

FINALLY—IT’S HERE!!

FLY FISHING IN THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK: AN INSIDER’S GUIDE TO A PURSUIT OF PASSION

“I am fascinated by this book and will be from now on. This is the complete book about fly fishing in the Smokies. It is obvious that Jim Casada knows more about Park streams, the area’s history and heritage, and our sport than anyone I have met. It is a masterpiece.”

—Byron Begley, owner of Little River Outfitters

“If your passion is trout of the Southern highlands, this book will prove to be as indispensable as a favorite rod and wading boots.”

—Sam Venable, longtime columnist for the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*.

“This is a book anyone who knows or plans to visit the Smokies will cherish, but also a book that anyone who takes pleasure in fine writing about the outdoor world and especially fly fishing will admire greatly. I do.”

—Nick Lyons, noted fly-fishing book author, from the Foreword

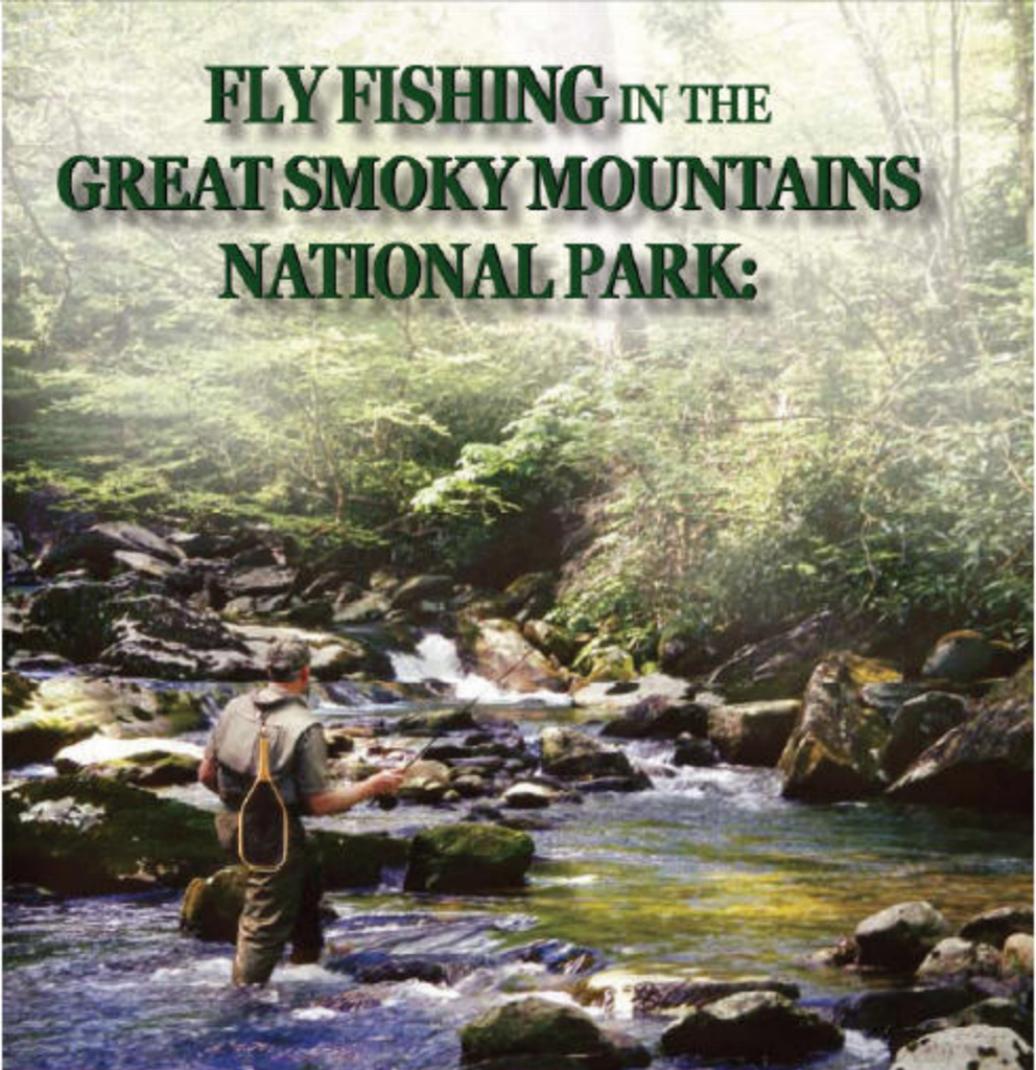
CHECK OUT A SAMPLE OF THE BOOK’S CONTENTS BELOW

This is a book I’ve mentioned repeatedly in my monthly newsletter and in public appearances, and for me it is my “book of a lifetime.” The 448-page book features detailed coverage of all the major streams of the nation’s most visited national park along with insight on even the smaller feeders. In addition, there are dozens of helpful graphs, scores of both vintage and modern photographs, a detailed list of outfitters and guides, a folding map which is tucked into the book and can be carried with you on the trail, an extensive annotated bibliography, and much more.

