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EXPOSURE
Winter on a Michigan River

Masters at the Bench
John Shaner

Partridge & Orange
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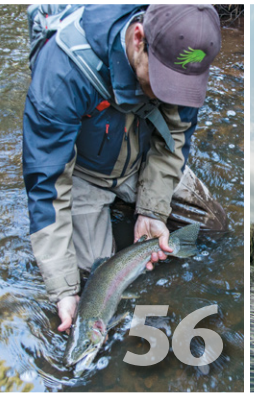

Cover: Fly Skinz owner Jonathan Kiley exploring a south Georgia swamp for largemouth bass

Photo by: Jon Luke

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Volume 14, Number 1 • January/February 2018

Features

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Western Rivers Conservancy focuses on one thing: buying land along the West's greatest streams for the benefit of fish, wildlife and people. On Colorado's **upper Rio Grande** (pictured), WRC is conserving over 19,000 acres of riverland and improving access for anglers, boaters and others.

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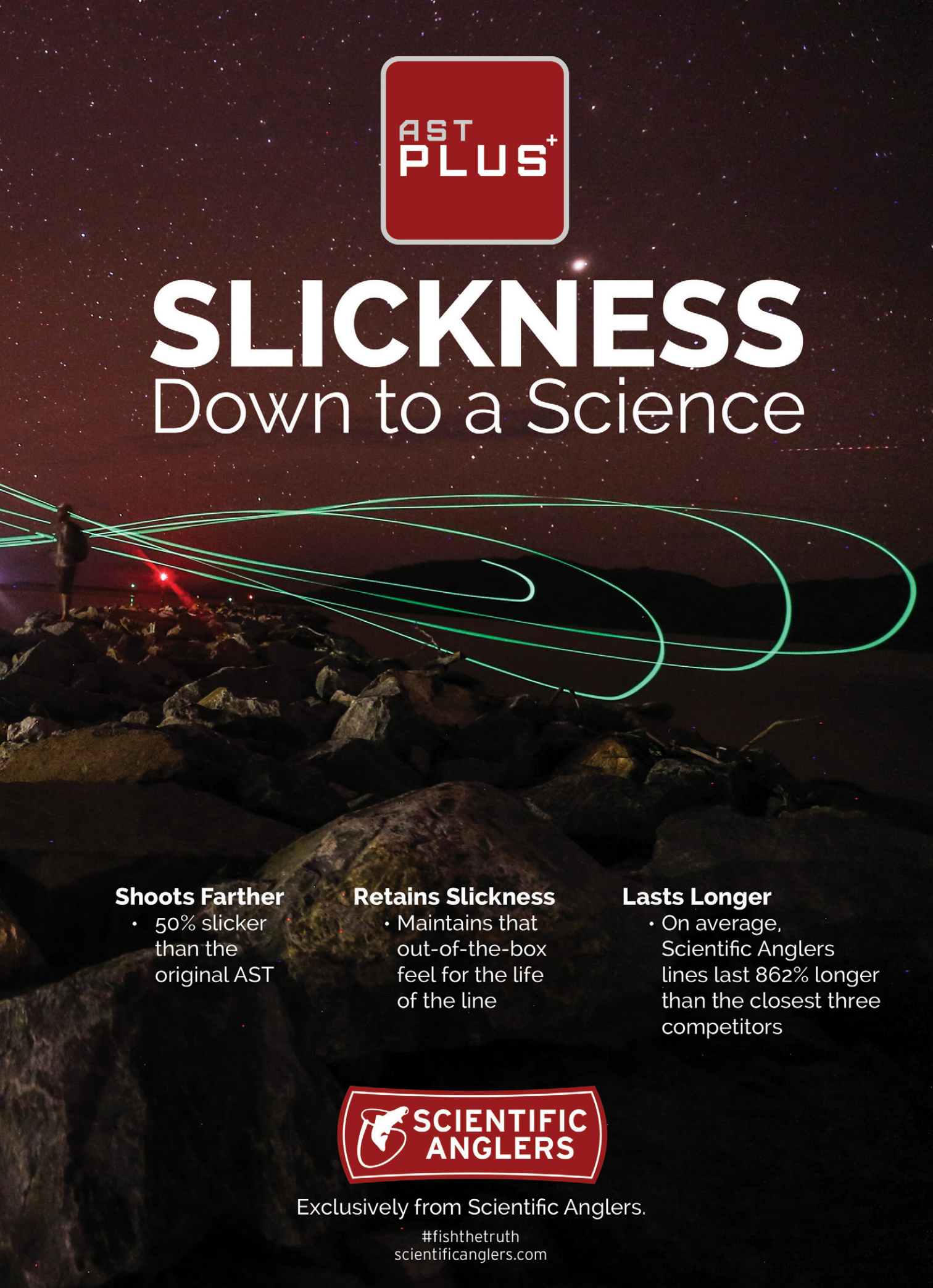
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From the Editor

Passing the Baton

Our "Pioneers & Legends" (P&L) column has been a fixture in the magazines since the first issue of our flagship publication, *Northwest Fly Fishing*, in 1999. In the nearly two decades since then, the column has profiled 90 different people who have influenced the sport of fly fishing, both profoundly and subtly.

Originally the column was penned by Jack Berryman, who contributed 34 installments, many of them compiled in his 2006 book, *Fly-Fishing Pioneers & Legends of the Northwest*. Thanks largely to his P&L columns, Berryman was awarded the 2017 Roderick Haig-Brown Award from Fly Fishers International this past August.

PHOTO BY JACK BERRYMAN

In 2006, we launched *Eastern Fly Fishing* magazine and gave the new publication its own P&L department, which lasted until 2011 and featured a dozen installments researched and penned by Tom Rosenbauer of Orvis and nearly that many more by New York–based writer Mike Valla (author of *The Founding Flies* and a host of other books). Meanwhile, Berryman stepped down from his role as the P&L columnist for *Northwest Fly Fishing* in 2009. Soon thereafter, we were thrilled to announce Oregon-based author, historian, and former magazine editor Don Roberts as the new columnist for this longstanding department, which requires substantive research, not to mention an often-difficult search for supporting graphics.

During the past eight years, Roberts has contributed 22 installments of P&L, each of them compelling, and each imbued with his inimitable wry humor and subtle wit. His stories are as much fun to edit as they are to read, although they require very little editing. The continuity of P&L is like a relay race in track—Berryman set the bar with his lap, Rosenbauer and Valla exceeded our expectations with their diligent research and provocative writing, and then Roberts took the baton and elevated P&L to new heights of excellence.

PHOTO BY DON ROBERTS

Roberts will soon step down from his position of P&L columnist; he has voted in favor of increased fishing time rather than the rigors of historical research. He richly deserves his time on the water, and the rest of the staff and I wish to thank him for his outstanding work these past eight years. You'll still be able to read his work in other columns, such as "Fish Food" and "Masters at the Bench," and rest assured: P&L will be entrusted to capable hands.

John Shewey
Editor in Chief

Eastern
FLY FISHING
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Cast a Caption

January/February 2018 Contest

November/December 2017 Finalists

1. **"I never thought I'd have to pay to park my butt in this river!"**
   David Kolb, Quakertown, Pennsylvania

2. **"Watch this. As soon as I put money in the meter the fish will quit rising!"**
   Hiroshi Sano, Richmond, California

3. **"We never should have let Congress sell our public lands."**
   Paul Downing, Fountain Hills, Arizona

CAST a CAPTION WINNER!

September/October 2017 Winner!

"Let's just say 'left' or 'right' from now on instead of 'port' or 'starboard. ' "
Cody Coyne, Starkville, Mississippi

Each 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 January 6, 2018. Above left are the finalists for the November/December 2017 contest; please go online to vote for your favorite. The winner will be announced in the March/April 2018 issue and will receive a T-shirt displaying the cartoon and the winning caption. The September/October 2017 winner appears above right.

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FISHEYE

An Underwater Perspective

Bonefish

By Jay Fleming

Masters at the Bench

John Shaner/By Mike Valla

If you've ever attended one of the many fly-fishing shows or events that take place around the country, you've probably crossed paths with John Shaner. You might have sought his equipment advice at the Hardy booth he staffs. Perhaps you listened to one of the captivating presentations about fishing soft-hackle flies that he manages to slip into his hectic schedule during a show. There's even a chance you've run into him on one of his favorite trout streams, such as the Firehole River in Yellowstone National Park, where he might have offered unexpected yet friendly angling assistance.

Anyone who has met Shaner will tell you he's one helpful guy. But you might not be aware that beyond his personal attributes, vast knowledge of fly-fishing equipment, and interest in fly fishing, he's a humble yet extraordinary fly tier.

Shaner's lifelong passion for fly fishing and fly tying blossomed during his childhood on the shores of Skaneateles Lake, in central New York. While his father was an avid conventional angler who preferred saltwater fishing, his grandfather dabbled in fly fishing. A couple of old fly rods hanging on John's grandfather's den walls, along with other fly-fishing equipment that was later handed down to him, exposed Shaner to the sport, but he was largely introduced to fly angling by reading books on the subject. As far back as his boyhood years, Shaner was a precocious reader.

"I began to read about fly fishing and fly tying, and in a short time I was taking-bait fishing hooks and lashing feathers to them with sewing thread," he explains. "But I really had no idea what I was doing."

In 1964, not long after Shaner's interest in fly tying was sparked, his dad bought him a then very popular Tack-L-Tyers fly-tying kit. "I can still remember the smell of that kit," he recalls. Like many young fly tiers of that era (including this writer), he also had at his side the *Noll Guide to Trout Flies*, handed to him by one of his father's friends. Formerly printed as *Family Circle's Guide to Trout Flies*, in the early 1950s, with color illustrations of wet flies, dry flies, nymphs, streamers, and bucktails by artist G. Don Ray, the book was a popular fly-pattern reference manual especially useful to beginners.

Shaner's early years combined fly tying with a love of reading, a joy that has remained with him throughout his adulthood. Yet the pull of the stream was there early, too, and in a short time he became proficient in landing fish on the flies that emerged from his vise. In 1965 or 1966, Shaner caught his first fish on a self-tied fly while fishing Little

Genesee Creek in western New York. "I can't remember the fly pattern I fished, but I can remember that brown trout like it was yesterday," he says.

Shaner is for the most part a self-taught fly tier. But in addition to improving his craft by reading about various fly patterns in books he checked out from the library, and by scanning outdoor magazines, he derived substantial influence from Vad's Bait Shop in Syracuse, New York. In addition to conventional fishing gear and bait, the shop carried fly-fishing equipment.

"There were older gents who frequented the store who inspired me," Shaner remembers. "There was a man in the shop who offered fly-tying instruction at a local YMCA, and my dad enrolled me in his lessons. Those lessons, when I was 12 years old, gave me my first professional introduction to fly tying. The instructor, Clark Liechtenauer, tied with silk thread in a very traditional organic way," he fondly recalls. To this day Shaner prefers to tie with silk threads and natural materials, although he occasionally uses synthetics.

When Liechtenauer, a local legend of sorts, passed away years later, Shaner bought his library. "He was quite interested in the history of fly fishing, and the books included some of the old British titles," he says. The basic tying techniques the man taught him were all derived from traditional British fly-tying methods. Liechtenauer's flies were tied sparse, very much in the English tradition, a style that Shaner prefers in his own techniques. While he is proficient in tying many types of trout flies, Shaner is especially drawn to the elegant yet simple, sparsely tied soft-hackle-style patterns.

His interest in simple soft-hackle flies can be traced back to reading George Parker Holden's *Streamcraft* (1919), which included simple spider-like flies that fascinated him. Then came Sylvester Nemes's *The Soft-Hackled Fly and Tiny Soft Hackles* (1975), which stimulated a heightened interest in the history of soft-hackle flies. But it was later, when he lived in West Yellowstone, that Shaner became infatuated with tying and fishing soft-hackle flies.

In addition to a small group of soft-hackle aficionados in West Yellowstone, Shaner would occasionally bump into Nemes, who came down from Bozeman from time to time. The rich history behind the elegant soft-hackle style and the camaraderie among other soft-hackle followers was as appealing as the flies' effectiveness as fish takers.

Shaner's fondness for tying soft-hackle flies grew because he found that he could catch so many more fish on those simple patterns than on other types. If the fish were rising he'd go after them with dry flies. Yet eventually he discovered that he could also take risers on soft-hackle patterns. The effectiveness of these flies also enhanced his success at guiding relative neophyte fly anglers in Yellowstone. "I could take a client out on the Firehole or the Madison, and no matter what their casting skills might have been or their overall experience with fly fishing I could get them into fish," he explains.

The ultimate goal of many fly tiers is to catch fish, or assist others in catching fish, on self-tied flies. In the process of tying effective patterns, fly tiers naturally become interested in fly-tying materials. Shaner has taken his interest in materials to an extreme. In recent


PHOTO BY ROBERT SMITH

years he has been cataloging material samples—everything from various hackle shades from all the growers, to many other types of feathers, to body materials, tinsels, and threads.

This practice is not new. "Specimen books," as they were once called, go back to the mid-1800s. Inspired by such works as W. H. Aldham's *A Quaint Treatise on Flies and Fly Making* (1876), Shaner's own "materials reference book," as he calls it, helps ensure consistency in his own fly tying. It also helps him communicate to other tiers the exact shades and textures of the various feathers, furs, and other fly components he uses in tying specific patterns. "If someone, for instance, wants to know what a rusty dun hackle looks like from a specific grower, I can flip to a page in my notebook and show the tier its appearance and texture," he explains.

PHOTO BY ROBERT SMITH

Creative fly tier John Shaner, who lives in New York state, hooks a trout on the River Wharfe in Yorkshire, England.

While many tiers and anglers are entirely focused on catching fish, others, like John Shaner, enjoy fly tying as a contemplative pastime rather than a means to fill fly boxes. His approach to fly tying allows him to combine an appreciation for the rich history of the craft with a love for the literature that surrounds it. And there's nothing Shaner enjoys more than sharing his joy with others.

Mike Valla is a freelance writer, photographer, and angling historian who lives in the Catskills region of New York.

Fish Food

Chironomids/By Phil Rowley

PHOTO BY ROB BRUNO

Years ago I was lakeside trying to figure out where to go and what to use. A veteran fly fisher came up to me and asked, "Do you want to catch trout in lakes?"

My answer was obvious: "Yes."

"Here, try one of these," he said, dropping a size 16 black Chironomid pupa pattern in my hand. I looked down at the tiny fly and then up at the vast expanse of water, and thought, "Are you kidding me! You expect me to toss this skinny fly into all that water and expect fish to find it?

Now, 30 years after that event, I regularly fish Chironomid patterns with complete confidence—they work that well.

Chironomids, aka midges or buzzers, belong to the order Diptera, meaning "two-winged." Other members of this large order include craneflies, mosquitoes, blackflies, and houseflies. The only life stages fly fishers consider of practical interest and worthy of imitation are larva, pupa, and adult.

Regardless of the stage, midge size is a constant source of frustration. What Chironomids lack in overall size they more than make up for in volume. In most waters, Chironomid numbers dwarf those of food items such as mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies combined. They are a critical food source in lakes, rivers, streams, and ponds.

Although capable of living in a diverse range of habitats, from clean cold streams to sewage treatment ponds, the larvae prefer soft stable bottoms and weeds in slower-moving stretches of rivers and streams, as well as in lakes and ponds. In ideal habitat, Chironomids can establish themselves in staggering numbers.

Chironomid larvae are slender and wormlike, featuring nine body segments, a small head, and stubby posterior prolegs. Successful patterns need to be slender and ribbed; typically, wire is used to add weight, a touch of flash, and segmentation. Because Chironomid larvae are creatures of the bottom, presentation methods that place your flies in this neighborhood work best.

Larval colors include white, green, olive, brown, red, and maroon. Lake larvae are most often red and maroon. Nicknamed bloodworms due to their coloration, lake larvae generate hemoglobin that allows them to survive in anoxic areas along the bottom, where they live and feed on detritus and decaying plant matter.

Upon reaching maturity, a process that can take days, weeks, or over a year, the larvae transform into pupae. The pupae often drift before beginning their ascent to the surface, where they will transform into adults. Lake Chironomids often stage for days just above the bottom in staggering numbers before ascending to the surface.

Midge or Chironomid pupae are slender and segmented, and feature a slightly tapered abdomen and

PHOTO BY ARLEN THOMASON

bulbous thorax. White gill filaments located at the front of the thorax are prominent on larger species. Caudal gills may also be present at the tip of the abdomen. Gills are a key feature and are best imitated with white yarn, ostrich herl, even dental floss. White beads are popular as well, especially for flies used in algae-stained waters that tint other materials green.

Depending on species and habitat, Chironomids cover a wide size range, from specimens simply too small to imitate to the monster Bomber Chironomids of western lakes, where larvae and pupae push an inch in length. On average, Chironomids range from tiny size 24 through size 10. On eastern waters and on many rivers and streams across North America, anglers should focus on the tiny side of the ledger, size 16 and smaller. On productive western lakes, stick with size 16 and larger.

The best patterns are slender, almost anorexic looking. Metal beads are a common pattern component. The Zebra Midge is a prime example of what a simple midge pattern should look like.

Pupa colors include black, maroon, brown, tan, olive, and various shades of green. Black is predominant. The pupae trap gas beneath their skins to add buoyancy, aiding their ascent and their final adult transformation. The gas gives pupae a distinct silvery shine, often masking their true color. Some of the best patterns factor in the mirrorlike appearance of an inflated pupa through the use of shiny beads, ribs, and body materials.

No matter the water type, still or moving, floating-line–strike-indicator tactics are the most common presentation method when fishing both larva and pupa patterns. Keeping the patterns near or just above the bottom is the best option, as trout favor the protection and the proximity to food these regions offer. For still waters, floating lines and indicators are not the only presentation option. When still-water trout feed in deep water or when the wind is up, making indicator tactics challenging, try other methods. Dangling pupa and larva patterns vertically a foot off the bottom using fast-sinking lines and 4- to 5-foot leaders produces heart-stopping strikes. Floating lines coupled with 15- to 22-foot leaders also work well. When fish are spread out, slow-sinking, hover, and clear intermediate lines sweep flies through the water column and work well.

No matter the presentation method, still-water retrieves are painstakingly slow. When using floating-line tactics, with or without indicators, if the line creates any sort of wake during the retrieve you are going too fast. In many instances, allowing wind-induced current and chop works to animate flies and that is all that is needed.


PHOTO BY ARLEN THOMASON


Dean's Double Duty
Fly courtesy of Rainy's


Chan's BH Chironomid Bomber
Fly courtesy of Montana Fly Company


Solomon's Go Go Dancer
Fly courtesy of Rainy's


Cut Bait Midge
Fly courtesy of Umpqua


Little Foamy Purple
Fly courtesy of Umpqua


Frostbite Bloodworm
Fly courtesy of Montana Fly Company


Shewey's Bloodworm Chironomid Emerger
Fly courtesy of Rainy's


Haslam Midge Adult
Fly courtesy of Rainy's


Chan's Lady McConnell Chironomid Dry Fly
Fly courtesy of Montana Fly Company

At first glance, adult Chironomids look identical to their annoying mosquito cousins. Thankfully, female midges don't require the protein and iron found in blood to produce their eggs. Walking through a swarm of mating Chironomid adults won't involve any blood loss, but you might swallow a few bugs.

In calm, warm conditions, emergence can be delayed, allowing trout to focus on the emerging pupae and adults. Targeting "midging" trout at the surface is challenging because the trout feed in narrow lanes, dictating accurate, drag-free presentations.

After midges form large mating swarms, the females return to the surface to lay their eggs. The audible buzz and whine of swarming adults can be deafening, hence their "buzzer" nickname. One of the best times to take fish on dries is when the females return to lay their eggs. On lakes and ponds, egg-laying females skitter across the surface, producing distinct wakes that trigger splashy, aggressive takes. On moving water, adults often blanket the surface, gathering in large clusters along calm stretches and in back eddies. Trout slide into these areas, sipping adults with rhythmic lazy rises. Targeting trout in these conditions can envelop you for hours. As captivating as fishing floating patterns might be in these situations, larva and pupa patterns often offer your best chance of a hookup.

Chironomid adults mirror the coloration of the pupae. Recently emerged adults often have brighter body colors until their bodies both harden and darken, a trait to remember.

Mastering Chironomids is a lifelong journey full of frustration and reward. Trout can fixate on size, color, depth, or life stage. But once you understand the importance of these insects to trout, a lifelong appreciation for Chironomids begins to take root. Learn everything you can about these insects and how to fish them. Your investment will pay dividends, enabling you to catch fish when others can't.

Walen Francis "Bud" Lilly, 1925–2017: Fish Killer, Fly Shop Owner, Firebrand Conservationist

By Don Roberts

Long before he was trout's best friend, Bud Lilly was trout's worst enemy. Not only was he born with an instinct for finding fish, but he grew up in an era when catching and killing were inseparably linked, the harvest inextricably bound to the hunt. Back then there were only three socially acceptable reasons to abstain from keeping trout: you and probably your neighbors already had a freezer full of the damned things; you found caring for and cleaning one's catch a disagreeable chore; you just plain couldn't stomach the taste of fish. For most anglers in those days the question wasn't whether to keep trout; the question was how many.

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Back in the early 1970s, Lilly made it his personal mission to popularize the Stetson as the preferred topper among Western anglers.

In his autobiography, *A Trout's Best Friend* (written with Paul Schullery), Lilly recounted that one of his first serious angling companions, besides his dad, was an old woman, a neighbor and friend of his mother, whom everyone called Ma Wiedman. "The two of us would dig a can of worms in her chicken coop and go up to the Gallatin … and we'd catch our twenty-five each [the limit in 1935] in the morning, clean them, and go home for lunch," Lilly wrote. "Then we'd go back and get another fifty in the afternoon. It was my job to try to pawn them off on neighbors. It got so that often when I'd knock, they wouldn't answer the door."

Despite such apparent abundance and a profligate attitude regarding game, in retrospect Lilly came to realize that the resource wasn't what it seemed. "We had a lot of great fishing, but I don't know if it was really that much better then than now," remarked Lilly. "There were so few laws regarding harvesting fish, and so little protection for streambeds and habitat, that many rivers are probably in better shape now than they were when Ma Wiedman and I were at our peak."

The main difference between then and decades later boils down to ever-increasing population counts. Not of trout; of us. The fewer people who share the resource, the greater the illusion of abundance. Fewer people meant more fish to go around. In addition, the perception of space—i.e., elbow room—provided the standard yardstick for measuring the outdoor experience. As Lilly recalled, "My dad used to take me up the Gallatin Canyon for some fishing, and we were so spoiled that if we saw another fisherman, we considered it crowded. He [dad] complained that he didn't want to fish the Gallatin on the Fourth of July because he didn't want to break off the tip of his rod in somebody's ass."

One and Done

Around 1920 or so, Walen Lilly Sr. moved from California to Manhattan, Montana, where he opened a barbershop. There were several reasons for the move—recuperation from the flu epidemic that had swept through California, escape from a marriage gone bad, a complete change in career—but a man doesn't move to Montana to cut hair; a man moves to Montana to hunt and fish every minute he isn't cutting hair. Somehow, between hours spent fishing and barbering, Walen found the time to meet, woo, and wed Violet Collins, a local who was a descendant of famed Montana pioneer Mary Wells "Granny" Yates.

Walen Jr., aka Buddy (later Bud), was born in 1925. Soon after Bud's birth, Walen Sr. proclaimed that was that: no more kids. As far as Bud's future was concerned, the single-child arrangement couldn't have been more advantageous. Bud became his father's constant hunting and fishing companion. Lilly recalled, "Dad started me fly fishing as early as I could handle it. Having read all

the outdoor magazines, I was familiar with fly fishing, but my exposure to it was limited to the old snelled wet flies.… On my thirteenth birthday dad let me order a South Bend, nine-foot, three-piece split bamboo rod from Salt Lake City. It cost around twelve dollars. I lost that rod, but I do have my first creel. [It was so big] you could put alligators in it."

Standing knee-deep in his beloved Madison River, Lilly was moved to observe that even after decades of intensive river time he still had "that same excitement whenever I put a fly over a trout and the miracle happens" (above). As an officer in the U.S. Navy in 1945, Lilly wrangled shore leave in Japan, where he witnessed firsthand the immediate aftermath of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki (below).

Although nothing ever entirely overshadowed fishing for Lilly—not girls, or cars, or carousing with compadres—baseball came close. Like many other sports-obsessed fathers in America, Walen Sr. nursed visions of his son playing in the major leagues. It almost came to pass. Fifteen-year-old Lilly was so good he played on as many as three local baseball teams at once, including an independent all-adult town team. While playing second base for the Manhattan men's club, kid Lilly experienced the high point of his baseball career: hitting a ground ball single off a pitch by the incomparable Satchel Paige, the headliner for an all-black team that had been barnstorming the country.

