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In the Studio
Bitterroot Nets

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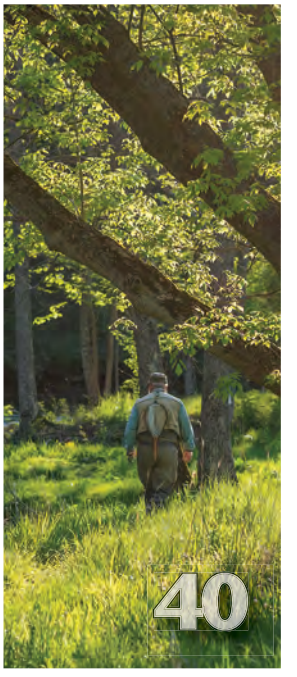
Page 12



Cover: Landon Lipke of Davidson River Outfitters fishes a Tenkara rod on a backcountry trout stream in western North Carolina.

Photo by: David Cannon

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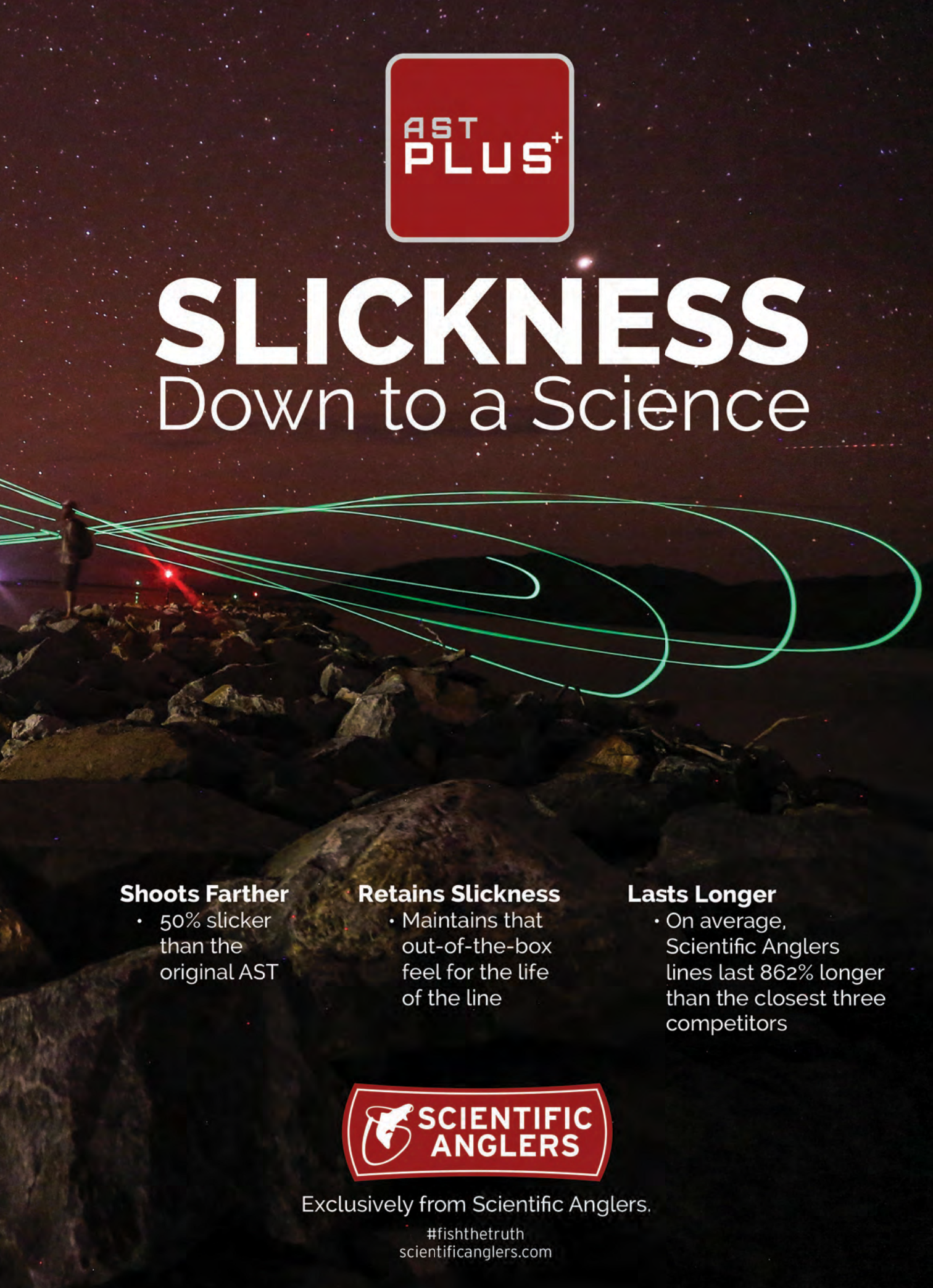
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From the Editor

Jon Luke, 1967—2018

I'm terribly saddened to report to our family of readers that Jon Luke, the creative director for the Northwest Fly Fishing family of magazines, passed away on March 17 as a result of injuries he sustained in a boating accident while he was on assignment in Texas.

Jon was in many ways the heart and soul of the magazines, caressing every step of the design process to create and improve the visually stunning and provocatively written magazines you enjoy; he also conceived many of the departments in the magazines, such as In the Studio and Fisheye. He was my friend and my coworker; he made me better at my job, and he especially loved the humorous side of our occupation and the sport of fly fishing. We spoke almost daily, often to fine-tune the magazine, but also to share bemusing stories, interesting discoveries, and much more.

Jon was optimistic, engaging, and entertaining. His interests and talents seemed boundless. For example, he was an intrepid, groundbreaking photographer who delighted, and excelled, in capturing intriguing and striking images, many of which appeared in our magazines. He was very open about his photographic techniques and tactics, and generously helped many of our contributors elevate their own work. For Jon, fly fishing went well beyond the casting and the catching. He reveled in the entire experience and loved to record all the nuances of a day on the water, and he often implored our contributors to photograph everything from launching the boat in the morning to sipping a drink well after dark at a favorite watering hole. He was a skilled angler, and especially enjoyed stalking carp, pursuing muskies, and designing innovative flies for bass and many other species. He taught his sons, Ben and Caleb, how to fly fish and enjoyed their company on many outings.

A cofounder and part owner of the magazines, Jon helped launch our flagship title, Northwest Fly Fishing, in 1999, and over the span of 20 years his passion never waned. Indeed, his enthusiasm was infectious, inspiring all who knew him and everyone who met him. He created a solid foundation that will help us carry the torch well into the future, and we look forward to sustaining and building upon his legacy.

Among all his other admirable qualities, Jon was a family man first and foremost, completely dedicated to his wife, Kim, and his sons, to whom I and the rest of our staff offer our deepest condolences. We miss him greatly and always will.

John Shewey
Editor in Chief

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Cast a Caption

May/June 2018 Contest

March/April 2018 Finalists

1. **"But, my dear, this one is gold, just the color of your beautiful hair."**
   Doug Atkinson, Bradford Woods, Pennsylvania

2. **"I know, I know, just make sure when I die that you don't sell them for what I told you I paid for them."**
   Carlos Fushimi, Idaho Falls, Idaho

3. **"Yes, dear, fly reels are just like shoes and purses: you need several for every season."**
   Bradd Churchill, Wichita, Kansas

CAST a CAPTION WINNER!

January/February 2018 Winner!

"Make all the jokes you want. I haven't paid for a nymph in 10 years."
Daniel Peterson, Santa Monica, California

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

To cast your caption, go to
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An Underwater Perspective

Crevalle Jack

By Jason Arnold

Masters at the Bench

Herman deGala/By Don Roberts

There's just no way around it. Herman deGala is a flerd—a fly (tying) nerd. In case you're wondering, that's a compliment. Back in the day, when he was attending design courses at the College of Architecture and Community Planning, University of Colorado, deGala would probably have registered some bafflement, if not scoffed, at the prospect that decades later he would embrace such an esoteric preoccupation as fly fishing and tying. But embrace it he did, and he brought to the table an approach informed by analytics.

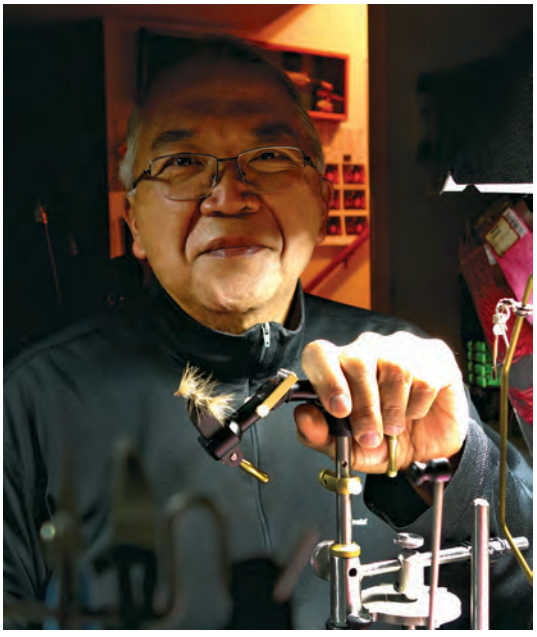
"I was taught a methodology at college," says deGala, "for defining problems and designing solutions." Of course, it helped that he first acquired a reasonably proficient skill set under the early influence and tutelage of commercial fly tier Shane Stalcup. "I found Shane Stalcup to be one of the most innovative fly designers I have ever met," deGala muses. "He came up with techniques no one had seen before, created and produced his own materials, and invented patterns that mimicked the life cycle of the bugs he was imitating."

DeGala was born in Hawaii and grew up on a "homestead across from the old Dole factory where there used to be a giant water tower in the shape of a pineapple." Although he is now firmly established in Aurora, Colorado—where he lives so close to lakes and reservoirs that his boots hardly ever dry out—he still considers Hawaii home, a state of mind reflected in his casual use of island vocabulary, such as *mahalo*, and charmingly incorporated into the names of certain fly patterns.

Contrary to the usual narrative arc wherein a father, or grandfather, or uncle takes an impressionable young lad fishing—an act that over time may mutate into lifelong fly-fishing fever and perhaps its viral sidekick, fly tying—deGala didn't get into fly angling until he was 43 years old. And it was his wife and kids who gave him the initial shove. His wife had quite reasonably suggested that Herman and his boys needed an outdoorsy activity they could do together. Clearly, at 43, skateboarding, dirt biking, and parkour were out of the question. So his spouse did what suburban wives do: she solved the dilemma by going shopping. "She purchased a couple of spin rods from a nearby big-box store," recalls deGala. "They were horrible, and I returned them the next day for better equipment. We began to frequent a local fly shop–bait store, and of course they got us into fly fishing.… Every Wednesday the

shop would stay open late and guys would come in to tie flies. I observed for more than a year before I started tying myself."

Having carefully observed—and absorbed—the methods and techniques employed by numerous guest tiers, deGala was soon bringing his own style and analytical thinking to the tying bench. After all, the mechanics of fly tying are one thing, but the creative process is quite another. How do you interpret an aquatic life form using the language of fur, feather, and fiber? The answer, or at least part of the answer, can be found in deGala's own words. Take, for example, this discussion of the thinking behind his Hula Damsel Nymph: "The design of this fly started as a problem-solving exercise after viewing a damsel nymph migrating to the shore. What struck me was how the head of the damsel stayed stationary while the *okole* [Hawaiian for "butt"] was moving rapidly side to side. I knew that I couldn't possibly completely duplicate that movement, but I could partially mimic it.



"To mimic the sinusoidal movement of the damsel I chose to use two hooks linked with a piece of mono. The key here is how the two hooks are joined [visual instruction is available on YouTube; search for "Hula Damsel Nymph"]. The articulated abdomen must move horizontally and not vertically. Given the proper mono connection, when the fly is stripped through the water, the abdomen moves from side to side just like doing the hula."

When it comes to other distinctive features of the Hula Damsel, deGala elaborates: "For the legs I use CDC for its long, thin tendrils as it moves through the water. I add a pinch of UV Ice Dub to give it a glint of light to further suggest movement. I add a bead under the thorax so that when the fly stops moving it dives, just like it does in nature. I use medallion sheeting or cellophane that's been tinted with a felt marker to suggest a shiny wing case and to tone down the shininess of the bead. For the

abdomen I use a long-shank dry-fly hook wrapped with D-rib to define the segmentation and translucency of the body. Ostrich was the natural choice for the tail appendages.… I also drew the ostrich herl along the sides of the abdomen to represent gills and to further enhance lateral movement."

If deGala's unselfconscious use of the term "sinusoidal" somehow failed to establish his bona fides as a total flerd, the fact that he once earnestly engaged in a flies-for-food horse trade most certainly does. When word spread of the particular effectiveness of deGala's CDC Callibaetis—his friends in Aurora having taken to calling it the Hermanator—another acquaintance, an accomplished chef, just had to possess the pattern's secret sauce. "I actually traded with this friend of mine his recipe for crème brûlée for my Callibaetis. I taught him how to tie my Calli and he taught me how to cook his crème brûlée"— a trout-for-taste-buds quid pro quo.

In keeping with his normally reserved nature, deGala did not initially submit his flies to Umpqua Feather Merchants, which now offers several; it occurred instead via the angling community's palm-to-palm express. As deGala explains, "I had given some of my flies to a friend who gave them to another friend, and they ended up in the hands of Brian Schmidt and Bruce Olson at Umpqua Feather Merchants. After having first taken my Hula Damsel and swum it in their 500-gallon fish tank, they called me and told me my flies had been accepted [into their signature tier program]."

Fully appreciating the detail of deGala's more intricate patterns requires considerable magnification, which, it so happens, deGala provides on his website, www.flytyingclips.com, where he regularly posts 3-D carousel views of featured flies. But magnified or not, clearly some of deGala's patterns are relatively complicated (or "involved," he says), while others fall into the category of mostly unabashedly buggy.

In regard to the admittedly involved patterns, a question arises: Yeah, but do they work? It's a question deGala answers obliquely by recalling a funny story: "One day my sons, Efren and Ian, and I headed to the lake to fish. Several anglers had been there for hours and were not having any luck. Within 10 minutes my sons and I each had on fish. Finally, an older gentleman approached my youngest boy, Ian, who was 8 at the time, and asked him what we were doing differently. Ian looked him in the eye and proclaimed, 'Oh, we had prayer before we came out.' The guy just walked away shaking his head."

Rest assured, with flies like deGala's, you've got more than a prayer.

Don Roberts is an Oregon-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to the Northwest Fly Fishing *family of magazines.*

Fish Food

Crane Flies: Daddy Longlegs with Wings/By Don Roberts

PHOTO BY ARLEN THOMASON

Despite some confusion about what to call them, crane flies, at least in the adult stage, are among the easiest insects to identify. You know that gangly-legged insect that looks like a daddy longlegs but with wings, the one that resembles a mondo mosquito on steroids, the one that sneaks into your house and bounces around the windowsill like the flimsiest of dervishes? There's just no mistaking the weird appearance and more than slightly wacky antics of a crane fly.

Aliases abound, including skeeter eater, mosquito hawk, gollywhopper, and gallinipper. Although these names seem to imply aggressive behavior, particularly toward mosquitoes, adult crane flies don't bite, sting, or attack anything. They're simply not equipped with the mouthparts for predation. About all these lovable wusses can manage (and that's just some species of crane flies) is to meekly sponge up some flower nectar. The fact is, adult crane flies don't need to eat because they don't live that long: estimates vary from 48 hours to several days, depending upon the individual species observed.

On the other hand, crane fly larvae, known as leatherjackets, not only live many months but also have chewing-capable mandibles and consume as much algae, microflora, and decaying matter as they can scrounge. And, yes, some species are predatory, ostensibly targeting mosquito eggs and larvae. Since leatherjackets are essentially grub-like, resembling maggots, they have no real means of locomotion and—aside from wriggling around in the muck, mud, or rotting vegetation—hardly venture beyond their point of origin, where the adult female first dropped her cargo of eggs.

Given their soggy, subterranean lifestyle, crane fly larvae have for the most part eluded in-depth scientific study. In fact, the larvae of many species have never once been sighted, much less studied. Surprisingly, the way more conspicuous and amusing adults have fared only marginally better in the annals of science. Had it not been for entomologist Charles P. Alexander—who during his career described a herculean 11,000 of the 15,000 or so recognized crane flies in the family Tipulidae—we would today know even less about these familiar-yet-strange creatures. What Alexander and other entomologists managed to ascertain is that, with the exception of polar ice regions, crane flies have adapted to live almost everywhere on the planet.

PHOTO BY ARLEN THOMASON

Crane flies are also known to have a somewhat truncated life cycle, typified by the adult female emerging from the pupa case with a payload of already mature eggs. So it is with a sense of urgency that the males and females seek each other out in order to expedite fertilization. Though most crane flies have relatively big eyes, their visual acuity has never been scientifically tested and

remains another unknown. What entomologist have noted, however, is that the males of some species flit around their habitat with their forelegs outstretched, presumably relying on a contact pheromone to locate females. After rather speedy courtship and mating, the female immediately seeks an alluringly damp, putrid spot for laying her eggs, and the cycle begins anew.

Belonging to the order Diptera—derived from the Greek word *di* (meaning "two") and *ptera* (meaning "wings")—crane flies all possess a single pair of nearly translucent, veined, monochromatic wings. In some species, the female's wings are much smaller than the male's, appearing to be so rudimentary as to seem incapable of flight. As aerodynamic compensation for their spindly bodies and absurdly thin, stilt-like legs, nature has seen to it that crane flies come equipped with modified appendages called halteres. Easily overlooked, upon close examination these matchstick-shaped organs, one located just behind each wing, become clearly visible to the naked eye. Halteres vibrate at high speed during flight and function as stabilizers, similar to gyroscopes on planes, thus preventing excessive pitch, roll, and yaw.

Despite sharing the same basic structural shape—long, slim body; slender cellophane-like wings; wire-thin, jointed, outrigger legs—crane fly species vary in size, color, and wing pattern (arrangement of veins). The smallest crane fly on earth could easily come in for a landing on the head of the largest crane fly. The daintiest species measure mere millimeters, while the whopper species tape out at over 3 inches in body length, with leg spans of 10 inches or longer.

In regard to devising a convincing fly pattern, the most common crane flies are typically 0.5 to 1 inch from head to tail, with legs extending to about double the body length. Those crane flies usually found near lakes and streams in North America come in three standard-issue colors: gray, shades of brown, or creamish-tan (sometimes yellowish). That said, sans any logical explanation except perhaps eye attraction, I've always found amber to be the most productive color for imitations. I'll also offer this admonition: when tying crane flies, suppress the compulsion to get fancy; superfluous detail or added froufrou of any kind will only bog the flies down. Keep them lithe and sparse. Here's the test: with only the leader and tippet extended from your rod tip, a worthy crane fly imitation must be airy enough to flit and dance on the breeze.

Mason's Rust Big Daddy Crane
Fly courtesy of Rainy's

Keller's Crane Fly
Fly courtesy of Montana Fly Company

Crane Fly
Fly courtesy of Orvis

Variant Daddy Long Legs
Fly courtesy of Rainy's

Strolis's Rat Nest Crane
Fly courtesy of Montana Fly Company

Tim's Candy Crane
Fly courtesy of Orvis

Horodysky's Mopsickle
Fly courtesy of Umpqua

The most crucial aspect of fishing crane flies is neither the color nor the size of the imitation, but simply to be there when they hatch—easier said than done. A few years back, while I was fishing a wide side channel on a river in southwest Montana, a sudden rainsquall blew across the surrounding marsh grasses and evicted throngs of crane flies. Normally nervous, exceedingly wary trout abandoned all caution, chasing down and inhaling each and every crane fly that wobbled over the glass-smooth flow. Of course, par for the course, I didn't have a single crane fly pattern. On the other hand, I did have a large bushy Stimulator, which I whittled down (scissors are a must in every vest) to almost nothing, then coaxed the remaining fibers into a messy splay and buttered the entire butchery with Mucilin. The trout didn't stop to ask questions, but simply ate the ugly ruse each time it was presented halfway smartly.

Crane flies are, in every sense of the word, *occasional* critters. If—as with mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies—crane flies operate or propagate under some kind of temperature-sensitive cyclic calendar, it has not been well recorded or understood. There are really only two ways to plan for the emergence of crane flies: fish the same lakes and streams season after season, noting when and precisely where you encounter a hatch (even then, don't count on dependable repetition), and always, *always* carry at least three or four reliable crane fly imitations in the field, in the event a hatch does occur. In the meantime, practice until you master the wind-tossed, dap-dap-skitter-pause of a crane fly haphazardly alighting on the water. When fishing crane flies, intermittent motion is the secret potion.

Chicago Angling and Casting Club, 1892—The Yankee Casting Club That Beat the Brits to the Punch

By Don Roberts

ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED BY DAVID DUROCHIK/SPORTPICSONLINE.COM

It's amazing what you can do with some sticks and string. The games you can play—games that at some point are destined to become competitions, with rules and standards and ostentatious trophies bearing inscriptions heralding primacy.

Anytime you throw people together in the same location, with access to sporting (or even not so sporting) implements and devices, competition will ensue. It's encoded in our genes. Of course, we're not talking pikes, cudgels, or ax throwing here; we're talking the will-o'-the-wisps of angling. Nevertheless, it seems prudent to own up to more than a trickle of testosterone.

Although fly fishing dates back 2,000 years, to Macedonian anglers plying their wiles on the Astraeus River, organized competition casting is a relatively recent and, at least at its inception, uniquely American phenomenon. Intuition might suggest that it started in concert with the angling craze in pre-industrial England—Izaak Walton's motherland and not so coincidentally where the artisan-laden village of Redditch became the foundation of the fishing tackle trade in Europe. Intuition would be wrong.

As Cliff Netherton noted in the first volume of his book *History of the Sport of Casting: Early Times* (1981; the second volume, *Golden Years*, followed in 1983), "The first casting contests ever held were at the annual meetings of the New York State Sportsmen's Club [NYSSC]. At the second annual meeting held at Syracuse in October [1861] a resolution was passed, 'that the club hereafter award a prize for skill in the use of rod and gun.' "

Keep in mind that the NYSSC was not the first angling club in America—and certainly not the longest-lived, having disbanded in 1873. That distinction goes to the Schuylkill Fishing Company of Pennsylvania, founded in 1732. However, what little record exists indicates that the Schuylkill club has long been a social gathering, more about boisterous meetings and tankards of ale than anything as formal as a casting contest. Flipping perch apparently took precedence over rod-wielding skills, as attested to by a section of the club's charter, which states, "Each club

> "The Chicago Angling and Casting Club is without doubt the oldest active club in the USA and possibly the world, having been founded in 1892 just prior to the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago."

member serves as an apprentice at some time, and must learn to hold three perch in a long-handled frying pan over the blazing wood fire until one side is done to a turn, then, with a quick twist of his wrist, toss the fish up the old chimney, catching them as they fall on the uncooked side. The perch are served to the company assembled about the ancient table, on one of William Penn's platters."

The Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club (originally the San Francisco Fly Casting Club) dates back to 1894 and touts itself as the second-oldest casting club in America. Actually, if you want to get technical, and discounting the Schuylkill bunch, the Golden Gate club ranks as third oldest, after both NYSSC and the Chicago Angling and Casting Club (CACC). But, in terms of active, still functioning, casting clubs, it is inarguably the second oldest. According to John Seroczynski, a Chicago Club member of long standing and still a tournament caster at age 72, "The Chicago Angling and Casting Club is without doubt the oldest active club in the USA and possibly the world, having been founded in 1892 just prior to the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago."

The multifaceted Fisheries Pavilion that Charles Cotton had built 300 years ago on the banks of the River Dove in Staffordshire, England—composed of a Spanish-Romanesque central structure, connected to a series of polygons, with gables, pillars, and arches, and further distinguished by the adjacent, almost exact replica of the Walton and Cotton Fishing Lodge, aka The Stone Temple—turned out to be one of the fair's most crowd-pleasing installations. But what really gave the club an unrivalled measure of brio was the fact that it also sponsored the first-ever international open-invitational casting competition, billed as "The World's Columbian Exposition Scientific Angling Tournament."

This event proved so popular, attracting competitors from all over Europe and Scandinavia, that over subsequent years and decades CACC held numerous "Open to the World" tournaments. (In 1939 the nomenclature "Scientific Angling" was replaced with simply "Angling and Casting" to overcome the impression that viably competing somehow depended on sophisticated and customized (scientific) equipment.

