

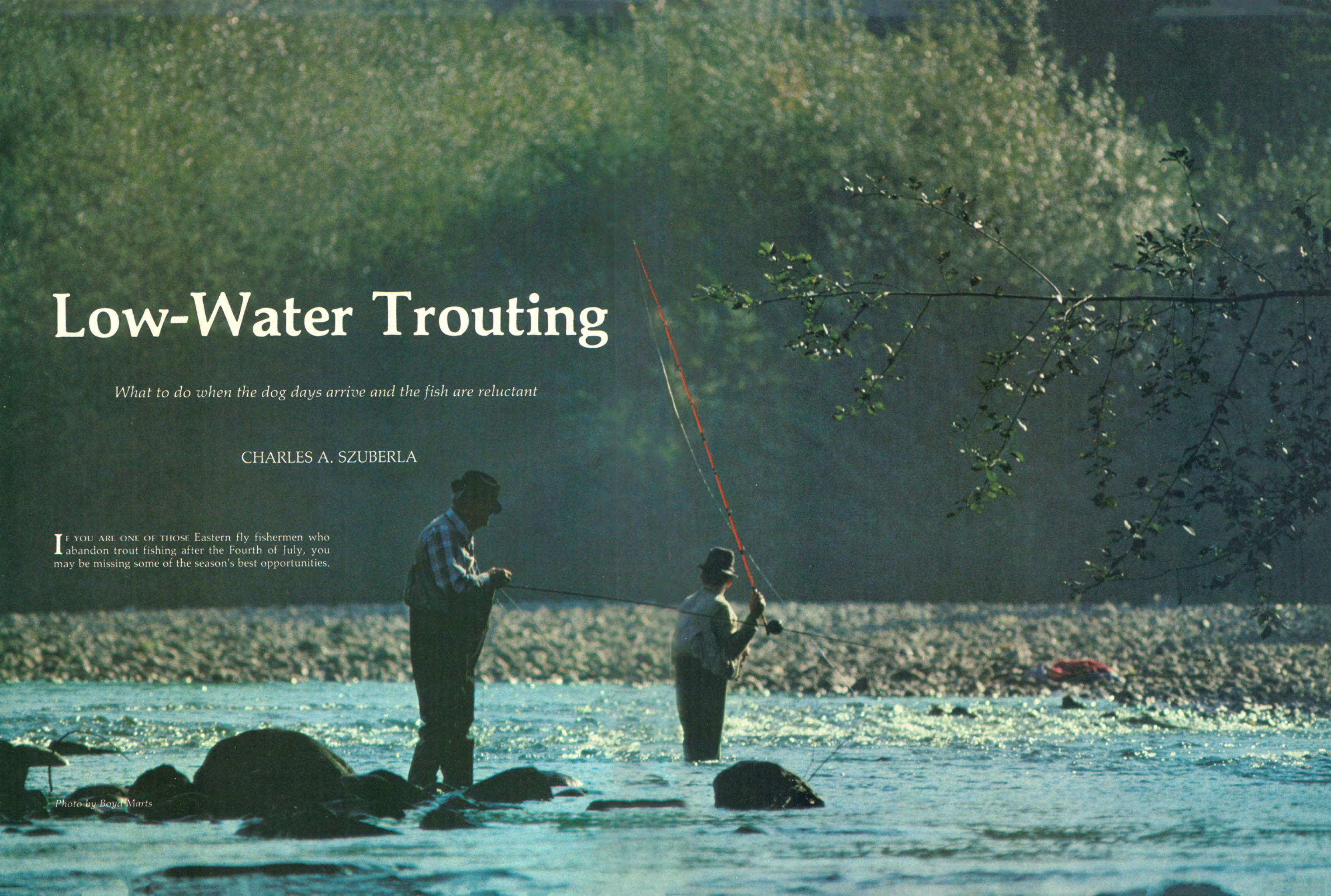
Low-Water Trouting

What to do when the dog days arrive and the fish are reluctant

CHARLES A. SZUBERLA

IF YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE Eastern fly fishermen who abandon trout fishing after the Fourth of July, you may be missing some of the season's best opportunities.

Photo by Boyd Marts



Low-Water Troutling . . .

The thin waters with their exposed, rock-studded shallows may appear lifeless, but a careful approach, thoughtful fly selection and the right presentation can produce surprises and add two months to your fishing season. If you plan for the fly-fishing and get out on the water at an unpopular hour, you'll probably find yourself alone on the stream, wading comfortably in hip boots and fishing under pleasant weather without the annoyance of early-season biting insects.

While the better-known mayflies are gone from Eastern waters by July, there are still some good hatches, the most important of which is the *Tricorythodes*. This

a spent, or partially spent, imitation for the spinner fall that follows emergence.