Pro scouts came looking—two of whom, at his father's insistence, young Lilly took fishing. Lilly later recalled that they seemed more impressed by his fish-catching ability than by his ball playing. However, upon their return a couple of years later to take a second look, they offered the teenage wunderkind-angler a contract with the Cincinnati Reds farm team system, to take effect after high school graduation. It never happened. Instead, World War II came along and threw everyone, particularly draft-age males, an epic curveball.

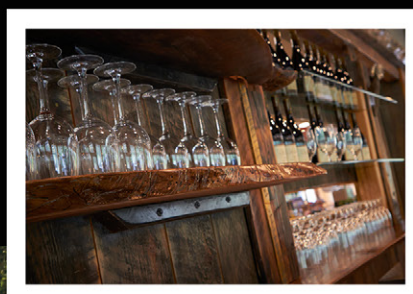
When U.S. Navy recruiters showed up in town, Lilly and a friend decided that going over to take the test would offer a legitimate way to ditch school for a few hours. He did not expect to score in the upper percentile, much less qualify for officer candidate school. The "special Navy training program," Lilly recounted, "turned out to be the greatest thing that ever happened to me because it gave me the chance to get a college education."

Faster than you could intone, "Anchors aweigh, my boys, anchors aweigh," the freshly enlisted teenager was sent off to the old Montana State School of Mines in Butte, Montana, for a 16-month grounding in engineering. From there, he was transferred to midshipman school in Throgs Neck, New York, where in due course he received his commission. He was 18 years old and an officer in the Navy.

Although, like many veterans, Lilly was reluctant to elaborate upon his experiences in the war, he made note of the fact that vivid memories of hunting and fishing in the Montana wilds provided a psychological boost. One episode Lilly was not loath to share occurred in the war's wake, on November 1, 1945. While their ship, the USS *General R. M. Blatchford*, was temporarily moored in a Japanese port, Lilly and a fellow officer took liberty ashore. Upon disembarking they made arrangements with some Marines to borrow a truck and drive through the atomic blast zone in Nagasaki. In a letter home, Lilly wrote, "The bomb was a complete success here, for the whole industrial area was knocked out of existence. Those buildings constructed of steel girders were pushed over and laid low like fallen grain … window glass was melted and all wooden things burned. The machines stood naked of their buildings.… Skulls and bones are still to be seen [three months after the explosion] among the rubble and thousands are still unaccounted for … children swarm the streets looking very dirty and hungry."

Despite the utter devastation he had witnessed, Lilly ended his letter on a quintessentially American upbeat note—a possible prospect concerning the spoils of war: "I have a line on some Jap rifles, dad, so I may have some for us to look at anyway."

PIONEERS & LEGENDS *continued on page 72*



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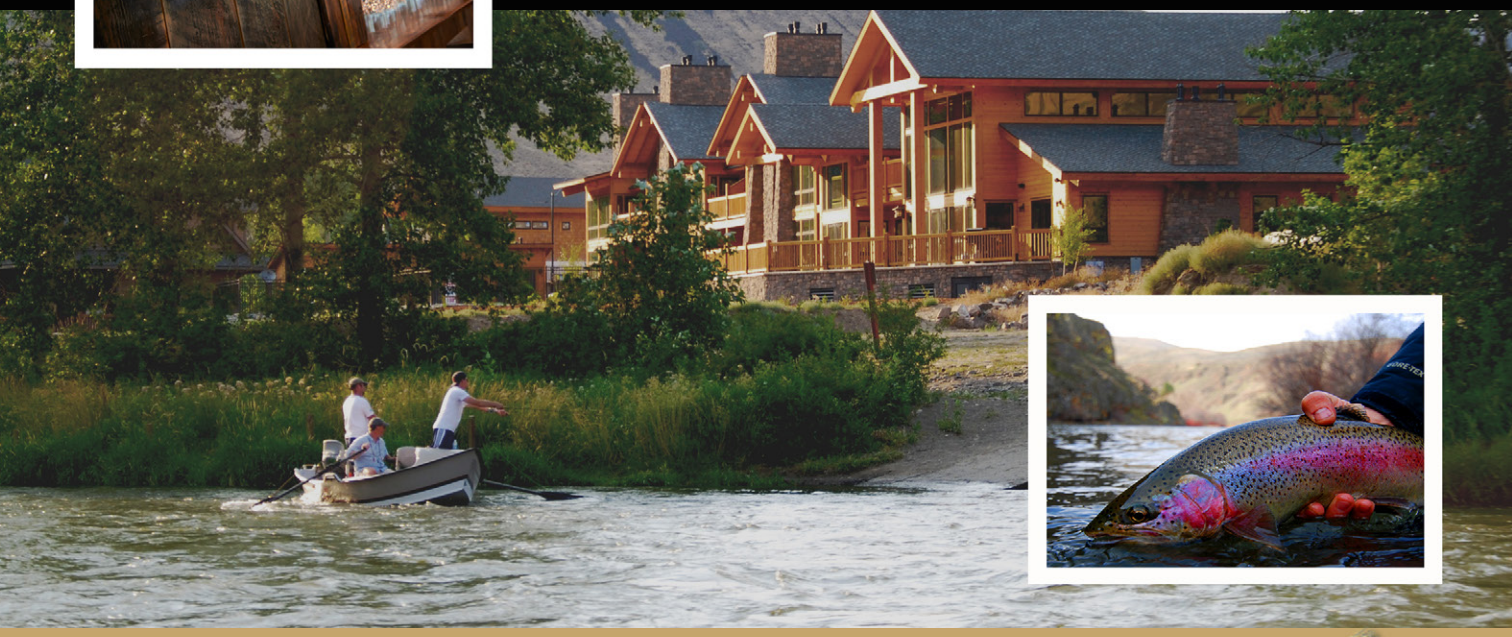

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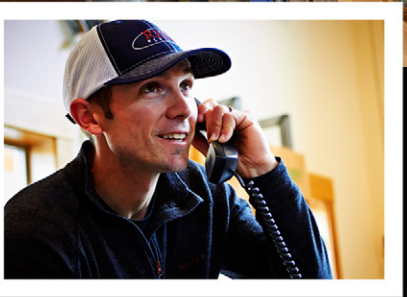

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Minnesota's Straight River Endures Challenges/By Jeff Erickson

I grew up in the North Star State, and few streams captivated my young angler's imagination like the Straight River. Located in north-central Minnesota near Park Rapids, surrounded by excellent bass, walleye, and northern pike water, the Straight is famed for surrendering big brown trout during an extraordinary, early-summer *Hexagenia* hatch. Veteran anglers venture into the bat-filled gloaming, nervously casting huge mayfly patterns to slurping "pigs" they can hear but not see. A favorite book from my youth—Kit Bergh's *Minnesota Fish and Fishing*—put it this way: "When a hatch occurs … trout sometimes go on the wildest feeding sprees a fisherman is likely to witness in his lifetime."

PHOTO BY JEFF ERICKSON

The Straight's reputation gradually faded, partly because of the resurrection of southeastern Minnesota's Driftless Region streams, which eclipsed the old king. Unfortunately, the Straight's diminution has also been linked to widespread deforestation, agricultural changes, and reduced groundwater quantity and quality. While the stream is cold enough to support trout both above and immediately below Straight Lake, which it flows through, its greatness lies in prolific downstream springs, which enhance its flows.

Threading through forests, farms, and wildlife-rich wetlands, the Straight is on the western edge of native brook trout range in the larger upper Mississippi River basin. Regionally, 275 square miles of land have been cleared for agriculture since 2006, according to University of Minnesota research. Brookies still retain footholds in Straight headwaters, but have vanished lower down. The river's notoriety is based on sustaining more temperature-tolerant wild browns, numbering more than 1,000 per mile in prime reaches.

While habitat-improvement projects have helped the Straight, it is imperiled by proliferating agricultural wells pumping groundwater from the Pineland Sands Aquifer. In particular, an expansion of irrigated potato fields has increased concern that the Straight's lifeblood springs are diminishing. Summer heat waves push water temperatures close to the 70-degree danger zone, threatening even hardy browns. Consequently, the Straight was added to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's list of impaired streams due to low levels of dissolved oxygen.

According to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) records, groundwater pumping permits in the watershed increased from around 100 in 1988 to 275 by 2014, with dozens more requested. Approximately 8 billion gallons are extracted annually, 90 percent for irrigation. The DNR requires pump tests before issuing new irrigation permits: The challenge is proving connectivity between groundwater withdrawals and a diminution of springs and river flows. Once an irrigation permit is granted—previously routine—withdrawal is difficult.

It's not just about trout. In 2014, Park Rapids was forced to drill a deeper well and open a $2.5 million water treatment plant, increasing water rates by 25 percent. Nitrate levels in wells that previously supplied the town's inexpensive water had climbed to levels threatening health standards. Private wells also showed worrisome nitrate levels. The likely cause: nitrogen fertilizer applied to permeable sandy soils. That same infusion of nutrients (and pesticides) into shallow aquifers also poses another challenge to the Straight.

Disagreements notwithstanding, diverse interests are discussing the complex issues. Following years of badgering by Minnesota Trout Unlimited, the DNR established a groundwater management area in the basin to monitor changes and bring groups to the table. The state Department of Agriculture is working with farmers to help them reduce both water and fertilizer use. A key player is the R.D. Offutt Company—Minnesota's largest irrigator, the nation's biggest potato grower, and owner of a local French fry plant, which draws on 9,000 acres of nearby potato fields. With farming changes, some growers have significantly reduced nitrogen use, while Offutt introduced a water recycling program at its facility.

But irrigation requests and nitrate levels are still rising: In 2015, the DNR stopped issuing additional permits pending an environmental review. "It's important that the DNR carefully consider the implications that this rapid forest land clearing and conversion will have on water quality, water supply, and related resources in this region and beyond," explains DNR commissioner Tom Landwehr. Ultimately, time will tell whether the Straight can convincingly reclaim its crown as Minnesota's best trophy brown trout stream, one 21st-century kids will still dream about.

PHOTO BY RUSTY CHINNIS

Chassahowitzka NWR, FL By Rusty Chinnis

The morning light was just breaking above the warm natural spring as we launched Captain Bryon Chamberlin's Hell's Bay skiff at the Chassahowitzka River Campground. An ethereal mist created by the cold March air mixed with tendrils of Spanish moss draping from a canopy of live oaks. I was heading downstream to the vast and seemingly endless Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge with Chamberlin and friend Captain Nick Angelo. The "Chaz," as it's often called, covers over 31,000 acres of saltwater bays, estuaries, and brackish marshes at the mouth of the Chassahowitzka River.

Located approximately 65 miles north of Saint Petersburg, Florida, the refuge was established in 1941 to protect waterfowl habitat. It's home to 250 species of birds and a wide array of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, including the endangered West Indian manatee.

We weren't here to bird-watch, but to fly fish for redfish and trout. Acres of exposed limestone and oyster reefs make this area prime habitat for many inshore species, but inhospitable to the inexperienced or faint of heart. Like North Carolina's Outer Banks, the area could be considered a graveyard of sorts—the final resting place of outboards and lower units from sport angling craft, not ships and men.

We wound our way down the sinuous river, careful to stay in the narrow rock-lined channel. Five miles from the spring, the river opened to broad saw grass marshes that line the Gulf. Bringing the skiff off plane, we idled past the marshes and onto the flanking shallows. The flats were pockmarked with hard-bottomed basins lined with mud and grass. We were fishing the backside of a winter cold front and taking advantage of the visibility afforded by the bluebird sky.

Chamberlin and Angelo like to fish low tides, even minus tides, whenever possible. The low water concentrates fish in basins as they wait for the tide to flood. Today the fishing time would be extended, as the north to northeast winds had blown more water off the flats than usual. The wind would also hold back the incoming tide, keeping the flats from flooding too fast and spreading the fish out.

Standard equipment for stalking reds and speckled trout ranges from (depending on conditions) 7- to 9-weight rods with floating lines. If it's flat calm and the fish are spooky, a 7-weight outfit with leaders to 12 feet provides a stealthier approach. If it's blowing hard, 9-weight outfits help to turn the leader over and allow a more accurate delivery of the fly. An 8-weight rod is the go-to outfit under normal condi-

PHOTO BY RUSTY CHINNIS

tions, for typical-size flies. Leaders don't need to be extra-long either; 9 to 10 feet is ideal. Shrimp and crab patterns, 2.5 to 3 inches long, in tans, browns, olives, and black, are best. Most anglers use flies tied with extra-small or small lead eyes on size 4 hooks. Bead-chain eyes are substituted if the redfish are prowling ultra-skinny water. There are also times when redfish will take top-water flies and gurglers have proven to be the best choice.

PHOTO BY RUSTY CHINNIS

Chartreuse/white Clouser Minnows are ideal for speckled trout, and a sinking-tip line helps get the flies down to the trout when you fish deep flats and cuts. The area also holds a few big snook, but you typically run into them unexpectedly while fishing for reds. According to Chamberlin, "When I encounter a snook, I'll throw what I have in hand, hoping I'll lip-hook them since I won't have a bite tippet."

Small black drum occasionally inhabit the rocky basins. Chamberlin and Angelo have found the drum will eat the same flies as redfish. When you spot a black drum, it's critical to present the fly close to the fish because it won't swim far out of its way to eat.

On that clear March day we had excellent conditions. In a period of seven hours we cast to numerous reds, landing almost a dozen in the 4- to 10-pound range. We also caught a number of trout, several of which pushed 3 pounds. The air had warmed late in the day as we returned to the spring and the campground ramp. A dip in the warm waters soothed tense muscles and washed the salt spray from our faces. Most of the day, the only sign of civilization we had encountered was the occasional angler and kayaker. It had been a wonderful day in a part of Florida where you feel like you've gone back in time.

Monmouth and Ocean Counties, NJ

By Captain Jim Freda

PHOTO BY CAPTAIN JIM FREDA

If you ever want to catch lots of striped bass on flies, then November and December is the time to hit the ocean waters of Monmouth and Ocean Counties in New Jersey. This time of year ushers in the peak of the southerly migration of striped bass, and hundreds of bass can be in right front of you. Blitzes erupt frequently, with 10- to 15-pound bass hammering flies on almost every cast for anglers positioned to cast into the melee. And then there are the epic days when 20- to 30-pound bass pretzel your rod to your heart's delight.

The action can remain very good right up until Christmas as the bass move south on their way to their wintering grounds off the Carolinas. Ideal ocean temperatures of 46 to 56 degrees, which trigger daily blitzes, are typical at this time. During the first week of November, the ocean temperature is normally 58 degrees, and it then drops 2 degrees per week. By the first or second week of December, 48 degrees is the norm. However, if strong northwest cold fronts barrel through the Garden State, the mass exodus of bait and bass will be accelerated and shorten the season.

During this migration period, three baits—peanut bunker, sand eels, and sea herring—dominate and ultimately dictate where the schools of striped bass are located. All three of these prey species are easily found by boat, from just off the beach to 3 miles offshore. Peanut bunker and sand eels also reside in the surf, a boon for surf-casting do-it-yourself fly fishers who can cash in on the action from beaches and jetties.

For fishing the surf, 9- to 10-weight rods and clear intermediate cold-water lines with 8- to 9-foot, 30-pound fluorocarbon leaders are ideal. Boat anglers should opt for 10-weight rods, 300- to 400-grain sinking lines, and 6- to 8-foot, 30-pound fluorocarbon leaders. Carry flies to imitate each of the three baits and match the hatch when you see what bait is present. Top peanut bunker imitations include Geno's Baby Angel, Popovics's Baby Bunker, Popovics's Bangers, Farrar's Bunker Fly, Skok's bunker patterns, and Lou Tabory's Slab Flies. All these flies have a wider profile and high light-reflecting properties to match the natural appearance of the bait.

For sand eel imitations, long, slender flies work best, including Jiggies, Clousers, Half and Half patterns, Stick Candies, flat-wing patterns, and tube flies. For sea herring imitations, Popovics's Beast Fleye, bucktail Deceivers, and Hollow Fleyes are my top choices. Big synthetic bunker flies and other herring patterns also work.

Walk-in access to beaches and jetties is easy: just park in a legal parking spot along the street or beachfront and walk on down. Kayakers can launch directly from the beach on west-wind days when there are no waves. Four-wheel-drive vehicles with the proper safety equipment and permit are also allowed on the beaches in Ocean County. Go to the New Jersey Beach Buggy Association website, www.njbba.org, for all the access points and requirements. A public fee-based launch ramp is located at the Belmar Municipal Marina, (732) 681-2266, www.belmar.com.

PHOTO BY CAPTAIN JIM FREDA

Editor's note: For guide service, contact Captain Jim Freda, Shore Catch Guide Service, (732) 762-0870, www.shore-catch.com.

Connecticut Lakes Area Backcountry Ponds, NH By Matthew Reilly

Northern New Hampshire's end-of-the-line township of Pittsburg sits on the Connecticut River, the diverse river renowned for pot-bellied tailwater browns, big brook trout, wild rainbows, and feisty landlocked salmon. The river originates in the aptly named Connecticut Lakes area, which encompasses the entire drainages of the four Connecticut lakes that feed the river's flow: 171,000 acres of working forest and preserved natural area, biodiverse and captivating. But the Connecticut River is only a small part of the region's fishery.

Pocking the conifers and rolling mountains are handfuls of small bogs and ponds—some puddles, some deeper. Some require hikes; others, a car with moderate ground clearance. Most harbor the North Country's crown jewe: dark, feisty brook trout. All offer a classic northern angling experience not to be passed up.

The big-dog fly shop in town, Orvis-endorsed Lopstick Outfitters, www.cabinsatlopstick.com, maintains rowboats on several of these ponds—available for rent for a modest $15 per day—providing the best access to these waters. Popular ponds include Big Brook Bog, Coon Brook Bog, and Moose Pond, all of which carry fly-fishing-only regulations.

New Hampshire's fishing season starts with ice-out, usually in the last week of April, and stretches through September 30 on the larger trout lakes and ponds, and through October 15 on the smaller bogs and ponds.

"The ponds start fishing best around mid-May and stay good, depending on the type of pond," says Bill Bernhardt, Lopstick's head guide. "Higher-elevation ponds will stay colder, and fishing is good throughout the summer. Lowland ponds fish best through June, though you may still see some evening hatches through July. There is a month or so of warm weather before the fishing picks up again in September, and I have had great days at the end of the season in October."

Visiting anglers would be well equipped with a 4-weight and a floating line, though some dedicated brook trout pond fishermen switch to sinking lines and 5- and 6-weights in deeper waters, like the northernmost Boundary Pond, which is significantly deeper than the other ponds. Aside from Lopstick's conveniently stashed boats, canoes, kayaks, and float tubes are excellent options for fishing these and nearby predominantly small ponds.

Bernhardt's fly suggestions are systematic: "Start with a dry and work your way down." Dry flies like the Parachute Adams and Blue-Winged Olives will fit just about any situation. Nymphs such as the Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear and Pheasant Tails retrieved slowly will do the job in the absence of rising fish, and hair-wing streamers and Woolly Bugger–type patterns shouldn't be overlooked. Stillwater brookies are structure-oriented creatures. Without rising fish, search for drop-offs and points. Cast flies around structure and close to the bank. Cover a rise with a dry when it presents itself, or strip a nymph or streamer through it. Don't forget the floatant.

One particular night on a highland pond in mid-June, I was fortunate enough to be in the presence of clouds of emerging insects. The tumultuous surface of the small bog was alive with the noses of feeding trout, silhouetted against the reflection of a burning sky. A packable one-man raft was my watercraft of choice, and I had successfully taken a handful of hand-size brookies by stealthily positioning myself within striking distance of a pod of fish and covering rises with a Parachute Adams.

The dark forest on the bog's periphery was experiencing a nightly awakening: owls hooted in time, frogs croaked, coyotes howled, and a pair of unidentified predators screeched wildly about the coniferous trunks. A chunk of the water's surface was gulped with a solid-sounding *thump*, and I wheeled in my seat to place my fly on the ring of the rise. A 14-inch brook trout resurfaced, ate, and then bore toward bottom. My rod bent, and I became a part of the drama of evening on a northern trout pond.

PHOTO BY MATTHEW REILLY

PHOTO BY KYRA PERKINSON

Tygart Valley River, WV By Nathan Perkinson

The Tygart Valley River (commonly shortened to just Tygart River) is a warm-water tributary of the Monongahela River. The Tygart rises in the Allegheny Mountains in West Virginia's Pocahontas County and flows north for about 135 miles to its mouth, between Grafton and Morgantown.

Smallmouth bass and panfish are the top targets in the Tygart, and if it's elbow room you're after, you'll find it, especially in the spring and autumn, when a majority of West Virginia's fly anglers are keyed in on trout.

Like many of West Virginia's rivers, the Tygart has a bit of a split personality. Plenty of sections run smooth and are easy to wade, while other stretches form a few Class III white-water rapids that, tempting as they may look, shouldn't be waded regardless of your experience. Be sure to check out the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources website (www.wvdnr.gov/fishing/public_access.asp) for great tips on accessing the Tygart River.

First up is a nice stretch around Elkins that features rocky structure and holds a lot of bass. You can fish the Tygart at River Bend Park in Elkins or along US Highway 250 in and around the small town of Junior. The river is relatively narrow in this area and studded with boulders, so concentrate on riffles, runs, and pocket water, using weighted streamers and crayfish patterns for smallmouth.

You can also access the Tygart at the covered bridge in Philippi. The Philippi Covered Bridge was built in 1852, survived the first land battle of the Civil War, and was saved from nearly burning down in 1989. The bridge continues to serve Highway 250 today. You'll find easy public access with a canoe launch at Blue and Gray Park near the bridge. The Tygart is broad and shallow in this area. Focus on fallen timber, rocky structure, and deep holes for smallmouth and panfish.

The Tygart River is dammed near Grafton, forming Tygart Lake, which is best fished by boat, with shoreline angling being limited. However, Tygart Lake State Park has a nice lodge and cabins, so if you want to stay in a central location with access to both the lake and the river, there's no better place. Grafton City Park, just below the Tygart Lake dam, provides additional access to the river. You can fish the tailwater or launch a boat from the park. Finally, be sure to check out Valley Falls State Park, about 20 minutes north of Grafton. There, a stunning set of waterfalls showcases the power of the river. Wading is not allowed in the falls area, but you can catch bass and panfish in the slower-moving upper river section of the state park.

Bring tapered leaders ranging in length from 6 feet for top-water fishing to 12 feet for dropping weighted streamers into deep holes. Strike indicators are handy for picking up subtle takes when you fish flies along the bottom. Carry flies to fish at all levels, from top to bottom. Stock your box with poppers, divers, and sliders ranging from size 12 for panfish to size 4 for smallies, along with various streamers, bucktails, and Clouser Minnows; carry weighted crawfish patterns to fish deep. Fishing a crayfish pattern beneath a strike indicator is always a good bet for smallmouth, and the Tygart's rocky structure and deep sandy holes provide plenty of opportunities. Lightly weighted foam spiders, fur-body ants, and wet flies are guaranteed to catch a bucketful of sunfish in slow-moving pools and beneath the bankside brush.

Fly fishing for bass and panfish on the Tygart River begins to warm up in May, with the season in full swing by June and running through September. Cool temperatures can put the fish down by fall, though there are usually enough warm days in October that you can get in a few more days of autumn bass fishing before the first snow falls.

Northern Ohio Fly Fishing Expo Slated for January 20

North Coast Fly Fishers will hold its 16th annual Northern Ohio Fly Fishing Expo on Saturday, January 20, at the Cuyahoga Valley Career Center in Brecksville, Ohio. Expo 2018 will feature four seminar series (Masters, Fishing Locations, Fly Tying, and Getting Started), fly-tying demonstrations by celebrity and club tiers, many vendors, and nonprofit organizations. The featured speaker is George Daniel, author of the highly regarded books *Strip-Set* and *Dynamic Nymphing*. Conveniently located in northeast Ohio near Interstate Highways 77, 80, and 480, the show offers activities for the whole family, from those thinking about trying the sport to highly experienced fly fishers. You can even try tying your first fly. Seminars include women enjoying the sport, and teaching the kids and grandkids. Help is available to assist scouts working on the fly fishing merit badge. For more information, visit www.ncff.net.

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PHOTO BY KYRA PERKINSON

Yellowwood Lake, IN By Nathan Perkinson

Brown County State Park, Indiana's largest and most popular park, is a true slice of paradise, just an hour from Indianapolis, but there's one thing missing: a nice fishing hole.

Enter Yellowwood Lake, a 133-acre impoundment of Jackson Creek in nearby 23,000-acre Yellowwood State Forest, located between Nashville, Indiana, and Bloomington, Indiana, a few miles from Brown County State Park, off State Route 46. The lake is most easily accessed by following Yellowwood Road north off SR 46 to Yellowwood Lake Road, where you'll find the park office, campgrounds, and several great spots to pull over and wet your line.

