

## The Fall River

### A few sage words about California's largest spring creek

*Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.*

— Norman Maclean

Gary Cox is the best fly fisher I know. He's been pursuing trout on the waters near Burney for decades. "I'm heading to Fall River tomorrow, if you're interested," Gary said unexpectedly to me one day, adding a terse "We'll need to leave early." I was new to both fly fishing and the Fall River, and I jumped at the opportunity. The following morning, I boarded Gary's boat at the California Trout public access area and was introduced to a method of angling that I have appreciated and emulated ever since.

While positioned far forward in the hull of Gary's boat, I found myself staring into the water in amazement. Fish too numerous to count dashed and darted out of our path as we moved upstream. I soon discovered that seeing these fish didn't necessarily mean they were easy to catch.

**The Fall River is rich with aquatic life.**



## **Lasting Impression**

The Fall River is a large, slow-moving spring creek teeming with rainbow trout averaging 16 inches in length. Since the land bordering the river is private, public access is limited. As a result, anglers typically fish from shallow-draft boats and prams equipped with electric motors. The accepted practice is to motor slowly so as to create no wake. Craft with gas motors are not allowed to launch at the CalTrout access.

Although fish can be found virtually anywhere on the upper Fall, I tend to focus on the waters several miles upstream from the CalTrout launching point. Most of this section of river is no more than five feet deep. The shallowness of the water combined with its clarity, makes fishing here challenging. To be successful requires skill and patience — presentation and line control are key.

Whether nymphing or dry-fly fishing, successful anglers fish the Fall slowly and stealthy with a downstream presentation, all the while mending and feeding line. Here, more than anywhere, fly fishers should attempt to match the hatch. Take heed — dry-fly fishing Fall River can become addicting.

I visit the Fall often and still find myself employing the fishing methods and techniques taught to me by my friend Gary decades ago. I carry two fly rods in my boat. Both are 9-foot 5-weights. One is set up with an intermediate line and the other with a floating line. To both, I tie a long 6X or 7X tapered leader. My flies for Fall River are typically in the 18-to-20 size range.

The Fall River contains little structure, so as I motor upriver, I search for vegetation beneath the surface. Underwater grasses there are loaded with insects, making them ideal gathering places for trout. I also look for and mark rising trout. Once I reach my destination, I drop anchor and prepare to fish downstream, seeking those earlier points of interest.

## **Fishing with a twitch**

For many anglers, fishing downstream is an advantage. When executed properly, it ensures that the first thing a fish sees is the fly and that it is not spooked by the fly line. When presenting a dry fly downriver on the Fall, I like to make short casts off to the side and then feed line in order for my fly to make a long, drag-free drift angled toward targeted fish. Casting in the wrong lane will result in a fly not drifting close enough to feeding trout. When nymphing, I try to imitate an insects swimming motion by twitching my rod tip as the end of my drift nears and line swings down and across. This action perhaps helps my fly get noticed by hungry fish.

Although the Fall is most famous for its *Hexagenia* mayfly hatch, I find that my go-to fly pattern there is the Pale Morning Dun. PMDs are the predominate hatch throughout the

season. Blue-Winged Olives are also common. When fishing is exceptionally slow and small mayflies and midges are being ignored, I have taken trout by retrieving Zug Bugs with sporadic fast strips.

### **Tips for the Fall River**

Sometimes, fishing on the Fall River can be exceptionally easy. At other times, it can also be terribly frustrating. Here are three tips to help you maximize your chances of catching trout.

Although I briefly touched on this beforehand, anglers should focus on maintaining a drag-free drift when working their fly at the correct level in the water column to reach trout they're targeting. Read the water and observe the trout's position before casting.

Focus on the quality of your presentation, not the quantity of casts that you make. Ensure that you are fishing the correct pattern at the correct depth and that your fly is drifting close to your target.

Finally, don't be afraid to make necessary adjustments to your fly during a drift. Anglers accomplish this by mending, by twitching the line to add action, or by pulling the fly back toward the boat and into a feeding lane — whatever helps get your fly to the strike zone.

**Five-year-old Alexia is ready to spend a late afternoon fishing the Fall River with her father.**



## Directions and Notes

The Fall River is about a 1.5 hour drive east of Redding. As you might guess, you'll need a boat to fish it, which means bringing your own or renting one (such as from Circle 7 Guest Resort or, farther upstream, the SpinnerFall Lodge), or, like most of us, hiring a guide who has a boat.

To reach the public access that CalTrout owns, take Highway 299 to McArthur and turn left on Glenburn Road, then drive six miles to Island Road. Make a right and drive an additional two miles. The entrance will be to your right immediately after crossing the Island Road Bridge. It has limited parking, and vehicles not parked in a designated location or that are parked along the roadside will be ticketed.

The fishing and hunting club Wilderness Unlimited also offers access to the Fall River. You'll need to join to use it.

The fishing season begins the last Saturday of April and ends November 15. Only artificial lures can be used. When fishing with a companion, I drop two anchors, one at the bow of my boat and one at the stern. I position my boat perpendicular to the current, with both anglers facing downriver. This lessens the likelihood of tangled lines while casting. When ready to move, we simultaneously each lift an anchor just enough to drift downriver until we drop them again at the next location.

Consider combining a visit to Fall River with a trip to the Pit River or Hat Creek. Often, I fish Hat Creek during the early morning hours and then end my day on the Fall River. Lodging is available as noted above and in Fall River Mills and the Burney area, and these towns also offer grocery stores and dining options.

**Release of a healthy Fall River rainbow trout.**

