalls. The Niagara River also offers readily available year-round fishing. This angler's paradise is a 37-mile strait that connects Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, with an average flow of 212,000 cubic feet per second at Buffalo. In other words, it's big and it's fast. From its head at Lake Erie, the river flows through a single channel for about 5 miles, then splits into two channels around Grand Island. On the Canadian side, the western channel runs about 12 miles, while the eastern channel, in the United States, runs about 15 miles. The two channels rejoin about 3 miles above Niagara Falls. Below the falls, Niagara Gorge stretches downstream for 7 miles, and then the river makes a 7-mile run to terminate in Lake Ontario.

Along the way, the Niagara River presents opportunities to catch more game fish on flies than perhaps any other river in the country, probably the continent. I'm not sure if that's ever been stated before, and perhaps it's a bold claim, but consider this list of species my clients and I have caught on flies: smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, white bass, muskellunge, northern pike, common carp, panfish, steelhead, chinook salmon, coho salmon, lake trout, freshwater drum, bowfin, walleye, brown trout, and Atlantic salmon. With so many options on the table in just a 37-mile stretch of water, the hardest part is deciding what fish to target. Walk and wade the flats for carp? Fish the deep water for smallmouth bass? Take a leap of faith and go after muskies? The best way to narrow down your choices is to consider the time of year.

Winter on the Lower River

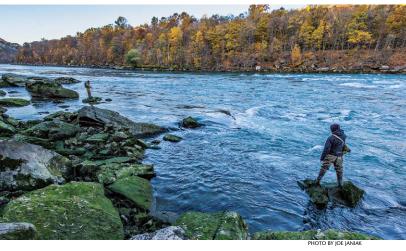
I know what you're thinking: "Western New York in the winter? Really?"

The Buffalo area has earned its reputation for brutal winters, an icebox swept by blizzards. Yet anglers can still enjoy outstanding fishing opportunities on the Niagara River throughout the winter months. While icebergs and shelf ice lock up the upper river (between Lake Erie and Niagara Falls), the scenic lower river continues to offer good fishing and lots of access for adventurous—and warmly dressed—fly anglers.

Many of the steelhead that enter the lower river from Lake Ontario in fall overwinter in the river in advance of the spring spawning season. The cold water can sometimes make the fish sluggish, but targeting them can nonetheless produce good fishing, especially for anglers drifting egg flies and nymphs, but also sometimes with streamers. Big lake-run brown trout are also available through the winter months. In addition, the season for lake trout begins January 1. After their fall spawn, many of these fish remain in the lower river and will eagerly take an egg fly or streamer. Hold on tight if you hook one of these behemoth chars—they fight brutishly and the powerful river currents give them an edge.

Good bank access is available near Artpark in Lewiston, Devil's Hole State Park, and Whirlpool State Park. All of these locations provide access via well-developed paths and walkways. However, they're not for the faint of heart. In places the walk down to the water can be treacherous in winter if ice coats the stairs and trails. And, of course, you need to hike back up out of the gorge at the end of the day.

Experienced boaters can launch at the Lewiston marina or from Fort Niagara State Park. However, this is a river fraught with hazards, and good sense dictates hiring a qualified charter guide who knows the river. It's not a fishery for do-it-yourselfers who are not intimately familiar with the river.



The power is unmistakable and it is truly a unique place to swing a fly. On a crisp autumn morning, Ian Archibald and Jon Janiak (far) hope to connect with one of the Niagara's powerful steelhead (above). Roughly 220,000 cubic feet per second of fresh water flow over Niagara Falls and into Niagara Gorge (left).

Welcome Warmth of Spring

Spring is magical on the Niagara River, and the peak fishing period for many species. Trout, steelhead, smallmouth bass, carp, northern pike, and salmon are all abundant and willing. It makes for tough decisions—choosing one means sacrificing fantastic opportunities for the others.

As winter slowly begins to loosen its grip, fresh-run steelhead enter the lower river to join fish that overwintered as they ready for the spawn. Anglers catch plenty of fresh, chrome-bright fish as well as colored-up fish. This incredible steelhead fishing holds up well through April, and anglers often catch drop-back steelhead throughout May in years with a cool spring. In addition, a fair number of big lakerun brown trout remain in the river during the spring.

Both the steelhead and the browns are best targeted with streamers, nymphs, and egg flies. Streamers can be particularly effective in the spring, as the warming water leads to more active and aggressive fish.

> As if what's available in the lower river weren't enough, smallmouth bass fishing peaks on the upper river during the spring. Often it seems like every rocky bank and shoal holds lots of big bass, with some fish surpassing 20 inches. And double-digit days are the norm. Anglers find fish in shallow water, from 2 to 8 feet deep, and can hook these native beauties on flies mimicking goby minnows, emerald shiners, and crawfish.

Late spring also marks the best carp fishing of the year. Niagara River carp are numerous and they grow huge. Whether roaming the flats on foot or by boat, anglers get plenty of shots, including opportunities to cast flies to behemoths. Floating lines on 6- to 8-weight rods, and flies that mimic crawfish, goby minnows, and large nymphs, are the tickets.



For fly anglers who are not faint of heart, pursuing muskies can become an obsession. Many local fly fishers dedicate months at a time just for the chance to bring one fish to hand. When they do, some say it's life changing. Autumn on the Niagara River gives traveling anglers the chance to find out.

The lower river access points are the same as those mentioned for winter fishing. Upper river access, however, is quite limited. Drive the roads that parallel the river in Grand Island, New York, and Fort Erie, Ontario (where you need an Ontario fishing license), to find public land and access sites. At these places, look for shallow flats and signs

of carp activity, such as tailing or schooling fish. After targeting carp, walk and wade to the edge of these flats and look for drop-offs and rocky shoals—home to smallmouth bass.

Shore-bound anglers can have a lot of fun and catch many fish on the upper Niagara, but boats are definitely advantageous, allowing you to cover far more water and fish locations inaccessible to walk-and-wade anglers. The upper river offers numerous launch sites, most of which charge a launching fee after Memorial Day.

The upper river is much wider than the lower river, so the current is slower and less complex, but that doesn't mean boating is without risk. The water is deep in most spots, and the current moves faster than any human can swim. Additionally, the shoreline margins of Grand Island are shallow, with many rocky shoals. Pay attention and slow down as you get close to shore. Also beware of the pleasure-boat traffic during warm weather. Boat ramps can be busy, so launch early in the day, if possible; otherwise, be patient and be courteous to other boaters, as well as proficient in launching your vessel so you don't clog up the ramp. Many pleasure boaters show little regard for anglers, so keep your eyes peeled.

Heating Up Summer

Flip-flops and short sleeves, solid fishing, and easy living—that's summer on the Niagara River. Early summer is a transition period: fish are on the move to their summer ranges. Muskies are off the spawn and starting to feed more frequently as the water warms to their preferred temperatures. The Niagara River provides solid opportunities to hook up with these apex predators. There are no guarantees when it comes to muskie fishing (save for a sore arm at the end of the day), but most days anglers can expect multiple encounters with these beasts, whether it be fish in the net or close calls with knee-shaking follows all the way to the boat. You'll need 10- to 12-weight rods, intermediate or sinking-tip lines, and 6- to 10-inch muskie streamers.

Hunting for these beasts on your own is emotionally and physically taxing. One of my fishing buddies decided that he wanted to pursue muskies last season;

months passed before he finally hooked one, and at that point he shed a few tears of both elation and exhaustion. Probably more so than for any other fishery on the Niagara, muskies are best pursued by hiring a guide.

Smallmouth bass move to deeper water as the summer progresses. This is the time to fish water from 8 to 25 feet

All Day Sucker

By Nate Carr, Brookdog Fishing Company



Rear hook: Gamakatsu Octopus (barbless), sizes 7/0–5/0 Front hook: Partridge Universal Predator, sizes 8/0-4/0

Rear shank: 40 mm Chocklett's Articulated Big Game Shank

Articulation-

connector: 35 mm Fish-Skull Articulated Shank tied to front hook

Thread: Tan GSP 200

Wind-style 10 mm Fish-Skull Living Eyes Eyes:

Flash: Gold Flashabou Holo Flash

Tail: Four ginger-grizzly magnum saddle hackles

Gold Big Fly Fiber Straight over honey Big Fly Fiber Straight; 0.25-inch Chocklett's Body Tubing (to flare the hair) **Body:**

Head: Amber and cream spun and trimmed deer hair; 2 long,

narrow saddle hackles tied on top behind the head; 1 short,

wide saddle hackle on each side behind the head

deep, and for that you'll need high-density sinking lines to sink crawfish and baitfish patterns to these deeper-dwelling fish. However, poppers can still draw aggressive fish to the surface like green missiles shooting up from the depths. Hooking these fish in open water gives them plenty of real estate to work with, resulting in some prolonged battles.

By late summer, as the nights begin to cool, so does the water, marking the beginning of some the best fishing of the year on the Niagara River. Muskies are increasingly willing to move off the bottom to chase a fly. At the same time, salmon begin to stack up at the mouth of the river where it pours into Lake Ontario. Hooking salmon on a fly while they are still silver and full of moxie is an awesome experience. These hard-fighting giants make blistering, drag-screaming runs. Anglers in boats can target salmon with large streamers and sinking lines from the same boat launch sites mentioned in the winter fishing section. At the same time, the river's mouth also holds huge lake trout, brown trout, and steelhead, providing an exciting mixed-bag fishery. Unfortunately for shore-based anglers, this is a boat-only game, but local guides can put you into the action.

World-Class Autumn

Crisp air, beautiful foliage, and plenty of fish—autumn on the Niagara River is tough to beat for scenic beauty and excellent fishing. Fall is big-fish time. Salmon, steelhead, massive lake-run brown trout, and muskies all feed aggressively, and smallmouth bass move back to shallow water to fatten up on abundant forage.

Starting in late September, steelhead begin to funnel into the lower river as they migrate to spawning gravel farther upstream. These early ascenders love streamers and are some of the hottest fish anglers will hook all year. Add the swift current of the lower river and hookups turn into a wild ride. Once hooked, these strong, bright fish show anglers their backing in a hurry and usually display impressive acrobatics. To hook these chrome bullets, target them with streamers, but egg flies and nymphs become more important as fall turns into winter.