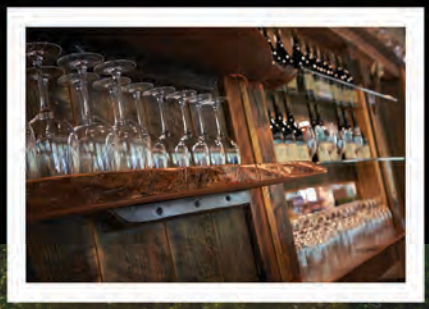
Of special note, particularly in a fly-fishing publication, was the early recognition and inclusion of bait casting in tournament casting. As early as 1893, CACC commented in its "History and Objects" report that "As bait casting [is] much in vogue in bass fishing, and to cast bait correctly and accurately considerable practice and the application of set principles were found to be necessary, the Club decided to include bait casting as one of the events of the Club contests."

To this day, bait casting continues to be a heady complement of most large-scale fly-casting tournaments. Spin casting? Not so much.

Although surprisingly little has changed in the sphere of competition casting in the last 100 or so years—after all, the same skills apply—some minor differences and alterations have been adopted. For instance, during the formative years of tournament casting, casts were scored two ways: consciously executed with the wind and then against the wind (two separate scores). A so-called light rod back then could weigh 10.5 ounces or more, and a distance cast of 60 to 70 feet was considered quite respectable. Additionally, casting for accuracy had to be executed with each hand (composite scoring). Single-handed rods were limited to 12 feet in length, while salmon rods (two-handed) were held to a maximum of 20 feet—a two-story-high fly rod. Just picking one up proved cumbersome, never mind swinging the damned thing. Netherton complained that because "no such longer rods are made or used in actual fishing," the two-handed rod "should be dropped for it is

Though originally organized primarily to promote casting skills and the mingling of like-minded sportsmen, the Chicago Angling and Casting Club, along with other regional clubs affiliated with the Izaak Walton League, soon adopted the principles of environmentalism before it was even a word and became tireless defenders of the earth and the creatures that swim, soar, or roam upon it (above). Carol Rand (nee Steel), daughter of casting great Frank Steel, demonstrates proper bait-casting form at a women's Skish practice session. After its introduction in 1939, Skish, a compaction of "skill" and "fish"—which like croquet, was more of a casual and social pastime than a rigorous, rules-laden competition—attracted increasing numbers of women to the sport (left).

PIONEERS & LEGENDS *continued on page 70*



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Training the Next Generation of Conservation Stewards/By Luke Frazza

Like many Americans, you may think fondly of the amazing work the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) did in the 1930s and '40s to help build our national parks. You may not realize, however, that modern-day versions of the CCC are working today to improve the environment and outdoor spaces.

PHOTO BY LUKE FRAZZA

One offspring of the fabled CCC is the Phillipsburg chapter of the New Jersey Youth Corps (NJYCP), www.njycphillipsburg.com, headquartered just a few minutes from the Delaware River. Funded through the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, NJYCP offers young adults an opportunity to earn a high school diploma while giving back to their community through service projects. In 2014, NJYCP volunteered to pilot a new aquatic restoration training and certification program, aptly named Waders in the Water (WitW). The WitW program introduces members of different conservation corps nationwide to basic safety, materials, and installation for aquatic restoration while providing an opportunity to obtain industry-recognized credentials and additional pathways to a career in the $10-billion-per-year restoration economy—all while improving the health, beauty, and climate resilience of public streams, rivers, wetlands, and other habitats.

The program was designed under a new public-private partnership between The Corps Network, www.corpsnetwork.org, which represents 128 corps nationwide, and the Paradise Valley, Montana–based Trout Headwaters, Inc., www.troutheadwaters.com, a national innovator in restoring the protective features of streams, wetlands, and other critical habitats.

Since the pilot, NJYCP has partnered with New Jersey Audubon, www.njaudubon.org, and other organizations to restore local habitats and improve water quality on streams, including some that feed into the Musconetcong (Musky) River. On these waterways, corps members carefully planted fast-growing willow stakes to stabilize the stream banks, prevent soil erosion, and cool the water. As the trees grow, the streams become more hospitable to everything from macroinvertebrates to trout to nesting birds. Excess phosphorous, considered one of America's most challenging environmental problems, will also be reduced. The Musky project has multiple phases on different streams in the watershed and uses different corps members as they cycle through the NJYCP program.

After working on a Musky feeder stream project, 18-year-old NJYCP corps member and WitW graduate Zach Oefelein said, "It definitely gives me a sense of pride. There aren't enough people focused on things like this. A lot of our world is focused on what you can get out of nature and not what you can put back into it."

The Warren County Rod & Gun Club of Asbury, New Jersey, also joined the partnership to restore the Musky watershed. Afterwards, club member Maribeth Venezia marveled that the corps members "knew exactly what to do." After completing their work in a short time in a torrential rainstorm, they were "off to another job, which was larger.… Talk about impressed," Venezia said.

New Jersey Audubon stewardship project director John Parke added, "I cannot express how impressed we were by the group's knowledge of riparian systems and their immediate understanding of how to do the job and do the job right the first time.... To see the pride on their faces after the job was complete, knowing that they helped improve the ecosystem with the hard work they performed, is something that I will never forget and a big reason why we would certainly reach out to students of the Waders in the Water program again."

NJYCP's list of both WitW graduates and conservation partners continues to grow. New Jersey Audubon recently announced that with financial support from the William Penn Foundation (www.williampennfoundation.org) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (www.nfwf.org) for the Delaware River Watershed Initiative (www.drwi.net), NJYCP is now New Jersey Audubon's on-call workforce to perform riverbank and wetland restoration and other stewardship activities associated with the Delaware River Watershed Initiative.

After working on one of the Audubon projects, 17-year-old NJYCP member and WitW grad Ciara Echevarria observed, "This was awesome. I didn't think it was possible for me to participate in something like this. I would love to do this for a career!"

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHE PEREZ

Ottauquechee River, VT By Christophe Perez

The Ottauquechee River, a major tributary of the Connecticut River, is one of central Vermont's longest trout streams. Yet fly anglers are a rare sight along its 38 miles. Sure, the Ottauquechee shouldn't be fished at the height of summer, when it suffers from elevated water temperatures. But in spring and fall, it runs cold and fly anglers can find active trout from its headwaters in Killington to the Quechee Gorge, in Quechee.

Some 28 river miles separate these two points. In between, the Ottauquechee River presents very different types of scenery and waters. In its upper reaches, along River Road and US Highway 4 in Killington, it remains a mere 10- to 15-foot-wide stream meandering through woods and floodplains. Deep pools carved in the sandy bottom along ledges and under deadfall provide shelter to native brook trout and a few rainbow trout. Outside of occasional periods of high flows, fly anglers can easily scout this stretch on foot, but it is also possible to kayak or canoe downriver from a car-top-boat launch located next to the bridge on Rabeck Mountain Road in Killington.

Three miles downstream, the Ottauquechee River enters Bridgewater and picks up speed. Faster flows and a rockier bottom create the kind of habitat that rainbow trout favor. The state stocks this species every year in early May, from State Route 100 in Bridgewater to the Taftsville Covered Bridge in Woodstock. Most of this long section of the river runs along US Highway 4, and the river and the highway cross paths eight times. Several roadside turnouts signal worthy access points. To find the rainbows, look for pools and runs, but also for the mouths of smaller brooks flowing into the river, where the water is cooler and more aerated. The most popular access point is the Church Street bridge in Woodstock, above which are some of the river's best pools. Drifting bead-head nymphs through these pools has proven productive for me and many others.

With hatches of Hendricksons in May, Light Cahills in June, and various caddisflies from spring to fall, dry-fly fishing can be excellent. Some of the best dry-fly areas include the stretch above the Taftsville Dam, in Woodstock, and the long section between the two Quechee dams. There, the impoundment of the river forms wide, deep, and slow stretches where scores of rainbows hold over. On spring and fall evenings, their presence is revealed by the countless rings of their rises. These deep sections can be fished from the shore or from limited shallow areas, where wading is possible. But the best way to fish them is from a kayak or a canoe, which can be launched above

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHE PEREZ

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHE PEREZ

the Taftsville dam, and at Dewey's Landing Park, along Quechee Main Street in Quechee.

Just below the lower dam in Quechee, the Ottauquechee River plunges 165 feet into Quechee Gorge. This spectacular stretch of deep and fast-running water holds large brown and rainbow trout, which are best tempted with streamers fished on sinking-tip lines. Access to the gorge is limited to two main fishing spots: one along the upper section of the gorge, accessible from a trail on the west side of the gorge; and one at the tail end of the gorge, accessible from the eastern trail. Both trails start at the US Highway 4 bridge, which spans the gorge. Beware: Quechee Gorge presents serious dangers and should be approached with the utmost prudence. Added to the steep incline and slipperiness of its rocky walls is the threat of sudden water releases at the dam, which cause the river to rise very quickly. Such releases, announced by an alarm, should prompt you to leave the gorge immediately.

Quechee Gorge is best fished with a knowledgeable guide. For this, contact Stream and Brook Fly Fishing, www.streamandbrook.com. Stream and Brook offers guided fly-fishing trips on the Ottauquechee River as well as on many other Vermont streams. Vermont's trout season runs from the second Saturday in April to October 31.

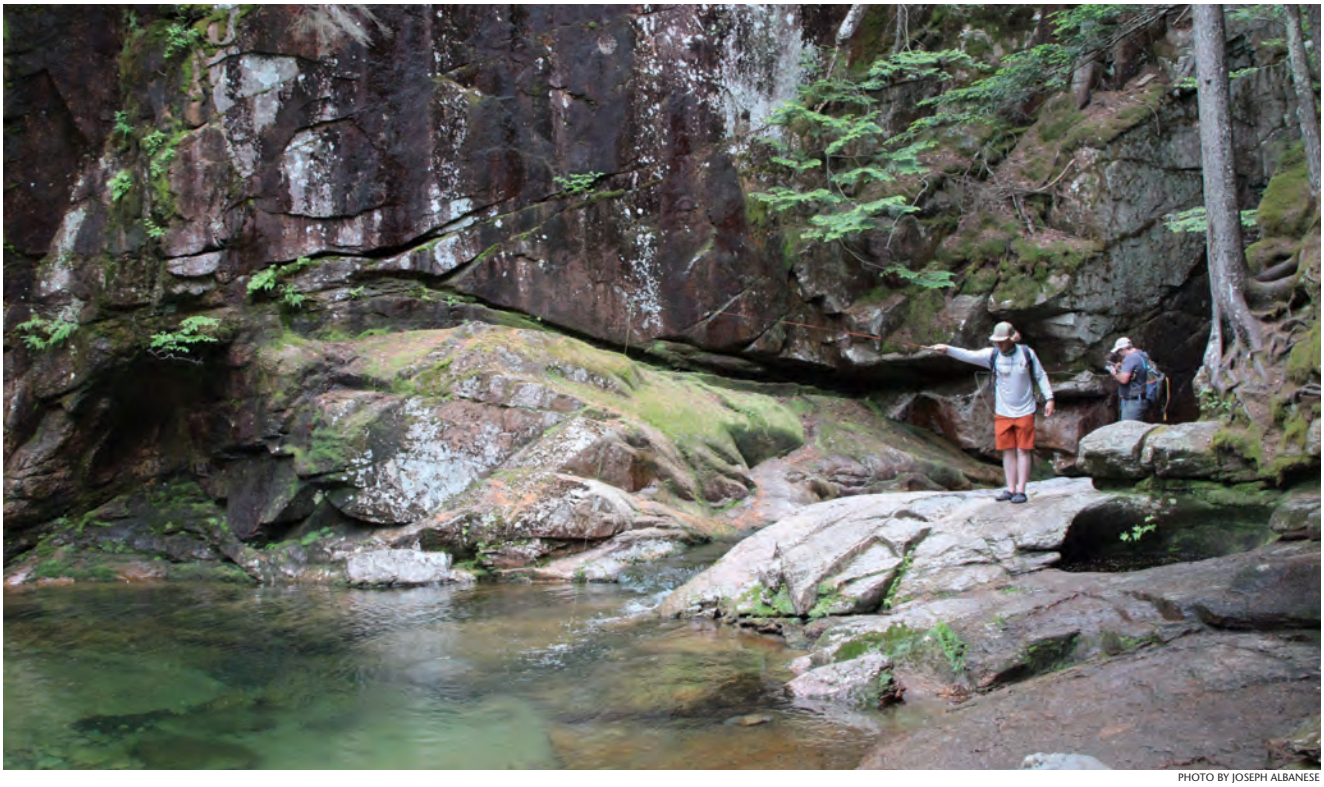


PHOTO BY JOSEPH ALBANESE

Kancamagus Highway, NH

By Joseph Albanese

New Hampshire's Kancamagus Highway, a section of State Route 112, runs through some of White Mountain National Forest's most popular attractions. Starting in Lincoln and running to the town of Conway, this 34-mile stretch has been designated a Scenic Byway for its natural beauty; it offers stunning views and plenty of recreational opportunities. Every year, thousands of vacationers roll down the thoroughfare to take advantage of the swimming holes, hiking trails, and campgrounds that pepper the periphery. Adding to that allure are brook trout, both native and stocked. The average wild fish will go 7 inches, but I have taken some as large as 14 inches.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH ALBANESE

The Kancamagus, or "Kank" as it's known locally, parallels the Swift River for a good portion of its run. This rocky stream is spring-fed, which keeps water temperatures down even in the heat of the summer. Despite the cool water, the Swift remains an early-morning fishery as hordes of tourists descend like so many locusts during the daylight hours. Some of the prime fishing spots are also prime swimming holes, so beating the crowds is a requisite for success. Water levels fluctuate with rainfall in this freestone river, with no dams to regulate flows. In dry years the angling can actually improve, thanks to the preponderance of plunge and flume pools concentrating the fish.

Lower Falls and Rocky Gorge are perfect examples of tourist traps that hold plenty of fish, though swimming is prohibited at the latter. Both can be productive for anglers drifting nymphs or fishing small streamers, with caddisfly and mayfly hatches occurring with some regularity. Just across the road from the Swift, Sabbaday Falls features a gorgeous waterfall dropping into a gin-clear pool holding plenty of natives. Despite the staggering number of visitors, fishing pressure is almost nonexistent. The last time we were there, a tourist remarked to my wife as she plucked a 6-incher out that he had been coming there for 30 years and that was the first time he had seen anyone fishing.

Flowing water isn't the only attraction, with a number of small ponds available for a short hike into the surrounding forest. Falls Pond, a scant 0.25 mile from Rocky Gorge, offers enough stocked brookies to keep an angler with even the shortest attention span entertained. Bill Thompson, owner of the North Country Angler in Conway, has called this pond "a bug factory." One afternoon, he witnessed five dif-

ferent mayfly hatches in a few short hours. One of the most memorable hatches I've ever seen took place here, with caddisflies coming off the water in such numbers that they drew a large flock of cedar waxwings, swooping and diving on the insects for well over an hour as I cast to rising fish.

The other ponds are farther away (up to 7 miles), but well worth the walk. Designed to be accessible for families with small children, the trails are well groomed with gentle grades, so the hiking isn't as technical as elsewhere in the Whites. Upper and Lower Greeley Ponds, Church Ponds, and Sawyer and Little Sawyer Ponds all contain stocked and holdover trout. If you're after big fish, your best bet is flinging streamers on a sinking-tip line at Upper Greeley. Tote along a float tube if you have one, as these ponds are tailor-made for inflatables. Waders are mandatory; the water in these ponds is tannic and harbors more than a few leeches.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH ALBANESE

The U.S. Forest Service provides and maintains parking lots to service these watering/fishing holes, complete with pit toilets. A modest fee is payable at self-service stations located at each. The Saco District Ranger Station, (603) 447-5448, sits at the intersection of State Routes 112 and 113 on the outskirts of Conway, and can provide you with a map of the area and information about the trails. Unfortunately, fishing licenses aren't available here, so purchase one online from New Hampshire Fish and Game at www.nhfishandgame.com. And make sure to stop at the North Country Angler, (603) 356-6000, www.northcountryangler.com, to stock up on caddisfly patterns, Humpies, and Carrie Stevens–style streamers.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL SALOMONE

Beach Parks of Boca Raton, FL By Michael Salomone

When fly fishers plan a vacation for destinations in south Florida, Boca Raton easily makes the list of desirable beach locales. Boca provides all the necessities for a do-it-yourself saltwater fly-fishing experience, with multiple public beach parks that offer lots of productive waterfront. From north to south, prime water is available at Spanish River Park, Red Reef Park, South Beach Park, and South Inlet Park.

Spanish River Park is unique because it provides access for anglers on the Atlantic Ocean beachfront on the east side and within the Intracoastal Waterway along the western edge. A lifeguarded beach on the ocean side provides fishing opportunities outside the guarded beach area and during non-swimming hours. Telltale signs of the original Spanish River that flowed through the park are still easy to locate. Parking can be problematic at times, but additional parking is available in metered spaces along Spanish River Boulevard.

Red Reef Park (be sure to make time for the Gumbo Limbo Nature Center) has a rock reef close to the beach at the southern end of the park. Red Reef also has some productive reef areas just offshore, adding to the fish-attracting power of this location. Snook favor this area because of all the structure, especially during the closed-harvest summer months. These hard-fighting fish rank high with fly anglers, and they are plentiful here.

Fish the public swimming area until the lifeguards arrive at 9 a.m. and then move on. If you arrive at the 8 a.m. gate-opening time, you'll have an hour of quiet fishing before the swimmers appear. Early in the morning, snook pop at glass minnows along the shore, schools of jacks hunt up and down the beach and push bait out of the water, and menacing barracudas prowl the reef like bullies on a middle school playground. Cast Clouser Minnows into nervous water, at dark shadows, and near jumping minnows, and you'll hook snook and barracuda fishing right from the beach.

At South Beach Park, high-deck paths lead anglers to the beachfront. Fishing is permitted in swimming areas during non-swimming hours and outside the guarded area anytime. Lifeguards are on the job year-round from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and will politely direct you to the appropriate fishing areas during the daytime. The wide, sandy shoreline provides plenty of beachfront for anglers to cast for snook, jacks, and the oc-

PHOTO BY MICHAEL SALOMONE

casional tarpon, along with bluefish and pompano. Jacks and bluefish battle like heavyweight fighters on 6- and 7-weight rods, and pompano jump on small Clousers, glass minnow imitations, and sand flea flies right along the swash zone, where the waves crash upon the shore.

South Inlet Park (not to be confused with South Beach Park) has a large fishing jetty and the only passage in the area from the Atlantic Ocean to the Intracoastal Waterway. It can get busy here, but fly-fishing action can be excellent. The rock jetty can hold large snook, and they also cruise the shallows along the nearby beachfront in summer months. Reefs about 175 feet from shore are magnets for fish.

Boca Raton conjures up images of geriatric drivers, upscale shopping, elegant properties, and pristine beaches. But this iconic vacation spot also provides exciting opportunities to target some of Florida's most sought-after game fish. The local fly shop is Ole Florida Fly Shop, (561) 995-1929, www.olefloridaflyshop.com.

Little Elkhart River, IN By Nathan Perkinson

Remember Fonzie from *Happy Days*? No matter what kind of trouble was brewing around him, you could always count on The Fonz to be calm and cool. That's a good way to describe northern Indiana's Little Elkhart River. Spring runoff and heavy summer rain can wreak havoc on area fly fishing, but the Little Elkhart, short and buffered by extensive wetlands, runs steady and clean while nearby rivers like the Saint Joseph and Pigeon are raging over their banks.

The Little Elkhart is a warm-water stream that rises in LaGrange County near Shipshewana and flows northwest for 20 miles, where it joins the Saint Joseph River in Bristol. Not to be confused with the nearby Elkhart River, which is larger and feeds the Saint Joe several miles downstream in the town of Elkhart, the Little Elkhart is a small, mild-mannered stream that gently flows through the Hoosier State's northern farms and wetlands.

PHOTOS BY KYRA PERKINSON

Smallmouth bass and panfish are the Little Elkhart's native attractions, and both are plentiful. Panfish and bass fishing usually picks up in late April or early May and continues through September or October. This small stream flows slowly through north-central

New Book
The Reel Sisters

By Michelle Cummings
www.thereelsisters.com

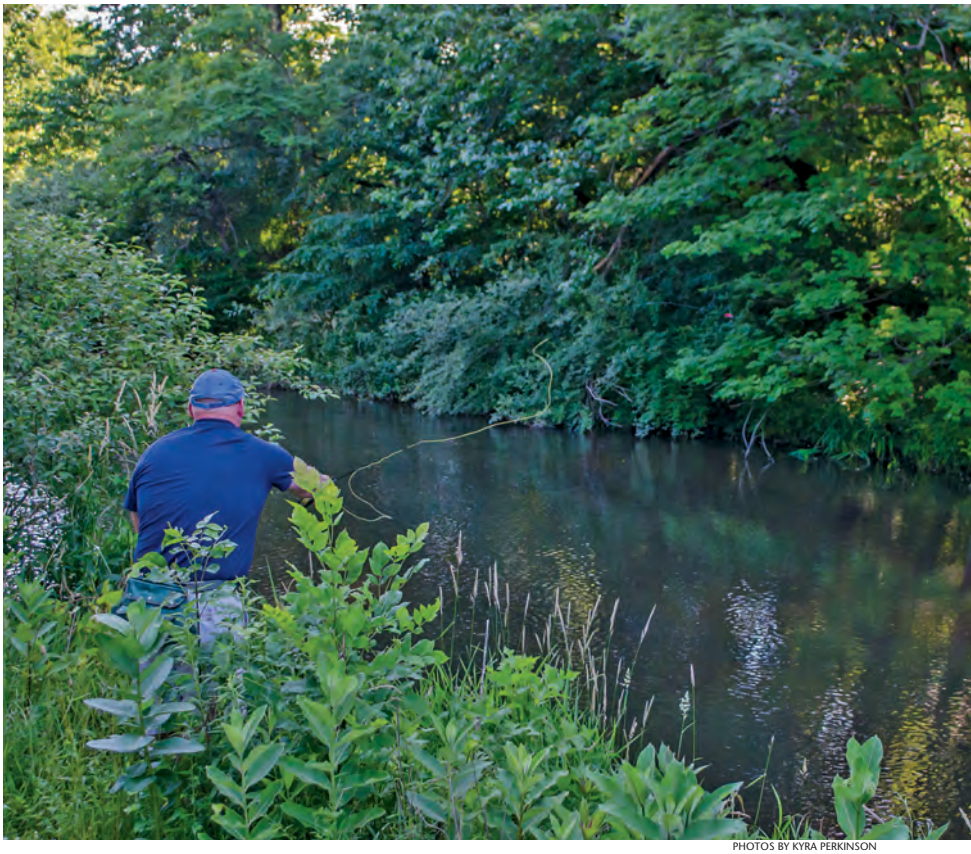
A naked girl gets swept downstream and is fished out by four women fly fishers. Tales of adventure, as well as stories of renewal, discovery, and tragedy, follow the five women as they find each other (and themselves) through the sport of fly fishing.

As it focuses on each character, *The Reel Sisters* fosters the notion that fly fishing has the potential to transcend age, gender, culture, and even socioeconomic barriers, and can occasionally be the glue that binds us. *The Reel Sisters* is a story about the power of friendships and how we learn a little bit about ourselves each time we step into a river. By the end of the book, you'll want to start planning your own reel sisters adventures.

The characters include a complete adventurer and risk taker, a maternal sage and leader, a safe and steady organizer, a creative artsy type, an outdoorsy one, a business-minded pragmatist, and a little bit of everyone else in between.

The book tells a wonderful story about women on their personal journeys to fly fishing, but in some ways it is also a subtle fly-fishing instruction manual. The author teaches some important fly-fishing lessons, while allowing readers to view the lives of different but deeply connected fishing friends. It's easy to identify with each of the characters, and fun to identify with where they're at as anglers.

The release of *The Reel Sisters* coincides with the rise of women in fly fishing and the recent announcement by Orvis of its 50/50 On the Water campaign (www.orvis.com/s/women-on-the-water/14602). Author Michelle Cummings took her first fly-fishing class in 2010 and has been hooked ever since. She is the founder of Training Wheels, a team-building organization, and cofounder of Personify Leadership, a leadership development company. Cummings grew up on a farm in Norton, Kansas, and currently lives in Colorado with her husband and two sons.



PHOTOS BY KYRA PERKINSON

Indiana's lake-effect snow belt, so expect snow and ice to shut down the fishing from December to late March.

