



Winter Trout Fishing

Story and photos by
Harry Murray

If you enjoy solitude on the trout streams and matching your wits against large trout, you should seriously consider fly fishing for them in the winter. From November through January you can find very gratifying action throughout the Old Dominion. In order for you to take advantage of this exciting fishing, let's begin in November and fish our way through January examining the various tactics, fly patterns, and the types of

streams that will give you good action.

The large stocked streams, such as Big Stoney Creek west of Edinburg and the Bullpasture River in the gorge, hold many nice rainbow trout that feed heavily on small minnows in the deep pools immediately below the riffles as the water cools during the winter. A very productive way to fish these areas is to enter the stream right below the riffles and cast streamers such as a Pearl Marauder in size 12 or

Murray's Olive Strymph in size 10 straight across the stream. After it sinks deeply, swim it back across the stream by stripping it six inches every five seconds. By fishing all the way downstream through the deep pools in this way, you can catch many nice rainbow trout in the large streams.

The "delayed harvest" streams such as Passage Creek and Back Creek are excellent in November. Watch the flat sec-



The author finds that in order to consistently catch large trout in the winter, he needs to use flies that match the natural foods upon which they feed. By dressing warmly, the author was able to catch many nice trout on this winter day.

tions of the pools in the evenings and you'll often spot trout rising to sip natural midges from the surface of the stream. A very exciting way to fish for these trout is to use a Mr. Rapidan Midge in size 20 or RS 2 Pupa in size 20 on a 9-foot, 7X leader and go one on one with each rising trout. Be sure to use a cautious approach and a

delicate presentation because these trout are often very wary.

The "delayed harvest" streams can give you great action throughout the day by fishing right below the riffles with nymphs such as the Causal Dress in size 10 and the Murray's Cranefly Larva in sizes 12 and 14. Fish these upstream and

dead drift along the stream bottom using two Scientific Anglers indicators spread at three and six feet above the nymph on a 9-foot, 5X knotted tapered leader in order to detect the strikes.

The mountain brook trout streams can be excellent in late November. Since these trout often have not finished spawning until the middle of November, most anglers believe it is not wise to stress them by fishing for them until after this. You can usually catch these trout on dry flies from the middle of November into the first or second week of December. Dependable flies at this time are the Murray's Flying Beetle in sizes 14 and 16 and the McMurray Cinnamon Ants in sizes 16 and 18. From the middle of December through January you can catch some trout in the mountain streams on nymphs such

In January you can catch trout in small headwater streams by fishing nymphs deeply.



as the Red Squirrel in size 12 and the Bead Head Zug Bug in size 14 by fishing these along the stream bottom in the deep pools. However, the action will be very slow because of the cold water.

During December and January the beatis mayfly hatches become very heavy on some tailwater streams and large freestone streams which have large springs flowing into them. These hatches are at their best on heavily overcast days because the low light levels prompt the nymphs to emerge from the stream bottom. Since large trout prefer to feed on overcast days, this is a perfect situation for you to get great fishing.

Explore different sections of the stream when the beatis hatch is on because some areas can have clouds of emerging duns and many rising trout while another stretch of the stream a hundred yards away may produce only a few flies with no feeding fish. I've encountered this often and have never been able to explain it because both sections of the streams appear to have the same bottom composition and flow rates.

During the beginning of the beatis hatch each day when the adults are sparse, you can catch many nice trout on a Blue Wing Olive Nymph in size 18. Position yourself about a hundred feet downstream of where the springs enter the stream and fish upstream using a 9-foot, 6X leader. After the nymph sinks deeply, use a slow lifting and dropping rod tip motion as the current pushes it downstream. Your goal is to make your nymph look like a real beatis nymph swimming up from the stream bottom. To aid in detecting the trout's strike, retrieve it slightly faster than the current is pushing it. Also use two Scientific Anglers indicators on your leader to help see the trout's subtle take. Once the hatch is in full swing and you can see many rising trout, switch over to a Beatis Parachute Dry in size 18 or a Blue Wing Olive Dry in size 18 and go one on one with each feeding trout.

The author fishing for a large brown trout that he spotted feeding on natural cress bugs in the winter



Many of the delayed harvest streams, tail waters and put-and-take trout streams throughout the state have sections where the trout feed heavily on natural cress bugs and shrimp throughout the winter. These are usually stretches of the streams downstream from where rich springs flow into them. In some cases, such as on Big Stoney Creek at Lantz Mill, these springs flow into the streams from the streamside banks, and they are easy to spot by the lush green vegetation along the bank.

My favorite way to fish these areas is to wade into the stream about a hundred feet downstream of the spring and wade upstream ten feet from the bank looking for feeding trout as I go. This feeding is manifested in one of two ways. You may spot a slight splashing commotion on the surface of the stream created by the trout's tail as he turns to take the shrimp and cress bugs from the aquatic

vegetation, or you may spot a short stream of discolored water streaming downstream as the trout roots the bugs from the stream bottom where the grass is attached.

In either case I use the same tactic. I cautiously move in close enough to actually spot the trout. From here I watch him feed for several minutes to assure that I haven't scared him with my approach and to make sure that I have accurately identified his location. As he continues to feed, I cast my Shenk's Cress Bug in size 16 two feet upstream of his location and watch him closely as my fly drifts downstream to him. When I see him turn to take my fly or "white it" as he opens his mouth to take it, I set the hook quickly. This is very exciting fishing, so don't feel embarrassed if you get a little rattled when you begin using this ploy. Seeing a 20-inch brown trout feeding on natural cress bugs 30 feet away in water two feet deep can cause the most experi-

enced angler to become nervous.

In some of our large trout streams these springs enter in the stream bottom, and you will often detect them unexpectedly as you wade the stream. The stream immediately below them will be cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter than the rest of the stream. When you find these underwater springs, mark them carefully by some physical feature such as large streamside trees or unusual boulders in the stream. This way you'll know exactly where to fish them the next time you are on the stream because by the time you wade close enough to feel the spring the first time, you have scared the trout.

These stream bottom springs are easy to fish. Wade into the stream to position yourself 40 feet upstream of them and 20 degrees to the side. There are usually more natural shrimps here than cress bugs, so use a shrimp pattern in size 14 on a 9-foot, 5X leader. Cast down and across at a 20-degree angle so your fly falls at the near side on the upstream section of the spring. After your shrimp sinks deeply, use a very slow retrieve to crawl it across the stream bottom. Gradually lengthen your casts and wade downstream using this same angle and fly action on successive casts until you have covered the whole area thoroughly downstream 30 feet of the spring. At the slightest hint of a take, set the hook quickly but gently because often some large trout feed here.

Winter trout fishing can be some of the most challenging and gratifying angling of the whole year. Try it and I believe you will agree.

Harry Murray is a renowned fly fisherman, author, and fly tyer. He resides in Edinburg, Virginia.

Our Snowflake Theory of Investment Management...

Each Portfolio
is as Unique
as the Individual
It's Working For

No two families are alike, so we believe that no two portfolios should be alike, either. We select from a variety of investment opportunities to create an individual strategy that blends achievement of goals with peace of mind.

Personal attention combined with our independent, disciplined, investment approach makes us uniquely qualified to help you and your family reach for the sky.

**A.N. CULBERTSON
& COMPANY, INC.**

INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT
FINANCIAL PLANNING
434-972-7766

www.anculbertson.com

ALAN N. CULBERTSON ■ GEORGE L. PAYNE, JR. ■ GEORGE H. KIDDER, JR.