Yellowwood Lake is typical of southern Indiana hill-country reservoirs: an earthen dam holds back Jackson Creek, flooding the hollows and creating extensive cover for warm-water species like largemouth bass and panfish. The lake is only 30 feet deep, so fly rodders have little problem fishing at any depth. Fishing usually warms up in mid-April and lasts well into October.

Fly selection for largemouth should include bass bugs in sizes 4 through 2/0 and lightly weighted, 2- to 4-inch-long streamers like Whistlers and Clouser Minnows. Balsa poppers, foam spiders, and bright beadhead nymphs in sizes 6 through 14 are perfect for panfish. A boat allows easy access to the entire lake, but gasoline-powered motors are not permitted, so be prepared to troll or paddle. Anglers on foot need not worry, as there are ample opportunities to fish from shore. The eastern shore, dam face, and campground areas are easy to access on foot and provide great cover for bass and panfish.

Target dense cover with bass bugs and streamers fished on a floating line. The closer you can cast to tight cover, the better your chances. The heavily wooded western bank is a great spot to catch bass in the evening shadows. When the sun is overhead, target shady tree lines or jerk a Clouser Minnow around thick submerged vegetation in deeper water.

Panfish tend to congregate in the shaded creek arms and small bays. The weedy bays near the picnic and camping areas are top-notch sunfish spots. You'll catch a load of bluegills, crappies, and pumpkinseeds on a flashy nymph or small popper by quietly walking the perimeter of the creek arms and sight-fishing the shallows. A pair of long jetties near the youth campground also hold lots of panfish and offer plenty of casting room.

The backwater into Jackson Creek is broad and marshy, but you can wade the creek itself for about a mile above the lake before it becomes too small to fish. If there's such thing as a silver lining to an already bright cloud, Jackson Creek receives a modest stocking of rainbow trout every spring, so early-season fly anglers can supplement their warm-water adventures with a rare shot at southern Indiana trout.

Yellowwood Lake and the surrounding state forest are a great diversion for anglers who are visiting nearby Brown County State Park. Moreover, Yellowwood stands on its own as a destination for anglers who dream of warm summer days and live for the subtle plops of bucketmouth bass and bright sunfish slurping bugs from a mirror-still lake.


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EXPOSURE

Winter on a Michigan River

By Kevin Feenstra

When the Great Lakes freeze during bitter cold winters, waterfowl, including swans, seek open water on the rivers.

Capturing this photo of an eagle, with the moon in the background, took luck and a long lens.

In the coldest water conditions, steelhead can be taken with a slow, deliberate presentation, often with a sculpin or baitfish pattern.

An angler fishes a wooded stretch of river. In water littered with logs and branches, heavy tippets and bendable hooks prevent excessive loss of flies.

Early Black Stoneflies are harbingers of spring.

Lake-run browns remain in many rivers through the winter months, feeding heavily on other fish.

Tom turkeys take on brilliant colors as the spring mating season approaches.

Salmon carcasses add biomass to the rivers.

The big rivers are majestic on cold winter nights. This is a long exposure in the darkness, as clouds obscure a bright moon.

On the coldest mornings, ice rings form around the rocks.

Classic fly-fishing gear makes landing a steelhead all the more rewarding. This nice buck was a thrill on a cold day.

Eastern bluebirds arrive with spring weather.

Kevin Feenstra, www.feenstraguideservice.com, is a Michigan-based fly-fishing guide and freelance photographer.

PHOTO BY ERIC RICHARD

Laurel Run, PA

Getting Lost for a While

By Henry Ramsay

The first time I caught a wild brook trout, I remember holding it in my hand for a moment, awestruck by its brilliant colors and intricate markings. Its beauty was something that pictures in books and magazines had failed to accurately capture; I thought the fish cupped in my hands was truly perfect.

That trout was about 6 inches long and it rose to a Female Adams drifted down the surface of a small pool flowing under an overhanging tree limb. Its back was dark olive and laced with paler olive vermiculation; its flanks were dotted with a mixture of bright lemon-yellow speckles and ruby spots haloed in ice blue. Its fins were brilliant tangerine, edged in front with boldly contrasting bands of coal black and bright white.

I kneeled alongside the creek and admired the fish briefly before it vanished back into the depths of the pool as quickly as it had taken the fly. That first brook trout was caught most of a lifetime ago, yet is still vivid and fresh in the back pages of my mind. We tend to remember our first date and our first fish, and that initial encounter with a wild brook trout started a lifelong love affair with quiet ribbons of cool water that flow away from the beaten path—streams that are tangled in rhododendron, mountain laurel, ferns, and hemlock, and that weave their way through the narrow creases of tight valleys that always seem to remain hidden in the shadows and are penetrated by sunlight for only brief moments of the day.

To this day I still seek out those small mountain brooks whenever I get the chance, always enjoying the headwater streams and the soft music they play as their currents mix and tumble over stones—the haunting waters where these brilliantly colored brook trout live.

Four decades after my first brook trout encounter, Eric Richard and I drove down a bumpy dirt road that wound down into a tight valley in the woods. Richard operates Coveted Waters guide service in central Pennsylvania, and several times he had invited me to fish with him. His persistence finally paid off, and I ventured out to join him on Laurel Run, one of his favorite streams. The truck rattled its way downward over the rocks and washed-out gullies, and we stopped momentarily to watch a grouse cross the road in front of us before continuing to the end of the narrow track, where a small cabin sat nestled in the shadows between the trees beside a small mountain stream.

An old man emerged from the cabin; he looked as if he were a part of the woods himself, with his weathered-gray, chest-length beard. He talked of hunting spring turkeys as he sat down in a rocking chair on the front porch, his shotgun leaning against the cabin wall. "Ain't nothing in there but natives," he cackled. "Just go ahead and fish."

With permission obtained, we headed for the stream. Richard and I exchanged glances and laughed as we pulled on our waders: "Nothing but natives."

It was a small ribbon of ice-cold water, twisting through a dark forest, and from the depths of its pools came brightly speckled fish that gleamed like jewelry in our hands as we worked our way upstream, taking turns fishing each likely-looking run or pool. In the tree branches spreading above the water, bright green inchworms were hanging from fine silken threads; in the currents below, eager brook trout waited for them to drop into the creek. Some ate an inchworm pattern fished as a dropper, while others took an Ausable Wulff with a bright salmon-orange body drifted on the surface. For two men who had spent their boyhoods chasing these fish in the headwater streams of Pennsylvania, it was a great day on a remarkable stream.

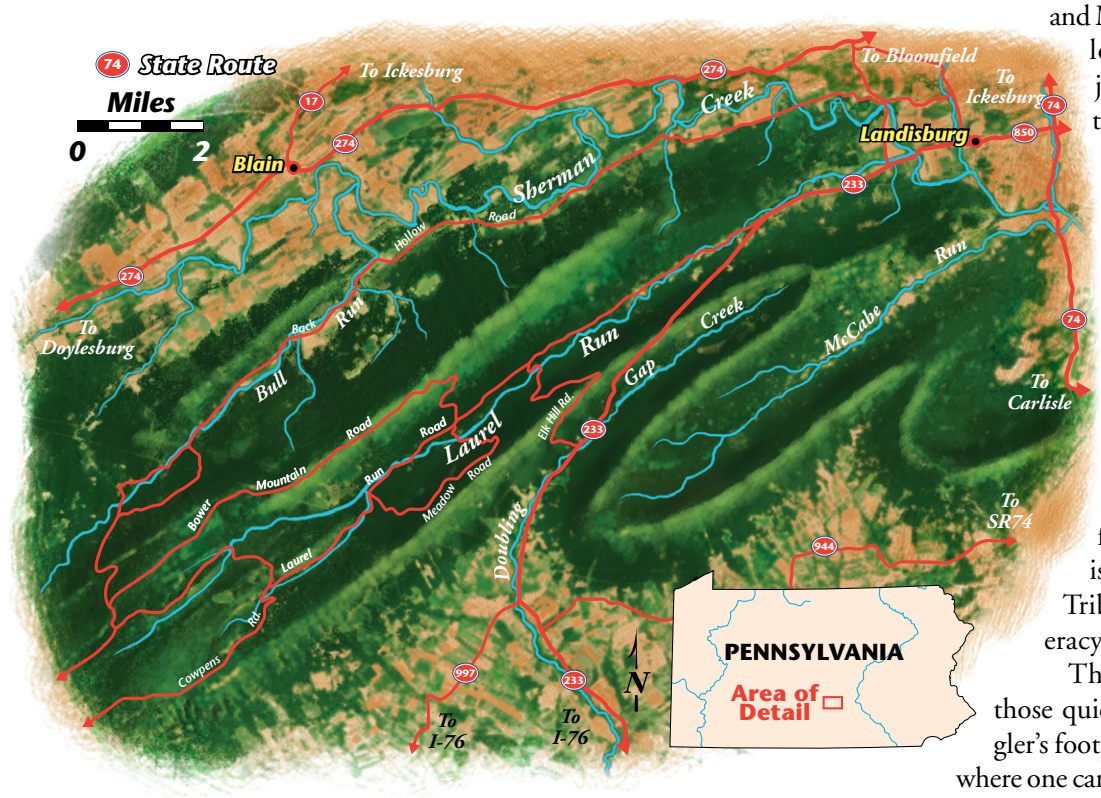
PHOTO BY HENRY RAMSAY

Laurel Run is a wild trout stream with a mixture of brown and brook trout. Brown trout are more plentiful in the lower section, the upper stream has plenty of native brook trout (above). While the north branch of Laurel Run is a much smaller stream than the lower section, its larger pools can hold lots of fish (left).

Laurel Run is a beautiful stream flowing through the heart of the Tuscarora State Forest of Perry County in central Pennsylvania, approximately 35 miles west of the state capital, Harrisburg. The stream originates in western Perry County in Gunter Valley between Blue Mountain to the south and Bowers Mountain to the north, and then flows northeast for more than 17 miles to its confluence with Sherman Creek in Sheaffer Valley, 3 miles west of the small village of Landisburg.

Laurel Run has two branches. The north branch begins just east of Three Square Hollow Road and south of Sherman Mountain, and flows east for 3 miles before joining the South Branch near the intersection of Laurel Run Road and Meadow Road. The 2.5-mile-long South Branch heads just north of Blue Mountain, approximately 0.5 mile northeast of the intersection of Three Square Hollow Road and Cowpens Road. The headwater branches, as well as most of Laurel Run, flow through the scenic Frank E. Masland Natural Area and Tuscarora State Forest—a 96,000-acre area in Cumberland, Franklin, Huntington, Juniata, Mifflin, and Perry Counties that is named after the Tuscarora Tribe of the Iroquois Confederacy indigenous to the region.

This fertile stream is one of those quiet places where another angler's footprints are seldom found and where one can get lost without actually be-



ing lost. The streams to the south of Pennsylvania's Blue Mountain are well known by most anglers and were made famous by writers such as Vince Marinaro, Charlie Fox, Ernest Schwiebert, Ed Koch, and Ed Shenk. In the heart of the Cumberland Valley, renowned limestone streams such as the legendary Letort Spring Run and Big Spring Creek bring anglers from all over the country, while Laurel Run, just to the north, has remained quiet, flowing in relative obscurity and well off the radar of most anglers.

Laurel Run is a healthy stream that offers more than 12 miles of fishable water. The stream has the appearance of a typical mountain freestone stream, with numerous runs, riffles, plunge pools, and undercuts, but it's steep, dropping nearly 1,000 feet in elevation from its headwaters to its confluence with Sherman Creek. The headwater branches begin as seepages from the base of the mountains and hillsides. Both branches are about 10 feet wide by the time they meet, and each offers about 2 miles of trout water before they join up. The main stem varies in size from section to section as it flows through shale rock formations. At some points the stream stretches to 20 feet wide, and in other places it narrows to perhaps 10 feet across as some of the stream flow is diverted underground by faults in the shale layers, only to reemerge to join the surface water farther downstream. Laurel Run forms some surprisingly large, deep pools that often hold one or more big brown trout.

The lower end of the creek is dominated by wild brown trout. As you move upstream, brookies become increasingly common. Within Tuscarora State Forest, brook trout dominate the fish population for the next few miles. From the convergence of the two branches up into the headwaters, almost all the fish are brook trout. An 8-inch brookie is a trophy here, but what they lack in size they more than atone for in their numbers and their vibrant coloration.

Brown trout here are beautifully colored; they typically range from 8 to 12 inches, but larger fish are fairly common. Cautiously sneak up on some of the better holding pools and you may hook a surprisingly large brown trout. As the season progresses toward summer, more large browns show up in the stream. One of the things I enjoy about Laurel, aside from the sheer beauty of the stream, is that there is always the potential for surprise. A pool may yield a small brookie or a big brown. Richard and I refer to one particular pool as the "Gum Line Pool" after he located a big hook-jawed male brown there one day.

The water quality is exceptional, and Laurel Run holds a wide array of mayfly, caddisfly, and stonefly species. But you needn't worry about hatch matching. The trout seldom feed selectively. I like to fish a buoyant dry fly with a dropper nymph dangling 8 to 12 inches below. My favorite dries are the Ausable Wulff, my Little Yellow Stonefly, or a tan X-Caddis. These flies float well in the broken water. Dropper nymph patterns should be tied with tungsten beads or lead wire to get them down quickly on short drifts through the swift currents. Top dropper nymphs include the Hot Spot Hare's Ear, Pheasant Tail Nymph, Frenchie, Copper John, Rainbow Warrior, and Green Weenie. In the deep pools, you may need a weighted large stonefly nymph or Woolly Bugger. In Laurel Run's short, deep, swift pools and pockets, it's essential to get nymphs down quickly before they drift out of small feeding zones.

Carry some streamers, including small bucktails; they can work wonders at times. Also load a box with an assortment of beadhead soft hackles tied on size 14 and 16 hooks; be sure to include a BH Pheasant Tail Soft Hackle—it's tough to beat on these waters.

I like short, fast-action rods, in 4- and 5-weight, so I can cast easily and accurately in tight quarters. Casting can be somewhat of a challenge in the narrower stream sections and where branches overhang the water; sometimes you need to be creative to get the fly in the water, especially where there is limited room for a backcast. Richard, one of the best casters I know,

Ramsay's Little Yellow Stone

By Henry Ramsay

PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook:	Daiichi 1260, sizes 14–16
Thread:	UNI-Thread Light Cahill, size 8/0
Tails:	Light ginger hackle barbs divided with a ball of Sulphur Yellow Superfine Dubbing
Abdomen:	Sulphur Yellow Superfine Dubbing
Wing:	Bleached, fine deer hair over pale yellow Z-Lon yarn
Thorax:	Sulphur Yellow Superfine Dubbing
Hackle:	Light ginger wrapped in open turns and clipped flat on the underside
Head:	Sulphur Yellow Superfine Dubbing

Ausable Wulff

Originated by Fran Betters

PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook:	Dry fly, sizes 12–16
Thread:	Fluorescent orange, size 6/0
Tail:	Woodchuck guard hair
Body:	Rusty-orange Australian opossum fur
Hackle:	Cree or grizzly hackle and brown hackle
Wing:	Kip tail or calf body hair

uses a modified bow-and-arrow cast to get flies into tight areas on small streams with amazing accuracy. The cast is made using only the leader and a foot of fly line: hold the fly in one hand and pull the leader tight, but not tight enough to force the rod to bend; hold the rod at a low angle just above horizontal and snap forward quickly by squeezing the rod grip, pushing forward with your thumb and coming to a quick stop with the rod tip aimed at the target. A moderate-action rod works best for this type of cast, which allows for better accuracy than the conventional bow-and-arrow cast.

Finding Your Way

To find Laurel Run, take State Route 233 westward from the town of Landisburg to Laurel Run Road, which parallels the stream for much of its length. The lower section of Laurel Run flows through private property, but most landowners will grant permission when asked. The lower sections are approachable from Lightner Road, Lake Seldom Seen Road, and Laurel Run Road. The Tuscarora State Forest boundary is 3 miles upstream from SR 233 on Laurel Run Road, and most of this area is publicly accessible. Meadow Road provides another good access point to the main stream. Above the confluence of the two branches, the South Branch is accessible via Laurel Run Road and Cowpens Road. The north branch is far more remote, and a section of about 2 miles is accessible only by foot via the North Branch Trail, which parallels the section of stream from the confluence of the two branches upstream to another point where Laurel Run Road crosses the stream again. Parking areas are located at various places along these roads.

As long as you're visiting this quiet little part of Pennsylvania, consider the other attractions found in Perry County. One of the more mysterious places in the immediate area is the small Pioneer Cemetery located just off Laurel Run Road between the looped ends of Meadow Road. The little cemetery sits quietly in the woods, surrounded by an old dry stone wall; many claim it is the site of paranormal activity and it is visited often by ghost hunters. A few visitors leave coins or candles on some of the headstones, and one grave has a collection of trinkets and toys placed around it by visitors. The cemetery's inhabitants were residents of the 18th- and 19th-century lost town of Pandemonium, a local mystery and a source of intrigue as to how and why the town disappeared.

A trained eye can find remnants of Pandemonium along Laurel Run in the form of stone building foundations, a mill raceway, stone steps, and walls along what were likely small fields around the edges of the village that have become overgrown and settled peacefully into the valley's woods over time.

When you're ready to sit down over a beer and a burger to contemplate the fate of Pandemonium, head for Chick's Laurel Run Lodge, a local tavern and once a gathering place for bluegrass musicians who traveled here to jam with the fiddle-playing owner of the establishment. The tavern still hosts live music on weekend nights. If you enjoy craft ales, chase down a cold Appalachian Brewing Company birch beer (as well as a good lunch) at Poppa'z in the town of Alinda, a mile or two east of Landisburg.

I'm especially fond of Laurel Run; it beckons to me when I need some quiet time and a chance to cleanse my soul in the soothing water of a cold mountain stream. It transports me far away from a busy life and provides solitude off the beaten path. Each time I land one of the stream's little wild brook trout I reconnect with that young boy tucked deep in my heart holding a beautifully colored brook trout for the first time.

Henry Ramsay, www.ramsayflies.com, is a well-known Pennsylvania-based fly tier and photographer.

Laurel Run NOTEBOOK

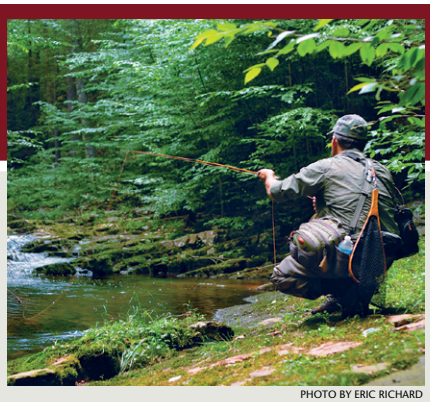


PHOTO BY ERIC RICHARD

When: Spring through fall; check the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission website, www.fishandboat.com, for season dates.

Where: 3 mi. west of Landisburg, PA. Take SR 233 west to Laurel Run Road.

Access: Walk-and-wade fishing from roads, plus hike-in access to the north branch.

Appropriate gear: 7- to 7.5-ft., 4- to 5-wt. rods; floating lines; 4X tippets.

Useful fly patterns: Wulffs, Ramsay's Little Yellow Stone, X-Caddis, nymphs with tungsten beads, soft-hackle wet flies, Woolly Buggers, small bucktail streamers.

Nonresident license: $26.90/3 days, $34.90/7 days, $52.90/annual, plus $9.90 trout/salmon permit.

PHOTO BY HENRY RAMSAY

Guides: Coveted Waters (Eric Richard), (717) 789-4706, www.covetedwaters.net.

Maps: Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN KILEY

Banks Lake, GA

Mystery in a Southern Swamp

By Jonathan Kiley

Have you ever found yourself singing along with a song, not knowing exactly what the lyrics meant, but knowing the tune meshes with how you are feeling?

It happened to me not long ago. I had made some new friends: Jon Luke, creative director for *Eastern Fly Fishing*, and Steve Maeder, the magazine's advertising manager. They are like-minded people, and my interactions with them have helped me learn more about myself.

We were on a weeklong fishing adventure and needed to change plans when our initial destination turned out to be unproductive. I suggested an alternative—Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge, named for its centerpiece, Banks Lake—I'd recently begun exploring. I'd heard it was challenging, one of the most difficult fisheries to figure out in southern Georgia. Before my first trip I had done plenty of homework, searching the internet for any helpful details, but finding little of use.

Like many anglers, I'm always looking for an edge, maybe a new style of fly or a new tying material to work with. I'll search relentlessly for information online—articles written about a place, maps that might offer some insights, even photos that might help me decipher something useful about the fishery. Such quests help me be better prepared for the unknown and are what led me to start my Fly Skinz business. But Banks Lake remained enigmatic; there just wasn't much useful intel.

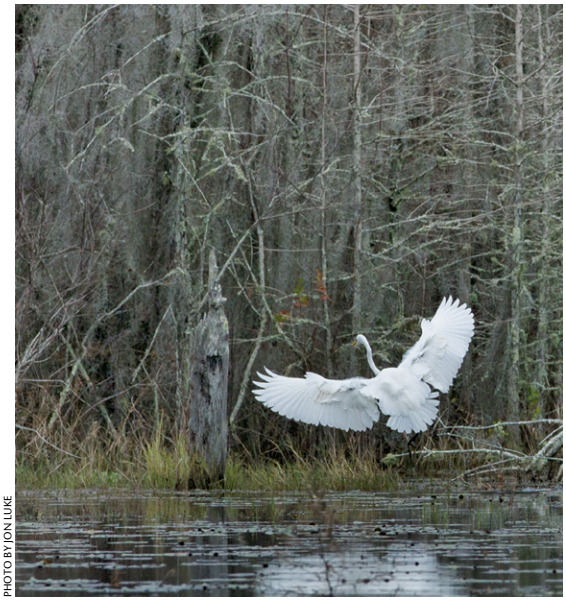


PHOTO BY JON LUKE

A great egret takes flight on Banks (right). The author fooled this 7-pound Banks Lake largemouth bass with his Kiley's Vertical Leech (above). Kayaks are a great conveyance on Banks Lake, allowing anglers to move quietly through the cypress trees and lily pads while targeting wary largemouth bass (opposite). Photo by Jon Luke

Banks Lake, just 30 miles north of the Florida border and 152 miles south of Macon, is an example of a Carolina bay. According to Wikipedia, Carolina bays are "elliptical depressions concentrated along the Atlantic seaboard," forming ponds and lakes. Wikipedia explains, "Various geomorphological hypotheses have been proposed to account for the bays, including action of sea currents when the area was under the ocean or the upwelling of ground water at a later time." The lake spans more than 4,000 acres, but only a quarter of that is open water accessible to boats.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN KILEY

Luke, Maeder, and I fished Banks Lake the next day without success, which only fueled my desire to figure out this fishery. I soon returned, and kept going back, even high-centering my boat a few times on stumps. This sketchy place began to strike fear in me; on those initial outings, I wandered rather aimlessly about the lake—productive looking water was everywhere.

Finally, I decided to look for a channel of some kind. My GPS indicated a location called Alligator Alley, and when I arrived at the spot, it looked plenty fishy. Profuse lily pads sprawled everywhere, signifying excellent bass habitat, but the prime real estate was so extensive it was intimidating. I was overjoyed at finding so much great-looking bass cover, but nearly panic-stricken into inaction by my inability to decide where to begin. So I decided to simply stop and study, and come up with a plan.

I settled on searching the edges of the channel using a white popper, systematically covering the water closest to the boat and then progressively casting farther out. However, in my zeal to discover the secrets of this productive-looking area, I began casting and popping like an over-caffeinated lunatic. Once I realized my tempo was erratic, I slowed down and let the bug sit on the water for a time, allowing the ripples to clear.

Patience paid off when a fish took the popper, and I yelled, "Fish on!" Nobody was around to hear me, but I was excited. I had no idea what species of fish I'd hooked, but it was heavy. But before I could haul the beast into sight, it was gone, just like that. I was amazed at how strong that fish had been and befuddled about how it had come unpinned. So far, this fishery was proving to be quite humbling, especially in light of my recent streak of catching big bass just about everywhere else.