You can access the Little Elkhart at Riverbend Park in Middlebury or by following Elkhart County Road 8, aka Bristol Avenue, which runs parallel to the river northwest of Middlebury. The County Road 35 bridge between Middlebury and Bristol is another good spot to hop in the river, with a couple of gravel turnouts near the bridge. As you come into Bristol, be sure to stop at Bonneyville Mill County Park, which features a gristmill that has operated for over 150 years. You can fish the river right at the mill or explore the park's many streamside trails for angling solitude.

Bass and panfish are not the sole targets. The state of Indiana and the local chapter of Trout Unlimited stock trout in the Little Elkhart. Trout do not hold over well in the stream because of elevated water temperatures, so it's best to consider trout fishing on the Little Elkhart a put-and-take affair. Nevertheless, the efforts of conservation and sporting groups have helped to create a catch-and-release, artificial-lures-only section in Elkhart County from County Road 43 to the town of Middlebury.

Go early in the season to fish the Little Elkhart for trout. Indiana's trout season opens on the last Saturday in April. Aside from the catch-and-release section, attrition rapidly takes a toll on stocked trout, with reliable trout fishing ending via either angling pressure or high water temperatures by June in most years.

A 9-foot, 5-weight fly rod with a floating line is ideal for the Little Elkhart. Bankside brush and overhead trees limit casting room, so a shorter rod, or at least short leaders, come in handy. A well-rounded fly box for fishing the Little Elkhart should include 2- to 3-inch-long crayfish patterns and Woolly Buggers, as well top-water bugs in sizes 2, 4, and 6 for smallmouth bass. Foam spiders, dry flies, beadhead nymphs, and wet flies in sizes 6 through 14 are great for panfish and cover trout fishing as well. In the catch-and-release trout section, general attractor patterns suffice.

For bass and panfish, target rocky stretches and obvious cover. Hopping crayfish patterns and swinging streamers through riffle-runs and deep pools are great subsurface techniques for Little Elkhart bass. Focus on bankside cover such as fallen trees and overhanging brush when you fish top-water bugs. The stream also has loads of man-made structure and cover, such as abandoned bridge pilings, streamside walls, and old building foundations. These features are fish magnets, for both warm-water species and stocked trout, so don't overlook them as you wade in search of fish.

If you're in northern Indiana and find your favorite river blown out by runoff or rain, check out the Little Elkhart. It's one cool river—leather jacket and Triumph motorcycle optional.

Bass Pro Shops Opens World's Largest Immersive Wildlife Attraction

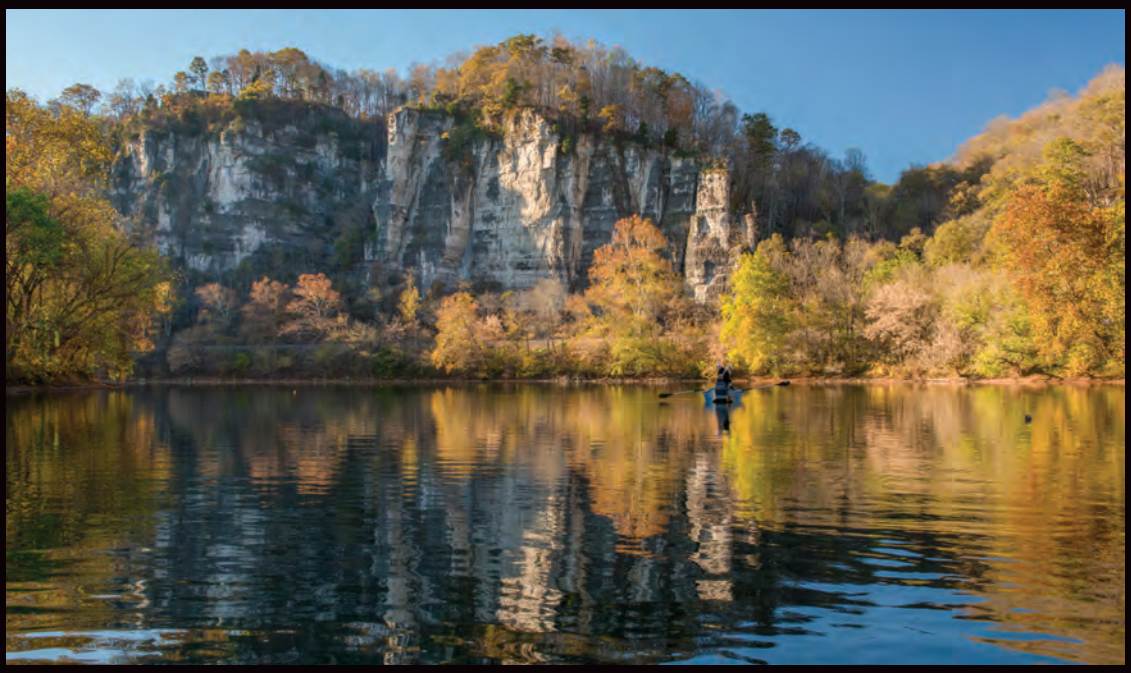
Last fall, Bass Pro Shops opened its 350,000-square-foot Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri. The attraction is packed with everything hunters and anglers live for, including fully immersive wildlife galleries that replicate the sights, sounds, smells, and climates of natural habitats from around the world. Walking through the galleries, you experience everything from the cold winds of the Himalayas to the dry sun of the African savannah, bringing you eye to eye with animals from the wildest places on earth. Overall, there are more than 1.5 miles of trails to explore, with more than 800 different species represented. In addition to the many trails and still-life experiences, the facility contains 1.5 million gallons of fresh- and saltwater aquariums, which hold a total of around 35,000 live fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds.

It's all fun and games when you walk through the galleries and experience the amazing aquariums, but Wonders of Wildlife serves a larger conservation purpose as well. Bass Pro Shops worked with more than 40 conservation organizations to help share the story of the leading role hunters and anglers play in wildlife conservation. Wonders of Wildlife is a destination for outdoor lovers of all ages, and worth a visit during a family vacation or if you're drifting through the Ozarks on the way to your next fly-fishing adventure.

EXPOSURE

Virginia Muskies

By Austin Green



Man has inhabited Virginia for at least 15,000 years and these great rivers were the lifeblood of indigenous peoples. Despite its name, the New River is one of the oldest rivers in North America.

Blane Chocklett's innovative T-Bone fly pushes the envelope for fly action in the water.

The guide watches intently as Katie Blizzard lays into her rod after a firm strip-set on a big muskie.

As with any specialized genre of fly fishing, muskie anglers must learn and employ specific techniques. Here, Captain John McCloskey buries the rod deep under -water and moves the fly in a figure-eight motion, hoping to entice a fish that followed all the way to the boat.

Keep 'em wet! The water might be cold through the prime months of December, January, and "feed-bag" February, but it's important to be mindful of the health of these large predators when handling them at boat side.

In low-water conditions, anglers need to be sneaky to hook muskies, so a sleek boat such as this aptly named Stealthcraft comes in handy.

The Hollow Fleye is a go-to pattern for Virginia muskies.

The James River forms in the Allegheny Highlands, and then travels 350 miles through the Old Dominion to Chesapeake Bay. The upper 80 miles are a gorgeous mountain river with a thriving muskie population.

Working the oars—South Valley Anglers guides pursue muskies on a combined 150 miles of their favorite river systems.

Anglers from all walks of life convene in Roanoke and Blacksburg, Virginia, to head out to any of several great muskie waters.

Southwest Virginia produces trophy-class muskies, such as this fish taken by Katie Blizzard while being guided by Captain Josh Laferty.

The James River Valley, in the heart of Blue Ridge Mountains in southwest Virginia, offers gorgeous campsites where anglers can settle into prior to a muskie fishing expedition.

Maryland-based outdoor photographer and avid fly angler Austin Green, along with Arlen Caplan, run Caplan & Green Productions, www.caplangreenproductions.com.

ALL PHOTOS BY NICK CARTER

East Fork Pigeon River, NC

Chasing Rainbows and Unicorns

By Nick Carter

When I die, my ashes should be scattered near the upper end of one particular tributary to the East Fork Pigeon River.

This creek is little more than a trickle where it meets the East Fork on the valley floor. There's a small hole near the mouth, and then nothing deep enough to wet the tops of your boots for several bends upstream. It's hemmed in by rhododendrons, there's no streamside trail, and no fly fisher would ever think to veer from the main river to investigate its insignificance.

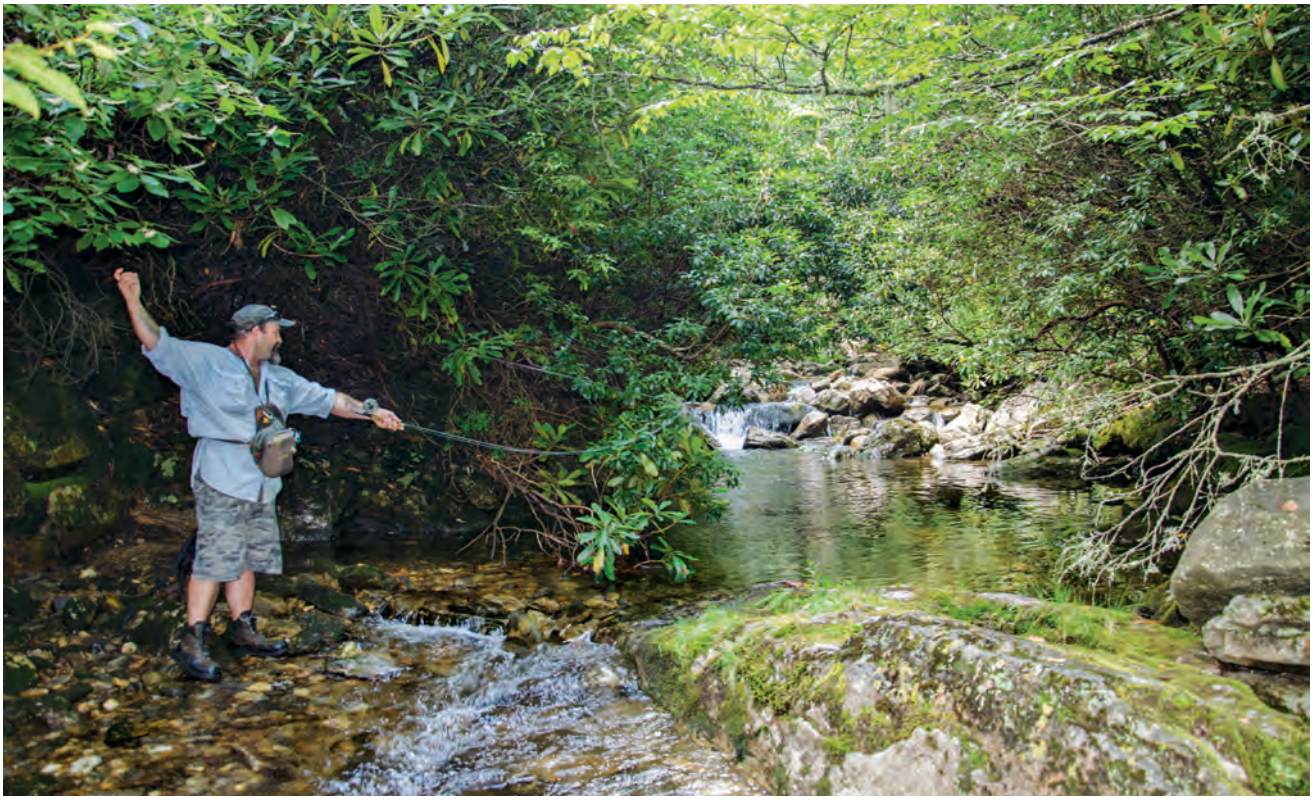
But as with many small high-elevation streams, something magical happens to this rill a couple hundred yards upstream of the mouth. Out of the eyesight of hikers on the Big East Fork Trail, this emaciated flow seems to expand. The valley closes in; the creek banks become steep and tall. Water clearer than any you've seen is forced through a seemingly endless series of ever-deeper plunge pools. Even in the deep holes, it's possible to spot tiny, native southern Appalachian brook trout hovering near the bottom.

Stealth is important in a stream where individual pebbles can be counted 10 feet below the surface, but squatting to keep a low profile isn't always necessary. Likely as not, the next pool upstream is at chest height or higher. It's that steep, and fishing this little creek might best be described as grueling—or treacherous. It's a combination of rock climbing and fly fishing, and depending on the stream levels some swimming might be involved as well.

Egress is by the streambed alone; vertical banks entangled with rhododendron make traversing the gorge next to impossible otherwise. Once you commit to climbing up the creek, you're in for a full day of it. Late in the afternoon, you'll stumble back out into the main river with sore ankles and achy knees, happy but tired.

One day, three hours up this creek, my brother made us turn back in fear of a flash flood as an approaching thunderhead released its first drops. He was probably justified. Another time, I almost killed a friend by jokingly telling him the only way back downstream was to slide down a 30-foot waterfall. Before I could stop him, he sat and slid.

Southern Appalachian brook trout are the only species of salmonid native to the range. Protected by a barrier falls from encroachment by rainbow and brown trout, "specks" thrive in the upper reaches of the East Fork (above). In places, tiny creeks flow through scenic gorges where they flow steeply between vertical banks, creating mesmerizing and productive pools (right).



The East Fork's high tributaries are pretty places that can be as difficult to traverse as they are to fish. In a tunnel of rhododendron, Joe DiPietro gets creative to deliver a fly (above). In the lower end of its run through North Carolina's Shining Rock Wilderness, the East Fork Pigeon River is home to wild rainbow and brown trout. Most of the fish in this infertile, high-elevation stream are less than 12 inches long, but the river definitely holds some bigger specimens (below).

All the work getting in and out might garner a handful of fish that max out at less than 10 inches. They are beautiful. They are fun. They'll slap at a dry fly over and over until it's just right.

The fish are only part of the equation, though. The adventure and the scenery are just as important to the experience. At some point as you work upstream, focused on the water ahead, you'll look up to discover an environment completely different from where you started. Everything opens up as the canopy overhead dissipates. The hardwood forest you climbed from is replaced by stunted firs of high elevation. Even the boulders and cliffs look different—strange and beautiful. In surroundings like these, it wouldn't be surprising if a pickaxe-toting gnome emerged from some shadowed crag.

It is a special place that is too difficult to visit often. My final request is a parting gift for whoever is tasked with the mission.

Yellowstone Prong

The East Fork, sometimes called the Big East Fork, is gorgeous. It runs very clear and cold year-round, and it's not nearly as inaccessible as some of its tributaries, although it does require some hiking to get there. Northwest of Brevard, North Carolina, the East Fork's highest tributary, Yellowstone Prong, tumbles from more than 5,500 feet of elevation off Black Balsam Knob in North Carolina's Pisgah Game Lands. As it falls into the Shining Rock Wilderness, the river is roughly paralleled by the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway. The parkway runs along the ridgeline, offering spectacular views of the Great Balsam Mountains. The river runs along the bottom of the deep valley below.

The highest access point to Yellowstone Prong is off the Blue Ridge Parkway at a place called Graveyard Fields. The parking area and trailhead are heavily used, giving mostly backpackers and day hikers access to the Yellowstone Prong valley. The valley is as beautiful as it is unusual. With a low point above 5,000 feet, it is surprisingly flat and surrounded by 6,000-foot peaks. Yellowstone Prong drops into the valley over a tall waterfall and then meanders lazily for a short stretch before ceremoniously dropping out of the valley over Second Falls.

There is easy access where the trail crosses Yellowstone Prong in the valley. This flat stretch, however, is not the best the prong has to offer anglers. Upstream and downstream of the flat valley, fly fishers with a thirst for exploration will find gorgeous deep and clear plunge pools, plus plentiful shallow pocket water. On this upper end, the trail crosses but does not parallel the creek, so it takes some scrambling and climbing in a streambed that is very steep in places.

On a summer afternoon, with the stream passing through a tunnel of white rhododendron blooms, I crept up

on one of the many shallow pools that spread out where the creek plateaus in places between drops. Even in the low water of deep summer, the East Fork and its tributaries remain cold enough to keep brook trout happy.

The tendencies of the region's only native salmonid are interesting. Some days you'll find them in every pool and run, racing each other to gobble whatever wad of feathers splats down on the water. Unlike the little rainbows one finds in many of these high-elevation streams, specks seem to feed in the eddies rather than the runs. On days when they're aggressive, lifting the rod tip to skate the fly across the surface can be more productive than a beautifully executed drift.

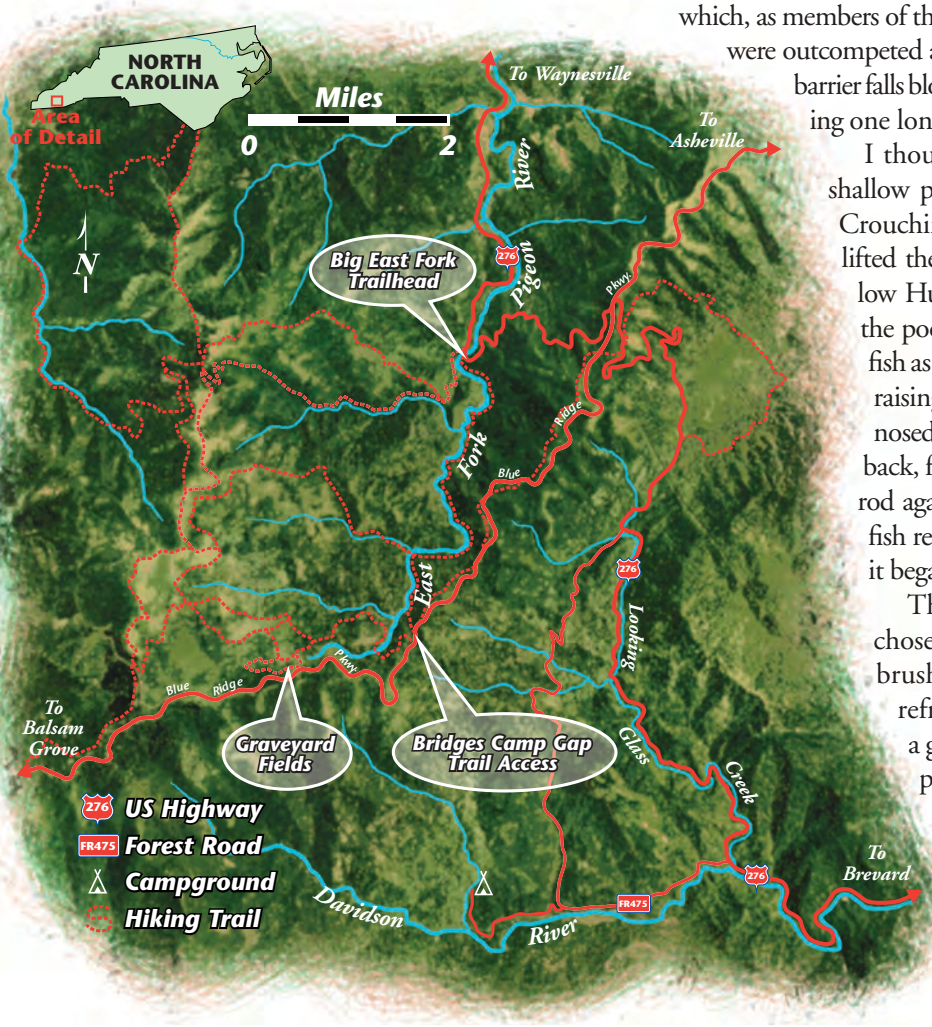
This was one of those days. My brother and I climbed the creek, plucking gorgeous, white-finned, orange-bellied brookies out of every few pockets. None were longer than 5 or 6 inches, but we were having a blast.

As much as it is a practice of stewardship, catch-and-release is also a convenience. Despite this, I've always said a native speck 12 inches or longer would have a special place on the wall as some of nature's finest artwork. A 12-inch southern Appalachian brook trout is a unicorn. Perhaps since the last ice age, they evolved in isolation in Appalachian headwaters. They are a strain genetically distinct from northern brook trout. They rarely live longer than four seasons in the wild, and they do not reach nearly the same size as their northern kin.

Northern-strain brookies stocked from hatcheries are part of an introduction that both muddied the gene pool and limited speck habitat to only the highest and most infertile mountain streams. In the early 1900s, stocking of northern brookies, rainbow trout, and brown trout began. Specks, which, as members of the char genus, aren't technically trout, were outcompeted and now exist only in places where a barrier falls blocks upstream passage of trout. Catching one longer than 10 inches is memorable.

I thought I saw a unicorn in that wide, shallow pool in the East Fork's headwaters. Crouching low, I made the cast and then lifted the tip of my 3-weight to skate a Yellow Humpy a foot or so across the top of the pool and into the main flow. I saw the fish as it turned and streaked toward the fly, raising a small wake with its dorsal fin. It nosed up to the Humpy and then dropped back, following the drift. When I lifted the rod again to flick out a quick roll cast, the fish retreated to the top of the pool, where it began to harry the fly again.

That's when my good old dog Otis chose to come down from the creek-side brush for a little drink of water and a refreshing wade up to his ankles. I got a good look at that fish as it fled. Otis probably saved me from a taxidermy bill. He also kept the quest for the unicorn alive.



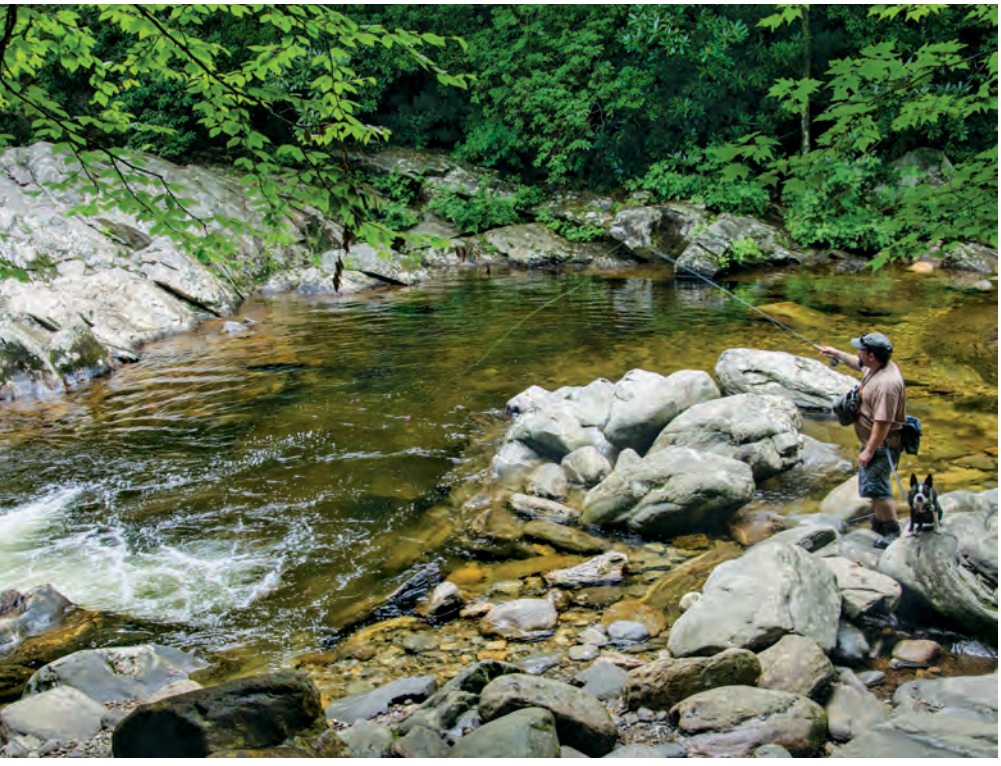
Big-Water Specks

The junction of Yellowstone Prong and Dark Prong forms

the East Fork proper. Below this point it is a pretty large flow by speck-stream standards. The river retains the same character, with ultra-clear water coursing over steep drops and around large boulders; it's just that everything is on a slightly larger scale. Most people would consider it a medium-size creek, which offers the kind of casting room rarely found where speckled trout live.

Trail access is easier below the convergence of the two prongs. The Bridges Camp Gap Trail drops from a trailhead on the Blue Ridge Parkway to intercept the river as well as the Big East Fork Trail. The Big East Fork Trail parallels the river for about 4 miles as it flows north through the Shining Rock Wilderness.

It is a beautiful stretch of river, with multiple small waterfalls and plunge pools, as well as long stretches of rocky pocket water. This kind of scenery can draw a little bit of a crowd when the weather is nice, and don't plan on fishing the larger holes when it's hot outside. Dreams of sinking a nymph rig to the bottom of big holes like the one at Skinny Dip Falls often come crashing down when you hear squealing kids and round the bend to find a small crowd in bathing suits leaping from rocks into the river.



