

Ramblings from a Rookie

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April 23, 2017

Whoa,tauga!

Caddis, trichoptera, sedge-flies, and rail-flies; whatever your name for this pattern, there's nothing I can write about it that hasn't been written 1,000 times before. I CAN mention how underappreciated that this particular pattern was by me until last week, when I found myself on the Watauga River in Elizabethton having possibly the best day of fishing I've experienced.

I was fortunate enough to spend 3 days in northeast Tennessee, surrounded by a group of anglers, who are far more experienced than me, and the best tail waters of the eastern seaboard. I participated in a Carolina Fly Fishing Club outing to Bluff City, TN from April 18 to April 20. For 2 days on private and public water of the South Holston, the group went in search of the elusive gigantic Brown trout that the S. Holston is famous for. Efforts mainly resulted in 9-11" Bows, with a few Browns averaging the same length, minus a couple of 13-15" Browns. Hardly the hogs we'd heard about.

By day 3, I was surprised to learn that NO ONE in the group had ever fished the Watauga River, a short drive of about 13 miles away. Was the mighty S. Holston, with its prolific Sulphur hatches and mammoth browns, overshadowing the opportunities of the Watauga? Granted, both rivers are highly demanding. Both have scheduled, and unscheduled releases, requiring you to "chase generations" in order to prevent the angler from becoming a life buoy while wading. Both rivers require stealth and matching the hatch, along with delicate presentation.

So why was this body of water historically overlooked by a group of seasoned anglers? The entire group decided to embark on a new patch of water, and soon learned why wading access is a premium on the Watauga. Gorge-like, and deeper than the S. Holston, even during non-generations, any location where Mother Nature didn't prevent access, "No Trespassing" signs did.

After spending half of the day at Wilbur Dam access, with minimal success and even less accessible water, I resigned to head home. Bound for North Carolina, I passed a gravel parking lot underneath a bridge marking the entrance to Elizabethton. Curiosity and an unwillingness to admit defeat caused me to reroute my vehicle towards the parking lot. While traversing the current upriver, I spied a series of textbook riffles split by an island of Rhododendrons and Laurels. After choosing the left bank and getting into a stable position, I proceeded to release my dry-dropper rig into the current and strip line off of the reel. After 3 long strips, I noticed my line travelling

across stream before I had a chance to do a preliminary cast. This was indicative of my next hour and a half.

The initial Bow broke off my #22 purple zebra midge, #14 black elk hair caddis, and 4 feet of 5.5x Trout Hunter tippet. If you are familiar with Trout Hunter, you know it to be no easy feat. After using dry-droppers, double and triple nymph rigs for 2 days, I decided to scale back to a single #12 black elk hair caddis. Averaging 1-2 casts into the busy riffles brought forth the most voracious takes I've ever seen. This resulted in 7 missed strikes and 20+ takes, consisting of 13-15" Bows and 2 wild browns. The late afternoon generation arrived, causing an early, albeit laughably sloppy, exit from the river. Driving home through the Smokies, gave me time to reflect and process that busy afternoon.

Whether is refining casts, learning new tying methods, scouting locations, or reading water, priorities of an angler are always changing and adapting. I learned 3 very important lessons that afternoon:

1. Don't be afraid to simplify your rig
2. Travel off the beaten path, regardless of history and reputation of the more popular waters
3. Pay attention to TVA scheduled releases

Don't let the hype of the S. Holston and the limitation of wading access overshadow the opportunities offered by the Watauga.

CFFC has a 4 day camping trip at Camp Stonefly in Johnson City, TN from 6/22/17 to 6/25/17. Registration deadline is 5/18/17. The cost is \$35 per tent. You can register here:

www.cffc.memberlodge.com/event-2448891