My fascination with Banks Lake deepened. Back in my everyday life off the water, I couldn't take my mind off what I'd experienced and I continued to mine for information, even in the most unlikely places. I thought

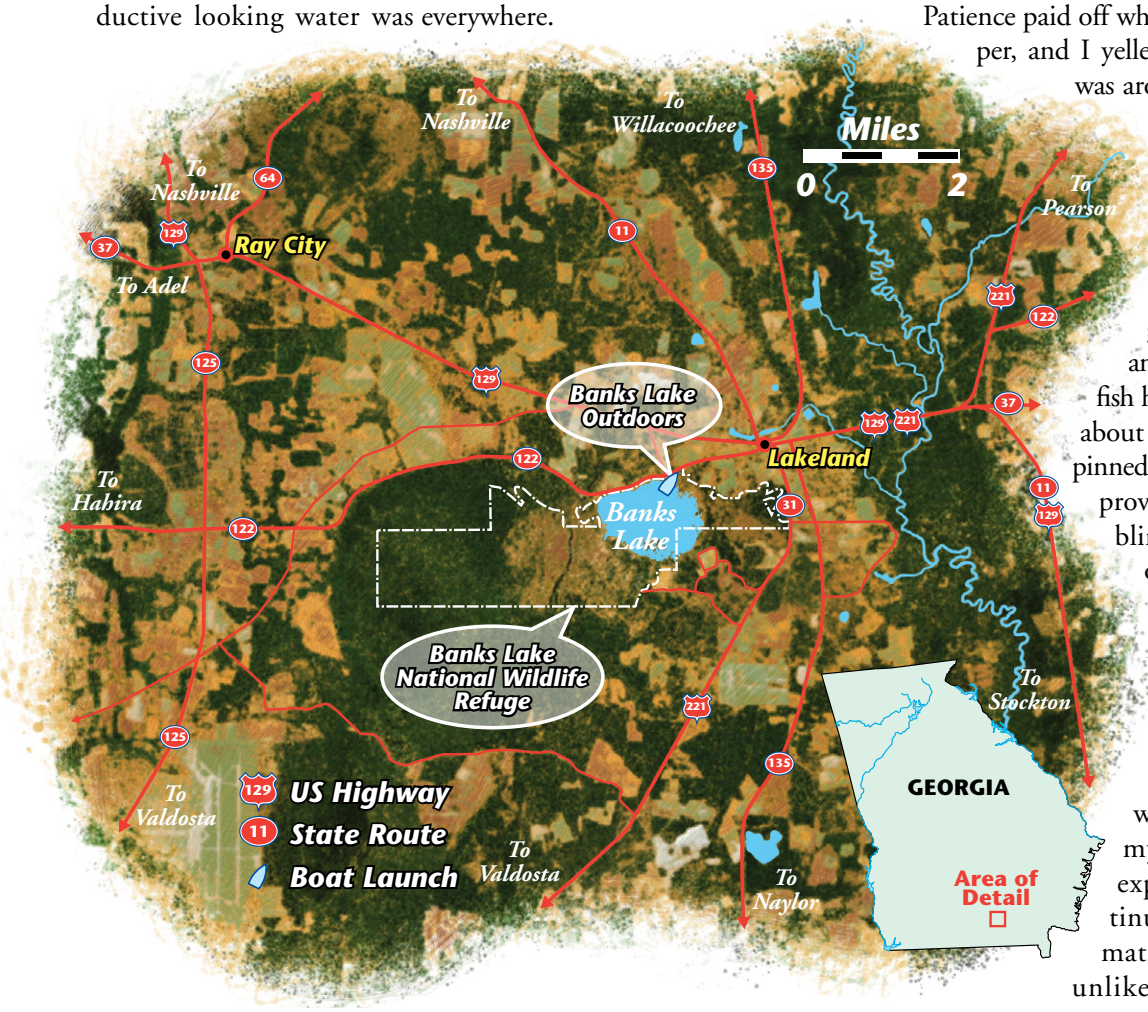


PHOTO BY JON LUKE

Banks Lake is loaded with fish-holding structure. Exploring the wood, submerged weedbeds, and lily pads is the key to cracking the code to success (above). The Swampy Frog is a productive pattern for fishing heavy cover, such as logs, pads, and grass (below). For obvious four-legged reasons, swimming is not allowed in Banks Lake (left).

that maybe just around any corner—in any store, bait and tackle joint, gas station—I'd discover some nugget that would unlock the secrets of fishing Banks Lake. I'd see someone wearing a fishing shirt and hit them up for intel, asking if they knew anything about the fishery, but my queries usually elicited answers such as "There ain't nothin' out there, man," or "You can't fly fish that."

Occasionally, I'd get lucky and see a few old-timers fishing deep in the cypress trees on the lake; they tended to use either black or white lures—no colors. They swore no other shades were productive, and then followed up with questions of their own upon seeing my fly tackle: "What kinda rod is that?" "Are you fishing for bream?" "Aren't those rods for trout fishing?"

But these anglers were extremely helpful, gold mines of information about Banks Lake. They relied mostly on soft-plastic flipping jigs in the form of worms, salamanders, and crayfish—all of which can be replicated with flies with the many modern synthetic materials available.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN KILEY

Based on their staunch adherence to using black or white lures, I did what any slightly neurotic, compulsive fly angler would do: I tied a variety of flies in black and white. I also invented a new tying material. I had noticed that one of the white lures used by the anglers I met had a pearlescent hue, so I created a version of Kiley's Exo Skin with a pearl-green tint; it became my new Metallic Exo Skin. Armed with these new flies, including a white-bellied frog pattern that I named the Swampy Frog,

I figured the Banks Lake bass didn't stand a chance. I was confident this fly would be the answer and I knew fishing surface flies was effective based on the results I'd had with my white popper.

As often as possible—every other weekend, and even after work some days—my mission to figure out this fishery continued at Alligator Alley. One day, while cruising through the channel, trying to avoid hitting lily pad stems with my trolling motor, I noticed a sizable log partially out of the water; yellow-bellied slider turtles were basking on the log, which looked like prime cover for a bass, so I kept my distance to avoid alerting any fish to my presence and double-hauled a long cast to drop the frog pattern alongside the log. I retrieved the Swampy Frog with steady pulls of line—one strip, two strips … *galoop*. Instant gratification: the new fly did the trick. Kiley one, bass zero.

Swampy Frog

PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook: Ahrex TP10, size 2/0

Body: 4 mm foam shaped with Hareline Dubbin foam cutter; Fly Skinz pearl-green/white Exo Skin and olive/brown Exo Skin

Eyes: Deer Creek Zombie Eyez

Weed guard: 30-lb. mono (made adjustable by poking a hole in the Exo)

Legs: Olive/black flake Hareline Dubbin Crazy Legs

Note: A tutorial is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQC1g_rKAes&t=10s.

The bass in this swamp are probably the strongest I've encountered. Perhaps it's the tannic opaque water, or maybe it's their need to avoid numerous predators, such as alligators, ospreys, great blue herons, snapping turtles, and larger predatory fish, such as pickerel and bowfin. I continued to explore and experiment, and soon came to a critical realization: when there is a disturbance nearby, the likelihood of catching a fish in the same spot is nil. I think the nearby fish either slowly cruise away or sink in the weeds. To a bass, any disturbance in the water could turn out to be a predator.

My code cracking continued for weeks and months. I kept going back to the channel at Alligator Alley because it offered consistent action. Then I tried something new. So far, I had focused all my efforts on top-water action. But at some point the perfect conditions for top-water fishing would end for the year, and to truly master this fishery I'd need to be versatile in my strategies and tactics. So I decided to create a subsurface fly I could retrieve along the bottom. The fly needed to be weedless, with lots of built-in movement, and I opted for white in keeping with what I'd learned from those gear anglers. Ultimately, I built a white spoon fly that I outfitted with a white Slow Rolla Tail. It had more wiggle than the inflatable man at a used car lot. I figured the Banks Lake bass wouldn't be able to resist.

On my first trip with the new fly, using an intermediate line, I made a cast along the edge of the lily pads and parallel to the channel. After the fly sank, I began a slow retrieve and soon felt a distinct and newly familiar double tap. Immediately, I knew what was at the end of my line: a bowfin. I'd learned to recognize the way they hit a fly while fishing other nearby water.

This ancient species of fish elicits ire from many anglers for its propensity to aggressively outcompete bass and other fish for a fly or lure. But I love catching bowfin—aka swamp trout, grinnel, pain in the arse, or whatever you want to call them. They hammer flies and pull like a tarpon. A bowfin is a blast on a fly rod, even though the fish's sharp, fly-shredding teeth mean more time spent at the tying bench whipping up replacements for badly chewed patterns. Those sharp teeth also dictate that you keep your hands out of harm's way.

Having caught both bass and bowfin at Banks Lake, I considered the possibility of what I termed a "swamp grand slam," catching a bass, bowfin, and bluegill in the same day. The feat seemed plausible. So I set my sights on the gateway drug, so to speak, for many people new to fly fishing: the ubiquitous sunfish. I'd heard rumors of big Banks Lake bluegills, along with shellcrackers and even crappies. I started with small top-water flies that imitated tiny baitfish or grasshoppers, as well as flies that look like nothing in nature, and numerous trout dry flies. I soon discerned that little white baitfish patterns, as well as flies that resembled crappie jigs, worked best.

Suspicious Swimmer

PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook: Gamakatsu SS15, size 1/0

Tail: White medium Slow Rolla Tail sandwiched between white Zonker strip with superglue

Body: 0.035-in.diameter lead wire, size 1/0 Kiley's Spoon Skinz, 20- to 30-min. BSI Epoxy mixed with Loon pearl-red powder

Note: You need a drying wheel to make these or you can use UV resin; a tutorial is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KzcalGLD6w.

The bluegills in Banks Lake look different than their clear-water brethren. The Carolina bay swamp water makes the fish look as if they were caught in a crude oil slick or some sort of Chernobyl incident; they are dark and colorful.

Consistent success on Banks Lake requires putting your time in. I enjoyed success from April through November, but be forewarned that the summer months—which produce excellent fishing for aggressive bass—are brutally hot. Even when the water temperature reached 90 degrees I still found aggressive fish waiting to hammer my flies. These sultry summer days often bring brief rain showers. Keep an ear peeled for distant thunder, however, and get off the water at the approach of lightning storms. Usually you just get rain, and then the sun returns to reheat the air before sundown. I've found that approaching and retreating storm fronts are better predictors of Banks Lake fishing than moon cycles and daily temperature changes. Approaching cold fronts shut these bass down quick. Don't bother fishing for anything but crappies during these times, although crappies are a blast on a fly rod. Use small, bright flies and a rapid retrieve with frequent pauses. Crappies often take the fly on the drop, so be ready to set the hook when you see or feel the line slowly pulling back.

Banks Lake is primarily a boat fishery; if you don't own a boat, you can rent canoes, kayaks, and other watercraft on-site. Big motors are not really needed; I have fished extensively with just a trolling motor, and have also kayaked most of the lake. Besides, stealth counts here, so a loud engine is often a disadvantage.

Remember that here in the Deep South you can expect lots of bugs, as well as snakes and gators. You don't want to be on the wrong end of them. Bring bug spray and keep your eyes peeled. I've watched in awe as gators dismantled turtles by biting right through the shell. That crunch echoes through the cypress trees and sounds like a tree cracking in half. Respect the power of those jaws.

Next time you are in the Peach State, take time to explore Banks Lake, a place that rewards anglers with a keen sense of adventure and exploration.

Georgia-based creative fly tier Jonathan Kiley is the brains behind Fly Skinz, www.flyskinz.com, producer of innovative tying materials.

Banks Lake Wildlife Refuge NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY JON LUKE

When: April–November.

Where: Southern GA.

Headquarters: Lakeland. *Information:* Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge, www.fws.gov/refuge/banks_lake. *Information/boat rentals:* Banks Lake Outdoors, (229) 569-0147, (229) 482-9755, www.facebook.com/bankslakeoutdoors

Access: Primarily a boat fishery; single access point to Banks Lake located on the western edge of Lakeland along SR 122.

Appropriate gear: 6- to 8-wt. rods, floating and intermediate lines (clear and muted-color lines are best), 15- to 20-lb. fluorocarbon tippets.

Useful fly patterns: Foam poppers with and without weed guards; unweighted Deceivers (white, black, silver, gold); Suspicious Swimmer, spoon flies (gold, pearl white), Swampy Frog and other frog patterns (white, yellow, or black belly), Vertical Leech, salamander patterns and crawfish patterns (black, olive, with a chartreuse hot spot for muddy water or overcast conditions).

Necessary accessories: Boat, canoe, kayak, or small johnboat with trolling motor; polarized sunglasses; sunscreen; insect repellent; gnat spray (sold locally in gas stations).

PHOTO BY JON LUKE

Nonresident license: $10/1 day plus $3.50 each additional day, $50/annual.

Maps: www.fws.gov/refuge/Banks_Lake/map.html.

ALL PHOTOS BY NICK CARTER

North Toe River, NC

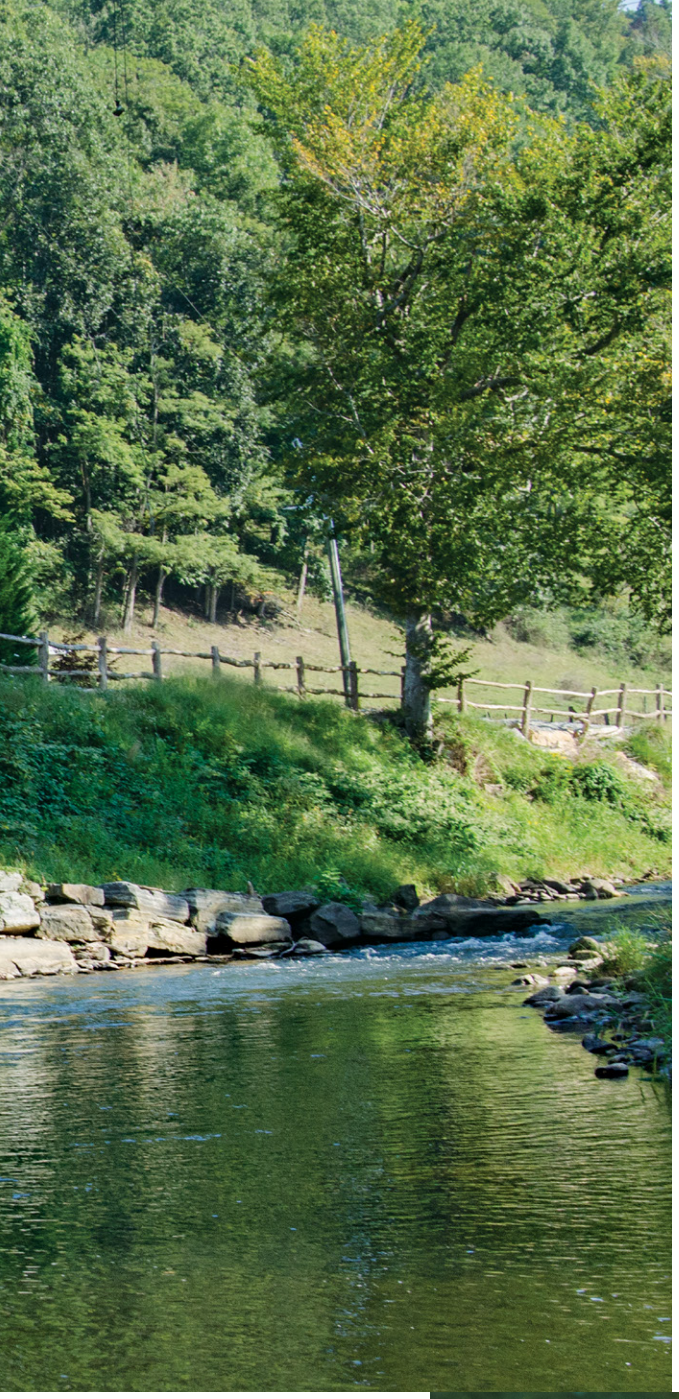
Slide Down the Bank by the Side of the Road

By Nick Carter

It's interesting that trout fishing in North Carolina's High Country doesn't receive more attention than it does. Spanning seven counties along the state's northwest border with Tennessee, the region boasts some of the highest peaks in the east, with Grandfather Mountain topping out near 6,000 feet.

Every Southeastern trout angler knows high elevations make for clear, cool mountain streams, and those streams hold trout. It's as true in the High Country as it is anywhere else.

Someone should to tell the marketing department they dropped the ball. While fly fishers flock to North Carolina towns like Brevard, Bryson City, and Cherokee to fish high-profile rivers like the Davidson, Tuckasegee, and Oconaluftee, the High Country receives less attention from anglers. This region, centered around Boone and Appalachian State University, is more widely recognized as a destination for its ski resorts. Yet there are some fine trout streams flowing from these hills.



Perhaps no river in North Carolina is more underutilized as a trout fishery than the North Toe River. It has garnered some press as an excellent smallmouth bass river in its lower stretches. But other than a small delayed-harvest section in the town of Spruce Pine, I didn't even know the river offered a viable trout fishery before speaking with Bob Ivins, owner of Mountain Troutfitters guide service. He and guide Cade Buchanan were getting ready to open my eyes.

Trout in the Valley

The North Toe rises as a tiny trickle near the town of Newland, a ridge west of Sugar Mountain Resort. At the head of the river valley, Newland, the Avery County seat, sits in a low point, surrounded by mountains that top out around 5,000 feet. ("Low point" is relative. With an elevation higher than 3,600 feet, Newland is the highest county seat in the eastern United States.)

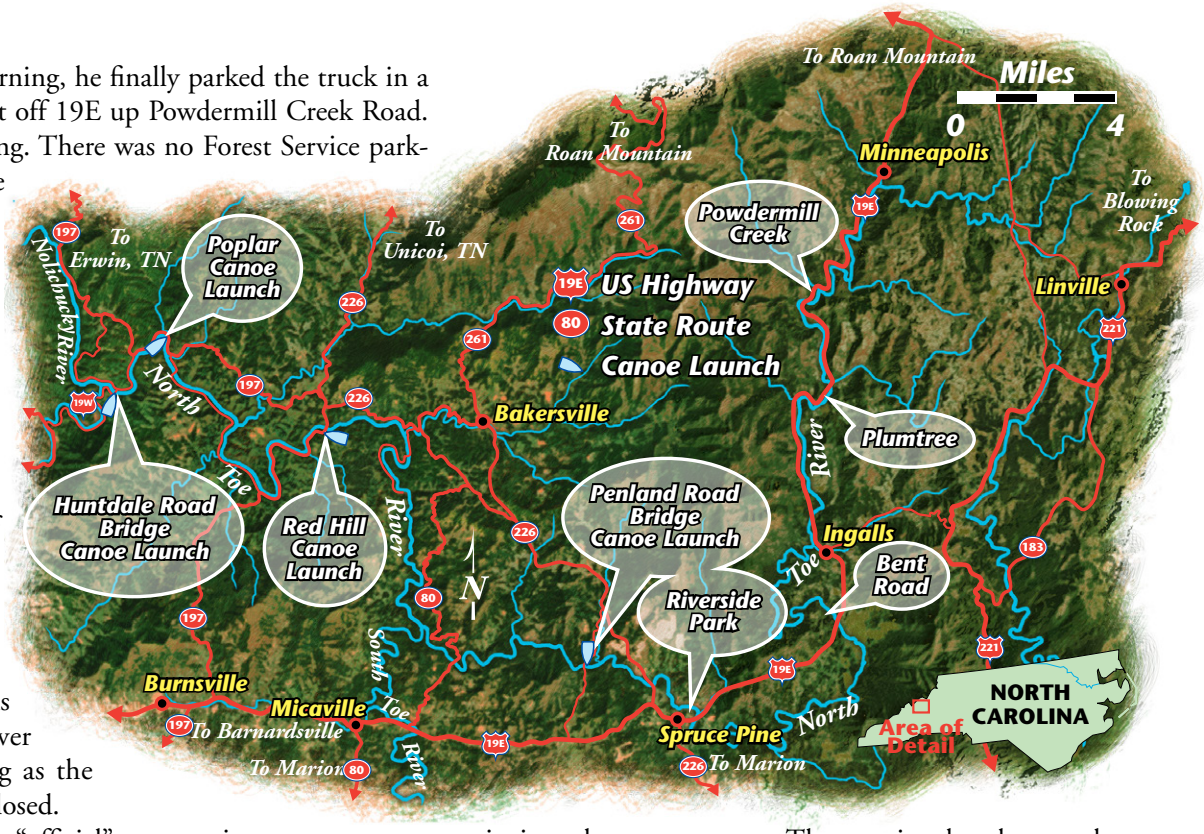
The North Toe holds trout where its tributaries stream from the mountains and join around Newland, but the river here is little more than a rill. After leaving town, it loses elevation, gains flow, and passes through a privately held fishing club along Old Toe River Road. It emerges again to the public near Minneapolis, where it is large enough to be considered a small river.

Downstream of this point, there are more than 12 miles of hatchery-supported water that hold a good mix of freshly stocked trout, holdovers, and wild fish. From Buchanan's truck, I toured most of the upper river. Almost all of the river where it flows through Avery County runs next to US Highway 19E, and as we drove he pointed out favorite stretches and access points.

He even showed me the house he grew up in, which sits in a small cluster of homes across the street from the North Toe. From the time he could hold a fishing rod, Buchanan crossed the street daily to pester trout. Before that, he was probably turning over the river's rocks to find crawdads and salamanders. Most anglers have their home water, where familiarity breeds affection and experience divulges the type of knowledge that can deepen to intuition. It later became clear that Buchanan is completely at home in the North Toe's brown-tinged waters.

It is not a wild place like many of western North Carolina's high-elevation trout streams, yet the North Toe has pastoral charm (spread). This gorgeous North Toe rainbow was drawn from a shadowed eddy with a big, dark, and heavily weighted stonefly nymph (right).

About midmorning, he finally parked the truck in a church parking lot off 19E up Powdermill Creek Road. This was interesting. There was no Forest Service parking area, and there were none of the regular roadside pullouts a seasoned angler learns to watch for. Also absent were "NO FISHING" and "POSTED" signs. This must be the kind of river access oldtimers remember, when farmers allowed passage through their fields and there was never a problem as long as the cattle gates were closed.



There are a few "official" access points on the upper North Toe, like the beautiful spot across the street from the Plumtree Presbyterian Church on 19E. These were negotiated between the state and private landowners. They are marked with small signs. But don't think they are the only places one can get to the river. There is easy roadside access to long stretches of good water. And while there isn't much signage indicating where one is allowed to fish, there also isn't much signage restricting access. Some of this roadside water probably remains available because of the limited fishing pressure the river sees. Anglers should be respectful of property owners for everyone's sake. The open-to-all nature of much of the upper North Toe is likely due to the limited use it receives. It's also worth considering the services of a guide. Local knowledge and connections sometimes open up water where accessibility might be a little murky.

A white cross and steeple stood over the river bend where we dropped into the river to fish the first run of the day. Downstream of a rocky shoal, lightly stained water coursed into a wide pool. Imported chunk rock lined the bank to stave off erosion, and a split-rail fence ran along the roadside in view.

Although this stretch of the North Toe is rural, it is not a wild place. It is less rugged and remote than the streams on North Carolina's Pisgah Game Lands. The river meanders through sparse development, following the low line of the valley floor. We fished between tree-lined banks past small houses and under bridges. Cattle watched us from behind wire in rocky green pastures. The occasional car hummed up the highway. Wading was easy, and the cold water felt good as a cool summer morning gave way to afternoon sun. This river has a pastoral charm.

Buchanan didn't waste any time bringing fish to hand. In deep summer, a big stonefly nymph under an indicator was all he needed to fish. It was simple, and it produced. A standard 9-inch stocked rainbow was followed by a small and colored-up wild brown. Later, a big, dark, battered-

looking brook trout took the fly. That fish might have been reared in a hatchery, but it had been in the river awhile. Its struggle to adapt was evident in scarring and feathered fins. It was not a pretty fish, yet it elicited a certain amount of respect, or perhaps pity. There is irony to be found in a creature toiling to survive in an environment that should suit its nature.

There were examples of the opposite, as well. Bright little stream-born rainbows and browns, multiple hatchery fish that appeared to be thriving, were all fun and pretty to look at, but they took a back seat when Ivins called for a net man. He was prospecting with a stonefly nymph in a small, shaded pocket of deeper water against the bank. It was a boulder eddy just downstream of a bridge hole I was fishing. No more than two minutes prior, I had given up on the eddy after thoroughly dissecting it with a streamer. I guess big fish are sometimes hungry for something other than smaller fish.

The Blind Squirrel Brewery at The Vance Toe River Lodge sits riverside in Plumtree. As out of place as the venue may seem in these rural environs, a warm meal and a dozen craft brews on tap are hard to argue with after a day on the river (above). The upper North Toe River snakes through pretty highland farms in its upper stretches. Barn quilts, large paintings reminiscent of quilt squares, adorn many barns in the area. These decorations are a trend that gathered momentum from the Midwest in the early 2000s. Now 48 states have barn quilt trails that take motorists through the countryside to look at and photograph barn quilts (left).