Trophy-size lake-run brown trout enter the lower river on spawning runs as well. The earlier-running fish follow the salmon to gorge on their eggs. These fish are most readily taken on egg flies and nymphs prior to spawning; however, by late November, the fish have finished their spawn and aggressively chase streamers, providing excellent opportunities to catch the brown trout of a lifetime. At this time, the season for lake trout is closed, but these fish abound in the river, so if you catch one, keep it submerged and release it immediately.

As the leaves begin to turn and the water cools, muskies

Niagara River NOTEBOOK

When: Year-round. Late spring and early fall are prime.

Where: Niagara River in western NY, from Buffalo to Lewiston.

Access: Best as a boat fishery, but a variety of public access points are available for walk-and-wade anglers.

Headquarters: Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

Appropriate gear: 6- to 12-wt. rods,

depending on target species; variety of lines to cover all depths.

Useful fly patterns: Carp: Crabcake, Simple Crayfish, Clouser Minnows. Smallmouth bass: CK Clawdad, Clouser Minnows, Vegan Goby, Fish-Skull Skulpin Bunny, Game Changer. Anadromous species: More Better Minnow, Game Changer. Muskies: Nate's Jenna.

Fly shops/guides: Orvis Buffalo, (716) 276-7200, www.orvis.com. Brookdog Fishing Company, (716) 704-5144, www.brookdogfishing.com; Cattaraugus Creek Outfitters, (716) 479-2327, www. cattarauguscreekoutfitters.com; Adventure Bound Onthefly, (716) 217-4047, www.adventureboundonthefly.com.

Books/maps: Hunting Musky with a Fly by Rick Kustich; Sander's Fishing Guide: Western New York Edition by John M. Sander. New York Atlas & Gazetteer by DeLorme.

> begin to pack on weight for the upcoming winter. If you want to catch a huge muskie on a fly, I can't imagine a better place than the Niagara River during late fall.

> Because steelhead, salmon, and muskies tend to steal the spotlight in the fall, many anglers (including me, from time to time—again, lots of choices) miss other hot fishing opportunities. Smallmouth bass, concentrated in the shallows, are easy to get to and provide fast-paced fishing. Using somewhat larger and gaudier flies than they would during spring, anglers often have banner days with double-digit numbers and large fish.

Make the Trip

Offering a diverse array of species and year-round fly-fishing opportunities, the Niagara River is one of the country's most productive rivers, yet it remains an under-the-radar, enigmatic fishery for most anglers. Nevertheless, for fly fishers who want to learn the river's vagaries year-round, catch big fish in big numbers, and then enjoy the ample activities available in Buffalo when the fishing day is over, it is truly a destination fishery.

Niagara River veteran Ryan Shea owns and is head guide for Brookdog Fishing Company, www.brookdogfishing.com.



Big Sable River, MI

Ludington State Park

By Nathan Perkinson

'd seen two steelhead all day. One of them was tucked into a sunken root and wouldn't budge for anything. The other finally turned to look at a Glo Bug, then darted off downstream, so I tied on a big pike fly and started casting around the rocks and cribbing that lined the bank beneath the footbridge.

"Any luck?" someone called from the bridge above. I looked up and saw it was a conservation officer. I shook my head. "Nothing."

"You know, there's a lot of perch up by the dam," he said. "Haven't seen a perch run like this in 30 years."

"Cool," I said, dismissing perch because I'd come to Ludington with steelhead on my mind—maybe even some earlyseason pike. But I wasn't catching anything, and it had been years since I'd fished for perch. My mind turned and churned until

curiosity finally got the best of me, so I hiked a half mile up to the dam. I tried a Clouser Minnow first, but it must have been too big for the perch to eat, so I switched to a Crazy Charlie that catches a lot of bluegills back home. I cast into the seam where the turbulent water flowing from the dam collided with still water near the bank. Almost immediately the indicator bobbed, then disappeared beneath the crystal-clear water. We caught a lot of perch that afternoon. I even got my kids in on it. Perch were not why we'd come, but it was a lot of fun nonetheless. The last time I was in Ludington I was about a week late for the fall salmon run. The salmon were dying, so we had a blast catching pike instead.

It's an important lesson that you learn the more you fish: take what the river gives and don't lament what you've missed. And there's no better place to learn that lesson than the banks of Michigan's beautiful Big Sable River.



Bluegills and other panfish are among the many species that live in the Big Sable River. Keep in mind spawning times so that you can best match your flies and tackle to the fish that will be in the river when you visit (above).

A Very Short River

The lower mile of the Big Sable River, from the dam at Hamlin Lake down to Lake Michigan, offers a nearly yearround cornucopia of fly-fishing opportunities. Several factors combine to create this unique fishery.

First and foremost is the habitat created by the Hamlin Lake dam. The dam is about 1 mile above the river mouth, and it completely blocks any migration upstream. Given this close proximity to Lake Michigan and the fact that lake-run fish cannot pass beyond the dam, there is usually a traffic jam of some sort below the dam.

It's not unusual to find a grab bag of warm-water fish and salmonids near the dam. Smallmouth bass, panfish, and northern pike are natives and are frequently caught below the dam. Salmon are stocked in the river and return to spawn, stopping at the dam as well. Stray steelhead also enter the river, often to gorge on salmon spawn.

Add to this the fact that baitfish stack up in the cool, turbid water below the dam and you've got the makings of a fly angler's paradise.

You'll also find a wide variety of structure and cover to fish. A deep, swift pool at the dam's base has been scoured out over the years by continuous water flow. A hundred yards downstream, the water clears and calms a bit, though there is a still a noticeable current. Shallow, sandy banks flank deep, rocky runs and the fish may be in either place, depending on conditions. Below the footbridge, which roughly splits the lower mile in half, the river spreads out into a series of broad pools that provide yet another type of habitat for fish. Generally speaking, the south bank of this stretch is shallow and weedy, while the north bank is steep and drops off into deep runs. Again, the trick here is to locate the fish depending on the water conditions, season, and the species you are targeting.

Moving downstream you'll cross the bridge at Michigan State Route 116, where a large pool marks the final stop before Lake Michigan. This pool is deep and sandy, bordered by tall dunes. This is the first place for lake-run fish to stop, and all fish entering the river must pass through, so it's a natural place to wet your line. Despite the glassy surface, the deep current is strong in this pool, so be careful if you wade here.

Identifying cover that holds fish is key at Ludington. The water is clear and you'll be able to see the bottom in most places along the river. Polarized sunglasses can help you pick out rocky structure, fallen trees, and other submerged



features that you should target with a fly. You can also see a fair number of the fish, but remember, the fish that you can see can see you too. Wade quietly and approach fish from behind, because you can bet that sloppy wading and a careless approach will spook every fish in the river.

An interesting feature of the Big Sable below Hamlin Lake is the presence of wooden cribbing along much of the lower mile. These pilings support the rocky banks and provide excellent fishing opportunities for structureoriented species like bass, pike, and panfish. Sections of cribbing that drop off into deeper rocky water are best. Plopping a popper or drifting a Woolly Bugger along the cribbing-and-rock structure is a great way to pick up fish. Hamlin Dam and the lower Big Sable are within the boundaries of Ludington State Park, so the entire stretch of river from the dam to Lake Michigan is open to the public. The park encompasses about 5,300 acres of lakefront dunes and forest located about 5 miles north of Ludington on SR 116. The highway crosses the mouth of the Big Sable toward the north end of the park and the road dead-ends at the state park's main parking lot.

In addition to great angling, Ludington State Park is a favorite destination for hikers, campers, and canoe paddlers. Several miles of hiking trails offer visitors a chance to get away from the main roads and enjoy nature in this ever-changing Lake Michigan shoreline ecosystem. Hiking along the beach, you'll see new dunes being formed as the lake constantly brings more sand ashore. Notice that the vegetation becomes thicker and more established as you hike inland from the lakeshore. This is the process of succession that has led bare sand dunes along the lake to eventually form the hardwood-blanketed hills that tower over Lake Hamlin and the Big Sable River. Succession is most evident if you hike the beach trail to Big Sable Lighthouse, then follow the Lighthouse Trail back to the parking lot—a 4-mile round trip offering first-class scenery.

Summer and fall find the campgrounds at Ludington State Park filled to capacity, especially on weekends. The campgrounds at Ludington are top-notch, with big, wooded campsites and modern restrooms. There is even a warming shelter that is open to winter visitors. Be sure to

The Big Sable River within Ludington State Park is easy to access via a system of trails that parallel the river. The river's gentle flow makes for easy wading, but beware of the occasional deep hole.

call ahead or reserve a spot on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website, www.midnrreservations.com, if you plan to camp at the park during peak times. The Cedar Campground is closest to the river, so reserve a spot there if possible and you'll have a short walk to the water.

Canoeing, kayaking, and float-tubing are popular summertime activities on the lower Big Sable. As with many rivers in the area, floaters can cause headaches for anglers. The best way to handle paddlers on the river is to fish in the morning and evening so that you miss the midday flotilla.

Seasons and Species

Water flow from the dam usually keeps parts of the lower Big Sable open for winter angling. Expect a few steelhead to overwinter near the dam and in deep holes. Winter fly fishing in Michigan is far from a sure thing, but having the constant flow of a dam near the river mouth raises the odds of hooking up in winter. While salmon are stocked in the Big Sable, steelhead are not. There's no big run of steelhead like the ones you find on the nearby Manistee and Pere Marquette Rivers, but there are enough stray trout in the river to make it interesting.

Fishing on the Big Sable really kicks off in late March or early April when the water warms enough to stir cool-water species like northern pike and yellow perch. Both species spawn early in the spring and can be found below the Hamlin Lake dam.

As summer rolls around, pike retreat to the weeds and smallmouth bass become active, especially along the rocky streambed. Crayfish are abundant in the river and are undoubtedly a favorite meal for the resident bass. You may notice signs around the park informing visitors about the rusty crayfish, a native of lower Midwest states like Ohio

and Kentucky. These aggressive crayfish are larger and darker in color than the native crayfish species and are considered invasive. Rusty crayfish are plentiful in the clear waters of the Big Sable, so think big and dark when tying or buying crayfish patterns for summer fly fishing. Summer is also a good time to search the Big Sable's warm, weedy shallows for panfish. Bluegills and rock bass will take all sorts of small poppers, wet flies, and nymphs when the water warms.

