TEXAS DOG DAYS

By C. A. NICHOLSON

"Dog Monday" is a monthly free-for-all in Canton, a day when hunters shop among hundreds of purebreds and mutts and their wives search for antiques

"Yes, sir! Both of 'em honed sharp as tacks and ready to go!"

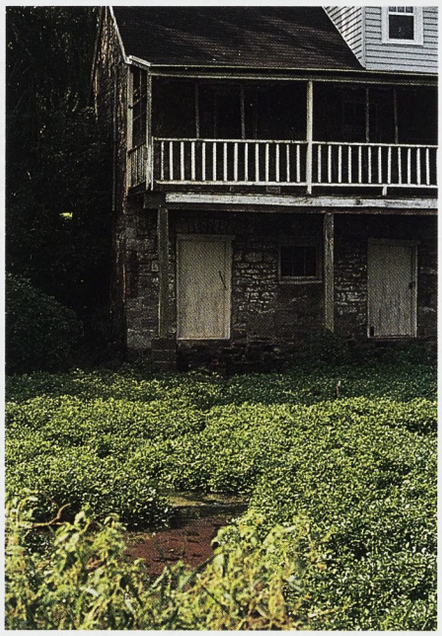
ON THE first Monday of each month the normally quiet little town of Canton, Texas, erupts in an overpowering cacophony of baying, barking, yipping, growling, and squealing as the town very literally goes to the dogs.

This is Dog Monday, and traders come from all over the state—and from as far away as Kentucky and Louisiana—to swap dogs, horses, white elephants, and once, so the story goes, wives! Canton, sixty miles southeast of Dallas, has somehow maintained the charm and dignity of another era.

With all that hootin' and hollerin', a puppy feels a lot safer in the shelter of a jacket

Limestone Country

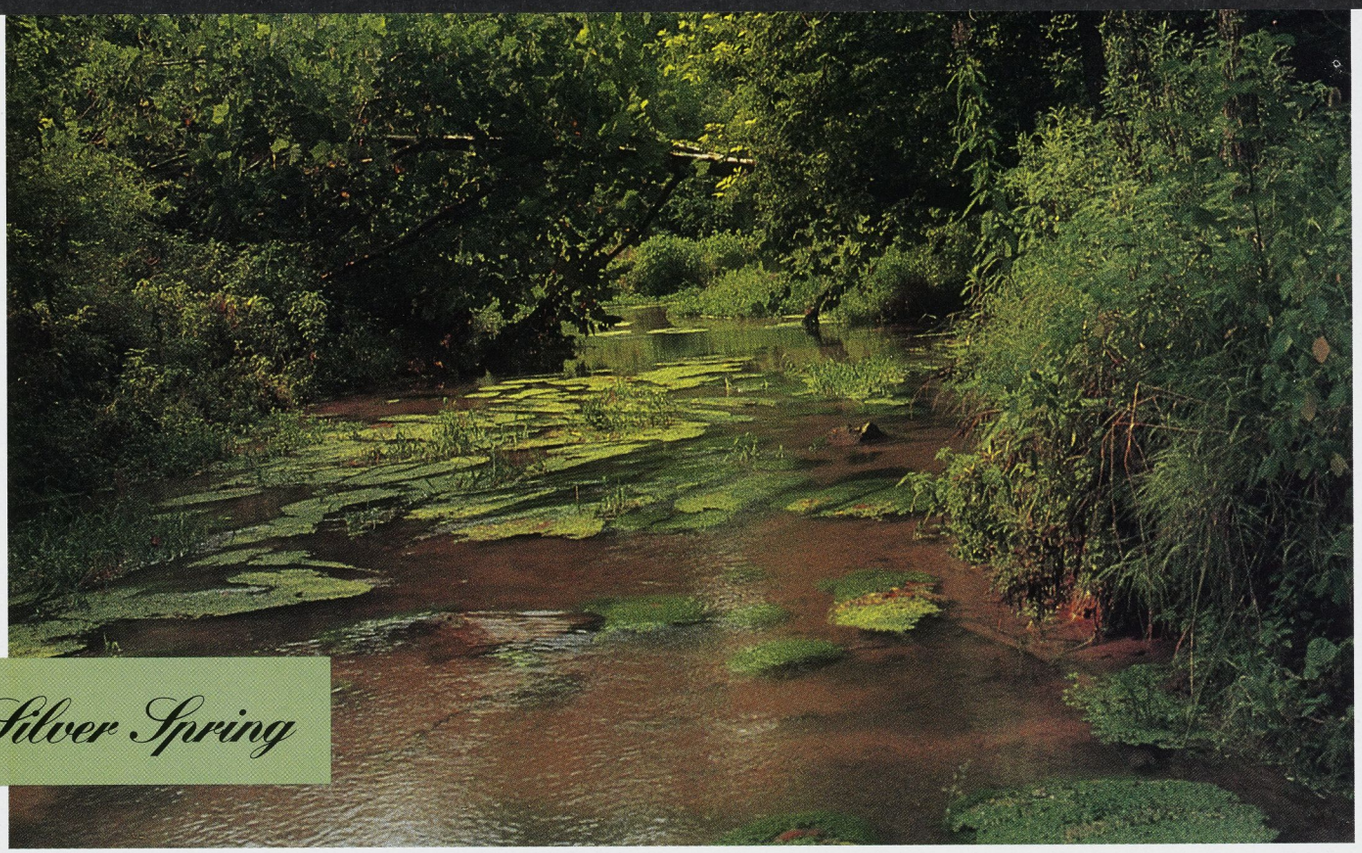
By Datus C. Proper
photography by Dave Williams III



"Find an old map of the limestone springs," photographer Dave Williams III told **Trout**, *"and it will lead you to most of the wonderful pre-Revolutionary War homes." The springs flow a constant 47–56 degrees year-round.*

This is about the spring creeks that bubble up from the limestone of Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley. I want you to see them and love them and know about their trout. I want you to see the country, too, and know a little of its history, because there are things worth knowing. I won't give you a fly-shop's guide, a real-estate pamphlet, or a hero-angler's tale. I'll give you a lover's tale, a romance without cosmetics. Sometimes the lover is frustrated.


Falling Spring



Silver Spring

A popular stream of yesteryear, Silver Spring is sadly representative of numerous smaller places now forgotten – lost in recent decades to road construction and tract housing. Today little fishable water remains. Like other calcium-rich waters of southcentral Pennsylvania, Silver Spring was once thickly populated with native brook trout.

The Limestone Country

The first things you should know about the Cumberland Valley are that it is not a valley and has no Cumberland River. It does not even lie entirely within the modern boundaries of Cumberland County. To reduce confusion, therefore, I shall refer to the area as the "limestone country." It lies in southcentral Pennsylvania. The flat part is fertile (for farmers who don't mind plowing soil peppered with rocks). The steep ridges and knobs are covered by second-growth forests, and in these hills are small streams – not spring creeks – that may have been good for trout when the environment was primitive but are marginal now.

The waters of the non-Cumberland non-Valley run in all directions. Most of them end, after a great deal of winding and merging, in the Susquehanna River. Falling Spring Branch flows to the Potomac. Saltwater is never far away, but there is a thermal barrier between trout and Atlantic: warmwater where bass and catfish and sunfish can survive, but not salmonids. More accurately, there are springfed headwaters where isolated pockets of trout survive. Their scarcity makes them doubly prized, as with all jewels.

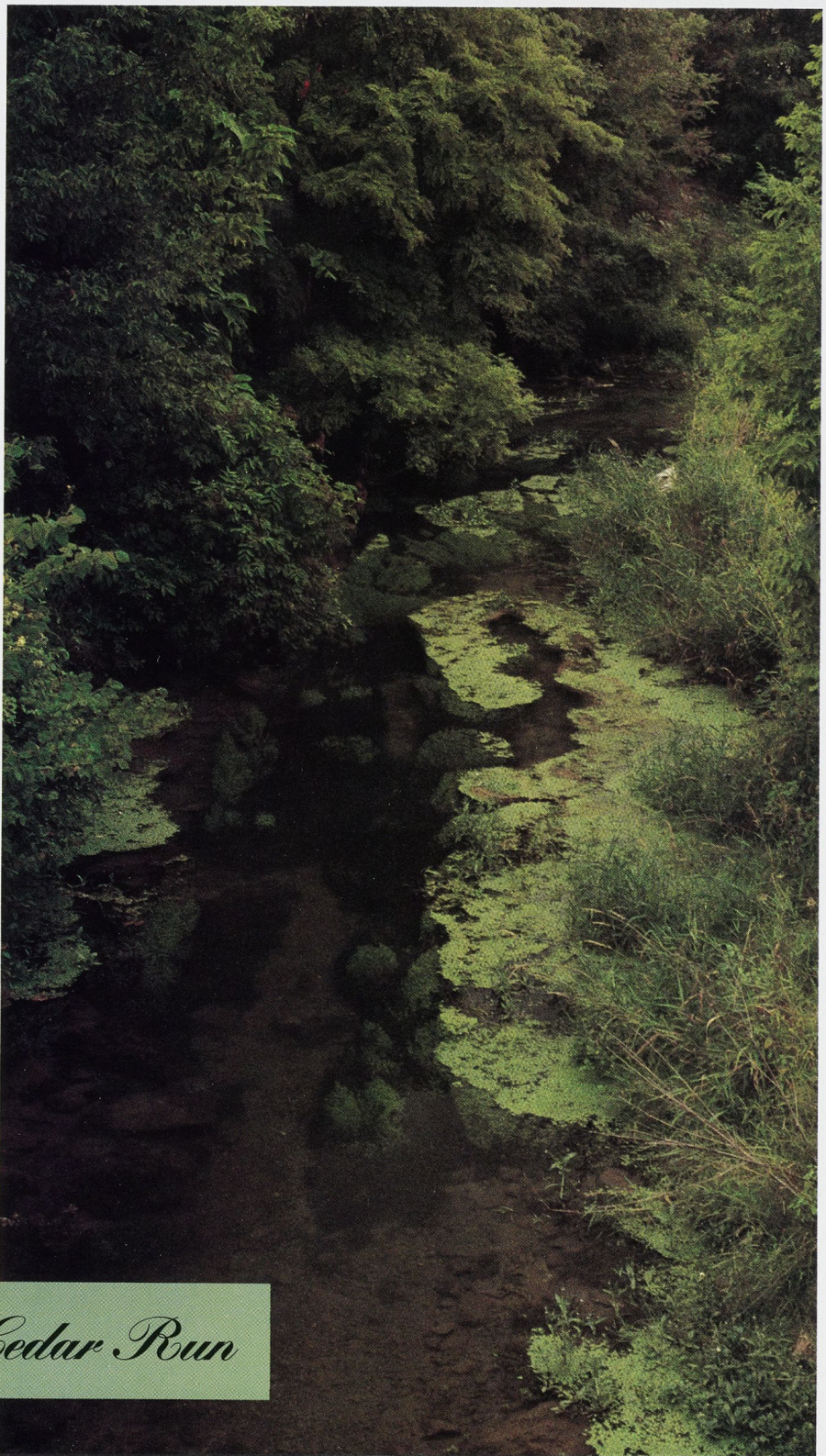
Americans have been chasing the limestone-country trout since frontier days. Carlisle was on the edge of civilization, then, and the army built a base which is, if I am not mistaken, the Army War College today. (I have given seminars in its old red-brick buildings and then sneaked out to fish the lower Letort where it winds through the campus. Caught some trout, too, but not wild ones.)

The region has other old houses of red brick and white frame, some of them with log-cabin skeletons underneath. Best of all are the farmhouses of gray limestone. These, at least, are so obviously rare and beautiful that they are often restored. Many of the frame and brick houses have been torn down, rented out cheaply, or just abandoned, like the good old churches on the main streets of the small towns. Many of the local folks have moved to new houses – the kind with shiny siding. It's not that they think it looks better. They want what is underneath the siding: insulation. Old houses don't have that, and Americans today like to live at a steady, draft-free 70 degrees.

The limestone country is at the south end of the North, butted right up against the Mason-Dixon line. The winters are northern enough to push pheasants into a farmer's barn and then freeze them. The summers are southern enough to push trout to the headwaters and then simmer them. It is a region of humid air and dry streams, like most of eastern America.

I love it just the same. It gave me blessed relief from Washington, in all the years I lived there. This is a personal history (like all histories), and for me the best things about Washington were the roads leading away from it. If this were even a half-century earlier, I would have thought the limestone country the best place in all of America. It is still one of the best on the East Coast, and this is the biggest of its problems. It is a nice

Brown trout first took hold in limestone country in Cedar Run; local anglers caught and carried them in buckets to the Letort.



Cedar Run

place to live for the semi-adventurous. There are pretty small towns within easy range of the big cities, and the climate is not as bad as in some of the other places where our forefathers did their forefathering. And so the population has doubled since I started fishing the limestone country. Some of it has reached near-urban density. Cars creep through old Chambersburg. There are chic shoppes on the banks of the Letort. Once, recently, when I took my family on a weekend fishing trip, we got stuck in a miles-long jam of cars heading for a car-parts fair.

It's too bad. The limestone country is not California yet, but it's moving in that direction.

The spring creeks are at the bottom of the heap – literally. They run not on the forested hillsides but in the lowest valleys, where people live, sewage drains, and interstate highways follow the path of least resistance. On some of the Letort, the banks shake from trucks blasting by, and there are not many stretches that can still be called beautiful. The pattern of small riparian holdings has been hard on the fishing too; few landowners have had economic incentives to restore their streams. Even so, as we will see, the news is not all bad. Some of the people who loved the limestone streams to death now want to love them back to life.

The Cradle of American Fly Fishing?

Well, no. American fly fishing did not start in America. It had its origins in Britain and Ireland – misty islands some distance east of Pennsylvania. But there was, if not a cradle, at least a sort of American barbell of angling. It ran from a weighty bulge in the Catskills down through the Poconos to another bulge in the limestone country of southcentral Pennsylvania. There are good limestone streams elsewhere in Pennsylvania – Penns Creek and Spruce Creek in the middle of the state, for example – but that was Indian country back when Carlisle was an army base.

The writers who fished in the barbell seem to me to have developed faster than most of the those in the rest of America. Theodore Gordon, for example, ended in the Catskills but began (or at least fished from the age of 14) in the Cumberland Valley, "where there are many fine streams that gush forth in full volume from a great spring or springs in the solid limestone rocks of that section."[1] Gordon is the first American whose accounts I can easily understand, because he fished in the ways that you and I fish today.

General Gibson, on the other hand, was an antique, but he must have known

Green Spring is still a fine, fishable limestoner of several miles in length. A number of large, active farms along its banks have insulated it against development. Nutrients from a commercial trout hatchery in the headwaters, however, contribute to channel-choking weed growth.

how to handle his tackle. He began using it in 1790, in the big old Cumberland County. He found "three good trout streams" – "Big Springs," the "Letart" and Silver Spring. The latter had "the largest and best trout in the State. They are from one to three pounds...." They were all wild, native brook trout, back then. Once Gibson landed 20 in a hour on flies.[2] (The biggest brook trout I have caught in the limestone country was smaller than the smallest of his.)

At Big Spring, Gibson also met "Laughing Joe," who "makes his own lines and flies, holds a rod eighteen feet long and throws thirty-six or forty feet of line with one hand...." This is the kind of thing that puzzles me about so many old American accounts. I have an ancient 18-foot rod that is difficult to hold off the ground, let alone cast, with one hand. How did Laughing Joe do it? Did he cast his flies up- or downstream? How far did he let them sink? He must have been good, because the water was hard-fished even then.

Gordon helps me to understand. On opening day, he says, there would be a hundred anglers on Big Spring, and the total catch would add up to three or four thousand trout. "The native anglers made their own rods of two pieces of hickory, lashed or ferruled together and painted green. Usually they cared not for a reel," and they used but one fly. Later, Gordon found the same stream ideal for dry flies.[3] And I remember old anglers telling me that Big Spring stayed good till after World War II, with brook trout rising for small mayflies.

The strangest thing about the history – stranger even than one-handed 18-foot hickory rods – is that until recently the limestone spring creeks made so little impact on American anglers and angling methods. There are repeated references like this one from 1911: "Difficulties we have to overcome, but they are not the difficulties of the English chalk stream."[4] Most American anglers – even the writers – had no notion that chalkstream techniques could be relevant on this side of the Atlantic. Fishing conditions are in fact much the same on British chalkstreams and American limestoners. Theodore Gordon did not understand that, but he had never been to England. Edward R. Hewitt did not understand, and he *had* been to England.