Summer is also the time of terrestrials—ants, jassids, beetles and grasshoppers. Sunny, breezy mornings seem to be best for terrestrial activity, and humid days are best for flying ants, which appear in mating swarms in early August. Pattern selection depends on the waters you fish: I use a #14 or #16 Letort Hopper for blind fishing and smaller ant and jassid patterns for the occasional selective riser.

The *Isonychiae* provide exciting fishing from mid-August on into September and October, although they

THE KEY TO LOW-WATER TROUTING SEEMS to be water temperature. Low-water conditions may make trout more wary in their feeding, but it is water temperature that controls their metabolism. My experience suggests that so long as water temperature does not exceed 72 degrees Fahrenheit, trout will feed freely, regardless of how low the water is.

I've found Eastern trout to be relatively nonselective during July and August, except in those streams with the good *Tricorythodes* hatches. This nonselective feeding in our freestone streams may be caused by the scarcity of food once the early-season mayfly and caddis hatches

for low-water troutling. You'll see few other anglers in these early-morning hours, but the deserted rivers hold fish that have not been put down by waders. I also find that the low waters provide access to fishing lies that were inaccessible to wading and casting in spring.

ON MOST EASTERN STREAMS low-water fishing is blind, requiring attractor patterns to locate fish. A favorite of mine is a #10 or #12 Gray Fox Variant, which has a buggy appearance, lands softly and is large enough to excite large brown trout. The pattern is relatively easy to see, even on broken water, and is an excellent floater when tied with quality hackle. However, there are days when trout will only splash at this large Variant, and when that happens an effective alternative is the old standby, #16 or #20 Adams.

In spite of what is often easy fishing during these low-water days, there are always those times when nothing seems to interest trout. When this occurs I tie on a #14 or #16 Royal Wulff. While this attractor pattern may seem out of place on shrunken Eastern streams, it has proved effective for me so often, that I would not feel confident going out without it.

Low-water conditions demand an upstream approach and careful sidearm casting to avoid spooking fish. Your tackle, too, must fit the stream conditions: A 4-weight rod is ideal (I prefer a Russ Peak seven-footer that weighs only two ounces), particularly if the tip is slightly faster than the typical 4-weight rod. The rod should make possible the rapid casting tempo required to flick the fly from pocket to pocket on the shrunken waters, for long floats are neither necessary or possible under such conditions.

When fishing flat, low waters with small flies, I use an Orvis Midge Rod, which has a slower action with the 4-weight line and a soft tip to slow my strike when using #20 to #24 imitations and a 7X leader. My leaders are usually only ten feet long, since much of the time the line and a portion of the leader may be resting on exposed stream rocks and boulders. Because I prefer 24- to 30-inch tippets, it requires a radical step-down in the mid-sections of the leaders to achieve the proper design. The 5X leader that I use when fishing larger flies blind is constructed with the following dimensions:

.019 - 24"	.011 - 9"
.017 - 18"	.009 - 8"
.015 - 18"	.007 - 7"
.013 - 12"	.0061- 24" to 30"

The demands of low-water fly-fishing require greater consideration for the occasional fellow angler you may encounter on the stream than you would normally give spring fishing companions. (You give the low-water fly fisherman as much water as possible to fish alone.) But the attractiveness of summer fishing makes this concession an easy one to make—part of the game, the special appeal of the sport.

Low-water troutling during early morning hours can be productive.

Photo by Kris Lee.

subside. However, during brief periods when cooler water temperatures excite trout metabolism, fish feed hungrily—as if to make up for the long, low-water fasts.

It's wise for dog-day fishing to schedule your fishing to coincide with daily periods of lowest water temperature, which do not occur, as many fishermen suppose, during the evening hours when the sun is off the water and the air temperature cools. The air temperature may be cool, but water has unusual thermal stability, acting as a heat-sink that is equally slow to heat and cool and retains the heat of the day until well after dark. By morning, however, the water is cool: It's the best time



#24- to #28-size mayfly emerges nearly every day in the early morning on such waters as Vermont's Battenkill, New York's Esopus Creek, the West Branch of New York's Ausable River and on many other Eastern streams.

When fishing the "Tricos" I use a 7X tippet with a #24 dry Dark Blue Dun to match the emerging duns and a white/black spinner in the same size, with thorax material tied figure-eight through the hackle to create

are often sporadic in their emergence pattern. Although the *Isonychiae* seldom create a visible rise of trout—because they crawl out of the water onto streamside rocks to shed their nymphal pellicles—trout in freestone streams nevertheless respond to a Dun Variant when the *Isonychia* nymphs are active. Evidence of the insect's activity are the nymph cases you will find on exposed rocks. At such times a #14 imitation of the Dun Variant works well. On cloudy days the *Isonychia* emergence seems to concentrate around noon, and it often provides fast fishing to the hatch. Spinner falls occur during the evening and after dark; and again the small Dun Variant is effective.

CHARLES SZUBERLA lives in Menands, New York. His last contribution to FFM, "Fishing the Dorotheas," appeared in Vol. 10, No. 6.

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