

The Stanislaus River - The “Stan” from Camp Nine Road

An option for trout in the western Sierra foothills.

The long echo of a gunshot put me ill at ease. I knew deer season coincided with my fishing trip to the Stanislaus River, and although I was wearing a blaze-orange hat to make my presence known, I was still a bit on edge. Fly fishing's supposed to be fun, not nerve-racking. Happily, my attention was directed to the small rainbow trout that just then abruptly struck my fly.

Trout thrive in the Stanislaus River's deep water.



The Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River from Camp Nine Road downstream to New Melones Reservoir can be a productive piece of water for anglers willing to make a long drive on a road that's not always well maintained. From early in the fishing season to midseason, a fly fisher's catch there will typically consist of small trout. However, late in the season things begin to change. This stretch of river becomes a thoroughfare for large browns migrating from New Melones Reservoir to spawn. Kokanee salmon also leave New Melones and proceed up the Stanislaus for the same reason, and both brown and rainbow trout will hunt for their eggs.

On this visit, I started by nymph-fishing the Stanislaus early in the morning. Not more than an hour had passed when I observed fish rising downstream. They were visible along the shoreline and gave the impression that the river had awakened. I now knew where the fish were, but had not yet determined what they were taking. Thinking about where I needed to be I left the river and hiked a horseshoe route through manzanita and

scrub brush. This placed me within casting distance of feeding fish. The move also put me in the midst of an incredible Trico spinner fall that I was not aware of earlier.

Whenever I have an indication of what fish are taking I fish that fly pattern or I select a fly that is the closest to it from what I have with me at the time. Since this wasn't my first time fishing here I happened to have the right fly. In fact, I had about a dozen or more Trico spinners in my fly box that looked to be of exact color and length.

Timing Isn't Everything

The life of the adult Trico is over in just a few hours, so I acted fast in order not to miss out on this opportunity. I selected a size 22 fly and tied it to my 6X leader, applied gel floatant, and waited for a fish to rise. I've learned over the years when dry-fly fishing that my first attempt is usually my best chance of hooking a trout.

Unfortunately, for the next hour or so it didn't seem to matter whether it was my first, third, or fifth cast, or whether I changed position to ensure a drag-free presentation. I simply could not persuade a trout to take my fly. I had fish swim up and examine my offering, but they wouldn't commit to it. Fishing was challenging, and what I first perceived to be a no-brainer situation turned into a game of strategy.

A crowded Trico fall looked promising yet created false hope. In spite of their abundance, the author had little success drifting a Trico spinner pattern over rising fish.



Submerge Your Dry Fly

I replaced my fly with one of the exact same size and pattern. The only difference was I did not apply floatant. As expected, after several casts, my saturated Trico broke below the surface, where I fished it “drowned.” I cast into pockets of water and over rocks and drifted my fly through places where the water deepened. The changeup worked immediately on a few fish and continued to be successful for a bit even after fish quit rising. When the action stopped, I pitched another changeup, this time a size 16 Peacock Caddis. I fished it in the same manner, submerged, and caught fish even though I had not spotted a similar-sized, similar-shaped, or similar-colored bug.

A head shake released this brown trout. Sunny days plus low water levels equals an abundance of river vegetation. To successfully fish shallow water check and clean your fly often.



Other fly patterns I have had success with at Camp Nine include the black or purple Prince Nymph, the Zug Bug and the Yellow Humpy. Additionally, instead of replacing some dry flies, I clip the bottom hackle and add a small amount of floatant gel near the eye of the hook, causing the fly to sink partially and thus resemble emerger in the film.

As Fall approaches, though, trout actively feed just below the surface and appear to be less selective when they do so. It is during this time of year that I experience the most success tumbling a dry fly pattern in fast moving water when fish stop rising, casting to all the likely looking places. With no rise to target, I keep my eye on my leader.

If what you're doing doesn't work it's time to change flies or your method of angling. While Tricos were spinning the author caught several brown trout on a Peacock Caddis pattern.



Location and Directions

Camp Nine Road is located about three hours from San Francisco, just outside the town of Angels Camp. From Angels Camp, proceed east on Highway 4 towards Murphys. At approximately three and a half miles, turn right onto Parrots Ferry Road. Then, after one mile, turn left onto Camp Nine Road. Your destination is a canyon fishery, so drive carefully down the steep one-lane road approximately nine miles until you arrive at the river's edge.

This stretch of the Stan might be resurrected as a popular destination for whitewater boating. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is currently studying whether to open it to commercial rafting operations.

Another nearby area to fish or visit is Calaveras Big Trees State Park. The park offers well-marked hiking trails and conifers of enormous proportions. Beaver Creek and the section of the Stanislaus River located within the park are stocked and offer good trout fishing. Learn more at www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=551.

Prior to my trip, I called and spoke with a ranger stationed at Calaveras Big Trees State Park. I also reached out to an acquaintance from a nearby fly-fishing club of which I was once a member. With both, I discussed river conditions and possible changes related to drought and wildfires. These days in California, these are factors you need to take into consideration whenever you plan a trip.