Vincent C. Marinaro understood. He must have made the connection between limestone and chalk by reading, because he did not actually visit the chalkstreams till long after he published *A Modern Dry Fly Code* in 1950. There had been other good American writers, but none had grasped British precedents well enough to build on them. It was not till mid-twentieth century that we got our first world-class angling book, the first that did not have to start by re-inventing the wheel. It sprang from the streams of the limestone country.

Stenothermal Waters

Limestone spring creeks and chalkstreams are not the same but they are chemically similar, and the chemistry provides high fertility. Equally important, they are stenothermal – meaning that their temperatures fluctuate in a

narrow range, relative to that of streams fed directly by rain or snowmelt. (In Pennsylvania, these latter streams are called "freestone" – as opposed to limestone – waters. My dictionary does not give a definition for "freestone" in this sense, and in most of the world the term is not used.)

Streams that issue from springs should not form anchor-ice in the winter or reach temperatures lethal to trout in the summer. Further, water volumes are *relatively* constant when streams elsewhere are in drought or flood. I have, nevertheless, seen both the Letort and Falling Springs Branch when local downpours made them too high and dirty to fish. The Yellow Breeches has important rain-water sources.

There are spring creeks in the West which are, today, in better condition than either the Pennsylvania limestoners or the English chalkstreams. There are tailwater fisheries that provide the same kind of fishing, and more of it, without sources in springs. Americans have come to love such fishing. Our fly fishing boom of recent years has focused on the spring creeks and other rich streams. We have by no means stopped fishing in the less-fertile waters, but our books and our fishing schools have emphasized the techniques of stenothermal streams. Such waters tend to produce heavy hatches and rising fish which we catch, or try to catch, with imitative flies – those that match the hatch. The fish often feed visibly on or near the surface, so we use many dry flies or near-surface nymphs. It is a kind of hunting, really: stalking and aiming at a visible quarry, rather than waiting for something mysterious to happen in the depths. The people who are drawn to fly fishing in the first place often seem especially drawn to this particular kind.

The Spring Creeks Today

The Pennsylvania limestone creeks, then, offer a sport of special attractions to the residents of Megalopolis. In the absence of private waters, the offer is almost without costs and restrictions. And so, of course, the fishing has drawn crowds that seem enormous by comparison to those of the sixties. I have stayed as far as possible from the crowds. This is why I promised not to give you a fly-shop's guide. My personal limestone map is different from most.

You have to decide, first, whether to fish on your schedule or Nature's. Perhaps the best time for you is a Sunday afternoon. You drive to the Letort Spring Run after a late breakfast, park, and wander where the mood takes you. It feels good. You don't catch much, but you were not expecting to do so; everybody has told you what a difficult stream this is.

If you want to fish during convenient hours, there is an alternative: Go where there is a concentration of trout willing to take a deep nymph at any time. You could try the Yellow Breeches. It has a

Famous Letort Spring Run at Bonny Brook, site of a limestone quarry. Doses of insecticides from an upstream watercress farm have killed fish in recent years. Weed-cutting and placement of fresh spawning gravel by Trout Unlimited volunteers have helped.

Letort

Falling Spring

TU volunteers launch the Falling Spring Greenway by collecting samples of stream biota – Vincent Marinaro once calculated that a limestone trout had available 5,000 pounds of food per acre!

put-and-grow stocking program, and the fish wise up after they've been caught a few times — which usually does not take long. There is a concentration of anglers, too.

Alternatively, you could time your visits to hit the hatches: Nature's schedule. It is not convenient. The *Tricos* provide the most abundant and long-lasting of hatches, but it comes in the early morning, or even late at night if the weather is unusually hot. This timing thins out the anglers.

The Letort has had its troubles – the usual assortment, plus insecticides that washed down from the cress beds at the headwaters – but of all the limestoners, it is the only one that improved while I was watching. Earlier in this century, sewage from the town of Carlisle had turned the lower part of the Letort from a brook trout stream into a sewer. A new sewage-treatment facility changed that.

Vince Marinaro is often associated in writing with the upper Letort, so I should mention that he liked the lower part better. He showed it to me at sunrise on July 20, 1985, right after I had returned from a tour of duty in Europe. Vince's bad hip made walking difficult, by then, so he waded into the river right below a bridge and spent the whole *Trico* hatch casting to a few fish that he had been educating all summer. I roamed a mile of the stream. There were a lot of rising brown trout – most of which had been stocked as fingerlings – and they took flies without caution. The fish-breeders had managed to perfect a strain of browns as stupid as the usual hatchery rainbows. I worried about the impact of degenerate genes on the old Letort strain. Fortunately, most of the stocked fish could not figure out how to reproduce. (I watched them trying in the fall.)

The rise was over by mid-morning, so Vince guided me to other access points just for a look. The stream had good pools and runs everywhere. Vince said that he'd been watching it through the years and thinking how wonderful it could be. Now that it had trout in it instead of sewage, he was delighted.

Other developments on the Letort have not been so encouraging. Bill Horn tells me that in 1989 there was a major die-off of weeds from the watercress farm at the head of one fork down to Fox's meadow. The *Trico* hatch was weak too. The sulfur duns have been growing scarcer for a long time. Twenty years ago, you might have done well during their afternoon hatch. It is so thin now that you have to wait till late evening, when the spinners all fall within a few minutes and the trout see enough food to arouse their interest.

Big Spring, near Newville, is of all the limestone-country streams the one I would have been most eager to fish 50 years ago. Before I got to it, however, water quality collapsed. Most of the brook trout and mayflies went with it. The stream was taken over by cress bugs (alias sow bugs or water lice). At a Trout Unlimited meeting, we asked state fisheries biologists about this, and one of them said: "We can't manage a stream for invertebrates." It was a

memorable position – about like a dairy farmer refusing to consider the condition of his pasture. Perhaps attitudes have changed. This stream has a single source in a spring that is indeed big, so it could be cleaned up more easily than most. It always did have some good brown trout in its lower reaches for diligent seekers of truth.

Falling Spring Branch, near Chambersburg, was my favorite until 1980. An occasional trout could be found rising to terrestrials even during the off-hours. (The stream is so small in the midst of its meadows that insects are bound to fall in.) Water quality was the way *Tricos* liked it: not as poor as Big Spring but not pristine, either. Most anglers had not yet figured out how to fish the *Tricos* and I had stretches to myself on summer dawns. Today, however, the stream's wild rainbows – unusual in this part of the country – are almost gone. Some stretches of stream are barren of all fish, but other sections have wild browns. (Bill Horn heard of one 23 inches long that was caught in 1990.) Some dedicated people are working hard to restore the stream with a Falling Spring Greenway. Blessings on them. This is something worth saving.

Over the years, I sampled all of the well-known limestone streams and others not so well known. Silver Spring and Green Spring Run had some fishing but were not as good as the Letort. There were other little spring creeks too. Some of them are still there, but I heard of one that was paved over for an interstate highway.

Springfed streams – those that are left – can be maintained or reclaimed if enough of us want badly enough to do it. I've watched the process in England and participated in it in Montana. (In both cases, admittedly, the pattern of land-ownership provides more incentives.) You cut off sources of pollution and fence off the banks to prevent degradation by cattle. You put in stream improvements to restore pools and clean spawning-gravel. You shore up crumbling banks. If you can afford it, you get into the stream with heavy equipment that lifts out silt and corrects decades of abuse in a few days. It looks like a violent cure. It works splendidly when it's done right, and we have learned more about avoiding errors.

What do we do with the reclaimed streams? We go fishing in them. There are a lot of us, and God isn't making trout streams any more. We have seldom been successful in apportioning access to public streams. Americans chafe under such restrictions.

Can we learn to manage success?

[1]Gordon, Theodore. *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, edited by John McDonald. NY:Nick Lyons Books, 1989. p.111.

[2]The quotations from Gibson are drawn from an article by Austin S. Hogan in *The American Fly Fisher*, Vol. 3 No. 4 (Fall 1976), p.12.

[3]In *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, pp. 112 and 188.

[4]Rice, E.B., from *The Field & Stream Treasury of Trout Fishing*, edited by Leonard M. Wright, Jr. NY:Nick Lyons Books, 1986. p.31.

Electrofishing found predictably few fish in stretches of severely degraded habitat. The ambitious Greenway project (see Trout's Window, *p. 9) aims to restore Falling Spring Branch to its former glory.*

Falling Spring

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A MIDLIFE

RECKONING IN THE

RIVER OF DEEP TIME

BY HOWELL RAINES

Zen & the Art of Trout Fishing

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALLAN JANUS

LIKE MANY SOUTHERNERS, I WAS RUINED FOR CHURCH BY EARLY EXPOSURE TO preachers. So when I need to hear the sigh of the Eternal, I find myself drawn to a deep hollow between Fork Mountain and Double Top Mountain on the eastern flank of the Blue Ridge. This is where the Rapidan River plunges through a hemlock forest and through gray boulders that jut from the ferny earth like the aboriginal bones of old Virginia. This is a place of enlightenment for me, the spot where I received the blessing of my middle years. Here, after three decades of catching fish, I began learning *to fish*.

At this point it is necessary to introduce Mr. Richard C. Blalock, a man given to pronouncements. There are two reasons for this trait. As a former foreign service officer, he is a natural-born pontificator. Also, Dick Blalock is the fly-fishing guru for a small circle of Washingtonians, and we sometimes provoke his speechifying for our own enjoyment.

I'll try to give you a sample of what you might hear if you were grinding along in Dick's loose-jointed Chevy over the road that the marines built in 1929 so Herbert Hoover could reach a stream that was, in those days, reserved for his exclusive use. President Hoover liked to fish. He also needed a place where he would not be bothered by the little people while he planned the Great Depression. I find it impossible to visit the Rapidan without a haunted feeling in regard to Hoover, but more on that later. First, the fish and the river, according to the teachings of Dick Blalock:

"This species of brook trout has never been stocked in this stream. They go back to the Ice Age. That means they've been here in this form, just as we see them today, for 10,000 years. They are survivors." That is what Dick always says to newcomers by way of inspiring respect for the

I BEGAN LEARNING FROM THE MASTER OF PARADOXES AND HIGH PRONOUNCEMENTS.

HERE PRESIDENT

HOOVER BUILT HIS

FISHING LODGE.

OTHERWISE, HE

OPPOSED SPENDING

TAX MONEY ON

PROJECTS IN

THE SOUTH.

Rapidan and its tenacious little genetic warriors. "They are the most beautiful fish that God ever put on this earth. When they are in their spawning colors, they are just breathtaking," he adds for those who need prompting to adore the lush greens and pinks, the unmitigated reds of *Salvelinus fontinalis*—"the little salmon of the waterfall."

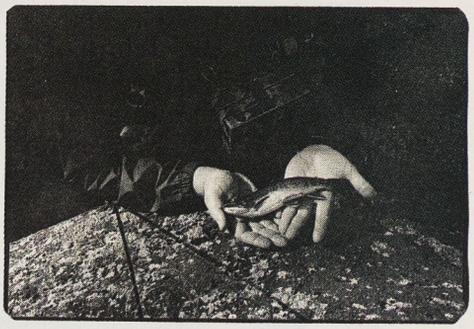
Then he enunciates Blalock's Rapidan Paradox. "These brook trout will strike any fly you present, provided you don't get close enough to present it." This means the fish are predatory, but skittish. More to the point, pursuing them prepares us to receive the central teaching of Blalock's Way. To achieve mastery is to rise above the need to catch fish.

THIS PART DID NOT COME EASILY FOR ME. I WAS BORN IN THE HEART OF DIXIE and raised in the Redneck Way of Fishing, which holds that the only good trip is one ending in many dead fish. These fish might then be eaten, frozen, given to neighbors, or used for fertilizer. But fishing that failed to produce an abundance of corpses could no more be successful than a football season in which the University of Alabama failed to win a national championship.

Of course, not even Bear Bryant won every year. Similarly, the greatest fishermen get skunked. So it is inevitable that the Redneck Way, which is built around the ideas of lust and conquest, will lead to failure. In that way, it resembles our physical lives. In the days of youth, when the blood is hot and the sap is high and the road goes on forever, it is easy enough to slip the doomy embrace of frustration. But time, as a British poet once said, is a rider that breaks us all, especially if our only pleasure—in football, fishing, or love—comes from keeping score.

By the time I reached my late thirties, my passion for fishing brought with it an inexpressible burden of anxiety. As Saturday approached, or, worse, a vacation, the questions would whirl through my brain. *How many* would I catch? *How big* would they be? Would my trip be

wonderful? Would I be a *success*? I had reached the destination of all who follow the Redneck Way. I had made my hobby into work.

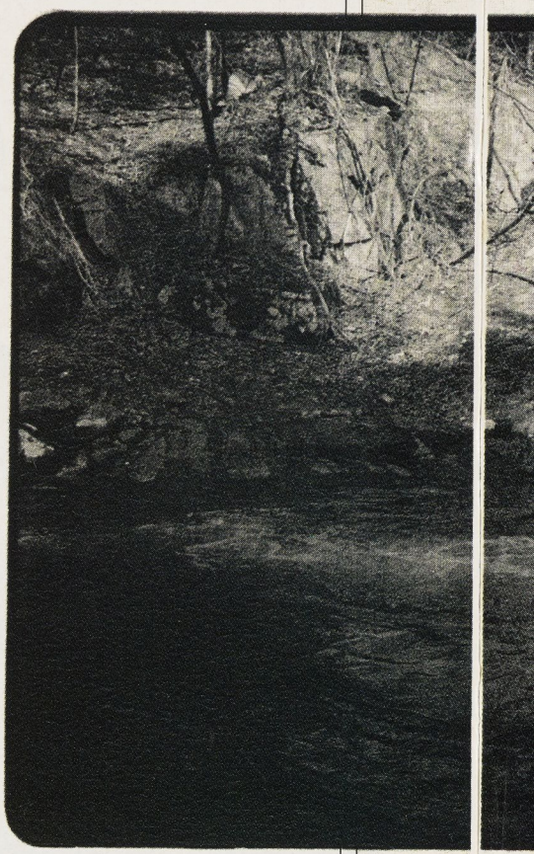


Then one day in the summer of 1981 I found myself at the L.L. Bean Company in Freeport, Maine. I was a correspondent at the White House in those days, and my work—which consisted of reporting on President Reagan's success in making life harder for citizens who were not born rich, white, and healthy—saddened me. In fact, hanging around the Reagan crowd made me yearn for connection with something noble and uplifting. I bought a fly rod.

A BROOK TROUT IN THE MASTER'S HANDS.

I do not know if you are familiar with the modern fly rod, but it is one of the glories of industry. The maker starts with a toothpick of steel called a mandrel. Around this mandrel are wound miles of thread spun from graphite. The mandrel is slipped out, and this long taper is then painted with epoxy, producing a deep, mirrored finish of the sort one saw on the German automobiles of 30 years ago.

The result is a piece of magic, an elegant thing, willowy and alive—a wand that when held in the hand communicates with the heart. And the more I waved such a wand over the next few years, the more the scales of my old fish-killing heart fell away. At last I stood on the threshold of being what I had tried so hard, yet so blindly, to be since that sublime spring day in 1950 when my father and mother helped me catch 20 crappies from the Tennessee River. In the ensuing decades, I had killed hundreds of fish—bass, crappies, bluegills, shellcrackers, pike, king mackerels, red snappers, black snappers, redfish, bluefish, pompano, amberjacks, jack crevalles, barracudas. I had been blooded in the Redneck Way by those who understood fishing as a sport and a competition. Now, I was about to meet a man who understood it as an art, a pastime, a way of living easefully in the world of nature. One day my telephone rang and it was Dick Blalock.



I LIKE TO SAY I GOT MY GURU FROM THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. HE WAS 55 YEARS old when we met and already a walking medical disaster. Dick played football for a season at the University of Oklahoma, but in the ensuing years he had open-heart surgery and gained weight. The big event in his medical history—and his angling history, for that matter—was an exotic liver malady contracted while he was stationed at the American embassy in North Yemen. Although the illness was not infectious, the government pressed him to take medical retirement and a pension when he was 37.

VIRGINIA'S

RAPIDAN TUMBLES

THROUGH

HEMLOCK WOODS

AND BOULDERS.