Joe DiPietro, accompanied by his Boston terrier, Millie, resort to nymphing one of the larger holes of the East Fork. With its rough terrain, the river is not a great place to take pets fishing. Millie is special. As the companion of a trout guide, she spends every day on the water.

But despite all the hikers, swimmers, and waterfall watchers who use the Big East Fork Trail, there is surprisingly limited fishing pressure. Not many folks are willing to work hard for little fish when there are easier and more prolific fisheries nearby. That said, working upstream into a trail of wet boot prints on the rocks means it's time to backtrack downstream and give the other angler some room or take the opportunity to explore one of the tributaries that enter the East Fork through this stretch.

Speck streams seem to react more drastically to pressure than those that hold rainbows and browns. In such clear and predominantly shallow water, fish must be extremely wary of danger from above. They must also eat whatever is available to survive in such nutrient poor conditions. Typically one dry fly is as good as any other as long as it lands where a speck can see it. These fish are not picky; they like brightly colored flies, and it makes them easy targets. These fish are particularly susceptible to bait fishermen, who can all but clean out a creek over the course of a weekend.

On Big Snowbird Creek, another great speck stream, in Graham County, I watched two summer seasons of fishing collapse this way. The first year, there was fast action through several spring trips up the creek. Then one day the fishing just shut down. It left me pondering the situation until I found a campsite just above the barrier falls that was sickeningly trashed. Tangled wads of 6-pound-test fishing line, beer cans, empty cans of corn, plastic bags—all the regular refuse of slobs who camp and fish—was strewn around the fire ring. They even left a large, well-seasoned cast-iron Dutch oven perched upside-down on a stump. I assumed it was because the big pot was too heavy to carry the more than 5 miles out to the trailhead. As it turned out, they must have left it there to use again the next year.

From the looks of things, I speculated a large group had spent a weekend keeping and cooking everything they caught. My suspicion was bolstered when the fishing dropped off again the following summer and I found the same campsite trashed again. I'd always thought locals were joking when they talked about gutting little specks by the dozens, frying them up crispy, and tossing them down like potato chips, heads and all. They weren't kidding.

I've never witnessed such abuse on the East Fork Pigeon, but I have seen the fishing get really slow when fishing behind others and on days when other recreational traffic gets heavy. Despite being aggressive, specks are sensitive to their surroundings. It doesn't hurt to wear drab clothing and to stay out of the sight line of fish.

Below the Falls

I've yet to pinpoint which set of falls blocks the upstream spread of nonnative trout, but stream-born rainbows and browns enter the mix somewhere in the 2-mile stretch between Greasy Cove Prong and Shining Creek. The best access to this stretch of river is from the northern East Fork trailhead at the US Highway 276 bridge about 2.5 miles west of the Highway 276 intersection with the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The East Fork Pigeon River is much larger where it crosses out of the Shining Rock Wilderness than it is in the headwaters. The water remains clear, but there is a noticeable brownish hue when compared with the water upstream. Because the quarry is predominantly wild rainbows and browns, the fishery is different as well.

On this lower end of the publicly accessible water, it might be wise to tie in a dropper beneath your dry fly. On days when you don't see fish rising, a double nymph rig beneath an indicator or a small streamer might come in handy for prospecting in deep holes, of which there are plenty.

A fishing buddy, Joe DiPietro, showed me something in one of the large pools upstream of the US 276 bridge. Moving quickly from run to run, catching 6- to 10-inch rainbows and browns, I caught up to him as he sat on a rock with his dog, Millie. He wasn't searching through his fly box or messing with his line; he was just looking into the water.

"See them?" he asked, as I moved to pass behind him toward unfished water upstream.

I stopped and looked down at the water. Sure enough, a couple trout were hanging near the surface in plain view.

"Yeah," I replied. "That one's decent—maybe 10 or 11 inches."

"No. Look deeper," he said, pointing with his rod tip.

I pulled the polarized shades off my hat and slipped them over my eyes. On a streambed of dappled browns, I didn't see anything but rocks. I told Joe so and turned toward the fishy-looking run upstream.

"Wait a minute," he said, sensing my impatience. "She's on our side of that long red rock in the middle."

I looked hard for a minute or two and saw nothing but a long red rock.

"She must have moved," I thought out loud.

"No. I'm looking right at her," Joe said.

Then she did move, making just a slight adjustment in the current. For a split second I saw a big fish, maybe 18 inches, maybe longer. Then she disappeared, her butter-brown flanks and red spots perfectly camouflaged against the rocky bottom.

I left Joe at that hole. I guess he stayed there the rest of the afternoon fishing for that one fish. When I arrived back at our campsite in a torrential downpour that evening, Joe was digging with a stick to reroute a growing stream of muddy water that had formed a considerable puddle on the backside of his tent.

"Did you get her?" I asked, stepping past him to check on the status of my own tent.

"No," he replied.

Nick Carter is a frequent contributor to Eastern Fly Fishing *magazine.*

East Fork Pigeon River NOTEBOOK

When: April–November. Stream is open year-round under undesignated trout regulations; however, access can be difficult in winter, as the Blue Ridge Pkwy. frequently closes in winter conditions.

Where: Shining Rock Wilderness, Pisgah National Forest, Transylvania and Haywood Counties, NC.

Headquarters: Brevard, NC. *Information:* www.brevardnc.com.

Appropriate gear: 0- to 4-wt. rods for the upper section, 4- to 5-wt. rods for lower stretch, floating lines.

Useful flies: Elk Hair Caddis, Stimulator, Parachute Sulphur, Yellow Humpy, Light Cahill, Quill Gordon, Parachute Adams, Prince Nymph, Hare's Ear Nymph, Pheasant Tail Nymph, Copper John, Tellico Nymph, black stonefly nymph patterns.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses; hat; drinking water; camping gear, including bear-proof canister (required by regulation) and a portable stove (no campfires allowed).

Nonresident license: $18/10 days, plus $13/trout privileges; $36/annual, plus $13/trout privileges.

Fly shops/guides: Davidson River Outfitters, (828) 877-4181, (888) 861-0111, www.davidsonflyfishing.com.

Books/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.

PHOTO BY JAY NICHOLS

Penns Creek, PA

Pennsylvania's Premier Limestone Stream

By R. Chad Chorney

"Where the hell are the spinners?"

For several nights running, Billy asked that question of our fishing party as we sat around the campfire, going over the day's events. While we had found decent numbers of Green Drake duns during the afternoon, the evening spinner fall had turned out to be almost nonexistent. What was going on? Were we fishing the right water? Was it the weather? It was a mystery we were intent on solving.

For many years, Billy and his family had owned a fishing camp on Penns Creek, located nearly halfway between the small Pennsylvania towns of Coburn and Weikert. Visitor traffic to Billy's camp always spiked from late May through early June, when anglers descended on Penns in anticipation of the famous Green Drake hatch. When I lived back East, I did my best to spend a few days on Penns each year, hoping to catch the Green Drake spectacle at its peak.

Routine at fishing camp during "the Drake" was fairly predictable. Mornings started out with coffee strong enough to take the paint off a car, followed by a breakfast medley of eggs, bacon, and hash browns, cooked in a single cast-iron skillet, of course. Anglers then split up and headed out on the water, nymph-fishing likely runs and pockets, throwing streamers around structure, or prospecting softer water with Sulphur, Blue-Winged Olive, or Green Drake imitations.

PHOTO BY HENRY RAMSAY

For many Penns Creek anglers, the emergence of Eastern Green Drakes reigns as the most anticipated hatch of the year (above). A colorful wild brown trout is released back into Penns Creek (below). Flowing 67 miles, Penns Creek is the state's longest limestone creek, and one of the best (left).

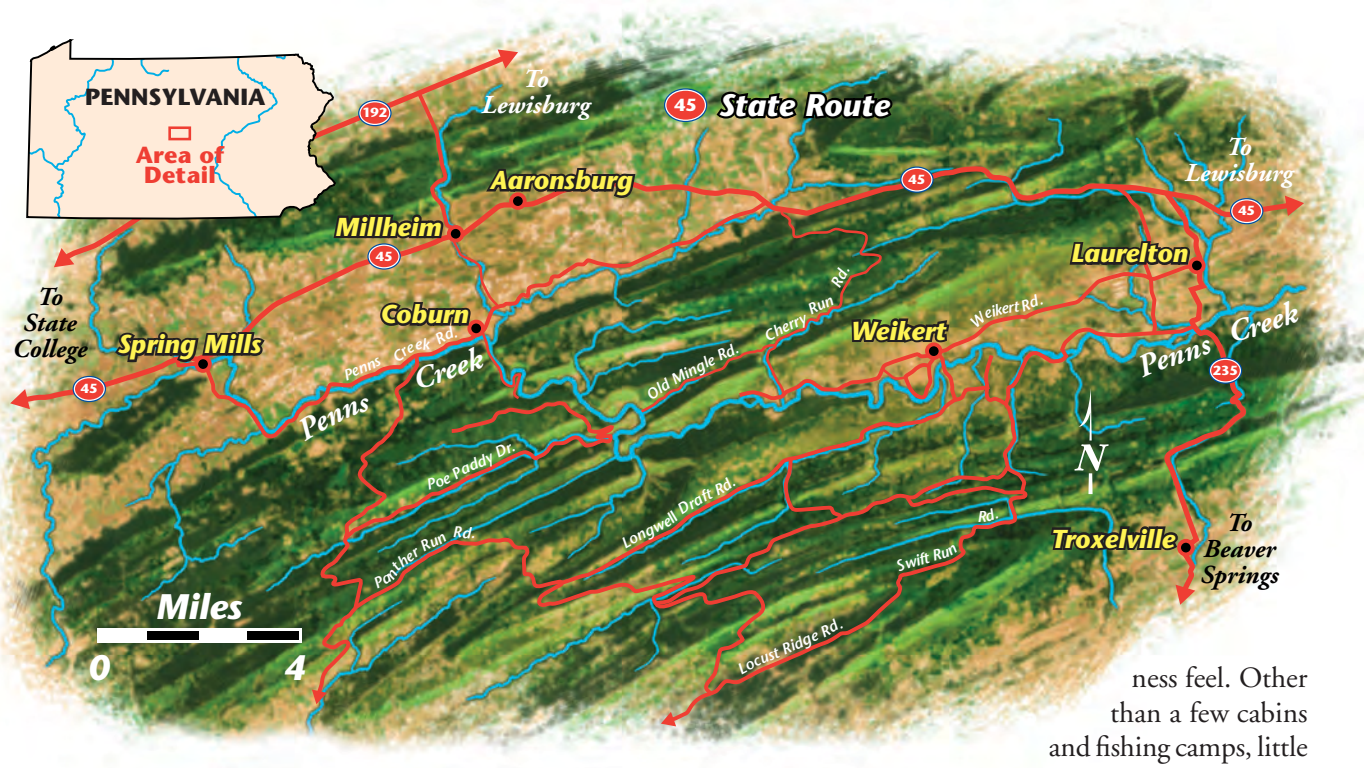
By late afternoon, most anglers had returned to camp in search of a cocktail and the chance to brag about the day's fishing. "Just one cocktail" usually turned into several, and after a meat-and-potatoes dinner, we'd argue about where the Green Drake spinner fall would occur that evening.

Dressed in warmer clothes and with headlamps at the ready, we'd rig up, claim our "spinner water," and wait. During this particular trip, it turned out that we weren't waiting long enough. After a few spinner-less evenings, Billy decided to fish water a bit closer to camp so that he could extend the evening vigil. He was rewarded with a heavy Green Drake spinner fall that started much later than normal and lasted into the wee hours. Mystery solved.

Sum of Its Parts

Many anglers consider Penns Creek the crown jewel of limestone trout streams in Pennsylvania, and given the state's abundance of such, that's quite a billing. It's also Pennsylvania's longest "limestoner" (to use the local vernacular), rising near Spring Mills and then flowing 67 miles to the Susquehanna River at Selinsgrove. Penns Creek can generally be considered in sections, with each offering different stream characteristics and angling quality.

PHOTO BY R. CHAD CHORNEY



Upper Penns Creek (from the headwaters at Penns Cave to just upstream of the town of Coburn) consists of approximately 13 miles of gentle flows that run through low-gradient agricultural bottomlands. Subsequently, water temperatures in this section of Penns can be elevated during the summer months. Stream substrate is composed primarily of small gravel and silt. Although this section does support a modest population of wild brown trout, it is regularly stocked by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) and is rated as Class B water. Public access is limited, and fishing pressure is heaviest around the traditional opening day of trout season each April.

The middle portion of Penns Creek is the most important to fly anglers. Near the town of Coburn, Elk Creek enters Penns, infusing cold, nutrient-rich water. From Elk Creek downstream for approximately 15 miles to Cherry Run, Penns is designated as a Class A Wild Trout Stream by the PFBC. Additional designations within this stretch include trophy trout water and catch-and-release regulations, respectively. Here, the trout population is dominated by wild browns. Native brook trout are found in many of the adjacent mountain tributaries, with Cherry Run itself having a strong population.

This middle section defines Penns Creek as a fishery. The stream escapes the hustle and bustle of urban Pennsylvania and takes on a rural, wilderness feel. Other than a few cabins and fishing camps, little development exists near this section, and the stream flows through forests, mountains, and valleys. Stream gradient increases, and Penns takes on more character, with countless pools, riffles, and runs holding dense insect populations and large, wild trout. Boulders and large cobbles dominate the streambed, creating both excellent aquatic habitat and challenging wading. Vehicle access in this section is very limited; a good bit of walking is required to sample the best water. Not only is this section the most productive, it's also the most scenic. Here, Penns is surround by mature, lush forests and steep mountains.

PHOTO BY KURT BUDLIGER

An angler enjoys a perfect autumn day on Penns Creek. Fall brings several great hatches, including Isonychia*—the Slate Drakes—which often cause normally suspicious browns to feed ravenously.*

The lower section of Penns starts downstream of Cherry Run and extends to the confluence with the Susquehanna River. While not as productive as the middle portion, this section does feature some good fishing from Cherry Run down to Weikert, as the stream retains most of its gradient, substrate character, and rural nature. However, most of lower Penns Creek is classified as Class B water, and is stocked by the PFBC. Heading downstream from Weikert, Penns widens and slows, and becomes primarily a smallmouth bass fishery as it nears the Susquehanna.

Water flows on Penns Creek are subject to fluctuations due to drought and temperature trends. During wet, cool summers, good fishing lasts throughout the season. Conversely, dry, hot summers lead to elevated water temperatures and subsequent poor fishing. Since the upper reaches of Penns flow through agricultural lands, the creek can become turbid after heavy rains, and flows often take a long time to drop and clear following such events.

Bugs Big and Small

A nutrient-rich limestone stream, Penns Creek is a proverbial insect factory. Hundreds of species of mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies are found throughout the stream, with populations of these aquatic insects highest in the middle section.

The list of important insects on Penns Creek is long and varied. Grannom caddisflies, Blue Quills, Light Cahills, Blue-Winged Olives, March Browns, Hendricksons, Sulphurs, Gray Foxes, Quill Gordons, Eastern Green Drakes, Slate Drakes (*Isonynichia*), Tricos, Yellow Sallies, Little Brown and Little Black Stoneflies, ants, and beetles are all important for trout and fly anglers.

By far the most famous insect on Penns Creek is the Eastern Green Drake; they bring some of the stream's largest brown trout to the surface. The Green Drakes—known locally as the Shad Fly or Coffin Fly—bring anglers to Penns as well; the hatch is associated with the heaviest fishing pressure on the stream. The nymph, dun, and spinner stages of this insect are all important to anglers. The Green Drake is a large, robust mayfly (size 12), and its notoriety on Penns has spawned a multitude of local imitations. During the Drake hatch, anglers stake out their favorite water and wait patiently for the evening spinner fall, when quiet pools boil with large brown trout feeding greedily on the spent spinners. Action can last well into the dark of night, and as Billy discovered, it's best not to leave the water too early.

Keep in mind that during the peak of the Green Drake hatch, other mayflies, such as Light Cahills or Sulphurs, can be hatching as well, and trout will often key in on the smaller bugs. Too often anglers stick to their guns and pound the water with a Green Drake imitation, when a Sulphur dun is what the trout are actually feeding on.

When to Fish

Dry-fly fishing on Penns kicks off in early to mid-April with the arrival of Blue Quills, followed by early stoneflies, Hendricksons, and Grannom caddisflies. While Grannoms often hatch profusely, the hatch rarely brings large numbers of trout to the surface. This occurrence is not uncommon on Penns: thousands of bugs fill the air and float through every eddy and current seam, and only a handful of trout break the surface sporadically. Penns Creek trout have a reputation for being a bit fickle, but it's likely that they are simply spoiled by the sheer numbers of natural insects.

As spring yields to summer, the insect parade continues. The massive Green Drake is the marquee mayfly, hatching from late May through early June. Anglers from across the East Coast make the pilgrimage to Penns Creek during the Drake hatch, with many of them catching their largest wild brown trout on a dry during this fabled hatch. Once the Green Drake madness ends, mayflies such as March Browns, Blue-Winged Olives, Gray Foxes, Sulphurs, Light Cahills, and Tricos hatch during June, July, and August. During the summer, terrestrials become a staple for fly anglers. Penns Creek is lined by dense vegetation, and that translates into large numbers of terrestrials. Ant, beetle, inchworm, and grasshopper patterns are useful on Penns throughout the summer months. A variety of caddisflies are found during the summer, and anglers should be prepared with tan, brown, and green imitations.

Perhaps some of the finest fishing on Penns occurs in the fall. Water temperatures are cooling, the fishing pressure of spring and summer has passed, and brown trout become more aggressive in anticipation of spawning. Several good hatches occur during September and October, most notably Blue Quills, Blue-Winged Olives, and the impressive Slate Drakes (*Isonychia*). In particular, the appearance of Slate Drakes seems to cause typically wary browns to drop their guard and feed with abandon. Terrestrials continue to be important during autumn; I've used them to fool Penns Creek trout into early November.

Coffin Fly Spinner
(Green Drake Spinner)

PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook:	Long-shank dry fly, size 12
Thread:	White 8/0 for abdomen, black 8/0 for thorax
Tail:	Moose mane, divided
Abdomen:	White poly yarn or white Superfine Dubbing
Thorax:	Black Superfine Dubbing
Wings:	Splayed deer hair

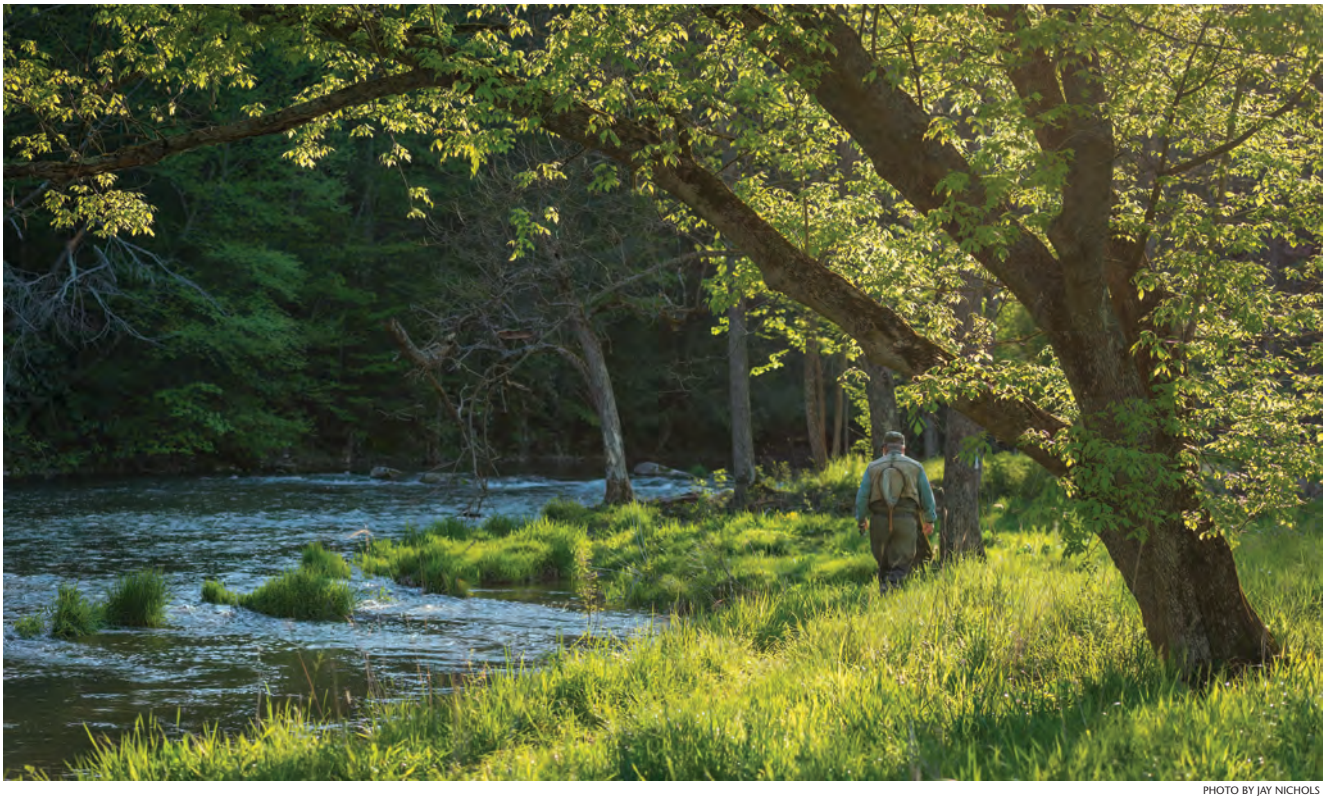


PHOTO BY JAY NICHOLS

Thanks to minimal roadside access, anglers enjoy ample serenity on Penns Creek. The creek offers myriad water types, providing plenty of opportunities to fish dries, nymphs, or streamers.

Streamer enthusiasts relish the aggressive trout of autumn, and some of the largest browns are caught on streamers during September, October, and November.

Where to Fish

Penns Creek is blessed with a lack of road access. When fishing Penns, you won't hear car horns, sirens, and the drone of traffic. In order to fish the best water here, you need to stretch your legs a bit. Abandoned railroad tracks roughly parallel the middle portion of Penns Creek, and anglers can hike along the tracks to enter the water in numerous areas. The tracks are accessible from Ingleby Road on the north side of Penns (about 7 miles south of Aaronsburg), or from Poe Paddy State Park on the south. You can also reach the tracks about 3 miles east of the town of Coburn by following Tunnel Road to the old railroad tunnel.

Another place to gain access to Penns Creek is near the tributary of Cherry Run (via Cherry Run Road) where Weikert/Winters Road parallels the creek down to the town of Weikert. Here, anglers can fish the downstream portion of the Penns Creek special-regulation area, as well as Cherry Run itself.

Almost all land within this middle portion of Penns is public. Anglers should be respectful of any private property within this stretch. In recent years, many anglers have found that a mountain bike gains them access to more water in this section of Penns Creek, and perhaps some less-fished water as well.

Fishing Tactics

Penns Creek offers something for every type of angler—the dry-fly purist, the nympher, and the streamer junkie. All of these methods excel at certain times on Penns Creek, and anglers who become proficient with them can fish Penns effectively throughout the year.

The creek's countless insects and its many flat pools, glides, and soft current seams make it a dry-fly angler's paradise, but the abundance of mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies can be a bit daunting. I've found it useful to pare down fly selection and carry fewer types of patterns, but in a wider variety of sizes and colors. For example, a Parachute Adams in sizes 12 through 20 covers just about any mayfly you'll encounter on Penns Creek. While it may not match the hatch perfectly, it will take trout when presented properly on an appropriate leader.

Nymph anglers are drawn to Penns Creek. Pick up any rock on Penns and you'll be amazed at the number of nymphs you see. Caddisfly larvae, swimming mayflies, crawling mayflies, and stoneflies abound in the rocky substrate. Large, buggy stonefly nymphs are particularly effective on Penns Creek; in order to compete with the large number of natural insects, I like to offer the fish a substantial meal. While indicator nymphing is certainly productive, high-stick nymphing the pocket water and boulder-strewn runs of Penns can be deadly.

Penns Creek has plenty of excellent streamer water: deep pools, submerged structure, and undercut banks.

Anglers adept at fishing streamers catch some very large trout on Penns each year. A variety of baitfish, juvenile trout, and crustaceans inhabit the creek, so streamers that imitate these mouthfuls all work well. I've had success using a standard chartreuse/white Clouser Minnow when all else fails.