Autumn is salmon time on the Big Sable River. Chinook salmon are imprinted on the river in holding pens every spring, and returning fish usu-

ally arrive in September and October. The salmon run can draw outrageous crowds, with literal elbow-to-elbow conditions right below the dam. Even if tight-quarters fly fishing isn't your cup of tea, it's worth checking out. Chinook salmon are huge, and fresh fish will charge right up to the dam with reckless abandon, sometimes trying to jump the dam outlets. Try as they might, the dam prevents upstream migration. Park literature states that a fish ladder would allow invasive species to progress farther inland and do more harm than good, so if you're looking for salmon, look no farther than the dam.

It bears mentioning that these same bass, salmon, and steelhead can also be caught along the beach. Ludington State Park has over 7 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. If you're up for something different, try throwing big flies on a sinking line in the surf. It's a completely different experience and a guaranteed way to escape the crowded conditions that sometimes occur on the river.

Tackle and Flies

With such a wide variety of fish in the Big Sable, no single outfit will cover everything. As a comparative minimalist,

at least in my mind, I think that you can really get by with a couple of rods—three at the most. My standard warm-water rig is a 9-foot, 5-weight rod with a floating line, which handles bass and panfish, as well as cold-water steelhead (because you'll be casting small nymphs and eggs rather than streamers during the winter).

Crayfish patterns are tops for smallmouth bass in rocky cover. Large, nondescript flies like Woolly Buggers, Murray's Hellgrammites, Zoo Cougars, and Muddlers should be in every bass angler's fly box as well. Top-water bugs are great for overcast days. In general, the Big Sable's water is clear enough to make top-water bass a difficult proposition, but a handful of Gurglers, Dahlberg Divers, and deer-hair bugs cover the bases if conditions produce a top-water bite.

If you're pursuing panfish, small poppers and sliders are ideal for fishing the weedbeds on steamy summer mornings and warm evenings. For extra panfish excitement, hang a beadhead nymph off a short dropper attached to your popper's hook eye. Don't make the dropper too long or you'll get hung up in the weeds. Get your nymph hanging a few inches above the tops of the weeds and watch the popper for sudden strikes.

For pike (and for salmon), I use an 8- or a 10-weight rod. Although a heavier rod will help you land bigger fish, the size of the flies I am casting is more of a determining factor as to which rod is called for. Be ready to switch between floating and sinking fly lines when you're targeting pike. Massive pike flies are hard enough to cast, and you'll need a sinking line to keep long streamers down in the strike zone. Remember those perch at the beginning of the story? You'd do well to pack your pike box with flies that imitate perch before you hit Ludington. Most pike flies these days are tied with bucktail or synthetic hair and a lot of flash. Pike flies that use rabbit strips are easy to tie and also very durable, so don't count out bunny bugs like Barry's Pike Fly and the simple yet deadly Barr's Bouface. Flies for salmon and steelhead run the gamut from egg patterns and nymphs to streamers. It's hard to say what salmon will take unless they are absolutely fresh and still keyed in on minnows. Otherwise, getting salmon to take a fly is a game of trial-and-error, with error usually coming out on top. Steelhead are much more predictable. Winter patterns include eggs flies and small Pheasant Tails, Prince Nymphs, Hare's Ears, and caddisfly larva patterns. Dropback steelhead and new arrivals in the spring are more apt to take streamers and swung wet flies.

This little mile-long stretch of the Big Sable River is a special fishery. There aren't many places where you could reasonably expect to catch such a wide variety of fish. The next time you're in Michigan, stop by Ludington State Park and see what the river has to offer.

Indiana-based Nathan Perkinson is a frequent contributor to Eastern Fly Fishing magazine

Big Sable River NOTEBOOK



When: Year-round; spring and summer are best for warmwater fly fishing; September and October for salmon.

Where: Ludington State Park, MI, about 90 min. northwest of Grand Rapids.

Access: Easy foot access to the dam, the lower river, and 7 mi. of lakeshore throughout Ludington State Park. A Michigan Recreation Passport, www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10365 55798---,00. html, is required for state park entry (\$9/day or \$31/ annual for nonresidents).

Headquarters: Ludington State Park for camping. Motels, restaurants, and an RV campground are available in the town of Ludington.

Appropriate gear: Bass/panfish/winter steelhead: 5- to 6-wt. rods, floating lines. Pike/salmon/spring and fall steelhead: 8- to 10- wt. rods, floating and sinking lines.

Useful fly patterns: Bass: Holschlag Hackle Fly, Whitlock's Near 'Nuff Crayfish and other crayfish patterns, Clouser Minnows. Pike: Pinky, Barry's Pike Fly, Barr's Bouface, Popovics Hollow Fleye. Panfish: Cork poppers, wet flies, beadhead nymphs. Salmon/steelhead: Prince Nymph, Hare's Ear Nymph, stonefly nymphs, caddisfly larvae, Glo Bugs, Clouser Minnows.

Necessary accessories: Waders, polarized sunglasses, insect repellent, sunscreen, extra clothes (lakeshore weather can change quickly).

Nonresident license: \$10/day, \$76/annual.

Fly shops: Rockford: The Hex, (616) 866-2085.

Books/maps: Great Lakes Steelhead, Salmon & Trout by Karl Weixlmann; Pike on the Fly by Barry Reynolds and John Berryman. Michigan Atlas & Gazetteer by DeLorme; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www. StreamMapUSA.com.



Big Green River, WI

A Driftless Classic

By Carl Haensel and Jade Thomason

f you've fished the Driftless Region streams once, you will find them calling you back. Thousands of miles of trout water course from the hills of Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin, and the potential for big fish, great hatches, and superb spring-creek fishing hides around the

corner of each bluff that you pass. The southern Wisconsin Driftless Region in particular has a host of good streams, forcing you to make difficult choices on any given day you want to hit the water.

The Big Green River, an ironically named Wisconsin stream, is one of a host of productive waters in the area south of the so-called Big River, which is the Wisconsin River in this part of the Driftless. The Big Green fishes well from January through October, and as long as you bring the right flies and the weather accommodates you, brown trout will keep you busy throughout your time on the stream.

Last year we ventured to the Big Green on a glorious morning, with dew sparkling on spiderwebs. A closer examination of the spiders' recent prey showed a handful of small mayflies. On a good limestone spring creek, something is almost always hatching, even if it's not a major hatch. It pays to keep an eye out. We rigged up, looking for fish feeding, and found casual risers edging out of the bankside

grasses to find a meal. A recent rain had slightly discolored the water, but the Big Green clears quickly, and in a matter of minutes we found trout willing to take flies. Wild browns, from cookie-cutter 10-inchers to 16-inch beauties, came to hand like clockwork, one after another taking nymph patterns in the absence of consistent surface action. Swinging a few streamers down and across the river brought active browns chasing across riffles and following the flies. Not all of the fish hit, but enough ate our streamers to keep us at it for a while. As the day progressed, we covered a variety of water, from riffles to deep pools. All held trout, and, of course, the biggest ones got away, assuring we'd come back for another day on this classic limestone spring creek.

With 11 miles of trout water on the main stem and 8 miles of easements, access to the Big Green is easy. Plenty of bridge access points allow anglers to find good water up and down the watershed. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has accomplished significant

habitat-improvement work on the river, which has helped provide good holding water for trout over a majority of the river. The Big Green has a Category 5 special-regulations section located from Wisconsin State Route 133 upstream through the headwaters of the river. Here, anglers are allowed to harvest only three trout per day and the fish must be under 12 inches in length; these rules protect larger fish in the stream. While special regulations aren't guaranteed to produce the biggest fish, this section of the Big Green regularly offers a good shot at trout that average a bit larger than in nearby areas.



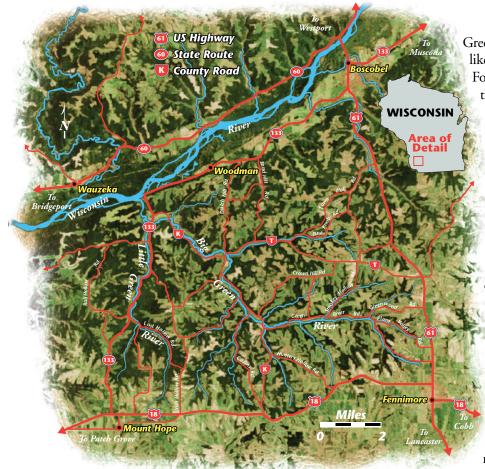
Try the Big Green River after a rainstorm and you will find that it clears quickly and can offer fast fishing. The river has a more stable watershed than other local trout streams and is often the first to clear in the area. It is a strong option after heavy rains (above). The pastoral and bucolic Big Green River valley provides a soothing backdrop to a day of fly fishing. Visiting anglers will find rolling hills dotted with cows, pastures, and small farmsteads. (left).

A Winter's Tale

The Big Green is truly a river of all seasons. With the recent change of many Wisconsin streams to a January opening for the catch-andrelease season, spring creeks like the Big Green shine in the winter. Strong flows pouring out of hillside springs allow the water to stay open on even the coldest days. These alkaline limestone springs

are also a source of nutrients that keep this and other streams in the area humming and full of fish. Big pools are the place to find fish in the winter on the Big Green. The trout congregate, and often, if you find one fish, you will find 50 of its closest companions nearby.

Such concentrations of fish don't guarantee simple fishing, but with a selection of small mayfly nymphs and midge larvae, you can have a great day when it's warm enough to fish. Plan your days accordingly, and look for those magical winter days when the weather warms above freezing and you don't have to deal with the rod guides icing up. On colder days, trout are often reluctant to leave the slower water near the bottom of a deep pool to



take a fly. If you're not catching fish, make sure that your offering is deep enough so the fly is ticking the bottom occasionally as it dead-drifts through a hole.

You might just catch a big brown if you're lucky—and on the next cast it's entirely possible to have a hefty white sucker take your fly, convincing you that you've finally hooked that 24-inch brown you just know is living in the depths. On warmer winter days, Big Green browns edge up into riffles and runs, and you may have good luck catching them on flies you might use in spring. Don't be surprised if you see a few fish rising on the warmest winter days, seeking out small Winter Stoneflies and midges. While raising fish to dry flies in the winter is unlikely, it's not impossible, and catching the year's first trout on a dry may well make the effort worthwhile.