"So I decided that if they were so determined to pay me not to work, I'd take advantage of the opportunity and go fishing for a while," Dick told me on the day we met. "That was over 17 years ago."

"So, how's it been?" I said.

"Terrific," he said. "I'd recommend it to anyone."

As Dick Blalock spoke these words, we were rolling through northern Maryland on the enticing roads that Robert E. Lee followed to his mistak[illegible] Gettysburg. Dick had spotted an article I wrote for *The New York T[illegible]es* sports page on bass fishing in the Potomac and called out of the blue to say maybe it was time I tried my hand on trout. He suggested the limestone creeks of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, holy territory for fly fishers since before the Civil War.

It was a day I will not forget. At the Letort Spring Run, we watched huge brown trout fighting for spawning sites. In deference to the wishes of Charlie Fox, a venerable fly fisherman who lives near the Letort and dislikes having his trout disturbed during procreation, we did not fish. Later, on nearby Yellow Breeches Creek, I caught my first brown trout on a fly. Actually, at the time, I wasn't entirely sure whether it was a brown or a rainbow. But I guessed correctly, sparing myself embarrassment in the eyes of my new friend. Then, in accordance with the

catch-and-release rules of the limestone creeks, I set the fish free. This occasioned the first Blalockian pronouncement I was to hear:

"I will never kill another trout. I release every one I catch, no matter what the regulations call for. There are too few of them in the world, and each one is too precious to do something as wasteful as eating it."

Driving back to Washington that night, I was seized by a sneaky kind of joy, a feeling not altogether in keeping (I thought then) with the fact that I had caught only one fish—quite by accident, really—and killed none. This feeling was a clue. Soon I would be ready for the Rapidan.

LIKE MANY THINGS IN VIRGINIA, THE RIVER WAS NAMED FOR A MEMBER OF THE British royal family: Queen Anne. Being swift, it was called the Rapid Anne and, in time, the Rapidan. When we first got there in 1985, spring had come with an abrupt glory. Daffodils and forsythia bloomed on the banks, marking the homesites of the mountaineers who had been evicted by creation of the Shenandoah National Park. My sons Ben and Jeff were 15 and 13. I was 42.

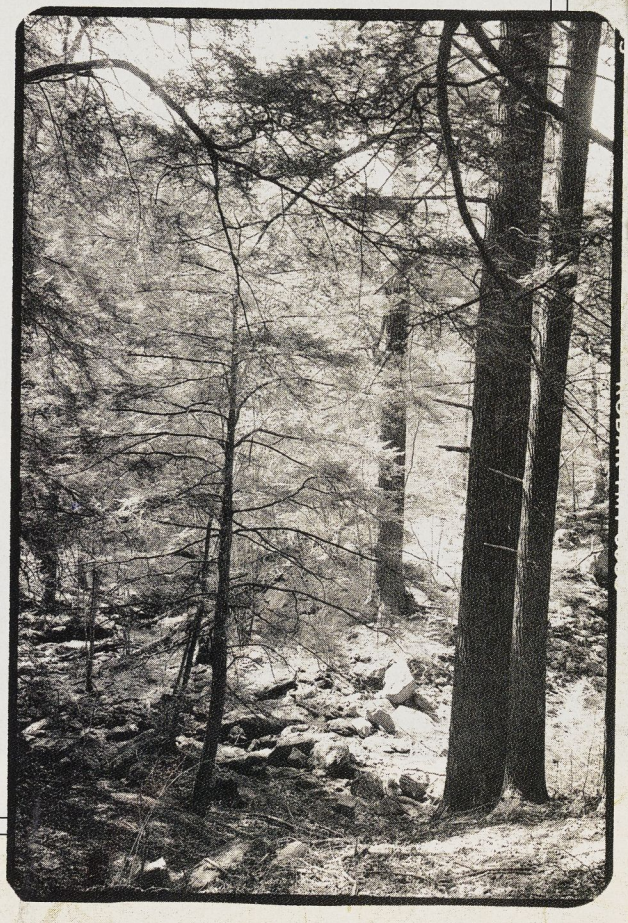
TO SEE IT

IS TO WANT TO

POSSESS IT.

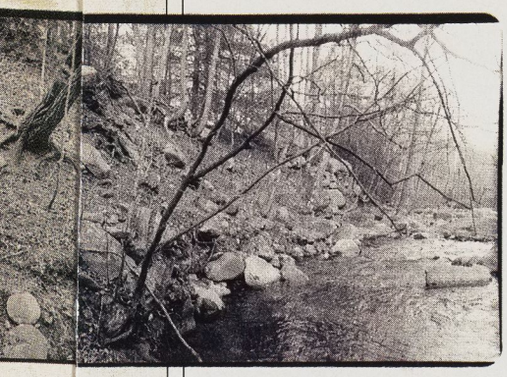
We began our apprenticeships at stream fishing together. It was a painful business, learning to cast without hanging the flies in the trees, conquering the clumsiness of foot that is as much an enemy in wading as in dancing. One of the saddest sights I have ever seen was Ben returning to camp with his new Orvis rod—a Christmas treasure—shattered in a fall on slick boulders.

But in time we were skilled enough to defy Blalock's Rapidan Paradox. We learned to creep to the rim of crystal-clear pools without spooking their fish. We learned to whip our flies under limbs and drop them like live things into a living current. These matters take concentration, and the stream graded us unforgivingly. The only passing mark was a fish flashing into the visible world to strike more quickly than a finger-snap.



It is fishing I would have disdained in years past for the fragility of the tackle and the tininess of the fish. Eight inches is an average brook trout, ten a large one, anything over eleven a whopper. Dick Blalock is one of the few people who has caught an accurately measured 12-incher.

He took this fish at a time when I was boasting about my liberation from the competitiveness that is part of the Redneck Way. I no longer had to catch the most fish or the biggest fish. That is what I said.



In fact, Dick's 12-inch brook trout filled me with a sudden bolt of envy.

So there came the day when Dick and I took Bill Dunlap, my friend from Mississippi, to the river. Bill is a painter with a special eye for the Virginia landscape, and I wanted him to see the shapes and colors of the Rapidan. At the time, he was in that stage of his fly-fishing novitiate in which every cast develops into an accident, so he contented himself with watching me fish one particularly sweet pool.

Straightaway, I caught my largest Rapidan trout, a deep-bellied fish that I guessed to be at least 13 inches long. Before releasing it, I carefully marked its length on my rod, and we hurried downstream to borrow Dick's tape measure. My trophy measured eleven and one-half inches.

Later, I admired the symmetry of the experience. I had created a competition for myself and then lost it. It was yet another lesson in listening to the song of Rapid Anne. It is a song, among other things, about conquering greed and learning one's place.

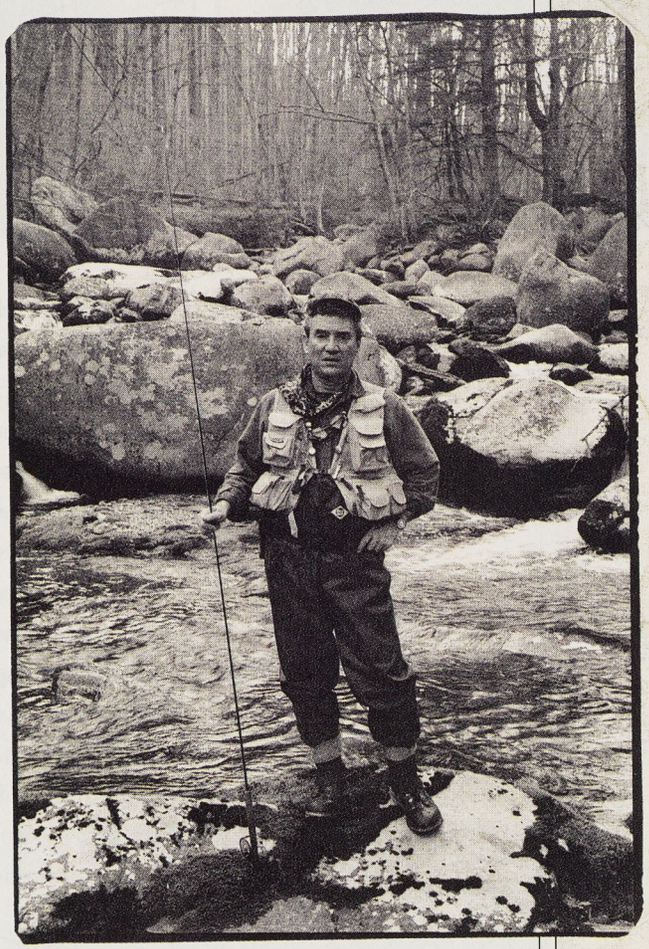
AT 37, A LIVER DISEASE FORCED HIM TO RETIRE FROM GOVERNMENT. HE DECIDED TO GO FISHING FOR A WHILE. THAT WAS MORE THAN 17 YEARS AGO.

THE FACT IS, THIS IS A RIVER THAT CAN MAKE PEOPLE GREEDY. TO SEE IT IS TO want to possess it. So it was with Herbert Hoover when he first came in 1929. In no time, a crew of 500 Marines was splitting the silence with bulldozers and hammers. Camp Hoover became a layout of a dozen cabins, barracks for 250 men, and riding stables. Hoover liked to think big. The marines carted in 51 tons of boulders for a single fireplace in the president's lodge. By 1930, plans were under way for a 100,000-trout hatchery on the riverbank.

A few Democrats grumbled about this use of tax money to create a private, 164-acre playground, but Hoover assured them that he had done his part. He had paid five dollars an acre for the land and chipped in $15,000 worth of lumber for the marine carpenters. As for the road building, the White House explained that this was a training exercise that the president had generously allowed to take place on his land. As they settled into their new retreat, the Hoovers did not let the political carping or the nation's rising unemployment spoil their taste for trickle-down

humor. Mrs. Hoover, known to locals as The Lady, issued written instructions, advising guests that the proper course on chilly nights was to "throw your fur coat" over the foot of the bed.

Hoover delighted in making members of his cabinet and distinguished visitors such as Charles Lindbergh join him in building rock dams in the stream. Their labor did result in better holding water for trout in a few pools. This was one of the few undertakings of the Hoover administration that actually improved conditions in a Southern state. Except for his fishing camp, Hoover was generally opposed, on principle, to the spending of tax money on public-works projects in the South. His firmness in this regard allowed the region to enjoy an especially intimate experience with the Depression, and no doubt many older Southerners can identify with the sentiments expressed by my 82-year-old father when I described Hoover's idylls along the Rapidan. "Yeah, we heard back then that Hoover liked to fish," he said. "We were hoping he would fall in and drown."



The more time Hoover spent on the Rapidan, the more his greed increased. First, he got permission to fish year-round, ignoring the three-month trout season that applied to everyone else in Virginia. Then, being a Westerner, he became unhappy with the size of the native brook trout. Through a mix-up, both the Virginia game department and the National Park Service loaded the stream with rainbows and browns, stunting the lot with this double stocking and causing the president to yearn belatedly for the stream he had spoiled. According to Darwin Lambert, author of the National Park Service history of the area, "Hoover jumped on them, saying, 'Where are you getting all these fish? Why don't you just leave it alone?' "

Of course, the fishery people were just trying to please The Chief, as Hoover liked to be called. It was not an easy task. Lambert provides this glimpse of a frantic Hoover arriving by limousine from Washington. "He'd disappear within three or four minutes, in the very clothes he was wearing. You'd look for him and he'd be gone. He's gone out there in his dark suit and white shirt. Maybe he's loosened the tie, but he's out there on the stream. He couldn't stand people any longer. He had to be out there with his fish."

"I WAS RAISED IN THE REDNECK WAY OF FISHING," SAYS RAINES.

BEING SWIFT, IT

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There's something touching in the image to me—Hoover fly-fishing while the country goes to hell, casting frantically, and not understanding the frustration that churned in him and produced his lust for deeper pools, more fish, bigger fish. The president of the United States had transformed himself into a follower of the Redneck Way. I often wonder if he ever learned how deeply he erred with his stocking of those big, innocent hatchery trout? For he was already in the presence of a perfect thing, the Eastern brook trout living as it lived while the centuries rolled over the earth, living as it lived in those very waters before Christ, before Caesar, before the Pharoahs.

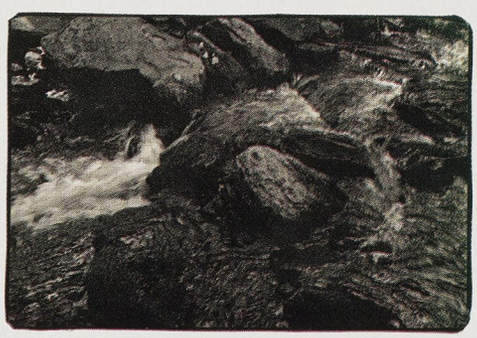
LIKE THEM, HOOVER HAS COME AND GONE. LUCKILY, THE RAPIDAN, LIKE AMERica, survived him. The brown trout and rainbows did not take over and drive the brook trout to extinction, a common occurrence in other Eastern streams. Now, in our eye-blink of eternity, Dick Blalock and Bill Dunlap and my boys and I will have our moment to contemplate these perfect beings and to understand that they do not exist for our pleasure.

This is a lesson that Henry Beston set down more than 60 years ago in a book called *The Outermost House*. "For the animals shall not be measured by man," he wrote. "They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth."

To embrace this knowledge in one's inmost heart is to depart from the Redneck Way and to know, as Dick Blalock says, that "fishing is not about food." It is a way of interrupting the invisibility of these shining creatures and existing for a moment with them in their wildness and transience, their indifference to our approval and their dependence on our restraint if they are to add another hour to their ten thousandth year.

Henry Beston wrote of splendor. On the Rapidan one day I saw snow fall through blooming dogwoods. I do not expect to see such a multiplication of whiteness again in my lifetime, but it is a part of me to be lived again whenever I pull a Rapidan trout into our half of the world or, for that matter, when I contemplate these words that somehow seem to tumble together toward poetry, or song:

Rapidan.
Rapid Anne.
Rap-i-dan.
Rapidan.



Howell Raines, a native Alabamian, is Washington editor of The New York Times.

BUSTING THE BEAST

It moved hundreds of millions of drug dollars through the U.S. banking system. Then Buddy Parker, an Alabama party boy turned federal prosecutor, found out just how big it was.

By Ann Woolner

Photographs by Chip Simone

News Casts . . .

Letort Rebounds

PENNSYLVANIA FISHERIES BIOLOGIST Lawrence L. Jackson says the Letrot Spring Run in Carlisle, Pa. is recovering as expected from its massive fish-kill on Sunday, May 17, 1981. Latest tests show the Letort trout populations are coming back following the poisoning by endosulfan (FFM, July/Sept., 1981). The five-year recovery period, predicted by the Area 7 fisheries manager at the time of the kill, appears to be on schedule.

In the test figures from the Letort, compiled by Jackson and his crew, trout populations in Charlie Fox's Meadow section of the Letort declined drastically following the kill. But in the years following the kill recruitment of young trout is apparent as populations recovered. As the age classes increase the larger fish for which the Letort has been known will again be present.

In the figures the number of trout per size group is the number actually captured by electro-shocking.

—JOHN RANDOLPH

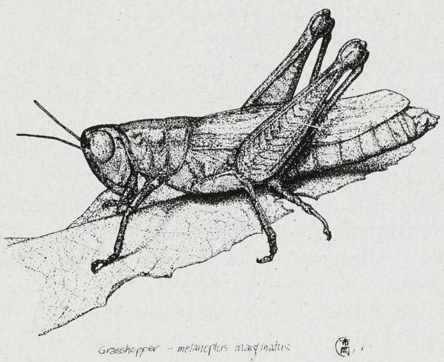
Letort Brown Trout at Fox's Meadow

	Sept. 1977	Sept. 1978	Sept. 1980
6"	17	14	22
6–8.9"	12	15	15
9–11.9"	29	30	67
12–14.9"	68	52	38
15–17.9"	22	23	18
18"	3	1	2
19"		1	1
20"			1
21"			
22"			
TOTAL	151	136	146

	May 1981	Sept. 1981	Sept. 1982	Sept. 1983
6"	0	0	59	12
6–8.9"	2	0	0	58
9–11.9"	23	17	2	64
12–14.9"	24	28	12	11
15–17.9"	11	14	15	19
18"	0	0	1	1
19"	0	0		2
20"	1	1		1
21"				
22"				1
TOTAL	61	60	89	169

fishing pressure patterns and quantify the rate of harvest. Effects of different flow levels on reproduction, and survival of both brown and rainbow trout will also be examined.