With a Foreword by acclaimed angling writer Nick Lyons, this book features a lifetime of knowledge and insight gained from untold days and years of blissful casting and wading in the finest wild trout water east of the Rockies. If you are interested in the history of the high country of western North Carolina and east Tennessee, want to know more about fishing in the Smokies, or are seeking detailed information on tactics and techniques which work well in the region, this book is for you. You’ll enjoy all sorts of anecdotal tidbits, take to the stream with endearing old timers, and find answers to about anything imaginable about the Smokies and their fishing.

The samples below will give you a feel for the flavor and flair of the book. They include the Table of Contents, the full text of two chapters covering streams (one in each state), a selection from the coverage of “Seasons of the Smokies,” and a stream graph of the type provided for all the Park’s major drainages. I think you’ll find the material of interest, and it’s but a hint of what awaits you.

The book is available in both hardback and paperback formats. Both include the folder map showing Park trails and designated backcountry campsites. For the hardbound version, send \$37.50 plus \$5 postage and handling, while the paperbound version is \$24.95 plus \$5 postage and handling. You can order by sending a check or money order to Jim Casada, 1250 Yorkdale Drive, Rock Hill, SC 29730-7638 or through my Web site (www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com) using PayPal. I’m scheduled to have the books in hand on August 21 and will start filling orders immediately.

A photograph of a fly fisherman standing in a shallow, rocky river. The fisherman is wearing a vest and waders, and is holding a fishing rod. The river is surrounded by lush green forest and rocks. The water is clear and flows over the rocks.

FLY FISHING IN THE
GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS
NATIONAL PARK:

*An Insider's Guide to A
Pursuit of Passion*

by Jim Casada

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CHAPTER 4

Seasons of the Smokies: An Angler's View

SPRING

Spring comes to the Smokies in fits and starts. White splashes of flowering service trees adorning an otherwise bare landscape serve as the first highly visible harbingers of the earth's rebirth, and the knowing angler might want to mark those growing along streams for a later visit. Serviceberries, with their mild flesh and seeds carrying a hint of the taste of almonds, can be a welcome delicacy come June. Soon signs of earth's reawakening appear everywhere. The white of dogwoods vies with the vivid purple of redbuds for attention in the forest, and a myriad of wildflowers adorn the understory. Among them are wild iris, jack-in-the-pulpit, bluets, wake robins, violets, and the dozen or so species of trillium found in the region.

As the days gradually lengthen and the sun's beams slowly strengthen, change comes to the watery world of the trout as well. These cold-blooded creatures react to warmth and light in a predictable fashion—they celebrate the end of winter's lean, mean times and greet earth's rebirth with active feeding. Since spring's arrival also heralds renewed activity in the insect world, with periodic hatches of caddis, March browns, dark Hendricksons, blue-wing olives and other insects encouraging surface feeding of the sort largely missing since the Indian Summer days of late September and early October. As is almost always the case, even more food is available beneath the surface

THE LURE AND LORE OF TROUT IN THE SMOKIES

of streams full from winter's rains, and all sorts of nymphs, along with minnows which have joined the trout in increased activity, become part of the food chain.

April soon gives way to May, and with it comes even better and more varied hatches—little yellow and golden stoneflies, larger brown stoneflies, the occasional flurry of green drakes, aptly named May flies, sulphur duns, and more. Once past the nasty little cold snaps that old-timers call catbird winter or blackberry winter, the trout fisherman can enjoy day after day of serene weather, fine fishing, and relatively predictable insect activity. Incidentally, it should be noted that there are a number of hatch guides, many of them specially bound to be waterproof and of a size to fit nicely in one's vest, that cover insect life and the patterns to match it on a month-by-month basis. My personal favorite, thanks to a long-term acquaintance with the author and the fact that he is a fellow son of the Smokies, is Roger Lowe's *Smoky Mountain Fly Patterns*.