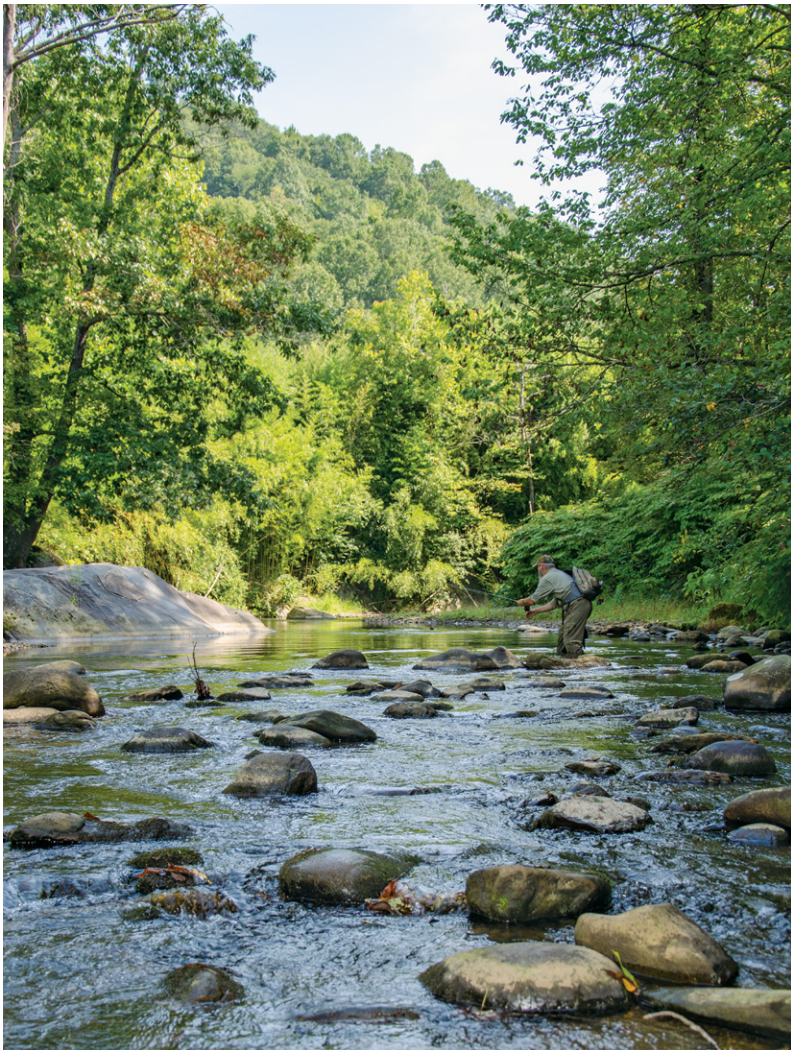
With his small-stream setup, Ivins had a bit of a fight on his hands. And when Buchanan finally tailed the fish to lift it from the water, he showed us a thick and healthy 18-inch rainbow with vibrant rose-colored gill plates. It was a nice fish, good enough that its release called for a lunch break.

Ivins hadn't prepared the standard guide service lunch of sandwiches, chips, and cookies dished up under a shade tree on the bank. Instead, we headed down the river to Plumtree, a small mountain community with a post office and a church that serve clusters of homes tucked out of sight in mountain hollers. Plumtree is a pretty place. The 1989 Kurt Russell film *Winter People* was filmed there, and some of the buildings and a log cabin used in the movie still stand at a bend in the river where there is an official angler's access point.

There's also a small lodge with a restaurant and the attached Blind Squirrel Brewery, which seemed odd and out of place. Far from any sizable population center—in the middle of nowhere, really—we sat down at a bar in a pub that had 10 or 15 craft brews on tap and a menu offering elevated renditions of typical bar food. Lunch was good, as were the atmosphere and the service. The Vance Toe River Lodge might make a good base camp for exploring the area, but the real reason for mentioning it is how odd it is that this place even exists. Western North Carolina might as well be the buckle in the Bible Belt. Churches outnumber restaurants three to one, and unless it comes from a mason jar hidden in the spring house, alcohol is generally frowned upon.

For a touch of more traditional local flavor, any fly fisher in the area needs to stop in at the Faye Hughes Store in Linville. This place is like stepping back in time. There is a modern, well-appointed fly shop, Highland Outfitters, on the main drag where you can get all the necessities. Right around the corner on an out-of-the-way backstreet, Faye's is a general store that might as well be a museum of locally tied old-fashioned flies.

Grinning at the chance to talk fishing, owner Paul Hughes sat on a stool by the front door beneath a mounted wood duck, its plumage as dusty and cobwebbed as the merchandise. What Hughes referred to as "junk" for sale has been crammed in a jumble about the room. Hardware store? Clothing store? Sporting goods retailer? It's tough to put a name on this place, but after the eyes adjust to the dim lighting they fall on time-etched glass cases. Each case holds stacks and rows of small plastic boxes. Each little box holds a handful of a life's work for Hughes and his wife, Faye.



Skinny pocket water backs up into deep bend pools as the brown-tinged North Toe River meanders through the valley floor (above). North Carolina stocks the upper North Toe with browns, rainbows, and brookies, and there is also a strong population of naturally reproducing wild fish (below).

For half a century they have tied and sold the flies that were popular when Hughes was a boy in the 1930s and '40s.

There are newer patterns as well as old ones, all wrapped tightly and carefully, but with a distinctive style. It's hard to put a finger on it. There's just something that feels classic about these flies, as if they were created with a blind eye to the evolution of fishing flies. They appear utilitarian, designed to catch fish rather than fishermen.

I finally settled on a handful of Yellow Palmers, wet-fly versions of the Yallerhammer that is so ubiquitous in Southern fly tying. I didn't need any flies, but chances were I would never see anything like these again. When Hughes rang them up, I was stumped upon learning he only takes cash. He let me leave the store with them for an IOU, which I made good the following day. Like those old-timey flies, which work just as well as they always did, transactions based on a man's word have largely become a thing of the past. It's good to know there are still places like Faye's.

Delayed Harvest

Anglers will find more mountain culture, as well fish, downstream in Spruce Pine. The North Toe enters Mitchell County and runs through this mountain town, which promotes cultural tourism a little more than places upstream. It's a good destination for those traveling with folks who might not fish.

This part of the river is generally thought of as the mixing point between trout water and smallmouth bass water. It gets a little warm in summer for trout, so the state has designated a delayed-harvest section to keep trout anglers busy during the cooler months.

The 2-mile delayed-harvest stretch, which runs through the heart of town, is stocked heavily and managed under catch-and-release regulations from October into June. Those looking for obvious access to a lot of trout in water that is easy to fish will find it in Spruce Pine. This stretch is also designated as a Mountain Heritage Trout Water, which means anglers can legally fish it with a three-day Mountain Heritage license that costs only $5. That's hard to beat for beginners or out-of-state anglers looking for a long weekend in the mountains with their family.

Of course, this piece of water receives pressure. It is wide and flat, with easy access and easy wading. Because it is low in the drainage, it is bigger water and there are some deep holes where stocked fish tend to congregate. Getting

nymph rigs down deep where the fish are is a key to consistent success. Egg patterns, worm patterns, flashy beadhead nymphs—all the typical delayed-harvest flies will work.

But if you like variety, tie on a streamer and you're just as likely to hook a chunky smallmouth bass in this lower section of the river, especially when the stocked trout numbers begin to thin out in the summer months.

Summer Smallies

The lower North Toe downstream of Spruce Pine is one of the best places in North Carolina to bug up bronzebacks. It fishes best from late spring through early fall, and float trips in canoes, kayaks, rafts, or other inflatables can result in days with dozens of smallmouth bass falling victim to popping bugs and streamers.

Like the upper river, the lower North Toe has few official access points, so it's necessary to have a boat that can be hand-launched. As Buchanan put it, "It's mostly slide down the bank by the side of the road" access. It is also shallow in places, which makes navigation in a traditional drift boat nearly impossible. Wading anglers will also find roadside access at highway rights-of-way.

There are close to 9 river miles between the end of the delayed-harvest stretch in Spruce Pine and the North Toe's confluence with the South Toe north of Micaville, in Yancey County. From that point, the flow turns north and continues another 20 miles until it joins the Cane River to become the Nolichucky southeast of the Tennessee border. Every inch of it is prime smallmouth bass water; however, the river drops into a gorge downstream of the Poplar boat launch at Pigeonroost Creek. From Poplar all the way into Tennessee, the gorge is dotted with Class IV and V rapids that are challenging even for experienced white-water paddlers.

Buchanan says he frequently fishes the stretch from Red Hill to Poplar. It is a ton of fun casting a popper to back eddies and dead water from the bank and waiting for an explosive top-water take. Deep summer is the best time to catch bass on top. When they're not looking up, smallmouth hold on the river's many rock ledges. Buchanan says it's tough to beat a big Woolly Bugger for pulling bass off ledges. Patterns with a little copper flash do a good job mimicking the crayfish that smallies love.

Pound for pound, smallmouth bass pull harder than most fish in fresh water. Put them in a river, where they spend their existence battling current, and the power of their bulldog runs can be astounding for fly fishers accustomed to delicate trout. Aggression and brute force are the attributes that make smallmouth bass so much fun on a fly rod. On a 5-weight, even a 1-pound smallie feels like a freight train set loose on the rails that run along the bank of the North Toe.

North Toe River NOTEBOOK

When: Year-round.

Where: North Carolina High Country, Mitchell and Avery Counties.

Headquarters: Spruce Pine. *Information:* www.highcountryhost.com.

Useful flies: Elk Hair Caddis, caddisfly emergers, Stimulator, Adams, Tungsten Golden Stone, Girdle Bug, Prince Nymph, Copper John, Hare's Ear Nymph, Pheasant Tail Nymph, San Juan Worm, egg patterns, Sculpzilla, Zoo Cougar, Woolly Buggers, popping bugs (various colors).

Appropriate gear: 4 to 6-wt. rods, floating lines.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses, hat, drinking water.

Nonresident license: $18/10 days, $36/annual, plus $13/special trout license. $5/day Mountain Heritage Trout Waters license (only good in Mountain Heritage Trout Waters).

Fly shops/guides: Mountain Troutfitters, (828) 387-6534, www.mountaintroutfitters.com; Highland Outfitters, (828) 733-2181, www.highlandoutfittersnc.com; Faye Hughes Store, (828) 733-5145.

Book/maps: *Flyfisher's Guide to North Carolina & Georgia* by Nick Carter. *North Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

Author of Flyfisher's Guide to Georgia & North Carolina, *Nick Carter is a frequent contributor to* Eastern Fly Fishing *magazine*

ALL PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHE PEREZ

Otter Creek, VT

A Long, Strange Trip

By Christophe Perez

Otter Creek may not enjoy the same name recognition as some other Vermont streams—say, the Batten Kill—but locals have long relied on the creek for excellent fishing, be it for native brook trout, hardy rainbows, fat browns, or large northern pike. Some sections also hold smallmouth bass, muskellunge, and fish that most fly anglers have never encountered, such as longnose gar and bowfin.

Fly-fishing guide Brian Cadoret prospects for trout below Middlebury Falls in the center of Middlebury (above). Nymphs and streamers fished deep are often the best way to connect with trout hugging the rocky bottom below Otter Creek's waterfalls (spread). This northern pike, caught and released by Brian Cadoret below Twin Bridges in Weybridge, is only a small representative of its species; pike over 40 inches long are rather common in lower Otter Creek (left center).

The wide variety of fish species in Otter Creek is explained in great part by its sheer length and geography. It is, after all, the state's longest stream. From its source on the western slope of Mount Tabor, in the Green Mountains, the creek meanders 112 miles through western Vermont. And while most major Vermont streams flow southward, Otter Creek flows in the opposite direction, south to north, to empty in Lake Champlain.

Framed to the east by the Green Mountains and to the west by the Taconic Mountains and the southern tip of Lake Champlain, Otter Creek served as a convenient route of passage for Algonquins, who occupied the east side of the creek, and Iroquois, on its west side. They also traveled along Otter Creek and its valley for hunting and fishing. Several of the names given to the creek by Native Americans already referred to otters, which were then abundant. The French explorer and cartographer Samuel de Champlain made the same observation when he named the creek "*la Rivière aux loutres*"—"the river with otters"—in 1609, while scouting the contours of the lake that now bears his name.

Rutland is the largest town along Otter Creek and is Vermont's fastest-growing community. But the quaintest are undoubtedly Middlebury and Vergennes, on the lower section of the creek. US Highway 7, which parallels the creek for most of its course, links all of these communities. In this area, traveling anglers can find many choices of accommodations, from campgrounds to upscale B&Bs, and enough good eateries to satisfy their hunger and thirst. Of particular interest to craft beer and spirits aficionados is the

Otter Creek Brewing Company, Appalachian Gap Distillery, and Stonecutter Spirits in Middlebury.

Middlebury is also home to excellent fly-fishing guides, particularly Brian Cadoret, Dave Konopke, and Evan Collins. Cadoret is the co-owner of Stream and Brook Fly Fishing, while Konopke and Collins both guide for Middlebury Mountaineer, an outdoor outfitter and guiding service in the center of Middlebury. These highly regarded guiding services offer trips for cold-water and warm-water species along the entire length of Otter Creek, as well as in its excellent tributaries.

Dave Konopke, a fly-fishing guide for Middlebury Mountaineer, fights a hardy rainbow trout in a section of Otter Creek running through Wallingford. There, for 0.25mile or so, fast-flowing riffles and deep pools harbor rainbows, browns, and brookies (above). Rainbow trout like this one, netted by fly-fishing guide Dave Konopke in Wallingford, inhabit several fast-flowing and well-oxygenated sections of Otter Creek (below).

Brookies, Browns, and 'Bows

Otter Creek offers varied opportunities to fly fish for trout, starting with native brookies in its headwaters, in Green Mountain National Forest. There, the creek makes a 4-mile run as a small mountain brook before entering Emerald Lake; it then emerges on the northern side of the lake a much slower stream, meandering across a low-gradient meadow in Dorset. This stretch, sometimes referred to as "the Danby swamp," harbors brook trout, but is too deep for wading and is best fished from a kayak or canoe.

Much more accessible is the Otter Creek State Wildlife Management Area in the small town of Mount Tabor, where the state stocks two-year-old "trophy" trout. A short walk from its main access point on Highway 7 leads to a deep pool holding large brook, brown, and rainbow trout. As you might expect from any readily accessible and stocked fishing spots, this one receives a fair amount of pressure. But many non-wading anglers fish only this one pool, and less-pressured trout are a short hike away.

Save for some deep pools, this section of the stream is easy to wade, and trails parallel the stream on both banks. Anglers visiting this section at dawn in late spring and early summer sometimes find the quietude interrupted only by the distinctive sound of big browns rising to caddisflies. These are good times to fish two-fly rigs featuring a dry caddisfly pattern over a weighted caddisfly pupa or larva imitation. A variety of attractors, streamers, and large nymph patterns, whether drifted or stripped slowly through the pools, can also work wonders on this section.

Another noteworthy stretch of trout water hides a few miles downstream, in Wallingford. There, for 0.25 mile or so, a rockier bottom and faster current provide suitable habitat for rainbows and browns up to 15 inches long. I was introduced to this section by Konopke, an inveterate trout bum and high-stick nymphing expert. High-stick nymphing can be very productive in the fast-flowing and deep sections of Otter Creek, where the key to connecting with trout is to get your fly to sink fast and drift along the bottom for as long as possible. For this,

Konopke relies most often on tandems of nymphs, the dropper being the heavier of the two flies.

Below Wallingford, Otter Creek slows and becomes more of a warm-water fishery, though trout inhabit several sections of the lower creek where hydroelectric dams and waterfalls create well-oxygenated water. The most accessible of these areas are Mead's Falls (aka Center Rutland Falls) in Rutland, Middlebury Falls in Middlebury, Middlebury Lower Falls in Weybridge, and the Weybridge Project Recreational Area (known locally as Twin Bridges) in Weybridge, and Beldens Falls in New Haven. Wading isn't advisable on these sections when the stream gauges in Rutland and Middlebury record flows higher than 900 cubic feet per second (cfs). Lower flows (below 700 cfs) improve not only the safety of wading anglers, but also the quality of the fishing. Konopke explains, "There are so many current breaks in these sections that you can't get to the trout when flows are too high."

Even at times of low flows, Konopke and many other local fly anglers resort primarily to nymphing—high-stick nymphing in particular—to reach trout hugging the bottom. Streamers are also used to pique the interest of large browns and rainbows. Dry-fly fishing tends to be better in fall, when water levels are low, than in spring. The major mayfly hatches are Hendricksons, March Browns, and Quill Gordons in early spring, followed in late spring and early summer by Sulphurs and Slate Drakes. Spring also sees the emergence of caddisflies, including the American Grannom, and Alderflies. In fall, trout look up mainly for hatches of Blue-Winged Olives, Slate Drakes, and October Caddisflies.

Trout also inhabit the mouths of some of Otter Creek's tributaries, such as East Creek, Furnace Brook, the Middlebury River, the New Haven River, and the Neshobe River. The upper sections of these streams, on the western slope of the Green Mountains, sustain striving populations of small brookies, browns, and rainbows; their lower sections harbor bigger rainbows and sizable browns that find refuge in the deeper waters of Otter Creek in summer and winter.

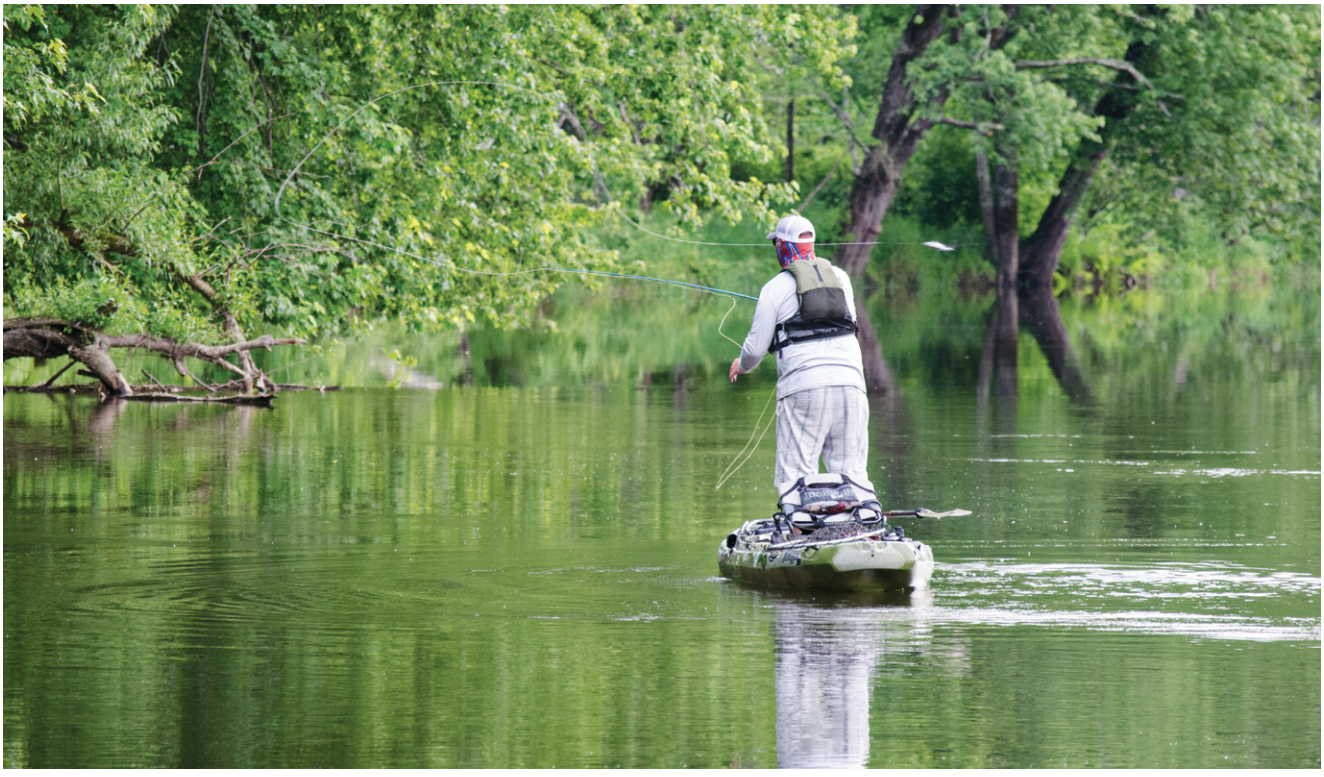
In all trout sections of Otter Creek, water temperatures remain typically within an ideal range from early spring through mid- to late June, as well as in fall, favoring excellent trout fishing throughout these seasons. Anglers should refrain from fishing the creek in summer if water temperatures rise above the critical 70-degree mark. At such times, trout anglers can find cooler waters in the higher reaches of the tributaries.

Esox Galore

Downstream from Rutland, lower Otter Creek offers a wealth of fly-fishing options. Most sections that hold trout also hold smallmouth bass. But the fish species that bring many fly anglers to lower Otter Creek are northern pike and muskellunge. While the latter are mostly present below the falls at Vergennes, northern pike thrive throughout most of the lower creek. In fact, there may not be a stream in New England where pike are more numerous. Their prevalence is fostered by abundant forage fish and favorable habitat. Every year from March to May, the creek rises and overflows in floodplains, creating extensive pike spawning areas and nurseries for their fry.

Chasing for pike has been a lifelong passion of fly-fishing guide Brian Cadoret. His Jeep's license plate reads "PIKEBUM" for a reason. Cadoret spends much of his time angling for pike on Otter Creek, and regularly nets 30-inchers, which he considers "on the small side," plus specimens well over 40 inches long, which he says are "always a possibility" in lower Otter Creek. On good days, Cadoret reports, 40-inchers can be spotted along the banks and several will come out of the shadows to follow his flies.

At other times, pike can prove elusive. When pike move in and out of different hunting grounds, it takes the experience of a guide like Cadoret to locate them. An untrained eye might pass some of his favorite fishing spots without giving them much consideration. "High water levels," he says, "provide a lot more opportunities to fish



Fly-fishing guide Brian Cadoret casts for pike at the junction of the Middlebury River and Otter Creek in Middlebury. The almost 40-mile-long stretch from Proctor to Middlebury is particularly favorable for kayak fishing and harbors countless northern pike.

for pike." The floodplains and ditches surrounding the creek then become excellent hunting grounds for pike.

At the end of spring, when the water recedes and pike come back to the creek, Cadoret recommends prospecting any area where the water enters the creek. Pike hideouts also include weedbeds, deadfalls, undercut banks, and drops, but also eddies and pockets of slack water at the edge of faster currents.

While Cadoret frequently fishes for pike by wading or from the shore, he's also an avid kayak angler. Numerous access points and canoe portage trails make Otter Creek an ideal destination for paddlers. Particularly favorable to float trips is the almost 40-mile-long stretch winding through farmlands from Sutherland Falls, in Proctor, to Middlebury Falls, in Middlebury. Although frequently obstructed by deadfalls and beaver dams, this stretch is easily navigable and allows hours upon hours of exploration. Popular access points include Sutherland Falls in Proctor, Gorham Bridge in Pittsford, and the junction of the Middlebury River and Otter Creek in Middlebury. Both Middlebury Mountaineer and Stream and Brook Fly Fishing offer guided float trips on this section of the creek.

Prime northern pike habitat also extends below Middlebury Falls, in the towns of Middlebury and Weybridge. The section known as Middlebury Lower Falls, or Pulp Mill, borders Morgan Horse Farm Road in Weybridge and offers plenty of opportunities to pursue pike from the shore or from a car-top boat. Here Otter Creek widens to about 400 feet and is closer in nature to a pond. Shore anglers frequently prospect the western bank for pike lurking in weeds, along drops, and near the rocky point below the falls; paddling anglers have access to far more water and fish.

Wading anglers also find excellent pike water in the area known as Twin Bridges, accessible from Quaker Village Road in Weybridge. After dropping over a dam, Otter Creek

Rotax

By Kevin Ramirez of Vermont Fly Guys

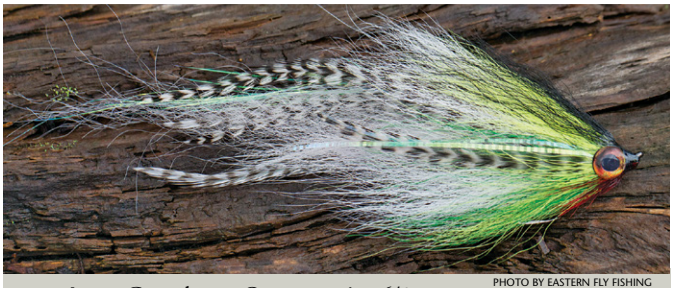


PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook: Gamakatsu Octopus, size 6/0
Thread: Flat waxed, 210-denier
Tail: Synthetic sled dog fur, grizzly hackle, and mirror flash
Body: Bucktail, grizzly hackle, and Flashabou Lateral Scale
Eyes: 10 mm Fish-Skull Living Eyes
Head: Two-part epoxy

divides into two arms. This is another stretch of fast and well-oxygenated water, where northern pike live side by side with trout and smallmouth bass. This section is too fast to fish via a kayak or canoe, but fly anglers can cover lots of water by wading along the shore and, when water levels are low enough, by crossing the creek to access two islands downstream. Pike often lurk along the banks and in current breaks, and can be tempted to follow big streamers retrieved across pockets of slack water. About 0.5 mile below Twin Bridges, Otter Creek again becomes easily navigable and kayak and canoe anglers can launch boats along Quaker Village Road for a chance at finding hungry pike.