Long-term threats to the Bighorn's tremendous fishery potential center on depletion of water. The possibility of withdrawing Bighorn water upstream in Wyoming for industrial uses, such as coal-slurry pipelines, is a real threat. An annual inspection of Yellowtail Dam in October requires shutting the river down to as little as 10 percent of its normal flow; in the past, this has created serious fish kills and stranded fish. The department is working with the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) to alleviate this problem.



For several years, nitrogen supersaturation has been a problem. Excess nitrogen dissolved in the water causes blisters to form on the fish, with potentially fatal consequences. Afterbay Dam, source of this disease, was modified in October 1982 by the BuRec to correct this problem. Time will tell whether this effort has succeeded. The department applauds the bureau's effort to stem this nitrogen problem and hopes the deflector plates installed at Afterbay Dam do the job.

The Bighorn River is a remarkably productive system. The clear waters carry high nutrient loads which produce abundant aquatic vegetation. This, in turn, provides a home for a tremendous density of invertebrates, the major food source for trout. The system's productivity enables it to maintain the fishery that exists today. Management of the river is in its infancy. As knowledge grows, we will be able to employ techniques and establish regulations that will optimize the fishery. But even then, it is doubtful that the Bighorn will produce the mythical monster trout in incredible numbers about which fishermen talk and biologists dream.

Don't believe everything you read. The Bighorn is a beautiful stream to float, fish, and enjoy. Go there with reasonable expectations, and you won't go home disappointed. As a caller confided to me the other day, "There is only one thing 'for sure' in all of this. In the long run, the river will speak for itself." Let's hope that when that day comes, someone will be listening.

WADE FREDENBERG is Bighorn fisheries biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

THE LETORT SPRING RUN

One step forward, another back; natural and manmade problems buffet the stream where terrestrials were 'born.' Hard work may preserve it.

MORE THAN 50 seasons have passed since I released my first fly-caught trout in Pennsylvania's Letort. Since then I have caught a few more; most went back to fight again. During those seasons many changes have taken place in and along the stream, some good but some that could and did spell trouble for this stream and its fish.

Until 20 years ago it was still possible to find free-rising native brookies along the upper mile of water. And what beauties they were, with their bright orange bellies, orange, black and white fins, and emerald-green backs with nearly white vermiculations. Nowhere on earth have I seen such beautiful fish. Looking back further, to my teens, I recall that both headwaters branches of the stream harbored some respectably large natives as well. The best I ever captured were over 18 inches long: deep-bodied, powerful fish so brilliant they boggled the mind. These larger fish were never pushovers and required the sneakiest approaches and presentations if one was to be even moderately successful. I often wonder if these fish would be easier for me now. I suspect they might be, but I'll never know for sure.

Somewhere back in the '20s the Letort received its first brown trout when another valley limestone stream (Mount Rock Run) was drying up during an extremely parched summer. A number of threatened browns were netted and hurriedly taken to the Letort, 10 miles distant. The browns flourished, to the consternation of many brook trout fishermen, who hated the newcomers with a passion. I suspect these anglers really hated the fish because they were more difficult to catch.

During my kid days, the Letort was heavily stocked by the state, and Opening Day (April 15 at midnight, or rather 12:01) was always a shoulder-to-shoulder proposition. Come what may, however, we were always there as part of the horde. Some of my fondest memories are of those Opening Days when the crowds thinned out at lunchtime. I would string up my lightest bamboo rod, an 8-footer, and catch a number of trout that had weathered the initial onslaught. Quite often the score would approach 50 fish caught and released before darkness and fatigue set in. (My favorite fly for these early-season excursions was a small, white marabou streamer.)

Late May was sulphur time on the Letort. It still is, for that matter. The beautiful, pale yellow *Ephemerella dorothea* was on the water in such numbers that trout rose everywhere. So popular was this hatch that notables such as Ray Bergman and Edward Hewitt put in appearances on occasion, mainly as companions of Charlie Fox.

The early '60s saw a poisoning on the Letort that literally wiped out aquatic insect life from Bonny Brook downstream to Carlisle. Gone also were many of the sculpins and minnows. Yet the poison appeared to affect the bottom-feeding suckers more than the trout. For some years after, the cry was "The sulphur is done, it's gone," and it was, except for the righthand branch above Bonny Brook. The few of us that haunted the upper sections of the stream had a few seasons of fisherman-free sulphur fishing in Trego's Meadow, and we kept it to ourselves. All good things come to an end, however, and the wrong person chanced to fish this meadow and "discover" the insects. After that, evening after evening found the same group monopolizing the meadow during the rest of sulphur season.

The lack of cress bugs, freshwater shrimp and other aquatic fish food during this period helped to heighten the importance of terrestrials to the trout, and to the angler. The trout were "looking up." Vince Marinaro and Charlie Fox had already done much of their work on terrestrials, in fact basing their studies on the Letort, and during this era terrestrial patterns became publicized and standardized. Marinaro's Jassid had been around quietly for a number of years, as well as the fur-bodied ants. The Schwiebert Hopper, with its divided turkey wings, and the Shenk Hopper, with a flat-silhouette turkey wing, came into being, followed shortly by my Letort Cricket. And the Chauncy Lively deerhair ant, the Crowe Beetle and the flat-winged Letort Beetle became household names. All these patterns are standard today and still account for many Letort browns as well as trout all over the world.

stretches, as it provides not only trout but also water that is pure and cold.

A major change has occurred on the lower Beaverkill. In the 1960s a four-lane highway came through the valley parallel to the stream. The late Catskill fly tier and conservationist Harry Darbee led sportsmen's groups in a battle to keep it out. The fight was lost, but a plan to rechannel the river was abandoned and the stream disturbance was kept to a minumum. Biologically the river appears unchanged, while aesthetically the highway has altered the Beaverkill greatly, destroying the river's beauty and removing the peacefulness and solace it provided.

On the big Beaverkill there are more than 20 miles of public water, beginning at Junction Pool. Downstream for the next four miles, the river flows through a series of pools and riffles that are possibly the most celebrated in our angling literature. Ferdon's, Barnhart's, Cairns' and Wagon Tracks are but a few familiar to Beaverkill regulars. These are large, deep pools, with riffles that abound in aquatic insects. A major reason for the Beaverkill's popularity with fly fishermen is its abundant mayfly hatches. The Beaverkill is "classic" dry-fly water, producing all the major hatches anglers read about.

A special feature of this historic section is the popular "No Kill" water. (Instituted in 1965, it was immediately successful at improving the trout fishing.) Beginning about a mile below Junction Pool, at the county line, and running downstream 2.5 miles, all trout must be returned to the water unharmed. Angling is with artificials only, and possession of trout in the area is prohibited.

While the rest of the river also has special regulations (a 9" size limit and five trout per day), it is not comparable to the no-kill areas. The average trout is between 8 and 10 inches, and most often stocked the same year it was caught. Wild trout are rare, as are fish over 12 inches.

While reproduction is common on the upper river, in the lower Beaverkill it is rare; most of the wild trout are recruited from nearby tributaries. Hatchery brown trout do, however, hold over exceptionally well, and the no-kill regulation contributes greatly to this success. The Beaverkill is stocked annually with yearling (8") brown trout. In the no-kill water they are caught and released over and over; the fish survive and grow. Great numbers hold over to the following year, forming the nucleus of an excellent population of trout between 12 and 15 inches, and a few in the 20-inch range are caught each season. Daily catches of 20 or more browns are common, and fishing is comparable to the "good old days," especially by regulars.

At Horton the river flows through a second no-kill section, approximately 2.3 miles long, with fishing very similar to the other area.

Fishing, particularly in no-kill waters, means crowded conditions. At times there are so many fishermen squeezed into a pool that it seems more a spectator sport than one in which to seek solitude. (To be sure, there's not much solitude on a river with highways on both banks; the din of traffic regularly drowns out the pleasant sounds of the river.)

Anglers often stand only a rod length away from one another, but today's fisherman doesn't seem to mind; in fact you have to admire the social equality that exists on this public water. A noted author sharing a pool with the local barber, a truck driver from Queens and an investment banker from Manhattan, all intent on casting to rising trout. Not only do they share the pool, but should the trout be finicky, requiring something unusual or a diminutive fly, the angler catching fish more often than not will share his knowledge: "Try a #22 Pheasant Tail midge on 7X." This camaraderie does not exist on all streams.

The lower Beaverkill's water quality is good, possibly better than it was earlier in this century, when tannery, sawmill and acid factory wastes were discharged directly into the river. However, of immediate worry to Beaverkill watchers is a new sewage treatment plant being constructed downstream of Roscoe. By law, the river is a classified trout stream, and has assigned standards of quality that cannot be changed or downgraded. The plant is due to be completed this year, and its effect will be monitored closely by environmental officials and anglers.

The highway has made the river more accessible, thus more crowded, leading to more restrictive fishing rules. Though extreme, no-kill works on the Beaverkill, providing trout fishing similar to that of its storied past. While not a wild trout fishery, the big Beaverkill does have quality fishing. What it loses in natural beauty and tranquility it makes up with its prolific hatches and lots of rising trout. Public fishing easements guarantee that many miles of the Beaverkill will remain open to fishing—forever!

Red Smith, the late dean of American sportswriters, once wrote, "It can be said without irreverence that to celebrate Opening Day on the Beaverkill is a little like observing Christmas in Bethlehem. For the Beaverkill is the shrine, the fountainhead, the most beloved and best-known trout stream in America."

Fishing the Beaverkill on opening day is a tradition, but if you want to see it at its best, try May or June, when the Hendricksons or Green Drakes are on the water. Then you will learn why the Beaverkill is still a popular trout stream, dear to the hearts of so many.

— Ed Van Put

A mountain jewel—the brook trout (Salvelinus fontinalis)

HARRY MURRAY

I HAVE ALSO seen many changes in the water itself. During the dry '50s the water table dropped and the underground springs were reduced in volume by as much as 50 percent. Some of the tiny springs ceased to flow altogether. Since the dry years the flow level has improved slightly but it's nothing to compare to the original volume. Water use in Cumberland County has increased tremendously. In 1960 the County population was 124,816. The increase from then to 1980 was nearly 55,000, and the population by 1990 is expected to be 199,274.

Bear in mind that the Letort is totally dependent on the underground water that is being hungrily consumed. This reduction in water volume has also lessened the flushing action; the stream's water pressure is no longer sufficient to overcome the buildup of silt and the growth of weeds. Even at its greatest, the weed growth did not previously harm the fishing (although some fishermen here equate good fishing with mud-free walking along the stream). Boggy banks are part of the character of the Letort, one of the things that make it a great trout stream.

This past summer was a tough one as far as catching trout in the daytime was concerned, because of a periodic heavy die-off of the *elodea* and other water weeds. (I've only seen such an extreme weed die-off twice before in my recollection.) The upper mile of stream was nearly barren of weed cover, making the fish even more wary than usual, if such a thing is possible. I had to work much harder than usual to catch and release 18- to 22-inch fish. Evening sulphur fishing was good but inconsistent—one evening there'd be an excellent hatch in one meadow and the next day the same meadow would seem completely devoid of insects and fish.

When we were in the thick of things we had 15 or 20 minutes of daylight to get a strike. Emphasis was on a good sulphur imitation and accurate casting to get on a rising trout as quickly as possible. The average evening catch was four or five fish but some nights were much better.

Normally there is some thinning of the weeds each spring, and then by midsummer the stream is pretty well packed with green beds of *elodea*, watercress and other growth. Some fishermen curse and grumble at this, but the trout and, perhaps more important, the cress bugs love it. We are now keeping our fingers crossed, hoping our weed growth will come back. The past few seasons have seen a marked increase in the goose population on the upper waters, and it has been suggested that this may be one of the factors contributing to the total loss of water weed. We'll have to wait and see.

A few years ago the Letort suffered a disastrous and highly publicized pesticide poisoning. (A chemical called Endosulfan, overapplied on a watercress farm, leached into the water.) I would say that the stream has now recovered. We have had very good spawning seasons since that occurrence, and these new fish, along with the survivors, are gradually filling the blank spots in the upper mile of stream. There appear to be concentrations of fish in certain sections, while other short stretches of stream seem still to be fishless. I'm sure the trout population will even itself out with the natural increase in numbers, barring another mishap. The secret now is to find the tiny hiding spots that the fish favor and work on them.

A couple of years back the Borough of Carlisle moved their sewage treatment plant from along the Letort, and the lower half of the stream began to cleanse itself immediately. Fingerling brown trout were planted in those previously polluted miles of river, and they must have liked the environment because the lower stream, below Carlisle, now features some fine fishing. Insects are also abundant. There is an excellent sulphur hatch and spinner fall (mid-May to early June), and also a tremendous spinner fall of the tiny black and white *Tricorythodes* (from July 1 into October). The lower miles of water are open fishing, so you may run into a bait fisherman or two. Once the hot weather sets in, however, their numbers diminish and the fly fishers have the water to themselves.

WHAT ABOUT the future? I believe there will be more fishing pressure on the water downstream from Carlisle. Remember that this is not catch-and-release water, so the population of fish may drop as summer progresses; but as time goes by, I believe the average size of these fish will increase. There is plenty of water below Carlisle—the most crowded areas are closest to the road crossing park areas—so don't be afraid to explore.

Fly fishermen have a love-hate relationship with the Letort. The river supports a good population of free-rising trout, sometimes of impressive size, that are often discerning enough to frustrate even the most experienced angler. Those who love the stream keep coming back for more; those who hate it seldom make a second visit. I believe, with its recovery from the various troubles over recent years, that the Letort will see a significant increase in fishing pressure. Only those who really love the sport of fly-fishing will be able to preserve the fishery, and we must add hard work and committment to our hope that the Letort is one of the storied waters that survive.

—Ed Shenk

AUTHOR'S PHOTOGRAPH

THE HUGHS RIVER

Natural rehabilitation, governmental protection and a long-term view have brought this mountain jewel back to near-primeval condition.

IF YOU ARE one who believes the past offered better trout fishing than the present, this may shock you. The Hughs River, in Virginia, is better now than it has been for a very long time. In fact, as a trout fishery it is outstanding, with an excellent population of fish, impressive insect hatches and near-perfect spawning conditions—thanks to the hard work of the state management agencies and the National Park Service, and the care of committed local and not-so-local anglers.

This beautiful brook trout stream is high in the Blue Ridge Mountains, mostly within Shenandoah National Park. The small feeder streams that contribute to its flow begin at elevations above 4,000 feet, from such romantic-sounding ridges as Stony Man Mountain, Old Rag Mountain and Pinnacle Peak. And the mind can play endless games with the origins of such names as Indian Run and Hannah Run, which are the main branches of the Hughs. This is a typical mountain stream, with a very steep gradient; its water falls from rocky pool to rocky pool. The six miles of the river that hold trout (farther downstream the water warms and panfish and smallmouth bass predominate) average only about 15 feet in width, and its jewel-like pools are generally 10 to 20 feet long.

Today, seeing these crystal-clear waters and densely wooded ridges, it's hard to believe that as recently as 60 years ago these mountains were heavily clearcut. Nearly all the timber was harvested, and then most of the remaining scrub on the land was burned off to promote huckleberry growth. As new shrub growth sprang up, it also was removed, leaving no opportunity for timber to return. Apparently no thought was given to the adverse effects this would have on the Hughs, much less on its fragile brook trout or the other animals of the ecosystem. With much of the tree cover gone, the water temperature rose significantly; the effects on the river's fish and all-important insect life were devastating.

Fortunately for anglers and for the trout, in the 1930s the federal government acquired this area from private landowners and formed Shenandoah National Park. Through elimination of timber cutting, establishment of bag and size restrictions on the trout and other good, sound conservation measures, the Park Service, in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, has let this wonderful little river heal itself. Today it is one of the finest streams in Virginia, and it will hold its own with any wild brook trout waters south of Canada. And it's not just a local fishery. Anglers come from states around to pursue the beautiful Hughs brookies.