In the trout fisherman's lexicon, "magical" provides an apt way to describe May. Along with October, it is one of the two best fishing months of the year in the high country of western North Carolina and east Tennessee. While the major hatches normally come from mid-afternoon to evening, fishing can be good throughout the day. It also should be remembered that the month often described as "merry" brings frequent showers to the Smokies. These normally lack the intensity and heavenly pyrotechnics of summer rains, and to be astream in a gentle spring rain is to be a player in a special time and place.

Unless lightning plays across the sky, continue fishing. The rain will wash terrestrials into the stream and often set off intense feeding. Also, brown trout love these times of low light and plentiful food, and leaving a stream because of a sudden shower or an all-day drizzle is a mistake. Unless or until sufficient rain has fallen to turn the water quite dingy, it behooves you to cast away with a will.

Spring fishing requires somewhat less finesse than will be the case in summer and the early part of the fall. Streams flowing at full spate, hungry fish, and the closest thing the relatively infertile waters ever come to predictable hatches mean the fly fisherman can get by with shorter casts, shorter leaders, bigger flies, and stronger tippets. A leader of eight or nine feet in length tapering to four-pound test tippet should be sufficient, while you will want dry flies in sizes 12 or 14.

FLIES

variation on another mountain favorite, the Cottontop Nymph.

*Zug Bug

*Hot Creek Special—Developed by Hendersonville’s Don Howell, as the name implies, this is a pattern for use in the hot, humid “Dog Days” of late summer.

*Smoky Mountain Forked Tail—A stonefly nymph imitation that mountain fly-tiers frequently used crow feathers to fashion, although most pattern books suggest wood duck feathers.

My personal preference is to have nymphs tied in beadhead fashion. The color of the bead possibly attracts attention, and it adds weight which helps get the nymph down deeper whether fished alone or as the trailing portion of a dry fly and dropper arrangement.

Turning to streamers, let’s begin with a bit of confession, which is supposedly good for the soul. While I’ll stoop to conquer, when it comes to use of streamers things have to be mighty slow before I’ll turn to stripping one. By the same token, the largest trout I have ever caught in the Smokies, by far, hit an Olive Matuka. With these thoughts on streamers having been duly shared, I’ll readily admit that they are the most consistent producers of big trout, thanks in part to the fact that, as Frank Young once put it when I asked why he was casting a Royal Wulff tied on a size 6 hook, “big trout like big bites.” That translates to flies imitating things such as minnows, crayfish, and salamanders, the primary dietary items of large trout. Good choices include the following:

*Muddler Minnow

*Matuka (black or olive)

*Wooly Booger (again, black or olive)

*Black-nosed Dace

The above listings are suggestions, nothing more. There are a number of helpful books available on traditional mountain patterns and recommended flies for fishing the southern Appalachians. You will find fuller details in the bibliography at the end of this book, and readers who also tie flies will find recipes aplenty in these and other works devoted to the fly-tying fraternity. There’s also a rich history associated with regional patterns, and as someone with roots in the Smokies and an adult life devoted to the study of the past, this intrigues me. I’ve been privileged to know great virtuosos of the vise such as Fred and Allene Hall, Bill Rolen, Benny Joe Craig, Cato Holler, Roger Lowe, the Howell clan (Dwight, Don, and Kevin), Marty Maxwell, and a host of others.

SAFETY, EQUIPMENT, AND RELATED MATTERS

Four of the above-named individuals, Holler, Lowe, and Don and Kevin Howell, have written books on mountain fly patterns, and their collective knowledge, accumulated over lifetimes of fishing, should be must reading for anyone seriously interested in tying. Add to their books L. J. DeCuir's *Southeastern Flies*, which involves a lot of research but has some historically inaccurate information as well, and you have a wealth of material on which to draw during your hours of armchair angling.

As I have already suggested, mine was an incredibly rich boyhood. I was blessed by growing up in a world well populated with devoted anglers and surrounded by the deep-rooted traditions of mountain fly fishing. Some of the fly-fishing heroes of my marvelously misspent youth served as informal mentors, and tales associated with the sport's regional history were almost daily fare.

Today ours seems a world obsessed with a fast-paced lifestyle that too often leaves little time for tradition, storytelling and respect for the past. Yet those of us who cherish the feel of the long rod or savor the music of whistling line and singing reel should pay careful heed to the lure and lore of fly-fishing history in the Smokies. With that thought firmly in mind, let's take a bit of a side trail for a longing look back at some of the endearing individuals and enduring traditions of the sport. These fishermen and their feats run as a bright thread through the fabric of high country sporting history.