Although wet flies aren't nearly as popular as they once were, I've seen old-timers on Penns produce some astounding results while swinging wets. In fact, the largest fish I've ever seen caught on Penns Creek was taken at night on a classic Pennsylvania triple-wet-fly rig.

While the large boulders, cobbles, and rocky substrate found in Penns Creek provide excellent habitat for both aquatic insects and trout, they mean difficult and sometimes dangerous wading, especially during the heavy flows of spring. Felt-sole wading boots with metal cleats provide the best traction; just be sure to clean the soles after fishing to avoid the spread of invasive species. A wading staff can be very helpful as well.

Be aware that tick populations across the Northeast have exploded in recent years, and the dense vegetation surrounding Penns Creek is ideal habitat for these pests. Permethrin-treated clothing, including a long-sleeved shirt (DEET and other repellents are typically ineffective on ticks), is recommended, and always do a tick check after a day on the water.

Anglers planning to fish Pennsylvania for the first time are often daunted by the sheer amount of trout water in the Keystone State. But Penns Creek should be at the top of any destination list. The creek's unbeatable combination of scenery, wilderness, incredible hatches, and wild trout make it one of the premier trout fisheries in the entire region.

A native of New York, R. Chad Chorney is a widely traveled freelance writer, photographer, and fly-fishing guide who now makes his home in central Idaho.

Penns Creek NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY KURT BUDLIGER

When: April–October; mid-April through mid-June are prime dry-fly fishing months.

Where: Central PA; the most productive trout fishery is the middle section of Penns Creek between the towns of Coburn and Weikert.

Access: Vehicle access is very limited throughout the middle section. Foot access is primarily via an abandoned railroad tunnel and tracks accessed at Poe Paddy State Park or Ingleby Road; Cherry Run also offers access.

Headquarters: State College offers all services and amenities, including airport and rental car agencies.

Appropriate gear: 3- through 5-wt. rods, 6- or 7-wt. rods for streamers.

Useful fly patterns: Patterns to match duns, nymphs, emergers, and spinners for Green Drake, Blue Quill, Light Cahill, Gray Fox, March Brown, Sulphur, Hendricksons, Slate Drake, Trico; patterns to match nymphs and adults for Little Brown Stonefly, Little Black Stonefly, Yellow Sally; ant, beetle, and inchworm patterns; Pheasant Tail Nymph, Hare's Ear Nymph, Woven Stoneflies, caddisfly pupa patterns, Elk Hair Caddis, Zonkers, Woolly Buggers, Muddlers, Clouser Minnows.

Nonresident license: $26.90/1 day, $34.90/7 days, $52.90/annual; plus $9.90 trout/salmon permit.

Fly shops/guides: The Feathered Hook, (814) 349-8757, www.thefeatheredhook.com; Penns Creek Angler, (267) 994-9943, www.pennscreekangler.com; Penns Creek Guides, (814) 364-9142, www.pennscreekguides.com; Sky Blue Outfitters, (610) 987-0073, www.skyblueoutfitters.com; Flyfisher's Paradise, (814) 234-4189, www.flyfishersparadise.com; TCO Fly Shop, (814) 689-3654, www.tcoflyfishing.com.

Books/maps: *Penn's Creek (River Journal)* by Daniel Shields; *Fly Fishing Penns Creek* by Bruce Fisher; *Flyfisher's Guide to Pennsylvania* by Tom Gilmore; *Trout Streams of Pennsylvania: An Angler's Guide* by Dwight Landis; *Trout Streams and Hatches of Pennsylvania* by Charles R. Meck; *Keystone Flyfishing: The Ultimate Guide to Pennsylvania's Best Water* by Dave Rothrock, Gary Kell, Henry Ramsay, Len Lichvar, and Mike Heck. *Pennsylvania Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme; Stream Map USA, (215) 491-4223, www.StreamMapUSA.com.

PHOTO BY R. CHAD CHORNEY

PHOTO BY R. CHAD CHORNEY

Conneaut Creek, OH

Buckeye State Steelhead

By R. Chad Chorney

The Lake Erie shoreline stretching from western New York through the northwest sliver of Pennsylvania to central Ohio (Buffalo to Cleveland) is drained by a host of tributary streams that draw staggeringly large runs of Great Lakes steelhead. Collectively, the three states stock more than 1.5 million steelhead smolts annually in Lake Erie and its tributaries, with a smaller number of wild fish supplementing hatchery stocks. This translates into incredible fishing opportunities for anglers throughout the region.

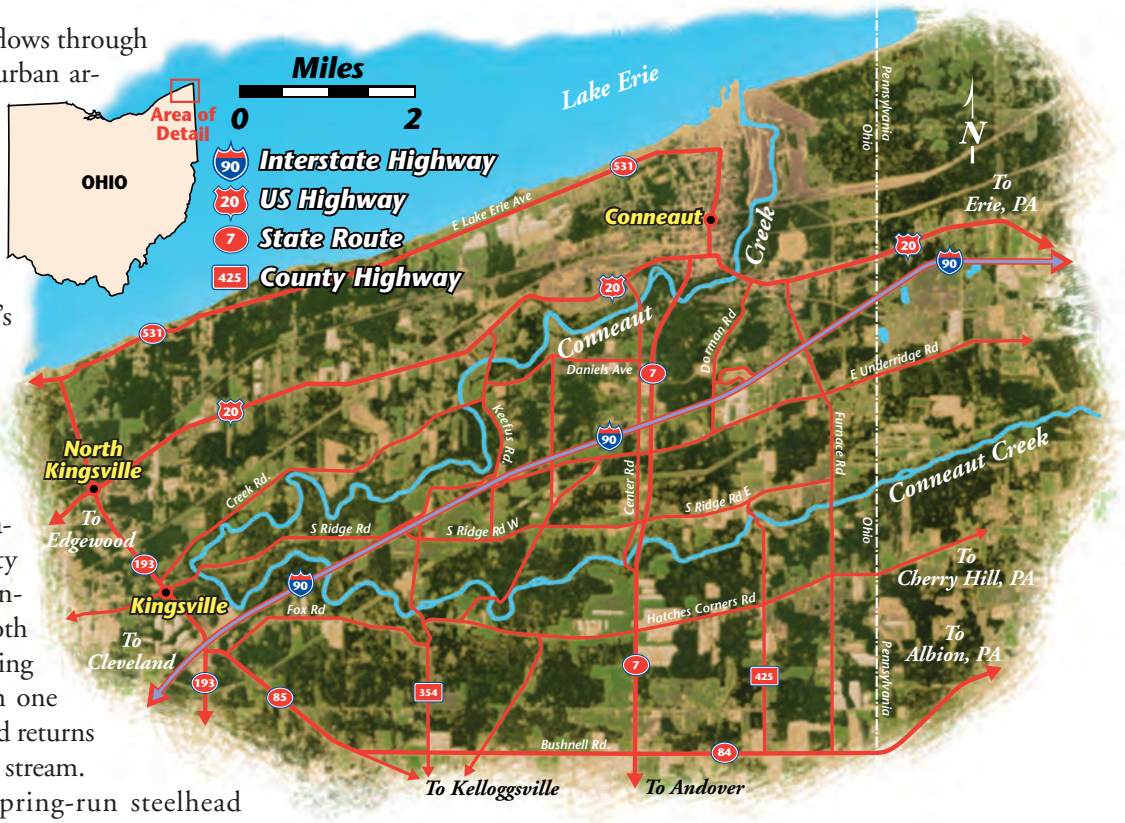
Tales of hooking 20 to 30 steelhead a day when conditions are optimal are not uncommon. Rightfully so, this area and its fisheries have earned the nickname Steelhead Alley, and Conneaut Creek, in northeast Ohio, is one of the finest of the area's fisheries.

Conneaut Creek (known as "the Conny" by locals) runs northwest and then southwest from its headwaters in northwest Pennsylvania, and then flows for approximately 43 miles to enter Lake Erie at Conneaut, Ohio. The name Conneaut is originally derived from the Seneca Indian moniker Konyiat, meaning "place of many fish." That description holds true today, even though steelhead never swam the waters historically.

In 2005, 21 miles of Conneaut Creek (from the Ohio–Pennsylvania border to the Penn Central Railroad Bridge in Conneaut) were designated by Ohio as Wild and Scenic, affording this portion of the stream greater protections by the state. In addition, 16 of those miles have been designated by Ohio as a State Wild River, one of only three in the entire state. This classification is reserved for waters of only the highest quality.

Unlike many other streams in the region, the streambed substrate of Conneaut consists of sand and gravel in addition to Chagrin shale (a stratigraphic formation that bears fossils dating to the Devonian era, 419 million to 359 million years ago). Consequently Conneaut runs clear due to minimal suspended sediments. Conneaut is a spate stream; it rises quickly after significant precipitation, and—typically—drops and clears to optimal fishing conditions within three days. Experienced steelhead anglers become weather watchers, timing fishing outings to coincide with receding water. A spring or fall freshet on Conneaut brings new, aggressive steelhead into the stream, and anglers react accordingly.

Conneaut Creek flows through a variety of terrains: urban areas, rural landscapes, and remote gorges, valleys, and forests. It courses past some of Ohio's most scenic surroundings and ranks among the state's prettiest waterways.



Run Timing and Seasonal Behavior

Because of its location in Ohio and headwaters in and proximity to Pennsylvania, Conneaut benefits from both states' steelhead stocking programs, resulting in one of the highest steelhead returns of any Steelhead Alley stream.

Both fall- and spring-run steelhead ascend the Conny. Steelhead run timing is dependent on weather conditions and annual climate variations. In years with mild, wet summers, fish begin to enter Conneaut as early as September, with fall runs peaking from mid-October to mid-November. Generally speaking, steelhead inhabit Conneaut Creek throughout the winter. Again, weather is the deciding factor. In mild winters with good stream flows, anglers catch steelhead in Conneaut throughout December and January, and into February. On the other hand, dry, bitter-cold winters cause much of the stream to ice over, limiting steelhead to the lowermost portions of the stream.

PHOTO BY NICK PIONESSA

Conneaut Creek boasts an abundance of water ideal for swinging flies to aggressive steelhead. Many anglers favor Spey and switch rods on Conneaut. Two-handers are extremely effective at covering lots of water and casting in tight quarters. In recent years, Spey fishing has become increasingly popular along Steelhead Alley (above). While spending several years in the forage-rich waters of Lake Erie, steelhead grow quickly. Conneaut fish typically weigh in at 5 to 8 pounds, with fish pushing 20 pounds caught on occasion. This gorgeous specimen was taken on a recent November outing, and was kind enough to pose briefly for the camera (left).

The beginning of March signals true spring steelhead fishing on Conneaut. The best fishing occurs throughout March and into early April. Prespawn fish are often bright and fresh from Lake Erie and aggressively feed in preparation for the rigors of reproduction. Postspawn fish ("drop-backs") can provide incredible fishing. These steelhead feed heavily after spawning as they descend back to Lake Erie. Adequate flows allow some steelhead to remain in Conneaut into early May.

Conneaut Creek steelhead hold in a variety of water types, dependent upon flows, conditions, and time of year. On the backside of a good rainfall that raises the water and brings fresh fish into the stream, steelhead spread out into pockets, riffles, runs, and pools. When the water is pea green, or "steelhead green," to use anglers' vernacular, it pays to cover all types of water and to do so fairly quickly. Under these conditions, you are targeting fresh, aggressive fish.

Swinging flies is particularly effective, as is nymphing with large, bright egg imitations.

When flows drop and clear, focus on deeper pools and runs that offer steelhead protection. Nymphing with muted egg patterns and nymphs is productive given these stream conditions.

Equipment and Techniques

The most popular and effective technique for fishing Conneaut Creek is nymphing (both indicator and tightline) pockets, pools, and runs with egg patterns and nymphs. Although there's no such thing as a perfect rod, a 10-foot, 7-weight single-hander is an excellent choice. The extra length is ideal for roll casting, mending, and high-stick nymphing in tight quarters, and a 7-weight is stout enough to handle steelhead. While fast-action rods seem to be in vogue these days, a moderate- or medium-fast-action rod does a much better job of protecting the lighter leaders and tippets needed when Conneaut Creek runs low and clear. In addition, slower rods are better at loading casts when weight, indicators, and multiple fly rigs are part of the equation.

On Conneaut, and on similar streams throughout Steelhead Alley, my standard setup consists of a 9- to 10-foot 1X leader mated with an additional 2 to 3 feet of fluorocarbon tippet in 2X or 3X. Although some anglers fish tippets down to 6X, going that light makes it difficult to land large, feisty steelhead. I'd rather sacrifice a few hookups than have little chance to land a steelhead or risk playing a fish to exhaustion. Floating lines are standard for nymphing on Conneaut. Weight-forward lines with short, heavy heads help turn over weighted nymph rigs and are helpful when you need to mend large amounts of line.

Nontoxic weight (split shot) is almost a necessity when nymphing, especially in deep pools and fast runs. Weight can be added directly to the tippet (1 to 2 feet above the fly), on the leader above the connecting knot between leader and tippet, or on the tag end of said knot. Often, less is more when it comes to weight; your fly should be drifting near the bottom of the streambed, not dragging or hanging up consistently.

If I were limited to a single fly to fish on Conneaut Creek and throughout Steelhead Alley, I'd have to choose the simple Estaz Egg. I'm not sure who originated this pattern, and I've seen several variations, but it's hard to beat this version: Krystal Flash tail, Estaz body, and a thin collar of white or cream egg yarn. When wet, this fly literally glows, and steelhead find it hard to resist.

Egg patterns are almost irresistible to aggressive, fresh-run steelhead. In addition to the Estaz Egg, standard egg patterns like the Glo-Bug and Nuke Egg are also productive. Egg flies exist in every color under the sun, and at times odd colors like purple, blue, and even olive take fish.

When steelhead become stale after having been in the river for some time, or when flows are low and clear, nymphs often perform better than egg patterns. Stonefly nymphs, caddisfly pupa patterns, Pheasant Tail Nymphs, and Hare's Ear Nymphs all produce. I've found that olive versions of these flies work exceptionally well in the lowest flows, and nymphs tied with electric purple or blue in the thorax sometimes entice steelhead when nothing else will. When fishing these patterns on Conneaut or other Great Lakes tribs, make sure that they're tied on stout hooks.

Within the past couple of decades, swinging flies with two-handed rods has really come into its own on many Steelhead Alley streams. Conneaut is large enough that you can swing flies with 11- to 13-foot switch and Spey rods. During the early fall, swinging flies is especially effective on bright fish fresh out of Lake Erie. These chrome steelhead are aggressive and willingly move good distances to take a swung fly. Swinging is a great way to cover water, and there's nothing like the take of a big steelhead on the swing. The tug is the drug, as they say.

Traditional Pacific Northwest steelhead and Spey-style flies take fish, as do beefed-up trout streamers, including sculpin patterns, Zonkers, and Egg-Sucking Leeches. One of the better patterns I've fished is the Bunny Spey. Originally tied by Rick Kustich of western New York, this pattern effectively imitates a variety of baitfish found throughout the Great Lakes (smelt, shiners, alewives, and shad). My favorite color combination is white over purple, and I've also had success with black, olive, blue, pink, and chartreuse.

I typically fish floating lines when swinging flies, as steelhead move in the water column during early to mid-autumn when water temperatures are optimal. As water temps drop, steelhead become less active and are less apt to move long distances to take a fly. A mini sinking-tip or sinking leader can be helpful in these conditions. Another alternative is to fish flies weighted with nontoxic barbell eyes, cones, or beads. Both of these methods will slow down the swing and put the flies in front of lethargic steelhead.

Bunny Spey

PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook: Alec Jackson 2052 (nickel) or 2052 (black), sizes 3–7

Thread: Orange, size 6/0

Wing: White or grizzly rabbit strip, tied Zonker-style

Body: Purple or white Ice Dubbing, tied on a dubbing loop

Hackle: Purple schlappen

Collar: Purple guinea

Public Access

Unlike some streams within Steelhead Alley, Conneaut Creek features excellent public access, with many access points throughout Conneaut's urban and rural areas at public parks, roads, and bridges. They include Conneaut Harbor, Woodworth Road Boat Ramp, Lakeville Park, Old Main Street, Center Street (Conneaut Local Youth Organization ballpark), Keefus Road, State Route 7 (Old Main Street) in town, State Route 7 south of town, Farnham Bridge on Center Road (just downstream of where SR7 crosses the creek), and Furnace Road. Three scenic covered bridges—at Creek Road, Middle Road, and State Road—also serve as access points.

In the more remote sections of Conneaut, on the upper portion of the river, access is not as plentiful and is limited to public roads (as mentioned above). Anglers are able to hike to a fair amount of water and enjoy relative solitude in these areas, but must beware of private property, and heed "POSTED" and "NO TRESPASSING" signs.

As noted previously, part of Conneaut Creek flows through the northwest corner of Pennsylvania, and, given good water flows, steelhead can be found as far upstream as Dicksonburg. Good public access points in Pennsylvania (progressing upstream) include Griffey Road, Huntley Road, McKee Road North, the US Highway 6N overpass, and Carter Road.

A reality of traveling to fish Conneaut or other streams in Steelhead Alley is that at times these waters can be unfishable due to high water. Heavy rains or rapid snowmelt often cause Conneaut to run swift and turbid for a brief period. If that occurs, all is not lost. By driving a short distance to the west (in Ohio) or east (in Pennsylvania), anglers can find other streams that are fishable. Good choices in Ohio include the Rocky, Chagrin, and Grand Rivers. In Pennsylvania, anglers should consider Raccoon, Crooked, Walnut, and Elk Creeks.

Anglers fishing on Conneaut and other Steelhead Alley waters should keep in mind that these streams are located within a day's drive of most of the population of the Northeast, and given their abundant runs of steelhead, they have become very popular. When steelhead runs are at their peak, it is almost impossible to have complete solitude on the water.

That said, I have found that the majority of anglers rarely stray far from the public access points and named pools and runs. A willingness to walk a bit, and fish less popular sections of streams, is usually all it takes to access plenty of good steelhead water. There are certainly enough steelhead for all anglers to enjoy.

A native of New York, R. Chad Chorney is a widely traveled freelance writer, photographer, and fly-fishing guide who now makes his home in central Idaho.

Conneaut Creek NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY R. CHAD CHORNEY

Where: NE corner of OH.

Access: Good public access by vehicle at public roads, parks, and bridges; access in more remote sections requires a fair amount of hiking.

Headquarters: Conneaut, OH.

Appropriate gear: 6- to 8-wt. rods; fly reels with smooth, enclosed drag systems; floating fly lines; mini sink-tips.

Useful fly patterns: Glo-Bug, Nuke Egg, Estaz Egg, Clown Egg, Sucker Spawn, Bunny Spey, sculpins, Lake Erie Shiner, Woolly Bugger, Egg-Sucking Leech, Steely Stones, Egg-Sucking Stone, Caddis Pupa, Teeny Nymph, Psycho Prince, Pheasant Tail Nymph, Hare's Ear Nymph.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses; large, fish-friendly net (aids in landing fish quickly); rubber-soled wading boots (with cleats).

Nonresident license: $19/3 days, $40/annual.

Fly shops/guides: Mad River Outfitters, (888) 451-0363, www.madriveroutfitters.com; Steelhead Alley Outfitters, (888) 453-5899, www.steelheadalleyoutfitters.com; The Steelhead Guide, (440) 773-8064, www.steelheadguide.com; Fish Lake Run Outfitters, (330) 240-0086, www.fishlakerun.com.

Books/maps: *Fly Fishing for Great Lakes Steelhead: An Advanced Look at an Emerging Fishery* by Rick Kustich and Jerry Kustich; *Advanced Fly Fishing for Great Lakes Steelhead* by Rick Kustich; *Steelhead Dreams: The Theory, Method, Science, and Madness of Great Lakes Steelhead Fly Fishing* by Matt Supinski; *Steelhead Guide: Fly Fishing Techniques and Strategies for Lake Erie Steelhead* by John Nagy. *Ohio Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme; FishErie/FishUSA, www.fisherie.com/maps; Ohio Department of Natural Resources map, https://wildlife.ohiodnr.gov/Portals/wildlife/Maps/Rivers%20&%20Streams%20Maps/conneautcreek.pdf.

Jamaica Bay, NY

In the Shadow of the New York Skyline

By Joseph Albanese

The morning begins like so many before it, with the first orange rays reflecting off the A train as it bisects Jamaica Bay, crawling slowly atop its weathered steel girder. The bay is precariously close to my feet; the full moon is exerting all its power in an attempt to separate the water from its basin, pushing it well above the normal high-tide line. As the water covers the outflow pipe in front of me, a few juvenile menhaden launch themselves skyward in an attempt to escape the marauding pack of striped bass using the tube to help corral their next meal.

Through my earmuffs, the low-pitched rumble of jet engines reminds me I am a few hundred feet from one of the busiest runways in the world, at John F. Kennedy International Airport. In the distance, a laughing gull spots the melee and wheels around to take advantage of the easy pickings. As the gull nears, I grab my Benelli shotgun and swing into action.

For several years, working as a government sharpshooter, I spent almost every day from early spring to late fall managing the laughing gull population to prevent bird strikes. When I wasn't busy protecting the runway from avian threats, I was daydreaming about pulling stripers, bluefish, and weakfish from the waters surrounding me.

In 1948, the powers that be saw fit to drop an airport smack-dab in the middle of 10,000 acres of salt marsh just 12 miles southwest of Manhattan—salt marsh that provides some spectacular fishing. Originally known as Idlewild, the airport was renamed in 1963 after Kennedy's assassination. JFK now serves about 50 million passengers a year. While those passengers likely know of New York City landmarks such as Times Square, the Empire State Building, and the Statue of Liberty, it is a good bet that most are unaware of the fantastic fishing just off the tarmac.

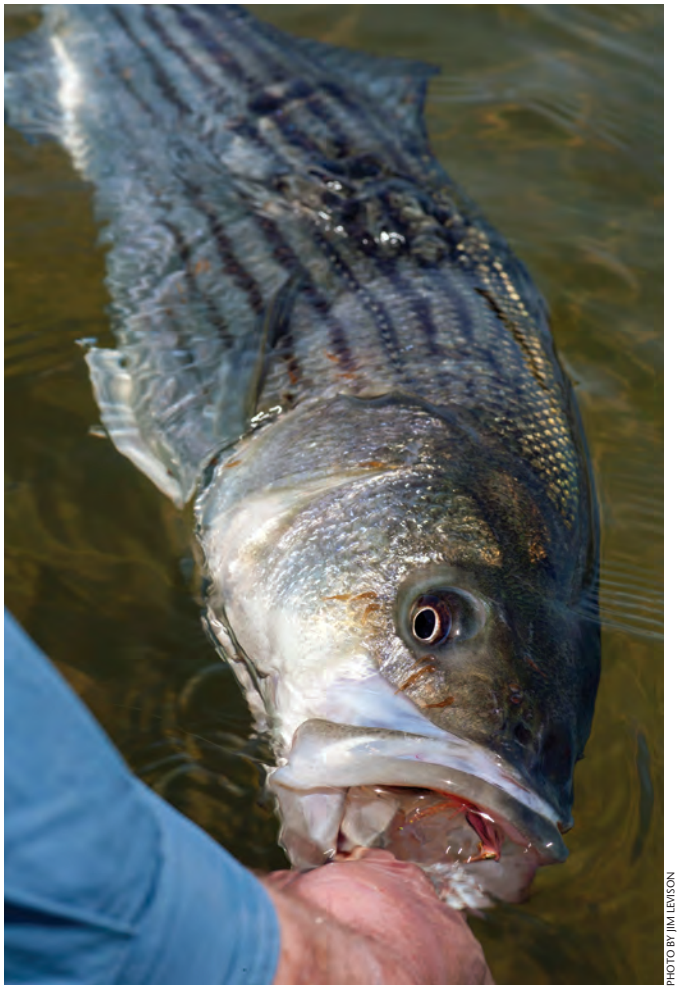


PHOTO BY JIM LEVISON

One byproduct of society is excess nitrogen. This nutrient comes from a variety of sources, including fertilizer runoff and detergents. Too much nitrogen and harmful algae blooms erupt, but a mild influx provides nourishment for phytoplankton, the basis of the aquatic food chain. It may seem counterintuitive, but the large population base within the five boroughs actually helps increase the productivity of the bay. The phytoplankton feeds the zooplankton, which feeds the Atlantic menhaden. These large, abundant baitfish form the forage base for all of the predators that call Jamaica Bay home. Measuring 14 inches fully grown, they represent a lot of calories in a single gulp. While Montauk is considered by many to be New York's big-fish haven, the waters off the island's western end have given up more than their share of gigantic striped bass, with a few 50-pounders caught every year.