Spring on the Big Green

March, April, and May are prime months to fish the Big Green River. Bankside vegetation is low, hatches can be epic, and the weather is comfortable. On some days the fish constantly feed on a smorgasbord of mayflies, caddisflies, stoneflies, and midges. Caddisflies constitute a major hatch on the river, and caddisfly patterns should be at the heart of your dry-fly planning. Size 14 and 16 caddisfly patterns will take plenty of fish, and you can expect even more success if you add a dropper—specifically, a caddisfly emerger pattern or a soft hackle.

If a rainstorm blows out the Big Green, head to other nearby watersheds, like Castle Rock Creek (aka Fennimore Fork) or the Blue River, located just to the east. Thunderstorms can be spotty,

drenching one valley and leaving another nearly dry. Don't despair when one Driftless stream blows out. Head upstream to find smaller water and check out nearby valleys to see what other waters might still be in fine shape. If that doesn't pan out, bust out the big Woolly Buggers to see what's willing to go for a big streamer.

Thankfully, the Big Green is one of the quickest streams in the area to clear after a rain, and you can actually watch the water become cleaner throughout the day when you're on the banks after a storm. Spring is also the season you're likely to have company on the river. The river carries a fairly widespread reputation for fine fishing, drawing anglers from Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois. Hike into some of the wooded sections to get away

from the roads and into more untouched fish.

While you're back in those wooded sections, try out a great local dry-fly pattern, the Coulee Cranefly. During spring and early-summer hatches, craneflies often hatch alongside mayflies and caddisflies. They bounce and skitter wildly on the surface of the water, and often induce some impressive aerial acrobatics from brown trout trying to catch them. An extremely versatile fly, the Coulee Cranefly can be dead-drifted, skated dry, and even strip-retrieved like a streamer. Long a local secret, cranefly patterns are a go-to part of my fly box in the Driftless, and well worth fishing on the Big Green.

Summer in Pastureland

Like many other Driftless streams, much of the Big Green flows through cattle pastures. Take advantage of this when you hit the water in the summer to comfortably fish in a low-vegetation environment. Just watch out for the occasional bull that might be a bit territorial. In a high-quality spring creek like the Big Green, fish can be found in nearly every inch of good water.

Conversely, in streams where water levels vary considerably through the season, trout rarely occupy tiny bank niches and shallow riffle pockets. But they do so in the Big Green. We've found trout in water that didn't look like it could cover the back of a fat 13-inch brown, but there they were, happily feeding on nymphs drifting in the current.



Hard-fighting brown trout are found throughout the Big Green River watershed. It's not uncommon to hook multiple trout when you fish a nice run. Often the largest fish is not the first one you will hook, so keep fishing a hole for a longer period of time to wade through the smaller and more excitable trout.

Summer offers a wide variety of opportunities to catch good fish. Some anglers like to splat hopper patterns, and others go for small nymphs, or chucking streamers after a rainfall. All these tactics work on the Big Green. If you want to cover a bunch of water and learn the river, fish hoppers or streamers; rarely will a spring creek trout come up for the 10th cast of a hopper, so keep moving. Fishing hoppers will let you take a nice walk over a small section of the 11

miles of trout water on the river. If you want to dial in some of the fish and catch a few more, rigging up with a couple of small nymphs is the way to go. Dark Pheasant Tail Nymphs are a strong option and always worth carrying on the river. Scuds will do the trick as well, as will caddisfly larvae. Another summer option is to look for fish feeding on ants. We've found nice-size browns lurking below trees in the forested areas of the river, waiting for unlucky ants to drop off tree limbs. Ant and beetle patterns often work for these fish. Look for a rhythm to the feeding of the fish before you cast. Often they patrol a swath of a large pool as they feed, if the current is slow enough. In areas with swifter water, they hug the bank as they wait for their meal.

The Lower End

Most trout streams in the Driftless hold fewer trout as they flow downstream through their watershed, and the Big Green is no exception. The lower mile of water as the river flows through floodplain to its mouth at the Wisconsin

> River is flat, wide, and without much differentiation.

> That said, it's still worth a look. Cold water from the river pours into the Wisconsin at a Grant County park (Woodman Recreation Area) at the river's mouth, downstream of Woodman. Warm-water and cold-water species mix, and everything from big northern pike to smallmouth bass and walleyes hang in the plume of cold, deep water at the mouth.

> The park has a boat launch on the Big Green, offering anglers additional access to the Wisconsin River. The most action on big pike and other species occurs in the heat of summer, when the largest pike search for cold water.

Coulee Cranefly Originated by Mat Wagner



Hook: Dry fly, sizes 16-18

Thread: Tan Hackle: Ginger

Single strands of knotted pheasant tail fibers Legs: Creamsicle-orange or butter-yellow dry-**Body:**

fly dubbing

Big Green River NOTEBOOK



When: January-October.

Where: Grant County in southwestern WI.

Headquarters: Fennimore and Spring Green. *Lodging:* Green River Guest House, (608) 988-4319, www. greenriverguesthouse.com; Driftless Lodge, (608) 822-3950, www.driftlesslodge.com; The Fenway House Hotel, (608) 822-3782, www.thesilentwoman.com.

Access: Plentiful walk-and-wade access at easements and various bridges along the river, including County Road K, Collins Road, Green River Road, Spring Valley Road.

Appropriate gear: 8- to 9 ft., 3- to 5-wt. rods; floating lines; 3X–6X tippets.

Useful fly patterns: Sparkle Duns, Hackle Stackers, CDC Emergers, Pheasant Tail Nymphs, midges, Pink Squirrel, Coulee Scud, Elk Hair Caddis, Coulee Cranefly, ant and beetle patterns, hopper patterns, small streamers.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses, chest waders or hip waders (or wet wade in summer), fish-friendly net.

Nonresident license: \$10/1 day, \$24/4 days, \$28/15 days, \$50/annual, plus \$10 trout stamp.

Fly shops/guides: *Middleton:* Orvis, (608) 831-3181, www.orvis.com. *Viroqua:* Driftless Angler, (608) 637-8779, www.driftlessangler.com.

Books/maps: Exploring Wisconsin Trout Streams by Steve Born, Jeff Mayers, Andy Morton, and Bill Sonzogni; Trout Streams of Wisconsin and Minnesota by Jim Humphrey and Bill Shogren; Flyfisher's Guide to Wisconsin & Iowa by John Motoviloff. Wisconsin Atlas & Gazetteer by DeLorme; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

Focus on the delta where the rivers meet. The water can be deep and the wading challenging, but the chance to add a species or two to your angling trip makes the effort both fun and worthwhile.

Fish on the Move in Fall

In the fall, Big Green brown trout are on the hunt for good places to spawn. On spring creeks, that sometimes means big trout heading upstream into small water. Don't be surprised if you see a few more particularly large fish around the end of the season. While the river isn't known for fish over 18 inches, they can show up in autumn.

Try swinging streamers through some of the big holes, and don't be alarmed if your rod nearly gets yanked out of your hand. Even the smaller trout will sometimes hit a big streamer, so while fishing such patterns might cut down on the total number of trout you catch, you will still find plenty of fish ready to charge. Look for the greatest movement after a fall rain, and test the tailouts of those big pools and the tops of riffles leading into them to hunt for fish on the move. Often the most active fish stage in such places, not in the depths of the deepest holes.

Cellphone Service?

When you're exploring the Big Green and other quality nearby waters, you're only a short drive from some top attractions. If you stay in Fennimore, make time to visit locations like Frank Lloyd Wright's estate at Taliesin, American Players Theatre in Spring Green, and House on the Rock, between Spring Green and Dodgeville. All are iconic destinations that draw visitors from across the country, and are located about 40 minutes or less from the Big Green.

A diverse community of actors, artists, and other creative individuals make the town of Spring Green another interesting location to visit during your Driftless tour, and Otter Creek, another brown trout stream, is nearby as well. A historic narrow-gauge railroad, called the "Dinky," connected Fennimore with the Big Green River valley towns of Werley and Woodman. Look for signs, museums, and a bike trail that highlight the historic past of the area.

While most anglers are happy to leave their cellphones in the car, many folks fishing in more agricultural areas of the country are accustomed to checking weather radar, finding a place to stay, or otherwise communicating with the world. At this time, the southern Wisconsin Driftless area is very poorly serviced by all major cellphone providers, due to an odd arrangement that keeps a second-tier provider as nearly the sole servicer in the area. You may not have viable cell service for a few days while you fish.

It might just be better that way. **

The writing-and-photography team of Carl Haensel and Jade Thomason operates the Minnesota-based guide business Namebini, www. namebini.com, which specializes in many different regional fisheries.





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PIONEERS & LEGENDS continued from page 19

job, his editor counseled, "Write the words the way you talk so people can stroll through and won't have to climb

over the big words." He heeded that advice and forged a name in outdoor journalism that lasted seven decades.

Things were also working out on a personal level. Too broke to get married, Circle lamented that he had been courting the same lass for five years. Now, with more financial wherewithal, in 1937 they finally exchanged vows. For the next 70 years, until her death in 2007, Circle invariably, tenderly referred to his wife, Gayle, as his "child bride." Asked once about the key to a lasting marriage, he philosophized, "Having been happily married to one lady [for all these years], I'm expert enough to believe: there are no homely gals, some just prettier than others,... no fat ones, some are just wider for their height. And for

every woman who has made a fool out of a man, there are a thousand women who have made a man out of a fool."

Over the years, Circle developed both a distinctive, plainspoken writing style, mixed with backwoodsy expressions, and an ingratiating, instant-friend, public persona. Some say that early in his career he insisted, even upon first introductions, on being called Uncle Homer. Others say it was a familial form of address that just came naturally to those around him—one



person uses the loving honorific "Uncle" and others are sure to follow. Whether the honorific was urged or volunteered depends upon whom you ask. Either way, to everyone except his child bride, his boss, and his CPA, he became and always would be not Mr. Circle, but Uncle Homer.

The Walnut Crab

No matter one's attributes or abilities, the trajectory of a person's life often hinges on luck and timing. Circle had

both in spades. On a fishing trip to Michigan in the mid-1940s, he made an impromptu visit to the Heddon Company, a lure and tackle manufacturer located in the little town of Dowagiac in the southwestern corner of the state. Having a penchant for designing lures and fiddling with terminal tackle, he had devised a new plug called the Walnut Crab. Circle, whose silver tongue could sell feathers to a peacock, made his pitch. The Heddon boys, of course, had seen it all, every whittled and polka-dotted geegaw under the sun. They politely declined.