Without question, Mark Cathey must be reckoned the best-known of all North Carolina fly fisherman. Yet it was the next generation, one of men in their fishing prime during the middle years of the 20th century, which really witnessed a breakthrough in terms of innovative fly tying and growing popularity for the dry-fly approach. It was during this period that Cap Wiese, the headmaster of Patterson School, was catching big trout with his Sheep Fly along with taking pioneering steps to give a fledgling conservation organization, Trout Unlimited, a foothold in the state. Sometimes known as the "Mark Cathey of Grandfather Mountain," Wiese perfected a technique that deserves far more attention than it gets today—fishing two dry flies in tandem.

Another notable fly fisherman was Marion's Cato Holler, who was among a founding national director for Trout Unlimited as well as the originator of a fly with the irresistible name of Infallible. Holler experimented with all sorts of unusual or offbeat materials, including the fur of a polar bear he killed on a hunt in the Arctic, and he was an early advocate of careful stream

FLIES

management with a section of Armstrong Creek he owned and operated as a private club. Holler's good fishing friends included Walker Blanton, one of the founders (with Holler) of the Lake Tahoma Club and a member of the Armstrong Creek Fishing Club; Alex Shenck of the Cane River Club, who owned several trout streams in the northwestern part of the state; and a whole host of nationally prominent figures. All of these sons of the Tar Heel soil also made regular trips to the GSMNP and recognized the Park as a true angling treasure.

Holler and Wiese had national connections, but there was another, less prominent, face of mountain fly fishing. This featured individuals who did most of their fishing in the Park, and theirs was the sport as I knew it during my boyhood. Thanks to the fact that my father was an avid Appalachian trout man, a representative sampling of these individuals became the fly-fishing heroes of my youth. Most are now deceased and largely forgotten except as local legends, but they typify those who popularized Tar Heel fly fishing and gave it a distinctive character.

Among them was Claude Gossett, my father's favorite fishing buddy and a character if there ever was one. He had an uncanny ability to cast with such finesse that the fly always fell to the water as delicately as a floating feather, and he was always experimenting with approaches that would make him a more effective fisherman. I remember fishing with him one day, after I had reached a reasonable degree of proficiency, when he made a comment that was a sort of angling epiphany. "You've gotten to the point where you can catch trout pretty well," he said, "but if you want to be really good you've got to change a bunch of things." Among the changes he suggested were use of much longer leaders (he regularly cast 16-foot leaders which he fashioned by linking eight or 10 sections of different-sized monofilament with blood knots), lengthening my casts when working larger pools, utilizing greater thoroughness in stream coverage, and, as he put it in his pithy way, "For goodness sake slow down. Trout fishing ain't a wading race." On another occasion, after having watched a mother mink with her kits, he commented: "Trout fishing always offers magic," he said, "and a lot of time it doesn't have anything to do with what you put in your creel."

Another of Dad's close friends was "Hop" Wiggins, whose long, lanky frame made wading turbulent waters simple and eating up the miles to remote headwaters a cinch. He was a participant in my first-ever overnight backpacking trip for

SAFETY, EQUIPMENT, AND RELATED MATTERS

trout, one where he debated carrying me and a friend across a crossing in Deep Creek known as “Deep Ford” on his shoulders. The stream was swollen from a summer downpour and he knew we boys couldn’t wade it. Ultimately we took a different route, and when I caught my first trout on a fly the following day, he was lavish in his praise and made a special point of seeing that it showed up on my plate that evening when we enjoyed a meal of fried fish.

Then there was an inseparable fishing pair from Waynesville, Alvin “Little Man” Miller and Levi Haynes. More than once I heard my father say: “If you want a fine limit of trout, you couldn’t make a better choice to catch it than one of these fellows.” Miller, who could roll cast with a precision that rendered overhanging limbs insignificant, was a pure joy to observe, and I learned a great deal about proper presentation of a fly in tight quarters from watching him. Sadly he died relatively young, but his erstwhile partner continued fishing with matchless intensity and passion.

After having saved for years to take a fishing trip out West to sample Montana’s fabled streams, Haynes came back and told his wife: “Sell everything; we are going to move to Montana for us to run a motel and for me to fish.” He did precisely that, residing in the little town of Gardiner on the edge of Yellowstone National Park for years, but as he remarked to me late in life with a wry grin, “Eventually these old mountains called me back home.” In later years any encounter with him was likely to be a memorable one, because he had a dog that accompanied him whenever he fished. Haynes’ canine companion even had a little backpack of its own for use in carrying food when the inseparable pair made overnight forays to remote trout waters. More than once I’ve heard experienced anglers say that Haynes was the finest fly fisherman they had ever seen.