Prospecting for big pike in Otter Creek calls for 6- to 12-inch-plus streamers, which match the size of the myriad forage fish the pike eat. Brian Cadoret relies most often on elaborate and sometimes articulated patterns designed by well-known fly tiers such as Pat Cohen and Vermont Fly Guys (flyfisherbp@gmail.com), a company led by local anglers Kevin Ramirez and Brian Price. Cadoret also recommends adapting the size of your flies and your retrieve to the seasons. While fall and winter call for smaller patterns fished very slowly, spring and summer allow the use of bigger flies and fast retrieves.

Beyond Trout and Pike

The last stretch of Otter Creek, from the falls at Vergennes to Lake Champlain, opens the door to many more fly-fishing adventures. Several fish species native to the lake are also present in this stretch of the creek, including smallmouth bass and northern pike, but also muskellunge. The latter have been successfully reintroduced in recent decades after being nearly extirpated from the lake in the 1980s. Now protected—all muskies caught in Otter Creek and Lake Champlain must be released—they continue to provide much excitement for fly anglers.

Also of interest to those who, like Cadoret, relish epic fights with big and aggressive fish are longnose gars and bowfins. These prehistoric-looking predators can be targeted by sight-fishing the shallows and weedbeds at the mouth of the creek. Longnose gar are best fished with nylon streamers designed for tangling their long, toothy bills rather than hooking them, and bowfins are easily lured by Woolly Buggers and crayfish patterns.

This stretch of Otter Creek is best explored by boat. Public boat ramps offer plenty of parking space and easy access at Vergennes Falls Park in Vergennes and on Fort Cassin Road in Ferrisburgh. Just 0.5 mile below this last access point, Otter Creek empties into the immensity of Lake Champlain, another great fly-fishing destination well worth exploring.

Christophe Perez, www.christopheperez.com, is a freelance writer and editorial photographer who lives near Boston, Massachusetts.

Otter Creek NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY JON LUKE

When: Prime time is May–June and September–October for trout, and April–October for northern pike.

Where: Western VT.

Access: *The most popular access points are, south to north:* Otter Creek WMA in Mount Tabor; Elm St. in Wallingford; Mead's Falls in Rutland; Sutherland Falls in Proctor; Gorham Bridge in Pittsford; Creek Road and Middlebury Falls in Middlebury; Middlebury Lower Falls in Weybridge; Beldens Falls in New Haven; Weybridge Project Recreational Area in Weybridge; Vergennes Falls Park in Vergennes; Fort Cassin Road in Ferrisburgh.

Headquarters: Middlebury, Rutland, and Vergennes.

Appropriate gear: *Trout:* 3- to 6-wt. rods, floating and sinking-tip lines, 5X and 6X tippet. *Pike/muskie/gar/bowfin:* 8- to 10-wt. rods, floating and sinking-tip lines, 20- to 30-lb. test leader, wire tippet.

Useful fly patterns: *Trout:* Montana Prince, Frenchie, Girdle Bug, Iron Lotus, Juju Baetis, Pheasant Tail Nymph, standard and olive Hare's Ear Nymph, Barr's Emerger, caddisfly pupae patterns (tan, green), Golden and dark stonefly nymphs, San Juan Worms, Squirmy Worms, Ausable Wulff, Parachute Adams, Rusty Spinner, X-Caddis, yellow Stimulator, Royal Stimulator, Muddy Buddy, Marcum's Butte Rat, sparkle Sheila Sculpin, Woolly Buggers. *Pike:* 6- to 12-in. streamers, mostly in shades of yellow, orange, white, chartreuse, pink, and black.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses, waders/wading boots.

Nonresident license: $21/1 day, $23/3 days, $31/7 days, $52/annual ($15/ages 15–17).

Fly shops/guides: Middlebury Mountaineer, (802) 388-7245, www.mmvt.com; Stream and Brook Fly Fishing, (802) 989-0398, www.streamandbrook.com.

Maps: Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

Sucker River, MN

Don't Be Fooled by the Name

By Carl Haensel, with Jade Thomason

In the late winter, high above Lake Superior in the vast inland forests of the North Shore, the Sucker River (Big Sucker Creek on some maps) begins at the outlet of a still-frozen Paradise Lake. It flows into a wilderness broken only by one road for the first 9 miles of the river, winding through bogs, passing logging areas, and scooping up dozens of small spring-fed tributaries. Twenty twisting miles and over 1,000 feet of vertical drop later, the mouth of the river, near Stony Point on the big lake, attracts steelhead.

Twenty-five years ago this watershed captured my attention as a place to explore, and in the years since, I've made it my home, walked its banks, and explored much of the 50 miles of streams within its watershed. Home to brook trout, steelhead, brown trout, and a handful of salmon, the river offers a diversity of fishing experiences rarely matched beyond the North Shore. Named for a run of longnose suckers that enter the river at the same time as the steelhead in the spring, the river's moniker is a direct translation of the original Ojibway name, Namebini zibi.

ALL PHOTOS BY CARL HAENSEL

Wild steelhead like this large male put up a strong battle during the spring runs. Water temperatures in the low 40s signal the beginning of the spring steelhead run, and rainfall that increases flows on the Sucker (and other local rivers) draws increasing numbers of fish to head upstream (above). The upper sections of the Sucker River include expansive meadows where beaver ponds and meandering runs hold some large brook trout. Fish the meadow sections during late May and June for shots at the best fish, but pack bug spray because the mosquitoes may carry you away. Often the best hatches occur when the mosquitoes are densest (left).

Spring Steelhead

We scrambled down the steep hill to the river in the predawn darkness, hoping to be the first anglers on the water. It was early spring, and there were still ice shelves along the river, making footing tricky as we found our spots. We tied on egg patterns created the night before and listened to the water roaring through the chutes, rapids, and waterfalls above, echoing off the volcanic rock. When we could see, we began fishing the soft edges of the run, not wanting to spook fish that had crept into calmer waters in the low light. Just moments after starting, I was hooked up, a bright steelhead thrashing the surface of the pool as it surged downstream. At the tail of the pool, it turned, headed back up, and settled in for a fight. Three times it came in almost to the net and rocketed back downstream before we landed it. The hefty male steelhead with a strong jaw was in good shape, and after some quick photos we slid it back into the current to continue its journey to spawn.

Only a few miles north of Duluth, the lower Sucker River is a destination for steelhead anglers in the spring. Once the snow melts and the waters warm, waves of fish surge into the river with each spring freshet. From early April until the middle of May, the river draws anglers to its pools, rapids, and waterfalls. While steelhead are theoretically able to make it nearly 5 miles upstream from the mouth of the river, massive falls less than 2 miles upstream from the lake block most of the migration.

Don't look to be alone on the lower river on weekends, but the anglers are there because of a consistent, quality fishery. The Sucker River offers the closest wild, naturally reproducing steelhead to the city of Duluth. Fly selection for steelhead is easy on the river, and varies primarily between egg patterns and stonefly nymphs. Bright flies are great in the early season and when the water is up. Egg patterns are usually more effective on bright, fresh fish just in from the lake. As the season progresses and the water drops, smaller, more muted patterns work well. Both beadhead and standard nymphs take fish, and often the steelhead are more willing to take a small fly. While it can be tempting to use flies smaller than size 10, try tying a smaller fly on a larger hook and sticking with hook sizes around 6 or 8. Larger fish can be challenging to land on the smaller flies, and steelhead often throw the hook.

Some anglers also swing small streamers or Woolly Buggers, but the vertical nature of much of the water on the steelhead section of the river has led to shorter, deeper, faster runs and pools, not optimized for swinging

This scenic large falls on the lower Sucker River presents a challenge to steelhead and other migratory fish, but modification of the falls, along with habitat improvement, undertaken more than 40 years ago by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has helped ensure fish passage. Look for deep holes upstream and downstream in areas like this where the bedrock has been carved by thousands of years of regular flood waters (above). A colorful wild brookie from the Sucker River (right).

flies. Expect to walk by water that causes you to question the ability of steelhead to swim upstream. There's no way they can get up this falls, you'll think. Then, shortly after, you'll hook a wild-fighting fish of nearly 30 inches in a small run. It only takes one experience to convince most anglers that steelhead, given the right conditions, can jump nearly 6 feet vertically and clear waterfalls that look almost impossible. It's easier to gauge their success when later in the summer, in the same reaches of the river, you find wild steelhead smolts, living for two years in the river before making their way to the lake.

Protective steelhead regulations have helped make the river what it is, ensuring total catch-and-release of all wild rainbow trout of any size. Steelhead can live as long as 14 years in this region, and protecting them is the highest priority on the river. Stocked Kamloops-strain rainbow trout show up in the river at times as well. Not intended to reproduce with the steelhead, they're a prime option to take home for the table when caught, as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Minnesota Trout Unlimited both advocate for not allowing them to spawn with wild steelhead. While catch-and-release is always optimal, keeping a tasty fish for conservation purposes is never a bad option. Differentiate Kamloops rainbow trout from wild steelhead by looking for a clipped adipose fin on the Kamloops.

On all Lake Superior tributaries in Minnesota, anglers are limited to a single hook when fishing the sections of the rivers accessible to lake-run fish. This can make fishing less complicated, and also helps anglers snag fewer fish. Once you've found and hooked a big steelhead on the Sucker River, your next challenge is to land it. The best way to land a big fish is to give it line when it wants to run. While steelhead sometimes decide to bail out and start heading downstream to the lake, when allowed to run they will often stay in the same pool where they've been hooked.

Wild Brook Trout

The mosquitoes swarmed among us deep in the forest, but they weren't as thick as the burgeoning flight of mayflies coming off the river. Dozens of rising trout leapt into the air to try to catch emerging Gray Fox mayflies trying to take flight. Plenty of mayflies were making it, but many were becoming dinner for the trout as well.

It was a perfect evening of fishing, with nearly every fish in the river cruising the surface looking for a meal. Small brook trout swam among our boots, holding just downstream, oblivious to our presence. As the evening light faded, larger trout took over prime positions at the head of the run coming into the big pool that we were fishing. They were more selective and harder to catch, and we wondered if a few of them might be large brown trout. As the inky darkness took over the forest a few trout continued to rise and we kept casting, hooking fat brook trout, including a few over 16 inches.

The Sucker River hasn't been stocked with trout for nearly two decades, and the brook trout population is strong. Habitat improvement in multiple reaches has added capacity and helped with better survival during low-flow periods in late winter and the depths of summer. Miles of DNR fishing easements, along with public lands, ensure public access on the vast majority of the upper river. Catch-and-release is key to ensuring a continued quality fishery. While numbers can be good, lower river fertility simply doesn't support regular harvest.

In the late spring and early summer, catching Sucker River brook trout can be easy. After dropping from spring floods, water levels in the river are often high into the middle and late parts of June. Hatches are best during this time of the year, with caddisflies and mayflies active in the evenings. North Shore hatches will never compare to those on spring creeks, but what they lack in density they often make up for in diversity. It's not uncommon to find a dozen different species of insects active at once on the Sucker River, known for its good water quality. This helps

with the fishing, since brook trout will be on the lookout for nearly every variety of insect out there, and your fly, no matter what it is, will likely look like a good meal.

When water levels are up and fish are hungry, dry flies, emergers, and swung wet flies consistently take fish. When water levels drop in the middle of summer, the fish often tuck into deeper pools and under logs. More-precise casts are needed to entice them, but if you figure out a pattern the fishing can be excellent. As summer changes into fall and rains return, brook trout fishing can again be stellar as the males begin to move about in anticipation of spawning. In the last weeks of the season, try swinging Woolly Buggers or large nymphs to see if you can get a big male brook trout to chase your flies.

And something bigger might chase your brook trout. It happens each year along the river: an angler is bringing in a brook trout, sometimes a small one, and a leviathan from the deep makes a grab, often successful, at taking a meal back to the bottom of the river. Almost always these large predators are brown trout. Making up only 10 percent of the trout population on much of the river, they are challenging to target on their own.

Consisting of resident fish as well as migratory fish up from the big lake, Sucker River brown trout are both uncommon and large. Compared with brook trout, browns are more reclusive, likely to feed at night, and less aggressive. If there are 20 fish in a pool and two are browns, it's rare that they are the first trout to the fly. More often they are the first to spook away into the shadows and under a log. To catch them, you need to target them. Streamers are a great way to search for the larger trout, and anglers can be rewarded with fish over 20 inches at times. Even on small-stream reaches, try throwing fat, 4-inch-plus rabbit hair patterns if you're truly trying to get into the big browns. Fishing into the night also works, because the brook trout usually stop biting at dusk and any remaining trout rising in the darkness are likely to be brown trout.

Fall Fishing

It was small male steelhead, known as "skipjack," that first caught my attention as a Sucker River angler. As a teenager I somehow convinced my father that we should take a long drive from farther south in Minnesota up to the Superior North Shore in the fall. After hours of driving, we ended up on the Sucker River, fishing runs and riffles without success until I heard my father shout from downstream. Running through the brush, I caught a glimpse of him releasing a shiny 18-inch rainbow back into the water.

"There's more of them," he said, and offered me his spot on the riverbank. Settling in,

Sucker River NOTEBOOK

When: April–October.

Where: Near Duluth, MN.

Headquarters: Duluth. *Information:* www.visitduluth.com. *Lodging:* Chain hotels available in Duluth, many in the Canal Park area, including Comfort Suites, (218) 727-1378, www.choicehotels.com. Hike-in camping is available along the river, in designated locations only, on the Superior Hiking Trail, www.shta.org. No camping reservations required.

Access: Easements and public land provide excellent access to the majority of the river. Many bridge and road access points. In sections that are not eased, respect landowners' signs and requirements.

Appropriate gear: 3- to 5-wt. rods for trout, 7- to 8-wt. rods for steelhead, floating lines.

Useful fly patterns: *Trout:* Small streamers, Bead Body Soft Hackle Olive and other soft hackles, wet flies, beadhead nymphs, Gray Fox, March Brown, Blue-Winged Olive patterns, ants, beetles, caddisflies, Woolly Buggers and other streamers. *Steelhead:* Egg patterns, stoneflies, other nymphs in sizes 8–12.

Necessary accessories: Mosquito repellent in the midsummer, polarized sunglasses, hip or chest waders.

Nonresident license: $12/1 day, $32/3 days, $38/7 days-$45/annual, plus $10/trout stamp required on 7-day and annual licenses.

Fly shops/guides: Great Lakes Fly Shop, (218) 740-3040, www.greatlakesflys.com; Superior Fly Angler, (715) 395-9520, www.superiorflyangler.com. Namebini, (218) 525-2381, www.namebini.com.

Books/maps: *Fly-Fishing the North* Country by Shawn Perich; *The Streams and Rivers of Minnesota* by Thomas Waters. *Minnesota Atlas and Gazetteer* by DeLorme; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

I drifted a nymph through the dark, tannin-stained water and hooked a nice fish. Large for a wild trout, but small for a steelhead, the skipjack rocketed out of the water and put on a fine display before coming to the shore. Two more followed in quick succession, and I was convinced that there was good fishing to be had on the river.

Fall fishing on the Minnesota North Shore is entirely dependent on rainfall, and the Sucker River is no exception. Anglers searching the waters of the lower river during the fall find the occasional wandering steelhead, pink salmon, and even a few wild chinook salmon at times. While all bets are off for timing, the first few weeks of September after a good rain are a strong possibility to find viable fishing for migratory fish. Look to find fish in the larger holes on the lower river if they're around, with the knowledge that pink salmon are poor jumpers and can be concentrated near the lake. If the rains don't come, neither will the fish, so keep a sharp eye on local river and stream gauges to see if higher flows might have brought in some good fish.

The Superior Hiking Trail and Beaver Dam Networks

Famous among hikers as one of the jewels of the national North Country Trail system, the Superior Hiking Trail provides access into the Sucker River backcountry where no roads venture. A campsite is located along the river in the heart of some of the wildest country near Duluth, complete with wolves, the occasional moose, and porcupines. Three separate trailheads offer access into the river, and backpackers can explore tributaries, beaver ponds, and rumors of large trout far into the reaches of the forest.

Northern Minnesota brook trout fanatics love to explore waters like this and find beaver dams that might hold the largest trout in the area. One of the first rules of being a brook trout fanatic is to never tell anyone where you have caught trout and where they might exist. All I can say is that it's entirely possible to find wild brook trout that exceed 20 inches in length. The places to find them are often above beaver dams. There are a handful of select circumstances that lead to these big fish, and if you look for them you might just find your own brook trout nirvana.

The distinctive combination includes three characteristics. First, cold water. The lowest beaver pond in a drainage will often be too warm and have no fish unless there is sufficient spring flow. Second, the pond must provide access to spawning areas the brook trout can use. Third, the pond must be relatively new. Old ponds have less food and cover, hold more silt, and become shallow over time. Find a spring-fed beaver pond that meets these requirements on the Minnesota North Shore and you may just find the big brookies you've dreamed of.

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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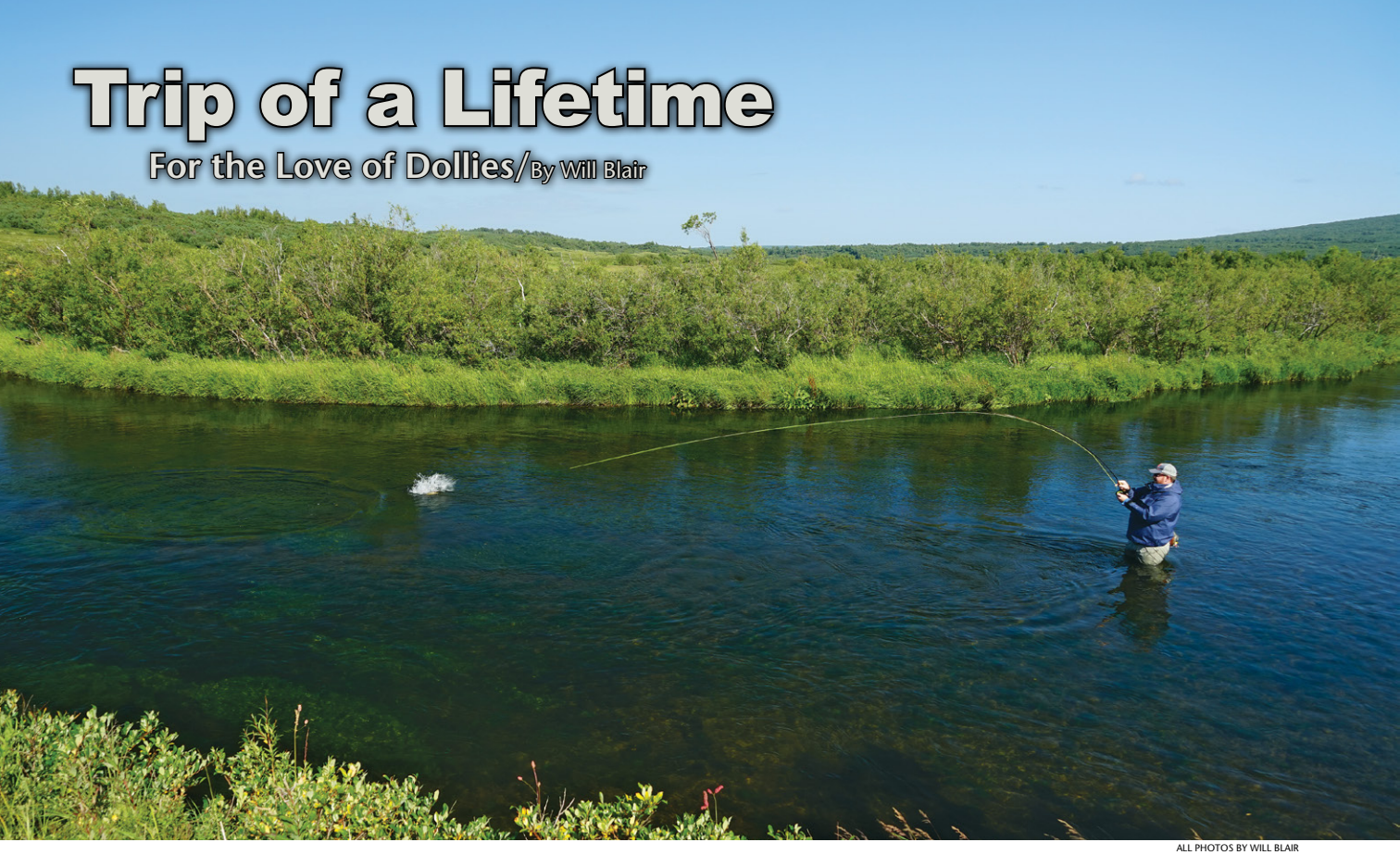

ALL PHOTOS BY WILL BLAIR

I always get excited by seeing immense numbers of fish. Few places, if any, can compare to Kamchatka in this regard: its waters are simply loaded with big, wild fish. Kamchatka and other parts of the far north are home to char populations, including Dolly Varden, that exceed my wildest dreams. Moreover, the remote waters of Kamchatka support big arctic grayling in staggering numbers; these strongholds represent the last bastions of untouched wilderness. And these are all native fish, thoroughly wild and never watered down with hatchery genetics.

Many fly anglers find arctic char, Dolly Varden, kundzha, other Asiatic chars, and arctic grayling exotic and intriguing. In North America, grayling range as far south as Montana and native Dollies live as far south as northwest Washington, but both species are more abundant farther north. Arctic char are true to their name, occurring only in the arctic and subarctic regions. The closely related kundzha, or white-spotted char, is native to the Far East. All these species and more abound in the rivers of Kamchatka, a peninsula in far eastern Russia.

The char family is an evolutionary success story; these oft-colorful salmonids thrive in cold, comparatively sterile rivers. But they can also prosper in fertile waters, which helps explain the widespread introduction of eastern brook trout—a species of char—to waters well beyond its native range. Grayling, on the other hand, are highly susceptible to water-quality degradation and disappear quickly in compromised habitats; luckily, they remain abundant in the planet's northernmost watersheds.

I've been lucky to target char and grayling in many places, from Alaska's Bristol Bay to the incredible rivers of Kamchatka. Famous Alaska rivers such as the Nushagak, Togiak, Goodnews, and Kanektok hold large numbers of sea-run Dollies. Other rivers, such as the Alagnak, have only sparse populations of landlocked char. Wherever these char

species exist, they tend to be cooperative with fly anglers—easy to catch, colorful, and exciting.

As good as Alaska can be, Kamchatka is even better. The rivers, feeding both the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk, are simply loaded with fish, and targeting them truly is the trip of a lifetime for fly anglers.

Char Beyond Imagination

In 1998, while he was working as the head guide on the Zhupanova River during one of its many blowouts, our Russian outfitter announced he had secured special permission to fly up to the outlet of Kronotsky Lake inside a restricted area, a place rumored to hold huge char. The rumors turned out to be true. These fish are now landlocked, the lake's outlet having presumably been blocked by a prehistoric earthquake. The lake also has sockeye salmon, which have morphed into kokanee (the landlocked form of sockeye). The landlocked char have changed over the eons and differ physically from other char in the region. They are long, with gaping mouths, and are a beautiful emerald green. Moreover, they are abundant and easy to catch. Stand on the edge of the shoreline drop-off, cast a black leech pattern as far as you can, then start retrieving the fly. And hold on: these fish hammer flies and speed away, rapidly peeling line off a reel.

If it's possible for a river to have too many fish, then at times some Kamchatka rivers are guilty as charged. Back in 2000, in pursuit of big trout on the westward-flowing Kolpakova River, we encountered massive runs of both Dollies and chum salmon. The river was so full of salmon and char that we had difficulty catching trout. But the char, bold by nature, were not put off by the swarming, spawning salmon. The char were gorging on salmon eggs even as toothy chum salmon bit them and chased them in vain. Swinging streamers, we hooked char nonstop and watched them follow our flies. The action was incredible, and hooking these awesome fish was almost unbelievably easy.

I've heard anglers denigrate Dolly Varden and arctic char they've caught in Alaska as being somehow less sporting than the rainbows or salmon they are there to catch, but the trophy-class char of Kamchatka will change that attitude in a hurry. Our clients are frequently amazed at how hard these gorgeous fish fight. In fact, anglers fishing these rivers complain that their arms ache from battling too many big fish.

Moreover, the char of Kamchatka, including the Dolly Varden, will rise for dry flies. Beginning in August, many different mayflies hatch on the Ozernaya River. At this time of year, the supply of salmon eggs dwindles between the early runs and the later runs of chums, silvers, and fall sockeye. Without that food supply, the fish start looking up for their meals. Surprisingly, perhaps, a standard Muddler Minnow, skated on the surface, works better than a mayfly imitation.

A few years ago, while jet-boating back to the lodge on the "Oz," we found a huge flat just a mile upstream from the lodge, boiling with rising fish. We stopped, and the two clients with me enjoyed incredible fishing, catching 18- to 27-inch Dollies on dry flies. One angler skated a Muddler and the other dead-drifted an Adams—all while enjoying fine cigars and excellent whiskey.