Despite failing to sell his new gimcrack plug, Circle unintentionally made a far more significant sale: himself. With little deliberation, Heddon

shrewdly offered Circle the position of vice president of advertising and public relations. And for the next 15 years he traveled the continent, testing and marketing Heddon products, speaking at trade shows, and exchanging insider scuttle with the rising stars of bassdom.

Circle honed his craft as a professional communicator, and his easy-to-digest, down-home storytelling eventually earned him a place on the masthead of *Sports Afield*, first

as special features editor and later in the coveted position of fishing editor. When Sports Afield suspended publication in 2002, Circle simply moved across town, so to speak, and assumed the role of bass columnist at Outdoor Life. In the meantime, Circle never ceased being engaged with other communication venues, including penning numerous books on bass fishing and hosting such television shows as The Fisherman, Sports Afield (an offshoot of the magazine), and The Outdoorsman-all precursors to You-Tube and the Outdoor Channel. With his warm, inherently friendly baritone voice-relaxed and modulated, with just enough twang to establish his Southern street cred, without sounding

hillbilly—and comfort in front of a camera, Circle was a natural fit in the TV and radio broadcasting realm.

But for all his stints in sundry mediums, Circle confided that his most personally fulfilling role was sitting at his writing desk responding to mail sent in to his monthly

column, "Ask Uncle Homer," in Bassmaster magazine. Beth Costantino, one of Circle's four grandchildren, noted that her grandfather always commented how he especially got a kick out of writing "Ask Uncle Homer" because it allowed him to interact with other bass anglers. In her words, "It wasn't about

the fishing; it got to be more about the person."

One Shot, Two Ducks, Three Casts

Whether at a sports show, in chance meetings on the street, or just out fishing with a cohort, Circle was notorious for telling jokes and spinning yarns. In person, mostly due to his delivery, he could get away with farce or *Hee Haw*-type drollery. Example: "What's breezy and smells like worms? When a spring robin flatulates and you're downwind." Another example: upon sitting through a particularly boring speech at a banquet, Circle quipped under his breath, "Now that was drier than a popcorn hiccup." He had a thousand more such country saws ever ready in his repertoire. But in his writing, sans the vocal inflections and gestures, whether his yarns tended to make you grin or grind your teeth depended upon your tolerance for colloquial, cornpone humor.

Circle was at his writerly best not when dusting off old pickle-barrel jokes but when recounting actual, emblematic episodes in his life—what he termed "keeper memories." One such memory was the result of a quail hunting trip in the lakes district of northwest Arkansas. He was accompanied by Walmart founder and impresario Sam Walton, one of Circle's cadre of perennial hunting and fishing buddies. As they stepped out of their rig into fairly deep snow, Circle glanced down and noticed a hole in one of Walton's boots, his little toe pushing a bulge of sock out through the hole. "Sam," Circle blithely commented, "you've got a whole new store with lots of boots to choose from.... Why wear a boot with a hole in it?" Walton replied dryly, "If there's one thing I hate worse than a cold toe, it's breaking in a new pair of boots."

Perhaps the single most Homeric (pardon the pun) of Circle's keeper memories had as its backdrop the casting platforms for Atlantic salmon on the Mörrum River in Sweden. He was there at the behest of Lenny Borgström, then president of ABU (now Abu Garcia), to spend a couple of days trying out their line of Ambassadeur reels. On the first morning, Circle observed waterfowl "winging upstream in the daybreak fog" and asked about borrowing a shotgun. At the nearby lodge, Borgström procured a classic

double-barrel and handed Circle two shells, muttering, "That's all you'll be needing."

The next morning at first light, Circle took a stance on a bridge and waited for the birds to follow their habitual route. Alerted by their telltale quacking, he



As fishing editor for Sports Afield from 1968 to 2002—one of the longest, if not the longest, tenures in the outdoor magazine business—Homer Circle tried to change the perception of fly fishing for bass, particularly largemouth bass, as far more than an infrequent novelty, and in Bass Wisdom (2000) he wrote, "Fly rodding just an infrequent novelty, and in Bass Wisdom (2000) he wrote, Fly rodding just may be the best all-around method for catching the greatest number of bass. This conviction grows on me with each passing season" (above). Circle worked his way up to the position of vice president of Heddon, and the company brass likely supplied him with the popular moniker "Uncle Homer," as evidenced by the fact that both James Heddon, the founder of the company, and his father, Richard Heddon, had similarly styled themselves as "Uncle Jimmy" and "Uncle Richard" (left).

steadied himself as two ducks emerged from the thick fog. "I could barely make them out in the overhead fog," he recalled, "but I fired one shot and killed both ducks." One conveniently dropped onto the bridge, while the other plummeted into the river. Circle grabbed a rod, to which was attached a heavy spoon, and dashed downstream to the nearest casting platform. He waited until the duck floated into range and on the third cast hooked it in the neck and reeled it to the bank.

When Borgström came down for breakfast, he was met with an array on the front porch: mallards, shotgun, and bait-casting rig. "What's the story?" he asked. Without missing a beat, Circle replied, "One shot, two ducks, three casts—and one shell left over."

Creatures of Cover

Even though much of his fame resulted from his part in developing the Sonic lure—a flat-bodied, ring-eye-on-top style of plug that upon retrieval emitted a high-vibration pulse—Circle maintained that "bass bugging with the long rod was the very best way to catch the greatest total of bass in a given period of time."

During the late '50s and early '60s, however, Circle's enthusiasm for fly fishing was tempered by the lack of specialty taper fly lines, the paucity of bass-specific fly patterns, and the preconceived notions of his sportfishing contemporaries. Consider, for instance, that level (nontapered) fly lines were the industry standard. It was difficult to gear up for fly-rod bass if the tackle reps were uninterested in pushing products suited to the pursuit. The residue of that attitude persists to this day.

Nevertheless, Circle preached the fly-fishing gospel to all who would listen, exhorting anglers to target the reachable upper column of water, where bass are most apt to hang out and feed. "Keep in mind that bass are creatures of cover," he advised. "Look for lily pads, rocks, weeds, tree roots, logs, stumps, pilings, and piers bordering darker, deeper water."

Circle suggested starting out with a few basic patterns made out of buoyant materials, such as hollow deer hair, cork, and closed-cell foam, that "[float] high and can be easily animated." He wrote, "My best catchers are three naturals: a mouse ['Make it do everything but squeak'], a spent-wing moth [probably in reality a dragonfly], and poppers in several sizes and colors ['No creature makes a loud pop on the water, yet bass bust poppers with a vengeance']."

Like most accomplished anglers of a certain age, Circle passed through different phases of consciousness and, well, maturity. In the beginning it was about catching a few fish—small, big, or in between. While he was still youngish the imperative became numbers—racking up a serious headcount. Many years later, with increased proficiency and skill, the trophy hunt mentality prevailed. Circle admitted that in middle age his main goal in life was to "pursue only trophy bass ... and [dog] them with a vengeance." Having seen numerous ways of displaying bass mounts, he decided that he should invest both time and money in catching and displaying an array of eight XXL taxidermy-preserved bass hanging from a mock stringer in his office—in Circle's words, "an ego kick to impress fellow bass anglers."

Circle never finished his mega-bass-on-a-stringer wall mount. Before he could hook the requisite number of 12-pound-plus fish, filmmaker Glen Lau asked Circle to be the designated fisherman for *Bigmouth*, an in-depth (in every sense of the word) documentary about largemouth bass. Almost overnight, Circle was transformed from a bag-and-brag angler into a learn-and-concern sportsman. He later commented that "through the eyes of the young men on the underwater cameras who lived daily with bass, I learned more about bass than in all my previous forty-five years as a fisherman... An empathetic assessment touched off an intense desire in me to know everything about this creature."

Another Lau production, *Bigmouth Forever*, followed in the 1990s, again starring, at least in the human role, the ever august Homer Circle. By now Circle could be counted among the staunchest proponents for catch-and-release angling—touting a finicky protocol for using only stainless steel dehooking devices and "neutralized" hands cleansed in a salt solution—and an ardent environmentalist to boot. He observed, "The more fishermen become concerned about the welfare of the fish they pursue, the more they will insist on a better environment for their survival."

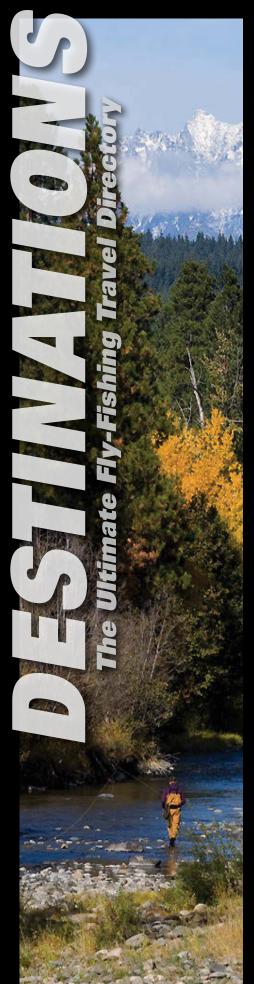
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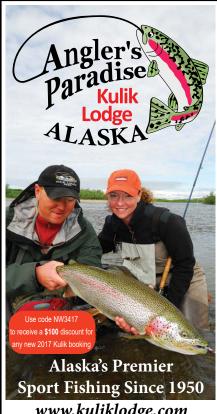
In an anxiety-riddled culture, Circle appeared to float in a shimmering bubble of pure, unadulterated happiness—the kind of steady-state contentment few of us can hope to attain. In the simplest terms, he loved fishing, he loved bass, he loved people, and he absolutely adored his child bride, Gayle, and his daughter, Judy. But many less-than-happy men love their wife and kids, and love their recreational diversions and amusements. What most clearly and distinctly separated Circle from the herd was that he was doing exactly the job (or jobs) he was born to do. That and his sense of his place in the universe, his philosophy for living, if you will. For instance, when asked why certain people fished—a question relentlessly posed by skeptics and others—Circle replied, "To purge our soul of petty thoughts ... and, if only for a few hours, to shed the shackles of regimentation."

It has more than a little bearing on the subject that Circle was what you'd call an honest, God-fearing man, though light on the fear part. God, in Circle's eyes, was not so much an angry specter as he was a caring celestial boatman. Circle once ruminated that his greatest wish in life was "to commune with nature, reverently in God's great, green cathedral ... a fallen log for a pew, the songs of birds for a choir, and the towering trees whispering a sermon for those with ears to hear."