Most of these men, and others I knew, were simple individuals who had known the economic rigors of the Depression and who never even approached affluence. They brought a great deal of thought, a sense of economy, and no small amount of innovation to their fly fishing. Many tied their own flies, and at least one, Bryson City’s Fred Hall, earned a livelihood from the sport. In partnership with his wife, Allene, Hall made a decent living for many years with a mom-and-pop operation that monthly produced hundreds of dozens of flies. These included several patterns closely identified with the couple, notably original creations in the Thunderhead and Adams Variant. Their primary customers were local anglers and

FLIES

sporting goods stores, but their flies were of such high quality that eventually word-of-mouth advertising led to extensive mail sales. Interestingly, Fred was only an indifferent fisherman, and to my knowledge Allene never fished at all.

Another popular Smokies' pattern which can be specifically linked to the fly's originator is the Little River Ant. Developed by Newport, Tennessee tier and fisherman Kirk Jenkins, it features a black ant carrying an egg sac and is tied using sponge rubber and crow wing. Jenkins once told me, "I just get feathers off any of them old crows." Jenkins, who loved to fish Greenbrier, started tying flies in the early 1950s, relying in part on supplies from Herter's and on materials he could obtain locally himself. The Little River Ant is but one of a number of patterns he developed, with another noted one being a black stone fly imitation. Jenkins was also noted for the manner in which he readily shared his skills with aspiring young fly fishermen and tiers living in east Tennessee.

As these individuals such as Fred Hall and Kirk Jenkins aged, a new generation of fly fishermen emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. They carried the common sense approach to fishing and willingness to experiment, develop new flies, and extend their education in the school of the outdoors to an even higher level. Two Hendersonville brothers, Dwight and Don Ray Howell, became accomplished fly-tiers who produced a number of new patterns along with making meaningful variants to existing ones. They also exhibited an uncanny knack for taking really big trout with great consistency.

In nearby Waynesville, Benny Joe Craig quietly worked his way toward becoming a true virtuoso of the vise. In many senses his "make do with what you have" approach to fly-tying and willingness to utilize ersatz materials epitomized mountain ingenuity at its best. Examples from his fly tying included using the bright red band on Lucky Strike cigarettes in fashioning Royal Coachman flies, "rescuing" rabbit hair ladies' coats from racks in Salvation Army stores for material, and encouraging friends who hunted to save the fur and feathers from anything they killed. Indeed, in Craig's tying room you would find scores of example of materials, many of them items originally intended for the dumpster, from which he crafted highly effective flies. "It's amazing," he once told me, "how many kinds of material can be used to tie flies. I grew up 'making do' with whatever you had, and I've brought the same philosophy to my fly tying."

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Indian Creek

USGS MAPS: Bryson City, Clingmans Dome, Smokemont

DeLORME: Page 28

COUNTY MAPS: Swain County

ACCESS: Indian Creek empties into lower Deep Creek an easy walk of a half mile from the parking lot at the lower Deep Creek trailhead. Once you reach the juncture of the two streams, the Indian Creek Trail turns to the right and, for most of its 3.7 miles of length, follows the stream quite closely. The one exception is a gorge, roughly two miles upstream, where the road climbs the ridge well above the stream. It is accessible by other trail systems as well, but they require a longer, and from the fisherman's perspective, less practical, hike.

BASES OF OPERATION: Until quite recently there were no designated campsites on Indian Creek, but the addition of backcountry campsites #46 and #51 has changed that situation. One of these, #46, is located four miles up the stream at the turnaround on the gravel road occasionally used by Park vehicles. It makes a fine location for the angler who wants to sample Indian Creek's headwaters. Of course foot access poses no problem since the reasonably fit angler can access any part of this stream, except its uppermost, off-trail reaches, with ease. For those who

STREAMS OF THE SMOKIES--NORTH CAROLINA

come to visit and want more than a day's exposure, the drive-in campground just beyond the entrance to the Park on lower Deep Creek is available, or the many motels, guest houses, and bed-and-breakfast operations in and near Bryson City are logical options.

Despite the fact that Indian Creek was the "home water" of legendary angler Mark Cathey, today probably not one local angler in a hundred could locate either the old Cathey home place, where he lived on the stream a few hundred yards above Indian Creek Falls, or the Cathey Hole. This was one of the larger pools on the stream's lower reaches, and it is still known to dwindling numbers of old timers by the name of the man who owned narrow strips of land on both sides of the creek at this point.