There are many facets of the Hughs River besides its trout that enhance its appeal. The heavy whitewater sections tumbling through dense forest and over huge boulders give one the feeling of isolation; this is, in fact, the case. Although the lower Hughs is crossed by a main road (Rte. 231, south of Sperryville), a willing angler can easily walk away from civilization and find himself alone with his trout. Oh, there will be whitetail deer that look up from their feeding as you fish the stream, and a ruffed grouse may flush if you get a little too close to its teaberry thicket. And once I had to duck as a wild turkey selected a low glide path across the pool I was fishing. But angling competition is certainly not the order of the day. To reach the head of the stream it's necessary to hike down the Nicholson Hollow Trail or the Corbin Cabin Cutoff Trail from Skyline Drive, south of Panorama, so access is not easy. Since most of the river is in the national park, development of the land bordering the Hughs is not the problem it is on many other bodies of water, and we consider ourselves lucky.

TODAY the stream and its fish are in excellent condition. There has been little high water for the last several years to damage the insect population or wash out the spawning beds, and fall and winter conditions have been ideal for good spawning and survival of newly hatched fish. Consequently there is an excellent population of brookies, with many big individuals. The management agencies didn't bother with any complicated slot limits, or stocking programs that would dilute the genetic integrity of the native trout. They used the enlightened, long-term practice of letting nature take its course and heal the wounds inflicted by man in its own way, and were rewarded with shining success. The timber slowly returned, the water temperature dropped, and the insect life came back in great number and diversity. The Hughs is now better than it has been in half a century, and is still improving. Last year was the best I've ever had on the river, especially by the standard of the good number of large fish I encountered.

All is not entirely rosy on the Hughs, however. Recent studies show that acid rain is having a detrimental effect on the river. These studies have recorded ph levels that are rather disturbing, but the fishing keeps getting better and better, and the flies don't seem to have suffered—*yet*. New research is now being conducted to give us some idea of the trend of this acidity in the Hughs and surrounding bodies of water, and we're hoping for firm conclusions and thus a course of action from them.

The Hughs is a river on which it is normally reasonably easy to catch good fish, but the more observant and cautious you are the better the catch you can expect to make. This point was driven home to me quite forcefully recently.

A friend returning from an unsuccessful

SPORTS AFIELD
MARCH 1981

The Everyday Letort

Photograph by Douglas Lees

The typical Letort brown seems to know that an unpredictable feeding pattern makes him less vulnerable.

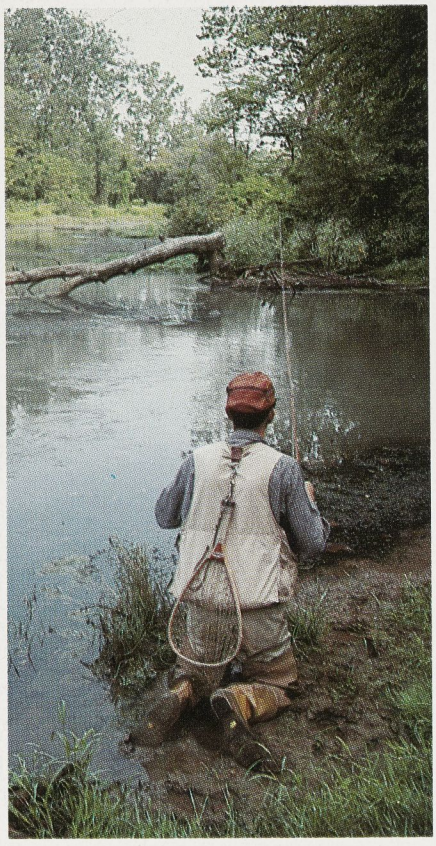
The skittery trout in this spring creek can humble the most experienced anglers. by Harrison O'Connor

Observe the usual feeding behavior: the long, staring pause before the convulsive, lurching gulp and angry chomping of jaws and spitting up of gelatinous algae. Presented with an unusual food item, they feel the nervous energy of indecision. One cannot but notice the irritability expressed by the ticking motion of the head. "Should I? No, no!" is clearly spoken by those mute lips. Their initiative so often punished, they fret decisions; taught by fear, they adhere to a regimen. When not withdrawn to dark rooms, they may wander up at any hour to appease appetites dulled but comforted by a repetitious diet. "A cress bug is a cress bug," say the grim brown trout of Pennsylvania's Letort Creek.

I fish the Letort 20 weekends a year. Every month of the calendar, knee-deep in muck or in snow, I stalk these coffee-and-cream-colored browns. Not every newcomer finds the Letort exciting to the eye, however. I have been told, somewhat huffily, that "I like to fish under the hemlocks," and I have wanted to reply, "I don't fish for scenery." That is not true, though. From the first day I have loved the derelict appearance of this spring run.

I was initially struck by the dark, secretive pulsing of the limestone-green flow, not realizing that the mysterious appearance was a lack of reflected light off a

The fisherman must observe each trout, not merely to see whether it is rising or rooting, but to see at which tempo.



For consistent action, it's best to go for rooting trout. Keep a low profile, and stalk fish holding near the bank.

gravel bottom. There is no gravel, not even where a chute cuts deeply through the many feet of muck that years of weed growth and subsequent siltation have accumulated. I yanked up handfuls of cress and immediately felt the skin-crawling presence of hundreds of sow bugs and shrimp. I stooped my head low over shallow water and saw a scudopolis: Every inch of bottom was alive with the slow motion of cress bugs. Then I went looking for the rising trout for which the Letort is famous.

One walks through swampy meadows, through pasture luxuriant if rank with weed, through long, tree-darkened stretches of stream, all the while listening to the roar of an interstate highway, the sirens of a fire department, the takeoffs and landings of small aircraft, the buzzing of lawnmowers, the voices of neighbors calling over fences, and the sudden roar of approval from a nearby baseball park.

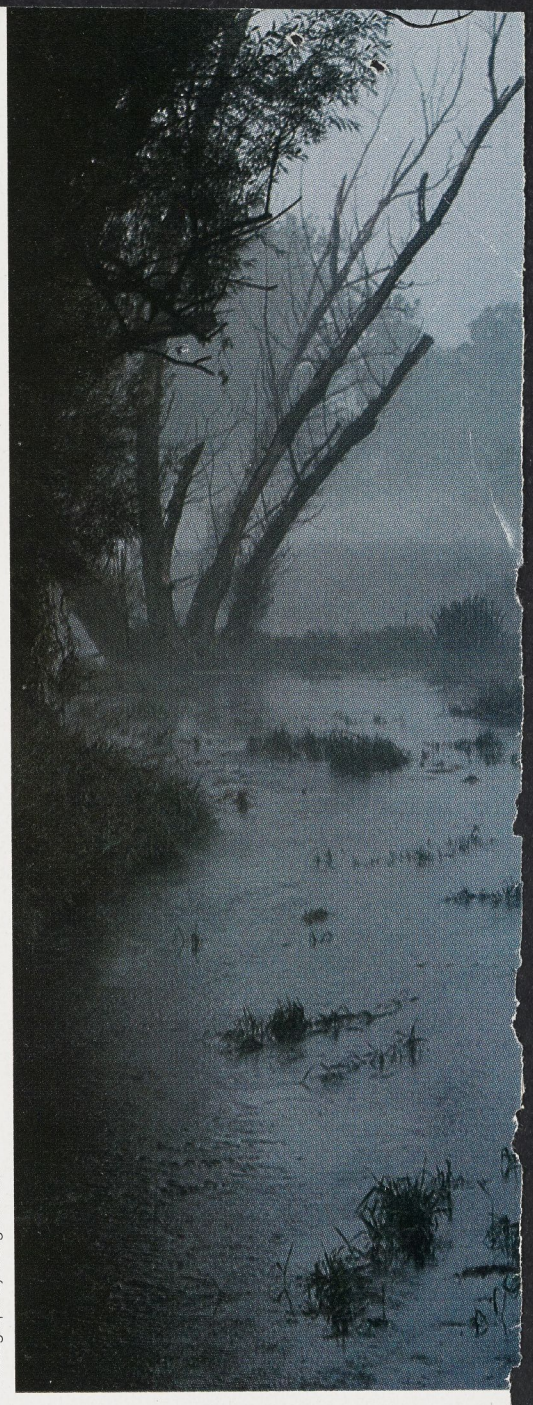
Unmoved by the clamor, the eye sees only the utterly calm and silently flowing spring water and, now and again, a trout. The fishing is seldom good enough to become all-encompassing, but the remarkable stealth of the trout insists that the eye remain sharp. This trespassing into the business of trout through the backyards of men makes me feel like a ghost. Clear-headed, smoothly flowing, exactly on edge between two species, I am neither reminded of responsibility (unless a small child cries when I suddenly feel dreary) nor committed to action. Instead, I am poised. Poised for hours, a wonderful state of mind.

Since regulations permit the killing of one trophy fish over 20 inches, one easily becomes obsessed with wanting to see such a fish. I supposed daybreak to be my best chance.

Many has been the dawn when I arrived to see every trout in the stream, or so it seemed, actively rooting, their tails flapping in the air as they darted forward to gulp a shrimp, a feeding tempo as regular as a rise to a good hatch. Relaxed by the night, the fish had worked themselves up to this accelerated feeding. The tempo of their tailing was the measure of their confidence. The fisherman hopes to match the rhythm of his casting to the fish's impulse to feed. The faster the trout tails, the easier it is to slip him a fraud.

Those mornings taught me where to look when the stream appears dead, as it usually does. The rooters—trout ranging in size from 13 to 16 inches, with a few up to 18 inches long—rise up out of the green holes, slither across the water-skimmed banks of mud and submerged cress, and make their way into narrow, silt-bottomed sloughs between the cress beds or between the cress and the grassy bank, wherever little current flows.

If I positioned myself to polarize the glare on the water, I could see trout hovering in inches of water in these alleys. They



Photograph by Douglas Lees

seemed in a stupor, barely finning in the slack current, but occasionally one tipped down and scooped a scud off bottom, the tail barely wrinkling the surface, the mouth flashing white.

I cannot say how many days I walked along the Letort looking for rising trout, all the way presented with the challenge of rooting trout. Seldom did I meet another fisherman, although just a few miles away there are limestone streams so flogged by flyfishermen that the trout tolerate anglers rollcasting line across their backs. I finally asked myself, can it be that the Letort, inspiration for *The Modern Dry Fly Code, In the Ring of the Rise* and *Rising Trout,* hosts a population of brown trout that prefer rooting to rising? Had I thought more carefully about the stream's apparent lack of popularity, I should have guessed that the Letort does not offer the predictable hatch action that most flyfishermen seek.

Do it does.

One walks through swampy meadows rank with weed, finding trout in pockets beneath, beside and on top of the cress.

One expert trout fisherman told me the Letort was finished. Yet my eyes saw that the stream was overloaded with constantly feeding, one-and-a-half-pound trout. It is the tempo and style of the feeding that has turned everyone off.

From time to time during the heat of the day, I did see midstream rise forms. But experience taught me that these free risers, usually holding in the main current at the tail end of the holes, are nearly always trout under 12 inches in length. The bigger fish, when they rise, need to feel disguised. They typically choose stations out of the current, under an overhanging tussock of grass or beneath a low bridge.

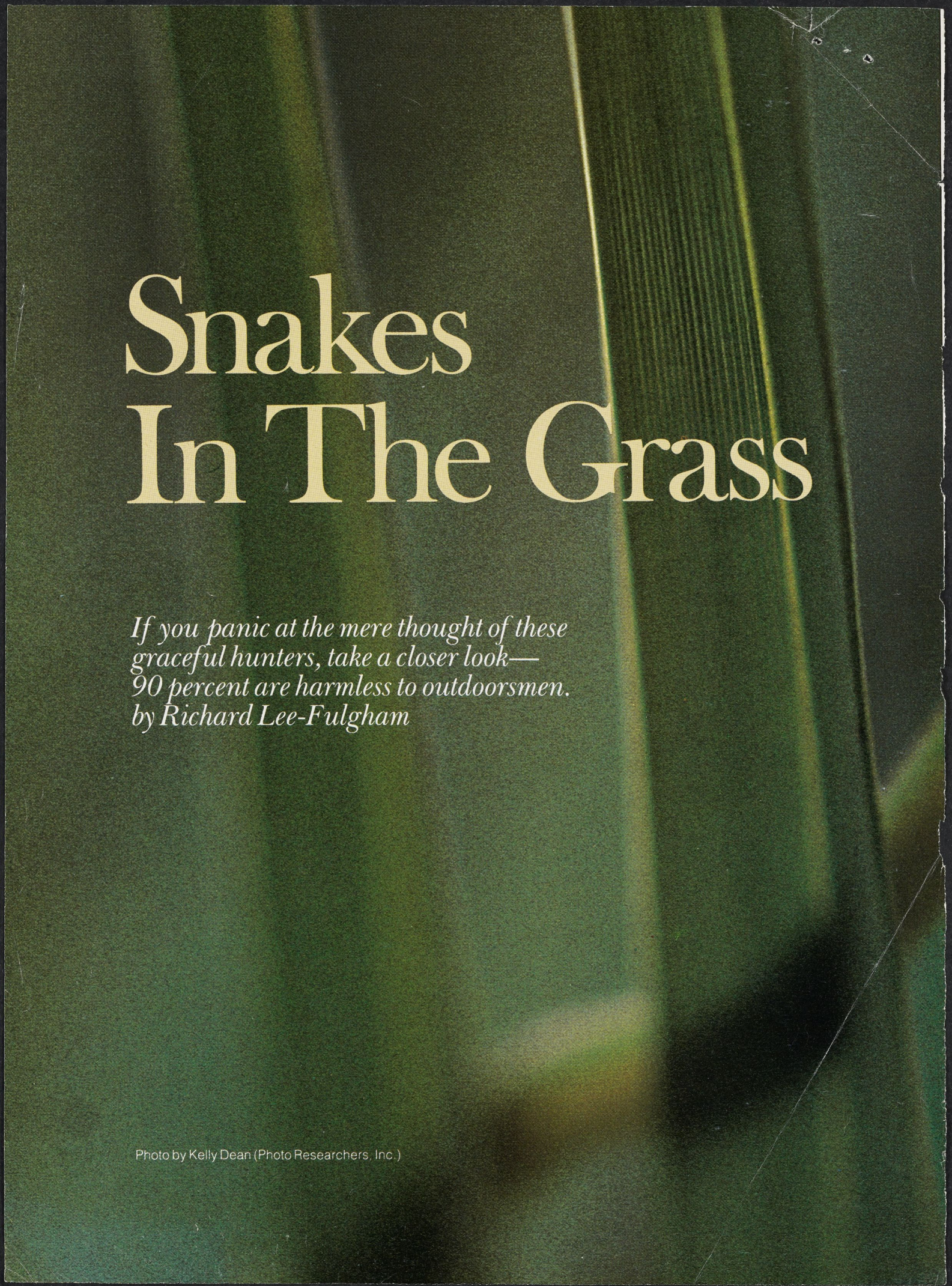
On the Letort, the size of the fish governs its feeding habits in this way: the "yearlings" rush here and there in the pools and show a preference for food on the surface; but once a trout grows to 13 inches, he chooses a much more energy-efficient feeding station in the shallows. But so extremely self-conscious does he feel, holding in half a foot of water, and so vulnerable, having wiggled across broad mud banks to a position many feet away from his hiding hole, that he depends for his safety upon minimal movement. Though grasshoppers sail in the meadows and beetles hang in the bushes and the yearlings blip-blip in the pools, most days he deliberately roots scuds. Those trout able to grow over 18 inches long at this point quit the shallows, at least during the day. They are large enough to feed on the ample supply of crawfish that begin to move with darkness.

Observe the typical Letort trout, a fat 15-incher. When he first arrives on station, at the tail end of a shallow trough of slow water, he does not move at all for quite some time. Barely finning, he seems to stare straight ahead. Like a groundhog that first rears to scan a memorized view before feeding, this trout watches his limited horizon for movement.

At last he carefully tips down and scoops up a cress bug, an action as subtle as a quick discard from an expressionless card player. So begins the listless tailing that does not mark the surface except for the occasional wrinkle. The fish is well aware that eagerness gives away his game.

After a period of successful, unmolested feeding, he begins to work a beat. Now the trout darts forward two feet to intercept a shrimp—no cress bug requires such effort. Chomping his mouth, settling back away

(Continued on page 152)



Snakes In The Grass

If you panic at the mere thought of these graceful hunters, take a closer look— 90 percent are harmless to outdoorsmen.
by Richard Lee-Fulgham

Photo by Kelly Dean (Photo Researchers, Inc.)