Don Roberts is a freelance writer and fly-fishing historian who lives in central Oregon.







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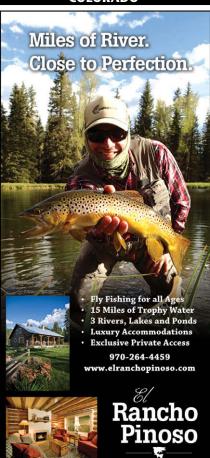


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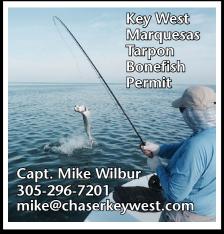


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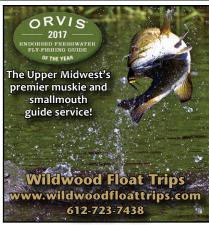
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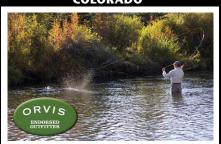
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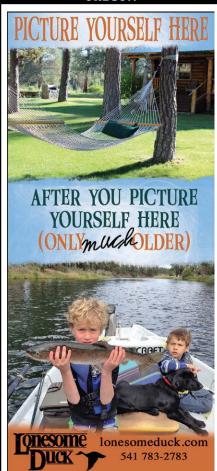
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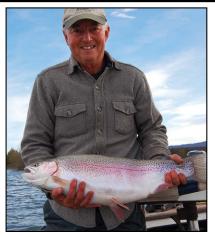
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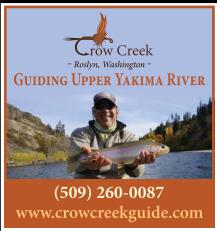


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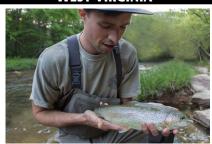
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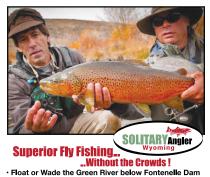
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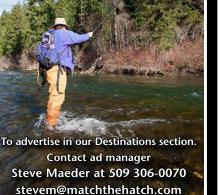
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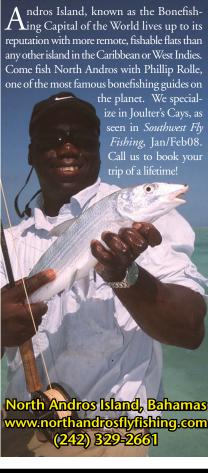
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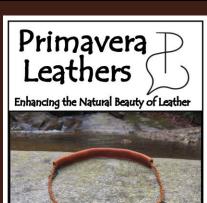


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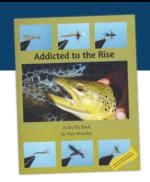
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New Products



Orvis Helios 3 Rods

Can the right fly rod make you a better caster? In the case of the new Orvis Helios 3, or H3 (www.orvis.com), the answer is an emphatic yes. This innovative rod not only lives up to its billing as "the most accurate fly rod on the planet," but also exceeds expectations through a combination of new materials and new construction methods. Accurate casting derives not just from proper casting technique, but also from two critical components of fly rod performance: rod tracking (horizontal vibration reduction) and rod damping (vertical oscillation reduction). The better a rod tracks during the casting stroke and the faster tip vibrations cease, the better that rod reduces waves in the line, meaning the line goes where you target your cast.

What does all this tech talk mean when the Helios 3 is in your hand? It means you finally have a rod that makes accuracy second nature. Long a fan of Orvis rods, I expected an action that screamed, "Take me fishing now!" and the H3 casts with a velvety smoothness; but the improved accuracy was a pleasant surprise, even though I knew Orvis also designed unique technology to prove its claims about the new rods. Basically, you aim a cast where you want the fly to land and the fly lands there. Sure, you need pay attention to casting technique, but the H3 is ideal for beginners and a major advantage for experienced anglers: the rod casts effortlessly.

Casting instructors might admonish you not to look at your backcast; ignore them (just don't alter your backstroke) and watch the way the line unfurls in a perfect loop, how the H3's tip seems to freeze momentarily—if you watch closely, you can see the rod damping. You can feel it too. It's unique. And in that fleeting moment when you accelerate the forestroke, you can feel the H3 load and sense its smooth power, and then watch that forward loop unfurl dead on target. By March, the Helios 3 line will include 25 models in 3- through 12-weight configurations (starting at \$849).—*John Shewey*



New Scientific Anglers Amplitude Tapers

Scientific Anglers, www.scientificanglers.com, has added five new tapers to its award-winning Amplitude series of textured fly lines, available this fall. The new Amplitude lines are the Trout and Andros tapers for fresh water, and the Bonefish, Tarpon, and 100-pound-core Big Water Taper for salt water; all of the lines cost \$129.95 and are available at Scientific Anglers dealers. Introduced in 2016, the Amplitude series features the revolutionary AST Plus slickness additive, which is 50 percent slicker than any previous additive and makes Scientific Anglers lines, on average, more than eight times more durable than similar fly lines. "Our Amplitude series has been extremely successful due to the overwhelmingly positive reception from anglers to our AST Plus technology," says research and development manager Josh Jenkins. "We knew that the next step was to bring AST Plus to some of our most popular specialty tapers. . . . We couldn't be happier with how these lines turned out."

Estaz UV60

Most fly tiers are familiar with the Estaz™ product line. Many of us who tie large muskie, pike, and bass patterns have wished for a larger version of Estaz Grande, and now our wish has been granted. Estaz UV60 has the same ultraviolet properties as Estaz Lights 15 mm and UV Grande 30 mm. UV60 is constructed on a strong, slim line core, which allows for significant tension while tying. Estaz UV60 is an excellent and durable replacement for or addition to hackle. It is great for big streamers and poppers, and for patterns meant for saltwater, salmon, steelhead, trout, muskie, pike, bass, and carp. In addition to making an excellent substitute for hackle, UV60 is the perfect body material for large flies, allowing you to create flies that are translucent when wet.

Use UV60 alone or as an accent to create new designs or add new flair to existing and traditional patterns. UV60 is available in white, black, olive, chartreuse, pink, and root beer in 1-yard packages for \$3.50. Visit your local fly shop for more information or to purchase any of the Estaz products.

Patagonia Tough Puff Hoody and Shirt

If your idea of fun is pushing through cover and snags to fish in the cold all day, your go-to insulation has arrived with Patagonia's new Tough Puff hoody (\$299) and shirt (\$199)—insulated tops that deliver stretch for movement, abrasion resistance for durability, and warmth even when wet. The Tough Puff hoody and shirt pair the stretchy and breathable warmth of Patagonia's FullRange® insulation with a durable face fabric that resists wind, abrasion, and water absorption. Perfect for cold days when the full protection of a waterproof shell is overkill, the Tough Puffs have fishing-specific features: chest pockets for large fly boxes, zippered lower hand pockets, water-shedding elastic cuffs that stay in place or can be easily pushed up for releasing fish, and arms lined with shell fabric for less water uptake if you go deep. The 100 percent recycled-polyester Capilene® double-knit lining in the body optimizes comfort and efficient moisture management, and the breathable lining allows for faster on-body drying after a dunking. Tough Puffs are designed to fit so you can move easily in them and layer over them when foul weather closes in. They set a new standard for warmth and functionality, on and off the water. For more

information and to purchase, visit www.patagonia.com or see your favorite Patagonia dealer.

CF Burkheimer Single Hand Spey Rods

The classic 10-foot steelhead rod designed for casting and fishing a swung fly needed updating to better handle modern Spey-casting lines, high-density sinking tips, and bulky flies. Enter the single-handed Spey series rods from CF Burkheimer (\$845 to \$895). At 10 feet 4 inches, these rods are crafted for maximum power and excellent sensitivity—that "Burkie feel," as fly casters like to say when they describe the special casting and fish-fighting quality of Kerry Burkheimer's rods. The 7-weight model is perfect for summer steelhead (not to mention smaller salmon species and even big autumn browns), and the 8-weight is ideal for big water, sinking-tip lines, and large flies, capable of handling steelhead, salmon, and other species. The Burkheimer single-hand Spey rods are adept at casting specialty steelhead taper fly lines, as well as Skagit and Scandi heads. The blanks are deep flexing, which encourages the angler to load the butt and midsection of



the fly rod. Ryan Smith, owner of The Avid Angler in Seattle, says, "Once you've cast these rods, it is hard to fathom how Burkheimer came up with this magic mix of materials. The obvious influence is proper casting technique with multiple prototypes,

over a long development period, to create a unique single-handed Spey rod." For more information, visit www.cfbflyrods.com.

Costa Sunrise Silver Mirror Lens

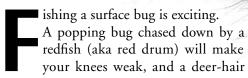
Anglers who need polarized sunglasses for low-light fishing now have an answer with the new Costa Sunrise Silver Mirror lens. Moreover, this versatile new lens is great for any sight-fishing situation and for times when light is changing quickly or often. The Sunrise Silver Mirror allows 30 percent light transmission versus the typical 10 to 12 percent and does this successfully while maintaining 99 percent polarization efficiency, giving it the highest light transmission of any polarized lens on the market. This lens features Costa's proprietary 580 technology, offering 100 percent protection from harmful UV light, and is currently available in polycarbonate. Polarization film on the front and back of the lens reduces the strong presence of yellow light to help eliminate glare, while green, red, and blue hues are enhanced, creating greater clarity and contrast. Scratch-resistant and prescription ready, the Sunrise Silver Mirror lens is currently offered in eight different frames (\$189 to \$249); see www.costadelmar.com to purchase

and for more information. "Having been in field-testing with some of our pro staff since last summer, the early indicators are we have a game changer," remarks John Sanchez, vice president of product design for Costa. "The Sunrise Silver Mirror sharpens contrast all day but performs best under the toughest low-light conditions, making it ideal for dusk and dawn performance and cloudy fishing days."

In the Vise

Shad Slider: Working with the Copic Marker System

By Kirk Dietrich



bug taken by a bass can make your heart skip a beat. A unique connection between fish and fisher occurs when you can see your fly being engulfed.

The terms "poppers" and "bugs" are used to categorize or identify flies that have heads in a variety of shapes

designed to pop, slide, or dive; they are usually made with soft or hard foam, cork or buoyant wood, or deer body hair.