For those who might be interested, Uncle Mark's property extended from the juncture of Indian Creek with Deep Creek well past the bridge which today crosses the former a short way above the falls. The stream Cathey called his own and where he practiced the dance of the dry fly in his inimitable way has, over the years, become increasingly difficult to fish. As old farmsteads have become overgrown, banks that were quite open when I was a boy fishing this stream two or three times a week have been overtaken by rhododendrons. There are places in Indian Creek which defy even the most adroit of bow-and-arrow casters or the deftest of dappers. However, for those willing to fight through such obstacles and walk around a surprisingly large beaver impoundment a mile up the stream, ample rewards await them.

Thanks to the barrier formed by the strikingly beautiful falls near the mouth of Indian Creek, it is a stream that contains nothing but rainbows for virtually all of its drainage. They are here in great abundance. Once or twice each summer, as much for reasons of nostalgia as anything, I rig up my first fly rod, a South Bend 7½ footer made of Tonkin cane, and head for the waters of this stream that provided me so much pleasure during my boyhood. It was here I caught my first limit of trout (it was seven fish at the time), caught my first decent-sized rainbow of a foot or so in length, and learned many of the basics of small stream tactics and techniques.

Such outings offer a wonderful day's worth of nostalgia, but they also invariably produce plenty of fish. Provided I am careful and make a decent cast, every pool and modest run produces a strike or two, and there is simple pleasure to be derived from having to cast through cobwebs. That offers a telltale sign of little fishing pressure. A full day of fishing Indian Creek usually produces somewhere between 30 and 50 trout. Most of them will

INDIAN CREEK

be in the 4- to 8-inch range but an occasional “trophy” 10-incher always stirs the soul.

By most standards of measurement, at least if you calculate by numbers instead of size, that’s a good day of fishing. There’s the additional bonus of these being some of the most brilliantly color rainbows found anywhere in the Park. Then too, you can take quiet comfort in knowing that you are wading and casting in the footsteps of Uncle Mark Cathey. Think about this wonderful character and at some point during the day, you may want to do what has become standard Indian Creek practice for me; namely, tie on the fly he used almost exclusively, a Grey Hackle Yellow, and dance it over the surface of a larger pool in imitation of his highly effective technique. Chances are you will be rewarded with a fish which provides a piece of time travel taking you back a full century.

While on Indian Creek, make a point of observing the vestiges of a world we have lost. This might involve a visit to the Queen Cemetery near where the trail ends. A side trail leads a few hundred yards to the site. Alternatively, stop to admire boxwoods marking an old home place on the upper part of Indian Creek Trail or, if it is early spring or far enough into the fall for leaves to have fallen, venture off the trail and check out the foundations of homes now gone for three quarters of a century.

For the fisherman who also enjoys hiking, it might be noted that the Indian Creek area is exceptionally well served by trails. The Martins Gap Trail leads northwestward from Indian Creek to the Bryson Place, while a loop trail lower down carries one from Indian Creek to the bridge at the upper end of the Jenkins Fields on Deep Creek. You can also make a climb out of the valley to Stone Pile Gap, where this trail intersects with the Thomas Divide Trail. Finally, there’s the Deepplow Gap Trail, which connects the Deep Creek watershed with that of the Oconaluftee, offering access to the Park portion of Cooper Creek along the way.

GETTING BACK OF BEYOND: Although it is readily accessible throughout most of its fishable length, in reality all of Indian Creek fits this description. There are still trout in the trickle of a stream above where the Indian Creek Trail ends at the Martins Gap Trail, which crosses the ridge to the Bryson Place on Deep Creek. However, in these upper reaches you will have to use the stream as your trail. The reason for what at first glance seems unjustifiable in terms of being “back of beyond” is a simple one. Almost no one fishes this stream.

CHAPTER 45

Road Prong

USGS MAPS: Mt. Le Conte and Clingmans Dome

DeLORME: Page 44

COUNTY MAPS: Sevier County

ACCESS: Access to Road Prong begins at the parking area for the Chimney Tops Trail along Highway 441, and for the first nine-tenths of a mile, until you reach an area known as Beech Flats, where the stream slows its generally precipitous course for a time, you actually follow this trail. This manway is a part of the old Oconaluftee Turnpike, and it is only at Beech Flats that the named Road Prong Trail begins. It continues to follow the stream quite closely while heading towards Indian Gap and the Appalachian Trail. Notable physical features along the way include Indian Grave Flats and Trickling Falls at the quarter-mile mark. Just under a half mile farther upstream you come to Talking Falls. The trail crosses and recrosses Road Prong numerous times.

