

## Lower Burney Creek

### More of a challenge than you might think

*An enormous brown trout was found dead on the bank of Lower Burney Creek. The fish was 39-inches long and had a girth of 22-inches. Fishery Biologists determined the fish died of old age.*

— *The Intermountain News*

### Special Water

Lower Burney Creek beneath Burney Falls is where you'll experience fly fishing heaven on Earth. Located in McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park, the creek is productive and picturesque, a tranquil spot that can be rewarding for fly fishers. Surprisingly, however, it's a destination visited by very few anglers each season. I have fished here for over 20-years and can summarize the reason for the lack of fishing pressure in three words: Double Black Diamond



In the United States we use a color-shape rating for ski trails. As a fly-fishing destination, Lower Burney Creek would rate as a double black diamond, a designation that speaks to the level of difficulty involved in catching wild trout there and that signifies the highly advanced skills required.

The mouth of Lower Burney Creek flows into Lake Britton. Trout gather together in the vicinity of the inflow, where cold creek water enters the lake. Lake Britton is home to some hefty-sized fish, and is fed by the Pit River and Hat Creek, both celebrated trout waters. These connections increase a dedicated angler's chance of catching and releasing trophy trout.

**Brown Trout release, Lower Burney Creek. To be successful an angler must learn to move upstream without spooking fish; tread lightly and keep a low profile.**



### **Technique**

When I fish Lower Burney Creek I practice the art of stealth and always fish heading upstream. Working upstream places me behind fish and allows me to see the layout of the water ahead. I plan my course, move slowly, and try to keep my shadow off the water. I can't over-emphasize how important a slow careful approach, combined with short casts, is for success.

My outfit consists of a 7.5 foot, 3-weight fly rod with six-foot leader. The size of the creek demands use of a shorter rod. Use a longer rod, and you will spend most of your time removing flies from trees and vegetation. Trying to make long casts will just result in frustration. Success will come from roll casting, and remember to keep the length of casts to within 10 or 15 feet. Since water clarity is exceptional, I prefer tippet sizes that are 6X or smaller. Fishing close in extremely clear water adds to the excitement of seeing a trout come up from below to take your fly.

I begin fishing Lower Burney Creek with a dry fly. A dry fly allows me to cover a vast area of water without spooking entire pools or runs. Two dry fly patterns I have had continued success with are an Adams Grey Drake Emerger and a Tan Elk Hair Caddis. Nymph patterns I prefer are Pheasant Tails and Bead Head Hare's Ears. Additionally, when I fish a creek or small stream I pay more attention to terrestrial insects. The banks of lower Burney Creek are alive with crickets, beetles, and ants, as well as seasonal aquatic insects such as stoneflies. Many fall from overhanging vegetation to hungry trout below. As on most creeks, you'll do better placing your fly where it needs to be, rather than mulling over pattern selection.

The challenges imposed by learning to fish lower Burney Creek will make you a better fly fisher. Regardless of your skill level, however anyone who values a natural setting will experience pleasurable fly fishing here. The challenge, absolute beauty and relative ease of accessibility will keep you coming back.

### **Location / Directions / Notes**

When the McArthur family gifted land for use as a state park they stipulated one condition: provide free public access. Here's where to find it - from the Highway 299/89 junction, turn north on Highway 89 and travel 4.3 miles to Clark Creek Road. Turn left and proceed 1.8 miles. You will arrive at a McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park trailhead. The small parking lot can accommodate about ten vehicles. A short hike along the trail will bring you to the middle of lower Burney Creek, between the base of the falls and Lake Britton. An alternate trail leads you above the falls and across a footbridge close to the Park's main entrance. McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial Park has campsites, restrooms w/showers, a general store, and visitor center.

The waters of upper Burney Creek are well stocked with hatchery trout. If you become frustrated fishing the lower section of the creek, move to the upper and fish the section of water adjacent to the "pump house."

The facilities at Lake Britton include a boat ramp, seasonal boat rentals, and roped-off swimmer's beach. Nearby waters to fly fish include the Pit River, Hat Creek, and Baum Lake, to name a few.

**Burney Falls defines the upper limit of Lower Burney Creek. The falls continues to flow at the same rate all year long – about 100 million gallons daily. President Teddy Roosevelt described Burney Falls as “The Eighth Wonder of the World.”**



### **Burney Creek’s Camp Britton**

On the western shore of Burney Cove across from diatomaceous earth cliffs lies Camp Britton, today owned and operated by and for PG&E’s Public Service Employee Association. But it has a long relationship with California fisheries. The building was originally built in 1907 by the United States Forest Service for use as a silver salmon hatchery. In those days, there were no dams to interfere with the spawning migration of salmon. Salmon made their way up the Sacramento River into the Pit River and then up Burney Creek, ultimately becoming trapped at the base of Burney Falls. Here they were caught and harvested at the Burney Creek Hatchery.

In 1922, PG&E began constructing dams in the area and the hatchery was converted to a dormitory for workers. Then, in 1928, the property came under ownership of the State of California. The facility was again used as a fish hatchery, this time for trout. The hatchery had 100 troughs capable of raising millions of fingerling trout. During the late 1950’s, a land swap took place involving the current site of Camp Britton and property in the Hat Creek drainage. Camp Britton became PG&E property and Crystal Lake was established as the site for a new hatchery that is still in use today.

**Burney Creek Fish Hatchery, Shasta County, CA**



**Interior Burney Creek Fish Hatchery, Shasta County, CA**

