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Subject: : Paflyfish General Forum

Topic: : Late Summer Outing I

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Date: : 2013/9/15 22:35:10

URL:

As has been noted, the weather has been relatively kind to the streams this summer, reportedly leaving them in pretty good shape. Unfortunately, I haven't made much time to test that assertion but I found myself spending a family Labor Day weekend in a part of the state where many trout streams are within short driving or hiking distance. I managed part of a free day to spend on my own fishing. My initial plans had me hiking in a few miles, which looked reasonable on an overview map, but when viewed in detail, turned out to not be so great an idea in practice. It would have required about a five mile hike in (and out!) and after tacking that on before and after a day of fishing, didn't seem like that great of an idea.

Thankfully, some additional poring over the maps and the ability to ignore the one comment about needing a 4WD vehicle to traverse the road had me driving closer to the spot. The road was in great shape, except for the last quarter mile or so, where it appeared that the bond that the logger must have put down to maintain the road apparently ran out. The car made it though. An ominous looking white pickup rumbled through as I was gearing up, spreading dust and the aura of exploration/exploitation into the air.

I began my hike in, walking through a salvage timber sale area and into the headwaters area. A lot of times, I find ways to access streams downstream and work my ways up to the headwaters and then hike back down. This time, I would be walking in from the headwaters. I had chosen a spot about a mile into begin fishing. But as I was walking through the woods, I saw a bright yellow bag with an orange cone on top. It wasn't something you could miss while walking through the woods. Closer inspection revealed a owner's tag, asking the finder to call CGGVeritas if found. I had a pretty good idea what the contents were and I figured I was looking at a helicopter drop of Marcellus exploration equipment.

I continued my hike in and was chagrined to find a few more of the yellow bags with equipment, along with pink streamers marking the spot. I reached my fishing start point, but couldn't resist the urge of following the old railroad bed further downstream into the woods. The stone wall foundation of the railroad bed was still very intact in spots, reminding me that over a century ago, someone had labored to remove another resource from the forest and the remnants of that infrastructure were still visible, in the form of old stone walls and evenly spaced moss patches, where railroad ties had rotted away. I can only hope that the fish that rebounded from the deforestation phase of our history will survive the natural gas extraction phase.

Anyway, the railroad bed I was hiking on switched sides of the stream several times and was lost to rhododendron thickets at times. But before long, I heard the roar of traffic on another of our more modern infrastructures, the Eisenhower Interstate system. Too many times had I roared on by above, looking longingly down at the stream I was now standing by. This time, I was looking up and in the right spot.

The water was definitely on the low side. It was definitely on the clear side. And a stream temp registered 63 degrees. My first cast went into the tunnel that carried the stream under the Interstate and the retrieve awoke a

small fish that wasn't quite interested enough in the mass of man-assembled materials on a metal hook that had descended into his home. However, the next cast fooled a beautiful brookie and I could tell that my years of wanting to fish this stream were finally paying off.

The second fish I caught was a pretty little brown. I worked my way slowly upstream. The roar of the Interstate traffic faded away. I found myself needing to cast two pools ahead, because of the low clear water, but the fish were willing. The stream was documented as a brookie stream, but clearly had been invaded by a strong contingent of browns.

It was getting to the noonish hour when I pulled up on a small pool, with a nice root system on the left and a few holding rocks in the bottom. On the first cast, a decent size fish missed the offering. It was clearly a brown trout (or else the brookie of a lifetime). And sometimes, these fish are once and done, and other times, they are the opportunistic feeders they have to be in order to survive in a small, infertile freestone stream. The latter condition applied, and on the second cast, I hooked a beautiful 15" brownie. What struck me was how big his tail was and how blue his eye spot. I released him and decided there wasn't a better spot to eat lunch. By this point in the day, I had not managed to arrive back at the point where I was originally planning to start fishing, so I was glad I had decided to walk the extra mile and a half or so and cover that stretch of water.

After lunch, it was time to move on. I worked my way upstream, through patches of rhododendron and under the watchful gaze of forest sentinels, big trees standing streamside. As far as rhododendron goes, it was extremely manageable, if a bit tough on casting. If fishing in rhododendron, I do at time gain rhododendron fatigue, where my mind starts to get weighed down by the thought of having to crawl through and fish through tight rhododendron. And, at times, I've fished in rhododendron hell, which is the point where the rhododendron is so thick and low-hanging that I actually want to be done fishing, because I'm so sick of dealing with it. But on this stream, the patches were mostly short and I never made it beyond the rhododendron fatigue point.

I did encounter the contents of one of the yellow bags setup stream side. It appeared to be a mobile seismometer, likely with a recorder, a power source, a few dozen yards of cable, and with sensors attached to this cable at regular intervals. It was disconcerting to see this setup a yard from the side of a Class A stream. And had I tossed a yellow bag of garbage out the window of my vehicle along a state forest road, I would have been littering. But here was a whole forest of litter. I realized that while I've read a lot about Marcellus, I haven't been practically impacted by it, because many of the streams I fish are in areas where Marcellus is out of sight.

Moving on, I continued to pick up fish on a periodic basis. The rhododendron tightened up. Another opportunistic fish, this time a brookie, gave me three chances to catch him, before I finally did. He looked like a David Weaver painting that I was holding in my hand.

At one point, I was crouching on a rock under the rhododendron, in the stream. I heard a call. I looked around and saw no one, and I released the fish. I heard another call. I stood up a bit and saw a woman with a pruning shears looking at me, and she asked me if I was ok. I told her absolutely 😊 She probably didn't expect to see me and I didn't expect to see her.

The stream continued to narrow. At one point, I could hear the laughing and carrying on of another group but I think I managed to move stealthily through the stream and they never knew I was there. I managed a few more small brookies, as well as three 13" FAT brownies, before coming to an opening.

It was apparently the location of a beaver dam years ago. The obstruction appeared to be long gone, but the trees were dead. The stream flowed in a clear channel, and surprisingly, there were a fair number of trout in the deeper portions. However, as I've come to learn, when a school of fish turns a complete blind eye to a dry fly or a bugger dragged through them, they are hunkered down in survival mode, and that is apparently what these fish were doing in the warm water of the meadow.

As the hours of the afternoon had ticked by, I decided that further exploring would likely yield limited results, so I zigzagged back onto the trail and started to plod back to the car. The trail was crossed at one point by the ribbed tracks of some mechanized piece of machinery. Perhaps the people who hung the pink streamers didn't like walking to find the yellow bags, and instead drove a mini-bulldozer through the forest.

Once I returned to an area with cell coverage, I looked up CGGVeritas. Their piece on their mapping Marcellus Fairway was the answer to the mystery of the yellow bags, and I came to discover that they were a company conducting a seismic survey of a multi-county area. I saw their equipment roadside last week, on the W. Branch of the Susquehanna, although there a large orange road signed warned "Seismic Survey Ahead".

A few days later, I continued the exploration kick, on a stream that was listed as 100% Public Open access. I split up - my brother went upstream, and I decided to head downstream. I never did find access to the stream. I ran into a line of posted signs - Orange No Trespassing, and white Posted and Patrolled signs. I followed them downstream for about half a mile, before giving up. Time constraints prevented me from traveling any further, searching for the break in the signs. No signs of seismic exploration on that excursion.