Letort

(Continued from page 61)

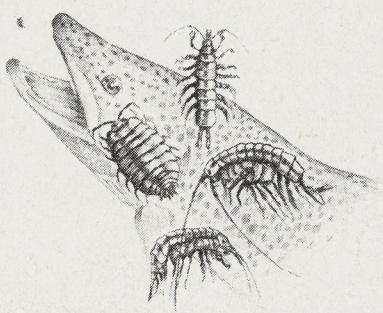
from the puff of disturbed mud, he watches the edge of the cress for another victim, then darts forward again, and so progresses up the alley.

Finally he turns, swims back to the beginning of the beat, and after another period of watchful waiting, resumes the patrol. That his tail now regularly breaks the surface at the moment of interception indicates the fish has slightly relaxed, though certainly the tempo of the tailing is not as accelerated as during the dawn sprees. By bright of day the trout keeps up his guard with intervals of watchful immobility, a habit that is rewarded when unobservant anglers walk by on the banks; for the more times the fish routinely scoots to the safety of his green hole, the surer of his shallow feeding station he becomes.

The really good rooting trout, one that's 17 or 18 inches long, tails at a rate that is less regular and even-spaced. Halfway up the beat, he turns and scoots out into the pool, reappears one minute later at the starting position, picks up one or two cress bugs, then swims up the alley and enters a pocket of backwater, there to linger and stare. This whimsical pattern, rooting interrupted with scoots of nervous swimming, suggests the trout knows that the more unpredictably he feeds, the less vulnerable he is to being tricked by a properly pitched fly.

Later, during the terrestrial part of the day, the occasionally grubbing trout is observed ticking with nervous hesitation and excitement when a wriggling ant passes overhead. How he relishes the sharp taste of ant! But after hours of disciplined tailing, how loath he feels to make a move so bold as a rise, an action that recalls the hook's sting from yearling days.

Eventually, the trout does rise. He completes the action with an alarmed scoot forward, just as if he had felt the hook, a nervous response telling of the fish's experience. Then he settles into a pattern of rooting interspersed with a few daring rises. I have hidden in the bushes and watched a trout gulp down a couple of cress bugs almost angrily, then rise carefully for a floating insect, then root again.



It has been my observation that such a trout, when presented with a floating artificial, is far more selective—concentrating his mental energies on making the decision to rise—than when he is offered a sinking fly that reaches his depth. The opposite should be true—in the slow current, the fish can take a better look at the wet fly. Yet I have taken Letort browns with pink maggots, nothing more than a wide-gapped hook wrapped in pink floss ribbed with copper wire, a quick-sinking fly that cannot resemble either a cress bug or a shrimp. I believe the fly simply slipped up on the trout, triggering the go-ahead response from a fish that has spent hours maintaining his invisibility by careful rooting. The floating artificial excites him, concentrates his mental powers; but it asks him to break out of that comforting groove of rooting, which lets the trout feel most secure since the cress bugs are always there. The sunken fly asks only that he open his mouth.

It's possible that this same trout, with growing confidence, warming water temperature and an abundance of surface food, may slip into the groove of rising. If so, he is usually an easier fish to catch because he is so much more interested in the menu than the listless rooter. On those rare days when I have found the fish committed to surface feeding, I have had my best scores. But if something should frighten this rising fish, he will scoot for his dark hole; when he resumes feeding, he will again root up his confidence before rising.

The angler cannot always expect to find rising trout, even during the prime terrestrial hours of late season. Rather, he will encounter fish displaying varying degrees of self-confidence. That one over there, caught just this morning, fins sullenly. Another has chosen a feeding station where he is regularly flushed by passing anglers, or even couples out for a walk along the railroad tracks. Out of nervous habit, he tails, scoots out into the pool, then returns to root again. A third trout rises steadily in the middle of a brushpile where the angler's fly rarely interrupts his concentration on choice food.

The Letort fisherman must observe each trout, not merely to see whether he is rising or rooting, but to determine at which tempo, and how voraciously. Then match the hatch if you will but, more important, match the mood. The choice of fly is more psychological than entomological. For instance:

On the inside bank of a bend in the stream, a gentle rise form disturbs the slack water—a welcome sight for the fisherman frustrated by a morning of rooters. I move into position where I can watch the fish. Ah, the trout dips forward, tail barely wrinkling the surface. Moments later, something passes over his head and the fish twitches. Does he want to rise? Is he afraid to rise? He is not tailing vigorously, not in that groove of rooting. Apparently he hasn't been feeding steadily on terrestri-

able yellow-gold in color with brilliant orange fins, except for the midrays of the tail which are a deep, velvety blue. The dorado's body is marked by narrow transverse stripes, giving it a speckled appearance. The most isolated dorado is *S. brevidens,* which is found mainly in the São Francisco River system of Brazil. It is said to reach a weight of 40 pounds or more. I have never fished this watershed, but I did fly beyond it and camp on the São Laurenco River, where *brevidens* has been reported. We caught nothing over five pounds there, however. In fact, some of the river's piranha were bigger than the dorado. The third dorado species, *S. affinus,* is found principally in northeastern South America, from the Magdalena, Perené and Cauca rivers of Colombia to the Santiago River of Ecuador. It also attains good size, although the biggest I have seen was about 20 pounds. It was handlined by an Indian on the Cauca.

The giant dorado species, *Salminus maxillosus,* is found primarily from the upper Amazon south to the Plata River at Buenos Aires. Though this dorado inhabits many smaller, remote waters, the Paraná in Argentina, the Mogi Guassu and Paranaiba in Brazil and the Paraguay and Uruguay rivers are the accessible places to fish for trophies. Today, there is even a fancy hotel overlooking Iguassu Falls on the Paraná—in convenient juxtaposition to some of the greatest dorado fishing on the continent—and a paved road along the upper river. The best location I have found is at Paso de la Patria, where guide Luis Oscar Schulz operates a hotline with his peers. They keep each other posted on the peregrinations of dorado schools following the sábalo. All the upper river ports hold dorado fiestas in July and August. Whole towns turn out for a contest, followed by the nightly fun and games that end with a dorado asado—or barbecue—with the fish crisping over hot coals, while the wine flows to infinity.

It was an asado that our Gruppenführer had in mind for the "celebration." About 50 or 60 people turned out at the barbecue pit in back of our hotel. Even the mayor was present. WJJ made an emotional speech after a few drafts of the local poteen. I don't know exactly what he said, but he was obviously describing whirlpools and ravenous fishes with the fervor of a missionary, while waving his arms and stamping his feet. It must have been a cliff-hanger, because he got *oohs* and *aahs* from the audience. My little thank you speech, which WJJ translated, was anticlimactic. Peter was there, but he looked gloomy. After the speeches, he joined Gil and me for a drink. Although we had a week of fishing left at El Dorado, Peter wanted to be paid off now. "Ich muss' jenseits des Flusses gehen." He didn't explain why, but he had to go across the river into Chaco country.

With a click of his heels, he bowed and then was gone. SA

als either; he clearly lacks confidence. He looks like a trout in a "normal" stream that is waiting for a hatch. I believe this fish is waiting on his nerve.

At last he eases up and sips something off the surface. Then he roots, once, twice. I see all the signs of caution in a fish that has not been at his station for a long time. Because of his reluctance to show himself, I choose not to offer a dry fly. I ponder my flybox.

If I select a wet fly tied on a No. 24 to No. 28 hook—say a floating mayfly nymph or midge pupa—I won't have the necessary sink rate and the trout must still rise. A fly as large as a No. 16 could easily frighten this fish, he that fins suspiciously in the slackest of currents. Why not make the obvious choice and pitch him a small cress bug? Instead, my fingers pinch a No. 20 lacquered black ant out of the box. This fly will sink quickly and may stimulate the fish to move for his food. To interest a fish in a cress bug, the presentation must be perfect. But for an ant, the trout perhaps will move a foot. The sinking ant tempts him with, "Here's one you don't have to rise for."

When a Letort brown likes a floating fly, he quivers with excitement. On the other hand, a good sunken fly he simply gulps.

I have since had my good dry fly days: "June 4—sulphur action"; "August 21—unbelievable heat and humidity, with the fish picking up terrestrials all afternoon"; "October 7—a sudden flying ant hatch." Such days are rare. So is the morning when you arrive expecting to stalk rooters, immediately see a rise form, and say to yourself "*Now* the floating ant will do its work." Uncommon are those dawn sprees when every fish in the stream is tailing, not merely greedily, but euphorically (though mornings in May are a good time to anticipate such action, which will last until 11:00 a.m.). And if you fish the stream persistently, you will discover the free-rising, mature trout of late season that has made the Letort famous—this trout, having found a station that is either inaccessible to most angling or so hidden from the angler's eye, has developed the confidence to think only about preferred food. But it is the rooting trout on which the Letort fisherman must depend for day-in, day-out sport. It has always been that way.

Any organized description by me on how to catch these rooters would be a lie. In fact, I am still working on the basic pieces of the puzzle. I can say this, however: Of any spring creek I have fished, the Letort offers the finest finishing course on the problems of approaching skittery trout.

Lying in bathtub-sized puddles of open water in the cress, able to feed merely by tipping forward, these trout concentrate their full attention on the fisherman. They come to depend upon his habit of wearing bright clothes, of following paths beside the stream, of moving steadily, of casting repetitiously, and of preferring certain flies. I have a friend who liked to wear a dapper, white fishing vest. How the stream punished him!

My biggest mistake may be that I like to creep close to a trout to see every flicker of fin. I often take one step too many. Perhaps, unconsciously, I recall those days when a fine rain, not really a rain at all, pinpricks the surface, when a fisherman can almost walk the fly into the mouth of an unsuspecting fish. The close-stalking game seems to depend upon the lighting. Certainly the fish are more relaxed on overcast days, feed more regularly, and therefore are more easily caught. Yet there is a particularly penetrating brightness under a certain dark sky that, though it gives excellent visibility to the angler, also allows the trout to see backwards an extra 15 feet.

Most of the rooters I have caught were taken from the near bank, where I was able to stalk within 40 feet. Total passivity is the sign of a wary fish. By crouching close behind such a fish, within "pitching range," I can choose the best moment to cast, just when the trout lets down his guard and activates his hunting instincts. My first throw is usually off. Or else the fish tails just as I start casting. In either case, I wait until the fish is again preoccupied before I lift my line off the water—an action that frequently disturbs the cress, signaling the alert trout to freeze up and wait for further evidence.

At this close range, one can actually sense the fish's mood in order to know how long to wait before casting again. If the trout's head turns toward the fly, then back, then toward the fly again, in slight but sudden movements—he seems to be ticking with indecision—then the fly is right or nearly so; but for the moment, for reasons of drag or something else, it is wrong. If the same fly is immediately pitched back above the aroused fish, even if the throw is drag-free and on target, the trout will not budge. Once disturbed by doubt, these fish habitually settle into a well-rehearsed groove of slow-finning, watchful passivity.

If a too-eager fisherman persists by casting, the fish will simply stare at the fly, and stare, and stare, though each presentation swims the fly within inches of his

snout. Finally, the trout will unlock his hold in the feeble current and begin drifting. Ever so deliberately, he will back down the alley, then suddenly turn and scoot out into the deep (all this only if the presentation is not frightening, for any big mistake on the part of the angler immediately results in a scooting fish). Now, whenever I see that fixed, bug-eyed staring at a fly, or notice a fish drift tentatively backwards, I rest the trout for a good ten minutes.

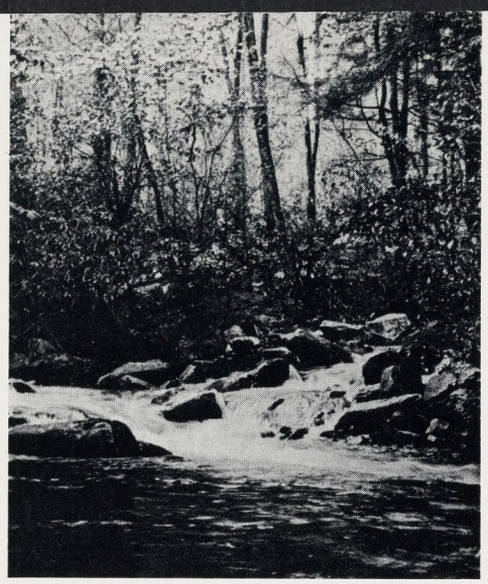
When a Letort brown likes a floating fly, he quivers with excitement. A good sunken fly he simply gulps. I believe a fly-tier has to exercise more skill dressing a floater than a sinker. As to what makes a good fly for this stream, the obvious answer is one that is black. The starling-hackled midge, the ant, the cricket and the sculpin, all tied in black, are a range of flies that will move these browns. Productive dry flies are: a No. 24 Adams, a No. 24 black Humpy, a No. 16 house fly, a No. 16 black ant and a No. 24 flying ant. Actually, an angler fishing the Letort in September and October could also do well with odd, low-profile dries that float in the film.

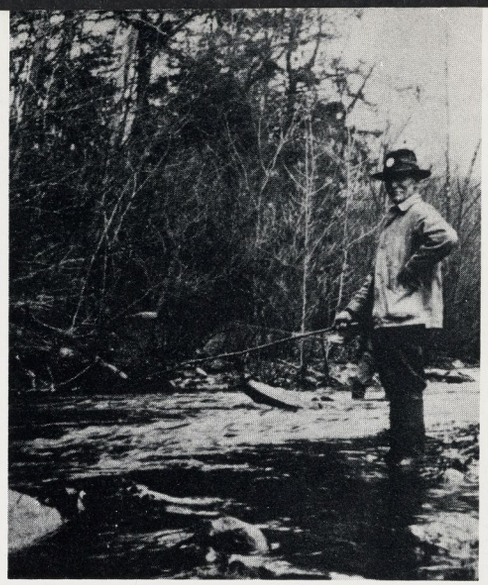
Most days, however, the choice of flies is all too simple: a small fly that sinks promptly. A cress bug, a black, lacquered ant, the same sinking ant with a red floss tail, a maggot tied with black, white or pink floss, a fat hare's ear, a fore-and-aft hackled peacock, in fact any quick-sinking buggy fly will catch rooters. I have not found a good shrimp pattern.

The ploppy sound of a chunky No. 20 wet fly must ring a familiar bell with these fish. Time and time again I have made a poor cast, plopping such a fly to the side and behind a fish, only to see him turn promptly and sometimes take. Though he is rooting, he hears the terrestrial plop, turns involuntarily, sees a fly sinking at a natural speed, and takes because he does not have to think about rising.

When casting to a tailing fish, I sometimes can see the sunken, drifting fly—that is how close this game may be played. If I cannot see the fly, I watch for any sudden movement of the trout's head in order to know when to strike. Now and again I make a perfect cast and the fly floats right into the fish's mouth. I see that suddenly irritable headshaking, the gill flaps fluttering as the trout tries to rid himself of the sticky, offset hook. I lift deliberately to feel him. So light is the strike that the fish is not certain what has happened—feeling no resistance (I instantly drop the rod tip to horizontal), he does not boil away for the deep, but scoots forward two feet, then fins nervously, waiting and watching. The fish is hooked and he doesn't even know the battle has begun. Rod pointed straight at the fish, I reel up the extra flyline, then lift to start that panicked, swooshing scoot for the deep hole. For me, that is *the* moment in fishing, not the landing of a played-out fish. SA

Blue Ridge TROUT Then & Now





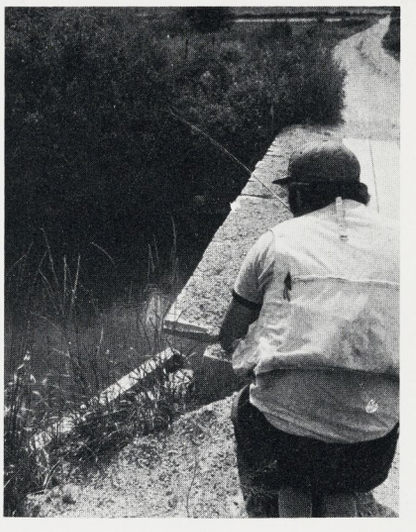
by Don Carpenter

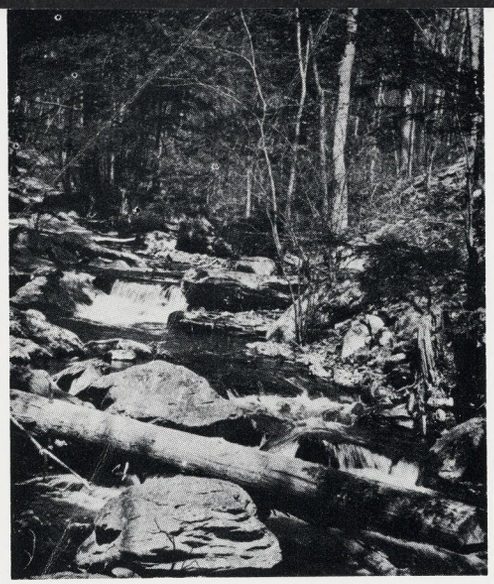
There were more and larger wild brook trout in Virginia's Blue Ridge Shenandoah National Park area before the squatter mountaineers were moved from their homes and farms on the slopes than after the eviction of these people and their animals, and before the many roads were closed to auto traffic.