Acrylic paint, nail polish, fabric paint, permanent markers, and other media are commonly used to color hard and soft popper heads, and most fly fishers are fond of two-toned bugs with a feathered transition line. The most common way to achieve this effect is airbrushing acrylics or using sponges and blending brushes to achieve a realistic fade between colors.

A great alternative, however, the Copic Airbrush System, be-

came available in the U.S. back in 1999, making it easy to obtain professional results on your favorite popper heads. The Copic system works by blowing air through the pointed end of a cone-shaped nozzle and across the tip of a specially designed marker. The liquid dye in the marker tip atomizes in the airstream, providing a nice, fine mist to color your bugs. Simply swap markers in the air handle to change colors.

The colors are transparent, which allows a foiled body or pearl paint base coat to be used beneath the Copic colors to create bright, reflective baitfish impersonations. That same

trait also means that light colors cannot be used over dark and you must plan your spray sequences using light colors first.

While the Copic spray system can be used freehand, masks and stencils allow for more detailed markings and effects. Masks cover and shield areas you don't want painted, allowing you to direct the color and prevent overspray. Stencils or templates are necessary for obtaining consistent patterns and shapes, such as stripes, scales, dots, or gill plates.

> Items such as hair combs, netting, and draftsman's templates can be used for stencils, and custom ones can be created from a variety of materials; plastic folders or commercially available thin plastic template sheets can be cut to shape and will last for years.

Realize that when you hold masks and stencils close to your work, distinct shapes will result; when they are held farther away, you can achieve a soft feathered edge. To prevent tightly held stencils from sticking to previously sprayed colors, applying a lightly misted coat of a clear

acrylic aerosol spray to the head will create a hard, clear barrier.

While this may seem like a lot of work, considering solid-color bugs catch plenty fish, making and painting poppers to express your own fish-catching ideas is an age-old practice and is a pretty fun and practical way to let the artist within shine.

Materials

Hook: Mustad CK52S, size 2

Wapsi Perfect Popper head, size 2 **Head:**

Head color: Metallic pearl gesso acrylic paint and Copic markers YG07, C5, R08,

100, and B29

Painting

Krylon or equivalent acrylic clear coat, tools: scale netting template, circle and line

templates, dowels in various sizes

Black, yellow, and neon-orange Eyes: acrylic paints, or stick-on eyes

Top coat: 30-minute epoxy or equivalent

White Danville, 210-denier Thread:

Tail: White, gray, and blue fox fur; char-

treuse grizzly neck feathers; silver flash

Skirt: Natural grizzly neck feathers

> Kirk Dietrich has been tying poppers since the early 1980s. He lives in Kenner, Louisiana, and fly fishes for fresh- and saltwater fish in the New Orleans metro area.

Step 1: Apply lip balm to the hook eye, which makes it easy to remove the thick coat of gesso and metallic pearl acrylic base coat from the eye. The white pearl base coat adds a nice sheen to the transparent Copic colors and represents the reflective sides of a shad.

Step 2: With the YG07 Acid Green pen, spray through a straight-line stencil such as this draftsman's erasing shield to create a stripe on each side of the head.

Step 3: Use the C5 Cool Gray No. 5 to mist a scale pattern on the top half of the head by spraying through a scale-patterned mesh, such as this one sold by Cascade Crest Tools. Hold the mesh tightly to the head with clips.

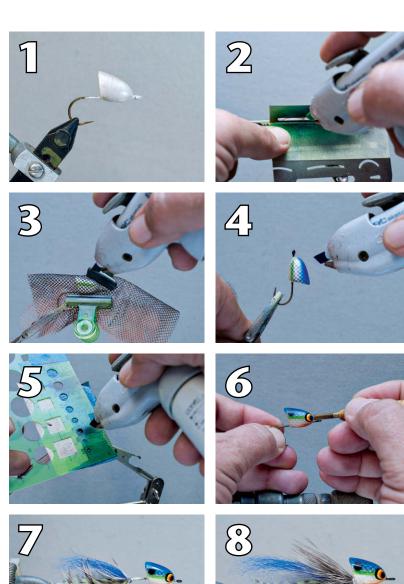
Step 4: Using the B29 Ultramarine pen to color the top of the head blue is a sure way to get a predator to notice your slider. If you want the top center a little darker, apply a light misting of black.

Step 5: A shad pattern would not be convincing without adding a black false eye spot. Hold a circle template near the rear of the head above the center line and spray some black through the round opening. Here, the adjacent openings in the stencil are taped off using masking tape to prevent spray from going through them.

Step 6: Spray a strike-triggering spot on the belly using the R08 Vermilion pen and apply a light misting of acrylic clear coat aerosol to the body to seal the Copic dye. Add eyes; here, I'm using three colors of acrylic paint applied with four progressively smaller brass dowels. Use 30-minute epoxy (or your favorite clear coat) as a top coat to prevent the colors from fading and/or being scraped off by fish teeth.

Step 7: Make a tail of arctic fox that is slightly longer than the hook. At the bend of the hook, tie white followed by gray and topped with blue. Tie in silver flash and a chartreuse-dyed grizzly neck feather on each side. Palmer in two natural grizzly neck feathers for the skirt.

Step 8: Tie off the palmered feathers, trim excess butts, and apply your favorite head cement to the thread wraps to finish the Shad Slider.





In the Vise



urvival of the fittest doesn't really apply to people anymore. We've invented our way out of that law of nature with heart transplants, bug spray, fast food, and a lot more. I'm half blind, so I'd be long dead if I had to fight prehistoric megafauna without my eyeglasses. But underwater, survival of the fittest is still the rule. There are predators and prey, and ferocious predatory fish such as barracuda, striped bass, and giant trevally terrify lesser species.

Trout, on the other hand, are often branded as dainty, but the Big Business fly proves otherwise. When I'm tossing 6-inch streamers while bobbing down Montana's Yellowstone River or hoofing it on the Truckee River in California, I'm looking for predator trout that want a 32-ounce porterhouse for dinner. Giant streamers are common among trout anglers these days, and the Big Business is in my starting rotation. The baby rainbow colors

take advantage of the fact that juvenile trout are often on the menu for browns, cutts, and even cannibalistic 'bows. Moreover, stripers, largemouth bass, pike, and numerous other species will hammer this pattern. I spin up other color combinations as well, including white/cream, brown/ orange, and even wilder combos, such as chartreuse/red.

Many of my articulated streamers sport only one hook at the front and just a shank in the rear. The back hook isn't necessary, because big trout hit like saltwater fish, smashing the head of their prey. This pattern, however, keels and swims better with two hooks, the rear hook being a size 10, which isn't likely to stick a fish in the gills or eyes the way larger hooks can. Hook gap is important, though, and commercially tied streamers are often tied on small hooks full of materials that can get in the way of a proper hook set. The TMC 8089 bass hook in a size 6 is ideal. You can strap on piles of materials at the head of your fly and still end up with plenty of gap exposed. As a bonus, the 8089 will bend out if you stick it in a log, giving you a better chance of getting

it back—with 15-pound tippet, anyway.

The Big Business ripples and dances from tip to tail, thanks to marabou as well as saddle hackle tips. In fact, I use marabou on most of my streamers and salmon and steelhead flies because it breathes and undulates better than anything else. Marabou's only kryptonite is its fragility. After several hours of violent casting and chomping, marabou can look a little ratty. But the fish don't seem to mind.

Materials
Hook: TMC 8089, size 10 (rear) and size 6 (front)

Thread: Olive UNI-Thread, size 6/0

Connector: 30-lb. articulation wire with three metal beads

Tail: Grizzly hackle tips

Underbody: Copper-olive UV Polar Chenille

Body: Olive over white marabou

Sides: Pink Mirror Image

Head: 3/8-in. black nickel Cross Eyed Cone, with red/black

Oval Pupil 3D Eyes; 0.025-in. lead wire inside the cone

Rear body: Olive over white marabou **Underbody:** Copper-olive UV Polar Chenille

Front/over-

body: Olive over white marabou

Sides: Pink Mirror Image over pearl Polar Flash

Collar: Natural schlappen

I'm not sure the eyes matter much, but Hareline Cross Eyed Cones are great because they have recessed eye sockets ready for your favorite stick-on eyes. I prefer Hareline Oval Pupil 3D Eyes; I always feel like they're looking into my soul.

I used to be a dry-fly addict, choosing nymphs when I wanted to catch a lot of trout. Then I was introduced to 8-weights and sore shoulders, lead eyes to the back of the head, and flies that take an hour to tie. Through streamer fishing I started catching the fish that eat the fish I caught on dries and nymphs. The Big Business is for them.

Step 1: On the rear hook, tie in two matching hackle tips on edge, curved sides facing inward, with 4 to 5 inches of the feathers extending beyond the hook bend. Secure a length of Polar Chenille and wrap it forward, covering the shank.

Step 2: Select a marabou plume with long barbs. Strip them off and attach them in clumps, olive on top, white on bottom. Repeat to achieve desired bulk. Tie in a clump of Mirror Image on each side of the shank and clip excess. Cement the head.

Step 3: Thread the wire through the trailer hook and slide three beads over the wire. Slide the cone onto the front hook and transfer the hook into the vise. Wrap a few turns of lead wire and push them under the cone (this helps prevent the cone from spinning). Secure the wire to the shank, double it back, and secure the double segment.

Step 4: Again, select a marabou plume with very long barbs, and strip them off the stem. Attach the marabou fibers in clumps, olive on top, white on bottom. Repeat to achieve desired bulk. Follow that up with Polar Chenille wrapped forward up to the cone.

Step 5: Again apply long marabou fibers, white below and olive above, continuing to add fibers to achieve the desired bulk.

Step 6: Tie in a half-dozen strands of Polar Flash on each side of the fly, followed by Mirror Image over the top of the Polar Flash; clip away the excess. Wrap several turns of schlappen for a collar and whip-finish. Try to build a seamless transition between collar and cone by making the last few turns of the schlappen up inside the cone. Secure the eyes with Zap-A-Gap.

Creative fly designer Brett Wedeking is a freelance writer and a custom tier for Dirty Water Fly Company, www.dirtywaterfc.wordpress.com.













In the Vise

Mercer's Missing Link/By Dennis Collier



hotographers call it the golden hour. Anglers call it "Just one more cast" and "Late for dinner again."