The aquatic cast of characters includes a number of species of interest to the feather flinger. Perhaps the most coveted, and pursued, is the aforementioned striped bass. Because of the bay's location, it sees fish from two distinct

PHOTO BY CHRIS DICKEY

The Marine Parkway Bridge can be a hot spot throughout the season. Bridges are placed at pinch points, and this one is no exception, funneling both bait and game fish (above). A Jamaica Bay striper comes to hand. The bay offers opportunities for both shore fishing and fishing by boat (left).

stocks, according to information gathered through tagging programs. Spawning populations exist in both the Hudson River and Chesapeake Bay, and they both call the bay home from early spring through Christmas. Bluefish, a swimming set of jaws, are probably the most prolific predator to call the bay home. Weakfish are known by myriad names, including yellowfin and papermouth, referring to the yellow hue of their skin and the soft tissue in their mouth, respectively. These game fish are similar to the speckled trout of the South, and their presence seems to occur cyclically, with their numbers increasing every seven years.

False albacore make a showing as well, much to the delight of fly anglers. These speedsters are members of the tuna family, and they are tailor-made for fly fishing because of their preference for small baits.

Most people don't think of bottomfish in the context of fly-rod quarry, but summer flounder, or fluke as it's known locally, can make a great target in the dog days of summer when water temperatures are too high for most game fish. These ambush predators bury themselves in the mud and wait for an unsuspecting meal to pass by, and they will go surprising distances to chase it down. Unsuspecting anglers frequently catch them in the middle of the water column in depths to about 10 feet.

Jamaica Bay is characterized by a labyrinth of creeks running through meadows of salt hay and cordgrass, shallow flats, and open water. The dark black of the bay's bottom may seem polluted to the untrained observer, but that deep hue is the result of decomposing mollusks. Over hundreds of years, the calcium content in the shells

of clams and oysters dissolves into fine black silt. This dark bottom helps the bay heat up in the spring, absorbing solar energy and warming the water above it. This effect is so profound that there is a temperature difference of up to four or five degrees between the first cool ocean waters of the incoming tide and the warm surges from the last of the ebb.

PHOTO BY JIM LEVISON

Bluefish are prolific in Jamaica Bay, arriving in significant numbers in late spring and early summer (above). Black skimmers are among the many species of birds found in and around Jamaica Bay (right).

What species you encounter depends on the time of year and the water temperatures. These cues provide the necessary prompts for the migratory species that frequent the bay to begin their yearly pilgrimage, and can vary somewhat. The fishing starts in mid-April most years, with school-size stripers of 18 to 26 inches composing the advance guard. After the water temperature reaches 64 degrees, the bass arrive in full force and the fishing busts wide open. After the stripers have made their presence known for a while, bluefish come nipping at their heels. Weakfish, though present in much smaller numbers than in years past, seem to arrive sometime between the two.

As water temperatures crack the 70-degree mark, many of the larger bass make an exodus from the bay, seeking refuge in the cooler waters of the Atlantic. This is when you should start looking for the flatfish that thrive in these warmer temps. Fluke season typically opens in the middle of May, and they can be found through the end of September, biting right through the dog days of summer. Around Labor Day, local sharpies start waiting with bated breath for the arrival of legions of false albacore. Besides offering some of the most exciting fishing of the year, it usually signals the start of the fall bass run. The cooling waters once again draw the bigger fish back into the bay, fatter than they were after their long journey in the spring. And the decreased photoperiod lets fish know that they will need to be on their way shortly, so they must put on the feedbag for the next leg of their journey. Fall fishing is typified by blitzes, fish so lost in competition for food that they throw caution to the wind and snap at anything they think they can fit in their mouths. If you had to pick just one time to fish J-Bay, you couldn't go wrong with October.

Tide is perhaps the most important consideration when fishing the salt. It is the equivalent of current in a trout stream, except it changes direction twice a day. This movement controls the flow of bait, and saltwater predators set up to intercept just like brook trout do. If your interest lies in fishing the many creeks in the marsh, concentrate on the hour right before and after high tide, with the best fishing usually occurring just as the tide starts to fall. The dropping water flushes bait out of hiding places in the grass, which can create a feeding frenzy among bass and blues. If flats fishing is your thing, the slack period at the top of the tide is your best bet. There is no current for an hour or so, and game fish actively feed, roving the shallows in pursuit of bait. As the tide works its way out, start to focus on open water. Cast toward any sort of channel or depression you see, as a drop-off of even a few inches is liable to hold fish. The absolute bottom of the tide can trap bait and concentrate game fish, so look for deeper pockets and place your offering there.

Like any large water body, Jamaica Bay is best fished by boat, although there are plenty of opportunities for shore-bound anglers, many reachable by public transportation or taxi. With a boat, you can easily visit a variety of habitats

of interest. The ability to move with the tide can really improve your success, compensating for fluctuating water levels and letting you follow bait as it's flushed from the shallows. And when it comes to chasing blitzes, the ability to hop on plane and be under the birds in seconds can't be beat. A couple of guides call the bay home, and you would be well served to get out with them if you can. Understanding the intricacies of this vast salt marsh takes years of observation, but you can flatten the learning curve by gleaning insights from someone who already has this knowledge.

PHOTO BY SUSAN YOUNG

Gateway National Recreation Area was created by the National Park Service in 1972 to help preserve the unique ecosystem that exists right alongside one of the world's busiest metropolises. This huge management area is composed of almost the entire bay below the high-water mark, plus several parks that dot the periphery. While any spot can harbor fish, some locations are better than others. Floyd Bennett Field is one such location. New York City's first municipal airport, it was later used as a naval air station in World War II. The waters adjacent to the park still have runway control buoys from the days when seaplanes came and went with regularity. Now this frontage provides great access for anglers seeking to connect with the denizens of the bay. You can legally camp in Floyd Bennett by making reservations with the National Park Service.

Jacob Riis Park offers sun worshippers a place to spread out a towel, and anglers a place to wet a line; it offers access to the bay on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other, just a short walk from each other. Designed by Robert Moses, the man who planned most of downstate New York, this park features a boardwalk and a historic bathhouse. The open sand beach allows you to hook fish even in the heat of the summer; the relatively flat contours are great for dragging weighted flies along the bottom to tempt fluke. This may also be one of the better places to try for albies, as they occasionally herd bait along the shore. On the bay side, the Marine Parkway–Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge is a known hot spot for big weakfish—up to 14 pounds.

Bridges are usually fishy places because they are built at pinch points, and the Cross Bay Boulevard causeway is no exception. On any given day in season, you can see anglers lining the span shoulder to shoulder, plying the depths below with lead weights and cut bait. There is no place atop the bridge for fly anglers, but the shore offers plenty of opportunities if you're willing to wade. Lots on the southeast and southwest sides of the bridge offer free parking. The east side

PHOTO BY CHRIS DICKEY

Jamaica Bay includes substantial salt marsh habitat, punctuated by sections of open beach. These areas often provide the earliest action of the year, with the dark mud bottom warming quicker than lighter substrates. Brooklyn provides a backdrop to this urban setting.

features a mud flat that holds rooting and cruising fish, but exercise caution, as the tidal mud can be very soft. The west side has a much firmer bottom and structure in the form of old pilings. A little-known fact about this site is its use in religious ceremonies. I would often find coconuts floating in the bay, which surprised me. It turns out a small local population practices Santeria and uses the nuts in their rites. I often see brightly colored fabric as well, part of certain Indian observances.

Tackle needs for Jamaica Bay are fairly straightforward. Anything from an 8-weight up to a 10-weight works, with most anglers opting for a 9-foot 9-weight. Reels should have a good drag and a large arbor to aid in regaining lost line quickly. Line selection is a bit trickier, as the varying depths require different configurations to present your fly properly. Floating lines can be used on calm days to present flies on or near the surface, but throw in a little chop and you'll lose control. A slow-sinking intermediate is the best all-around choice for the lesser depths. But when it comes to probing the deep, or special situations like fishing the bunker schools, you may want a fast-sinking line or shooting-head. Leader and tippet selection is simple. Use 6 to 10 feet of 10- to 20-pound test.

Jeanne's Skrimp

PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

Hook:	Jig hook, size 1/0
Thread:	Clear mono
Underbody:	Glass rattle
Weight:	Metal dumbbell
Antenna:	Rubber leg material and green Krystal Flash
Eyes:	Creature Eyes or mono
Body:	Pearl Estaz

Fly selection for stripers depends on the time of the year. In the very early spring, before any baitfish make an appearance, crab patterns are ideal. Overwintering by burying themselves deep in the mud, the crustaceans begin to emerge at the first hint of warmer weather, and their lethargic pace makes for easy pickings for bass. Crab patterns such as Simon's Hover Crab or Del's Merkin are best fished on a dead drift, letting the fly ride the tide the way you would a nymph in your favorite large trout stream.

As the water warms, the Atlantic sand lance, known locally as sand eels, appear in droves. These thin minnows are best imitated by a Clouser Minnow or Popovics's Jiggy, because the forward weight of these patterns drags the fly along the bottom just like the real thing. Push the clock forward a bit more and the menhaden arrive. These fish are quite the mouthful, so you'll need to imitate their broad profile or risk having your offering ignored. Patterns like big Deceivers or Cowen's Magnum Baitfish are needed to match the wide silhouette.

Bluefish will hit nearly anything when the feed is on. I've seen a school of them repeatedly nail a beer can that drifted into a blitz. With blues, it is more about getting the fly in front of them than about matching the hatch exactly. That said, there is another consideration when it comes to choosing flies for these marauders: the razor-sharp teeth they use to make quick work of their meals. These teeth can also make quick work of monofilament tippets, so a bite tippet of single-strand or knottable wire is preferable. While the added visibility of wire all but guarantees fewer strikes from other species, the solution is to use flies that are tied as far away from the hook eye as possible, like Keys-style tarpon flies. The hook shank functions as a bite guard, and there's no wire to dissuade other species from striking. Many anglers tie Surf Candies in this style, as the epoxy holds up well to the blues' abuse.

Weakfish will go for whatever the bass are after most of the time, but they seem to prefer certain colors. For whatever reason, they seem to have a thing for pink. Because they will gorge on aquatic worms, I started using a fly that resembles their outline and has a similar undulating motion. Called the Bunny Worm, it couldn't be any simpler—just a pink rabbit strip palmered around a hook with a long tail hanging past the bend. I tie it in a number of arrangements to get it to the proper depth: some with coneheads, some weighted with lead-free wire under wraps, and some with round float foam concealed by the Zonker strip. The floating version is useful for snaking along just above the weeds on a sinking line. Another bait of particular interest to weakfish is grass shrimp; use an Ultra Shrimp to fool them if you think that's what they're after.

Fluke will key in on whatever bait is most prevalent in the area, so match the hatch if you can. But don't fret if you don't know what exactly they are chowing down on. Presentation is the most important element of a successful fluke outing. Getting down to the bottom is paramount to hook these delicious flounders. A sinking-tip line is great, as is a weighted fly. You can almost never go wrong with a Clouser Minnow in the salt, and this is no exception. White/chartreuse in the 1/0 size is a regional favorite, but other colors and sizes work. Be sure to switch to a wide-profile fly if juvenile menhaden are in the area. Fishing below these schools has resulted in my biggest fluke, so keep your eyes peeled for them.

The polar opposite of blues, false albacore are very picky, requiring a precise match of the bait they are feeding on. Their arrival coincides with the forage collectively referred to as rain bait. This grouping of 2- to 3-inch fish is so called because when their schools are under siege by predators they make their escape on the surface, and the resultant splashes look like drops of rain hitting the water. Included in this group of small, translucent forage are Atlantic silversides and anchovies. These are best mimicked by Mikkleson's Epoxy Minnow, Surf Candies, or Clousers made with translucent fibers. Use fluorocarbon tippet with a rating of no higher than 15 pounds when targeting false albacore, as their eyesight is excellent and they can easily pick out mono.

For an experience you won't soon forget, hit the Big Apple's Jamaica Bay. There is something thrilling about pulling double-digit fish from single-digit depths no matter where you are, but to do so in the shadow of the world's most recognizable skyline takes it to the next level. Pack up the family, catch some stripers, and see some famous landmarks in one of the United States' oldest cities.

With a fly rod in hand, Joseph Albanese's tenure in natural resources has taken him from the shadow of the Empire State building to remote parts of Alaska. Currently he lives in Lynbrook, New York.

Jamaica Bay NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY CHRIS DICKEY

When: Mid-April–November.

Where: West end of Long Island, NY.

Headquarters: Gateway National Recreation Area. *Information:* www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/jamaica-bay-hours.htm.

Appropriate gear: 8- to 10-wt. rods, intermediate and sinking lines.

Useful flies: Keys-style tarpon flies, Deceivers, Simon's Hover Crab, Del's Merkin, Clouser Minnow, Jeanne's Skrimp, Popovics's Jiggy, Cowen's Magnum Baitfish, Kinky Muddler, Surf Candy, Bunny Worm.

Nonresident license: A state fishing license is not needed for saltwater, but anglers must enroll in the Recreation Marine Fishing Registry (free) at http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/54950.html. In addition, some areas in Jamaica Bay require a $50 National Park Service fishing permit.

Fly shops/guides: Urban Angler, (800) 255-5288, www.urbanangler.com; Riverbay Outfitters, (516) 415-7748, www.riverbayoutfitters.com; Capt. John McMurray, (718) 791-2094, www.nycflyfishing.com.

Transportation: *To Cross Bay Blvd. Bridge:* Queens-bound A train to Rockaway Blvd., transfer to Q52/Q53 bus Limited Rockaway Pk/B 116th St. via Woodhaven Blvd. via Cross Bay Blvd. *Last stop on the mainland:* 163rd Ave. *First stop on Broad Channel Island:* Wildlife refuge. *Last stop on Broad Channel*: W. 15th Road. *First stop on the Rockaways:* Beach 96th St. *To Floyd Bennett Field:* Brooklyn-bound 2/5 train to the end at Flatbush Ave./Brooklyn College; transfer to the Q35 bus toward Rockaway Park/B 116th St., get out at the Ryan Visitors Center. *To Gateway/Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge:* Queens-bound A train to Rockaway Blvd., transfer to Q52/Q53 bus Limited Rockaway Pk/B 116th St. via Woodhaven Blvd. via Cross Bay Blvd., get out at wildlife refuge; or Queens-bound A train to Broad Channel, walk west on E. Sixth Road to Cross Bay Blvd., turn right, and walk north on Cross Bay Blvd. (total walk is 0.8 mi.).

Maps/information: Jamaica Bay fishing maps/information, www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/fishing-maps.htm.

ALL PHOTOS BY RICK MCNARY

Roaring River State Park, MO

A Beginning Fly Fisher's Paradise

By Rick McNary

If you are new to fly fishing, head to Roaring River State Park in southwest Missouri. There, you will learn more about trout feeding behavior in a few hours than in a dozen hours of casting to fish in other rivers. The reason? You can see the trout and watch how they act and react. It is a sight-fishers' paradise.

The clarity of this spring-fed river offers anglers the ability to observe the feeding habits and behavior of rainbows and browns. What works at 9 a.m. might not work at 10 a.m., and, although you can see them clearly, catching wary trout that have had everything imaginable thrown at them is even more difficult than you might think. Even if you miss way more than you catch, you'll be comforted by the fact that they expelled that nymph you drifted by, chased that streamer you retrieved, or rose to that BWO you laid gently on the surface only to tease you, then swim away. It is wonderfully maddening.

The Nature of a Trout Park

Missouri claims to have the only three state parks in the United States dedicated solely to trout fishing. Family-friendly Roaring River, Bennett Spring, and Meramec State Parks exist for the pleasure of trout anglers, not to mention their nonfishing companions. If you walk along the bank and strike up a conversation, many anglers will tell stories of the annual family tradition of camping and fishing with their parents and grandparents.

The Roaring River's source is a large spring, and the stream tumbles through a picturesque Ozark valley in a man-made course. However, when torrential rains come and drain through the valleys, the runoff sometimes floods the river so badly it takes a year or longer to repair.

The river cuts through a valley with steep walls and rugged terrain of spectacular beauty. Each season brings its own charm, especially fall, when the colors of turning leaves transform the valley into a postcard panorama. Three entities provide governance and resources for the area: the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), and the park concessionaire.

The state park covers 4,000 acres of Ozark hills, valleys, trees, streams, and wildlife. Of those 4,000 acres, only 800 are used for easy-access recreation; the rest are set aside as

primitive area with no motor vehicle access. More than 10 miles of trails thread through the state park, some leading through groves of endangered tree species, like the chinquapin oak, which was nearly wiped out by blight in 1904.

The park has 186 campsites, a swimming pool, laundry facilities, an inn with 26 rooms, 26 cabins, and a recently restored lodge with seven suites. In addition, during the regular season, from March 1 through October 31, the park store is open and offers a variety of fishing supplies, groceries, and apparel. The store is also the place to purchase a daily tag for fishing, in addition to a regular Missouri fishing license and trout permit. The hatchery uses the sale of these $3 tags to calculate the number of fish it stocks each day: 2.25 fish for each tag sold.

In addition to purchasing a license and trout stamp, anglers must also purchase a $3 daily tag. Each night, 2.5 fish per tag sold are stocked in the river. They average about 12.5 inches in length (above). Much of the river in the state park can be fished from the bank, but if you like to wade, Zone 2 is ideal. The water comes from a spring and remains the same temperature, so hatches occur regularly, even during winter. You can fish a dry fly, strip a streamer, or drift a nymph all in the same morning (left).

This multiuse state park is ideal for anglers who want to teach their children the sport, or who plan to fish by themselves while nonfishing family members engage in other activities. The park even hosts two designated Kids Fishing Days during the regular season to encourage young anglers to take up the sport.

The MDC oversees the hatchery and the water. The hatchery is near the Roaring River Spring and provides the river with approximately 265,000 fish a year. It takes two years for the trout to grow to the preferred size for placing in the river (12.5 inches). The MDC works with both the state park and the park concessionaire to determine how many fish are stocked each night during the season. They occasionally stock the river with larger broodstock fish. The large observation pool by the spring, which is basically there for people to enjoy watching the larger fish swim around, is also stocked with browns to help eat the minnows.

Directly below the spring are the Twin Falls and a pool that holds the larg-

est concentration of bigger fish on the river. In addition to the regularly stocked rainbow trout, some large browns make their way out of the observation pool and into the river during high-water events by washing over the top and into the lower pool. And speaking of big trout, the Roaring River yielded the 18-pound, 1-ounce state-record rainbow trout in 2004.

The Roaring River is divided into 33 sections, providing a variety of water conditions, such as rapids, runs, and pools. In a short stretch of river, anglers can employ a full slate of techniques and presentations.

Seasons on the River

There are two seasons for fishing the river. The regular season runs from March 1 through October 31; the catch-and-release season begins the second weekend of November and closes the second Monday of February. During the C&R season, the fishery is open Friday through Monday. A horn sounds in the morning to begin fishing, then sounds again in the evening to signal the closure for the day. The hours vary during the regular season, but fishing is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the catch-and-release season.

Opening day on March 1 is a cultural phenomenon. If it's during the week, local schools and businesses shut down, and everyone goes to the river. If it's on Sunday, local churches close their doors and congregants gather at the river. Usually, the presiding state governor fires the opening shot as thousands line the shores, waiting to toss their lines in. As the locals say, people are guaranteed to catch something; sometimes it's a fish.

I prefer fishing the river during the catch-and-release season because there are fewer people and thus less angling pressure on the fish. The store is closed and you don't need a daily permit during this time. Part of the campground is open during this time, too. Even in the winter, dry-fly fishing can be good because the temperature of the water never changes. In winter, it's not uncommon to see hatching caddisflies come off the water, hit the cold air a few inches above, and fall back down. The trout gorge like pigs at a trough.

Although the Roaring River eventually feeds into Table Rock Lake, 3 miles flow within the state park, where the river is divided into three zones, which vary in regulations during the regular season.

Zone 1 is near the hatchery and anglers may use flies or lures. During the regular season, this zone absorbs the most intense pressure on the river from conventional-gear anglers. Some days it is shoulder to shoulder and difficult to fly fish. You cannot wade in this water, and the majority of its length is fishable from only one side of the river. You can keep the fish from this zone, and there are convenient fish-cleaning stations in the parking lot. Zone 1 has the aforementioned large pool near the hatchery and holds numerous large rainbows and browns. The east bank of the pool has a concrete sidewalk where anglers slowly drift nymphs and strip-retrieve streamers. Numerous handicap-accessible angling locations are also available in Zone 1.

As the large pool spills down over small waterfalls, the river forms a variety of rapids, runs, and pools, creating ideal water for casting dry flies, stripping streamers, or drifting nymphs. I frequently case my rod and learn by watching others fish these sections. This river is an excellent place to sharpen your tenkara techniques.

Zone 2, which is flies-only and catch-and-release down to the State Route 112 bridge, begins where Dry Hollow Creek joins the Roaring River and runs down to old dam at the end of Campground 3. Where Zone 1 dumps into Zone 2, a large set of falls tumble into a deep pool teeming with big fish that typically roam near the bottom. This is an excellent place to improve your deep-water nymphing techniques, requiring you to deliver the flies quickly into the depths while still drifting them naturally. The lower end of this pool, where it gets shallower, is a fine place to test your dry-fly presentations on more placid water. The bank is elevated and gives you a prime view of fish to target with a dry fly.

Downstream from that pool, the Zone 2 section opens into one of the most picturesque parts of the river for wading. The stream widens and slows, providing excellent water for strip-retrieving streamers from advantageous wading positions. From the SR 112 bridge, which offers a great vantage point for watching other anglers working fish in the clear water below, down to the old dam below Campground 3, the river is generally more lethargic. A set of gentle riffles about 50 yards downstream from the bridge holds a fair number of fish, making it an ideal place to

practice and improve your shallow-water nymphing techniques. The river continues wide and slow until it turns the corner by a wheelchair-accessible platform. Below that platform, the stream regains some velocity, forming rapids, runs, and pools. When the water is lower, you can walk out on the rocks that form small dams to create the rapids. From such a position, it's easy to work the roily water below the rocks and then turn upstream to fish the pool above.

Zone 3 begins at the old dam and continues to the state park boundary. In this section, anglers can use flies, but also soft baits, natural baits, and scented baits, making it less popular for fly fishing.

Man-Made River

The Roaring River is man-made, designed to offer anglers a variety of opportunities. Within the river's three designated zones are 33 different sections, each created to offer a variety of rapids, runs, riffles, and pools.

Where pools tail into shallower riffles with myriad current seams, anglers find excellent water for streamers; more placid shallows are prime for a dry/dropper rig; or you might opt to practice drifting small dries free of drag, or drift nymphs into small windows. Whatever your preference, not only does the Roaring River offer water to suit your favorite techniques, it also allows you the luxury—or the frustration—of watching how the fish react or don't react to your offering.

Tim Homesley, owner of Tim's Fly Shop, is among the acknowledged experts on the Roaring River. He grew up here and began fly fishing when he was 5 years old. A wealth of information, he still fishes the river 300 days a year, but readily advises that these fish are not as easy to catch as you might think. Hatchery-born they may be, but Roaring River's trout are rapidly educated by angling pressure and their aquarium-like environment.

Nonetheless, because of the ideally designed water and the opportunity to scrutinize how fish react to your presentations, the Roaring River is an excellent place to learn fly fishing, teach fly fishing, or sharpen your skills. I wish I had discovered this river 35 years ago, when I began fly fishing. I've learned more in a day on the Roaring River simply watching the way trout behave than I have in a month standing in other rivers where I can't see the fish.

That visual aspect is addicting. It's much easier to walk away from a river where you can't see the fish than it is to walk away from a place where you see large trout feeding voraciously on *something*. The temptation is to stay and try to figure out that *something*. As an added bonus, you'll get lots of knot-tying practice as you keep changing patterns, looking for just the right fly to fool the fish.

Now that I have grandchildren with short attention spans, I appreciate the Roaring River all the more. My grandchildren, like me, stay longer and work harder trying to catch fish they can see. Inevitably, soon after we leave, I'm happily bombarded with the refrain, "Let's do it again, Papa Rick!"

Based in Kansas, Rick McNary is a wide-ranging freelance writer and photographer. See more of his work at www.rickmcnary.me.

Roaring River State Park NOTEBOOK

When: *Regular season:* March 1–Oct. 31. *C&R season:* Second Fri. in November–second Mon. in February; open Fri.–Mon., 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

Where: Roaring River State Park, 7 mi. south of Cassville, MO, via SR 112 (nearest airport is in Branson). *Information:* www.mostateparks.com/park/roaring-river-state-park; www.roaringriverstatepark.com.