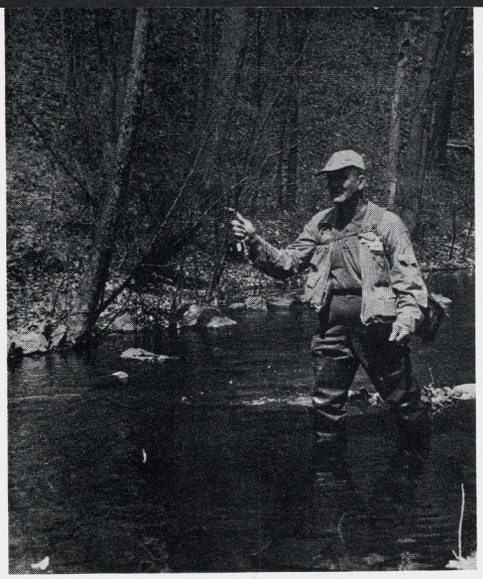
In the late '20s and early '30s, native brook trout were unbelievably plentiful and shy up in Free State, Nicholson Hollow, and other domains of the mountaineers. Apparently, the slight silt runoff from the hillbilly farm patches, animal pens, and human sewage did not hurt but rather seemed to help grow wild trout.

The evicted mountaineers were a poor but proud stock of English people, who had lived in the hollows for about one-hundred years and spoke an Elizabethan form of language, hard to understand at first. They were one-hundred percent honest about everything, including money, but not about whiskey and fish hooks, which were considered common property.

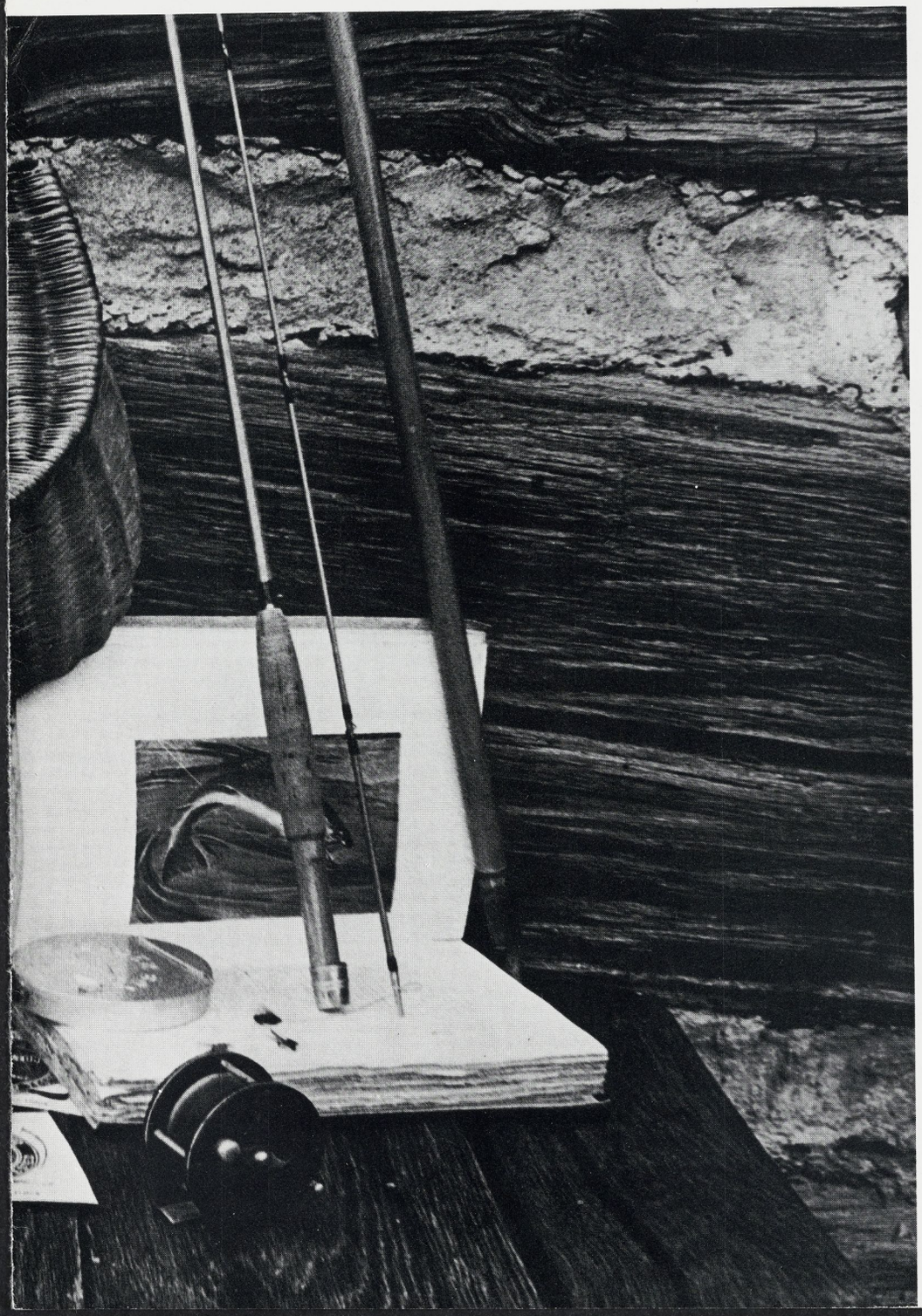
They caught and ate lots of small trout from three to four inches long mostly, on up to a few of pound size, which they caught with cut poles, three or four feet of line, and a fly hook baited with stick bait from the stream, then in endless supply. From a well-hidden place on the stream bank, the pole was poked out over the water and the bait quietly presented, with the resulting catch snatched high and backwards into the forest where the fish was usually found after a search. Aside from the fun of fooling a really wild trout, their fishing was not a sport but rather a practical way to get a meal.







Photographed by
Don Carpenter /S. A. Neff, Jr.



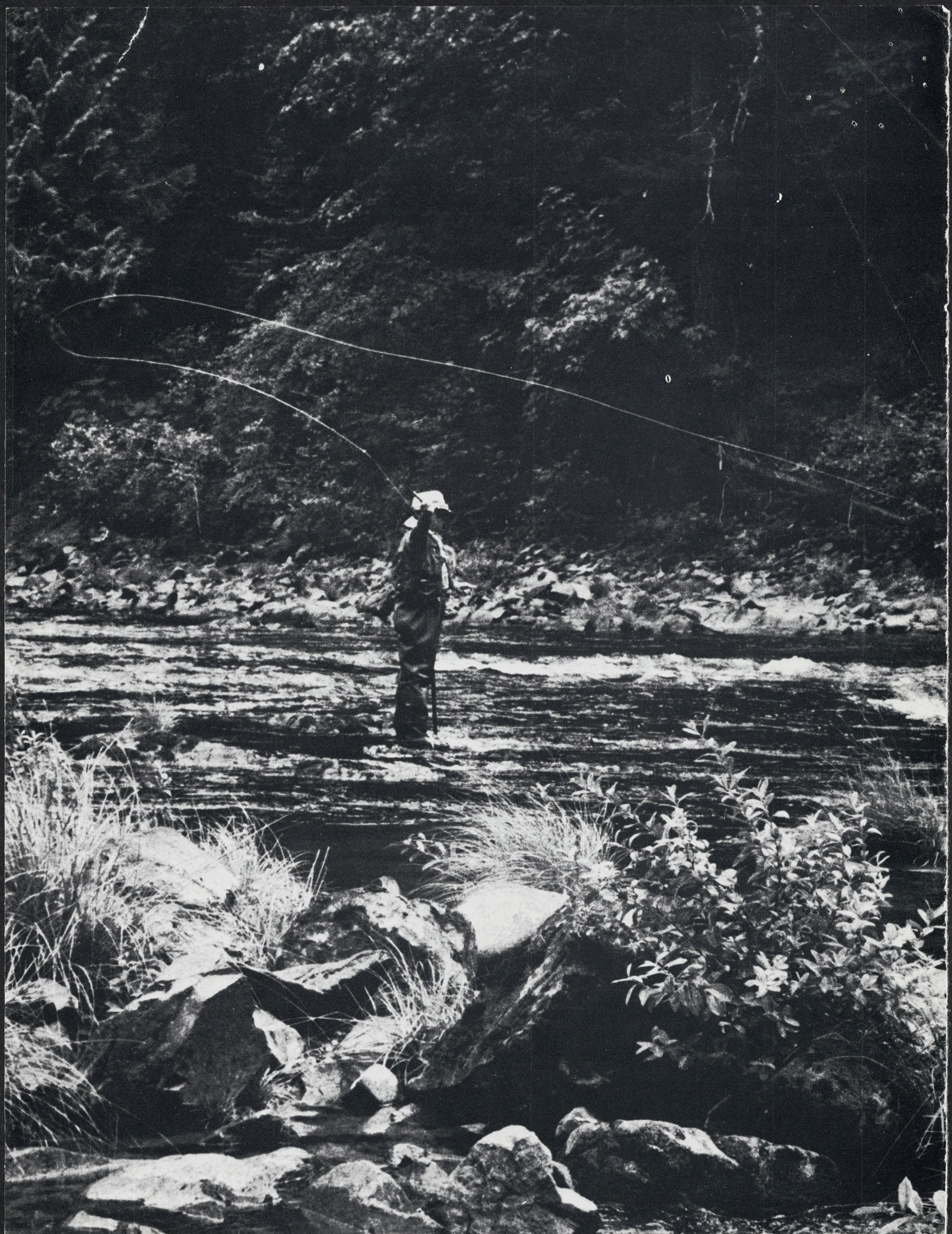
These ridge-runner people usually had large families, lived off the land, sold some moonshine whiskey, had a yearly income of fifty to one-hundred dollars per family, lived in hand-hewn log cabins, and all slept in a common bed of quilts spread on a hardwood floor.

Money was unimportant to these mountaineers, who mainly used cash to buy some sugar, flour, and tobacco from small stores at the foot of the hills, which they visited infrequently on foot or by horseback. One-room schools were provided by the State. Few of these people had seen many automobiles or ever ridden in one. It did not pay anybody, including "revenoors," to get curious about whiskey stills in the hills. In fact, it could be downright unhealthy. These people were armed and excellent marksmen, who moved as silently and unseen as a deer, and their feuds with other clans in the mountains were sometimes very bloody.

Despite the mountaineers' weakness for getting drunk and borrowing my tackle, I learned to love them and live near them but not with them! They were generous with information about the best fishing holes. I could even leave my pocketbook with money in it on the seat of my car for days, and nothing was taken but my bottle of snakebite cure.

Sure, I saw some hefty timber rattlesnakes and dangerous copperheads along the streams and mountain trails while afoot. My ancient Model A with a high oil pan was used to cover the first three miles of rocky road up to the schoolhouse, where the remaining two or three miles were only possible afoot on very steep grades where the

Continued on page 38



SMALL STREAM SURFACE MAGIC

or "use" midges along with a larger, brighter dry fly.

Quality, high-floating patterns should be selected when buying dry flies—the very best you can afford. If you tie your own, purchase the best grade hackle and bucktail that your wallet will allow.

Tapered leaders and fly lines cast better than level ones, and they help put your fly down properly for small-stream dry fly-fishing. A good single-action reel with interchangeable spools makes it possible to fish a high-floating fly line in the morning and a fresh, dry line in the afternoon.

The dry fly is an all-season producer of trout on tiny brooks and creeks—though not always the best. If you use the techniques mentioned, dries will almost always take trout from small streams anywhere at any time.

BLUE RIDGE TROUT

trails were marked on the trees with splashes of blue paint by early hiking members of the Appalachian Trail Club.

Since the eviction of the mountaineers and the destruction of their homes when the park people took over, the roads have been mostly closed to auto traffic, have been washed out by big storms, and are almost impassable to cars today except in certain improved areas. If you are unwilling or unable to hike five miles up and five miles down per day, this area's trout fishing is not your cup of tea. I still can manage it, but very slowly at my age. Somehow, it is worth the effort.

On my last and most recent trip to the Hughes River, near Nethers Post Office, I found the stream stocked from the park-line fence downstream with hatchery rainbows of legal size and subject to very heavy fishing pressure.

That park-line fence was unique because it served as a scoreboard for stocked trout taken in the winter months by mountaineers living just below the park line. They caught the trout stocked in winter and kept a chalk tally on the fence, which usually showed that none of the hatchery fish were left in the stream at the start of the regular trout season.

After the park was established, only fly-fishing was legal on park streams, and wardens patrolled the area. This did not bother the natives living along the streams of that area. They fished as usual up in the park, using flies tipped with stick bait. When they saw a warden coming they simply whipped off the illegal bait and angled innocently.

In my earliest days of dry fly-fishing for these very wild Blue Ridge brookies I was very frustrated. My first two-day weekend produced exactly nothing. The next weekend on the same water resulted in a bag of two. After a month of serious fishing and more experience, I finally reached catches of ten trout a day, all 8- to 12-inches long, with many smaller trout released unharmed.

The secret of my success with dry flies was that I learned the hard way that you must move quietly and unseen, often crawling or wading to where you plan to cast—always upstream. These headwater areas on the steep grades were mostly deep, small pools gouged out of solid rock. They were never muddy and seldom cloudy even after heavy rainstorms.

Most of the potholes offered eye-level casting from the pool below, so the caster remained unseen to his quarry above.

To cover the pool above me I started with a pop cast of a dry fly to the area just above the lip of the pool where the water flowed over and down to the rocks below, holding the rod tip high so that only the fly rested on the current and floated at a speed no faster than the natural current. If a trout was waiting there, the action came fast with an explosive rise, and a fast reaction was necessary to set the hook.

In order that I not disturb the pool I was fishing, I led the fish over the waterfall into the pool below where I could play and land it quietly.

My following casts were worked slowly upstream to the head of the pool, a foot at a time, in the current and on both sides of the stream, with particular care to cover hiding places around rocks or snags, never using any more line or leader than necessary to avoid drag of the fly. Trout can apparently judge the speed of floating food accurately and will not rise to food moving faster or slower than the current.

In pothole fly-fishing, leaders need not be as long as those used for distant casting over very clear water such as is found on big streams or lakes. Mostly, a fine 5- or 6-foot leader to 4x of 5x is quite enough and is much easier to handle than the conventional 7- to 9-foot leader commonly used.

Wild headwater mountain streams usually have lots of overhanging tree limbs and some bushes growing along the water's edge. These casting hazards preclude the use of a long fly rod, and I have always used a 6- to 6½-foot, two-ounce rod for my 10- or 12-hour days of casting. This ultra-light tackle is easy to transport in thickly wooded areas.

Back in the early days, Ray Bergman, a tackle salesman who later turned writer, sold me a 2-ounce Wm. Mills fly rod that I still can use after some 45 years of casting. For the past 15 years my pet rod has been a 2-ounce Orvis Deluxe, which I credit with thousands of trout catches.

Speaking of trout catches in the thousands makes me sound like a meat hog. Actually, I have never killed more than a few trout. I suppose my kill ratio is about one fish in 50 to 100 fish hooked and played. Often I have had days when 100 or more trout were hooked and released unharmed to grow and fight again.