On the Bering Sea side of Kamchatka flow the massive Kamchatka and Yelovka river systems. By the time the Kamchatka River empties into the sea, it is nearly the size of the massive Columbia River in Washington state, and it is home to the black stone char. Found only in the Kamchatka drainage, the fish are aptly named: their dark coloration makes them easy to spot and, once found, easy to catch. Last August I watched from a high bank, about 5 feet above the water, as a black stone char attacked a fly five times before it was finally hooked solidly. They are distinctive, with orange spots patterned over a dark emerald-green body. Scientifically, little is known of them—they are among a number of char species that have yet to be fully studied.

Then there is the kundzha, aka white-spotted char. This is one bad fish. On a recent flight home, I was speak-

ing with a famous saltwater angler who had just fished Kamchatka for the first time. He compared kundzha favorably to barracuda—explosive, fast, and deadly; when they are on the hunt, nothing escapes those jaws.

I've seen some large specimens on the end of the line, but landing a big kundzha is another story altogether. Battling such a beast is reminiscent of fighting a large, chrome-bright king salmon. One day on the west coast of Kamchatka, the elder member of a father-and-son angling team yelled excitedly that he had hooked something huge. We jumped in my jet sled to follow the running fish and finally caught up to it 100 yards downriver in a big pool. I thought we could land the beast, which I'm sure was over 40 inches long. But then the fish ran 100 yards back upstream and swam into the logjam where the fight had initiated. My client was an experienced angler, with a 7-weight rod and 15-pound tippet, but we stood no chance.

Grayling Like No Other

While not massive like the giant chars of Kamchatka, grayling abound in some of the rivers, such as the Ozernaya and others that we fish through our Rainbows From Above fly-out program. And not only are the grayling numerous, but they are trophy class—some are over 20 inches long. On the Oz, I once landed a 5-plus-pound grayling and another angler recently caught one over 6 pounds. Those are huge grayling. Grayling require pristine habitat, and in the Oz they have 120 miles of it.

A 5-weight outfit is perfect for grayling, and the fish feed ravenously, slashing any surface fly with reckless abandon. They also migrate in large numbers. During the early season (July) we regularly catch them on all stretches of the Oz. By late July, the majority are upstream of the lodge, packed so densely that their favorite pools look like aquariums full of hungry bronze-tinged fish.

In fact, our fly-out program includes a river that is loaded with big trout, but it has a bit of a problem: upon arrival, we need to walk past slow runs and seek the swifter water to avoid grayling—big grayling. One afternoon I stood on the bank as a client complained that he was tired of catching trophy grayling on every cast. Where else in the world would you bemoan nonstop action on gorgeous trophy-size grayling?

I did sympathize, however, as he had been hooking grayling on every cast in three consecutive pools while trying to target big trout. Saying this seems odd, but he was just unlucky: sometimes we hit that river and find nonstop action on big rainbows. And sometimes we luck into the best of both worlds, when trout and grayling come in equal numbers, creating the kind of fishing tales told around the campfire for decades by the lucky anglers who lived them.

Options and Adventures

About 90 percent of our angling effort targets Kamchatka's big, bad rainbow trout. But sometimes the char are so abundant and so aggressive that they impede our trout fishing effort. It's a great problem to have.

As we explore more rivers on Kamchatka, we continue to discover fantastic fisheries for both char and grayling. Fifteen years ago I floated the Uka on the northeast coast in hopes of finding more big rainbows. Instead, we found world-class fishing for big grayling and huge sea-run Dollies—some weighing 15 pounds—and to this day nobody fishes this river. Such is the vastness and richness of Kamchatka.

Our fly-out program reaches many incredible waters, including Two Yurt Lake, just a short distance from the lodge. Two Yurt is a large, clear, deep, glacial moraine lake that is stuffed with its own species of char. On a day last season when inclement weather kept us grounded, we opted to make the 20-minute hike to the lake rather than sitting around playing pinochle. We caught more char than we could count, not to mention prodigious numbers of silver salmon, along with a few rainbows. But the char stole the show: schools of them would follow our flies all the way to the boat, making our pulses race in anticipation of the inevitable grabs. These gorgeous natives reach 10 pounds, although the largest specimens stay deep during the summer. Next season, maybe I will try sinking-tip lines to catch one of the Two Yurt Lake monsters.

On our last day of the 2017 season, we were enjoying incredible trout fishing on a creek on Kamchatka's west coast. By noon, our small group had hooked more than 200 20- to 27-inch rainbows. In fact, just before our chopper arrived to bring us lunch, we spent an hour in one run landing huge trout, one after another, with all three of us hooked up and battling fish simultaneously. The trout were fewer at the lower end of this run, but the bottom of the river looked like a solid dark liquid waving in the currents; it was a layer of Dolly Varden stretching bank to bank for 50 yards. They were easy to catch, so much so that one angler finally asked, "Are there any flies they won't eat?"

People often ask me if my wife fishes. In 2000, she went with me on an exploratory float on the east coast of Kamchatka. I gave her a spinning rod and with it she caught 20-plus-inch grayling on every cast for 30 minutes. Finally she laid the rod aside and said, "I cannot imagine who would find this interesting."

But for fly anglers, such abundance of huge fish is not only interesting but incredibly rare. Except in Kamchatka—a land where fly-fishing dreams are realized every day of the season.

Kamchatka Char FAQ

How do I book a trip? These exclusive trips are available through www.thebestofkamchatka.com, (530) 941-8524, bigrainbows@thebestofkamchatka.com.

When is the season? July–early September.

How do I get there? A convenient 4-hr. flight between Anchorage and Petropavlovsk, Russia, typically leaves on Monday morning and returns you the following Monday. Buses and helicopters ferry you to the Ozernaya and Two Yurt Lodge and Rainbows From Above.

What travel papers do I need? You need a current passport and a visa to enter Russia, but no immunizations are required. *Information on Russian visa requirements:* (800) 215-4378, www.allstatepassports.com/russia.html.

What tackle should I bring? 9-ft. rods, 6- to 7-wt. for the Ozernaya and Rainbows From Above, 5- to 6-wt. for Two Yurt; floating lines (optional 15-ft. sinking-tip line, type IV); 6- and 7.5-ft. leaders with 0.012–2X tippets; disk-drag reels and backing to handle screaming runs.

What other gear should I bring? Be smart; pack light. Waterproof rain jacket and guide-weight Gore-Tex waders; felt-sole wading boots (no studs); layered clothing for warmth (fleece, etc.); protective hat; polarized sunglasses (amber is best); bug net, insect-repellent shirts, insect repellent; sunscreen (SPF 55); sleeping bag (air mattresses are provided); waterproof gear bags. See "Miscellaneous Equipment Checklist" at www.thebestofkamchatka.com for current information.

What temperatures can I expect? July, 50–68 F; August, 53–68 F; September, 46–59 F.

What flies should I bring? Dolly Lama (black, olive), Zuddlers (black, olive), sculpin patterns (olive, black, tan), rabbit leeches (black, purple), smolt patterns, Muddler Minnows, traditional salmon flies (pink, chartreuse), Parachute Adams, Stimulator (yellow, orange), Elk Hair Caddis, assorted mayfly patterns, Morrish Mouse. *Important:* Do not bring streamers larger than 4X long, size 4, or mice tied on bass-style stinger hooks.

What else should I consider? First, consider renting a satellite phone; cellphones don't generally work. Also consider buying travel cancellation insurance (not the same as emergency medical evacuation or trip insurance). When traveling to Kamchatka, expect the unexpected. Take a deep breath and relax. Be sure to read The Best of Kamchatka's brochure, available from Will Blair, (530) 941-8524, www.thebestofkamchatka.com.

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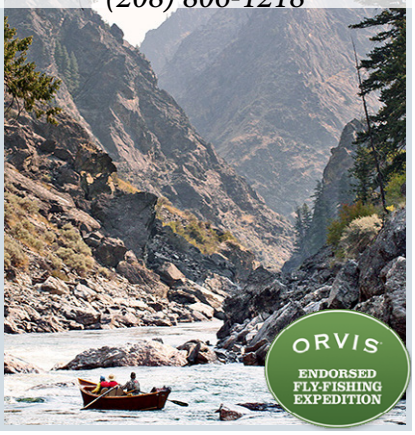

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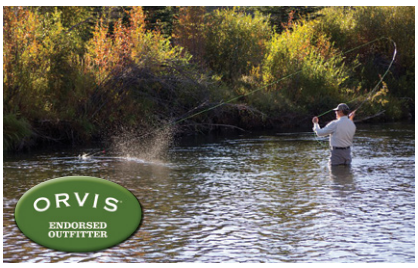

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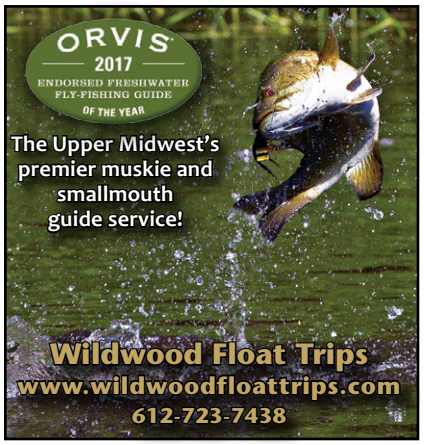

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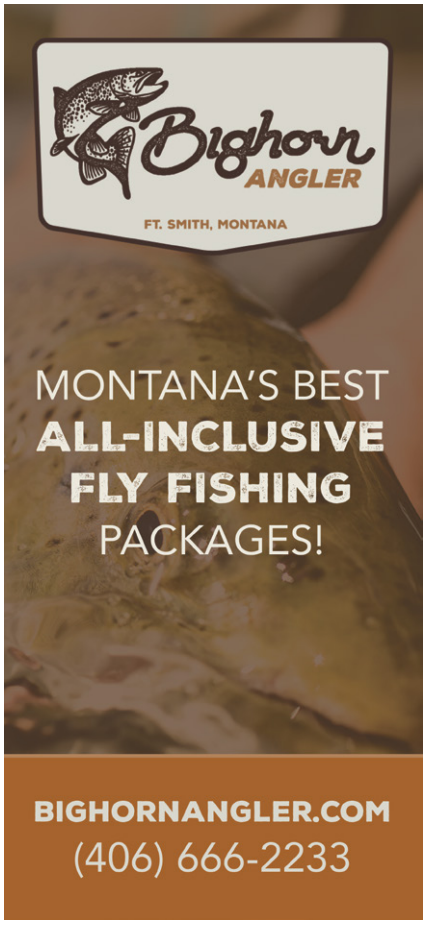

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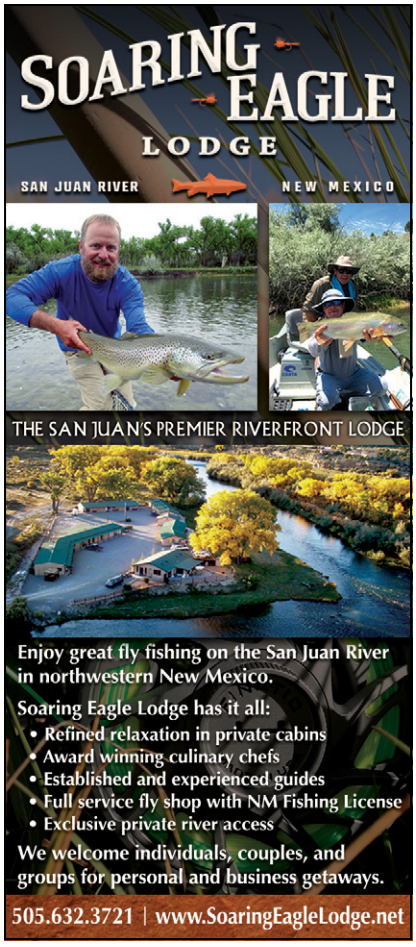

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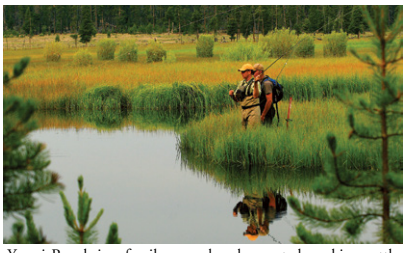

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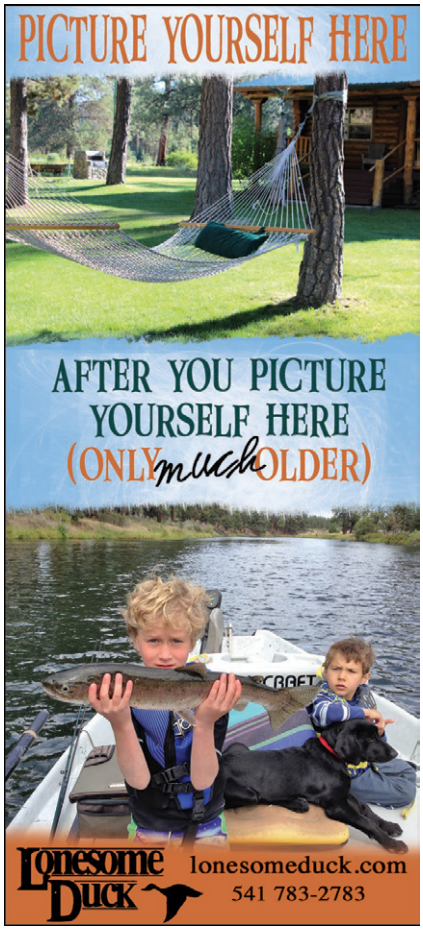

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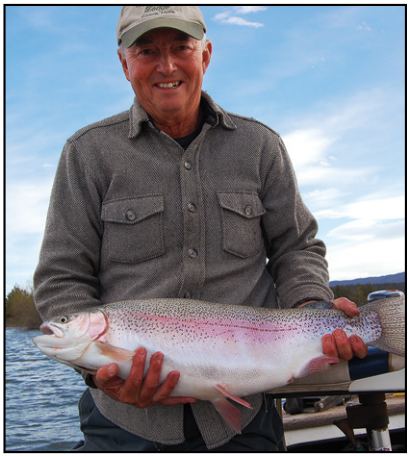

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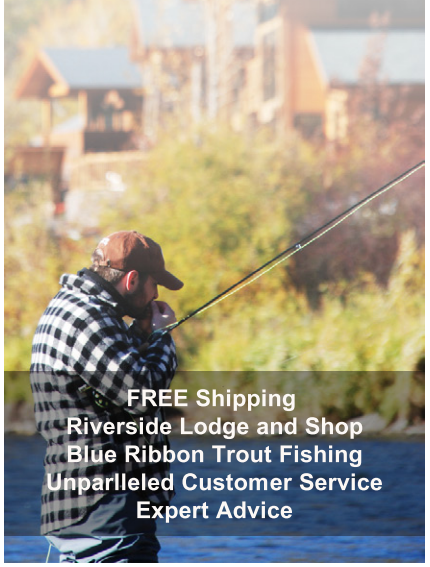

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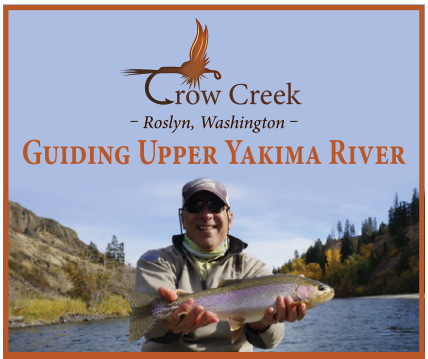

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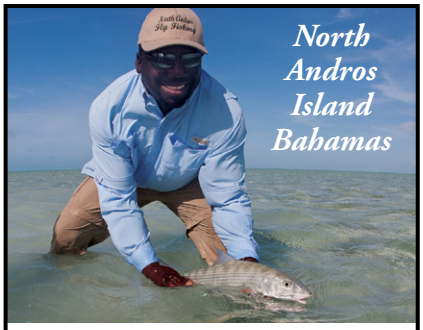

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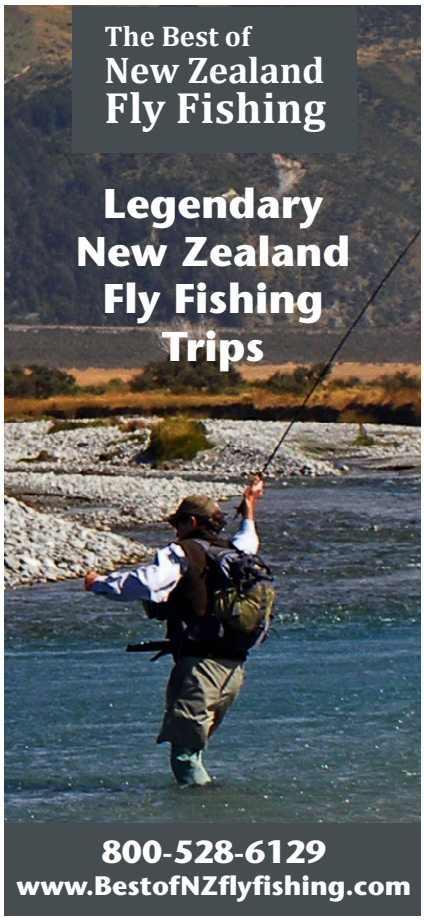

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FLY SHOP

Hello, West Yellowstone

In the summer of 1946, Lilly "saw this cute Irish girl dancing with some guy" at an old-fashioned barn dance just down the road from Manhattan. He cut in for a couple of dances, just long enough to become completely smitten by Pat Bennett, a doctor's assistant in Three Forks. Never ones to dawdle, having met in July, they married in March. In the meantime, Lilly plunged back into school to get both a degree and a teaching certificate in applied sciences from Montana State University in Bozeman.

For the next few years, Lilly bounced around teaching science courses in high schools in several towns in southwest Montana, including Roundup and Deer Lodge, before settling in for the duration in Bozeman. Meanwhile, as the Lilly household expanded—two sons and a daughter—it became increasingly evident that a "teaching salary didn't stretch far enough."

In 1952, Norm Hansen, one of Lilly's teacher colleagues, pointed out that West Yellowstone, the most trafficked entrance to Yellowstone Park, had become something of a boom town, a raw and rollicking place, with few services beyond beds and bric-a-brac, and crude unpaved streets given to alternating states of dust or mud. Despite the road grime, gas station attendants were so busy pumping fuel that nobody could be bothered with washing a car. It happened that Hansen's mother owned a small lot in West Yellowstone just big enough for a makeshift carwash. "So, we went to West Yellowstone," said Lilly, "cut a few trees for a tent, ran a garden hose from nearby, dug a drain ditch, and were in business."

While hand-washing cars was lucrative, it was also labor intensive, a real backbreaker. But at that juncture simply being in West Yellowstone proved providential, as Lilly heard, again through the teacher grapevine, that a small fly shop–bait shop (with a walk-in cooler) had come up for sale. Instead of buying a new car that he'd been saving up for, Lilly wrote a check for $4,500 and received "a little piece of paper"—a handwritten bill of sale for one more-than-slightly neglected fly shop, inventory and sign included. Exit wrinkled-prune hands; enter bins brimming with Humpies.

The Dairy Queen Dog

Lilly spent the next two decades building not so much a business as a brand, which revolved around three abiding principles: first, never forget a name; second, never condescend (no question is too dumb); and three, never fail to dispense sound information and/or advice (sale or no sale). Oh yeah, and free cookies. Don't forget the free cookies, which, as Lilly wryly noted, busloads of Boy Scouts managed to sniff out from miles away.

Every successful brand needs to project its own identity or image. Among the many small touches—such as artwork and pottery, shelves of books and field guides, and outdoor gear unrelated to angling—two elements Lilly quite consciously and conspicuously incorporated into the atmosphere of the Trout Shop were his ever-present cowboy hat and a succession of shop dogs, "customer greeters," the most memorable of which was a Lab named Sam, aka the Dairy Queen dog.

Of the hats, Lilly wrote, "I like to think that we had something to do with the popularization of western hats among fishermen and guides in our area, and I was glad to see it. I was glad partly because we sold Stetsons and Resistols in the shop, but also because it was part of developing an image of Western fly fishermen. Easterners had their Tyroleans and little tweed hats" and Westerners now had their Stetsons. "I didn't realize how successful I had been at developing the image," Lilly mused, "until one day a fellow came into the shop and wanted to buy the hat right off my head."

When the customer asked if it was for sale, Lilly replied that "everything is for sale in here except my wife," then promptly quoted the man a price. The cash register chimed sweetly.

Over the years, the Lillys owned many shop dogs, "but none had made the Trout Shop his territory as aggressively as Sam." Despite his loyalty and staunch protectiveness, Sam had a weakness: a fierce love for the ice cream at the Dairy Queen directly across the street. At midday, when the crowd would start to gather at the DQ takeout window, Sam would stroll over and await his opportunity to snatch a carelessly dangled cone. "He was especially effective with small kids," Lilly remarked, "who tended to gawk all around while eating and who, being short, held their ice cream cones just about at the level of Sam's nose. He had no mercy."

Bud Lilly (right) talks flies with customers at his iconic Bud Lilly's Trout Shop in West Yellowstone, Montana.

On the Front Line in the Trout Wars

With the boom in fly fishing in the 1970s, the Trout Shop became a veritable beehive of activity, starting with the first five gallons of coffee brewed at dawn, followed by the dispersal of its stable of guides, including all three Lilly offspring, and their clients, and ending after dark with the guides straggling back in and, having filed their field reports, mounting a logistics plan for the following day. It was exhilaration and madness and exhaustion all rolled into one.

Along with heady success and heretofore unimagined profits loomed the realization that unless the gravy train changed direction it might be headed for a cliff. More and more people catching more and more fish became an untenable proposition. Animal activist Jonathan Safran Foer observed that fish receive little human sympathy because of their failure to show emotion. "Fish are always in another element," Foer maintained, "silent and unsmiling, legless and dead-eyed." But for Lilly the word "fish" was both noun and verb—both the animal and the act of pursuing it. Lilly saw trout as a constantly worthy quarry—dead-eyed only when removed from their living medium, but bright-eyed and evasive in their underwater realm. It became crystal clear that conserving wild trout was not only the right thing to do but that it meant business, or, more precisely, staying in business.

Enlightened thinking by state biologists concerning habitat protection and restoration, along with a groundbreaking study on the Madison River proving the efficacy of wild trout management versus dead-end hatchery programs, set the stage for a new era of fisheries management and policies in Montana. Special regulations, particularly no-kill and catch-and-release, were enacted to supplant increasingly worn-out meat fisheries. However, neither science nor reason could easily penetrate parochial passions, not to mention an opioid-like addiction to hatchery stocked trout.

Along with such noteworthy contemporaries as fellow fly shop owner Dan Bailey and river guide Dick McGuire (a man big enough, in Lilly's words, "to lick anybody in the place"), Lilly manned the front lines in public hearings and town hall meetings, where he staunchly defended the need for reduced bag limits, maintenance of wild trout populations, and enhanced habitat protection. "We had, in short," wrote Lilly, "to overcome a lot of ingrained and traditional ideas about how the West should care for its natural resources."

But the specific issue that provoked the loudest outcry of all was Lilly's support for discontinuing hatchery programs on the Madison (and, later, every river in the state). At that juncture in his outspoken advocacy for wild trout management, Lilly became about as popular as a swarm of yellow jackets in an outhouse. "There was unlimited hostility," said Lilly. "It's something for your soul to get up in front of a group of your neighbors and have them so angry with you that they're booing and hissing like you're a matinee villain. We went through that to drag Montana fishing into the 20th century."

The right guy in the right place at the right time, Lilly fearlessly crusaded for wild trout conservation and enlightened watershed management in Montana during an era when such notions roused considerable local animosity.

Were the years of struggle worth it? The short answer lies in a Chamber of Commerce view of today's West Yellowstone. It doesn't take a Harvard economist to understand the significance of five fly shops operating full tilt in a hamlet of 1,271 residents. Of course, one must take into account the nearly 2 million visitors who pass through each year on their way to Yellowstone and ponder what percentage of those wayfarers are fly fishers who choose to linger awhile and sample the hundreds of miles of quality trout water in the surrounding area.

The sheer number of blue-ribbon rivers, the size and number of wild trout, the number of anglers who annually ply these waters, and, yes, even the number of wallet-bulging dollars that change hands—all serve as testament to Bud Lilly's enduring effort to drag Montana and its glorious fisheries into the 20th—and 21st—centuries. The kicking and screaming have receded to the faintest of echoes.

Don Roberts is an Oregon-based freelance writer and fly angling historian.