BASES OF OPERATION: Gatlinburg is the nearest town, with Pigeon Forge and Cherokee, North Carolina, also being situated an hour's drive or less away. The nearest campgrounds are at Elkmont, Cosby, and on the North Carolina side, Smokemont. No backcountry campsites figure into the picture for this stream.

STREAMS OF THE SMOKIES--TENNESSEE

Long before the first Europeans penetrated the looming vastness of the main range of the Great Smokies, the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River was a primary pathway for trans-mountain travel. So it continues today, with Highway 441 snaking its way from Newfound Gap down to where Walker Camp Prong and Road Prong join to mark the beginning of the West Prong. Those unfamiliar with the area might conclude, based on names, that the only highway to intersect the heart of the GSMNP followed Road Prong. Such is not the case, for the upper reaches of the Tennessee section of Highway 441 closely parallel Walker Camp Prong.

The explanation for this seeming anomaly lies deeply rooted in history. Until the construction of Highway 441, Road Prong was the primary route through the heart of the Smokies, although calling it a "road," at least by modern standards, might be stretching things a bit. It is at least possible that as far back as the 16th century, when the Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto visited the region, he used this pathway. Certainly Horace Kephart, an indefatigable researcher, concluded such was the case. "It now seems likely," he wrote, "that De Soto in 1540, went up the Lufty, through Indian Gap and out into Tennessee."

Whether or not this was the case, the old Indian trace, which had crossed the mountains since before the memory of man, followed Road Prong. It was widened and in some small degree improved in 1830 and became a toll road known as the Oconaluftee Turnpike. Three decades later, during the Civil War, the road underwent further changes, including some route alterations. Ironically, the men responsible for this effort, as native Cherokees who were a remnant remaining behind after the Trail of Tears years, were direct descendants of the original travelers along this trail. Some six hundred of them, members of the Thomas Legion, led by Colonel William "Little Will" Thomas, used the basic route of the ancient trace to hack out a road through some of the roughest area in the Smokies.

During most of the war the road, which became variously known at the Oconaluftee Turnpike and the Thomas Road, was used primarily to transport ammunition. This was a region of decidedly divided loyalties, and in 1864, after some skirmishing in the Cherokee, North Carolina, area, Union troops in retreat forced several local Native Americans to guide them in their retreat across the Smokies. Along the way one of the captive

STREAMS OF THE SMOKIES--TENNESSEE

guides was shot, and the pursuing Confederate soldiers found him dying on the path. He was buried in a spot now known as Indian Grave Flats.

Today any angler who walks along the Road Prong Trail, even in its lower and less-rugged reaches, has to be struck by what it must have been like to move cannons, wagons, or large quantities of goods over this path. Ken Wise, in his *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*, captures it quite nicely. "The hardships they endured cannot be overestimated. Lurching and groaning down the steep, rough road, wagons would often reach some point beyond which progress was impossible. Or worse, they would slide on the slick boulders, spilling their contents into the creek, or, under the stress and strain of hauling over an uneven surface, they would collapse over a snapped axle." Passage during the coldest months of the year was impossible, since this is one of the Park's heaviest rainfall/snowfall areas, and icy rocks make things extremely treacherous.

For the fisherman, though, access to Road Prong is simple and not overly strenuous. It does need to be noted, however, that big boulders, lots of plunge pools, and dead hemlocks which have fallen across the stream present challenges as you wade upstream. Call it Chimney Tops Trail or Road Prong Trail, though, there are two things of interest and note to the fisherman. First, nine-tenths of a mile of the Chimney Tops Trail, plus the entire Road Prong Trail, uses the same route as the ancient trace. Secondly, for the entire fishable length of Road Prong, there is always a trail nearby. That means once you have completed your day's angling, the start of a relatively easy hike back out to the trailhead is mere yards away. If there is a downside to this, it is that the angler is visible to passers-by headed to Chimney Tops, but once you reach the nine-tenths of a mile mark and the trail there diverges from Road Prong, that little negative disappears.

