

## The Lower McCloud River at Ash Camp

### An overview of fishing this section of a storied trout river

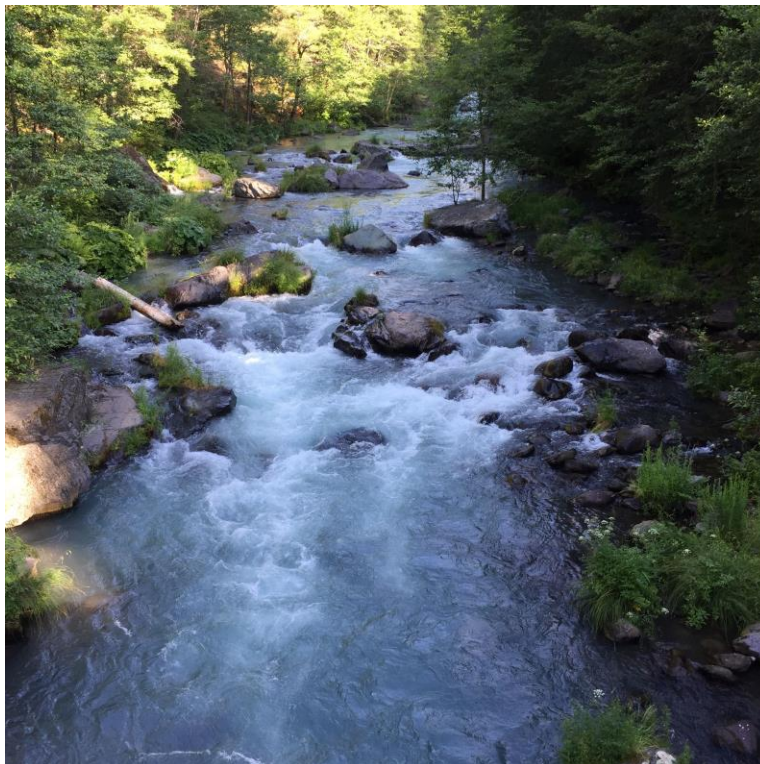
*You can never appreciate the shade of a tree unless you sweat in the sun.*

— Author Unknown

#### Conditions

The summer heat hit hard in McCloud this past Fourth of July. I expected that combined with drought conditions, the 98-to-101 degree temperatures and low water levels would make angling a challenge as I set out to fish the Lower McCloud River. Because low water flow and rising temperatures combine to stress trout, I planned to fish the water above Ash Camp during the cool morning hours. This section below the dam lies in a deep canyon with limited morning sunshine. Unfortunately, by the time I entered the river, the sun had risen high, and the air temperature was exceptionally hot.

The lower McCloud River at the Ash Camp footbridge.



## Gear and Strategy

Whenever I fish rivers and streams in hot weather I wet wade. On hot days when flows are low and water temperatures rise, I try to fish the deepest water available, because trout tend to gravitate there, where the water is deeper and cooler, and toward shade. And when flows are low, I tend to stay out of the water as much as possible. Disturbances made by wading in low flows spooks trout. To minimize stress, I land fish quickly and keep them in the water.

**The author blends in with his surroundings and attempts to keep a low profile. In low-water conditions trout are easily startled. Wear drab or camouflage clothing and stay hidden. If possible, stay out of the water.**



My outfit consisted of a 9-foot 5-weight fly rod with 10 feet of 6X leader attached to floating line. I was able to sink my fly to where the fish were holding, but getting a strike was more hit and miss. Fly patterns that work well here on intensely hot days usually include Pale Morning Duns and Little Yellow Stones. After several changes, though, I found a pattern that consistently brought hits and stuck with it throughout the day. It was a prospecting pattern that I was shown by the late David Brown of Trout Country Fly Shop in Johnson Park, near Burney. His wife Janet tied it. The design is a classic Pheasant Tail Nymph on a size 18 to 20 scud hook using red thread and a red wire rib.



David called his creation “trout candy” and I cannot recall a body of trout water I have fished where this pattern hasn’t drawn a strike or two. About eight inches above the nymph, I fastened one number 4 split shot. That’s it: one fly - one split shot. That is how I was rigged for the remainder of the day. I’ve come to practice simplicity when fly fishing for trout and tend to stay away from indicators and dropper rigs. I believe the fewer odds and ends attached to my line, the better.

**This large rainbow trout was released immediately after the photograph was taken. The fish remained in the water while the barbless hook was removed with forceps.**



## **Presentation**

Presentation of your fly on the McCloud River is just as important as the fly pattern you select, if not more important. I’ve learned to limit my casts on this stretch of water to quartering upstream and quartering downstream. Rarely do I use direct upstream, downstream, or across-current casts on the Lower McCloud. A quartering upstream cast is a great way to avoid drag and the unnatural movement of your fly. Quartering upstream is also the most common cast I’ve observed anglers use when fly fishing for trout in rivers and works equally well in both slow and fast-moving water.

**The author quartering downstream.**



A quartering downstream cast was the presentation the fish preferred July Fourth, though. It allowed my fly to swing across the current, instead of traveling in the same direction as the current. The action imitates the behavior of an emerging insect. As my fly swung, I followed it with my rod tip, and at the end of the swing, I allowed it to sit for a moment. Strikes tend to occur at the end of the swing.

**Quartering downstream was the presentation fish preferred this hot summer day.**



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

Wading the Lower McCloud River wet on a hot day was wonderful, and the river is a great place to fish that time of year. Surprisingly, while fishing the section from the Ash Camp footbridge toward the dam, I crossed paths with only one other angler. However, if you are planning to spend the night there, keep in mind that the campground is frequented by nonanglers - campers, birders, and more. Ash Camp lies adjacent to the Pacific Crest Trail, and while rigging up, I encountered a fatigued young man trekking his way to Canada. He appeared puzzled when I asked him if he thought he could handle carrying additional weight, then grinned from ear to ear as I reached into my chest pack and handed him a frozen-solid water bottle. Someone coming upon the scene would have thought I had given him a bar of gold. As I wiped the sweat from my brow and glanced at the blistering sun, I thought to myself "I bet that before this day is over, I am really going to regret having done that." And I did.



**In the heat of the day trout gravitate toward shade. Anglers should cast along the shoreline and work their fly to drift beneath overhanging vegetation.**



To get to Ash Camp from the town of McCloud, make a left onto Squaw Valley Road and drive approximately ten miles. Once across the McCloud Reservoir dam you'll come to a T in the road. Go right and make your way downhill into the canyon. Ash Camp will soon appear on your right. Here you'll find easy river access to a true fisherman's paradise.

**David Brown's Trout Candy, basically a Pheasant Tail Nymph with a red rib.**