New Products

Patagonia Workwear

Ask any rancher or construction worker what matters most when it comes to on-the-job clothes: "durable and tough" tops the list for hard work, from the rigors of farm chores to laying bricks. Patagonia has raised the bar with its new Iron Forge Hemp canvas line, part of the Workwear collection of barn coats, jackets, pants with reinforced knees, sweaters, hoodies, shirts, vests, and hats—all designed for gritty men and women for whom heavy-duty is a must. This new fabric is 25 percent more abrasion-resistant than conventional duck canvas. Its durability is due to the long-bast fibers that surround the core of the hemp stalk, which, combined with recycled polyester and organic cotton, result in a remarkably supple and comfortable garment that needs no break-in period. With this new product line ($29 to $199; www.patagonia.com), Patagonia offers the sharpest-looking line of environmentally friendly work clothes and accessories available—and they're built to last. As always, with this new line, Patagonia honors its credo: "Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis."—*Steve Maeder*

Monic Flies Featuring The Dot

Nothing tops a tight-line slam on a wet fly swung across the current. It's an electric feeling, whether it is a 10-inch brookie or a beast of a brown trout. Monic, known for its innovative fly lines, has taken matters one step further to make your wet fly stand out from the naturals by adding a luminescent dressing called The Dot to the bend of the hook. When charged by the sun or other light sources, The Dot makes the fly an attractor beacon for fish. This emerging technology uses controlled iridescence, which occurs naturally in both salt and fresh water. The Dot has been enhanced for durability, and new Activator Pads that can be clipped on a shirt or vest charge flies with The Dot on their hook. The Activator Pad comes with five wet flies with The Dot for $25.95, and replacement flies are available, as are hooks with The Dot so you can tie your own patterns (10 hooks for $24.95). The Dot with controlled iridescence is an exciting concept in its infancy and is available direct from www.monic.com or by calling (303) 530-3050. —*Steve Maeder*

Adamsbuilt Women's Waders

It's simple: women comprise the fastest-growing demographic in fly fishing, and Adamsbuilt has taken notice: the new Adamsbuilt Truckee River women's waders are designed specifically to fit women, and the line includes a full range of sizes, from small to extra-large, including short sizes and plus sizes. These waders are built from the same Pore-Tech breathable membrane and premium four-layer microfiber material that has been so successful in Adamsbuilt waders over the years. The new women's waders feature comfortable and easily adjustable H-back suspenders and a quick-release belt, along with a micro-fleece-lined hand-warmer pocket, water-resistant zippered storage pocket, attached 3.5-millimeter neoprene gravel guards with lace hook, and high-density 3.5-millimeter neoprene booties with ergonomic right and left feet. Like all Adamsbuilt products, the new Truckee River women's waders ($239.95) are available at Adamsbuilt retailers—go to www.adamsbuiltfishing.com to find a dealer near you.

Echo E3 Fly Rods

Exceptionally advanced, high-modulus graphite and modern resins make the new Echo E3 rods light and sensitive while maintaining the backbone to go 10 rounds with an angry fish. They're crisp and responsive on that instant 70-foot cast you didn't have time to ponder, but not so fast that you can't feel the rod tell you that it's go time. From trout to tarpon, these feather-light, high-performance four-piece rods cast like a dream, allowing hours of nonstop fishing with minimal arm fatigue. The saltwater version is built with salt-corrosion-resistant components, including titanium stripping guides, and comes equipped with a high-density foam-tipped fighting butt. The 11 freshwater models ($349.99) featuring dazzling deep-green blanks range from 3- through 8-weights; the seven saltwater models, deep blue in color, range from 6- to 12-weights. Each rod comes with a fabric-covered square rod case and rod sock, and carries Echo's lifetime warranty. For more information, go to http://echoflyfishing.com/project/echo3.

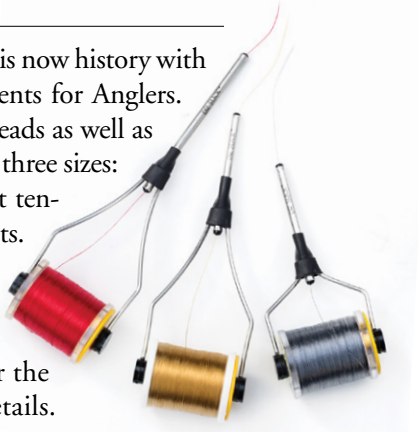
EPIC 686 FastGlass Rods

Handcrafted one at a time after you choose the options you want, the Epic 686 FastGlass Rod ($838 at www.swiftflyfishing.com) has rapidly become a standard-setter in the rejuvenated world of fiberglass fly rods. These high-performance rods, as versatile as they are beautiful, are designed to deliver super-smooth casts with everything from bushy dry flies to meaty streamers, and are even well suited to light-duty saltwater work. Epic FastGlass rods are incredibly tough—the S2 FastGlass fiberglass blanks actually have a higher strength-to-weight ratio than carbon-fiber (graphite) rods and can endure more acute and severe bends than the equivalent carbon-fiber. Tip sections are stronger and less susceptible to breakage from high-sticking and problematic rod angles when pulling against load. Each rod, studio-built to your specs, is identified by a laser-engraved winding check registered in your name in the Epic owner database. You can further personalize your rod with an optional handwritten name or inscription. Epic also takes the guesswork out of matching your rod with the ideal line: Epic's Carl McNeil, a certified master casting instructor, has designed lines that are perfectly matched to Epic rods. I've been fishing with the 686 for over a year now and it has become one of my go-to rods for casting streamers and big dries; it facilitates easy line pickup and has the power to load for the longest casts. Plus, the FastGlass blanks make the transition from graphite rods a piece of cake. The best part of any Epic glass fly rod is the hookup—that feeling and the deep rod bend are addicting.—*Jon Luke*

Orvis Ultralight Wading Jacket

My in-person appraisal of the new Orvis Ultralight Wading Jacket ($249) revealed a jacket that is as stylish as it is functional; this jacket is ideal for everyday use in inclement weather, not just for wading your favorite river or fending off showers on a saltwater flat. Still, it was designed for anglers and it excels on the water, particularly for people who want to keep weight and bulk to a minimum while traveling. As such, the new jacket is part of the Orvis Ultralight system, which includes the new Ultralight Convertible Waders and Ultralight Wading Boots. This minimalist jacket is built for durability and offers solid protection against wind and rain, but it can be carried in a small day pack or even the Orvis Safe Passage Guide Sling Pack. The jacket features two-way stretch and a three-layer shell fabric with a 20K Waterproofness and 30K Breathability rating. Seams are fully taped for added weatherproofing. The integrated Dolphin Skin Cuff system keeps water from running up inside the sleeves, even when you hold a rod upright during casting. The YKK AquaGuard® water-resistant zippers are flexible and slide easily, yet keep the elements out. A three-way adjustable storm hood with laminated brim keeps you comfortable and dry regardless of what kind of hat you wear—or even if you don't wear a hat. A DWR (Durable Water Repellent) finish repels water so the jacket stays lightweight even in a soaking rain. The jacket has rubberized tabs for tool docking, which eliminates punctures in the fabric and offers greater security for tools. Two front storage pockets and two side zip pockets feature power mesh for breathability, less bulk, and more room when you need it. An internal power mesh pocket provides added storage. The Ultralight Wading Jacket is available in two colors and a full range of sizes at www.orvis.com and at Orvis dealers.—*John Shewey*

Dr. Slick Glass-Insert Fly-Tying Bobbins



The age-old dilemma of fly-tying thread breaking, becoming abraded, or losing tension is now history with the development of new ultra-slick dual glass-insert bobbins from Dr. Slick Instruments for Anglers. The glass-insert fly-tying bobbins were designed to handle the new synthetic tying threads as well as traditional size 8/0 and extra-fine threads. Dr. Slick glass-insert bobbins are available in three sizes: 3-, 4-, and 4.75-inch. The bobbins are fitted with synthetic feet for smooth, constant tension on the thread spool; tactile, comfortable grips; and hyper-smooth dual glass inserts. Both the top and bottom of the bobbin pipe have glass beads, giving them the dual glass designation. The three glass-insert fly-tying bobbins bring to 350 the number of fly-fishing or fly-tying products in assorted sizes offered by the Montana-based company. Retail prices are $9 (3-inch), $10 (4-inch), and $11 (4.75-inch). Ask for the new bobbins at your nearest Dr. Slick dealer and see www.drslick.com for more details.

Slint/By Brett Wedeking

"Turn to your right and cast upstream," barked my buddy, Dan Soltau, as he pulled on the oars. "Now strip fast!"

The steelheader in me pined for a gentle, smooth swing, but instead I was ripping a 6-inch streamer through the depths of the Yellowstone River like I was after barracuda, not brown trout.

My first experience with real streamer fishing for trout was awkward and clunky, but oh so sweet, as a parade of browns and cutts lined up to take turns in wild displays of predatory recklessness. Slashing Jaws-like attacks perforated my streamers throughout the day, and by the time we coasted into the take-out I was worn out and convinced Pheasant Tails and Hare's Ears were old news.

Years later—after much experimentation—the Slint is my most heavily fished pattern, in a stable of articulated beasts I carry while trout fishing. Browns, 'bows, and cutts will eat any color combo, but I like creamy white for a couple reasons. First, it passes for a number of widespread baitfish, like whitefish, baby browns, chubs, and saltwater species like bunker or sardines. Second, creamy colors are highly visible underwater, so you can keep track of your retrieve and see fish react to the fly.

The Slint utilizes a couple of my favorite materials, starting with good old marabou. Nothing beats marabou for flow and movement in the water. And, when stripped erratically through the water, marabou come alive with wild motion. The other body material here is UV Polar Chenille, the sparkly, wavy wrap that has taken over much of my steelhead and streamer tying. It comes in an array of colors with infinite applications, and with marabou spun over the top it creates a unique translucence and flow. I try to incorporate saddle hackle tips in most of my streamers, salt- or freshwater, simply because they have great action in flowing water and react sharply when stripped. And natural grizzly goes with almost anything.

The hook setup is critical to this pattern. That same friend, Dan, really fueled my streamer game and turned me on to jig-style single hooks for big trout. Since then, I've enjoyed a better landing-to-hookup ratio and fewer injured 12-inch trout that tried to eat streamers with hooks meant for larger fish. The connection is heavy bite wire, which is more durable than mono or Dacron. I slide metal beads down the wire to tighten up the loop around the eye of the trailing shank, to reduce fouling but allow maximum motion of the rear half of the fly. I see a lot of articulated patterns with glass beads, which tend to shatter after repeated abuse, hence the metal beads, which are much tougher.

This hook configuration, and this pattern specifically, will catch more than just trout. Stripers, largemouth, and smallmouth love the wild motion, and it has applications for saltwater species like dorado or snook too.

Adding to the hardware, I like the self-leveling nature of I-Balz and in this case the unavoidable hot orange. I use I-Balz, from Dirty Water Fly Company, on my streamers in a variety of anodized and enameled colors, depending on the color combo I'm tying.

Lastly, I add a little more sparkle and variegation, courtesy Senyo Predator Wrap and Hareline's new Ice Ripple Fiber. Predator Wrap moves with the marabou in the water, and Ripple Fiber gives a lifelike translucence.

Northwesterner Brett Wedeking is a freelance writer and a creative fly tier who tests his patterns on many different waters and species.

Step 1: Strip a clump of marabou fibers from a plume and tie them in at the back of the shank. Follow with the Polar Chenille and wrap it three-quarters of the way up the shank..

Step 2: Tie in cream marabou by its tip and spin it over the Polar Chenille. Whip-finish and cement the head.

Step 3: Thread the bite wire through the eye of the rear shank and slide beads down the wire. Lash down the wire to the front hook. Double back the wire and wrap over the tag ends for security.

Step 4: Tie in I-Balz near the jig bend. Then, tie in and wrap the Polar Chenille three-quarters of the way up the hook shank.

Step 5: Tie in cream marabou by its tip and spin it over the Polar Chenille. Strip off a length of burnish gold tan marabou and add as a topping.

Step 6: Tie in several strands of Ice Ripple Fiber on each side of the body. Follow with a single wrap of Predator Wrap and then wrap the schlappen collar. Whip-finish and cement.

Materials

Rear shank:	Netcraft wire shank
Thread:	White UTC, 140-denier
Tail:	Cream marabou
Underbody	UV copper Polar Chenille
Overbody:	Cream marabou
Connection:	30-lb. bite wire and 3 metal beads
Front hook:	Owner 60-degree bend jig hook, size 2
Eyes:	DWFC 0.5-in. hot orange I-Balz
Underbody:	UV copper Polar Chenille
Overbody:	Cream marabou
Topping:	Burnish gold tan marabou
Flash:	Pearl Ice Ripple Fiber
Collar:	Natural barred schlappen over grizzly Predator Wrap

Clear Water Pupa/By Philip Rowley

Materials

Hook:	Daiichi 1120, sizes 10–16
Thread:	Black MFC, size 8/0
Rib:	Small or extra-small red UTC Wire
Body/ thorax:	Black MFC thread, size 8/0
Wing case:	Medium or small Mirage Opal Mylar
Wing pads:	Amber or orange Sexi-Floss or Super Floss
Gills:	White UNI-Stretch
Note:	This pattern can be tied in many other colors.

For many years I have followed the still-water fly-fishing scene in Europe, particularly England, where fly fishing on lakes and reservoirs is both popular and productive. The challenges faced by European fly fishers are unique, but are countered by their insights and persistence. Studying English Chironomid tactics and patterns inspired the genesis of my Clear Water Pupa.

English buzzer (Chironomid pupa) patterns differ from the typical North American beadhead patterns. The focus is on slender, hard-body, quick-sinking, semi-realistic patterns. That style of fly proved to be the perfect solution to fooling the wary trout I encounter on many of the public waters I fish across North America. Lakes full of trout have fallen victim to enough beadhead patterns to make them wary and suspicious; in clear waters, the flash of a bead may alarm rather than attract.

The Clear Water Pupa is a straightforward fly featuring the key traits common to successful Chironomid pupa patterns: a thin and slender, slightly tapered body, a bulbous thorax, a segmented body, and prominent white gills.

Although I experiment with a variety of body options, I favor size 8/0- or 70-denier thread for the slightly tapered body, barely larger in diameter than the hook shank. Two or three layers of thread are more than enough. Obese pupa patterns are often ignored by selective trout. Other body options include Mylar, Flashabou, Frostbite, and Buzzer Wrap. Tying thread is also used to form the bulbous thorax. Depending on fly size, small or extra small, UNI-Wire creates distinct, contrasting body segments. Mylar, Flashabou, or tying thread are other rib options.

The wing case and wing pads give the Clear Water Pupa a semi-realistic look while adding a subtle element of flash and attraction. For the wing case I prefer medium-size opal Mirage Mylar on size 10 and 12 patterns, or size small for size 14 and smaller hooks. Other wing case options include pearlescent, red, gold, or silver Mylar.

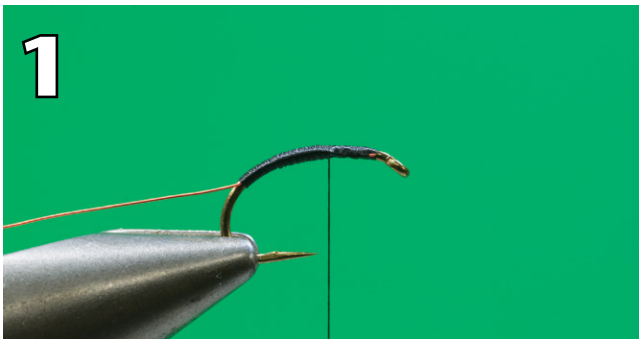
The wing pads can be either natural or bright. My current favorite material is tan, amber, or hot orange Sexi-Floss or Super Floss. Glo Brite Floss or holographic Mylar are great options if bright wing pads are needed to accentuate a Clear Water Pupa within a crowd of natural Chironomid pupa.

Use only gentle pressure when tying down wing pads made from Sexi Floss or Super Floss. Wing pads pulled forward under too much tension cause the material to spring from beneath the thread wraps once the excess floss is trimmed.

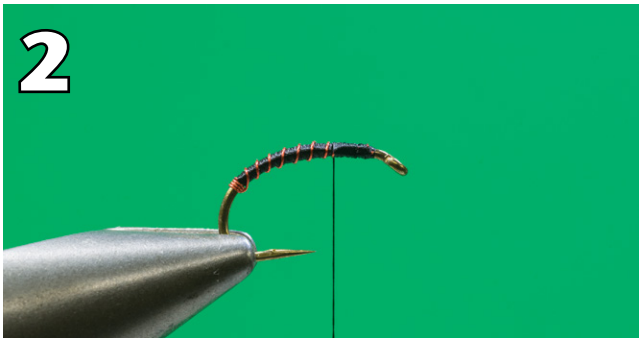
Coat and cure the completed fly with UV resin for added durability and shine. The gills are added after the body has been cured. Tying on the gills prior to coating causes the resin to wick up the gill material, making them appear stiff and lifeless upon curing.

The Clear Water Pupa is a simple, versatile pattern that produces no matter the presentation depth or technique. This semi-realistic fly also provides a source of confidence under challenging conditions. I believe pattern confidence coupled with the proper presentation is a key to success.

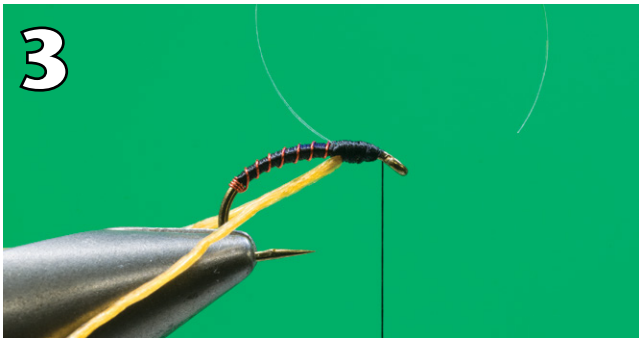
Philip Rowley, author of Fly Patterns for Stillwaters, *is a well-known lake-fishing expert who lives in British Columbia.*



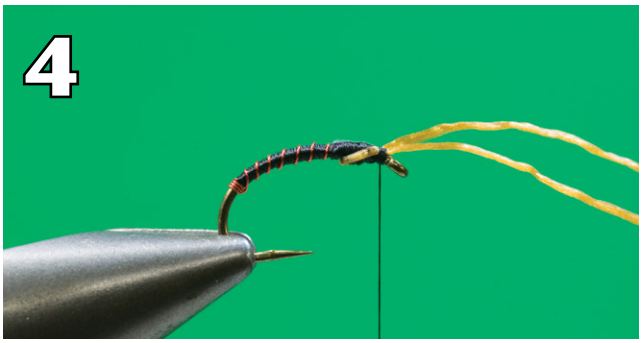
Step 1: Attach the tying thread just back from the hook eye and cover the shank with thread from the hook eye back to a point just forward of opposite the hook point. Tie in the rib material and bind it down into the hook bend. Form a neat, slightly tapered thread body forward to a point just ahead of the hook point.



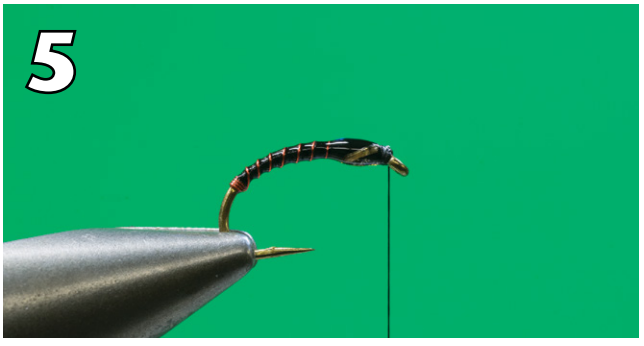
Step 2: Form a small butt of two to three wraps of wire at the base of the body, then spiral the wire forward, using seven wraps to form nine distinct body segments. Tie off the wire at the rear of the thorax area. Lay the remaining wire along the near side of the thorax. Using touching turns of thread, cover the wire forward to the hook eye. Twist and break off the excess wire.



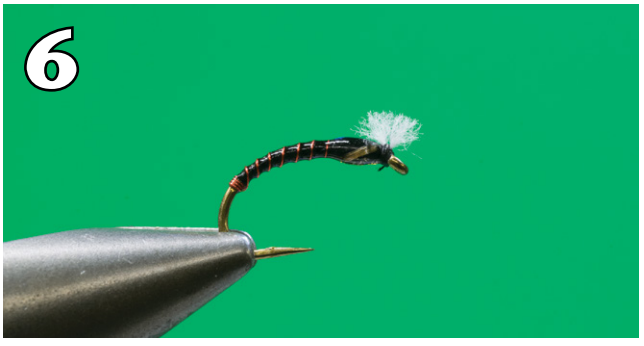
Step 3: Secure the wing case on the top of the thorax. Fold and double a short section of floss around the tying thread. Slide the doubled floss up the thread. Hold it in place along the underside of the thorax, just back from the hook eye. Using touching turns of thread, bind the floss along the underside of the thorax. Pull down and back on the floss to reduce bulk. Form a neat, bulbous thread thorax.



Step 4: Pull the wing case material over the top of the thorax. Tie off and trim the excess. Using moderate tension, bring the floss forward along each side of the thorax in a diagonal, one strand at a time. Tie off each strand. Carefully trim the excess and, using a minimum of thread wraps, cover the tie-off area. Whip-finish.



Step 5: Coat the body and thorax with UV resin, and cure. Place a few additional coats on the thorax area and into the pocket created by the wing pads along the underside of the thorax.



Step 6: Fold and double a short section of white UNI-Stretch around the tying thread. Slide the doubled UNI-Stretch down the thread and secure it on top of the thorax just back from the hook eye, using a minimum of thread wraps. Whip-finish again and remove the tying thread. Trim the gills to length.

Fish Tales/Munching Mayflies, Crunching Caddisflies/By Chip O'Brien

I am a fly fisherman, and I eat bugs.

If you hang around fish as much as I do, you may also find yourself munching mayflies, crunching caddisflies, and salivating over stoneflies someday. It started while I was working as a fly-fishing guide for an especially challenging client on Northern California's Pit River.

Why this snotty 20-something kid showed up for a day of fishing with a sour attitude is beyond me, but it was obvious he didn't want to be there. His grandfather had hired me and was fishing too, but there must have been some kind of wrinkle between them. We hadn't been in the water 10 minutes when the complaining started.

"Can't we get out of the water and fish from that rock over there?"

"Hey, I'm tangled—fix it."

"Shouldn't I have hooked a trout by now?"

"Were all the good guides busy today?"

On and on and on he went, and just when I was about to suggest he probably didn't need that wading staff, he plucked an aquatic insect from a midstream boulder, thrust it in my face, and demanded, "What's this?"

ARTWORK BY LISSA JENSEN

What happened next surprised us both.

Plucking the bug from his fingers, I held it up for closer examination. "That is an *Isonychia* mayfly exoskeleton," I said in my most scholarly-sounding voice, "and … they're delicious."

And I popped it in my mouth.

Time hung suspended for an uncomfortable moment while the kid struggled to comprehend what he had just witnessed.

"Did you just … eat that?" he groaned. "That's *so gross!*"

Recognizing momentary weakness, I went with it. "Yep," I said. "You gotta think like a trout, eat like a trout, be the trout."

"That's so disgusting," he shrieked. "Leave me alone!"

While that was the most welcome suggestion I'd heard all day, I couldn't quite do it because his grandfather was paying me to help the kid catch fish. But eating bugs quickly became my go-to weapon in our battle of wits.

I soon discovered that every time the kid was rude or obnoxious, all I had to do was pop another insect in my mouth to really bug him, so to speak. It seems desperate times do call for desperate measures.

That day I sampled adult mayflies, caddisflies, and even a few nymphs. I couldn't quite force myself to eat the 3-inch long Salmonfly nymph I dredged up from an underwater rock, though it would have been almost worth it to see the kid's reaction. At the end of the day, his grandfather awarded me a generous tip, and I thought I saw something more than just a wry twinkle in his eye.

The thing is, once you've eaten a dozen or so aquatic insects, the low vulgarity wears off and you're ready for some real fun. Turns out I had acquired a new superpower.

You never quite know how people will act when you pop a bug into your mouth. Reactions vary from wide-eyed amazement in some to (my favorite) triggering a serious gag reflex in others. No one has ever actually thrown up when I ate a bug, but most witnesses are at least guaranteed butterflies in their stomach. I've also learned not to tell my wife when I've been eating bugs if I wish to kiss her hello, goodbye, or good night.

The conversations around eating bugs are terrific, too. People genuinely want to know how they taste, what are the biggest bugs I've eaten, and, of course, about the crunch factor.

Perhaps we ought to be glad we're not bait anglers. That would, after all, open a real can of worms.

Chip O'Brien is a freelance writer who lives in Spokane, Washington.

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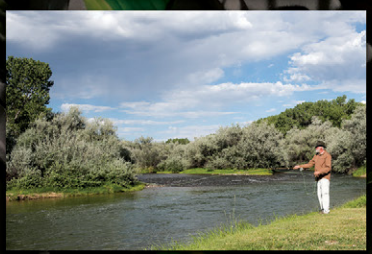

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