Access: Wading allowed in river Zones 2 and 3; shore-fishing only in Zone 1.

Headquarters: Roaring River State Park, https://mostateparks.com/park/roaring-river-state-park. *Lodging:* (417) 847-2330. *Camping:* (877) 422-6766.

Appropriate gear: 3- to 6-wt. rods, floating and sinking-tip lines, 6X–7X tippets (heavier tippets for streamers).

Useful fly patterns: Copper Johns, Pheasant Tail Nymph, Zebra Midge (various colors), Mega Worm, Woolly Buggers, Griffith's Gnats, BWO patterns, beetles, dark caddisfly patterns.

Necessary accessories: Polarized sunglasses, layered clothing.

Nonresident license: $7/day; $42/annual, plus $3/daily tag during regular season (purchase the preceding evening or day-of at the park store).

Fly shops/guides: Tim's Fly Shop, (417) 847-4956, www.missouritrout.com/timsflyshop; state park store, (417) 847-4971.

Books/maps: *The First 150 Years in Cassville, Missouri, 1845–1995* by Emory Melton. *Missouri Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme.

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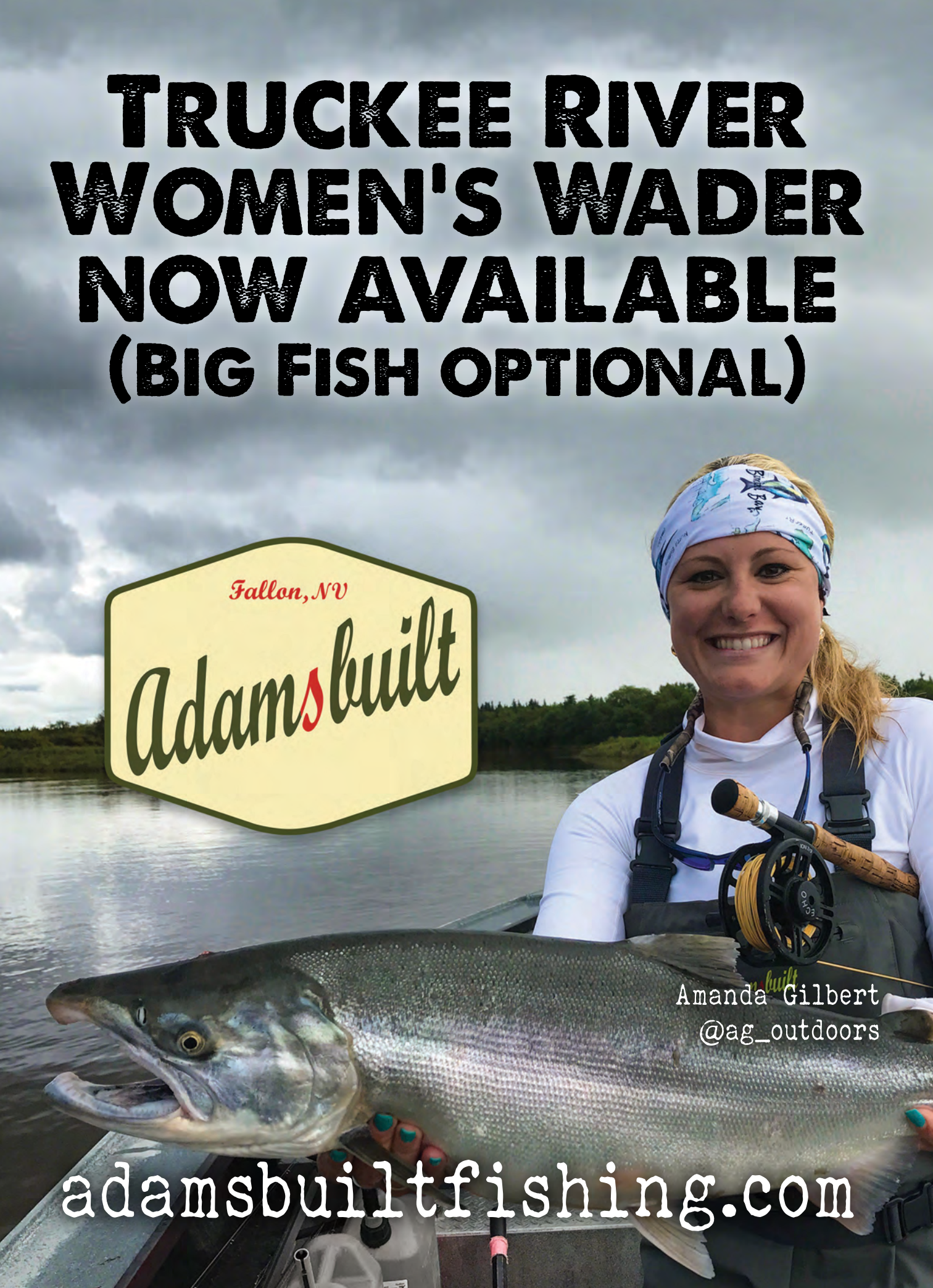

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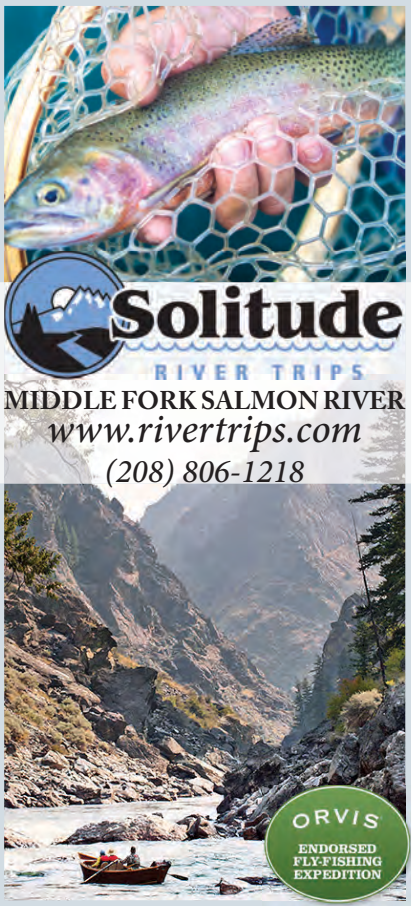

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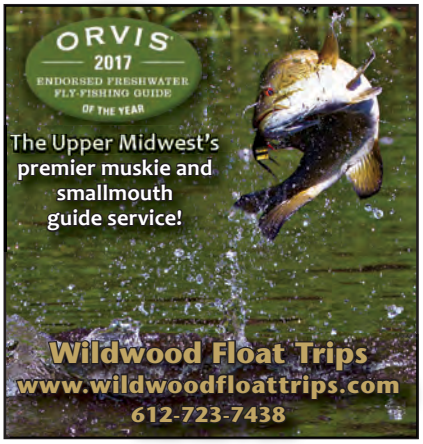

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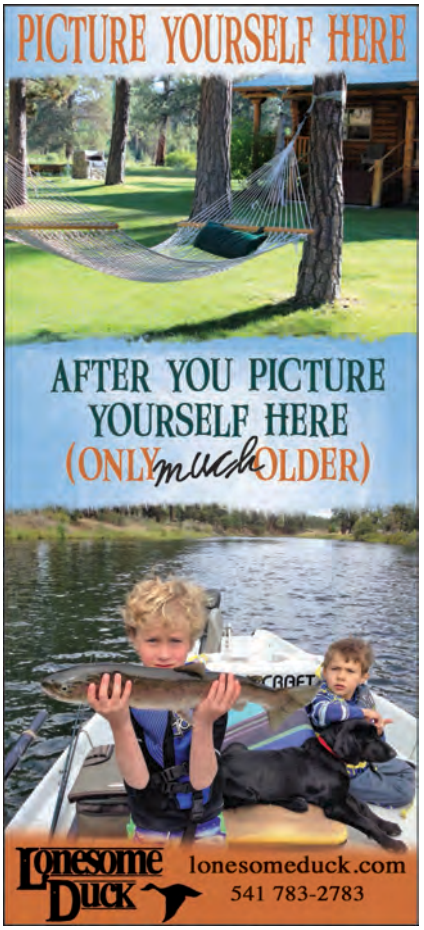

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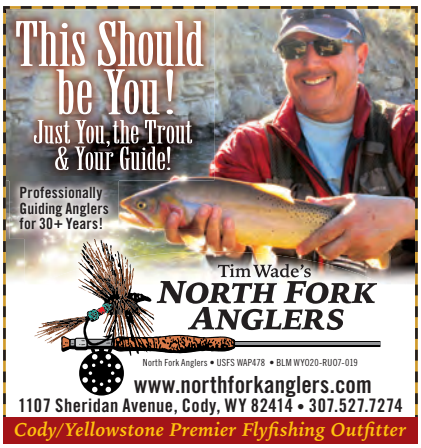

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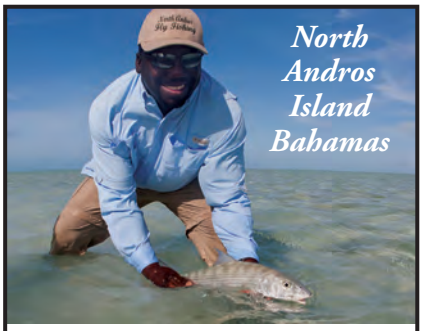

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In the Studio

Denny Carson and Bitterroot Nets/ By Jeff Erickson

Beauty ranks among fly fishing's defining characteristics: a radiant Eastern brook trout or a Yellowstone cutthroat; a river winding through a Technicolor autumn valley; and meticulously produced gear—traditional, iridescent salmon and steelhead flies, exquisite bamboo rods, and handcrafted wooden landing nets and fly boxes.

The latter two are purveyed by master woodworker Denny Carson and his Spokane, Washington, business, Bitterroot Nets (www.bitterrootnets.com). The nets come in three series—stream, tailwater, and boat nets—ranging in price from $189 to $269. In addition, for a modest fee, customers can add a customized engraved monogram filled with crushed turquoise or black epoxy.

In contrast to mass-produced gear, each Bitterroot net is a work of art, with many utilizing exotic hardwoods or individualistic burls (knots) in the grain. With the right burl, it's even possible to inlay bright green malachite or hand-tied flies. Bitterroot uses a special acrylic application process to strengthen and waterproof the wood, and offers a lifetime guarantee on finish and workmanship. Additionally, Bitterroot has a creative magnetic carry system that allows nets to be grabbed with the handle down for easier retrieval during the critical landing moment. Having the net's bag higher on the back also reduces annoying snags while thrashing through brush.

Carson's beautiful nets are owned by many ordinary fly anglers, as well as TV celebrities like Tom Brokaw and David Letterman. But he says he's "most proud when a net is given as a presentation piece to someone who has dedicated their life to conservation." The nets are attractive enough to be displayed in a museum or over a cabin fireplace, but sufficiently tough to provide many years of service on the water. Carson offers this advice to buyers: "Don't baby that thing … they're made to be used."

The fly boxes—priced from $119 to $139—are available in dry-fly and streamer configurations, and utilize the same nine-step marine-finish process as the nets to lock out moisture. The burl faces of many boxes are adorned with turquoise or other semiprecious minerals. They boast traditional lock miter joints for additional strength, snag-free brass hinges, and rare-earth magnets to keep the lids securely shut. The boxes are gorgeous, but highly functional, designed to be unhesitatingly snatched from your vest when it's sleeting during a fall *Baetis* hatch.

Carson's career shifted in 2007 when his family's franchise woodworking business, Woodcraft, hosted a "bent lamination" class taught by an expert; he signed up with the intention of making his first fishing net. He says he "started making nets for buddies, and eventually realized he needed to start charging." Those early creations sparked the business that now produces nearly 300 nets a year, mainly sold over his website, through select fly shops, and at art shows Carson and his wife, Tina, travel to in the summer. He christened his new company after the trout-rich Bitterroot Range, which forms part of the jagged border between Idaho and Montana, and which he can view from an east-facing shop window.

Carson understands that he occupies an unusual niche in the fly-fishing industry. He says his nets and boxes "occupy the high end of things—mostly gifts—not run-of-the-mill products. They're not created in a mold in some other country." Bitterroot Nets was recently featured on *Handcrafted America*, hosted by the intrepid Jill Wagner on the INSP TV channel; sales tripled.

In a world where generic products are produced cheaply in countries like China, it's a challenge to run a business that relies on masterful, time-consuming craftsmanship. Carson says he needed to "start from the ground up, while still floating a family. With businesses like this, it's impossible to initially quit your day job. There's no time off."

Demands notwithstanding, it seems like a good fit: "I don't sit well" he says. "I'm always a busybody with something." With mixed humor and seriousness, Carson suggests the most important requirement was "to pick the right wife," someone who unwaveringly hangs in there—believing—through uncertain twists and turns, ups and downs.

Unsurprisingly, Carson is an avid fly angler. When he's fishing, he's thrilled to see people using his handiwork, saying, "It puts a permanent grin on my face for the rest of the day … although it would probably happen more often if I got out more."

Bitterroot Nets produces gear that's strong, durable, and customized; it's also as natural and beautiful as the environments we cast in and the fish we catch.


FESTOOL

Denny Carson, founder of Bitterroot Nets, carefully sands the hoop of one of his nets in preparation for the installation of the magnetic carry system, or I-MAG.

Blue dye mixed with the acrylic during the hardening process lends a water-like sheen to the buckeye burl finish on this wooden fly box.

The frames of Bitterroot fly boxes are fastened together with lock miter joints. This box and lid will become one of the River Series boxes.

An overhead drum sander is used to sand down net hoop laminations of Bolivian redheart, Honduran mahogany, and African wenge so they are flush with the net's handle.

A stunning handle of blue buckeye burl inlaid with turquoise is paired with a hoop lamination of Bolivian redheart and white rock maple to make Bitterroot's Patriot model net.

Bitterroot's I-MAG system allows the net to hang handle down, keeping it from hanging on brush and other snags, and making the net easy to retrieve when needed.

The handle for a Stream Net is carefully cut from an intricately figured section of buckeye burl. Mostly found in California, buckeye burl is a root ball burl that is prized for is multicolored chatoyance.

For the River Series Stream Nets, the live edges of two pieces of western maple burl are fitted together to create a riverbed pattern between them. The "river" is then filled with a blend of crushed turquoise from different mines.

Art meets functionality in a finished Bitterroot wooden fly box.

Bitterroot nets and fly boxes are made to be used. The voids in the wood are filled using an acrylic waterproofing and hardening process.

After multiple machining steps to build a net, Carson applies the final shaping and sanding by hand, and then begins his nine-step waterproofing finish process.

outmoded.… Such equipment is not necessary to catch salmon or any other kind of game fish."

Boy, was he wrong. Actually, he was right for his time, as his observations concerned contests held mainly during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, and his books first saw print in the early 1980s, before graphite, a material still in its infancy, transformed the industry. It took another decade for manufacturers to come to grips with the design and technology required to tame the two-handed beast, to begin building Spey rods that weighed less than 5 pounds and behaved agreeably. (To be fair, Spey rods had been in use on salmon rivers in the United Kingdom since the 1800s and never lost favor there, but that was an ocean away.)

Though only casual competitors, Andrew Trimble (left) and Louis Hurst were instrumental in organizing international fly- and bait-casting tournaments under the auspices of the National Association of Scientific Angling Clubs (above).

As rods got better, so did casters. And as factory-produced, accessibly priced rods of respectable quality flooded the market, civilian anglers could be more easily attracted to the fold. Like all clubs, casting clubs exist in order to multiply—cultivating membership by fostering camaraderie, nursing the affliction, and promoting the sport and mastery of casting. As author Lou Darling so aptly commented in a 1907 edition of *Field and Stream*, "Fly and bait casting tournaments … awaken and sustain interest in what one might term the finer arts of angling. The unaccustomed hand lacks in cunning." Darling went on to admit that while he was "absolutely green at the game," upon observing a lineup of middle-distance casters, he "was fairly 'stung' by the microbe of tournament casting." In order to learn the ropes, he became a "rail bird" and "kept as close a watch as possible upon the experts in practice and contest."

The main objective of casting clubs is, and always has been, to hatch more rail birds. Periodic slumps in popularity are part of the growing pains for every organization, sporting or otherwise. In the 1930s, many casting clubs, including CACC—fearing they were becoming or seen as elitist—introduced Fish-O, a competition aimed at the regular angling crowd, amateurs, and anyone outfitted with over-the-counter tackle. Described by *Outdoor America* (the house publication for the National Association of Scientific Angling Clubs) as "the new accuracy game for bait and fly casters," Fish-O made competitive casting more approachable—by simplifying the rules—more accessible, and more achievable by increasing the diameter of the target from the tournament-standard 18-inch ring to 30-inch rings, veritable Hula-Hoops.

Fish-O caught on, especially among outdoor organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America, and in college P.E. departments, and even with some large industrialists who offered the game as a work-break pastime for their factory laborers. In 1939, the name Fish-O changed more or less in sync with the name change of the sponsoring organization. In part to shake its musty image and to overcome the impression that tournaments hinged on technological developments, the National Association of Scientific Angling Clubs changed to the no less lengthy title National Association of Angling and Casting Clubs (today known simply as the American Casting Association). And Fish-O shucked its name, rebranding itself as the monosyllabic Skish, a compaction of the terms "skill" and "fish." Along with the name change came a further simplification of the rules, to—in the words of the National Skish Board—"the least number of restrictions possible."

Though the time frame is murky, sometime in the 1950s the Skish craze went into a skid and crashed. Perhaps owing to the sense of globalism generated by World War

II, both open-to-the-world casting competitions and more formalized national tournaments—aligned with a renewal of rigorous rules and regulations, and the support of a burgeoning tackle industry—enjoyed a resurgence of interest. The postwar economic boom, hand in hand with technologies spun off from the military-industrial complex and NASA, positioned boats and the vehicles to pull them, sophisticated sports equipment, and once seemingly unattainable—i.e., exotic or chic sporting destinations—squarely in reach of the middle class. Quaint backyard pseudo-sports (such as Skish) got left in the moon dust.

Not surprisingly, given his talents as a tournament caster, fisherman, and tackle manufacturer, Fred Arbogast (right) reigned as the national bait-casting champion in the early 1920s, breaking the world distance record of 250 feet in 1924. Also no slouch, William Stanley (with megaphone), a standard bearer for Heddon and early proponent of split-bamboo fly rods, dominated the all-round bait- and fly-casting competitions from 1918 to 1925 (above). As casting theorist and tournament virtuoso Frank Steel observed: "There is one practically certain way to become at least a moderately good caster. That is, join or form a casting club in your town…and to practice there between fishing trips" (below).

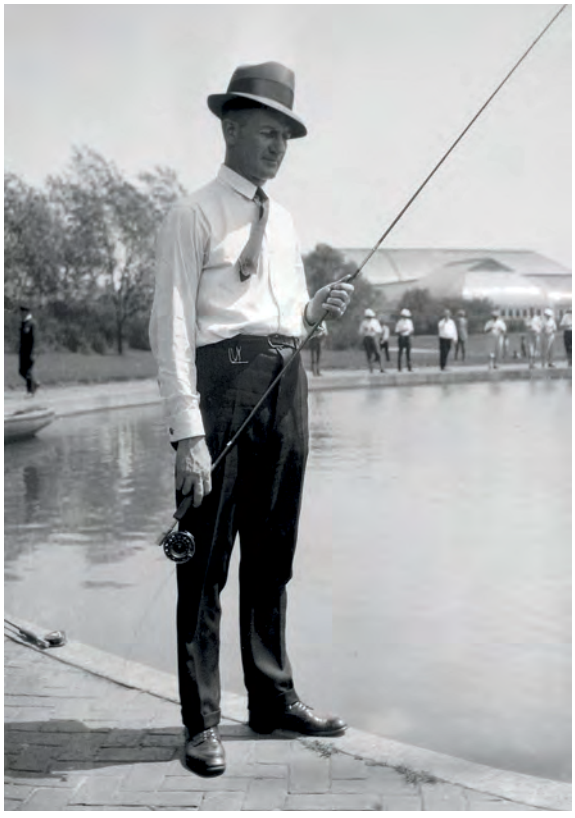
The temper, tone, and thrust of an organization is a mirror reflection of its members. Over the decades, the CACC has sustained an enrollment that runs the gamut of income and education levels, from teacher to tycoon, from contractor to cartoonist, from publisher to plumber. But they have all had one thing in common: an abiding love for the intricacies of casting. The CACC has had its share of casting titans, but also men known for making a lasting contribution to the culture of fly fishing. Though too numerous to list in this article, a core sample would have to include Fred Peet, Call J. McCarthy, Will H. Dilg, W. J. Jamison, Frank R. Steel, and Leonard Hopkins (whose inclusion among these stalwarts owes more to his departure than his arrival, described below).

During the early 1900s, Fred Peet's rod-handling skills earned him the title "Dean of the American Fly Casters." Peet was a casting machine, his name occupying so many slots in tournament standings it was as if his score sheets from year to year had simply been duplicated on a mimeograph. According to bystanders, Peet threw a line so tight you could hang your laundry on it (perhaps no accident given that he owned a laundry company). He was also acknowledged for his angling prowess, and his Cains River streamers—distinctive for their signature barred wood duck tails and long saddle hackle wings—became go-to patterns on Atlantic salmon streams and, in much larger sizes, were effective pike lures.

Fellow tournament caster Will Dilg flatly stated that "Call [McCarthy] was the greatest artist with rod and reel of his time." A claim hardly in dispute, since McCarthy won the national all-around champion bait and fly caster title three times during a seven-year time span from 1914 to 1921. However, it was in the field, in

pursuit of fish, that he had the most impact. McCarthy devised a nonslip hook to prevent cork or deer-hair bass bugs from twisting on the shank, a constantly annoying defect. And he refined the design of bass bugs, incorporating feathers and bucktail. One could legitimately claim that all of today's poppers are essentially knockoffs of McCarthy's original, flat-faced Callmac Floating Bugs.

While I'm on the subject of terminal tackle and hook design, if you've ever tied a fly on a factory barbless hook—the kind with a built-in kink—you owe at least small thanks to W. J. "Smiling Bill" Jamison. Adept with both bait casting and fly rods, Jamison once remarked that he'd "rather fish than eat and rather do tournament casting than fish." In his magazine ads, Jamison urged anglers to get away from "the fish hog idea"—i.e., practice catch-and-release, and "use Jamison Barbless Hooks because … they will not injure even a minnow."



Never mind sheer distance: casting tournaments at the turn of the 20th century often highlighted dry-fly presentation, emphasizing accuracy (objective scoring) and delicacy (subjective scoring). The commonly worn neckties and fedoras, or flat caps, seem, in retrospect, somehow fitting and harmonious.

Although he made his mark for casting and angling feats, Will Dilg is credited as the founder (some would say father) of the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA). In his speech at a CACC meeting in January 1922, Dilg noted that "there is not a true angler in America who does not fully realize that the paramount issue with which we fishermen are confronted can be summed up in just eight words—what shall we do to save the fishing?"

Weeks later, Dilg and fellow club members drew up a mission statement and ushered the newly formed conservation organization through the articles of corporation. Of the 54 signatures on the original IWLA charter, 38 were active CACC members.

World-renowned angler and author Ernest Schwiebert took casting lessons from Frank Steel—that's how skilled a caster Steel was. An indefatigable contestant and perennial winner during a remarkable 20-year span, from 1929 to 1949, Steel became, in Netherton's words, "a theorist who could successfully demonstrate and teach his style of casting."

Netherton described Leonard Hopkins as "a promising young caster … in the 1920s"; his CACC peers, noting Hopkins's 98.8 percent average scores in both bait-casting and fly-accuracy events, viewed him as a rising star. Hopkins was a popular member of the club who played a significant role in the inception of the IWLA, and he remained in the thick of the angling scene by working as supervisor of the sporting goods department at Bullard & Gormley Co., a sporting goods equipment and hardware store in Chicago. In 1923, the company sent Hopkins to Alaska on a hard-core hunting and fishing expedition meant to bolster his station in the sporting goods department. He never came back. Hopkins was so smitten with the vast, beguiling wilds of Alaska that he remained there for the next 50 years. For many years afterward, CACC cohorts quipped that Hopkins was "now in Alaska, casting with the Eskimos."