Road Prong, like other streams in this immediate part of the Park, makes things comparatively easy on the fisherman. Thanks to the occasional near cloudburst up on the main ridge, along with the precipitous nature of the way the creek drops, vegetation stays well back from the normal stream flow. That makes for easier casting than might be expected on what ranks as a medium to small creek by Smokies standards, and there's not nearly as much of what my Grandpa Joe used to term "fishing for squirrels" as you might expect. Instead

ROAD PRONG

of fighting rhododendron reaching over the entire creek and relying on bow-and-arrow casts to present a fly, you can actually work out some line and cast from a reasonable distance in most places. The only major exception to that, especially in Road Prong's lower reaches, comes in the form of the occasional fallen hemlock.

The fisherman has two quarries in this lovely stream of huge boulders, tumbling waters, plunge pools, and the occasional waterfall. It contains both rainbows and specks. In the lower reaches 'bows are predominant, although any given cast might bring a strike from the lovely little speckled jewels, adorned with halo-encircled red spots and striking olive markings atop their backs, which old-timers simply referred to as mountain trout. The farther you progress upstream, the greater the preponderance of specks. Indeed, from the standpoint of accessibility and ease of fishing, I would rate Road Prong one of the top streams in the Park for catching specks. Bobby Kilby gives it an "A" rating, and more than one local angler with whom I've chatted confides that it ranks high among their favorite streams.

Here, as is true at higher elevations and in smaller waters throughout the Smokies, it is presentation rather than pattern which matters most. Put a fly in the right place, get a good, drag-free drift, and if trout are on the prod a strike will be your reward. Mind you, making the right presentation can sometimes be a problem, and overall that poses Road Prong's biggest challenge. You will find that plenty of exertion, more than a fair share of climbing, and negotiating rough moves from one lovely pool to the next will be your lot. But keep a low profile, land your fly in likely spots, and cover the water carefully—your rewards will be not merely adequate but ample.

A skilled Smokies angler can reasonably expect 30- to 50-fish days on Road Prong. Mind you, a goodly portion of them will be smaller than the minimum of seven inches required to go towards meeting a limit of five "keeper" trout, but for those who savor solitude and enjoy catching specks amidst breathtakingly beautiful surroundings, that's of little concern.

You can cover virtually all of Road Prong's fishable water, its lower two and a half miles or so, in a long day's outing. For most, though, a mile or so on this rugged creek will be action and exertion aplenty. With that in mind, my suggestion would be to sample and enjoy this lovely little creek by taking one of

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two approaches. The first would find you beginning at the mouth of Road Prong and covering the water from there up to Beech Flats. The second would involve hiking the mile involved in reaching Beech Flats and working your way from there upstream into the headwaters. Either way, Road Prong lets you get the feeling of being back of beyond without requiring the hikes of many miles necessary to get to most comparable destinations.

GETTING BACK OF BEYOND: Although accessible by trail for all its drainage, Road Prong can still have considerable appeal to the angler wishing an escape to little-pressured waters. There are crowds, to be sure, but they are headed toward Chimney Tops or, on the Road Prong Trail proper, coming from or going to the Appalachian Trail at Indian Gap. Seldom will you encounter another fisherman, especially if you are out on a week day.

APPENDIX 3

reveal the location of a number of designated backcountry campsites lying alongside streams, and these are denoted by CS.

LIST OF FIGURES FOR STREAM ELEVATIONS

Figure Location

NC-1	Twentymile Creek
NC-2	Eagle Creek
NC-3	Hazel Creek
NC-4	Forney Creek
NC-5	Noland Creek
NC-6	Deep Creek
NC-7	Deep Creek and feeders
NC-8	Comparison of major Fontana Lake feeder streams
NC-9	Oconaluftee
NC-10	Bradley Fork
NC-11	Raven Fork and feeders
NC-12	Straight Fork
NC-13	Oconaluftee and major feeder streams
NC-14	Cataloochee Creek
NC-15	Little Cataloochee Creek
NC-16	Caldwell Fork
NC-17	Palmer Creek
NC-18	Rough Fork
NC-19	Cataloochee and feeders
NC-20	Big Creek, Swallow Fork, and Gunter Fork

Figure Location

TN-1	Abrams Creek
TN-2	Abrams Creek and feeders
TN-3	West Prong of Little River
TN-4	Middle Prong of Little River and feeders
TN-5	East Prong of Little River
TN-6	Upper section of East Prong of Little River and feeders
TN-7	West Prong of Little Pigeon and feeders
TN-8	Le Conte Creek
TN-9	Roaring Fork
TN-10	Little Pigeon, Middle Prong of Little Pigeon and feeders
TN-11	Porters Creek
TN-12	Cosby Creek

Figure NC-1. Twentymile Creek (B)

