



## *Freshwater Fishing in Northeastern Pennsylvania*

### WAYNE COUNTY AND THE UPPER DELAWARE RIVER

*"In Pennsylvania, by the time the trout have started to learn something about Hendricksons, the hatch is gone; it usually peaks on one Wednesday and Thursday while I am a hundred miles away earning my wages, and then a heavy rain floods the river Saturday."*

—DATUS C. PROPER, *What The Trout Said*.

Al Caucci, an excellent entomologist, author, fly-fishing teacher, and Temple University alumnus, agrees with others that the Upper Delaware River is the "Bighorn of the East." He writes, "Imagine productive, uncrowded cold rivers with wild trout that rise to flies on hot July and August days. This midsummer's dream is . . . just a few hours outside of New York City and Philadelphia, and not much farther from Boston and Washington."

In his article, "Delaware Summer," in the September 1995 issue of *Fly Fisherman* magazine, Caucci celebrates the Upper Delaware, notably the West Branch and the main stem of the river into which the West Branch flows. This article is a good introduction to the insect hatches a fly-fisher will meet on the Upper Delaware.

The West Branch of the river is truly a treasure, but neither it nor the rest of the Upper Delaware is easy to fish. Jim Merritt had it right in an article about Al Caucci in the February 1997 issue of *Field & Stream*: "The Upper Delaware is a lovely but fickle lady. I've been fishing it off and on for

15 years and have reluctantly concluded that it's a river on which I'll forever be paying my dues."

For some, like us, the large water was at first intimidating, and our ignorance (which, after all these years, continues to amaze us) held us back. Yet this is a great fishery. Despite certain heavily fished hot spots, the Upper Delaware will continue to thrive—if polluters, poachers, and thoughtless slobs in the fishing fraternity and sorority are held in check.

The East and West Branches of the Delaware join just south of Hancock, N.Y., the apex of our triangle. If you drive north on Pa. Route 191, you will come to a bridge crossing the river and leading into Hancock and N.Y. Route 17. You can fish just by the bridge if you like, but there are other, less crowded places. If you are unfamiliar with the Delaware, it's time to take an imaginary look at this great river.

If you stood on the Hancock Bridge and, with the vision of Superman, surveyed the river west, east, and then south through the Poconos to the Delaware Water Gap (or to Philadelphia, for that matter), you'd see nothing but productive, fishable waters. The river is reasonably clean, despite a few degraded sites—in fact, shortly we will take you past a sewage treatment plant on the way to a neat place to fish.

Your krypton-spawned super-vision would also reveal an astonishing variety of fishes: trout, catfish, stripers, panfish, bass of varying mouth sizes, muskies, suckers, walleyes, shad, and eels, and you'd see spectacular scenery in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. Old-timers will have narrowed their vision to favorite species and spots, but the prospects are truly awe-inspiring if you like to fish, eat, drink, and be entertained. We know places where you can drink champagne, among other activities, in a heart-shaped, king-size bed, but that's tacky. Besides, after catching a half-dozen trout, love is much better on a moss-lined bank.

#### WATER CONDITIONS ON THE UPPER DELAWARE

Water depths and temperatures on the Upper Delaware change quickly and erratically. For fishers new to the river, these water conditions are important. They are comparable to the tides and variable conditions on the lower river and along the shore. Don't be threatened; just know the conditions for the best fishing and for safety's sake.

There are several influential dams in New York, one at the Pepacton Reservoir (with a goodly population of brown trout) on the East Branch and one at the Cannonsville Reservoir on the West Branch. These two dams



control water level in the East and West Branches and, ultimately, in the river's main stem. New York City takes a part of its water supply from the reservoirs, and the city's demand governs the water released by the dams. The water releases are erratic, yet those flushes are responsible for keeping the water in the East and West Branches at temperatures in the 40s and low 50s. Cool water is good for trout but not too good for the fisher in waders who falls in. If you have heart disease, please be particularly careful.

The March 1997 issue of *Fly Fisherman* reports that two new water control valves were recently installed in the Cannonsville Dam. We have been hearing about those valves for several years now. The valves are supposed to spread out peak water releases during the summer so that river conditions on the West Branch will remain steady. We aren't so certain. New York City still takes water regardless of what the trout need. The bottom line: when New York needs water from the reservoir, water releases downstream are reduced, and they are severely reduced in times of drought.

Luckily, the bottom of the Delaware is fairly easy to wade. There are the usual rocks, but anyone can handle them if the water is not too high. Be sure to wear chest waders and a belt, preferably warm waders with felt soles; the felt will help keep you from slipping on slimy rocks. Should you fall, the belt will trap air in the waders, and you'll have a better chance of floating. When the water is high, wading is difficult and so is the fishing. When the water is very low, wading is easy, and sometimes you can actually wade across the river, but the fishing is erratic.

If you plan to fish the Upper Delaware, you can call the National Park Service at (914) 252-7100 for a recorded message giving official water temperatures and gage heights that will tip you off about water depths at the Calicoon (New York side) access point, which is south of the East and West branches. A call to the U.S. Weather Bureau in Harrisburg at (717) 234-6812 or in Philadelphia at (215) 627-5575 will tell you what's going on at the Hale Eddy gage in New York.

