

# Challenge of the Trout

Challenges—  
Different waters,  
Different lyrics.  
A look at four  
varieties and  
the demands of  
each. These  
situations are  
everywhere—  
we've all fished  
Gary's water but  
never, perhaps,  
with his  
keen perception.

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## The Quiet of the Stream

The pool is a settling basin of a trout stream. As the current dissipates into the area, the drift-fare held in suspension is deposited by the flow. The drop-point where the insects of greater bulk filter from the current in the hold is gathering place for trout that pick out the stranded nymph—and here trout often feed selectively on the prevalent species of nymph in the drift.

When an emergence of aquatic insects or a fall of terrestrial insects stimulates the fish of the pool to the rise, the trout appear from the deep-water recesses, and the feeding positions of the fish trace the channel of the current through the basin. The movement of water that splits into bands of varying speed serves as a conveyor to present the vulnerable insects.

Many fly fishermen approach the pool water as if it had the uniform slope of a bowl with a straight flow-through of current, but a pool consists of a varied bottom structure. Each obstruction and each depression provides cover for a trout. The exposed patches seldom hold the prime fish during the bright part of the day unless an emergence of insects motivates the trout to forage in the open water.

The knack of reading a pool requires an ability to correlate the current and the structure. Where the line of flow intercepts the deepest and snarliest tangle, the best trout typically hold. If pieces of structure are nearly identical, then the area with the heaviest harvest usually carries the bull fish of that water.

A purist determined to ply the dry-fly pattern with success divides his time between pool and riffle. During the moments of the rise the flat water offers a fair challenge for "fishing the pattern," but in the dead periods the choppy water presents an opportunity for "fishing the water."

But the angler concentrating solely upon the fussy pools of a stream fits the manner of approach to the necessities of the situation. The dry fly proves valuable only when the fish hold in a position of activity near enough to the surface to notice the pattern. When the trout feed or retreat deep into the pool, the sunken fly provides the means to the end.

These flat-water portions of streams require a knowledge of the rhythm of a river. Without that sense of timing which puts the fly fisherman at the prime spot of the moment, the flurries of activity often pass in unobserved brevity. The trout of the pools respond to each minor shift of the influences of the environment too rapidly for random angling experimentation.



Vermont's upper Battenkill by John Merwin

Gary  
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FFM Rocky Mountain Field Editor

## The Mix of the River

A river strange to an angler is a complex flow of minor peculiarities. The twists and curls of the current that buffet a fly or hide a trout are unseen after a cursory glance. The water holds a multitude of secrets and it is not for the visiting fly fisherman to learn all of the subtle truths immediately. And yet, any sense of initial strangeness is worth enduring to cast on a river full of trout-promise.

In a simplified view of a freestone river the water is divided into riffle and pool. A riffle or a rapid is a movement of the current agitated as it contacts with the rock strata. A pool or a flat is a distribution of the flow-energy dissipated as it fans over a larger area.

The riffles are fertile complexes of diversity. In the typical river most of the food-energy production of invertebrate animal life is generated in the flowing shallow sections. In the spaces under and between the matrix of stones the insects bustle about—browsers gathering algae clinging to the rocks or the detrital debris that litters the strata; filter-feeders strain



. . . The Mix of the River

particles from the drift, and hunters seek insect prey among the crevices. Swimming, clinging, and crawling forms of life share the distinctive habitat of the riffle.

The trout hold in the zones of quiet amidst this tumble of the stream, buffers of protection formed where the obstructions mix the current. Each jut from the stream bed acts as a deflector to split the flow into varying ribbons of velocity, with the sweep being weakest at the bottom layer of drift.

The angler exploring the promise of a strange river studies the water—the water as a hindrance to the fish with the push and swirl of the current that restricts the holding area of the trout—and as a convenience to the fish with the ebb and flow of the current which delivers the natural food of the trout.

The method and manner of the angler is affected with each variation in these natural phenomena. The angler greets the river differently, according to the conditions that prevail upon the fish—conditions that dictate the choice of a type of fly presented in a certain manner to a selected point of flow.

The trout is a relatively simple creature who reacts to stimuli in a basic pattern of conditioned response. The fascination of the angling quest for the fly fisherman is predicated upon the infinite variables of the trout's environment that subtly change the trout's activity and the fly fisher's approach.



A Montana spring creek by Dan Abrams

The West Branch of New York's Ausable by John Merwin



The Puzzle of a Spring Creek

The seep-lands of Montana are a paradise of plenty for the spring-creek fancier. The alkaline flows are innumerable, issuing from the rim of the hill meadows to lace the valleys with trout-flush streams. A few of the creeks are famed for the free-rising fish—Armstrong or Nelson near Livingston—but there are other streams that are as equally rich in trout. The creeks range in size from large trickles that grow fat brookies and cutthroats to small rivers that harbor huge browns and rainbows.

The art of fly-fishing is inextricably wedded to the spring creeks. The advances of technique and imitation link contemporaneously with the demanding waters that spawn the fly fisher's ultimate problems. The challenges of the often bitter refusals foster solutions that can apply to these gentle-water habitats everywhere.

Selectivity ranks of greater importance on these rich spring flows, and the pampered trout structure their feeding to a restrictive diet which demands imitations with hair-trigger characteristics of the natural if their feeding is to be interrupted.

Devotees of the creeks cherish these moments of fuss-time angling because of the challenge offered by each individual trout. The quest for a hyperselective fish raises the quality of fly-fishing above and beyond the measure of mere numbers.



Duck Lake, Montana, by Frank R. Martin

The Lure of a Mountain Lake

The fish of the lakes often prove to be of fussy temperament. The proper fly or the correct technique falls into a very specific category. When all else fails to interest these trout of punctilious habit, the manner of presentation often determines their response to the fly.

Certainly an angler encounters those easy moments of plenty on the lakes; and equally as certain the fisherman experiences occasions of complete befuddlement, especially with the wilderness trout. The fish of the lakes are as fickle as their brethren of the stream. The reasons for their selective activity—often unfathomable even to the knowledgeable devotee of the stillwater habitat—are linked inextricably to the circumstances of the environment.

As a defense against the totally blank moments, a fly fisherman gathers a repertoire of odd techniques, a bag of tricks packed with the recollected experiences of past frustrations. The philosophy here is the "anything goes" approach, in which the determined fly fisherman wisely admits to not knowing the reason for the obstinate behavior of the trout—and stops relying on totally reasonable methods.



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