During an age—an electrified epoch really—when we are undergoing a tech-driven redefinition of social and public life, something as old-fashioned and field-oriented as casting clubs may come across as almost moribund. Furthermore, because of the degree of difficulty, and the fact that it's inextricably linked to a blood sport, competition casting will never be a mass-appeal event. Yet for some, like Seroczynski, who would rather take a stance on a casting platform alongside fellows and foes than hook "three huge trout in a stream somewhere," it's more than a rewarding pastime. It's almost a way of life.

It's quite possible that very few people have seen some of the best casters in the world. All the more reason for casting clubs to not only remain vital, but also continue to throw a wide net. And then there's this: for anyone serious about learning to cast or concerned with kicking up their casting skills a notch, there are really only two viable options: fork over some moolah for a pro instructor or join a casting club. Any rookie gingerly stepping through a clubhouse door for the first time can expect to be treated with the tender deference normally reserved for dewy-eyed Labrador pups.

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

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New Products

Patagonia Middle Fork Packable Waders

Whether you're hiking into the alpine wilderness areas of the West, trekking to a favorite remote creek, or packing light for flying or floating, Patagonia's new Middle Fork Packable Waders are great news for adventurous anglers. Patagonia chiseled these waders down to a featherweight 26 ounces, including the stuff sack, without compromising performance. Utilizing light but durable H2No® Performance Standard fabric with a waterproof, breathable barrier and a DWR (durable water-repellent) coating, these are the most technically advanced waders Patagonia has ever designed. The streamlined design features innovative low-bulk seamless synthetic rubber booties, minimalist adjustable suspenders, a wading belt, and a waterproof interior pocket. Patagonia's newly developed seam tape, single-seam construction, and a gusseted crotch make for waders so comfortable you'll want to wear them every day. Middle Fork Packable Waders ($349) are available at www.patagonia.com and through Patagonia dealers.

Orvis Ultralight Wading Boots

Orvis Ultralight Wading Boots are an integral part of the Orvis Ultralight Wading System, which includes Ultralight Waders and the Ultralight Wading Jacket. Not only are these essential wading components more comfortable than heavier gear, they are built for durability. Orvis accomplished this synergy by utilizing the latest in lightweight, durable fabrics and construction techniques. Orvis Ultralight Wading Boots significantly reduce the energy expended in walking and wading, while providing plenty of support and comfort. The boots weigh only 44 ounces per pair—more than 30 percent lighter than traditional wading boots. The upper is made of quick-drying Clarino microfiber, which provides a better strength-to-weight ratio than traditional leather. Lightweight mini ripstop mesh inserts are added for extra durability, and abrasion-resistant rubber spray adds an additional layer of protection in high-wear zones without increasing weight. The custom Vibram® EVA midsole affords all-day comfort over rugged terrain, plus security and superior foot protection. The highly regarded Orvis dual-durometer Vibram outsole features a proprietary lug pattern that provides solid traction for hiking and wading, with hard rubber on the outside perimeter for durability and softer rubber under the foot for traction. The boots will also accept stud inserts. Orvis Ultralight Wading Boots ($169) are available in men's whole sizes 7 through 14 and women's whole sizes 6 through 11.

Scientific Angler's SONAR Stillwater Series Fly Lines

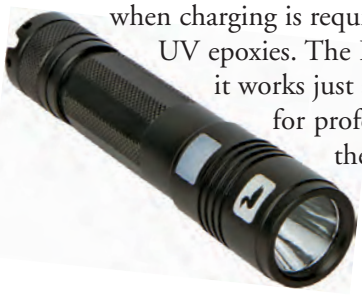
Designed and built with the latest cutting-edge technologies, Scientific Anglers SONAR Stillwater fly lines ($89.95; www.scientificanglers.com) allow you to fish at every depth and with any tactic you need for success, even with the most difficult-to-decipher fish. Matching the right line to the situation at hand means more time with a bent rod. Whether you need to retrieve streamers in deep water, skim a damselfly nymph just under the surface, or hover a mayfly nymph over weedbeds, you'll find a SONAR series line that is designed specifically to match your methods. The SONAR Stillwater series includes the following lines:

- The SONAR Stillwater Seamless Density comes in a variety of double-density sinking rates, with a smooth, seamless transition between each to provide straight-line connections to subsurface flies.
- The SONAR Stillwater Parabolic Sink sinks through the water column in a U-shape, suspending flies just above the bottom, and imparts enticing action to the fly each time you strip line. The line features10- and 20-foot textured hang markers.
- The SONAR Stillwater Clear Camo simply disappears beneath the surface, and features a slow intermediate sink rate to tempt fish sitting just below the chop.
- The SONAR Stillwater Hover is built with an extra-slow sink rate, ideal for slow retrieves that can be so deadly on selective fish.
- The SONAR Stillwater Emerger Tip is designed for tossing multiple flies and long leaders to wary fish cruising just beneath the surface. The floating running line and short, clear intermediate tip allow anglers to fish with supreme line control and stealth.

Waterworks-Lamson Center Axis Combo

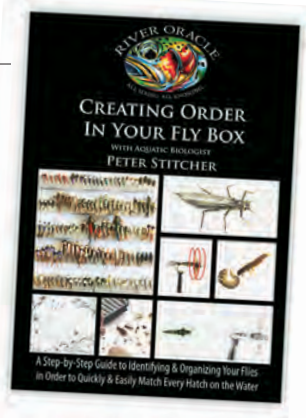
Anyone familiar with Waterworks-Lamson (www.waterworks-lamson.com) knows the company has a penchant for unique designs. The new Center Axis rod/reel combo—featuring the proven Litespeed reel integrated into a medium-fast-action rod—exemplifies their out-of-the-box thinking. Visually it couldn't be more obvious: with the reel placement on the end of the rod butt, this integrated combo stands out. But to really gain an appreciation for this concept, cast with the Center Axis. This outfit requires less energy and power and provides noticeably better rod feedback, resulting in better, more accurate casts after just minutes of practice. Distances of 80 feet were a breeze with the 5-weight combo—more than adequate for most trout fishing. The company says, "By closely aligning the center mass of our Litespeed reel with the center axis of our medium-fast action rod, we've de-levered the mass of the heavier object." The result is a combo that casts easily and feels lighter than traditional rod/reel setups weighing the same amount. Available at Waterworks-Lamson dealers, the 4- through 7-weight Center Axis combo models cost $749.99, and the 8-weight is $799.99.—*Steve Maeder*

Loon Outdoors UV Infiniti Light



The most powerful UV light to date from Loon Outdoors, the UV Infiniti Light features a 3-watt output and a rechargeable 18650 battery that uses a USB cable (included) for charging. A light on the on/off switch indicates when charging is required, allowing you to always be certain that the light is optimally charged for fully curing UV epoxies. The Infiniti is designed for curing all Loon Outdoors UV products in about 15 seconds, and it works just as well on several other UV products available for fly tying. The light is powerful enough for professional tiers who need to crank out lots of flies, and environmentally friendly thanks to the USB recharging feature. Moreover, the rechargeable battery means you save money: no expensive battery replacement, which is required by many other UV lights on the market. Retailing for $59.95, the Loon Outdoors UV Infiniti Light is available at your local fly shop or at www.loonoutdoors.com.—*Jon Luke*

Creating Order in Your Fly Box, *a film by River Oracle*



If you've ever looked at your fly box and wondered what all those patterns are supposed to imitate or when to fish them, River Oracle's *Creating Order in Your Fly Box* ($29.99) is the tool you have been waiting for. In this 82-minute film, aquatic biologist Peter Stitcher teaches you to identify every fly in their box according to the insects and the life cycles they imitate. You then learn how to organize and repack your fly boxes in rows of flies dedicated to each order (family) of trout food. After watching this film, matching the hatch will become easy and you'll spend more time catching and less time guessing, whether you visit familiar waters or explore new places. The film is available on DVD at www.ascentflyfishing.com and from Amazon, and a digital copy can be streamed online at watch.riveroracle.com.

Stillwater Fly Fishing App

Have you ever wanted to spend a day on the water with Phil Rowley and Brian Chan, the well-known lake-fishing experts from British Columbia? Here's your chance to have them join you. In their new Stillwater Fly Fishing app, Rowley and Chan share their combined 75 years of experience fishing in lakes for trout and char. The app is broken down into chapters, including entomology, leaders and knots, techniques and tactics, equipment, and favorite still-water flies—with on-camera tying of 23 proven patterns. Each topic is presented in a video format that can be easily downloaded and saved to your mobile device, so you can watch them anywhere, even without a Wi-Fi connection. The Stillwater Fly Fishing app provides more than 75 tips in the initial launch, with new tips added monthly. Three subscription options are available ($4.99/month, $13.99/three months, $50.99/annual) through iTunes (for Apple devices) or Google Play (for Android devices) to download this wealth of still-water fly-fishing knowledge and improve the quality of your time on the water.

In the Vise

X-Ray Caddis/By Greg Vinci

Materials

Hook:	TMC 2302, sizes 14–16
Thread:	Olive or ginger UTC 70
Eyes:	Black bead-chain eyes, sized to hook
Abdomen:	Stretch Flex (1 mm for size 14 hook, 0.7 mm for size 16 hook)
Back:	Gadwall or teal flank
Thorax:	Arctic UV Chenille
Legs:	Hungarian partridge
Head:	Ostrich or peacock herl
Transparent coating:	5-minute epoxy or UV Knot Sense

Leaning against the bow pedestal of Jason Lozano's drift boat, I was conversing with Tim Fox, who was sitting in the stern position while Jason rowed us to the next slot on Northern California's lower Sacramento River. I couldn't help noticing the fly attached to the fly keeper on Tim's rod, as it literally glowed in the backlight of the afternoon sun. The translucence of Tim's Fox's Poopah was amazing and provided the clue as to why he was outfishing us two to one.

Tim developed his Poopah in the late 1980s, and it went on to become a top-selling fly pattern. Ever since that float trip, I've strived to create patterns with substantial translucence, and eventually I developed a pattern I named the Riffle Dragon Stone. I was able to impart translucence to the fly by wrapping the abdomen with clear and stretchy Scud Back ribbon; light passes through the Scud Back and reflects off the other materials. Umpqua Feather Merchants picked up the pattern as one of its specialty flies. Not long after, I developed the X-Ray Caddis, but in the case of this pattern, I wanted to not only incorporate translucence into the body, but also add impressionistic legs and thorax that would attract the fish.

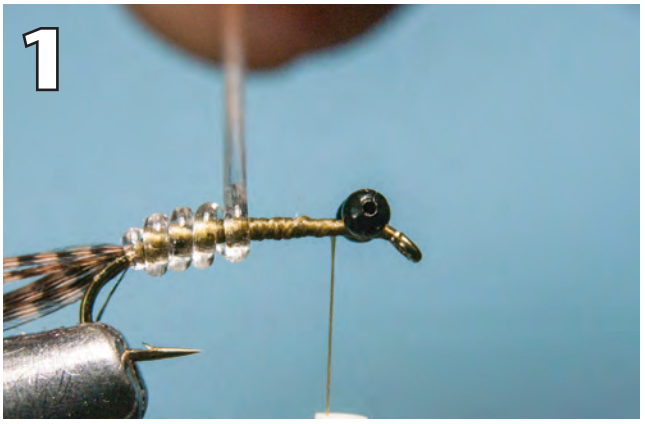
If you hold a caddisfly pupa up to the light, you'll notice the insect's translucence immediately. If you could see that same pupa underwater, you would also notice the sparkle of the gas bubbles that cling to the bug to help it ascend in the water column during emergence. Both of those characteristics, plus the movement of the bug's legs, are triggers that fish can't resist. Incorporate all of those features into a fly design and you are going to catch fish.

In designing the X-Ray Caddis, I did my best to add each of those features, and more. To create a segmented body, I found a clear stretchy material marketed in craft stores called Stretch Flex. It is available in several diameters, so it's applicable to a range of hook sizes and fly styles. I wrap the Stretch Flex around the hook shank to create a realistically segmented abdomen. Coloring the Stretch Flex with a permanent marker (olive, bright green, tan, or rust) makes it translucent rather than transparent.

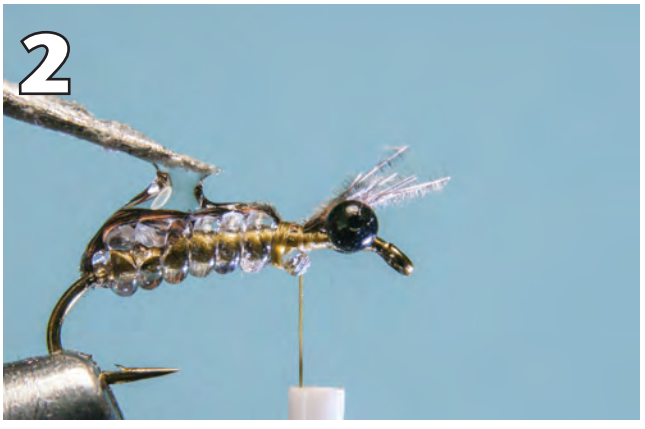
The sparkle representing gas bubbles is created by wrapping a turn or two of Arctic UV Chenille behind the thorax. In recent years, I have relied less and less on bright-colored beads built into my flies because I think lightly weighted and unweighted patterns are more lifelike when drifting in the current, so in this case I use lightweight bead-chain eyes rather than more conventional gold, copper, or silver bead. I think the bead-chain eyes give the fly more character anyway. For a weighted version of the X-Ray Caddis, I recommend a black tungsten bead, as the fly already has enough sparkle to attract fish without a shiny metal bead. Unweighted, the fly is versatile and can be fished just under the surface film to represent a crippled caddisfly, or it can be dead-drifted deep by adding split shot to the tippet. The fly also elicits lots of takes when swung cross-current at the end of the dead drift.

By combining realism with impressionism, the X-Ray Caddis excels on all kinds of waters—freestone flows, spring creeks, limestoners—from coast to coast.

Greg Vinci is a California-based freelance writer and photographer.



Step 1: Tie in the bead-chain eyes, then return the thread to the bend of the hook and tie in the flank and Stretch Flex (heat the tip of the Stretch Flex with a small flame to decrease the diameter, making it easier to tie in). Wind the Stretch Flex forward and tie off behind the eyes, leaving room for the thorax and legs.



Step 2: Pull the duck flank fibers forward over the top of the body and secure behind the eyes. Apply a coating of 5-minute epoxy or UV Knot Sense to the top of the abdomen. With epoxy, allow time for it to dry; if you use UV Knot Sense, cure it in direct sunlight or with an ultraviolet light.

Step 3: When the coating hardens, color the abdomen both top and bottom with a marking pen to match the color of the insects you want to match.

Step 4: Dub in Arctic UV Chenille between the abdomen and the bead-chain eyes, and pick out with a bodkin. Then tie in a Hungarian partridge feather.

Step 5: Make a turn or two of partridge, tie off, and trim excess. Then tie in an ostrich or peacock herl behind the bead-chain eyes.

Step 6: Create the herl head by making X-wraps around the eyes. Tie off with half hitches behind the eye of the hook and apply head cement.

In the Vise

Mercer's Green Drake Foam Profile Dun/Spinner/By Dennis Collier

The soft glow of the sickle moon hangs like a tree ornament in the gloaming of a western sky. We had booked a guide and drift boat for a full-day July float on "No Name River," but had elected to wait until early afternoon to launch—not a tardy departure, but rather a strategic and leisurely late-day drift toward a much anticipated rendezvous with Green Drakes and big trout.

With a deft sweep of the oars, our guide swings the boat into quiet water on an inside current seam and drops the anchor above a long, enticing run. Tying a fresh Mercer's Green Drake Foam Profile Dun/Spinner (there's a mouthful) to 4X tippet, we work the long run on foot from here to avoid spooking the numerous trout whose snouts bulge the meniscus with metronomic cadence—gold at the end of the rainbow!

Green Drakes reside in the genus *Drunella*, with a number of identified species touting fancy Latin names, and are spread along countless watersheds from the East Coast to the West Coast. Regardless of your region and tvwhat you choose to call these beautiful mayflies, they reign supreme in the annals of aquatic insects linked to angling history. Likewise, the daily, weekly, and monthly hatch stages are completely dependent on the specific watershed, elevation, air and water temperatures, and other natural influences, so localized research and knowledge are a must to time the hatch.

Mercer's Green Drake Foam Profile Dun/Spinner is another winner in the long list of fish-catching fly patterns spawned at the vise of master fly designer Mike Mercer, and is currently available to the angling public via Umpqua Feather Merchants. Mercer, a Californian who has fished Green Drake hatches on the West's best trout streams, offers these thoughts on the subject: "I had been tying the little biot-bodied Profile Spinners for years, in smaller mayfly versions—PMDs, BWOs, *Callibaetis*, Tricos—and they were so successful that I wanted to tie them in Green Drake, Brown Drake, and *Hexagenia* versions as well."

Mercer discovered that biots didn't work on the larger hooks, so he substituted the realistic and buoyant foam extended bodies. "They take a little longer to tie," he says of the larger foam-bodied patterns, "but the finished products are beautiful, float great, and, best of all, they work really, really well!"

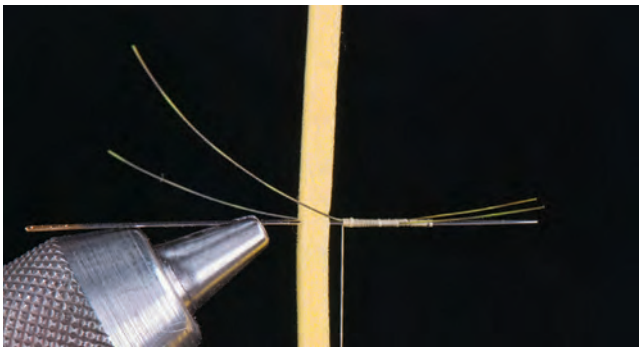
Mercer's concept for his Profile patterns has always been to create flies that the fish might take for a dun or spinner, and that would sit low and realistically in the water while still being easy for the angler to see, even in fading light. "These flies accomplished all those things," he says, adding, "The cool thing about the Profile Green Drake is the fact that it's just as effective on flat water, like California's Hat Creek, as it is on a broken water freestoner in Colorado: easy to see in the light of day or the gloom of evening. The fish are comfortable taking the soft foam body in their mouths, and rarely push the fly away on the take."

Mercer, who has dozens of well-known trout patterns to his credit, also notes that the foam can be colored with a permanent marker to match the coloration of specific insects. Sage advice from the sage himself.

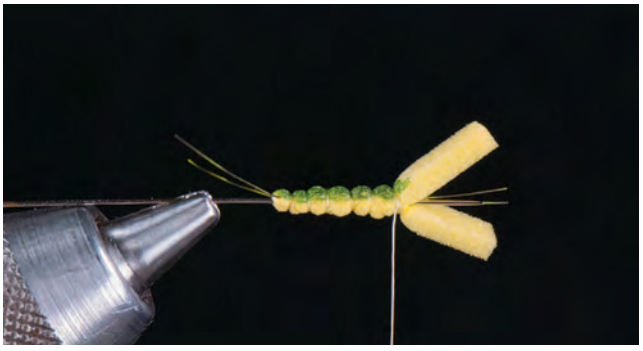
Materials

Hook:	TMC 2499 SPBL, size 10 or 12
Thread:	Primrose UNI-Thread for the foam abdomen, size 8/0; olive Veevus for the thorax, size 14/0
Tail:	Dyed olive stripped grizzly neck or saddle hackle stem
Abdomen:	Yellow 2 mm open-cell foam, cut 3/16-in. wide
Wing post:	Fluorescent white Aero Dry Wing, white calf body hair, or similar
Down wing:	Dun straight-fiber Z-Lon
Thorax:	Light olive dry-fly dubbing
Parachute hackle:	Dyed olive grizzly saddle hackle
Marker:	Light olive Chartpak P33 marker

Dennis Collier is a creative fly tier, photographer, and freelance writer who lives in Colorado.



Step 1: Place a small sewing needle in the vise and lubricate it with a few strokes of paraffin. Double a strip of foam and slide it onto the needle. Start the thread on the needle and tie in two hackle stems, tips facing the rear. Wrap back approximately 5/8 inch and split the tails around the foam. Pull and fold the foam forward to splay the tails and form the first body segment with a few thread wraps.



Step 2: Fold the foam tags back and advance the thread approximately 1/8 inch to create the second and subsequent body segments. Ease the thread tension on segments two through six to create a tapered abdomen. Whip-finish and cement the final segment. Using a permanent marker, color the top and sides of the foam. Slide the foam off the needle and set aside to dry.

Step 3: Secure a hook in the vise and tie in a parachute wing at mid-shank. Post the base of the wing. Strip a short section of the lower stem of a stiff hackle and attach to the wing post. The hackle barbules should be pre-sized to roughly a hook gap width. Add a small drop of head cement to the wing base to prevent it from rolling on the hook shank.

Step 4: Clip the foam tag ends short and tie in the abdomen roughly 1/16 inch behind the parachute post. Tie in a length of spent wing material, using X-wraps, between the abdomen and the parachute wing. The material should be long enough that it can be pulled down and secured out of the way while the parachute hackle is being wrapped in the next step.

Step 5: Create a small dubbing noodle and wrap a thorax behind, around, and in front of the spent wing and parachute wing post. Pull down and secure the spent wing material to get it out of the way. Make several wraps of parachute hackle around the wing post, tie off, and clip the hackle tip. Whip-finish, cement, and trim the tying thread. Trim the parachute wing.

Step 6: Release the spent wing material and trim slightly longer than the parachute hackle, being careful not to clip off the barbule tips in the process. Do a final color touch-up on the abdomen and set aside to dry. If the marker color(s) look a little too intense when first applied, remember that they will fade and soften as soon as you start fishing the fly, so allow for this.

The Scene/By E. Donnall Thomas Jr.

The kid certainly looked the part: expensive sunglasses dangling from his neck, even though we were inside on a cloudy day; fashionable fishing shirt from one of the more prestigious makers of fashionable fishing shirts; trendy stubble on his face (I've had a beard since 1966, but have never figured out how to keep it permanently frozen at one-week length); and a look that announced to me and all the world that he knew more about fly fishing than I ever would.

I'd stopped by the fly shop to ask about local smallmouth patterns. I didn't really need the information, since I've never met a hungry bass that wouldn't hit a green/white Clouser Minnow. I just wanted to get a feel for the local fly-fishing ambience. For the record, whenever I stop in to chat I always buy something, even if I don't really need it. That's common courtesy.

"I don't fish for bass," the kid replied in answer to my question about smallmouth patterns, dripping indignity all over his $300 shades. "I only fish for steelhead."

This retort left me staring like a deer caught in a headlight beam. I considered telling him that I had been fly fishing for steelhead not only longer than he had, but probably longer than his father and maybe even his grandfather. Then I thought about telling him that if he had never fly fished for smallmouth, he needed to get out more. Finally, I turned around and left, eager to escape "The Scene."

Back in the '50s, my father and I used to float blue-ribbon Montana trout streams all day without seeing another fly angler. The few we did meet invariably proved pleasant and collegial, as if the novelty of fly tackle established a social bond.

Sometimes it still does, but things have changed. Several years ago I realized that everyone in southwestern Montana between the ages of 14 and 50 was or had been a fly-fishing guide. I knew this because our lovely, fly-fishing, Bozeman-based daughter had dated all of them. As much as I enjoyed their company, in their presence I could never suppress the image of Mary Martin swinging around on wires as Peter Pan. I also found myself rewriting the words to the Willy Nelson classic: "Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be fly-fishing guides."

No longer an obscure pastime practiced by a few eccentrics, fly fishing had become a Scene. Lots of us blamed "The Movie," Robert Redford, Brad Pitt, and even Norman Maclean, although it couldn't have been his doing. I confined my objections to the patronizing claim in the movie's trailer assuring us that no fish were harmed in the making of the film. Really? Do the math. A conservative catch-and-release mortality of 3 percent times 10 fish per rod per day times two rods per guide boat times a hundred guide boats on the Madison daily—whatever the movie was, it wasn't harmless to fish.

Then there was "The Stuff"—the high-end shades and clothing, the Spey rods longer than the creeks were wide. I value good optics myself and sometimes wear nice shirts when I can't find any of the old surgical scrub tops I swiped from the hospital when I worked there. I just couldn't understand how so many new guides could learn more after six months on the water than I'd learned in 60 years.

Make no mistake—I'm glad for The Scene. The next generation's enthusiasm and commitment will prove valuable to the fish and their habitat in these difficult political times. I've learned from them. But if this testy essay has a point, it's simply that most knowledge of the outdoors is better derived from experience than from the internet. It would benefit us all to remember that.

E. Donnall Thomas Jr. is a longtime outdoors writer and photographer and the author of some 20 books on wing-shooting, bow hunting, fly fishing, and more.

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