According to Dwight Landis (*Trout Streams of Pennsylvania: An Angler's Guide*, 2d Edition, Hempstead-Lyndell, page 22), fishing is often best with a gage height between 2.0 and 2.5 feet. At 2.75 feet, there is some difficulty wading out very far; above 3.2 feet, you could get yourself in trouble if you don't work out about six hours a day. However, if the river is likely to be too strong for you, the hefty current when you first start to wade will let you know how careful to be. If we have frightened you, we back off. Fishing the Upper Delaware is not all that difficult. And if senior citizenship threatens to make you an alien on the river, then don't hesitate to use a wading staff.

We often do, and a fine fisher we know who has yet to see age fifty wears CO<sub>2</sub>-inflatable suspenders all the time.

THE WEST BRANCH (WITH A DETOUR TO THE  
BEAVERKILL AND WILLOWEMOC)

*"I'm tired of working from dawn to dark. . . . I'm just sick of it. I just want to go out to a trout stream and get away from it."*

—Media mogul **TED TURNER** in 1996, after purchasing  
a 5,000-acre ranch in Montana.

We'll start with the West Branch of the river, and we are talking mostly about the trout fishing, which is about as good as it can get on the Delaware. You can begin by heading north out of Hancock, N.Y., on Route 17 to Deposit, N.Y. In Deposit, look for Route 4A, and take it south along the river to Hale Eddy. A New York fishing license is necessary at Hale Eddy, but it is valid on all water in the state and, thanks to a reciprocal agreement, in Pennsylvania and New Jersey wherever the Delaware is the border between the two states. (The reciprocity agreement is among the three states—New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, wherever the river is a border.)

After fishing Hale Eddy with flies, lures, or live bait, anglers often return north in the late afternoon to the two-mile catch-and-release section just below Deposit, N.Y., and then cross the bridge in Deposit and come back south on Route 17, perhaps to wet a line in the water at the Hancock Bridge. In fact, for the sake of travel directions, we use Hancock and the Hancock Bridge as a kind of hub to a wheel whose circumference encircles the East and West branches, the Beaverkill and Willowemoc rivers, and the main stem of the Delaware down to about Equinunk. We will return to Hancock for reference before we speed out along another spoke of the wheel.

*Resort*

Before we leave the Hale Eddy area too quickly, we should mention the West Branch Angler and Sportsmen's Resort, (607) 467-5525, located on the Pennsylvania side of the river. Surrounded by the protected beauty of Pennsylvania State Game Lands, the resort has seventeen comparatively new cabins. The cooking facilities are elegantly complemented by L.L. Bean furniture. Guests have access to a good, private restaurant, and there's an excellent fly shop that carries top equipment and thousands of flies. A guide service is available, and fishers can rent canoes and rafts. There are

also hiking trails and a lodge with its own motel rooms. The resort is expanding, and Manager Larry Finley says the emphasis is on family recreation. In fact, the West Branch Angler and Sportsmen's Resort caters to non-fishing families as well as to fishers and expects to have a large swimming pool for the 1997 season.

### *Tackle*

Driving south from Deposit, cross the Hancock Bridge onto Pa. Route 191 and start looking to the left for a tackle shop. This is the Delaware River Fly Shop (formerly Fur, Fins & Feather), now owned and operated by the West Branch Angler and Sportsmen's Resort. It's a good idea to stop at this nicely stocked shop before fishing the West or East Branch of the Delaware because whoever is working that day will know the right bait or fly to recommend, as well as conditions on the river, especially water depths and temperatures. You can telephone the Fly Shop at (717) 695-5983. For detailed information about water conditions, including the hatches, call the resort's Hot-Line at (607) 467-5565. If water conditions are really nasty, you can fish the famous Beaverkill and Willowemoc.

### *The Beaverkill and Willowemoc*

As Dwight Landis points out in *Trout Streams of Pennsylvania*, anglers who come to fish the Delaware and find the water too high or too low often just head west on N.Y. Route 17 to the heart of fly-fishing. If inclined, you can quaff a quick one at the junction of the East Branch and Beaverkill River (Exit 90) at the Log Cabin Hotel and Bar. Keep going west on Route 17 to Roscoe or Livingston Manor, N.Y., to fish the Beaverkill and Willowemoc, both superior capillaries to the artery of the Delaware. You are now in historic fly-fishing country, so show some respect!

Access to the two streams is relatively easy, and parking is plentiful. Between Roscoe and Livingston Manor on the Willowemoc, there is a No-Kill zone restricted to artificial lures. Fishing is allowed year-round here. For more information, check with Fur, Fin and Feather on DeBruce Road in Livingston Manor, (914) 439-4476, or with The Beaverkill Angler in Roscoe, (607) 498-5194.

We have gone to New York in late spring and taken nice brook and brown trout on Blue-wing Olives, March Browns, Sulphur Duns, and the ever-faithful Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear for nymphing. We fished the Beaverkill close to Pig Pen Pool near Rockland and the Willowemoc between Akens Pool and Deckers Eddy. It was a lovely, slightly chilly day for early June. Fish