The stifling heat of the day is mercifully abated with cooling downslope air currents; the sights, smells, and sounds of twilight stimulate the senses as a fresh fly is knotted to 5X tippet and caddisflies dance across the liquid ceiling of trout's domain, now cloaked in gilded light and indigo shadows. The scene has played over and over for countless fly fishers over countless decades on countless waters. Problem is, the fish are often unreceptive to anglers' ulterior motives and have a nasty habit of shattering this tranquil scene with refusals of their fly boxes full of offerings.

Materials

Hook: TMC 102Y or similar, sizes 12-18

Camel UNI-Thread, size 8/0 Thread:

Abdomen: Camel UNI-Thread, size 8/0, coated with

Softex or UV resin after the rib is applied

Rib: UV pearl Flashabou or pearl Krystal Flash

Wing splitter: UV brown Ice Dub (or color of choice)

Delta

Dun Z-Lon or similar wings:

Up-wing: Light tan or blonde cow elk hair Hackle: Dark dun or dun-dyed grizzly

Mike Mercer's Missing Link was born of just such an occasion, when his traditional caddisfly dries were repeatedly rejected by California's lower Sacramento River rainbow trout. Says Mercer, "Unlike other fisheries, including some pretty darned technical ones, the lower Sac has always toyed with me.

"One night in early spring, 2007," he elaborates, "I offhandedly whipped up a couple new dries to try the following evening. It had occurred to me that the one life stage of caddis I'd rarely even considered had nothing to do with the nuance of emergence, but was rather at the reverse end of the life cycle—the dead or dying insect."

For those who don't know Mercer, he is not only an accomplished fly tier, but a methodical flydesign architect as well, and with the crafting of the new Missing Link, the playing field for fish and fisher had just been further leveled. As I conversed with Mercer for this article, we discovered that we have at least two things in common: first, we both love streamer fishing, and second, as the wheels of time keep rolling along, we lean more toward the minimalist approach to fly fishing, meaning long hours of fishing while yoked to a bloated fishing vest, stuffed to the gills with rarely used fly boxes and gadgets, and leading to a sore back, have far less appeal now than in decades past.

The Missing Link is a minimalist angler's delight, as the fly, when tied in a few basic colors and sizes, can function as a crossover pattern to mimic mayflies, smaller stonefly species, flying ants, and, of course, caddisflies. Note: Fly fishers who prefer to buy rather than tie this versatile fly can purchase it at The Fly Shop, www.theflyshop.com, and other Umpqua Feather Merchants dealers.

Years after the pattern's inception, Mercer justly claims that it works everywhere trout and insects are found, and rare is the occasion when he needs to use any other dry fly for just about any situation he encounters. Further testimonials from anglers who ply the technical waters of the Henrys Fork and the Delaware River, to name a couple, swear by its magical fish-fooling charms. Strong validation, indeed.



Step 1: Start the tying thread at midshank and tie in a single strand of ribbing material. Wrap the thread to the hook bend, then back to the tie-in point, creating a tapered abdomen. Spiral the rib up the abdomen and tie off, then lightly coat the thread and rib with Softex or UV resin.



Step 4: Strip the barbules from the base of a dry fly neck or saddle hackle and secure to the shank on the far side of the hook, just ahead of the wing tie-in point. Leave a short length of hackle stem showing to ensure a clean first wrap, then post the stem upward to the base of the elk-hair wing.



Step 2: Create a small ball of dubbing at the forward shank position, then secure a sparse strand of Z-Lon on top of the hook shank, immediately in front of the dubbing ball. Pull the Z-Lon to the rear and secure with a few thread wraps, pointing the wings toward the rear of the fly (do not trim the wings yet). Using 0.010 lead wire, pull the wings back and secure out of the way against the body.



Step 5: Wrap a few counterclockwise turns of hackle feather parachute-style around the elk-hair wing post. Pull the remaining hackle tip down on the near side of the hook and, sliding the thread under the hackle umbrella, trap the hackle stem to the post with a few counterclockwise wraps around the post. Trim the hackle tip and whip-finish behind the eye. Put a small drop of cement at the base of the wing post to lock in the hackle.



Step 3: Clean and stack a small clump of cow elk hair and measure against the hook shank to determine the wing length (slightly less than a shank length long). Take a few tight thread wraps to secure the hair to the shank, then pull the tips and butts upward and take a few thread wraps around the hair clump to form a wing post.



Step 6: Grip the butt ends of the elk hair and pull them forward and away from the wing, then snip the butt ends close to the hackle, leaving a short stump. Trim the delta wings to length.

Dennis Collier, www.dennis-collier.com, is a creative fly tier, writer, and artist who lives in Colorado.

Fish Tales

Give Me a Break!/By E Donnall Thomas Jr.

is inside a vehicle. I admit that my explanations for broken rods sometimes fall short of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth when I send the dead body back to the manufacturer to get a tip replaced. It just seems more creative to say that I shattered it battling a giant trevally (as I actually did once) or defending myself from a grizzly bear (which hasn't happened yet, although it may just be a matter of time). I suspect that most of the people who make fly rods are on to these ploys by now anyway. It's easier for them just to replace the broken part and get you off their back. They know that you smashed it in your car door.

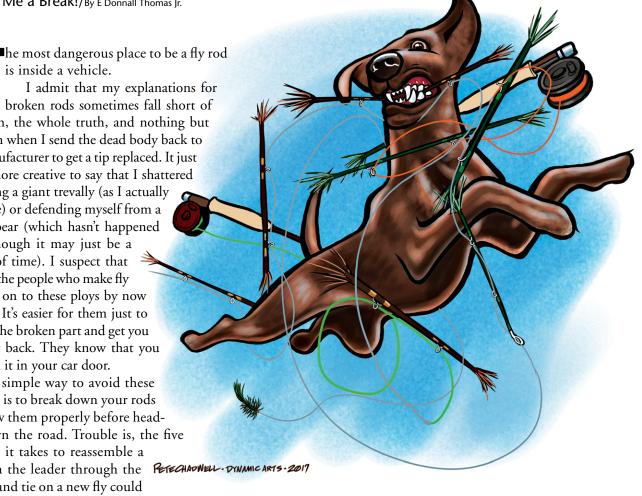
The simple way to avoid these mishaps is to break down your rods and stow them properly before heading down the road. Trouble is, the five minutes it takes to reassemble a rod, run the leader through the PETECHADWELL DYNAMIC ARTS . 2017 guides, and tie on a new fly could

have been the best five minutes of fishing all year.

Long ago, I learned that by breaking down my favorite four-piece 7-weight into two sections, it would fit perfectly on the dashboard of my Alaska fishing truck, rigged up and ready to go. My father, who always stored his tackle properly, took a dim view of this practice, but one day I talked him into letting me place his rod right next to mine. We were prospecting for silvers on a warm summer day, and I was driving with my window rolled down. When we arrived at our destination, I hit the button to roll the window back up. Of course, it was his favorite 7-weight that got decapitated, earning me a look I hadn't seen since the morning 50 years prior when I woke up after a long, hard night and had to admit that I wasn't sure where I'd left his car.

This incident illustrates two important points about carrying rods in vehicles. The disaster will always befall the most expensive rod in the rig, and that rod will always belong to the person who least deserves to have it broken.

I eventually bought a car-top rod carrier for the Alaska truck. It worked well until I drove along an old abandoned logging road, looking for a route into a steelhead stream. A



canopy of alders had grown over the road. I forgot about the rods until I stopped at the top of the hill and found that the overhanging brush had scoured the rooftop clean.

The combination of dogs, fly rods, and vehicles is particularly ominous. Years ago, I built a full-length padded shelf under the topper on my Montana fishing truck so I could sleep on top and stow camping gear below. I could also lay broken-down, rigged-up fly rods on top of the foam.

As I did one day prior to a trip to the Big Hole. Unbeknownst to me, my wife, Lori, had let one of the Labs out, and when he saw the truck being loaded he assumed that we were trying to go hunting without him. Rocky was an agile dog, and he managed the standing high jump easily. He immediately became tangled up in the rods, and the more tangled he became, the harder he thrashed around trying to free himself. Just as I recognized the disaster in progress, he jumped back out wearing the shattered remains of two 5-weights. I should have listened to my dad.

I can say that about a lot of things.

E. Donnall Thomas Jr. is a longtime freelance writer, author, and photographer.



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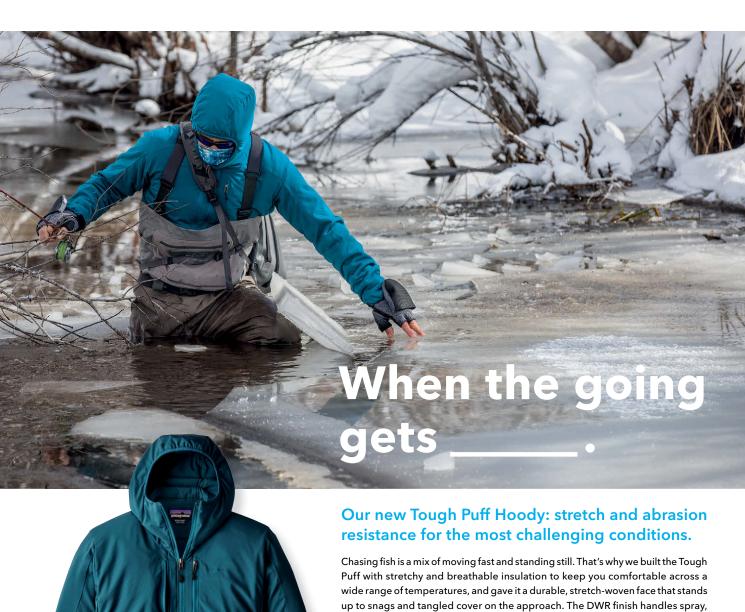
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Men's Tough Puff Hoody women's available online Chasing fish is a mix of moving fast and standing still. That's why we built the Tough Puff with stretchy and breathable insulation to keep you comfortable across a wide range of temperatures, and gave it a durable, stretch-woven face that stands up to snags and tangled cover on the approach. The DWR finish handles spray, spit and drizzle, and helps the cuffs shed water after you've dunked 'em in for the release. Worn on its own or layered under a wading jacket, the fish-specific Tough Puff sets new standards for function and performance—no matter what challenge the day may bring.

Steve Frogley on a frigid approach to the deep runs of the Provo River in Utah. **ANDREW BURR** © 2017 Patagonia, Inc.

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