The matter of releasing a trout unharmed is surrounded by much inaccurate folklore and baloney. My tests, conducted in such controlled areas as trout rearing pools, years ago proved to me that the safest way to hold a trout for release was by the lower jaw where the fingerhold would not remove any of the fish's body-protective slime. If this slime is removed infections attack, eventually disabling or killing the fish.

I always hold the trout I wish to release with the thumb and first finger of my left hand, being right-handed. After a busy day of releasing fish, these fingers were sore and often bleeding from the punctures made by the sharp teeth.

In my tests, using the lower-jaw hold, the mortality rate was less than one percent, the mortality rate for fish held by the body with pre-moistened hands proved to be some 60 percent, and with dry hands, well over 80 percent, assuming the fish were released in the water without dropping.

My wife Peg and I nearly get ulcers watching TV shows, being viewed by millions of amateur anglers, in which a famous fisherman makes the catch, grabs the fish around the middle like a beer can, yanks out the hook, and then drops the fish into the water from a height of three or four feet. What such an ill-informed showman apparently

Continued on page 40

BLUE RIDGE TROUT

does not know is that the fish probably will not live.

When a fish is dropped in shallow water, it hits the bottom hard with its nose. If the bottom is hard or rocky the crash breaks the fish's spinal cord, and though the fish seems to swim away all right, about forty-eight hours later a white spot appears on the neck and the trout rolls over and dies. It is time that TV shows feature the correct way to handle fish.

My method of handling and releasing fish applies to most all freshwater and saltwater species, except such saber-toothed fish as the shark, barracuda, pike, bluefish, and other species equipped to easily remove your fingers. In this case the fish can be held safely with the fingers placed in the eye sockets like holding a bowling ball.

But back to my original subject of luring wild trout with a fly. I always approach the water as silently as possible, trying to present a low profile by crawling or stooping. At the edge of pools too deep to wade, I sit on a rock or kneel, usually waiting the length of time it takes to smoke a cigaret so that any fish scared on the approach will return to their accustomed feeding positions.

When ready to cast, I pull from my reel the amount of line I estimate necessary to reach the target so as to eliminate unnecessary false casting. Slow, deliberate, accurate casting with a dry fly will fool the wildest trout. To hurry, making sloppy casts, can be fatal to the sport. I do not like any deadline for my fishing day because I find that the best time of all for dry fly-fishing is the hour before to an hour or more after sunset when the light of the afterglow is enough to see a rise.

I practically never fish right behind another fisherman. Back in the old days in the Blue Ridge streams when two, three, or four anglers were in my party, we worked the water as a team, taking turns at the casting while the rest of the group would hide and watch the action, waiting for their turn to come up. The rivalry was great and we learned a lot from each other, with no one ever disturbing the water that lay ahead.

Our gang fishing parties in the old days included such now famous names as Dan Bailey of Livingston, Montana, and Dr. William B. Holton, long a member of Maryland's Fish & Game Commission.

Dan Bailey invented a most effective dry fly pattern that he named The Virginia—a black palmer-tied spider fly with a tag of black bear hair. My favorite creation was christened Carpenter's Variant—a honey-hackled palmer-tied floater with a bee body and a scarlet tag made of the stiff red hackles from a Lady Amherst's pheasant. Both flies were killers on Blue Ridge streams.

In general, our home-tied dry flies were mostly the Royal Coachman, Black Gnat, McGinty, Yellow Sally, Grizzly King, Brown Hackle, Light Cahill or Light Caddis. Hooks were mostly sizes 10, 12 or 14. We also fished gyro-type flies and spent wings. Careful casting was more important than fly patterns, I learned.

The wild Blue Ridge brook trout, as far as I know, are native to these headwaters. Due to the forest cover over the water, these brookies are darker in color than most other wild brookies, except those found in Maine. On their sides, the red spots, with blue circles surrounding, are much brighter than those of most other squaretails, and they have plenty of sooty black specks under the lower jaw with very snowy white edges on their fins.

It is still possible to find and catch some of these fine native brookies in upper Blue Ridge waters, but to get them you must be willing to walk a lot and work a lot. The park waters are limited to fly-fishing only, and on the Rapidan you will find a fish-for-fun only area stocked with large rainbow and brook trout. Brown trout are a really scarce fish in the Blue Ridge. Below the park lines, Virginia stocks hatchery trout on a put-and-take basis. Anglers use bait, spinners, salmon eggs, Green-Giant Yellow Hackle (canned corn), live minnows or what-have-you, often on rods quite suitable for taking an Atlantic sailfish.

But when you fool a native brookie high in the Blue Ridge, you will find it to be a small but very strong, chunky fish. If you get any measuring over 12 inches, don't tell anybody else the place. Just tell me!

LOVE AFFAIR WITH A RIVER

wouldn't keep me from slipping, falling and getting wet in that 55° to 60°F water.

With this experience I started using the wading staff that Fred had loaned me, a five-foot metal-tipped pole, made from an old shovel handle with a rope loop running through a hole in the upper end of it. The loop slipped easily over my shoulder. A wading staff is invaluable, not only for wading but also for probing ahead to indicate water depth and to determine a safe place to step. The North Umpqua is an extremely beautiful river, great for wading and fly-fishing, but it has holes and drop-offs that can get a fly-fisherman into trouble—real trouble, not just getting wet and chilled, but the possibility of being washed into deep water with the chance of drowning.

Several fishermen I know have had the experience of slipping while wading fast, waist-deep water. When this happens the air that is trapped inside the waders causes the feet to float higher than the head and it becomes a real problem to keep the head above the surface.

Most fishermen strap a waist belt around the outside of their waders. This is an excellent precaution except, as I mentioned, if you slip and fall it may cause your feet to float higher than your head.

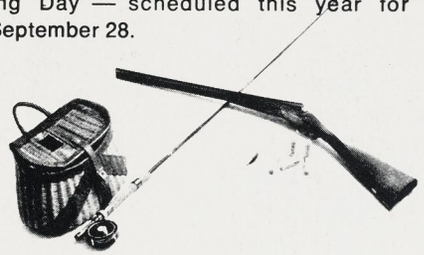
Fred, fishing upstream above me, started wading strongly into water that was just inches below the top of his waders. The current tugged at his waders, trying to wash him downstream. Fred wanted to fish from the trail side of the river. I watched as he started casting, lengthening the cast to quarter downstream. His fly hit the water about 80 feet away from the end of the rod, sank and started to quarter the current. Fred, with a flick of his nine-foot rod, mended the line to prevent any drag on the fly. This is necessary and a standard procedure when fly-fishing the North Umpqua.

Many, if not all, of the steelhead strikes come just as the fly is about to tail out. Any drag on the fly at this point will turn most steelhead off.

Mending line is a simple, yet important, technique if you're going to interest one of these great fish. After casting across stream, as most fishermen know, the current closest to the angler immediately starts to drag the fly, especially if it is faster than the far current where the fly lands. If this happens then you simply raise your rod tip and make a side roll with it, rolling the line upstream to prevent drag on the leader and fly. On some casts you may have to do this twice or even three times to prevent the fly from dragging.

Continued on page 42

For the third consecutive year, this nation's sportsmen will be honored for their contributions to conservation through the observance of National Hunting and Fishing Day — scheduled this year for September 28.



have a good day

national hunting & fishing day
September 28, 1974

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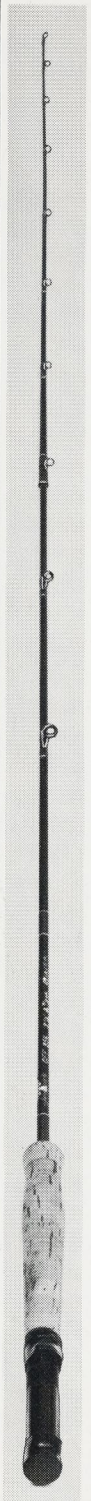

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Datus C. Proper
American Embassy
APO New York, NY 09678

June 15, 1979

Mr. Brad Phillips, Biologist
Shenandoah National Park
Luray, Virginia 22835

Dear Mr. Phillips,

The purpose of this letter is to offer you some knowledge I have about Park streams, and especially about the Rose River. Though living overseas at the moment, I'm a member of the National Capital Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Probably I'm the member who has been active longest in the chapter. Several years ago, when I was chapter President, I helped organize a campaign to dissuade the State of Virginia from degrading the native brook-trout fishery on the lower Rapidan River. I've been fishing and watching a number of Park streams. Have also published occasional magazine articles on the fishing in the Park and elsewhere. In what I've written, I've been careful not to identify back-country streams with fisheries that have seemed fragile to me. My experience goes back roughly 20 years. This by way of identification.

I know the whole Rose River pretty thoroughly, and I suspect I may know its more isolated parts better than most people. Solitude is an important thing for me. I was interested, therefore, to see (in the TU newsletter) that you consider part of the Rose River and White Oak Canyon overused. You have a point.

The big advantage of the Rose River is that it does not have a trail nearby for a good stretch of its course. (Wish we could find a way to get rid of the trails near many other streams.) There are, of course, good trails down to the Falls (especially along the Hogcamp Branch) and ~~especially~~ along the stretch above the boundary. These trails have, of recent years, been attracting a lot of back-packers. Perhaps this is what is meant by the mention of overuse in the notice I saw.

Although I like back-packing myself, I'm inclined to think we should restrict it in fragile watersheds like that of the Rose. Many of the back-packers are careful, but too many are not. Some camp right on the stream, build fires, and discard garbage. A couple of years ago I was about four miles down from skyline drive when I ran into several couples camping -- with a large cooler, ice, and plenty of beer. Strong backs and weak minds. This kind of thing would have been hard to imagine ten years ago.

On the other hand, I have been pleased to find that the fishing has not declined over the years. If anything, it has improved, perhaps because the Park has recuperated a lot since the 1930s. There are days on the Rose when you could swear that all the fish have been removed.

As you probably know, the trout can hide very effectively under those big rocks when there is nothing to bring them out. Under similar conditions (not in the Rose), I have seen them difficult to find even with electro-shockers. But when there is the right insect activity, the trout come out. The stream seems to me to hold a full population of trout, many of excellent size. The same is true of a few other Park streams. The fish-for-fun Rapidan does not seem to me appreciably better than the Rose and a few others.

My conclusion has been that the young backpackers -- fortunately -- do not know how to fish. They pose some dangers to the environment in general, but they do not bothr the trout nearly as much as some of the old-fashioned poachers. And I've seen less sign of the old poachers in recent years. (You may have better information.) They could do a pretty effective job of getting the trout out in early spring, using bait.

With this background, I'm inclined to think that current fishing regulations are about right. The size limit of 8" seems ~~about~~ right; I suppose only a few fish ever get much over that size. If there were ever indications that the trout were being badly affected by angling, I would quickly urge more restrictive regulations: limits of two or three fish or a 9" limit, for example. The 9" limit would make for almost fish-for-fun angling, though a few 10" "trophies" are of course present.

On the basis of what I know now, it would seem a mistake to move to more restrictive regulations. Some legitimate fishermen would be discouraged or pushed to the Rapidan, which is easier to reach. The few fishermen I see in the back country are usually fly-fishermen who do not kill many fish, even of the larger ones. It is helpful to have the people on the stream ; they tend to keep an eye out for poaching and other abuses.

When the fishing is good (largely a question of insect hatches), I can usually figure on catching half-a-dozen trout over 8" in one or two hours. I usually stop at this point even though I return virtually all the trout alive. When my young son comes along, he likes to kill two or three trout to take home. Probably most of the Trout Unlimited members are fairly similar.

If I had my druthers, I would prefer to end spinning even with single hooks. I used to do quite a bit of it years ago in the Rapidan but stopped because too many trout seemed to hit the spinner in such a way that the hook went deep in their gills. I'm not aware of any research supporting this, but it was my distinct experience. Similarly, big streamers and bucktails fished downstream tend to hook a lot of trout deeply. This is a fairly well known phenomenon, and because of it streamers are often restricted in private waters in the U.S. (the Brodhead, for example) and England. What happens, I think, is that

trout take minnow-imitating spinners and streamers differently from small insect-imitating flies. Trout know that minnows can escape easily and so take them more decisively, if they are taken at all. The problem could be avoided by allowing only fly-fishing with hooks no smaller than ~~1x2x~~ 1" in length (about a size 12 Mustad). I don't expect much enthusiasm for this proposal for a few years, even though it is already in effect in some private waters.

Hope some of the above may be of use to you. I would be extremely grateful to receive copies of your research (or any other on Park Streams). If you would send me copies, I will be happy to send any payment.

Thank you.

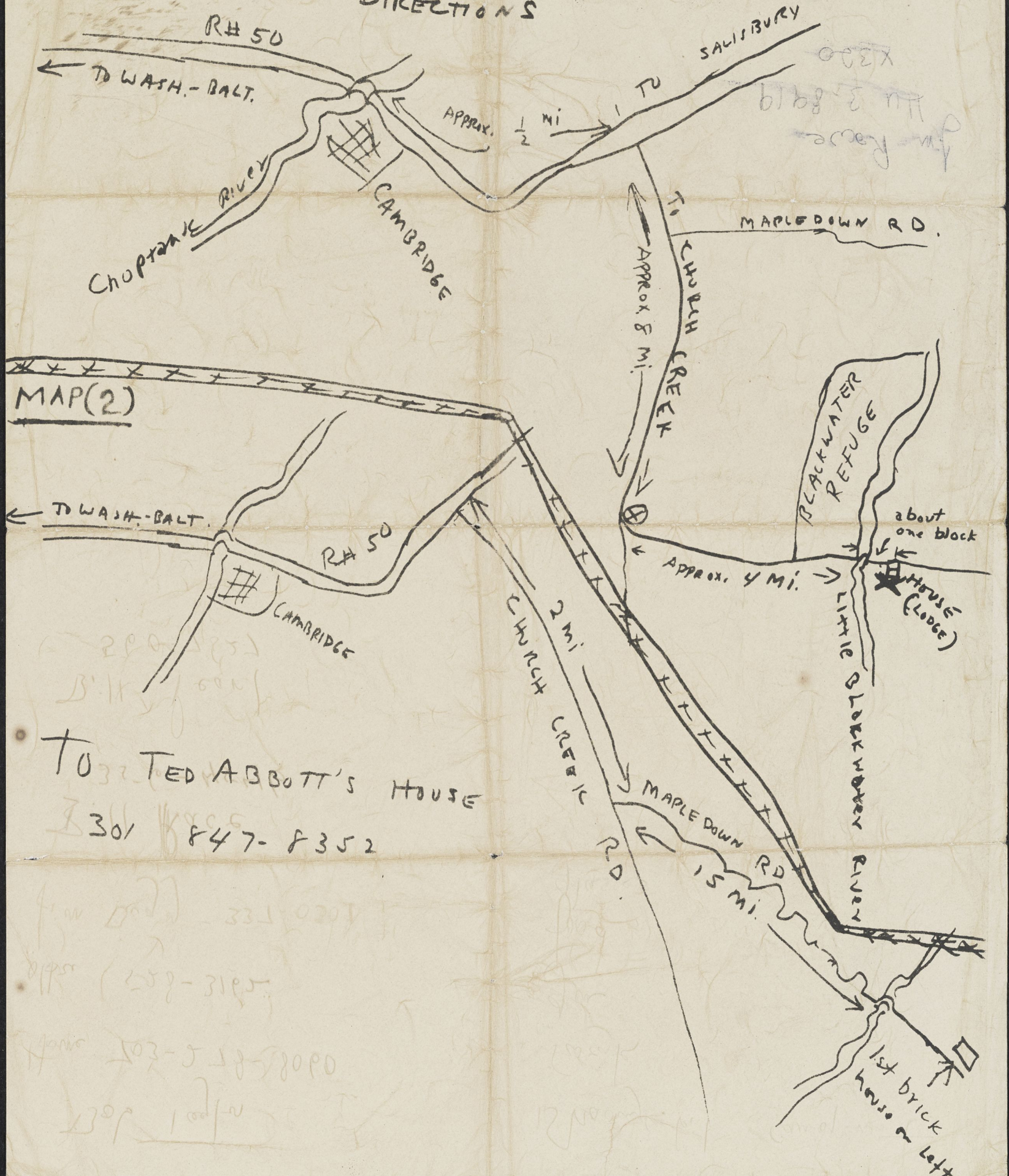
Sincerely yours,

Datus C. Proper

MAP(1)

BLACKWATER DUCK CLUB

DIRECTIONS



TO TED ABBOTT'S HOUSE

301 847-8352